



PROCEEDINGS OF THE GIBRALTAR PARLIAMENT

AFTERNOON SESSION: 3 p.m. – 7.03 p.m.

Gibraltar, Tuesday, 19th December 2023

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<i>The House adjourned at 6.05 p.m.</i>	61

The Gibraltar Parliament

The Parliament met at 3 p.m.

[MADAM SPEAKER: Hon. Judge K Ramagge GMH *in the Chair*]

[CLERK TO THE PARLIAMENT: J B Reyes Esq *in attendance*]

PRAYER

Madam Speaker

CONFIRMATION OF MINUTES

Clerk: Meeting of Parliament, Tuesday, 19th December 2023.

Order of Proceedings: (i) Oath of Allegiance; (ii) Confirmation of Minutes – the Minutes of the Second Meeting of the 15th Parliament, which was held on 22nd and 23rd November 2023.

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Madam Speaker: May I sign the Minutes as correct?

Members: Aye.

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Madam Speaker signed the Minutes.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

Pillar Two Qualified Domestic Minimum Top-Up Tax – Statement by the Minister for Justice, Trade and Industry

Clerk: (iii) Communications from the Chair; (iv) Petitions; (v) Announcements – the Hon. the Minister for Justice, Trade and Industry.

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Minister for Justice, Trade and Industry (Hon. N Feetham): Madam Speaker, I rise to make this Ministerial Statement to update our Parliament and our country on an important corporate tax reform.

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In the Chief Minister's State of the Nation address to Parliament during the 2023 Budget debate, he spoke briefly about the importance of the OECD's Pillar Two Global Minimum Tax initiative, mentioning that this is a significant and important change in international tax. As an inclusive framework member, Gibraltar joined the consensus on these changes and remains firm in its commitment to this day. This demonstrates our priority in complying with international standards and collaborating with the global community in preventing tax avoidance through base erosion and profit shifting. Given the importance of Pillar Two, this Government has dedicated specific resources to the creation of a working group in order to ensure proper implementation domestically.

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Our initial view on Gibraltar's Pillar Two implementation was that this was expected to apply to accounting periods in in-scope multinational enterprise groups commencing on or after 31st December 2024. This has now changed. The adoption of Pillar Two is a dynamic process, and its global implementation is anything but uniform. Since that parliamentary address, the uncertainty regarding the level of global implementation achievable by 31st December 2023 has continued. Some EU jurisdictions have still not enacted legislation in respect of the latest EU directive on a global minimum level of tax for multinational enterprise groups. Some have even published draft laws as late as November 2023.

We have considered the best implementation plan for Gibraltar. This is an approach all jurisdictions have taken: a roadmap which best suits their individual circumstances. The advice the Government has now received is that as part of its Pillar Two implementation, Gibraltar should first implement a Pillar Two compliant qualified domestic minimum top-up tax ahead of our original schedule, one that becomes effective for accounting periods commencing on or after 31st December 2023. This is not a change to the domestic tax system as we know it. This change will not affect the vast majority of taxpayers in Gibraltar. It will only affect Gibraltar-based subsidiaries and permanent establishments belonging to in-scope multinational enterprise groups that are parented outside Gibraltar and whose parent jurisdiction has adopted the Pillar Two rules.

In my capacity as Minister for Taxation, I am, therefore, announcing today that as early as possible in 2024, Gibraltar will enact the necessary legislation to bring into force this top-up tax, one that is compliant and consistent with the objectives and principles of Pillar Two, the OECD model rules and commentary and other guidance material issued up to and including 31st December 2023. This is one of the aims of the working group we have created. This group of professionals, working in conjunction with a wider pool of expertise in Gibraltar, are well placed to deliver what we need and when we need it by.

I understand that many who are listening may wonder why this is necessary and why the need to introduce it earlier than planned. The answer is simple: we have monitored global implementation, we have seen how this is developing and are taking the steps to ensure Gibraltar is among the early adopter group commencing with their Pillar Two implementation. This is not uncommon. Reforms in international tax are large-scale projects and timetables for jurisdictional implementation must be flexible. The introduction of a top-up tax in Gibraltar is a bridge to full Pillar Two implementation. We have seen how jurisdictions push for rapid implementation of these measures that best suit their individual circumstances. We need to, as well. This is, therefore, a strategic decision by the Government, one that protects our tax base by shielding profits of Gibraltar-based subsidiaries and permanent establishments, preserving our taxing right over these and, in so doing, raising additional and valuable tax revenues for Gibraltar. It effectively creates a safe harbour, allowing the required minimum effective tax rate to be achieved through a top-up tax paid in Gibraltar. Without this top-up tax in 2024, revenue from Gibraltar-based subsidiaries and permanent establishments of multinationals would be subject to the international adoption of Pillar Two outside Gibraltar. If we do not charge the tax, the jurisdiction where the parent company is based will collect it instead. The effect will, therefore, be practically neutral for those multinationals. It is an important and crucial step, a step towards our full implementation of Pillar Two, and one that has the approval from the OECD Secretariat Pillar Two team, cementing our participation in international efforts to address tax challenges whilst allowing Gibraltar the flexibility to continue to monitor how the international landscape in this space evolves. The Government will be releasing an official notice and press release on the introduction of this top-up tax and will continue to provide guidelines and a clear channel of communication for those affected as we continue with our implementation of Pillar Two. We emphasise this will have no effect at all but for the smallest number of Gibraltar entities.

Madam Speaker, a resilient economy depends on more than just our tax competitiveness, but also on ensuring we continue to raise tax revenues from large businesses in accordance with international tax rules to allow us to be able to pay for our high-quality public services and education, among other things, and support other areas of government expenditure. With a

80 limited labour pool, we must equally continue to invest in skills, especially digital skills development, and encourage our young people to join the lucrative financial sectors in Gibraltar.

In our commitment to alleviate the tax burden on our citizens, we aim to raise revenues from large corporations that thrive in Gibraltar, sharing in the benefits of our regulatory environment, business opportunities and unique lifestyle. This ensures a fair and balanced contribution to our community's prosperity. Over the last nine weeks, we have moved quickly in this regard because
85 we believe it is vital for our economy.

I will not lie by saying that the pace we have set in the last nine weeks has been easy – the same pace the Chief Minister has set for his Government over the last 12 years. It has required working unsociable hours, including weekends, sometimes inundated by different and competing ministerial priorities. I therefore have to thank the Chief Minister for his unwavering support and
90 guidance despite his own hugely demanding schedule, as well as the officials within my Ministry. In particular, I would like to thank the Commissioner of Income Tax, John Lester – not a week has passed without a meeting with him, often more than one, and countless exchanges; also, the Tax Working Group members for their expertise and time, as well as the advisers we have consulted and the stakeholders we have spoken to.

95 I am obliged, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker: Thank you.

I will explain, for the benefit of the newer Members of the Opposition, that following the making of a Ministerial Statement, Members of the Opposition may ask questions for the purposes
100 of clarification on any aspects of the Statement made. However, whilst questions may be asked and very brief comments made, they should not be made the occasion for immediate debate.

Does anyone wish to ask a question? The Hon. Mr Clinton.

Hon. R M Clinton: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

105 May I start by thanking the Minister for an advance copy of his Ministerial Statement and, of course, for the making of the Ministerial Statement, something which I have long advocated in this House; it makes the business of this House a lot easier.

May I ask the Minister for various points of clarification without going into too much technical detail, because, as the Minister will be aware, this is not something that is Tax 101 but probably
110 Advanced Tax, which is not to everybody's taste.

In terms of this working group, as far as I am aware, there has been no public consultation issued on this. If I am wrong, I am happy to be corrected. Could he provide some information as to the members of this working group and how they were identified? Also, given that they have had approval from the OECD –
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Madam Speaker: Let's take one question at a time, so that we can keep our minds on that.

Hon. R M Clinton: As you wish, Madam Speaker.

120 **Madam Speaker:** Let the hon. Member answer that question, and then I will let you ask the second part of your question.

Hon. N Feetham: Thank you very much to the hon. Member opposite. Yes, the working group was set up by my predecessor, Albert Isola, in consultation with the Finance Centre Council, I believe, and certainly in consultation with the wider industry. It pre-dates my time in office.
125

I think you have also asked about the composition of the working group. I have the names here and I am very happy to disclose the membership of the working group. Apart from representatives of the Income Tax Office, they include Mr Vikram Khatwani, a tax partner at Deloitte; Adam Craig, who I understand works in the gaming industry in Gibraltar; and Neil Rumford, who is a practitioner at EY. I am absolutely assured – and need not obtain any assurance in relation to this
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because I know these gentlemen myself professionally – that they are of the very highest standard in the area of taxation.

The working group has met in order to discuss the proposal that comprises the Statement that I have made to Parliament, and they have been very supportive of the Government's initiative.
135 We have also consulted other stakeholders and sought advice from third parties, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker: The Hon. Mr Clinton, you had a second question.

Hon. R M Clinton: Yes, Madam Speaker. I was going to roll them up because once I sit down, normally I cannot stand up again, but as you wish.
140

Thank you very much to the Minister for identifying the members of the working group, and certainly I recognise those names, too, as being experts in the field of tax.

May I ask the Minister two separate questions – easy ones: is this working group remunerated at all; and when was the working group set up?
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Hon. N Feetham: Madam Speaker, I do not know the exact date on which the working group was set up; all I know is that it was set up by my predecessor, Albert Isola. I understand it may have been a few months before the General Election.

I think you asked whether the working group is remunerated: my understanding is that the working group is not remunerated.
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Hon. R M Clinton: Madam Speaker, I am grateful to the Minister for his answer.

In terms of the work that has been done in assessing the top-up tax, does the Minister have any sense of the level of the top-up tax and how much potential tax revenue could be raised by this top-up tax?
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Hon. N Feetham: The level of top-up tax, Madam Speaker, will obviously depend on the application of the relevant rules. The OECD global rate of tax is 15%, so what is being proposed is that Gibraltar taxes the difference between the Gibraltar headline rate of tax of 12.5% through the effective rate of tax in individual circumstances and the global rate of 15%. I emphasise the obvious point that if we were not to tax that difference, another jurisdiction outside Gibraltar would do so, and therefore we are putting Gibraltar in a position where we do not leave money on the table, so to speak.
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You have asked whether we have assessed the level of revenues that we will raise. That is a difficult question at this stage. What we have done is looked at individual circumstances, and from our consultation of stakeholders we believe that the *minimum* amount that will be raised is in the region of £6.5 million. That is the minimum. We expect that the actual amount will be significantly higher than that, but it depends on the level of profitability, clearly, and the number of companies that fall within the scope of the relevant Pillar Two rules.
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Madam Speaker: Does any other hon. Member have any questions?

PAPERS TO BE LAID

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

Chief Minister (Hon. F R Picardo): Madam Speaker, I have the honour to lay on the table the Annual Report of the Gibraltar Police Authority for the year ended 31st March 2023.
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Madam Speaker: Ordered to lie.

Questions for Oral Answer

INDUSTRIAL RELATIONS, CIVIL CONTINGENCIES AND SPORT

Q687/2023

New fire station – Facilities for female firefighters

Clerk: (vii) Reports of Committees; (viii) Answers to Oral Questions.
Questions to the Hon. the Minister for Industrial Relations, Civil Contingencies and Sport.
180 **Question 687/2023. The Hon. J Ladislaus.**

Hon. J Ladislaus: Madam Speaker, will plans for a new fire station ensure the provision of facilities for female firefighters?

185 **Clerk:** Answer, the Hon. the Minister for Industrial Relations, Civil Contingencies and Sport.

Minister for Industrial Relations, Civil Contingencies and Sport (Hon. L M Bruzon): Madam Speaker, yes.

190 **Hon. J Ladislaus:** Madam Speaker, can the hon. Member give more specifics as to the exact facilities that will be included?

Hon. L M Bruzon: Madam Speaker, in relation to female officers or facilities in general?

195 **Hon. J Ladislaus:** My apologies, in relation to female officers.

Hon. L M Bruzon: Madam Speaker, all facilities generally – toilets, showers and sleeping facilities – will be for both men and women officers.

200 **Madam Speaker:** Next question.

Q688/2023

Lathbury Sports Complex – Plans for cafeteria facilities

Clerk: Question 688. The Hon. E J Reyes.

Hon. E J Reyes: Madam Speaker, does Government have any plans to provide cafeteria facilities at Lathbury Barracks Sports Complex?

205 **Clerk:** Answer, the Minister for Industrial Relations, Civil Contingencies and Sport.

Minister for Industrial Relations, Civil Contingencies and Sport (Hon. L M Bruzon): Madam Speaker, yes.

210 **Hon. E J Reyes:** Madam Speaker, could the Minister enlighten us on what type of cafeteria facilities he envisages? I will help him along with the answer. It is outdoor sports facilities in the

main part, but there are some indoor facilities, like the swimming pool area and so on. Could the Minister enlighten us on what type of cafeteria facilities are on the drawing board at the moment?

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Hon. L M Bruzon: Madam Speaker, at present, Government is exploring options, but there are definitely plans for cafeteria facilities within the sports complex.

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Hon. E J Reyes: If I can home in a little bit, Madam Speaker, are they going to be indoor facilities or outdoor facilities? The weather there, unfortunately, can be quite chilly during the winter months.

Hon. L M Bruzon: Madam Speaker, definitely indoors. There is already an area assigned to that.

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Madam Speaker: Next question.

Q689/2023

Bayside Sports Complex – Upgrade to hockey pitch and related facilities

Clerk: Question 689. The Hon. E J Reyes.

Hon. E J Reyes: Can Government provide details of its plans and expected completion dates in respect of an upgrade to the present hockey pitch and related facilities at Bayside Sports Centre?

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Clerk: Answer, the Hon. the Minister for Industrial Relations, Civil Contingencies and Sport.

Minister for Industrial Relations, Civil Contingencies and Sport (Hon. L M Bruzon): Madam Speaker, at present, the GSLA are in discussions with the Gibraltar Hockey Association in relation to the type of surface to be installed given that there have been developments on the international stage. Once the preferred surface of choice is determined, the proper procurement process will be initiated.

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Hon. E J Reyes: I am grateful for that answer, Madam Speaker.

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The Minister has rightly said that he is in discussions with the Hockey Association in respect of the hockey pitch surface and so on, but my question said, 'present hockey pitch and related facilities'. Are there any plans envisaged for enhancement of changing room and showering facilities and so on?

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Hon. L M Bruzon: Madam Speaker, at present, the request from the Hockey Association is for new turf.

Madam Speaker: Next question.

Q690/2023

GSLA accessible swimming pool – Cancellation of allocations

Clerk: Question 690. The Hon. E J Reyes.

250 **Hon. E J Reyes:** Can Government provide information on why it was necessary, from October 2023 to date, to cancel allocations at the GSLA's accessible swimming pool, with details of all dates when these cancellations were necessary, together with a breakdown of costs incurred?

Clerk: Answer, the Hon. the Minister for Industrial Relations, Civil Contingencies and Sport.

255 **Minister for Industrial Relations, Civil Contingencies and Sport (Hon. L M Bruzon):** Madam Speaker, there was a malfunction with the lighting system at the accessible swimming pool. Only the evening sessions after 6.30 p.m. were affected. Full repairs were completed during the week beginning 4th December given that these had to be scheduled with other existing works. These
260 works were undertaken by the Gibraltar Electricity Authority at no extra cost, as they were undertaken during working hours. The pool is now fully functional.

Hon. E J Reyes: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I did ask for some sort of breakdown of costs related. Obviously, I take it as an expense that had to be met by the GSLA, and if carried out by
265 the Gibraltar Electricity Authority, an invoice must be forthcoming.

Hon. L M Bruzon: Madam Speaker, the information I have is that it was undertaken by the Gibraltar Electricity Authority during their working hours and therefore there was no cost to the
270 GSLA.

Hon. E J Reyes: I am grateful for that, Madam Speaker. Should the Minister find in the future that there were costs incurred, would he please update this House? My experience, having once held that portfolio, is that even though the repairs may be carried out during normal working hours, the Electricity Authority does tend to raise invoices. I know they were forwarded in respect
275 of the Bayside Sports Complex. May I have an assurance from the Minister that they will update the House as and when he gets an invoice?

Hon. L M Bruzon: Madam Speaker, yes, of course.

280 **Madam Speaker:** Thank you.
Next question.

HOUSING AND THE UNIVERSITY OF GIBRALTAR

Q691/2023

Elliot's Battery –

Refurbishment completion date

Clerk: Questions to the Minister for Housing and the University of Gibraltar.
Question 691. The Hon. the Leader of the Opposition.

285 **Hon. Dr K Azopardi:** Madam Speaker, when will the refurbishment of Block 20 of Elliot's Battery be completed?

Clerk: Answer, the Hon. the Minister for Housing and the University of Gibraltar.

290 **Minister for Housing and the University of Gibraltar (Hon. P A Orfila):** Madam Speaker, Block 20 of Elliot's Battery is a private estate and, as such, falls outside the remit of the

Government Housing Department. It is respectfully suggested that the hon. Member direct his question to the relevant management company.

Thank you.

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Hon. Dr K Azopardi: Madam Speaker, I note what the hon. Member says, but even so, it was, she will know, part of their manifesto in the 2019 election. It was said that the Government had assisted the management company in upgrading and refurbishing the estate. It was said as a political statement and a political commitment. Therefore, I am asking, given that there was that statement made in their political manifesto in 2019, why it is that, of all the blocks, our information is that Block 20's works are unfinished. Given that they had made a political statement and a commitment, one would have thought that they would have sought to find out whether the works had been finished to the satisfaction of all the blocks.

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Chief Minister (Hon. F R Picardo): Madam Speaker, the question relates to a time when the hon. Lady was not a Member of this House. The commitment of the GSLP Liberals in the 2019 General Election was to fund the works but not to run them, so in this instance we are not dealing with the refurbishment of a government estate which is run by the Government, we are dealing with the assistance of the management company in the refurbishment of a private estate. That refurbishment is run by the management company of the estate. The funding is provided by the Government on terms. In other words, it is a soft loan if there are improvements which are in keeping with the Government's policy, which there were, and we are working with the management company of Elliot's Battery.

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There are other issues outstanding in respect of Elliot's Battery that are ongoing, but the extent of the finished works, whether there is something still outstanding to be done, is not something that is in the purview of the Government, even in the context of the manifesto commitment that we acquired in 2019, spent four years delivering on and will continue to deliver on in respect of the lifetime of this Parliament if there is still anything outstanding to be done, which would come to us from the management company.

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Hon. Dr K Azopardi: Madam Speaker, their manifesto commitment in 2019 actually reads:

We have assisted the management company to refurbish the estate and will continue to work with them in upgrading Government infrastructure in the area. The estate now looks much more modern and attractive than it used to and this will have added great value to the properties in this area.

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I fully appreciate that this is a private estate, but given that the Government stated that they will continue to work with the management company and had assisted in funding the refurbishment, did the Government not show an interest in continuing to work with the management company in finding out whether the works had been carried out to all the blocks, as was envisaged? Given that the information that we have received on this side of the House is that the works to Block 20 are unfinished, will the Government now work with the management company and find out whether those works have been completed in accordance with, presumably, the funding that the Government provided?

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Hon. Chief Minister: Madam Speaker, I am delighted to go back five years, to 2019, to debate with the hon. Gentleman what the extent of that manifesto commitment was, but I will gently remind him that we won the election of 2019 on the basis of that commitment and we won the election of 2023, too.

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The commitment that he has read out is that the Government will continue to work with the management company on the upgrading of the government infrastructure there, and yet his question is about Block 20 in Elliot's Battery. His supplementary, however, ends by asking me whether we will take an interest now in quizzing the management company as to why they have

not finished the refurbishment of Block 20. Well, the commitment is very clear. When the
340 management company comes to us and says, ‘We have finished the refurbishment of Block 20.
There is still an amount to be paid under the terms of the soft loan: will you provide the soft loan
funding?’ we will, of course, provide it, but we are not running the refurbishment of Elliot’s Battery
Estate because it is not a government estate. The management company has to run it. What we
say in what he read that we would continue to do is deal with the government infrastructure, and,
345 as far as I understand, the government infrastructure aspect has been dealt with and completed;
I have been there on a number of occasions to interest myself in how that government
infrastructure has been laid and completed.

If the hon. Gentleman thinks that the Government should, in 2023, in exercise of a manifesto
commitment of 2019, now go and police the people we have been working with – who have done
350 a magnificent job in the refurbishment of Elliot’s Battery, which looks completely different to what
it used to look like and value has, therefore, been added to those properties – he is a much more
interventionist Chief Minister than I ever have been.

Madam Speaker: One last question and we are done with this subject.
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Hon. Dr K Azopardi: Madam Speaker, it is not about going back five years. Five years on we are
receiving information that the projected refurbishment of one of the blocks of Elliot’s Battery has
not been finished. Given that the Government announced that it had provided financial assistance
for the carrying out of works to Elliot’s Battery and promoted how great the work was, what we
360 are asking is for the Government to take an interest, given that they provided funding and public
moneys were used for that purpose, to ensure that the works were all carried out. Will he do that?

Hon. Chief Minister: Madam Speaker, the point I am trying to make to the hon. Gentleman is
this: we have provided funding for the works that the management company has wanted to carry
365 out. We are not saying that the management company should do A, B, C or D, or Block 20 or Block
21. We are saying if the works comply with certain criteria, then they are eligible for funding ...
Well, not funding, it is a low-cost loan. It is paid back on the basis of the service charges, but it is
paid back. Therefore, the point I am trying to make to the hon. Gentleman about the manifesto
commitment – not of this administration but of the one that has already ended – is that it was to
370 assist the management company to do that which *they* believed should be done when *they*
believed it should be done. We have done that.

I have continuing discussions with Elliot’s Battery management company on other aspects. If
there is anything still to be dealt with in the context of the refurbishment, I am sure they will bring
it to our attention, but it is not for us to bring it to their attention, as the hon. Gentleman is
375 proposing. I am perfectly satisfied that the works that have been done have been in keeping with
the obligations that the management company acquired with the Government at the time that
we agreed to provide the assisted funding, and I believe that the people in Elliot’s Battery
management company are responsible people who have wanted to do the best by all of the
tenants, and the evidence is there to be seen.

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Madam Speaker: Next question.

EQUALITY, EMPLOYMENT, CULTURE AND TOURISM

**Q692/2023
Bruce's Farm –
Waiting time**

Clerk: Questions to the Hon. the Minister for Equality, Employment, Culture and Tourism.
Question 692. The Hon. A Sanchez.

385 **Hon. A Sanchez:** Can the Government clarify whether there is a current waiting time for individuals intending to commence the programme at Bruce's Farm; and, if there is a waiting period, could the Government furnish details regarding the duration of this waiting time?

Clerk: Answer, the Hon. the Minister for Equality, Employment, Culture and Tourism.

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Minister for Equality, Employment, Culture and Tourism (Hon. C P Santos): Madam Speaker, the waiting list for individuals awaiting entry into Bruce's Farm is currently one to seven weeks. The waiting time is only pertinent for those service users who, following assessment, require treatment to start with detox under strict medical supervision. There are no waiting lists for entry into Bruce's Farm for service users who do not require the medical detox first. There is also no waiting list for service users who undertake their rehabilitation under the same therapeutic programme in the community.

