



PROCEEDINGS OF THE GIBRALTAR PARLIAMENT

AFTERNOON SESSION: 3.06 p.m. – 8.26 p.m.

Gibraltar, Wednesday, 19th October 2022

Contents

Prayer	4
Administration of Oath of Allegiance to His Majesty King Charles III	4
Confirmation of Minutes	4
Announcements	4
Tribute to Her late Majesty Queen Elizabeth II	4
Tribute to Marie Montegriffo, former Member of the House	8
Papers to be laid	11
Thanks to all from Hon. Ms M D Hassan Nahon for friendship and support during period of bereavement	12
Standing Order 7(1) suspended to proceed with Government Bill	12
Order of the Day	13
Bill	13
First and Second Reading	13
Extradition (Amendment) Bill 2022 – First Reading approved	13
Extradition (Amendment) Bill 2022 – Second Reading approved	13
Extradition (Amendment) Bill 2022 – Committee Stage and Third Reading to be taken at this sitting	16
Committee Stage and Third Reading	17
Extradition (Amendment) Bill 2022 – Clauses considered and approved	17
Extradition (Amendment) Bill 2022 – Third Reading approved: Bill passed	17

Standing Order 7(1) suspended to proceed with Questions	17
Questions for Oral Answer	18
Digital, Financial Services, Health Authority and Public Utilities	18
Q276-77/2022 Counselling, psychological support services and Child Protection Services – Number of children referred	18
Q278/2022 Children referred to Mental Health Services – Numbers receiving medication, counselling or other therapies	20
Q279/2022 Number of suicides in last 11 years – By age and sex.....	20
Q280/2022 Numbers receiving medication for mental health conditions – By condition, age and sex	22
Q281/2022 Numbers receiving therapy, counselling or CBT – By condition, age and sex....	25
Q282/2022 Mental healthcare – Budget	25
Q283/2022 Primary Care Centre appointments – Difficulty in accessing.....	27
Q284/2022 Cat 2 individuals and HEPPS – Numbers	30
Q285/2022 AquaGib – Financing; indicative purchase price	30
Q286-88/2022 Mount Alvernia, Dr Giraldi and St Martin’s – Staff numbers; nationalities; numbers through recruitment agencies	31
Q289-292/2022 COVID boosters administered – Number by resident and non-resident	33
Q293/2022 Gibraltar Health Authority – Number of vacant posts.....	35
Q294/2022 Power cuts – Duration, districts and reasons	36
Q295/2022 Power’s Drive Tunnel – Reservoir stock level on day preceding fire	38
Q296/2022 ITLD – Increase in staff complement	40
Q297/2022 DHA orthodontists – Whether Government satisfied with complement.....	41
Q298/2022 GHA Domestic department – Management of and relationship with employees	42
Q299/2022 GHA electrical works – Whether being privatised	43
<i>The House recessed at 6.05 p.m. and resumed at 6.23 p.m.</i>	<i>44</i>
Social Security, Economic Development, Enterprise, Telecommunications and the GSB.....	45
Q300/2022 Construction and Engineering Trades Training Centres – Trainees; instructors and current vacancies; future plans.....	45
Q303/2022 Disability Allowance – Number of cases where revoked or discontinued.....	48
Q304-310/2022 Public debt – Figures for June to September 2022; General Sinking Fund – Balance as at June to September 2022; Gibraltar Savings Bank – Listed bond portfolio; unclaimed deposits National Economic Plan – Engineer’s Lane air-raid shelter; application procedure Rooke Nursing Home – Arrival date of modular units; Jewish Home – Refurbishment costs	49
Q311/2022 Disability benefit – Number of applications outstanding	55
Q312/2022 Apprenticeships – Whether continuing locally	61
Q313-16/2022 Rooke residential home – whether private or public facility; Mount Alvernia – option for existing residents to remain; criteria and financing terms for residents moving to new facility.....	62

Justice, Equality and Public Standards and Regulations.....	66
Q348/2022 Development Plan – Expected date of publication	66
Deputy Chief Minister	68
Q349/2022 Rooke site – Update re preferred bidders.....	68
Adjournment.....	69
<i>The House adjourned at 8.26 p.m.</i>	69

The Gibraltar Parliament

The Parliament met at 3.06 p.m.

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

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

PRAYER

Mr Speaker

ADMINISTRATION OF OATH OF ALLEGIANCE TO HIS MAJESTY KING CHARLES III

Clerk: Meeting of Parliament, Wednesday, 19th October 2022.

Order of Proceedings: (i) Oaths of Allegiance of hon. Members.

The Chief Justice administered the Oath of Allegiance to the Hon. M L Farrell, the Hon. F R Picardo, the Hon. Dr J J Garcia, the Hon. Prof. J E Cortes, the Hon. A J Isola, the Hon. J J Bossano, the Hon. G H Licudi, the Hon. S E Linares, the Hon. P J Balban, the Hon. Miss S J Sacramento, the Hon. V Daryanani, the Hon. K Azopardi, the Hon. Ms M D Hassan Nahon, the Hon D J Bossino, the Hon D A Feetham and the Hon E J Phillips.

CONFIRMATION OF MINUTES

5 **Clerk:** (ii) Confirmation of Minutes – the Minutes of the last meeting of Parliament, which was held on 22nd, 23rd, 28th, 29th and 30th June, and 4th and 5th of July 2022.

Mr Speaker: May I sign the Minutes as correct?

10 **Members:** Aye.

Mr Speaker signed the Minutes.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

Tribute to Her late Majesty Queen Elizabeth II

Clerk: (iii) Communications from the Chair; (iv) Petitions; (v) Announcements.

15 **Chief Minister (Hon. F R Picardo):** Mr Speaker, the community has had an opportunity to hear, already, fulsome tributes to Her late Majesty from all Members of the House in different fora in the time since 8th September, when her death was announced. It would be remiss of us, however, not to reflect those tributes in this House in some way.

hon. Members will have heard me say, and I repeat here, when it came to Her Majesty, Mr Speaker, we were her Rock and she was ours, and in much more than the geological meaning of those words. For all the time that this Parliament has existed, as well as its predecessor the House of Assembly, we were Her Majesty's seat of Government in Gibraltar. For all hon. Members except Sir Joe and – although it would be rude of me of me to ask – perhaps yourself as a Member, if not an elected Member, we, the rest of us, have all been born in her reign. So the Government considered that the death of Her Majesty on 8th September had to inevitably lead to the cancellation of the National Day celebrations this year. As one Member of the great Gibraltarian public told a foreign television station, once Her Majesty's death had been announced we had nothing to celebrate that week.

Mr Speaker, I refer the House to the statements I have made to various media and elsewhere and reiterate those sentiments to the House today. On 18th September, I also extended condolences on behalf of the people of Gibraltar and all Members of this House directly to His Majesty the King, Charles III, to the Queen Consort, the Earl and Countess of Wessex and the Princess Royal at the reception at Buckingham Palace ahead of Her late Majesty's funeral.

The British Royal Family have seen the depth of the real affection for Her Majesty that there was in Gibraltar and which remains in respect of the memory of her reign. It is also true that the depth of that real affection will also have been seen and felt beyond the United Kingdom. One hopes it will better help some people to understand that, for us, British sovereignty is not an esoteric concept, it is something that runs through our veins and that, like our blood, it comes from our hearts.

Mr Speaker, once we have heard from other Members I will ask that the House should observe a minute's silence as a sign of respect for Her late Majesty Queen Elizabeth II.

Mr Speaker: The Hon. the Leader of the Opposition.

Hon. K Azopardi: Mr Speaker, I will associate myself entirely with those remarks by the Chief Minister on the passing of Her Majesty.

What can one say that is sufficient when something like that happens? A monarch who served not only her country and her people but the entire Commonwealth for 70 years and left her mark and her legacy throughout the entire Commonwealth. As the Chief Minister says, we have, all of us, each and every one of us, reflected on the passing of Her Majesty and her legacy in different ways and on social media, and it is fitting that we should also say so today.

She came here in 1954 and left her mark. The people of Gibraltar felt her loss massively, as we did when the Duke of Edinburgh also passed, before. Her Majesty was in place and saw almost every significant step towards self-government in our community, and it is worth reflecting that she was there at the time of the three Constitutions that were granted to her people of Gibraltar. And while we, of course, always assert our right to self-determination, it is entirely compatible with our place as loyal members of the Commonwealth, so we have always valued our links with Her Majesty. She leaves an enduring mark that will never be surpassed or rivalled as the monarch that she was, who touched the hearts of so many people throughout the Commonwealth and so many people in Gibraltar.

Mr Speaker: The Hon. Marlene Hassan Nahon.

Hon. Ms M D Hassan Nahon: Mr Speaker, I would like to echo the tributes of the Chief Minister and the Leader of the Opposition for our beloved Queen Elizabeth II, and pass on, of course, my condolences to all within the great British family of nations.

As did I, many of our brothers and sisters felt her passing as the loss of a close, comforting and protective relative, and have felt a degree of orphanhood ever since. Having recently lost my mother, I must admit that losing our Queen reopened wounds in powerful and completely unexpected ways. Many have expressed criticism of some excessively performative and dramatic

shows of mourning, but these are, to me, nothing more than the manifestation of a level of respect and adoration that is not easy to express with words. I hope not to fail these excesses with this honest and heartfelt obituary.

Queen Elizabeth II meant a lot to me, for many different reasons, and I profoundly admire the way she fulfilled her many roles. She will always be an example I will try to follow. As a figurehead, she was an example of how to exercise great power with great sensibility and humility. As a matriarch, she was always capable of navigating the right course between loyalty and responsibility. As a woman, she endorsed and echoed the progress achieved by her female peers despite the traditionalist trappings of the institution she represented. As a monarch and perhaps the greatest exponent of an institution many consider anachronistic, she was capable of garnering global sympathy and uniting the nation in times of hardship. She made republicans embrace the monarchy and recognise the value of emotion, symbolism and tradition. She was a consensus figure standing right in the middle of a time where there is no middle ground. Think what you like about the monarchy, but these are all objective achievements of enormous value.

In a time plagued by polarisation, demagoguery and alienation, Queen Elizabeth gave us hope that we could have unity, dignity and kindness in public life. May this promise inspire us all for years to come.

Thank you, Mr Speaker.

Mr Speaker: The Hon. the Deputy Chief Minister.

Deputy Chief Minister (Hon. Dr J J Garcia): Mr Speaker, the death of Queen Elizabeth, on 8th September, was the end of an era.

Many tributes have been paid to the late Queen, much has already been said and written, so I would like, if I may, to make my own short contribution in this House with a personal story. Six years ago, I agreed to represent the Government at an event at Buckingham Palace. My wife and I attended, together with guests from the United Kingdom and all over the Commonwealth. It was our first visit to the Palace, so logically we were struck with the surroundings. We stayed in our allocated place, chatting to political and military figures and their spouses who came and went; one of them had worked in Gibraltar, one worked for the Royal Family. The Royal Family entered the enclosure and circulated amongst the guests. The afternoon wore on and there were only, more or less, 10 minutes before everybody had to go home. It was then that we saw Her Majesty talking to the people directly in front of us. The image in my mind is of that crowd parting, and in an instant the Queen stood there in front of us. We exchanged pleasantries and, logically, a few words about Gibraltar. I remember that conversation vividly and it was a moment both my wife and I will cherish forever. It was a genuinely humbling experience.

It was obvious to me from that encounter that the Gibraltarians had a special place in her heart, just as she had won a place in ours. This was the Queen who defied General Franco by visiting Gibraltar in 1954, the Queen who brushed aside security concerns to come here and visit the Rock, and the Queen who came here in the face of advice not to do so. Meeting her even briefly was a real honour. It was also genuinely impacting. I understood then the effect Her late Majesty had on the very many people she came across over the years, and when you try to rationalise it, it really comes down to this: Queen Elizabeth II was a constant in our lives. Prime Ministers and Presidents have come and gone – 15 UK Prime Ministers during her reign, 179 Prime Ministers of her realms, 14 American Presidents – but Her Majesty the Queen was always there. Millions of her subjects have not known anyone different. Indeed, it was almost as if the Queen would be eternal, for the Queen was a symbol of continuity, of stability and of strength. She represented tradition and security in a turbulent world, and her passing has left a void.

She was born in a time of empire and she departed this world still Sovereign of her numerous realms and territories – over Gibraltar, too. Indeed, our very own Constitution states that Gibraltar is part of Her Majesty's dominions – now His Majesty's, of course. The outpouring of grief we witnessed only a few weeks ago has shown precisely how much her reign has meant to the people

we represent here in Gibraltar, to the wider British family of nations, and indeed to the world as a whole. The Members of this House have always been clear about their loyalty; our people, too. Her Majesty was a symbol of what it means to be British. She personified it.

125 The House will know that the Gibraltar National Archives organised an exhibition in June precisely to mark the Queen's Platinum Jubilee, and in 2010 a new Gibraltar £5 coin was minted, approved by the Palace, inscribed for the first time with the words 'Queen of Gibraltar'. Those three words said it all. This was a reflection not only of a strict legal and constitutional position; those words marked an emotional and popular bond as well, an unbreakable link between the people of Gibraltar and the late Sovereign.

130 Mr Speaker, in paying tribute to our late Sovereign I want to highlight what has already been said: her dedication, her exemplary devotion to duty and the record she has set as the longest-serving monarch in British history. We now look forward to the coronation of our new King, Charles III, in May.

135 We will all remember where we were and what we were doing at the moment we heard that Queen Elizabeth had passed away. The second age of the second Elizabeth came to a close last month. Her reign was a watershed that will mark a before and after. May she rest in peace.

Mr Speaker: I truly believe that the people of Gibraltar feel an emptiness in their hearts at the passing of Her Majesty the Queen. There is a deep sense of grief amongst all of us, and it will be difficult to come to terms with her loss.

140 Her Majesty was a tower of strength as she led her country through the many trials and tribulations in the seven decades of her reign. For us in Gibraltar, Her Majesty was a symbol of British sovereignty. We will continue to nurture and treasure our status as a British Overseas Territory.

145 Her Majesty was held in very high esteem by the people of her Rock of Gibraltar, and we remember her with great love and affection. I am sure that she was proud and fond of her most loyal subjects of Gibraltar. We thank her for a lifetime of service to our small nation.

Her Majesty is now with our Lord and in the company of her beloved husband, and as we mourn her departure we welcome our new monarch, King Charles III, as King of Gibraltar.

150 God save the King.

Hon. Chief Minister: Mr Speaker, can I thank you and all hon. Members for those fulsome tributes? It is in the nature of Parliament that we are here to debate the things that divide us and to seek to improve the governance of our nation through the debates that we have, but it is genuinely a pleasure to see all of the people of Gibraltar represented in this place, united under the British Crown and our reflections in respect of the monarch who held that Crown for 70 years in such impeccable fashion and to have seen us all able to swear our allegiance now to the current monarch.

160 Mr Speaker, if I can just sum up by saying that certainly Her Majesty the Queen will go down in history as the emancipation monarch, the monarch under whom colonialism has ended in most of the realms that she was responsible for as monarch when she was elevated to the throne – and remained responsible for, in many instances, but after the emancipation of those people.

165 If in 1954, when she came – as the Deputy Chief Minister reminded us, against the advice of so many – General Franco saw that visit as the beginning of the reasons to start to impose restrictions on Gibraltar, and the fruit of those restrictions was the hardening of the identity of the Gibraltarian as British, then that seed was laid by her and we will always thank her for it.

And so, Mr Speaker, I call that the House should now observe a minute's silence in the memory of Queen Elizabeth II.

The House observed a minute's silence.

170 **Hon. Chief Minister:** Thank you, Mr Speaker.

**Tribute to Marie Montegriffo,
former Member of the House**

Chief Minister (Hon. F R Picardo): Mr Speaker, we received equally sad news on 18th August that the former Member of this House, Marie Montegriffo, had passed away. It was certainly a bitter blow to those of us on this side of the House. She had been a Member of the House from 1984 from the moment that the GSLP took all of the Opposition seats, and she had remained a Member of this House until 2007. I therefore had the pleasure of sitting alongside Marie as a Member of the GSLP for four years, from 2003 to 2007, and, to add to my pleasure, I actually sat next to for a lot of that time. I confess that I learnt greatly from her. I learnt how to write an Opposition Budget speech and leave nothing out. I learnt about historic political issues on the GHA and how to write Opposition press releases, and, most importantly, I learnt how to get under my predecessor's skin from her. Perhaps she taught me that a little bit too well, but she did it *really* well, as those who were on this side of the House with her might remember.

I know that she also cared for me a lot as a younger Member and she nurtured me, and I think that is one of the enduring memories that most people will have of Marie Montegriffo, that she was somebody who cared. She cared enough to leave everything for her political service to the Socialist Party and to this community, she cared enough to leave her career to become a Government Minister, and she cared enough for everyone in our small community to work every hour that she could in her Ministries of Health and Sport. She was, in many respects, a pioneer, and yet, despite that, she was approachable and personable in equal measure. I know that she was highly regarded by those she worked with in all her Ministries and by all those whom she had worked with outside of Government. She was also very highly regarded by those who worked for her and those she worked for, in particular the people of Gibraltar and the patients and staff of the GHA that she gave so much time for.

I know that we will all reflect on the fact that she was an excellent parliamentarian. She was well loved across the floor of the House and I know her loss was deeply felt also by Members who served with her in Parliament, even those who were on different sides. In that respect, I will long remember that in moments of tension in this place, certainly in the four years that I was here with her, it was often Marie who would break the ice behind the Speaker's Chair after a particularly trenchant argument might have taken hold. We would all benefit from reflecting on her approach in that respect, I am sure.

Mr Speaker, I have extended the condolences of the people of Gibraltar and the GSLP executive in particular to Gillaine, Marie's partner, whose loss I know is immense. I know all our thoughts are with her at this still difficult time.

Sadly, once again, Mr Speaker, after other Members' reflections, I will ask the House to hold a minute's silence in honour of the service of Marie Montegriffo.

Mr Speaker: The Hon. the Leader of the Opposition.

Hon. K Azopardi: Mr Speaker, on behalf of my party, certainly Members on this side, I would like to extend our respectful condolences to Marie's family, her friends and, of course, her political family in the GSLP. I did so, of course, at the time, but I do so on the record in this House because, for the same reasons, I think it is important for us to do so when a Member of this brotherhood and sisterhood passes.

I certainly know, from sitting on that side of the House when Marie was on this side of the House, that there was no one who got Sir Peter Caruana going more than Marie Montegriffo. That was reflected in the rather long interventions that the then Chief Minister would dedicate to her political points. He did so in recognition of the fact that those points needed answering and they could not just be left on the record, because Marie was always an effective parliamentarian and the points hurt and needed to be responded to, and I say so in the most amicable political way that I can.

I was a very young Member of the House when I was elected in 1996. It was a very difficult time for this community and a divisive election, but when I became a Member of this House for the first time and Marie was my opposite number who had been Minister for Health herself, beyond the politics of it all we always enjoyed a very good personal relationship. She was very kind to me – not kind in this House but kind outside it – and we had a relationship also outside this House when I ceased to be a Member of the House in 2003.

The Chief Minister reflects her importance in politics. If I can put it this way, she was massively influential, I am sure, and a role model for women. Tomorrow, the GSD will have a memorial event for our own standard bearer for women, Terry Cartwright. In many respects, there were two very strong women in our respective parties. Marie's contribution to politics was also decades long, as was Terry's, and certainly on this side of the House I respectfully associate myself with everything the Chief Minister has said about her long career, her contribution to politics and the extension of condolences to her family.

Mr Speaker: The Hon. Marlene Hassan Nahon.

Hon. Ms M D Hassan Nahon: Mr Speaker, Marie Montegriffo was one of our first female political representatives and the first female Mayor of Gibraltar. She was also a dear friend, whom I deeply respected and enjoyed spending time with; listening to her pearls of wisdom and experience was always a treat.

Marie was a trailblazer who showed women such as myself that the path to equality and empowerment lies in our institutions and in political activism. With great humility she furthered the agenda of the LGBTQ community at a time when simple exercises of honesty and coherence were nothing short of heroic. She was a kind, generous and supportive woman, always ready to give insightful advice and capable of discussing issues openly and honestly, always prioritising the greater good for the community. It was this openness that allowed her to take part in Together Gibraltar discussions and engage with political rivals with elegance and respect. These qualities, which we now associate with a bygone era in politics that was more about the betterment of society and less about self-aggrandisement and partisanship, should be praised and recognised by our community as we celebrate her life and achievements.

Our most heartfelt condolences go out to Marie's wife, Gillaine Morello, and her family and friends.

Thank you.

Mr Speaker: The Hon. the Deputy Chief Minister.

Deputy Chief Minister (Hon. Dr J J Cortes): Mr Speaker, thank you.

In paying tribute to the life and career of Marie Montegriffo, I recall having had the fortune of knowing her from before she was in active politics and before I was in politics, through her father, who was a photographer for the *Gibraltar Evening Post* for many years.

As the House knows, she served as a Member on both the Government and the Opposition sides, for four terms in opposition and two terms in government. From 1999 to 2007 I sat with her on those benches in opposition, and I have to say it was always a pleasure to hear her contributions in this House, particularly her legendary Budget speeches on health, to which the hon. Member has already alluded.

She was a trailblazer for women, certainly, but also, I think, in the area of sports, and in health as well, where she made important contributions, too. Also, she was a fighter. In everything she did in life she was a fighter, having a wicked sense of humour as well, which sometimes manifested itself at the most inopportune or solemn opportunities. I certainly found that she always had the perfect remark to say in the perfect situation.

Mr Speaker, I want to pay my condolences to Gillaine and to her family.

Mr Speaker: The Hon. Prof. John Cortes.

Minister for the Environment, Sustainability, Climate Change and Education (Hon. Prof. J E Cortes): Mr Speaker, if I may add a personal note, I had the honour and pleasure of having an office next to Marie for three years when she was Minister for Health under the Government of my hon. Friend Sir Joe Bossano, and I was her hospital manager and then her general manager. We worked very closely together, and indeed with Sir Joe, and we became good friends.

She cared dearly for the health of the population of Gibraltar. We often forget achievements of the time in Health. Just to mention a few, we inherited a decrepit St Bernard's Hospital that was falling to bits and we totally refurbished it and gave it a new lease of life. Through her leadership, we achieved not only the refurbishment of the Hospital but the introduction of new processes like ultrasound for the first time in the radiology department, new x-ray equipment, new lab equipment which allowed us to automate blood analysis and other analyses for the first time ever. For the first time – perhaps something minor – mothers were allowed to keep babies by their side on the maternity ward, which was not allowed before then. And need I remind this House of the progress made in establishing Calpe House, which she spearheaded from the Health Authority side? It is important that we recognise her huge contribution to the development of Gibraltar's Health Service, and, in paying tribute, that is a point that we must most definitely remember.

