



PROCEEDINGS OF THE GIBRALTAR PARLIAMENT

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

Gibraltar, Thursday, 21st December 2023

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The Gibraltar Parliament

The Parliament met at 3.02 p.m.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

75 I commend this Statement to the House.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

135 I commend my Statement to the House.

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

Questions for Oral Answer

CHIEF MINISTER

Q757/2023

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

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

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

Clerk: Answer, the Hon. the Chief Minister.

145

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

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

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

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

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

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

Hon. Chief Minister: All costs, Madam Speaker.

165

Madam Speaker: Next question.

Q758/2023

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

Clerk: Question 758. The Hon. A Sanchez.

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

Clerk: Answer, the Hon. the Chief Minister.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Hon. Dr K Azopardi: Clarify.

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

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

245 **Madam Speaker:** Next question.

Q759/2023
Carer's Allowance –
Plans to introduce

Clerk: Question 759. The Hon. A Sanchez.

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

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

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

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

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

Madam Speaker: Next question.

Q760/2023
Airport staffing issues –
MoD update

Clerk: Question 760. The Hon. G Origo.

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

Clerk: Answer, the Hon. the Chief Minister.

275

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

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

280

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

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

290

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

295

Madam Speaker: Next question.

Q761/2023
Government personnel –
Mental health support

Clerk: Question 761. The Hon. J Ladislaus.

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

305

Clerk: Answer, the Hon. the Chief Minister.

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

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

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

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

Madam Speaker: Next question.

Q762/2023
Government occupational pensions –
Index linking

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Q763/2023
Artificial intelligence –
Regulation of use in Gibraltar

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

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

Clerk: Answer, the Hon. the Chief Minister.

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

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

400

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

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

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

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

Madam Speaker: Next question.

Q764/2023

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

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

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

Clerk: Answer, the Hon. the Chief Minister.

425

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

430

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

435

Hon. Chief Minister: No, ma'am.

Madam Speaker: Next question.

Q765/2023

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Was the visit to this event official government business?

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Clerk: Answer, the Hon. the Chief Minister.

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

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

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

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

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

Clerk: Answer, the Hon. the Chief Minister.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Madam Speaker: Next question.

Q769-70/2023

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

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

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

Clerk: Answer, the Hon. the Chief Minister.

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

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

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

Clerk: Answer, the Hon. the Chief Minister.

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

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

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

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

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

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

Madam Speaker: Next question.

Q71/2023

Victoria Keys –

Whether agreement signed with developers

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

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

Clerk: Answer, the Hon. the Chief Minister.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Madam Speaker: Next question.

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

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

665 **Hon. Dr K Azopardi:** Madam Speaker, is the Government, as part of a treaty on a new relationship for Gibraltar with the EU, prepared to agree terms on issues not mentioned in the New Year's Eve Agreement; and, if so, what such issues are being discussed within the negotiations, apart from the use of the Gibraltar Airport?

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

Chief Minister (Hon. F R Picardo): Madam Speaker, I will answer with Question 773.

Clerk: Question 773. The Hon. the Leader of the Opposition.

675

Hon. Dr K Azopardi: Madam Speaker, will the Chief Minister update the House on the latest round of talks towards a possible treaty for a new relationship for Gibraltar with the European Union?

680 **Hon. Chief Minister:** Answer, the Hon. the Chief Minister.

Hon. Chief Minister: Madam Speaker, the latest official round of treaty negotiations took place in London last week. We continue, alongside the United Kingdom, to work with colleagues in the EU and Spain to seek to finalise all outstanding issues as soon as possible. The return of the same governments in Spain and Gibraltar has enabled work to start again from where it was left off, and with a very positive outlook that seeks technical and practical solutions that avoid any of the relevant parties having to cede on fundamentals.

In respect of the detail being discussed in the negotiation, the hon. Member will understand that I am unable to publicise any of the detail being discussed, as to do so will undoubtedly prejudice our position. I would, however, add that we are, of course, taking matters beyond the New Year's Eve Agreement, as that was a framework and not the treaty itself, although it did mention the possibility, if not the necessity, of an agreement on the Airport, in clause 17. That is, therefore, not entirely new. Additionally, by clause 24 there is an option to address other areas of mutual interest.

