



PROCEEDINGS OF THE GIBRALTAR PARLIAMENT

AFTERNOON SESSION: 3.03 p.m. – 7.40 p.m.

Gibraltar, Tuesday, 28th June 2022

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The Gibraltar Parliament

The Parliament met at 3.03 p.m.

[MR SPEAKER: Hon. M L Farrell BEM GMD RD JP *in the Chair*]

[ACTING CLERK TO THE PARLIAMENT: S Galliano Esq *in attendance*]

Appropriation Bill 2022 – Second Reading – Debate continued

Clerk: We continue with the Second Reading of the Appropriation Act.

Mr Speaker: Before I put the question, does any hon. Member wish to speak on the general principles and merits of the Bill? The Hon. the Leader of the Opposition.

Hon. K Azopardi: Mr Speaker, thank you.

This morning we listened intently to the Chief Minister, as we would. It had been trailed, already, as a tough Budget by drip-feeding into the public domain and we listened intently, and towards the end ... The temerity of calling this the people's Budget. The people will be tired of the antics and wish the Chief Minister would practise what he preaches.

This was the ultimate act, especially towards the end – 'we are on your side' – while he stared right into the people's eyes and slipped his hand into their pockets. It is all too much. Some, or all, of these new revenue-raising measures would not need to happen if the Government had been disciplined last year, if they had been disciplined from the beginning. This is a case, simply put, of passing the bill on to the people for *their* failures, of Mr Picardo asking the people to bail him out of his mistakes, and then, with drama, trying to convince them that it is not his fault.

When anyone looks at this Budget and, importantly, last year's public spending, there are some big themes that emerge: on trust, because the Chief Minister cannot be trusted on the economy, public finances or the recovery – there is no real plan, other than a very late and insufficient one, no direction, no willingness to address issues and no clue; a reality check, because scratch the surface of his Budget and today's picture is far worse than presented – when you look forward to next year, it might be even worse than that, and that is down to the possibly unrealistic projections the Government is making in certain key areas; and failure, because all this is down to Government failures – a failure to control expenditure, a failure to control waste and a failure of discipline, which goes all the way to the top because there is a clear line of responsibility and the buck stops with Mr Picardo, who has political responsibility for the bottom line, no ifs, no buts. I am going to deal with all these points in some detail, but first some observations on the macro-economic picture as well as some state of the nation issues that affect public finances and the economy.

We are still without a post-Brexit deal, six years after the referendum. We have been warning about lost opportunities for some time. Not only have there been lost opportunities, there now appear to be missed boats. When, with great fanfare, the flimsy eight-page non-binding New Year's Eve Agreement was presented as some form of Neville Chamberlain-type triumph, we warned about its vagueness, the potential concessions it may lead us to, and the fact that we had missed the boat by not landing a deal at the same time as the UK had bagged for itself a 1,000-page binding legal treaty. We were told we were wrong and that the negotiations for a new treaty would be over in six months, but here we are, 18 months on, without a deal, without even the

draft of one and with problems surfacing and affecting some of our citizens. That is inevitably compounded by the Northern Irish reality, despite any assertions that the negotiating streams are separate. Of course, they are theoretically separate and I hope they remain so in practice, but it does not take much to understand that these are also human processes and the potential of our process being stymied by the mounting sense of European frustration with the UK over Northern Ireland is a distinct possibility.

I make clear that we want a safe and beneficial deal, but this uncertainty is not good for Gibraltar and some of our people are now facing the impact of delay as blue card holders endure an erratic and sometimes hindered passage across the border. These are also realities on the ground. The Chief Minister may urge us not to mention this a lot or too loudly, lest we all suffer the same fate, but that is a drab, self-serving invitation tendered by a contributor to, if not the architect of the misfortune, (*Interjection*) because we have been saying since 2018, when Spain bagged lasting freedom of movement rights for its frontier workers, that Gibraltar lost an opportunity to bag enduring rights for our people – again a reality – not because workers should not have these rights but because we should have got these at the same time in exchange and when we gave other things away.

Mr Picardo often says it was not the right time to talk about these things. I get it – he got it wrong and he does not like to admit it, but that is the reality. Instead of landing permanent rights for our citizens, we gave away MoUs that were inroads into our economic and social affairs, gave frontier workers permanent rights for not much in return, and accepted a permanent Tax Treaty that classed some Gibraltarians and some of our companies as Spanish tax resident, even when they lived here and did not do business in Spain. It discouraged inward investment by hitting at the core quality of life factors that attract investors to Gibraltar.

That was the balance sheet before the New Year's Eve Agreement and when the boat to a new relationship with the EU was badly missed again. Now, here we are, six years after the Brexit referendum, without a permanent deal and without knowing what the future has in store. We are now alone in this quest, as the UK has its deal, and we have the certainty that if we do not get a deal, Spain will still have obtained permanent rights for its citizens and permanent tax concessions to its state. Facts, not spin, and so far a black mark as to the Government's negotiating skills.

He said, this morning, he could not go quicker because he was protecting our rights and our sovereignty, but he gave away rights in the MoUs and fiscal sovereignty in the Tax Treaty, so if this is him taking his time to protect us, then I say no thanks. Is he suggesting, by placing us in a position where we are the only ones without a deal, that this is somehow beneficial to us? That would be the last straw in his salesman's pitch. I suppose we are to thank him for not having landed a deal and for keeping us in this state of uncertainty. I, for one – and I am sure I am not alone – cannot see the logic of those statements.

None of that is to indicate we do not want an agreement. I repeat: we want a safe and beneficial agreement, and the sooner the better, clearly. Of course, whether it is safe and beneficial will need to be judged when the specific text of the draft treaty is published. Again, we think that publication should be before any treaty is entered into, and not just before its ratification. It should be before the treaty parties – the UK and the EU – enter into it. After all, this is a treaty of some importance and it will affect our lives and our people. Why shouldn't it be published in draft, so we can look at it before it is entered into, so that a debate can be had, so that there can be proper scrutiny, so that the people most affected can express a view, and perhaps for that view not just to be expressed informally in the media but in a referendum where our people decide whether to freely choose to accept the permanent relationship with the EU which is then on offer?

I am clear that I want a deal that achieves freedom of movement – mobility – for our people, and safeguards our economic future. We need to be politically and economically sustainable, and a good deal would enhance those prospects, if it can be achieved. Uncertainty damages our economy and the prospect of inward investment. It is less likely that people making investment choices will opt for a territory whose economic relationship with the EU is unclear over one that

90 does not have these big challenges and uncertainties on the horizon – again, a fact. So, despite my criticisms of the negotiations so far, which I make in all honesty and clarity and have always made, I reiterate our desire for a deal that works and is good for Gibraltar.

Whatever happens, we are at a crossroads because the present situation cannot continue much longer – at least, we would not expect it to. Either there is a deal that emerges and that is acceptable, or there is not. We cannot turn the clock back and we are not in the EU. Unless a future UK government were to take the presently unforeseeable course of applying to join the EU, the best we can do is negotiate an acceptable arrangement for ourselves with Europe, because we are European and that is where our future lies as an inevitable geographic reality that nowhere else in the UK has. So we do hope for a safe and beneficial agreement and one that emerges soon this year, because the present Brexit uncertainty affects our economy and is present against a backdrop of global and local economic pressure. Some of that has been caused by the COVID pandemic but other factors have not, and it is important to distinguish between these.

The COVID pandemic left economic chaos in its wake which will take time to recover from, but it also needs to be seen in context. Not every country was the same and not every country will face the same issues. Some had longer lockdowns than others, some are still suffering from these, some were more affected by the economic pressure, and in some countries the toll of human suffering was much larger than in Gibraltar, so it is important to understand the effect of COVID and not let it mask other, more historic issues we had when entering the pandemic.

Clearly, by the time we entered the pandemic we were already straddled in a historic ratcheting of direct and indirect gross debt of around £1.3 billion, this despite the Government having promised to halve the level of gross debt that existed in 2011, then £480 million. Instead, it tripled it. That is a fact and a stunning breach of promise and one that affects our recovery and our ability to manoeuvre. Again, this may be an unwelcome reminder for Mr Picardo, but it is true and a fact. As I said last year, while the £500 million guarantee of the UK was welcome because it lowered the cost of borrowing, it did not provide absolution of past mistakes and nor did COVID paper over the financial state in which we arrived when the COVID crisis happened. If there is further borrowing, it should be to kick-start the economy and not to plug the running costs of an unrestrained and undisciplined Government.

I know he does not like my reminders of his debt promises of 2011, but in 2012, in his first Budget speech as Chief Minister, Mr Picardo said:

in Opposition, we raised issues about the creeping growth of our nation's gross debt and why we have a clear commitment to deal with gross debt and net debt levels, as we set out in our manifesto ...

[...]

That is why, Mr Speaker, our manifesto specifically provided, in clear and unambiguous terms, our approach to the reduction of national debt. Our manifesto provides on page 27 that in respect of gross debt:

'Our commitment is that Gibraltar's public debt will be brought down by half of its current level, whatever the current level is after the election, so that by the time of the next election in 2015 there will have been a 50% reduction. Gibraltar's gross debt is presently stated to be at £480,000,000.00 ...'

In 2015 he was still carrying on the pretence of lowering gross debt in his Budget speech, but as the addiction to debt and hunger for clinging on to power grew, the Government parked hundreds of millions of pounds in off-book transactions to pretend the gross debt is smaller than it is. There is now almost £1 billion in off-book, indirect gross debt and the total gross indirect and direct public debt is over £1.7 billion.

That historic debt hangs over our ability to do things. It deprives us of leeway in this severe financial crisis and lessens the opportunities for us to navigate through these challenges quickly. All that is a fact, and it is a fact born out of the financial ill-discipline over the last decade when he has been in charge. Where we are now is because of him and his policies. He has had the opportunity to tackle issues but dismissed those opportunities and, instead, taken the easier road of borrow and spend with everyone's money – your money. Anyone can do that. It takes guts to

be disciplined, bold to ensure you say no. Instead, every time a lender has knocked on his door, all he has been able to say is yes without regard to the precarious position it would put Gibraltar in, and that is why we already were weak when we entered the COVID period.

135 The most direct and extreme effects of COVID subsided before the beginning of the last financial year and obviously have improved further since then. The last lockdown did not occur during the last financial year; it happened almost 17 months ago. The vaccination programme which was successfully rolled out, to the credit of the Health Authority and its staff, started 18 months ago. It is clear from the COVID Fund numbers that some income streams have
140 recovered well. I mean, in particular, Income Tax and, to a large extent, company tax. The Import Duty issues may suggest factors that are systemic or structural and not about COVID, and they bear further examination in the future.

During the period up to 31st March 2021 the COVID Fund contribution was £227 million, this last financial year it was £135 million and the forecast for next year is £40 million, but as you will
145 see when I analyse the COVID Fund spend for this year, we have some doubt about how or why this Fund was used this year to channel some payments, and questions as to whether it will or should be used in the future. Ultimately this fund was about costs directly attributable to COVID and not other costs.

There are also surrounding economic circumstances affecting citizens. There is talk of a US
150 recession, which of course would trickle down to the whole globe, and high inflation during 2023. In the UK, inflation rates are already high at 9%, and here the index of retail prices has reached levels not seen in years with a 7.6% increase this last financial year, compared with 1.4% for the year up to April 2021, and 0.6% in the year up to April 2020. This is a reality faced by people whenever they go to buy food in the supermarkets. Life has become more expensive when there
155 is less money for wage rises. Everyone is tightening their belt and understands this on the ground, and so it is important for Government to lead by example. The facts, however, show that the Government is not. In fact, far from leading, it is making the situation far worse and their mistakes have contributed to the necessity for the more financially painful measures today.

This is the backdrop which takes us to the more detailed analysis of why Mr Picardo cannot be
160 trusted on the economy and on public finances, because there are seven economic sins: because there is no discipline; because there is no plan – there is bad management – and he just hopes one will magically emerge; because the worse-off, the vulnerable and the most affected in this community have been left behind despite some of the measures today; because he is not making the public sector more efficient – he has a duty to do so and to make it more responsive to people,
165 and he is failing; because there is a duty to reduce waste and better monitor the spend and use of the people's money; because there has been an unwillingness to make hard choices; and because the policies are often incoherent and contradictory.

Let's look at those features that come through, in detail. Last year the Government predicted a deficit of £50 million, or £1 million per week. In other words, they predicted that the public
170 sector would cost £1 million per week more than it would generate in revenue. Let me make that clear: that is like losing over £142,000 per day, £6,000 an hour. And of course that calculation was based on the fact that they were going to borrow £50 million to prop up public finances. It was, by all accounts, the worst public finances crisis ever. Sir Joe Bossano candidly described it that way: the worst he had seen in all his 50 years in Parliament. But let's be clear, what happened
175 next and over the last financial year has been absolutely staggering.

Instead of being extra prudent and careful in the worst time ever for our public finances, instead of being the watchdog of the people's money, instead of being the financial shepherd he pretended to be this morning, in this crisis the Chief Minister allowed further overspends, and not just a few pounds here and there. Instead of making sure he kept to his own Budget in the worst
180 crisis of our history, the Chief Minister has presided over some massive overspends and could not even keep to the limits he promised this House and the people last year.

In the estimate for 2021-22 the Government promised it would spend, and it was authorised to spend, £768 million. In fact, the actual expenditure this last year was £859 million. In other

185 words, this was a figure of around £91 million above the estimated Budget. They spent an
additional £91 million which they had not expected to spend, which they had promised not to
190 spend in the worst year ever. Not just £90,000: £90 *million*. We appreciate some of that is
represented by additional contributions to loss of revenue, but a big chunk of that is departmental
overspend. In fact, the basic departmental overspend in net terms alone, compared with what it
should have been, is around £35 million of that figure. Not £35,000: £35 *million*. To compound
195 things, they had to resort to borrowing more. They borrowed an extra £50 million, bringing the
borrowing for the last year alone to £100 million, and a large part of that borrowing was just used
to pay for running costs.

To put it in the simplest terms, if you were a person who had started the year with zero in the
bank account and you had then added all your income and taken out all your expenditure, you
195 would have been down 12% – in reality, £103 million, given the figures that were presented last
year ... this year. Any person running a home or a business will understand that. You are earning
less than you spend. If that is the case, you need to tighten your belt. You cannot buy luxuries;
you have to live within your means. You cannot go on holidays or buy expensive things; you have
to wait till you have more money, till your income rises, and cut out unnecessary spending. You
200 do not buy cake if all you can afford is bread. You do not go on that Caribbean cruise. Everyone
understands that. But instead of tightening its belt, the Government is still spending more than it
receives and, worse still, more than it promised to spend in the worst financial year ever. This is a
recipe for disaster. The public finances are out of control. In the year of the biggest deficit,
Mr Picardo failed to have the discipline of sticking to his own Budget and had to borrow more.
205 That is sheer irresponsibility with the people's money. How can he have got it so wrong,
£103 million down for the year, and the Government that he is responsible for not sticking to their
own departmental budgets by £35 million?

There is sometimes departmental overspend, but the difference is that this was the year of the
biggest deficit ever, which required the biggest discipline ever for us to get out. It is very different
210 to overspend in a year of surplus than in a year of the biggest financial crisis ever. And when you
drill down further, there are serious warnings for the future. The Health Authority budget, for
example, for last year was supposed to be £140 million, of which £134 million was supposed to be
regular expenditure and £5.5 million was supposed to then come via the COVID Fund as COVID-
related expenditure. In fact, the GHA spent a whopping £170 million last year, with £20 million,
215 instead of £5.5 million, coming through the COVID Fund. And it is not necessarily because people
are getting an amazing, unsurpassed Health Service. There are many excellent health
professionals, but they are frustrated and morale is low. For the user, the children's dental service
is appalling, the telephone appointments system at the Primary Care Centre has been a shambles,
the administration services are slow and grinding, and in Mental Health the complaints of lack of
220 support and continuity of care are legion. If we are not getting a Rolls Royce service for the money,
should we not at least expect the Government to keep to the budget that they have been voted
and to ask for more money only if they are intending to provide better services?

So, GHA overspent by £30 million – over 20%, not just a few thousand – and as I mentioned,
when you look at that in detail you see that instead of a projected injection of £5.5 million from
225 the COVID Fund the GHA received £20 million last year from that source. But how were some of
those COVID Fund expenses ...? If we take a step back, in the year of the two lockdowns, with the
massive disruption which that entailed, with the massive extra recruitment that had to be
engaged, with the massive purchase of PPE and other equipment that had to be made, with the
massive commitment to the Nightingale facility that had to be planned and delivered, in those
230 two years that ended in March 2021 and spanned all the COVID expense from the beginning of
2020 – in practice, a period of 15 months of intense spending from March 2020 – the GHA needed
£19 million from the COVID Fund, £19 million of extra money to pay for the costs of COVID.

So how can it be that last year, after the lockdowns – we did not have a lockdown last year –
after the vaccination programme and after the worst effects of COVID, the GHA needed more
235 money, £20 million, than in the worst COVID time? And if it did, why was it not foreseeable last

year when the Budget was presented? Why did they not know? How did they project £5.5 million would be needed and then ended up needing £20 million? Why were these payments necessary? And why was this a surprise and unforeseen? Above all, how was this COVID related, given that the sum received last year was higher than when the COVID pandemic was in full force? And even
240 if all this was COVID and unforeseen, how were other aspects of the GHA overspend generated and why was there such obvious inability to maintain the Budget?

I will give you a few examples. They had forecast they would spend £2.5 million in relief cover last year. They ended up spending £11 million – it is not even close – of which £4.3 million was a sum attributed via the COVID Fund, so why was there a need for the other overspend of nearly
245 £5 million? How can you go from £2.5 million to £11 million? How can you get it so wrong?

Medical departments were supposed to spend £3.5 million last year, and they spent £18.5 million. It is not even close. Of that £18.5 million a sum of £13.1 million was funded from the COVID Fund – £18.5 million instead of £3.5 million. How can you get it so wrong? They presented that Budget. These are figures from their Budget of last year. They must have had that
250 information. Officials provide information, and then they present the Budget. Massively off.

Recruitment expenses cost £2 million instead of the promised £900,000, more than 100% more. Security services cost £270,000 more than budgeted. Computer and office equipment were £700,000 above budget. There are other examples. And if they got it wrong this year by such a margin, what comfort do we have that the figures this year are realistic or will be kept to?
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This year, for example, if we do the same exercise, they are projecting to spend £1 million in relief cover – that is down £10 million on last year; £750,000 in recruitment expenses, down from £2 million last year; £9 million in GPMS prescriptions, down from £12 million last year; £5.7 million on medical departments, down from £18 million last year; £10 million on sponsored patients, down from £14.75 million last year; and £1.5 million on disposal of clinical waste, down from
260 £2.4 million last year. In overall terms, the GHA forecasts it will spend £128 million this year. That is £42 million less than last year and £12 million less than last year's estimate, which they did not keep to anyway. Are these figures realistic? Will they keep to the Budget this time, and will they do so in a way that the public service is not impaired? That is what the user expects. After all, the health and care services – meaning the total of GHA, ERS and the Care Agency – cost the taxpayer
265 over £210 million last year alone.

The GHA is not the only Department; I am using it as an example. Other departmental budgets are smaller but the principles are the same. The Environment Department was £500,000 above budget. The collection and disposal of refuse was £750,000 above budget. There are other examples scattered around the Budget of departments, agencies and statutory authorities
270 overspending by margins which are well above slight increases.

This inability to keep to the Budget hampers our overall ability – Gibraltar's ability – to emerge from this financial crisis, and there is a political responsibility for all this which lies at the feet of the Chief Minister, who presented last year's Budget as a real attempt to start our process of recovery. In that, he has singularly failed. In fact, our position this year is worse than last year. We
275 had to borrow £50 million more than envisaged, just to keep afloat. The Government spent £90 million more than it promised. Government Departments for which Ministers are responsible and accountable overspent by £35 million.

Our direct and indirect borrowing is now at approximately £1.75 billion. Of that sum, hundreds of millions of pounds were parked in an opaque way without there being full clarity of how those moneys have been spent – and, indeed, if they have been spent. We still do not know how much
280 of those moneys borrowed remain.

This year the Chief Minister promises to spend £723 million – in other words, £45 million less than the promise he made last year of £768 million, which he did not keep to anyway. Last year's promise was breached because they spent £859 million. So, to put it into context, this year he is
285 promising to spend £136 million less than the Government actually spent last year. Really? After all that failure? Who believes that? It is like someone who ran a kilometre two minutes slower than expected now saying that he will run it three minutes faster than his personal best time. He

is a person without credibility in the field of economic promises. These promises having been breached so often and this failure of financial discipline being so profound, he will forgive us for no longer believing he can navigate us through the storm. He has borrowed to the hilt, with even six of our housing estates mortgaged, with tenants locked into regular rent increases because of the terms of those facilities.

People face hikes in inflation. Everything costs more. Their wages stretch to less. The Government is not providing a better service but is asking people for more for a worse service and giving the people less. Prescription charges go up, and by stealth the legal notice contains a provision that there will be inflationary prescription charge increases every year. This is a Government that issues a press release whenever it feels any sense of good news story which it can capitalise on, and yet did not tell us of the expected annual prescription fee charges – an attempt to bury bad news and to hide behind the GHA.

The financial stress is being felt by the ordinary citizen and the small business owner, who has now been left to survive out there while the Government asks everyone to tighten their belt but does not do the same itself and overspends massively in the year of biggest financial crisis. Little surprise, then, that we have no faith in Mr Picardo's economic management skills. He is the captain without a plan and without a clue, all spin and smoke and mirrors. Is that why he went to visit His Holiness the Pope in the Vatican? Things must be really bad if he had to go all that way to ask for financial forgiveness and to confess his economic sins. Or, as he walked those hallowed corridors and smelt the powerful incense, was it a bid for divine inspiration that would illuminate his financial path, or a request for an economic miracle, because that's what he needs now?

Mr Speaker, people are increasingly seeing that the promises are just that: empty words that are said but not kept, like the pretty pictures in their successive manifestos, like the hundreds of letters he writes to associations and individual voters at election time hoping to persuade them to trust one more time – just one more time, one more for the road. He is addicted to debt and to economic failure. Just one more for the road does not cut it anymore with an electorate that can see through the smoke and mirrors of his spending and his promises.

He spends the people's money like there is no tomorrow – maybe because there *is* no tomorrow for him – and the signs of recklessness and lack of realism are also there in other ways. They say they will borrow another £50 million next year, but of course we know they did not keep to that promise last year. They are now perilously running out of leeway in the guarantee facility they negotiated – and we heard what he said this morning about that. For next year's Budget and to maintain the pretence of prudence they have shaved off projected expenditure from high-spending Departments, but without any real sense of whether these promises will be kept – because, as I have illustrated clearly, they were not last year at all.

Part of the reason they are projecting to spend £723 million next year is because this year they are only providing a notional £1 million contribution from the Consolidated Fund to the Improvement and Development Fund (IDF), from which, as people know, the infrastructure projects of the Government are paid. The spending in the IDF seems clearly dependent on the receipt of the Eastside premium of £90 million, but what happens if it is not received? How are the extra projects going to be funded? After all, they are expecting to spend an extra £30 million this year through the IDF.

For example, via that fund it is clear that they intend to spend £2.75 million on computerisation of the Government, having already spent a massive £14.5 million in 2019-21. Over and above that, they intend to spend £3.75 million on so-called digital transformation, having spent £3.4 million last year. But of course that is a misnomer, if you ever needed one, because the citizen knows that e-government is still a shambles and there is not much to show for that – and yet the millions being spent just keep on piling up.

Remarkably, the Island Games facilities are still not complete. They intend to spend another £2.3 million on those facilities this year to complete the facilities of the Games that took place three years ago. If there is a monument to this Government's tendency for smoke and mirrors, it is those facilities – which they are still trying to finish – that were promised to sportsmen and

340 sportswomen as a generational legacy to enhance sports facilities and training capabilities, only to be ripped up, in part, when the Games were over; because the façade shown at the Games was just that, a façade, and for these still not to be complete even now forcing sports people to go elsewhere to do their training. This morning, he called them the best sporting facilities our athletes enjoy. In fact, they are the best sporting facilities that our athletes do not enjoy.