Mr Speaker: The Hon. Sir Joe Bossano.

Minister for Social Security, Economic Development, Enterprise, Telecommunications and the Gibraltar Savings Bank (Hon. Sir J J Bossano): I think everything that Marie did was the result of her decision to join the group of trade unionists who created, in 1976, the GSLP. She was, then, the shop steward in the Bland Group, a member of the clerical staff. It was at the time when we were fighting for parity, and then the logical step from that was ... With the situation that was looming in talks with Spain after 1975, there was a clear need to clarify the position in which Gibraltar found itself. We campaigned on the slogan 'We want to know our future now'. We started campaigning initially as a pressure group and the Labour Government said that they would not talk to us unless we could prove that we had the support of the people. The movement that we had went into politics at that time in order to be able to make sure that the future of Gibraltar was in the hands of the Gibraltarians and not in anybody else's hands. And then, of course, once we entered the political arena alongside our work within the trade union movement to achieve parity, it was obvious that this was not a fight that would only last three-and-a-half years, like the parity one, but that was, in fact, going to last a lifetime.

In the process, I think when we became the first socialist Government in 1984, we brought something completely new to the way things were done in Gibraltar because, for a start, Members were required by the party to be full time, they were not allowed to continue with their employment, and they worked for the 50% wage that had existed under the previous administration because they were part-timers. So, from the very beginning, the demands that the party made were a level of commitment and sacrifice that nobody else had ever been asked to accept in political life. That spirit that was in her commitment and in that of the many others who had started the GSLP, kept her committed throughout her life in everything she did.

After she retired from the House, she was totally active in the party. She would come and help me do my speeches for the manifestos, she would come and help me do my speeches for the United Nations, she would come and help me type my questions and she was always available whenever she was needed; without having to ask twice, she was there. She was there for the party, because she was there for Gibraltar from the moment she took the first step to help us bring into existence what we have today, which I think has been something that has been good for Gibraltar, whatever mistakes we might have made on this long road, the road that I have been

travelling for 50 years. We are here because we care about our country more than we care about ourselves. She was one of us. *(Banging on desks)*

Mr Speaker: The Hon. Samantha Sacramento.

Minister for Justice, Equality and Public Standards and Regulations (Hon. Miss S J Sacramento): Mr Speaker, I grew up knowing Marie since I was a child. I was 11 years old when we were in government first, in 1988. My family was, of course, very close, and my recollection of Marie growing up was, as we have heard from everyone else, her kindness. I remember a time when she helped with the sponsored patient arrangements for my Grandad to go to the UK, and since that day he always said that she was the one who had saved his life. Since that day there was a huge photograph of Marie and my Grandad in my house. Marie knew that, and she loved the photograph, too.

When I first joined Parliament, Marie was always not only kind but also very protective of me, and we spoke often. Later, when I became Minister for Health, I often called Marie for advice. I always recalled everybody's fond memories of Marie as Minister for Health and her kindness. I knew first-hand how important it is as a Minister to make sure that people who need Health are helped, and Marie was very much my guiding light in that respect.

Finally, I remember the day Marie called me to tell me that she was getting married and she thanked me and our party for making that possible.

I have incredibly fond memories of Marie from all my life, and I am extremely grateful for all the guidance that she gave me personally and, needless to say, what she did for women and women in Parliament.

Thank you, Mr Speaker.

Mr Speaker: The Hon. the Chief Minister.

Hon. Chief Minister: Mr Speaker, Marie would be very disappointed if we forgot that she was also a great sportswoman and that she represented Gibraltar on a number of occasions, in her beloved sport of squash in particular. We have made some references to her being Minister for Sport as well, but she was also a sportswoman in representation of Gibraltar. The last thing I want is if some people are right about all this and I turn up at the pearly gates and Marie is there to tell me off because I forgot to say that she was one of Gibraltar's leading sportswomen as well. Indeed, as we have been reminded by Sir Joe, anybody who has been heroic enough to try to type anything for Sir Joe Bossano in the number of bits that it comes deserves praise indeed.

I am so pleased that once again this House is united in reflecting on the contribution of a Member like Marie Montegriffo. I would invite everyone to now hold a minute's silence in respect of her memory.

The House observed a minute's silence.

Hon. Chief Minister: Thank you, Mr Speaker.

PAPERS TO BE LAID

Clerk: (vi) Papers to be laid – the Hon. the Chief Minister.

Chief Minister (Hon. F R Picardo): Mr Speaker, I have the honour to lay on the table the Annual Report of the Gibraltar Regulatory Authority for the year ended 31st March 2022; the Audited Accounts of the Gibraltar Regulatory Authority for the year ended 31st March 2022; the Annual Report of the Gibraltar Police Authority for the year ended 31st March 2022; the Licensing and Fees (Amendment of Schedule) Order 2022; the Licensing and Fees (Amendment of Schedule

370 No. 2) Order 2022; the Qualifying (Category 2) Individuals (Amendment No. 2) Rules 2022; and the
High Executive Possessing Individual Skills (Amendment) Rules 2022.

Mr Speaker: Ordered to lie.

375

**Thanks to all from Hon. Ms M D Hassan Nahon
for friendship and support during period of bereavement**

Clerk: Suspension of Standing Orders. The Hon. the Chief Minister.

380 **Chief Minister (Hon. F R Picardo):** Mr Speaker, before we carry on, I think the hon. Lady wanted
to make a contribution. I wonder whether this is the right moment to do it before I suspend.

Mr Speaker: The Hon. Marlene Hassan Nahon.

385 **Hon. Ms M D Hassan Nahon:** Mr Speaker, if I may, I would like to register here, in this House,
and for the purposes of *Hansard* too, my deepest gratitude to hon. Members for their tributes,
letters, words of support and kindness shown towards me and my sister on the passing of our
beloved mother just four months ago today. I was absent from the House at the time, so this is
my first chance to thank you all, from the Chief Minister to the Deputy Chief Minister, the Leader
of the Opposition, your good self, Mr Speaker, and especially my good friend the hon. Lady,
390 Minister Samantha Sacramento for your friendship, affection and kindness during such a difficult
time for me and my family.

I also take this opportunity to thank the people of Gibraltar for your outpouring of love and
respect for my late mother. We shall be forever indebted to all of you for your generous words
and support.

395 Thank you.

Standing Order 7(1) suspended to proceed with Government Bill

Chief Minister (Hon. F R Picardo): Thank you, Mr Speaker.

I now beg to move under Standing Order 7(3) to suspend Standing Order 7(1) in order to
proceed with a Government Bill.

400 **Mr Speaker:** Those in favour? (**Members:** Aye.) Those against? Carried.

Order of the Day

BILL

FIRST AND SECOND READING

Extradition (Amendment) Bill 2022 – First Reading approved

Clerk: (ix) Bills.

A Bill for an Act to amend the Extradition Act 2018 for the purposes of implementing, in part, the requirements of the Convention on Extradition between the United Kingdom and the Kingdom of Morocco dated the 15th April 2013, and signed in London.

405 The Hon. the Minister for Justice, Equality, Public Standards and Regulations.

Mr Speaker: I wish to confirm that I have been notified of the urgency of this Bill.

410 **Minister for Justice, Equality and Public Standards and Regulations (Hon. Miss S J Sacramento):** Mr Speaker, I have the honour to move that the Bill for the Extradition (Amendment) Act 2022 be read a first time.

415 **Mr Speaker:** I now put the question, which is that a Bill for an Act to amend the Extradition Act 2018 for the purposes of implementing, in part, the requirements of the Convention on Extradition between the United Kingdom and the Kingdom of Morocco dated the 15th April 2013, and signed in London be read a first time. Those in favour? (**Members:** Aye.) Those against? Carried.

Clerk: The Extradition (Amendment) Act 2022.

Extradition (Amendment) Bill 2022 – Second Reading approved

420 **Minister for Justice, Equality and Public Standards and Regulations (Hon. Miss S J Sacramento):** Mr Speaker, I have the honour to move that the Bill for the Extradition (Amendment) Act 2022 be read a second time.

425 The purpose of the Bill is to implement the mandatory requirements of the Convention on Extradition signed between the United Kingdom and Morocco in 2013. We are currently not provided for under Gibraltar law. Gibraltar's proximity to Morocco makes this Agreement beneficial. Gibraltar is largely compliant with the requirements under the Convention, and for that reason it is a short Bill. The United Kingdom has advised us that we need to form part of the Convention and there is a very tight timeline. Gibraltar is also included in other bilateral extradition treaties with other countries, and this would be a useful addition to these other international arrangements.

430 I will take each amendment as it appears on the Bill, Mr Speaker.

Clauses 1 and 2 contain provisions in relation to the title and entry into force of the Act.

In relation to the age bar, clause 3(2) amends section 17(1) of the Extradition Act 2018 by adding a further bar to the list of reasons barring extradition under section 17.

435 Clause 3(3) adds a new section 19A to the Act. The effect of this section is to bar the extradition of a person who would have been under the age of criminal responsibility had the offence

occurred in Gibraltar at the time the extradition offence was committed. This is consistent and in line with Gibraltar law and also provides an important protection. It also aligns more with the practice in the United Kingdom.

Clause 3(4) introduces a new section 109A. This provides the Minister with two powers – (a) to make regulations, and (b) to amend the Act – for the sole purpose of implementing conventions, treaties, bilateral or multilateral agreements, other obligations or standards concerned with these, the recommendations of international bodies that are involved with the adoption, monitoring or promotion of these obligations and standards and any other international obligation that concerns matters covered under the Act. Regulations made under the Act can contain consequential, incidental or transitional provisions. Regulations to amend the Act can also contain transitional, transitory or saving provisions. This regulation-making power is a very common provision where international agreements are concerned. Similar provisions can be found in the Proceeds of Crime Act 2015 in section 184, the Imports and Exports Act 1986 section 129G, the mutual Legal Assistance (Council of Europe) Act 2018 section 18, the Trademarks Act section 19, the Patents Act section 14, section 152(1)(f) of the Terrorism Act 2018 and section 223A(1)(b) of the Merchant Shipping Act.

In relation to the transit provisions, clause 3(5) inserts new sections 110A to 110B into the Extradition Act.

Clause 110A provides the interpretation provisions.

Clause 110B(1) makes provision to facilitate the transit through Gibraltar of a person who is being extradited from a third state to a state where a transit request is approved by the central authority in Gibraltar.

Clause 110B(2) provides for the particulars that must be contained in that transit request.

Clauses 110B(3) and (4) deal with the formalities of the request and the response to that request.

Clause 110B(5) provides that the transit must be supervised by a police officer and the person who is transited must be deemed to be in the custody of that police officer.

Clause 110B(6) provides that where a person is being conveyed in transit and makes an unscheduled stop through Gibraltar, in that scenario the central authority must be provided with the information referred to in clause 110B(2) and this person shall be deemed to be in transit through Gibraltar. There are already similar transit provisions under section 20 of the Extradition Arrest Warrant Act 2004 and section 19 of the Mutual Legal Assistance (International) Act 2005, which apply in different scenarios.

Mr Speaker, I commend this Bill to the House.

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. Daniel Feetham.

Hon. D A Feetham: Mr Speaker, we will be supporting the Bill, but I would ask for clarification from the Minister in relation to certain parts of it.

The first point is under proposed section 109A(b), which allows the Minister, by regulation, to amend this Act for the purposes of subsection (a). Bearing in mind that we are dealing with extradition, we are dealing with depriving people of their liberty, are there any plans for those regulations to then at least be laid before Parliament, allowing Members of Parliament to potentially, should an issue arise, at least debate them in Parliament? I know – we have done it when we have been in government and they have done it when they have been in government over the last 11 years – that Bills do occasionally make provision for regulations to amend the principal Act, but when you are dealing with something like this, which is about potentially depriving people of their liberty, it is a practice that really has to be justified and also has to be scrutinised very carefully by us, as legislators, in order to make sure that essentially nothing is done by way of side win, so to speak, without proper scrutiny. I would ask her to comment in

relation to that and whether there are any plans specifically for regulations to be laid before Parliament and debated in Parliament.

490 The second point I would appreciate clarification on is section 110B. This Bill appears to me to be about transit from a third state to a Convention state. Is this directed at a transit from Morocco through Gibraltar to a state under the Convention? Is that the main purpose of this, or is it wider? I ask that question because the title, we are told, is 'to amend the Extradition Act ... the requirements of the Convention on Extradition between the United Kingdom and the Kingdom of Morocco, dated the 15th April 2013, and signed in London', but it does not appear, at first glance, 495 to be limited to Morocco. Perhaps if she could give me a little bit more information in relation to that.

Mr Speaker, those are our comments, trying to be as helpful as possible and accepting on this side ... the Minister and the Chief Minister have said this is an urgent piece of legislation ... that, of course, that is so and that we are debating its urgent consideration.

500

Mr Speaker: The Hon. Chief Minister.

Chief Minister (Hon. F R Picardo): Mr Speaker, I want to thank hon. Members for indicating that they are going to be supporting this Bill.

505 The United Kingdom signed this Convention in 2013, but it is taking some time for that Convention to come into effect. It is about to come into effect, and this is the moment when we have the opportunity to be included in it. As the part of the British family of nations covered by the ratification of the United Kingdom of this Convention closest to Morocco, of course it is in our interest that we should be able to form part of the process of ratification, so that as soon as it is possible we will be able to enjoy the benefits of this extradition treaty.

510 Mr Speaker, I am going to address only the point that has been raised by the Hon. Mr Feetham on the regulations, and my learned and hon. colleague the Minister for Justice will take the other point that he has made.

The Government has no plans to bring any regulations to Parliament. The hon. Member says it is those regulations that might have the effect of depriving an individual of their liberty, and therefore, for that reason, they should be brought to this House, even if they are simply laid, so that hon. Members could have the benefit of debating them. I want to take issue with both aspects of that contribution from the hon. Gentleman. On the first, because it would not be regulations that we make under this Act that would have the effect of depriving an individual of their liberty. 520 An individual would be deprived of their liberty only if they are deemed to have committed a criminal offence for which they are detained, and that offence would likely not be an offence created by this Bill. A person might be, for example, illegally in Gibraltar. The offence is in the Immigration Act; it is not here. What this will do is provide the pathway out of Gibraltar for that individual, either because they have been convicted of being illegally in Gibraltar or because there is another route for their extradition. Extradition very often – and not in the classic case of 525 immigration that we might be dealing with in the context of most people who are illegally in Gibraltar from Morocco, but most often – is about a person having committed a criminal offence in another state, then being found in a second state and the state where they committed the criminal offence seeking that they be taken back there. Obviously, in the context of south to north immigration the circumstances are usually different, but the offence that leads to detention and deprivation of liberty is not an offence that is being created by this Bill and will be in effect under this Act; it is an offence in another Act. This is the route for the person being removed from the jurisdiction, and that routing is a routing that is going to be – of course, as it could not be otherwise under our legal system – subject to judicial scrutiny at every stage. So, what this Bill does is give 530 powers to courts to extradite, but subject to court jurisdiction and court supervision. So, first of all, the first issue I take with what the hon. Gentleman says is that these regulations will give rise to deprivation of liberty. They will not.

The second point the hon. Gentleman made was that laying the regulations here was the way that hon. Members would be able to debate the regulations. In fact, when something is laid as a regulation made, we could have a debate at that stage, but of course the regulation would already have been made, it would already be in effect, so there would be no difference between the Government laying the regulation ... Of course, regulations, when they are made by the Government, to have effect, have to be published. They are published to the world and they are published in the Gibraltar Gazette. The whole world is given notice of them. Legal practitioners receive the Gazette, they see the regulations made up, and all of that would happen before the laying on the table. There is, of course, another way that hon. Members can bring about such a debate: they can put a motion in the terms of the regulation and seek to debate it. There are many ways to achieve a debate on a motion.

Mr Speaker, although for those reasons I do not believe it is necessary for us to lay regulations on the table and neither do I think we should do so – it is a practice that governments making regulations to amend legislation ... It is a practice that is very circumspect and successive Governments have done it. We have been very careful when we have used those powers in particular, but I have no difficulty telling the hon. Gentleman that we will share the regulations with them in draft before they are made, in case they have any concerns that they want to express to us, because if they were to express a concern with which we might agree, we would not want that it be expressed after the regulation is made, when it is laid in the Houses as a regulation made. In the same way as we have done with hon. Members during the COVID period etc., we are quite happy to share those regulations with them before they are made, if they have to be made, so that we take their views, and if they have anything to put to us, we are happy to consider that.

I do not know whether before I sit down the hon. Gentleman wants to come back on any of those issues. I am happy to give way, but otherwise I am happy to sit down.

Mr Speaker: The Hon. Samantha Sacramento.

Hon. Miss S J Sacramento: Mr Speaker, in relation to the second point that the hon. Gentleman raised, he will be aware that this Bill amends the principal Extradition Act, so when it comes to the definition of 'state' it is as defined in the Extradition Act.

Mr Speaker: I now put the question, which is that a Bill for an Act to amend the Extradition Act 2018 for the purposes of implementing, in part, the requirements of the Convention on Extradition between the United Kingdom and the Kingdom of Morocco dated the 15th April 2013, and signed in London be read a second time. Those in favour? (**Members:** Aye.) Those against? Carried.

Clerk: The Extradition (Amendment) Act 2022.

**Extradition (Amendment) Bill 2022 –
Committee Stage and Third Reading to be taken at this sitting**

Minister for Justice, Equality and Public Standards and Regulations (Hon. Miss S J Sacramento): Mr Speaker, I beg to give notice that the Committee Stage and Third Reading of the Bill be taken today, if all hon. Members agree.

Mr Speaker: Do all hon. Members agree that the Committee Stage and Third Reading of the Bill be taken today? (**Members:** Aye.)

COMMITTEE STAGE AND THIRD READING

**Extradition (Amendment) Bill 2022 –
Clauses considered and approved**

Clerk: Committee Stage and Third Reading. The Hon. the Chief Minister.

585 **Chief Minister (Hon. F R Picardo):** Mr Speaker, I have the honour to resolve that the House should dissolve itself into Committee to consider the following Bill clause by clause, namely the Extradition (Amendment) Bill 2022.

In Committee of the whole House

590 **Clerk:** A Bill for an Act to amend the Extradition Act 2018 for the purposes of implementing, in part, the requirements of the Convention on Extradition between the United Kingdom and the Kingdom of Morocco dated the 15th April 2013, and signed in London.
Clauses 1 to 5.

Mr Chairman: Clauses 1 to 5 stand part of the Bill.

595 **Clerk:** The long title.

Mr Speaker: The long title stands part of the Bill.

**Extradition (Amendment) Bill 2022 –
Third Reading approved: Bill passed**

600 **Chief Minister (Hon. F R Picardo):** Mr Speaker, I have the honour to report that the Extradition (Amendment) Bill 2022 has been considered in Committee and agreed to without amendment, and I now move that it be read a third time and passed.

Mr Speaker: I now put the question, which is that the Extradition (Amendment) Bill 2022 be read a third time and passed. Those in favour of the Extradition (Amendment) Bill 2022? (**Members:** Aye.) Those against? Carried.

Standing Order 7(1) suspended to proceed with Questions

605 **Clerk:** Suspension of Standing Orders. The Hon. the Chief Minister.

Chief Minister (Hon. F R Picardo): Mr Speaker, I beg to move under Standing Order 7(3) to suspend Standing Order 7(1) in order to proceed with Questions.

Mr Speaker: Those in favour? (**Members:** Aye.) Those against? Carried.

Questions for Oral Answer

DIGITAL, FINANCIAL SERVICES, HEALTH AUTHORITY AND PUBLIC UTILITIES

Q276-77/2022

Counselling, psychological support services and Child Protection Services – Number of children referred

Clerk: (vii) Reports of Committees; (viii) Answers to Oral Questions.
Question 276/2022. The Hon. E J Phillips.

Hon. E J Phillips: Mr Speaker, can the Government state how many children have been referred to counselling or other psychological support services since the answer to Question 97/2022?

Clerk: Answer, the Hon. the Minister for Health, Digital and Financial Services.

Minister for Digital, Financial Services, Health Authority and Public Utilities (Hon. A J Isola):
Mr Speaker, I will answer this question together with Question 277.

Clerk: Question 277/2022. The Hon. E J Phillips.

Hon. E J Phillips: Mr Speaker, since the asking of Question 97/2022 can the Government state how many children have been referred to Child Protection Services?

Clerk: Answer, the Hon. the Minister for Health, Digital and Financial Services.

Hon. A J Isola: Mr Speaker, I can confirm that in respect of the GHA, 117 children have been referred to counselling or other psychological support services. I can confirm that in respect of the Care Agency, 49 children have been referred to counselling or other psychological support services.

In respect of Question 277, since Question 97/2022, the Care Agency has referred 261 children to Children Services. As I do not wish to mislead the hon. Member, I am advised by the Care Agency that the correct term is Children Services and not Child Protection Services, which Question 97/2022 and this question both refer to. All children referred to the Care Agency's Children Services are triaged by the duty team. The duty team's manager will review, categorise and allocate the referral of a child to a social worker following the relevant policies and procedures pertinent to the issues in question.

Hon. E J Phillips: Mr Speaker, Question 97/2022 referred to ... I think the answer to that question was 112 children were referred for purposes of counselling and other psychological support services. The figure that the Minister now has given me is 117 in respect of counselling and then 49 in relation to psychological support services. I am just trying to rationale the numbers, because it seems like a very significant increase in numbers since the asking of that question.

Just to add a little bit of narrative to it, the Minister was, as I was, very concerned about the numbers here in respect of children being referred. Can the Minister give any further and better visibility as to what we are doing to support these children beyond this, because the numbers continue to be alarming, to say the least?

Hon. A J Isola: Mr Speaker, the numbers that I quote are obviously for different periods and not the same length of time, and so it is difficult to compare the two on a mathematical basis.

Clearly, the numbers are higher than they have been in the past. On average, the number of referrals to Child Services has ranged from 350 to 380 per year. In 2018 it was 376 – so they fluctuate – and 266 referred in 2019, so they are slightly higher than those years, and the team, I understand, are looking into what is, if any, the cause of that increase. There is certainly greater awareness and greater use. Whether those two will bridge that gap that the hon. Member is putting his finger on, I do not yet know.