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Hon. A Sanchez: Madam Speaker, I am grateful for that answer. Could the hon. Member clarify what they are doing to reduce the waiting times for access to the detox programme? We are receiving concerns from individuals and their families as to the number of weeks that they have to wait to access Bruce's Farm. The delay is actually not with direct entry into Bruce's Farm but, as he has clarified, with access to the detox period and beds in Ocean Views, so could he expand further on what they plan to do to reduce this waiting time?

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Hon. C P Santos: Madam Speaker, by 8th January the five people on the waiting list will be seen to, at least in a preliminary meeting with the multidisciplinary team. Currently, we are looking for an expansion of availability of beds in order to go into the detox programme before Bruce's Farm.

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Hon. Dr K Azopardi: May I ask what is the capacity of beds there?

Hon. C P Santos: There is no set number of beds at the moment. We have one available. We are trying to access two extra ones, but we are finding plans to move the people who are in the beds into other programmes.

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Madam Speaker: Next question.

**Q693-94 and 702/2023
Supported Employment Scheme –
Adherence to UK supported employment model; inclusive apprenticeships/internships;
number of individuals assisted**

Clerk: Question 693. The Hon. A Sanchez.

420 **Hon. A Sanchez:** Does Supported Employment Company Ltd adhere to the supported employment model practised in the UK?

Clerk: Answer, the Hon. the Minister for Equality, Employment, Culture and Tourism.

425 **Minister for Equality, Employment, Culture and Tourism (Hon. C P Santos):** Madam Speaker, I will answer this question together with Questions 694 and 702.

Clerk: Question 694. The Hon. A Sanchez.

430 **Hon. A Sanchez:** Are there locally facilitated inclusive apprenticeships and supported internships; and, if so, could the Government provide the figures for the number of individuals currently participating and the date of commencement of their said apprenticeship/internship?

Clerk: Question 702. The Hon. the Leader of the Opposition.

435 **Hon. Dr K Azopardi:** Madam Speaker, how many different individuals have been assisted under the Supported Employment Scheme from 1st January 2012 to 1st January 2023?

Clerk: Answer, the Hon. the Minister for Equality, Employment, Culture and Tourism.

440 **Hon. C P Santos:** Madam Speaker, in answer to Question 693, Supported Employment Company Ltd is modelled on the UK model of supported employment, though some of our protocols differ due to size, population, culture and employability opportunities.

445 In answer to Question 694, Supported Employment Company Ltd currently employs 65 persons with supported needs throughout our community. They do not specifically follow internships and/or apprenticeship programmes, but instead are learning on the job.

In answer to Question 702, I can confirm that 97 individuals have been assisted by the Supported Employment Scheme in this period.

450 **Hon. A Sanchez:** In relation to supported employment and the model that it follows, would the hon. Member have any information about how many trained and qualified job coaches are employed under Supported Employment Company, what qualifications and training they have received and where they have acquired these?

455 **Hon. C P Santos:** There are five steps to follow in the UK model. We follow four. We are in the process of training our job coaches. This is a process that started from when I came into office in October.

460 **Hon. A Sanchez:** Just to clarify, the hon. Member is stating that the job coaches are being trained now?

Hon. C P Santos: Madam Speaker, no, they are not being trained now. We are finalising what the processes are. We have identified some members of our staff who will be getting training for this, but the training of the job coaches is not taking place right now.

465 **Hon. A Sanchez:** If the hon. Member could answer my question, perhaps: how many job coaches are there who are actually trained and qualified as job coaches in the Supported Employment Company? What is the complement of actual trained and qualified job coaches?

470 **Hon. C P Santos:** Currently, we do not have any trained job coaches. We have a team of four who are assisting with the supported employment programme, but as I mentioned, we have

identified two new members of staff whom we want to train to continue this job, as we are now securing following the supported employment model of the UK.

475 **Hon. A Sanchez:** Just to clarify, you have a Supported Employment Company that has been running for several years, but you have, currently, no trained and qualified job coaches and you are now training them – that is the position?

480 **Hon. C P Santos:** You mentioned how does it run now. Right now, since I came into office, we have started to follow the model. We have run Supported Employment Company differently. I am now looking at a different model to continue, seeing as the needs seem to be expanding, and as a succession plan and seeing what numbers we are hopefully going to have to cater for. We are looking at remodelling how we are going to continue working with the Supported Employment Company.

485 **Hon. A Sanchez:** Since the model is being reviewed and you are changing the way that it works, do you have any plans to publish any guidelines, such as the ones that exist in the UK, to give the general public some more information in relation to the process, the model that is being followed, the criteria, etc?

490 **Hon. C P Santos:** Yes.

Hon. Dr K Azopardi: Madam Speaker, in my question, which is Question 702 – just to be clear, so that we are not talking at cross purposes and the Minister has answered the precise question that I was looking for – I asked for different individuals. He has given the answer 97, so these are 495 97 different individuals throughout the 12-year period? That is correct, isn't it?

Hon. C P Santos: Madam Speaker, that is correct.

500 **Madam Speaker:** Next question.

Q695-97/2023

Morocco –

Actions to secure tourism and business opportunities/air and sea link services

Clerk: Question 695. The Hon. G Origo.

505 **Hon. G Origo:** Madam Speaker, what specifically is the Minister for Tourism doing to secure tourism and business opportunities with Morocco?

Clerk: Answer, the Hon. the Minister for Equality, Employment, Culture and Tourism.

Minister for Equality, Employment, Culture and Tourism (Hon. C P Santos): Madam Speaker, I will answer this question together with Questions 696 and 697.

510 **Clerk:** Question 696. The Hon. G Origo.

Hon. G Origo: Madam Speaker, can the Government confirm whether it has received any proposals yet from private entities for the provision of links by air and sea to Morocco?

515 **Clerk:** Question 697. The Hon. G Origo.

Hon. G Origo: Can the Government explain how it proposes to entice air and sea links to Morocco? How would the Government ensure that the continuous running of such a service is maintained, given that these have been available in the past, albeit unsuccessfully?

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Clerk: Answer, the Hon. the Minister for Equality, Employment, Culture and Tourism.

Hon. C P Santos: Madam Speaker, in answer to Question 695, I am working with the Minister with responsibility for developing relations with Morocco in order to organise trade missions, both locally and abroad, to further our relationship with Morocco.

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In answer to Question 696, the re-establishment of air links is something that we are currently pursuing. We have received an initial proposal for air links, but it is still in the early stages and under consideration.

In answer to Question 697, once we established these links to Morocco, we would not leave any stone unturned to ensure the continuous running of such services.

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Hon. Dr K Azopardi: Is the Minister willing to reveal from which airline he has received a proposal?

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Hon. C P Santos: Not at this stage. It is very early stages.

Hon. Dr K Azopardi: In relation to these trade missions that he has discussed with his colleague Minister, can he elaborate a bit more on the kind of timescale that he intends to launch these trade missions in?

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Hon. C P Santos: Currently, we are planning on this taking place in the first quarter of the New Year.

Madam Speaker: Next question.

Q698/2023
Shared parental leave –
Timescale re drafting of Bill

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Clerk: Question 698. The Hon. G Origo.

Hon. G Origo: Madam Speaker, by when does the Government think it will have drafted a Bill with the legislation amendments necessary to allow parental leave to be shared equally between parents of a newborn?

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Clerk: Answer, the Hon. the Minister for Equality, Employment, Culture and Tourism.

Minister for Equality, Employment, Culture and Tourism (Hon. C P Santos): Madam Speaker, the Government remains fully committed to the introduction of parental leave. There have been a number of operational and logistical issues that have made the process of co-ordinating this challenging. The Government will, nonetheless, fulfil this manifesto commitment as soon as it is feasibly possible.

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Madam Speaker: Next question.

Q699/2023

**Disability champions –
Plans for introduction throughout the public sector**

560 **Clerk:** Question 699. The Hon. G Origo.

Hon. G Origo: Madam Speaker, can the Government explain its plans on how it proposes to introduce disability champions throughout the public sector for the purpose of ensuring adherence to the responsibilities contained in the Disability Act? Will such responsibilities be further remunerated? If remunerated, what would be the expected cost to Government for the introduction of disability champions to the public sector?

Clerk: Answer, the Hon. the Minister for Equality, Employment, Culture and Tourism.

570 **Minister for Equality, Employment, Culture and Tourism (Hon. C P Santos):** Madam Speaker, training on the Disability Act will be delivered to all departments, so that everyone understands the Disability Act. It is then up to the head of department to liaise with their team and assign a disability champion. All disability champions will then have a meeting with the Supported Needs and Disability Office, whereby they will receive training on how to be a disability champion. Documents are currently being developed to support those in this role. Champions will then have regular meetings with the Supported Needs and Disability Office, as well as direct access to them should they require it.

575 This responsibility will not be remunerated. For example, every department has their own fire marshal, IT liaison officer, first aider, health and safety officer, etc., which are not separately remunerated either. Those with these responsibilities do have protected time within their established work schedule to tend to these issues. In the same way, the disability champions will have specific time assigned to them during working hours, and this time will be protected so as to ensure that this role is being conducted properly.

585 **Hon. Dr K Azopardi:** The Minister mentioned in his answer that documents were being prepared. Can he perhaps elaborate on that? Are these internal guidance documents to civil servants that are being prepared; and, if so, are they going to be also made public, or are they just internal Civil Service documents?

590 **Hon. C P Santos:** Madam Speaker, the documents are intended to be given to those who will become disability champions – guidelines on the Disability Act and how to continue the job in a beneficial way.

Madam Speaker: Next question.

Q700/2023

**Flight service interruptions –
Number and causes**

595 **Clerk:** Question 700. The Hon. G Origo.

Hon. G Origo: Madam Speaker, can the Government provide details as to the number of flights that experienced service interruptions, together with a breakdown of the causes of those interruptions?

600 **Clerk:** Answer, the Hon. the Minister for Equality, Employment, Culture and Tourism.

Minister for Equality, Employment, Culture and Tourism (Hon. C P Santos): Madam Speaker, yes, I will now provide the hon. Member with a handout of the breakdown requested since my time in office from 12th October 2023, given there have been no specific dates requested.

Answer to Question 700/2023

Period	Diversions	Cause
From 12th October - 31st October	11 diversions (10 Malaga/1 Sevilla)	All due South Westerly winds (crosswinds/turbulence).
From 12th October — 31st October	1 diversion (Malaga)	Inbound flight delayed so late that GIB ATC had already closed for the night as per laid down operating hours.
From 12th October — 31st October	1 diversion (Malaga)	Operating flight crew not certified to operate to GIB.
November	5 diversions (Malaga)	4 due to South Westerly winds (crosswinds/turbulence) and 1 due to mist
1st December — 13th Dec 23	2 diversions (Malaga)	Both due to poor visibility

605 **Madam Speaker:** Perhaps we can move on to Question 701, and when you have had a chance to look at the tables, I will let you ask any supplementaries.

Q701/2023
UK-GIB Tourism Association –
Next meeting date

Clerk: Question 701. The Hon. G Origo.

610 **Hon. G Origo:** Madam Speaker, can the Government confirm whether the UK-GIB Tourism Association has set its next meeting date yet?

Clerk: Answer, the Hon. the Minister for Equality, Employment, Culture and Tourism.

615 **Minister for Equality, Employment, Culture and Tourism (Hon. C P Santos):** Madam Speaker, the UKGTA no longer exists in its original format. We commenced a consultation process and met all relevant stakeholders to establish the relevance of the previous format of the UKGTA and its relevance in today's world, to discuss how to proceed from now on.

620 **Hon. G Origo:** Madam Speaker, if I may just push a little further, there was a manifesto commitment in the hon. Members' manifesto in 2019 which stated that the UKGTA would meet within the first 60 days of the GSLP being elected into office. Can the hon. Member please confirm that there will be no body made up to take over what the UK-GB Tourism Association used to work towards?

625 **Chief Minister (Hon. F R Picardo):** Madam Speaker, the only Members of the Government who contested the 2019 General Election who remain in this House are the Hon. John Cortes, the Hon. Deputy Chief Minister, the Hon. Joe Bossano and myself, and none of us held the portfolio of tourism. We have, all of us together, defended the 2023 General Election manifesto, which, from memory – but I did write it – does not mention the UKGTA.

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Hon. G Origo: Madam Speaker, if I may be helpful to the hon. Member opposite, it is found at page 62 of their 2023 manifesto.

635 **Hon. Chief Minister:** Well, in that case, Madam Speaker, the UKGTA is, as the hon. Member said to him, under review.

Hon. Dr K Azopardi: Can I ask: under review by whom, and who is he discussing the matter with?

640 **Hon. C P Santos:** The UKGTA, as it was, no longer exists; most of the stakeholders are not even active right now. In the first 60 days, I have met all the relevant fields, which are the Hotel Association, all the different tour operators and people from the Airport, and we have decided – the way that tourism is working now, as opposed to 1991 when it was first formed – to hold meetings with all the individual stakeholders, so that we can plan ways moving forward using new technologies which are used now to promote tourism.

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Hon. Dr K Azopardi: What is the timescale of this launch of a new-style body?

650 **Hon. C P Santos:** We have already met everybody, so now we are continuing meetings. I am meeting in January with the tour operators again, and I am meeting in the first quarter with the Hotel Association, whom I met last month. We are not creating a UKGTA because we found that the way that tourism works in Gibraltar now and the needs of the tourism industry locally are not what they were in 1991, which was a reaction to the Gulf War and that is why it was created. Now we are just moving forward with how social media, digital marketing and all different types of marketing and media are working in the world today.

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Hon. Dr K Azopardi: So, to be clear, there will not be a new body under any new nomenclature formed going forward – is that right?

660 **Hon. C P Santos:** We were in discussions to have representatives from all the different stakeholders in one association. I find it more beneficial to have every single voice heard and I have no issue in meeting all the different stakeholders, so I will just be having more regular meetings with hoteliers, tour operators and everyone, as opposed to having one voice representing a whole association in one organisation. This is my choice. It is a choice I have made that works better for me and the programme I want to continue moving on forward.

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Q700/2023

**Flight service interruptions –
Supplementary questions**

Madam Speaker: We will revert to Question 700. Would the Hon. Mr Origo have any supplementaries on that table, or anybody else on the Opposition bench?

670 **Hon. G Origo:** Madam Speaker, the only supplementary I will ask the hon. Member opposite at this stage is whether he would be minded to provide a copy of the breakdown of the same question but for the whole period of 2023. If he can give it to me written or by email, it would be fine. Thank you.

675 **Madam Speaker:** The answer?

Minister for Equality, Employment, Culture and Tourism (Hon. C P Santos): I have no issue whatsoever with that.

680 **Hon. Dr K Azopardi:** I have one question. In relation to the flights in the period 12th October to 31st October, it says, in the third entry, one diversion to Malaga because the operating flight crew was not certified to operate to Gibraltar. May I ask the Minister to give us a bit more detail about that, if he has the details; and, if he does not have those details, perhaps to take an interest in that issue? I find that entry a bit more surprising than the others. The reasons were the reasons, but to the extent that flights leave the UK when it is known that flight crew are not certified to
685 operate to Gibraltar is a bit more concerning, and perhaps the Minister would show an interest in that and take it up in his relevant discussions with whoever it needs to be.

Hon. C P Santos: Madam Speaker, I will, indeed. I have already made some inquiries about that. A lot of the time it is about the pilot and the certification, but I will find out more information
690 and I will, no doubt, pass it on to you, because this is something to do with a private company and nothing to do with the Government or the Airport but the actual operating company.

Hon. Dr K Azopardi: I appreciate he is taking an interest in the issue. Can I ask him, when he does that, to try to get to the bottom of whether the certification issues are due to specific rules
695 that apply to our Airport – for example, it could be because of the length of the runway; I am not sure, I am speculating – or other things? These issues must be known to the airline – presumably – so it would be helpful when he has those discussions ... I am not sure who he envisages having those discussions with, perhaps the airline or whoever, but it would be helpful if he did get to the bottom of that. Of course, weather issues people will understand, but if they are boarding a plane
700 which cannot land in Gibraltar for other reasons, I am sure that will lead to passenger frustration.

Hon. C P Santos: Madam Speaker, I will get that information and pass it on, but as I said, this has to do with the operating company and there is not necessarily anything that we can do. However, I can gather the information and I have absolutely no problem passing it on to the hon.
705 Member opposite.

Madam Speaker: The Hon. Mr Reyes, do you have a question or has it been answered?

710 **Hon. E J Reyes:** Thank you, ma'am. It was in very similar terms to that of the Leader of the Opposition.

Madam Speaker: So you do not need to answer it, if it is the same question.

715 **Hon. E J Reyes:** Sorry, I was trying to clarify, Madam Speaker, but I appreciate the Minister will answer in the future whether 'flight crew' refers just to the pilot and co-pilot, or the cabin staff.

Madam Speaker: I think that answer has been covered by the Hon. Minister, who will get back to you with all the details.
Next question.

EDUCATION, THE ENVIRONMENT AND CLIMATE CHANGE

Q703/2023

Mediterranean Steps and fortifications at top of the Rock – Government's plans and expected costs

720 **Clerk:** Questions to the Hon. the Minister for Education, the Environment and Climate Change. Question 703. The Hon. G Origo.

725 **Hon. G Origo:** Madam Speaker, what plans does the Government have for further improvements to the Mediterranean Steps and the fortifications at the top of the Rock? Can the Government confirm what would be the expected costs of such improvements?

Clerk: Answer, the Hon. the Minister for Education, the Environment and Climate Change.

730 **Minister for Education, the Environment and Climate Change (Hon. Prof. J E Cortes):** Madam Speaker, the Government plans to carry out numerous improvements along Mediterranean Steps and some of the fortifications at the top of the Rock. With regard to Mediterranean Steps, these improvements consist of repair works in areas of the path that have been eroded, as well as new balustrading. There are also plans to restore some of the military fortifications along the path and install interpretation panels showcasing the trail's rich natural and military heritage. A similar
735 approach will be adopted for the area known as Mount Misery, located near the Skywalk. This area will benefit from a soft intervention in keeping with its former use and the installation of a range of interpretation panels and visitor information displays.

The exact costs are currently being determined by the Department of the Environment.

740 **Hon. G Origo:** Madam Speaker, could I ask the hon. Gentleman opposite if he could please provide information as to when he would expect the repairs to the path at Mediterranean Steps and the banisters that he has just proposed be installed will be completed? This is an area that is frequently used by many people.

745 **Hon. Prof. J E Cortes:** Madam Speaker, the reason I mentioned the repairs and the balustrading first is because that is what is going to be given priority. The Department is looking at the costs. I would not be able to say exactly when this can be ready; I do not have that information. Obviously, I want it as soon as possible, too.

750 **Madam Speaker:** Next question.

Q704/2023
Europa Point and Eastside –
Creation of new natural habitats

Clerk: Question 704. The Hon. G Origo.

Hon. G Origo: Madam Speaker, can the Government provide more details of its plans to create a new natural habitat at Europa Point and the Eastside? Where are these natural habitats going to be created? Who will be contracted to develop them and at what cost?
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Clerk: Answer, the Hon. the Minister for Education, the Environment and Climate Change.

Minister for Education, the Environment and Climate Change (Hon. Prof. J E Cortes): Madam Speaker, the new natural habitats at Europa Point will be created by planting native species in areas which are devoid of vegetation. An example of this can be found in the former Du Farol site, which has now become a prominent feature of Europa Point. In addition, new habitats will be created along Europa Advance Road by removing invasive species and thus providing sites for native species to flourish. Part of this work has already started and will continue in the months ahead. These works have been carried out and will continue to be carried out by the Department of the Environment's Nature Reserve and Maintenance teams – in other words, in house.
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In relation to the Eastside, plans are being developed to restore the area known as Blackstrap Cove, which now forms part of the Gibraltar National Trail Network. This area will benefit from the installation of a coastal trail, interpretation panels and the removal of construction rubble and invasive species.
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The exact costs of this work are presently being determined jointly by the Department of the Environment and the Technical Services Department. No contractor has been chosen to date.

Hon. G Origo: Madam Speaker, with regard to Blackstrap Cove, the area has been in that condition for a decade now. There are dangerous articles there – sharp, rusty, also asbestos. Will this be a priority for the Government, and will he be able to attach a timeframe to it?
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Thank you.

Hon. Prof. J E Cortes: That forms part of the plans for the area. In other words, yes, Madam Speaker.
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Madam Speaker: Next question.

Q705/2023
Renewable energy –
Gibraltar share at December 2023

Clerk: Question 705. The Hon. G Origo.

Hon. G Origo: Madam Speaker, can the Government state what is Gibraltar's share of renewable energy as of December 2023?
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Clerk: Answer, the Hon. the Minister for Education, the Environment and Climate Change.

Minister for Education, the Environment and Climate Change (Hon. Prof. J E Cortes): Madam Speaker, I will refer to the share of installed capacity in relation to the daily demand as follows:
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average daily demand is 30 MW; installed capacity of photovoltaic cells (PVs) is 3.5 MW. If we take 30 MW as the benchmark, then we have increased to 11.7% installed capacity, up from 10% last year.

795 Of course, the amount of electricity generated by PVs varies due to several factors – amount of sunlight, state of PVs, angle of PVs – so that the actual amount generated will be less. The figures, Madam Speaker, are the installed capacity.

800 **Hon. G Origo:** Madam Speaker, I thank the hon. Gentleman for those figures. I would like to pick up on the fact that he referred a few times to ‘installed capacity’, which, to me, means that it may not be the average of the capacity that these renewable energy sources are actually producing, so is the hon. Member able to provide a figure for how much renewable energy was produced for the year 2023 and the amount of energy produced by non-renewable energy for the same period?

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Hon. Prof. J E Cortes: I do not have those figures, Madam Speaker. I would be able to look for them, or if he wants to ask a specific question ... Normally we would measure this by means of installed capacity. I do not have the exact figures, but they will be made available.

810 **Hon. Dr K Azopardi:** Madam Speaker, the statistics the hon. Member has given on the 11.7%, which is the renewable energy ... that is produced, presumably, through solar energy, is that right?

Hon. Prof. J E Cortes: Yes, exclusively solar energy.

815 **Madam Speaker:** Next question.

Q705/2023

Private sector energy-efficient renovation – Plans to encourage

Clerk: Question 706. The Hon. G Origo.

820 **Hon. G Origo:** Madam Speaker, how is the Government proposing to encourage energy-efficient renovation in the private sector, which accords with the Government’s health and sustainable city goals?

Clerk: Answer, the Hon. the Minister for Education, the Environment and Climate Change.

825 **Minister for Education, the Environment and Climate Change (Hon. Prof. J E Cortes):** Madam Speaker, the energy-efficient renovation of existing buildings is one of the biggest challenges that we face. Government has engaged with the Gibraltar Sustainable Buildings Group to help develop a strategy for the energy-efficient renovation of existing buildings, including those with heritage sensitivities. This will help to identify the most suitable techniques and technologies for Gibraltar’s different building types, not just in relation to our climate needs but also in respect of their cost effectiveness and their market availability. Barriers to adoption of these techniques and technologies will need to be identified and work done to overcome them. Undoubtedly costs and financing options will be one of these barriers and Government is currently reviewing the existing incentives in place for the improvement of a property’s Energy Performance Certificate (EPC) rating, as well as the installation of micro-renewables, to determine how these could be modified
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835 to be greater drivers of change.

