



PROCEEDINGS OF THE GIBRALTAR PARLIAMENT

AFTERNOON SESSION: 3.06 p.m. – 9.21 p.m.

Gibraltar, Thursday, 19th January 2023

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The Gibraltar Parliament

The Parliament met at 3.06 p.m.

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

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

Questions for Oral Answer

CHIEF MINISTER

**Q91/2023
LNG and diesel –
Amount spent in 2022**

**Q92/2023
Power outages in 2022 –
Overtime costs**

Clerk: Meeting of Parliament, Thursday, 19th January 2023.
We continue with Answers to Questions.

5 **Mr Speaker:** Are we suspending Standing Orders?

Chief Minister (Hon. F R Picardo): No.

10 **Clerk:** Question 91/2023. The Hon. E J Phillips.

Hon. E J Phillips: Can the Government state how much it has spent on LNG and diesel in 2022?

Clerk: Answer, the Hon. the Chief Minister.

15 **Chief Minister (Hon. F R Picardo):** Mr Speaker, I will answer this question together with Question 92.

Clerk: Question 92/2023. The Hon. E J Phillips.

20 **Hon. E J Phillips:** Mr Speaker, can the Government state how much the power outages in 2022 cost the taxpayer in overtime?

Clerk: Answer, the Hon. the Chief Minister.

25 **Hon. Chief Minister:** Mr Speaker, before we are able to answer this question, the hon. Gentleman would assist us by clarifying if he seeks calendar year information or financial year

information. For financial year 2021-22, he has the figures in the final Budget Book. For financial year 2022-23, he will have the Estimates Book in the first week of April, of course.

30 **Hon. E J Phillips:** Mr Speaker, I think it would be helpful if he would clarify Question 92. Does he have a general figure in relation to power outages in 2022?

Hon. Chief Minister: Mr Speaker, this is the point I am trying to make to him in my response. We do not keep calendar year information, we keep financial year information.

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Hon. E J Phillips: The only question I would ask in relation to that is can you not provide the House with a specific number in relation to power outages for 2022? You do not keep that information? *(Interjection)* Yes, for a year. It should, hopefully, have been done.

40 **Hon. Chief Minister:** Sorry, Mr Speaker, this is fairly basic. Let me try to take the hon. Gentleman through it. I will try. I do not know whether he will understand it or not.

The first three months of 2022 *(Interjection)* relate to the financial year 2021-22, so we account for the overtime in the financial year 2021-22, not broken down by month necessarily. The next nine months of 2022 are accounted for in the financial year 2022-23, not by month, they are
45 accounted for by way of financial year. The Hon. Mr Clinton has a question I will answer now which will deal with the first six months of the financial year 2022-23. That is why I am saying to the hon. Gentleman is he asking us for the calendar year information or the financial year information? Nine months of the financial year 2022 are in the financial year 2022-23. That is why I am saying to him he will have the information in that respect in the Estimates Book when we get to the end
50 of March, and he will have the Estimates Book provided to him in the first week of April in the usual way; and in respect of the first three months of the year, not broken down by month, he has it in the other Estimates Book.

This is why I am trying to put it to him that before we can give him a detailed answer I need to know whether he wants calendar year or financial year. Calendar year will require us to break
55 down the figures we have for the first three months of the year for 2021-22 and try to apportion that overtime per month, which is an exercise. That is why I was putting it to him in that way.

Hon. E J Phillips: Mr Speaker, it is a calendar question. I think it reads like that. I did not say for financial year 2021-22 or financial year 2020-21. It is obvious from the question that it appears to
60 be a calendar year. I cannot believe it would take civil servants months to prepare an answer to this question; it is a fairly simple question. I suspect he has some of the information before him that might help this House in understanding the answer.

Hon. Chief Minister: Mr Speaker, it is very unusual to be asked to provide information in calendar-year terms in this way. That is the issue. Because we account in financial years, which
65 start on 1st April, providing a figure for the calendar year is a little harder. If the hon. Gentleman considers that he wants it for calendar year although we account for everything in financial years ... I do not think I have, in the information I have available, the calendar-year provision because we just do not keep the information in that way; it is not maintained in that way.

I would invite him to have the information in financial-year terms, in which case what he is asking me for is a further breakdown of the figures already provided for 2021-22, and I will refer
70 him to 2022-23 when we have it. Otherwise, if he wishes to put the question again in respect of calendar year 2022, we would not take the issue that he is asking it again within six months, but it will require an exercise to be done to break down per month all of the amounts and provide it
75 per calendar year.

Hon. E J Phillips: Is there any information contained in the answer by civil servants that would help us in any event?

80 **Hon. Chief Minister:** Yes, Mr Speaker, I believe I am able to give him, if he wants it, the figure of the sum spent on LNG and diesel on the basis that those are invoiced to us monthly, so I am provided with the figure on the basis of the costs for the months in 2022 – if he wants that? Okay, well, the expenditure on LNG for the calendar year 2022 is £24,895,600.95 and the expenditure on diesel, which is automotive gas oil, for 2022 amounts to £9,331,879.25.

85 **Hon. K Azopardi:** Thank you, Mr Speaker. I want to go back to Question 92, if I may. The Chief Minister has referred us to the Budget Book for 2021-22 in respect of that. I do not have it in front of me. The Budget Book will have a collective cost of overtime but surely will not give us a breakdown of overtime in respect of power outages, which is the question we are asking. So referring us to the Budget Book will not give us the specific answer.

90 **Hon. Chief Minister:** It will not give you the specific answer but you will have the amount for overtime, and then what you are asking me for is a breakdown of that overtime so that then I can tell you how much of that overtime in respect of that head relates to payments that arise from a power cut. But you are asking for it then in the context of each of the financial years. Otherwise, 95 we have to do a breakdown by month of the overtime and see how much of that overtime by month relates to a power cut, and then bring, for calendar year rather than financial year, that amount. That is what I am saying to him.

100 **Hon. K Azopardi:** Given, therefore, that I will not find the answer in the Book – and he has explained the difference between the financial year and calendar year approach, which I understand – does he have a figure in front of him for financial year 2021-22 broken down in respect of power outages?

105 **Hon. Chief Minister:** No, Mr Speaker.

Mr Speaker: Next question.

Q93/2023

Civil servants acting as directors of private companies – If allowed and whether register is kept

Clerk: Question 93/2023. The Hon. R M Clinton.

110 **Hon. R M Clinton:** Mr Speaker, can the Government advise whether civil servants are allowed under General Orders to act as directors for private companies; and, if so, does the Chief Secretary keep a register of such individuals to monitor potential conflicts of interest?

Clerk: Answer, the Hon. the Chief Minister.

115 **Chief Minister (Hon. F R Picardo):** Mr Speaker, the General Orders chapter regarding private activities of civil servants was revised in 2021. This now provides more flexibility and clearer guidelines in relation to declarations of any involvement in financial interests, business activities, private work and private trading. This includes the declaration or request for permission to hold directorships of companies and private work amongst other business interests, as long as these 120 do not conflict with their role within the Service or prejudice the Service in any way. This follows UK Civil Service practices.

The Human Resources Department keeps, for the Chief Secretary, a register of all declarations and requests of such activities and, where appropriate, continues to monitor post approval for any potential conflicts of interest.

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

I was wondering whether it is permissible to give us a copy of that revision to General Orders.

Secondly, would the Government consider it reasonable for us to ask for ... obviously, I do not believe he will give us names of people who have sought clearance from the Chief Secretary, but perhaps numbers of people according to classes of requests for permission – for example, directorships or things like that – without actually disclosing names?

130

Hon. Chief Minister: Mr Speaker, I have a copy here of the bulletin, which I am happy to circulate to hon. Members when the Clerk comes. Thank you.

I am happy to provide the hon. Gentleman, across the floor of the House, if he asks me for it, the information he has requested.

135

I have not checked with the Chief Secretary, but I do not believe it would be objectionable for hon. Members, if they wish to see the register, to ask to come and see it on the basis that it is shared with them in confidence, in the sense that they cannot then bandy those names around. In my view, that would be unfair.

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I will give you the information you have asked for in terms of numbers and classes. Perhaps we could agree the sorts of classes they want. If they are interested in it, we could happily put that on the website as a statistic that is updated every three months – it does not necessarily have to be updated every month ... and to come and see the register on the basis that it is not a publicly accessible register, but in the context of Members of this House having oversight in respect of Government business, I have no difficulty with them seeing the register on the basis that they would not then use the names.

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Hon. R M Clinton: Mr Speaker, I thank the Chief Minister again. I think what he has just said is entirely reasonable and it is something that we will obviously consider on our side. If I can just add by way of an aside, I am gratified to see that such a register is in place.

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Mr Speaker: Next question.

Q94/2023

Departmental expenditure – Totals for six months ended 30th September 2022

Clerk: Question 94/2023. The Hon. R M Clinton.

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Hon. R M Clinton: Mr Speaker, can the Government provide, as in prior years, an analysis of total individual departmental expenditure outturn for the six months ended 30th September 2022?

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Clerk: Answer, the Hon. the Chief Minister.

Chief Minister (Hon. F R Picardo): Mr Speaker, the analysis of total individual departmental expenditure outturn for the six months ended 30th September 2022 is, subject to the usual caveats, in the schedule I now provide the hon. Member.

Answer to Q94/2023

Department	Estimated Expenditure as at 30/09/2022
Treasury	£13,327,196.29
No 6. Convent Place	£3,940,119.20
Customs	£5,395,694.28
Income Tax	£1,390,546.12
Parliament	£783,241.39
Human Resources	£2,459,751.51
Immigration and Civil Status	£821,514.64
Government Law Offices	£3,577,225.91
Financial Secretary's Office	£448,511.60
Drugs & Alcohol Awareness & Rehabilitation Services	£518,047.88
Office of the Deputy Chief Minister	£1,120,255.38
Civil Aviation	£813,873.50
Environment	£7,497,750.39
Utilities	£4,581,583.65
Collection and Disposal of Refuse	£4,131,379.18
Upper Rock Tourist Sites and Beaches	£3,132,612.04
Education	£25,453,539.47
Heritage	£847,293.48
Technical Services	£1,862,652.78
Driver and Vehicle Licensing	£852,386.84
Town Planning and Building Control	£568,870.42
Statistics Office	£178,065.90
Economic Development	£1,600,667.34
Procurement Office	£180,522.71
Housing	£1,681,942.98
Equality	£527,661.92
Health and Social Care	£453,651.90
Policing	£8,614,751.28
Prison	£2,123,469.91
Gibraltar Law Courts	£919,570.27
Justice	£877,334.47
Tourism	£709,889.77
Employment	£935,014.92

Department	Estimated Expenditure as at 30/09/2022
Maritime Services	£616,356.92
Social Security	£9,986,309.41
Civil Contingency	£749,785.37
Fire and Rescue Service	£2,842,525.02
Gibraltar University	£499,999.98
Culture	£1,693,638.15
Broadcasting	£2,648,571.43
Youth	£311,859.40
Sports and Leisure	£760,879.94
Financial Services	£1,564,092.39
Gambling Division	£424,497.25
Postal Services	£1,841,581.94
Gibraltar Audit Office	£595,835.26
Gibraltar Regulatory Authority	£1,200,000.00
Contribution to the Covid-19 Response Fund	£44,106,418.83
Information Technology and Logistics Department	£4,333,066.58
Office of Fair Trading	£300,841.97
Office of Chief Technical Officer	£162,709.08
Business	£308,919.67
Airport Fire and Rescue Service	£1,437,062.54
Digital Services	£798,435.05

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Hon. Chief Minister: Mr Speaker, whilst it is delivered to the hon. Member, I would just repeat that the usual caveats are that these are the interim financial statements for the period and are based on the Treasury's accounting records as they stood in about November. The figures contained in the schedule are, therefore, still subject to reconciliation by the responsible

170 Government bodies and may therefore be subject to corrections and, as such, should not serve as
an indicator of the likely outturn for the year in any way.

Hon. R M Clinton: Mr Speaker, I am grateful to the Chief Minister for the analysis. Unfortunately, it does not have a total, so it is a bit hard for me to come up with any comment at this stage. If we may come back to this later on, with your permission? If not, I will lodge a question for the next session. Thank you.

Hon. K Azopardi: Just quickly, I appreciate that the question asks about Departments, so the answer might lie in that, but skimming very quickly through it, unless I have missed it I do not see a cost for the Gibraltar Health Authority.

Hon. Chief Minister: Yes, Mr Speaker, because the question is about Departments and the information I think we regularly provide is for the Department heads. We do not provide it for the agencies or authorities on the six-month basis.

Hon. K Azopardi: I thought that might be the case. However, I was asking the question because I did see on the list the Gibraltar Regulatory Authority.

Hon. Chief Minister: Because I think the accounts of the Regulatory Authority are managed more directly by the Treasury than the GHA, which has its own accounting infrastructure.

Hon. K Azopardi: Obviously, the Chief Minister will not have that information, but would he write to me with the equivalent information for the Gibraltar Health Authority?

Hon. Chief Minister: I will, Mr Speaker, if he writes to me so that I have something to reply to. I am just conscious that I could forget if I say I will, and I might not. I know that I have something to send him already from the last session, which I know is being prepared.

Hon. R M Clinton: Mr Speaker, as regards the Chief Minister's observation that in the past it has only been departmental expenditure, I would draw his attention to the Estimates Book, on pages 13 and 14. The Health Authority is included within total departmental expenditure, and if my memory serves me correctly, in the past the Health Authority has been included in the list we have been provided with in order that we can do a full analysis of estimate to outturn. So I would just like to make that point, that in the Estimates Book the GHA is included within departmental expenditure.

Hon. Chief Minister: The contribution is included by way of departmental reference, not ... the contribution, yes. The GHA is dealt with at the back of the Book. It is not dealt with by way of departmental expenditure.

I think it is important to clarify what the hon. Gentleman has said. What appears in the departmental expenditure section of the Book is the contribution. There is a reference, in the list I have given him, to Health and Social Care, which is a low amount. It is not the GHA proper. If the hon. Gentleman says that in the past when we have given it to him it has included the GHA, I am surprised because the same people who have prepared that have prepared this and given it to me on the basis of what is usually given, but I am quite happy to go back and, if they have added the GHA in the past, add it and/or, as lawyers love to say, also provide it to the Leader of the Opposition if he writes to me. I have no difficulty with the hon. Members having the six month outturn-ish, as we have said, on the basis of the caveats provided.

Mr Speaker: Next question.

Q95-96/2023

**Government housing –
Expected reduction in waiting list; government rental flats**

220 **Clerk:** Question 95/2023. The Hon. D J Bossino.

Hon. D J Bossino: Does the Government know by what number the housing waiting list will be reduced following the release of the 161 flats in the government rental housing stock following, in turn, the affordable housing developments becoming available?

225

Clerk: Answer, the Hon. the Chief Minister.

Chief Minister (Hon. F R Picardo): Mr Speaker, I will answer with Question 96.

230 **Clerk:** Question 96/2023. The Hon. D J Bossino.

Hon. D J Bossino: Does the Government have any intention to build any flats for government rental?

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

Hon. Chief Minister: Mr Speaker, as we discussed at length during the last meeting, the housing waiting list will be reduced directly by at least 161, in the first instance as a result of the sale of affordable homes. The subsequent reduction of the housing list cannot be provided with any accuracy now, but can be up to three or four times that. Additionally, the housing list would similarly be reduced by the move of elderly residents to the new government rental stock being developed for pensioners. These are 44 units at Chatham Views and 83 at Bob Peliza Mews. The new facility at Rooke will also likely relieve the list, and I should just say, as an aside, that I know the hon. Gentleman has another question on the Order Paper directly about that issue in relation to Rooke. As set out in relation to Chatham Views and Bob Peliza Mews, a number of government rental projects are already on foot.

Hon. D J Bossino: Mr Speaker, just by way of premise and by very brief preamble, the question arises as a result of a press release from Action for Housing which I think raised legitimate points following our exchange in this House, which dealt with ... I think it was described as the domino effect by the Hon. the Chief Minister, and questioned really the positive effect that that would or would not have on the government housing waiting list. I think he described it as ... well, he did describe it as – reading directly from the text of his press release – excessive and farfetched.

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255 His view is that the reduction is going to be three or fourfold in number. On what basis does he say that? I understand that he may not have any empirical evidence at this stage and he has already said it is impossible to do so at this stage, but on what basis does he come up with what is actually, I think, a very ambitious result?

Hon. Chief Minister: Mr Speaker, I think we had this debate ad nauseam at the time of the last House, before the Christmas festivities, but I am quite happy to explain again to the hon. Gentleman that our experience – having developed the affordable housing at Mons Calpe and the affordable housing at Beach View Terraces in the time that we have been in government this time round and the work that was done in the early 1990s as a result of the first affordable projects, and indeed, what we see was the management of the creation of the affordable and rental housing stock in their time – shows that if you properly manage the allocations of the houses that become available after people move to the affordable housing, you can take what they leave and use it to create that domino effect.

As I explained the last time but am happy to explain again, if people leave a five-bedroom house because they are going to an affordable home that they have bought, the five-bedroom house will be taken by somebody who is in a four bedroom waiting for a five, the four bedroom house will be taken by somebody who is in a three bedroom awaiting a four, the three-bedroom house will be taken by somebody who is in a two bedroom awaiting a three, the two-bedroom house will be taken by someone who is in a one bedroom awaiting a two, and the one bedroom house will be taken by somebody who is in a bedsitter awaiting a one. That is how you create the massive domino effect. You can take three, four or five people and move them as a result of one property being vacant.

Additionally – and this is the point that we also discussed last time and Action for Housing did not take into consideration in the letter they published in the press – there is also the rental housing being made available at Chatham and Bob Peliza Mews, which is not just, therefore, for 161. You have to add to the 161 the 83 and the 44, so that is 205 plus 83, 208 plus 80, 288. When you multiply that four or fivefold, you are able to move a lot of people from where they are on the housing list. When you add Rooke, which is going to add not housing but the sort of living that elderly people who need care need, and you move them from homes that they may be in ... It is impossible to say what number at Rooke. There is another question on the Order Paper I do not want to get into, but Rooke has 267 flats, I think, from memory, but a number of them may be taken by people who are in other areas, so we do not know how many would come from government flats that would become vacant – say a hundred. That is 388 moves from government property into new properties, the affordable, the rental and Rooke; 388 multiplied by five – okay, multiply it by four – creates a domino effect which deals in very large measure with the numbers on the housing waiting list. But then, of course, you have to break it down into the appropriate categories, so you might still have four or five people who are on the five RKB waiting list, even at the end of that, because although you have moved a lot of people and you might even have availability of three-bedroom properties, you have not got what they need, which is a five bedroom.

So it is not possible to say that you are going to completely get rid of the housing waiting list, because there may be some configurations where you might not be able to do so entirely for a short period, because there is always churn on the list, but you are going to be able to do what we say we expect to be able to do without that prediction being fairly described as excessive or farfetched, because if you factor in all of the information and one does not allow oneself to be led by the nose by the Opposition's view of 161 flats, you actually have all of the information at your disposal which we disclosed in this House – the 161 Rooke and the rental homes that we are building – and then you do get to do a calculation that gets you much closer to where you need to be.

Hon. D J Bossino: I think that is a very interesting exposé and explanation and I do acknowledge that a lot of what he said he did say in the last session of the House, but I wanted to drill down further because of the comments made by one of the NGOs that deals with this issue, and I thought it was important to raise it across the floor of the House, Mr Speaker.

I suspect the answer is going to be no, because I suppose it is a question really of suck it and see, but would he venture at this stage to say by what figure he thinks the housing waiting list – which I understand, and I have not checked this figure but according to Action for Housing, stands currently at 792 applicants – can be reduced by?

Hon. Chief Minister: Mr Speaker, I have done a lot of work with Action for Housing in the time I have been in government. I have a lot of time for their commitment. That does not mean I have to agree with their arguments. In fact, it is my job to deliver housing; it is their job to continue to put pressure on the Government to deliver housing. Those are two different jobs. One does not come with the level of responsibility that the other comes with because, of course, in delivering

320 housing we also have to deliver housing in the way that is the best value for money for the taxpayer, which is our other responsibility as custodians of the public purse.

325 So I am afraid that, given the hon. Gentleman has raised this across the floor of the House, it is not possible for the Government to accept that what we are doing is figure juggling to try to convince the general public that this exercise will go a long way towards resolving our chronic housing problem, quite the opposite. What Action for Housing are failing to do in the way they present their figures – and I am dealing with that because the hon. Gentleman has put it to me across the floor of the House – is to factor in not just the 161 but the 83 at Chatham, the 83 at Bob, the 44 at Chatham and the Rooke issue. When you put all that together, you are not figure juggling. You still cannot break it down in terms of the constituent room composition requests because it is dynamic and also because Hassan Centenary Terraces will be ready on one date, Chatham on another, Bob on another and Rooke on another, and therefore you are going to have a different housing waiting list at different times, which is not one picture.

330 This is not on 1st September everything is ready, what is the housing waiting list on 1st September, boom, it happens. It is dynamic, it happens at different times, so the effect of one, which is one of the affordable housing estates, will happen in part because it is in two phases during the period of the summer of this year. The second phase of Hassan Centenary Terraces, Bob Peliza and Chatham will happen on another date and the housing waiting list will be a different picture then, and Rooke will happen perhaps sooner than all of them, so the housing waiting list will be different and therefore you do not have one target that you are dealing with on one date.

340 That is why I cannot give him a figure, and if he were sitting where I am sitting he would be doing exactly the same thing, unless the argument is – and this is where I think it is completely wrong – you have to just build to the housing list. If what you are saying is build rental stock for the housing list, then you are not looking at value for money because if you are going to deliver an apartment for an elderly couple to which you are going to move them from a five bedroom but you are also going to build a five bedroom, what are you doing in terms of value for money for the taxpayer? Better you build, for the price of one five bedroom, three pensioner flats. That releases three five bedrooms, and in that way you move the list in the right direction.

345 That is the philosophical difference between us and Action for Housing. It is a good-faith philosophical difference because we both want to achieve the same thing. We have the obligation to achieve it not esoterically or philosophically, but looking at value for money for the taxpayer, and this is how we have demonstrated in the past it can be done and how we believe we will now demonstrate it can be done again.

355 **Hon. D J Bossino:** In relation to that final point, is it the case, because when Action for Housing ...? There is a call out there, by some sectors of our society, for another government housing estate, *à la* Mid Harbours, Varyl Begg and all the rest of it, which is, I think, where Action for Housing are ... basically the point they are driving at when they make the point that really the only solution ... They do not accept what the hon. Member opposite is saying, so they are saying the only way of breaking the back of this problem is to build another Mid Harbours, let's say.

360 Do I take it from the hon. Gentleman's answers that that is most definitely not the intention of the Government and that the rationale for that thinking is that it is not value for money for the taxpayer to go down that route? In respect of the specific question I asked, which related to government flats, he referred to the 44 and 83 in number that are being built, I think, for the elderly in the two affordable housing schemes that the Government is embarked upon and is about to start putting bricks on the ground, but apart from that, there is not a commitment to build a new – if I can put it in these terms – proper government housing estate?

370 **Hon. Chief Minister:** Mr Speaker, he has asked me, really, two questions, so let me start by answering the first, the idea that you can only resolve the housing list by building a new estate, that some apparently have taken the view is the correct position. By some, I assume he includes himself, because I understand this is the position they have taken: at the last General Election they

said they were going to build a new estate. Whether it is 'they' the GSD, 'they' Action for Housing, or 'they' the people who Mr Bossino says are saying this, they would be wrong to argue that the only way to deal with a housing list, as we have at the moment, is to build a new housing estate. I will demonstrate why they are wrong. In 1988, Gibraltar had a housing list which was greater
375 than it had ever been. I think, from memory, it exceeded 2,000. By 1996, the housing list had been eradicated. No government housing rental estate had been built. The management of the building of affordable housing and the beginning of the provision of housing for pensioners, although not building but providing houses in existing estates for pensioners, had enabled us to do that. In fact, some were built for pensioners at the bottom of Gib5 and were provided as rental. So you can get
380 rid of a housing list that is three times the size of what it is today without building an estate for rental. Full stop. Demonstrated. Empirical. There is the evidence.

You can build an estate for rental and not solve the housing list problem. I will demonstrate it. In 1996, the housing list was at its lowest ebb ever. In 2002, it was once again longer than it had ever been since 1988 and Mid Harbours had been built. So building a housing estate for rental
385 does not solve it. The hon. Gentleman seems to take issue with some of the facts I am saying. Mid Harbours – *(Interjection by Hon. D J Bossino)* The dates are not wrong. *(Interjection by Hon. D J Bossino)* No, between 1996 when they took office, and 2011 when they left office, Mid Harbours had been built – *(Interjection)* Sorry. Mid Harbours had been built, but the housing list in 2011 was longer than it had ever been, except in 1988.

390 So you can build affordable housing, which they built, you can build pensioner rental, which they built, you can build government rental straight and still not deal with the housing list. But if you build affordable, if you build government rental for the elderly and you manage the elderly problem, you can get rid of the housing list, as we did between 1988 and 1996 and as we will do now.

395 One more final fact, Mr Speaker. Mr Clinton should perk up. An estate with 350 homes – the sort of size of estate you would expect to build – at £3,000 per square metre with an average of 70 square metres per apartment, which is the average: £73½ million. If you are going to reduce debt, if you are going to solve the housing crisis and if you are going to end the pay freeze, better
400 hon. Members think a little about how we are proposing to deal with the issue without spending £73 million.

Mr Speaker: This will be the final supplementary.

Hon. D J Bossino: Mr Speaker, simply to make the point ... I am actually keeping a tally of my
405 supplementaries, and indeed of hon. Gentlemen's and the hon. Lady's supplementaries. I think this will be my fourth of two questions, so on that basis I think it is a bit ... The replies are also long, and I am not complaining about that because they are full replies and I think it is an important social issue.

410 He talks about the rounded figure of £74 million, which he has calculated very quickly – we can check those figures ourselves, no doubt – but then there is also the ongoing maintenance cost, which also falls on the Government into the future; windows have to be fixed and all the rest of it, painted. That is a point on which I am assisting him in his argument. *(Interjection)* Yes, exactly. But in relation to the point when he was explaining the flats that would be made available, which
415 would assist in bringing down the housing waiting list figure, he mentions Rooke but he does not mention the project which is on line to build by the Laguna Club. I think he knows which one I mean. Would that also assist? He is shaking his head, so maybe he can explain why he did not include it as part of his response.

Hon. Chief Minister: Mr Speaker, the reason I am shaking my head is because, as the hon.
420 Gentleman, I think, will recall when I remind him, that project is to build for elderly residential for sale, principally for people who are living in existing affordable housing. The example that we imagine as we try to plot this and see whether it is an issue, is somebody who bought in the

affordable housing schemes in the late 1980s and early 1990s, has built a family there, now wants
425 to sell, can sell for 10 times what they bought for, but 10 times what they bought for – which is a
very tidy sum; if you bought for £35,000 you might sell for £350,000 to £400,000 – does not buy
you a one bedroom in one of the private estates or developments near town, and you probably
want to be near town because you are elderly. So to create churn in the affordable housing
estates, even though they are at open market, we need to provide an opportunity for people to
430 buy also at an affordable-ish rate but with different covenants going forward, which we discussed
generally here we were going to make policy decisions on as the whole thing progressed. Indeed,
I understand that today or tomorrow a press release will be issued by the Ministry for Economic
Development asking for expressions of interest from people who might want to buy in those sorts
of estates in the future, just to gauge the interest that we believe is there and to confirm that it is
there to purchase those estates. Minister Bossano will be issuing a statement in that respect in
435 coming days, which I urge people to look out for.

Mr Speaker, just to clarify my answer before, and so that we are talking on the same basis, I
am reminded by the keen ear of former Minister and much-loved former Member of this House,
Pepe Baldachino, who is watching and listening, that the housing waiting list in 1988 was 2,126.
And just so that we are talking about the same numbers, the hon. Gentleman said he would like
440 to check the calculation I have done, which I said before, but just to be very clear about it, is £3,000
per square metre to build, more or less, today, and 70 square metres per apartment – it is an
average; you have bigger ones and smaller ones, but the average tends to be, for the purposes of
working out the cost of developing, 70 square metres – and I calculated 350 flats in an estate. You
can build a bigger one, you can build a smaller one, but if you build a smaller one do not pretend
445 that you are going to be able to deal with the housing waiting list by building your way out of it,
because then you would have to build 792, which I understand is the waiting list, more or less,
now.

That is why we are saying the combination of the things we are dealing with, not the building
of affordable homes for pensioners, because those are for people who are already in affordable
450 homes and therefore are not housing-list fodder, so to speak ... The building of rental for the
elderly, the building of affordable homes where people are given priority if they vacate properties
that they hold which are government rental, and the building of adequate elderly residential
facilities of the sort we are seeing at Rooke will be able to deal with the housing waiting list and
we do not believe that this is a calculation that is excessive or farfetched.