Hon. E J Phillips: Just in relation to Question 277, I know that the Minister, in response to questions to the Leader of the Opposition and myself at the time, said that one child is too many. I think that is one of the phrases that he used in his answer. I have not checked *Hansard*, but I think it was that type of language, and I entirely agree with that analysis that he conducted at the time of that question. Insofar as Child Services, I know the answer last time was in relation to Child Protection Services. This is obviously a slightly wider term – Child Services – that would encompass other matters apart from protection. Is that right?

Hon. A J Isola: The term is Child Services, so Child Protection Services – in other words, children who are requiring of that – is a small part of Child Services. Child Services encompasses all the services which they may be referred to, so the number in respect of child protection is obviously a small part of the global number that I have given.

In respect of one child being too many, obviously the numbers that we are talking about cover a whole range of reasons as to why children may have been referred. I do not think we can surmise or imply that they are all as serious as some may be, and I do not want to be driven in that direction in terms of what each one of them is because I would not go there. But yes, as I said, this is something that has been considered and looked at by the Care Agency. I met with them recently and they were expressing some concern as to the numbers as well, so it is something they are looking at with a view to trying to understand better what can be done to prevent those numbers increasing further.

Hon. E J Phillips: Just one further question generally in relation to Questions 276 and 277. I assume this has to combine the joined-up approach within schools as well, because that is ultimately where the notifications are coming from. I believe that the last time we asked these types of questions, the schools were directly referring into the system. What is being done in schools internally to review the resource element? If we are referring out, it might mean that we might need greater resourcing on the ground in schools. Is the Minister currently looking at that with his counterpart at the Ministry for Education?

Hon. A J Isola: Mr Speaker, children and their families are referred with a range of difficulties. It is, as I mentioned before, very wide. Some are anxiety, some are self-harm, some are school related – bullying is one example – bedwetting, depression. The range is very extensive and very wide, so the school is one entry into the services of identification. There are many others, but that is certainly one, and yes, of course an important one because they have a good rapport with pupils and have a good idea of when somebody is not behaving in a normal way and can identify and then refer a problem that is requiring attention.

I think it is way too early to begin to say whether we are able to deal or cope with what we have. Clearly when the Care Agency want more people, they have them and they use them, so that is not something that I think we need to be concerned with. There is the resource and there is the support there for them today.

Mr Speaker: Next question.

Q278/2022

**Children referred to Mental Health Services –
Numbers receiving medication, counselling or other therapies**

Clerk: Question 278/2022. The Hon. E J Phillips.

705 **Hon. E J Phillips:** Mr Speaker, further to Question 97/2022, can the Government state of the 112 children referred to Mental Health Services how many are receiving medication as a form of treatment and how many are provided with counselling and/or other forms of therapy?

Clerk: Answer, the Hon. the Minister for Health, Digital and Financial Services.

710 **Minister for Digital, Financial Services, Health Authority and Public Utilities (Hon. A J Isola):** Mr Speaker, the number of children receiving counselling or other forms of therapy is 35.

In connection with the information being requested by the hon. Member, the GHA would need to review the individual records of the 112 children in order to provide an accurate answer, which I am advised is an onerous exercise as not all GHA records are held electronically and would also entail a manual exercise. The GHA would be happy to provide this to the hon. Gentleman when the information is available in due course.

720 **Hon. E J Phillips:** Just so that I can follow up, if I email the Minister I am sure that he will be able to provide that information electronically to me at the appropriate time when it is ready?

Hon. A J Isola: Yes, Mr Speaker, the work has commenced; it was just not ready in time to be provided now.

Q279/2022

**Number of suicides in last 11 years –
By age and sex**

Clerk: Question 279/2020. The Hon. E J Phillips.

725 **Hon. E J Phillips:** Mr Speaker, can the Government confirm the number of suicides over the last 11 years broken down into age and sex?

Clerk: Answer, the Hon. the Minister for Health, Digital and Financial Services.

730 **Minister for Digital, Financial Services, Health Authority and Public Utilities (Hon. A J Isola):** Mr Speaker, the number of suicides recorded by HM Coroner during the last 11 years is 20. All of these are males. The breakdown in age is as follows: 20-29, four; 30-39, four; 40-49, three; 50-59, five; 60-69, three; 80-84, one.

735 **Hon. E J Phillips:** Mr Speaker, I am grateful for the answer. Obviously this subject touches many people in our community, and I think that certainly on this side of the House that quite astonishing figure – not in number, but actually insofar as the male population is concerned ... I know that we have all recorded Mental Health Awareness Day, all of us in this House, in our own way and publicly by way of our own positions in Gibraltar, but it is an astonishing figure insofar as how it dominates insofar as the male sex. I would be grateful, given the fact that the Minister has done 740 the work in getting this number so that we can all be more aware of the loss of life in this area,

for what resources are currently at the Government's disposal to help those people in those age brackets in trying to prevent what is a tragedy in families and for the rest of our community.

745 **Hon. A J Isola:** Mr Speaker, if one looks behind the 11 years ... The last 11 years have been all male. Before that, since 1990 when these records have been made available to us, there are only four females from 1990 to now, none in the last 11 years. In the last three years we have only had two, so that would indicate a reduction in terms of the numbers despite the perception that this is a number that is going up and astronomically so. This last year I am delighted to say the number
750 is zero – one the previous year and one the year before that. I think if you look at the United Kingdom, for example, 2021 was 7% up from the previous year, so in terms of statistics I think we are doing okay. But again, as I said to the hon. Member when we referred to a previous answer I have given, one is too many and so work is going on. You will know that there is a huge amount of work going on in terms of creating awareness, creating the resource and the assistance and
755 support and help for those who may think they may need that support. I think the work that has been done in that respect, particularly in creating awareness and getting people to phone these lines, and providing the services of people who are trained and able to deal with those calls, will help us further in dealing with this. That work is very much work in progress, and there is a lot more still to be done.

760 **Hon. E J Phillips:** Mr Speaker, I am grateful for the answer, and of course we should, all of us in this House, and I am sure the Minister might, in this reply to this question, continue to support the mental health charities in Gibraltar that do such great work in highlighting not only this issue but of course the wide areas of mental health challenges across our community. I am sure he
765 would agree with that analysis.

The Minister had the figures from 1990 onwards in relation to females. I think he referred to four. I wonder whether he has the same figure in respect of males.

770 **Hon. A J Isola:** I do, Mr Speaker, but I would have to tot it up. I am very happy to pass that on to him later on in the session.

With respect to the work of charities, I think I have been astonished since coming into this Ministry in recent months at the extent of the support and the work that we do with all of the charities and all of the associations to promote each of the different areas in which they support us, and create more awareness and more of a working relationship, a closer working relationship
775 with them between the health and care services and all of these charities, for which, of course, we are hugely grateful and depend on for so much of the good work that they do and that we do as well.

780 **Hon. E J Phillips:** I am grateful for your patience, Mr Speaker, in relation to this. It just goes to the point that the Minister has made in relation to the mental health charities because, as you know, there was recently a video deployed in relation to particular patients who have had mental health challenges over a number of years in relation to assisted living, and one of the calls was the support that individuals in our community need for assisted living moving forward. I know the GHA CEO was in attendance at the video showing this week, along with me and the Hon.
785 Mr Clinton. What that video did display was quite a powerful and moving message about individuals in our community, and to be fair to the Government, actually, there was support for some individuals but not for others. It was a bit of a mixed bag insofar as support for those who require assisted living, and their families, actually, who fall within that vulnerable category as well.

790 The Minister does talk about resources and I just wanted to question him as to how the Government will deploy further resources in relation to that assisted living because I currently understand there are seven units that are available. It might be interesting to learn from him what the Government is doing in that area.

Hon. A J Isola: Yes, Mr Speaker, I understand the point the hon. Member is making. I think it is important to remember that the clinical assessment that is made determines whether assisted living is appropriate or not. There are cases where the professionals themselves do not believe it is, but the families may believe it is. And so it is not a question of just having endless numbers of units available for assisted living, it is very much a clinical assessment process that goes through with the professionals telling us when they think they are and when they think they are not.

Yes, we have seven now where there were none before, so that is an improvement, but that does not mean that the Care Agency is asking us for more or for less. We are not being pressed for more, which indicates to us that they can work with what they have available to them, and if they do need more they will come to us and ask for it. So I think it is really important with all of these areas to understand that there is a professional process, with the agency and with the GHA, of professional assessment, clinical assessment, and that is obviously what we follow always.

Mr Speaker: The Hon. the Leader of the Opposition.

Hon. K Azopardi: Mr Speaker, the hon. Member may not know, but in relation to the seven flats that are provided for assisted living, can I assume safely that the level of assistance will vary in each case, so some of them may be people who are in the community who had domiciliary care services, but some of them may have live-in assistance? Is that correct?

Hon. A J Isola: Mr Speaker, in seeking to have more and more people at home, whatever the ailment – which is an objective, we want to keep people at home – again, an assessment is made as to how much care they need, and whatever care the professionals say is required is then provided to them.

Whether in respect of those seven today there are some living in them or not, I do not know the answer to that question, but what I can tell the hon. Member is that certainly it is an assessment as to what level of care they need, and in many of these cases they have care from family, care from professionals and care from co-workers, so it is very much on a case-by-case basis.

Mr Chairman: Next question.

Q280/2022

Numbers receiving medication for mental health conditions – By condition, age and sex

Clerk: Question 280/2022. The Hon. E J Phillips.

Hon. J Phillips: Mr Speaker, can the Government provide details of the numbers of people receiving medications in respect of all mental health conditions, broken down into condition, age and sex?

Clerk: Answer, the Hon. the Minister for Health, Digital and Financial Services.

Minister for Digital, Financial Services, Health Authority and Public Utilities (Hon. A J Isola): Mr Speaker, there are currently 1,846 people receiving *some form* of medication in respect of *all* mental health conditions.

In connection with identifying the age and the sex of the individuals in question, the GHA has advised that it would take a considerable amount of time to provide accurate information.

However, the GHA would be happy to conduct this exercise – and, indeed, has started – and provide the hon. Gentleman with the information requested as and when it is available.

840 If I may provide more information, of the 1,846, 26 are in-patients and the rest are out-patients.

Hon. E J Phillips: Just one question, Mr Speaker. In the Minister's experience of the current portfolio and the work he is doing within mental health – current – what is his view as to that number historically, if he looks at the statistics? With respect, it looks alarming from where we sit, in terms of the number of people on medication for mental health conditions.

845 I know that, generally speaking, the Government and the Opposition are very supportive together, insofar as the use of counselling and therapy as an alternative to medication, not least given the long-term gains that counselling and therapy can provide for those people suffering from mental health conditions. How is the Government looking at transitioning away from medication? Clearly, there will be cases where there will be clinical need for medication, but ultimately, insofar as those who require counselling and therapy, what is the Government doing to try to move the dependency away from medication in this area to counselling and therapy?

855 **Hon. A J Isola:** Mr Speaker, I think the sexy number is obviously the 1,846, which is alarming, but the number that gives you a far better impression of the nature of the problem is the in-patients, which is 26. The number of people on some form of medication ... that medication is very drastic, on extremes on both sides. I think before we draw any conclusions in respect of the numbers, we need to understand better where the numbers are higher. So, if there are higher numbers in the more serious types of medication, then obviously the problem is a different one than if they are at the lower end of the scale – both of which require attention anyway, I agree.

860 Of course we would all like the numbers to be lower, both in-patient and out-patient. I know that part of the work that has been done and is carrying on with the Director General and Peter Wadum Buhl, who are advising us in respect of, specifically, mental health, is to address these issues and to understand better. I think that work, when it is concluded, will greatly assist us in understanding if there is a problem, and if there is a problem, how serious or not it may be. We will only get that when we get that further information from them.

865 I will get the information the hon. Member has asked for, which will be made available to me, I hope, in the coming 10 days to two weeks, and I will then pass it on.

870 **Hon. K Azopardi:** Mr Speaker, may I just ask how this is defined? The hon. Member has asked about the numbers of people receiving medications in respect of all mental health conditions. What is the threshold there? I recall having asked a question about the number of people who have received medication for anxiety, or antipsychotics, or depression, and it being a much higher number, so I am just wondering what has been the understanding of whoever prepared the answer of the scope of mental health conditions. Can I understand that? It does not seem to be capturing, if you look at the consistency of the figures, everyone who might have been receiving medication for depression or anxiety. It may be that that is outside the scope, so we need to understand the scope of how this has been prepared.

880 **Hon. A J Isola:** Mr Speaker, this is why I urge caution in respect of the numbers, because I suspect that some of the medication may be in respect of anxiety or stress, or something like that. I do not know what measure has been used to calculate the definition in the eyes of the staff who have dealt with ... It says 'all mental health conditions'. It is quite a wide question, so I suspect we have thrown the net pretty wide to ensure that everything is captured within the answer. I will certainly ask the question and see if I can fish out the original question that the hon. Member refers to – I do not know if he can help me as to when that may or may not have been, because that would be helpful in trying to understand if there is a difference and if we are comparing like with like.

890 **Mr Speaker:** The Hon. Marlene Hassan Nahon.

Hon. Ms M D Hassan Nahon: Mr Speaker, if I can, on the back of this mini-discussion, ask the Minister if he remembers a few years back, in the time of the last Minister for Health, Minister Neil Costa, there was a moment when I believe it was Pfizer who warned Gibraltar of all the
895 medications for depression and anxiety that were given out. The corporation was concerned at how much we were consuming for a community of our size. I would like to ask whether the GHA undertook some kind of plan to target this feedback that we were given in order to minimise the dependency on drugs for anxiety and depression after we had been given this very essential and eye-opening information in order to stop this dependency.

900 **Hon. A J Isola:** Mr Speaker, the answer is yes, they have, and they continue to. It is an ongoing process of engaging with the GPs to ensure that the prescribing of these medicines is appropriate and not just patient driven because the patient has got used to something and wants to continue. That work is ongoing all the time and it was one of the matters referred to me more recently when
905 we introduced some changes to the pharmacies in the generic medicines which cause some of the same problems the hon. Member is referring to. So yes, very much aware of it and they are engaging with GPs to ensure that we work towards dealing with that exact issue.

Mr Speaker: The Hon. Daniel Feetham.

910 **Hon. D A Feetham:** Mr Speaker, thank you very much.

My hon. Friend Mr Phillips asked about alternative therapies. The reason for my supplementary is this week I had a meeting with somebody who suffers from mental health and she was telling me – my question is whether the Minister can actually look into this – that she has been referred
915 to a therapist, but the therapist is saying to her that she can only be seen six times and after the sixth time that is it; there is no discretion on the part of the therapist to see her a seventh, eighth, ninth or tenth time if it is justified. She has then got to essentially go back to the GP to get another referral and come back. It just seemed to me very odd, because the system has to have the flexibility that if the therapist says she has to be seen a seventh or an eighth time, there is that
920 flexibility for the therapist to do this.

It is self-evident I am not a doctor and I have no inside knowledge about the system, but could he at least have a look into that, because I thought it was very odd when a constituent who came to see me about the problems that she has had within the mental health system was telling me about this, and I thought it was too late now to ask questions about this, but next time round ...
925 and given that these questions have been asked now it gives me an opportunity to raise with the Minister.

Hon. A J Isola: Mr Speaker, the first point I would make is that the hon. Member does not have to wait for Question Time to write to me. I would be very happy to look at it and revert to him, as
930 I have done with some of his colleagues on that side of the House.

The picture that the hon. Member has painted is alien to me. I do not understand it and it does not make any sense to me, so if he does write to me I will certainly look into it, as it makes no sense at all.

935 **Mr Speaker:** I think we have deviated substantially from the original question and answer and I think we need to move on. With respect, we need to move on.

Hon. K Azopardi: I was going to move on, Mr Speaker; I am just answering the ... Can I just give the hon. Member the ... not the question number, but I can tell him that the answer was given in
940 the House in ... it would have been January 2020, and the figure that I was given at the time was that the total figure of people receiving antidepressant and anti-psychotic medication was 3,974.

I think it is important to understand. Despite what the hon. Member has said about the width of the definition, it seems to me that it is the other way round, so I just wonder how it has been drawn and it would be helpful to understand how it has been drawn. If he goes back to his Department, it would be interesting to see where things lie.

Hon. A J Isola: Mr Speaker, I would be very happy to look at that.

Mr Speaker: Next question.

Q281/2022

**Numbers receiving therapy, counselling or CBT –
By condition, age and sex**

Clerk: Question 281/2022. The Hon. E J Phillips.

Hon. E J Phillips: Mr Speaker, can the Government provide details of the number of people within our community receiving therapy, counselling or cognitive behaviour therapy, broken down into age and sex?

Clerk: Answer, the Hon. the Minister for Health, Digital and Financial Services.

Minister for Digital, Financial Services, Health Authority and Public Utilities (Hon. A J Isola): Mr Speaker, within the GHA there are currently a total of 139 persons in our community receiving therapy, counselling or cognitive behaviour therapy. The breakdown is as follows: 35 under 18, of whom 20 are male and 15 are female; 98 between 18 and 64, of whom 50 are male and 48 are female; six are 65 or over, of whom two are male and four are female.

Within the Care Agency there are currently a total of 190 persons in our community receiving therapy, counselling or cognitive behaviour therapy. The breakdown is as follows: 49 under 18, of whom 21 are male and 28 are female; 136 between 18 and 64, of whom 71 are male and 65 are female; five are 65 or over, of whom two are male and three are female.

Hon. E J Phillips: Would the Minister mind if I get a copy of that particular answer?

Mr Speaker: These are the prepared answers and you will get them either today or tomorrow, I believe.

Q282/2022

**Mental healthcare –
Budget**

Clerk: Question 282/2022. The Hon. E J Phillips.

Hon. E J Phillips: Mr Speaker, can the Government state the actual budget for the provision of mental healthcare in Gibraltar?

Clerk: Answer, the Hon. the Minister for Health, Digital and Financial Services.

Minister for Digital, Financial Services, Health Authority and Public Utilities (Hon. A J Isola):
980 Mr Speaker, the mental health budget for this current financial year is £5.7 million.

Hon. E J Phillips: Does the Minister have a breakdown of how that is allocated beyond the mental health budget? We have had numerous exchanges on the lack of mental health budget. Public Health England has criticised us, in relation to the mental health situation in a report of
985 April 2019, for not having a mental health budget. It would be helpful to have from the Minister a bit more information as to how that is distributed across the services, given the lack of visibility we currently have on that particular figure.

Hon. A J Isola: Mr Speaker, I would be happy to provide the hon. Member with that
990 information.

Hon. K Azopardi: Can I just ask if the hon. Member has a figure in front of him? Does he know how much money is being provided for counselling services in the Mental Health Services?

Mr Speaker: Of the £5.7 million, how much is –?
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Hon. A J Isola: No, I do not have that information here, Mr Speaker.

Hon. K Azopardi: I would just ask the hon. Member perhaps to consider that issue with his
1000 Department and write to us, but also consider it internally, because in relation to the previous question, if I heard him correctly, and he may correct me if I am wrong but I heard that the answer to the question of the number of people receiving therapy, counselling or cognitive behaviour therapy was ... did he say 190?

Hon. A J Isola: A hundred and thirty nine.
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Hon. K Azopardi: A hundred and thirty nine? Well, in the context of the fact that the previous answer to that was a 1,846 people receiving medication, and, as I illustrated to him a moment ago, they had given a previous answer in this House which seems inconsistent, that almost 4,000
1010 people were receiving anti-psychotic or anti-depressant medication, it seems a very tiny proportion of people are receiving counselling. Perhaps that is something that the GHA should reflect upon, and if it is a resource issue it should be addressed.

Can I just say that of all the people who come and talk to me about mental health problems, almost the biggest complaint is the lack of support and lack of access to counselling services, and
1015 the figures that he has just pointed to seem to indicate that those complaints are not far wrong?

Hon. A J Isola: Mr Speaker, the numbers that the hon. Member has mentioned do not sit with mine. He mentions 4,000 receiving some form of medication. That may have been in 2020. The number I have is 1,846 and I have told the hon. Member already 26 of those are in-patients and
1020 the rest are out-patients with a whole string of varying degrees of strength of treatment.

With respect to therapy, I have said there are 139 persons in the GHA and 190 in the Care Agency, so the numbers are not as disparate as the hon. Member referred to, but I will certainly look at the point he has made and consider it further.

Hon. K Azopardi: Mr Speaker, can I just say, first of all, I am not sure whether those numbers are consistent, for the reasons we have outlined before, and it is something that perhaps the Department needs to check, given the scope. But even if we were to take the figure of 1,846 and the cumulative figures of 190 and 139, we are still talking about 240 people out of 1,846, if that figure is accurate. That is a small proportion. Doing the maths quickly in my head, it is about 15%
1025 of the people on medication and it correlates ... It seems to support the point that is made to me
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a lot by people who engage with Mental Health Services and, I think, with other people on this side of the House, that people are finding it difficult to access resources for counselling to the point that a lot of people are forced, if they can afford it, to go private, and those people who cannot afford it are left languishing.

1035 In the context of the review of mental health services and the strategy that they announced and so on, and the keenness which they have said publicly they have to review and expand the services for mental health, I am asking the hon. Member to look at that issue.

1040 **Hon. A J Isola:** Mr Speaker, I am not going to speculate on the numbers. I have agreed to go back and check and have a look to ensure that we get the correct picture and we know we are talking about the correct numbers. I am not going to begin to agree or disagree as to whether the numbers are high or low without even knowing.

1045 The basis of the medication is clinical. It is a clinical assessment. They are the ones who are deciding whether the treatment is going to be one of medication or one of therapy. I am not hearing the same things the hon. Member is hearing, but if he writes to me and tells me and gives me examples, I will very happily look at them to ensure that where therapy is needed it is being given.

1050 **Hon. K Azopardi:** This is my final question. The hon. Member needs to understand it from this perspective, that people come and see me. Some people get medication and that is the end of it, but a lot of people I am aware of who come and see me are given medication but they are also put on a counselling path. The problem with not accessing the counselling is that you bounce from prescription to prescription, you get put into a corner of endless medication. And so it is not as easy an answer as to say the reason for a bigger number of people on medication is simply because
1055 the clinicians have decided that you only need medication. A lot of the people who engage with the Mental Health Services are given medication as a stopgap, sometimes as an enduring thing, but are also told to go to counselling, but they face great difficulty in engaging with counselling services.

1060 **Hon. A J Isola:** Mr Speaker, I am happy to note and look into these issues. The GHA is spending a lot of time with a lot of expertise in this specific area, and so I have every confidence that we will get to the right place as we roll out the National Mental Health Strategy that was launched in 2021.

Q283/2022

Primary Care Centre appointments – Difficulty in accessing

1065 **Clerk:** Question 283/2022. The Hon. E J Phillips.

Hon. E J Phillips: Can the Government state why it has yet to tackle the appalling situation as regards the inability of our citizens to access PCC appointments?