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Hon. Dr K Azopardi: Madam Speaker, the hon. Member has talked about the formal round in London, and I think it was made public today that there were discussions at a different level – less formal, perhaps – in Madrid yesterday. Can the Chief Minister explain to us the context of that, and whether those were technical talks of a different nature?

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Hon. Chief Minister: Madam Speaker, it was not made public today, it was made public yesterday because there was a government press release yesterday saying that the Hon. the Deputy Chief Minister and I were in Madrid. Those discussions are not between the European Commission and the United Kingdom. They are between officials in the United Kingdom, Gibraltar and Spain, trying to address issues of principle rather than issues relating to treaty negotiations, which are between the UK and the EU.

705

Hon. Dr K Azopardi: Madam Speaker, on Question 772, the hon. Member says he does not want to talk about the detail of what is being discussed, so as not to prejudice the position in the talks, and of course I would not want him to prejudice the position of Gibraltar in the talks. However, it appears that his caution about not talking about what should or should not be part of the discussions is not shared by other participants, because the Spanish Foreign Minister has been quite open about his aspirations, about including the Airport as part of the ambit of the New Year's Eve Agreement. Is the Government prepared to contemplate an agreement that does include terms in relation to enhanced use of the Airport?

715

720 **Hon. Chief Minister:** Madam Speaker, I do not think that it is fair that the hon. Gentleman should say that he is hearing more from the Spanish Foreign Minister than he is from us. We have confirmed on a number of occasions that we are having discussions in relation to the Airport. We have not confirmed the detail of that. Indeed, he will also have heard it from James Cleverly, he has heard it from Fabian Picardo and he has heard it from David Steel. So I do not think it is only Jose Manuel Alvarez who has said that we are trying to determine whether it is possible to reach an arrangement in respect of the opening of Gibraltar Airport to EU flights, even though we have left the European Union.

725 **Hon. Dr K Azopardi:** May I ask him to comment on timescale, which I appreciate may be a thorny subject, but there is an expectation and a desire for news on this issue, and, indeed, senior people have been commenting on timescales, not least His Excellency the Governor when he expressed the hope that there would be some kind of breakthrough by Christmas. Given that we are a few days away from that seasonal break, what can he say about the likelihood of a breakthrough in the next few months, especially given the prospective dissolution of the European Parliament, the prospect of UK elections, and so on?

735 **Hon. Chief Minister:** Madam Speaker, first of all, let me just go back a moment to his earlier supplementary and remind him, which I did not in my response, that clause 17 of the New Year's Eve Agreement specifically talks about air transport, so we told the world on 31st December 2020 that we were looking at the Airport.

740 Hope springs eternal. I have confirmed on television and, I think, in the printed media in Gibraltar, that I, too, very much would wish to see an agreement as soon as possible. I wished to see an agreement before last Christmas, and I would like to see an agreement before this Christmas. I would *like* to see an agreement, but what I *want* to do is the *right* agreement. I do not care whether I do it on 25th December in the morning, or on 30th June before the European election happens, or whatever date it may be, as long as it is the right agreement for Gibraltar.

745 As I have told the hon. Gentleman consistently in the lifetime, already, of this Parliament and in the lifetime of the previous Parliament, what I am not going to do is to set up a clock that will tick against us in the negotiation. I am not going to say if it is not done by X, it cannot be done, because that is a rope that will start to cut at our throat. Therefore, I am not going to be drawn on timescales; I am going to be drawn only on the substance, and when the substance is right, that is when we will do the agreement.

750 The hon. Gentleman says there is a desire for news and a desire to know. No one has more of a desire to give all the information and to explain why we think that the treaty we may have the opportunity of laying before the people of Gibraltar is safe, secure and beneficial for the people of Gibraltar than the Deputy Chief Minister and me, and, I am sure, all my Cabinet colleagues. However, we are not going to be pushed in the direction of making any announcement if the time is not right.

755 I would ask the hon. Gentleman, despite what he has elegantly termed the curiosity that there is, not to permit curiosity to allow the Gibraltar cat to be caught. We have to ensure that we play with a straight bat. We continue to be very optimistic that we can get there, but we do not want to say more at this stage and we do not want to be drawn on timescales, for good reason, and if he were sitting where I am sitting, he would do the same thing.