345 But no worries, Mr Speaker, because No. 6 Convent Place expects to spend 50% more in its entertainment budget this year. While Rome burns, the emperor will play the fiddle and be entertained. To put it in sharper context, the Government is cutting the GHA's sponsored patient budget by £4.75 million this year, or over 30%, but intends to spend 50% more by way of the Chief Minister's entertainment budget than last year. The priorities are all wrong. *(Interjection by Hon. Chief Minister)*
350 The Hon. Chief Minister says it is to invite me to National Day. Well, that glib little remark will not obscure the reality. If you pull that picture together, you see a large public sector budget out of control with a Government preaching a tightening of the belt to others but unable to carry it out themselves. Far from a tightening of the belt, the figures show a greater loosening by the Government.

355 If only they at least stuck to their Budget, that would be but a first step. There would then be a need to weed out inefficiencies, monitor public contracts in a better way and cut out waste and abuse. But that seems a lost cause with a Government that has not got a clue or a real desire or commitment to rein in expenditure, prioritise properly and become more efficient and deliver a better service to people. Above all, there is no leadership to make that happen, and that must be
360 a conscious decision. Instead, everywhere you look there are contradictions and incoherence.

Beyond this, there remain real concerns that the people have still not been properly told how hundreds of millions of pounds borrowed in their name have been used, or *if* they have been used, and what we have seen over the last 12 months indicates a willingness to ignore tendering processes that the Government itself had triggered. These practices affect governance and
365 finances. So it was a few months ago that TNG, an entity that did not even exist when the expressions of interest process closed for the Bayside/St Anne's plots, were suddenly announced as having been awarded that multi-million luxury plot, despite not even having participated in the expressions of interest process. Instead of re-advertising the process, the Government awarded the sites to them. That was compounded by the downright misrepresentations of the Government
370 press releases at the time, which clearly suggested that TNG had presented the 'highest offer' – to quote from their press release – clearly implying that they had been bidders in that process when they had not.

Once we made clear and put in the public domain that our own verifications suggested that the entity did not even exist when the process had closed, the Government backtracked,
375 inevitably, at that stage, and, to try to deflect matters, suggested the Opposition had an agenda for some nameless developers; a complete nonsense, of course, but demonstrative of how, if there were 'locked-up cats' here – to coin the pejorative Spanish saying used by the Chief Minister on Twitter at the time – they were on that side of the House. But the reality is that the cats did not stay locked up much longer, because days after the Bayside announcement the same entity
380 was also awarded the whole of the very valuable £2.5 billion Eastside development. Again, this entity had not participated in the Eastside expressions of interest process because, we know, it did not exist at the time. Again, the Government misrepresented the position by saying TNG were, to quote, 'the highest bidder', when clearly they were not bidders at all at the time the process closed. Again, much more recently the Government has accepted that TNG did not submit an
385 expression of interest by the closing date in this Parliament. The 13 other bidders on the Eastside plot and the other bidders of the Bayside/St Anne's plot may feel, rightly, hard done by that sequence of events.

Of course, at the same time that those behind TNG were seeking to persuade the Government that they should consider their aspirations for those plots, when they had not even filed bids by
390 the closing dates, it was a complete coincidence that those behind TNG via Trusted Novus Bank gave the Government a £3.75 million donation to bail it out of the spiralling high cost of the

Midtown Park. In a rather quirky intervention at the Budget last year the Chief Minister described the donation in this way:

I am very pleased to be able to announce that the new park at Midtown is being funded entirely by a very generous donation from Trusted Novus Bank.

He went on:

What an out of the ordinary manner to support the community with an out of the ordinary donation for an out of the ordinary park area in the very centre of our city.

395 He used the words 'out of the ordinary' in front of descriptive words several times for emphasis
and clearly deliberately. Given that the bank that shares the same ultimate owners of TNG market
themselves as the 'Out of the Ordinary Bank', using that as their effective strapline – 'Out of the
Ordinary' – and that the park eventually acquired the livery and emblem of the bank, one can be
400 forgiven for being left thinking that these are the new depths that we have got to with this
Government.

This is a cash-strapped Government that is not only selling the family silver and looking for
benefactors for its financial mistakes but is, apparently, prepared to rent out the Chief Minister
for short, 30-second commercials where you are assured that he will use your corporate slogan a
few times. If he was in Saatchi & Saatchi they would be proud, but to watch that performance was
405 farcical and demeaning to his office, especially given the events that then unfolded, a few months
later, when it became obvious what the donation was for.

Mr Speaker, last year the Chief Minister increased Social Insurance, which was a burden on
small businesses trying to survive as they emerged from the COVID lockdowns. He did so by a
significant margin. He also increased electricity charges: 20% for commercial electricity and 16%
410 for home consumers. When he did so, he compared electricity charge increases in the past. This
year, there have been further hikes of 8% in electricity and water charges. Of course, it is different
to increase charges when wages are going up and in a buoyant economy with low inflation, where
charges and increases may still leave you better off, in net terms, after you take account of wage
rises; but when wage rises are difficult or low and inflation is high, all these charges and new
415 indirect taxes leave the poorer worse off. So where is the real evidence that ordinary working
families are being insulated from his economic mismanagement? That is not a sentiment felt
simply by the Opposition. The Equality Rights Group, who have campaigned fearlessly on social
issues for decades, chastised the Government recently, and rightly, for precisely running deeply
contradictory financial policies seeking a tightening of the collective belt but being unprepared to
420 do so itself. All this leaves people behind.

We share the view that in a year of high inflation and such economic pressure the Government
should be cautious about putting further pressure on workers or small business. There are people
already living on a knife-edge. There is a need to protect the worse off, the more vulnerable and
those on the business economic knife-edge who are striving hard to put food on the table for their
425 families and employing people who, in turn, need those businesses to survive. This is especially so
given the rising inflation of over 7%. Everything is more expensive. People have less money in their
pockets.

The problem with this year's measures is that it is a bag of contradictions, like everything they
do. This year, and unusually, certain figures have been drip-fed into the public domain ahead of
430 this Budget debate. Additionally, they have briefed the press about how this is going to be his
toughest Budget. But what he has omitted to say is why. The why is because of a decade of
borrowing without restraint; a decade of spending without discipline; a decade of not controlling
public sector contracts; a decade of not controlling waste and abuse; a decade where
systematically *our* money – *your* money – has been misspent by him and where he has singularly
435 failed to provide a strong financial legacy to future generations. We have been taken, as a
community, to the financial cliff-edge. That is why it is so appalling for the Government to

overspend in its own Budget in this year, because this then creates pressure on the innocent. Workers and small businesses and the ordinary citizen will feel a sense of genuine outrage that the reason they face new taxes or charges or higher fees is because in the worst financial year ever the Government of Mr Picardo has not kept to its own Budget. Why should people pay for his mistakes? What moneys are the measures they have announced this morning going to generate, other than to plug the holes of his overspend, which I have explained already he did last year?

Some sectors of the business sector will rightly suffer a genuine sense of dejection. There is nothing in the Budget to help businesses through the current turmoil. Beyond the continuation of BEAT for part of the last financial year, the big chunk of the COVID Fund was used to fund loss in revenue, although some went to expenditure of some Departments, as we have seen.

The Social Insurance price hikes last year were penal. They hit business and eroded wages so that there were employees actually worse off, even after receiving a wage rise. That is how profound the Social Insurance hikes last year were. He will remember that the Chamber condemned those increases because they were done without consultation and highlighted, to quote from their press release at the time, 'the precarious state of the Government's finances in the wake of not only the COVID pandemic but also years of rampant recurrent and capital expenditure'. We agree. Those increases were against a backdrop of much lower inflation, and even then there were concerns on jobs, wages and business viability. The Social Insurance increases last year were from 20% to 107% at one brutal stroke. Voluntary contributions were increased by 142%. This meant around £1,100 to those taxpayers.

As I said last year, COVID left certain sectors of the economy very damaged – particularly those reliant on the tourism industry, which is only now starting to come back, albeit not in the large pre-pandemic volumes – but many of those businesses remain on a precipice and there is no real sign of Government assistance or sympathy. For example, when the Omicron variant spread quickly and the Government openly discouraged people from going out, this had a real effect on bookings and business. The public comments of the Government were unsympathetic, as the Catering Association had itself noted in its public remarks at the time. Rather than give the small business sector breathing space, the Government jumped from funding BEAT payments to levying higher Social Insurance or electricity charges – plainly inconsistent policies. And now, this year, further pressure has been piled on workers, ordinary families and small business.

So, let me be absolutely clear on the specific budgetary measures announced today. Of course we welcome that state pension and disability benefits should be increased by inflation and the measures designed to assist the most vulnerable through this crisis – for example, the means-tested utilities credit. We agree with the measures announced in respect of adjusting Income Tax rates at the highest end on incomes over £500,000 a year and the reform of rules on Category 2 individuals. We also agree with measures that would address any corporate under-declaring.

Some of the other specific measures seem short-sighted and counterproductive to the economy. For example, of concern would be the passenger tax applied to the cruise liner market. In a notoriously competitive market, that could remove any edge our market has and mean that cruises do not dock at Gibraltar. This would be a massive mistake. It would harm the industry and jobs. That measure and our concerns will be addressed more specifically by my colleague Damon Bossino in his reply.

So, too, the imposition of a so-called COVID recovery charge, by which companies have to pay, in effect, £1,250 per year. That will raise lots of eyebrows in the business and financial services sector. It was not clear – and he has the chance, on reply, to say – but did he mean all companies or all trading companies? If the former, it will, in effect, strike a crushing blow to company and trust managers and potentially destabilise the big sectors of the financial services industry and, with it, endanger many jobs in the industry. If he meant the latter – trading companies – then this, too, is harsh on small businesses trying to make ends meet. Margins of survival are thin and all he is doing is making it so much harder for business and for these ...

On the Minimum Wage, we understand and share the concern that we must do more for our lower paid. When this is put alongside other charges, however, and without any rebalancing relief
490 for small business, the Government may find that the effect of increasing these burdens is that small businesses on thin margins will not survive. That will mean the loss of jobs and the irony that by seeking to increase wages the Government has caused workers to lose their jobs, in some sectors.

The Chief Minister has increased Income Tax by 2% and electricity and water charges by 8%.
495 The fact that electricity and water prices may be higher in Spain is of little comfort to ordinary working families who may be on the edge. Food prices here are higher than in Spain, and there are people who are even facing difficulty going across the border, so they cannot just pop over to buy food in Spain. So, if we are going to do the comparison, let's do the comparison in the round. He may be dismissive about the effect of these charges, but they have to be seen in context, and
500 as a cumulative effect they take a toll on the ordinary working family. Last year, electricity and water went up 16%, so in cumulative terms it means they have raised these 24% in the space of merely 12 months. That will mean hundreds of pounds more per year for consumers, on top of the hundreds of pounds they have already been paying because of last year's increases. Combined with that and the inflation and the Income Tax, it will erode wages even further. It will mean that
505 the vast majority of people will be worse off after this Budget and will have less money in their pockets, and they will ask why.

This is not the people's Budget, Mr Speaker. It was the last straw for him to call it that. This is *not* the people's Budget. It is to hold the people up by the side of the road like a 15th- or 16th-century highwayman. This is not the renaissance Budget. I know how fond the Chief Minister is of
510 straplines, in the hope that tomorrow the headline will be 'The Renaissance Budget', but the Renaissance was a break with the past, a great leap into modernity. The only relevance to his Renaissance reference is that there were plenty of highwaymen robbing the people in Renaissance times as well. And this is all this is. This is the highwayman's Budget: stand and deliver! These are his inabilities to control expenditure, which he is now seeking to sell to people as everyone
515 chipping in to save the country. He has the gall to sell to people – after his failures, the over-expenditure last year – that this is the people's Budget, a Budget for them, to save the people, to save their souls, when this is only to cover *his* tracks and save *his* political future after *his* expenditure and overspending last year, to plug that hole.

How do the words even slip out of his mouth when he has raised taxes and made most people
520 worse off, after overspending last year and making our position worse than it was last year, in the year when all financial records were broken? How can he even keep a straight face after raiding everyone's pockets, when all he is doing is taking more from the people? How can he treat the people with such financial disdain? Why does he not own up to the indiscipline, the overspending, the vanity projects, and say this is necessary because of that? Why doesn't he say that? Why
525 doesn't he come and say, 'Look, we overspent, we apologise, we made mistakes, but we have to do this?' That is not what he says. It is a different message and he is trying to sell to people that it is the people's Budget, some kind of common-man approach. It sticks in many people's throats, Mr Speaker.

I repeat, as I said last year, that we need a new way and one that ditches this catalogue of
530 failures and contradictions. We need efficiencies, control of waste, control of abuse and corruption, transparency so there is real visibility of the economy and actual debt, real prudence, targeted business assistance to deliver restart, borrowing only to invest and to create economic activity, a programme of reduction and management of borrowing, a reform of public services to deliver a better and more modern service to people which gives the taxpayer more value for
535 money and embraces the 21st century.

Mr Speaker, this Budget does not give a true picture of public finances and is unrealistic. We cannot support it because to do so would give the signal that we support the approach of someone with no clue and no plan, that we support someone who has made our public finances even worse in the worst year of our democratic history. We are not going to do that and we are not going to

540 equivocate. As I said last year, this is not about us being seen to vote for public service salaries or
not. This is about the Chief Minister and not our hardworking public servants, who grow as
frustrated and tired of his lack of leadership, inconsistencies and failures as the rest of the
electorate.

545 The basic point here is this: we think that our ability to emerge from the effects of the COVID
pandemic have been made worse by years of economic mismanagement. The Government say
that is not true. They say the deficit has nothing to do with them, and nor does our financial
weakness. But putting that debate as to where we were before COVID and our relative financial
strength or weakness, as it was, to one side, what is clear is that they had the opportunity last
550 year to show discipline and leadership. That required, at the very least, that they keep to their
Budget. By failing to do so, they have demonstrated beyond doubt everything that they have been
accused of.

Mr Speaker, this is the State of the Nation debate, and after the damning indictment people
will hear from the Members on these benches about his economic record and the lack of
leadership, it would be wrong and perverse to send the signal that we are aiding and abetting his
555 attempts by voting for his lack of controls and unwillingness to grapple with the hard choices
necessary to steady our economy and to leave a legacy of sustainability. That would require
leadership and vision. In the ambition he has to remain in power, he is sacrificing the public
interest for the sake of their narrow electoral interest. That is why a change in approach is so badly
needed, so we move away from his addiction to debt, his recklessness and his lack of direction, so
560 that we can recover a better path of economic sustainability, tackle the big challenges for our
community and deliver a long-term strategy for a solvent future.

Where is, for example, the big roadmap to first recognise and then deal with the issues of major
public sector reform that exist? It is obvious that systems and working practices need to change
to achieve a responsive, modernised and effective public service. That requires investment
565 combined with change, not just a continuation of antiquated practices, a perpetuation of the
unchecked and also untargeted, un-strategic use of money. This is as bad as throwing taxpayers'
money down a deep well, in some cases. The taxpayer deserves better. The people deserve better.

All this, Mr Speaker, is putting huge pressure on working families or small business because
there is little financial leeway to help them out at a time of crisis – because the Government led
570 by the Chief Minister has spent all the people's money and there is no money left. Borrowing from
banks to pay wages and costs, which he is now having to do, is a fool's economics – and that
because of historic debt and a fundamental inability to control expenditure in this time of deep
crisis and make efficiencies. Everyone knows reform is necessary, and it takes courage and
leadership to deal with those issues but to deal with them consistently and show and lead by your
575 example of having kept to the Budget of last year, which they failed to do. Mr Picardo is not the
man for that job because he is far too fond of just being in that job. The people have given up
hoping for financial realism, prudence or a willingness to conduct radical economic reforms from
him or his Government. (*Banging on desks*)

580 **Mr Speaker:** The Hon. the Deputy Chief Minister.

Deputy Chief Minister (Hon. Dr J J Garcia): Mr Speaker, it has been a difficult six years. I think
even the hon. Member opposite would realise that. As you know, Gibraltar has, in that time, had
585 to endure a dual crisis, the consequence of a lethal combination of our departure from the
European Union and a global public health pandemic. The former stretches back now to the
referendum of June 2016. The origins of the latter can be traced to December 2019. Those two
events have dominated our politics and shaped our lives. They have also taken up valuable hours,
days, weeks, months and years of Government time. And not least, the pandemic in particular has
impacted negatively on the economy and on Government finances. All this is reflected in the
590 Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure before us today. In all my time in this House I have never
witnessed an external event which has impacted on our finances in this way – and I have been

here for 23 years now. It would be grossly unfair to belittle or ignore this fact, as the hon. Members are prone to do, and to pretend it simply has not happened. This is, as I said, my 23rd Budget debate; the pandemic, as the House will recall, caused us to skip one a couple of years ago.

595 The COVID Response Fund has set out, in a clear and transparent manner, exactly what the financial consequences of the pandemic have been. Clearly, the human cost will always be more important than the numbers – the 6.3 million people who have lost their lives so far, over one hundred of our own citizens – but the public health crisis has catapulted the planet into an economic crisis. That cannot be denied. Businesses have closed, many have contracted; jobs have
600 been lost; revenue has fallen; expenditure has increased; and debt has mounted everywhere. Government finances all over the globe have taken a hit, and Gibraltar is no exception. The latest published figures show that the overall impact of the pandemic, here, is over £360 million. All this represents a real and direct blow to our finances.

The House will recall the detailed preparations that were made in 2020 and 2021 to meet the
605 challenge posed by the pandemic. This included the purchase of medical equipment, the stockpiling of medical supplies, the creation of a field hospital from scratch, the extensive testing regime which made Gibraltar a world leader in the field, the Contact Tracing Bureau. And in addition to all this, the taxpayer supported the salaries of private sector workers during two lockdowns and, in certain cases, beyond. Indeed, businesses were also assisted with their costs in
610 other ways. The bill has run to hundreds of millions of pounds. That is money the Government has spent and money the Government has not received – all this with the agreement of the Opposition. True, we hoped to have seen the back of the pandemic by now, but the truth is, as variants of concern continue to emerge, we can never know for certain. The vaccination programme remains our main defence going forward, and in this area, too, Gibraltar has led the
615 world with the invaluable support and assistance of the United Kingdom. Therefore, the impact of the diversion of resources, funding, staff, time and energy to fight the pandemic since 2020 should not be underestimated or belittled; neither should the combined consequences of the £360 million in expenses and lost revenue.

But COVID-19 is, sadly, not the only external factor to have hit Gibraltar. The effects of our
620 departure from the European Union have been with us for even longer. Indeed, Brexit has dominated many Government workstreams since the 2016 referendum. That makes it six of our 10 years in office. It also means the entirety of this electoral term so far. It is inevitable that six years of Brexit and three years of COVID will have consequences for what any Government can do. The time spent on Brexit matters by Ministers and officials has had and will have a knock-on
625 effect. That same attention will, sadly, have been denied to other areas. The speed with which decisions are taken has been impacted. The time available to meet people has been, sadly, squeezed.

We cannot underestimate the all-consuming and cross-cutting nature of our EU departure. Practically every Department or Ministry has been affected in some way. It is true that the Chief
630 Minister and I have certainly devoted more time to this than other Members of the Government, but that does not mean to say that the others have not been involved also. On the contrary, they have: firstly, in the wider discussions and the policy decisions that have needed to be taken; secondly, because of the direct impact of our EU departure in their own areas of responsibility; and now, thirdly, in the assessment and discussions of the proposed future relationship with the
635 European Union. I cannot stress enough, therefore, the cross-departmental nature of this work. It is also relevant to emphasise that there are different Brexit workstreams: the first for work in the context of an agreement; the second for work in the context of no agreement, with the exploration of possible alternatives or contingencies; and the third in relation to future long-term economic planning. The entirety of the Government has been involved in these processes over all
640 these years.

As my hon. Friend the Chief Minister has said, the Government continues to work towards a treaty to govern the future relationship of Gibraltar with the European Union. The House knows that our main interest lies in a mobility agreement which facilitates the movement of persons.

645 That principle was reflected in the New Year's Eve Agreement of 31st December 2020. It is relevant
to note that this objective is diametrically opposed to the deal that the UK negotiated for itself
under the Trade and Co-operation Agreement. The UK wanted barriers, controls and check points,
whereas we were looking for the opposite. But for us, our objective remains – that is to remove
650 the existing EU Schengen controls from the land border with Spain and transfer those controls to
Gibraltar Port and Airport. The effect of this would be the seamless movement of persons by land
between Gibraltar and the European Union through Spain.

It is obvious that the movement of goods can impact on the movement of persons. Under the
terms of a common travel area, a person on foot or in a vehicle would not be subject to
immigration controls. However, they could still be stopped and asked to show the contents of
their bag or their suitcase, or indeed to open the boot of their vehicle. The decision of the
655 Government to pursue an agreement on the movement of goods must be seen in this context.
The House will understand why. The history of the border crossing experience enjoyed by our
people since the Frontier opened is well known to us all, and no controls means no queues. So the
work goes on.

The Government remains fully committed to arrive at a positive conclusion, but we also need
660 to be alive to the alternative – that is to say the possibility of a no negotiated outcome (NNO).
This, to put it mildly, is not an attractive proposition, nor is it where we wish to land politically,
but we do recognise that until there is a deal no agreement remains a possibility, and the
Government has a duty to prepare, as far as possible, for that eventuality. In some areas, Gibraltar
can and will look to alternative mechanisms and procedures. We will look to non-EU international
665 legal frameworks, Council of Europe and United Nations Conventions. International Agreements,
too, may cushion the full impact of our departure from the European Union. However, it must be
understood that there are some areas where it will simply be impossible to provide any mitigation.
That means that the full impact of our position outside the European Union will come to bear.

This House will be aware of the booklet on NNO which was issued by the Government in
670 February. This was entitled *Guidance to Citizens – No UK-EU Treaty on the future relationship of
Gibraltar*. It was an important piece of public information strategy on NNO. The booklet was
published online and distributed to thousands of households all over Gibraltar. It made the point
that since the UK or Gibraltar would never sacrifice fundamentals or put Gibraltar's future in
jeopardy, we must also be ready to walk away. The 40-page guidance covered areas like the
675 movement of persons, the movement of goods, healthcare, driving licences, social security,
students and mobile roaming. It also pointed to advice which had been issued previously. This
information is now all on the Government website.

I should add that the booklet did not pretend to be exhaustive, so in order to further assist the
public, the email address brexite@gibraltar.gov.gi was provided in order to handle any further
680 queries. That email address was set up in October 2020 and a total of 170 emails have been
received. These were all replied to in substance or the sender was referred to the correct
Department for a substantive reply. The queries mainly related to passports, residency, health
cover, customs requirements, road haulage, driving licences, pets and the registration of medical
devices. Those questions and questions about other areas were answered in line with the
685 guidelines included in technical notices or based on the advice provided by different Government
Departments. Over 50 technical notices and two information booklets have been published to
date.

Mr Speaker, United Kingdom experts have supported every aspect of the negotiations. The
necessary resources and expertise have been made available to Gibraltar at every stage. This has
690 been a cross-Whitehall effort. In that same way, we have also worked together on every step of
our planning for an NNO. There has been, and continues to be, very positive and productive
engagement between the two governments. The formal structure between the Gibraltar and UK
governments remains the NNO Board. This is co-chaired by me and by the UK Minister for Europe.
When in that role, Wendy Morton MP participated in a Board meeting here in Gibraltar, her

695 successor, Chris Heaton Harris Mr President, did so virtually, and I very much look forward to working with James Cleverly MP on the NNO Board going forward.

