



PROCEEDINGS OF THE GIBRALTAR PARLIAMENT

AFTERNOON SESSION: 3.00 p.m. – 5.44 p.m.

Gibraltar, Tuesday, 24th June 2025

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The Gibraltar Parliament

The Parliament met at 3.00 p.m.

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

[CLERK TO THE PARLIAMENT: P A Borge McCarthy Esq *in attendance*]

Questions for Oral Answer

INWARD INVESTMENT AND THE SAVINGS BANK

Q581/2025

**Mobile network –
Lack of resilience**

Clerk: Meeting of Parliament, Tuesday, 24th June 2025.
Answers to Oral Questions continued.

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Madam Speaker: Before we start, just a thank you to the Hon. Mrs Ladislaus for having moved from her usual place, but we are having problems with the microphone. So, thank you.

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Clerk: Questions to the Hon. Minister for Inward Investment and the Savings Bank.
Question 581, the Hon. C Sacarello.

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Hon. C Sacarello: Good afternoon.
Is the Minister concerned with the lack of resilience displayed in our mobile networks which became super-saturated during the general power cut on the 8th April 2025?

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

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Minister for Inward Investment and the Gibraltar Savings Bank (Hon. Sir J J Bossano): Madam Speaker, I am not concerned, because I have been advised by the company that the position is the following. During the Gibraltar-wide power outage, 23 out of 24 MAST sites remained operational. Between 1730 and 1900 hours, one MAST site serving the town centre became non-operational due to an initial power surge that overwhelmed its protection and backup systems. The investment in resilient infrastructure is evident from the network's strong performance under these challenging conditions.

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Hon. C Sacarello: Madam Speaker, I thank the Hon. Minister for his reply. Could the Hon. Minister confirm, then, if the MAST in the town area was the sole reason behind the lack of resilience in the network, and that only people in that area were affected by it?

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Hon. Sir J J Bossano: Madam Speaker, that is the information that I have been provided with, yes.

Hon. C Sacarello: Thank you. And would the Hon. Minister be able to confirm if the reason behind the failure of that particular signal tower has been resolved, and will it occur again in the future?

Madam Speaker: “Will it occur again in the future” is quite hypothetical, by any stretch.

Hon. C Sacarello: I shall rephrase that. In that case, has the resilience issue been sorted?

Hon. Sir J J Bossano: Well, Madam Speaker, the issue clearly has been addressed once it has been identified that this one failed and all the others did not fail. But unless and until another occasion occurs, we cannot be 100% sure that this next time round it will be 100% safe instead of 99%, as happened on this occasion.

Hon. C Sacarello: And finally, just for clarification's sake, was the failure due to the surge in power as opposed to the surge in demands in people using it?

Hon. Sir J J Bossano: My understanding was a surge in power, not in demand.

Madam Speaker: Next question.

Q582-85/2025

Rooke Residential Home –

Certificate of fitness; Amount lent by the Savings Bank; Companies in receipt of payments; Amounts outstanding

Q586-88/2025

Pre War Government Flats –

Flats refurbished from Gibraltar Savings Bank funds; Level of funding by the Gibraltar Savings Bank; Companies receiving funding from the Gibraltar Savings Bank in connection with refurbishments

Clerk: Question 582, the Hon. D J Bossino.

Hon. D J Bossino: Has the building known as the Rooke Residential Home been issued with the certificates of fitness, and if so, when?

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

Minister for Inward Investment and the Gibraltar Savings Bank (Hon. Sir J J Bossano): Madam Speaker, I will answer this question with Questions 583 to 588.

Clerk: Question 583, the Hon. D J Bossino.

Hon. D J Bossino: What amount has been lent by the Savings Bank in respect of the Rooke Residential Home project to date?

Clerk: Question 584, the Hon. D J Bossino.

Hon. D J Bossino: Please provide the names of the companies which have received payments in connection with the Rooke Residential Home project to date, with details of the services provided and amounts received.

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Clerk: Question 585, the Hon. D J Bossino.

Hon. D J Bossino: Please provide details of the amounts outstanding to be paid in connection with the Rooke Residential Home project to date, with details of the services provided.

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Clerk: Question 586, the Hon. D J Bossino.

Hon. D J Bossino: Which pre-war Government flats are being refurbished from funds from the Gibraltar Savings Bank?

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Clerk: Question 587, the Hon. D J Bossino.

Hon. D J Bossino: What level of funding is being provided by the Gibraltar Savings Bank to refurbish pre-war Government flats?

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Clerk: Question 588, the Hon. D J Bossino.

Hon. D J Bossino: Which company is receiving funding from the Gibraltar Savings Bank in connection with the refurbishment of pre-war Government flats?