Madam Speaker: Next question.

Q707-08/2023

COP28 –

Details re trip; implementation of recommendations

Clerk: Question 707. The Hon. G Origo.

840 **Hon. G Origo:** Madam Speaker, could the Government please provide the following details relating to the recent visit to COP28: (1) who comprised the Government's delegation; (2) the total cost of the trip, broken down into air travel costs, lodgings and entertainment; (3) who the Minister or any member of the delegation met at each event; and (4) the duration of the trip?

845 **Clerk:** Answer, the Hon. the Minister for Education, the Environment and Climate Change.

Minister for Education, the Environment and Climate Change (Hon. Prof. J E Cortes): Madam Speaker, I will answer this question together with Question 708.

850 **Clerk:** Question 708. The Hon. G Origo.

Hon. G Origo: How will the Government respond or envisage implementing the recommendations emerging from COP28, and what impact will this have on its own 25-year environmental plan?

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Clerk: Answer, the Hon. the Minister for Education, the Environment and Climate Change.

Madam Speaker: Madam Speaker, the Government's delegation comprised me, as Minister for the Environment, Sustainability and Climate Change; Mr Guy Dumas from the Gibraltar London Office, who acted as my PA; and Ms Catherine Walsh, a Technical Scientific Officer from the Department of the Environment.

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The costs can be broken down as follows: air travel, economy, £3,700; hotels, £4,150; and subsistence, approximately £1,240, depending on exchange rate used. There was no entertainment element, other than a small amount for one meal each for two Gibraltar teachers who were resident in Dubai and whom I hosted for dinner.

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We were fortunate to attend a number of events during my time at COP and to meet with a wide variety of people. It is impossible to make a list of each person in each event. However, some of the key people I met were: the Hon. Graham Stuart, Minister of State for Energy Security and Net Zero; the Hon. Mark Harper, Secretary of State for Transport; Therese Coffey, previous Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs; Lord Zac Goldsmith, former Minister for Overseas Territories, Commonwealth, Energy, Climate and Environment; Dr Enric Sala, Executive Director of the National Geographic Society; Dr Nicholas Hardman-Mountford, Head of Oceans and Natural Resources, Commonwealth Secretariat; Justin Mundy, Strategic Adviser to the World Resources Institute; Peter Thomson, the UN Secretary General's Representative for Oceans; Kristian Teleki, CEO of Fauna & Flora International; Karen Bearman, Head of Ambassadors and Fellows at WWF; Cynthia Barzuna, Director of Ocean Action 2030; James Shaw, co-leader of the New Zealand Green Party and former New Zealand Minister for Environment; Deputy Jonathan Renouf, Minister for the Environment, Jersey; Deputy Lindsay de Sausmarez, President of the Committee for Environment and Infrastructure, Guernsey; the Hon. Walter Roban, Deputy Premier of Bermuda; the Hon Quincia Gumbs-Marie, Minister of Sustainability, Innovation and the Environment, Anguilla; the Hon. Josephine Conolly, Minister for Tourism, Environment, Maritime, Heritage, Culture and Religious Affairs, Turks and Caicos; the Hon. Peter Biggs MLA, Environment and Public Infrastructure, Falklands; Minister Christine Scipio, Environment, Natural Resources and Planning, St Helena; Premier Natalio Wheatley, British Virgin Islands; the Hon. Crenston Buffonge, Minister of Agriculture, Lands, Housing and Environment, Montserrat; Conrad Jefferies

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and Felicity Morrison from the UK Negotiating Team; and Sarah Crudgington from the UK Pavilion Team.

890 Although as a full party state delegate – a member of the United Kingdom delegation – I was invited for the duration of the whole conference, I did not attend for the full period. The delegation left Gibraltar on Monday, 4th December and returned on Sunday, 12th December

895 In answer to Question 708, it is clear from the discussions held at COP28 and from the text of the deal now agreed that the world must transition away from fossil fuels if we are to stay within reach of the 1.5°C target. Gibraltar has already made commitments in this respect in the Climate Change Strategy, with fossil fuels for energy generation to reduce by 70% by 2045 and the accompanying electrification of the vehicle fleet. The draft 25-year plan also reflects these commitments. Indeed, the COP28 goals are very similar to those contained in our Climate Change Strategy and Climate Change Act, but we will tweak the strategy and amend the draft 25-year plan to reflect this. Gibraltar’s electricity network operates in island mode, and therefore, in order to achieve 100% fossil-fuel-free energy will be a challenge. Government will continue to explore possibilities in this respect.

900 Government will also step up adaptation planning as it becomes increasingly clear that some of the impacts of climate change cannot be avoided. Ensuring that our buildings and infrastructure are fit for purpose in a changing climate will be a key focus of this work – relevant, Madam Speaker, to the previous question.

905 Following, also, from COP28, and from the sessions we attended, we will be introducing a new section to the 25-year plan, on carbon literacy. I also signed up to a new initiative launched at COP28, the Global Initiative for the Decarbonisation of Waste, which commits countries to reduce the carbon footprint of waste. This will also be included in the 25-year plan.

910 **Madam Speaker:** That may go down as one of the most comprehensively answered questions. Next time, you may want to be more specific in terms of listing people who were met – but there we go. Anything that follows? Any supplementaries?

915 **Hon. Dr K Azopardi:** Yes, Madam Speaker. On the proposed amendments to the environmental plan, is the Minister, therefore, working on a new document that is going to be published; and, if so, what timescale would there be on that?

920 **Hon. Prof. J E Cortes:** Madam Speaker, the intention was to publish it during the course of this week as a full consultation draft. In view of the changes that we have to carry out to reflect COP28, I am expecting to publish it in January. It is now at final draft stage, so we will be publishing it, I suspect, in the first half of January. It is virtually ready but had to be tweaked, as I have explained.

925 **Hon. Dr K Azopardi:** And slightly outside the scope of this but related to that answer, what kind of timescale will be provided in the consultation period? At the end of the day, this is a 25-year plan, so I am sure the Minister will agree that there should be a substantial period for consultation.

Hon. Prof. J E Cortes: I am planning on an eight-week period, Madam Speaker. I think that is not too long, but it is not short either.

930 **Madam Speaker:** Does the hon. Member have a question?

935 **Hon. G Origo:** Yes, Madam Speaker, just a quick one. I noticed that the hon. Member opposite mentioned that during his visit to COP28, one of the things that they discussed and impacted on 25-year environmental plan was a commitment to move away from fossil fuels to a figure of around 70% by the year 2045. Given that only a few questions ago he confirmed that the renewable energy percentage share that we currently hold in Gibraltar can be no more than 11-point-something percent at its highest – because he gave me the best number it could possibly

940 have in terms of capacity – by when does the hon. Member opposite think, for instance, that we
would hit 20% renewable energy in Gibraltar, given that this is something that the Government
opposite has previously promised to attain but has not been able to do so despite having
committed to have attained these levels in the past?

Hon. Prof. J E Cortes: Madam Speaker, it is a huge challenge for the whole of Gibraltar. It is not
945 easy to do it for an island community, where our options are limited. It is a challenge that we will
have to do our best to achieve. There is, obviously, the alternative of carbon offset, which in itself
has been very controversial, particularly in this last COP, and the Climate Change Strategy does
take some account of that possibility in the long term.

I think the target is a little bit away, and, although it is very challenging and very difficult, we
950 can only do our best, but it will take a concerted effort from Gibraltar to achieve it. I do not shy
away from that challenge.

Hon. R M Clinton: Madam Speaker, if I could ask the Minister ... I think I heard him talk about
the impacts of climate change, especially in relation to infrastructure. Could he elaborate or give
955 an example of the impacts on infrastructure that may already have been identified?

Hon. Prof. J E Cortes: Madam Speaker, does the hon. Member mean the physical impact in
Gibraltar of climate change? This is actually spelt out in the Climate Change Strategy. It ranges
960 from more severe weather, with the effects that can have, from flooding to rockfalls, to actual
physical damage, to sea level change, and in fact the Climate Change Strategy shows the impact
of one-, two-, three-, four- and five-metre sea-level change. We are not expecting five metres, but
even two metres could have significant effects on places like the airfield or the North District,
where most of our residential areas are low level. So we can only do what we can. Clearly, as the
Hon. Sir Joe Bossano has said in this House, what we do will be an infinitesimal amount, but we
965 have a duty to do the best we can.

One of the things that I think I was able to do during my attendance at COP, together with
970 some representatives from other Overseas Territories and Crown Dependencies, is put pressure
on His Majesty's Government to use their influence to insist on the measures, many of which have
been carried out in COP. I think our influence is not just in what we can do in Gibraltar, but taking
the opportunities of the contact that we have been able to make with the national government in
the UK to put pressure at conferences such as COP to increase the amount of work that the
international community does in order to ensure that the airfield is not covered over by sea
several times a year.

Madam Speaker: One last question from the Hon. Mr Sacarello.
975

Hon. C A Sacarello: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. I would just like to ask the hon.
Member across the floor ... You mentioned the 25-year plan and the extremely challenging and
980 admirable target for 70% reduction in fossil-based-fuel energy production, but as you will be
aware, failing to plan is planning to fail. You mention that at the moment we have one source of
renewables, which is PV. Would you care to elaborate as to what the plans are for the next 25
years to meet that challenge in terms of diversification of types of renewable energy and what
the Government is doing to invest in bringing different ideas to the table?

Hon. Prof. J E Cortes: Madam Speaker, this is stretching the supplementary. I have said this
985 before, publicly, in interviews: solar is the main, the easiest and the cheapest one. The hon.
Member will be aware that there is a plan for the airfield which will considerably increase the ...
or the surrounding area of the airfield. There are other areas in Gibraltar which we already have
earmarked for solar production.

990 Unfortunately, the technology for marine currents is not yet advanced enough to be viable from the investment point of view because of our currents. That has been studied. We carried out a study with the University of the Highlands and Islands as to the strength of the marine currents: they are not strong enough, believe it or not, within British Gibraltar Territorial Waters.

995 There are possibilities in the wind generating field. We have mentioned before carrying out assessments on the possibility of offshore wind, but there are also increasingly small vertical wind generators which are increasingly efficient, and there are areas in Gibraltar where those could go without a negative impact either on the visual landscape or decapitating migrating birds as they fly across the Straits.

1000 So the technology is developing and we are studying all these options, and there are various other things that one can look at. I could give a full presentation with slides, but I do not think we have time for that today.

Madam Speaker: Not today. Next question.

Q709-10/2023

**Vocational BTEC music and acting courses –
Delivery costs**

Clerk: Question 709. The Hon. E J Reyes.

1005 **Hon. E J Reyes:** Can Government provide a breakdown of the delivery costs in respect of (a) Vocational BTEC Music Performance and (b) Vocational BTEC Performing Art (Acting) since September 2023, showing to whom these payments were made?

1010 **Clerk:** Answer, the Hon. the Minister for Education, the Environment and Climate Change.

Minister for Education, the Environment and Climate Change (Hon. Prof. J E Cortes): Madam Speaker, I will answer this question together with Question 710.

Clerk: Question 710. The Hon. E J Reyes.

1015 **Hon. E J Reyes:** Can Government provide the missing information to Question 558/2023 showing payments made for registration fees and equipment since September 2023 related to all BTEC courses, showing to whom these payments were made?

1020 **Clerk:** Answer, the Hon. the Minister for Education, the Environment and Climate Change.

1025 **Hon. Prof. J E Cortes:** Madam Speaker, the information is as follows in relation to Question 709. Vocational BTEC Music Performance: September, tuition £2,558, zero for registration and equipment; October, tuition £2,558, £390 times three for the registration fees, zero for equipment; November, tuition £2558, zero for registration and equipment.

For the Vocational BTEC Performing Arts (Acting): September, tuition £378, zero for registration and equipment; October, tuition £513, £390 times six for registration CVQO fees paid through GAMPA, zero for equipment; November, tuition £742.50, zero for registration and equipment.

1030 All payments were made to GAMPA, as they pay the CVQO registration fees directly to the examination body and then the Department of Education reimburses them. Students do not pay a registration fee for enrolling in GAMPA.

1035 In answer to Question 710, there was, to my mind, no missing information. However, since the
last Parliament session, the information is as follows. This is almost a repetition of what I have
said, but for completeness I am saying it again: CVQO fees for BTEC in Music Performance was
paid to GAMPA for the amount of £1,170; CVQO fees for BTEC in Performing Arts (Acting) was
paid to GAMPA for the amount of £2,340 – as I said before, this is reimbursement because that is
the full amount that is paid; and £360 registration fee was paid to City & Guilds for Hair and Beauty
Studies Level 2. There have been no payments made in respect of equipment fees to either
1040 GAMPA or Mayfair on Main for the period under question.

Hon. E J Reyes: I am very grateful, Madam Speaker, for the update and that information. Right
at the very end, the Minister has just confirmed that there was no payment for the supply of
equipment in respect of the vocational hair and beauty course. Does the Minister know if it
1045 because no payment has been made to date, or because there have been no payments due during
the academic year 2023-24 because no equipment is needed? It is a question of whether it is
pending or no requisition for equipment has been made.

Hon. Prof. J E Cortes: I believe, Madam Speaker, that no payment was due, but if I am wrong,
1050 I will find out, and in my usual way I will provide that information. However, I do not think payment
was due for those three months, which is specifically the period that the question is referring to.

Hon. E J Reyes: I am grateful for that, Madam Speaker. I think we have that understanding. The
Minister will have the data because, given the way he answered the question last time, you could
1055 see it is normally between September and October in 2020, 2021 and 2022 when these payments
are made, and the question was last answered in November, but I appreciate the Minister ... In
order not to waste parliamentary time, we will wait patiently and see if he does make any
payments. Then he can update us with that information, rather than me having to be inquisitive
every month, because we have a gentlemen's understanding.

1060
Hon. Prof. J E Cortes: Madam Speaker, absolutely, and if the hon. Member cares to remind me
at any stage, either by email or WhatsApp, I would be very happy to check that the information
perhaps has not been given to me.

1065 **Madam Speaker:** Next question.

HEALTH, CARE AND BUSINESS

Q711/2023

Speech and language therapy assistants – Number recruited, by which entity and commencement date

Clerk: Questions to the Hon. the Minister for Health, Care and Business.
Question 711. The Hon. A Sanchez.

1070 **Hon. A Sanchez:** Could the Government clarify how many speech and language therapy
assistants have been recruited to date, have they commenced their roles, and under what entity
have they been recruited?

Clerk: Answer, the Hon. the Minister for Health, Care and Business.

1075 **Minister for Health, Care and Business (Hon. G Arias-Vasquez):** Madam Speaker, the
recruitment process for speech and language therapy assistants has already commenced. Since
September 2023 to date, the GHA has been working on the creation of five senior paediatric
1080 support workers. These new roles will support the Occupational Therapy, Nutrition and Dietetics
and Speech and Language Therapy teams, as well as children and their families, in the delivery of
therapeutic and treatment interventions.

Hon. A Sanchez: Would the hon. Member be able to clarify whether this will alleviate the
concerns that are continuously expressed to us about many families and service users not being
1085 able to access one-to-one therapy services and many non-speaking children who are in need of
these services not being able to access these? Would the employment of these support
assistants – or therapy assistants, as you call them – free up the actual therapists to be able to
deliver these services?

Hon. G Arias-Vasquez: We certainly hope so, Madam Speaker, and we have been working with
1090 the teams to ensure that that is the case.

Hon. Dr K Azopardi: Madam Speaker, may I just ask the Minister to be clear: these are five new
posts? They are not filling vacancies that existed, are they? Are they five new posts? And, if so, I
1095 am not sure I caught from the answer whether they have actually been recruited yet.

Hon. G Arias-Vasquez: Madam Speaker, they are five new posts and the recruitment process
has been commenced. They have not been recruited yet.

Madam Speaker: One last question.

1100 **Hon. J Ladislaus:** Madam Speaker, could the learned Minister – the Hon. Minister, and
learned – perhaps just confirm whether she has a timeline as to when these five individuals will
be in post?

1105 **Hon. G Arias-Vasquez:** Madam Speaker, as I have confirmed, the recruitment process has been
confirmed but we have no timeline; it depends on the recruitment process.

Madam Speaker: Next question.

Q712/2023
Care Agency vehicle fleet –
Renewal

Clerk: Question 712. The Hon. A Sanchez.

1110 **Hon. A Sanchez:** When does the Government anticipate renewing the fleet of vehicles of the
Care Agency?

Clerk: Answer, the Hon. the Minister for Health, Care and Business.

1115 **Minister for Health, Care and Business (Hon. G Arias-Vasquez):** Madam Speaker, the Care
Agency fleet is constantly under review. They are currently leasing two new vehicles and two
additional buses will be arriving in the first quarter of 2024.

1120 **Hon. A Sanchez:** Would the hon. Member happen to have any figures available for the number of vehicles that have been replaced and the dates when they were replaced?

1125 **Hon. G Arias-Vasquez:** Madam Speaker, we would need specific notice of the question. As I have confirmed, we have received one of the vehicles under the leasing arrangement and we are expecting another one, and two new buses will be arriving in the first quarter of 2024. That is the information I have available.

1130 **Hon. A Sanchez:** And the new vehicles that the hon. Member has mentioned are all vehicles where the costs have been incurred by the Government? None of these are donations that have been made to the Care Agency?

Hon. G Arias-Vasquez: Madam Speaker, I will have to confirm that. I believe that they are costs incurred by the Government rather than donations.

1135 **Hon. A Sanchez:** Does the Government currently have a fleet replacement programme in place for the Care Agency to monitor the vehicles?

1140 **Hon. G Arias-Vasquez:** Madam Speaker, we looked at the Agency, to look at that. There is a programme in place for them to renew the vehicles constantly.

Madam Speaker: Next question.

Hon. G Origo: If I may quickly follow up?

1145 **Madam Speaker:** The hon. Member wants to ask a supplementary? All right.

Hon. G Origo: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Relating to the question on the fleet of vehicles for the Care Agency, could the hon. Member opposite please confirm whether the Government has any intention to renew this fleet of vehicles and make these vehicles electric?

1150 Thank you.

Hon. G Arias-Vasquez: Madam Speaker, as we are updating the fleet we are looking precisely to make most of these vehicles electric.

1155 **Madam Speaker:** Next question.

Q713/2023
Care Agency –
Finance Director post

Clerk: Question 713. The Hon. A Sanchez.

1160 **Hon. A Sanchez:** Can the Government confirm if there is a new Finance Director at the Care Agency?

Clerk: Answer, the Hon. the Minister for Health, Care and Business.

Minister for Health, Care and Business (Hon. G Arias-Vasquez): Madam Speaker, yes, there is a new Interim Finance Director, appointed in November 2023.

1165 **Hon. A Sanchez:** Can the hon. Member clarify whether this post vacancy was advertised?

Hon. G Arias-Vasquez: Madam Speaker, this post was filled before my time. I will confirm whether that was the case or otherwise.

1170 **Hon. A Sanchez:** Would the hon. Member be able to also clarify or give us information as to the total cost of this post and whether the post also carries additional costs such as accommodation, travel, etc?

1175 **Hon. G Arias-Vasquez:** Madam Speaker, the salary of the individual is £79,237. It comes with the pension scheme, and the basic salary will increase in line with cost-of-living increases afforded to the public sector. Sick leave is, again, as afforded to the public sector.

1180 **Hon. Dr K Azopardi:** May I just ask the Minister ...? She used the word 'Interim' before 'Finance Director'. Is it because the post is not permanent, or is it because the person in post is not permanent? May I just clarify that? Is this a post that they do not envisage will carry on for a long time, or is it that the person who has been put into the post, which is permanent, is not there permanently because there has not been a proper selection process carried out yet – that needs to finish?

1185 **Hon. G Arias-Vasquez:** Madam Speaker, the use of the word 'Interim' is because the person in post is not permanent.

1190 **Hon. Dr K Azopardi:** I take from that that there is an ongoing recruitment and selection process that is being conducted. Is that right, and what is the timescale for the conclusion of that process?

Hon. G Arias-Vasquez: Madam Speaker, there will be a process held, but we do not know what the timescales for the conclusion of the process will be.

1195 **Hon. Dr K Azopardi:** Have they started the process?

Hon. G Arias-Vasquez: Madam Speaker, the process has not been commenced yet.

1200 **Hon. Dr K Azopardi:** I see. I think, but I am asking the hon. Member to clarify because, in terms of the original answer, she gave a date for when this person had originally been in post. Is that right? Can she refresh our memory on that? And, if so, whatever the date is – and clearly there is an intention to commence this process – does she not have a view of when this will be done?

1205 **Hon. G Arias-Vasquez:** Madam Speaker, the date I gave was November 2023. The process will begin, but it has not commenced yet.

Madam Speaker: Next question.

Q714/2023
Care Agency and ERS –
Senior grade management transfers

Clerk: Question 714. The Hon. A Sanchez.

1210 **Hon. A Sanchez:** Since Friday, 13th October 2023 to date, how many senior-grade management staff members have been transferred to the Care Agency and Elderly Residential Services, and what roles have they assumed?

Clerk: Answer, the Hon. the Minister for Health, Care and Business.

1215

Minister for Health, Care and Business (Hon. G Arias-Vasquez): Madam Speaker, there have been two senior-grade management transfers to the Care Agency since 13th October. The roles are Head of Administration and HR Manager. There have been no transfers to ERS in that time.

1220 **Hon. A Sanchez:** Could the hon. Member clarify whether these individuals hold the same grades as they did in their previous departments?

Hon. G Arias-Vasquez: Yes, that is confirmed.

1225

Hon. Dr K Azopardi: Madam Speaker, may I clarify? These two senior-grade management staff members have been transferred to the Care Agency as Head of Admin and HR Manager, and that is because before that date those posts existed and were vacant, or is it that these posts have been created?

1230

Hon. G Arias-Vasquez: The posts were created.

Hon. Dr K Azopardi: I see. Having been created, is there an intention to now run a selection process? Are these persons in place in these new jobs on an interim basis pending a selection process?

1235

Hon. G Arias-Vasquez: Madam Speaker, that is indeed the case.

Madam Speaker: Next question.

Q715, Q725-28 and Q742/2023
Mental health –
Specialist social workers employed by Care Agency;
child and adolescent specialist psychologist; number of psychologists in GHA;
emergency assistance for crisis sufferers in the community;
creation and location of mental health A&E;
number of children referred as in- and outpatients

Clerk: Question 715. The Hon. A Sanchez.

1240

Hon. A Sanchez: How many social workers with a specialisation in mental health assigned to the Mental Health team are currently employed at the Care Agency?

Clerk: Answer, the Hon. the Minister for Health, Care and Business.

1245 **Minister for Health, Care and Business (Hon. G Arias-Vasquez):** Madam Speaker, I will answer the question together with Questions 725 to 728 and Question 742.

Clerk: Question 725. The Hon. J Ladislaus.

1250 **Hon. J Ladislaus:** Madam Speaker, does the GHA currently employ a psychologist specialised in the treatment of children and adolescents?