I want to place on record the thanks of the Government, on behalf of the people of Gibraltar, for the unwavering support that we continue to receive from the United Kingdom. The contribution from UK Ministers and officials from every department and in every area has been
700 second to none. I must single out for particular praise the support of officials from the FCDO. This has extended to the co-funding of NNO projects here in Gibraltar. The first of these was for the purchase of waste equipment. The shredder, wrapper and baler was put to good use at the beginning of the year when there was a delay in the processing of permits for the export of waste to Spain under a new system. This increased the resilience of Gibraltar by allowing us to shred,
705 wrap, compact and store a greater volume of waste.

The UK also co-funded the food ferry operation from Algeciras. The House will recall that the end of the transition period saw a change to the way in which goods of animal origin made their way from the UK to Gibraltar. That ferry operation is now entirely funded by those who choose to make use of it.

710 A third area where the UK has assisted financially is with works to the container terminal at the Port. Those works have involved repairs to the wharf, resurfacing and repaving the area as well as improvements to its electrical infrastructure. The outcome is that the number of electrical connection points for refrigerated containers will increase from just a handful to over 50. That project will be complete in the next few weeks. The Government cannot stress enough the
715 importance of this facility in an NNO context.

The UK has also assisted Gibraltar with financing a contingency to hold a number of hotel beds for key workers in the event of problems at the border when the transition period came to an end.

Mr Speaker, the governments of the UK and Gibraltar are now working together on a plan to extend the pedestrian entry facility at the land border with Spain. A planning application has now
720 been filed with the DPC. The objective is the expansion of the building in order to accommodate the installation of a number of e-gates on our side of the Frontier. These are already in place on the Spanish side. In the event of NNO, the automated technology would assist with the flow of persons into Gibraltar. The UK and Gibraltar governments had agreed to co-fund this programme as well. Indeed, as I speak, a team of officials from Gibraltar are in London to meet with the UK
725 Border Force precisely about the e-gate project. Hon. Members should bear in mind that even if there is a treaty, this contingency will be available to Gibraltar at any point in the future. It will arise at the four-year treaty review point, for example; it could follow the election of a more aggressive government next door; and it would also work when there is a need to reinstate controls with and within Schengen. This happened, for example, following the terror attacks in
730 France and again during the migrant crisis from the east.

I want to take this opportunity to thank the many officials of the Government of Gibraltar, too, who have also been active participants in this process, in particular the Civil Contingencies Co-ordinator, Ivor Lopez, the Director of Gibraltar House in Brussels, Daniel D'Amato, the CEO of the Ministry of the Environment, Dr Liesl Mesilio, and my Principal Secretary, Ernest Francis. They
735 have brought the many strands of this work together in an effective, organised and highly efficient manner. However, despite all this work, I must repeat the following. In certain areas there are simply no contingencies available, there is no mitigation and no plan can be formulated. In those areas, the default position of NNO will simply reflect what it means to be outside the European Union.

740 The details of NNO planning were set out in private to Members opposite and to others. The Leader of the Opposition and the Brexit Select Committee were each briefed separately. A similar presentation was delivered on a confidential basis to the Chamber of Commerce, the Gibraltar Federation of Small Businesses, the Gibraltar Betting and Gaming Association, the Finance Centre Council and the media. Gibraltar is, therefore, as prepared as we can be. It is impossible to have
745 done more.

The House will know that the full impact of a hard Brexit has been mitigated, so far, by a series of contingency measures unilaterally extended by Spain. Those unilateral measures were first enacted by them on 28th December 2020, a few days before the transition period came to an end. The last extension, under Spain's *Decreto Real*, came on 28th December 2021, so persons with a
750 right of access to public healthcare in Gibraltar were allowed to continue to access public healthcare in Spain on terms equivalent to those which existed before we left the European Union. That measure was reciprocal and applies only between Gibraltar and Spain. This comes to an end this month, on 30th June, unless it is extended further. The equivalent provisions with regard to
755 the rest of the European Union ended with the transition period some 18 months ago. There were other bridging measures applied at the time, in relation to the exchange of driving licences and education. Gibraltar has ensured reciprocal treatment, where relevant.

The single most important area has been the border. Gibraltar's departure from the European Union at the end of January 2020 meant that the legal status of our land border with Spain changed overnight. It ceased to be an internal EU border and switched from being an external
760 border of the Schengen Area to an external border of the European Union as well.

Our departure also transformed our personal status. British citizens, including Gibraltarians, ceased to be EU nationals and became, instead, what the EU terms Third Country Nationals. Therefore, when crossing a Schengen border the rules that apply to us are no longer the same. Nonetheless, Spain maintained the position at the border from January 2020 until October 2021.
765 However, at that point the United Kingdom introduced new immigration rules for EU nationals. Spain did the same for UK nationals at the border. This led to the stamping of their passports on entry to and exit from the Schengen Area.

In April 2022 there was another new departure. UK nationals, including those who hold blue civilian registration cards, started to be stopped and questioned by Spanish border guards; some
770 were turned back. Although there is provision for questioning in the Schengen Border Code, the Government has made it clear that this state of affairs is not satisfactory. We have raised the matter both with the United Kingdom and with Spain, and we will continue to do so. Having said that, the Government is conscious that the default legal position at the Frontier is the Schengen Border Code. The full application of that Code would mean that everyone, including Gibraltarians,
775 would be subject to the more stringent controls. No agreement would extend that same chaos to all. It is important to note that the proposed treaty, therefore, would unblock these mobility issues for all residents of Gibraltar.

Mr Speaker, I now turn to report on our office in Brussels. The expanded office is in its seventh year of operation. It has been a constant source of support throughout the tumultuous journey of
780 our withdrawal from the EU and it continues to provide vital assistance to the Government as we conduct negotiations for a treaty to govern our future relationship.

The office has provided much more than simple technical support. Its footprint in Brussels, in the heart of the European Union, has also gone a long way to promote our interests and our reputation. The Government has always maintained that this physical presence in Brussels has
785 provided a value to Gibraltar that goes far beyond its size. Our representation in Brussels has continued to engage on a regular basis with the EU institutions and with other stakeholders there. This includes officials from the European Parliament, from the European Commission and from different member states. This contact takes place both online and in bilateral meetings in person. Indeed, the Government hopes to be in a position to resume familiarisation visits to Gibraltar by
790 relevant EU stakeholders. The value of this was evidenced by the European Commission technical visit to the Airport and the border, which took place in January. They left with a better understanding of the situation on the ground and with a willingness to explore practical solutions. The best way to understand Gibraltar is to see it.

Efforts continue to be made by Gibraltar House to remain centre stage of the British presence
795 in Brussels. The office continues to have a central co-ordinating role in the activities of the network of UK interests there. This organisation has been newly rebranded and is now called UK Stakeholders Brussels (UKSB). It brings together governments, industry associations and

educational representatives from the wider British family of nations which are based there. This has become a forum in which to share perspectives and devise strategies to collectively promote British interests within the EU. Gibraltar maintains close contact with the offices of the devolved administrations – Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. We also work very well with the Channel Islands, the Isle of Man and with other UK Overseas Territories like Bermuda, all of whom maintain their own representation despite Brexit.

Gibraltar remains a vital British interest in Brussels. This is evidenced by the excellent working relationship the office and the Government maintains at all levels with the UK Mission to the EU, known as UKMIS. Indeed, the lead negotiator for the UK in our treaty negotiations is the UK Ambassador to the EU himself, Lindsay Appleby, a close friend of Gibraltar who understands better than most every nuance and every detail of our position. This, in itself, underlines the importance that the UK government attaches to these negotiations.

In the last year, the Brussels office has been instrumental in facilitating my participation in the European Committee of the Regions' UK Contact Group. The Group was formed in 2020. It brings together local and regional political representation from the UK and EU member states. The majority of meetings I have participated in have been virtual. However, the most recent meeting of the Contact Group took place in the Welsh Senedd, in Cardiff. I took the opportunity to attend that meeting in person. It was a useful occasion to engage with officials from the EU institutions as well as with politicians from different regions. The meeting was attended by the Chair of the UK-EU Parliamentary Partnership Assembly, Ms Nathalie Loiseau MEP, and the First Secretary of the Delegation of the EU to the UK, Mr Jan Tatum-Krauss, among others. I also used the visit to meet bilaterally with the First Minister of Wales, the Rt Hon. Mark Drakeford MS. It was very useful to be able to exchange notes with the First Minister on Brexit and on other matters. The next meeting is pencilled in for Brussels in September. It is important to be part of the efforts at continued UK-EU co-operation. This is key to ensure that Gibraltar's unique situation in the post-Brexit landscape is understood by the relevant actors both in the EU and indeed in the UK itself.

With regard to the actual treaty negotiations, the office in Brussels has been a bedrock of support. It has been involved at every stage of the preparation and conduct of these negotiations. Indeed, the Director of Gibraltar House, Daniel D'Amato, has participated in every negotiating round, in person, alongside the Attorney General, Michael Llamas. We anticipate that the office will also be vital in ensuring that any agreement, if reached, is effectively communicated in Brussels.

It is relevant to recall that, as with any other international treaty, a Gibraltar treaty will have to be ratified by MEPs in the European Parliament. It will also require ratification by the EU member states in the European Council before it can enter into effect. The UK and Gibraltar governments and Parliaments will have to do the same. Our point of view during any ratification process will be put forward by Gibraltar House.

The role of the office will be vital if a treaty is concluded, but it will be equally important if there is no agreement. In the case of a deal, this will mean another wholesale transformation in our relationship with the European Union. The office will need to cater for the increased workstreams which such agreements usually generate. There would, for example, be technical work and reporting requirements through working groups and joint committees established by the agreement itself. In addition to this, there would also be a need for day-to-day working relationships with the Commission to ensure that the anticipated treaty is implemented correctly and efficiently. On the other hand, if an agreement is not reached, the office will continue with our lobbying and promotion work. Therefore, Gibraltar House in Brussels stands ready to continue to serve Gibraltar's interests, whatever the future may bring. I take this opportunity to thank the Director of Gibraltar House in Brussels, Daniel D'Amato, and the team there.

Mr Speaker, I move on, now, to Gibraltar House in London. COVID restrictions gradually eased in London over 2021. Gibraltar House took the first opportunity under UK rules to have a full staff return to the building on 12th April, thereby ending working from home. It was a priority to get back to normal operations as soon as possible. This reopening of the office was in the context of

850 a London where many shops and businesses were still closed. Indeed, there was a very gradual
return to in-person work on the part of many institutions and organisations. Whitehall itself was
a prime example of this. By late May 2021, officials and Ministers from Gibraltar were once again
travelling and making use of the office in the Strand for meetings and as a base for work.
Commercial entities began using Gibraltar House two months later. In this period, it was also
855 possible for the team at Gibraltar House to finally meet more parliamentarians and officials in
person. However, both Houses of Parliament took a cautious approach. It was only some months
later that meetings were allowed on the actual parliamentary estate. Nonetheless, lobbying and
engagement in London continued both online and in person, where possible. Indeed, online
meetings of the All-Party Gibraltar Group had one important advantage. This was simply that MPs
860 working from home were more easily and readily available. It also meant that the Chief Minister
and I were able to brief MPs remotely from Gibraltar. We did so on several occasions.

The House will recall that last September the traditional National Day celebrations were once
again on pause due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Instead, Gibraltar House in London hosted 10 MPs
and peers to a lunch, to mark Gibraltar Day on 10th September 2021. Before lunch, guests
865 gathered at Gibraltar House for a viewing of the National Day rally, which included an address
from Sir Bob Neill, the Chairman of the Group, all virtually.

Mr Speaker, the Government expects to have a presence at all main UK party conferences this
year. In 2021, both the Conservative and Labour parties returned to in-person conferences.
Gibraltar hosted a stand and a reception at both of these. The Prime Minister, Boris Johnson,
870 addressed the 400-strong Gibraltar reception in Manchester. Then Shadow Europe Minister
Catherine West did the same at the reception in Brighton, at which some 300 delegates were
present. The Liberal Democrats chose to meet virtually, instead. This included a fringe meeting
with speakers from the devolved regions and from Gibraltar.

In late October, Gibraltar House supported my colleague the Minister for the Environment,
875 Prof. John Cortes, who led a delegation to COP26 in Glasgow. The office in London also co-
ordinated our participation at the Joint Ministerial Council between the UK government and its
Overseas Territories, which was hosted at Whitehall in November.

In January 2022, Gibraltar House London organised a visit to Gibraltar by Sir Bob Neill MP. He
was briefed by the Chief Minister and I on the state of the negotiations with the EU. Sir Bob also
880 attended a number of meetings and delivered an address to students at the University of
Gibraltar. Two months later, in March 2022, Stephen Doughty MP, Shadow Europe Minister, and
Stephen Morgan MP, Shadow Schools Minister, also visited Gibraltar. They too were updated on
a number of issues, including the continued negotiations on the proposed UK-EU treaty.

March also saw the first in-person meeting of the All-Party Parliamentary Group. I would like,
885 at this point, to pay tribute to Lord David Chidgey. He was both a close personal friend and a good
friend of Gibraltar. In his early days, David represented the Liberal Democrats on the Foreign
Affairs Committee of the House of Commons. He took a strong and determined stand at the time
against the attempt to share the sovereignty of Gibraltar between the UK and Spain. Sadly, he
passed away after having contracted COVID-19 in February of this year. I am sure that the whole
890 House will join me in expressing our deepest condolences to his wife, April, and to their family.

Members will recall that in March the Royal Gibraltar Regiment was presented with new
colours by HRH the Earl of Wessex at Windsor Castle. The Government hosted eight MPs and
peers, as well as the UK representatives of the other Overseas Territories, to the parade and a
reception to mark the occasion.

895 Finally, Gibraltar House has, of course, been subject to the same restrictions and controls on
spending as other areas of Government. The Gibraltar Representative to the UK has reported back
to me that there will be an inevitable impact on the office of the level of inflation there. This will
cut across different areas. The cost of electricity, for example, projected from existing usage, is
expected to rise by 86%. The telephone bill is expected to increase by 14%. Generally, a 9% rise
900 for most items and services is anticipated. However, the expiry of some long-standing contracts
at Gibraltar House has nonetheless allowed the opportunity to explore alternative providers for

some services. This may help to mitigate some of those projected costs. Hon. Members will have seen that both Gibraltar House in London and Gibraltar House in Brussels have come within the Estimates approved by this Parliament last year.

905 In the last financial year, Gibraltar's engagement and links with the Commonwealth continued to be an important part of the activity of Gibraltar House. There was plenty of direct contact with Commonwealth institutions and High Commissions, as well as general diplomatic contact with other countries. Gibraltar was invited to and represented at a number of royal and Commonwealth events. The Gibraltar Representative, Dominique Searle, attended regular
910 sessions of the advisory group of the Commonwealth Enterprise and Investment Council. He also participated in meetings of the Commonwealth Foundation, as well as FCDO meetings on the Commonwealth Games.

Along with the other UK Overseas Territories, Gibraltar was represented at key events in the United Kingdom. These included Remembrance Day, the Commonwealth Day service and the
915 memorial for Prince Philip, the Duke of Edinburgh. On Commonwealth Day, Lyndsay Hoyle invited all the Overseas Territory representatives to the raising of the Commonwealth flag at the Houses of Parliament in Westminster. Gibraltar was there, too, along with Commonwealth High Commissioners, at a number of events in London to mark Her Majesty the Queen's Platinum Jubilee. This included the Trooping of the Colour ceremony, the service of thanksgiving at St Paul's
920 Cathedral and the Platinum Jubilee pageant.

Now that restrictions have eased, a number of Commonwealth High Commissioners have expressed an interest in visiting Gibraltar. We hope to be able to make arrangements for this to happen soon.

Part of my role as the Minister with responsibility for relations with the Commonwealth is to
925 bring together the different strands of Commonwealth activity. The Estimates before the House reflect the continued support of the Government for different organisations and institutions of the Commonwealth. These comprise the Commonwealth Enterprise and Investment Council, the Commonwealth Foundation and the Commonwealth Local Government Forum. Separately, the House will see reflected in the Estimates the estimated expenditure in relation to the
930 Commonwealth Parliamentary Association, which this year meets in plenary session, in person, in Canada.

I want to take this opportunity to thank my hon. and learned Friend the Minister for Justice for her sterling work during her term as chair of the regional Commonwealth Women
935 Parliamentarians.

This year, Gibraltar was represented at some of the events taking place in the margins of the Commonwealth Heads of Government meeting in Kigali, the capital of Rwanda. There was a
940 business forum, a women's forum, a citizen's forum and a youth forum. These meetings were a case of third time lucky for Kigali. On the previous two occasions, in 2020 and 2021, everything was postponed as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. The Commonwealth Youth Association selected Chris Cardona and Adriana Lopez to represent them and Gibraltar in the youth forum. Sadly, Chris was unable to attend for health reasons but was replaced, just in time, by Aaron Santos. My friend and colleague the Minister for Tourism and Business delivered an address to the business forum. He was joined there by the Country Director of the Commonwealth Enterprise and Investment Council, Jared Peralta.

945 This year, the Commonwealth Games will take place in Birmingham. The opening ceremony on 28th July will once again see the Gibraltar flag flying proudly with those of over 70 countries and territories that make up the wider Commonwealth family. I know that the House will join me in wishing all the very best to Team Gibraltar.

Mr Speaker, I move on, now, to our work in Washington and in New York. This is an area of
950 Government in-person work which has suffered as a result of the pandemic. Given the restrictions on travel to the United States at different points, coupled with the risk of enforced quarantine or isolation, the Government has exercised some caution in this respect, although some of that work did move virtually. In this context, it was very helpful that Gibraltar's representative in the United

955 States, David Liston, lives and works in New York. He was only too pleased to deliver our annual
address to the Committee of 24 in June 2021, and later to the Fourth Committee, in October. The
Government is very grateful to him for this.

960 The work in New York has often gone beyond the set speeches to the United Nations. There is
a significant amount of activity behind the scenes. This year, the Chief Minister and I were able to
continue where we had left off. The House knows that there was also a private meeting with the
Chair of the Committee of 24, the Ambassador of Grenada, to the United Nations. In addition to
this, my friend and colleague Sir Joe Bossano participated in the annual regional seminar in
St Lucia.

965 There has been no work in Washington in person over the last financial year. This was brought
to an abrupt halt by the pandemic, so my last visit to the US Congress was in May 2019 and the
last visit by a group of US Congressmen to Gibraltar was in July of that same year. I have, however,
met virtually with Congressman Ron Kind, who is a Democrat. The Congressman is now the lead
sponsor on the annual resolution which is tabled in support of Gibraltar. This followed the
retirement of Congressman George Holding, who was himself a great friend of Gibraltar. Indeed,
the House unanimously approved the award to Congressman Holding of the Gibraltar Medallion
970 of Honour in 2017. Congressman Kind has himself been a supporter of the Gibraltar resolution
since 2014. The House will recall that we started with only five sponsors. There are currently 25
other co-sponsors, in addition to Representative Kind.

975 However, Gibraltar has continued its interaction with the United States of America in different
ways. The Gibraltar branch of the American Chamber of Commerce (AMCHAM) continues to
develop commercial ties. Under their auspices, a sister cities agreement was concluded with
Raleigh in North Carolina, the capital of George Holding's former congressional state. I know that
there are plans for a trade exchange in the pipeline. I was also very pleased to receive the
Commercial Attaché to the US Embassy in London, here in Gibraltar, in March.

980 This year marks the 80th anniversary of Operation Torch. This was the Allied offensive against
the Nazis in North Africa. It was planned and executed from Gibraltar under
Gen. Dwight Eisenhower, who became the 34th President of the United States after the War.
Indeed, Gen. Eisenhower then became the first non-British person to command Gibraltar for over
200 years. There are plans to celebrate our links with the United States through a permanent
memorial to Operation Torch in the vicinity of the American War Memorial in Line Wall Road. The
985 concept is that that will mark the start of the Walk the Wall project.

Mr Speaker, I move on, now, to civil aviation. The Airport has managed to continue to grow its
traffic, albeit now concentrated on British Airways and easyJet flights. The 2022 scheduled
programme of summer flights is not far short of the pre-COVID levels of 2019. I have to
congratulate my hon. Friend and colleague the Minister for Tourism for this. It has been a difficult
operating environment for the airline industry all over the world. The number of non-scheduled
990 flights visiting the Airport also set new records in 2021. The figures for the first quarter of 2022
show a significant increase in numbers, even over that same period last year. While domestic
routes between Gibraltar and the UK continue to develop, Brexit limitations mean there are no
scheduled flights from Gibraltar to EU airports. In the event that a UK-EU treaty regarding Gibraltar
is concluded, and if that treaty covers aviation, it will set the legal basis for flights to and from the
995 EU.

1000 Work on aviation legislation continues. Over the past 12 months, a law improving the
enforcement of the control of drones has come into effect. This is important as it allows a number
of agencies, in addition to the RGP, to impose penalty notices on those persons using a drone
without the correct authorisation.

1005 The Government has recently published a Bill to cater for the policing of Winston Churchill
Avenue between the police posts at the Airport. This has come about as a result of an incident last
year which occurred as the function of Winston Churchill Avenue changed from a road to a
runway. The consequence of the incident was that an aircraft was forced to break off its approach
to land.

Gibraltar has followed the western world in imposing restrictions on Russia after the illegal invasion of Ukraine. In common with the United Kingdom and the European Union, Gibraltar issued instructions to the Airport and the wider aviation community that we would not permit aircraft owned, chartered or operated by persons connected with Russia at Gibraltar Airport.

1010 Post-COVID, the Director of Civil Aviation (DCA) has reintroduced the ongoing audit programme. This is necessary in order to demonstrate continued compliance with stringent international civil aviation requirements. The audits, which are undertaken by UK CAA inspectors, have provided the DCA with confidence that standards have not dropped despite the impact of COVID on operations. In compliance with international aviation requirements, the DCA has
1015 informed the Civil Airport that it will face a cyber-compliance audit before the end of this year.

Drone activity has reduced slightly in 2022. Nonetheless, there remain a significant number of local commercial and recreational operators registered with the DCA. In addition, there is an increasing number of requests from persons visiting Gibraltar with their drones. The majority of drone flights continue to be undertaken within the authorisation system run by the DCA. However,
1020 there continues to be evidence on social media of flight activity being undertaken by unregistered operators. Given the very small size of drones and their limited endurance, it is exceedingly difficult for the law enforcement authorities to counter this unlawful activity. For this reason, the DCA, in conjunction with the MoD, law enforcement agencies and a local software company, will be trialling an electronic surveillance system designed to detect drones in flight. Once a drone
1025 datalink is activated, the system should be able to pinpoint the location of the drone, but more importantly the location of the operator. If the trials are successful, consideration will be given to seeking funding for a permanent solution to protect not only the Airport but also local wildlife and persons in the urban environment.

On another matter, after a short competitive tender process, the DCA has renewed the contract of Redline Assured Security Ltd to provide unannounced covert and overt testing of security at the Airport. I want to take this opportunity to thank the Director of Civil Aviation, Chris Purkiss, for all this.
1030

Mr Speaker, I now want to update the House on the workings of the Freedom of Information Act. The House will recall that when the Command Paper on Freedom of Information was published, there were no representations received from anyone within the period allowed. The Freedom of Information Act was commenced in June 2021. In that time there have been a total of nine requests made. Four of those requests came through the online portal. All of these were in respect of the Human Resources Department. Two of those requests were subject access requests, which do not carry a fee and are dealt with directly by the Department. The applicants
1040 were informed to contact Human Resources directly. A further five requests were received by email. Request 1 was for information from the Gibraltar Health Authority, which is not currently in the schedule. Request 2 was for information from the Gibraltar National Archives, for which a Freedom of Information request was not necessary; the applicant was advised to contact the archives directly. Requests 3, 4 and 5 were from persons who were not resident in Gibraltar and therefore did not meet the criteria. The Government looks forward to the annual report from the Information Commissioner, after which it will consider the next steps.
1045

Mr Speaker, the Gibraltar National Archives continues to do a sterling job in promoting our history. This is due in large measure to the energy, enthusiasm and commitment of the Archivist, Anthony Pitaluga, with the assistance of his dedicated staff. Much of this promotion is carried out online through their website, which has become a portal for the world. In the financial year 2021-22 there were 22,434 hits on the website from 135 different countries. There were also 2,427 registered visitors who consulted analogue and digital material directly at the premises. In addition to this, there were 59 enquiries received by email and one by post from a total of 30 different countries.
1050

On 1st January 2016, the Archives implemented the issuing of history cards for registered users. This allows them to log the number of enquiries received per member and to build up a
1055

profile of the interests of each one of them. There are now 1,254 registered members of the Archives, of whom 143 are new users who joined in the financial year to 31st March 2022.