I ask Action for Housing to take into consideration not just the domino effect on the 161, which
455 is what they referred to in their public statement that the hon. Gentleman has raised with me, but
also the additional homes that we are going to provide, the 83 and the 44 for elderly rental at
Chatham and Bob Peliza Mews and the Rooke facility.

460 **Hon. D J Bossino:** Simply for the benefit of the House, I think the Hon. the Minister for
Economic Development has already issued the press release – it is out – inviting people to write
to him at 31 Town Range if they wish to express an interest in the flats he was referring to.

465 **Hon. Chief Minister:** I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for clarifying that. I believed it was
about to go out; I did not know it had gone out. I very much hope people will read the press release
and indicate their interest, if they are interested, so that we can gauge how many of these units
we have to build. We are convinced that there will be a serious take-up and that the project at
Laguna will be only the first of many such projects which will address the point that the Hon. Sir
Peter Caruana, the former leader of the party opposite, when he was already a backbencher on
470 the other side, said was one of the key issues that we had to deal with: when do we stop building
affordable housing and how do we deal with numbers then? Our view is that one of the ways –
perhaps not the only way, but one of the ways – we deal with it is by creating churn in the
affordable housing market with a way out ... I hesitate to say 'at the end' ... later in life when one
is older and wants to buy a smaller unit. Thank you.

475 **Hon. K Azopardi:** Mr Speaker, I just want to ask a net question. I was listening carefully to what
the Chief Minister said about creating churn, and to a very large extent of course we agree that
creating churn alleviates the housing issue as well. I am not sure we are exactly where he is in
respect of government rental housing. There are different arguments as to whether you can do it
that way, in the way he has described – without going over that territory again – or whether
480 actually, if insufficient rental housing is built over many decades, it causes a logjam because also
you have to take into account the growth of the population, which is very obvious over the last
few decades, the growth of the Gibraltarian population. But anyway, that is not the question I
wanted to ask. I suppose that is the basis for a housing symposium that would lead us to perhaps
different philosophical positions or different positions of approach.

485 What I wanted to ask him is, in relation to the 161 figure, does he have a number of how many
of those are going to be released this year?

Hon. Chief Minister: Mr Speaker, it could, in fact, lead to a symposium, which would not, I
think, start on the basis of the premise that he has set out – the idea that sufficient has not been
490 built for rental over a number of decades, because if we look at the past decade and a half only,
we have seen Mid Harbour Estate being built, we have seen Bishop Canilla House being built, we
have seen Albert Risso House being built, we have seen Charles Bruzon House being built and we
have seen Sea Master Lodge being built. If you take those last four, those are almost an estate for
the elderly that has been built, and we are now adding two more, the block at Bob Peliza Mews
495 and the block at Chatham. So the question is do you build for general provision or do you build for
the elderly so that you also create the churn in the rental? I think that if anybody were looking at
this objectively and were not trying to gain votes, they would say, 'It makes sense, of course, to
do it in the way that you are proposing,' but of course it equally makes sense, if you are trying to
gain votes, to go out and say that you are going to build for rental generally, so that people think
500 there is the result.

What would certainly not work, what is economic madness, is to sell your existing rental stock
of post-war housing, as hon. Members did when they were in government, because then you are
undoing the asset that you have in rental. You are selling it and taking it out of circulation, and
you are selling it at a 10th of its value and then building at five times the cost of sale. And that,
505 looked at objectively, not looked at through the prism of what we want to say this year so that we
might or might not win an election, looked at through the prism of what is good for the people of
Gibraltar in the long term, is certainly the wrong thing to do, whilst doing what we are
proposing – looked at objectively, not trying to gain votes, trying to do the right thing and trying
to deliver value for money – is obviously, objectively, the right thing to do.

510 **Hon. K Azopardi:** Mr Speaker, that did not even come close to answering the question I put as
to whether how many of the 161 are going to be released this year, so I will ask it again: how many
of the 161 are going to be released this year?

But before I sit down, I really ... I prefaced my question with the statement – and I thought it
515 was fairly neutrally expressed – that there might be a disagreement of approach as to what is the
best way of solving the perennial decades-long housing issue. I did not say that their approach is
some kind of Machiavellian approach to gain votes or whatever, and it is only our approach that
is value for money. But the way the Hon. Chief Minister put it, their approach is value for money
and any other approach – and he was pointing at us – is to gain votes. Ultimately, I am laying the
520 ground to the position that there might be legitimately a difference of opinion on how to approach
the housing crisis and both are taken from good-faith positions. That is what I am saying. But I ask
again: how many of the 161 are going to be released this year?

Hon. Chief Minister: Mr Speaker, the hon. Gentleman is entirely right. I forgot to give him the
525 answer to that because I was dealing with his first point, which I do not think was made in the way
he has pretended. But I will tell him the answer to the first one first, before I deal with that, so I

do not forget the second time. I do not have the number of how many of those 161 are in phase 1 of Hassan Centenary Terraces and how many are in the rest of the phases of the other affordable housing.

530 Mr Speaker, the hon. Gentleman prefaced his intervention by saying one of the issues we could look at is if you have not built for rental in decades, it could create a logjam, and I was trying to deal with the point that in fact there has been building for rental in the past decade and a half, and considerable building in the past decade and a half. That was the point I was trying to make.

535 Of course we must assume that we all come here in good faith, and I do not assume that they do not, but having done the analysis, I do not believe that a person properly directed could reach the conclusion that there is a better value-for-money approach – and we must all want to deliver the best value for money – than the one we have set out, and I have demonstrated to the hon. Gentleman, I believe, in the way that I have done the analysis of the period 1988-96 and 1996-2011 ... can be seen in one instance to already have dealt with a housing list that was the
540 longest we have had, which was 2,000 people. That is why I am making the point, because the issue must also be one of value for money.

Hon. K Azopardi: My final question, Mr Speaker, on this.

545 The hon. Member does not have the answer to the question I asked, so I will write to him and it would be helpful if he could give me that information.

Does he see the point that while he has given quite a lengthy explanation on the churn and I have agreed with him that churn is important, the problem with the explanation is that because it is tied in to the delivery of Hassan Centenary, Bob Peliza Mews and Chatham Views, all these numbers he has given – 161, 83, 8, 44 – and the expected completion dates of Chatham and Bob
550 Peliza are not until maybe 2026 or 2027, the reality is that, broken down, it would be helpful to understand what the yearly churn is, because actually, when you break it down the yearly churn might be relatively small, deliverable, from all these estates over a period of seven or eight years and it will not have the dramatic effect he is hoping for? So I ask the Government to perhaps ... It would be helpful to them. I am sure they maybe even have this information, but if they do not,
555 they should probably procure it, I would suggest, to see what the yearly churn of these figures is.

Hon. Chief Minister: Mr Speaker, I am happy to reply to him if he writes to me. We are going to start becoming pen pals at this rate, and I am only one third into my questions.

560 The period will not be seven to eight years. We are delayed on Chatham and Bob Peliza but the latest date by which they will be ready has already been provided and it is not seven or eight years from now, so he does not need to refer to seven or eight years from now.

565 The problem we have is that we are trying to catch up, because the important thing is to build at least 200 units a year in terms of housing. That is what we have insisted for some time now is what you need to do in order to stay ahead of the curve. If they had built 200 units a year in the 16 years they were in government, then we would not have been in the situation we were in, in 2011. In the period 1996 to 2003 – which coincided with him being a Minister, but I am sure it is not relevant to him because he was not Minister for Housing – there was nothing built. Those are the issues.

570 The other point I think is important is that we simply reflect on the fact that the hon. Gentleman's alternative solution would suffer from the same affliction that he says ours now suffers. Of course, we have the difficulty that we were not able to build because of COVID. Okay, fair enough, so we are delayed, but if they win an election it is not going to be in a way that enables them ... Let's assume the worst and they win an election during the course of calendar year 2023. They cannot pretend to start building until 2024, so that means that their estate for rental, in the
575 idea that they might be bringing an estate for rental into the mix, would not be ready until after Hassan Centenary phase 2, Bob, Chatham and Rooke have been delivered. So it would not for one moment enable you to pray in aid, as a way of resolving the difficulty that he says we have, that they are now going to go and build a housing estate, because the housing estate, ironically, is

580 going to be ready when we have broken the back of the housing problem with the issues I have already explained across the floor of the House. The delay cuts both ways.

Mr Speaker: Next question.

Q97-98/2023

**Eastern Beach car park additional storey –
Cost and funding; eligibility for using**

Clerk: Question 97/2023. The Hon. D J Bossino.

585 **Hon. D J Bossino:** What are the expected costs of the additional storey to the Eastern Beach car park, and which entity will fund it?

Clerk: Answer, the Hon. the Chief Minister.

590 **Chief Minister (Hon. F R Picardo):** Mr Speaker, I will answer with Question 98.

Clerk: Question 98/2023. The Hon. D J Bossino.

595 **Hon. D J Bossino:** Maybe one day! He will certainly be promoted!
Mr Speaker, who will be eligible to use the extra floor of parking being considered at the Eastern Beach car park?

Clerk: Answer, the Hon. the Chief Minister.

600 **Hon. Chief Minister:** That's more like it!
Mr Speaker, the expected cost of the additional storey of the Eastern Beach car park is £2.8 million. The entity that will fund it is yet to be confirmed.

An announcement about the eligibility for the use of the additional floor of parking at the Eastern Beach car park will be made at the appropriate time.

605 **Hon. D J Bossino:** If the question of eligibility will be decided upon at some point in the future, why is this car park being built in the first place? As I understand it, there are two floors already. As I further understand it, I am told that they are not used to full capacity. So why is this extra floor in the car park – at a considerable cost, at first blush almost £3 million – being built? Who is it being built for?

615 **Hon. Chief Minister:** Mr Speaker, I do not know who is giving the hon. Gentleman that information, but there are times of the year when the car park is more than *abarrotado*. In other words, it is full and overflowing, and given the debate we have just had... I should not say that, Mr Speaker – you will tell me we should not have debates at Question Time. Given the exchange we have had at Question Time a moment ago, the hon. Gentleman is surprisingly appearing to overlook the fact that phase 1 of a new government affordable housing estate is going to be provided just across the road from that car park and phase 2 has already started, and those are a considerable number of homes. There is another question on the Order Paper about parking for that estate, and he will see that I will answer him, I will say no more other than positively in respect of that. But of course, in the area, although there are parking spaces available for each resident in the areas and estates that have been developed, most people do not have just one car, to the

chagrin of the Hon. Minister for Transport, but they have more than one car and therefore provision has to be made in the area.

625 The reason I have not given an answer about eligibility is because we need to work out as a matter of policy how we provide for that, and we expect to be making a statement, which will be quite detailed, about people in the area and the summer use of the car park etc., which we have not yet finalised. Therefore, we will be making a statement during the next few weeks, which sets out that eligibility criteria. The car park is expected to be finished by late May/June.

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Hon. D J Bossino: So, in short, is the answer not that this extra floor is being built for those people who are going to be living in the affordable housing? In effect, that is what he said. And does he not agree with me that this policy decision to spend £3 million for extra car parking spaces runs absolutely and utterly counter to the policy – which should be the policy of this Government, because it seems to be the policy of the hon. Gentleman sitting to his immediate left at the moment, the Minister for Transport – to encourage less use of cars? It just does not make any sense.

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Hon. Chief Minister: Mr Speaker, no, I have not said the thing that the hon. Gentleman says I have said. I have said, in fact, the things that *Hansard* will reflect I have said, and not his summary as he wishes to present it.

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There are going to be people at Hassan Centenary Terraces. There are people already at Beach View Terraces. There is a new private development across the road. The Government has seen already and Members opposite may have seen also at the DPC proposals for other developments along Devil's Tower Road. The Government has announced – we have not yet finalised but we expect to – a project to the south of Hassan Centenary Terraces, which is called the East Side project, which will provide some parking in some areas, which we have already talked about, but it is going to be just there. So the volume of people that there will be on the East Side – in a new city, in effect, that will be the East Side – will be massive, and not just those who are going to be at Hassan Centenary Terraces.

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What the Hon. the Minister for Transport wants is for cars to move less, and therefore car parks are an essential part of the strategy.

Mr Speaker: Continue with the Hon. Damon Bossino.

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Hon. D J Bossino: Mr Speaker, is he able to tell me how many parking spaces will be made available as a result of this construction? And further, is he also able to tell me what the totality of the car parking spaces will be, once the ... I think it is going to be the third floor ... is constructed?

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Hon. Chief Minister: Yes, Mr Speaker, but it is publicly available information, I think ... Or not. Hang on, let me see. Sorry, I do not think it has been marked out entirely, so, no, I cannot give him the exact number, but let me see ... If he gives me a minute, I think I have the information. I do not think I have it here; I think I have it in my electronic portable device. Mr Speaker, because of the period that my device holds information for, I do not have it, but I am quite happy, during the next recess, to obtain the information of the estimated numbers of parking spaces – I think it is a very clear estimation – and let the hon. Gentleman have it.

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I would just add one additional point that I forgot to mention in the context of the explanation I gave him a moment ago but which is also relevant, and that is of course that that area is not just the area of the East Side project, Hassan Centenary Terrace, Beach View Terraces, the new residential private facility across the road, and others that are going to be developed. That area is also the area of the entrance into Gibraltar. In other words, if you are coming through the tunnel and you want to park and get a bus, that is going to be the area where you would want to park and get the bus because that is where the tunnel roundabout will be, and you will be able to go into that car park. So the park and ride concept also is relevant to this and is very much in keeping

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675 with the Minister for Transport's strategy. So everything he has said about this being contrary to
our strategy is, in our view, entirely wrong, and given that it is our plan to build parking and our
Traffic Strategy, we think we are getting it pretty right.

680 **Hon. D J Bossino:** Who is responsible for the development of the project? In the news
published by GBC, which alerted me to this, it talks about the notice being submitted by a company
called ANS Project Management Services Ltd. Is that the entity developing it, or is it a different
entity?

685 **Hon. Chief Minister:** No, Mr Speaker, those are our project managers.

Hon. D J Bossino: So does he have the answer to the question?

Hon. Chief Minister: Mr Speaker, it is the Government developing it.

690 **Hon. D J Bossino:** And are any – all, some, I do not know – of the parking spaces going to be up
for sale? Is that the intention?

Hon. Chief Minister: I do not think that is presently the intention, but of course if there was
interest we would have to consider that possibility. But it is not the intention.

695 **Mr Speaker:** The Hon. Roy Clinton.

Hon. R M Clinton: Mr Speaker, the Chief Minister has just kindly mentioned that it is a
government project, this additional floor, but perhaps he could point to where in the
700 Improvement and Development Fund I could find it, because I have gone through it in some detail
but I do not seem to find it in the estimates for 2022-23.

Hon. Chief Minister: Mr Speaker, I already told the House that the entity that will fund it is yet
to be confirmed, but it is a government project.

705 **Hon. R M Clinton:** Mr Speaker, it has usually been the convention in this House that capital
projects are in the Estimates Book through the Improvement and Development Fund, so if it is not
in the Improvement and Development Fund and it has not been voted on by Parliament, how does
he intend to fund a capital project like this?

710 **Hon. Chief Minister:** Mr Speaker, that convention is not the one that I learnt when I was
elected to this House and the GSD were funding government projects through government
companies. In the time that we have been here, we have had a number of arguments about this
issue, so I am surprised the hon. Gentleman should think that a government project can only be
715 developed through the I&D Fund. Indeed, we have developed a number of schools and his
complaint has been that they have not been in the I&D. It does not mean that they are not
government projects, even though they are funded through government companies. We have
that debate annually, and he should not be surprised that we are going to continue to have it.

720 **Mr Speaker:** A final supplementary.

Hon. D J Bossino: Thank you, Mr Speaker.
Who is the contractor? And is the £2.8 million a fixed price?

725 **Hon. Chief Minister:** Mr Speaker, will the hon. Gentleman allow me to respond to him after
the recess, because I do not have the information here. I know the discussions we have had with

various contractors, but I am unable to tell him the contractor that was selected off the top of my head.

730 **Hon. D J Bossino:** And in relation to the fixing of the price, does he have that information either in his head or available to him in the papers he has in front of him?

Hon. Chief Minister: Yes, fixed price.

735 **Mr Speaker:** Next question.

Q99-100/2023
Forbes ex-Ready Mix site –
When available and cost

Clerk: Question 99/2023. The Hon. D J Bossino.

Hon. D J Bossino: When will the parking at the Forbes ex-Ready Mix site at Devil's Tower Road, which the developer had committed to provide to the public, be made available?

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Clerk: Answer, the Hon. the Chief Minister.

Chief Minister (Hon. F R Picardo): Mr Speaker, I will answer with Question 100.

745 **Clerk:** Question 100/2023. The Hon. D J Bossino.

Hon. D J Bossino: Has the parking at the Forbes ex-Ready Mix site at Devil's Tower Road, which the developer committed to make available to the public, been sold or are they being sold; and, if so, for how much?

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Clerk: Answer, the Hon. the Chief Minister.

Hon. Chief Minister: Mr Speaker, a number of different options were considered for the small car park under the Forbes development. It was felt that it would not be as economically viable to equip, prepare and maintain this car park for the purposes of rental and sale. Given that over 200 spaces have become available at Devil's Tower Road car park nearby, the decision was taken to sell the Forbes spaces back to the developer for a premium of £½ million.

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Hon. D J Bossino: The information I have been able to gather as a result of the information which is made public via the DPC was that one condition was that the public spaces which were on the site where the Forbes development is – and, so the public are aware, it is the tower which is constructed more or less opposite St Theresa's Church in Devil's Tower Road ... that there would be 24. I heard a higher number, but according to the documentation there were 24 public car parking spaces which were going to be lost as a result of the construction, and then there was a commitment, which was a condition of the planning process, which resulted in the commitment by the developer to make these parking spaces available. The hon. Member is now saying that it has been sold at a premium of £½ million? Is he able to confirm what the net sale price from the Government to the developer of each parking space is?

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Hon. Chief Minister: Yes, Mr Speaker, as could he. It is £½ million divided by 24, which would give you £20,833.

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Hon. D J Bossino: When was this arrangement arrived at? It strikes me that that sale has been effected, if one compares the going price of sale of parking spaces in the area ... I saw somebody on social media ... I think I had already filed the question, but I think very helpfully for the purpose of the point I am making ... that there was a parking space going in the Laguna area, if not on Laguna estate, for £40,000. Those are the prices that parking spaces are going for, so on the basis of that calculation, what rationale did whoever made the decision on his side of the House ... influence them to sell it at, in effect, half the price, so the Government has lost out – the taxpayer has lost out – by 50% because they have sold it at an undervalue? Can he comment in relation to the point that I have just made?

Hon. Chief Minister: Yes, Mr Speaker. I think the hon. Gentleman has lost leave of his senses. I think what he is saying is utterly nonsensical. The hon. Gentleman thinks that because there was a sale of a car parking space in Laguna estate for £40,000 inside the estate ... Indeed, as I am reminded by the Hon. Minister for Transport, that is not the sale price, that is the advertised price. Sometimes people go bananas when they see that an affordable home has been advertised at £½ million. Facebook erupts, it is on fire, and then when you look at the completion notice, it has been sold at £350,000 rather than the £½ million that was the asking price – although I go equally bananas when it is sold at £350,000, but at least we have the special stamp duty.

Here, the hon. Gentleman seems to forget that there was a premium paid for the property. A premium was paid. Part of the premium included the provision of the spaces. The spaces, when they are going to be handed to us, require us to maintain them and to enter into a covenant to maintain them with the individual who is going to run the property, keep the area secure if we are going to rent them etc. – in other words, add recurrent cost to the Government. Instead, what we have managed to do is add £½ million to the capital account of the Government.

The calculation the hon. Gentleman is doing is the most nonsensical one can come up with because by his measure, whenever we sell a plot we should take all of the profit that is going to come from it. In other words, when we sold a plot for anybody to put a block of flats on, in effect that party would sell the flats at say £½ million and the plot was sold to them for £2 million. The total sale value would be £15 million of the block. ‘The taxpayer has been denied £14 million,’ – yes, and the risk of building, the risk of marketing and all of the other risks that are involved. But he would believe that the only way to sell a plot of land and do fairness by the taxpayer is to take the full profit once the whole thing is going to be developed. And yet when the taxpayer is going to have an interest in developments in Gibraltar in order that the taxpayer does garner some of the benefit of development in Gibraltar – like, for example, Victoria Keys – what do we get? ‘It is disgraceful that the taxpayer is going to be involved in development and make profit from the sale of property.’ For goodness sake, you could not make this nonsense up.

So, Mr Speaker, I believe that the person who made the decision – who was the Deputy Chief Minister, as the Chairman of the Land Management Committee, with the whole of the Land Management Committee – made the right decision for Gibraltar. He made it looking at the recurrent costs that this would have meant for Gibraltar, he made it at the right time, he made it in the right circumstances, he made it with a Devil’s Tower Road car park in the area of the west of Devil’s Tower Road with the expansion of the Eastern Beach car park at the east of Devil’s Tower Road and understanding that this was exactly the right thing to do for the taxpayer, and without in that way incurring any of the nonsense that the hon. Gentleman has just suggested.

Hon. D J Bossino: Mr Speaker, the only nonsense which is being spouted in this House has just come from the hon. Member. The central point, the basic point that I am making still stands despite all the waffle, despite everything that we have heard. He has taken us round the houses. The basic point and the accusation still stands. This was a bad deal for the taxpayer. It is very clear. He is saying that that is the offer price – £40,000 – for that parking space in Laguna. The reality is that people are probably going to pay that money – that is the market price. If not £40,000, thirty-odd thousand. The hon. Gentleman to my right tells me that there are parking spaces in Notre

825 Dame School that have gone for £30,000. That is the going price in Gibraltar. And on this occasion
the Government has decided to fob off 24 spaces which ultimately and fundamentally should have
been made available to the public in the first place. We should not be having this discussion. The
developer, once they built Forbes, should have made 24 parking spaces available to the public,
but the Government decided to sell them to that particular developer at £20,000.

830 Mr Speaker, by way of question, may I ask the hon. Gentleman what premium was paid for the
land?

Hon. Chief Minister: Mr Speaker, we all know what is happening here and we all know what
we are seeing, but we are going to stick to the issue so that we do not bore watchers or listeners.

835 Anything the GSLP Liberal Government does is waffle, nonsensical and bad for the taxpayer,
and everything the GSD Government did was magnificent and a golden legacy. But when you talk
about premiums, does the hon. Gentleman remember the other car park that we developed at
Midtown? There, parking spaces are being offered at about £35,000, in the centre of town, not in
Devil's Tower Road – £35,000 in the centre of town, in some instances. *(Interjection)* Well, perhaps
the offer price, but the sale prices that we are seeing ... We see the sale prices, not the offer prices.
840 The hon. Gentleman seems to forget that we developed a car park under St Anne's School and a
car park under Notre Dame School. We offered for sale parking spaces there for £30,000.
(Interjection) We could not sell any of them, they have all gone to rental, but it is our building. So
I do not know where he gets the idea that you can sell for £40,000 when we could not sell for
£30,000. We had to take all of those people who wanted to buy and put them in Bayside car park
845 instead.

So I think, Mr Speaker, the hon. Gentleman really needs to think a little beyond the opportunity
to make suggestions that the Government has in some way provided less than the best value for
the taxpayer, because we know when we tried to sell those just along that we could not sell them –
in a much more populated area, because Laguna with Glacis opposite is much more populated
850 than Devil's Tower Road, very much so, and Devil's Tower Road and the church etc. have a car
park already available for rental within very short walking distance. So it makes no sense.

I do not have the number of the premium for Forbes, but I am reminded by the Hon. the Deputy
Chief Minister that it went to the highest bidder, so it was the highest premium on the table, to
which we now add £½ million. And when it comes to premiums – I was reminding them about the
855 car park here – does he remember what the deal was when they handed over the naval grounds?
They exchanged the naval grounds for the refurbishment of the Kings Bastion Leisure Centre,
capped out at £10 million. How can I take lessons on what is good for the taxpayer and what is
value for money for the taxpayer from the party that did that? When we were elected, we went
back, we reduced the plot and built ourselves the car park and took more premium.

860 Mr Speaker, I think we are doing an excellent job for the taxpayer. I have demonstrated before
that we have more premium per square metre for land in Gibraltar, even adjusted for inflation,
than any amount they ever got per square metre for land in Gibraltar. We are doing an excellent
job and we are going to continue doing so.

865 **Mr Speaker:** Next question.

Q101/2023
Wonderworks Media Ltd –
Employees working within Government

Clerk: Question 101/2023. The Hon. D J Bossino.

870 **Hon. D J Bossino:** Please state whether employees of Wonderworks Media Ltd or any other private entity work or have worked in/from/at the Ministry for Tourism; and, if so, how many, the duration of their employment contracts and the duties they are/were performing.

Clerk: Answer, the Hon. the Chief Minister.

875 **Chief Minister (Hon. F R Picardo):** Mr Speaker, I will answer with Question 102.

Clerk: Question 102/2023. The Hon. D J Bossino.

880 **Hon. D J Bossino:** Please state whether employees of Wonderworks Media Ltd or any other private entity, work or have worked in/from/at any Government department – other than the Ministry for Tourism – government agencies, authorities or companies; and, if so, how many, the duration of their employment contracts and the duties they are/were performing including details of the entity under which they have been/are employed.

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

Hon. Chief Minister: Mr Speaker, no employees of Wonderworks Media or any other private entity work or have worked in, from or at the Ministry for Tourism.

In respect of Question 102, the information requested is in the schedule I now hand over for the month of December 2022.

Answer to Question 102/2023

Government Department Name:	Details of the entity under which they have been/are employed	Please provide reasons for employment	Please list the duties they are/were performing	Date employment commenced	Is the employee still working	Date when the employment contract is due to expire	Date employment Terminated
Department of Social Security	ETCL	Support with Clerical vacancies	Clerical duties	07/11/2022	No		06/01/2023
Department of Social Security	ETCL	Support with Clerical vacancies	Clerical duties	17/10/2022	Yes	10/09/2023	
Department of Social Security	ETCL	Support with Clerical vacancies	Clerical duties	07/11/2022	Yes	05/05/2023	
Department of Social Security	ETCL	Support with Clerical vacancies	Clerical duties	07/11/2022	Yes	05/05/2023	
Upper Rock & Beaches	GBIC Ltd	Staff shortage	Maintenance and Repairs	01/06/2022	Yes	31/05/2023	
Upper Rock & Beaches	GBIC Ltd	Staff shortage	Maintenance and Repairs	01/06/2022	Yes	31/05/2023	
Upper Rock & Beaches	GBIC Ltd	Staff shortage	Maintenance and Repairs	01/06/2022	Yes	31/05/2023	
Elderly Residential Services	ADA	VACANCY	Nursing Assistant	12/04/2020	YES	05/07/2020	
Elderly Residential Services	GHC/ERS	VACANCY	RGN	09/03/2020	YES	01/06/2020	NO. FTC
Elderly Residential Services	MEDDOC	LONG TERM SICKNESS	Nursing Assistant	20/09/2020	NO	13/12/2020	PERMANENT
Elderly Residential Services	MEDDOC	MATERNITY LEAVE	Nursing Assistant	02/01/2021	NO	27/03/2021	PERMANENT
Elderly Residential Services	MEDDOC/ERS	MATERNITY LEAVE	RGN	06/10/2019	YES	29/12/2019	NO. FTC
Elderly Residential Services	MEDDOC/ERS	VACANCY	Nursing Assistant	22/03/2020	YES	14/06/2020	NO. FTC

ANSWER TO QUESTION 102

890 Additionally, the Gibraltar Health Authority has been unable to provide their responses in time for this Parliament session. The information can be made available in slower order, should the hon. Member wish to receive it.

Hon. D J Bossino: Mr Speaker, whilst I have a look at the schedule he has passed over in relation to the answer to Question 102, in respect of Question 101 I must say I am very surprised by the answer. The information I have – and there is absolutely no reason in my mind to the information I have received from various sources – is that, in fact, there are two employees who work from the Ministry for Tourism.

Let me remind the hon. Member – I hope he has prepared sufficiently for the supplementaries – it talks about a historical position and it talks about whether they are working in, from or at the Ministry for Tourism. I will make the point – he has the Hon. the Minister for Tourism to his right – I am told that there are two individuals who follow the Minister for Tourism, photographing him, videoing him and producing that type of visual stuff for him, and that those two who work at, from or in the Ministry for Tourism are employees of Wonderworks Media Ltd. Can he please provide a specific answer to that? He has said zero in his written reply.

Hon. Chief Minister: Mr Speaker, as ever, the hon. Gentleman is as wrong as he is vehement. I will repeat the answer: no employees of Wonderworks Media or any other private entity work or have worked in, from or at the Ministry for Tourism. None. Zero. Zilch. He is wrong, completely wrong. The information he has is wrong. It was wrong when he had it, it was wrong when he referred to it here. He has got it completely wrong. If he wants to refer to the two individuals he is referring to, he can. They are not employed by Wonderworks Media, so he is wrong.