Clerk: Question 726. The Hon. J Ladislaus.

1255 **Hon. J Ladislaus:** Madam Speaker, what is the current contingent of psychologists within the GHA?

Clerk: Question 727. The Hon. J Ladislaus.

1260 **Hon. J Ladislaus:** Madam Speaker, can the Hon. Minister confirm what system is in place to provide emergency assistance to an individual within the community suffering from a mental health crisis?

Clerk: Question 728. The Hon. J Ladislaus.

1265

Hon. J Ladislaus: Madam Speaker, what plans are in place as to the creation of a mental health A&E, and where would that be situated?

Clerk: Question 742. The Hon. the Leader of the Opposition.

1270

Hon. Dr K Azopardi: Madam Speaker, how many children have been referred for inpatient and outpatient mental health treatment within the GHA in this calendar year to 12th December 2023, providing a breakdown between inpatient and outpatient figures?

1275

Clerk: Answer, the Hon. the Minister for Health, Care and Business.

Hon. G Arias-Vasquez: Madam Speaker, in answer to Question 715, there is one social worker with a specialisation in mental health assigned to the Mental Health team who is currently employed by the Care Agency.

1280

In answer to Questions 725 and 726, there is one psychologist who specialises in psychological treatment with children and adolescents, based in the Gibraltar Young Minds team. There are currently four psychologists employed within the GHA. The fifth and final post has been recruited and the post holder will commence on 15th January 2024.

1285

In answer to Question 727, the Mental Health Crisis Pathway was launched on 26th July 2021 and provides emergency assistance to individuals, or concerned family members, within the community suffering from a mental health crisis. The pathway has seven different triage categories, with extensive criteria on what courses of action to take.

1290

In answer to Question 728, the GHA provides a service for patients in crisis which is managed by the Mental Health Liaison team. They are located just outside of A&E and attend to mental health patients when in crisis. They are also supported by the on-call psychiatrist.

In answer to Question 742, the total number of children who have been referred for mental health treatment within the GHA in this calendar year up to 12th December 2023 is as follows: inpatients, three; outpatients, 309.

1295

Hon. A Sanchez: Could the hon. Member clarify, given that she has confirmed that there is only one social worker specialised in mental health, whether this particular social worker is facing any

backlog in relation to cases that are assigned to her in relation to mental health and whether the Government is looking to recruit any more social workers with a specialisation in this field?

1300 **Hon. G Arias-Vasquez:** The social worker, as well as carrying a significant caseload, supervises the hospital's social care team and the community social workers. So, even though there is one, she supervises a larger team who, in turn, help the community. To my knowledge, the caseload is sufficiently well managed that there is not a significant backlog, and she spends two to three days with the Mental Health Services herself; so, no, we are not aware of a significant backlog.

1305 **Hon. A Sanchez:** Is the Government looking to recruit any more social workers specialised in mental health?

Hon. G Arias-Vasquez: Madam Speaker, there has been no suggestion that we should.

1310 **Madam Speaker:** Next question.

Hon. Dr K Azopardi: Madam Speaker, I was waiting to see if my colleagues had other questions. May I just ask: on the mental health A&E, is the Minister's answer what it is because they have no plans to create a specific A&E service within a mental health facility? Will it stay at St Bernard's? Is that their policy?

1320 **Hon. G Arias-Vasquez:** Currently, Madam Speaker, the mental health facility in A&E is clinician led, so whatever the clinician feels is appropriate is what is done at that moment in time. If the clinician feels that it is appropriate to deal with them in A&E, they are dealt with in A&E, and if the clinician feels that it is appropriate to take them away to a more private setting, they are taken away to a more private setting. Currently the set-up is felt to be adequate.

1325 **Hon. Dr K Azopardi:** I take from that answer that they do not have a policy position to inaugurate a specific service elsewhere. I think that is what she said. I am giving her the opportunity to answer that, if she may.

1330 **Hon. G Arias-Vasquez:** Madam Speaker, we are looking at community mental health as a whole, but at this stage we have no specific plans to move the A&E mental health facility elsewhere.

1335 **Hon. Dr K Azopardi:** One of the concerns that we get is that you turn up with a mental health crisis in an A&E, which, of course, does have the ability to call on the services of the psychiatrist and so on, and we fully accept that, but that still it is mixed with lots of other services that are being provided at that crisis centre. Sometimes, inevitably, there are waits that have to happen. Mental health crises are very different to crises that affect your physical health. Does the Minister agree that in an ideal situation we should really be moving away from that and having a more specific centre elsewhere to provide that service?

1340 **Hon. G Arias-Vasquez:** Madam Speaker, there is now a single point of contact, which is the 111 service, which triages calls depending on their need. So yes, we do accept that there are different needs for patients suffering from a mental health crisis arriving at the hospital, but that is the point of the triage service. If they are arriving at the hospital and they are arriving at A&E, they will be triaged and they will be dealt with in different ways.

1345 There is a separate facility. There is a room, outside A&E, where patients are taken, where it is felt by clinicians it is appropriate to take them outside the A&E setting. I am told that a fifth of patients suffering from a mental health crisis are taken to this facility.

1350 **Hon. Dr K Azopardi:** May I ask, in relation to Question 726, is the Minister satisfied that the employment of four plus one, who I think she said start on 15th January next year, for five psychologists is sufficient to deal with all the mental health outpatient treatment that there needs to be?

1355 **Hon. G Arias-Vasquez:** Madam Speaker, we are satisfied. We are looking at the complement as a whole, including counsellors, and if it is felt that there is a need to employ more, more will be employed, but at the moment we are satisfied that the present complement is sufficient.

1360 **Hon. Dr K Azopardi:** Is the Minister not receiving reports in relation to the service provided, outside the clinician or official circles that she moves in? I would urge her to consult a bit more widely on that issue and perhaps take the input of service users and the associations that work within this area, because certainly the information that reaches us in relation to mental health ... The most common complaint that I get from people who want to see me is about the lack of follow-up of outpatient services in mental health, so I would urge her to perhaps consult a bit more widely on that issue and I would be grateful if she would agree to do that.

1365 **Hon. G Arias-Vasquez:** Madam Speaker, there was a recent press release which came from my office in which we said that the complaints procedure was actually brought into the Ministry, so that people with issues could come directly to the Ministry to air any such issues. We have been made aware of several issues of this nature and we are dealing with them, but we do feel that the current complement can deal with the issues that are arising.

Madam Speaker: Yes, one last question.

1375 **Hon. J Ladislaus:** Could the hon. Member confirm whether the new role that is being taken up in January is a permanent role or is on a temporary basis, and what contract that individual will be commencing under?

1380 **Hon. G Arias-Vasquez:** Madam Speaker, my understanding is that it is a permanent role, commencing on 15th January.

Madam Speaker: Next question.

Q716/2023
Care standards –
Establishment of independent body to regulate

Clerk: Question 716. The Hon. A Sanchez.

1385 **Hon. A Sanchez:** Is there a plan to establish a local independent body, like the Care Quality Commission, to regulate and moderate care standards?

Clerk: Answer, the Hon. the Minister for Health, Care and Business.

1390 **Minister for Health, Care and Business (Hon. G Arias-Vasquez):** Madam Speaker, yes, there is.

Hon. A Sanchez: Would the hon. Member be able to attach a timeframe to this, please?

Hon. G Arias-Vasquez: Madam Speaker, that was a commitment made in the GSLP manifesto, and it will be done in the lifetime of this Parliament.

1395

Madam Speaker: Next question.

Q717/2023

**Fostering and adoption court proceedings –
Selection of legal counsel re Care Agency**

Clerk: Question 717. The Hon. A Sanchez.

1400

Hon. A Sanchez: Regarding court proceedings for fostering and adoption cases involving the Care Agency, could the Government clarify the process for selecting legal counsel to represent the Care Agency in these proceedings?

Clerk: Answer, the Hon. the Minister for Health, Care and Business.

1405

Minister for Health, Care and Business (Hon. G Arias-Vasquez): Madam Speaker, there are no court proceedings specifically for fostering. Fostering is a care arrangement that may feature in the care plan of a looked-after child. Adoptions are presently private proceedings between parties.

When the Care Agency needs to be represented in court in respect of family law matters, they are represented by an in-house counsel. This work is not outsourced and therefore there is no selection procedure for legal representation.

1410

Madam Speaker: Next question.

Q718/2023

**Care Agency/ERS –
Payments made to employees re grievances/interdictions**

Clerk: Question 718. The Hon. A Sanchez.

1415

Hon. A Sanchez: How many individuals employed by HMGoG and/or Government-owned companies, holding positions in the Care Agency and/or Elderly Residential Services, have received payments or pay-outs related to raised grievances or underlying facts of any interdictions in the past six years, and what are the total costs incurred for each of these cases to date?

1420

Clerk: Answer, the Hon. the Minister for Health, Care and Business.

Minister for Health, Care and Business (Hon. G Arias-Vasquez): Madam Speaker, there have been no payments of the description proffered in the question made to individuals fitting the characteristics of those described in the question.

1425

Hon. Dr K Azopardi: I see. Does the Minister have any information in relation to any payments or pay-outs made in respect of people who have been interdicted in the last six years?

Hon. G Arias-Vasquez: Madam Speaker, I do not have any information on that.

1430

Hon. Dr K Azopardi: She does not have information, but she is not saying that there have been no payments – is that right?

1435 **Hon. G Arias-Vasquez:** I am unaware whether there have been any payments. In answer to the question asked, there have been no payments made.

1440 **Hon. Dr K Azopardi:** Presumably the Minister is saying that she considers the question of whether there have been any payments to people who have been interdicted in the last six years a different question, so we would need to file that for her to have that answer – is that right?

1445 **Chief Minister (Hon. F R Picardo):** Madam Speaker, the hon. Members opposite have asked a very specific question in the question that is before the House. The supplementary is the widest possible question, so they are two completely different questions that would require information to be sought in respect of the Care Agency or the GHA, in a way that would require different trawl. Therefore, we would not be able to tell the hon. Gentleman here whether or not the answer to his question is positive or negative, let alone give any data which would be meaningful.

Madam Speaker: Next question.

Q719/2023

Care Agency interdictions – Number of individuals interdicted, commencement date and costs

1450 **Clerk:** Question 719. The Hon. A Sanchez.

1455 **Hon. A Sanchez:** In relation to interdictions within the Care Agency, could the Government provide a breakdown of (a) the number of individuals within the Care Agency who are currently interdicted, (b) the commencement month and year of interdiction, and (c) the costs incurred so far in relation to each of these interdictions?

Clerk: Answer, the Hon. the Minister for Health, Care and Business.

Minister for Health, Care and Business (Hon. G Arias-Vasquez): Madam Speaker, I now hand over a schedule with the information requested.

Answer to Question 719/2023

	No. of Employees	Date Interdicted	Costs
GoG Employee	1	14/05/2020	None
Sub Contracted Employee	1	30/08/2023	None

1460 **Madam Speaker:** It is a very short schedule, so we will not skip a question. I will give you a moment to look at it, in case there are any supplementaries.
Any supplementaries?

1465 **Hon. Dr K Azopardi:** Well, only one, if I may, which is in relation to the Government of Gibraltar employee. If that date is right, if it is not a typo, it suggests the person has been interdicted for three and a half years. Does the Minister have any information as to why that interdiction has taken so long? Is it a disciplinary process or is it another process, and is it ongoing? I am not asking for great detail but just an understanding of it.

1470 **Hon. G Arias-Vasquez:** It is a disciplinary process, an investigation into the matter. It is ongoing, but it should be coming to an end very soon.

1475 **Hon. Dr K Azopardi:** But that person remains a government employee for three and a half years. As I understand the process, although I may be wrong, there is a period of time where someone is interdicted on pay and you then may transition to a time where they are interdicted without pay. Does the Minister know whether that is the case? Has it caused hardship on that particular person because this process is taking so long? What is the reason why it is taking so long?

1480 **Hon. G Arias-Vasquez:** Madam Speaker, the individual involved is on full pay and has been on full pay throughout the period, so there is no hardship. It is an ongoing investigation, so that is the reason why it has taken so long.

Madam Speaker: Next question.

Q720-21/2023
Adult incontinence products –
Supplier; expenditure

1485 **Clerk:** Question 720. The Hon. J Ladislaus.

Hon. J Ladislaus: Madam Speaker, who is the current provider of adult incontinence products to the GHA?

1490 **Clerk:** Answer, the Hon. the Minister for Health, Care and Business.

Minister for Health, Care and Business (Hon. G Arias-Vasquez): Madam Speaker, I will answer this question together with Question 721.

1495 **Clerk:** Question 721. The Hon. J Ladislaus.

Hon. J Ladislaus: Madam Speaker, can the Hon. Minister provide a breakdown as to the GHA's expenditure on adult incontinence products for the following years: 2013-14, 2014-15, 2015-16, 2016-17, 2017-18, 2018-19, 2019-21, 2021-22 and 2022 to date?

1500 **Clerk:** Answer, the Hon. the Minister for Health, Care and Business.

Hon. G Arias-Vasquez: Madam Speaker, in answer to Question 720, the GHA has a service level agreement in place with Eulabor S.L. for the supply of incontinence products to the hospital. The GHA has recently entered into an additional service level agreement with Trafalgar Pharmacy for the provision of incontinence products for outpatients.

In answer to Question 721. I have handed over a schedule with the information requested.

Answer to Question 721/2023

2013/2014	£315,633.37
2014/2015	£328,100.58
2015/2016	£366,540.16
2016/2017	£397,429.60
2017/2018	£395,518.57
2018/2019	£344,402.66
2019/2021	£894,066.89
2021/2022	£463,672.85
2022/2023	£445,769.74
2023 - (to date)	• £472,660.42

1510 **Madam Speaker:** We will keep Questions 720 and 721 to one side until you have had a chance to look at the schedule, and then I will allow you to ask any supplementaries which follow. We will proceed with Question 722.

Q722/2023
St Bernard's Hospital –
Current capacity

Clerk: Question 722. The Hon. J Ladislaus.

1515 **Hon. J Ladislaus:** Madam Speaker, does St Bernard's Hospital have enough beds on offer within its wards to accommodate the community's current needs?

Clerk: Answer, the Hon. the Minister for Health, Care and Business.

1520 **Minister for Health, Care and Business (Hon. G Arias-Vasquez):** Madam Speaker, there are sufficient beds to deal with and accommodate patients who require acute clinical input/services.

Madam Speaker: Next question.

1525 **Hon. Dr K Azopardi:** Madam Speaker, may I ask, does the Minister have occupancy level information in front of her, and can she let us know to what extent the current capacity of St Bernard's is occupied for acute secondary care and to what extent it is occupied by persons who are in those beds for non-acute care?

1530 **Hon. G Arias-Vasquez:** Madam Speaker, the information that I have in front of me does not enable me to answer that specific question. What I can say in relation to that question is that there are bed management meetings every Monday to manage beds and to proactively manage the processes. We are aware that there are patients in the hospital awaiting transfer to the ERS and other agencies, but there are enough beds available for any patients requiring services in the hospital.

1535 **Hon. Dr K Azopardi:** She does not have the information on how many beds are non-acute. I accept that. It is a fresh question and we will put it in due course, if necessary.

When she gives the assurance on being satisfied that there is sufficient capacity there, does she have figures on the percentage of beds that are occupied in St Bernard's?

1540

Hon. G Arias-Vasquez: Madam Speaker, I do have the information available; it just was not relevant to the specific question that he asked previously. So if I can give you that information, the overall capacity in St Bernard's Hospital in the year to date has been 62.8%; for the Calpe Ward, the figure is 62.1%; Capt. Murchison, 81.4%; Dudley Toomey, 61.5%; Emily McIntosh, the maternity ward, 18.4%; James Giraldi ITU, 52.4%; the John McIntosh rehab ward, 92%; Rainbow, 15.6%; and Victoria McIntosh, 92.3%.

1545

Hon. Dr K Azopardi: And just to confirm, the John McIntosh Ward is the heavily geriatric ward, I assume?

1550

Hon. G Arias-Vasquez: It is a rehab ward.

Hon. J Ladislaus: In respect of the patients awaiting transfer to ERS, can the hon. Member comment as to how many are awaiting transfer?

1555

Hon. G Arias-Vasquez: Madam Speaker, that figure changes constantly. If the hon. Member opposite provides me with a period, we will provide her with that figure.

Hon. J Ladislaus: Can the hon. Member comment as to the last three months?

1560

Hon. G Arias-Vasquez: I do not have that information available. I have to ask the question, and then I will obtain that information.

Madam Speaker: Next question.

Q723/2023

GHA employees –

Numbers on short-term and zero-hours contracts

1565

Clerk: Question 723. The Hon. J Ladislaus.

Hon. J Ladislaus: Madam Speaker, can the Hon. Minister provide a departmental breakdown of the number of individuals employed on short-term and zero-hours contracts by the GHA?

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Clerk: Answer, the Hon. the Minister for Health, Care and Business.

Minister for Health, Care and Business (Hon. G Arias-Vasquez): Madam Speaker, as at 13th December 2023 the GHA had the following bank – zero-hours contract – employed: nursing, 80 employees; medical, two employees; allied health professionals, six employees; ambulance, three employees; admin and support, 11 employees.

1575

Again as at 13th December 2023, the GHA had the following locums on short-term contracts: nursing, 39 employees; medical, 19 employees; allied health professionals, 18 employees; ambulance, three employees.

1580

Hon. J Ladislaus: Madam Speaker, given that such contracts are highly temporary, should we say, in nature, and they often result in a high turnover of staff, which is not in the interests of

service users and just disrupt continuity, can the Hon. Minister comment as to why there is such a large number of individuals working within the GHA still on zero-hours contracts?

1585 **Hon. G Arias-Vasquez:** Madam Speaker, the overall number is not large in the context of the staff of the GHA. These are bank workers. They are workers who are called in on a supply basis. They are workers who are needed to be contracted on this basis for the operation of the hospital.

1590 **Hon. Dr K Azopardi:** So to clarify, the 80 nursing zero-hours contracts are all bank? Is that what the hon. Member is saying? There are none who are actually there employed in any other capacity? These are 80 bank, zero-hours contract workers?

Hon. G Arias-Vasquez: Madam Speaker, that is correct.

1595 **Madam Speaker:** Next question.

Q724/2023
GHA employees –
Number of agency workers

Clerk: Question 724. The Hon. J Ladislaus.

1600 **Hon. J Ladislaus:** Madam Speaker, can the Hon. Minister provide a departmental breakdown as to the number of individuals employed by the GHA who are agency workers?

Clerk: Answer, the Hon. the Minister for Health, Care and Business.

1605 **Minister for Health, Care and Business (Hon. G Arias-Vasquez):** Madam Speaker, the GHA currently has the following numbers of individuals who are contracted via agencies: domestic, seven; catering, six; Ocean Views, five domestic plus one admin; pathology, one stores labourer plus one admin; pharmacy, one stores labourer; ERS domestic, six; ERS labourers, two; medical, 11; AHP, six; 111 clinical advisers and/or paramedics, two; nursing, 103.

1610 **Hon. J Ladislaus:** Madam Speaker, given that such agencies are usually used to provide cover on a short-term basis, could the Hon. Minister please clarify, once again, why so many individuals – particularly in the nursing sector, as we can see the numbers – are currently being sourced via agencies?

1615 **Hon. G Arias-Vasquez:** Madam Speaker, this is by operation of the hospital. This is the case in most hospitals worldwide. There will always, inevitably, be a certain element of staff employed via agencies.

1620 **Hon. J Ladislaus:** Could I just ask, Madam Speaker, whether the hon. Member could confirm whether making use of agencies to employ staff is considered beneficial to the public purse?

Hon. G Arias-Vasquez: Madam Speaker, the contracting of workers via agencies is necessary in every hospital worldwide. It is necessary to provide a service to the patients. It is an established way of getting workers for the hospital.

1625 **Madam Speaker:** Next question.

Q729-31/2023
Paramedics –
Training; development opportunities; capacity

Clerk: Question 729. The Hon. J Ladislaus.

Hon. J Ladislaus: Madam Speaker, what is the local education pathway, if any, to train new paramedics; and how long does it take for a new paramedic to qualify?

1630

Clerk: Answer, the Hon. the Minister for Health, Care and Business.

Minister for Health, Care and Business (Hon. G Arias-Vasquez): Madam Speaker, I will answer this question together with Questions 730 and 731.

1635

Clerk: Question 730. The Hon. J Ladislaus.

Hon. J Ladislaus: Madam Speaker, what professional development opportunities are available to paramedics both locally and abroad?

1640

Clerk: Question 731. The Hon. J Ladislaus.

Hon. J Ladislaus: Madam Speaker, are there currently enough paramedics to man the GHA's ambulance fleet and keep up with demand for the service?

1645

Clerk: Answer, the Hon. the Minister for Health Care and Business.

Hon. G Arias-Vasquez: Madam Speaker, in answer to Question 729, the GHA is currently working closely with the University of Gibraltar to explore the development and delivery of a paramedic degree locally. It is envisaged that this would commence in September 2024. Currently, a one-year preceptorship/mentorship programme to consolidate practice for returning paramedics after a three-year degree or masters training in the UK is applied locally.

1650

In answer to Question 730, a local MSc in Contemporary Healthcare Practice via the University of Gibraltar was offered to all paramedics working in the GHA. Additionally, in-house courses and CPD updates via the School of Health Studies are also ongoing.

1655

In answer to Question 731, the present ambulance skill-set model used by the GHA provides enough paramedic capability and contingency planning to provide resilience.

Madam Speaker: Any supplementaries? Next question.

Q732/2023
Emergency ambulances –
Transportation of discharged patients

1660

Clerk: Question 732. The Hon. J Ladislaus.

Hon. J Ladislaus: Madam Speaker, are the GHA's emergency ambulances used to transport patients home when they have been discharged from hospital?

1665

Clerk: Answer, the Hon. the Minister for Health, Care and Business.

Minister for Health, Care and Business (Hon. G Arias-Vasquez): Madam Speaker, the GHA's emergency ambulances are not used to transport patients home. The emergency ambulances are only used to transport patients to another healthcare facility.

1670

Hon. J Ladislaus: Madam Speaker, could the hon. Member confirm whether any of the other ambulances are used to transport patients home?

1675

Hon. G Arias-Vasquez: Madam Speaker, if patients are unable to get themselves home because they do not have family members etc, the GHA funds a taxi service to transport a medically fit patient home.

Madam Speaker: Next question.

Q733/2023
Diabetes clinic –
Staffing

Clerk: Question 733. The Hon. J Ladislaus.

1680

Hon. J Ladislaus: Madam Speaker, is there a diabetes clinic manned by a specialist diabetes nurse currently ongoing within the GHA?

Clerk: Answer, the Hon. the Minister for Health, Care and Business.

1685

Minister for Health, Care and Business (Hon. G Arias-Vasquez): Madam Speaker, the GHA diabetes clinic is currently manned by a specialist diabetes nurse.

1690

Hon. J Ladislaus: Madam Speaker, can the hon. Member confirm as from when that has been the case?

Hon. G Arias-Vasquez: Madam Speaker, I am unable to give a date as to since when that has been the case. It has been the case for quite a while that the specialist diabetes clinic is manned by a specialist diabetes nurse.