1060 In April 2021, the Archivist attended, via Zoom, online digital preservation workshops run by Preservica UK. In August, he also took part in the Zoom conference of the Archives and Records Association of the United Kingdom and Ireland after the in-person event was cancelled.

1065 In November and December 2021, the Gibraltar National Archives organised an exhibition which marked 100 years of the establishment of the City Council in 1921. Another exhibition was organised on 25th April 2022, outside that financial year, to mark the 40th anniversary of the Falklands conflict. These exhibitions were both expertly curated by Anthony Pitaluga to the high standard that he has us accustomed to. Hon. Members will be aware that an exhibition to mark the Platinum Jubilee of Her Majesty the Queen opened at the Gustavo Bacarisas Gallery in Casemates earlier this month. It will run until 22nd July. I must specifically thank the Archivist, the staff and their helpers for this commendable achievement.

1070 The Government remains fully committed to the development of the Gibraltar National Archives. Hon. Members will recall that Duke of Kent House has now been earmarked as the building that will be home to the public face of the Archives. There is a nominal entry for this in the Improvement and Development Fund Head 102 Projects, Subhead 4 Other Projects (zzu). The House will also note that the I&DF also provides for funding to be made available for the installation of a specialist fire suppression system at the Gibraltar National Archives. This is shown under Head 102 Projects, Subhead 4 Other Projects (zzc).

1075 Mr Speaker, work at the Northern Defences continues to progress well. The Government remains committed to continue the transformation of the site into a new heritage, tourist and community park. In March this year, outline planning permission was received for a strategic master plan. This will gradually see that vision come to reality. An application for full planning permission for an access staircase from Casemates Square was also supported by the Development and Planning Commission. It was gratifying to witness such overwhelming support from every member of the Commission, both for the work done so far and for the holistic proposals presented to them for the future.

1080 In addition to the clearing and restoration work, the area has also witnessed major improvements to our infrastructure. This year, I wish to particularly praise the work carried out by Aquagib. They have co-ordinated that work tirelessly with representatives of my office. Providing and upgrading infrastructure is an essential component of a thriving community. However, those responsible for delivering such a service are rarely acknowledged or praised for the work they carry out. We too often take for granted the presence of our Wi-Fi signal, the provision of electricity or the supply of water.

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1090 Last year, the Western Water Mains Relief Project, designed to supply the needs of the Eastside reclamation site, progressed smoothly and quietly along the western slopes and tunnels at the Northern Defences. This infrastructure project was born out of the need to provide redundancy in water supply due to the ageing infrastructure on the west side. It was also designed to cope with increased demand due to the rapid expansion rate of construction and demographics in the building sector. The logistical challenge of supplying these relatively remote sites has been overcome through close co-operation between AquaGib and the project director, Carl Viagas. The combination of knowledge about the Northern Defences coupled with a dedicated management team has enabled the identification of a route away from congested sites. The outcome has reduced costs and avoided considerable inconvenience to the public. The extent of the works, once completed, will involve the laying of some 1,650 m of twin pipes, 1.6 km. This will make this project one of the most significant of its kind in the last decade.

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1100 I have to congratulate the team at AquaGib for the sensitive way in which this infrastructure has been dealt with. For instance, hundreds of metres of pipes have been laid and then buried in tunnels, and a viewing platform below the Tower of Homage now conceals a previously exposed network of pipes. The speed and nature of this intervention will hopefully be adopted in sensitive sites elsewhere in Gibraltar in the future.

1105

1110 The pandemic wreaked havoc with our lives. The challenge of isolation and of adapting to this
was a strain on many of us. However, our people have always been resourceful. The Government
responded to this new stressful environment by adapting our programme of works at the
Northern Defences. The work was redirected to infrastructure, as I have just explained, but we
also isolated those works to allow for the rest of the site to remain partially open for leisure
activities. The public was able to make use of this new park within the Nature Reserve. There is
1115 still, obviously, plenty more to be done, though the benefits were immediately obvious. Families
have been able to enjoy a stroll or a picnic in what is one of Gibraltar's most picturesque
landscapes. I have been extremely pleased to see members of our community practising yoga
there or attending some of the popular tours on offer, but perhaps the best use of the site has
been for educational purposes. Several schools have visited the area, which now features as part
1120 of our local history curriculum. Walking through fortifications which date back to the late
18th century and witnessing the impact damage of cannon-shot upon our historic walls often has
a greater effect on a student than the most relevant book or classroom presentation will ever be
able to accomplish.

The most notable use of the site for educational purposes came last year. I reported to the
1125 House then on the use that the Gibraltar College made of the area. The House may recall that the
College chose this site as a destination as part of its Business and Travel module. In the past they
had opted for locations outside Gibraltar. Organising events such as rock climbing and abseiling,
the College tapped into a resource that until now was only available elsewhere. Building on such
an event, the College will be announcing its new educational programme starting this September,
1130 and I am very grateful to my colleague the Minister for Education, Prof. John Cortes, for this. The
concept is to use the Northern Defences as a wall-less classroom. This is a revolutionary vision
which the Government is very keen to support. The use of this site and access by specialists will
allow students to play an active role as part of an educational enrichment programme. This
programme will consist of modules such as event organising, health and safety, local history, rock
1135 climbing and conservation, and will be part of the education provided.

The investment at the Northern Defences will therefore go beyond the physical elements of
the site. It is also an investment in our younger generation. The Northern Defences will become a
key area that will provide the opportunity for us to create a qualified team of youngsters who may
well end up running this or other similar sites in the future. This will be a unique experience for
1140 our learners to redefine learning in real-life local projects. It will connect students to the real world
with a vision of enhancing creativity and purpose in a range of vocational fields. So, works will
continue this financial year. They will see interpretation signs and access stairs as well as lighting
and improvements to the designated activity areas at Queen's Lines. The House is aware that the
Government has received a number of expressions of interest for the commercial running of
1145 activities on the site. However, no firm decision has yet been taken and multiple options are being
studied.

The Government warmly welcomed the fact that the Earl of Wessex, Prince Edward, chose to
visit the Northern Defences earlier this month. He did so, together with His Excellency the
Governor and I, under the expert direction of the project director, Carl Viagas. My impression is
1150 that His Royal Highness was very interested in everything that he saw and valued the restoration
and rehabilitation of this historic site. I wish to thank Carl Viagas, whose energy and enthusiasm
have been a driving force behind this project.

I now move on to update the House on progress at the Mount. Two planning applications for
the Mount and its associated grounds received planning approval in March this year. The first was
1155 a master plan, which provided a holistic approach and strategy to the site and its grounds. The
second was a detailed application for the refurbishment of the Porter's Lodge and the hall, which
are to be used as a registry office and an events venue respectively. The two applications received
overwhelming support from the Development and Planning Commission and works are expected
to commence after the summer.

1160 The policy approach here has been similar to that adopted at the Northern Defences. The
Mount is a large, complex and historically significant site. Hon. Members will recall that the
Government embarked on a clearing-out exercise two years ago. The grounds have now been
1165 cleared of undergrowth and many paths and steps have been exposed as a result. This work has
respected the wildlife and has been carried out in consultation with GONHS, the Heritage Trust
and the Environmental Safety Group. The removal of vegetation has allowed us to identify an
original set of steps which connect from the Mount's main service road all the way up to Engineer
Road. This will become a new direct walking or hiking route to the Upper Rock Nature Reserve,
away from our busy roads.

This first exercise has allowed for the true scale and nature of the project to be appreciated.
1170 Even though the task may seem overwhelming, the team has eagerly accepted the challenge and
defined the type and sequence of works which now need to be carried out. This will be based on
the phased approach that was presented and approved at the Development and Planning
Commission. Whilst clearing-out works will continue, works to the Porter's Lodge will commence
as phase 1. The refurbishment of this charming building, the events hall and associated gardens
1175 will be an initial step towards the renaissance of the Mount. This will provide the perfect venue
both to register and host weddings. Running parallel to the refurbishment of the Porter's Lodge
will be works to the slopes behind the main residence. These beautiful spaces and magnificent
views of the bay will be used for outdoor educational experiences.

This part of the project is being funded directed by the Parasol Foundation, for which the
1180 Government is extremely grateful. Their generous donation of £1 million towards this vision is
what makes us special as a community. Their contribution will see the creation of a children's play
area, paths, nature areas, tree-hopping activities and an adventure park which seeks inspiration
from the property's history. Future phases will see the creation of paddle tennis courts. The
centrepiece will be the sensitive restoration of the main building, which is our ultimate goal. The
1185 recommissioning of disused water tanks and the use of sustainable technology could make this
project a truly remarkable one to be enjoyed by our people and by visitors.

Mr Speaker, planning permission for the refurbishment of Parliament House and a change of
use for the ground floor was received on 22nd March. It therefore gives me great pleasure to
1190 announce today that the installation of the lift at Parliament House is finally scheduled to
commence during this financial year. The preliminary funding for this can be found at Head 102
Projects, Subhead 4 (zzv). This is the outcome of the work of several years on a number of different
options. In the end, following the availability of the premises on the ground floor, it will now be
possible to provide an internal lift. The proposed solution will address the concerns of those
1195 persons with reduced mobility who want to access the Parliament Chamber, but it will do so in a
manner which respects and is sensitive to our proud heritage, too. This new planning application,
as with the previous two, received overwhelming support at the Development and Planning
Commission. Hon. Members will recall the wider proposal which I presented to them privately last
year and of which they have copies. The next phase, in the future, will see the creation of meeting
rooms, enhanced security and offices for Members and staff. The roof will also be refurbished and
1200 will allow for a series of uses, whether ceremonial or simply as an external space for staff and
Members. Once again, the appreciation of the Government must go to the Parasol Foundation.
Their generosity has not been limited to the Mount and to its grounds, it will also go towards the
external refurbishment of this handsome but currently tired building.

In order to satisfy the requirements for an internal lift and much-needed extra office space,
1205 the ground floor cafeterias have been lost. However, we do acknowledge that these provided an
element of vibrancy to this part of town. In order to minimise this loss, the Government has
awarded a tender for the use of the kiosk as a coffee-serving facility with a limited number of
tables and chairs. Such a proposal has already received planning permission. We look forward to
providing a modern Parliament which allows the public to enjoy that special morning coffee
1210 downstairs in its forecourt.

This building is not just bricks and mortar; it is and has been the bedrock of our democracy. It has witnessed our evolution and our development as a people. It is, therefore, only fitting that there be some investment and restoration. The first phase will focus on the external refurbishment and the internal lift. This is expected to commence after the summer. The rest of the restoration will have to wait and will be carried out in phases over slower time as this House approves the funding.

Mr Speaker, the last expression of interest for Road to the Lines closed on 7th March. The Government has since engaged in detailed discussions with the most attractive proposal from the highest bidder. The discussions have involved a number of Government Departments, agencies and utilities who have put in a considerable amount of time and effort to push matters forward. The result is that the Government is on the verge of concluding an agreement that will completely transform the Upper Town. I will give the House a flavour of the submission on the table.

This proposal will see considerable private sector investment which will run into millions of pounds. Hon. Members will know that the site has been neglected and dilapidated for decades. Road to the Lines is a quaint area consisting of narrow streets and steps visible from Casemates Square. Nestled below our castle, it is the backdrop to many of the events held in our most popular public space. Yet it has been the victim of neglect and sadly witnessed the loss of its residents. Many old housing properties lie empty and abandoned beyond economical repair. Different factors have contributed to this, including anti-social behaviour, the lack of accessibility, and poor infrastructure. These issues are not easy to resolve. The Government has regarded this as a challenge, a challenge that we have a duty to meet if we wish to drive a meaningful urban regeneration programme that is truly meaningful. In dealing with such projects, we have to understand and accept the causes of this kind of urban decline. Refurbishing individual properties without addressing the core issues, while certainly very useful in certain areas, is only an important first step. The current situation requires a fully co-ordinated, multi-disciplinary approach if we are to succeed in bringing life back into this quarter of town. In order to do so, we aim to address those main core issues head on.

Road to the Lines is adjacent to the Northern Defences, an area once colourfully described as 'the jungle'. Anti-social behaviour plagued Road to the Lines for decades. No urban renewal attempt would ever have a chance of succeeding if the Northern Defences had remained ignored. We are now on the road to tackling this matter. The Northern Defences is slowly becoming a family-friendly area, even before it has been officially opened. It will become our most prized jewel as a recreational space, once works have been completed, and it will provide the perfect outdoor walking and picnic area for residents and visitors.

There are two other remaining costly issues. The first is failing infrastructure and the second difficulty of access. The negotiations that the Government is conducting aim for improvements to infrastructure to be provided at no cost to the taxpayer within the site. That is the objective. It is painful to see cables and pipes fixed on to historic walls and facades, and collapsed drains in different places. All this needs to be tackled. A significant cash premium has been offered for the land. The details will be announced when the agreement has been signed. In addition to this, private investment estimated at over £2 million will be made in infrastructure for the area. This will see the provision and re-routing of essential services. It will also involve the introduction of high-speed telecommunications. New drainage will be provided. The proposed development will involve the use of sustainable technologies. The creation of a revitalised public square, landscaping, stone paving, cafés, public artwork, up-lighting of historic walls and green walls are also proposed as part of this scheme. This will be directly in line with our manifesto, where we pledged to create a child-friendly city by upgrading properties and public spaces.

The above improvements will be pointless if we do not address the issue of access. This will affect not only residents and visitors but also the developer himself, who will need to transfer tonnes of material to and from the site. It is a logistical challenge that very few have been willing to accept and an impossibility for individual property owners. Once completed, and as part of the scheme, the intention is to provide lift access to Road to the Lines. This will not only serve

1265 residents but will also become a vital connection to the Northern Defences. I am very grateful to my friends and colleagues, Minister for Urban Renewal Prof. John Cortes and Minister for Housing Steven Linares, for their invaluable and continued support. The Housing Department has been instrumental in decanting residents over many years. A small number of tenants who remain are being offered alternative accommodation so that they are not inconvenienced during these intensive and intrusive works.

1270 Having said all that, I must stress that this proposal is still under negotiation. The House may, nonetheless, be interested to know that the redevelopment is aimed at attracting a diverse market and that the properties are intended to be rented and not sold. This was an important consideration for the Government. The objective is to create a vibrant new quarter in Gibraltar. There will be, needless to say, a full public consultation exercise with all interested parties when the plans are presented to the Development and Planning Commission, hopefully later this year.

1275 The outcome will deliver an improvement not only in the constructed fabric of the area but, in so doing, to its social environment. This project will deliver an exceptional residential product, but it will also attract visitors to appreciate the history of the area as well as its unique environment. The combination of the Northern Defences with Road to the Lines will provide a springboard from which to push forward with a new high-quality visitor offering. I must, once more, thank Carl Viagas, who has advised the Government on the merits of the different proposals received, as well as Kevin de los Santos, the senior director at Land Property Services Ltd, for his advice.

1280 The House is already aware that the different expressions of interest for the Victualling Yard and the former GBC premises have yet to progress. The Government is, however, in discussion with preferred bidders in respect of the vaults at Ragged Staff and, separately, the relocation of the College of Further Education to the Cross of Sacrifice site. We also continue in discussion with preferred bidders for the Rooke site and for the old air terminal site following two separate invitations to expressions of interest. I want to thank the staff at the Lands Office in Convent Place and the management and staff of Land Property Services Ltd for their assistance and their professional advice.

1290 Mr Speaker, the last six years, since the Brexit referendum, have been difficult years for Gibraltar, not least because of the consequences of the global pandemic, which was thrown into the mix for good measure. The combined effect of these two events has been that the Government has had less time to deal with other matters. This is not an excuse, it is a reason. It is the plain truth and the hard reality we have lived over the last few years. Were there things we could have done that we have not been able to do? Yes, there were. Were there also things we could have done differently? Yes, there were. But the financial and time constraints imposed upon us have meant that we had to do what needed to be done. The people put us in office in 2011, in 2015 and in 2019 for a reason, precisely to take those difficult decisions, to tackle and overcome whatever challenges fate may throw in our path, and we are fully confident in the knowledge that nobody else in the same circumstances, faced with the same challenges, would have done any better.

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1305 So, for now, we are where we are. Gibraltar is not an economic island. We are not insulated and protected from what happens in the wider world outside. Whether it is Brexit or COVID or the new monkey pox virus, or even the war in Ukraine, everything, however distant it may seem, will have an impact here, and when we look at the Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure before the House that is precisely what they reflect: the localised impact of international crises on our own unique situation.

I close by thanking my personal staff at No. 6 Convent Place. I thank you, Mr Speaker, and the staff of the Parliament for their assistance and support throughout the year.

1310 Thank you. *(Banging on desks)*

Chief Minister (Hon. F R Picardo): Mr Speaker, with great thanks to the Deputy Chief Minister, with whom I work so closely, I wonder whether now might be a good opportunity to take 15 minutes before we return?

1315 **Mr Speaker:** The House will now recess for 15 minutes and return at twenty to six.

The House recessed at 5.25 p.m. and resumed at 5.44 p.m.

**Appropriation Bill 2022 –
Second Reading –
Debate continued**

Mr Speaker: The Hon. Prof. John Cortes.

Minister for the Environment, Sustainability, Climate Change and Education (Hon. Prof. J E Cortes): Mr Speaker, last year I started my Budget speech with the words ‘The world is in crisis.’ Little did we suspect then how the crisis would worsen and on so many fronts: COVID still with us, the cost-of-living conundrum, war in Europe. And yet, the crisis that the Earth’s climate continues to experience, and which some media and some decision makers seem to want to forget, is still, by far, the worst. Much reference will be made during this Budget debate to the economy and the tightness of our budgets – I will do so, too – but these issues will pale into insignificance as the world heats up by 2°, or more. Parts of the tropics will become uninhabitable by our species, there will be massive migration to the temperate regions with all the social, political and economic crises that will bring, with us on the front line of rising temperatures and desertification, severe storms and immigration. So we have to be careful, globally, that we do not allow short-term concerns to cloud our vision and we must guard against thinking that the danger to the planet will simply wait for us to get our act together.

1330 Many of the decisions being taken now by some countries to step back on low-carbon measures and reverse other environmental progress, to try to stave off those other crises, are short sighted and opportunistic, and the world will regret them sooner than they think. However, as we have seen this morning, despite all else, this Government is standing firm on its commitments. I also have to express disappointment that, due to the necessary investment in a robust COVID response, we have had to pull back on some of our plans, manifesto and otherwise, and will not be able to deliver all those wonderful – and, to my mind, necessary – things we planned, but we have to carry on, and carry on we will.

1335 Mr Speaker, 2021 saw the publication of the Climate Change Strategy, a plan which was due to have been published just before we entered the first COVID lockdown. Despite the delays, this document is an important step in the development of Gibraltar’s climate policy and further work on its implementation is already being undertaken across Government.

1340 We have formed a cross-governmental group, soon to be formally established in statute as the Net Zero Delivery Body, which will be responsible for establishing yearly programmes of work to ensure the targets set out in the Climate Change Act are reached. I am tremendously pleased that this body will be chaired by my hon. Friend the Deputy Chief Minister and includes the Minister for Transport and myself, as well as senior officials from across Government Departments, agencies and authorities. It will be supported by a Secretariat which will sit within the Department of the Environment and Climate Change. We have also appointed the independent Climate Change Committee, made up of individuals with expertise across various areas of climate policy who are already providing independent and impartial advice to the Government as we progress on the journey to net zero. The setting up of the Climate Action Fund will be significant as it will release resources for climate action and, as the Chief Minister has announced this morning, we are taking practical steps to populate this fund. Our first climate change and vulnerability risk assessment consultation has been carried out in collaboration with UK consultants Ricardo Energy and Environment and has helped to build a more complete picture of Gibraltar’s potential climate

hazards and impacts, identifying strengths and weaknesses, as well as solutions and areas for action.

1360 I was fortunate to attend the COP26 conference in Glasgow as part of the official UK delegation. I participated in a number of events at which I was able to highlight the important work being done in Gibraltar. I was also able to make our pledge at the Environment and Education event, in which we committed to ensuring that learning about the climate emergency becomes a fundamental principle of education policy, and to providing teachers with the training, support and resources they require in order to deliver this. We have already begun work on this in collaboration with the Department of Education and the University of Gibraltar.

1365 I would like to take a moment to commend the many private sector companies that are working on their environmental sustainability agendas. We have noticed a significant increase in their engagement with Environment from in-house training and awareness to setting their own net-zero targets within their own company goals. We are increasingly seeing how the business community is stepping up to the climate challenge. It makes economic sense, too. The most recent one to highlight is NatWest, who launched their new Green Mortgage product right here in Gibraltar just a couple of weeks ago.

1370 Mr Speaker, we live as though we have emerged from the scourge of COVID, although really we know that we have not. Public Health worked its guts out throughout the last year – more than the last few years. It is easy to forget that just three months ago we had a Contact Tracing Bureau working seven days a week, as well as a drive-in test centre and, recently, a dedicated lab at the University. I thank all those who worked directly in Public Health in COVID response; indeed, we had an award ceremony for them recently in recognition of this. It is important that we learn the lessons that the pandemic has taught us about the importance of all the functions of Public Health, not just in the monitoring of communicable diseases, but also in disease prevention, lifestyle improvement and health advice. I am working with the new Director of Public Health, Dr Helen Carter, in developing an assessment of Public Health strategic needs in order to ensure that in the future the Public Health team and function are well able to work for the good of the community and for its good health.

1385 Mr Speaker, leading on from my Budget speech last year, I am delighted to confirm that our programme to develop culture and its appreciation, both in Gibraltar and abroad, remains at the heart of my agenda, as is evident with the daily cultural activity and the increased cultural services that are provided by my team whilst sticking within our budget. My commitment to develop our arts at an international level is also a priority, and art programmes, residencies and exchanges have already been put in place for this forthcoming year by Gibraltar Cultural Services, working, as ever, on behalf of the Ministry of Culture as our executive and operational arm. We are achieving this, despite a tighter budget, thanks to hard work, sponsorship from philanthropists and the private sector, and through the support of volunteers. And so our cultural service is thriving in events, development, cultural facilities and premises, cultural education, promoting our art galleries, our public library and more, together with all the stakeholders. It is imperative that we continue to produce these programmes, as we need to make sure we invest in the cultural leaders of the future, who will promote Gibraltar outside our shores. What gives a community more celebrity status than a world-class actor, singer, musician, author or artist? That is just one reason why we must invest in culture. We have to develop and promote our own. Events with international artists are welcome and important for recreation and enjoyment, and inspire us, but it is much more important, significant and less expensive to promote the development of the arts within our community.

1395 Despite all the doom and gloom, life goes on and I will do all I can to ensure that we continue to live it to the full, enjoying all that this blessed community in which we have the privilege to reside has to offer. That is what culture does. To this end, there have, this past year, been myriad events organised, including the third Cultural Awards; an extraordinary and successful Literature Week, mainly dedicated to local authors but which saw the participation of renowned international authors Lord Jeffrey Archer and Christopher Lloyd. The Christmas Fair attractions

1410 returned at John Mackintosh Square. February 2022 saw the return of the ever-popular GibTalks.
The 2022 Youth Arts Jamboree, as part of our cultural development initiatives, was carried out
with projects in poetry and creative writing and musical composition workshops delivered by our
musician Gabriel Moreno. Live drawing sessions for young people were organised by the Fine Arts
Association and workshops were provided in collaboration with the Gibraltar Youth Service. The
programme also included the Gibraltar International Dance Festival, the Festival for Young
Musicians, the Drama Festival, the Young Art Competitive Exhibition and the ever-popular World
Book Day celebrations. The street art mural walk was a new addition which proved popular this
year, with fun and educational tours of the Mario Finlayson National Art Gallery, and City Hall and
the GEMA Gallery also part of the programme. The Young Shakespeare Company returned to the
Rock in May after a two-year gap. We supported three Gibraltarian artists to take part in the Rock
Retreat Residency in May 2022. This international initiative, spearheaded by artist and illustrator
Eleanor Dobbs, was aimed at aspiring writers and artists, with the focus on creating work for
children and young adults. There was a programme of events in celebration of the Platinum
Jubilee of Her Majesty the Queen, including the return of the popular local food festival, for this
year renamed 'Jubilita' and the completion of a John Lennon Street art mural at Landport tunnel.
Our video archive, culturetv.gi, continues to provide local entertainment to our community.