I hope he has come sufficiently prepared to ask another supplementary based on that answer, which is correct, as the Hon. Minister for Tourism will indicate and as I can indicate to him, given my responsibilities for the public sector as Chief Minister of Gibraltar and the information I have been given by the Human Resources Department, which manages all of these contracts, and indeed the Employment Service, which would manage the contract of a third party.

So, wrong, Mr Speaker. Vehement, passionate, but wrong.

Hon. D J Bossino: Mr Speaker, I am quite relaxed. It is information that I have been provided and I am duty bound, in exercising my public service to this community, to ask these questions because had it been right, it would have been very serious.

Can he then tell me who those two individuals are employed by? Are they government employees? Are they employed by a different company? I dare say with the hon. Gentleman and the entire Government, pretty much, we cannot take anything they say at face value. There is always going to be a bit of fancy footwork in order not to answer the questions. This is why I still do not harbour doubts as to the information I have been provided. I will ask him that specific question: who are those two individuals who follow the Hon. the Minister for Tourism around, videoing him and photographing him, employed by?

Hon. Chief Minister: Mr Speaker, of course he is duty bound to ask the question. I never complained that he asked the question; I am just saying that however passionate and vehement he may be, he was wrong and the person who gave him the information was wrong. No doubt, given that everything they do is in good faith, he got the information in good faith and he brought it here in good faith. I do not challenge that, of course not, but I just remind him that however much passion he might put into things, if the information is wrong, it is wrong.

In terms of fancy footwork, I am not inclined to take that in any way other than positively because, of course, what he is saying to us is that we are right and that they sometimes find it difficult to work out how right we are, because I have told him that these are not employees of Wonderworks Media and I have told him that they are not employees of a private company. They are not. They are employees of a government company, so they are in the public sector. They are

employees of ETCL – Employment Training Company Ltd – and they are on an apprenticeship scheme and have been for some time. I am surprised that he got that information, given that these two are public sector employees through a government company. Footwork or otherwise, I hope that satisfies his curiosity.

Hon. D J Bossino: Mr Speaker, with the greatest of respect to him, I take everything he says – and I do not want to personalise it: almost everything that the Government says – with a pinch of salt. I have been on this side of the house for –

Mr Speaker: I do not think that is quite right and it is being disrespectful. I would rather you withdrew that expression.

Hon. D J Bossino: Mr Speaker, I withdraw it on your advice. Let me just put it in these terms, that everything they say I am put on enquiry and I need to check it. So I still stand by what I said earlier in respect of I think it was my first or second supplementary, but is he telling me that those individuals have never worked for Wonderworks Media Ltd and that there has not, at some point, as a result of the questions that we have been asking from this side of the House, been a bit of fancy footwork ... and had them transferred to ETCL, which he has rightly described as a government-owned company.

Mr Speaker, if I may, there is a long schedule that has been provided in respect of the answer to Question 102, and I would like a bit of time, if I may, to come back to that, but I will ask a question in relation to Question 102 now, which may obviate ... No, Mr Speaker, it arises from the same point that I am making, and I think it would assist him, but I am happy not to ask it.

Hon. Chief Minister: Just so that I can answer one thing at a time, otherwise I might have the 161 problem I had before.

Mr Speaker, even to say that the hon. Gentleman puts on enquiry the information that we have is, if I may say so with respect to him, unedifying. I am not going to say it is unparliamentary because that is a matter for you, Mr Speaker, but it is unedifying for this reason. The information I am giving him is provided to me by the brilliant people who prepare the Government for answering these questions – by the Parliament team at No. 6 Convent Place. They go to the Departments to obtain the information and then check it against the records at Employment and Human Resources to ensure that, insofar as possible, we do everything we can to ensure the information we give the House is accurate.

He has known me for longer than he and I care to remember. I have given him direct information. I have told him who they are employed by. He knows I am not going to give information that could enable him to embarrass me by showing that the information I have given him is wrong in the way I have been able to embarrass him by showing the information that he brought to the House and based his question on is wrong. *(Interjection by Hon. D J Bossino)* Well, he should be embarrassed, Mr Speaker, because he should have checked with his alleged source of information. The information that I have, therefore, is information provided to the Government through the Government in good faith to come to the House to put on the record of *Hansard*, and therefore there is not going to be any chance that anybody should legitimately be able to be put on enquiry by information that we provide in that respect. His suggestions about me are water off a duck's back and irrelevant, but his suggestions about the people who work for me and who work for the taxpayer are really unearned because they do their best to ensure that every piece of information that I give to this House is accurate.

The information I have is that in all of the time that these individuals we are referring to across the floor of the House have been working in the Ministry for Tourism, they have been employed by ETCL on this apprenticeship and that therefore it is completely wrong for anybody to have given him the information that they worked, ever, for Wonderworks Media. I do not know whether before they worked in the Government they might have served chips and doner kebabs for

995 Wonderworks Media if they have a takeaway somewhere; I do not know, but certainly they have never worked in the Ministry for Tourism for the hon. Gentleman, as he has suggested, for Wonderworks Media.

1000 There has not been any attempt to change records as a result of that questioning. My goodness, he does ascribe to himself an incredible importance that a question from him across the floor of the House might suggest that we then go and change records, that we might create an erroneous and fraudulent paper trail on public documents to address a question that he put in this House in a way that would expose us to potential criminality and sanction. That is the sort of allegation he is making. He does not think through the things he is saying. That is the problem. The allegations that are loaded within the things that he says he does not think about, that we or public servants have changed the public record. No, it has not happened. These two ladies he refers to, who do an excellent job, (*Interjection*) do it for ETCL, seconded to the Ministry for Tourism on an apprenticeship from the day they walked into the Ministry for Tourism.

1005 The hon. Member might want to reflect on the fact that he has cast huge aspersions – not on me, because we have known each other for long enough that we call each other every name and our friendship is unaffected, but on the public servants beyond me. Knowing him as I do, I do not think he intended to do that and he will want to extend an apology to the public servants who work with the Government in providing information to this House.

1015 **Hon. D J Bossino:** Mr Speaker, the first point I would like to make is that ... The Hon. the Minister for Housing, in an unhelpful way, I suppose, is asking me from a sedentary position where the question is. I have just started to speak; a question will come, he can relax. When he says 'alleged' source of information, I would ask him to withdraw that on the basis that it is true, what I am saying. I do have a source and information has been imparted to me, so he is questioning the veracity of what I have said and I would ask him, please, to withdraw that.

1020 But if I may ask the question, Mr Speaker – and this is the question I was going to ask in relation to Question 102, with the caveat that I would like to consider the schedule with a bit more time – is it the case that there have been transfers to these government companies – he has mentioned one, but I see that there are others; we have GBIC, which is a joint venture with a Chinese entity, and others – of people who had at one point worked with Wonderworks Media Ltd? In his answer – and this is why it needs to be unpicked – he says that at the time of ... and quite properly because the question arose from Question 101, which related specifically to the Ministry for Tourism, but is it possible that these individuals worked in other Government Departments before they were transferred to ETCL with Wonderworks Media Ltd? And I widen the question now, because I am able to as a result of the way that Question 102 was posed, to other employees.

1030 **Hon. Chief Minister:** Mr Speaker, I will start with the request that I withdraw something: I should withdraw that his alleged source of information provided him information. I do not know what it is that the hon. Gentleman wants me to withdraw, and it is a bit rich coming from somebody who has said that everything that I say – by the way, Mr Speaker, it is 1639 by my watch: I hope he will take that for granted – he is put on inquiry about. He might want to check the phone that he is looking at: 1639. I hope that on that his inquiry leads him to the same conclusion, that I am telling the truth, because the idea that everything I say, even when I am telling the time, is something that puts him on enquiry is something which, if I was not so long in the tooth and if I did not have such a thick skin, I would say I would like to see withdrawn because it is an allegation that the things that I say are not reliable.

1040 Forget the fact that I am talking to him, that I have known him for 38 years and that I have a sufficient personal regard for him that I would not mislead him – even if we were outside here, I would not say something to Damon Bossino, whom I have known since we entered comprehensive school together, which was untrue. I would not, because of the regard I have for him. But the idea that I have come to this House, where we have an obligation not to mislead, where we have an obligation to ensure that what we say on *Hansard* reflects the truth and that everything I say puts

1050 them on enquiry, I can only mean as to the truth of what I say. Mr Speaker, if he does not withdraw that, I am certainly not going to withdraw what I am alleged to have said about the person who is alleged to have told him something. The fact that he has been told something ... I fully accept he has been told something. We are going to the thing that he has been told, and the thing that he has been told is untrue. That is the reality.

1055 In terms of whether any of the people on this schedule that I have passed to him have been employed by Wonderworks Media, well, the hon. Gentleman might care to look at the schedule. The schedule has a date of employment commencing set out in one of the columns. From my memory, all of those dates of employment predate the controversy, as he has described it in this House, about Wonderworks Media, so I would have thought that a careful analysis of the schedule might have led him to the answer and not required that he put the question in the way that he has, which is designed to suggest that there is some, what he has described as fancy footwork, changing of things as a result of their questioning. As far as I can see, there has not. I have no information to suggest that any of these people have ever been employed by Wonderworks
1060 Media, and I hope that his enquiries lead him to the conclusion that this House has never been misled by me or any Member of this Government.

Mr Speaker: Next question.

1065 **Hon. Chief Minister:** Mr Speaker, before we move on, I have some information that the hon. Gentleman asked me for before, in relation to the other questions.

I have the premium for the Forbes site. It was £1.8 million.

1070 In respect of the Eastern Beach car park, the contractor is GJBS. I thought we had settled on GJBS, but I did not want to give the information to the House because I did not want to act from memory in case I misled the House.

The total number of new parking spaces is 144, which brings a total of 579 parking spaces to the car park – 579, £1.8 million premium.

Mr Speaker: We move on to the next question.

Q103/2023

Hassan Centenary Terraces residents' parking – Whether sufficient

1075 **Clerk:** Question 103/2023. The Hon. D J Bossino.

Hon. D J Bossino: Is there sufficient parking for all Hassan Centenary Terraces residents?

1080 I think the hon. Member made a reference to this in response and he thinks positive news will be coming my way now.

Clerk: Answer, the Hon. the Chief Minister.

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

1085 **Hon. D J Bossino:** He has kind of already answered this question, but in relation to ... Just by way of further supplementary, the affirmative response ... Just so I make myself clear, in other words, that is parking spaces ... Presumably there is one per flat within the entire development, or just split into two phases, phase 1 and phase 2, and he has given completion dates in respect of each. Is that understanding correct? He said that the extra floor being built at Eastern Beach is

1090 going to be providing extra parking and doing other things, but is going to be providing extra parking spaces for residents at Hassan Centenary Terraces. Is that understanding correct?

Hon. Chief Minister: Mr Speaker, the understanding is correct insofar as he is referring to one parking space per affordable home. The Hassan Centenary Terraces phases 1 and 2 are designed so that there is one parking space available per affordable home. It is the sort of criterion that the DPC imposes on private developers anyway.

1105 The use of the Eastern Beach car park extension in part by Hassan Centenary Terraces residents for their second cars is also for Eastern Beach, Beach View Terraces second cars, for the private development second cars, for areas in relation to the East Side project when completed, which will require more parking, and also the users of Eastern Beach. I gave him much more logic in relation to the Eastern Beach car park, Mr Speaker, so I hope that gives him the information.

1100 In the amount of costs, which was £2.8 million that I gave him a moment ago for the car park, by the way, the 144 spaces comes to about £19,400 per space, which means that we did quite a good deal on the Forbes one.

1105 **Hon. D J Bossino:** Is he not being overly ambitious that the – 144, I think he said – extra car parking spaces are going to be providing for so many? He has mentioned many developments plus other private developments. That strikes me as a very tall order as far as those 144 extra car parking spaces are concerned – but he is sniggering, so I am sure he will have an answer.

1110 **Hon. Chief Minister:** Sniggering, Mr Speaker, at the morass of contradictions that I face from him, and I am snickering with affection because he started by telling me that the car park is empty. And so it is not the 144 that we have to calculate on, it is the 579, which will be the total number of parking spaces available in the car park, given that it is empty. But this is now going to be the entrance to Gibraltar when the tunnel finally opens. We are going to have a very large estate. The East Side project is going to be there. You are about to see completions in the private property which has just been completed across the road, and Beach View Terraces is there also. So it is not the 144 that is going to do the job, it is the 579.

1120 **Mr Speaker:** Next question.

**Q104-05/2023
Gibraltar Airport –
Recent flight diversions**

Clerk: Question 104/2023. The Hon. D J Bossino.

1125 **Hon. D J Bossino:** Have the human resources issues which have been the cause of recent flight diversions at Gibraltar Airport been resolved?

Clerk: Answer, the Hon. the Chief Minister.

Chief Minister (Hon. F R Picardo): Mr Speaker, I will answer with Question 105.

1130 **Clerk:** Question 105/2023. The Hon. D J Bossino.

Hon. D J Bossino: What contingency measures have been put in place in order to prevent flight diversions which have arisen as a result of a faulty telephone line in Spain and fuel bowser technical issues at Gibraltar Airport?

1135 **Clerk:** Answer, the Hon. the Chief Minister.

Hon. Chief Minister: Mr Speaker, if the question is related to the historic HR issues that NATS Gibraltar has, the information I have is that these are still not entirely resolved. This is highly unsatisfactory and I have personally made this point to the Commander British Forces and shall
1140 raise the matter with the Defence Secretary if a satisfactory resolution is not forthcoming. However, flight operations have not been affected due to HR issues since 24th November 2022.

On diversions, it must be noted that the main reason for flights diverting at Gibraltar Airport is for safety reasons which, by and large, relate to weather or technical circumstances. The aviation industry is one of the most regulated and safe modes of transport and this is only achieved
1145 because the strict safety protocols in place are adhered to.

Diversions and disruptions are very inconvenient to passengers and HMGoG would like to avoid these completely, but the reality is that they occur every day in many parts of the world and will never disappear completely, due to the complex nature of the operation and the aviation industry itself. For this reason, Gibraltar Airport has robust diversionary procedures in place, which are well
1150 planned and executed, and although they add more travelling time they still achieve a continuity of service for passengers and deliver that key aspect of air transport, which is safety.

Mr Speaker, let me be very clear: the diversions caused because of communication issues at ATC were resolved by the MoD and any measures put in place are their responsibility and not the Government's. Gibraltar Airport is a strategic UK airfield and an important military base, and it is
1155 not for HMGoG to report on what these plans are. Having said that, we did offer our support in trying to resolve their issues and we were kept fully informed of the problems they were facing at all times and have been assured that they will continue working to add resilience to what is already in place. In this instance, I understand that all three resilience options were down at the same time. The resilience needs to be checked, in our view, more often, so that Plans B and C are
1160 available when required, when Plan A is not available.

Additionally, there were no diversions effected because of the fuel bowser technical issues. The technical issues encountered on the morning of 1st January 2023 were also related to safety and these were resolved on site. Again, on this, even the resilience failed. This is unacceptable and must be addressed urgently. We have assurances from the contractor that they are addressing
1165 these issues. The first aircraft due that morning operated normally, although the next two were delayed outbound whilst this was resolved.

Hon. D J Bossino: All of these things ... it is almost like a perfect storm in the sense that you almost could not make it up, and because they happened, really, in such a short period of time.
1170 As far as the fuel bowser and the Seville telephone line issues are concerned, they all happened, I think, within the same week, during Christmas, which is, to boot, a very busy period.

There is a lot of information that the hon. Gentleman has imparted in his response, and I hope not to miss any replies which I think are worthy of a supplementary question to elicit further
1175 information.

Because this is such an important asset as far as our economy is concerned, because it is a means by which we communicate and travel, and that is hugely important, I am sure that, when I say that, I have the complete and utter agreement of the hon. Gentleman opposite that we need to make sure that we do everything absolutely possible to prevent these issues. I fully understand and acknowledge the remark that he has made. He has made it in the past. It is a fact and it is
1180 obvious that this is an MoD airport at the end of the day, but we have an interest in it and our economy has a huge interest in it – just by way of, I hope, as brief as possible a preamble that I have been able to muster on this occasion.

In relation to the human resources issue, I think he said that the last occasion when that issue caused a flight disruption was in November. He gave us the precise date of 24th November. Can
1185 he give us a firmer response as to whether these issues have been finally resolved? As I understand it, they are caused as a result of fewer personnel available than there used to be, and again, when

we have a bit of a perfect-storm situation where there are more than x number of individuals who are off sick and it results in the tower not being available for operation ... The mind boggles just saying that. Can he give us some further information in relation to that? And then I will ask him some supplementaries in respect of the other question.

Hon. Chief Minister: Mr Speaker, yes, this obviously became a perfect storm because if the airfield is unable to operate for civilian traffic, then although in the mind of the MoD the principal purpose of the airfield is to be an RAF airfield, as far as I am concerned the only reason I am prepared to put up with the risk of having it is because it provides civilian services. And, to boot, we pay an amount per month which goes towards the resurfacing of the runway and therefore the maintenance of the whole thing. It is, as I have said already in my first answer, entirely unacceptable that the MoD should not get its act together with its contractors to be able to provide a service that does not fall down. It is just unacceptable. As I have said before and the hon. Gentleman will have heard me say outside of this place and inside this place, we have reduced the amount that we pay to the MoD by the number of hours of operation that they have not been able to give us the running of the airfield as we expect to be able to have it for civilian operations, and we will continue to do that. I know that the MoD itself is reducing the amount that they pay to their contractors when their contractors are falling down.

Unfortunately, perfect storms happen. Hon. Members will have seen what happened in the United States last week. Every aircraft in the air in the United States, thousands of aircraft, had to land because the air traffic computer equivalent in the United States failed – remarkable – with aircraft in the air, and they were down for almost a day. This morning, Manchester Airport in the north of England had to close both its runways due to snow. Frankly, if you are in the north of England, I am surprised you have to do that, because I was in Finland in November and they did not have to close their airfields because of snow, which was bountiful and falling. We all know and have seen on our screens the issues affecting Heathrow Airport, the largest airport in Europe, and Schiphol Airport and Gatwick Airport.

We may all be told that these things happen because of a perfect storm. I find it entirely unacceptable and a failure of process that if you have three systems in order to be able to communicate safely with Seville Air Traffic Control in a way that provides a log so that you are able to have, for air-safety purposes, a proper recording of your conversations, the three go down on the same day. In other words, your usual system does not work, you go to your resilience option 1 and it does not work, and you go to your resilience option 2 and it does not work. My question is when did you last check your resilience option 1, and when did you last check your resilience option 2? If you did not check them because you have not had to use them for 15 years, well of course they are not going to work; they are going to atrophy. You need to be checking them. You need to ensure, every morning, that your three resilience options are operating, and if one of them is down you repair it on that day so that if, the following day, something goes down, it is provided for.

It is just unacceptable. If we were running the Airport we would be crucified, rightly. And so the message has to go out that this is not acceptable, to the MoD and to the MoD's contractor, because of the importance of the airfield for Gibraltar and, indeed, for the civilian importance of the Airport; also for people who work in the MoD who, when they are not working and flying on a services flight – most of them do not – also rely on the Airport to be able to go back home and see their relatives etc. It is just unacceptable.

In terms of a firmer response on the personnel issue, I do not understand how they have not been able to resolve this yet. It is just remarkable. They need to train new people. They need to have people here who are able to operate the airfield. Why didn't they do it already? How has this crept up on us? This is a key piece of national infrastructure, even though we do not run it. We make sure that nobody is able to leave a bolt on the runway, we make sure that this piece of critical national infrastructure is available in an emergency, and yet we do not see coming that we

are going to have this difficulty with personnel. As I have said before in this House, if Trevor Hammond had been running it, it would not have happened; he would have seen it coming.

1240 I do not understand what on earth it is that NATS does not understand about how important
this asset is to Gibraltar, and because it is important to Gibraltar, its economy and its resilience
economically, how important it is to the UK, of which the MoD is a part. In my view, they had
better wake up and smell the coffee and get the operation of the Airport right, so that it can be
1245 properly relied on by the airlines that fly to it, by the people who depend on it and by the
businesses that depend on it, because otherwise one is left with the view that it is just not fair
that they should continue to control such an important asset and that the people of Gibraltar
would do a better job of running it.

Hon. D J Bossino: I hear the hon. Member. I hear the passion with which he is expressing
1250 himself. He is certainly as irate as I think we all are as a result of the problems and he is a user of
(*Interjection*) airlines because he travels a lot as a result of the work that he carries out. But how
is that, dare I say irate reaction, anger and passion reflected on the ground? From everything that
he has expressed now, putting to one side the manner in which he has expressed it, in terms of
1255 the substantive things that we as a government can do, other than, I think, at the end of his
comments he was almost suggesting – I would invite him to say something about that in his reply –
that what, we would run it? Presumably we would not be able to afford it. I remember in the days
when Sir Joe Bossano used to say, when he was Chief Minister, that if the MoD ever passed the
running of the Airport to the Gibraltar Government he would have to close it the next day because
1260 it was simply impossible for us to pay for it. So we are, in that sense, lumbered with the situation
we are in, but I would invite him to comment in relation to that point.

But other than – just to carry on with the point I made earlier – the reduction of the amount
that we pay, what else is there that we can do? In the press release attributed to a spokesman of
No. 6 during Christmas was ‘we will continue working with ...’ He now says the Gibraltar
Government is going to be supporting the MoD. And he pulls his hair out, saying, ‘How is it possible
1265 that those three resilience measures ...?’ I would ask him also if he can specifically say what those
are – A, B and C. He may not be able to, but I ask him to do so. How is it possible that that should
have arisen? Is it things like that that the Gibraltar Government can assist with? In other words, I
suppose it is a bit of a mix, what he has said. It is a bit of a carrot in the sense that we are here to
support –

1270 **Mr Speaker:** Please –

Hon. D J Bossino: I am asking questions as I go along.

1275 **Mr Speaker:** Right. You can only –

Hon. D J Bossino: Let me, then, distil it, at the Speaker’s request, to that: what is it that the
Gibraltar Government can do substantively by way of putting pressure in a ‘stick’ way? He talks
about reducing the amount that we pay. Is there the possibility of seeking compensation for the
1280 losses that we may suffer, or indeed increasing the reduction? And secondly, what is it that we
can substantively do as a government to support the MoD, so that these incidents do not reoccur?

Hon. Chief Minister: Mr Speaker, let me start by saying that he is asking what am I doing.
Answering as I have in this House is one of the things that I am doing, communicating the same
1285 level of conviction that this is unacceptable to the Commander British Forces. I do not know
whether he heard the answer I gave him: raising the issue, if necessary, with the Defence
Secretary. In other words, the top of the Ministry of Defence. I do not discard, if things were not
to improve quickly, raising the matter with the Prime Minister of the United Kingdom because this
can affect the economic resilience of Gibraltar. All of the way that we have to go, we will go. I have

1290 expressed the views I have expressed in this House directly – in a way that does not require me to
keep to the established level of polite language that this House requires me to keep in the way
that I have expressed it more privately – to those who have responsibility.

1295 What else can we do? Well, of course we can redact further the amount that we pay under the
customer user agreement. We are doing it in quite a scientific way at the moment. I do not think
we can take over the running of MoD RAF Gibraltar, which is the sort of thing that Sir Joe Bossano
used to say he would not do, but we can take over, for example, the running of air traffic control
and train local controllers, and then we sell that service to the Ministry of Defence, because
1300 somebody is selling that service to the Ministry of Defence today. NATS is a UK company. It sells
its service to the Ministry of Defence in all of its airports around the world, including Gibraltar. It
is falling down in Gibraltar. Well, look, we can employ those air traffic controllers in Gibraltar, we
can train them for Gibraltar and we can sell our service to the Ministry of Defence in respect of
that, because they do not do it themselves now. So there are options. But in terms of
compensation, the hon. Gentleman should know this is pure economic loss.

1305 **Mr Speaker:** Final question. If you were to reduce the length of your preamble, then perhaps
you can get ... Honestly – (*Interjection*) Just go ahead and ask the questions.

Hon. D J Bossino: Mr Speaker, yes, but I think it is fair comment to say that the answers are
long. I do not criticise that. The answers are long. There is a lot of information, but the answers
1310 are also long, not just on this occasion as a result of this exchange, but as a result of many of the
questions that we pose, the answers from the Ministers tend to be long. I have not been keeping
a tally of the number of supplementaries I have asked in respect of this exchange, but I do not
think there have been that many.

1315 When he questions the three resilience options – A, B and C – all of which failed ... I think he
said they are working to add resilience. Has the work towards that resulted in a permanent
solution, so that, as best as possible, we have some form of guarantee that something like this will
not happen again in the future?

Hon. Chief Minister: Mr Speaker, if the resilience options had been working, then what
1320 happened would not have happened because what failed was one, and therefore if the other two
had been working, or one of the other two had been working, there would have been a seamless
period of transition to repair one and the other one would have continued.

1325 What I am assured is that all three are being brought back up and all three will be checked
more regularly, so that therefore there should not be a recurrence of it. But you can never say
never. If there is an earthquake and it does not affect us, but it affects the other side of *Los Barrios*
and the east line goes between Gibraltar and Seville, then there is going to be nothing you can do.
You cannot have a radar link between Gibraltar and Seville. So these things, subject to what could
reasonably be provided for, I am assured are being provided for.

1330 There is no Government of Gibraltar element in here and there is nothing that we can do in
terms of that link. Just so that we understand what we are talking about, we are talking about the
black box recorder of air traffic control and that is why they have to be able to record everything
in a way that is particularly time stamped etc.

1335 **Mr Speaker:** You may ask another question, but just a single question. Do not group them
together. Let's have another question, but concise and straight to the point.

The Hon. the Leader of Opposition.

1340 **Hon. K Azopardi:** Mr Speaker, I have one question and it is short, but before I do that, because
I see the explanation ... The Hon. Chief Minister has said, and I see the value of him making those
comments publicly, as he has done, about how unacceptable it is that the airport infrastructure
should be affected by those issues, and so that the message goes out loud and clear to the MoD

1345 that this House speaks on a united basis on this issue, can I also add that the Opposition considers it wholly unacceptable that – barring acts of God, of course – things that can be planned better, things that are employee related, things that are related to the infrastructure or are about forward planning of the Airport should be done in a better way? So we are with the Chief Minister in relation to those remarks and the House speaks united on that basis.

1350 Can I ask him, is there a joint forum between the Government and the MoD in relation to these types of issues? Or given that there have been, if there is not one, does the Government agree that one should be set up going forward?

Hon. Chief Minister: There is a forum, Mr Speaker. I am grateful for the hon. Gentleman's remarks. It is very helpful.

1355 **Mr Speaker:** The Hon. Damon Bossino.

Hon. D J Bossino: Just one final question. I am grateful, Mr Speaker, for your guidance in relation to this.

1360 The fuel bowser incident – was that not under our control? I am not sure. I am not sighted on the detail, but that was not an MoD thing. I think that was something ... I acknowledge and it was reported in the press to that effect, that that did not result in a flight delay, but something like that surely, again, is unacceptable and should not be happening. It is just because it happened at the same time. But in terms of the future, can he give any comfort to this House that that issue will not happen again within the possible ...?

1365 **Hon. Chief Minister:** Mr Speaker, yes, that issue is not an MoD issue. That is a Government of Gibraltar issue. It is the Gibraltar Air Terminal that grants that tender. It was not granted in our time, it was granted by them. I do not think there are many parties who can do it. I, myself, became involved and the Minister became involved that day. We were receiving the reports from people who were sitting on the plane and given what they were being told. In fact, I must say that, there, 1370 the resilience failed, but the contractor brought the resilience back immediately. It was 1st January, but they brought people in and they very quickly dealt with the issue, and as a result of the resilience failing they are going to provide further and additional resilience to ensure that it does not happen again.

1375 I can tell the hon. Gentleman I have been in an aircraft in Barcelona and the bowser failed. There, they have an alternative, which is that they take fuel directly from the runway. The runway has the fuel lines underneath. There was an electrical storm. They could not use the fuel from under the runway because it relies on metal connections, and my flight was cancelled – some years ago. So fuel issues arise. I have had fuel issues at Heathrow. Perhaps because I am a frequent flyer, I experience these issues often. I have had fuel issues at JFK as well. So these are issues which 1380 in fact arise only ex abundanti cautela In other words, you could refuel the aircraft but you have not got all the safety mechanisms, so you do not do it because there are passengers on board whilst you are refuelling etc. That needs to be fixed and the contractor has assured us that they will be providing additional resilience. I thank them because, on 1st January, getting people out to very quickly turn that around and be able to continue flight operations after only a short delay 1385 I think is a remarkable demonstration of their commitment to Gibraltar Airport. Would that they all acted like our fuel contractor did – we would not have these problems at the Airport.

Mr Speaker: Next question.

Q106/2023
Red ID cards –
Applications filed and granted in 2022

Clerk: Question 106/2023. The Hon. the Leader of the Opposition.

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Hon. K Azopardi: Mr Speaker, how many applications for red ID cards have been filed and granted in 2022?

Clerk: Answer, the Hon. the Chief Minister.

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Chief Minister (Hon. F R Picardo): Mr Speaker, a total of 6,131 applications for red ID cards have been filed and granted in 2022.