1070 **Clerk:** Answer, the Hon. the Minister for Health, Digital and Financial Services.

Minister for Digital, Financial Services, Health Authority and Public Utilities (Hon. A J Isola): Mr Speaker, the hon. Member will be aware that the GHA has previously advised that as part of their Reset, Restart and Recover strategy, a significant transformation programme for Primary Care services would be announced. I am pleased to now refer the hon. Member to Press
1075 Release 766/2022 detailing the significant changes which will be introduced as from tomorrow.

As I say that, I would like to sincerely thank Dr Valerie Flores, Dr Elaine Flores, Patrick Geoghegan and all the rest of the team who have worked so hard to deliver the strategy which we hope to see come into full force tomorrow and which I am delighted to see the hon. Member has welcomed.

Hon. E J Phillips: Mr Speaker, Members on this side of the House will, of course, welcome initiatives that seek, at their very heart, to improve this process. I know the Minister and I have shared conversations about PCC appointments and the staggering difficulties that are encountered by everyone in accessing medical appointments, but how does the Minister reconcile the latest changes – which we hope, of course, will improve the system – with the statements made back in 2018 by the former, former Minister for Health, where he characterised the changes at the PCC then as extensive, impressive and which referred to a first-rate service moving forward?

What I would say to him in relation to that particular question is we have been here before, haven't we? And whilst we have every confidence that the system may well be improved, many people in our community have lost trust and confidence and I would hope that he would agree with me that this process will, hopefully, restore that trust and confidence in our Health Service and the PCC Appointment Committee.

Hon. A J Isola: Mr Speaker, the hon. Member has quite a perverse way of welcoming initiatives such as this. A welcome has never been more meek than that one. Good Lord.

Between 2018, which is the date to which the hon. Member refers, and today, something has happened. I do not know if the hon. Member is aware that there is this thing called COVID that for two years has shaken the very core of our Health Service and, indeed, the economy, not just here but around the world, to require change to come. Whenever you mentioned the Hospital and you forget to mention COVID, you commit a pretty fundamental mistake because when you talk about waiting times, if you do not also, in the same breath, refer to COVID you are not being realistic. So when you say would I reflect on what we did in 2018 and today, this is a progression of the same effort to stay ahead of the curve.

I mentioned in the press conference on Monday that in 2011 there were 16 GPs and today we have over 26 – it is 26.2, and then it was 16-point-something – and we have gone from ... I cannot remember the number because I have not got it noted down, but we have significantly increased the number of appointments – I think was from 140,000 to 190,000 a year. So the whole use of this facility by our people has grown enormously. There is no explanation for it. And so, when you are trying to deal with so many people calling into a system, all at eight o'clock, hundreds and hundreds – for a blood test or for the wellness clinic or for the sexual health clinic or for an urgent appointment – at the same time, no matter how good that system is, it is not going to work.

When the Chief Minister asked me to help him and he said, 'For goodness' sake, please look at the appointments system,' – which I have accepted before in this Parliament was not good enough – the first thing I thought was surely we just need a decent phone system. No. Surely we just need a good calendar system. No. This needed fundamental change, and that is why it has taken us not a week or two, it has taken us months to put all the different things in order that we hope, together as a package, will enable us to deal with the problem and ensure that we can meet the needs of the community.

And so, by filtering the calls from eight until 11 just for the need for a same-day GP visit and pushing the bloods and everything else to 11 o'clock, and then having the evening surgery available to those ... and linking the phone system to 111 so that you have clinical expertise available to triage calls ... There may be no appointments but there may be somebody in need of an appointment, so the new system will deal with that person and say come in this afternoon, or, if it is urgent, get yourself to A&E right now. It seeks to deal with the urgency and, at the same time, you have the online booking system four weeks in advance with your named GP. And the app is also being launched tomorrow. From your phone you will be able to book your blood appointment up to four weeks ahead, a GP appointment four weeks ahead with the GP you prefer

and they will become your named or preferred GP. If that person is unavailable, then obviously you will have to go to another one – there are no appointments necessary.

1130 There will be teething problems, there will be issues, but I can assure the hon. Member that if people pick up the mantle that we have asked them to, in terms of acting responsibly and only calling at eight when they need to see someone that day – go to the chemist first, self-help ... We are still going to introduce these mobile units which will be going around our community on different days, offering support to people who need it, at different times of the week in different
1135 parts of Gibraltar. We are trying to do everything we possibly can to keep people away from the eight o'clock phone call and from the PCC unless they have to, but giving them the opportunity to book up to four weeks in advance and to ensure that they have the best service available during the times they need them – and 'needing' is the really critical word in all of this.

Am I confident this is going to work? If this does not work, I honestly do not know what we are
1140 going to have to do in Gibraltar to get our appointments systems working. I do not know because this is *really* pulling out every stop: 490 more appointments a week. This is a significant change. Everyone has bent over backwards to make this work and I hope the community responds favourably, has some patience with us over the next couple of weeks as all these new systems bed in, and enables us to get this working for the benefit of all our community.

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Mr Speaker: Just the one.

Hon. E J Phillips: I am grateful, Mr Speaker.

It is an important issue, of course. I am just struggling. As impressive as the Minister is in
1150 explaining the magnitude of the changes and the package of measures that he announced on Monday – and we contributed to the debate publicly on the *News Watch* last night – I would just say one thing to him. He talked about COVID as being the difficulty, given what Minister Costa said back in 2018, namely the impressive and extensive reforms that would lead to very significant changes and a first-rate service, but we also heard the same in 2020 in the context of COVID,
1155 insofar as the Reset, Restart and Recover strategy to again make changes to the telephone lines. Whilst we are supportive and willing to assist the Government in whatever way we can to rebuild that trust and confidence within our community, is he confident that the work that is being done to restore that confidence amongst the community will, in fact, happen? A lot of people have lost that trust and confidence. I know he acknowledges publicly in this House and outside that this is
1160 probably one of the most difficult things that we can achieve, but is he confident that the system will now change to accommodate the pressure on the GHA?

Hon. A J Isola: Mr Speaker, I do not remotely agree with the premise of the question, which is that people have lost trust and confidence in the GHA. I believe that people are cheesed off that
1165 they cannot get an appointment when they want to, but when they get in and they need help the story that I hear from patients and the many letters I get from people saying thank you is extraordinary. So I do not believe there is a lack of trust or confidence at all.

I accept that the appointments system – and I have said this publicly – has not worked as it should. It has not, but how many people were coming to complain to you about appointments in
1170 2018 and 2019? There were not any. The noise was now. The system now cannot cope with the incredible demand that we face from people seeking those appointments since COVID. You could say it was since 2021, but from 2018 to when COVID struck, the appointments system was not really an issue. People struggled, but it worked. The numbers increased and so the problem is extenuating and it has to be dealt with, and that is precisely what we have done.

1175 I would not for a second wish to accept that any member of the public has lost trust and confidence in the extraordinarily hardworking people at the GHA who provide a damn good service, in some cases in very difficult circumstances. I give the GHA my vote of serious confidence in the work they do and the manner in which they deliver it. I sympathise with people who have had problems with the appointments system, absolutely, and that is exactly why we are trying to

1180 improve the service we offer the community, to make sure that we can get even that bit that was not working so well working very much better.

Mr Speaker: Next question.

Q284/2022
Cat 2 individuals and HEPPS –
Numbers

1185 **Clerk:** Question 284/2020. The Hon. the Leader of the Opposition on behalf of the Hon. R M Clinton.

Hon. K Azopardi: Mr Speaker, can the Government advise how many Category 2 individuals and HEPPS there were at the following dates: 31st March 2018, 31st March 2019, 31st March 2020, 31st March 2021 and 31st March 2022?

1190 **Clerk:** Answer, the Hon. the Minister for Health, Digital and Financial Services.

Minister for Digital, Financial Services, Health Authority and Public Utilities (Hon. A J Isola): Mr Speaker, the information being requested by the hon. Member is publicly available on the Government Statistics page and the statistics available date back even further than date for which the hon. Member has asked the question, which is 2018. However, I will obviously provide the information.

1200 As at 31st March 2018, there were 346 Cat 2s and 146 HEPPS; March 2019, 355 Cat 2s and 148 HEPPS; March 2020, 335 Cat 2s and 171 HEPPS; March 2021, 338 Cat 2s and 192 HEPPS; March 2022, 355 Cat 2s and 210 HEPPS.

The hon. Member will note that in respect of both Cat 2 and HEPPs the numbers are increased, and in respect of HEPPs, significantly so.

Mr Speaker: Next question.

Q285/2022
AquaGib –
Financing; indicative purchase price

1205 **Clerk:** Question 285/2022. The Hon. the Leader of the Opposition on behalf of the Hon. R M Clinton.

Hon. K Azopardi: Mr Speaker, can the Government advise how it intends to finance the purchase of AquaGib, and does it now have an indicative purchase price?

1210 **Clerk:** Answer, the Hon. the Minister for Health, Digital and Financial Services.

Minister for Digital, Financial Services, Health Authority and Public Utilities (Hon. A J Isola): Mr Speaker, at present we do not have an indicative price, but rather are working together with the shareholders of AquaGib to come up with an agreed formula to determine this based on the value in the accounts. As you will be aware, some of the unprecedented issues this summer are

leading to discussions that involve insurers and the management of AquaGib, which ultimately impinges on this.

1220 With regard to financing this, the Government is presently exploring a number of options and we will advise Parliament of these once we have narrowed this down.

1225 **Hon. K Azopardi:** Mr Speaker, does the Minister have any view of the kind of timescale for those discussions, both in terms of the basic formula for arriving at the purchase price and also the financing arrangements?

Hon. A J Isola: Mr Speaker, the formula is what we are currently working on. In terms of its implementation and applying it, there are factors outside our control – the insurance is one that I have mentioned – which may have an impact on that.

1230 As to the timing, I am not able to give him an indication, but what I can tell him is that we are working very closely with AquaGib. We have a board meeting this week, at which further discussions will take place afterwards in respect of this issue, and I fully expect this to happen ... I cannot give a date, Mr Speaker.

1235 **Hon. K Azopardi:** Mr Speaker, just a clarification, so that I know whether I have understood the answer correctly. When he says that they are discussing the formula and its implementation, is he saying that the formula is up for grabs as well, or is it just the implementation? Have they landed on a correct and agreed figure and it is simply now about implementation, or is it that they have not set a figure? Can I just understand the answer?

1240 **Hon. A J Isola:** Mr Speaker, what I have said in my answer is to come up with an agreed formula to determine the price based on the value in the accounts. So there are a number of things in the air – the timing of when that is looked at in terms of the accounts, which is the date, and what we are seeking to do is agree the formula so that when that date is agreed, that formula will be applied to the accounts on that date. The formula is as good as agreed. They are still working on some of the minor details, but in the main it is pretty much already agreed.

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Hon. K Azopardi: And if the formula is agreed –

1250 **Hon. A J Isola:** Pretty much.

Hon. K Azopardi: – pretty much agreed, is he able to give us the figure, or is he unwilling to do so because the other factors are still up in the air?

1255 **Hon. A J Isola:** Mr Speaker, I cannot give him a price because I have explained that the formula depends on the number in the accounts at any given time, so I would not be able to do that even if I wanted to.

Mr Speaker: Next question.

Q286-88/2022

**Mount Alvernia, Dr Giraldi and St Martin's –
Staff numbers; nationalities; numbers through recruitment agencies**

1260 **Clerk:** Q286/2022. The Hon. D A Feetham.

Hon. D A Feetham: Mr Speaker, how many people work at Mount Alvernia, Dr Giraldi and St Martin's?

Clerk: Answer, the Hon. the Minister for Health, Digital and Financial Services.

Minister for Digital, Financial Services, Health Authority and Public Utilities (Hon. A J Isola): Mr Speaker, I will answer this question together with Questions 287 and 288.

Hon. D A Feetham: Mr Speaker, what is the nationality of the people who work in Mount Alvernia, Dr Giraldi and St Martin's?

Clerk: Question 288/2022. The Hon. D A Feetham.

Hon. D A Feetham: Mr Speaker, how many people who work in Mount Alvernia, Dr Giraldi and St Martin's are employed by recruitment agencies, providing details of the agencies in question?

Clerk: Answer, the Hon. the Minister for Health, Digital and Financial Services.

Hon. A J Isola: Mr Speaker, there are currently 323 persons working at Mount Alvernia, 125 persons working at Dr Giraldi and 135 persons working at St Martins.

The nationalities of the people who work at Mount Alvernia are as follows: British, 170; Spanish, 135; Moroccan, 11; and one of each of the following – Argentinian, Brazilian Portuguese, French, Italian, Polish, Russian and Romanian.

The nationalities of the people who work at Giraldi are as follows: 39 British, 78 Spanish, two Italian, one Polish, one Irish, one Romanian, one Australian, one Belgian and one German.

The nationalities of the people who work at St Martins are as follows: British, 127; and Spanish, eight.

I am providing the information in relation to St Martin's, which is an educational establishment, for administrative ease to avoid the Minister for Education having to get up also, but I will not be able to answer any supplementaries in respect of that.

Three people who work at Mount Alvernia are employed via recruitment agencies as follows: two agency workers contracted via Meddoc and one agency worker contracted via ADA.

Forty four people who work at Dr Giraldi are employed via recruitment agencies as follows: 37 agency workers contracted via ADA; five agency workers contracted via Meddoc and two agency workers contracted via We Care.

Twenty two people who work at St Martin's are employed via recruitment agencies as follows: six through supported employment; 14 agency workers through GJBS; one agency worker via ADA; and one agency worker via Meddoc.

Hon. D A Feetham: Mr Speaker, I only have one supplementary and then I will digest the statistics the hon. Gentleman has provided. He said 14 GJBS in St Martin's. Can he explain how an employee from GJBS comes to be working in St Martin's, unless they are dealing with maintenance or something of that sort?

Hon. A J Isola: Mr Speaker, the 14 persons contracted through GJBS are lunchtime attendants. They are not carers or working within the educational realms of St Martin's, simply lunchtime attendants.

Hon. K Azopardi: Mr Speaker, can I just ask, in relation to the figures under Question 287, the nationalities of the people who work in Mount Alvernia, Dr Giraldi and St Martin's, the numbers that he has given, I suppose they fall into different categories, but does he have a subdivision? For example, in relation to the Spanish employees at Mount Alvernia, Dr Giraldi and St Martin's, the

two bigger numbers, as I took it, are 135 at Mount Alvernia and 78 at Dr Giraldi. Are they primarily carer grades? Is that the division of labour?

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Hon. A J Isola: Mr Speaker, I do not have that information available to me, so I would not want to hazard a guess as to which of these are doing what.

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Hon. D A Feetham: Mr Speaker, in relation to these numbers – 323, 125 and 135 – does the Hon. Minister have the figures for those people who are permanent and pensionable – in other words, they are permanently employed – and those people who perhaps are on a one-year or two-year contract, where the contract has not been made permanent?

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Hon. A J Isola: Mr Speaker, I have given the numbers in respect of those who are employed by recruitment agencies. That is the division that I have, which is the division that was asked for by the hon. Member. If he wants those again, it was three from Mount Alvernia, 44 from Dr Giraldi and 22 –

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Hon. D A Feetham: No, that is not the question I have asked. I have those figures. The first question was how many people work at Mount Alvernia, Dr Giraldi and St Martin's. That is nothing to do with recruitment. Some of those will be through recruitment agencies. I am asking out of the 323, 125 and 135 do you have the figure for permanent and pensionable or one-year and two-year contracts. If you do not, I will ask it next time round.

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Hon. A J Isola: That is what I was trying to explain, Mr Speaker, that I have given him the numbers of the total, and of the total, if you deduct the numbers through recruitment agencies, that is the division I have. That is what I was trying to say. So in respect of, as an example, Mount Alvernia, of those 323, three are employed by recruitment agencies and the rest are employed directly, not through recruitment agencies, but I do not have the subdivision of that number.

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Hon. K Azopardi: Mr Speaker, I am getting confused by that last answer where he engages the deduction of the last figures from the 323. Presumably the hon. Member is not saying that, using the example I was giving before on the same line, 135 Spanish nationals working at Mount Alvernia and 78 Spanish nationals working at Dr Giraldi ... they are not all permanent and pensionable? Presumably, some of those are on contract, are they not?

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Hon. A J Isola: Mr Speaker, I think we need to be careful in terms of the language we use, because to call someone permanent and pensionable is normally attributed to people who work in the public sector, in the Civil Service. Somebody can be on contract, employed, who is not permanent and pensionable, he is on a contract.

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I have not got the information to draw the division between permanent and pensionable, contract and recruitment agency, if you want to have that answer.

Mr Speaker: Next question.

Q289-292/2022
COVID boosters administered –
Number by resident and non-resident

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Clerk: Question 289/2022. The hon. the Leader of the Opposition.

Hon. K Azopardi: Mr Speaker, of the 40,474 COVID boosters administered to 30th September 2022, how many were first COVID boosters, i.e. a third dose of a COVID vaccine, broken down by residents and non-residents?

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Clerk: Answer, the Hon. the Minister for Health, Digital and Financial Services.

Minister for Digital, Financial Services, Health Authority and Public Utilities (Hon. A J Isola): Mr Speaker, I will answer this question together with Questions 290 to 292.

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Clerk: Question 290/2022. The Hon. the Leader of the Opposition.

Hon. K Azopardi: Mr Speaker, of the 40,474 COVID boosters administered to 30th September 2022, how many were second COVID boosters, i.e. a fourth dose of a COVID vaccine, broken down by residents and non-residents?

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Clerk: Question 291/2020. The Hon. the Leader of the Opposition.

Hon. K Azopardi: Mr Speaker, of the 40,474 COVID boosters administered to 30th September 2022, how many were third COVID boosters, i.e. a fifth dose of a COVID vaccine, broken down by residents and non-residents?

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Clerk: Question 292/2020. The Hon. the Leader of the Opposition.

Hon. K Azopardi: How many third COVID booster – fifth COVID vaccines – had been administered by GHA by 11th October 2022, broken down by residents and non-residents?

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Clerk: Answer, the Hon. the Minister for Health, Digital and Financial Services.

Hon. A J Isola: Mr Speaker, of the 40,474 COVID boosters administered to 30th September 2022, 30,941 were third doses, of which 23,564 were administered to residents and 7,377 were administered to non-residents; 9,508 booster doses were fourth doses, of which 8,527 were administered to residents and 981 were administered to non-residents; similarly, 25 booster doses were fifth doses, of which 24 were administered to residents and one was administered to non-residents.

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A total of 572 third COVID boosters – fifth COVID vaccines – had been administered by GHA by 11th October 2022, of which 560 were administered to residents and 12 were administered to non-residents.

Hon. K Azopardi: Mr Speaker, when you just look at those figures you can see quite a significant descent, I suppose, in the take-up figures between ... Obviously, the vast majority of people got vaccinated once or twice. You then have 23,000-odd residents getting the first booster, if I can put it that way, the third vaccine, but only 8,000 taking up the second booster, and now we are in the realms of the third booster, the fifth vaccine, so it may be that we are expecting further descent. Is the Government concerned about the difference in numbers of take-up of the booster vaccine?

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Hon. A J Isola: Mr Speaker, I think the challenge is that people think COVID is over; we all know it is not. The clinical advice continues to be get your vaccine. The GHA continues with its awareness campaign to ask people to get their vaccine and, indeed, for those over 50, to take the flu jab as well. The GHA continues to call people, to seek to invite them to come in and have the vaccines, and will continue to push the population to be as fully vaccinated as it can be within the realms of what has been provided for them.

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So yes, we would like more people to be vaccinated and we will continue to work to push the clinical advice that we get from the GHA, which is for vaccination.

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Hon. K Azopardi: Mr Speaker, as I understood the current position, the GHA was offering the fifth vaccine, the booster, to people over 50, I think it was. Given the numbers, would it be sensible to offer the vaccine to whoever wants to take it? It is not as if you are managing the programme that you used to manage in the early days, where you really needed to stagger the rollout in the community. As we are entering winter, if the hon. Member is concerned about that message perhaps it might be prudent to extend the offer, now that we are in October, to whoever wants to take it up.

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Hon. A J Isola: Indeed, Mr Speaker, we are coming to the winter months when I am sure we will see an increase in the incidence of COVID in our community, so yes, I fully expect the board of the GHA and the executive team to do exactly what the hon. Member has suggested.

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Q293/2022
Gibraltar Health Authority –
Number of vacant posts

Clerk: Question 293/2022. The Hon. the Leader of the Opposition.

Hon. K Azopardi: Mr Speaker, can the Government confirm how many posts were vacant at the Gibraltar Health Authority at 11th October 2022 and provide a list of current vacancies at the Gibraltar Health Authority?

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Clerk: Answer, the Hon. the Minister for Health, Digital and Financial Services.

Minister for Digital, Financial Services, Health Authority and Public Utilities (Hon. A J Isola): Mr Speaker, at this moment in time and after agreeing to many vacancy policy issues with the Director General in recent bilaterals, there is significant activity at this particular juncture. As part of the GHA's post-pandemic Reset, Restore and Recover Strategy, there are many boards, interviews and re-advertisements currently taking place. The GHA is, therefore, working on this, but exact numbers will be provided to the hon. Member as soon as this phase has been completed, within the next 10 days. I am advised that all clinical, allied health professional and nursing vacancies are being covered in the interviewing period where there are vacancies in the process of being filled.

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In addition to that, I would say I am able to provide the hon. Member, in the next couple of days, with a list of all those that are currently in train. In other words, there is another question on the Order Paper relating to the Ophthalmology Unit, where I am going to be saying there is one coming in November. So these are in process and I would like to give the hon. Member some proper information and not just give lists without background information in respect of each one and how it is being managed and handled.

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Hon. K Azopardi: So the hon. Member is not able to give me a precise figure of how many posts are vacant today – is that really what he is saying?

Hon. A J Isola: Not now.

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Hon. K Azopardi: Not now, but he will give it to me in the next 10 days. Mr Speaker, that is fine. I just put on the record – and perhaps with your indulgence, Mr Speaker can reflect on it –

that I may have questions I want to ask about that list when I get it in 10 days' time, and I do not want to infringe the six-month rule, so I would like to be able to have the ability to ask follow-up questions relating to the information that he will give me in 10 days' time.

Hon. A J Isola: Mr Speaker, that is perfectly sensible and reasonable and I have no issue with it at all. When he receives the information, if he has any questions to ask at the next sitting I would be very happy to take them.

Q294/2022

Power cuts –

Duration, districts and reasons

Clerk: Question 294/2022. The Hon. the Leader of the Opposition.