1695

Madam Speaker: Next question.

Q734/2023
Knee surgery –
Weekday and weekend surgery cost differential

Clerk: Question 734. The Hon. J Ladislaus.

1700

Hon. J Ladislaus: Madam Speaker, what is the cost to the GHA of carrying out knee surgeries on a weekday in comparison with carrying out the same surgery on a weekend?

Clerk: Answer, the Hon. the Minister for Health, Care and Business.

1705 **Minister for Health, Care and Business (Hon. G Arias-Vasquez):** Madam Speaker, the cost of knee surgery is dependent on a number of different variables, namely complexity, urgency, time taken, type of surgery, equipment required, post-operative ward costs, type of prosthetics required and staffing costs. It is naturally expected that any increase in cost for any knee surgery carried out during a weekend is only due to staffing remuneration rates.

1710 **Hon. J Ladislaus:** Madam Speaker, could the hon. Member please clarify whether there is a difference in cost because one is working over the weekend rather than on a weekday in order to carry out these surgeries? One would expect that to be the case, given that weekends are considered more unsociable hours.

1715 **Hon. G Arias-Vasquez:** Madam Speaker, as I have confirmed, any increase in costs comes from staffing costs.

1720 **Hon. Dr K Azopardi:** Madam Speaker, just to clarify on that issue, unless it is an emergency knee surgery, why would it be the case that you are doing elective or programmed surgery on a weekend?

Hon. G Arias-Vasquez: Madam Speaker, this was an initiative that was brought forward by the clinicians in the GHA. They are waiting list initiatives to reduce waiting times for patients.

1725 **Madam Speaker:** Next question.

Q735-36/2023
COVID Fund –
Spending public donations and consultation thereon

Clerk: Question 735. The Hon. J Ladislaus.

1730 **Hon. J Ladislaus:** Madam Speaker, have or will clinical staff be consulted in respect of what the public donations to the COVID Fund would be best spent on?

Clerk: Answer, the Hon. the Minister for Health, Care and Business.

1735 **Minister for Health, Care and Business (Hon. G Arias-Vasquez):** Madam Speaker, I will answer this question together with Question 736.

Clerk: Question 736. The Hon. J Ladislaus.

1740 **Hon. J Ladislaus:** Madam Speaker, now that plans for a new entrance to St Bernard's Hospital have been scrapped, can the Hon. Minister confirm what the public donations to the COVID Fund will be spent on?

Clerk: Answer, the Hon. the Minister for Health Care and Business.

1745 **Hon. G Arias-Vasquez:** Madam Speaker, no decision has been taken as to the future of the COVID Fund. However, as with the entrance proposal, there will be full public and clinical engagement and consultation regarding the use of the COVID Fund, including with the clinical staff.

1750 **Hon. J Ladislaus:** Madam Speaker, does the hon. Member accept that the public was not initially consulted? It was only once the plans were revealed as to the entrance to the hospital that the public outcry was then heeded.

1755 **Hon. G Arias-Vasquez:** Madam Speaker, the public was consulted on the plans, so, no, I do not accept that premise.

Hon. J Ladislaus: Madam Speaker, does the Hon. Minister have a timeframe as to when the decision could be taken as to whether the public donations to the COVID Fund would be spent?

1760 **Hon. G Arias-Vasquez:** No, Madam Speaker, we do not have a timeframe.

Madam Speaker: Next question.

Q737-38/2023

Legionnaires' disease outbreak – Identification and treatment of source

Clerk: Question 737. The Hon. J Ladislaus.

1765 **Hon. J Ladislaus:** Madam Speaker, can the Hon. Minister specify what steps have been or are being taken to identify and deal with the source of infection in respect of recently reported cases of Legionnaires' disease within Gibraltar?

Clerk: Answer, the Hon. the Minister for Health, Care and Business.

1770 **Minister for Health, Care and Business (Hon. G Arias-Vasquez):** Madam Speaker, I will answer this question together with Question 738.

Clerk: Question 738. The Hon. C Sacarello.

1775 **Hon. C Sacarello:** Madam Speaker, can the Government categorically confirm that this mini-outbreak of Legionnaires' disease did not originate from any AquaGib-owned reservoirs or pipes?

Clerk: Answer the Minister for Health, Care and Business.

1780 **Hon. G Arias-Vasquez:** Madam Speaker, we have not identified that any potential sources of infection are in AquaGib-owned reservoirs or pipes. However, as the hon. Member may be aware, following Press Release 872/2023 issued on Friday evening, the Director of Public Health confirmed that a common source of infection had been identified and was immediately isolated. Further assurances from water specialists have been given to confirm that the risk from this potential source has now been mitigated to the extent that it poses no significant risk of further infections.

1785 **Hon. J Ladislaus:** Madam Speaker, can the hon. Member comment as to what the potential source is?

1790 **Hon. G Arias-Vasquez:** Madam Speaker, there is an ongoing investigation into this matter and it would be highly irresponsible of me to do so.

1795 **Hon. C Sacarello:** Madam Speaker, could the hon. Member perhaps explain why Reservoir No. 1 was emptied the same day – that Friday that you mentioned – the outbreak was announced publicly, why it was worked on overnight, and what function exactly was being performed that that day and night?

1800 **Hon. G Arias-Vasquez:** Madam Speaker, it must have been for reasons entirely unrelated, because it was not referred to us in any meetings.

Madam Speaker: I have given leave to the Hon. the Leader of the Opposition. All right, the Hon. Mr Sacarello.

1805 **Hon. C Sacarello:** Thank you, Madam Speaker. Does the Government have sufficiently robust water management programmes in place to avoid creating the ideal climate for the future creation of the bacterium *legionella*?

1810 **Hon. G Arias-Vasquez:** Madam Speaker, yes, we do.

Madam Speaker: Does the Hon. the Leader of the Opposition have a question?

1815 **Hon. Dr K Azopardi:** Yes, just on that, because the question of the source of infection being isolated was the subject of a government press release on Friday and reported on Saturday morning, I think it was, and the press release actually says that action has been taken to isolate. I cannot recall the specific phrase used, but the Hon. Minister said something like it was ‘a common source of infection’. Without telling us precisely what it was, can she not elaborate, in the public interest, what that source of infection was? People are concerned about the Legionnaires’ outbreak, which unfortunately and tragically led to the loss of the life of one person, and I am sure
1820 Members opposite join us in expressing our condolences on that issue, but can she not reassure people by giving a bit more information on the source of infection?

1825 **Hon. G Arias-Vasquez:** Madam Speaker, as I have already confirmed, there is an ongoing investigation and we cannot give any more information. What we can say is that the source has been isolated and there is no risk of any further infection.

1830 **Hon. Dr K Azopardi:** I understand that, but I am asking, if she is satisfied at the end of that investigation or at the current point in the investigation that this is the cause of the infection, can she not give a bit more information about that? Ultimately, for them to issue that press release on Friday, they must have been satisfied that it was the source of it, and if they are satisfied that it is the source of it, why not end the public speculation in the public interest and reassure the public?

1835 **Madam Speaker:** I just want to interject here to remind the hon. Member that a question should not be asked whether a press release was accurate or not.

Hon. Dr K Azopardi: I am not sure, Madam –

1840 **Madam Speaker:** I am not sure that that was what you were asking, but for the avoidance of doubt, for the Minister answering, I just highlight that rule.

1845 **Hon. Dr K Azopardi:** Madam Speaker, I am not sure I put it in those terms, but if I did – because I cannot recall – I certainly did not intend it in that way. I thought I was asking the very straight question that I did towards the end of my supplementary.

Madam Speaker: Well, I understood that perhaps you were asking for comment on the press release, but –

Hon. Dr K Azopardi: No.

1850

Madam Speaker: All right.

Hon. G Arias-Vasquez: Madam Speaker, the investigation has not been finalised, it is an ongoing investigation, so we cannot comment any further.

1855

Hon. Dr K Azopardi: If I may probe that a bit, the Government issued a press release and the Minister has stood up in this House, on the strength of that press release, to say that there has been an identification of the source of it. What I am saying is, if she has made that assurance to the people, and given the concern that there is on this issue, can she not reassure the public about the source of it, given her affirmation, in the public interest?

1860

Hon. G Arias-Vasquez: Madam Speaker, in the public interest I cannot say more at this stage.

Madam Speaker: All right. Yes, the Hon. Mr Clinton.

1865

Hon. R M Clinton: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I just have a very brief question. If, as the Minister says, the Government has identified the source, can she at least tell the House whether the source is a public sector source, or is it something in the private sector?

1870

Chief Minister (Hon. F R Picardo): Madam Speaker, we refer all hon. Members to the answer the Hon. Minister gave a few moments ago.

Madam Speaker: Yes, the Hon. Mr Origo.

1875

Hon. G Origo: Madam Speaker, thank you.

Could the hon. Member opposite please clarify? In her statement, a few times, she referred to the common source of infection, but I refer to the press release issued on Friday and the very words ‘a potential common source of infection was identified’, which infers that it may not be the actual source that the Legionnaires’ disease derived from. So could the hon. Member opposite please confirm and clarify that it may not actually be that this common source which has been identified is actually the source which the disease came from?

1880

Hon. G Arias-Vasquez: Madam Speaker, that reflects the issue. I am very grateful that the hon. Member opposite has clarified that it is a potential source at this point. It is a very likely potential source, but we cannot say any more. The investigation is ongoing and it is not in the public interest for me to say any more at this stage.

1885

Madam Speaker: If it is a different question, not on the same issue, yes.

1890

Hon. J Ladislaus: Madam Speaker, following the recent outbreak of Legionnaires’, can the hon. Member confirm whether any extra precautions will be taken in establishments such as schools following the festive period that we are about to come upon, in order to prevent or mitigate this from occurring again?

1895

Minister for Education, the Environment and Climate Change (Hon. Prof. J E Cortes): If I may, in relation to schools, the measures are ongoing. There was an incident some years ago, hon. Members may recall, and since then, whenever the schools are closed for any period of time, taps

1900 are left running for the required period and so on. So we are very confident that the schools are well catered for and that there is no danger in schools, since the hon. Member has mentioned schools specifically.

Madam Speaker: Next question.

Q739/2023
GEA vacant posts –
Recruitment

Clerk: Question 739. The Hon. C Sacarello.

1905 **Hon. C Sacarello:** In November's parliamentary session the Government confirmed that there were 30 unfilled vacancies within the GEA, of which 12 were actively being recruited for. Is the Government intending on filling the remaining 18 vacancies; and, if so, when?

Clerk: Answer, the Hon. the Minister for Health, Care and Business.

1910 **Minister for Health, Care and Business (Hon. G Arias-Vasquez):** Madam Speaker, HMGoG intends to recruit for the remaining 18 vacancies once all vacancies have been advertised internally. The remaining vacancies will then go out to the public for candidates who meet the requirements.

1915 Previous applicants have been found to have been lacking in proficiency. Therefore, HMGoG, in collaboration with the GEA and the Gibraltar College of Further Education, is considering vocational electrical training courses for students, with a view to attaining NVQ level.

Madam Speaker: Next question.

Q740/2023
GEA –
Companies engaged in last financial year

1920 **Clerk:** Question 740. The Hon. C Sacarello.

Hon. C Sacarello: Would the Government please confirm the names of the 12 companies that the GEA engaged with in the last financial year?

1925 **Clerk:** Answer, the Hon. the Minister for Health, Care and Business.

1930 **Minister for Health, Care and Business (Hon. G Arias-Vasquez):** Madam Speaker, the names of the 12 companies that the GEA engaged in the last financial year are International Site Services, Bruno Henrique Mendes da Silva, Park Solar One, JMP Systems, Glide Technologies Ltd, Safety Solutions Ltd, Mediterranean Computer Services Ltd, Darktrace Ltd, ABC Services Company Ltd, Mott Macdonald, OSG and Aquagib Ltd.

Madam Speaker: Next question.

1935 **Clerk:** Question 741. The Hon. the Leader of the Opposition.

Hon. Dr K Azopardi: Madam Speaker, if I may, I think my colleague has some questions on the incontinence schedule, which is Question 721.

Madam Speaker: I am happy to take that now. We will put this one on pause.

Q721/2023
Adult incontinence products –
Expenditure –
Supplementary questions

1940 **Hon. J Ladislaus:** I am grateful, Madam Speaker, and I am grateful to the Hon. Leader of the Opposition as well, for highlighting that.

Could the hon. Lady confirm whether the provider has changed, in the recent six months or so, as to the incontinence products that are being provided to service users?

1945 **Minister for Health, Care and Business (Hon. G Arias-Vasquez):** Madam Speaker, the provider has not changed. There has been further provision to outpatients, which was not there initially, but the provider, Eulabor SL, has not changed.

1950 **Hon. J Ladislaus:** Madam Speaker, can the hon. Member confirm whether the same products are being sourced? I ask this question on the basis that I am receiving complaints from service users that the products are not up to standard, as they were in the past, and therefore they are not benefiting from their use.

1955 **Hon. G Arias-Vasquez:** Madam Speaker, I am unaware of any change of products.

Madam Speaker: The Hon. the Leader of the Opposition had a question?

1960 **Hon. Dr K Azopardi:** Yes, Madam Speaker. I just wanted to ask, because in the original answer to Question 720, the hon. Lady Minister talked about Eulabor – that is the right one, yes? – and then she went on to talk about Trafalgar Pharmacy for outpatients. Does that mean that Eulabor do the inpatients and Trafalgar Pharmacy now do the outpatients, but, before, Eulabor did both of them? Is that right?

In the schedule to Question 721 we have a collective cost. Is there a breakdown that she has between inpatient and outpatient?

1965 **Hon. G Arias-Vasquez:** Madam Speaker, in order to take those two questions separately, my understanding was that previously Eulabor provided all of the incontinence products. There were issues with the provision of services to individuals, and therefore it was sought to rectify that by having a local provider.

1970 I do not have a breakdown of the two figures with me.

Madam Speaker: All right, let's revert to Question 741.

Q741/2023
Flu vaccine –
Number administered

Clerk: Question 741. The Hon. the Leader of the Opposition.

1975 **Hon. Dr K Azopardi:** Madam Speaker, how many people have taken up the offer of this year's flu vaccine to 12th December 2023?

Clerk: Answer, the Hon. the Minister for Health, Care and Business.

1980 **Minister for Health, Care and Business (Hon. G Arias-Vasquez):** Madam Speaker, a total of 5,579 flu vaccines have been administered this calendar year up to 12th December 2023.

1985 **Hon. Dr K Azopardi:** Madam Speaker, as a beneficiary of the flu vaccine, I declare my interest. Does the Minister have statistics on how that compares with previous years, and can I invite her to encourage people to take the flu vaccine, as I always did her predecessor?

Hon. G Arias-Vasquez: Madam Speaker, I had my picture taken taking the flu vaccine and I would encourage all Gibraltarians to take their flu vaccine regularly.

1990 In answer to the previous question, in 2019, 2,945 flu vaccines were administered; in 2020, 7,568 flu vaccines were administered; in 2021, 6,077 flu vaccines were administered; and in 2022, 6,822 flu vaccines were administered.

Madam Speaker: Next question.

Q743-44/2023
Prescription glasses –
Pensioner entitlement

Clerk: Question 743. The Hon. the Hon. the Leader of the Opposition.

1995 **Hon. Dr K Azopardi:** Madam Speaker, what is the GHA policy on entitlement to prescription glasses for pensioners?

Clerk: Answer, the Hon. the Minister for Health, Care and Business.

2000 **Minister for Health, Care and Business (Hon. G Arias-Vasquez):** Madam Speaker, I will answer this question together with Question 744.

Clerk: Question 744. The Hon. the Leader of the Opposition.

2005 **Hon. Dr K Azopardi:** Madam Speaker, are pensioners entitled under GHA criteria to prescription glasses for free should they need it whenever their prescription changes?

Clerk: Answer, the Hon. the Minister for Health, Care and Business.

2010 **Hon. G Arias-Vasquez:** Madam Speaker, under the GHA's Patient Optical Appliance Policy, Optical (Adults) 2007, persons registered under the GPMS in receipt of an old age pension or elderly person's allowance, or their dependant, are eligible for GHA assistance with the cost of

2015 prescription glasses. The level of subsidy provided is means tested. Therefore, only those persons who meet the policy's criteria and who are on low income will receive a free pair of glasses.

2020 **Hon. Dr K Azopardi:** I see, and that applies to everybody, including pensioners? There is means testing also for pensioners – is that right? The mere fact that someone is a pensioner does not automatically mean that they are given prescription glasses for free – is that what the hon. Member is saying?

Hon. G Arias-Vasquez: Madam Speaker, unfortunately, I do not have that level of information on me today. Again, I can clarify that.

2025 **Hon. Dr K Azopardi:** Madam Speaker, the question is quite specific. My questions are only about pensioners, both of them: whether they are entitled to get glasses for free. She has given an answer in relation to a policy and explained that the policy is means tested, and in my supplementary I just ask does that mean that the means testing policy that she has described applies to pensioners, because my questions are only about pensioners. I do not think she needs notice of that.

2030 **Hon. G Arias-Vasquez:** The information that I have been given says that persons in receipt of an old age pension or elderly person's allowance are eligible for GHA assistance with the cost of prescription glasses, so I think that answers the hon. Member's question.

2035 **Hon. Dr K Azopardi:** Well, I would ask her to perhaps check that, because the information that we are receiving – and the information may or may not be accurate, but it is the source of the question and I am inviting her to review the issue, if that is so – is that some pensioners are being told that they are entitled to get prescription glasses for free, but only if their prescription changes within a certain number of years, and that if it changes more frequently than three, four or five years, they are not entitled to get their prescription glasses for free. So to the extent that people are receiving information like that, the Minister can assure people that that is incorrect?

2040 **Hon. G Arias-Vasquez:** Madam Speaker, my understanding is that applications for assistance are available every two years, and there is an exception for that considered where there is a clinical need for a change in a person's glasses. The applications, therefore, cannot be every five years as the hon. Member says. However, if there is information that is being received, I would welcome that information to be provided to me, and we will check it. As far as we are concerned, the policy is that applications for assistance are available every two years.

2045 **Hon. Dr K Azopardi:** I see, but I think the Minister has said also 'subject to clinical need'. If someone's prescription changes within two years, does the Minister agree with me that there is, therefore, a clinical need for the prescription to change, and that they would, therefore, be eligible under the saving of that policy?

2050 **Hon. G Arias-Vasquez:** The clinical need arises if there is ocular surgery, eye disease or anything of that nature. I review my own glasses once every two years. In the ordinary course, applications can be made once every two years. If there is a clinical need based on a significant change, i.e. eye disease or ocular surgery, the prescription glasses will be reviewed.

2055 **Hon. Dr K Azopardi:** I see. So something as significant as that; the clinical need does not extend to a simple change of the prescription. Is that right?

2060 **Hon. G Arias-Vasquez:** Madam Speaker, there has to be a *significant* change in the prescription, and the significant change is determined by clinicians.

Hon. Dr K Azopardi: I understand, but given that it is all about the policy, really, can I invite the hon. Member to perhaps reflect on whether the policy should change to allow persons on low incomes to be entitled to changes in prescription for free within the two-year period, precisely because they are on low income?

2070

Hon. G Arias-Vasquez: Madam Speaker, where a clinician determines that there is a clinical need for the review of that prescription, indeed, that is the case, but otherwise the policy remains that every two years there is assistance available for people requiring prescription glasses.

2075

Madam Speaker: Next question.

JUSTICE, TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Q745/2023

HM Prison –

Apprenticeships and courses

Clerk: Questions to the Hon the Minister for Justice, Trade and Industry.
Question 745. The Hon. A Sanchez.

2080

Hon. A Sanchez: Could the Government state whether there are any apprenticeships/courses currently available for those in custody at HM Prison; and, if so, could they provide details of the courses available and the current number of individuals participating in said programmes?

Clerk: Answer, the Hon. the Minister for Justice, Trade and Industry.

2085

Minister for Justice, Trade and Industry (Hon. N Feetham): Madam Speaker, HM Prison Service does not offer any apprenticeships. It offers one-hour evening classes delivered by the College of Further Education in the following subjects: English, Maths, Spanish and French. HM Prison Service also has a workshop for hand crafts/woodwork. At present, we have 50% – 16 inmates – participating.

2090

Madam Speaker: Any supplementaries?

Hon. E J Reyes: Madam Speaker, the one-hour session, is it one hour per week or one hour daily? I am not acquainted with the frequency.

2095

Hon. N Feetham: My understanding, Madam Speaker, is that it is one hour daily. That is the information that I have here, which I have interpreted as meaning one hour daily.

2100

Hon. A Sanchez: Does the hon. Member have any plans to introduce any apprenticeship courses at HM Prison for those who might be interested?

2105

Hon. N Feetham: Madam Speaker, apprenticeships have never been provided in the Prison, mainly as it requires years of training and inmates' sentences fall well below the training requirements, and they are, therefore, unable to complete the course while in prison. Space in the establishment is limited and I believe that a major investment by Government would have to be made in order to provide teachers, materials, machinery and, more importantly, space.

Madam Speaker: Next question.

Q746/2023
Electric scooters –
Number of riders prosecuted

Clerk: Question 746. The Hon. G Origo.

2110

Hon. G Origo: Madam Speaker, can the Government state how many electric scooter riders have been prosecuted for contravening traffic laws?

Clerk: Answer, the Hon. the Minister for Justice, Trade and Industry.

2115

Minister for Justice, Trade and Industry (Hon. N Feetham): Madam Speaker, the Royal Gibraltar Police have prosecuted 13 electric scooter riders for the offence of driving a personal light electric transporter (PLET) whilst over the prescribed limit of alcohol.

2120

Madam Speaker: Next question.

Q747/2023
RGP inspectors –
Number

Clerk: Question 746. The Hon. J Ladislaus.

Hon. J Ladislaus: Madam Speaker, how many inspectors does the RGP currently have within its complement, considering any inspectors who are not currently on active duty?

2125

Clerk: Answer, the Hon. the Minister for Justice, Trade and Industry.

Minister for Justice, Trade and Industry (Hon. N Feetham): Madam Speaker, the Royal Gibraltar Police has 14 inspectors, of whom one has been interdicted and two are on sick leave.

2130

Hon. J Ladislaus: Madam Speaker, given the vast number of interdictions in recent months, could the hon. Member clarify whether anything is being put in place to mitigate the shortfall, particularly in terms of senior officers within the RGP?

2135

Hon. N Feetham: I am grateful for the question, Madam Speaker. The absent inspectors are being covered by sergeants acting as inspectors in their stead and by other inspectors covering the rostered duty officers' responsibilities. There is an inspector appointed as the duty officer and on duty during eight hours, and then on call on a 24/7 basis. All inspectors share this responsibility, which occurs on a rotation every 14 weeks.

2140

Hon. J Ladislaus: Madam Speaker, I am grateful to the hon. Member for that, but could he perhaps clarify who is covering the sergeants who are, in turn, acting inspectors?

2145

Hon. N Feetham: My understanding, Madam Speaker, is that it is police constables who, in turn, cover for sergeants.