760 **Hon. Dr K Azopardi:** The Chief Minister knows that we ask these questions because they are questions of public interest, but he knows that we do, beyond all this, give him sufficient political space to conduct these negotiations.

765 Finally on this question, when he talks about the possibility of an agreement, are we still talking about an agreement of principles and that what would be announced are those principles but not the treaty itself, because that will still require work beyond those principles? In other words, is the negotiation still about the unblockage of principles?

770 **Hon. Chief Minister:** Madam Speaker, we are talking about a negotiation for a treaty between
the United Kingdom and the European Union which is being conducted between the United
Kingdom and Gibraltar and the European Union. As the hon. Gentleman knows and I have told
him in this House, and, I think, said in the context of my earlier answer, there is also a negotiation
going on between the United Kingdom, Gibraltar and Spain on other issues which were not
resolved in the New Year's Eve Agreement, which we would also like to see resolved and which
775 may then also make their way into the treaty negotiations. So this is continuing at many levels on
many planes, and we hope to get all of them to align in time to announce the treaty in time. It
may be that we will be able to make announcements about some parts of arrangements or
agreements being done and not about others at a particular stage, or we may be able to announce
everything at the same time.

780 I do not want to be drawn on anything which can be turned into something that I then have to
deliver against, because if I have to deliver against something, in particular a timescale or a
principle, then the other side will know that they have got me on that timescale because I have to
deliver against it. That is why it is not in Gibraltar's interest that we say more or set ourselves up
against a clock that can work against us.

785

Madam Speaker: All right, let's move on.

Questions for Written Answer

Clerk: Answers to Written Questions.

790 **Hon. Chief Minister (Hon. F R Picardo):** Madam Speaker, I have the honour to table the
answers to Written Questions W60/2023 to W68/2023.

Order of the Day

GOVERNMENT MOTION

Social Security (Open Long-Term Benefits Scheme) (Amendment of Benefits) Order 2023 – Approved

Clerk: (ix) The Order of the Day. Government motion – the Hon. the Chief Minister.

795 **Chief Minister (Hon. F R Picardo):** Madam Speaker, I have the honour to move the following
resolution:

*That this House approve by Resolution, pursuant to section 46 of the Social Security (Open Long
Term Benefits Scheme) Act 1997, the making of the Social Security (Open Long-Term Benefits
Scheme) (Amendment of Benefits) Order 2023.*

As the House is aware, this is a motion that has to come before it annually. Members will note
that the content of this Order was previously approved by the House in December 2022. However,

it was never subsequently published in the Gazette. The draft Order contains the same substance as the one previously approved by the House, but with a new title and with myself as the signatory Minister for Social Security.

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Madam Speaker, I also beg to move that the House approve by resolution, pursuant to section 46 of the Social Security (Open Long Term Benefits Scheme) Act 1997, the making of the Social Security (Open Long-Term Benefits Scheme) (Amendment of Benefits) Order 2023. This Order seeks to amend the Social Security (Open Long Term Benefits Scheme) Act 1997 by increasing the rates of old age pensions and survivor's benefit by 7% with effect from 1st August 2023, which represents the annual increase.

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In order to persuade the House to do that, I am going to give notice of an amendment to the motion to include those references, which I will pass now. I am sorry I was not able to pass it earlier, but as the House has just heard, I was not in Gibraltar yesterday. This is the written notice of the amendment that I beg to move, which should be circulated to all hon. Members now, and which will include the new wording, which I am happy to speak to when I have that sheet back.

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The amendment would be to substitute the motion as it is with the following words:

That this House approve by Resolution, pursuant to section 46 of the Social Security (Open Long Term Benefits Scheme) Act 1997, the making of the Social Security (Open Long-Term Benefits Scheme) (Amendment of Benefits) Order 2022 and the Social Security Social Security (Open Long-Term Benefits Scheme) (Amendment of Benefits) Order 2023.

I beg to move that amendment, Madam Speaker, and will circulate it now.

815

Madam Speaker: I now propose to move the question in terms of the amendment moved by the Hon. the Chief Minister. *(Interjection)* You have not seen it? I think it is coming to you.

I am now going to propose the question in terms of the amendment moved by the Hon. the Chief Minister.