Hon. K Azopardi: Mr Speaker, how many power cuts have there been from 1st January 2022 to 30th September 2022, giving a breakdown of the duration of the power outage, the district affected and the reason for the same?

Clerk: Answer, the Hon. the Minister for Health, Digital and Financial Services.

Minister for Digital, Financial Services, Health Authority and Public Utilities (Hon. A J Isola): Mr Speaker, I now hand over a schedule detailing how many power cuts there have been from 1st January 2022 to 30th September 2022, giving a breakdown of the duration of the power outage, the district affected and the reason for the same.

Answer to Question 294/2022

APPENDIX 4

FILE 200

RECORD OF I-IV POWER CUTS

GENERATOR FAILURE REPORT

YEAR 2022	Date and time	Duration	Districts/Areas affected	Reasons for Power Cut	Type
1	28.01.2022 11.11	36 mins.	Blackout within GMES/MoD network. Vineyards, Nelson's view.	Private contractor damaged cable by Fossway tunnel. The earth fault triggered a blackout at GMES network. Restored by 11.47 with assistance given to GMES by GEA and MoD contractors. GEA S20 tripped causing power cut to Vineyards and S80 Nelsons view.	Network Failure
2	28.01.2022 16.00	7 mins.	Bedlam Court, Ocean Village Complex, Tradewinds, Casemates.	Operational switching at S61 WDC panel tripped causing power loss to Bedlam Ct, Casemates, Ocean Village, Tradewinds.	Network Failure

3	11.03.2022	2 — 11 mins.	Bayside, Varyl Begg West, Marina, Jetty Five, Watergardens, Ocean Village Complex, Waterport Terraces, William Jackson, New Harbours. King's Bastion, Cornwall's Lane, Governor's Parade. Alameda, Rosia Bay.	NMPS IFLS testing caused a trip of Set 1 causing feeders to open.	Generation Failure
4	08/07/2022	48 mins.	GEA network suffered no loss of supply but local consumers suffered power outage due to supply from ex MoD network.	Cable from GMES power station to Norfolk House S/S tripped on load. Upon first restoration process, Norfolk House tripped all ex MoD network including local consumers.	Network Failure
5	20.07.2022	67 — 116 mins.	Western Arm. Approx. 80% Gib-wide power-outage.	Cable fault at S68 Western Arm to S36 North Mole caused WDC panel trip affecting supply to Gasnor Plant. Gas supply main valve shut down in safety protocol caused trip on NMPS engines.	Network Failure
6	02.08.2022	6 — 43 mins.	Marina, Watergardens, Ocean Village Complex, Bedlam Court, Waterport Terraces, William Jackson, Waterport Place. King's Bastion, Cornwall's Lane. JBDC Alameda, Rosia Bay, Sunnyside Steps, Little Bay, Europa Business Centre.	NMPS TX2 fault caused trips of engine-bay cooling-fans triggering safety-protocol shutdowns of 3 Gas Engines. Reference to PACIS lost at NMPS CR. S55, S63 and S65 restored manually.	Generation Failure
7	12.08.2022	40 — 55 mins.	Alameda, Sandpits, Sunnyside Steps, Rosia Bay, Little Bay, Europa Business Centre.	Dual cable fault at S15 to S17 Willis's Road (spiked by contractor) and S19 to S67 Beach view Terraces.	Network Failure

Hon. K Azopardi: Mr Speaker, we will digest the schedule and we may have more points to raise in the future, but I am just looking at the list and for the purposes of those people listening there are seven on this list, seven power outages in the period, ranging from a few minutes to almost a couple of hours in one respect. I am just looking at the last column, where they are categorised in one of two ways, either network failure or generation failure. *(Interjection)* Well, 'Generation Failure', it says. *(Interjection)* Failure of a generation! Can the hon. Member help us understand the difference?

Hon. A J Isola: Mr Speaker, you have generation of power which is the North Mole power station, which is a generating station, and then you have the way we get to people's houses, which

is what is called a network. So we have a generation failure and a network failure. I would have thought that with all the eminence we have across the floor, we would have had no difficulty in understanding that.

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Hon. K Azopardi: Mr Speaker, I do not pretend to have any eminence in engineering, still less electrical engineering.

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To the extent that there are issues affecting the network – and, of the seven, five are about network failure – isn't that indicative of the need to review the network and find ways of improving the issues, so that we do not have to suffer so many power cuts? Not just seven this year, but last year I think the figure was almost 30.

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Hon. A J Isola: No, Mr Speaker, it is indicative of a private contractor damaging the cable by Fossway Tunnel, where the earth fall triggered a blackout of GMES' network, restored by 11.47 after 36 minutes.

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The information is given because each incident is different and is not indicative of a problem with the network. You will see that two, maybe three of these are the ex-MoD network – that is in the south district of Gibraltar – and that is an older network than our own and something that is being integrated into our own network over a period of time, working closely with the Ministry of Defence.

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So no, I do not believe it is indicative. People have to understand that if we have a generation failure within the power station ... For example, the two that are generation relate to works going on to integrate the current new power plant. Systems trip because these are all software driven and if you do not do something and the computer says no, you have a trip and you have a power cut. This is part of the process of integrating a new power station into the community.

The difference between Gibraltar and anywhere else in the world, or most parts of the world, is when power fails from one generation source another one kicks in. We have not got another one. We have one power-generation source, so that complicates the issues, but generation trips are absolutely normal all over the world with new power stations.

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Would I wish that we had zero at all and I could tell the hon. Member, today, zero? Of course I would, but this is a very sophisticated piece of kit that is being integrated into our community and is producing power to us. Are there issues? Yes. Will they continue? Unfortunately, I suspect they will.

Q295/2022

Power's Drive Tunnel – Reservoir stock level on day preceding fire

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Clerk: Question 295/2022. The Hon. the Leader of the Opposition.

Hon. K Azopardi: Mr Speaker, what were the water reservoir levels the day before the fire at Power's Drive Tunnel?

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Clerk: Answer, the Hon. the Minister for Health, Digital and Financial Services.

Minister for Digital, Financial Services, Health Authority and Public Utilities (Hon. A J Isola): Mr Speaker, the reservoir stock level on the day before the fire at Power's Drive Tunnel was 22.289 million litres.

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Hon. K Azopardi: And, Mr Speaker, that is from a total possible capacity of water reservoir of what?

Hon. A J Isola: To put the answer I am going to give the hon. Member in some context, the stock levels ... Our reservoirs are never full, so I think the total capacity, from memory – and this is a guesstimate – is around 70 million, then normally during the course of the year at around 40, reducing as you get closer to the summer months. If I look at it from 2020 onwards, I do not see a single month from July 2020 to date ... No, I am afraid that is not it. I cannot make that ... The vast majority of the months are below 50 million. As we get closer to the summer months the volume of stock reduces for two reasons: there is more water used and our production is fixed, and therefore, during the summer ... I remember last summer – and I have said this publicly during board meetings of AquaGib – we had a very keen eye on the amount of water we had because we were looking at alternatives should we need to bring in more water to meet the increasing demand. The demand has continued to increase over the years. This year would have been the same as last year had it not been for the fire at Power's Drive which caused us the problem that we had.

Hon. K Azopardi: Mr Speaker, the hon. Member will correct me if I give the wrong figure. I believe that the water consumption of Gibraltar is around 5 million litres a day, something like that. If that is right, this was reservoir levels of not more than four and a half days when the tunnel fire happened, and given the explanation he has given, that total capacity is around 70 million but it is normally at around 40 million and it lowers towards the summer months, isn't one of the lessons of the whole incident that we need to do much more to build up reservoir levels and perhaps to a higher level throughout the year and also to increase reservoir levels?

Hon. A J Isola: Mr Speaker, stock level and production ability are what dictate what stock we are advised we need to have. Do not forget this is AquaGib, a privately owned company, which is responsible, under contract to Government, for our water supply, and the measure they have taken is that if we are producing 4.5 million litres a day and we are using five – in the summer, it is higher than five – then we are treading water and we are okay. When you have a sudden cut off of four or four and a half million a day and you are left with one and a half at the Waterport, you are going to have a problem.

The speed with which we moved to restore that was remarkable. I did not think we would make the timelines that were set. In fact, AquaGib came in ahead of time in terms of producing, and then the Balaena reverse osmosis plant that was procured for us by the dockyard, who came to our rescue with that one that produced an extra million, has made the position more comfortable.

When anything goes down, to bring it back up is a real challenge because consumption continues. That was the battle, the consumption continued, so we took out, as the hon. Member will know, all the high users and found alternative sources for many of them and reverted back to just the ones that had to have it, and that enabled us to limit the damage to that 10-day period when people had problems at home.

Hon. K Azopardi: Mr Speaker, I am grateful for the explanation. Indeed, the Chief Minister was away and I had a briefing from the Deputy Chief Minister, for which I was grateful, as to the detailed mechanics of these things during the time when the fire was ongoing at that stage, and the Chief of the Fire Department was there.

I am not critical about the way the emergency was then handled. The emergency was handled well by the essential services and AquaGib once it had happened. What I am saying to the hon. Member is that perhaps one of the lessons to be drawn from this is that Gibraltar really should not function at a level where we have only four days' back-up water, because if something happens it is cataclysmic to an essential service, and what we should be doing is making sure that our capacity is higher and our reservoir capacity levels are able to be expanded.

I am not sure if the hon. Member heard that because he was having an aside with the Chief Minister. If he wants me to repeat it ... Yes, I will. Isn't the lesson to be drawn from this that we

1580 should not be functioning at four days' back-up water, that our reservoir levels need to be higher
and not at the levels which he has indicated, and that, indeed, given that there is probably an
increase in population ...? The Hon. the Father of the House went on television recently to talk
about the census, and he was talking about the increase in population and the increase in
infrastructure and the pressure on infrastructure, and we know all the pressure there is on the
sewage infrastructure and so on. Perhaps it is important to review our water infrastructure as
1585 well, to increase reservoir capacity.

Hon. A J Isola: Mr Speaker, the Government has already announced – and the hon. Member
has already asked a question on it – that it is purchasing the remaining shares of AquaGib to bring
the critical supply of water into public ownership and into Government hands.

1590 I think the Government would have preferred to have had more water in its tanks, of course
we would. The Government has for some time been preparing to have not just more production
of water available to it but in more diverse places. In other words, the reliance on one place for
so much capacity of our water is something that the Government did not believe was the best way
forward, and consequently one of the lessons learnt ... It is not really a lesson learnt because it
1595 was going to happen anyway because the provision of the new AquaGib facility at North Mole
already has provision ... In fact, there is plant arriving in November, nothing to do with the issue
at Power's Drive.

What is going to be happening at Waterport is there is going to be, instead of 1.5 million litres
of provision there will be 3.5 million litres of provision of water. So when we have that facility and
1600 the facility a Governor's Cottage we will be able to manage our water stock and supply far more
efficiently and with far more resilience than we have ever been able to do before.

The hon. Member, I am sure, will welcome that news and the decision by Government to buy
AquaGib and bring the water provider into public ownership.

1605 **Mr Speaker:** Next question.

Q296/2022

ITLD –

Increase in staff complement

Clerk: Question 296/2020. The Hon. Ms M D Hassan Nahon.

Hon. Ms M D Hassan Nahon: Mr Speaker, the GSLP Liberal Government said in a recent press
release that it had increased the complement of staff at the ITLD department. By how many
1610 people has the staff complement increased in the last 24 months?

Clerk: Answer, the Hon. the Minister for Health, Digital and Financial Services.

Minister for Digital, Financial Services, Health Authority and Public Utilities (Hon. A J Isola):
1615 Mr Speaker, the information that the hon. Lady is requesting is public information – it is obviously
in the Estimates, which are public documents, every year – but I will give the information
notwithstanding.

Indeed, the Government stated that the complement of the ITLD department has grown by
more than 100% since 2011. In 2011-12, the ITLD had a complement of 15. There is currently a
1620 complement of 31. In the last 24 months, the complement of the ITLD has not increased, which is
completely understandable bearing in mind what we have been through in the last two years and
that our commitment is to maintain complements as at 9th December 2011 and we have more
than doubled it since that date.

Hon. Ms M D Hassan Nahon: Thank you for the answer, despite it being publicly available; I was unaware. Thank you.

Can I just ask, from what I understand, the Government's servers have almost doubled from something like 180 to 340 since 2017, so I think we can deduce that the workload may have increased as well as you need more and more technology to satisfy that. My question would be if we have not increased complement in relation to this increase of what we see as the machinery, are we putting our department of ITLD at too stressful a level where perhaps low morale and poor output would ensue?

Chief Minister (Hon. F R Picardo): Mr Speaker, can I just get up on a point of procedure to set out that when information is publicly available the Government does not habitually provide it because it is publicly available information? In particular, in this case, we are not dealing with publicly available information which is beyond this House. That information is in the Book that we hand the hon. Lady and all hon. Members each year – it is the section that deals with ITLD – and the fact that we have provided the information in this case should not for one moment be taken to suggest that the Government must, or accepts that it should, provide publicly available information in the context of Question Time, because the rule has always been that if it is publicly available it should not be asked about. I just wanted to make that caveat.

I will allow the Hon. Minister to reply to the question, but given that we have doubled the server capacity, why haven't we doubled the number of people – we have, as he has just confirmed.

Hon. A J Isola: Mr Speaker, there is no question that since 2011 the work that ITLD carry out has increased. That is acknowledged, not just in doubling the numbers of people who work in that Department but in the investment that has been made in the very servers the hon. Lady talks about, because those servers are changed every ... I think it is five years, and there is a current round of tenders going out now for the new servers.

So yes, we accept that the ITLD workload has increased significantly. We have increased the complement significantly, we have increased the investment significantly and I would accept that we have some more to do, and we are engaging with them to get there. So I am confident that working together we will be able to deliver the service that not only Government expects from them, but they will be happy to deliver for us.

Q297/2022

DHA orthodontists –

Whether Government satisfied with complement

Clerk: Question 297/2020. The Hon. Ms M D Hassan Nahon.

Hon. Ms M D Hassan Nahon: Is Government satisfied with the complement of orthodontists in the GHA?

Clerk: Answer, the Hon. the Minister for Health, Digital and Financial Services.

Minister for Digital, Financial Services, Health Authority and Public Utilities (Hon. A J Isola): Mr Speaker, the GHA has commissioned a review of the dental services it provides. This includes a review of the scope of dental care currently being provided by the GHA, the workforce and infrastructure required to adequately cover the scope of dental care and how the current resource is being utilised. The current complement of orthodontists will be evaluated on the basis of the findings of this review.

Hon. Ms M D Hassan Nahon: Mr Speaker, I appreciate the Minister's answer regarding the review, which would of course give rise to us giving him some space to ensure that the new policies come into force, but my representations – and there have been several – are that currently the orthodontist complement has gone down from two to one and many teenagers who are in need of braces are being told that there is no guarantee that they will get them due to the decrease in orthodontists. My understanding from these representations is that parents are being told that the new policy is adopting a UK approach, which is based on quotas rather than needs based, and that would mean that many needy teenage patients with maybe justifiable complexes as well about the state of their teeth are being left behind.

Can the Minister tell us when we will know more about how they plan on filling this complement and what he would tell parents, at this stage, of children who are being denied orthodontic treatment, please?

Thank you.

Hon. A J Isola: Mr Speaker, no, the GHA is not following the UK practice, as the hon. Lady has referred to. At this present time, we have five dentists and two orthodontists, one of whom is acting up as a dentist, and there is a vacancy for one orthodontist, which is in the process of being filled.

Again, I have to mention COVID because, yes, there is a long waiting list. As I have also said in this House before, the GHA has actually gone out to private contractors in Gibraltar to seek to ask for their support to clear the backlog, to bring ourselves up to date as quickly as we possibly can. That is ongoing. We have orthodontists in private practice helping us with this process, but there is more work to be done. What the review is going to tell us is with the capacity of work that we need to deliver, is the complement we have too high, too low or spot on, what is the nature of the services that we should be providing and what is the nature of the services that maybe we should not be providing, but the ones that the hon. Lady has referred to are clearly ones that we will continue to provide, especially in respect of children.

So I think my answer would be we have, today, five dentists and two orthodontists. We are aware that we are one down on orthodontists, which will mean that the orthodontist will go back to being a dentist, and I hope once the review is concluded and we are able to clear the backlog with the support of the private sector, we will be in a better place.

Hon. Ms M D Hassan Nahon: Mr Speaker, I thank the Minister again for his answer. Can I ask him the timeline of this review? By when will they have some kind of answers and feedback in order to proceed with the new decisions and policies?

Hon. A J Isola: I do not have an exact date, but I know it is an external review by people from outside coming in and looking at us and seeing what we do, so I would expect to have it relatively shortly. I would hope by the end of the year.

Q298/2022

GHA Domestic department – Management of and relationship with employees

Clerk: Question 298/2020. The Hon. Ms M D Hassan Nahon.

Hon. Ms M D Hassan Nahon: Is the Health Minister satisfied with his Ministry's management and relationship with the employees within the Domestic department in the GHA?

Clerk: Answer, the Hon. the Minister for Health, Digital and Financial Services.

Minister for Digital, Financial Services, Health Authority and Public Utilities (Hon. A J Isola):
Mr Speaker, yes.

Hon. Ms M D Hassan Nahon: Mr Speaker, I have been made aware over months, and in fact the last couple of years, of the low morale within this department and the fact that they feel there is a shortage of staff, where people are covering positions of high responsibility, in many cases for years and for the same remuneration. Their conditions have made them feel ... As many of them have dubbed it, they feel that they are the forgotten department.

So my question for the Minister would be whether he has any sort of plan to engage this department, many of whom are feeling quite marginalised, in order to restore job satisfaction and general satisfaction for the employees this department? If not, what would he say to these employees?

Hon. A J Isola: Mr Speaker, the question asked the Health Minister with his Ministry's management and relationship with the employees, and with that I am happy because I do not have a relationship with them other than in respect of a dispute which has been resolved.

I am not aware of any of the matters that the GHA deals with, with the Domestic department, but from the agreement we have reached with them in the last 10 days I can tell the hon. Lady that they are extremely happy and that we have come to that arrangement and dealt with a longstanding dispute, which has now been resolved to both our and their satisfaction. Other than that, I am not aware of any issue at all, hence my saying that yes, I am satisfied with that relationship.

Q299/2022
GHA electrical works –
Whether being privatised

Clerk: Question 299/2022. The Hon. Ms M D Hassan Nahon.

Hon. Ms M D Hassan Nahon: Is Government privatising electrical works within the GHA which have traditionally been carried out by the Gibraltar Electricity Authority?

Clerk: Answer, the Hon. the Minister for Health, Digital and Financial Services.

Minister for Digital, Financial Services, Health Authority and Public Utilities (Hon. A J Isola):
Mr Speaker, no.

Hon. Ms M D Hassan Nahon: Mr Speaker, I have been told that as staff are retiring they are being replaced by private contractors and there are roughly 28 vacancies missing that have not been filled. What would the Minister say about this assertion, which has not come from rumour but from disgruntled members of the electrical agency?

Hon. A J Isola: Mr Speaker, I think I recognise some of the numbers the hon. Lady has referred to, but in different contexts. If I were to tell you that within the GHA the Techno-medical team, which is the team from the GEA in the GHA, is smaller than the total number of 28, which is the number of vacancies the hon. Lady has referred to ... So absolutely not. There are not 28 vacancies within the Techno-medical team at the GHA.

There has been an issue, because the way this works is that the GHA has works carried out within its buildings and when it does those, if it feels that the works can be done in house by its Minor Works team, who use the Techno-medical team from the GEA, then they will do that, but

1760 even when they do that they will get quotes to ensure that the pricing that has been given from
the Minor Works team within the GHA is competitive. If it is competitive, it will be done internally
and they will do it, hopefully, during normal hours at no cost. If it requires overtime, then that will
be considered. When the works are specialist works, and you can imagine the Hospital – many of
the works ... There are two large projects going on now which are actually contracted out with the
1765 agreement of the GHA Minor Works team and with the agreement of the Techno-medical team,
who accept that they could not do those works anyway. The Techno-medical team in the GEA
predominantly service electrical equipment within the Hospital, of which you can imagine there
is lots. That is their prime function, not to do building works. That is why I said no, it is not
privatising electrical works, because we are not; we are carrying on in exactly the same way we
1770 always have done, where there are some specialist works where outside contractors come in, and
what can be done internally is done internally provided the price is, obviously, competitive and in
the interests of the taxpayer.

There is no question at all of vacancies being replaced by private contractors. I met with the
shop stewards and I met with the unions yesterday to make that point absolutely clearly to them,
which they accepted, so I do not think that there is any concern that the hon. Lady has made in
1775 that respect.

Clerk: Question 300/2022. The Hon. D J Bossino.

1780 **Hon. Chief Minister:** Mr Speaker, I am just conscious of the fact that you have been in the Chair
for three hours. I wonder whether this might be a convenient moment to take a 15-minute break
before we come back.

Mr Speaker: I am grateful.

1785 **Hon. K Azopardi:** Mr Speaker, with your leave, can I just say – and with the Chief Minister's
giving way – I was going to say before, when I asked questions on behalf of Mr Clinton, as my hon.
colleague here, Mr Bossino, will ask questions for Mr Reyes, that in case the listener is wondering,
the reason we are doing so is because both my colleagues unfortunately have COVID and that is
1790 also the reason why they were not here to take the Oath of Allegiance?

Hon. Chief Minister: Mr Speaker, I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for clarifying that. I could
not find a convenient moment to say it, and I thought it was better for him to do so. Of course I
look forward to seeing them both back as soon as possible in full health. COVID is not what it was
when it hit us in March 2020 but it is still something that should concern us.

1795 I would simply reflect that when the hon. Gentleman says we have we have done nothing, he
has just got up and talked about listeners. He is still living in the world in which people are only
listening to us on the radio. We are now in glorious technicolour, one of the great reforms after
the new dawn of 2011.

I move that the House should now recess for 15 minutes.

1800 **Mr Speaker:** The House will now recess for 15 minutes, to return at 20 past six.

The House recessed at 6.05 p.m. and resumed at 6.23 p.m.

**SOCIAL SECURITY, ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT, ENTERPRISE,
TELECOMMUNICATIONS AND THE GSB**

Q300/2022

**Construction and Engineering Trades Training Centres –
Trainees; instructors and current vacancies; future plans**

Clerk: Question 300/2022. The Hon. D J Bossino on behalf of the Hon. E J Reyes.

1805 **Hon. D J Bossino:** Can Government provide details of the number of trainees currently enrolled at both the Gibraltar Construction Training Centre and the Engineering Trades Training Centre, providing details of the estimated completion dates of such courses and the qualifications to be obtained upon successful completion of said courses?