Hon. J Ladislaus: Madam Speaker, could the hon. Member then perhaps clarify what is being put in place in order to mitigate the impact of the shortfall that is clearly occurring within the RGP?

2150 **Hon. N Feetham:** Madam Speaker, the Government of Gibraltar continues to support the Commissioner of Police with further resources and has done so by recently starting the employment process for the recruitment of more officers, and for more support staff to release police officers into frontline duties.

2155 I would also like to remind the hon. Member opposite that in answer to the last parliamentary question – how does the Government propose to tackle the shortfall in the Royal Gibraltar Police complement and its impact on policing? – we stated:

the Royal Gibraltar Police has recently employed 16 police officers, who started their police recruit training in September 2023 and should be operationally deployable in March 2024. Furthermore, the RGP has recently conducted an additional recruitment campaign and will soon be employing a further 12 police officers, who will start their police recruit training in January 2024.

2160 In addition, as a supplementary answer to the parliamentary Question 584/2023 in the last parliamentary session, we said, ‘His Majesty’s Government of Gibraltar has also agreed with the Commissioner of Police that the Royal Gibraltar Police should not fall below the complement level’ and, in the new financial year, will be allowed to recruit above the complement level to maintain resilience.

Madam Speaker: Next question.

Q748/2023
RGP officers interdicted –
Number and rank

Clerk: Question 748. The Hon. J Ladislaus.

2165 **Hon. J Ladislaus:** Madam Speaker, can the Hon. Minister confirm the current number of Royal Gibraltar Police officers who are currently interdicted and their ranks?

Clerk: Answer, the Hon. the Minister for Justice, Trade and Industry.

2170 **Minister for Justice, Trade and Industry (Hon. N Feetham):** Madam Speaker, there are currently nine police officers who are interdicted: one inspector, three sergeants and five constables.

2175 **Hon. J Ladislaus:** Madam Speaker, could the hon. Gentleman perhaps confirm whether it could be the case that police officers, particularly the more senior officers, could be covered by bringing in officers from other constabularies?

2180 **Hon. N Feetham:** Absolutely, Madam Speaker. In fact, in my last meeting with the Commissioner of Police we discussed that precise subject and I am pleased to report to this House that the Commissioner has identified a number of potential recruits from the United Kingdom at a level that will allow for the replacement of gaps and shortage within the Police Force.

2185 **Hon. J Ladislaus:** Madam Speaker, could the hon. Gentleman perhaps confirm whether those would be short-term posts and how many will be recruited? I am grateful.

Hon. N Feetham: I do not currently have that information with me at hand, but I am very happy to provide that information outside this forum.

Madam Speaker: Next question.

Q749/2023
Terror threat level –
RGP resource

2190 **Clerk:** Question 749. The Hon. J Ladislaus.

Hon. J Ladislaus: Given that the terror threat level has been raised by various European countries in recent weeks because of the escalation in the situation in the Middle East, can the Government confirm that they will further resource the RGP to cope with any extra demands on workload resulting from an increased threat level?

Clerk: Answer, the Hon. the Minister for Justice, Trade and Industry.

2200 **Minister for Justice, Trade and Industry (Hon. N Feetham):** Madam Speaker, the threat level to Gibraltar, which is set by the Gibraltar Contingency Council, which is co-chaired by His Excellency the Governor and the Hon. the Chief Minister, has not increased and continues to be at 'moderate'. The question is, therefore, hypothetical.

Madam Speaker: Next question.

INWARD INVESTMENT AND THE SAVINGS BANK

Q750/2023
Public debt –
Figures at 1st November 2023

Q751/2023
General Sinking Fund –
Balance at 1st November 2023

Q752/2023
TNG Realty (Eastside) Ltd bonds –
Whether to be purchased by Government or its entities

Q753/2023
GSB loan to GSBA Ltd –
Whether to be used to fund National Economic Plan

Q754/2023
GSB cash in hand –
Whether held as Bank of England sterling notes and coins

2205 **Clerk:** Questions to the Hon. the Minister for Inward Investment and the Savings Bank. Question 750. The Hon. R M Clinton.

Hon. R M Clinton: Madam 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 date: 1st November 2023?

Clerk: Answer, the Hon. the Minister for Inward Investment and the Savings Bank.

Minister for Inward Investment and the Savings Bank (Hon. Sir J J Bossano): Madam Speaker, I will answer this question together with Question 751 to 754.

2215

Clerk: Question 751. The Hon. R M Clinton.

Hon. R M Clinton: Can the Government advise the balance on the General Sinking Fund on the following date: 1st November 2023?

2220

Clerk: Question 752. The Hon. R M Clinton.

Hon. R M Clinton: Can the Government advise whether the Gibraltar Savings Bank or any other government owned or controlled entity will be purchasing any bonds issued by TNG Realty (Eastside) Ltd?

2225

Clerk: Question 753. The Hon. R M Clinton.

Hon. R M Clinton: Can the Government advise what element of the £60 million borrowed from the Gibraltar Savings Bank by GSBA Ltd at 30th September 2023 is being used to fund the Government's National Economic Plan?

2230

Clerk: Question 754. The Hon. R M Clinton.

Hon. R M Clinton: Can the Government advise if the £12,185,428.79 reported as cash in hand at the Gibraltar Savings Bank at 30th September 2023 are Bank of England issued sterling notes and coins?

2235

Clerk: Answer, the Hon. the Minister for Inward Investment and the Savings Bank.

2240

Hon. Sir J J Bossano: Madam Speaker, the General Sinking Fund, gross debt and aggregate debt for November 2023 was at the same level as it was in October 2023. The cash reserves and the net debt figures were as follows. At 1st November 2023, cash reserves £80 million and net debt £765.1 million.

2245

As regards the bonds issued by TNG Realty (Eastside) Ltd, no decision has yet been taken on whether to invest.

No element of the £60 million GSBA loan notes held by the Savings Bank is funding any government expenditure under the National Economic Plan.

The £12,185,428.79 cash in hand at the Gibraltar Savings Bank at 30th September 2023 consisted of either Bank of England or Gibraltar Government sterling notes and Royal Mint or Gibraltar National Mint coins.

2250

Hon. R M Clinton: Madam Speaker, I will deal with the questions one by one. In relation to Question 752, in terms of purchasing bonds issued by TNG Realty, the Minister said no decision has been made as yet. My question was fairly wide in terms of Savings Bank or government owned or controlled entities. Can he tell the House who is considering whether or not to invest in these bonds? Is it the Savings Bank or a government-owned company? What entity is making this deliberation? Also, if I may add, to what extent would they consider an investment of this sort?

2255

Hon. Sir J J Bossano: I cannot tell the hon. Member what they will or will not decide, but the people who decide are the people who decide all the investments in the Savings Bank. That is to say in the Written Answer he has a breakdown of investments of £1.6 billion. Those investments are decisions taken by the professionals who operate the investment side of the deposits.

2260

2265 **Hon. R M Clinton:** Madam Speaker, I think he has answered my question in terms of what entity – the Gibraltar Savings Bank, it would appear. Can the Minister confirm ...? Well, he has confirmed – the Savings Bank – but can he give an indication of how much the Savings Bank might be willing to invest?

2270 **Hon. Sir J J Bossano:** I am not involved in taking a decision, and in any case, what they might or might not do is hypothetical, and therefore I do not have to answer.

2275 **Hon. Dr K Azopardi:** Madam Speaker, before my hon. colleague goes on to other questions, is the Minister saying that the Government or the Minister is not going to be involved in any shape or form in the decision making on this question?

Hon. Sir J J Bossano: I am the Minister responsible for the Savings Bank to this Parliament and I have answered that quite clearly. I do not know why he thinks he needs a supplementary.

2280 **Hon. Dr K Azopardi:** Only because in previous decisions in relation to the Savings Bank, we have certainly got the impression that the Minister has been involved in the decision making. For example, when there was an announcement about the possible use of Savings Bank moneys in relation to the Victoria Stadium or other projects, it was announced by the hon. Member quite publicly. I was simply asking, to the extent that the Savings Bank is going to take a decision, whether the Minister or any other Minister is going to be involved in the decision making, because
2285 clearly they have been in the past.

2290 **Hon. Sir J J Bossano:** Madam Speaker, if the hon. Member took the trouble to read the manifesto of the election he would know that there is a policy of investing in sponsored projects in the National Economic Plan. This particular investment does not fall into that category. It falls into the category of, for example, the £200 million that is being invested in companies in the United Kingdom, and that is not a decision that requires a policy decision by the Government. That has been happening for as long as the Savings Bank has been in existence, or at least in recent years. In the time when they were in government, there were investments in debt issued by companies in the United Kingdom, and those decisions were taken on the merits of the investment
2295 professionally and not on any other criteria. That continues to be the case.

2300 **Hon. Dr K Azopardi:** Just a final question, Madam Speaker. Of course, these bonds are unlisted and unsecured and they are of a different and higher risk nature, but I think the Hon. Minister is saying – although he has not said so in terms, because I put my supplementary again and his answer was to explain methodology with reference, first, to the manifesto and then, subsequently, to the fact that this project fell outside the manifesto; I do not think he exactly said so in terms, but I am inviting him to say so – that he would not form part of the decision making on this issue.

2305 **Hon. Sir J J Bossano:** What he is asking me has already been answered, but I can tell him that my view is that there is a higher risk of a quoted company defaulting in London, because the money that is invested in this particular bond would be money that would result in economic activity in Gibraltar. The money that we invest in the Stock Exchange in London produces nothing for Gibraltar other than the return. I do not necessarily accept that because something is listed, it
2310 is less risky than if it is not listed, but that is a matter of opinion.

Madam Speaker: The Hon. Mr Clinton.

2315 **Hon. R M Clinton:** Thank you, Madam Speaker. I will carry on to the next question, Question 753. If I understood the Minister's answer correctly, I think he said nothing was being spent by the

2320 Government on the National Economic Plan. The Minister will recall that in previous questions in this House I have asked about GSBA. In fact, I think he volunteered the information about GSBA, and at the time he had mentioned that the GSBA had funded something in the order of £20 million towards the Rooke Nursing Home cost via intermediary companies. The Minister will, of course, recognise that. Over and above that £20 million, has any other amount of the £60 million lent to GSBA been used in support of the Government National Economic Plan, of which he is the architect?

2325 **Hon. Sir J J Bossano:** Since he mentioned the Government National Economic Plan, I assumed that he was referring to whether the Government was spending money in the National Economic Plan, which was sourced from the Savings Bank. If he is talking about whether the Savings Bank has bought loan notes related to sponsored projects beyond the £20 million, the position now is that currently it is £39.5 million.

2330 **Hon. R M Clinton:** I am grateful to the Hon. Minister – we got to what I was trying to ask. I think he just said £39.5 million, so the additional £19 million-odd: can the Minister provide any information to the House as to which sponsored projects this is supporting?

2335 **Hon. Sir J J Bossano:** At the last meeting of the House I listed the projects that had been sponsored. He had the ones that were completed and the ones that were ongoing, and those are the ones that are covered by the original £20 million and the new £19.5 million.

Madam Speaker: Does the Hon. Mr Clinton have anything further?
Next question.

2340 **Hon. R M Clinton:** Madam Speaker, I have one on the next question.

Madam Speaker: I did ask.

2345 **Hon. R M Clinton:** Sorry, Madam Speaker, I meant I had nothing more on this question. Just moving to the last question I had for the hon. Member, Question 754, the Minister, I think, has not given me an exact answer as to what element of the £12 million is in Bank of England or Gibraltar currency notes, but can I ask the Minister this? The Currency Notes Security Fund is invested in the Gibraltar Savings Bank, or at least 100% the last time I checked. The last time I had a Principal Auditor's Report, the balance of the money, which would represent now about
2350 £34 million, represented a deposit in the Savings Bank. If there is £12 million of notes in the Savings Bank, it becomes circular if that £12 million is listed as an asset, which is an asset for the Currency Notes Fund, which is supposed to be secured on assets to secure those notes. It is totally circular. Is the Minister, in any way, considering that point and that the currency notes of Gibraltar issued under the Currency Notes Fund cannot, obviously, provide security to itself, being an asset?
2355 It cannot be an asset of itself, so has he taken steps to ensure that of that £12 million, certainly from a purist point of view, it is, in the bulk, Bank of England notes? And, if I may ask, why is there a need for such a high balance?

2360 **Hon. Sir J J Bossano:** I do not know why he feels the need to ask it this year and he has not asked it ever before. That balance has been there for a very long time. That is the balance, and I do not see ... The Gibraltar pound is sterling as much as the UK pound is sterling – it says it on the note – *(Interjection by Hon. R M Clinton)* so that is the amount that it has in cash here, and of course the amount that we have invested in the Bank of England is higher, anyway, than the
2365 money in circulation. I do not know what his concern is, but he has certainly never been concerned before about that amount, and it has been there all the time.

2370 **Hon. R M Clinton:** But does the Minister accept that the Gibraltar pound, which is meant to be back to back with assets, cannot be security for itself? It would be self-defeating that the Gibraltar pound is worth £1 of itself and therefore, to an extent, the Currency Notes Fund, if it is invested in the Gibraltar Savings Bank, should either have a specially designated element of the Savings Bank to cover it, or that the cash that is held is not Gibraltar-issued notes.

2375 **Hon. Sir J J Bossano:** [*Inaudible*] that there is any problem because there are £12 million in the Savings Bank, any more than if they were, instead of the Savings Bank, in any other bank. Nobody has suggested that we are keeping £12,185,428.79 as the reserve of the currency in circulation or the coins in circulation. This is his interpretation, this year, of something that has been there for a very long time.

2380 **Madam Speaker:** Next question.

DEPUTY CHIEF MINISTER

Q755/2023

**Landlord and Tenant Act –
Policy re amendment or repeal of section 69**

Clerk: Questions to the Hon. the Deputy the Chief Minister.
Question 755. The Hon. C Sacarello.

2385 **Hon. C Sacarello:** What is the Government's policy on the amendment or repeal of section 69 of the Landlord and Tenant Act?

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

2390 **Deputy Chief Minister (Hon. Dr J J Garcia):** Madam Speaker, the Government has no plans at present to amend or repeal section 69 of the Landlord and Tenant Act. However, it is open to listening to presentations in that regard.

2395 **Hon. C Sacarello:** Madam Speaker, I thank the Hon. Deputy Chief Minister for his reply and I certainly commend the intention to listen to the public on this. Section 69 was a subsection, or at least a subsection (2), that was introduced back in the 1980s, I believe, in a world where the landlords were feeling aggrieved at not cashing in on leases being assigned at a time when it made sense that this legislation was introduced. However, it is not a perfect piece of legislation. I am sorry about the preamble, but it is pertinent to my –

2400 **Madam Speaker:** I presume the Minister, when he said that he was willing to listen to representations ... it was not today.

2405 **Hon. C Sacarello:** I beg your pardon. It was meant to be compensatory and not punitive, and this is what effectively is happening now, where, even where no consideration is being exchanged for an assignment, the landlords are seeing it as a lottery and are charging it. There are many businesses out there, some who do not even realise that they are susceptible to this, but plenty who do suffer.

2410 **Madam Speaker:** Could I ask for the question now?

Hon. C Sacarello: I would ask: if they are interested, what form of engagement and when would this take place? Thank you.

2415 **Hon. Deputy Chief Minister:** Madam Speaker, I do not want to mislead the hon. Member. This is not a policy priority for the Government. As the hon. Member has quite rightly said, this has been around since 1986, so that is 37 years. It has spanned 10 different Governments – this is the 11th – and none of them have really seen the need to address it in any way.

2420 What I am saying is that certainly the Government is more than happy and willing to listen to any representation, so if anybody wants to write in – primarily I assume it would be the Minister for Business who will deal with this, or myself, perhaps, as the Minister for Land – and make representations, the Government would be happy to consider them, but it is not a policy priority in that sense.

Madam Speaker: Next question.

Q756/2023

**Midtown car park –
Rooftop level expressions of interest**

2425 **Clerk:** Question 756. The Hon. the Leader of the Opposition.

Hon. Dr K Azopardi: Can the Government update the House on the consideration of expressions of interest in relation to the rooftop level of Midtown car park?

2430 **Clerk:** Answer, the Hon. the Deputy Chief Minister.

2435 **Deputy Chief Minister (Hon. Dr J J Garcia):** Madam Speaker, the Government was not content with the proposed uses or the level of premium submitted by respondents to the expressions of interest process in respect of the rooftop level of the Midtown car park.

Hon. Dr K Azopardi: I see. Is the Government intending to reissue an expressions of interest, or is it now abandoning that project?

2440 **Hon. Deputy Chief Minister:** Madam Speaker, the process is terminated. The Government could take a policy decision to issue a new expression of interest or to do something else in that space, but that decision has not been taken and it is not imminent or urgent in that sense.

2445 **Hon. Dr K Azopardi:** No decision has been taken whether to issue a new expressions of interest process, so it is a live question – is that right?

Hon. Deputy Chief Minister: I suppose, Madam Speaker, it is a non-question. It is not something which is immediately, urgently on the Government's mind at the moment. The options are open, but it is not something urgent or pressing at this given moment in time.

2450 **Hon. Dr K Azopardi:** But if a decision is taken to explore this possibility again, there would be another expressions of interest process – is that correct?

Hon. Deputy Chief Minister: Madam Speaker, yes, unless the Government decided to use that space for itself.

Adjournment

2455 **Chief Minister (Hon. F R Picardo):** Madam Speaker, I move that the House should now adjourn to Thursday at 3 p.m., to take Chief Minister's questions.

Madam Speaker: I now propose the question, which is that this House now adjourn to Thursday at 3 p.m.

2460 I now put the question, which is that this House do now adjourn to Thursday at 3 p.m. Those in favour? (**Members:** Aye.) Those against? Passed.

This House will now adjourn to Thursday at 3 p.m.

The House adjourned at 6.05 p.m.



PROCEEDINGS OF THE GIBRALTAR PARLIAMENT

AFTERNOON SESSION: 3.02 p.m. – 4.15 p.m.

Gibraltar, Thursday, 21st December 2023

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The Gibraltar Parliament

The Parliament met at 3.02 p.m.

[MADAM SPEAKER: Hon. Judge K Ramagge GMH *in the Chair*]

[CLERK TO THE PARLIAMENT: J B Reyes Esq *in attendance*]

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

Clerk: Meeting of Parliament, Thursday, 21st December 2023.
Suspension of Standing Orders. The Hon. the Chief Minister.

5 **Chief Minister (Hon. F R Picardo):** Madam Speaker, I beg to move, under Standing Order 7(3), to suspend Standing Order 7(1) in order to proceed with a Government Statement.

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

Retirement of Darren Grech as Chief Secretary – Statement by the Chief Minister

10 **Chief Minister (Hon. F R Picardo):** Madam Speaker, almost two months ago, just after the General Election that he so ably oversaw, the current Chief Secretary wrote to me in relation to delicate personal circumstances which required him to spend more time with his family. Since then, I am happy to report that the complicated surgical procedure undergone by his daughter at Guy's Hospital has been successful and that Gabriella is making a speedy recovery, something I am sure everybody in this House will be delighted to hear.

15 Notwithstanding, when life throws you these circumstances it really does make you think where your priorities lie and about the debt of time one has with the core family. I entirely empathise with Darren in that respect. Darren has, therefore, now asked to step down from his role as Chief Secretary of His Majesty's Government of Gibraltar and proposed to me a different pathway, working in a supportive capacity in Education and reporting directly to me on a number
20 of initiatives, which can only be interpreted as absolutely beneficial for Gibraltar. Given Darren's experience in the field, I have wholeheartedly agreed to this, believing he has earned the right to determine his own future. The principle of self-determination goes to the core of everything that we do, Madam Speaker.

25 I recruited Darren from the Department of Education following his sterling work in transforming the schooling landscape and having observed his innate ability in dealing with people and investing in them. I must remark at this stage that he initially declined the offer to become Chief Secretary and eventually acceded after immense insistence from me. As usual, I made him an offer he could not refuse and I had a horse's head put in his bed: it took that level of persuasion. He put the greater good of Gibraltar, as I expressed it to him, over and above his love of education.

30 During his six years as Chief Secretary, Darren's contribution has been exceptional despite certain unpredictable events having taken centre stage and which, in a way, derailed the Civil Service transformation journey that we had embarked upon together. The Brexit and COVID challenges hit us all and he and I, both at the top of our respective parts of the administration,

35 had to deal with them. It took its undoubted toll, and yet the Civil Service rose up to the occasion
with sterling leadership and apposite guidance from Darren. We are now back on track. Darren
precisely realised what was needed to take the service to the next level in terms of building team
capacity with a number of significant others who possess the right skills to take the torch forward.
Darren has been selfless in this respect and has always put the good of Gibraltar first and foremost.
I thank him here, today, for his sterling service to Gibraltar. I am sure all Members in this House
40 will agree with me. His last day as Chief Secretary will be 31st December 2023.

Madam Speaker, given Darren's decision to step down, it is incumbent on me to appoint a new
Chief Secretary. As the House will know, the posts of Chief Secretary, Chief Technical Officer and
Financial Secretary, as well as our representatives overseas, are the Chief Minister's directly
appointed positions. Given I have announced that I will be stepping down in coming years, I think
45 it is essential, in Gibraltar's interests, that I should appoint someone who will hold the office for
longer than the time I will be in post. It is for that reason that I have sought to appoint a person
to the post who will transition from one Chief Minister to another.

Given the qualities he represents and the longevity he can give to the post, I have made the
easy decision to appoint Glendon Martinez to the post of Chief Secretary as from 1st January 2024.
50 Glendon possesses extensive experience in both the public and private sectors, which is needed
to do this job. As a former CEO of an international business specialising in e-commerce, sales and
managing large teams, he brings a wealth of knowledge from beyond the Civil Service.

He initially joined the public service to spearhead the modernisation of the Royal Gibraltar Post
Office. Under his guidance, the department achieved numerous successes, from the digitisation
55 of mail, next-day delivery services and the first postal service in the world to a full electric fleet of
vehicles, something definitely to be proud of – the only problem is you cannot hear them coming
in Irish Town.

Subsequently, he was appointed Head of the Driver and Vehicle Licensing Department. In this
role, he successfully managed the digitisation of services again, eradicated the backlog caused by
60 the lockdown and achieving record-low waiting times.

Additionally, Glendon played a pivotal role in assisting the Gibraltar Maritime Administrator.
He helped promote Gibraltar as a leading red ensign flag for international ships post-Brexit,
significantly increasing turnover in that department. His efforts included implementing new green
initiatives, revising fees and improving working practices.

65 After achieving various objectives, I, along with the Chief Secretary, recruited him to come and
work at No. 6. That was in 2018, I seem to recall. There, he has been instrumental in assisting the
Chief Secretary and my team. His work includes overseeing and continuously enhancing various
departments within the Civil Service and leading negotiations with key stakeholders such as
unions, business organisations, and private entities collaborating with the Government.

70 I am confident that Glendon will be an exceptional Head of the Civil Service. His experience at
the core of Government and his leadership abilities make him ideally suited for this vital role,
especially in the context of modernising the Civil Service. I look forward to seeing Glendon flourish
in his new role and the public sector flourish with him at its head. I do worry, though, that I can
now count on the fingers of one hand those at No. 6 who are older than me.