Q107-08/2023
Winston Churchill Avenue –
Future use; CEPSA petrol station

Clerk: Question 107/2023. The Hon. the Leader of the Opposition.

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Hon. K Azopardi: Mr Speaker, when does the Government intend to wholly or partly decommission the use of Winston Churchill Avenue, and will this be pedestrianised?

Clerk: Answer, the Hon. the Chief Minister.

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Chief Minister (Hon. F R Picardo): Mr Speaker, I will answer with Question 108.

Clerk: Question 108/2023. The Hon. the Leader of the Opposition.

1410

Hon. K Azopardi: Will the CEPSA petrol station be relocated or shut down as a result of the proposed new Victoria Stadium project; and, if relocated, by whom, at what cost and to where?

Clerk: Answer, the Hon. the Chief Minister.

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Hon. Chief Minister: Mr Speaker, there is no intention to decommission Winston Churchill Avenue. The section to the north of the runway will remain in use as at present, although there will be some changes introduced to cater for the discontinuation of the vehicular crossing of the runway once the tunnel is opened. The section to the south of the runway will also remain in use, although some changes are expected in the area arising from proposed new developments. The continued crossing of the runway by pedestrians and bicycles once the tunnel is opened will mean that some modifications will be made to Winston Churchill Avenue either side of the runway, such as the incorporation of cycle lanes.

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As the hon. Gentleman should already know, the CEPSA service station will be relocated due to the opening of the runway tunnel. Work on the new facility has already commenced. There is a lease in place between the Crown and CEPSA dating back to 1994, which states that in the event of the main traffic flow into and out of Gibraltar being diverted away from Winston Churchill Avenue, HMGOG will provide an alternative plot so that a new station can be built, which will then become the first. That is what CEPSA had confirmed by the GSD in 2010-11 when the works on the tunnel commenced – more than a decade ago, believe it or not. Therefore, the new Victoria Stadium project will not cause the relocation or closing down of the CEPSA station, the GSD tunnel

1430 project will. There is no direct relocation cost to the taxpayer, other than the provision of the new plot of land.

Hon. K Azopardi: Mr Speaker, on the decommissioning of Winston Churchill Avenue, he has said there is no intention to decommission. The reason for the question was that I picked up a reference to the decommissioning of Winston Churchill Avenue in the design statement on the Victoria Stadium. There is actually a comment on it. It actually says it as a statement of fact. It says after completion of the tunnel and new access into Gibraltar, it is currently anticipated that Winston Churchill Avenue will be decommissioned. I thought that was odd, so I wanted to ask about it and give the Government an opportunity to confirm how, because I could not envisage how that was going to be decommissioned given the importance and length of Winston Churchill Avenue. But not only that, can I just say, in relation to it, that it does not come up in the most recent design access statement only, it comes up in a previous one that was filed about two or three years ago, which actually refers, I believe, to discussions with the Government. So can I ask whether it was ever considered by the Government as a decommissioning?

Hon. Chief Minister: Mr Speaker, that design statement, the current one and the previous one, are not government documents, and the language of decommissioning is not the Government's language. I do not know whether a person who is preparing those things for the GFA considers that that is the right way to summarise what I have explained to him, but for example I can tell him that there needs to be a crash gate on either side of Winston Churchill Avenue to be able to have vehicular access to the runway continue in the event of there being an accident. The crash gate would be a necessary part of how you access the runway through there. There are other crash gates at different parts of the runway where you can access the apron as well. But, for example, we are not looking to build a wall on to the runway on either side, there will be crash gates, and therefore, for crash gates to be meaningful, the road still has to be there.

The way that the road will be used will, of course, be different because it will be used by pedestrians, it will be used by cyclists, it will not just be used by vehicles, but that is not a decommissioning as we understand it. The four lanes might become two because of the cycle lane etc., but there is no decommissioning to speak of, and decommissioning is not the Government's word or language to explain what I have set out to the hon. Gentleman. Whether a third party who hears us might want to describe that as a decommissioning of part of Winston Churchill Avenue is a matter for them, but that is not how we would use the word 'decommissioning'.

Mr Speaker: Next question. The Hon. Roy Clinton.

Hon. R M Clinton: Thank you, Mr Speaker, I just have one quick question in relation to Question 108. When the CEPESA station is relocated to the new site, given the opening of the tunnel, would I be correct in my understanding that the current site of the CEPESA petrol station would then revert to the Government? And is it the Government's intention to open up that site to expression of interest?

Hon. Chief Minister: Mr Speaker, I believe that site is already agreed to form part of the GFA's plot from the time that we transferred the plot to the GFA some years ago.

Mr Speaker: Next question.

Q109/2023

Civil Service –

Employment opportunities for returning graduates

Clerk: Question 109/2023. The Hon. the Leader of the Opposition.

Hon. K Azopardi: Does the Government consider that returning graduates should join the Civil Service; and, if so, how will it provide entry opportunities for that to happen?

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Clerk: Answer, the Hon. the Chief Minister.

Chief Minister (Hon. F R Picardo): Mr Speaker, the Government considers that returning graduates should take the most attractive jobs available that best suit their skills and qualifications. If these include the Civil Service, they should be very welcome.

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Hon. K Azopardi: Mr Speaker, from that generic answer the Government does not see any kind of special importance in ensuring that ...? Given that the Government obviously invests quite a lot in education and sending children to university, as all successive Governments have, or at least since the scholarship programme was first established and then enhanced, does the Government not see the value of a long-term plan facilitating the entry of graduates into the Civil Service, which will then also, together with any other new entrants into the Civil Service, provide for a long-term succession plan that strengthens the Civil Service?

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Hon. Chief Minister: Mr Speaker, yes, sir.

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Hon. K Azopardi: And given that, does the Government not consider there should be a specific plan to facilitate that entry?

Hon. Chief Minister: Mr Speaker, that assumes a specific plan is necessary. I can tell the hon. Gentleman from memory that when we last recruited AAs, I think we recruited 44 and I think 44 had degrees – they had been away to university, been through the programme that the hon. Gentleman refers to and then entered the Civil service – and that in the recruitment before that, I think ... Hon. Members can be put on enquiry about this because I am not sure, but I think 90% to 95% were also graduates, and in the recruitment before that, 95% to 100% were also graduates, and in the recruitment before that, ditto, and so on and so forth. So I think the effect of the scholarship programme has meant that when we get applications for the Civil Service, the best qualified have, of course, the five GCSEs, but most of them have also a degree, and many of them a master's degree to boot. So for the past ... I am going to even suggest 20 years, most of the people who have been recruited into the Civil Service – the question is about the Civil Service – have a degree, and if not, 95% to 100%. Because I have now gone to 20 years, 75% to 80% have degrees.

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And so I think that what the hon. Gentleman is saying is being achieved, because a lot of people who are coming through the ranks now are people who have degrees. Having said that, some of the best people I work with day to day do not have degrees because they come from another generation when they were not available, and they are exemplary and are leading the Civil Service today and giving an example to those who are joining the Civil Service, some of whom have degrees. But I would have thought that it is near-on a 100% hit rate that the new entrants have degrees through the scholarship programme already.

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Hon. K Azopardi: Mr Speaker, I am glad to hear it. Having gone to university when there was a points system in place, I do certainly remember that because of the constraint that the points system used to apply, sometimes a lot of people would either ... those closed-Frontier Gibraltar ...

1525 I am showing my age, but a lot of people would either then get into the private sector, maybe into banks, or a lot of very clever people would join the Civil Service. What concerns me, hence the question, and has concerned me for some time, is that now that there is not the points system, people are encouraged to obtain degrees but then somehow there is a lost generation that does not have the opportunity to join the Civil Service.

1530 Can I ask him whether the comments that he made in respect of the number of people who have degrees in the Civil Service are anecdotal or based on some kind of statistical basis? And if it is anecdotal and based on his experience, would it be useful to actually understand more precisely the kind of make-up of the current Civil Service in 2023?

1535 **Hon. Chief Minister:** Mr Speaker, I did not realise he was quite that old. I did not think he had gone away to university when the Frontier was closed; he went away to university when the Frontier was open. *(Interjection)* It had opened a year. Exactly, it had opened, so I was not wrong. When he went to university, the Frontier had opened because the Frontier opened for pedestrians in 1982 and he did not go away to study in 1982, and it opened for vehicles – *(Interjection)* The points system, yes, but he said ‘the closed-Frontier Gibraltar from which I went to university’.

1540 *(Interjection)* No, exactly, that is what I thought. When you were at school, right, okay.

I went to university when the points system was no longer there. Happily, I would have been able to go even if the points system had been there, but a lot of people who joined the Civil Service before the points system was done away with would very easily have been able to go to university without the points system, and so the Civil Service was the beneficiary of people who were going to the Civil Service instead of going away to get a degree, and it was providing them the university of life and administration. Now they get their university degrees and they come back to the Civil Service and to other jobs in Gibraltar, but the Civil Service is taking its lion’s share.

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You could also argue this in another way. You could argue that we are sending people away to university to obtain degrees, they obtain degrees in fields where Gibraltar might be able to benefit from them in the private sector, but the Civil Service terms and conditions are so attractive that they do not stay in the private sector, they go into the Civil Service. So there are arguments about this which go round and round.

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I am talking anecdotally, because I have met the 44 and I could see that they were all people who I knew had been away to university, but I will ask the Chief Secretary to give me a breakdown of the last three intakes of the Civil Service and indicate how many of those who are in the intake have a degree.

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One of the things that has been done very successfully also is that the Civil Service has offered the opportunity for continuing professional education and to take degrees, in particular in fields of management or further degrees in their fields of study. So people have continued to study whilst at work in the Civil Service – in the Open University, I think also with Sheffield University – and so people have become graduates whilst in the Civil Service, also a very laudable way of ensuring that those who work for Gibraltar are able to continue to develop their own studies for the improvement of the work that they do for Gibraltar and indeed for their work after retirement.

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Anything which is education enjoys the support of the Government, and although he is not here, we all agree that Joe Bossano was a visionary in that respect when he insisted on the abolition of the points system in the teeth of opposition, and he has been proved right. When we were re-elected in 2011 he was also insistent that we should go further and get rid of any requirement in terms of master’s degrees, and people can now do a first master’s degree as a mandatory grant, as we used to hear our teachers refer to it in comprehensive school.

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Hon. K Azopardi: Mr Speaker, my final question. We are in agreement, of course, that a lot of people who could have aspired to go to university had the current system been in place in those years joined the Civil Service, but of course it has now been so long that probably a lot of those people have retired. That is the reality since the change in the removal of the points system, which is more than 30 years ago now. Hence the concern.

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The Chief Minister talked about their entry at a AA level. Is the route available to returning graduates at that level, or would the Government consider any other entry point for graduates, as perhaps they do sometimes in the United Kingdom? And will there be another AA round at some point soon?

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Hon. Chief Minister: Mr Speaker, I do not think that last question arises from this question.

The Government already provides for graduate entry in respect of some grades and not just in the clerical Civil Service, but beyond. For example, Crown Counsel is a degree entry grade. Of course, in the GHA and in other areas you require a degree qualification in order to be able to apply – a mechanical engineering degree for certain of the technical services. At administrative grade we are looking at recruitment with degrees as a better qualification, which qualifies the individual applying and raises them up the ladder of those who are likely to get the job.

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Graduate entry to the Civil Service would require negotiation with the unions of that possibility. The Government has not raised that with the unions at this stage because we think this is happening organically. The hon. Gentleman is right to point to the fact that the points system was abolished – 35 years ago in May, I think – and so we have the benefit of 35 years of graduates now in effect in the Civil Service. If the hon. Gentleman, the Hon. Mr Feetham and the Hon. Deputy Chief Minister do not mind me disclosing, I believe that their age is now the retirement age for a clerical grade in the Civil Service, although they all look much younger than that – of course, the Deputy Chief Minister in particular. I would therefore suggest that we have, in effect, now a whole lifetime of civil servants who are benefiting from a recruitment process that has enabled HR and the Public Service Commission to take on those who have turned up with degrees at the time of application. And so very senior people in the service, either because they went away and had degrees when they joined or because they took degrees when they were in the service, have the benefit of degrees, and equally senior people are magnificent and nobody can hold a candle to them even though they do not have degrees.

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Mr Speaker: Next question.

Q110-11/2023

Administrative posts in Government Departments – Number of vacancies; posts occupied on acting or temporary basis

Clerk: Question 110/2023. The Hon. the Leader of the Opposition.

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Hon. K Azopardi: Mr Speaker, can the Government confirm how many vacant administrative posts there were in Government Departments on 10th January 2023 and provide a breakdown of where these vacancies arise by Department and by grade?

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Clerk: Answer, the Hon. the Chief Minister.

Chief Minister (Hon. F R Picardo): Mr Speaker, I will answer with Question 111.

Clerk: Question 111/2023. The Hon. the Leader of the Opposition.

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Hon. K Azopardi: Mr Speaker, how many officers were occupying administrative posts in Government Departments on an acting or temporary basis at ... the question says 11th January, but it really should have been 10th January, broken down by particular clerical grade and by the Department in which the particular officer is occupying the post?

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Clerk: Answer, the Hon. the Chief Minister.

Hon. Chief Minister: Mr Speaker, I now hand the hon. Gentleman a schedule with the information requested.

Answer to Q110/2023

DEPARTMENT	GRADE
DIGITAL SERVICES	PERSONAL SECRETARY
DIGITAL SERVICES	ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICER
ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT	EU FUNDS FINANCIAL CONTROLLER
ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT	ADMINISTRATIVE ASSISTANT
EMPLOYMENT	ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICER
EMPLOYMENT	ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICER
EMPLOYMENT	ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICER
EMPLOYMENT	EXECUTIVE OFFICER
EMPLOYMENT	SENIOR OFFICER
EMPLOYMENT	ADMINISTRATIVE ASSISTANT
ENVIRONMENT	HIGHER EXECUTIVE OFFICER
EQUALITY	SENIOR EXECUTIVE OFFICER
FINANCIAL SECRETARY'S OFFICE	SENIOR EXECUTIVE OFFICER
FINANCIAL SECRETARY'S OFFICE	SENIOR EXECUTIVE OFFICER
FINANCIAL SECRETARY'S OFFICE	ADMINISTRATIVE ASSISTANT
GIBRALTAR AUDIT OFFICE	ADMINISTRATIVE ASSISTANT
GIBRALTAR LAW COURTS	SENIOR EXECUTIVE OFFICER
GIBRALTAR LAW COURTS	EXECUTIVE OFFICER
GIBRALTAR LAW COURTS	ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICER
HUMAN RESOURCES DEPARTMENT	HIGHER EXECUTIVE OFFICER
HUMAN RESOURCES DEPARTMENT	HIGHER EXECUTIVE OFFICER
HUMAN RESOURCES DEPARTMENT	HIGHER EXECUTIVE OFFICER
HUMAN RESOURCES DEPARTMENT	EXECUTIVE OFFICER
HUMAN RESOURCES DEPARTMENT	ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICER
HUMAN RESOURCES DEPARTMENT	ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICER
HUMAN RESOURCES DEPARTMENT	ADMINISTRATIVE ASSISTANT
INCOME TAX	SENIOR EXECUTIVE OFFICER
INCOME TAX	SENIOR EXECUTIVE OFFICER
INCOME TAX	HIGHER EXECUTIVE OFFICER
INCOME TAX	ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICER
INCOME TAX	ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICER
INCOME TAX	ADMINISTRATIVE ASSISTANT
INCOME TAX	ADMINISTRATIVE ASSISTANT
INCOME TAX	ADMINISTRATIVE ASSISTANT
INCOME TAX	ADMINISTRATIVE ASSISTANT
INCOME TAX	ADMINISTRATIVE ASSISTANT
INCOME TAX	ADMINISTRATIVE ASSISTANT
INCOME TAX	CLERK/WORD PROCESSOR
MARITIME SERVICES	HIGHER EXECUTIVE OFFICER
NO.6 CONVENT PLACE	SENIOR OFFICER
NO.6 CONVENT PLACE	SENIOR EXECUTIVE OFFICER
NO.6 CONVENT PLACE	HIGHER EXECUTIVE OFFICER
NO.6 CONVENT PLACE	HIGHER EXECUTIVE OFFICER
NO.6 CONVENT PLACE	EXECUTIVE OFFICER

DEPARTMENT	GRADE
OFFICE OF FAIR TRADING	EXECUTIVE OFFICER
OFFICE OF FAIR TRADING	ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICER
OFFICE OF FAIR TRADING	ADMINISTRATIVE ASSISTANT
PARLIAMENT	USHER (ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICER)
POLICING	ADMINISTRATIVE ASSISTANT
POLICING	CLERK/WORD PROCESSOR
POLICING	TYPIST
POSTAL SERVICES	EXECUTIVE OFFICER
PRISON	ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICER
PROCUREMENT OFFICE	ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICER
PROCUREMENT OFFICE	EXECUTIVE OFFICER
PROCUREMENT OFFICE	EXECUTIVE OFFICER
PROCUREMENT OFFICE	HIGHER EXECUTIVE OFFICER
SOCIAL SECURITY	SENIOR OFFICER
SOCIAL SECURITY	EXECUTIVE OFFICER
SOCIAL SECURITY	EXECUTIVE OFFICER
SOCIAL SECURITY	ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICER
SOCIAL SECURITY	ADMINISTRATIVE ASSISTANT
SOCIAL SECURITY	ADMINISTRATIVE ASSISTANT
SPORTS AND LEISURE	ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICER
TECHNICAL SERVICES	ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICER
TOURISM	ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICER
TOWN PLANNING	EXECUTIVE OFFICER
TREASURY	ACCOUNTANT GENERAL
TREASURY	SENIOR EXECUTIVE OFFICER
TREASURY	EXECUTIVE OFFICER
TREASURY	EXECUTIVE OFFICER
TREASURY	ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICER
TREASURY	ADMINISTRATIVE ASSISTANT
TREASURY	SENIOR EXECUTIVE OFFICER
TREASURY	SENIOR EXECUTIVE OFFICER
TREASURY	HIGHER EXECUTIVE OFFICER
UPPER ROCK TOURIST SITES AND BEACHES	EXECUTIVE OFFICER

Answer to Q111/2023

Answer to Question 111

GOVERNMENT DEPARTMENT	OFFICER'S SUBSTANTIVE GRADE	GRADE ACTING FOR
Central Arrears Unit	Administrative Assistant	Executive Officer
Central Arrears Unit	Executive Officer	Higher Executive Officer
Central Arrears Unit	Higher Executive Officer	Senior Executive Officer
Civil Status & Registration Office	Executive Officer	Higher Executive Officer
Department of Employment	Senior Executive Officer	Senior Officer
Department of Equality	Higher Executive Officer	Grade 5
Department of Social Security	Administrative Assistant	Administrative Officer
Department of Social Security	Administrative Assistant	Administrative Officer
Department of Social Security	Administrative Assistant	Administrative Officer
Department of Social Security	Administrative Assistant	Administrative Officer
Department of Social Security	Administrative Assistant	Administrative Officer
Department of Social Security	Administrative Officer	Executive Officer
Department of Social Security	Administrative Officer (TP)	Executive Officer
Department of Social Security	Administrative Officer (TP)	Executive Officer
Department of Social Security	Executive Officer	Senior Executive Officer
Department of Social Security	Administrative Officer	Executive Officer
Department of Social Security	Administrative Officer	Executive Officer
Department of Social Security	Executive Officer (TP)	Higher Executive Officer
Department of Social Security	Grade 1	Administrative Officer
Department of Social Security	Higher Executive Officer	Senior Officer
Department of the Environment	Administrative Officer	Executive Officer
Department of the Environment	Administrative Officer	Executive Officer
Department of the Environment	Executive Officer	Higher Executive Officer
Department of the Environment	Grade 1	Administrative Officer
Department of the Environment	Typist	Administrative Officer
Digital Services	Administrative Assistant	Administrative Officer
Digital Services	Administrative Assistant	Administrative Officer
Digital Services	Administrative Officer	Executive Officer
Digital Services	Senior Officer	Chief Officer, E - Services and Innovation
Digital Services	Typist	Administrative Officer
Driver and Vehicle Licensing Department	Vehicle Tester	Driver & Vehicle Examiner
Economic Development Department	Administrative Officer	Executive Officer
Economic Development Department	Executive Officer	Higher Executive Officer
Economic Development Department	Grade 1	Grade 2
Economic Development Department	Higher Executive Officer	Senior Executive Officer
Economic Development Department	Higher Executive Officer	Senior Professional Technology Officer
Education	Administrative Assistant	Administrative Officer
Employment	Administrative Assistant	Administrative Officer
Employment	Executive Officer	Higher Executive Officer
Employment	Grade 1	Administrative Officer
Employment	Grade 2	Executive Officer
Financial Secretary's Office	Executive Officer	Higher Executive Officer
Financial Secretary's Office	Executive Officer	Higher Executive Officer
Financial Secretary's Office	Higher Executive Officer	Senior Executive Officer
Financial Secretary's Office	Higher Executive Officer	Senior Executive Officer
Gambling Division	Executive Officer	Higher Executive Officer
Gibraltar Courts Service	Administrative Assistant	Administrative Officer
Gibraltar Courts Service	Administrative Officer	Executive Officer
Gibraltar Fire and Rescue	Typist	Administrative Officer
Gibraltar Maritime Administration	Administrative Officer	Executive Officer
Gibraltar Maritime Administration	Executive Officer	Higher Executive Officer
Gibraltar Maritime Administration	Senior Marine Surveyor	Chief Surveyor
Government Law Offices	Administrative Assistant	Administrative Officer
HM Customs	Assistant Collector of Customs	Collector of Customs
HM Customs	Assistant Collector of Customs	Collector of Customs
HM Customs	Customs Officer	Executive Customs Officer
HM Customs	Senior Customs Officer	Assistant Collector of Customs
Housing Department	Administrative Assistant	Administrative Officer
Human Resources Department	Administrative Assistant	Administrative Officer
Human Resources Department	Administrative Assistant	Administrative Officer

Cont..

Continued Answer to Question 111

GOVERNMENT DEPARTMENT	OFFICER'S SUBSTANTIVE GRADE	GRADE ACTING FOR
Human Resources Department	Administrative Assistant	Administrative Officer
Human Resources Department	Administrative Assistant	Administrative Officer
Human Resources Department	Administrative Assistant	Administrative Officer
Human Resources Department	Administrative Assistant	Administrative Officer
Human Resources Department	Administrative Assistant	Administrative Officer
Human Resources Department	Administrative Officer	Executive Officer
Human Resources Department	Executive Officer	Higher Executive Officer
Human Resources Department	Executive Officer	Higher Executive Officer
Human Resources Department	Executive Officer	Higher Executive Officer
Human Resources Department	Executive Officer	Higher Executive Officer
Income Tax Office	Administrative Assistant	Administrative Officer
Income Tax Office	Administrative Assistant	Administrative Officer
Income Tax Office	Administrative Assistant	Administrative Officer
Income Tax Office	Administrative Assistant	Administrative Officer
Income Tax Office	Administrative Officer	Executive Officer
Income Tax Office	Administrative Officer	Executive Officer
Income Tax Office	Executive Officer	Higher Executive Officer
Income Tax Office	Executive Officer	Higher Executive Officer
Income Tax Office	Executive Officer	Higher Executive Officer
Income Tax Office	Executive Officer	Higher Executive Officer
Income Tax Office	Executive Officer	Higher Executive Officer
Income Tax Office	Executive Officer	Higher Executive Officer
Income Tax Office	Grade 1	Administrative Officer
Income Tax Office	Higher Executive Officer	Senior Executive Officer
Income Tax Office	Higher Executive Officer	Senior Executive Officer
Ministry of Housing, Employment, Youth & Sport	Administrative Assistant	Administrative Officer
Ministry of Justice	Executive Officer	Higher Executive Officer
No.6 Convent Place	Administrative Assistant	Administrative Officer
No.6 Convent Place	Administrative Assistant	Administrative Officer
No.6 Convent Place	Administrative Assistant	Administrative Officer
No.6 Convent Place	Administrative Assistant	Administrative Officer
No.6 Convent Place	Administrative Assistant	Executive Officer
No.6 Convent Place	Administrative Officer	Executive Officer
No.6 Convent Place	Administrative Officer	Executive Officer
No.6 Convent Place	Administrative Officer	Executive Officer
No.6 Convent Place	Administrative Officer	Executive Officer
No.6 Convent Place	Administrative Officer	Executive Officer
No.6 Convent Place	Administrative Officer	Higher Executive Officer
No.6 Convent Place	Executive Officer	Higher Executive Officer
No.6 Convent Place	Executive Officer	Higher Executive Officer
No.6 Convent Place	Executive Officer	Higher Executive Officer
No.6 Convent Place	Higher Executive Officer	Senior Executive Officer
No.6 Convent Place	Higher Executive Officer	Senior Executive Officer
No.6 Convent Place	Senior Executive Officer	Senior Officer
No.6 Convent Place	Grade 1	Grade 2
No.6 Convent Place	Grade 2	Grade 3
No.6 Convent Place	Grade 3	Grade 4
Royal Gibraltar Police	Administrative Assistant	Administrative Officer
Royal Gibraltar Police	Administrative Officer	Executive Officer
Royal Gibraltar Police	Administrative Officer	Executive Officer
Royal Gibraltar Police	Clerk Word Processor	Administrative Officer
Royal Gibraltar Post Office	Administrative Assistant	Administrative Officer
Royal Gibraltar Post Office	Administrative Officer	Executive Officer
Statistics Office	Statistics Officer Level 2	Statistics Officer Level 3
Statistics Office	Statistics Officer Level 2	Statistics Officer Level 4
Technical Services	Professional & Technology Officer	Higher Professional & Technology Officer
Technical Services	Professional & Technology Officer	Higher Professional & Technology Officer
Technical Services	Professional & Technology Officer	Higher Professional & Technology Officer
Technical Services	Technical Grade 1	Professional & Technology Officer
Technical Services	Technical Grade 1	Professional & Technology Officer
Town Planning and Building Control	Administrative Officer	Executive Officer

Cont..

1625 **Hon. K Azopardi:** Mr Speaker, while I look through the schedule, if the hon. Member looks at my questions, my questions were in two parts, really: first of all, how many; and then provide a breakdown. I think the schedules provide the breakdown but they do not provide the totals. I wonder whether the hon. Member has that information, given the wording of the question was how many and provide a breakdown.

1630 Sorry, did the Hon. Chief Minister say he does not have one?

Hon. Chief Minister: I do not have it. I have the same schedule he has.

1635 **Hon. K Azopardi:** Mr Speaker, I will count them, but ... It is quite a long schedule, for the listener and the watcher of this.

Hon. Chief Minister: Sorry. I think that the numbers I have are the relevant numbers he has asked for. I think that it is 76 in Question 110 and 167 in Question 111. I think that is what he is asking me whether I have the numbers on, and I just did not know whether this was an explanation to me about some aspect of it. I think that is the total, actually, of the two questions. He should check it, but I think given what I can see here and what those two numbers ... I think that is correct.

Hon. K Azopardi: I am grateful, Mr Speaker, and yes, I will have a look myself just in case that reference is to something else, but given the length of the schedules, it looks like it is probably right. That being so, on that assumption, 76 vacant administrative posts and 167 officers occupying administrative posts on an acting or temporary basis is a fairly large number, over 250 in total, but taking vacant administrative posts first, and indeed looking collectively at the acting officers in the various administrative posts in a number of Departments – Digital Services, Employment, Financial Secretary’s Department, Human Resources, Income Tax, No. 6, Treasury ... You can go on. It is many, many Departments. What is the process that the Government is following to fill these posts?

Hon. Chief Minister: Mr Speaker, I do not necessarily agree that it is many. I think it is many less than I inherited when I was elected – I understand that the number was much higher than that – first of all. Second, you cannot add 76 and 167. I do not think it makes any sense to do that because the 76 are inclusive of the 167, and to the extent that there will be people acting into the 76 in many great respects. So it is not 250 by any stretch of the imagination. At most it is 167, but the actual number of vacant posts would be 76.

What happens is that when you are filling a vacant post and somebody acts up, somebody else acts up and somebody else acts up. It is a little like the domino effect in respect of the housing. One vacant post can lead to two or three acting positions. So I do not think it is a very high number in that respect. Seventy six out of the total complement of the Civil Service is probably quite a low number.

I can tell him, for example, that just one of them is certainly a new post. That is to say it is not a post that was there before and is going to be filled; it is a post that the Government has accepted, after representations, we should create, which is a senior officer in the Employment Department. The process is that the Office of the Chief Secretary, the PSC and the HR Department deal with the opening of vacancies etc. This is quite a jigsaw puzzle. You open one and you create another vacancy because by filling, for example, the vacancy for a senior officer, you are creating the vacancy of senior executive officer. The next step is to fill that senior executive officer vacancy, which creates the HEO vacancy – I hope I am getting my grades right – etc., ad infinitum. That is a process that this Government, certainly that I lead, does not get involved in. It is a process that is run by the Office of the Chief Secretary and the Human Resources Department, and in my view it is not, at the moment, a huge issue in respect of the 76 vacant posts.