1810 **Clerk:** Answer, the Hon. the Minister for Social Security, Economic Development and Enterprise.

Minister for Social Security, Economic Development, Enterprise, Telecommunications and the GSB (Hon. Sir J J Bossano): Mr Speaker, before I give the answer, can I just say, having been put out of action for a fortnight by COVID myself, I wish both my friends, Edwin and Roy, a speedy recovery and I hope it will not keep them in bed as long as it kept me.

I will answer this question together with Questions 301 and 302.

1820 **Clerk:** Question 301/2022. The Hon. D J Bossino on behalf of the Hon. E J Reyes.

Hon. D J Bossino: I would just like to thank the Minister and acknowledge his kind remarks. I understand they are both doing very well.

1825 Can Government provide details in respect of the number of instructors currently employed at both the Construction Training Centre and the Engineering Trades Training Centre, together with details of any vacancies which may presently exist?

Clerk: Question 302/2022. The Hon. D J Bossino on behalf of the Hon. E J Reyes.

1830 **Hon. D J Bossino:** Can Government provide details of its future plans for both the Construction Trades and Engineering Trades Training Centres?

Clerk: Answer, the Hon. the Minister for Social Security, Economic Development and Enterprise.

1835 **Hon. Sir J J Bossino:** Mr Speaker, the number of trainees currently enrolled at both centres is 35. The estimated completion dates of the courses and the qualifications on successful completion are as follows. Level 3: Fabrication and Welding, November 2022 and 2023; Electrical Engineering, November 2022, 2023 and 2024; Mechanical Engineering, November 2022, 2023 and 2024. Level 2: Diploma in Building Maintenance, August 2023; Diploma in Plumbing, August 2023.

1840 There are five instructors currently employed at both centres. There are three vacancies which presently exist: one bricklayer, one painter and decorator, and one electrical instructor.

If, by 'future plans', the hon. Member means between now and the next General Election, there are no plans to change the role of either Training Centre.

1845 **Hon. D J Bossino:** Mr Speaker, in respect of the first question I posed, which dealt with the number of trainees, can he tell the House whether there are any current intentions to expand

upon the intake of numbers? He said there were 35. Is there any intention to expand on that and indeed to promote this in schools, given that not everybody wishes to pursue an academic route?

1850 **Hon. Sir J J Bossano:** The number we take in is determined by the fact that there is an intake of eight in any one of the specialities, and in the case of Electrical and Mechanical Engineering, which are done in GibDock, the requirement is higher because there is a higher requirement in terms of technical knowledge. For example, in Electrical Engineering and Mechanical Engineering you have to translate from drawings to physical work, whereas in the construction trades it is not as demanding so there are no entry requirements. In addition, the construction trades can be taken to craft labour in two years, whereas the other ones require three because they require more time at the place of work.

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1860 At the moment, the number of people who apply is in excess of the capacity of the centre and we do not have an intention of increasing, but we may have to do so in future. There are some trades where we have to reconsider what it is we are training people to do. For example, if we are talking about a future with no car engines, then it will be electrical training for electric cars that will be needed, and therefore motor mechanics will be a shrinking market and electricians will be an increasing market.

1865 Looking ahead, I think we will have to make sure that if technological changes are changes that demand skills in the market we then increase in one area and maybe decreasing in another. For example, in Fabrication and Welding we did an exercise last year and found that nobody who had trained in welding and fabricating since the centre had opened in 1996 had ever got to work in welding and fabricating, so we decided that we would not keep on training people in that area. We actually tracked every single person who had completed the course and not one single individual in the entire history of the centre had gone on to work in what he had been trained to do, and therefore it did not seem to be a worthwhile thing. We therefore decided to discontinue this in future. This is why there is a course that finishes in 2022-23 but there is not one in 2024. In that case, when we are looking at the manning levels, when vacancies come up we may need more instructors in one area than in another, but it will be driven by the demand in the market.

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1875 **Hon. D J Bossino:** But in the context of expansion, did he say there is a demand? I may have misunderstood him, but did he say there is a demand but there is, in fact, a limited number of places available to meet that demand? And that if that understanding is correct and I have heard we say it is about the various skills, does that not answer the question – in other words, that there is a requirement for further expansion?

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1885 **Hon. Sir J J Bossano:** The biggest problem we have is not in expanding the centre itself, it is that we have great difficulty in getting employers. At the moment, for example, we have people who have done everything they need to do in the electrical training and we are having difficulty in getting private sector electrical companies willing to take them on, even though they are provided free of charge and they will not necessarily have to employ them. They need to do real work. The City and Guilds and the other awarding bodies will not accept that the work is done in a simulated situation in the centre – where it can be done – except in the plumbing trade. The plumbing trade is one where you can do the whole course, finish it and get the certificate without leaving the construction sector, but for the other trades – and I do not know why the difference exists – you have to work in a real place on a real building site, and sometimes ... I remember one year we had a particular group – this led to some changes in the content of their course – who could not finish because the course that had existed there before required that they actually went on a building site to work on cavity walls and there was no building site in Gibraltar doing cavity walls. The situation was that the guys had done everything they needed to do to finish but they could not actually finish the last module that was required because there was not a single building site and we could not simply put them in the Training Centre to do a cavity wall and then knock the cavity wall down. That is not permitted. On subsequent courses we were able to substitute

something else, and that was because we are now concentrating more on the maintenance work. On the maintenance work, for example, you do not need to know how to build a cavity wall because that is not something you would normally do when you are doing maintenance. If you are doing maintenance, you are mostly doing internal work and repairs and this is where the bulk of the work is.

One of the positions that I have explained previously that we need to understand about the construction industry, particularly in the context of the fact that many of the construction companies only have frontier workers, is that the construction industry for many years now has had specialist workers, so when you are doing foundations people come in from Spain and Portugal, do the foundations and go away. If you had somebody here trained to do foundations, he would be out of work for six months of the year because there is no possibility of going in the opposite direction to work, with our wages above the UK and their wages below.

So where is the future employment? The more buildings we have, the more buildings will need maintenance, so we see the importance of having people trained to do maintenance, so that at least the permanent growth in the construction sector which would be providing the maintenance to ever greater numbers of buildings will be with local Gibraltarians. That is where the work is, but the problem at the moment is that if we plan to take more people, we might do by taking on more instructors, but unless we have more building companies willing to take them on, they cannot finish the work, and at the moment we are in that situation that we are using the maximum that is available.

Mr Speaker: Next question.

Clerk: Question 303 –

Mr Speaker: Switch on your microphone.

Hon. D J Bossino: This is in relation to Question 301 and the number of instructors, in respect of which he said there were three vacancies, I think. Can he say where those posts are being advertised? As we understand it, the information reaching the party is that the advertising of those vacancies has been limited to Government employees, Gibraltar company employees and the GDC, whilst we understand that there is interest from outside these two groupings. Can he expand a bit on that?

Hon. Sir J J Bossano: Mr Speaker, every vacancy in the public sector is initially advertised inside the public sector. The policy of the Government, of which I have made no secret, is that when a vacancy comes up we see if it is possible not to fill it, given the state of the estimates in the Budget, which hon. Members are well aware of, and if it does get through we hope to be able to fill it internally and then maybe the vacancy that is created by filling it internally will not need to be filled. In order to restore the Budget to what it used to be, which is that there should be no deficit, we have to constrain the numbers and increase efficiency, and that is part of my job, not in training but overall in the size of the public sector.

Hon. D J Bossino: One final question, Mr Speaker, in relation to that question. Is he able to say whether one of the vacancies is in relation to the Construction Training Centre Manager who has retired and that position is not yet replaced? Can he confirm that?

Hon. Sir J J Bossano: The three vacancies for instructors, which is what the question was about, is what I have given you in the answer. The manager is also being advertised internally.

Mr Speaker: Next question.

Q303/2022

Disability Allowance –

Number of cases where revoked or discontinued

1950 **Clerk:** Question 303/2020. The Hon. E J Phillips.

Hon. E J Phillips: Mr Speaker, can the Government state how many people who have been in receipt of Disability Allowance have had that allowance revoked or otherwise discontinued over the last three years?

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Clerk: Answer, the Hon. the Minister for Social Security, Economic Development and Enterprise.

1960 **Minister for Social Security, Economic Development, Enterprise, Telecommunications and the GSB (Hon. Sir J J Bossano):** Mr Speaker, out of 479 people in receipt of Disability Allowance, 28 have had their allowance revoked or discontinued over the last three years.

1965 **Hon. E J Phillips:** Mr Speaker, I am grateful for the Father of the House's answer to that question. Can he be more helpful in explaining the reasons for that revocation or discontinuance of the Disability Allowance and whether that is broken down in the other part of the written answer to that question, potentially, the information that is given to the Minister in respect of that data?

1970 **Hon. Sir J J Bossano:** No, Mr Speaker, I do not have that information, but as far as I understand it, the system is that there is a periodic review and then presumably the people who originally decided that the allowance was required have decided it is no longer required. This is a team of experts, doctors and so on, who take this decision.

1975 Remember that when the allowance existed before, in 2011, it was based on a medical condition. The system was reformed some years ago and the effect has been to increase it and make it available to many more people. There were 162 in 2011 and there are now 479. The reality is that, for example, two people can have the same medical condition and one person may be able to cope and live a normal life and the other person cannot. Therefore, the criterion is the ability to lead a normal life rather than the condition you have. Before, what the doctors listed was if you have this condition you can, and if you have some other condition you cannot. That was because sometimes the people with a condition that was allowable actually were able to cope better than someone with another condition that was not allowable. So now it is entirely arbitrary, in the sense that somebody makes a judgement. That judgement may be justified or not justified in the eyes of a layman, but the system that was newly created put that decision in the hands of a team that then makes a recommendation to the director and then the director either accepts or rejects the recommendation.

1985 I think when the question is one of granting in the first place, the director has a discretion but I doubt that he would go against the advice, unless there were some very compelling reasons; but when it is a question of disallowance, I do not think the director has the discretion to say, 'Although they say it is no longer needed, I will keep on giving it.' I do not think that is the case.

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1995 **Hon. E J Phillips:** I am grateful for the answer. This question actually arises in the context of my hon. and learned Friend Mr Feetham's questions in the past. I reviewed those contributions and the excellent work he does with his constituents in trying to get to the bottom of this longstanding issue. I have had a number of people who have approached me in the context of my Health portfolio who have been in receipt of Disability Allowance and have had very little notice in terms of that revocation, and in fact they do not know the reasons for the revocation. It is simply a very

short paragraph in a letter saying it is being removed. I need to give those individuals the reassurance that this will be properly investigated.

I bring it to the attention of the Father of the House because it is an important issue for people who have, in the past, received the benefit. I understand what he is saying in relation to regular review at technical level with experts, but what I would ask him is whether he is able to take on this feedback that I am trying to provide him with and hopefully get some further answers as to why these 28 in particular have had it revoked. That is the reason why I asked for the reasons from the Father of the House. I am grateful.

Hon. Sir J J Bossino: I went beyond what the question asked – how many people there were – just to get some feel for how many get revoked. It does not seem to be a very high number out of 479, so that suggests that the normal thing is that it does not get revoked. Obviously, the amount of information I get is limited because nowadays, with data protection, people are very sensitive, but I will try to see if there is a pattern to the reason why these 28 were revoked and the other 450 were not.

Q304-310/2022

Public debt – Figures for June to September 2022;

General Sinking Fund – Balance as at June to September 2022;

Gibraltar Savings Bank – Listed bond portfolio; unclaimed deposits

National Economic Plan – Engineer's Lane air-raid shelter; application procedure

Rooke Nursing Home – Arrival date of modular units;

Jewish Home – Refurbishment costs

Clerk: Question 304/2022. The Hon. the Leader of the Opposition on behalf of the Hon. R M Clinton.

Hon. K Azopardi: Mr Speaker, can the Government please provide the total gross debt, aggregate debt after application of the Sinking Fund to gross debt, cash reserves and net debt figures for public debt for the following dates: 1st June 2022, 1st July 2022, 1st August 2022 and 1st September 2022?

Clerk: Answer, the Hon. the Minister for Social Security, Economic Development and Enterprise.

Minister for Social Security, Economic Development, Enterprise, Telecommunications and the GSB (Hon. Sir J J Bossano): Mr Speaker, I will answer this question with Questions 305 to 310.

Clerk: Question 305/2022. The Hon. the Leader of the Opposition on behalf of the Hon. R M Clinton.

Hon. K Azopardi: Mr Speaker, can the Government advise the balance on the General Sinking Fund on the following dates: 1st June 2022, 1st July 2022, 1st August 2022 and 1st September 2022?

Clerk: Question 306/2022. The Hon. the Leader of the Opposition on behalf of the Hon. R M Clinton.

Hon. K Azopardi: Can the Government advise what the effect has been on the listed bond portfolio of the Gibraltar Savings Bank given the sell-off in the bond markets; and to what extent has this affected the ability of the Savings Bank to distribute its £50 million of reserves?

2040 **Clerk:** Question 307/2022. The Hon. the Leader of the Opposition on behalf of the Hon. R M Clinton.

2045 **Hon. K Azopardi:** Can the Government advise the value of unclaimed deposits identified under section 11A of the Savings Bank Act and what amount, if any, has been transferred to the Consolidated Fund?

Clerk: Question 308/2022. The Hon. the Leader of the Opposition on behalf of the Hon. R M Clinton.

2050 **Hon. K Azopardi:** Mr Speaker, can the Government advise how the air-raid shelter in Engineer's Lane is a sponsored project under the National Economic Plan; and how are applications made to be included in this plan?

2055 **Clerk:** Question 309/2022. The Hon. the Leader of the Opposition on behalf of the Hon. R M Clinton.

Hon. K Azopardi: Mr Speaker, can the Government advise when the modular units are expected to arrive from China for the Rooke Nursing Home project?

2060 **Clerk:** Question 310/2022. The Hon. the Leader of the Opposition on behalf of the Hon. R M Clinton.

2065 **Hon. K Azopardi:** Can the Government advise how the Jewish Home was refurbished at 'no cost to the taxpayer', according to Sir Joe Bossano, when the Estimates Book Improvement and Development Fund under subhead 4(v) shows an outturn for 2021-22 of £305,000 and a forecast of £900,000 for 2022-23 for this project?

2070 **Clerk:** Answer, the Hon. the Minister for Social Security, Economic Development and Enterprise.

2075 **Hon. Sir J J Bossano:** Mr Speaker, the gross public debt and the aggregate debt after the application of the Sinking Fund to gross debt, cash reserves and net debt figures for the months required were as follows in June, July, August and September. I will go through the months and then the individual items: gross public debt, £822.7 million in June and July, and £847.7 million in August and September; aggregate debt £797.3 million in June and July, and £822.3 million in August and September; cash reserves, £40.3 million, £24.6 million, £52.4 million and £40.8 million; net debt, £757 million, £772.7 million; £769.9 million and £781.5 million.

The balance on the General Sinking Fund on the requested date is the same as previously stated.

2080 There has been no effect on the listed bond portfolio of the GSB as a result of the sell-off in the bond markets.

The value of unclaimed deposits identified under section 11A of the Savings Bank Act since 2011 stands at £11,990.03, of which £9,821.58 was transferred to the Consolidated Fund on 30th June 2015.

2085 The air-raid shelter project is sponsored under the National Economic Plan in the manner described in the written answer to Question W27/2022. Prospective developers who are

interested in being sponsored under the National Economic Plan in respect of any planned project can contact my office and arrange a meeting with me.

2090 The Rooke Residential Home modular units are expected to be delivered in Gibraltar early next year.

The Jewish Home refurbishment will be at no cost to Government because the I&D contributions will be refunded in the current financial year.

2095 **Hon. K Azopardi:** Mr Speaker, I am not sure how the Minister wants to do it. It is my first experience of his rolling up of Mr Clinton's questions, which has now become traditional. I do not know if he prefers that I roll up all the supplementaries. I am happy to do that, if he wants to make a note, or I am happy to take them one by one. It is whatever he prefers. Let me just run through and then he can stop me if he thinks I should not ask them all together. It might be easier to do it that way.

2100 In relation to Question 306, he says there is no effect on the bond portfolio of the Gibraltar Savings Bank. Given the well-reported turbulence over the last two or three weeks, it would be helpful to get a more extended explanation as to why that is so. If it is so – and the hon. Member has said it is – that is good news, clearly, but it would be helpful to get a more extended answer on that.

2105 In relation to Question 308 on the air-raid shelter, he has explained that it is in the manner described in Written Answer 27/2022. I do not have that with me – my hon. colleague would have that, presumably, and he may wish to probe that next time – but he says if anyone wants to make an application they can contact his office and arrange a meeting. Can he expand on whether there is some kind of written criterion for the making of applications? If there is, what is it? How is it
2110 obtainable? If there is not a written criterion, what is the general in-principle criterion by which anyone listening – or viewing, of course – can then determine whether or not it is a good idea for them to make an application? Is there something that he can seek to explain that? Does he agree that it would be helpful for there to be some clarity on the process and on the criteria?

In relation to the modular units to arrive from China – and he says they are expected to arrive
2115 early next year – can he expand and say once these units arrive ...? If I have understood his previous explanations in the House, the modular unit form of construction is quicker once it is here because what you are basically laying is like Lego – if I can put it that way, in my simplistic view of construction. So how long will the Lego take for completion, assuming they arrive in January or February? Does he have advice as to the expected completion of the Rooke Nursing
2120 Home project?

In relation to the refund of the costs of the Jewish Home, can he say who is providing that refund?

2125 **Hon. Sir J J Bossano:** Mr Speaker, in terms of the effect on the bond, there are two reasons for it. One is that the indication before the turmoil was of increasing bank rates. There was a clear policy decision being taken some months before that the days of almost free money – some parts of Europe having a minus interest rate and the UK 0.05% – were coming to an end and central banks were saying that in order to curb inflation the central bank rates were going to go out ... and therefore, by definition, there was an inverted [inaudible] curve, which indicated the
2130 possibility of a recession and the inevitability of higher interest rates. So the portfolio that we had, which in any case is a portfolio which is principally in the short dated and which we hold to maturity and we do not re-value it on a ... If the hon. Member looks at the bond portfolio in the Savings Bank – which I produce a report on, at Mr Clinton's request, every month – the figures there are not constantly being revalued up and down. If they were, then in fact the value would
2135 be going up and down all the time. Since they are all short dated and they are all held to maturity, we do not sell them before the maturity date because they are short dated. We therefore had a portfolio which was changed before the turbulence in order to be proofed against the potential effect of the turbulence. Therefore, we did not expect it to affect us, it did not affect us and we

have been able to sell things where, in some cases, even without the turbulence we would have had a capital loss simply because we had bought above the par value, because the coupon might have been 4% and the yield 3%, therefore we paid more than 100% in the knowledge that the yield we were getting was in fact less than the coupon and that there would be a capital loss because we had paid more than 100%. But it is all in vehicles that do not go beyond 12 to 24 months, and the real big changes have been in the long term, which have gone into an inverse curve, where there has been a drop at the longer end even greater than at the shorter end. We have not had any long-dated bonds and that is where the big changes took place, so that is the explanation for that.

The next was the question on the written criteria, or how do people come ... The answer I gave last time is that when somebody comes and suggests to me ... because it is not a secret that we are prepared to include an initiative from a private developer. The number of developers in the Gibraltar economy you can count on the fingers of both hands, and therefore, if they are interested in exploring the possibility of us engaging with them and supporting them, and maybe helping in the investing, then they ask to see me and they come and explain what they are planning to do. In some cases I have to say I am not interested because this is just something they are doing to make money and we only get involved in things that are not merely to make money but also have an element of producing something long term for Gibraltar or meeting a social need. If somebody wants to build apartments to sell at £10,000 a square metre, then it is unlikely that I would be interested in sponsoring it, but if somebody comes along with a project and says we are going to try and see if we can get your support and involvement in doing, for example, something we are looking at, which is transition housing, where there would be privately funded and privately rented accommodation created for the people who are waiting to go into 50-50 and who are, at the moment, facing problems – which could get worse with interest rates going up – of having to meet payments on what they are going to buy and rents in the private sector, which are very high and leave little after paying two things ... That is a particular problem in the housing market for ordinary working people in that category, and I am exploring with some people whether it is possible to come up with a scheme where it would be for those people in that category alone ... so that it would be people who would not be getting the accommodation on a permanent basis but in order to be able to get out of something where they are paying maybe £1,500 a month to getting something where they would be paying £500 or £600. So there are things that are in the pipeline on which I am talking with different people.

Everybody in the market knows I am doing it and people contact my office and say, 'I have something I would like to discuss with you. Maybe the Government is interested in sponsoring this and helping me bring it about.' That is how the system works. We do not do forms criteria or anything else. Anybody who thinks there is something that fits the things we are doing in the National Economic Plan, which are to do with creating activity or creating social needs, which the Government at the moment is not able to do because we have a problem with a recurring deficit, which I am required to bring an end to ... and therefore I am looking for alternative ways of delivering things for our people which will not make our public finances go in the wrong direction, which is going further into the red instead going back to the black. That is basically the philosophy.

The modular units should be here in January, hopefully, but I cannot guarantee it because this is a question ... They are being manufactured now. The manufacturing should be finished by the end of this year, and then it is a question of ... I think it takes, normally, 42 days for the ship to arrive here. With all the units it will be one trip. And then the units, as the hon. Member says, will be slotted in, but you cannot just slot them in and leave them there like that. There will be several months of continued work here in terms of making all the connections in the structure that is now at the fifth floor, which is a concrete structure into which the modules will go. We have all the services joined still to the existing structure, and then this has to be joined to the units because the modules come fully furnished. That is to say each module already has a shower in each bedroom, a small kitchenette in each bedroom and all the services we are going to provide in the home. All this will require several months of further work. I hope the thing will be ready for

occupation maybe by May or June, around about that time, if everything goes to plan. With the construction and the delays in deliveries nowadays, you cannot be as confident as you would have been a few years ago, because everybody knows that there are shortages happening all the time as a result of the disruption there is in the global economy. The timeline is that kind of thing, so hopefully by January we will see the ship here, and then I think it will be a few weeks to put everything up, all 280-odd modules, and then there will be several more months of work on the building until it is finally complete and considered to be ready for occupation.