75 I commend this Statement to the House.

Madam Speaker: Does any Member opposite wish to say anything?

80 **Hon. Dr K Azopardi:** Madam Speaker, first of all, I would like to thank the Chief Minister for
giving me advance notice of the Statement, which I received earlier today. It is a Statement in two
parts. First of all, on behalf of Members on this side of the House, certainly we wish Darren Grech
well in his new tasks, whatever they may be in the roles that are going to be assigned to him,
perhaps more granularly in the area of education or in other tasks which the Government has
discussed with him. We are certainly glad that the medical circumstances that the Chief Minister
85 has described in the Statement went well for him and his family. We certainly were very happy

about that. We entirely understand, of course, that people reach personal decisions in life and careers and so on, and sometimes events happen that make them reflect on why things should be as they are or as they thought that they should always be, and that makes them take other personal decisions. We certainly understand that.

90 Of course, for someone who has, as a career civil servant, reached the pinnacle of the administrative Civil Service, as was the case with Darren Grech, who became Chief Secretary despite his passion in Education and his wish to perhaps continue in that role, I think it is ... When you are thrust into the role of Chief Secretary – and it is a wide role with huge responsibility for thousands of people and, indeed, for the stewardship of an administrative Civil Service and the public service in many aspects that are hugely important for Gibraltar ... Certainly on this side of the House we thank him for his work, especially in the last few years, because there have been very significant challenges to this community, which Mr Grech has been at the heart of in his role as Chief Secretary. Certainly, on this side of the House, we thank him for that work.

100 In relation to the appointment of the new Chief Secretary, as the Chief Minister says, these are appointments within the gift of the Chief Minister, and we certainly accept that. I do not know Mr Martinez personally, so, in terms of clarification, I will ask him this, if I may. I only know of Mr Martinez, primarily because it reached the press, because he did have a fairly public role within the Philatelic Bureau and then became, I think, the head of that arm of the postal services. I am aware that he also had a role in the licensing entity, but he was, I think, doing interviews in relation to postal services until fairly recently. I do not know of his role beyond that, although I was aware that he was at No. 6 and assisting in that regard, because I have seen a recent letter written by him. What I would ask, though, because I do not know Mr Martinez, is for clarification on whether Mr Martinez is a civil servant; and, if he is not a civil servant, if he is a public servant in the wider context of the meaning of that word, which is the entity in the public service that is his direct employer right now? Is it the GDC? Is it another entity? Perhaps the Chief Minister can clarify that. And if he is not a civil servant, because I am not sure if he is or is not, is he going to be seconded into that role as Chief Secretary *qua* the entity that employs him, or is he now being transferred into the Civil Service? If the latter is the case, has there been discussion with the GGCA on issues in relation to that?

115 In any event, beyond that clarification, Members on this side of the House wish him well in that role; it is a difficult role, I am sure. Certainly, we hope that in the years to come in the public service – the Chief Minister has not told us his age but has suggested that Mr Martinez is younger than him – he will have a fruitful career.

120 **Hon. Chief Minister:** Madam Speaker, I am grateful to the hon. Member for those remarks, in particular his very generous remarks to Darren Grech, who deserves nothing else.

Let me start at the end of the rest of what the Leader of the Opposition has said. Darren Grech is a civil servant and Glendon Martinez is a civil servant, and therefore there are no issues about secondment or otherwise. I would say that apart from the work that he has continued to do in respect of postal services, the department he no longer leads but continues to influence positively, he has been at No. 6 Convent Place, I believe, now since 2018, assisting the current Chief Secretary with his work in leading the Civil Service and the public sector more generally. Therefore, I believe that given he is in his mid-40s, he has a good long stretch ahead of him leading the administrative part of the Government much longer than I know I have leading the political part of the Government.

130 The one thing I would definitely say to the hon. Gentleman, if he wants to get to know him better, is I used to see him coming down from the Upper Rock at 6.30 in the morning when I was going up, so I think it is at about quarter past six that he gets to the top, every day, without an electric bike.

135 I commend my Statement to the House.

Madam Speaker: Does any other Member wish to ask any questions?

Questions for Oral Answer

CHIEF MINISTER

Q757/2023

Care Agency and Ministry of Equality –
Number of consultants engaged and costs since 1st April 2017

Clerk: Chief Minister's Questions. Question 757. The Hon. A Sanchez.

140 **Hon. A Sanchez:** Could the Government furnish a breakdown on the number of consultants engaged by the Care Agency and Ministry of Equality since 1st April 2017 to date, inclusive of the purpose of these services and the total cost for each consultant engagement?

Clerk: Answer, the Hon. the Chief Minister.

145

Chief Minister (Hon. F R Picardo): Madam Speaker, I am advised that the Care Agency has engaged three consultants from 1st April 2017 to date. The purpose of these services is to train, coach and mentor in the development of safeguarding policy and procedures and to provide guidance on positive behaviour support. They perform assessments, reviews, provide supervision to staff and offer recommendations. In total, from 2017 to date we have paid one consultant £84,623, a second consultant £70,832, and a third consultant £30,737. The Ministry of Equality has not engaged any consultants directly since 1st April 2017.

Madam Speaker, I am answering this question because it cuts across different portfolios.

155 **Madam Speaker:** Yes. Any supplementaries?

Hon. A Sanchez: In terms of the costs provided for each consultant engagement, are these salary-based alone, or are they inclusive of added costs such as accommodation, travel etc.?

160 **Hon. Chief Minister:** Madam Speaker, a consultant is not paid a salary.

Hon. A Sanchez: Are they inclusive of added costs?

Hon. Chief Minister: All costs, Madam Speaker.

165

Madam Speaker: Next question.

Q758/2023

Disability benefit applications –
Numbers accepted, pending and rejected since 2018

Clerk: Question 758. The Hon. A Sanchez.

170 **Hon. A Sanchez:** Regarding disability benefit applications from 2018 to date, how many have been accepted, remain pending and been rejected?

Clerk: Answer, the Hon. the Chief Minister.

175 **Chief Minister (Hon. F R Picardo):** Madam Speaker, since 2018, to date, 515 applications have been submitted for disability benefits: 245 have been approved, 148 have not been approved and 122 are pending.

180 **Hon. A Sanchez:** Madam Speaker, would the hon. Member happen to know what the average waiting time is for the determination of an outcome of an application, from the time when the application is made to when the application applicant is informed of the outcome?

Hon. Chief Minister: No, I do not have information with me that enables me to work it out.

185 **Hon. A Sanchez:** In relation to the pending applications, would he happen to know how long these have been pending for?

Hon. Chief Minister: I do not know how long they have been pending for, but I can tell her, Madam Speaker, that 80 of them have already been assessed by the panel and are being considered by the Director of Social Security, 22 are scheduled to be assessed by the panel in January, and 20 are yet to be scheduled to be assessed by a panel on a date to be provided.

190 Madam Speaker, the hon. Lady will appreciate that she has asked me a question from 2018 to date: that is five full years. The figure is roughly 500, and four-fifths, roughly, have been dealt with, so it is very likely that the waiting time – but I do not have the information – is in respect of the last year, unless one has been particularly tricky and has been held over for longer. If the hon. Lady wants, and she asks the question, I can provide it in another form.

195 **Hon. A Sanchez:** Madam Speaker, I am grateful for that answer. In terms of rejected applications, we receive a lot of concerns from individuals who state that they do not receive enough information in relation to why their applications have been rejected. Would the hon. Member perhaps not agree that letters with more information as to why these applications have been rejected might be beneficial to applicants?

200 **Hon. Chief Minister:** Madam Speaker, that is an issue on which we have not ever really got involved. We have left it to the Civil Service to respond to individuals who are determined to be entitled to benefit and those who are not determined to be entitled to benefit. We have not had a complaint from anyone, at a political level, that there is a lack of information in the response. The complaint we have had from some people is that they have been turned down when they believe that they should be accepted for benefit. However, as I will remind the House, there was a very clear rule in the past which was very easy to comply with: you were either born with a disability, which then might entitle you to a benefit, or you were not. We introduced a system to allow those who acquired a disability during the course of their lives to make an application for benefit. A number of people who apply are successful, a number of people who apply are not successful. On average, given the numbers I have provided to the House, it is almost half who are successful, and I would not say that it is a quarter who are not, because about a quarter are still to be determined. In every instance when someone is turned down, they tend to believe that it is unfair and they tend to want more information. I shall convey the hon. Lady's views to the department, to see if they can look at providing more information in the context of refusals, where that is appropriate. In some instances it might not be.

215 **Hon. Dr K Azopardi:** If I may, on that issue, in terms of the information available, I am aware that there is a criterion, but I do not think the criterion is available publicly for anyone to see. Does the Chief Minister agree that the criterion should be made public, given that there is one, to enable people to understand the process a bit better?

225 **Hon. Chief Minister:** Madam Speaker, we discussed this issue in the last Question Time. I
hesitate to use the word 'debated', because Question Time is not a time for debate. We discussed
this issue at the last Question Time. The Government's position was set out then, less than a
month ago. I know that hon. Members have a manifesto commitment to publish the criteria. We
do not. It is their position that he is pursuing, it is not ours.

230 I note that the hon. Gentleman was instructed in a case in relation to this matter in the
Supreme Court recently, and that he was pursuing that issue in the Supreme Court, but our
position is our position.

Madam Speaker: If the Hon. Leader of the Opposition wishes to ask a further question, he may
235 from a standing position, but I am not sure you are addressing anybody from a sedentary position.
Is there anything you want to say?

Hon. Dr K Azopardi: Clarify.

240 **Madam Speaker:** Well, he can clarify it on his feet.

Hon. Dr K Azopardi: No, Madam Speaker, I did not have a question. I was just saying to the
hon. Member, on an aside, from a sedentary position, that we were not, as far as I am aware,
seeking the publication, anyway; that matter was resolved.

245 **Madam Speaker:** Next question.

Q759/2023
Carer's Allowance –
Plans to introduce

Clerk: Question 759. The Hon. A Sanchez.

Hon. A Sanchez: Does the Government have plans to introduce a Carer's Allowance?

250 **Clerk:** Answer, the Hon. the Chief Minister.

Chief Minister (Hon. F R Picardo): Madam Speaker, carers are employed under different types
of contracts within the GHA, ERS, the Care Agency and other departments, agencies and
authorities. Some may enjoy allowances depending on the nature of the employment contract
255 they have entered into.

Hon. A Sanchez: Madam Speaker, I am grateful for that answer. What I mean by the Carer's
Allowance is Carer's Allowance in the same way that it exists in the UK for people who have to
take a break or step away from their work commitments because they have to care for a member
260 of their family, and, as such, they might face financial hardship and they receive an allowance from
the state to be able to do it. I wanted the Government to clarify whether they have plans to
introduce a similar allowance here, locally.

Hon. Chief Minister: Madam Speaker, a similar issue is under consideration by the
265 Government.

Madam Speaker: Next question.

Q760/2023
Airport staffing issues –
MoD update

Clerk: Question 760. The Hon. G Origo.

270 **Hon. G Origo:** Madam Speaker, can the Government confirm whether the MoD has provided an update on the progress made in resolving the staffing issues that have affected the running of the Airport?

Clerk: Answer, the Hon. the Chief Minister.

275

Chief Minister (Hon. F R Picardo): Madam Speaker, yes.

Hon. Dr K Azopardi: Can we ask what information has been given to the Government in relation to those issues and how they have been resolved?

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Hon. Chief Minister: Madam Speaker, we are satisfied that the Ministry of Defence has, working with NATS, now ensured that this should no longer be an issue, although it takes two years to train controllers, and of course, if we had a widespread issue with illness, it could cause us a problem. However, the issue has been managed very successfully since the summer, and I would say that the Government extends its gratitude to the NATS controllers and the support personnel who have continued to make great personal efforts in challenging circumstances throughout the summer and onwards to ensure that the Airport has stayed operational.

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Hon. Dr K Azopardi: So the Chief Minister is satisfied, from the information given to the Government, that those staffing issues will not reoccur and will not lead to disruption of the Airport again?

290

Hon. Chief Minister: Only insofar as possible, Madam Speaker, and on the basis of the information I have been provided.

295

Madam Speaker: Next question.

Q761/2023
Government personnel –
Mental health support

Clerk: Question 761. The Hon. J Ladislaus.

300 **Hon. J Ladislaus:** Madam Speaker, can the Hon. Minister confirm what mental health support is offered by Government to personnel within the following departments: the Gibraltar Ambulance Service, the Royal Gibraltar Police, the Gibraltar Fire and Rescue Service, the Gibraltar Prison Service, HM Customs Gibraltar, the Gibraltar Borders and Coast Guard Agency and the Gibraltar Courts Service?

305

Clerk: Answer, the Hon. the Chief Minister.

Chief Minister (Hon. F R Picardo): Madam Speaker, I can confirm that mental health support is offered by the Government to personnel within the departments mentioned, broken down as follows.

310 For emergency services and other first responders, the trauma risk management policy was implemented to identify personnel who may need additional welfare support at an early stage and signpost them as necessary. This includes the Gibraltar Health Authority Ambulance Service, the Royal Gibraltar Police, the Gibraltar Fire and Rescue Service, HM Prison Service, HM Customs and the Gibraltar Borders and Coastguard Agency.

315 The following departments have internal welfare officers or wellbeing champions who offer additional support to staff: the Gibraltar Ambulance Service, the Royal Gibraltar Police, the Gibraltar Fire and Rescue Service and HM Prison Service.

320 For all officers in the public service, the Employee Wellbeing and Support Team is also available to offer welfare support, and, if necessary, can liaise with other agencies to provide further professional support. Occupational health services are also made available for personnel to have access to practitioners. Occupational health reports are used by management in order to determine how best to support the employees.

Madam Speaker: Next question.

Q762/2023
Government occupational pensions –
Index linking

325 **Clerk:** Question 762. The Hon. R M Clinton.

Hon. R M Clinton: Madam Speaker, can the Government advise if it has abandoned the principle of index linking of government occupational pensions as set out under section 6 of the Pensions (Increase) Act 1973?

330 **Clerk:** Answer, the Hon. the Chief Minister.

Chief Minister (Hon. F R Picardo): Madam Speaker, there is no such principle.

335 **Hon. R M Clinton:** Madam Speaker, I would respectfully suggest that there is provision under section 6 for increasing by index linking, to the extent that I have been approached by retired civil servants who have had the expectation of index-linked increases to their pensions. A reading of section 6, which I will not bore the House with, makes repeated references to the RPI index and increases as at July. There was an amendment to the Act – section 6(2)(2A) – which said ‘the increase in pensions shall not be less than two per cent.’ I recognise that there is a conditionality. Madam Speaker, I am sorry if I am giving a preamble, but the Chief Minister said no. There is a presumption that it is either 2% or RPI. I recognise there is the word ‘may’. I am asking the Government: is the Government abandoning the concept of any increase in relation to the retail price index? By way of illustration, the retail price index increase for 2023 over the year was 5.5%, for 2022 it was 8.9% and for 2021 it was 2.4%. The Chief Minister, in his Budget address of 2023, said it would increase by 2%. However, there is provision, under section 6, for RPI index increases, and I am asking whether the Government is abandoning that principle entirely, because section 2(4), from my understanding, was a floor, not a cap.

350 **Hon. Chief Minister:** Well, Madam Speaker, we have gone from a principle to a concept and back to a principle. The hon. Gentleman simply glosses over the reference in the statute to the

word that implies choice, not requirement. If it was a requirement because there was a principle that the occupational pensions would go up by index-linked amounts, then the statute which he refers to, which was done in 1973, would refer to 'shall' and not to 'may'. In fact, it refers to 'may' in section 6(1), which was the section passed in 1973, and thereafter the 'shall' is in (2)(2A), which sets the floor.

If the hon. Member cares to look at the increases, he will see that in many instances, occupational pensions in the Civil Service went up by much more than inflation and nobody was complaining. When inflation was 0.2% and public sector pensions went up by 2%, nobody complained, yet when inflation is 8.9% and the increase in the pension is 2%, there are complaints.

The hon. Gentleman seems to forget that in that year, although by operation of the statute, which is in that sense requiring of the Government to increase by at least 2%, public sector salaries did not go up at all. So the hon. Gentleman is advocating that public sector pensioners with occupational pensions should have an increase in excess of the 2% that the law provides, even when public sector workers get less than 2%, or nothing. I do not accept that there is a principle, because there is a specific legal provision, not a principle, that sets out the options for the Government. I address that specifically in my Budget speeches – in particular this year, I believe.

Madam Speaker, my view is that if public sector workers, the people who are behind your Chair and throughout Gibraltar, working in the Gibraltar public sector, have been without a pay rise – they have had an amount which was not connected to salary, which was a one-off payment and was tax free, but they have not had a percentage increase – then it would be unfair for public sector occupational pension holders to have in excess of the amount that the law provides that they must have.

So there is no principle, there is no concept. There is a clear legal provision, which the Government is abiding by and which the Government addressed in the last Budget, in order to explain why things were going up by 2% rather than by 5.5% or 8.9%.

Hon. R M Clinton: Madam Speaker, I am grateful to the Chief Minister for setting out his understanding of that section, but can I ask him is there, then, any scenario where he would envisage that his Government would apply the RPI provision?

Madam Speaker: I am just going to interject. I think that is a hypothetical question.

Hon. R M Clinton: Well, Madam Speaker, the problem is that he is saying there is a law that says this is the minimum 2% and I do not have to go to RPI.

Madam Speaker: It is a hypothetical question on whatever basis it is premised. I think you have had the answer to your question, so we will move on to the next question.

Q763/2023
Artificial intelligence –
Regulation of use in Gibraltar

Clerk: Question 763. The Hon. R M Clinton.

Hon. R M Clinton: Madam Speaker, can the Government advise whether it has any intention to regulate the use of artificial intelligence in Gibraltar?

Clerk: Answer, the Hon. the Chief Minister.

Chief Minister (Hon. F R Picardo): Madam Speaker, yes.

Hon. R M Clinton: Madam Speaker, I am grateful for that 'yes'. Could the Chief Minister elaborate as to what approach the Government is thinking of taking? Is the Government considering the issuing of a consultation, perhaps?

400

Hon. Chief Minister: I am almost minded to tell the hon. Gentleman that I shall ask ChatGPT what the answer should be.

This is an issue that has to be dealt with in consultation, Madam Speaker. It would be a consultation across the digital services that the Government provides and across other departments. For example, there are issues in relation to financial services, there are issues in relation to health, there are issues that would affect all of the departments in the context of artificial intelligence, and therefore I envisage a very wide consultation. The European Union has recently adopted legislation – it is the first entity to have adopted legislation on artificial intelligence – and the United Kingdom is leading on the Bletchley Park principles to try to establish a global standard.

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Hon. R M Clinton: Madam Speaker, I am grateful to the Chief Minister for his more comprehensive answer. Even the Pope has expressed the view that artificial intelligence should be regulated. Can I ask the Chief Minister if he has a timeframe in mind?

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Hon. Chief Minister: Not at this stage, ma'am.

Madam Speaker: Next question.

Q764/2023

Own-motion investigations – Amendment of Public Services Ombudsman Act 1998

Clerk: Question 764. The Hon. R M Clinton.

420

Hon. R M Clinton: Madam Speaker, can the Government advise when it intends to amend the Public Services Ombudsman Act 1998 to allow for own-motion investigations?

Clerk: Answer, the Hon. the Chief Minister.

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Chief Minister (Hon. F R Picardo): Madam Speaker, the Government will advise when it intends to amend the Public Services Ombudsman Act 1998 to allow for own-motion investigations when it is ready to do so.

430

Hon. R M Clinton: Madam Speaker, may I remind the Chief Minister that he actually put forward a motion in December 2019 resolving that the Act should be reviewed to enable the Office of the Public Service Ombudsman to launch investigations of its own motion? If he has read the Ombudsman's report for 2022, he will see quite prominently the request for own-motion investigation. So I would ask the Chief Minister does he have a more specific timeframe in mind, bearing in mind that this has been a subject that has been discussed for well over four years?

435

Hon. Chief Minister: No, ma'am.

Madam Speaker: Next question.

Q765/2023

**Bank of the Year Awards 2023 –
Expenses of Ministers re London event**

440 **Clerk:** Question 765. The Hon. R M Clinton.

Hon. R M Clinton: Madam Speaker, can the Government advise who paid for the travel and accommodation of the Ministers who attended the 2023 Bank of the Year Awards in London?

445 **Clerk:** Answer, the Hon. the Chief Minister.

Chief Minister (Hon. F R Picardo): Madam Speaker, the expenses were met by TNG Global Foundation as part of their invitation to the event. No costs were incurred by the taxpayer.

450 **Hon. R M Clinton:** Madam Speaker, I am grateful to the Chief Minister for his answer. Given that the Government issued Press Release 833/203, can the Chief Minister confirm that both he and the Minister for Financial Services were on official government business?

455 **Hon. Chief Minister:** Madam Speaker, I think there is a rule that says that it is improper for a question to seek confirmation of anything in a government press release or press report.

Madam Speaker: The rule is, as I understand it, that there should be no questions as to whether anything that was in a press report was accurate.

Was that the basis of your question? If not, perhaps you can clarify it.

460

Hon. R M Clinton: Sorry, Madam Speaker, I only gave that reference by way of background, not by way of asking for clarification as to the accuracy of the statement.

Was the visit to this event official government business?

465 **Hon. Chief Minister:** Madam Speaker, Fabian Picardo and Nigel Feetham were not invited. The Chief Minister and the Minister for Financial Services in Gibraltar were invited.

470 **Hon. R M Clinton:** Madam Speaker, in which case, given the provisions of the Ministerial Code, will the Chief Minister be minded to make a reference to the independent adviser for what appeared to be a breach of the Ministerial Code section 10.4, in which hospitality should not be accepted for official government business?

475 **Hon. Chief Minister:** Madam Speaker, more than that, I wrote to the Chief Secretary and asked him for guidance on how we should deal with the way that the costs were incurred, and he is dealing with the issue.

480 **Hon. R M Clinton:** Madam Speaker, I am glad to hear that that process is being undertaken. Will the Chief Minister be able to advise whether the House will be given the results of the Chief Secretary's deliberations?

Hon. Chief Minister: Madam Speaker, as far as I know, those are internal issues in relation to the register, but the hon. Gentleman can ask. If he asks and the issue has been determined, then he will be told what the determination has been.

485 I am very surprised that he thinks it would have been a good idea for us to pay our way when this was an event we attended in order to support a Gibraltar operator in financial services. There is a common ownership of that bank and the old Jyske Bank, now the TN Bank in Gibraltar, and therefore we were happy to go to support a Gibraltar institution. We did not think that it should

be funded by the taxpayer. Neither did the institution suggest that it should be funded by the taxpayer. They thought it should be funded by them because we were intending to support them.

490 I sometimes find it difficult to understand whether the hon. Gentleman wants us to incur costs or wants us to save costs. I would have thought he would have been entirely on our side on this.

Hon. R M Clinton: Madam Speaker, I did not write the Ministerial Code: he did. Does the Chief Minister still stand by the Ministerial Code?

495 **Hon. Chief Minister:** Madam Speaker, of course I do. If I did not, I would not have written to the Chief Secretary, to ask him to resolve the issue that arose in respect of the code, long before the hon. Gentleman asked his question.