At this stage, when we are looking at the last quarter of the financial year, we would probably also be looking at whether any of those posts should continue or not continue. In the same way as you create new posts, you can also discontinue posts with the agreement of the union etc. in consultation, as we come up to the finalising of the Book and the complements for the year to come.

Hon. K Azopardi: Mr Speaker, just scanning quickly ... If I may, on the vacancies, there are 76 vacancies and obviously different grades, but I do notice, doing a quick look through the schedule, that there are 15 AAs and around 16 AOs – administrative assistants and administrative officers – so, AA being the entry grade, I ask again: I assume, obviously to fill in those vacancies, you would have to have a round of recruitment – is the Government planning an AA entry round soon?

Hon. Chief Minister: Mr Speaker, at this stage the Government is not planning to do anything that increases the recurrent expenditure because, as the hon. Gentleman should know, if we

1690 increase the recurrent expenditure the only place we are going to do it is by increasing the debt because we have not got a surplus to be digging into. He has started the week by saying that he wanted to bring debt down, and therefore I would have thought we would all agree that we would need to keep the recurrent costs down if we are going to bring recurrent debt down and we are going to bring the deficit down.

1695 So the Government is not planning in this respect, because he has identified that there are AA and AO vacancies, to do an AA or AO round. There are other ways that we can provide, for example by providing GDC employees who can assist in these areas, and in particular, given that the complement of the Civil Service is much higher than it was when we were elected, it is outside our electoral commitment in respect of the Civil Service to have to maintain those grades if they are beyond what the complement was on 9th December 2011.

1700 **Hon. K Azopardi:** Mr Speaker, the reason I ask is because ... I am asking about government policy and the Minister for Financial Stability ... He is not here right now, but he has said publicly, I think several times now, that when there are vacancies the Government would just take the view that they would assess the particular requirements of the particular posts and decide whether or not to fill the vacancies. He has not made the point generically that there would be no vacancies, but rather that they would test the case for it. I am asking whether, given this list of vacancies, they have assessed whether any of these AA entry posts should be filled, and if so, whether they are going to hold an entry round. That is really what I was asking.

1710 **Hon. Chief Minister:** But, Mr Speaker, that is really what I have said to him in other language. I have said as we are in the last quarter of the year, we are doing the assessment of whether, when we settle the complements for the Departments, a particular grade should remain or not remain, and only then would you be making a decision as to running a recruitment round.

1715 **Hon. K Azopardi:** Can I just ask specifically: the Accountant General Post is vacant? Is that correct?

1720 **Hon. Chief Minister:** Yes, Mr Speaker, because the Accountant General has just become the Financial Secretary.

Hon. K Azopardi: Presumably, this is a post that the Government does intend to fill. Is that right?

1725 **Hon. Chief Minister:** Of course, Mr Speaker, it is a statutory post, but that has nothing to do with AAs or AOs.

1730 **Hon. K Azopardi:** Of course it has not got anything to do with AAs and AOs, but I was not asking in that way. And so, given that, can I just ask about ...? Because a Financial Secretary was appointed – *(Interjection)* Well, he says just become, but it is at least four months since he became the Financial Secretary. I thought the previous Financial Secretary had stood down from the end of September, so that is nearly four months ago, isn't it? We are now in late January, so what process of recruitment is there of the Accountant General ongoing?

1735 **Hon. Chief Minister:** Mr Speaker, it is a process of recruitment that does not involve me. It is a process of recruitment that started the day the Financial Secretary took his post, on 1st October, which is run by the Chief Secretary and the Public Services Commission. It is not anything to do with the political Government. We are not standing in the way of it. It is a process that is running. In fact, I understand that it is something that started even before the Financial Secretary took his post because when he was going to take his post, he immediately started the process of recruitment of his successor.

1740

Hon. K Azopardi: Mr Speaker, I am not suggesting that the Government is standing in front of that process. I do not think anything I have said suggests that. I am simply asking for clarification as to the process. Does the Chief Minister have an expectation of when there will be a new Accountant General?

1745

Hon. Chief Minister: Mr Speaker, the hon. Gentleman has been a Minister. This is why I am surprised at his questions, unless they did things in a very different way, which was not to leave the Civil Service to its own devices when it came to recruitment. We leave the Civil Service to its devices.

1750

The Financial Secretary, who became the Accountant General, who became the Financial Secretary, immediately started a process, as I have told him, with the PSC, the HR Department and the Chief Secretary for the recruitment of their successor. This is an internal recruitment process and it is ongoing.

1755

When are they going to be able to have a new Accountant General? I do not know whether they announced one yesterday, I do not know whether they are about to announce one tomorrow or whether the candidates for interview have asked for a longer date for the interviews because of personal issues. I cannot give him an answer, but it is not a ministerial responsibility – at least it is not a ministerial responsibility in my time – that he would expect to be running if he were Chief Minister in a government like the one we are running. That is my point, Mr Speaker.

Q112-13/2023

No negotiated outcome scenario – Macro-economic impact; means of mitigating outcome

1760

Clerk: Question 112/2023. The Hon. Ms M D Hassan Nahon.

Hon. Ms M D Hassan Nahon: Does the government have any updated figures on the macro-economic impact of a no-deal Brexit scenario?

1765

Clerk: Answer, the Hon. the Chief Minister.

Chief Minister (Hon. F R Picardo): Mr Speaker, I will answer with Question 113.

Clerk: Question 113/2023. The Hon. Ms M D Hassan Nahon.

1770

Hon. Ms M D Hassan Nahon: In his New Year speech, the Chief Minister states that ‘if there is no deal for reasons we cannot control, I assure you we will be ready to mitigate such an outcome’. Could the Chief Minister explain the substance of how he plans to do this?

1775

Clerk: Answer, the Hon. the Chief Minister.

1780

Hon. Chief Minister: Mr Speaker, the hon. Lady is asking me to provide the substance of how the Government intends to mitigate, insofar as possible, the socio-economic impact of a no negotiated outcome (NNO). However, as she must surely understand, it would be to give those who may seek to gain leverage over us in the negotiations the ultimate lever should I reveal publicly in this House the measures we have taken and will continue to take to mitigate such an outcome.

As the hon. Member should already know, the Government has, for a number of years now, been working flat out in planning for an NNO. The NNO Board is led jointly by the Deputy Chief

1785 Minister and successive UK Ministers for Europe, now the Hon. Leo Docherty MP. It meets again this week – in fact, I think it met this morning.

The hon. Lady will have, undoubtedly, read our press release last month announcing the latest NNO Board meeting following a table-top exercise which was held at the end of November last year. This exercise proved to be extremely useful in highlighting areas of potential difficulties which may arise in the event of a no negotiated outcome and has reassured the Government of our preparedness, insofar as is absolutely possible, for such an outcome.

Hon. Ms M D Hassan Nahon: Mr Speaker, if I can just take the supplementaries because of the two questions. Even though maybe the Chief Minister cannot share the information with us, can he confirm whether his Government has prepared a detailed forecast of the impact of a potential no deal?

Hon. Chief Minister: Yes, Mr Speaker, we have.

1800 **Hon. Ms M D Hassan Nahon:** Thank you, Mr Speaker.

We know about the table-top exercise, and obviously that is all positive and gratefully accepted, I think, by the people of Gibraltar, but does the Government intend to conduct any campaigns to inform the public of the impact of a potential no-deal Brexit in order to mobilise and create public awareness and expectations in the event of no deal, prior to such an event actually happening?

Hon. Chief Minister: Mr Speaker, we have already distributed a book to every house in Gibraltar, called 'Guidance to Citizens – No UK-EU Treaty on the Future Relationship of Gibraltar'. It has a preface signed by me and the Deputy Chief Minister. It extends to 36 pages and was distributed last year, I believe.

When I see what she has said today to *El País*, I am surprised that she is asking me the question. She says that what I am doing is educating and reminding people that there will be things on which we will have to bend down, and others on which we will not. The quote in Spanish is, '*Picardo* Est^a educando, record^ándonos que habr^a cosas en las que tendremos que agacharnos y otras en las que no.' Well, Mr Speaker, I do not believe I am doing that. I do not believe I am trying to tell people in Gibraltar that we are going to have to bend over, because we are not going to bend over. We have already distributed a lot of the material to every household in Gibraltar without giving our opponents the levers they would need. I hope that our potential opponents become our partners, that we will be able to deliver an agreement and that she will join in agreeing that the negotiated outcome that we bring, if we bring it, is a good one for Gibraltar.

Hon. Ms M D Hassan Nahon: Mr Speaker, I am sorry to see that the Chief Minister has taken my words badly. I was actually trying to be complimentary to him by telling a journalist that our Chief Minister is trying to prepare us for an eventuality that might not be to our satisfaction. Having said that, obviously I could not comment on the substance, in terms of what I am trying to get today, in terms of how much information we can have and how much the Chief Minister himself can tell us on the eventuality.

One more supplementary. I do not know if he is willing to answer this, but as in other moments in Gibraltar's history where Gibraltar has received financial aid from the UK in difficult economic times, is the Gibraltar Government looking at receiving financial aid to see us through these potentially difficult times, as we have seen in the past, given the size of our indirect debt?

1835 **Hon. Chief Minister:** Mr Speaker, I am not taking it badly at all. I just want her to understand that I do not agree with her words. In politics, the least we can say to each other is that we do not agree with our words. She is being quoted by a Spanish newspaper, the leading Spanish newspaper, on an issue like Gibraltar, where I decided not to give an interview to this newspaper for reasons that I think will be obvious, but she did, and she is being read in Madrid this morning as saying that my words in my New Year message in respect of the agreement – not the absence of agreement, her words are quoted in respect of the agreement – are that I am trying to prepare people so that they understand that we are going to have to bend. *Agacharnos* is translated by Google Translate, and probably by most of us, as ‘bend’. I want to be very clear to anybody who may be watching us from Madrid, who has read a Gibraltar MP’s view of what I said in my New Year message, that I was not preparing the people of Gibraltar to bend because I am not going to ask the people of Gibraltar to bend – it is clear – and so that is the issue I am taking with the hon. Lady.

1845 In terms of financial aid, we are already receiving commitments from the United Kingdom, which we have published, in respect of financial aid. For example, the United Kingdom has committed to provide the Government of Gibraltar with funding for the provision of e-gates down at the North Front Four Corners entry point into Gibraltar. That will be funded half by the Government of Gibraltar and half by the government of the United Kingdom. The Hon. the Deputy Chief Minister referred to that, I believe, in this House during the course of the Budget debate at estimates time this year. There have been other such commitments and the Government of Gibraltar reserves the right to seek further financial assistance from the United Kingdom in the event of a no-negotiated outcome for a Brexit that we did not choose.

1855 **Mr Speaker:** Is the Chief Minister planning to recess for a short break? Before he does that, I believe –

Hon. Ms M D Hassan Nahon: Mr Speaker, can I just ask one more supplementary, please?

1860 **Mr Speaker:** Right.

Hon. Ms M D Hassan Nahon: Mr Speaker, based on the answer that the Chief Minister has just given, can I establish that the Chief Minister will not support any agreement which might require some bending or concessions on our part?

1865 **Hon. Chief Minister:** Mr Speaker, I could not have been clearer in my New Year message. I said there was absolutely no question of us for one moment considering any concession in respect of British sovereignty, for rights of access to the European Union, for rights of flights etc. It is all there, clearly set out in my New Year message. I do not think I could have been clearer. I do not think we, together, could have been clearer in this House that that would not be acceptable to the people of Gibraltar.

1870 I have also said that I will only bring an agreement to this House if the Gibraltar Government has approved it, if the Cabinet has approved it, and there is no member of this Cabinet sitting to my left or sitting to my right who would approve an agreement that required us to bend on issues of sovereignty which are fundamental to us. I have expressed it as vehemently and as clearly as I could. In fact, I seem to recall that that part of my speech said no spin, no nuance. It could not be clearer, so I am surprised that she felt it could be interpreted in this way and that it could be communicated to the leading Spanish national newspaper as my having said that, because I think, with the very greatest of respect – and I am sure that she did not intend to do this – it does a disservice to the negotiating position of the Government of Gibraltar.

1880 **Mr Speaker:** There was one supplementary question which the Hon. Edwin Reyes wanted to ask in connection with Questions 111 and 112. (*Interjection by Hon. K Azopardi*) On this one, fine.

1885 **Hon. K Azopardi:** Mr Speaker, the Chief Minister answered, in relation to Question 112, that the Government has carried out an impact assessment on the economy. Is the Government willing to share that report confidentially with the Opposition?

1890 **Hon. Chief Minister:** Mr Speaker, we are prepared to consider doing so. I would have to take advice on whether we should at this stage. The hon. Gentleman should know that that report is so sensitive it does not live electronically on our servers. We are, of course, very concerned about the opportunity for digital interference with information that we have. We have considered that information to be so sensitive that it has only been seen by a small number of the members of the Cabinet because we do not want to share it electronically. We have had a discussion about it in Cabinet, but it is extraordinarily sensitive. Even where we discuss it is sensitive, so we are careful even about where we talk about it.

1895

Q111/2023

**Administrative posts in Government Departments –
Posts occupied on acting or temporary basis –
Supplementary question**

Mr Speaker: The Hon. Edwin Reyes.

Hon. E J Reyes: Thank you, Mr Speaker.

1900 It is a small, pedantic thing, but in case one adds up all the posts that are being acted for, the Chief Minister, in the schedule referring to the answer to Question 111, if one looks six and seven lines from the bottom in respect of the Customs department, the post of Collector of Customs seems to be recorded twice as being acted for by Assistant Collector of Customs. It is either a typographical error or there are indeed two Assistant Collectors of Customs who are taking it in turns to act for the Collector of Customs. A clarification on that would help us to make sure we have the right total when we have the whole number of posts.

1905

Hon. Chief Minister: Mr Speaker, I think that post has now been filled. It was being acted for by somebody who was temporarily promoted and that person who was temporarily promoted was away on leave, I understand. That is why you see the numbers do not always tally, because there are different moments when you can have two people, in effect, acting in a post.

1910

Mr Speaker: Is the Chief Minister going to ...?

1915 **Hon. Chief Minister:** Mr Speaker, the timetable published for today seeks to provide an element of accuracy and sets out that I would answer questions at three o'clock and the Hon. the Minister for Financial Stability would answer questions at six o'clock. Given the number of questions I had, I thought we would have been finished in good time to enjoy a convivial cup of tea. In fact, we have four minutes to enjoy a convivial cup of tea. But given that people will be watching now, I am quite happy – understanding that whilst the rest of us have been able to come in and out, you have not – to propose that we should adjourn for 15 minutes and that the Minister for Financial Stability should start answering questions at 6.15.

1920

Mr Speaker: The House will now recess until 6.15.

The House recessed at 5.57 p.m. and resumed at 6.17 p.m.

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

**Q90/2023
2022 Census –
Entity engaged and cost**

1925 **Clerk:** We continue with Answers to Questions.
Question 90/2023. The Hon. Ms M D Hassan Nahon.

Hon. Ms M D Hassan Nahon: What entity outside of the Civil Service's Statistics Department was engaged to carry out the 2022 Census, and at what cost to the taxpayer?

1930 **Clerk:** Answer, the Hon. the Minister for Social Security, Economic Development and Enterprise.

1935 **Minister for Social Security, Economic Development, Enterprise, Telecommunications and the GSB (Hon. Sir J J Bossano):** Mr Speaker, to my knowledge, there has been no entity outside the Statistics Department engaged to carry out the Census.

1940 **Hon. Ms M D Hassan Nahon:** Mr Speaker, I was under the impression that a company had been engaged to carry out this project, but in any case, can the Minister tell us when the results of the Census are expected to be published?

Hon. Sir J J Bossano: I am not sure that it follows from whether there was a company or not. I will find out the answer to that question, but it does not follow logically from whether there was a company or not.

1945 **Mr Speaker:** No, it does not.

**Q61-62/2023
Public finances –
Update**

**Q63-66/2023
Loan notes –
GSBA Ltd, Gibraltar Community Projects Ltd, Community Supplies and Services Ltd**

**Q67/2023
GSBA Ltd –
Use of £40 million loan from GSB**

**Q68 and Q70/2023
Gibraltar Community Projects Ltd –
Reason for lending to Community Supplies and Services Ltd at 4%;
whether only borrowing from GSBA Ltd**

Q69/2023

**GSBA Ltd, Gibraltar Community Projects Ltd, Community Supplies and Services Ltd,
Gibraltar Community Initiatives Ltd and Wonderworks Media Ltd –
Appointed auditor**

Q71/2023

**GSB debentures –
Whether new issues stopped**

Q72-76/2023

**Prefabricated modular units –
Number shipped to Gibraltar on the *Great Faith*; cost;
whether paid for in advance of shipment;
whether for sole use at Rooke development and expected number of units per floor;
warranties obtained**

Clerk: Question 61/2023. The Hon. R M Clinton.

Hon. R M Clinton: Thank you.

1950 Mr Speaker, can the Government please provide the total gross debt, aggregate debt after application of the Sinking Fund to gross debt, cash reserves and net debt figures for public debt for the following date, being 1st December 2022?

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

1955

Minister for Social Security, Economic Development, Enterprise, Telecommunications and the GSB (Hon. Sir J J Bossano): Mr Speaker, I will answer this question with Questions 62 to 76.

Clerk: Question 62/2023. The Hon. R M Clinton.

1960

Hon. R M Clinton: Mr Speaker, can the Government advise the balance on the General Sinking fund on the following date, being 1st December 2022?

Clerk: Question 63/2023. The Hon. R M Clinton.

1965

Hon. R M Clinton: Mr Speaker, can the Government advise the total value of loan notes purchased by GSBA Ltd from Gibraltar Community Projects Ltd, including term and interest rate?

Clerk: Question 64/2023. The Hon. R M Clinton.

1970

Hon. R M Clinton: Can the Government provide a copy of the loan notes and term sheets for the loan notes purchased by GSBA Ltd from Gibraltar Community Projects Ltd?

Clerk: Question 65/2023. The Hon. R M Clinton.

1975

Hon. R M Clinton: Can the Government provide a copy of the loan notes and term sheets for the loan notes purchased by Gibraltar Community Projects Ltd from Community Supplies and Services Ltd?

1980

Clerk: Question 66/2023. The Hon. R M Clinton.

Hon. R M Clinton: Can the Government advise how does it expect Community Supplies and Services to be able to repay the three-year loan notes issued for the construction of the Rooke Nursing Home?

1985

Clerk: Question 67/2023. The Hon. R M Clinton.

Hon. R M Clinton: Can the Government advise how GSBA Ltd has used the £40 million borrowed from the Gibraltar Savings Bank for five years at a rate of 6%?

1990

Clerk: Question 68/2023. The Hon. R M Clinton.

Hon. R M Clinton: Can the Government advise why Gibraltar Community Projects Ltd is lending money to Community Supplies and Services Ltd at 4% whereas the cost of borrowing from the Savings Bank by GSBA Ltd is 6%?

1995

Clerk: Question 69/2023. The Hon. R M Clinton.

Hon. R M Clinton: Can the Government advise who is the appointed auditor for each of the following companies: GSBA Ltd, Gibraltar Community Projects Ltd, Community Supplies and Services Ltd, Gibraltar Community Initiatives Ltd, Wonderworks Media Ltd?

2000

Clerk: Question 70/2023. The Hon. R M Clinton.

Hon. R M Clinton: Can the Government confirm that Gibraltar Community Projects Ltd is borrowing only from GSBA Ltd?

2005

Clerk: Question 71/2023. The Hon. R M Clinton.

Hon. R M Clinton: Can the Government advise whether the early redemption discretions for new issues of Gibraltar Savings Bank debentures have been stopped?

2010

Clerk: Question 72/2023. The Hon. R M Clinton.

Hon. R M Clinton: Can the Government advise, further to its Press Release 7/2023, exactly how many prefabricated modular units have been shipped to Gibraltar on the *Great Faith*?

2015

Clerk: Question 73/2023. The Hon. R M Clinton.

Hon. R M Clinton: Can the Government advise the landed unit cost in sterling and total cost of the prefabricated modular units shipped to Gibraltar on the *Great Faith*?

2020

Clerk: Question 74/2023. The Hon. R M Clinton.

Hon. R M Clinton: Can the Government advise if the total cost of the prefabricated modular units has been paid in advance of shipment?

2025

Clerk: Question 75/2023. The Hon. R M Clinton.

Hon. R M Clinton: Can the Government advise if the prefabricated modular units that were shipped on the *Great Faith* are entirely for use on the Rooke Nursing Home site, and what is the expected configuration/use of units per floor?

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Clerk: Question 76/2023. The Hon. R M Clinton.

2035

Hon. R M Clinton: Can the Government advise what warranties have been obtained and by whom in respect of the prefabricated modular units for defects and for what period?

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

2040

Hon. Sir J J Bossano: Mr Speaker, the gross public debt, the aggregate debt after the application of the Sinking Fund to gross debt and the cash reserves and net debt figures were, on 1st December 2022: gross public debt, £872.7 million; aggregate debt, £845.3 million; cash reserves, £80.9 million; and net debt, £764.4 million.

2045

The balance of the General Sinking Fund on 1st December 2022 stood at £27.4 million.

GSBA has not purchased any loan notes from Gibraltar Community Projects.

The Government will not provide copies of the documentation of government companies' commercial transactions.

2050

The repayment of the loan notes by Community Supplies and Services will be from the cash it will have by the time the maturity dates of the loans are reached.

Of the £40 million raised by GSBA through the sale of loan notes to the Gibraltar Savings Bank, some has been invested in the purchase of real estate, some has been used to invest in loan notes from government companies and some is still in cash.

2055

The cost of borrowing from the Savings Bank by GSBA is not linked to the arrangements between Gibraltar Community Projects Ltd and Community Supplies and Services Ltd.

The auditor of the two Government companies is PwC. The selection of an auditor by private companies is a matter for those companies.

Gibraltar Community Projects loan notes can be held by any government company.

2060

No early redemption discretions in respect of Gibraltar Savings Bank debentures have been stopped.

I am informed that the vessel *Great Faith* has transported 226 prefabricated modular units.

The costs of the different stages of the elderly residential home at Rooke are a matter for the developer of the project.

2065

The prefabricated modular units for the Rooke site have been paid for as agreed between the suppliers and the purchasers of the unit.

As far as the Government is aware, all the modular units are needed for the Rooke project, which is not intended to be a nursing home. The configuration in the layout of the modular units is a matter for the developer and the construction company and will become evident once the modules start being installed in a week's time.

2070

The guarantees that may have been obtained by the developer in respect of the Rooke development is a matter that will have been agreed between the developer and the supplier on terms that are standard for this type of construction.

2075

Hon. R M Clinton: Mr Speaker, you will appreciate that there are 15 questions in there and it may take me a little while to work my way through them.

If I may start perhaps with the easiest one, in respect of Question 62 it would appear the Sinking Fund has increased by £1 million compared to the Minister's answer from last month. I would be grateful if he would give me an indication of what that £1 million represents.

2080

Hon. Sir J J Bossano: Mr Speaker, the £1 million is a result of the sale of government property to GSBA, which the legislation allows can be credited to the Sinking Fund rather than to the Consolidated Fund. It is something that I have initiated because, in the provision we make in the Consolidated Fund estimates for the year, since the interest rates are now higher than they were, there would be very little scope for adding to the Sinking Fund; so for the future movement of

2085

assets where the money is being placed in the Sinking Fund rather than in the Consolidated Fund, so that we are able to continue the Sinking Fund growth.

2090 **Hon. R M Clinton:** I am grateful to the Minister for that explanation. How do you distinguish which properties go into the Sinking Fund in terms of sale proceeds and which do not? Is it only those that GSBA is engaged in? How is that determination made? Or does the Minister have a target amount each year that he wants to put into the Sinking Fund?

2095 **Hon. Sir J J Bossano:** We are able to increase it by the amount that it has been increasing by in the past years, at least. At the moment, it can apply to any sale of government property. The law provides that the sales of government property can be provided to the Sinking Fund instead of the Consolidated Fund, and that is what I am doing at the moment.

2100 **Hon. R M Clinton:** So that I understand the Minister correctly, basically there is no set formula as to how this will happen – if I am incorrect, by all means correct me.

In terms of the property the GSBA purchased from the Government, would he be able to identify that for us?

2105 **Hon. Sir J J Bossano:** In this case, the property is the one that we are planning to use for the elderly people's flats, where initially – as I explained, I think, to the hon. Member previously – GSBA purchases the original lease and then grants a sublease to the construction entity or the developer of the site. It is a site in Laguna estate.

2110 **Hon. R M Clinton:** Mr Speaker, in answer to Question 63, I believe the Minister answered no, in that GSBA Ltd has not purchased any loan notes from Community Projects Ltd, but if I my memory serves me well, I think in last month's session he indicated that Community Projects Ltd obtained its funding from GSBA Ltd, and I may have assumed incorrectly that he had been following the same formula as for Community Supplies and Services and was purchasing loan notes. So how is GSBA Ltd transferring money to Gibraltar Community Projects? Or rather, more simply, on what basis?

2120 **Hon. Sir J J Bossano:** GSBA buys the loan notes from other government companies and Community Projects buys loan notes from those companies that have the funding, but it does not do it directly. The origin of the money is GSBA.

Hon. R M Clinton: Sorry, Mr Speaker, I thought I had understood the structure last month, in that there was a relationship between GSBA Ltd and Gibraltar Community Projects Ltd. I thought that was a direct relationship. Obviously it would appear that that assumption is incorrect.

2125 If the money is originating in GSBA Ltd and GSBA Ltd is purchasing loan notes from another government entity, could the Minister fill in the gap for us in the missing link between GSBA Ltd and Gibraltar Community Projects Ltd?

2130 **Hon. Sir J J Bossano:** *[Inaudible]* the hon. Member thinks there is a missing link. The money that eventually is received by Gibraltar Community Projects has originated in GSBA, but it is not necessarily all the money that has been obtained from GSBA by another government company. If there is £x in loan notes that have been bought by GSBA from one or more companies, there could be the whole of that amount that has gone, eventually, into Gibraltar Community Projects, or less than that. But in any event, whatever the amount is, whether it is the same or less, the origin is GSBA because GSBA is the one that buys assets, which can be either real estate ... As I have already told him in answer to the other question, the money is either in real estate or in loan notes from other companies, or in cash.

2140 **Hon. R M Clinton:** Yes, I understand what the Minister is saying, but what I am trying to do is get a full picture of the structure. To simplify things rather than trying to ask a big question, I ask one simple question: from which government companies – I do not know if the Minister has the information available with him – is GSBA buying loan notes, and the amounts?

2145 **Hon. Sir J J Bossano:** The hon. Member has asked me how the £40 million is used. The £40 million is used in either buying bonds from companies, buying land assets which then get resold or subleased, or is kept in cash for when it is needed to do either one or the other. I am not prepared to give him more information than that because that, in effect, gives the picture of what is happening, but it can be any company that we choose to use.

2150 **Hon. R M Clinton:** But, Mr Speaker, a loan note – forgive me for perhaps going back to 101 on finance – would be for a specific period of time at a specific interest rate with specific terms on it. The Minister has just clarified that the GSBA buys loan notes from government companies. I just want to know which government companies have been issuing the loan notes that the GSBA is buying. And then, of course, my question that will arise from that eventually is which one of these companies is lending money to Community Projects?

2155 **Hon. Sir J J Bossano:** I have told him that there is no reason for one or the other specifically. There is a question and I have said GSBA is lending to companies, meaning any company we choose – all companies or one company, whatever we choose to do – and I have told him that Community Projects in turn can issue loan notes to any company. That is the mechanism. Which company it is and how much it is ... I am not prepared to give him more information on that.

Hon. R M Clinton: Mr Speaker, why on earth not?

2165 **Hon. Sir J J Bossano:** The level of information that I have already given him far exceeds anything that has ever been given in this House to anybody else. I think at the end of the day what the hon. Member wants is to be the 11th Member of Government and be told every detail of everything we do from the time we get to the office in the morning until we clock out. *(Interjection)* He is not going to get it from me.

2170 **Hon. R M Clinton:** Mr Speaker, I think the Chief Minister might regret that offer, but ... *(Interjection by Hon. Chief Minister)*

2175 With the greatest of respect to the Hon. Minister, what I am trying to do on this side of the House is not run Government, but just hold Government to account. That is my job, as I am sure he recognised in the past when he called me a one-man public accounts committee. All I am trying to understand is the mechanism and all the various links in this mechanism.

2180 I have a question later on saying if Community Supplies and Services is borrowing at 4% and GSBA's cost of funding is 6%, where is the difference coming from? That is just not financially sensible, so what I am trying to understand is if GSBA is borrowing at 6% and it is issuing loan notes to someone ... If they are actually lending money to some government company, can he at least tell me at what rate they are lending? Is he going to tell me it just depends on the day? Surely he will have to tell me that if GSBA is borrowing at 6% for five years, it must be lending at more than 6%, otherwise GSBA is making a loss or getting money from somewhere else. This is what I am trying to understand. I am trying to understand how this mechanism works, because it is not clear to me.