1425 In our continued efforts to promote the art galleries and local art and artists, school groups
continue to visit as part of tours to the City Hall through the Mayor's Office, the Heritage Trust
and other collaborators. A rededication of the National Art Gallery will be held in September to
coincide with the 150th anniversary of the birth of Gustavo Bacarisas. We have also opened one
of the vaults at GEMA to local artists and groups, with several successful exhibitions and other
events taking place in this cultural heritage space over the last year.

We continue to support the Ministry for Sport in its summer and mid-term sports and leisure
programmes, providing cultural initiatives.

1435 I am delighted to confirm that 2022 will see many events returning to our social and cultural
calendar. These include the Gibraltar Fair, National Day celebrations at Casemates Square, the
Christmas Festival of Lights and the Three Kings Cavalcade among others. We also had the usual
annual programme of events and festivals, this including the Autumn and Spring Festival
programme, New Year's celebrations online, art competitions, literary events and other events
throughout last year. GCS has absorbed other cultural programmes, events and administrative
duties that used to be co-ordinated by the Ministry. This includes the running of the Mayor's Office
and organising events on behalf of the Ministry. This avoids duplication and allows experts to
support the many groups and associations and better co-ordinate and develop cultural activities.

1440 The Cultural Organisations Register has been updated, keeping in line with child protection
policy as directed by the Child Protection Committee and policies, ensuring that new cultural
entity applications are properly vetted. In the last year we have ensured that most of the groups
and individuals required have completed the safeguarding children courses. We will shortly be
launching a Register of the Arts, which will contain data of individuals working within the cultural
world in Gibraltar. The Safety Advisory Group continues to bring together key agencies, to ensure
the safety of all events in our community. SAG provides support, guidance and advice to all event
organisers whilst ensuring that they maintain a high standard of safety when considering or
planning a specific event. I am currently engaged in a review of legislation appertaining to
entertainment and entertainment licences, as the current regime is confusing to users and
members of the public. The aim is to provide a new, more efficient process which will both
encourage musical and other entertainment and at the same time protect the well-being of
residents close to venues.

1450 Last year, on behalf of Government, GCS acquired 41 new artworks for the Government's art
collection. This included purchases at auction and from private collections. Some special
purchases that form part of Gibraltar's cultural heritage are a Gustavo Bacarisas portrait of his
brother Horacio Bacarisas, a collection of nine works by Mario Finlayson and a work called *The
Kiss* by Christian Hook.

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The John Mackintosh Hall Library social media platform continues to generate and oversee content promoting related initiatives, storytelling sessions, school visits and literature. The Government has invested nearly £10,000 in the last year in the purchase of new books and the introduction of Borrowbox, a popular platform for the loaning of e-books and audiobooks. Storytelling sessions for young children at the John Mackintosh Hall Library continue, thanks to a group of volunteers who deliver these sessions. After tracking the use of the library by the public, we have introduced new opening hours, from 9 a.m. to 7 p.m., Monday to Friday. The reference room continues to be a popular resource for young professionals and students studying during term times in the afternoons. There is a great deal of collaboration, including exchange of books, with the Garrison Library and the Parasol Library of the University, as the three libraries work together to provide a better, more streamlined service overall, better providing for their own specific niches. The Mackintosh Hall Library makes it a point to have an extensive collection of books written by Gibraltarian authors, or books written on themes and subjects related to Gibraltar, to include military, history, social history, wildlife, flora and so on. This complete collection has been reviewed and catalogued to allow for ease of use.

The refurbishment and maintenance of all our current cultural facilities plays an important role in allowing us to support all cultural entities, groups and individuals, increasing their potential and striving towards the best possible standard of artistic practice. We continue with the refurbishment and maintenance programme for all our facilities to ensure we extend public participation in the arts. The Central Hall has been fully and extensively refurbished, restoring much of its heritage value, and fitted with a new stained-glass window. The Ince's Hall Theatre has had its air-conditioning upgraded, sewer system repaired and a lift installed. The John Mackintosh Hall has had its galleries upgraded, new equipment purchased, a hearing loop installed in a new area and general improvements made to a building that is now feeling its age. Works have also been carried out to the Gustavo Bacarisas Gallery and our historic City Hall, which I very happily share with His Worship the Mayor. These works have allowed us to display some of the original façades and ceilings which had been hidden for decades, while at the same time dealing with issues of water ingress and the like. We have also contributed towards lighting equipment for the Alameda Open-Air Theatre and a gallery hanging system at the secondary schools, which will allow them to exhibit works of art by students or visiting artists.

We must not forget the board and staff of the Retreat Centre, which has, over the past few years, been vital in our COVID response and is now looking after families seeking refuge from the war in Ukraine.

The Premises Unit continues, on behalf of the Ministry, to oversee cultural premises and estates. Works have been carried out in many of the estates, including the Retrenchment Block, Recreational Rooms, Wellington Front, Jumpers Bastion, Town Range and others. Many do not realise quite the extent of the work carried out by GCS on behalf of the very small team at the Ministry of Culture. Barely a day goes by without one, two or often more articles or stories in the media related to their vast amount of work, and much more goes unreported. I thank each and every one of them and was very proud to see their CEO, Seamus Byrne, receive a Governor's Award in recognition of his work and that of his team, especially during the pandemic, when they kept hard at work in keeping us entertained and ensuring that our rich and diverse cultural community continued to thrive.

In the coming year, the Budget will, of course, be tighter, and I am disappointed that I will not be able to fulfil all our plans, but we will not be stopped by this, and here I must once again acknowledge businesses, organisations and others who are making contributions to our culture through sponsorship or other means. Already planned for this year is a new international gourmet food festival that will provide a new and exciting event for Gibraltar. In September, as an addition to National Week celebrations, we will be holding a cultural event in London. This day will see a gathering of Gibraltarians who are placing our country on the map, working in the arts and the cultural scene in the UK. We will also, at the same time, be holding an art exhibition by Gibraltarian artists at the Bermondsey Project Space, organised jointly with the Lloyds Art Group in London.

1515 The JM Memorial Foundation, together with GCS, are overseeing the second part of a cultural exchange with Tangiers, with artists, musicians and performers from both cities taking part. These are superb opportunities to export our art and culture abroad. Much of this will be achieved through sponsorship, and once again I thank all those contributing.

1520 I cannot end my section on culture without paying tribute to our writers. Gibraltarian literature is an evolving reality. It is growing faster than ever and gaining ever more recognition on the international scene. Our poetry and short story competitions aim to support and encourage writers new and old, and this year will see new ways of encouraging and consolidating recognition of our literature, and not just through Literature Week.

1525 The Gibraltar Academy of Music and Performing Arts continues to develop and contribute to culture in Gibraltar, as do the many dance academies and schools, drama groups and musicians and their collectives, and we have the organisations such as the Fine Arts Association and Kitchen Studios in respect of the visual arts. Between them, hundreds of young and not so young are active in culture – thousands, if their families and friends are added. It is a huge lobby that deserves the support of this House, which brings me to what is, to me, the most exciting and most important project for Gibraltarian culture that we have seen for generations: the Gibraltar National Theatre and Cultural Hub at the John Mackintosh Hall. The way that culture has excelled in Gibraltar in recent decades, with internationally acclaimed artists and performers at the world’s best stages, the way that culture has captured the imagination of our young, makes it evident that they deserve a bigger and better performance space and a much bigger audience. Sadly, for the moment, and due to the COVID response, the Government will, itself, not be able to proceed with the project, but a group of supporters of the arts have formed the Gibraltar National Theatre Foundation, independent of Government, and with the support and participation of the John Mackintosh Educational Trust are working hard and successfully to make this a reality. Only last week, that great supporter of Gibraltar, Ruth Parasol, announced that the Parasol Foundation would contribute £1.5 million towards one of the four main elements of the project, the Gallery of Art. Kishin Alwani OBE of the Alwani Foundation has also contributed, and the very proactive Musicians’ Association of Gibraltar is actively fundraising for the project, too. The project will comprise a 1,000-seat theatre, a smaller 230-seat studio theatre, the Parasol Art Gallery and an expanded lending library, as well as the meeting rooms, cafeteria and other facilities that we have got used to at our beloved Mack Hall. It will be a revolution in culture and will be a centre for other activities as well, such as conferences, West End style productions, e-sports and even the much more mundane general election count and results. Most importantly, it will give our community the opportunity to perform in a real theatre such as we have not had in Gibraltar before. I want to thank His Excellency the Governor for his leadership in his work as patron of the Foundation, and the councillors and trustees of the John Mackintosh Educational Trust for their vision in being part of this landmark project. I wish it every success and look forward to opening night.

1550 Mr Speaker, if the year 2020 was the year when everything changed, 2021 and 2022 have been the years when humanity has been trying to understand what on earth is happening. I am not convinced that we have learnt the lessons that we should have learnt, and I fear that there are those in positions of influence elsewhere, as I said earlier, who are trying to use COVID and our reaction to it as a cover for their own agendas. Indeed, I referred earlier to some of the pressure elsewhere to reverse environmental progress. This, fortunately, is not happening in Gibraltar.

1560 The Department of Environment continues to be active in marine surveillance. In keeping with our policy of dynamic alignment with EU environmental directives, officers from the Department of the Environment continue to collect data on a wide range of marine descriptors. New monitoring programmes are also being developed, particularly in relation to micro-plastics, underwater noise and cetacean surveys using drones, to help better assess the state of the marine environment in British Gibraltar Territorial Waters. Further work into marine invasive species, such as the brown alga that is affecting our shores, will also be carried out, starting in July, as part of a UK Darwin Plus funded project aimed at enhancing, monitoring and prevention of invasive non-native species across UK Overseas Territories. Collaborative work being done by the

1565 Department of the Environment and the University of Gibraltar's Marine Science Masters
Programme will feed into our Marine Spatial Plan, which I intend to publish as a consultation
document later this year. Once again, the exceptional marine awareness and education work of
the Nautilus Project has to be recognised in this context, along with the yearly marine clean-up
1570 efforts co-ordinated by the Environmental Safety Group and monitoring of seabird migration by
GONHS. I thank the NGOs for their tremendous contribution overall.

Mr Speaker, as most of us are aware and the Deputy Chief Minister referred to earlier, this
year was a difficult one in terms of waste management. Changes to the export process, as a result
of the end of the Brexit transition period, caused transitional administrative delays that meant
Gibraltar was unable to export its municipal waste for a number of weeks. I would like to thank
1575 my team at the Department of the Environment, as well as those at the Environmental Agency
and Technical Services, who worked tirelessly for many weeks to ensure that we were able to
continue to collect and store our waste while they worked to resolve issues with their UK and
Spanish counterparts. They averted a crisis and the system is now working smoothly again. At a
different scale, we will be increasing provision of bin space for refuse and recycling in Town with
1580 a view to improving the state of these areas, and we are working with businesses, the Chamber,
the GFSB and the BID and with tenant bodies and others to improve the cleanliness of our urban
areas.

The issue of sewage treatment is one which should finally see resolution this year. I have clearly
stated the reasons outside our control for the delays, but I do understand that, justified as they
1585 are, there will be criticism. I can confirm that the legal process of closing the former sewage
treatment plant tender is now under way, a process which became necessary as a result of
Modern Water going into liquidation. Government is engaged in providing technical information
to a number of potential bidders and the competitive process for finding a new operator is about
to begin.

On air quality, the monitoring network recently experienced data losses due to ageing
instrumentation. This was due to inability of the UK providers to service the equipment during
COVID and the consequent backlog in their work. I am pleased to say that this is now virtually
resolved. New analysers will replace the existing ones, which have been operational for more than
17 years. Within this replacement programme Gibraltar will now report reference standard
1595 measurements for PM10 and PM2.5 at both Rosia Road and Bleak House. This represents an
increase in PM monitoring, providing data on both fine and coarse fractions of particulate matter
at both roadside and background locations for the first time. The new instruments are also capable
of near real-time data provision, which will enhance the public information service provided via
the Gibraltar air quality website. The monitor at Witham's Road will be moved to Devil's Tower
1600 Road and two additional air quality mesh pods have been procured, which will supplement the
three existing pods in providing indicative monitoring data at near real time. The North Mole
power station is now also reporting emissions online. Nitrogen-dioxide concentrations remained
consistent with the previous year. Annual means of 27 $\mu\text{g m}^{-3}$ at Rosia Road, 18 $\mu\text{g m}^{-3}$ at Bleak
House and 20 $\mu\text{g m}^{-3}$ at Witham's Road were all well below the European limit value of 40 $\mu\text{g m}^{-3}$.
1605 All other pollutants also met European directive limit values.

We finally achieved World Health Organization standards for particulates when new WHO
guidelines were published in 2021 with more stringent targets. These will be exceeded in the next
few years, as they will be across the world, and we have to continue to work hard to achieve them.
Continued effort elsewhere towards net-zero carbon emissions will have co-benefits for air quality
1610 also, particularly if these include measures on road traffic abatement and green shipping,
including the safeguards included in the new agreement with the future operators of GibDock.
We will also be seeing more progress on solar power, as both private initiatives and Government
projects progress.

The electrification of the vehicle fleet is an important part of the Climate Change Strategy and
the move to better air quality. We are already seeing an increase in the number of EVs being
1615 purchased and there is strong pressure from the industry, which is moving in this direction

globally. We are responding to this with an increase in the number of publicly available charging points. In December, the charge points on floor 6 in Midtown car park were replaced by Plug-N-Go, a Gibraltar-based company who own and operate the hardware and location under agreement with the Government. Next, the old charge points in the park and ride in Devil's Tower Road will be replaced and operational under the same platform, and both of these locations are future-proofed to match the growth of EV adoption in Gibraltar. In July, they will be adding charging points at Europa Point. They are also liaising with the Taxi Association and Government to start adding further charge points for taxi use, which in turn will assist the rollout of taxis to meet the EV-only taxi purchase requirement from January 2024. The usage of all these points will be monitored to ensure that we can continue to provide new locations to meet increasing demand. Other EV initiatives are also on the way.

Mr Speaker, the Environmental Agency continues to advise me in many areas and continues to operate a 24-hour on-call service, which saw environmental health officers engage in 229 callouts in 2021, and to date for 2022 there have been a total of 110 callouts.

The Department continues to work very closely with colleagues across Government under the direction of the Deputy Chief Minister on all issues related to Brexit, such as contingency planning on food imports, and exports of waste in the event of a no-deal scenario.

The Agency also continues to make a significant contribution to the Government's anti-dog fouling campaign. In 2021, 156 DNA samples were collected, with 16 fixed penalty notices issued to offenders. Thus far in 2022 they have collected 78 samples, with 12 FPNs being issued. Officers from the Agency and the Department also carry out patrols, during which they check that dogs being walked on the public highway are duly licensed and registered. During 2021, the Agency carried out 32 patrols and checked 95 dogs for registration. So far this year, the Agency has carried out 22 patrols, checked 66 dogs and issued 12 fines.

The Agency is also the competent authority for Control of Major Accident Hazards (COMAH). This year, the Agency will host the HSE inspector visit to carry out a mechanical integrity inspection as part of the bi-annual inspection regime of the North Mole power station.

The Environmental Agency continues to monitor the quality of our bathing waters, where standards have been improving over the past few years. Five of our bathing waters are now classed as excellent, with Western Beach improving and continuing to be classified as good rather than sufficient, which was the case in previous years. In the harbour we have, so far, not seen the problems of bacteria in the water that we had some years back. There are challenges in relation to turbidity from the Coaling Island site, and we are working hard to resolve these.

This year, the spring storms caused a great deal of damage throughout our beaches, considerably more than in previous years. This will become more regular, of course, as a result of climate change. Our beaches were ready for the summer, thanks to the great efforts of the pertinent sections of the Department of the Environment and Technical Services. After this year's storms, Camp Bay saw the removal of close to 250 tonnes of rocks and debris that had been washed ashore. Flotsam and detritus in large amounts had to be removed from Eastern Beach and Sandy Bay, while the entire car park and sections of the access road at Western Beach had to be cleared of accumulated seaweed. Most of this was carried out in record time, within a week, in time to have the beach available to the public for the Easter break.

Further to this, the storms caused structural damage to areas of flooring, railings, balustrades, concrete tables and bin pods at Camp Bay. Extensive remedial works involved structural works to affected areas of flooring, repairs to the boat-store garage doors, the replacing of damaged sections of railings and balustrades and the replacing of no fewer than 25 concrete tables. At Little Bay, the storms left a huge accumulation of rocks on the shoreline, requiring heavy machinery to re-profile the whole area and make it safe. Catalan Bay and Eastern and Western Beaches had their concrete walkways lifted by the wave action and shifted, leaving them in complete disarray and unsafe. These have been removed and re-laid once the beaches have been re-profiled. At Eastern Beach in particular, the re-profiling operation has been more laborious than ever before, with heavy plant involved in shifting hundreds of tonnes of accumulated excess sand from the

1670 southern half of the beach to the northern end, where the beach had been practically eradicated
by the storms. This exposed the wall foundations and the fenced perimeter of the Airport tunnel.
Emergency works also had to be carried out to partially remove an old airfield storm drain that
had been left exposed by the continuous loss of beach sand and posing a serious safety hazard.
General yearly preparatory works at our beaches have, obviously, also been carried out.
Improvements in the Lifeguard Service have been noticeable, thanks to a great deal of training
1675 and improved supervision.

The Cemetery Authority is undertaking a number of major initiatives aimed at improving the
management and use of the cemetery. Cremation has grown over recent years and is now the
preferred choice of three-quarters of the population. A columbarium for the interment of ashes
is therefore considered a necessity for our community, and one will be provided.

1680 I remain committed to planting trees and creating green, open spaces for the public. There
have been 185 trees planted since autumn 2020, and in fact the challenge has been finding
suitable new areas for new tree planting. Having said that, further new trees were planted at Red
Sands Road, and of course in the now completed Campion Park. New green areas have been
created at Europa Point and, with the added removal of alien invasive species, habitat for native
1685 plants has increased. We will continue to do our best to provide better green spaces that improve
our urban environment and increase the quality of life of our residents.

The Gibraltar Botanic Gardens continue to develop and excel in their objectives. Current
scientific projects include research on the cactus flora of the Caribbean and invasive species in
other UK Overseas Territories. The Alameda's collection in its nursery of plants from throughout
1690 the world, with an ever-growing emphasis on water-wise succulent plants, increasingly attracts
enthusiasts and experts from other parts of the world eager to see and study this well-
documented and curated collection. The Gardens are indeed considered a centre of excellence
for research on such plants, and Gardens staff continue to make discoveries and describe new
species. These exciting scientific discoveries are in lockstep with the annual improvements that
1695 are made to the Gardens' aesthetics – as regular users keep remarking, the Alameda looks better
with each passing year – even better than when I was in charge! Not least, this is due to the very
hard and enthusiastic work of the grounds staff. What is more, some of these same plants that
form the backbone of its research efforts are being used to develop planting beds afresh, and
these will soon be accompanied by new interpretation, as part of the Botanic Gardens' mission to
1700 educate. Pride of place in the Gardens' education activities goes to its extremely popular children's
education programme. Work on a bespoke education area will come to completion in the autumn
of 2022, thanks entirely to the contribution of a number of very generous donors. Finally, the
Gibraltar Botanic Gardens continue to propagate Gibraltar's special plants for conservation
purposes. This year, the stock of the Gibraltar Campion originating from the Alameda Gardens has
1705 been planted in the Nature Reserve as part of a long-term plan that began in the 1990s, when the
species, then thought extinct, was rediscovered and rescued from certain extinction when it was
propagated at the Alameda. The Gibraltar Campion, which is virtually extinct in the wild, can only
recover via a conservation programme such as this.

Mr Speaker, visitor numbers to the Upper Rock component of the Nature Reserve are once
1710 again on the rise following the hard times witnessed during the peak of the pandemic. In keeping
with our commitment to increase revenue, the entrance fee for non-residents to the Upper Rock
was increased earlier this year following a process of discussion with stakeholders. This was a
reasonable step to take given the recent investment carried out in the Upper Rock. The Skywalk,
Windsor Bridge and the Tovey Cottage Interpretation Centre, to name but some examples, are all
1715 helping attract and improve the visitor experience for locals and tourists alike. In parallel, work on
the day-to-day management of the Nature Reserve continues in earnest and new measures are
programmed to take place this year, such as the creation of open areas to favour biodiversity,
improved picnic areas, and signage. I opened a new Marine Interpretation Centre at Europa Point
just over a week ago, and plans are also in place for a new raptor reintroduction programme, as
1720 well as other exciting initiatives.

The yellow-legged gull is perhaps the most recognisable species of bird in Gibraltar. It is an opportunistic species that does exceptionally well around humans. Unfortunately, this also means that it causes problems for us. The population of gulls in Gibraltar needs to be controlled because they have an ecological impact on habitats and other species, can be a public health problem and, most importantly, they constitute a risk for aircraft. I highlighted last year that the long-term trend of yellow-legged gulls in Gibraltar is one of decline. Further to this, the excellent work done by the Avian Control Unit ensures that these gulls will never again be as abundant as they were during the 1990s and early 2000s. Moreover, parent gulls are aggressive when they are nesting and can be a nuisance when nesting on or around people's homes in the urban environment. Again, the Avian Control Unit provides an excellent service removing this nuisance for people. I know of no other place in the world with such a service.

The GONHS Bird of Prey Unit continues its excellent work in rescue, rehabilitation, release and tracking of injured and exhausted birds of prey. They do excellent conservation work and are also very involved in education on migrating birds and their preservation. Their wider conservation work includes the breeding and release of Barbary partridges in conjunction with the Department of the Environment. The fruits that this incredibly successful programme have borne are plain to see: Barbary partridges are more common in Gibraltar than at any other time in recent memory and members of the public frequently have very close encounters with them in the Nature Reserve. This surely serves as a model for conservation programmes in Gibraltar and beyond.

This year, as the tourists returned, the Macaque Management Team has been having to deal with problems of old, with heavy concentrations of tourists resulting in negative changes in behaviour of the macaques. In order to help deal with this, we now have a full-time wildlife warden to help with issues of interaction between tour operators, tourists and macaques. Incursions of monkeys into urban areas remains controlled, albeit slightly higher since tourism started to increase and resulted in increased disturbance of the macaques. This is not due to population growth, as macaque numbers remain static thanks to extensive contraception carried out by the Gibraltar Veterinary Clinic. Blood testing of the macaques this year has shown that they do not carry any zoonotic diseases that can be transmitted to humans. However, this is always a possibility, as macaques can catch human diseases and then pass them back, so that the now legal provision to not touch the macaques remains as relevant as ever.

Mr Speaker, I will now turn to heritage matters. The last year brought with it financial constraints, and the coming year will again see reduced funds available. Despite this, the Ministry for Heritage, together with all other heritage stakeholders, has continued and will continue to work diligently to protect and enhance our heritage.

The Heritage and Antiquities Advisory Council continues to advise me on all matters relating to heritage and is proving to be an invaluable asset. Last year, a subcommittee of the Council was established in order to produce a heritage vision for Gibraltar. The draft vision is now almost complete and will be presented shortly. Parliamentary reports on the Council's activities will also be laid, soon, in this place. Heritage-sensitive private properties will soon be listed in the schedules.