500 **Madam Speaker:** We have exhausted this subject now.
Next question.

Q766-68/2023
Gibraltar Properties Ltd –
GSB loan; funding to Eruca Investments Ltd;
financing re Government affordable housing schemes

Clerk: Question 766. The Hon. R M Clinton.

505 **Hon. R M Clinton:** Madam Speaker, can the Government advise why Gibraltar Properties Ltd has borrowed £80 million from the Gibraltar Savings Bank as at 30th September 2023?

Clerk: Answer, the Hon. the Chief Minister.

510 **Chief Minister (Hon. F R Picardo):** Madam Speaker, I will answer with Questions 767 and 768.

Clerk: Question 767. The Hon. R M Clinton.

515 **Hon. R M Clinton:** Madam Speaker, can the Government advise if Gibraltar Properties Ltd has provided any funding to Eruca Investments Ltd under the liquidity agreement as at 30th September 2023; and, if so, to what amount?

Clerk: Question 768. The Hon. R M Clinton.

520 **Hon. R M Clinton:** Can the Government advise if Gibraltar Properties Ltd is providing any financing towards any of the Government's affordable housing schemes?

Clerk: Answer, the Hon. the Chief Minister.

525 **Hon. Chief Minister:** Madam Speaker, the £80 million borrowed by Gibraltar Properties Ltd has been used for the construction costs of Hassan Centenary Terraces.

Gibraltar Properties Ltd is not providing any funding to Eruca Investments Ltd.

Gibraltar Properties Ltd has only provided funding towards Hassan Centenary Terraces and no other affordable housing scheme.

530 **Hon. R M Clinton:** Madam Speaker, I am grateful to the Chief Minister for his answer.

The amount that has been borrowed from the Gibraltar Savings Bank has been increasing regularly over the past two years, certainly. My understanding was that – and perhaps the Chief Minister can clarify it for us – the Eruca structure was going to be funding Hassan Centenary Terraces. I believe the number of about £160 million was discussed at the time. Is it that the Eruca structure has proved insufficient in providing the funding requirement? Was it always envisaged that you would be borrowing £80 million from the Savings Bank? That is certainly not my recollection. Why is it that you have had to resort to the Savings Bank to borrow this £80 million?

Hon. Chief Minister: Madam Speaker, I do not know how many questions he has asked in the context of that supplementary, but let me just tell him that in the same period that he is referring to the increased borrowing from the Savings Bank, the deposits in the Savings Bank have also increased quite exponentially. He may not recall it, but we did tell him that at different times, when we were at the peak period of the build, we would require to borrow more money in order to be able to fund the development costs at peak times. That is what has happened here.

Hon. Dr K Azopardi: May I ask: is this £80 million, or some of it, going towards the additional cost of Hassan Centenary? The Chief Minister will recall questions before the last General Election, where it was clear that Hassan Centenary would cost about £30 million more than envisaged because of circumstances that were described before the last General Election. Is part of this £80 million going towards that, or is it going towards a higher sum which is also due to additional expenditure on that development?

Hon. Chief Minister: Madam Speaker, it is impossible to break down which bit has been paid with which pound. It is going to the general overall cost of Hassan Centenary Terraces.

Hon. R M Clinton: Madam Speaker, I just have a supplementary on my last question, Question 768, and whether there will be financing to any other government affordable housing schemes. Is it envisaged that, for example, Bob Peliza and Chatham, which are the government affordable housing schemes, will be effectively funded by Gibraltar Properties Ltd in the same way, drawing financing from the Gibraltar Savings Bank?

Hon. Chief Minister: It is too soon to take a view in that respect.

Madam Speaker: Next question.

Q769-70/2023

**Gibraltar Bus Company –
Basic entry and end points on pay scale for bus drivers;
percentage increase and basic hourly rate for employees**

Clerk: Question 769. The Hon. the Leader of the Opposition.

Hon. Dr K Azopardi: Madam Speaker, what is the new basic entry point and end point on the pay scale agreed with bus driver employees of the Gibraltar Bus Company?

Clerk: Answer, the Hon. the Chief Minister.

Chief Minister (Hon. F R Picardo): Madam Speaker, I will answer with Question 770.

Clerk: Question 770. The Hon. the Leader of the Opposition.

575 **Hon. Dr K Azopardi:** What is the percentage increase and the new basic hourly rate of pay agreed with employees of the Gibraltar Bus Company?

Clerk: Answer, the Hon. the Chief Minister.

580 **Hon. Chief Minister:** Madam Speaker, the new basic entry point and end point on the pay scale agreed with bus driver employees of the Gibraltar Bus Company are, at entry, £23,088 per annum, and at end point, £28,860 per annum.

Agreement was reached with the driving grades of the Gibraltar Bus Company on a new payment structure, consisting of £12 per hour for drivers with one year's experience at the Bus Company, £14 per hour for drivers with two to five years' experience at the Bus Company, and
585 £15 per hour for drivers with six years' worth of experience and over at the Bus Company.

At no stage was this a negotiated percentage increase but an approximation to the pay and pay structure of publicly owned relevant UK bus services in application of the parity principle and the extant parity agreements between the Government and Unite the Union as the successor in
590 title of the Transport and General Workers' Union. In any event, the difference in percentage terms between the entry, median and end points of the old bus driver scale when compared with the entry, median and end points of the new pay structure is at entry 6.56%, at median 12.32% and at end point 11.50% higher.

Differentials between driving grades with charge hands and inspectors were respected. This equated to a percentage increase across the salary band of charge hands/inspectors of 11.5%,
595 resulting in an hourly rate at the entry, median, and end points of £15 per hour at entry, £17 per hour at median, and £19.28 per hour at the end point.

Hon. Dr K Azopardi: May I ask: what was the date of the agreement of these new arrangements, and what is the effective date of the agreement – meaning when is the
600 implementation date, if it is a different date?

Hon. Chief Minister: Madam Speaker, the negotiation started sometime, I think, in the summer. It ended before the General Election, but the application of these new salary scales has
605 commenced in November, I think – no earlier than that.

Madam Speaker: Next question.

Q71/2023

Victoria Keys –

Whether agreement signed with developers

Clerk: Question 771. The Hon. the Leader of the Opposition.

610 **Hon. Dr K Azopardi:** Madam Speaker, has the Government now signed agreements with the developers of Victoria Keys; and, if so, what are its main terms?

Clerk: Answer, the Hon. the Chief Minister.

615 **Chief Minister (Hon. F R Picardo):** Madam Speaker, the Government has not yet signed agreements with the Victoria Keys developers. Negotiations continue.

Hon. Dr K Azopardi: Madam Speaker, it will not sound repetitive to you, but it will sound repetitive to the Chief Minister because I ask this question every few months. There was, as the

620 Chief Minister knows, almost a centre-spread in the 2019 manifesto. There had been a press
release in April 2019, with glossy pictures showing beautiful views of a new scheme called Victoria
Keys. We were told that negotiations were ongoing. We have been asking this question often
during the last terms of Parliament. We seem to be no further along. Can the Chief Minister give
625 us an idea of why these discussions are taking this long, given that there was a very big
announcement by the Government made almost four and a half years ago now?

Hon. Chief Minister: Well, Madam Speaker, two years were lost, more or less, to COVID, and
a number of other months have been lost to the preparation of wave studies and the like, which
630 are relevant to the final view as to what can be developed, which will be relevant to the final view
of what can be agreed. Additionally, as the hon. Gentleman may know – he may have read it
somewhere that there have been issues with taking rubble to Spain, so the Government has been
using the rubble itself to create a reclamation to the west of Coaling Island. The principal reason
for doing the Victoria Keys development with those initial developers was to have their assistance
in the moving of rubble from the East Side. Then we sold the East Side to the TNG Foundation and
635 we sold the rubble also, so that rubble is no longer available for that purpose. There have been
very many, as the hon. Gentleman will understand, in my rusty Latin, *novus actus interveniens*,
which have interfered to make it impossible for us to move more quickly.

Hon. Dr K Azopardi: Is one of the issues that arises now that the scheme that was announced
640 in 2019 is no longer possible because of discussions had with the MoD, or objections from that
entity?

Hon. Chief Minister: No, Madam Speaker, the only thing that changes as a result of that is
645 shape.

Hon. Dr K Azopardi: But in terms of height and density, those issues are still on the table and
unaffected by any discussions there have been with the MoD – is that right?

Hon. Chief Minister: That is absolutely right, Madam Speaker.
650

Hon. Dr K Azopardi: That being so, is it the Government's position that it is still committed to
the scheme that was announced back in April 2019, and what is really outstanding now is
commercial discussion with the developers of Victoria Keys? Is that the situation?

Hon. Chief Minister: Madam Speaker, the situation is that the Government will negotiate, in
655 the best interest of the taxpayer, that which is, in our view, in the public interest of Gibraltar. That
may mean that we do not have an agreement with the developers if we cannot reach one that we
consider is in the public interest. We would like to reach that agreement and deliver as close to
that scheme as possible, and include there things which are, in our view, in the public interest of
660 Gibraltar.

Madam Speaker: Next question.

Q772-73/2023
Treaty for new relationship with EU –
Issues outside New Year's Eve Agreement; update on recent talks

Clerk: Question 772. The Hon. the Leader of the Opposition.

665 **Hon. Dr K Azopardi:** Madam Speaker, is the Government, as part of a treaty on a new relationship for Gibraltar with the EU, prepared to agree terms on issues not mentioned in the New Year's Eve Agreement; and, if so, what such issues are being discussed within the negotiations, apart from the use of the Gibraltar Airport?

670 **Clerk:** Answer, the Hon. the Chief Minister.

Chief Minister (Hon. F R Picardo): Madam Speaker, I will answer with Question 773.

Clerk: Question 773. The Hon. the Leader of the Opposition.

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Hon. Dr K Azopardi: Madam Speaker, will the Chief Minister update the House on the latest round of talks towards a possible treaty for a new relationship for Gibraltar with the European Union?

680 **Hon. Chief Minister:** Answer, the Hon. the Chief Minister.

Hon. Chief Minister: Madam Speaker, the latest official round of treaty negotiations took place in London last week. We continue, alongside the United Kingdom, to work with colleagues in the EU and Spain to seek to finalise all outstanding issues as soon as possible. The return of the same governments in Spain and Gibraltar has enabled work to start again from where it was left off, and with a very positive outlook that seeks technical and practical solutions that avoid any of the relevant parties having to cede on fundamentals.

In respect of the detail being discussed in the negotiation, the hon. Member will understand that I am unable to publicise any of the detail being discussed, as to do so will undoubtedly prejudice our position. I would, however, add that we are, of course, taking matters beyond the New Year's Eve Agreement, as that was a framework and not the treaty itself, although it did mention the possibility, if not the necessity, of an agreement on the Airport, in clause 17. That is, therefore, not entirely new. Additionally, by clause 24 there is an option to address other areas of mutual interest.

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Hon. Dr K Azopardi: Madam Speaker, the hon. Member has talked about the formal round in London, and I think it was made public today that there were discussions at a different level – less formal, perhaps – in Madrid yesterday. Can the Chief Minister explain to us the context of that, and whether those were technical talks of a different nature?

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Hon. Chief Minister: Madam Speaker, it was not made public today, it was made public yesterday because there was a government press release yesterday saying that the Hon. the Deputy Chief Minister and I were in Madrid. Those discussions are not between the European Commission and the United Kingdom. They are between officials in the United Kingdom, Gibraltar and Spain, trying to address issues of principle rather than issues relating to treaty negotiations, which are between the UK and the EU.

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Hon. Dr K Azopardi: Madam Speaker, on Question 772, the hon. Member says he does not want to talk about the detail of what is being discussed, so as not to prejudice the position in the talks, and of course I would not want him to prejudice the position of Gibraltar in the talks. However, it appears that his caution about not talking about what should or should not be part of the discussions is not shared by other participants, because the Spanish Foreign Minister has been quite open about his aspirations, about including the Airport as part of the ambit of the New Year's Eve Agreement. Is the Government prepared to contemplate an agreement that does include terms in relation to enhanced use of the Airport?

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720 **Hon. Chief Minister:** Madam Speaker, I do not think that it is fair that the hon. Gentleman should say that he is hearing more from the Spanish Foreign Minister than he is from us. We have confirmed on a number of occasions that we are having discussions in relation to the Airport. We have not confirmed the detail of that. Indeed, he will also have heard it from James Cleverly, he has heard it from Fabian Picardo and he has heard it from David Steel. So I do not think it is only Jose Manuel Alvarez who has said that we are trying to determine whether it is possible to reach an arrangement in respect of the opening of Gibraltar Airport to EU flights, even though we have left the European Union.

725 **Hon. Dr K Azopardi:** May I ask him to comment on timescale, which I appreciate may be a thorny subject, but there is an expectation and a desire for news on this issue, and, indeed, senior people have been commenting on timescales, not least His Excellency the Governor when he expressed the hope that there would be some kind of breakthrough by Christmas. Given that we are a few days away from that seasonal break, what can he say about the likelihood of a breakthrough in the next few months, especially given the prospective dissolution of the European Parliament, the prospect of UK elections, and so on?

735 **Hon. Chief Minister:** Madam Speaker, first of all, let me just go back a moment to his earlier supplementary and remind him, which I did not in my response, that clause 17 of the New Year's Eve Agreement specifically talks about air transport, so we told the world on 31st December 2020 that we were looking at the Airport.

740 Hope springs eternal. I have confirmed on television and, I think, in the printed media in Gibraltar, that I, too, very much would wish to see an agreement as soon as possible. I wished to see an agreement before last Christmas, and I would like to see an agreement before this Christmas. I would *like* to see an agreement, but what I *want* to do is the *right* agreement. I do not care whether I do it on 25th December in the morning, or on 30th June before the European election happens, or whatever date it may be, as long as it is the right agreement for Gibraltar.

745 As I have told the hon. Gentleman consistently in the lifetime, already, of this Parliament and in the lifetime of the previous Parliament, what I am not going to do is to set up a clock that will tick against us in the negotiation. I am not going to say if it is not done by X, it cannot be done, because that is a rope that will start to cut at our throat. Therefore, I am not going to be drawn on timescales; I am going to be drawn only on the substance, and when the substance is right, that is when we will do the agreement.

750 The hon. Gentleman says there is a desire for news and a desire to know. No one has more of a desire to give all the information and to explain why we think that the treaty we may have the opportunity of laying before the people of Gibraltar is safe, secure and beneficial for the people of Gibraltar than the Deputy Chief Minister and me, and, I am sure, all my Cabinet colleagues. However, we are not going to be pushed in the direction of making any announcement if the time is not right.

755 I would ask the hon. Gentleman, despite what he has elegantly termed the curiosity that there is, not to permit curiosity to allow the Gibraltar cat to be caught. We have to ensure that we play with a straight bat. We continue to be very optimistic that we can get there, but we do not want to say more at this stage and we do not want to be drawn on timescales, for good reason, and if he were sitting where I am sitting, he would do the same thing.

760 **Hon. Dr K Azopardi:** The Chief Minister knows that we ask these questions because they are questions of public interest, but he knows that we do, beyond all this, give him sufficient political space to conduct these negotiations.

765 Finally on this question, when he talks about the possibility of an agreement, are we still talking about an agreement of principles and that what would be announced are those principles but not the treaty itself, because that will still require work beyond those principles? In other words, is the negotiation still about the unblockage of principles?

770 **Hon. Chief Minister:** Madam Speaker, we are talking about a negotiation for a treaty between
the United Kingdom and the European Union which is being conducted between the United
Kingdom and Gibraltar and the European Union. As the hon. Gentleman knows and I have told
him in this House, and, I think, said in the context of my earlier answer, there is also a negotiation
going on between the United Kingdom, Gibraltar and Spain on other issues which were not
resolved in the New Year's Eve Agreement, which we would also like to see resolved and which
775 may then also make their way into the treaty negotiations. So this is continuing at many levels on
many planes, and we hope to get all of them to align in time to announce the treaty in time. It
may be that we will be able to make announcements about some parts of arrangements or
agreements being done and not about others at a particular stage, or we may be able to announce
everything at the same time.

780 I do not want to be drawn on anything which can be turned into something that I then have to
deliver against, because if I have to deliver against something, in particular a timescale or a
principle, then the other side will know that they have got me on that timescale because I have to
deliver against it. That is why it is not in Gibraltar's interest that we say more or set ourselves up
against a clock that can work against us.

785 **Madam Speaker:** All right, let's move on.

Questions for Written Answer

Clerk: Answers to Written Questions.

790 **Hon. Chief Minister (Hon. F R Picardo):** Madam Speaker, I have the honour to table the
answers to Written Questions W60/2023 to W68/2023.

Order of the Day

GOVERNMENT MOTION

Social Security (Open Long-Term Benefits Scheme) (Amendment of Benefits) Order 2023 – Approved

Clerk: (ix) The Order of the Day. Government motion – the Hon. the Chief Minister.

795 **Chief Minister (Hon. F R Picardo):** Madam Speaker, I have the honour to move the following
resolution:

*That this House approve by Resolution, pursuant to section 46 of the Social Security (Open Long
Term Benefits Scheme) Act 1997, the making of the Social Security (Open Long-Term Benefits
Scheme) (Amendment of Benefits) Order 2023.*

As the House is aware, this is a motion that has to come before it annually. Members will note
that the content of this Order was previously approved by the House in December 2022. However,

it was never subsequently published in the Gazette. The draft Order contains the same substance as the one previously approved by the House, but with a new title and with myself as the signatory Minister for Social Security.

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Madam Speaker, I also beg to move that the House approve by resolution, pursuant to section 46 of the Social Security (Open Long Term Benefits Scheme) Act 1997, the making of the Social Security (Open Long-Term Benefits Scheme) (Amendment of Benefits) Order 2023. This Order seeks to amend the Social Security (Open Long Term Benefits Scheme) Act 1997 by increasing the rates of old age pensions and survivor's benefit by 7% with effect from 1st August 2023, which represents the annual increase.

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In order to persuade the House to do that, I am going to give notice of an amendment to the motion to include those references, which I will pass now. I am sorry I was not able to pass it earlier, but as the House has just heard, I was not in Gibraltar yesterday. This is the written notice of the amendment that I beg to move, which should be circulated to all hon. Members now, and which will include the new wording, which I am happy to speak to when I have that sheet back.

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The amendment would be to substitute the motion as it is with the following words:

That this House approve by Resolution, pursuant to section 46 of the Social Security (Open Long Term Benefits Scheme) Act 1997, the making of the Social Security (Open Long-Term Benefits Scheme) (Amendment of Benefits) Order 2022 and the Social Security Social Security (Open Long-Term Benefits Scheme) (Amendment of Benefits) Order 2023.

I beg to move that amendment, Madam Speaker, and will circulate it now.

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Madam Speaker: I now propose to move the question in terms of the amendment moved by the Hon. the Chief Minister. *(Interjection)* You have not seen it? I think it is coming to you.

I am now going to propose the question in terms of the amendment moved by the Hon. the Chief Minister.

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Hon. R M Clinton: Madam Speaker, I am not sure if we can speak to the amendment.

Madam Speaker: What is before us now is the amendment as moved by the Hon. the Chief Minister, and then, after that, we will move on to the final motion, as amended by ... You can speak to the amendment now, yes.

825

Hon. R M Clinton: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

I recognise what the Chief Minister has said. I am not sure if this amendment to the motion will cure the omission, because the motion was already passed by this House in December 2022, so there already is a motion passed by the House approving that the Open Long Term Benefits Scheme should be amended. I have the *Hansard* of 22nd December 2022 in which the motion was carried. All that has not happened is that the Act itself has not been amended by way of Gazette, so I am not sure if adding another motion will cure the omission of the gazetting and the amendment of the Act.

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It is important because the wording of the Gazette that was attached to the original motion by the Chief Minister makes reference to amending section 2(2), which specifically references section 22(a) of the Act, substituting one number for another, and if we leave this as it is now, the substitution will not work because that number does not exist in the Act, as it assumes there has been this 7.6% increase already.

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I do not know whether the correct way to do it is to gazette the missing piece of legislation in relation to 2022 and proceed with this motion on the basis that the law will be gazetted. I would be interested in the Chief Minister's thinking on this because I am not sure that effectively passing the motion twice will cure the problem in respect of last year.

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845 **Hon. Chief Minister:** Madam Speaker, the Government's lawyers' advice is contrary to what the hon. Gentleman has suggested.

Madam Speaker: Is there anything else you wish to say, any of the hon. Members on this side, on the amendment?

I now put the question in terms of the amendment moved by the Hon. the Chief Minister.
850 Those in favour? (**Members:** Aye.) Those against? Carried.

What the House has before it now, as I understand it, is the original motion as amended. Does any hon. Member wish to speak on the motion as amended?

855 **Hon. R M Clinton:** Thank you, Madam Speaker. As we have already alluded to, the omission of the amendment in respect of last year's motion has meant that the Act was never updated. For the benefit of the House, I would normally compare the proposed schedule of the new pension numbers with the announcement the Chief Minister made in his Budget speech in 2023, which is that they would go up by 7%, and I could then do that calculation and give the House some extra assurance that the numbers match in terms of the percentage increase that was envisaged.

860 Unfortunately, because of this omission, I have been unable to perform that task, so I cannot do that comparison in terms of the increase, but that is not to say that this side of the House was not in favour of the principle of it. However, given the anomaly that has arisen, I cannot actually confirm that the numbers on the schedule, the proposed gazette that was attached to the original motion, actually represents a 7% increase as envisaged by the Chief Minister in his Budget address.

865 Other than that, Madam Speaker, I will accept the Government's lawyers' assurances that this double motion, as it were, will cure the deficiency, and I have nothing further to add. Thank you.

Madam Speaker: Does any other hon. Member wish to speak?

I now put the question – Sorry.
870

Hon. Chief Minister: Call on the mover to reply.

Madam Speaker: Yes, I will get there.

875 **Hon. Chief Minister:** And in reply, Madam Speaker, all I would say to the hon. Gentleman is that government lawyers have given him no assurances whatsoever. I have just reflected the advice that they have given us.

880 **Madam Speaker:** I now put the question in the terms of the motion proposed, as amended by the Hon. Chief Minister. Those in favour? (**Members:** Aye.) Those against? Carried.

Adjournment

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

Well, another election year over, a new Speaker and new Members of the House. It is now incumbent on me to move the adjournment at the end of another calendar year.

885 Before I do, I am delighted to be able to confirm that the individuals at NATS we were discussing earlier have confirmed to the Government that Santa Flight 001 is cleared to land on the easterly runway on Gibraltar. Meteorological advice is positive on visibility and winds, and the children of Gibraltar will be delighted to hear that the enhanced use of the Airport for the arrival of Father Christmas is a now a reality: I can announce that agreement with Father Christmas.

Other than that, Madam Speaker, I move that the House should now adjourn *sine die*.

890 **Madam Speaker:** I now propose the question, which is that this House should now adjourn *sine die*.

I now put the question, which is that this House should now adjourn *sine die*. Those in favour? **(Members: Aye.)** Those against? Passed.

This House will now adjourn *sine die*.

The House adjourned at 4.15 p.m.