On the refurbishment of the Jewish Home, I have told the House before that the developer was CSS. In the previous financial year, we started funding things that needed to be paid before the construction phase started. That is things that were concerned with mainly invoices from architects, planning and that kind of thing. We financed that initially and it is going to be refunded. It would have already been refunded, but they are now considering a second phase, and there is a provision in this year's Budget if the second phase goes ahead. There has been a lot of discussion about the second phase of the Jewish Home. It may have the potential for taking in new people coming to retire to Gibraltar who are very attracted by the idea of a Jewish Home which meets all their needs, because we have a kosher kitchen and it has all been done exactly to the requirements of the community. We have not yet used any of the money in this year's Budget, so if it looks like the second phase does not go any further and they do not need any help from us, then that money in the I&D will be available for something else, and, in addition, we will have the money that we spent the year before coming back into the I&D Fund as revenue.

I do not think I have left anything out, but if I have the hon. Member can remind me.

Hon. K Azopardi: No, but just a couple of things that stem from those, if I may, just for clarity. Helpful answers on all those issues, but can I ask, going back to Question 308, which is the sponsored projects under the National Economic Plan, as I have understood the hon. Member's explanation, there is nothing in writing but there is a judgement in his discretion as to whether there is a social-economic need, public interest assessment, basically. So someone will come to him and he just makes an assessment of whether the project, as explained to him, is in the public interest for a variety of reasons. Can I just ask what is the effect of being a sponsored project under the National Economic Plan? What is the effect of the sponsorship in terms of the financial or other benefits that may arise from it being a sponsored project? He talked about the interesting idea on housing and I am not sure if he is able to share more details with the House on the kind of numbers he is looking at or the type of dwellings he is looking at to break the back of that. I suspect that one of the big challenges, if something like that gets off the ground, is to then only have them as transition dwellings, but that is by the by.

Again rolling up my questions in the interest of speed, can I ask, on Question 309, which is the Rooke Nursing Home project, is he envisaging the importation of labour for the purposes of that phase of the project, given that this must be a fairly specialist kind of job? When the boat arrives from China, or wherever it is coming from – (**A Member:** Slow boat.) the slow boat from China; no, 42 days is not a bad journey – are we getting labour, and, if so, how many people? Presumably that is quite a big job. He talked about the Lego kind of project being set up within weeks and then maybe months, but that is still quite fast, so presumably, if the answer to the question is there is labour involved, it is probably quite significant labour. Hearing him, I thought it was interesting that he said the modular units already arrive with, for example, showers – very interesting – and I was wondering how they marry the whole Chinese standards, British standards ... (*Interjection by Hon. Sir J J Bossino*) They are all British standards, built in China but to British standards? Okay, very interesting. (*Interjections*)

Turning to his first answer, have I understood his answer correctly? Is it that the Government has drawn down on the £50 million amount budgeted by 1st September? Is that the correct understanding of the figures he rattled through at the beginning in respect of debt and so on, that they have drawn down the £50 million?

Hon. Sir J J Bossano: Mr Speaker, to answer the last question first, the answer is yes, we have drawn down. That is why the gross debt is up, having used the money. That is why the net debt is not as up as the gross debt.

In terms of the importation of labour, we are importing labour to do the integration of the modules into the structure. The labour is being imported from the UK and they are UK workers – not Chinese workers – who have done this already in the UK.

The modules are to UK standards because the company has been supplying it to the UK before supplying it to us. It has been certified here as being of that standard because we have a partner in China. One of the problems we sometimes can get in ordering stuff from China is that what goes into the container may not be what you ordered and you find out when it gets to the destination, so we have people who are our partners, who are supervising so that we get what we are supposed to be getting, as a safeguard of the quality of what we are getting.

The partner we have has a very big presence in the construction industry in the United Kingdom. It is responsible for building the Manchester Airport City, which was a £500 million development, and it is very big in the Midlands. It is involved in something like a total of £3 billion in construction work. Because we have still maintained the EU system of posted workers, the workers working for our partner in the Midlands will come out here as employees of our partner, still paid by the parent company in the Midlands, and we will pay them, which is the system of posted worker that has existed within the European Union, where one could go to provide a job in another member state and the job would be on the basis of going there, doing the work and then coming back, and you pay tax in the state in which you do the work but you are covered by the social insurance in your home state. We have not removed any of those elements of our membership of the EU because we put on hold, when the negotiations started, the law that we had repealing these things. This is something we are interested in continuing to have with the UK anyway, so that it works in both directions and so that we can send workers there to do work and they can send them here. We think there is potential for that, if we are able to do it, but at the moment it is working in one direction only, so people can send posted workers from the UK to do work here and they continue to be employees of the parent and not employees of the customer. So we are, in that aspect of this project, the customers. We will have some of our own workers here working alongside them, so they will acquire some of the skills, and in future projects we may need to be less reliant.

At the end of the day, because of all the restrictions in the lockdowns and that there have been in China all this time, it was actually cheaper to bring in UK workers than to bring them from China because of the difficulty of travelling in and out of China. If somebody comes here from China, when he goes back he has to spend three weeks in a hotel before they will let him out. We then have to pay for the three weeks the guy is going to be in the hotel, even if he has only been a week here. We did our sums and because the company had ... I think they probably only need to send something like 20 guys to do this. It really is something that happens very quickly once the modules are here, but there is still quite a lot of work to do in integrating the services and this is why it takes several months.

The vessel that brings the modules will only stay here for seven days and then, after that, we have a penalty, which I think is something like £10,000 a day, so it is very important that we do the work very quickly while the ship is here because these things are very expensive.

In terms of the sponsoring, it depends what it is. It is not that I have total freedom to decide what is in Gibraltar's interest or not; it is that much of it is already spelled out in the manifesto. We said in the manifesto we were going to do more elderly people's homes. We thought we would have the money to do it in 2019 when we wrote the manifesto. The reality is that we want to be able to do as much as possible of our manifesto, and if we can find a way of doing it in partnership with the private sector, where there is a profit element for the private sector and we get what we want for our citizens, then it makes sense to do it, and this is what I am doing.

For example, in the case of the investor I mentioned in my last year's Budget, and I think it was again in this year's Budget, which was a reconversion, which is the circular economy using a new

2295 invention of a vehicle which is predominantly for the taxi trade, the Gibraltar company that did
that is a sponsored company under the National Economic Plan. What does that mean? It does
not mean we are putting in any money, but I actually went to support the international launch in
Italy. The company has now obtained orders for quite a few thousand of these vehicles in Italy.
They have bought two unused car factories in Italy and I went there with the owners to talk to
2300 investors on the basis of the confidence we have in this product, the fact that it is a product that
meets the fundamental approach to climate change, which I am convinced is the only one that
will work because it is a product where it is ... The first vehicle is for the taxi trade. The taxi trade
vehicle will be provided to people in the trade for a higher rate, which will be €1 per kilometre.
The vehicle is provided free. The battery is recharged free. The maintenance is free. The vehicle
2305 belongs to the company and not to the driver, so if you have a company that has a fleet of a
thousand taxis, they can get a thousand of these cars free and the only element is that they pay a
euro a kilometre for the use. Why is it better for the climate? Well, apart from the fact that the
whole thing is battery driven and the battery can be changed in six minutes because it goes into a
unit that takes the battery out automatically and puts another one in and then that is recharged
2310 and the car carries on, you have now an incentive for manufacturers to make things that last.
When you are hiring something, the longer it lasts the more money you make, but if you are selling
it, the sooner it wears out and they cannot buy another one, the more money you make. So you
then use the profit motive of the capital system to produce long-lasting goods instead of having
an inbuilt sell-by date so that people continually have to replace what they have. My commitment
2315 to this company, more than anything else, is not just because if it is as successful as it has the
potential to be, it will probably be the biggest company we have ever had registered in Gibraltar
in terms of capitalisation, but I want it to succeed because of what it will do for the planet and the
climate. I think it is a good thing for Gibraltar to have it here and it is a good thing for the
Government to sponsor it, because it is a good thing for humanity.

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Mr Speaker: Next question.

Q311/2022

Disability benefit –

Number of applications outstanding

Clerk: Question 311/2022. The Hon. D A Feetham.

2325 **Hon. D A Feetham:** Mr Speaker, in relation to the answer provided to W28/2022, please state
how many of those outstanding applications/appeals remain to be determined.

Clerk: Answer, the Hon. the Minister for Social Security, Economic Development and
Enterprise.

2330 **Minister for Social Security, Economic Development, Enterprise, Telecommunications and
the GSB (Hon. Sir J J Bossano):** Mr Speaker, in relation to the answer provided to W28/2022, the
following outstanding applications/appeals remain to be determined: two applications
outstanding for three years, 10 applications outstanding for two years and 48 applications
outstanding in the last year.

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Hon. D A Feetham: So in reality there has been no movement, Mr Speaker. The answer last
time round was that there had been two applications outstanding for more than three years, or
appeals, 10 outstanding for more than two years and 55 for more than a year. It has come down
by seven in the year category, but no movement in the two and three categories.

2340 What does the hon. Gentleman say to somebody like ...? I saw a lady last week. She had a leg amputated as a consequence of bacterial infection and she has lost a substantial part of her hearing. She has an application that is outstanding for longer than a year, so she would be in the two-year category. What does he, on behalf of his Government, have to say to somebody like that who has been waiting for over a year to have her application for disability benefit determined?

2345 **Hon. Sir J J Bossano:** Mr Speaker, what I would say, if I were the one who had the power to determine it, is she should not have had to wait that long, but I do not have the power to determine it. The system we have is dependent on the people who have not been functioning for a long time. They tell me that the disruption to the Social Services Adult Care recently, where
2350 everybody had to be working from home, has not helped and that they have really only restarted the work in September, and we are in October. There is no way to satisfy that lady or any excuse that can be made. If it were a decision that I could take, I would, but I cannot.

The first thing I asked when I got this data was why have you started with the people with one year instead of the people with three? I would have thought you would start with the people
2355 waiting the longest. They tell me that of the ones who have been there longest, of the two applications ... one, the assessment was received in October 2022. What happens is there is a panel. I do not think there are time limits on the panel. The assessment was made in October 2022 and then the assessment was sent to the director on 12th October. So that is one. It has not been resolved because the director has to take a decision on the recommendation of the panel.
2360 Presumably that will be done after this meeting – very quickly, hopefully.

Of the two that are there for three years, they tell me the other application is pending documentation to complete the claim, that the Department has written to the applicant by letter on two occasions, on 10th August 2021 and on 29th November 2021 and that the person has also
2365 been contacted over the phone on 4th May 2022 and advised in all instances to provide the relevant information, and he has not done it. That is the explanation I was given for the two people there for three years. It seems to me that one finally is about to be resolved and the other one seems to be in the hands of the applicant to resolve it by actually delivering whatever information they have been asking him for three years to deliver.

Of the ones that have been there for two years, which is 10 applicants, they say three have
2370 already been assessed and are now with the director and seven are still with the panel and have not yet been sent to the director, but apparently there is action taking place.

All I can say is I am sorry for the people who have been waiting. I wish it was something I could resolve. I sincerely hope that when the next House comes in I will be able to tell the Members that it has all been done and we have made further progress on the other ones in the last 12 months.
2375 Certainly I can assure the House, Mr Speaker, that I am as keen to see these cases resolved as the hon. Member opposite.

Hon. D A Feetham: Mr Speaker, I am just going to read out to the hon. Gentleman a message that I received five minutes ago from somebody else. I have not seen her, but she has sent me a
2380 message:

I just wanted to reach out regarding disability benefit applications. I am feeling rather helpless at the moment. I initially applied mid-2020 and was rejected, and I requested an appeal last August. During the initial application only my GHA records could have been reviewed as they did not contact any of the private doctors that I had listed. I have since been sending updates on any changes to my medication or circumstances, but have not heard anything since April when I received an acknowledgement email of some files I sent. I have been trying to call regularly, but never get through and have not had any response to more recent emails. I have finally got through today, spoken to [...]

– I am not going to mention the public servant –

and have been told there is a likely further two years' wait due to backlog.

That is what this lady has sent me. I am not inventing this message that has been sent to me. Does he know anything about a two-year backlog in determination of applications?

2385 **Hon. Sir J J Bossano:** Obviously, I do not, because that is in conflict with the information I have provided to the House, which is the information that has been provided to me. The two-year backlog would be the people who have been there for two years. If the hon. Member gives me more specific information I will certainly investigate it, but this is a very difficult area because the level of information that you can get cannot be one that identifies the individual who is
2390 complaining, unless the individual personally comes to you and says, 'I want you to look into my case.' I do not get names and I do not get details of what is wrong with the people who are making the applications.

The system, as I mentioned in the earlier question, has been that there is now a much bigger group of people with a right. As I explained in the question that was asked previously, when we
2395 came in, in 2011, there was, as there had been for many years, a list of medical conditions, and either you had the medical condition or you did not. Originally, it started with Down's syndrome only, and then further conditions were added at different stages, so the eligibility grew as conditions were added. If you did not have one of the eligible conditions you could not apply, never mind be treated. When the concept was altered to the disability not being the criterion but
2400 the ability to lead a normal life being the criterion, then, in effect, the potential of people not being able to cope ... As I said in my previous example, the reality is that two people can have an identical ... Somebody can have a stroke and, as a result of recovering from that stroke, be limited in how much of a life they can lead, and there are people who make a huge effort to be self-sufficient and not depend on anybody. If they apply and put down all the details of how they are
2405 managing, they probably will be rejected because they are doing okay, whereas somebody who has a different approach to life or is less strong-willed may become incapable of doing anything on their own, and they will get the allowance. So the allowance and the assessment are now driven by the criteria of how well you are managing your condition, rather than how bad the condition is. Somebody, for example, who is not able to perform things will get it and may be visibly less ill
2410 than somebody else who has been rejected. This is something that is difficult for people to understand. There are people who seem to have very little wrong with them who get the allowance, and there are people who have lots of things wrong with them who do not get the allowance.

I think the change was made on the basis that there was increasing pressure from people asking
2415 why it was Down's syndrome only; then why were people with autism not included, so autism was included; then why people having an accident and being in a wheelchair were not included, so that was planned in; and then, eventually a policy decision was taken by the Minister at the time to take a completely different look at it, and that system then created a much bigger number. So, as I mentioned, of the 28 that had been discontinued, we now have 490 compared with 116 in
2420 2011.

This is the system we have. If there is a way of improving it, I am prepared to look at any suggestions, but at the moment all I can do is report to the House the information that I am being
provided with. I can tell the hon. Member that if anybody who approaches him is willing for him to give me the details, I will then ask specific questions as to why this is happening to this person,
2425 but I cannot do it any other way because I do not have access to files, I do not have access to names and I do not have access to their conditions. Data protection prevents all those things from being made available to me because I am not a professional entitled to have access to that information.

2430 **Hon. D A Feetham:** Mr Speaker, I understand everything the hon. Gentleman has said. This goes to the issue of rejection. We have discussed this and we have debated it. There has been a debate. We have suggested various ways forward, the Minister has not agreed with those, but that is a different aspect of the debate.

What we are talking about now is the very significant delays in the determination of applications. That is what we really are talking about now. Does he not agree with me that really, on something like this, where you are ...? Sometimes people try it on and I accept that. This is the reality of anywhere in the world, that some people may try it on and may be not deserving, or less deserving, but there are people who are genuinely deserving who are not trying it on. I have just mentioned one person. Does he not agree with me that because there are genuine cases and genuine hardship created by those genuine cases, there is a duty on the administration – which you head at the end of the day; I know it is the Civil Service, but you are responsible to this House for that administration – to determine applications expeditiously and there is no reason why an application of this sort, if all the information has been provided, should not be determined in three months, four months, five months, six months at the most? Therefore, does he not agree with me that perhaps a system where the Minister says, ‘No, hang on a minute, this is not acceptable and I want applications to be determined in a maximum of six months’ ...? There is nothing wrong with that, actually, for a Minister to basically take that position and make that statement to his Department – does he not agree with me?

Hon. Sir J J Bossano: I agree with him, Mr Speaker. First of all, I do not agree that it is a different thing, because it is the same people who say they reject it as the people who say they accept it. The people who review and the people who grant it are the same people. These people are doctors and specialists.

Hon. D A Feetham: I am not saying granting it, I am saying determining one way or the other.

Hon. Sir J J Bossano: Determine whether they get it or they do not. (**Hon. D A Feetham:** Yes.) Yes, well, there is granting it or rejecting it, okay? These are the same people who remove it. It is the same body that removes it.

Hon. D A Feetham: I know that.

Hon. Sir J J Bossano: So it is not a different issue. The people who take the decision to remove it and the people who take the decision to recommend that it should be given are the same people. Those people are a finite number of people, and because we have changed the criteria, there are now hundreds of people who can apply who could not apply before 2011. (*Interjection by Hon. D A Feetham*)

I can say to the people in my Department this is not acceptable, but the people in my Department cannot say to the group of doctors what they are doing is not acceptable, because they are not subject to direction. As I understand the system, we send the stuff to them and then we wait for them to come back with their recommendations, and then the director takes a decision based on the assessment that the panel has made and the recommendation that the panel has made, which is give it or do not give it. He then takes the decision to do it.

It is clear to me that the system is working too slowly for the volume of people who are now in the pipeline, which was not there before. I do not know whether there are enough people in the system in Gibraltar in the Health Service such that we can take them from doing something else to spend time doing this. I am not saying there are more deserving or less deserving cases, because I am not qualified to make that judgement. The criterion is not that anybody is less deserving because they are trying to milk the system. I cannot imagine you can invent something you do not have. I have told him if the criterion is ‘is the person able to lead a normal life?’, there is an element of subjectivity about it. This is not the same as saying if somebody has cancer they are entitled to disability. They either have it or they do not, which is what used to happen before 2011. You had a list of illnesses, people made a case for an addition to that list, and therefore there were 120 or 130 people at any one time who were getting the allowance. The position now is that there are four times as many people and therefore there are many more applicants.

In terms of other questions in other areas, it is quite evident that we seem to be having lots of health problems now in numbers, where we were not before. When the hon. Member asks me about disability and says, 'I cannot understand how we have got so many children in school with learning disabilities compared with what there was in the past, a massive increase.' That does not mean people are making it up. If it is real, then the most serious thing is that it should be happening, not what we can do for them: what is going wrong that this is happening?

What I am saying to the hon. Member is the system that we have, if there is a way in which it can be improved so that the people who have to take the decision are able to take the decision faster, then I am all for it, but I cannot instruct the experts on how long they should take on each case. Obviously, if there is a given number of experts and an increasing number of applicants, there is going to be a problem in how quickly it is being processed. The argument is that they have been out of action for a very long time and they only really started normalising the process in September, and I have told the hon. Member what has been happening since September.

If there are people who have a particularly strong case which is self-evident and they are not getting the response they should be getting and they go to him, then just like when there is somebody looking for work or somebody looking for a home and they go to the Opposition, if the information is put in my hand or in the hand of anybody else, as far as I am concerned I am grateful that I get to know that there is a case where I need to investigate if the Department has treated the person as they ought to be treated. Therefore, the only thing I can do, in terms of specific cases, is commit myself to asking for a detailed explanation of why this is happening. As a general case, all I can hope is that if they tell me the system has now come back into action in September, we will see a difference from now on from what it has been like up to now, but I do not think I can do more than that ... and agree with him that everything is wrong is something that ... just so that he can say 'Bossano agreed with me that everything is wrong.' That is not what I am going to do.

Chief Minister (Hon. F R Picardo): Mr Speaker, if I can be of assistance to the hon. Gentleman, he said, 'What should I say to this lady who is an amputee, who has been waiting so long?' The answer is very simple. It is that as a result of the reforms that the Government implemented, she can claim. She could not claim before the reforms that this Government implemented because it was not a disability she was born with.

Mr Speaker: Did the Leader of the Opposition want to pose a question? He indicated earlier that he did.

Hon. K Azopardi: Well, I did, but it was similar to the hon. Member's question. The only thing that was going through my mind when I was listening to the Father of the House give the answer was when he said, 'I cannot do more about it.' I did, initially when he gave his answer, detect a sense of frustration that the delay is big. There are 60 families affected and these are real situations, and some people – 12 families – have been waiting more than two years and two for more than three years, so these are real situations where people feel, whether or not ... Some of them will be granted and some of them will not be granted, but those are real situations where people feel that their life is slightly on hold, where they could get a bit more support. In a very difficult cost-of-living crisis it would be helpful if these things were determined.

I could sense the frustration. He says, 'I do not know what more can be done.' This is a non-statutory system and so on, and I am aware that there is a criterion, so the suggestion that there should be an introduction in the criterion by the Minister of a time limit for the determination of applications by the panel and by the Department is a sensible way forward if there has been this backlog. The only question would be the size of the time limit, but I am not sure if the hon. Member wishes to take that on board. From the answer he gave my colleague, it appears he does not think that that is something that can be considered, but I would ask him to reflect on it further because if the Department has made a criterion which governs the process, it is not so radical a step to just introduce something more to say that these applications will be determined within x

period in the same way as other things that there may be time limits for. People are entitled to see a determination of their rights within a reasonable period.

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Hon. Sir J J Bossano: I am told that since 1st September 28 cases have been heard by the panel. That is one a day. Is one a day too little? I suppose that it is not just a question of hearing somebody and saying yes or no. These people have to spend time examining the thing to make sure that they are being fair to all the applicants, that they are being fair to the ones where the recommendation is negative and the ones where the recommendation is positive.

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He mentions the one and the three years. I have told him of the two that are from three years ... The first thing I asked when I was given the answer was why have you started with the people who have been waiting one year instead of starting with the people waiting three? The logical thing, as a layman, is that you want to help the guys who have been waiting longest. I was told, 'One does not answer our questions,' so clearly there is something that is required in the criteria which they have been asking for, for two years by phone and by letter, and the person does not answer. That one of the two in three years is likely to be there for three, four or five, presumably, until he produces the information they are asking for. On the other one, I am told they have already done an assessment and the assessment has already been sent to the director, on 12th October, which is a few days ago. That is what is happening with the two people from three years ago, which he mentioned. One is stuck in the system because they are asking for something the person does not have or the person does not want to give. The other one, apparently, is in the process of being resolved but I do not know whether the resolution of that one will mean that the panel will have recommended that the disability should be awarded or that it should not be.

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Accelerating the process does not necessarily mean that everybody who has applied is going to get a positive answer; accelerating the process means a decision is taken. Sometimes, if you give people less time to make a decision, you may be doing a disservice to the applicant in that they say let's say no to everybody, without being as thorough as they need to be. I think 28 cases on 1st September, if they keep at that rate, should produce a considerable reduction in the backlog.