2185 **Hon. Sir J J Bossano:** In the answer to the other question he has referred to I have told him there is no connection between the two. GSBA does not borrow three-year money at 6%. He is saying if they borrow 10-year money at 6%, why do they lend three-year money at 4%? Well, because the rate that the Savings Bank pays on three-year money is 3%, so that is the cost of the

2190 money. But there is no link. There is a logic to the length of the repayment period and the interest rate, and if a company has recourse to the resources of the Savings Bank for investing in a development that is not going to take 10 years, why should they borrow 10-year money?

Hon. R M Clinton: Mr Speaker, the Hon. Minister knows perfectly well that if the funding costs are 6%, it does not matter what period it is, you have to make more than 6%; otherwise you will de facto make a loss. All I am trying to understand are all the various links in the chain – which he does not seem to want to tell me – as to how this money is eventually spent.

2200 He has already said in this House that Community Supplies and Services gets its money from Community Projects, which gets its money, we now know, ultimately from GSBA, which we know is a subsidiary of the Savings Bank, which we know has borrowed £40 million from the Savings Bank. All I am trying to understand is exactly how all this flows down the chain. That is the simple question.

2205 What the Minister does not seem to be willing to tell me is that element of the chain between GSBA and Community Projects. That is the element I am trying to link up and I cannot understand why the Minister is so reluctant to give me that piece of information. If he tells me, 'I have Gibraltar Government company X that has bought today' – he could argue that I have not given him a point in time, but you could choose a point in time – '£10 million of loan notes that they have issued to GSBA for a period of three years and they are paying x% per cent, and then they, in turn, are issuing loan notes to Community Supplies and Services for £x, or Community Projects,' and carry on down that ... I can understand the flow. That is all I am after.

2210 If he does not want to tell me now, I will ask specific questions of the links and then he can perhaps give me the answer then, but it would be a waste of this House's time if I have to come back and ask the same question.

2215 **Hon. Sir J J Bossano:** The question that the hon. Member puts ... The answer that I get leads to a whole range of other questions. It does not matter how much I give him, he has an insatiable appetite and therefore there is a point at which I am not prepared to give him more information beyond what I have given him.

2220 The money is in the Savings Bank. The money from the Savings Bank is invested in bonds or loan notes issued by GSBA. GSBA, in turn, issues loan notes to a number of other companies and one or more of those companies issues loan notes to Gibraltar Community Projects. That is not enough. He wants to know the date, the time, the amount, the rate. Well, he is not going to get any more detail. That is all I am telling him, okay?

2225 **Hon. R M Clinton:** Mr Speaker, Gibraltar Community Projects Ltd is ultimately owned by the Gibraltar Development Corporation. The Minister can confirm that or not by one entity and then another entity above it, and ultimately it is the GDC. It is a government company. Is the Minister telling me that he would refuse to answer a question in this House as to what loan notes Gibraltar Community Projects has issued and to whom?

2230 **Hon. Sir J J Bossano:** To whom – presumably so that people outside think we are giving money to outsiders. He knows to whom: ultimately, to building homes for our people; ultimately, to building a stadium for Gibraltar; ultimately, that is where the money is finishing up. But that is not enough for him. He needs to have a trail through the jungle – to get to where? To see if there is something that he can criticise the Government for. Well, criticise me for not providing the answer; it is faster.

2240 **Hon. R M Clinton:** Mr Speaker, with your indulgence, because I really did not want to get into this type of argument, but he has just described his own structure as a jungle, and that is what it has become: it has become a jungle. So basically I have a ... I am going to use this word, which he

will not like. We have a black hole between GSBA and Community Projects, and he is not willing to tell me what the link is. Is that his position?

2245 **Hon. Sir J J Bossano:** The position is that I am prepared to give a level of information, and beyond that I am not prepared ... The hon. Member has been asking since this arrived, and continues asking in every meeting, where every account is in the Government, in every company, and we tell him we do not ... And it does not happen anywhere. He knows where the Government starts with the money and he knows where the Government finishes. That is not enough. He has to be able to go through a trail to understand every bit. Well, look, understanding every bit is
2250 something you need to do when you are in Government. In Opposition you are entitled to know how it is we are funding things, and we have told you how we are funding things. Why we put it in one company or another is not asking for information, it is asking for you to be given an explanation of how the Government proposes to do things in the way they think it is necessary or efficient to do it. We have this position again and again. He does not seem to know where to draw
2255 the line.

Hon. R M Clinton: Mr Speaker, I accept that the Minister is not willing to give me any more information. I must say I am disappointed at the Minister because he normally is very helpful in this House in providing information. If that is his position, so be it, but I do not think it is a fair
2260 position to adopt and I will make it clear in due course, when the time arises.

If I can move on to other – (*Interjection by Hon. K Azopardi*) Yes, certainly. Can I give way to ...?

Hon. K Azopardi: Mr Speaker, before my hon. colleague moves on, can I just ask the Hon. Minister ...? He has used this phrase ... Why does it have to be a jungle? As he has described it, the
2265 money is going from the Savings Bank to companies, maybe different companies, then ultimately it may go through a trail – through the jungle, as he says – then ends up in community projects. Why does it have to be a jungle? What is the rationale of it being so complicated?

Hon. Sir J J Bossano: Mr Speaker, what I described as a jungle is the situation in which the hon.
2270 Member finds himself. I am not in the jungle. I know exactly where the things are. They may be in the jungle, but I am not. He is behaving as if he was in a jungle and he wants me to take him by the hand and lead him through the jungle. Well, look, that is not my job and I do not think he is entitled to do that.

The hon. Member knows that the previous Government wisely invented a cash pool where all
2275 the companies that were in surplus were netted against all the companies that were in deficit. That is something that is still there. This, we are doing as an alternative to the cash pool so that there is greater tracking of the money than there was before. I am doing it only because the money that moves from GSBA into another company is ultimately finishing outside the Government, albeit on projects that the Government is sponsoring as part of the National Economic Plan and
2280 where the Government knows exactly where it is going because the actual deliverer of the construction is a government joint venture.

Hon. K Azopardi: I am not sure, with respect, that the hon. Member has answered the
2285 question. Apart from explaining that it is not a jungle to him ... I am trying to understand why. Is there an economic case for it being a complex structure from company to company? What is the reason? Why can't it just go from the Savings Bank to Community Projects? Why do there have to be interposed companies? What is the reason for that?

Hon. Sir J J Bossano: Very simple: the money that goes initially from GSBA to another company
2290 may be used by the other company for another purpose relevant to the company's activities other than community projects. It is not that there has to be a matching. When I told the hon. Member where the money came from, it was because the money will be coming ultimately from the

2295 Savings Bank through GSBA, then it passes from GSBA to different companies that want to use
money by raising loan notes from GSBA, and then some of those companies can, if they want ...
or if we think that a particular company in a particular location has more liquidity than another
one, then we use the one that has more liquidity, depending on the point in time when the money
is needed. The money that goes into Gibraltar Community Projects goes as a ... basically demand
driven by the progress of projects, not for any other reason. The money that may be sitting in one
company or another ultimately does not make any difference because it is the same as the cash
2300 pool – except that it is not the cash pool, it is identified.

Hon. K Azopardi: And for me to be clear, who is making these decisions? When a company
takes the money, then moves it to Community Projects indirectly, having received it from the
Savings Bank, GSBA or whatever, who is making these decisions on the movements of the
2305 moneys? Is the Minister ultimately taking these decisions?

Hon. Sir J J Bossano: By the need that the company may have in the activities of the company.
All the companies have directors and the Treasury is responsible for all the movements.

2310 **Hon. K Azopardi:** The Government is making the decisions?

Hon. R M Clinton: Mr Speaker, I at least take some comfort from the fact that the Minister has
said that he is tracking this money more closely than perhaps he would other money that is in the
cash pool, and that it is obviously all trackable through these loan notes which he has described
2315 already.

Going to Question 64, in which I asked for a copy of the loan notes – and I guess this would
also cover Question 65 – I think his answer was that he would not provide copies of these loan
notes. I do not know why, because they cannot possibly be commercially sensitive since most of
this is intragovernmental or intragovernmental company borrowing, but can he tell me who drafts
2320 these loan notes? Is there a law firm involved in drafting them?

Hon. Sir J J Bossano: To my knowledge, I am not paying anybody outside to draft loan notes.
To my knowledge, it is just drafted internally. I do not know what complexity a note that is basically
an IOU between one government-owned company and another government-owned company
2325 needs in drafting, but as far as I am aware, we do not pay anybody outside the Government to
draft anything for this.

Hon. R M Clinton: So is the Minister effectively saying that these loan notes are drafted
internally by Treasury?
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Hon. Sir J J Bossano: Mr Speaker, I do not know how they governed, but when we are in
government I do not say I want the name of the person who was drafting this or the person who
was drafting that. We have processes that happen, thousands of processes, while you are in
government, and there are people working, doing things, and I am sure that if we spent the level
2335 of time in monitoring every movement of every civil servant like the hon. Member seems to want
me to do, then the system would take even longer to deliver anything.

The answer is things have to be done, they get done. I do not ask who has done it or how have
they done it. These people are employed to deliver something and they do it, the same people
who would have drafted a loan note before. What I can tell him is that we have not gone outside
2340 the Government to pay for somebody externally to draft a loan note, because if that had
happened I would know that there was a cost.

Hon. R M Clinton: Mr Speaker, if I can move on to Question 66, which is in relation to how
Community Supplies and Services is going to be able to repay the three-year loan note, I think, if I

2345 recall, his answer was cash it will have on maturity of the loan note. Can the Minister give us an
idea of how he expects Community Supplies and Services to actually have the cash to pay in
redemption?

2350 **Hon. Sir J J Bossano:** Community Supplies and Services is not giving the money away, it is
investing it in assets which will ultimately be owned by people who want to invest in them, all of
which I have explained to the hon. Member before. Ultimately, it does not mean, necessarily, that
we are going to have to wait three years, because we would not put Community Supplies and
2355 Services in the position that they had to keep on paying interest if the money was no longer
required. The three-year term is because we do not expect projects to take that much longer. The
construction projects, in the main, are things that should take less than three years, and therefore
three years is the maximum, but if the project is completed before and there is a transaction that
they receive money before, then they will probably come back and say, 'We want an early
repayment, to stop having to pay interest.' But ultimately what they will have, I have no doubt, is
the cash to pay if that does not happen.

2360 **Hon. R M Clinton:** The Minister talked about investors once the project is completed. So just
to be clear, is it the Minister's plan basically that the entire site would be sold as a single unit to
an investor or group of investors? Is that what the plan is, to realise the asset, as he describes it,
in order to repay the loan notes? Is that the overall thinking?

2365 **Hon. Sir J J Bossano:** The Rooke will be sold as one, yes, but obviously in Laguna it will be
individuals buying the apartments, and the cash will come back very quickly because the people
who are expressing an interest are already property owners who will sell for more than they are
going to be buying.

2370 **Hon. R M Clinton:** Again, I apologise to you, Mr Speaker, because this is a complex process of
understanding.

We anticipate that within three years we will have an asset that is saleable to an investor or
group of investors. I just have two questions. One, which I do not think I have had the answer to,
2375 or may not have asked as part of the questions I have asked before, is what is the actual maturity
date of that three-year loan note? And does he have an investor or group of investors that have
already expressed an interest in purchasing the Rooke site as a whole?

2380 **Hon. Sir J J Bossano:** To the second question, I have more than one.

The loan notes are not issued all at once. They draw on the loan notes as they need to pay for
the ongoing work, so the loan notes are three years from the drawdown, not three years from a
specific date.

2385 **Hon. R M Clinton:** Mr Speaker, the Minister has indicated that he may have two potential
purchasers for the site as a whole. What is it that the investors would be buying? I know the
architect's plan described it originally as a nursing home, and in his answer today he has said no,
it is not a nursing home, so what would he call it and what is it that the investors would be getting
in terms of an income or yield on the project?

2390 **Hon. Sir J J Bossano:** The only thing that investors in property get is rent from the users of the
property. I do not know of anything else that is done with property other than that.

2395 **Hon. R M Clinton:** And finally on this particular question, Mr Speaker, does the Minister
envisage having some kind of option agreement built into whatever arrangement he comes to
with the investors in order to buy the facility at some future point in time?

2400 **Hon. Sir J J Bossano:** I have no preconceived ideas. I am willing to listen to the people who are interested in buying and if I think what they are prepared to offer and the terms that they want are beneficial, then I will consider it; and if not, not. But at the end of the day, the importance is that the Rooke Home is going to be used for people who are on the waiting list for going to Mount Alvernia, and consequently what we are looking at is the ultimate cost to the Government of the facility. Clearly my involvement is in making sure that the cost to us, as potential users, is not excessive. I expect it to be less than we are paying now.

2405 **Hon. R M Clinton:** Mr Speaker, following on from what the Minister has just said, it is not a nursing home, it is an old people's home – that would be the correct description of it? And is it the intention, as part of this project, for the Government to effectively guarantee a block leasing of units in the building, or will it be a mixture of external people that the Government will not provide accommodation to and they are doing it off their own bat, and a chunk of the building
2410 may be leased by the Government to make provision for our own community?

Hon. Sir J J Bossano: At this point, what I am thinking is the cost per bed. So we would take the number of beds we need. What we have is priority. If we have the demand to take everything, then there will not be anything available to anybody else because at the end of the day it depends
2415 on, once the thing is finished and people see it, how many people want to go there.

The hon. Member must understand that everything we are doing ... He is asking questions all about what will happen in the future, and what will happen in the future is not one single path with one single option. It depends on the people we are dealing with, it depends on the money they put in, it depends on how many people want to be there.
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Hon. R M Clinton: And just a quick question on the building itself in this respect. These are all one bedroom, bathroom ...? What is the internal configuration, just so I understand, when it comes to the investors, what it is they are buying?

2425 **Hon. Sir J J Bossano:** I have not been able to see yet the finished product, but my understanding is that the rooms are big enough to be double rooms or single rooms. They are all the same size, but I think one floor could be for married couples and the rest for single people. It has a kitchen on every floor and a dining area, and a bigger kitchen and a restaurant at the top, and there is a shower and all the accessories you need for people with disabilities in these rooms. And each one
2430 has a balcony.

Hon. R M Clinton: So just by way of comparison, this is the layout of the standard Calpe House type room, where you have an ensuite bathroom/toilet and a main room which may have some other facilities, but that is about it – the bed and ensuite. Is that correct?
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Hon. Sir J J Bossano: Not quite, because Calpe House was something that we bought where the structure was there already and we adapted it. This has been designed for this purpose. It has been designed as a place that is going to be a home for people with disabilities because of their age, who are incapable of keeping themselves in their own homes. In some cases, the Government
2440 is having to provide quite a lot of support in their houses. Gibraltar, like everyone else in Europe, is facing an increasing ratio of people with dementia. The people on the waiting list ... There are something like 68 who are between 95 and 100. There are a lot of us living a long time, as I intend to do, so eventually there will be a place for me in the home as well, but not just yet!

2445 **Hon. R M Clinton:** So the waiting list we are talking about is the waiting list for Mount Alvernia – is that right?

2450 **Hon. Sir J J Bossano:** Mr Speaker, it will relieve the pressure on Mount Alvernia and the pressure on the GHA, which has a ward with people who really cannot be discharged to go back to their homes and cannot be discharged because Mount Alvernia has not got, at the moment, the capacity to take them.

2455 **Hon. R M Clinton:** And what, in real terms, is the difference between Mount Alvernia, which I always thought was a nursing home, and Rooke? What would be the difference in facilities? Or is it just a question of what label we put on it, but effectively people will get the same service?

2460 **Hon. Sir J J Bossano:** Mount Alvernia did not start as a nursing home, it started as a residential facility for elderly people, but I think as people have got older ... The movement of people in and out of Mount Alvernia in the old days, when people did not live so long, was much quicker. Now what happens is that people actually age in Mount Alvernia and really they get to the stage where they need medical treatment, and therefore in Mount Alvernia we have a level of medical treatment that is not too distant from what a hospital is.

2465 This is not what this is going to do. This is not going to be replacing the responsibilities of the GHA to provide medical treatment, so I am investigating whether ... Once it is finished, I am getting somebody from the UK to come out and advise me – free of charge, from a company that is a close friend of ours and has 25 homes in the UK – whether the layout and the facilities we have here would be suitable for having, say, one floor for dementia if we found that we were having problems in adequately fitting the number of cases we have in the facilities we have.

2470 At the end of the day, we need to be clear about one thing: this is only the beginning of what we need to do. The reality of it is that we can expect to have ever-increasing numbers of people over the age of 70 in Gibraltar, as in every other developed country in Europe, and sooner or later, however fit they may be, they will get to a point where they really cannot cope on their own – and that is what this is intended to be.

2475 **Mr Speaker:** The Leader of the Opposition.

2480 **Hon. K Azopardi:** Can I ask on this issue, before my hon. colleague moves on again ...? I had understood, actually, that in due course, once this is built, everyone in Mount Alvernia will be offered a transfer to this new facility, but of course, what would make it attractive is not only that this is a new-build in the centre of town – I suppose that would be a plus – but that in practice it would offer all the services that Mount Alvernia is offering to the current residents, including whatever access to nursing care they have. Is the hon. Member, in effect, saying it is not going to be like that? And if that is the case, well then does he not agree that it will, therefore, impact on people's attitudes to a transfer?

2485 **Hon. Sir J J Bossano:** It was there for many years without being structured the way it is now, and giving very good service to people. At the end of the day, having two or three doctors in Mount Alvernia, where there are 140 people, is a ratio of doctors to patients which does not exist anywhere in the world. This place is very near the Hospital and it will have a room as a clinic for doctors to see patients, so that they do not have to leave the building. It is certainly a better location than the location of Mount Alvernia.

2490 What we are doing is trying to meet need in a way that will be possible for us to finance the cost of the individuals, effectively. We believe that because the size is bigger and there are economies of scale, this will be the case. The need is there and it has to be met – we cannot escape it – but not everybody is in need of permanent nursing care 24 hours a day. That is not what this is going to be providing. This is not a nursing home, it is a residential home. The residential home is a stage in the process. What we have had in Mount Alvernia is a mixture, with people at different stages, and the people at the stage where they need most medical attention are there simply

2500 because they have been there for a very long time, not because they went in like that. That is the difference.

Hon. K Azopardi: I understand that, but I have seen a slight transition. The hon. Member first explained how people will be approached, as they will be made an offer, but then I was also taken by a phrase that he was reported to have said to the *Chronicle*, that the new residential place will eventually replace Mount Alvernia. I am not sure if that is an accurate quote, but if it was accurate I am not sure I understand how you are going to get there, because however many people there are at Mount Alvernia right now, there will be some who do require certain nursing care because they are older. It is fine, Mount Alvernia has changed and all of that throughout the decades, but the reality is that those people will not be attracted to be transferred to somewhere where they are not going to get that more immediate, permanent staffing assistance that they have at Mount Alvernia.

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2515 And the other issue arises, I would have assumed – again, maybe I am making the wrong assumption because it is not in the plans of the Government, in their thinking, but I would have assumed that the attraction of a transfer would then also impact on staffing issues at Mount Alvernia, and then maybe some of those people would go into new employment at the new home. But again, that may not be something that the Government is thinking about.

Hon. Sir J J Bossano: It is all speculative and in the future, but we may well find that we need to increase the capacity for people with dementia. That is a possibility and we may have to do a new centre. But certainly the Mount Alvernia building is increasingly unfit for purpose and would cost more money to put right than a new building would cost.

Hon. R M Clinton: Mr Speaker, I move on now to Question 69. I think, if I heard the Minister correctly, he said the auditor for the government companies is PwC, and I would identify those – and if I am wrong, the Minister, I am sure, will correct me – as GSBA Ltd and Gibraltar Community Projects Ltd. If the other three entities, which I think he said was a matter for the companies and the directors ... Given that these are effectively the building blocks for his National Economic Plan, would he obviously not have an interest that they are audited and would he not know, or at least can he tell us if he knows, whether there is an auditor appointed? And presumably he must know who they are.

Hon. Sir J J Bossano: Mr Speaker, if I was interested, it still would not be my responsibility to say who they are to him or anybody else. I am not answerable for whether they have or they have not, or who they choose or do not choose. But in any event, my understanding is that you do not need an auditor if your profits are under £1.25 million. These people are a long way from that figure, so I do not know what he thinks ...

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2540 We are in the process of starting something and the hon. Member puts questions that may be relevant sometime in the future – not when something has been going for two weeks, I would have thought.

Hon. R M Clinton: Mr Speaker, I would have thought the Hon. Minister was hoping for more than £1 million profit in the short term from these entities.

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2550 The problem is that we are dealing with this chameleon-type entity where it is obviously in the National Economic Plan and we all know it is in the National Economic Plan, but then anything to do with the actual mechanics, the nuts and bolts, the mechanism, whatever – no, it is nothing to do with the Government. The dilemma we have on this side of the House is that the Minister has created the structure under a registered charity and then disclaims any responsibility for it. He cannot have it both ways, Mr Speaker. Either it is in his National Economic Plan, for which he has full responsibility, including the structure, or it is not.

Hon. Sir J J Bossano: I can have it both ways, Mr Speaker. If I have an obligation to produce more housing for elderly people, which the National Economic Plan does, I do it in the way that is most effective, given my other responsibility for restoring financial stability, which I think is a very reasonable thing to do.

2555 If we did what they did, for example, when they were in government and they got an outside person to run the £1.2 billion programme that there was in 2010, because of its expertise and because in the private sector people charge the Government more than they charge private entities, then it would never have occurred to us to want to know every single transaction between the Government and that individual. And we never did. We accepted the rationale of the policy of the Government, and that is it. That is what they did. They did things how they thought was the best way to do them, and I am doing things in the best way to do them. Clearly, if we had not found ourselves with the results of COVID and the results of the drop in revenue that has come after COVID, we might have done it differently, and probably finished up spending more money given the position of the previous administration – which is probably true – than ... If the Government is the client, the money goes up, the cost goes up. We found a way, that I have devised, which ensures that I am able to deliver the goods by outsourcing the work, which is not something new because every time the Government builds an estate ... There are lots of companies involved in building an estate, but there is no question of when did you pay them, what did you pay them, how many invoices, how many people do they employ? It does not work like that.

2570 We have a responsibility to try to deliver what we set out to do, two years late. We are doing it in the way we think is most beneficial for Gibraltar because we think it will minimise the direct cost to the Government. We are confident – I am confident – that the results will justify the way we are doing it, and I think when the Members opposite see the results they will have to agree that it is.

Hon. R M Clinton: Mr Speaker, I just want to finish off on this particular question as to auditors. Can the Minister at least confirm to the House that he expects auditors to be appointed for any entity within his National Economic Plan?

2580 **Hon. Sir J J Bossano:** No, Mr Speaker, I cannot say that because I have just told him ... These companies are charities, and the charities that are going to be involved ... Gibraltar Community Initiatives is there because we had a need to do something and there was no other way of doing it with the Government and no other way of doing it with the private sector. Then we found a new vehicle to do it, and that new vehicle will comply with whatever the laws of Gibraltar require – not because I tell them, but because they have a legal obligation to do it. So if they have to have an auditor, I am sure they will have an auditor. Why on earth should they not want to have an auditor if they need to have one? Why should I expect them to have one? Well, I am not qualified to decide that if their turnover is a couple of thousand pounds a year, they have to have an auditor. My understanding is that there is a threshold, which in fact the professionals in audit have asked the Government to raise, so that there is less work for the auditors with very small companies. At the moment, they are very small. How much bigger they will get I do not know, but I do not expect them to become multinationals.

2595 **Hon. R M Clinton:** Mr Speaker, if I can just finish off on this, at the end of the day it is a creature of his creation which we will credit him for having created, but it is his creation and whether it has an audit or not it is not a question of simply complying with the law. At the end of the day, he can determine and the companies can determine the whole structure. He can design it. He is the designer, the creator of this structure. He can say 'I want an auditor' tomorrow. He does not have to wait for the legal threshold to be triggered.

2600 I would have thought, given that he is responsible for the Savings Bank and given that all the Savings Bank money is flowing through this entity, he would want to have at least that assurance,

2605 even at the very beginning, that everything is as it should be, because at the end of the day it is not his money. The money belongs to the savers of the Savings Bank and therefore I think it is entirely reasonable that he would be extra cautious, as he has already demonstrated he is trying to be by tracking every penny all the way down the chain. And yet when it comes to the appointment of auditors, he just says, 'Nothing to do with me, it is up to the companies.'

2610 That is the only point I want to make, Mr Speaker, and if he does want to accept that point, I will leave it there and move to the next question.

Hon. Sir J J Bossano: It is not that it has nothing to do with me, it is that if I decided to do it, I would not have to tell him because it is nothing to do with him. That is the point. He cannot say to me that I have to give information about what I do or do not do in relation to what I say to a private entity, because he is asking me questions in this House about things that are in the public sector, and these are people who are contractors.

2615 Maybe if he had been advising the previous Government they would not have found themselves losing lots of money with lots of companies that disappeared over the horizon. These people are not going to disappear over the horizon. They are here and they are doing something as a commitment to Gibraltar. These are not people who are lining their pockets. The situation is if they feel there is a need or I feel there is a need at any point in time that they should have an auditor, then I will consider discussing it with them, but I am not going to say to them, 'You must have an auditor', just so that some auditor gets more money and the thing cost us more money. No way.

2625 **Hon. R M Clinton:** Mr Speaker, if I can move on then – I am obviously flogging a dead horse on that one. I think we have had an answer to Question 70 already. On Question 71, about the early redemption discretions, whether there have been any changes in government Savings Bank debentures, I think the answer was a simple no. Can the Minister confirm that those discretions – as I recall them, and my memory could be faulty and have to be corrected ... I think it is at the discretion of the Financial Secretary, the purchase of a government affordable 50-50 or perhaps the death of the holder of the debenture, in which they nominate somebody to receive the money. Those are the three conditions that still exist for the breakage of a debenture, which is of a term, yes?

2635 **Hon. Sir J J Bossano:** Those are the three conditions that are standard, and of course somebody may come with a particular calamity that has affected them, which is not covered by those three, and then it is at the discretion of the Financial Secretary whether he says yes or no.

2640 **Hon. R M Clinton:** And just to confirm that if that discretion is exercised – apart, perhaps, from death or even the purchase of government property – there will be some sort of a penalty applied.

2645 **Hon. Sir J J Bossano:** If there is a penalty, depending on the nature of the ... I think it is possible ... For example, in the most recent debentures that were issued for pensioners, we actually allowed up to 25% to be withdrawn without penalty, so the person can withdraw 25% over the 10 years, and if he does not draw anything down in the first year he accumulates the percentage. So there, there is no involvement of the discretion. If somebody has done that, in that particular issue, normally there would not be a discretion to withdraw even more than that, because there is already a facility there.

2650 **Hon. R M Clinton:** And the new pension debentures, do they still have that 25% withdrawal facility in them?

Hon. Sir J J Bossano: As far I am aware, there has been no change in that either, but it is limited to the 10-year debenture for pensioners.

2655 **Hon. R M Clinton:** Mr Speaker, I move on to Question 72. I believe the Minister said there were
226 units shipped to Gibraltar on the *Great Faith*. If I can combine this with Question 75, in terms
of the use of the units and configuration, I was not quite clear as to whether they were all for the
Rooke site. And in terms of the configuration, I think he said it was a matter for the developer, but
if we were to take ... I think there are eight floors, maybe nine floors, but if there are eight floors,
2660 with 226 units that is 28 units a floor. Can the Minister enlighten me in any way as to what he
thinks the layouts or the usage of these units will be? First of all, I guess the simple question is are
all these 226 units going to be used at Rooke; and, if so, how many units per floor?

Hon. Sir J J Bossano: Mr Speaker, I do not have the information and I do not intend to ask them
2665 for the information, but I will invite the hon. Member to come to the Rooke and count them for
himself when they are all there.

Hon. R M Clinton: Yes, I have had a look, but I shall wait.

In terms of Questions 73 and 74, the Minister, I think, replied, in terms of the costs, that it is a
2670 matter for the developer, and to whether they have been paid in advance I think the Minister said
'paid for as agreed'. If I take the last question first, 'paid for as agreed', we know Community
Supplies and Services has issued loan notes of about £22 million. What I am trying to establish is
whether that £22 million will cover the cost of purchase of the modular units.

2675 **Hon. Sir J J Bossano:** This is a level of detail that the hon. Member wants me to obtain from a
private entity that is delivering something which, at the end, is going to be bought by a private
investor where the Government is going to be the user of some or all of the units. I do not go
asking them these questions, and I do not think he is entitled to expect me to ask them.