After 50 years of neglect, the 9.2-inch gun barrel, carriage and pedestal that was once at Levant Battery has been removed from the Metalrok Eco Park in Flint Road and transported to a holding and restoration area at Brewery Crusher for future display at Europa Point. The Ministry for Heritage also completed the restoration and transfer of the last two 25-pounder QF field guns in Gibraltar from the Gibraltar Regiment, which is now on display at the 100-Ton Gun visitor facility. While on this theme, the Ministry for Heritage, the Gibraltar Heritage Trust and Alabare – a UK-based charity – have been involved in the restoration of Lord Airey's Battery, an iconic asset located at the top of the Rock.

I am also pleased to announce that the Ministry for Heritage website, which we launched last year, has proved very useful and successful due to the large amount of information available. Heritage enthusiasts and professionals locally and from heritage institutions abroad request information regularly. An entire new section, with guidance notes aimed at applicants who need

1775 to provide information with any planning applications and its implications for cultural heritage, has been added. The key message to all potential applicants is to seek advice at the earliest opportunity, as safeguarding our cultural heritage does not mean preventing development or sustainable change. It means managing that change in order to retain and protect significant heritage places, sites or objects which are important to our community.

1780 The Ministry for Heritage, in collaboration with the Upper Rock Team, have placed 11 new interpretation panels at the City Under Siege exhibition, which contains new content and design that will enhance the visitor experience. I would like to remind Members of the House that in another collaborative effort between the Ministry for Heritage, the Gibraltar National Museum, Technical Services and GJBS, we have started restoring the Convent façade. Works are progressing rapidly under the guidance of the Gibraltar National Museum Conservator. I am also happy to report that the restoration of Southport Gates, the Tower of Homage and the façade of the future
1785 St Mary's Lower Primary School will also commence in the foreseeable future. Phase I of the restoration of the Town Range bakery ovens has now been completed.

Another unseen but fundamental part of the work undertaken by the Ministry for Heritage is its archaeological supervision through watching briefs. All developments are regularly supervised by the Government Archaeologist. These include Orange Bastion, North Gorge and the former
1790 Casino development among many others. The former TOC-H site immediately adjacent to Southport Gates will also be supervised in this way. It is, therefore, important to note that expert advice on all heritage-sensitive matters relating to developments through the planning system continues, as well as educational outreach via schools and youth organisations. The close working relationship the Ministry for Heritage has with other heritage stakeholders such as the National
1795 Museum, the Heritage Trust and the Garrison Library, as well as with other departments such as Town Planning and Technical Services, ensures that heritage-sensitive work is undertaken to the highest standards.

The close working relationship specifically with the Gibraltar Heritage Trust continues and is, indeed, going from strength to strength. The mutual support that now exists between the Trust
1800 and the Ministry on day-to-day work allows projects to continue unimpeded. Rolling projects such as the tampion project, the Artillery Park, and other ad hoc repair and renewal projects are a few examples. The Witham's Cemetery was formally presented just a few weeks ago and proves the Trust's commitment to practical conservation, and the Fortress of Gibraltar Group continues to give support in the form of historical knowledge and resources for works related to Gibraltar's
1805 fortifications.

In the Gibraltar Garrison Library we have seen that the determination of the small library team has shone throughout. Not only did they keep their day to day going, through the establishment of online services, during lockdown, but have continued to do so, engaging with international
1810 research enquiries, those from Gibraltar and, indeed, direct footfall enquiries, which are increasing. The Garrison Library has continued to build capacity over this last year and I feel sure that part of this is due to the fact that they have a dynamic social media presence now reaching almost 11,000 people. By way of offering an example of how this has worked out, the Garrison Library team has been approached by CILIP, the library and information association in the UK, to present a virtual tour of the Library, which is the among the most popular offered by that
1815 organisation. (**A Member:** Hear, hear.) The reinvigorated board of the Library, which I have the honour to chair, has most certainly ensured that the Garrison Library more and more becomes an integral part of our community.

Mr Speaker, I am delighted to report that the activities at the Gibraltar National Museum are now back to normal. In fact, this May, we were all able to enjoy the Museum's open day, the first
1820 since 2019.

The Calpe Conference programme continues its natural process of recovery. This conference will be, once again, a truly international one. This one is going to be particularly significant for me personally, as it commemorates the work of one of the most inspirational characters of my own formative years. Reginald Moreau at Oxford University was the leading light in the study of bird

1825 migration between Europe and Africa and he wrote a seminal book on the subject 50 years ago.
So, Calpe is bringing together some of the world's leading specialists to discuss progress in this
field in the last 50 years. It is highly appropriate that this should happen in Gibraltar, where Europe
meets Africa, and I have to say that my inaugural speech at the event is something I am particularly
1830 looking forward to, as I will make reference to the importance of the work of Gibraltar-based
naturalists and scientists in the study of bird migration.

The work at Gorham's Cave also continues to return to normality. This year we will have two
visiting teams, from Leiden University in the Netherlands and Liverpool John Moores University in
the UK. Excavations have commenced and will continue until mid-August. One of the main targets
will be the exciting new chamber that was revealed in Vanguard Cave last year, a space that had
1835 been sealed for over 40,000 years.

I am pleased to report that last month I officially launched a new gallery dedicated to the Pillars
of Hercules, a wonderful display of our heritage from the classical period and a testament to the
richness of the material that we have from that period.

1840 Mr Speaker, I move, now, to education. Our children have emerged from the depths of the
pandemic affected but resilient and their teachers advise me that educationally they have, by and
large, made up for lost time, but clearly there will be residual effects. The isolating effect of the
lockdowns has had an impact on children's socialisation, in particular. This, together with the
trauma experienced by families, has had and continues to have long-lasting repercussions in the
lives of the children and young people in our community. Although children and young people are
1845 remarkably resilient, school staff have been extra mindful of all learners' needs as we continue to
emerge from the grasp of the pandemic, and all in our schools have been working hard to restore
normality in teaching and learning – whatever normality is.

One of the most important areas under my responsibility is, of course, that of special
educational needs and disabilities. I am pleased to say that one notable project that we have been
1850 able to complete is the new home for St Martin's School. After the delays caused by the difficulties
the construction industry faced during COVID, the start of this academic year saw St Martin's
pupils and staff move into their new school building. This fantastic purpose-built school has
enabled us to offer a wider range of learning experiences for our pupils. In addition to a larger and
more bespoke learning environment, the new school building has a greater range of therapeutic
1855 opportunities to support our pupils' skill development, including rebound therapy and
hydrotherapy. All staff at St Martin's have recently received training on manual handling. A
number of GHA therapists and key St Martin's School staff were also trained in hydrotherapy. This
provision will be up and running in the school very shortly, following extensive planning with other
agencies including the GHA and GSLA. Hydrotherapy utilises the properties of warm water to
1860 provide an effective mode of treatment and exercise for people with physical and sensory
disabilities. The children who use this facility will benefit from the many significant, evidence-
based benefits of this type of therapy.

The trend we have noticed over the past few years, of an increase in the number of pupils with
special educational needs, is continuing. In fact, the number of pupils in St Martin's School and in
1865 our learning support facilities (LSF) has increased significantly in comparison with previous years.
This current academic year, we had a greater number of pupils starting in our Early Birds nursery
than we had ever seen previously, and this coming September we will have a higher number of
pupils moving from Early Birds into reception at St Martin's School than we have ever had. We
will, of course, be ready to meet their needs. The outreach programme from St Martin's School
1870 into our LSFs continues across all sectors. We also have a small number of pupils who are on an
in-reach programme from our LSFs into St Martin's School. All these pupils benefit from
opportunities to further develop on their learning journey. By the end of this year, all schools will
have received dyslexia training following the Made By Dyslexia pledge signed by the Chief Minister
in September 2019. Moreover, electronic dyslexia screening for all our current year 3 pupils will
1875 have been completed. Our commitment to a larger complement of special needs learning support
assistants (SNLSA) will help our schools to support pupils with additional needs. Both SNLSAs and

teaching staff continue to show great levels of care, dedication and commitment to ensure the provision we offer our pupils is of the highest possible level.

1880 The Department of Education continues to focus on pupil well-being, a hugely important and core area of a child's educational journey. There is recognition of the importance of early intervention to prevent the escalation of mental health concerns and help build happy, healthy young people ready to learn, who can achieve their potential in all areas of their lives, not just the academic. The Department works closely with numerous other agencies, NGOs and charities to enhance this vital area. The School Counselling Service continues to support our learners with their emotional well-being. The team constitutes four people giving one-to-one support to learners in all sectors, primary through to secondary, including the College. The team also plays an important role in liaising with and supporting parents of their clients. Likewise, they advise the teachers, giving them tools to better support the children and young people in their care. Counsellors have also played an important role in staff training, including bereavement training.

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1890 Our manifesto commitment to increase the complement of counsellors and, indeed, educational psychologists, has been set back but remains a commitment which, as has been said in answers to questions here, we intend to fulfil during the lifetime of this Parliament. Schools have been proactive in continuing to develop children and young people's emotional well-being. They have engaged in a large number of initiatives which aim to develop a child's emotional well-being – resilience through sport, buddy benches and friendship corners, and well-being days, to name just a few. Continued professional development has also focused on training to develop skills and knowledge to continue enhancing children and young people's emotional well-being.

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There continues to be a growing number of children in our education system who have been impacted by trauma, children who have a high number of adverse childhood experiences. Some of these children are in residential care, some are still living at home, and others spend time in and out of prison. The school environment can be a challenging place for these children, causing high levels of anxiety in the pupils themselves, staff and other pupils as well. Education has endeavoured to address this in a number of ways. The TLC continues to provide additional support for our most vulnerable who are unable to engage in mainstream education. It also provides a base for a bereavement group and a youth group for children with additional needs. One-to-one support for young people in the prison system identifies pupils to help them re-engage with mainstream schooling. Approximately 400 members of staff across disciplines will have received safeguarding training this academic year alone. Over 1,100 members of staff have received training since September 2018. Education continues to work closely with the Care Agency, the RGP and the GHA to engage processes to support vulnerable pupils and families, as well as collaborative work to devise strategy and work towards improvement of services for our most vulnerable pupils. Numerous school-based projects initiated by teachers, and those involving NGOs, charities and outside agencies, have aimed to support our most vulnerable, to increase their focus, address self-esteem, motivation and emotional regulation.

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Educators need to be the best versions of themselves in order to support learners and work to their best ability, at times in very stressful circumstances, both personal and professional. School-led initiatives have taken place, sometimes with the engagement of NGOs. Education staff in schools and the advisory team continue to liaise with the Government Well-being Team to support staff well-being, so that they are able to deliver the best education possible to our children and young people.

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In keeping with my commitment at COP26, schools continue to promote sustainable practices in school and work towards encompassing all priority climate change objectives within the curriculum. They continue to employ educational initiatives in schools, to develop understanding and awareness around climate change. ClimACT Schools Gibraltar, an Education staff action group, works to promote and share good practice across all schools. We are confident that our children and young people will act as change agents within their own families and communities, encouraging more mindful choices which help reduce the impact of climate change.

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1930 Mr Speaker, scholarship numbers in the 2021-22 academic year were 804 mandatory
undergraduate scholarships, 176 postgraduate scholarships and 85 discretionary scholarships. We
currently have 1,065 students in higher education despite the challenges that the pandemic has
thrown at our economy – something to make the community proud. We will, this year, continue
to provide for all the mandatory scholarships, which will likely mean we will have more students
in higher education than ever. We will need to continue to be selective in those under 18 and
others going through the discretionary route. This is, of course, no reflection on the students, and
1935 I ask young people and families to be patient, to look at alternative sources of funds and
constructive ways of using the time available should they not be successful.

On learning with digital technologies, all our upper and lower primary schools have now
embarked on our digital teaching and learning initiative. The rollout to secondary schools which
began prior to the disruption caused by COVID has now also been completed. We are targeting
1940 the next academic year to bring the Gibraltar College into the initiative while continuing to support
our colleagues at St Martin's. This financial year we have rolled out an additional 700 devices in
support of this initiative. Each primary school now has access to a cart of iPads in each year group,
vastly increasing the usage of these devices to support learning and teaching in our schools.

The September 2021 Year 10 cohort was significant. It was the first one ever in Gibraltar to
1945 benefit from the equalisation of the Key Stage 4 curriculum. This was so overdue, and I am very
pleased that all our young people will now have equal opportunities at this stage. Our first mixed-
gender cohort in Bayside and Westside were both offered the same range of courses for their
GCSE/Level 2 journey, and our Year 10 learners commenced on the courses of their choice in
September of this academic year. September 2021 also saw the first cohort of learners
1950 undertaking a Level 3 BTEC in Music Performance. This course is being offered by the Gibraltar
College, in partnership with GAMPA, and is a model that we will be following in order to be able
to offer more vocational courses.

Our teaching and learning initiative continues to develop digital skills in young learners, and
some of the learning that is being demonstrated by our young learners is breathtaking. Other
1955 developments in this area will be announced soon. The Deputy Chief Minister has already
mentioned one, which in fact cuts across two of my areas of responsibility, heritage and
education: the Northern Defences and the Mount, two remarkable sites from a historical and
environmental point of view, but tantalising in their potential to engage our younger generations.
As the Deputy Chief Minister has said, from September we are aiming to create a whole new
1960 educational programme which unleashes the creativity and ability of our students. The
Department, together with the College School of Business, have been developing this concept
during the last year.

This academic year, the Government significantly increased the complement of teachers by 97
new members of staff and the complement of SNLSAs by 122, recognising the importance of
1965 investing in the education of our children and young people. The commitment to the increase in
staffing has been made further to recent developments in our educational system, such as the
opening of morning nursery placements, the provision of LSFs in two additional schools, the
introduction of new vocational pathways and the equalisation of curriculum opportunities in both
secondary schools further to the realignment of the key stages, not to mention co-education from
1970 Year 7, something which we now take so much for granted. The impact of these systemic
developments, together with larger pupil cohorts and the growth in the number of pupils overall
and in those with additional needs, were carefully considered and directly informed the
commitment to increasing the teacher and SNLSA staffing complements.

The Department of Education, including its senior staff in all schools, together with colleagues
1975 in other Departments, agencies and authorities, have worked hard over the course of this
academic year to establish a more robust and meaningful CPD programme for teachers. In
addition to a wide range of individual, school-specific INSET foci which have taken place
throughout the course of the year, the Department gathered together en masse on 29th April for
an Education-wide INSET day which saw over 750 staff from all Gibraltar Government Education

1980 establishments gathered at the Bayside-Westside complex for the first full interschool INSET
training day ever organised. The Department has a very large team of staff and I value the
1985 professional contributions of all of the roles within each school. It was a fantastic day which will
have planted many seeds to be developed further in the future and which benefited tremendously
from the wealth of knowledge, experience, insight and enthusiasm of all Education staff members,
and will be built on in the next academic year.

The Department of Education has reviewed and revised the catchment areas for Government
schools, with a view to ensuring that these are as geographically appropriate as possible. This
exercise has also been conducted to ensure that pupil distributions across schools provide the
1990 best possible pupil-staff ratios. A powerful and versatile geographic information system,
developed and managed by the Department of Environment, has been used to inform this process
for all nursery enrolments for September this year, and, moving forward, will allow the
Department to manage catchment areas in a more dynamic manner ahead of each new academic
year. Although the changes this year are not too extensive, the amendments made will have
1995 lasting significant impact. The move to more geographically appropriate catchment areas will help
to further define and distinguish each school's community in a manner that makes more sense
physically. This will help the children and young people from a social perspective as well as
facilitate closer links between each school's location and the catchment area. The changes will,
hopefully, also help make school drop-offs easier and encourage families to walk to school. This
2000 further supports the Government's move towards a more child-friendly city and reducing the use
of motor vehicles. Gibraltar has changed a great deal in the last decade and centres of population
are changing. We have been considering these changes for some years now, but the trauma that
we suffered through the pandemic delayed the process. The new catchment areas better reflect
the current situation and should also have benefits for our environmental agenda.

We continue to develop the Education website and online services via education.gov.gi. The
2005 Department has now fully digitised and streamlined the pupil enrolment and scholarship
processes in order to better serve the public. The website also includes information on accessing
the educational psychologists and other support mechanisms offered by the Department.

We are currently overseeing the construction of three new schools, with the bespoke buildings
for St Mary's, Governor's Meadow and Bishop Fitzgerald all due to be completed in time for
2010 opening in September 2023. Plans are proceeding also towards a new Gibraltar College and
Hebrew Primary School, with improvements planned for those schools which will stay at their
current sites, namely both St Joseph's schools and St Paul's, where we have recently opened a
new wing and forest zone. We are close to having achieved something that no one could have
imagined, the virtually complete renewal of almost the whole of our education real estate.

2015 There are many other plans aimed at diversifying and widening the opportunities available to
our young and ensuring that education helps make them fulfil their dreams, take their place in the
community here or in the wider world, and so I look forward to taking on more and more
challenges and working with all in Education to continue to progress on things that have needed
fixing for a long time, but more importantly to achieve new and better ways of helping our young
2020 people to be better than us.

And so to the University of Gibraltar. There is quite a lot to say this year, precisely because this
creation of this Government is doing so incredibly well. To date, the University has enrolled over
500 students during the academic year ending 31st July 2022 into a combination of academic
programmes, professional and continuing education courses, training certificates and language
2025 courses. The University's portfolio of academic programmes continues to grow. This past year saw
the University offering undergraduate degrees in business, nursing and maritime science,
complemented by a range of access courses and postgraduate degrees in research in education,
business and marine science. Students enrolled on these core academic programmes have
increased from 30 in the year 2018-19 and 134 in 2020-21 to 189 in 2021-22. The latter are from
2030 28 nationalities. There is now a diverse student community residing at the Europa Suites
accommodation. Graduates of the University are also increasing, with 21 graduating in December

2020, 38 in 2021 and an anticipated 78, including three local PhD students, graduating in December this year.

2035 Following extensive consultation with industry and completion of a rigorous UK validation process during this past year, the University will offer a further two new degrees from September 2022: a BSc (Hons) in Computing and Entrepreneurship, which is carried out through a collaborative arrangement with the Gibraltar Digital Skills Academy, itself doing excellent work; and a Masters in Education developed in consultation with the Department of Education. During the upcoming academic year, the University will be working with industry to develop a number of
2040 other new academic programmes, including an MSc in Advanced Health Practice, an MSc in Contemporary Healthcare, one in Environmental Science and Climate Change, a BSc Adult Nursing International Top-up and an MSc in Psychology.

In addition to its academic programmes, the University has provided a range of professional continuing education and short courses. In March 2022 the Professional Development
2045 department launched its Remote Gambling online course which replaced the Responsible Gambling online course. This was in response to industry feedback and relevant updates in the industry. In May this year, a Professional Diploma of Competence in Financial Services was launched. The first of its kind, this cross-sector qualification, which was developed in direct consultation with the Regulator and each industry sector, will serve as an industry standard.

2050 During the past year, the University Maritime Academy launched its first two technical courses, including one for Customs and another for Police, Environment and Customs. In May this year, the Academy, in spite of a post-COVID critical global shortage of maritime cadet sea placements, was able to source sea time placements for all the University's maritime cadets.

The Centre of Excellence in Responsible Gaming, a multidisciplinary and interdisciplinary
2055 research institute that aims to study the etiological factors of addictive disorders and contribute to their effective prevention and treatment, was officially opened in March by my hon. Friend Albert Isola and myself. In addition to publishing almost 40 academic research papers this past year, the Centre has also assisted with the redesign of the University Responsible Gaming course.

In November 2021, the University underwent an international quality review by the UK Quality
2060 Assurance Agency (QAA) and was subsequently found to have met all 10 higher education quality standards. As a result, the University was awarded global accreditation by the QAA. Achieving this milestone only six years after its creation through the work of the then Minister for Education, the Hon. Gilbert Licudi, is a testament to the sheer hard work and commitment shown by the entire University team, as well as the ongoing support of the University Board of Governors and the
2065 Academic Board and the Government.

The current University strategic plan ends on 31st July this year with the accompanying final progress report anticipated to be published shortly thereafter. Development of a new strategic plan for the academic years ending 2023-26 is under way.

In spite of extremely challenging targets and the constraints posed by the ability of
2070 international students to travel, the September 2021 recruitment campaign was successful, with tuition fee income increasing from £488,682 in the year ended 31st July 2019 to £1.3 million in the year ended July 2021. Moreover, tuition income is estimated to reach £1.8 million by July this year. This growth reflects the University's ability to recruit increasing numbers of local, regional and international students attracted by its quality student experience. As a result of increasing
2075 student numbers, the University continues to work towards a much greater degree of self-financing, with the proportion of income, excluding donations, provided by the Government subvention steadily decreasing from 86% in 2017 to a forecast 36% by the end of July this year. This positive progress towards much greater self-financing is expected to continue, with the current Government annual subvention again being significantly reduced by £250,000 to
2080 £1 million, representing a reduction of 20% compared with the previous year. The University has to be congratulated for its increasing financial stability.

The University is now also operating from its North Wing, the old St Christopher's School.

2085 In December last year, the University held the formal ceremony to celebrate the installation of the Chancellor, Sir Lindsay Hoyle, and the Vice-Chancellor, Prof. Catherine Bachleda, together with two ceremonies to celebrate graduates from the BBA, MBA, PGCE and MSc marine.

2090 With regard to my legislative agenda, I have on the Order Paper, to proceed later this year, a Bill for an Act to create the Gibraltar National Park and another to prohibit the fur trade. Work is proceeding so as to be able to commence the Medicinal Cannabis Act, as well as on subsidiary legislation to the Climate Change Act including the setting up of the Climate Action Fund and the Near Zero Delivery Body. The updated Education Act and the new Cultural Act and a revised Entertainment Act are in the final stages of stakeholder consultation. Improvements to the Heritage and Antiquities Act are being worked on and the Environmental Agency is advising me on the updating of the Food Hygiene Regulations, as well as the introduction of allergens legislation. An Environmental Governance Act, a revised Garrison Library Act and a number of Acts
2095 which subdivide and modernise the archaic and voluminous Public Health Act, including one on waste, are also in preparation.

As I conclude, Mr Speaker, I want to congratulate Mr Kishin Alwani, an outstanding contributor to the arts, for his OBE in the Queen's Birthday Honours, and also Lewis Stagnetto of the Nautilus Project for the award of the British Empire Medal in this year's New Year's Honours list for his
2100 environmental work, as well as Paulette Finlayson-Napoli for the Gibraltar Ward, and also, as mentioned earlier, Seamus Byrne for the Governor's Award, the latter two for their work in culture. I want to mention the retirement of Dr Terence Ocana as head teacher of St Joseph's Upper Primary School after many years' service to education; of Paul Origo – whom I have worked with very closely from well before I became a Minister – as Town Planner; as well as of Jessica
2105 Alecia, who retired this year after many years' service to successive Environment Ministers as PA; and Sue Davies of the World Heritage Office, who has been instrumental in the work related to our World Heritage Site.

Finally, Mr Speaker, as ever, I wish to express my thanks to my personal staff and, of course, to my heads of departments and CEOs and their staff for their hard work at all hours and every
2110 day, and for their continued support; to all the schools, who make me feel so welcome on all my visits; to all the staff in my Departments and the agencies and contractors that work to them, as well as to the GEA, LPS, GSLA and Technical Services, the many departments I work with day to day; to NASUWT, UNITE and GGCA for their constructive work; to all the NGOs, associations, schools and academies, environmental, cultural, educational, who are so committed to what they
2115 believe in, often working as volunteers, for being committed, honest and reasonable in pursuing their aims; to all those many citizens appointed to voluntary boards, working groups and committees for which I am responsible; and to those in other Departments with whom I have regular contact – such as the staff at No. 6, including the Offices of the Chief Minister, the Deputy
2120 Chief Minister, the Chief Secretary, the Financial Secretary, the Chief Technical Officer and Civil Contingencies, and at the Gibraltar Law Offices – for always being there when I need them. Thanks also to you, Mr Speaker, and your staff, and to the Chief Minister, Deputy Chief Minister and colleagues. And finally, to His Excellency the Governor, Sir David Steel, for the genuine interest he shows in the work of the different parts of my Ministry and for his constant encouragement.