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All I am telling the hon. Member is I am not unsympathetic to the concerns they have about the people affected, but the system we have is designed to do something which requires more complex judgement than the system that existed before, which was simply that if you claimed to be affected by a particular condition you were examined and either you had it or you did not have it. You could be leading a totally normal life otherwise and you got Disability Allowance because you had that particular condition. That did not take much decision making. It was simply a yes or a no. If it is to what degree you are able to lead a normal life, there is a level of subjectivity there and you could easily get some people saying, 'I think they should get the Disability Allowance because they are finding it very difficult to lead a normal life,' and somebody else might have a different judgement. So the people on the panel really need to be conscientious and look into these things in depth, given the subjectivity that the nature of the criteria require, which is an assessment of whether they can manage. This is why, I suppose, they revisit it because the person might be able to cope better further along the condition than they did at the beginning. Some people initially may have an accident which creates a level of disability from which they can recover. Other people may have a lifelong condition, where they are born with a genetic change which is a handicap to them and is not going to disappear.

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I have already told the Members opposite I am prepared to go into any individual case where the person is willing that I should do so. If they are not willing ... they are entitled to their privacy. I am prepared to go back and monitor how this is happening and bring back the information, hopefully that there is less delay and that we are progressing faster. I do not think the hon. Member is going to expect me to be able to go further than this.

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Mr Speaker: Next question.

Q312/2022
Apprenticeships –
Whether continuing locally

Clerk: Question 312/2022. The Hon. Ms M D Hassan Nahon.

2590 **Hon. Ms M D Hassan Nahon:** Can Government confirm whether apprenticeships are in place and continuing locally?

Clerk: Answer, the Hon. the Minister for Social Security, Economic Development and Enterprise.

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Minister for Social Security, Economic Development, Enterprise, Telecommunications and the GSB (Hon. Sir J J Bossano): Yes, Mr Speaker.

2600 **Hon. Ms M D Hassan Nahon:** Mr Speaker, insofar as electrical apprenticeships go, I have an email here, sent to an aspiring apprentice by the Ministry of Economic Development, saying that there would be no further intakes until a suitable instructor is recruited to fill in for the ex-instructor who recently retired. So my question is until when will aspiring apprentices be waiting to start learning the typical trades offered by these schemes?

2605 **Hon. Sir J J Bossano:** As given in the answer to the other question, the trainers we need to recruit, and therefore people will be taken in when we have the people to do the training.

In the case of the electrical apprentices, there is a problem in placing them. We have a situation where there are now two people in level 3 who have been removed from the firm they were with because there were not getting the opportunity to do the work they needed to do to be able to qualify and finish their training. There is a problem in that you cannot commit to take people on if you cannot deliver what is required for them to complete their studies.

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Hon. Ms M D Hassan Nahon: Mr Speaker, I appreciate that answer, but I would like to ask the Minister what the prognosis is to find trainers. Obviously, I think it would affect the quality of jobs being done and market trade if we do not have these apprenticeships taking place because we cannot find the trainers.

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Hon. Sir J J Bossano: I have said we have vacancies and we have now advertised the vacancies, but even if we have the trainers, the difficulty in the numbers we can take and the difficulty with the people who are there finishing is not the trainers; it is that there are things they have in their modules which they specifically have to do in the real world. They cannot do it in the training centre. The awarding bodies accept in the early stages that when they are being taught they are asked by their trainers to do things. So, if somebody has to dismantle an electric module he can do it in the workshop in the first year and put it together and the trainer will look to see if he has done it properly, but to get to level 3 he has to be doing it in a real environment, in the market, with an employer, and if we do not have employers who are providing that kind of work then we have a problem in them being able to finish. There are people who are at level 3 and we have had to remove them from one particular company and try to put them in another. We have not yet succeeded in persuading the other to take them, but I hope to do so next month so that they can actually do what they are missing in their module. This is part of the problem, in that you cannot force people to take somebody on, or they do not have that kind of work. There are people who have electrical workshops and do electrical work in houses and so on, but there are certain things that the module requires and you have to tick them all, and some are more difficult than others.

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In one particular case – I do not want to mention the name of the company – it was clear that the lads we had there would never finish because they were not getting the opportunity to do a

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particular level of more sophisticated work which the City and Guilds qualification requires them to have. What happens then is that the work is done in the workshop and the trainer goes from the training centre to the workshop to see the work being done in a real environment. The difficulty is there, rather than in the training. I think we will not have a problem in having applicants for the training, but how many we can take depends on how many placements. In the electrical trade they only spend the first year ... and the next two years they have to be out with employers, still as employees of EDEC because we pay the wages of the apprentices. They are on the Minimum Wage, which is much higher than the wage of an apprentice in the UK, but even though they have them as free labour as an incentive, sometimes they put them on menial jobs and they never get the level of experience that is required. So, until we have more available companies willing to provide the work we need, we are limited as to how many trainees we can take in. As far as I am concerned, the more we train, as long as the market is there, the better.

Q313-16/2022

**Rooke residential home – whether private or public facility;
Mount Alvernia – option for existing residents to remain; criteria and financing terms for residents moving to new facility**

Clerk: Question 313/2022. The Hon. Miss M D Hassan Nahon.

Hon. Ms M D Hassan Nahon: Will the Rooke complex be a private or public elderly residential facility?

Clerk: Answer, the Hon. the Minister for Social Security, Economic Development and Enterprise.

Minister for Social Security, Economic Development, Enterprise, Telecommunications and the GSB (Hon. Sir J J Bossano): Mr Speaker, I will answer this question with Questions 314 to 316.

Clerk: Question 314/2022. The Hon. Ms M D Hassan Nahon.

Hon. Ms M D Hassan Nahon: Will residents who wish to continue to reside at Mount Alvernia, despite the new Rooke facility, be able to do so?

Clerk: Question 315/2022. The Hon. Ms M D Hassan Nahon.

Hon. Ms M D Hassan Nahon: Will residents of Mount Alvernia who choose to move to the new proposed Rooke complex be expected to subsidise their stay or will the residents' financing terms be the same as are currently in place?

Clerk: Question 316/2022. The Hon. Ms M D Hassan Nahon.

Hon. Ms M D Hassan Nahon: What criteria will be used to prioritise residents wishing to move to the Rooke site from Mount Alvernia?

Clerk: Answer, the Hon. the Minister for Social Security, Economic Development and Enterprise.

Hon. Sir J J Bossano: Mr Speaker, any resident of Mount Alvernia who prefers to move to the new home will be able to do so, and those who wish to continue living at Mount Alvernia will be able to do so.

2685 There is no current consideration of applying criteria as to who may move, since there is no way of knowing whether any of the current residents would seek to move to the new facility, and this is only likely to happen after the facility is handed over by the contractor and potential residents see what the new residence offers and exercise the choice of moving or staying in their present accommodation.

2690 The residents in the future residential home at Rooke will continue to contribute to their costs on the same basis as they do currently at Mount Alvernia, if sponsored by the Government.
The residential home will be privately owned and operated.

Hon. Ms M D Hassan Nahon: Mr Speaker, if I can ask a couple of supplementaries on these few questions. Firstly, the Minister has said it is going to be privately operated, so does this mean that residents are going to have a different type of service than they have at the moment at Mount Alvernia? Has it been weighed out as to whether the new standards that are going to be applied will match the traditional ones that we have now, where the residents have the full gamut of GHA services and resources, like ERS on call and facilities like medical equipment and things like that, which, from what I understand, they will go without if it is a private arrangement? How will the Government ensure that the same standards are met?

Hon. Sir J J Bossano: This is a residential home, not a nursing home, and therefore the entitlement to medical care is with the National Health Service and not the residential home. This is a place where people are living, not where people are treated for illnesses. This is what Mount Alvernia used to be many years ago. That is how it started and that is what it was supposed to be. At the moment, there are doctors in Mount Alvernia. There will not be doctors here. The doctors will visit like they visit any patient at home, or the patient will go to the Hospital to see the doctor.

2710 This is the same issue that the hon. Member thought was happening with the Jewish Home, which is not happening. That is to say the people in the Jewish Home get access to the Health Service the same as they would if they were in their houses, because it is a residential home, the same as the Jewish Home is a residential home.

Hon. Ms M D Hassan Nahon: Mr Speaker, I thank the Minister for that answer. It is interesting that he brings up my own take on the Jewish Home, because when we did bring up the issue of the Jewish Home I was told it was actually still public and not private. Now I am being told that the new Mount Alvernia is going to be private but on the same basis as the Jewish Home. I think the Minister should really keep a little bit of consistency when he offers us these new incentives, because we are seeing a complete change of heart in his reply.

2720 When he talks about this being residential and not a nursing home, my concern is that these residents obviously are just going to be getting older and frailer, so when he talks about no doctors and no medical set-up it is concerning. I would ask him how they expect to keep the patients ... He talks about a different set-up, but right now Mount Alvernia has that care, has that ERS set-up. We are talking about the same people, who are going to be transferred and lose that level of care, so how can the Minister be comfortable that these vulnerable and elderly patients are going to have the same level of care when it has clearly been stipulated that that will be changed and reduced?

Hon. Sir J J Bossano: I do not know whether the hon. Member has a problem hearing or understanding. Nobody is going to be moved. The first thing I have told her is that the people who are in Mount Alvernia are not going to be moved anywhere, unless they wish to move. When the home is ready and finished, they will see what there is, and if they are as sceptical about it as she is they will say they will stay where they are.

2735 When she asks what is going to happen with the people who are moved, they are not going to be moved. They will know what the services are and they will decide if they do not want to move to the new one, and then they will stay in Mount Alvernia; and if they want to move, then they will move. We are giving them the choice of another place which we think is an improvement to the facilities that are there in terms of the location and in terms of the way the facilities are being put together – people having individual rooms, having shelves in their rooms and having a much bigger, better and properly designed thing.

2740 It is not an addition to the GHA, it is not a mini-hospital, and we are not going to have people being provided with hospital services, which they are provided with in the ERS because the ERS is part of the GHA. If she looks in the Budget Book she will see that the GHA has a page that says 'GHA ERS' and therefore the people who are getting treatment in Mount Alvernia are getting treatment from the GHA. In a privately operated and privately owned home, there will be people who are there because they want to be there and the Government will pay the same support that they pay in Mount Alvernia, and there will be people who are paying for it themselves, who will not get the support from the Government. If those people are entitled to Health Service cover – the ones who are paying for themselves – they will be able to access it, and if they are not, they will have to have medical insurance to do it. This is how it happens in the United Kingdom and has been happening for many years, and nobody has thought there was anything wrong with it.

2755 **Hon. Ms M D Hassan Nahon:** Mr Speaker, how does the Minister propose to present this choice to people who are old and frail and might not know exactly what is best for them, what route to take, whether the resident route or the medical route? Who is going to be assisting in ensuring that an objective decision is made by a resident who will most likely need to be helped to decide where they are? The Minister is telling us that it will be their choice. I would like to know, because I find that a little bit concerning, to be honest.

2760 **Hon. Sir J J Bossano:** I will tell her when the time comes to make the choice, Mr Speaker.

Hon. Ms M D Hassan Nahon: Mr Speaker, I will wait with bated breath for that strategy. Given that the Minister did bring up the Jewish Home and he did say a couple of months ago that it was public, how is it he is now telling me that the new facility will be much like the new Jewish Home, which is private, as I had told him and he had told me not?

2770 **Hon. Sir J J Bossano:** I do not know what the hon. Member understands by public or private. The Jewish Home building, which is owned by the trust of John Mackintosh, has never been owned by the Government. It is sub-let and it will be sub-let to the new operator, who will pay for the ... We have somebody who is interested in investing in the building and that investment will be what will yield a return to pay for the money that has been invested in creating it.

2775 When the building was nearing completion, the Jewish community asked for quotes to operate it. They had three different companies coming forward with quotes and they selected one of the three. Certainly people are very happy in the Jewish Home. There is now the possibility of expanding it because there are indications that there are people who are willing to go into it privately, who would not be funded by the Government. Of course, if we get people who come in privately it is a good thing because the cost to the Government may be able to be reduced. That is because it is proved to be a successful transformation which has met with the approval of everyone in the community. Of course, the reality is that we expect and hope that the Rooke Home will be as successful as the Jewish Home has turned out to be.

2785 I am sure that if one wants to take a negative view of life, then one can speculate on all the things that could go wrong instead of speculating on all the things that could go right. I dare say that if she were on this side, she would be speculating that it is all going to go right. Now that she is there, and likely to stay there, she is speculating that it is all going to go wrong. Well, the answer is she should wait and see.

At the end of the day, we are being accused of going to be moving people down there. Nobody is going to move anybody. If the people there are old and frail and they cannot make a decision, the answer is they will not move because they cannot say, 'I want to move.' Or, if they do not have any family members ... I think we need to get the home finished and then we need to see just how good a job has been done and how attractive it is, and how good it is for the people who are there, who are the people who are going to be the beneficiaries, and how much better it is than the facilities there are now. If they are not better, then the people will say, 'No, I do not want to go.' The people may say, 'I do not want to go because I am used to being here, even if the other one is better.' Even if they are old and frail and they have family or relatives who will do it, and if they do not have family they will have to ask somebody, but nobody is going to be told they have to go out of Mount Alvernia because we are closing Mount Alvernia, which was one of the stories going round a few weeks ago. That is not going to happen.

I think when the time comes we will see what happens, and then, if there are opportunities for her to criticise what has happened she, no doubt, will do the criticising then, but she should wait.

Hon. Ms M D Hassan Nahon: Mr Speaker, I am sorry the Minister does not appreciate that our role as Opposition is to express any items of concern. It is not about negative or positive, but there is nothing more important than the most vulnerable in our community and we are duty bound to ask for clarifications. I would expect the Minister, instead of dipping into his usual jibes, to respect the Opposition's role and answer questions.

Can I just ask, in terms of the Mount Alvernia building, if only a handful of residents decide to stay there, how will the Government manage running two sites when one is almost empty and the other one ...? Will it be cost effective, or will it then maybe embark on another option for the Mount Alvernia building?

Hon. Sir J J Bossano: I am sorry she thinks that I am doing something nasty to her and intruding into her right to ask questions. She is asking entirely speculative questions which I have no obligation to answer. What happens if only a few stay? If only a few stay, when only a few stay you ask me the question. What happens if the roof falls in? She postulates a potential situation in the future and then asks me to speculate on what I would do if what she thinks might happen does happen. That is not what parliamentary questions are about. Parliamentary questions are about getting information about things that are taking place, not something that might or might not take place, which I might or might not respond to. The answer is if there is that problem, my job is to find solutions to problems and I will find a way of solving it when the time comes.

Mr Speaker: Next question.

Hon. K Azopardi: Can I just ask on this, Mr Speaker? The hon. Member says people are going to have the choice to go from Mount Alvernia to the new home, which will be privately operated. Assuming people want to go there, how is the Government going to achieve that? Once people go there, is there some kind of control of the services provided, so that the terms and conditions do not change, so that having taken the decision to go to the new environment, the new operator does not change the aspects of the services that they were enjoying at Mount Alvernia in a new environment in a way that is undesirable – for example, by levying fees on certain services? Presumably, that would be part of the arrangement that the Government would have with the operator. Would that be a fair way of describing it?

Hon. Sir J J Bossano: I think I have covered that by saying the relationship in terms of the persons who are sponsored by the Government – that is to say the persons for whom the Government is responsible, because the facility can take private people who come in and are charged a rate, but the Government will have nothing to do with that ... In the case of the Government ones, there will be a fee per person that we negotiate and then each person would

make a different contribution to the fee, just like they do in Mount Alvernia. In Mount Alvernia, for example, it costs us £98,000 per person. Nobody pays £98,000, but there are people who will pay £1,000 and there are people who will pay more, depending on their pension and their income. That is the system that exists in Mount Alvernia and that is the system that exists in the new one, except that we hope and expect that because it is a bigger place and there are more facilities there, the actual cost per individual will be less.

From the Government's point of view, we have a facility that we think has a lot in favour of it and we will be able to take care of more people without a big increase in our budget. That is the advantage to the Government of the new facility. So nobody is going to be charged for anything if they are ours. We will pay whatever has to be paid, which we will have to negotiate with the person ... which will have to meet all the standards that are required, which will be subjected to regular inspections of quality, and then from the person's point of view they will pay no more than they would pay if they were still at Mount Alvernia.

Mr Speaker: Next question.

JUSTICE, EQUALITY AND PUBLIC STANDARDS AND REGULATIONS

Q348/2022

**Development Plan –
Expected date of publication**

Clerk: Question 348/2022. The Hon. D J Bossino.

Hon. D J Bossino: I understand it is the only question the Minister is fielding in this session, Mr Speaker.

Please state when the Government now expects to be in a position to publish the Development Plan.

Clerk: Answer, the Hon. the Minister for Justice, Equality and Standards.

Minister for Justice, Equality and Public Standards and Regulations (Hon. Miss S J Sacramento): Mr Speaker, the Government is currently considering options for the retendering of the preparation of a new Gibraltar Development Plan. Following the award of a tender, work will be able to commence on the Plan before the end of the current financial year.

Hon. D J Bossino: So, if I have understood her correctly, does she think the Plan will be completed before the end of the financial year? That is okay. So, the process started for the tender, the commissioning of the Plan? Okay.

The reason why I ask this is because if one looks at the recent history in relation to this, her predecessor Minister who held the job, Mr Isola, in answer to a question that I posed back in July 2021, said expressions of interest were invited for suitably qualified consultants to undertake the review and the preparation of the new Plan in August 2019, and then he said that the procurement board had now concluded its assessment and the Government is currently considering its recommendations. Then there was a bit of a jug of cold water poured on it because he talked about priorities given the COVID pandemic. I am glad to report that the current incumbent in that position, at last – I think it was in June, in the *Chronicle* – talked about prioritising this issue and, indeed, in fairness to her, she also said in her Budget address that the tender process ... If I can quote her, it is a really small piece:

I hope to make further announcements on this once the tender process has been completed.

2865 Just by way of further preamble, her colleague did say that it would take approximately 18 months to two years to complete the work. Does she expect that once the tender process has completed it is going to take that long? If that is the case, then we could potentially be looking at not having a Development Plan until 2024 or maybe even 2025.

2870 **Hon. Miss S J Sacramento:** Mr Speaker, I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman, who has pre-empted in his preliminary suggestions what I was going to say in answer to his supplementary. The situation we find ourselves in is that there has been an unfortunate delay arising out of COVID, as the hon. Gentleman is aware from the last answer. What happened is that because we have engaged in the tender process, the tender process has now, unfortunately, elapsed because of
2875 the delay arising out of COVID and therefore we are advised by the Procurement Office that we need to restart. We are quite advanced on that, obviously, because the groundwork has been done. As I said in my answer, we would like to finalise that part of the process before the end of the financial year and then, of course, embark on the actual Plan.

I am aware of the statements made in the House by the previous Minister with this
2880 responsibility, and that was the timeframe we were advised of the time it would take, but because I am mindful of the delay that has arisen out of this policy's progress as a result of COVID, I will see what parameters we have, because obviously we are now getting out of COVID and we want to make this very much a priority.

As the hon. Gentleman knows from my Budget speech, as he rightly pointed out, I am very
2885 excited about this project because it is a very important strategic development for Gibraltar and I cannot wait to get started.

Hon. D J Bossino: Does she expect that this is likely to attract outside-of-Gibraltar interest in terms of the tender process, or will there be only local applicants? And if I may, has consideration
2890 been given – I assume it has and it has been rejected – to doing the Plan in house, which I think is what we did, which resulted ... I see the Deputy Chief Minister shaking his head ... in 2009. That is information that I have; I was not in government. Those are the questions.

Hon. Miss S J Sacramento: Mr Speaker, because it is a tender process, anyone will be able to
2895 apply, so we envisage that we will have both tenders locally and not locally. We will see what we receive and then it will be considered by the Tender Board as appropriate.

This is a project that is being outsourced, but it will be led internally. The team at the Town
Planning and Building Control Department of the Government will be in the driving seat when it comes to giving the instructions on the Development Plan.
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Hon. D J Bossino: Mr Speaker, is she able to give us some indication of what the likely costs are going to be?

Hon. Miss S J Sacramento: No, Mr Speaker, because it is a live tender process, so I need to let
2905 that run.

Mr Speaker: Next question.

DEPUTY CHIEF MINISTER

Q349/2022

Rooke site –

Update re preferred bidders

2910 **Clerk:** Question 349/2022. The Hon. the Leader of the Opposition on behalf of the Hon. R M Clinton.

Hon. K Azopardi: Mr Speaker, can the Government provide an update in relation to the preferred bidders for the Rooke site?

2915 **Clerk:** Answer, the Hon. the Deputy Chief Minister.

2920 **Deputy Chief Minister (Hon. Dr J J Garcia):** Mr Speaker, yes, the Government continues in negotiations with the preferred bidder and is currently awaiting revised concept designs from them.

Hon. K Azopardi: Mr Speaker, can the Government confirm that it is having discussions with just the preferred bidders and not any other party that expressed interest at the time of the tender?

2925 **Hon. Deputy Chief Minister:** Mr Speaker, the Government, as the hon. Member knows, was talking to two preferred bidders. Those two preferred bidders have now, my understanding is, merged into one, which makes the discussions easier, and they will be producing a new concept design, which we will be looking at when it is submitted.

2930 **Hon. K Azopardi:** Given that scenario – that the two have merged into one to make some kind of collective bid, I guess – is it safe to assume that at the end of that process of discussions, inevitably this entity will be awarded the site, or is it that it is still up for grabs because it is dependent on the discussions that you are undertaking?

2935 **Hon. Deputy Chief Minister:** Mr Speaker, no, there is still an ongoing live negotiation, so it could be that, as part of that negotiation, nothing happens and the Government must turn to the next highest bidder.

2940 **Hon. K Azopardi:** Does the Hon. Minister have any visibility as to the kind of timescale we are envisaging, given that these discussions have been going on for some time now?

2945 **Hon. Deputy Chief Minister:** Mr Speaker, the Government would like this to happen as soon as possible, but obviously it is a live negotiation and sometimes things take longer than you would like.

Hon. K Azopardi: Is the scope of the menu of components – if I can put it that way – of the site also part of the discussions?

2950 **Hon. Deputy Chief Minister:** Mr Speaker, the Government would rather not get into the detail of the negotiation across the floor of the House, but the expression of interest provides for a negotiation to take place with the preferred bidder once the bids are in, and that is what is happening at the moment.

Adjournment

Chief Minister (Hon. F R Picardo): Mr Speaker, I move that the House should now adjourn and continue with Questions tomorrow at 3 p.m.

2955

Mr Speaker: I now propose the question, which is that this House do now adjourn to Thursday, 20th October at 3 p.m.

I now put the question, which is that this House do now adjourn to Thursday, 20th October at 3 p.m. Those in favour? (**Members:** Aye.) Those against? Passed.

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The House will now adjourn to Thursday, 20th October at 3 p.m.

The House adjourned at 8.26 p.m.