2680 **Hon. R M Clinton:** Mr Speaker, with the greatest respect to the Minister, this is his National
Economic Plan. I expect him to know every aspect of the project, including how many nuts and
bolts have been used, because at the end of the day it all boils down to the cost on the bottom
line. The fixtures and fittings, which I have not asked about, is probably something that the
Minister has been intimately involved in because it all goes down to the final cost, which all goes
2685 down to the viability of the project and the cost to the Government as the ultimate user. I would
have expected that at least he would have a little bit more visibility as to costs because that is
what drives the economic viability of this kind of project and his ability to recover the money that
the Savings Bank has put into this project in that obviously he wants to recover the money from
potential investors.

2690 He keeps on saying it is a private entity on which I cannot ask questions, but it is his National
Economic Plan and again I come back to the same conundrum, where it is in the National Economic
Plan but I cannot ask questions about it. Does the Minister understand my frustration here?

Hon. Sir J J Bossano: Well, I do not want to forsake him – I am very fond of him – but he needs
2695 to understand that the Governments of Gibraltar over the years have used private contractors for
lots of things, and the level of information that the hon. Member is seeking about the behaviour
of those contractors has never been asked before. Nobody has asked how much did the
foundations cost in Hassan Terraces and how much does a window cost and what is the layout of
the room. You have a contractor, the contractor is given a brief and the brief is to deliver
2700 something. I am not the project manager of the operation. At the end of the day, it is something
that is happening on the basis that I know what we want to finish up with, we are doing it in a way
which I think is the most cost-effective way to do it, and we are doing it with entities that are not
from outside of here. We are doing it with a joint venture, a construction company, and with
people who are local people. These are not people who are going to disappear over the horizon,
2705 as has happened in the previous projects of the Government of Gibraltar in the last administration,
where, regrettably, people left, and left a lot of debts from local suppliers. Perhaps if every inch

of every contract had been examined, that might not have happened, but then, unfortunately, he was not in that Government to do it.

2710 What he needs to understand is that the level of lack of confidence in the people who are there and the level to keep an eye on them is not heightened by what I am doing, it is lessened by what I am doing because we are not dealing with people who put in a contract price and then, as often happens in the construction industry, you are shown the specimen room the first time ... I remember many years ago when I was working in the construction industry, when I came back in 1972, in Varyl Begg, when the government contract surveyor came along to see how the walls were plastered they were plastered with gypsum, which was quite expensive, and then when he went, the rest of the rooms were plastered with something else, which cost much less money. That happens in the industry, so even if you examine one room, they will fiddle you on the rest and there is nothing you can do about it because when it is all painted and finished, it all looks the same.

2720 Can that kind of thing be prevented? No. Is this kind of thing likely to happen with this? I think less so than with dealing with strangers, less so than with dealing with people from outside who are here today and gone tomorrow. So, if his concern is about the quality and the cost of the thing, then all I have to say to him is I am confident that he will find, when it is done, that the concern was unnecessary. If I accept that all he is expressing is concern, then I can tell him I am confident that the concern is not required, that the degree of control that he says there should be is not required, and I am confident that I can demonstrate that to him. And these things are going to be finished by the summer, by the way, not in 20 years' time.

Hon. R M Clinton: Mr Speaker, I am grateful to hear that the Minister is so confident.

2730 I am moving on to the last question now, Question 76, in which I asked about the warranties and by whom, in terms of defects, and for what period. I believe the Minister said that guarantees would be agreed between the developer and supplier in some standard terms on this type of construction, or words to that effect.

2735 In the Minister's last contribution, he talked about nobody disappearing over the horizon, but he may have seen an article that appeared in *Construction News* in August 2021 where I think, according to the article, one of the entities within the group – I think it is China International Marine Containers, and I think that is the name that is plastered on the side of the containers that we see here in Gibraltar – ran into some alleged defects at hotels in England, and they subsequently, for whatever reason, decided to put the UK entity into liquidation. So I have a real concern about defects. They obviously had problems in the UK with defects, or allegedly problems with defects. I think one particular complaint was settled, or they offered a settlement at £1.1 million. This is why I am asking about warranties on this project.

2740 It is a big project. It is costing, we know, at least £22 million. I would have thought that the Minister would have some kind of feel or some sort of idea of what kind of warranties ... because bear in mind that if he tries to sell this on to external investors, they will want the benefit of those warranties, especially since we are talking about modular construction. I am no expert on this particular methodology, but obviously it is all steel framed. How on earth do you maintain these units? What happens if unit number 10 in the middle of the structure suddenly develops a defect? How do you remedy that? And to what extent is the supplier of the module responsible? Or is it the person who assembles it on site? Or is it GBIC? Or is it somebody else? I would like to know, first of all, are there any warranties that the Minister is aware of that the supplier of the modules has given the developer?

2755 **Hon. Sir J J Bossano:** I know that there have been UK personnel in the factory supervising the whole process, that every single joint and every single thing has double signatures, that it meets ISO things, that the guy involved has actually travelled with the units here to Gibraltar and is here supervising it and that the workers engaged in the erection are from the UK, a Manchester company, UK people who have been doing this in the UK. The assurances that I have been given I

2760 believe. I think they want the business and they want the relationship with us. They have gone, I
think, to whatever lengths they need to, to give us comfort that they have been looking very
carefully at everything. Apart from that, if there are pieces of paper in the contracts between them
I do not know, but I know that we have been insisting from the beginning that it had to be UK
2765 standard and that even if it cost more we would not accept anything less and the UK had to
guarantee that. Frankly, the advantage that we have is the relationship with the company in China,
which has used its senior people to make sure ... The only problem, sometimes, with bringing
things from Asia is that what you see when you go to buy it may not be what they put in the
container, but they are not likely to do something like that if, in fact, their partner company is our
partner as well, and therefore it is an in-house relationship which, the way it has been explained
to me by the guy here who did it all, has been very thorough, checking almost everything.

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Hon. R M Clinton: This is my final supplementary, unless the Leader of the Opposition has
anything, or anybody else wishes to ask anything.

In conclusion, I understand what the Minister is saying in terms of the efforts he has made to
ensure that the product he receives here is a product that he desires, but can he tell the House
2775 one way or another is he aware or does he have no knowledge of whether any warranties have
actually been obtained in the legal sense? Is that in his knowledge, or not?

Hon. Sir J J Bossano: I do not know.

2780

Mr Speaker: Next question.

Q77-80/2023

**Disability Benefit applications and appeals –
Numbers determined since 1st July 2022; numbers outstanding;
numbers successful and unsuccessful**

Q81/2023

**Vacancies in government-owned companies –
Number at 22nd December 2022**

Clerk: Question 77/2023. The Hon. D A Feetham.

Hon. D A Feetham: Mr Speaker, how many applications for Disability Benefit or appeals from
the refusal to provide Disability Benefit have been determined since 1st July 2022?

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

**Minister for Social Security, Economic Development, Enterprise, Telecommunications and
the GSB (Hon. Sir J J Bossano):** Mr Speaker, I will answer this question together with Questions 78
2790 to 81.

Clerk: Question 78/2023. The Hon. D A Feetham.

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Hon. D A Feetham: Mr Speaker, how many applications for Disability Benefit remain
outstanding for (a) less than a year, (b) more than one, two or three years?

Clerk: Question 79/2023. The Hon. D A Feetham.

2800 **Hon. D A Feetham:** How many appeals against a decision to refuse Disability Benefit remain outstanding for less than one year, and how many remain outstanding for one, two or three years?

Clerk: Question 80/2023. The Hon. D A Feetham.

2805 **Hon. D A Feetham:** Mr Speaker, of those applications for Disability Benefit or appeals against a refusal to provide Disability Benefit that have been determined since 1st July 2022, how many have been successful and how many have been unsuccessful?

Clerk: Question 81/2023. The Hon. D A Feetham.

2810 **Hon. D A Feetham:** Following on from the answer to supplementary questions to Question 560/2022, can the Government now state how many jobs or positions within government-owned companies are vacant as at 22nd December 2022?

2815 **Clerk:** Answer, the Hon. the Minister for Social Security, Economic Development and Enterprise.

Hon. Sir J J Bossano: Mr Speaker, since 1st July 2022 to date, 28 cases have been determined for Disability Benefit; of these, 16 were approved and 12 disallowed.

2820 Ninety eight applications for Disability Benefit remain outstanding; of these, 71 cases are less than one year and 27 cases are up to two years.

To date, 12 applications for Disability Benefit which were not approved and requested to be reconsidered, remain pending; of these, four cases are less than one year, six cases are for one year, one case is for two years and one case for three years.

2825 On the date mentioned in the question, there were no vacancies within government-owned companies.

2830 **Hon. D A Feetham:** Mr Speaker, I will have to take this in stages. In answer to Question 77 – I thought it was Question 77; certainly the first part of the answer was Question 77 – he said that 28 cases have been determined since 1st July 2022, 16 approved and 12 disallowed. That is a combination of answer to Question 77 and answer to Question 80. But can he tell me, of the 16 that were approved and the 12 that were disallowed, how many were first applications for Disability Benefit and how many were appeals? The hon. Gentleman will see that Question 80 splits it down between applications and appeals. I just want to know what the ratio is.

2835 **Hon. Sir J J Bossano:** I am told, Mr Speaker, that of the 28, five were applications requesting the decision to be reconsidered, and two were successful and three disallowed of the five.

2840 **Hon. D A Feetham:** Mr Speaker, in relation to Question 78, what he said was there are 98 applications that remain outstanding. I think when I asked this question before the summer recess, there were 149. He says less than a year, 71, and then over two years, 27. Do I have that last figure correct? So am I right in saying that, therefore, no applications for Disability Benefit remain outstanding for longer than two years?

2845 **Hon. Sir J J Bossano:** It would be a logical deduction from the information I have been provided with, yes.

Hon. D A Feetham: And does that include also cases where, for example, an application may have been made three years ago, which was refused, therefore determined, there is then an appeal and that appeal remains outstanding? In other words, that the total process is over two

2850 years? Can he confirm that when you take appeals into account, none have been outstanding, taking into account the whole process, for longer than two years?

Hon. Sir J J Bossano: I cannot confirm that, Mr Speaker, because the alternative interpretation is also possible from the information that I have been provided, and that is that they only count the time from the last time that something happens and not from the time before that, when an appeal was made and then it was rejected. It is quite possible that they are counting it from the last time that some action was taken. I do not know. I can find which of the two it is.

Hon. D A Feetham: I may come back to this next time round, to get a clearer picture, but can he confirm that he understands that when I have asked the question how many applications for Disability Benefit remain outstanding, obviously that is the original application for Disability Benefit – not the appeal, but the original application for Disability Benefit?

Hon. Sir J J Bossano: I would have read the question like that. I do not know necessarily that the person who wrote the answer interpreted it that way, but I will find out. I would agree with him that that would be the correct interpretation of what he has said.

Hon. D A Feetham: He said, in relation to Question 79, that there are 12 appeals outstanding – which seemed to me quite a low number, but that is the answer he has given me – four below a year, and then I think he said six between one and two years and one above – *(Interjection by Hon. Sir J J Bossano)* All right.

Hon. Sir J J Bossano: Yes, and then six cases are one year.

Hon. D A Feetham: Well, it must be above one year.

Hon. Sir J J Bossano: Well, no, that is not what I have been told. It could be that they are one year exactly and the others are one day less than a year. *(Interjection by Hon. D A Feetham)* And one case is for two years and one case for three. Obviously, I do not know the individuals or their names or anything, so I cannot tell him anything other than the numbers that have been provided by the Department.

Hon. D A Feetham: Yes, I think that is unlikely, given the question.

Let me ask this. We have one appeal that is at least outstanding for two years. Does he agree with me that that is a very long time for somebody to wait for an appeal to be determined?

Hon. Sir J J Bossano: I agree entirely that the whole thing takes a very long time, but the reality is that the volume that the Department deals with nowadays is not what it was 11 years ago when he was in government. There was a huge increase in cases of disability when the criteria were changed. Some of them may be very urgent, difficult cases, and some of them very superficial, but I think they are not dealt with in order of importance, shall we say, but rather chronologically. They tell me that you cannot rush the people who are doing this and they will not be told to hurry because they say they have a professional assessment to do and if they take time, well, that is it.

I do not really know what the answer is, because other than trying to find more doctors to do it and provide more resources, I cannot see ... As I have told him before, what worries me is when I look at this and when I look at what is happening with children needing support in classes, where the figure this year has been astronomical. Members will see, when they see in the Estimates the growth that there has been in the resources we have to provide, that if there is indeed a real increase in children having disabilities and in adults having disabilities beyond what was normal before, then we need to do something about investigating what is going on. It is not just simply saying do more, because it is a very worrying thing, if it is happening.

2905 **Hon. D A Feetham:** I do not mean this as a criticism of the hon. Gentleman or anything like that, but I think the answer he has given me, which is dealt with in chronological order ... I am not sure that can be the case, given the fact that there is a case that is longer than two years and some of the other statistics that he has provided.

2910 But let me just drill down, because my concern is to search for the reasons why some of these are taking longer. Does he know how many, for example, panels there are determining these applications? Is it one panel, is it two panels, is it three panels? Of course, that is then going to impact on how quickly these applications and these appeals are determined.

Hon. Sir J J Bossano: One panel. I do not know of more than one.

2915 **Hon. D A Feetham:** From my own knowledge, I am not sure that can be ... If he does not have the answer ... I am not sure that can be the case, because of course there is one panel in the sense that it is the panel that advises the director, but the panel is composed of various doctors, and I think there has to be more than one panel because, for example, there may well be situations where there is a conflict and somebody else has to come in – for just a simple reason like that – and I think, from my own knowledge, there is more than one. There are more than three or four people. There is a pool of people who basically are then convened into a particular panel to advise on particular cases. But I will ask about that, unless he knows.

2925 **Hon. Sir J J Bossano:** What I have been told is that there is a panel for adults and a panel for children. That does not mean that the panel is always the same people. They can be different people, but at any one time there is only one panel.

Hon. D A Feetham: It has been me that has confused you by asking the question as to how many panels. Does he know how many pools of doctors there are from which you convene a panel, and also how many doctors on each panel?

2930 **Hon. Sir J J Bossano:** Three on each panel. I do not know what the pool is, but I will find out.

2935 **Hon. D A Feetham:** And of the applications that remain outstanding ... Well, let's deal with Questions 77 and 78, arising from a supplementary answer that the hon. Gentleman has given me. Out of the 28 cases that have been determined, does he know how many were children and how many were adults?

Hon. Sir J J Bossano: I have just given the questions put as they are written to the Department, and that is the information they have given me.

2940 **Hon. D A Feetham:** I presume, therefore, that he does not know, but please could he confirm whether he does not know, out of the ones that are outstanding, how many are adult and children?

2945 The next supplementary is this. Seeing that there have been considerable delays in relation to this ... This is probably an issue where if you are affected, it affects you very personally, so of course you are going to do everything you can to contact your MP or somebody else to try to help you out, and because I have asked a lot of questions I probably get more people coming to see me about this than anything else. I accept these are small numbers in the context of the people who live in Gibraltar, but there have been delays and there are people who are waiting for a long time. Has he attempted at least to drill down as to the reasons for that? And has he attempted to convene a meeting with the director in order to see how the decisions can be speeded up?

2950 **Hon. Sir J J Bossano:** No, I have not done that, but from what I have seen, the variety of definitions of disability seems to be very wide, both here and in the case of special learning needs.

2955 The system that there was before was a straightforward thing because it was a list of medical
 conditions and either you had it or you did not have it, so the decision was clear cut. The system
 we have today is ... For example, should mental illness be a disability that gets a disability
 allowance? And if so, should every person who has a mental illness get it? Because the system has
 been made subjective ... Before, it was arbitrary. A condition entitled you to it and another
 condition did not entitle you to it. Now it is irrelevant, really, what the condition is. It is whether
 2960 you are able to cope with your daily life. This is a very difficult thing to assess, in my view, and not
 everybody would agree with the assessment, because it is totally subjective. The person who is
 claiming it obviously thinks they cannot cope with their daily life. The person making the
 judgement – I do not know how they reach these decisions.

I think we need to maybe go back and analyse how we define the people who require help and
 get it to those people, because I think the ever-growing number is ... There really is no limit, in my
 2965 view, to what you can say is causing you an inability to cope with the daily chores of your life,
 because there is no criterion laid down. The criterion is not what is the condition, the criterion is
 how are you managing the condition. So if you manage it reasonably well, you get no help. If you
 say, 'I cannot get out of bed,' they have to give you help. It is not a system that makes a lot of
 2970 sense to me and I think maybe what we need to do is make sure that we are putting all the help
 in the place where it is needed, not having a system that is clogged up because the number of
 applicants keeps on growing every year. Therefore, how much, in terms of medical resources, do
 we ... if you keep on widening it? If somebody is depressed because they have had a quarrel with
 somebody, do they get Disability Allowance? And for how long? How do you judge when they are
 2975 no longer depressed and now happy?

I think the system is problematic. I think it is a difficult system to get delivery of what is
 required. But it is not something that I have sat down with the director to discuss. I try to
 understand. From the explanations that have been given to me of the range of things that people
 claim are preventing them from leading normal lives, I would say half the population would fit the
 2980 bill.

Hon. D A Feetham: But this is why I have been an advocate in this House for a number of
 years – probably more than four years now, asking questions about disability, about Disability
 Benefit – for there to be a statutory definition or a statutory test with defined criteria that then
 2985 allow the panel to refer to the test, and people to then also know where they stand and essentially
 the criteria that they need to meet in order to qualify. What people out there, unfortunately the
 people who come to me, say is, 'I have a disability,' and I say to them, 'That is not enough because
 it is not the disability, it is the effect that it has on your daily life.'

Of course, you say how do you determine it, it is subjective. In a sense, that is always going to
 2990 be a problem with any decision by any court, any tribunal, anything, because tribunals make
 decisions on the basis of evidence. You produce evidence – medical – of the disability and the
 effect that it has through a report from a doctor, and then the tribunal basically makes a decision.
 But if you have a statutory test with defined criteria, with the evidence that you might require –
 for example, a report – it makes it much more stringent but everybody knows where they stand,
 2995 and the people who need it will get it, and the people who do not need it will not get it. I commend
 that to the Minister and I ask him whether he agrees with me in relation to that.

May I ask another supplementary? I have just two more, Mr Speaker. The other supplementary
 is the lady I wrote to you about who has a leg that has been amputated and several other
 conditions: has he been able to look at that? I am very keen to try to help that lady because she is
 3000 going through a very difficult time.

Hon. Sir J J Bossano: Mr Speaker, I am not sure if that has been dealt with without going back
 and asking.

On the first one, I will think about the arguments he has put because I think they have merit.
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Hon. D A Feetham: If he wants, I can help him with that. I do not think anybody outside ... I do not even know if those who administer it have actually thought about it in those terms. I have given it a lot of thought. If he wants me to help, I am perfectly prepared, pro bono ... I see him there looking at me with a suspicious face. This is not me angling for any legal work or anything like that. This is pro bono.

The final supplementary is I could not help but notice when he answered Question 81/2023, which asks how many jobs or positions within government-owned companies are vacant, he said there are no vacancies within government-owned companies. Of course, last time round when I asked how many vacancies are there in government-owned companies, he said to me government-owned companies do not have any vacancies, and then it produced an exchange. That is why I used the words 'jobs or positions'.

What I do not want is, if I may say so ... This has been a jovial exchange. I do not want any funny business in terms of returning to the original answer that he has given me, that there are no vacancies in the formulistic sense. I am asking whether there are any jobs or positions that are needed within those companies, that are going to be filled. I just use language – I know he understands me perfectly, but language that all of us would understand because I asked originally about vacancies and he has now returned with the answer 'vacancies'. So is he saying that there are no jobs or positions within government-owned companies that are vacant?

Hon. Sir J J Bossano: Mr Speaker, I am not trying to misunderstand what he is saying. I explained to him already that in a company, when somebody goes it does not necessarily leave a vacancy, position or anything else, because government companies are not government Departments that have a list of things and you say, 'How many vacancies are there?' and you ask because of what you see in the Book. There are a number of companies that have been shrinking now for quite a few years. What we are not going to do is go down the route of saying there has to be a fixed number of positions in a company if the company does not have the work available to require to replace somebody who goes.

At the moment, the companies are not recruiting anybody, have not opened any vacancies in the ETB and I do not know whether they will in the future, but on the 22nd certainly they were not doing it.

Hon. D A Feetham: There were no vacancies?

Hon. Sir J J Bossano: No vacancies that required filling.

Hon. D A Feetham: But no vacancies open in the ETB, yes?

Hon. Sir J J Bossano: Yes.

Mr Speaker: Next question.

Q82-83/2023

Rooke and Victoria Stadium developments – Number of government flats to be released; plans re hotel

Clerk: Question 82/2023. The Hon. D J Bossino.

Hon. D J Bossino: How many Government flats will be released following the allocation of apartments at the Rooke residential development for the elderly?

3050 **Clerk:** Answer, the Hon. the Minister for Social Security, Economic Development and Enterprise.

Minister for Social Security, Economic Development, Enterprise, Telecommunications and the GSB (Hon. Sir J J Bossano): Mr Speaker, I will answer this together with Question 83.

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Clerk: Question 83/2023. The Hon. D J Bossino.

Hon. D J Bossino: Please state whether there is still an intention to build a hotel as part of the Victoria Stadium development.

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

Hon. Sir J J Bossano: Mr Speaker, as I explained in a recent interview with GBC, it is not possible to provide an accurate figure at this stage of the impact the Rooke residential development will have on releasing government rented housing because we do not know how many people will want to take it up and I do not think it is possible to know until the thing is finished and people see it.

On the question of the Victoria Stadium, as far as I am aware, there are no changes to the original design that was produced, which included the hotel development, but I can tell Members that there have been approaches to me by two different groups of people who are interested in the development and in providing the finance. In fact, I had a meeting yesterday with one group from the UK, where I said from my point of view the Government, as long as it meets what is required for the GFA and UEFA ... if somebody is interested in funding the whole thing, we will just pull out. If they want to fund part of it and they want us to stay, then we will stay in. We want it to happen, basically. If it has to happen with us providing 100% of the funding, then we will have people locally who are involved locally, interested in the project and advising what they think the project should contain in order to be viable from the point of view of paying for itself. If somebody comes from outside, they may have different ideas.

At the moment, we are getting ready to start on the project because we do not want to hold it up, but we still have an open mind as to how it is likely to finish up. I think the idea of the hotel is one that has logical attractions because of course if the people who come to watch the football in the place and they are coming from outside ... It is probably the only place where you can land at the Airport, walk across the runway, get into the hotel, wake up in the morning and watch the match, so it may have some attractions.

Hon. D J Bossino: Mr Speaker, if I can start with that last answer first, the reason why I am asking this question is because he did make a reference to various things that are going on, on that site – and that included a hotel – in a programme on GBC, but looking at the design and access ... I think he said in the answer also that it still features in the current plans, but in the design and access statement for outline planning permission as submitted by the GFA, there is no mention of a hotel. There are mentions of the apartments and commercial units, but absolutely no mention of the hotel. Does he know why that is the case? And should he correct the answer he has given me, or have I misunderstood?

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Hon. Sir J J Bossano: Remember that the people have been trying for a number of years to get this going. When they finally thought they were not going to get it and they would finish up with no stadium here and having to go forevermore to Portugal, they came to me to see if the Government could help. I told them, 'The Government cannot do it because we are having enough problems trying to pay for the things we need to pay for, so we cannot give you money, but we will look to see if there is something else we can do to get you the result that you want. We will

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incorporate your project in our National Economic Plan and sponsor it and give you the technical support and make funding available. Ultimately what we want is that it should happen, and we will make sure that it happens if we have to fund it, but only if it makes money. There is no question of subsidising it.'

In those conversations, the people who came to see me said they thought it would be a very attractive proposition to have a hotel in the complex, and therefore when I have talked to other people I think the idea of the hotel has always been seen as a positive thing, a multi-purpose thing that would have offices, accommodation, shopping centre, hotel. The more variation you can get, presumably the better the project is in terms of raising finance and making money.

Hon. D J Bossino: When he answered the question initially, he was talking about talking to different people and that he had had a meeting last night. When he is referring to 'the development', he is talking about the whole thing, not the hotel – is that correct? – and because he is speaking to various investors, some investors may think it is a good idea to have a hotel as part of the complex. Is that understanding correct?

Hon. Sir J J Bossano: With the people who have come to see me I have said we are not in this because it is particularly something we want to be doing, because otherwise we would have put it in the manifesto in the first place; this is something we are doing because we see a need and something has to be done about it, and we have decided to get involved on the basis that the product that we are financing will not be something that needs a subsidy from the Government. That is the criterion.

In terms of people wanting to come in, they only want to come in, obviously, if it makes money as well; they are not going to come in to lose money. Since there are different groups that have approached me, I have said to them, 'I think it is better if you discuss these things with the people in the GFA, who are going to be the ones who finish up with the stadium – we are doing this to help them – and then, depending on what you agree, we are prepared to look at different options from different people, and the one that makes most sense ...' Frankly, if somebody comes and takes over the whole thing and we are confident that it is going to happen, we will be quite happy to withdraw from the project and devote that money to doing something else, because there are lots of things that we intended to do and we have not done in the construction area.

So the answer is quite simple, really. At this stage, how it is going to finish up will depend on whether we are the only ones there or there are other parties, or whether we are not there at all. That could change the configuration, because if somebody comes along and says, 'I will do it, but only if it contains this because I am a professional property developer in the UK' – these people are from the UK – 'and I believe that this would bring more money than what you want to do,' I cannot argue against that because I do not have the knowledge to argue about what is the best property development – as long as we make sure that the people who come in do not then disappear, as has happened on many occasions with other projects that have never got off the ground. We want this to happen and it is important that it should happen in the timescale that we want, so that we have as little time as necessary with our players having to go outside. If it is something serious and the people there convince me that it is going to happen, that it is the best thing for football and the best thing for Gibraltar, then what I am saying today about its configuration may not be what materialises.

Hon. D J Bossino: I understand, Mr Speaker. Just so I have understood the position, is it the case that, as he has explained it, the Government, through the Savings Bank, which is part of the National Economic Plan, is providing the funding and it will hopefully reap the benefits as a result of this? The plans, as they currently stand ... Let's assume no developer comes forward that the hon. Member is happy will provide results. Is there some flexibility – talking about the hotel – within the current plan? Is it fair to assume that the plans as they are currently submitted by the GFA before the Planning Commission, which do not include a hotel ... and should there be no

3155 developers coming forward – other developers, other investors – that this project would not include a hotel? Or is there also flexibility there which the hon. Member would consider as, in effect, the prime investor in the project?

3160 **Hon. Sir J J Bossano:** My own view is that the hotel would add value and it is quite obvious that we do not have enough hotel beds at the moment. There are other people who have contacted me recently who are interested in coming in to invest – not in this, but in providing hotels and investing in the tourist infrastructure of Gibraltar. So it may be that if there are investors for hotels elsewhere, it may not matter too much if it is not here, but if that is not there, I would strongly argue that there is a need for the hotel, and I think it would do very well financially.

3165 **Mr Speaker:** Next question.

Hon. D J Bossino: No, Mr Speaker, please, I do not have any supplementaries on Question 83. I have asked three supplementaries on Question 84, which dealt with the hotel – sorry, Question 83, which has dealt with the hotel, but I have now got questions on Question 82.

3170 **Mr Speaker:** You may continue.

3175 **Hon. D J Bossino:** I am grateful. In relation to Question 82, which was how many government flats, he was not here, but we had a question and answer session with the Chief Minister in relation to that. I understand that it is, at this stage, not possible to have an empirical analysis of how many government flats will be released when the Rooke flats are made available and occupied, and there is an element of people making decisions as to how they want to proceed in their lives, but in terms of statistics, do I take it that we have ... I think it was 267 flats available at the Rooke development that is currently being constructed, and we have 300-odd applicants currently to Mount Alvernia, and there are 140, I think he said, residents in Mount Alvernia? Are those statistics correct?

3185 **Hon. Sir J J Bossano:** I think the list of people who supposedly wanted to go to Mount Alvernia is an exaggeration. I think the number is much less than that. Having asked for the list, there are people who are in their 50s. I think there has been, historically, a situation where, just like every 18-year-old puts his name down for the housing list so that eventually he goes up the list, every 55-year-old who came out of the Civil Service put his name down for Mount Alvernia, hoping he would get there eventually. So the list that I have been shown has people who are urgent cases, who may not be the people we can care for, depending on their medical condition, and then there is a list of the people who are between 90 and 101, some of whom are very fit, and they are likely to be the ones on that list, out of the 368. That is the kind of number that is most likely to be the people who would want to move now, although there may be people younger than 90 who may be less agile and less fit than the ones over 90. The list is divided into the urgent cases, the over-90 cases and the rest, and in the rest there are certainly some very young people who I would not expect to want to go there at this point but might want to be scoring points on waiting time to get there eventually.

3195 **Hon. D J Bossino:** And would he know, of the 368, how many are in government rental flats? It is possible that within that demographic there could be private dwellers.

3200 **Hon. Sir J J Bossano:** I do not have an exact figure, but from my recollection of the list they showed me, I think probably over 60% would be government tenants.