820

Hon. R M Clinton: Madam Speaker, I am not sure if we can speak to the amendment.

Madam Speaker: What is before us now is the amendment as moved by the Hon. the Chief Minister, and then, after that, we will move on to the final motion, as amended by ... You can speak to the amendment now, yes.

825

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

I recognise what the Chief Minister has said. I am not sure if this amendment to the motion will cure the omission, because the motion was already passed by this House in December 2022, so there already is a motion passed by the House approving that the Open Long Term Benefits Scheme should be amended. I have the *Hansard* of 22nd December 2022 in which the motion was carried. All that has not happened is that the Act itself has not been amended by way of Gazette, so I am not sure if adding another motion will cure the omission of the gazetting and the amendment of the Act.

830

It is important because the wording of the Gazette that was attached to the original motion by the Chief Minister makes reference to amending section 2(2), which specifically references section 22(a) of the Act, substituting one number for another, and if we leave this as it is now, the substitution will not work because that number does not exist in the Act, as it assumes there has been this 7.6% increase already.

835

I do not know whether the correct way to do it is to gazette the missing piece of legislation in relation to 2022 and proceed with this motion on the basis that the law will be gazetted. I would be interested in the Chief Minister's thinking on this because I am not sure that effectively passing the motion twice will cure the problem in respect of last year.

840

845 **Hon. Chief Minister:** Madam Speaker, the Government's lawyers' advice is contrary to what the hon. Gentleman has suggested.

Madam Speaker: Is there anything else you wish to say, any of the hon. Members on this side, on the amendment?

I now put the question in terms of the amendment moved by the Hon. the Chief Minister.
850 Those in favour? (**Members:** Aye.) Those against? Carried.

What the House has before it now, as I understand it, is the original motion as amended. Does any hon. Member wish to speak on the motion as amended?

855 **Hon. R M Clinton:** Thank you, Madam Speaker. As we have already alluded to, the omission of the amendment in respect of last year's motion has meant that the Act was never updated. For the benefit of the House, I would normally compare the proposed schedule of the new pension numbers with the announcement the Chief Minister made in his Budget speech in 2023, which is that they would go up by 7%, and I could then do that calculation and give the House some extra assurance that the numbers match in terms of the percentage increase that was envisaged.

860 Unfortunately, because of this omission, I have been unable to perform that task, so I cannot do that comparison in terms of the increase, but that is not to say that this side of the House was not in favour of the principle of it. However, given the anomaly that has arisen, I cannot actually confirm that the numbers on the schedule, the proposed gazette that was attached to the original motion, actually represents a 7% increase as envisaged by the Chief Minister in his Budget address.

865 Other than that, Madam Speaker, I will accept the Government's lawyers' assurances that this double motion, as it were, will cure the deficiency, and I have nothing further to add. Thank you.

Madam Speaker: Does any other hon. Member wish to speak?

I now put the question – Sorry.
870

Hon. Chief Minister: Call on the mover to reply.

Madam Speaker: Yes, I will get there.

875 **Hon. Chief Minister:** And in reply, Madam Speaker, all I would say to the hon. Gentleman is that government lawyers have given him no assurances whatsoever. I have just reflected the advice that they have given us.

880 **Madam Speaker:** I now put the question in the terms of the motion proposed, as amended by the Hon. Chief Minister. Those in favour? (**Members:** Aye.) Those against? Carried.

Adjournment

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

Well, another election year over, a new Speaker and new Members of the House. It is now incumbent on me to move the adjournment at the end of another calendar year.

885 Before I do, I am delighted to be able to confirm that the individuals at NATS we were discussing earlier have confirmed to the Government that Santa Flight 001 is cleared to land on the easterly runway on Gibraltar. Meteorological advice is positive on visibility and winds, and the children of Gibraltar will be delighted to hear that the enhanced use of the Airport for the arrival of Father Christmas is a now a reality: I can announce that agreement with Father Christmas.

Other than that, Madam Speaker, I move that the House should now adjourn *sine die*.

890 **Madam Speaker:** I now propose the question, which is that this House should now adjourn *sine die*.

I now put the question, which is that this House should now adjourn *sine die*. Those in favour? **(Members: Aye.)** Those against? Passed.

This House will now adjourn *sine die*.

The House adjourned at 4.15 p.m.