2125 Mr Speaker, we live in a blessed community. We have so much to enjoy, so much to be grateful for. Let us never forget that, and continue to live proud of our homeland and able to withstand any difficulties that may come our way. In doing all of this, I, too, commend the Bill to the House.
(Banging on desks)

2130 **Mr Speaker:** The Hon. Steven Linares.

Minister for Housing, Employment, Youth and Sport (Hon. S E Linares): Mr Speaker, this is my 22nd Budget speech and my 10th as a Government Minister. I will start by giving a synopsis of what has been achieved over the last year and explain some of the things we intend to do this

coming year in relation to my areas of responsibility, these being industrial relations, housing, employment, youth and sport.

I would first like to address developments in what is my newest ministerial responsibility, that of industrial relations. On 4th April this year, following a reshuffle of ministerial duties, my hon. Friend the Chief Minister transferred to me the responsibility for industrial relations. I was humbled by that decision. We all know how critical smooth industrial relations are to the functioning of the public sector. We also know how central such co-operation with the unions remains to the values of this Government that I am so proud to represent. As such, I am grateful and privileged to discharge this new role on behalf of HM Government of Gibraltar.

My own background should serve me well. I refer to my experience in tackling industrial relations matters from a union perspective as a former president of the Teachers' Association and of the Gibraltar Trades Council. The latter comprised the three local unions at the time. To this end I have already expressed to the trade unions my desire to work in partnership with them to tackle issues that concern the public sector. At times we will totally agree, and on other occasions less so. However, all our conversations will be held in an air of cordiality and fairness. The goal will be better terms and conditions within the budgetary resources available. The well-being of our workforce will be uppermost in my mind.

Although I have just assumed responsibility for this role, hon. Members may have seen that a number of issues have already been dealt with. In relation to the Customs dispute, my office has been involved in addressing concerns that the GGCA and Unite the Union have had in relation to the incorporation of the Marine section into existing rotation agreements. I am happy to say that the GGCA, who have negotiating rights for this department, agreed to the proposals developed by the acting Collector of Customs. This happened in close collaboration with my Industrial Relations officials and with me. It led to the lifting of industrial action within HM Customs and the resumption of wearing their uniform when performing their relevant duties. It is an example of the way in which my office will conduct business. We will support the respective heads of department where grievances or issues of concern are raised, and empower them to deliver solutions through negotiated outcomes with the unions. In this vein, my office is currently tackling issues raised in other departments. The working methodology is based on the agenda priority set by the respective trade unions. The approach is a sensible one based on collaboration and co-operation. New issues are raised as other issues are resolved. This means that the system is not overwhelmed, as this can cause issues to stagnate, which is not in the interests of any of the parties concerned.

The Government is conscious that on an industrial relations related legislative front a number of matters need resolution. This includes the implementation of the Trade Union Recognition Act and amendments on matters pertaining to zero-hour contracts. Both these matters are at an advanced stage and further developments will materialise soon. I will provide public updates accordingly.

On policy, I am currently tackling two initiatives within this portfolio. The first is the introduction and implementation of a comprehensive set of health and safety policies to be implemented throughout the public sector. This has already happened. Through this policy, a baseline of health and safety practice and regulation will be established within all Government Departments, agencies, owned companies and authorities. The policy will complement existing Health and Safety practice within specialist areas and provide a foundation in those that do not have specific guidelines. All this means that there is now a minimum set of health and safety standards, no matter the Department or the circumstances.

The second policy initiative that I would like to draw attention to is the implementation of a Public Service Code that will replace Government General Orders. Hon. Members will know that Government General Orders have underpinned public sector practices for many decades. Although over the years multiple circulars have been issued that updated elements within those rules, Government General Orders have remained largely unchanged. It is, therefore, necessary that those elements of Government General Orders that work remain, and those that do not are

changed. Modern employment issues that were not a concern at the time when Government General Orders were written have now been taken on board. I know that significant progress has already materialised on this front and I have instructed those tasked with developing the Public Service Code to work towards implementation within this calendar year. To this end, I have convened a working group consisting of the Human Resources Department, the Industrial Relations Department and the Department of Employment to tackle the outstanding elements of this document. The unions will be fully consulted on its content once the substantive body of the document is available. It is the view of the Government that a smooth transition to a more modern and effective Public Service Code will be advantageous to the public sector itself and welcomed by the Gibraltarian community as a whole.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank all those individuals within the trade union movement whom I have had the pleasure to work with in this short period of time. Union officials have clearly been made aware that my office is open to all of them with a view to resolving matters in partnership, in a positive, quick and efficient manner. Needless to say, I look forward to continuing to develop this exciting portfolio in the months ahead.

Mr Speaker, I will now move on to housing. Only last week, the Housing Department moved to new premises at the ICC. The Department is next to the Housing Works Agency, thus facilitating even more the work that they do together. The new premises are now more accessible to the public, right in the centre of town. Their previous premises have now been taken over by the DSS. The Housing Department staff have actively assisted their DSS colleagues during this difficult period. I would like to take this opportunity to thank the staff and management of the Housing Department for the positive manner in which they have co-operated with the DSS. They have stepped up to the mark and gone out of their way to assist.

The Housing Department has adapted quickly to new working practices in order to continue to provide its services to both applicants and tenants. This has happened despite the fact that staff had been deployed to the Contact Tracing Bureau during the pandemic. As from 1st April, the deployed staff have returned and they are quickly and efficiently dealing with the backlog that the deployment created; not only that, but dealing also with the physical move mentioned above. It needs to be said that the Housing Department staff did not stop offering services to clients during the COVID-19 pandemic. In addition to this, they have actively assisted Public Health and the Government in all matters relevant to housing and beyond.

The Housing Department counters are now open to the general public via an appointment system. This will assist cash payers who, despite continued efforts, are reluctant to pay electronically, by standing order, by telephone banking or otherwise, or those who simply do not have a bank account, thus ensuring house rent revenues do not fall into arrears. The Housing Department has been working closely with the digitalisation team in order to have all application forms available online on the e-government platform. This will offer the facility to complete, attach and submit documents electronically to the Housing Department, thereby avoiding foot traffic at our counter.

The Housing Department comprises four main sections. The Accounts section deals exclusively with the receipt of rental payments. The Housing Department has numerous methods available for rental payments, which can be carried out without attending in person. These are deduction at source from wages/salaries or occupational pensions, standing order from the client's bank account, online via the e-gov portal, or telephone payments. The Accounts section strives for customers to subscribe to these methods. The Department is working closely with the Treasury Department and with private banks in order to be able to accept payments via direct debit. This would expand even further the payment options for the collection of rent. The Accounts section has worked very closely with the DSS in order to assess rent relief more efficiently. An MoU has been signed in order to facilitate the process. The Department's vote book is also managed by the Accounts section.

The second section is Enforcement and Compliance. On 1st July last year the Housing Department introduced this section. It is tasked with litigation processes, anti-social behaviour, the in-house complaints procedure, claims, Ombudsman queries and the recovery of arrears – an unenviable task, Mr Speaker. Systems are in place that alert the Department to any tenant who commences to default in their rent payments. This process enables them to contact the tenant quicker than ever before and engage with them before any debt begins to build up and become a burden. The Department continues to assist tenants to arrange a repayment plan or adjust an existing repayment plan. The objective remains to meet the needs of the tenant as well as the needs of the Department. Since 1st April 2021 to date – the date being 18th May – there have been a total of 465 appointments, from which 150 arrears agreements have been concluded to the value of some £680,000. Those meetings have proved very useful as they allow our staff to identify tenants who have genuine hardship and are unable to pay their rent. All situations are looked at on a case-by-case basis. Careful consideration is given to those who may have social and/or medical issues that prevent them from paying their rent. This helps the Department differentiate between those who genuinely cannot pay and those who simply do not want to.

Mr Speaker, the continuation of the concerted effort to have rent payments deducted at source continues to be the Department's top priority. As I have stated in this House before, it is this Government's policy that all civil and public servants who are Housing Department tenants have their rent payments deducted from their salaries or wages automatically, thus ensuring that none of them default or fall behind in payments. Despite all the initiatives that this section has rolled out, and as they continue to engage with all those in arrears, there are, regrettably, still tenants who can pay but do not want to. These tenants have no social or economic hardship which would qualify them for rent relief, and yet they continue to default. There is no other option for this category of tenant than to commence legal action to recover the debt. The Department, together with the Central Arrears Unit, has engaged lawyers to commence litigation in such cases. As can be seen, the Housing Department has taken a very proactive approach, which is designed to ensure, as much as possible, that none of its tenants fall behind in their rent payments. As at 30th April 2022, the total arrears figure stands at nearly £4.4 million. More than £½ million has been written off as unrecoverable due to circumstances such as death.

Since the creation of this section on 1st April 2021, it has logged a total of 109 complaints in relation to anti-social behaviour. I have, in the past, outlined the procedure that the Department follows in such cases. This procedure is being implemented and all agencies continue to work to minimise the unacceptable behaviour of a few that causes misery to their neighbours. To this end we will continue to engage at joint agency meetings with the RGP, Social Services, the Care Agency, tenants' associations and even schools, if need be.

Mr Speaker, the Allocation Unit is the third section of the Housing Department. A total of 158 allocations have been made since 1st April 2021 to date, the date being 25th May when this data was collected. The Housing Department is working closely with the ERS, GHA and others in order to recover the properties of those tenants who have passed away, been admitted to the ERS, are long-stay patients in hospital or have chosen to move to private accommodation. These flats are immediately identified for applicants on the waiting list. A total of 412 applications have been received by the Housing Department since 1st April 2021. A review of all tenancies is under way so that all records are updated into our system in order to provide a more efficient service.

As announced by Government, all citizens, under the Register of Occupation Act 2021, have to register their occupation of property in Gibraltar. A lot of work has been undertaken by our IT provider and staff in order to be able to validate records of those persons who reside in a Government tenancy.

The Housing Allocation Committee continues to meet on a monthly basis. They provide valuable advice to the Housing Authority. I would like to thank them for the unremunerated and invaluable work that they do.

The fourth and final section of the Department is Senior Management. The Senior Management section undertakes financial assessment computations and assists the Minister,

together with the Ministry for Housing itself. They undertake secretarial duties for established committees under the Housing Act and liaise with the RGP, HM Customs and other enforcement agencies on delicate matters, which include anti-social behaviour. The section provides secretarial duties to the Housing Allocation Committee. They also co-ordinate with other Departments such as the GHA, ERS and the Care Agency in order to reallocate flats to those on the waiting list.

This section also leads on the issue of legal cases. A total of 27 cases have been referred for legal action since 1st April 2021. A breakdown of the 27 cases is as follows: 24 cases have been commenced for repossession under section 8 of the Housing Act, two cases have been for unauthorised occupation under section 14 of the Housing Act, and one case for decanting.

It is important to understand that, apart from all the work that the different sections do, the Housing Department also works closely with many other Government Departments. This has led to more efficient working practices. All entities, for example, have a designated contact person, and this minimises the time taken to undertake tasks. The senior management of the Department also work closely and attend multi-agency forums with the Department of Equality, the DSS, CSRO, the RGP, Social Services, the GHA, the Prison Service, the ETB, the Drugs Rehabilitation Service, the Gibraltar Fire and Rescue Service, the Central Arrears Unit and Car Parks Ltd. This shows the high degree of commitment that the Department enjoys towards working with others.

One other important aspect to the work that the senior housing officials and the Housing Works Agency officials do is meeting with the tenants' association representatives. Those meetings are used to identify issues relevant to individual estates, many of which are then expedited as a result of the contact with the tenants. The Housing Department encourages tenants residing on housing estates to organise themselves into a representative committee. The ultimate aim is to benefit and enhance the living environment of the estate in collaboration with Housing Department officials. In those estates that already have a tenants' association, I urge tenants to approach their association if they believe that any action needs to be taken there, or if they have any suggestion that would improve the lives of residents on the estate. The general feedback that I have received from the tenants' associations is generally very positive. By working together, we have been able to enhance the service provided. The Housing Department and the Housing Works Agency staff will continue to support the tenants' associations on the day-to-day issues that may occur.

Mr Speaker, I am also happy to report that the review that we have embarked on of the Housing Act will be concluded by the end of the year. This includes a reassessment of the Housing Allocation Scheme, the tenancy agreements and a review of all housing policies. All are at an advanced stage. This is a comprehensive review which will give clarity to all. It will set out how things will be done. The outcome will also better inform tenants as to what the Housing Department expects from them and what they can expect from us. The Principal Housing Officer has been able to establish a very good working relationship with Action for Housing and, with my ministerial blessing, meets them on a monthly basis.

I move on now to the Housing Works Agency. This agency has moved into premises in the ICC and released its temporary premises in the old Rooke area. The Housing Works Agency has dealt with a total of 9,444 works orders which have been paid during the last financial year. Despite this, the Housing Works Agency has processed and managed, during this year, in excess of 15,000 works orders. The difference between one figure and the other is in relation to works that are contracted by other official service providers such as the GEA, the Environmental Agency and the Department of the Environment, which do not have a direct cost implication for the Housing Works Agency itself. The Housing Works Agency also manages all capital works to Government housing stock.

Mr Speaker, I will now move to my responsibilities for employment, where, indeed, as I am sure all hon. Members will agree, we have not been idle. Despite the many challenges and obstacles encountered throughout these last few years, the Department of Employment has ensured that there has been no detriment to the provision of their services and they continue to deliver as effectively and efficiently as ever. Given the unavoidable impact of the pandemic on

employment within Gibraltar, it has still remained largely stable. I am pleased to inform the House that despite the adverse situations faced in recent years, we continue to see record low unemployment. In 2021, when the pandemic critically hit employment throughout the globe, the yearly average for Gibraltarians registered unemployed was 27, which is, as we all heard from the Chief Minister, a staggering 94% reduction in unemployment since 2011. In 2022, we have continued to maintain low unemployment levels. In the first quarter of 2022, the average of registered unemployed stood at 41, a 92% reduction in unemployment since the first quarter of 2012. Hon. Members should not forget that when the GSD were in government their view was that 300 unemployed was the norm and an acceptable number, and we inherited unemployment of 522 that year. It is, therefore, obvious that this Government's systems work and continue to work.

The highly successful mechanism that we have in place has taken many individuals out of unemployment and given them worthwhile, meaningful jobs. This has allowed and delivered a stable equilibrium in respect of the number of persons being unemployed and employed year-round. This employment stability has been achieved by creating long-term close working relationships with our employers and with the business community via employment outreach programmes and education. The objective behind these programmes is to fully comprehend and cater for the needs of the business community, as well as understanding and empathising with the specific individual needs of those persons seeking gainful employment, whether they are unemployed or in pursuit of progression and career development. In relation to understanding and empathising with the specific individual needs, the Employment Department provides guidance on interview skills and competences. It works very closely with individuals in order to train and provide support as a means of increasing the quality of their curriculum vitae, interview outcome and the possibility of their success at any given job application. This specific service has proved to be extremely beneficial, resulting in many successful individuals achieving gainful employment.

It is also important to note that the success of the Government's BEAT measures have resulted in a reduction in the number of redundancies. This has assisted in keeping the level of unemployment very low. Additionally, by way of continued support to Gibraltar's business community as it slowly begins to recover and emerge from the financial drawbacks of the pandemic, the fees payable to the Department of Employment continue to be waived.

Mr Speaker, the reform of the Employment Tribunal in recent years has delivered an effective, modern tribunal system. The rules have been enhanced further with the introduction of a lead chairperson, who will be appointed shortly and will also be carrying out the functions of the President of Chairpersons, as well as the appointment of additional chairpersons who wish to preside on an ad hoc basis. As recognition of the hard work and dedication in administering justice in employment disputes in accordance with Gibraltar's employment laws, payments made to chairpersons per judgment delivered will also be increased. The fee to be paid per judgment will be decided by the Director of Employment on a case-by-case basis, taking into consideration the urgency, intricacies and complexities of the Employment Tribunal proceedings. It is important to note that the Employment Tribunal Rules have also been amended to introduce a robust complaints procedure as a means of ensuring adequate investigations and resolution of complaints against mediators and chairpersons. This reform will also ensure that all cases are heard in a timely and judicious manner.

The Labour Inspectorate is tasked with the regulation and enforcement of our employment laws. The Labour Inspectorate's strategy and programme of inspections across the various industries, which had been delayed during the pandemic, now continues to operate conscientiously and effectively. This demonstrates our continued commitment to the eradication of illegal labour by ensuring that businesses are compliant with the Employment Regulations. The inspectors work hard in the field to ensure that all employers comply with employment legislation and that, amongst other matters, vacancies are registered with the Employment Service. The Department of Employment works closely with all sectors of the business community to ensure

that a level playing field is maintained. The Labour Inspectorate remains, as always, available to provide information and guidance to both employers and employees on all employment-related matters.

This Government is committed to ensuring the well-being and protection of staff. We continue to work, together with the Health and Safety Advisory Council, to develop and review safe systems and safety procedures. It is our unrelenting commitment to protect the rights of workers' terms and conditions of employment. The Health and Safety Inspectorate continues to remain available to anyone who requires best practice guidance and advice in respect of health and safety issues at work. Gibraltar is pleased not to have seen a fatality at work for over 11 years now. Additionally, we have effectively introduced the health and safety policy, which I mentioned before, in all Government Departments, agencies and authorities. Heads of Departments and senior staff have already been asked to familiarise themselves with the policy, and the relevant arrangements are being conducted by the Human Resources Department to ensure all training requirements are identified and fulfilled.

The Employment Department has not rested and has, undoubtedly, stepped up to the demands and challenges placed on it. They will continue to work tirelessly towards the demands of the Brexit negotiations and related contingency preparations, specifically in the area of employment and workers' rights. This is inclusive of the continuous assistance we provide to the Ministry for Digital and Financial Services as they continue to develop digitalised interactive Government e-services for corporate and service users, as well as providing the high-quality employment-related support our community deserves. Finally, as this House knows, our commitment has always been, and will continue to be, to ever increase employment opportunities in Gibraltar, and at this we have been successful.

Mr Speaker, I move on, now, to the Youth Service. The Gibraltar Youth Service continues to open its doors and has further created and developed programmes that have reached more of our young people. It is pleasing to see how many youngsters turn up to participate in all sorts of activities which are educational and also fun at the same time. Membership across the youth clubs has grown, with an increase in attendance since they reopened after the lockdown. COVID-19 travel restrictions had an obvious impact. However, after the lifting of restrictions, the Youth Service has been working with other agencies towards creating new safe travel policies for young people to enjoy new experiences abroad.

The Mingle Project, which is now in its third year, continues to support young people from the ages of 18 to 30. It develops skills for people who have mild learning needs to be able to increase their friendship with others and build a support network. This is done by participating in activities such as cooking, baking and karaoke. Through targeted activities and workshops they are able to develop their independence, confidence and further their life skills.

The Youth Café is an open club environment for young people from the age of 15 onwards to relax and enjoy a safe space. The Youth Café opens twice a week, every Wednesday and Friday. They have engaged members in a variety of creative activities and recently, in a cooking competition, they have been able to practise their skills and develop their confidence.

The environment and climate change are at the heart of the work that the Youth Service does with young people. To this end they participate in Clean up the World, they support the Nautilus Project presentations and attend the Alameda Wildlife Conservation Park, amongst other activities. Getting involved with charity work is yet another aspect of the work that the Youth Service encourages. The group Rock Thrifters' upcycling fashion project looked at opportunities to showcase clothes from the Clubhouse charity shop. The Dolphin Youth Club has been focusing its efforts on a 'giving back' project to the community, learning about families and vulnerable people in our community. They have welcomed various charities to talk about the work that they do in the community. This Youth Club is now planning a community fundraiser to support charities. The Laguna Youth Club has been involved in team-building and offsite activities. This includes board paddling in Sandy Bay as well as Army outdoor activities. The Plater Youth Club has focused on projects that have centred on its immediate environment. This has developed their

understanding of green spaces, which led to the creation of their own urban garden where they built their own patio furniture. The Plater Youth Club also focused on giving its members learning opportunities and the ability to experience outdoor activities in Spain.

Apart from organising, preparing and delivering all the said programmes, the Youth Service is involved in other areas. It organises and delivers Understanding Youth Work training courses to potential volunteers, as well as first-aid refresher courses. It participates in many multi-agency forums, such as the Child Protection Committee. The Voice of Young People continue to meet with me and report on issues that affect their lives. Those discussions have included employment and mental health issues.

This year, the Youth Service has embarked on a new pilot project that specialises in providing engagement with young people under 25 who are currently in prison and at risk of reoffending on their release. The Youth Service will provide these young people with an opportunity to talk to full-time youth workers, who will offer an objective, positive role model and can provide them with a non-judgemental ear and offer support and guidance with their transition back into the community. I intend to follow this project closely, since I think it will go a long way in breaking the cycle of reoffending.

The Youth Service, as always, will continue to work with both comprehensives and the College to see how they assist in giving additional support with pupil's self-esteem, confidence building, communication skills and social development programmes. Working in groups, they try to identify issues which pupils are experiencing within the school environment. This includes exploring ways in which pupils can address and manage their anger, morals and emotions with a view to developing coping strategies.

Many people sometimes tend to undervalue the important work that the Youth Services does throughout the year. I would like to thank them for this work and for the positive impact they have had on so many of our youngsters.

I will now continue with my last but definitely not the least area of responsibility as Minister for Sport and Leisure. The House knows that in a sporting context, league seasons tend to overlap between financial years. The 2020-21 season for most sports was challenging, to say the least. Most competitions were disrupted at one point or another as a result of COVID-19. These were only completed, with very strict restrictions, when stringent protocols became the norm. It is because of this that I will take the opportunity to thank all the registered sports associations and their armies of volunteers who ploughed through these obstacles to keep their sports alive during that time.

Thankfully, the 2021-22 season that has recently come to its conclusion was held under near-normal conditions. Leagues and development programmes had to deal with few or no disruptions whatsoever. Unfortunately, the same cannot be said for international competitions away from Gibraltar. More critical COVID-19 scenarios in other countries resulted in many competitions being postponed or cancelled. Many associations also adopted an understandably cautious approach and decided not to travel. Those who have done so have received financial support under the Gibraltar Sports Advisory Council process.

Many sports development projects, including coach training and mentoring, were also supported. A total of £142,592.38 was allocated to international competition and sports development. This year, a marked increase in participation at international events is expected and Government will try to support this as best it can. Competing in these events is not only important as it provides exposure to a higher level of competition, but it also means that Gibraltar continues to stand on its own two feet as a full member or as an affiliate of 23 international governing bodies of sport.

Gibraltar's reputation as a top-class host has not been affected by the pandemic. Whilst many countries cancelled competitions, our response to COVID-19 meant that we were able to resume hosting such events sooner, rather than later. To this end, the first post-pandemic Europe Netball event was held locally during October 2021. The success of the competition opened the door for

others to follow suit, and this signalled a return to hosting. We continue to be the standard bearer for such initiatives.

Other events were also held locally. Whilst spectator numbers might have been low, it was felt that continuity was the key to maintain the momentum that had been created in terms of event-led tourism prior to the lockdowns. The main events this year have included chess, bowling, darts, pool, snooker, squash, cricket and netball. This financial year we are looking at cutting down on those events that have taken a toll on our finances. We are streamlining events so that our budget can stretch further and yet retain the same positive impact on events-led tourism. It is important to note at this point that these events equate to a total of just over 3,000 bed nights, meaning that there is a significant amount of economic activity that is generated as a result.

We have finally managed to host all these events with a marked reduction in disruption to our local sporting community. This would not have been possible without the investment made in new sports infrastructure over recent years. It is a pity that the Leader of the Opposition is not listening to this part when he said that the legacy of the three – (*Interjection*) No, there are hon. Members here who are not here, but I am directing it at him because he mentioned it before. The hon. Member, from a sedentary position, is saying that there are other Members missing; I am just saying that he is not here, and it is a pity that he is not here to listen because of the comments that he made. I must say that these new sporting facilities ... And he was completely wrong – and the Hon. Mr Reyes knows this as well – in saying that no sports are being played on these facilities. Many sports have been using these facilities. This would not have been possible without the investment made in new facilities infrastructure over recent years.