3205 **Hon. D J Bossino:** One final question. I think it is a very interesting statistic and I want to think about it a bit more, but because there is a number of 260-odd, I think it was, available units at

Rooke, assuming everybody says yes, the supply will not necessarily meet the demand, and then – it arises and it is relevant to the question – that will have a correlating effect in terms of the availability of government flats for rental. Would that understanding be correct from the figures that we have available?

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Hon. Sir J J Bossano: [*Inaudible*] meet the demand, from the figures that I have seen, because I think there are people who are not ready to move there yet – quite a big number of people, I think. But it all depends. Once they see the quality of the place, if they are there and they have been accepted as being on a waiting list, if they say they want to move and they leave a government house that can be rented to somebody else, we will not say no. If the actual usage for pensioners is low because people are not ready to move now but want to move some years down the road, then subject to the advice I get from the expert I am getting from the UK being positive, in terms that we can dedicate one of the floors to people with Alzheimer's or dementia so that we can have one floor where perhaps the manning levels and the skills mix is different, we will consider that.

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I do not know what the answer is going to be. The reality is that obviously we want the place to be occupied, but we want to occupy it for the best possible use. If the advice I get is that this is not suitable, then it is not going to happen because we are not going to force people into a place that is not suitable.

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Mr Speaker: Next question.

Q84-89/2023

Victoria Stadium development –

**Tender and construction commencement dates; financial feasibility plan;
UEFA rules re number of seats; cost without residential and commercial development;
determination and approval re extent of residential and commercial elements**

Clerk: Question 84/2023. The Hon. the Leader of the Opposition.

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Hon. K Azopardi: Mr Speaker, when is it expected that the construction of the new Victoria Stadium and adjoining residential/commercial complex will commence, and when will the contract for the works go out to tender?

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

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Minister for Social Security, Economic Development, Enterprise, Telecommunications and the GSB (Hon. Sir J J Bossano): I will answer this question with Questions 85 to 89, Mr Speaker.

Clerk: Question 85/2023. The Hon. the Leader of the Opposition.

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Hon. K Azopardi: Who has undertaken a financial feasibility plan for the projected new Victoria Stadium and has the Government or Savings Bank received a copy?

Clerk: Question 86/2023. The Hon. the Leader of the Opposition.

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Hon. K Azopardi: Has the Government been told by the GFA whether it is currently permissible under UEFA rules for the proposed new stadium to be of a smaller size than 8,000 seats?

Clerk: Question 87/2023. The Hon. the Leader of the Opposition.

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Hon. K Azopardi: Is the Government aware what the projected cost for building a 5,000-seater and/or 8,000-seater new football stadium would be without the proposed residential and commercial development?

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Clerk: Question 88/2023. The Hon. the Leader of the Opposition.

Hon. K Azopardi: Has the Minister for the Savings Bank approved the extent of residential and/or commercial configurations of the proposed new Victoria Stadium project; and, if so, on what basis?

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Clerk: Question 89/2023. The Hon. the Leader of the Opposition.

Hon. K Azopardi: Who is determining what the size of the residential or commercial parts of the proposed new Victoria Stadium should be and how many apartments should form part of the project?

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

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Hon. Sir J J Bossano: Mr Speaker, there is no start date identified yet for the construction of the stadium complex project, but preliminary site-clearing work should be starting later this month. At the same time, packages for different parts of the project are being considered and quotes may be invited once planning permission has been obtained.

Neither the Government nor the Savings Bank have been given a copy of a financial feasibility plan for the projected new Victoria Stadium.

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The Government has not been told by the GFA whether under UEFA rules it is permissible for the proposed stadium in the complex to be smaller than 8,000 seats.

As far as I know, there is no standard cost comparison between a 5,000 and an 8,000 spectator capacity stadium, but I have been given to understand that the difference is not very big in terms of cost.

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I am not involved in the operational details of the commercial configuration of the stadium complex and I am not qualified to make such a judgement on the extent of residential and commercial configurations, which would determine the profitability.

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Hon. K Azopardi: Mr Speaker, I will take these in turn in a minute, if I may, but let me just ask a broad question that strikes me, having heard all those answers, which in effect, I think, is that the Government has not seen the financial feasibility study – at least the Minister has not seen it and he is not involved in the configuration, he is not aware of the specific costs and he is not aware whether UEFA rules allow a smaller stadium. In the context of all that, given that backdrop of his lack of knowledge and lack of sight of the financial feasibility study, on what basis has he been able to come to a conclusion to allow funding of the project?

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Hon. Sir J J Bossano: The project is subject to the project happening because it is profitable and viable; otherwise it will not happen. I made that clear in answer to the previous questions. We have made an offer that will permit this to happen on the basis that the people involved are confident that they can deliver a project that will, in fact, meet all the questions that he is asking now, even though so far there is nothing concrete that is taking place.

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I have told the previous questioner that if there are a number of parties interested, what would be the final thing and the feasibility would be different. If we have somebody coming along with one suggestion on the configuration and one result on the feasibility, and somebody else, I have

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3305 already said in that question that when we look at it we will then decide. If there are a variety of proposals and a variety of feasibility studies from different partners, from different people who want to get involved, we will pick the one that we think is best in Gibraltar's interest. If, indeed, it happens that somebody comes along and wants to take it out of our hands and do the whole thing, the answer is there will be no more questions to answer on this because we will not be needed.

3310 **Hon. K Azopardi:** Yes, Mr Speaker, I understand it is all about the financial feasibility of the project, but that is precisely where I am going: he has not seen the financial feasibility study, if there is one.

3315 The design and access statement that was filed by GFA National Stadium Ltd for the planning application sets out a fairly precise meterage of the shopping centre at 9000 m, the residential area at 11,700 m – it is quite precise – and commercial offices at 3,500 m. Somebody must have designed this project and put it together. You would have thought that this would have had a financial feasibility study underpinning it to precisely decide whether it is profitable or not, one way or the other. The hon. Member is saying that he has not seen it, so I am trying to probe on what basis then he has given this project his backing.

3320 **Hon. Sir J J Bossano:** I repeat what I said before so it might finally penetrate into the brain of the hon. Member opposite. I said, before he stood up, that there are a number of variable possibilities that may change the piece of paper he has in front of him: that we may not be involved at all, but that if we do get involved, as we are willing to get involved, it will be because we are satisfied that the thing is going to make money and not lose money and cause us to have to provide a subsidy. That is the state of play as we stand here today.

3325 The problem with the hon. Member's questions is that the questions they put the moment something is announced are as if in the first 24 hours everything that is possible has already been worked out. It does not work like that. We are moving at a very fast speed, compared with what is the traditional time it takes for anything to happen in Gibraltar in this area. So he can expect results faster than, for example, what happened when the GSD announced the Sovereign Bay Eastside project, which went through several iterations and they were going to be investing millions in it and then none of it happened. I am not going down that road. I am not making claims of things that are not tight. When they are, I will share what I know with the hon. Member. At the moment, what I am telling him is what I have told the GFA: we are willing to come in and do this, provided we are satisfied that it will not be making a loss and that we will not be incurring a loss, because I am not going to be investing money from the Savings Bank in anything that loses money – it is as simple as that – in this project, or in any other one. These things will make money for the Savings Bank that is better than the return they get by having it in London, in equity, which gives us a measly ½%. In my view, it is better to use the savers' money to create assets in Gibraltar than to create assets somewhere else. Clearly, I am not going to put that money at risk, and therefore, if when the time comes we see that the viability we expect is not there, it will not happen.

3340 Everybody involved who knows more about this than I do is confident that it can be done and that it will make money. I do not think they are all making it up in order to persuade me, because I will not be persuaded just by that. I will be persuaded when there is something more tangible being done. But at the moment, the fact that somebody comes out from the UK to meet me because they have heard of this and they think it is something worth investing into is an encouraging sign, I would have thought.

3350 They have not got a feasibility study. They have not asked all the questions the hon. Member is asking. I had a meeting of an hour and a half yesterday with them in the Savings Bank because they wanted to know what the position of the Savings Bank was in terms of being the investor, and I said, 'The reality is that we are the investor by default in this and we want this to happen,

but if somebody comes in and wants to do the whole thing and wants us to get out, we will get out. If you want to come in and you would like to partner with us, then we will partner.'

3355 That is the answer I have given before. I cannot go beyond that, because that is the state of play now.

Hon. K Azopardi: Mr Speaker, I do not think I am normally particularly slow on the uptake, so it is not that he has to repeat things – (*Interjection*) yes – for brain-penetration purposes; it is that what he is saying sounds so strange given the catalogue of events we have all seen. After all, he is
3360 now saying, on 19th January, that he has not seen the feasibility study, he is not involved in the configurations, and that they might not be involved at all, but if they are, it is going to make money. I say, 'On what basis does he think it is going to make money?' because he has not seen a financial feasibility study and he has not seen the numbers, but it did not stop him, three months ago, from donning the Gibraltar national shirt – which is the only shirt that he and I probably
3365 share – and announcing it with great fanfare in the middle of the Victoria Stadium at half-time in the last match that Gibraltar played at home. Having donned the Gibraltar shirt and then gone on television to explain the project, he must have been satisfied then that the savers' money was going to be well used, but he is now saying, three months later, he has not even seen the financial feasibility study. That is what he is saying to people, and I find that strange. I accept, at face value,
3370 that he is saying ... I am not suggesting he has seen it. I accept it, but I find it strange.

This is not the first GFA application. The GFA has made previous applications. In March 2020 it made a previous application for the construction of a stadium that did not have residential, commercial etc. At that stage, it was obvious that there was a financial feasibility study because the entity that prepared the design and access statement in March 2020 on their website says,
3375 'We prepared a financial feasibility study for the stadium that did not include residential or commercial.' He is saying he made a decision as to savers' moneys without seeing the financial feasibility study. I find that incredible given the sequence of events.

In the context of all this, will he not ask for the financial feasibility study?

Hon. Sir J J Bossano: Mr Speaker, in the 50 years I have been here I have done things that
3380 people thought were incredible on that side, and eventually they had to believe it because it happened, and I expect that this will be the case again.

I will not ask for something because he asks me to ask for it. I will ask for something if I think I need to ask for it. I have told him that I am more encouraged than ever if people come here looking
3385 for the opportunity to invest in something than by having said, 'Give me the feasibility study.' I have not said they have not done a feasibility study, I have said I have not seen it and I have not asked for it. At the end of the day, I have gone to great lengths to explain to him that if there was any risk whatsoever it would not happen ... I am totally convinced that there is no danger of risk and therefore it will happen, but I could be mistaken. If I am mistaken, I will say I am mistaken and
3390 we cannot do this because it is not possible to do it, but since I believe it is possible to do it, the feasibility study that will be done will depend, given there are a number of players, on which one eventually is going to be the partner or the person that delivers it, and if it is somebody that is doing the whole thing, then all his questions and all his worries and everything else evaporates because we will not be there.

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Hon. K Azopardi: And, of course, if that were the case, a lot of my worries would go away because I am worried about savers' moneys and the decision-making process.

The slight glimmer in what he has just said is that he might ask for the feasibility study. That is a good thing. I would have thought it would have been obvious. I appreciate we are different
3400 people and we are going to react differently, but if someone approached me on this basis I would want to know how much is the stadium that the GFA itself sought to construct in March 2020 – which was about 5,000 people, not an 8,000-seater stadium – going to cost, how much is an 8,000-seater going to cost, and if I am going to recommend this to the Government, if I am going to

3405 announce this decision, convince me that it is financially viable. I would have wanted to see the financial feasibility study, but I see the glimmer in what the hon. Member says.

3410 Can I just ask: in relation to the specific question on the commencement of the works, which is Question 84, he says that quotes may be obtained for packages of the works, the clearing of the site may start and so on, but he also said, in the context of an answer to my colleague to my left, that obviously there was a keenness to get on with the project within the timescale. I think he alluded to a timescale, although he was not specific on the timescale. I am not sure whether in his discussions with the GFA a timescale has become evident, given that obviously this is a stadium that is being used all the time for football. So two questions rolled into one: has there been any kind of timescale indicated as to when this project should be done; and are these packages where quotes have been obtained going out to tender on these works?

3415 **Hon. Sir J J Bossano:** Mr Speaker, the Savings Bank is involved in providing finance in the projects we do. We do not get involved from the Savings Bank or from the Ministry of Economic Development in telling people how they should do their jobs, so the people who are doing it, who are professionals, will decide what is the best way to do it in order to get the best result at the best price.

3420 This is not a government tender that is going out. I do not know what is different between the Savings Bank and the Gibraltar International Bank in terms of funding projects, but I cannot imagine that the kind of questions I am being asked here would be asked of the bank by them. *(Interjection)* No, but it is state owned, therefore the position is that at this stage I have given the hon. Members opposite an update on what is happening, which may change what happens in the future but the commitment is a commitment that I gave, subject always to the fact that when we go down the road of financing it, or whoever else comes in goes down the road of financing it, it will only happen if it is viable – and I am convinced that it is viable. Have I seen a feasibility study that convinces me? No. I am convinced that this will work and I am convinced that it can make

3425 money.

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Hon. K Azopardi: Mr Speaker, can I just ask about the cost of the stadium? The hon. Member I think said he does not have a specific cost for a 5,000-seater stadium or an 8,000-seater stadium, but he understands them not to be too different – or words to that effect, if I understood him correctly. Can I just probe on that? Is he saying that in the context of the decision-making process he did not ask the GFA what a 5,000-seater stadium and an 8,000-seater stadium cost? The reason I ask that question is simple in this sense: this is not the first application that the GFA have made to construct a stadium, this is the third. They made an application in 2018. The application in 2018 was for an 8,000-seater stadium. In 2020, they made a second one, this time for a smaller stadium.

3435 They say in the 2020 design and access statement, and I will read it to you:

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An initial concept design with a stadium capacity of approximately 8,000 seats was submitted as part of a planning application in June 2018 and was granted outline permission in November 2018. However, since then, the GFA has taken advantage of the fact that category 4 conditions were amended by UEFA in April 2019 to allow smaller countries to reduce the capacity of their stadia. This has allowed the GFA to adapt the capacity and other design elements to Gibraltar's actual needs.

3445 One would have thought, therefore, that it must have been relevant to the GFA because they filed a new application for a smaller stadium. So why would the Minister, when he engaged with the GFA, not ask them what the cost of the relevant stadium would be, whether it is 5,000 or 8,000? The GFA must have thought it was relevant because they filed a second application in March 2020.

Hon. Sir J J Bossano: The questions are hypothetical, not questions of fact. I am told that, in terms of the complex, the difference in the price of the stadium will not be significant. If you did not do the complex and you just did the stadium, then clearly the difference in price would be

3450 more significant. That is to say if you are doing a bigger thing, of which the football pitch is a part,
the number of seats in the football pitch may make a difference to a football pitch with seats and
nothing else. If you are doing something where perhaps, hypothetically speaking, 80% of the
project has nothing to do with playing football, then the difference in the bit that is about playing
3455 football may not be significant in the overall cost. I think that perhaps explains why before it might
have had more of an impact on the cost and now it has less. I am told that the impact on the cost
is not significant in the context of a complex. It might have been significant in the context of
nothing else there, other than the stadium.

Hon. K Azopardi: But told by whom? He has not seen the financial feasibility study and he has
3460 not seen our information. Told by whom that it would not be a significant cost? By the GFA or by
somebody else?

Hon. Sir J J Bossano: Would the hon. Member like to know the day of the week and the hour
of the day, or just the names of the people I talk to? He is asking for information, I give him
3465 information. He then wants to know *who* told me that. Well, it was a guy I met having coffee in
Main Street, okay?

Hon. K Azopardi: Mr Speaker, if that is true, fine, I accept it, but if that was a glib remark and
he does not want to give me the information, it is relevant because I am trying to assess ...
3470 Obviously the GFA thought it was relevant because they withdrew the application that they had
filed in 2018 and substituted a new one for a much smaller stadium using the UEFA rules that they
could use. They must have thought it was relevant as to cost. He is saying he has been told that it
is not such an impact, but he has not seen the financial feasibility study, so I am trying to establish
did he get that information from the GFA. If he does not want to give me that information, that is
3475 okay if that is how helpful he wants to be. People can decide how they make their minds up on
that issue.

Mr Speaker, can I ask him again on the residential configuration, which he says he is not
involved in? We now know what the residential configuration is. The last time I asked him he said
it had not been devised, but we now know that it has been devised because the information is in
3480 the design and access statement. He says he has not been involved in the configuration – again, I
take that at face value – but he will be aware that there are planned 92 apartments as part of the
development: 68 one-bedroom apartments, 18 two-bedroom apartments and six others, which I
presume are much bigger than that because they are not three or four bedroom apartments,
because those are blank. Again, someone must have decided that that has to be the basis of this
3485 development so that it is profitable. Is he saying he does not know and was not involved in those
discussions, and so when he reached his decision he had no influence on these issues?

Hon. Sir J J Bossano: Mr Speaker, if the hon. Member has all the information that he is asking
me for, then he should not be asking because he is not supposed to be asking things that are in
3490 the public domain. He says he has read it all in the submission that has been made. He started
saying that if I do not know, he knows. Well, if he knows and I do not know, why does he ask me
to tell him? Is it so that he can criticise me for not knowing? Is that the purpose of the question?

Hon. K Azopardi: Mr Speaker, I asked him a different question. I tried to lead up to it without
3495 trying to outflank the hon. Member on the basis that he suggested I did, which is to expose him
for saying he did not know. On the contrary, what I said to him ... I have asked him this question
before and he said the configuration had not been done. Since I asked him that question, the
design and access statement has now been published, and from the design and access statement
I can see the figures. What I am saying is having seen the figures ... These are very precise figures:
3500 68 one-bedrooms. Why 68 and not 75? Someone has formed the view that this has to be the basis
for profitability and I am trying to understand whether he was consulted on these figures – and if

he was not, why wasn't he? He must have made his mind up on some basis when he committed savers' moneys up to £100 million to this project.

3505 **Hon. Sir J J Bossano:** It is impossible to satisfy the Member because I have gone through a series of questions with the premise throughout that there are a number of parties interested in this, and therefore if somebody comes tomorrow and says, 'I am going to put £80 million on the table – you do not need to be in, but I want 169 instead of 168,' there will not be 168, there will be 169. Or does he think we will tell them, 'No, because Mr Azopardi read that there were 168 he is going to be very upset if we put in one more, so take the £80 million away.'

3510 At this point in time, that is the proposal. On the basis of that proposal, which may change depending on who comes in or does not come in, the cost of what is being sold today is quite substantial given the prices of the market. The reality is that a complex that would have that level of density ... You do not need to do a detailed feasibility study to get a reaction if it is this going to produce a volume of money that looks credible, and the answer is it does, but it does not have to be exactly like it is, because at the point we are now, we are open to alternatives, and of course the GFA knows our position is that we want this to happen. We will be there if it can make money and produce a return for the Savings Bank. If other people come in, provided they do not delay the thing too much by wanting to come in, we will get out. If they do not come in or the thing is taking too long, we will not get out. We will do the funding of preliminary works to try to make sure that avoidable delays do not happen, and then we would expect to be reimbursed if we are not the ones that do the funding at the end. So when I have said we are looking to start doing some of the site clearing and stuff like that, we are willing to fund it on the basis that we will get our money back if we are not there.

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3525 **Mr Speaker:** Can I just interject here and suggest that we are now moving in a situation where this is developing into a debate, so I would ask the Hon. the Leader of the Opposition to ask one or possibly two more supplementaries and then we will close it?

3530 **Hon. K Azopardi:** Mr Speaker, can I just say that if we are taking time ... I appreciate the answers, but I have asked, as far as I can see, nine questions on my six questions, so –

Mr Speaker: I fully accept that, but we are really not making any progress. We seem to be going over and over the same ground. This is why I am saying that if you have a new supplementary, then yes, you may continue, but if we are going to go over the same ground over and over again it serves no purpose.

3540 **Hon. K Azopardi:** Mr Speaker, I do have more questions and they are different ones. If we are not making progress, with all due respect it is also maybe partly, if not wholly, due to the answers I am getting and the style of the answers, so perhaps we have shared blame there.

It is not that I am saying to the hon. Member that the configuration should be ... I am not expecting him to turn round, if he gets someone interested in the development and he then points to the design statement, to say, 'No, it has to be 68, it cannot be 75 apartments.' That is not what I have suggested. What I am quite perplexed at, actually, is that there has been a configuration done, there has been a design and access statement done. It is very specific. It is not residential area, 15,000m, it is 11,738m. It is very precise. Someone has decided that that should be the configuration. He has made a decision on the basis of it. He says he has not seen the financial feasibility study and I take that at face value. He has made his decision and put his shirt on without seeing all that, and that is fine, that is his decision, but can he help me in understanding who decided the configuration of the apartments that was put forward as part of the planning application? Does he know who did the configuration? It was not him, but does he know who?

3555 **Hon. Sir J J Bossano:** And it is not my business to know who it was either. That is all I can tell him. I do not know if the piece of paper he has indicates who submitted it, but what I am telling him ... As you correctly say, Mr Speaker, he is going to get the same answer from whichever angle he puts the question. I do not mind – I am quite happy to do an all-night session; I have done them many times in this House.

3560 **Hon. K Azopardi:** Mr Speaker, did he have a discussion at all with the GFA about whether the UEFA rules would permit a smaller stadium with residential development? Did he have any discussion at all with the GFA about the size of the stadium?

3565 **Hon. Sir J J Bossano:** Mr Speaker, I did not have a discussion about it, and there was no indication that there was any problem with the stadium being 8,000 or 5,000. When I discussed it with them, they put to me all the things that were relevant, and that was apparently not something relevant until he raised the issue. When he raised the issue in his question I asked is there a problem or is there a difference between the two, and I was told that given the complex, 8,000 or 5,000 in the cost of the total complex is not significant. I asked because he put a question.

3570 **Hon. K Azopardi:** Mr Speaker, is he having regular meetings with the GFA in relation to this project, given that they have put forward a planning application? The planning application was put in by GFA National Stadium Ltd. He has already informed us that that is the entity that will be running the project. Is he having regular meetings with the GFA on this project? He seems, actually, completely left-fielded on the detail of this, even though he supported it publicly with the football shirt on.

3580 **Hon. Sir J J Bossano:** I have supported a lot of projects in the National Economic Plan, but I am not like the former leader of the GSD, who told Parliament that he saw himself as a project manager and he would go down to select the colour of the umbrellas in Casemates. I remember, on one particular occasion he said he was deciding on the painting of Joshua Hassan House in Secretary's Lane, and when the people who were doing the painting got fed up with his changes, they put, one day, paint on the side of the wall where the sun was shining and the one that was in shadow, and it was the same paint, and he chose one of the two from the same tin. I do not get that involved. I do not get involved in the detail, I have no intentions of getting involved and I have no intentions of going through the many projects we are going to have in the National Economic Plan, which I will be rolling out and which will be transformative for Gibraltar, and I am not going to be spending all my time having meetings – even though I work seven days a week – so that I can get all the details of everything that would satisfy him, in the knowledge that he will not be satisfied anyway.

3590 Their strategy is that whatever it is they are told, they ask for more – a voracious appetite for information, insatiable. Well, I am sorry, the answer is what I have told you is what I am going to tell you, and that is it. If I have more information to give you at a later stage, I will. At the moment, the situation is that we are looking at a project which has been reflected in what the hon. Member has read from the perspective of the GFA, who are the owners of the stadium company. There are other people with interest. We have to see what happens and how this finishes, but at the end of the day it will only happen if it is viable – and I am convinced that it is viable, without having to get a feasibility study, because it makes a lot of sense.

3600 **Hon. K Azopardi:** Mr Speaker, it is not that I have a voracious appetite. Of course I want the information, but the reason why we want the information is because he has taken a decision of importance in relation to savers' money, and what we are trying to do is fulfil our role here and hold him to account on these matters. Does he not accept that that is what we are trying to do, and it is not for any other agenda? Does he not accept that?

3605 **Hon. Sir J J Bossano:** No, Mr Speaker, I do not accept it at all. I think what they want to do is rubbish what we are doing so they can say that we do not know what we are doing, that it is crazy that the bank's money is going to be lost, that the savers should take their money out, that there should be a run on the bank and, hopefully, on the back of all that, win an election. Well, okay, good luck to him.

3610 **Mr Speaker:** The Hon. Roy Clinton.

3615 **Hon. R M Clinton:** Thank you, Mr Speaker. I will be very brief. Just one supplementary on Question 85, which was asked by the Leader of the Opposition. If I can ask the Minister if he could explain the difference between the answer he gave the Leader of the Opposition and the answer he gave to my Question 558/2022, in which the official answer, i.e. the written answer on the script, was:

The financial analysis of the viability of the Victoria Stadium complex development has been conducted as an exercise with input from people with expertise from the property market and assessed by a former partner of EY and has had input in terms of the technical features which lead to assessing the viability financially from experts in construction of stadiums, including the person who was the project manager of a stadium with 60,000 seats who happens to be currently a member of the staff of GBIC, and the design team that produced the concept that has been made public which has had an input from the construction of a number of stadium projects in Portugal.

I would ask the Minister if he could help us by reconciling what he has told the Leader of the Opposition and what he told me in answer to that question.

3620 **Hon. Sir J J Bossano:** Mr Speaker, the question that I have been asked is have I been given a copy, and the answer is no, I have not been given a copy.

3625 **Hon. R M Clinton:** Mr Speaker, at the risk of entering the absurd, if he has not been given a copy, has he *seen* the financial viability plan?

3630 **Hon. Sir J J Bossano:** Mr Speaker, what I have told him is the explanation that was given to me as to what was going on. I have not asked to see anything, I have not been given anything and I do not intend to ask for it. So there is no contradiction. I told him what I had been told they were doing, and I shared the information that I had with him. I have now been asked whether the Government has been given a copy of the feasibility plan. No, we have not got a copy of the feasibility plan. We have not asked for one, it has not been offered and we do not intend to ask for one. Why? Because the feasibility plan that was done by the people who are doing it then may not be the feasibility plan that will be done by the time this goes ahead.

3635 **Hon. R M Clinton:** Mr Speaker, I think we are making some progress, so can the Minister just clarify —? (*Interjection*) Well, I know, but the Minister always leads to further questions. Just for the sake of the House, is it right that effectively what he is saying is that was then, this is now, things have moved on, things are changing, what may have been a plan at that time when he announced it may not be the plan now, and therefore in his mind there is no financial viability study to look at because it is all basically back to the drawing board in that sense? Is that what he is saying?

3645 **Hon. Sir J J Bossano:** The picture that was seen as containing the elements that would make this a profitable entity, which the people here have, may not be the same as the picture of somebody coming out, where perhaps ... There are two issues here, I think. One is that I think the people who are in the local property market who have been involved in looking at this probably know the local market better than other people. However, the people who ... I have had two approaches. One was from the UK yesterday, and earlier I had an approach from a guy who was

3650 representing the Dubai office of an American investment fund, who said they had been very keen
to do a stadium in Marbella and apparently they found they had to pave the way to do the
investment – you know? – and after trying to pave the way, the paving of the way did not seem
to be getting anywhere, so they pulled out. I told them, of course, that this is not something that
happens in Gibraltar and they did not have to pave the way for anybody. They could look at the
at the project and if they were interested ... I had the same message for both contacts. The first
3655 guy said he would go back to Dubai and talk to his principals. I explained how the local property
people saw the project and I explained to him that really this was something we were very keen
to happen but we did not want to prevent investors coming in if they saw this as an attractive
proposition, because we had many other things that we wanted to do.

The position now is that the concept as envisaged by the locals may not be what is finally done
3660 if the guy who represents the American investment fund is the one who persuades us that that is
the best thing for Gibraltar, or the guys who have come out from the UK come up with something
different. There are things that need to be done anyway, whoever does it, and we are going to
invest money in doing things that will make no difference to the configuration of the project, just
to make sure that things are happening and we do not wait longer than we need to wait to get
3665 the programme started. As far as I am concerned, if we do it, then fine, we will have already paid
for some of it. If somebody else does it, they will come and we will show them how much we have
spent in getting things done and then we will recover that money.

There are, at the moment, the vision of the local property people ... The guy who came
representing the investment fund from the States brought me the scheme that he had done,
3670 which they had intended and were very keen to do in Marbella. He left a copy with me. To me
football is not something that ... They all look the same to me. So we have the domestic thing and
two potential outsiders. I think it is encouraging that there should be people coming in wanting to
do it, because if it was ... People do not normally go around the world looking for opportunities to
lose money. You can do that by buying Bitcoin with no need to go anywhere.

Questions for Written Answer

3675 **Mr Speaker:** Can we progress to Written Answers?

Clerk: Answers to Written Questions.

Chief Minister (Hon. F R Picardo): Mr Speaker, I have the honour to table the answers to
3680 Written Questions W1/2023 to W7/2023.

I have the honour to move, Mr Speaker, that the House should now adjourn until tomorrow at
three o'clock in the afternoon.

Mr Speaker: I now propose a question, which is that this House do now adjourn to Friday,
3685 20th January at 3 p.m.

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

This House will now adjourn to Friday, 20th January at 3 p.m.

The House adjourned at 9.17 p.m.