The use of the new facilities includes the sports halls at both secondary schools, which has not been mentioned either. It has meant that when either the Tercentenary Sports Hall or the Europa Sports Hall were used, all users were decanted to other facilities with minimal disruption to their programmes. In terms of the new facilities, the Europa Sports Park is in full use with the area a daily hive of activity. It has, for the first time, formed part of the community use scheme with badminton, rhythmic gymnastics and futsal, amongst others, benefitting from use of the hall. The Squash Association has had its first full season up at the new squash facility, with darts players from both the junior and senior categories competing in the aptly named George Federico Darts Hall. The indoor cricket nets have seen a resurgence of junior players with the facility serving as a springboard for Gibraltar cricket's first senior league in over four years. The Gibraltar Premier League, in its 20-overs format, comes on the back of the highly successful European Cricket Network T10 event held at Europa. Livestreaming figures peaked at 1.5 million during the week of the event, with a repeat event on a larger scale already planned for next season. The Gibraltar Rugby Football Union have also continued use of Europa with their local league and junior development programmes. They also host the now annual Royal Engineers visit, as well as several other tour groups. In the next few weeks we will have the management of this world-class venue complete. The Government envisages it will become a place where entities from abroad come to our shores to train and play with the ensuing benefit to our economy.

The Lathbury Sports Complex should be completed – I admit it has taken a long time – very early this summer. All the logistical issues with subcontractors have now been solved. Completion of the minor items that remain will allow many other members of Gibraltar's sporting fraternity to make use of these amazing facilities. Whilst the swimming pool is currently in its testing and commissioning phase, our swimmers have been able to continue training in the GSLA swimming pool complex. However, members of the Athletics Association have had their training and competitive seasons affected by what is now an old track at the Victoria Stadium. That track is now subject to extended periods of non-availability, as UEFA requirements when hosting matches mean that the Gibraltar Football Association have to render it out of bounds for longer periods. With all this in mind, I would like to go on record and thank the Gibraltar Amateur Athletics Association and all its members for their patience and understanding. They have conducted themselves admirably and have understood the issues to a very large degree. I share their frustration, but their attitude could have been very different and for that I am extremely grateful.

In relation to the Victoria Stadium, last February saw the complete handover of the area that was originally covered by a development licence over to the Gibraltar Football Association. The area that includes the main pitch, pitch 2, the running track and the Victoria sports hall now falls completely under the responsibility and management of the GFA, with GSLA staff no longer operationally involved. This move, which was inevitable in terms of moving forward, was not immune to delays incurred by COVID-19 and other matters but has provided both parties with the clarity that was required for a while now. The GSLA staff will move to manage the Lathbury Sports Complex as soon as this is completed. In fact, work has already started to make this transition as smooth as possible. However, until the national stadium is constructed, both the GFA and GSLA will continue to work together at various levels. I fully appreciate that the ambiguity caused by what was originally a short-term agreement has not been easy to manage on the ground, but I am very pleased to report that both parties have worked through the issues. I thank the GFA for their role, but I will take the liberty of placing on record my thanks also to the staff of the GSLA who have been receptive to all the changes that have come and are coming their way and approached these with a view to offering the best service possible.

On the subject of facilities, I remind the House that parks and playgrounds also fall under the remit of the GSLA. In the last financial year, we have been able to carry out a couple of major refurbishments. In addition to those, snagging issues were finally overcome at the new Laguna estate playground and this has been available to the general public for a while now. The crucial part of keeping these parks and playgrounds safe and in good running order is having a robust maintenance programme. In the last financial year, we spent a total of £116,487.84 on this. However, we have realised that the previous arrangements were found not to be adequate, with this leading to a review of the service. I am glad to report that, moving forward, the GSLA has engaged the services of GJBS, who now has a team fully dedicated to the maintenance and upkeep of the playgrounds. The increased monitoring of these amenities should result in savings in the long term. The improvements are already evident to see. These should become more noticeable as the months progress and as members of the public pack away their beach umbrellas and return to use these facilities.

The summer months used to be some of the quieter periods from a GSLA viewpoint. However, given that competitive sport has become a year-round reality, there is now no respite. The inclusion of the GSLA bathing pavilion and the Europa pool as amenities available to the general public has added to this. Last summer was extremely successful and the first since restrictions on gatherings had been lifted. The bathing pavilion and Europa pool returned to their pre-COVID-19 usage levels. The extensive use of both meant that maintenance was ramped up, but I am glad to report that there were no major issues. The overall cost of maintenance was as follows: the GSLA bathing pavilion £116,986.51, and the Europa pool £147,435.95. These figures account for chemicals, cleaning – including the services of divers – and other minor maintenance matters that are required before, during and after the summer season. Whilst the summer season lasts approximately 14 weeks, it is imperative to maintain these facilities all year round.

Mr Speaker, we cannot look back at any summer considering sport and leisure and not refer to the GSLA's Summer Sports and Stay and Play programmes. Whilst the Stay and Play programme was organised during the summer of 2020, the Summer Sports programme took an enforced hiatus. Thankfully, summer 2021 saw it return with a highly successful and well-attended eight weeks of activities. Absence makes the heart fonder and it was particularly warming to see our sports facilities buzzing every morning, ending with the now traditional water day, which is a fantastic end to the programme. Four hundred and thirty seven children, ranging from the ages of five to 13, registered and participated during the summer months. The importance of this cannot be underestimated, as unfortunately children are becoming increasingly sedentary and lured away from physical activity by electronic devices. The Summer Sports programme provides continuity of sorts whilst our registered sports associations and their volunteers take a well-deserved break.

Summer 2021 also saw an increase in the number of children registered and attending the Stay and Play programme. The programme, which deals with children with learning disabilities, catered for 35 children. The programme was, once again, a major success, offering an extremely varied range of sports and leisure activities at different venues around Gibraltar. This coming summer numbers are, once again, up with 43 registering already. All preparations have been done in order for this programme to commence on 11th and 13th July. Today, the leaders will be commencing their induction courses and I am happy to say that, this summer, the schemes will run for longer than ever, both ending on 25th and 26th August. As we all know, the value of having an induction course is that it will cover a whole range of items such as the delivery of generic and sport-specific sessions, leadership training and first aid, amongst others.

One very important aspect which has been introduced since we came into government is that of protecting our children. It is for this reason that all employees are required to undertake safeguarding training. They are also RGP vetted initially during the recruitment stage. This is in keeping with the requirements which are now imposed on any coach who is responsible for, or delivers sessions to children or young adults in any facilities managed directly or controlled by the GSLA. Since attendance at safeguarding workshops and adherence to relevant child protection protocols were changed from guidelines to registration criteria under the GSAC process, a total of 707 coaches have now undergone such training. Two hundred and thirty one of these became qualified during the last financial year. The numbers would have been much higher had the enforcement of COVID-19 restrictions not hindered the delivery of the sessions. However, the time was used profitably by the GSLA team, who have now developed protocols to not only be able to deal with the constant flow of new coaches but also address those requiring refreshers. Whilst updates are required bi-annually, an online refresher course will now be available so that face-to-face workshops are only required every four years. This will streamline the process for the volunteers involved and make it less onerous on staff, who will be able to deal with a greater number of new volunteers.

Mr Speaker, safeguarding has taken on a new level of importance in recent years, and rightly so. During the last financial year, the GSLA became a signatory to the Multi-Agency Public Protection Arrangements (MAPPA) process. This allows the GSLA to have access to confidential information, if and when required, in order to safeguard individuals who are using facilities under their management. Staff awareness training has been delivered given the importance of the role that each individual member of staff plays in ensuring that users are provided with a safe environment. GSLA facilities are, I dare say, the most utilised public facilities after our schools and health services, so it is imperative that all possible steps are taken to ensure the safety of all concerned, including staff.

Mr Speaker, I now move on to my part as Minister for Leisure and I will talk about the King's Bastion Leisure Centre. The King's Bastion Leisure Centre gradually got back on track after the lockdown with its doors opening for the new Rock Boulder Park on 1st July 2021. This replaced the ice-skating rink, which was very expensive to manage because of the high electricity costs and which had to be discontinued as the coolant gas to run it was no longer being produced. This facility boasts top specifications and will, no doubt, attract many more users to the Centre – that is the Rock Boulder Park. The cost of converting the ice rink to the boulder park was recovered from the savings on electricity, which meant that the Government did not have to provide any funds for this project. Other innovations included the purchase of 10 new training machines for the fitness gym to replace some of the old equipment which became worn out, and the addition of three of the latest game machines for the amusement arcade. LMS also invested in the purchase of the Santa's Sleigh Ride experience and a wall-mounted trio of singing reindeer, which were the star attraction at Santa's Grotto during the month of December. The ride will continue to be used as a jungle adventure throughout the year and as a Halloween special in October. Revenue since the start of 2022 is now on par with what it was in the first quarter of 2020, prior to the pandemic. It is expected that with the creation of new income streams from the Boulder Park and the Cannonball Store, which opened in July 2020, plus the other attractions, the total revenue for the

year will most likely be the highest to date since the centre opened. This will greatly assist in reducing the ongoing cost of running the facilities. The plans for the year ahead include the expansion of the Cannonball Store to cater for increased demands, including the sale of comics, and the purchase of at least six arcade machines aimed at toddlers and small children.

The King's Bastion Leisure Centre is always exploring ways of generating revenue and they are currently looking at some more new games and rides that will give children many enjoyable experiences. I must congratulate the management of the King's Bastion Leisure Centre for having great vision in not only finding ways of making the centre attractive to our young people but also for looking all the time at ways of making the Centre economically viable. The House should not forget the disaster area that the King's Bastion Leisure Centre was in 2011 and the economic black hole it represented. Just as a reminder, the King's Bastion Leisure Centre used to cost £2.6 million in expenditure whilst only bringing in approximately £50,000 in revenue. Now, the cost has been reduced to £1.4 million and it is reaching new heights of approximately £600,000 in revenue during COVID, but before that it was averaging £800,000.

Mr Speaker, in conclusion I would like to take this opportunity to thank all the staff who work under the different portfolios which I am responsible for. I would like to thank you and your staff here in Parliament for the help and assistance given to fulfil my parliamentary obligations.

I could not end my Budget speech without specifically mentioning my staff at the Ministry. Without them, I could not run the sometimes complex and difficult portfolios that I lead on and those that I have been honoured to hold in the past. They are the ones who guide me daily in all that I do and are also there whatever time of day. I am forever grateful, so a wholehearted thank you goes to them all.

Thank you, Mr Speaker. *(Banging on desks)*

Mr Speaker: The Hon. Edwin Reyes.

Hon. E J Reyes: Mr Speaker, the coming months of July and August will see, as every year, a change in daily routines for most families in Gibraltar. These two summer months are a longish period of time when children are not in schools, and therefore families make different plans, each catering for their own individual circumstances.

The Budget this year caters for a substantial expenditure of almost £63 million in respect of education-related expenses. This is made up of over £39 million in respect of payroll expenditure alone, and the remainder comes under the heading of other charges. The expenses on the payroll subheads estimated for 2022-23 actually have a predicted small saving when compared with the forecast outturn for 2021-22. The good news that as from September the number of teachers employed on a substantive basis will increase is welcome indeed, but subsequently the provision for temporary cover, from where supply teachers are normally paid, has been proportionally reduced.

Despite these justified adjusted estimated expenditures for 2022-23, I cannot understand how the Education Department estimates that only £1,000 will be required for maternity/paternity leave. We have a relatively high number of young teachers who are still within the child bearing ages, so I wonder what realistically the actual expenditure will be once the financial year 2022-23 is over. Likewise, temporary cover is also reduced to £1,000 despite the logical reality that the more teachers you have employed the higher the expenses for temporary cover will probably be, because these teachers need to stay home when contracting seasonal influenza or similar illnesses. Because of their close contact in classrooms with pupils, mostly in enclosed areas, it would be highly irresponsible for teachers to attend their respective workplaces if and when they unfortunately contract some virus or another.

There is a subhead provision in the Estimates, Head 16, subhead 2(34) which provides £8,000 for compulsory professional supervision. I believe the Minister for Education has not expanded upon this provision and I would therefore be grateful for an explanation in respect of what compulsory professional supervision is. Likewise, the provision of £78,000 catered for in

subhead 2(35) under 'Cyclical Maintenance – Primary Schools' seems, to me, to be a new item of expenditure and any light shone upon this would also be appreciated.

There is a huge increase of almost £400,000 in respect of facilities management, and I suppose this will be geared towards expenses in connection with improvement works within our school buildings. Again, further information would also be welcome, but improvements and repairs of facilities are mainly carried out during the eight weeks or so that schools are closed for pupils during the summer holiday break. I have heard from teachers that there is a certain discontent in respect of provisions and facilities made in some of our new schools. There is a difference between what contracted architects design, influenced by what they feel would look nice and pleasing to the eye in the new schools, and the reality of what teachers would really like as the most practical things for them in the delivery of their day-to-day lessons. I therefore urge that new-builds and improvement works in schools are planned and executed in close consultation with classroom teachers, who, after all, are the professionals entrusted with providing the best education possible for our pupils.

Details provided through the Estimates Book show an increase in the teacher complement from 370 to 471, therefore I make it 101 more teachers to be employed on a substantive basis. The Minister, in his speech, referred to an extra 97 teachers, so although it is a small discrepancy of only four teachers, perhaps these figures need to be checked out, in case we can actually employ four extra.

Welcome as the increase in teachers is, we are left now with the problem of around 90 to 100 teachers who, in the past, have been employed on supply contracts and are now left, technically, unemployed. These unfortunate – and I am told there are 94 – supply teachers have had employment opportunities in the past, for up to six years in some cases, but now they face an insecure future in respect of their employment opportunities and teaching careers. Concerns have been expressed by these teachers that there does not seem to be a clear criterion of how those lucky enough to now enjoy substantive contracts have been selected. Teachers who were unsuccessful in the recent selection process are disappointed at the lack of feedback as to why they did not get the teaching job they applied for. May I respectfully and strongly recommend that feedback is always offered to those who are unsuccessful in their applications, so that, in turn, they may improve their employment prospects and become better professionals?

During the second and third weeks in August we traditionally suffer a few days of nervousness and anxiety. This is because this is the time of year when our students officially receive their long-awaited A-Level and GCSE results. We all know from past experiences that examination results will have a great influence a youngster's future. I sincerely hope that this year's public examination results will see repetitions of past successes for all candidates. I equally hope that students will be wise in choosing their career paths for the future.

The Department of Education is strongly urged to develop a well-structured careers advice programme within our secondary schools system. As a teacher, I cannot recommend enough the value of pursuing higher education studies, possibly leading towards a degree, in an area where our students have the academic ability to achieve this. However, a strong influencing factor as to what subject areas should be followed at university should be encouraged by what our community's future professional skills requirements will be. There are already some professions which are well oversubscribed, whilst on the other hand there seems to be a continued need to import professional labour in other areas. Would it not be great if all Ministries provided the Education Authority with feedback as to their vision of Gibraltar's future professional skills needs? If this were to happen, then our students, who are Gibraltar's future workforce, would certainly be the winners.

Although we rightly invest heavily in scholarships, to the tune of some £17 million for this coming year, we owe a strong commitment to our pupils who are not necessarily of higher education calibre. There are provisions to invest £130,000 towards vocational courses – but, I ask, what qualifications do these vocational courses actually offer? Is there any provision for vocational

courses for those who are post compulsory school age who may be better suited to pursue this path?

A deep study should be undertaken in respect of courses offered and qualifications to be obtained through our training centres. There is a lot of construction taking place in Gibraltar, but is the labour market in this area employing from the local workforce? With an ever-increasing number of homes in Gibraltar, both within the public and private sectors, do we have adequately qualified craftsmen to ensure the best possible maintenance service is available for these homes from our local workforce? The Government's housing stock needs to be adequately maintained to ensure tenants enjoy homes of an acceptable standard. However, Government has an ever-decreasing workforce in respect of home maintenance teams at the Housing Works Agency. What, then, is the future for housing maintenance? The expenditure head at Appendix D, Housing Works Agency, subhead 26 actually has a decrease when compared with the 2021-22 estimate and forecast outturn. I have to ask: how can this be so, if our housing buildings are getting older and therefore might require higher maintenance? Would it not be a more efficient service if our own Housing Works Agency had an adequate team of suitably trained craftsmen to undertake maintenance tasks of our housing stock? Would this not be a sensible way to provide stable employment for our youngsters who have not undertaken degree courses but have attained qualified craftsman status at NVQ Level 2 and some even at Level 3, each of them specialising in different disciplines?

What I am saying is that in the same way we rejoice about the successes of our university students, are we not equally bound to invest in and subsequently eventually rejoice about the successes which are achievable by those who choose not to go to university? We must not forget the ultimate aim of providing education for our future generations. It is our duty to ensure all pupils always achieve their maximum potential. The school leaving age in the United Kingdom, upon which we also base our educational models, is set at 16, but it is set at age 16 if students embark upon an apprenticeship or training type of employment until at least attaining the age of 18. I believe it is high time we reviewed our own local school leaving age. For a pupil to leave schooling in Gibraltar at age 15 and not embark or have opportunities to embark upon an approved training programme is certainly not an investment in respect of the future employability prospects of that youngster. We are now in the third decade of the 21st century and decisive action is, therefore, long overdue.

Whilst desiring only all the very best in respect of whatever educational reforms may be introduced over the next few years, I cannot stress enough that the views of the professionals in this field must be heard and acted upon. There is no better formula for success than to cultivate a sense of ownership amongst all professionals tasked with the education of our children. Furthermore, the GSD believes that schoolteachers are a priority that is both needed and from which society will receive huge benefits. The job that they do benefits everyone. Teachers are not a group who are prone to industrial action or making a fuss. However, they are an essential and key contributory factor towards the success of our future adults and their aspirations in the adult world. To all those teachers who go the extra mile, I thank you on behalf of parents for assisting and, thus, enabling our youngsters to attain even greater successes than past generations have done.

Touching upon sports-related matters, Mr Speaker, the new facilities at Lathbury Barracks and Europa which were constructed in connection with the 2019 Island Games should have been completed three years ago now. Besides the need to meet the Games' requirements themselves, they are meant to enable Gibraltarian sports participants to continue to produce as best results as possible with an increase of facilities which develops their wide-ranging sporting talents and abilities. We have heard in this House a range of excuses as to why our new facilities are still not fully completed. The latest update in respect of the delays is that their completion is now imminent. Well, I sincerely hope so because it is embarrassing to be without facilities for so long despite this project being hailed as a sporting showcase of facilities. It is totally unacceptable that whilst the President of the Gibraltar Amateur Athletics Association holds the prestigious office of

President of the Athletics Association of Small States, he cannot go to meetings and boast about Gibraltar having any suitable venues across any of the wide range of track and/or field events in this traditional sport. This sporting example in respect of athletics is but only one, because it applies, unfortunately, to many other sports. The lack of approved sporting facilities has resulted in many associations not being able to take full advantage of recruiting new youngsters into their sports. It would have been an opportune moment for many local associations to welcome new participants – who were, at the time of the Island Games, enthusiastic to participate in certain sports thanks to the successes they witnessed from local athletes.

In the past we have quite often obtained results in numerous sporting disciplines which make our neighbours and sporting opponents in official competitions envious of our rather good and consistent performances. I sincerely hope that the new sports facilities, when eventually completed, will meet local requirements not only for today's needs but for generations to come. I am sure I speak for the whole House as we offer our collective best wishes to all forthcoming participants who, through their committed efforts, will hopefully, yet again, make Gibraltar proud of our sporting achievements in the season which is about to commence and those who, in just a few weeks' time, will be able to represent us at the forthcoming Commonwealth Games. May the best of Gibraltarian luck accompany all our representatives and may they, through their sporting efforts, prove their best results in the challenges that lie ahead.

Mr Speaker, once again, this year I wish to reaffirm my personal conviction that, through the collective celebration of social events, participating Gibraltarians contribute to reinforcing our identity, culture and history as a people and a community. Both the performing and fine arts fraternities have always proved themselves to be very proactive within their own specialised areas, and I take this opportunity to congratulate all the groups and individuals who have done Gibraltar extremely proud through their international participations and, in many cases, gaining awards. It is always a personal and collective pleasure to be able to say how proud we are of the international achievements of our fellow Gibraltarians.

This year's Estimates show a token provision of £1,000 under the Improvement and Development Fund expenditure set aside under Head 102 Other Projects, subhead 4 I (India) entitled 'Theatre'. Through public announcements a new project will be embarked upon which will see an enlarged theatre created within the John Mackintosh Hall complex. This theatre will be built with funds provided for by public subscriptions, and therefore it does not say much for Government's personal commitment to see through their original plans pertaining to theatrical facilities which they pledged were going to be provided and with the old Queen's Cinema site having been publicly announced as the preferred location. The new theatre will replace the existing John Mackintosh Hall facility, which currently has a little over 200-250 seating capacity and which is always in great demand for use by local schools and dance groups for their productions. It now leaves the question of where traditional users of the existing hall will be able to stage their shows during the works period. With the programmed refurbishment of the John Mackintosh Hall facilities we are actually not providing much-needed additional facilities; it boils down to an exchange of a small facility for a much larger one, which will not necessarily cater for our ever-increasing demands for theatre use. The new, larger theatre might be good news for some but it has also resulted in sad news for others, like local educational schools and dance groups for whom the size and seating capacity was just right. I wish the traditional users of the hereto existing Mackintosh Hall the best of luck in finding alternative venues which cater for their specific needs whilst we go through the transition period.

Government has, indeed, been very lucky in securing an extremely generous donation of £1.5 million towards making the new Mackintosh Hall theatre a reality. Given the ever-increasing cost of living, which seems to surpass any increase in income for the average working person, I feel that finding the additional funds for a new theatre from public contributions will be tough to achieve. I sincerely hope that our economy is handled prudently by this Government during the remaining tenure of their mandate, so that in the not-too-distant future the new theatre will actually see the light of day. Our local performers, entertainers and audiences are entitled to ask

for a theatre which is fit for purpose and available throughout the year without them having to exclusively raise the funds themselves.

Mr Speaker, I was first elected into this House in 2007, thus I have now tried to serve our electorate for 15 years. This House will soon enter into the final year of its mandate and, given that we live in a free and democratic country, nobody knows for sure what the future holds. Therefore, before I sit down, I must take this opportunity to once again thank you and all your staff at Parliament for the patient and professional manner in which you have all, both collectively and individually, dealt with us Members. I know that you personally have always strived to lead by example when dealing with Members on both sides of the House. I would like to assure you that you can give yourself full credit for the guidance and advice you have, so far, offered to our current Clerk at the table. I had the privilege of forming part of the Gibraltar Parliament delegation that attended the Regional Commonwealth Parliamentary Association meeting hosted by the Isle of Man in March this year, and I am certain the other Gibraltar delegates will also attest that our Parliament's Clerk proved to be equally as efficient as you personally proved yourself to be many years ago when I headed the Gibraltar delegation at the CPA regional meeting, also held in the Isle of Man. With these words, Mr Speaker, I wish you and all your members of staff at Parliament an enjoyable forthcoming summer recess. *(Banging on desks)*

Adjournment

Hon. Chief Minister: Mr Speaker, on that convivial note – and, in respect of the comments relating to the Clerk and yourself, I am sure with the support of the whole House – I invite that we now adjourn to tomorrow at 10 a.m.

2135 **Mr Speaker:** I now propose a question, which is that this House do now adjourn to Wednesday, 29th June at 10 a.m.

I now put the question, which is that this House do now adjourn to Wednesday, 29th June at 10 a.m. Those in favour? (**Members:** Aye.) Those against? Passed.

This House will now adjourn to Wednesday, 29th June at 10 a.m.

The House adjourned at 7.40 p.m.