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

Minister for Inward Investment and the Gibraltar Savings Bank (Hon. Sir J J Bossano): Madam Speaker, I understand the Certificate of Fitness for the Rooke development has not yet been requested. The current amount invested in loan notes for the Rooke project is £35 million. The detailed information requested in respect of payments and use of subcontractors by the main contractors is commercially confidential. Currently, flats at Hargraves Court are being refurbished with funding provided by the Gibraltar Savings Bank. The Gibraltar Savings Bank has invested £1 million in loan notes issued by Community Home Ownership, with the funds being used for the refurbishment of pre-war flats.

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Hon. D J Bossino: It is actually quite a challenge trying to allocate the answers which the hon. the Gentleman the Minister provides in respect of my bunched-up question, in respect of which the only common denominator is the questioner, not the subject matter. But be that as it may, in relation to the first question, which related to the Certificate of Fitness, is the Hon. the Minister able to expand further? I think he said that the Certificate had not been sought, and presumably one can deduce from that, therefore, that the Certificate has not been issued, which is the question as put. Is he able to provide information as to why that is the case, why it has not been sought yet?

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Hon. Sir J J Bossano: My understanding is that there is still some equipment that has to be tested, which has come from Spain, and a lot of the stuff that has come from Spain has been made to measure for this development. It is not something that has been bought off the shelf. Therefore, before you request the fitness, you have to have the people that supplied it—this is what I am told—coming and testing it and certifying that it passes all the tests. That is then when you invite the local experts to come and do the testing themselves. So they are at that stage. It is likely to be happening quite soon, but I have not got a date.

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Hon. D J Bossino: What equipment is the Hon. Minister referring to?

Hon. Sir J J Bossano: I believe the equipment is some pumping stations, which support what happens automatically if there is an incident, and it has to be tested for the whole of the block in one go. The equipment is installed, but until the people who installed it and manufactured it come and test it, it cannot proceed any further.

Hon. D J Bossino: Is the testing in respect of fire safety? Because we have had an answer from the Minister for Sport, Civil Contingencies and Industrial Relations to my hon. Learned Friend Mrs Ladislaus only yesterday afternoon, in terms that the fire service—in effect, the safety departments—will only issue, and I quote, “no objections to the issuing of a Certificate of Fitness once they are satisfied that all their requirements have been met.” Are we talking about the same thing? Is it a fire safety issue, or is the Hon. Minister referring to something else?

Hon. Sir J J Bossano: I do not have enough knowledge about this to be able to give him an honest answer. All I can tell him is, when I have asked, that is the explanation I have received, and that is what I am transmitting.

Hon. D J Bossino: And do I take it from both the substance and the manner in which the Hon. the Minister has replied to this particular question, that he has no concerns that the Certificate of Fitness will in fact issue, and that therefore it is possible that the project can come to its natural conclusion? Does he have any concerns in relation to that?

Hon. Sir J J Bossano: No, I have no concerns, and there is no reason why I should have.

Madam Speaker: Supplementary on any other of the questions?

Hon. D J Bossino: I suspect from that, Madam Speaker, that you are asking me to move on from Question 582.

Madam Speaker: We have had four on 582, so... I am not going to rise to that challenge. The hon. Member knows there is not a specific limit. It is about exercising my discretion to manage the number of supplementaries per question.

Hon. D J Bossino: And I am simply asking for clarification as to where we were going in relation to the number four.

Madam Speaker: The answers have been grouped, so if the hon. Member wants to ask questions generically on all of those, I will allow that. I simply ask to move on because the hon. Member began by identifying Question 582 as the source of his supplementaries.

Hon. D J Bossino: I am grateful to the Speaker in relation to that. In respect of Question 583, which was predicated or simply asked how much had been lent by the Savings Bank in respect of the Rooke residential home, the answer given by the Hon. Minister was a figure of £35 million. How does that figure tally—and I would ask him to provide an explanation if he may—to the answer that he gave on the 14th of March 2024, where he was referring to a figure in terms of expenditure of £38 million, with an indication, in fact, if I recall from reading the Hansard, and I do recall from asking the questions at the time, that he expected that the figure would increase because there was some information which at that stage in relation to expenses had not yet reached him.

Hon. Sir J J Bossano: Because this is the amount that is outstanding at the moment.

175 **Hon. D J Bossino:** So does one take it from that, that certain amounts have been repaid in the loan? And I shall ask him to—because I do not want to breach the ruling that we are only meant to ask one question—so I shall ask him to confirm that before I go into my next question.

180 **Hon. Sir J J Bossano:** That is correct Madam Speaker.

Hon. D J Bossino: Is the Hon. Minister able to state how much has been repaid?

185 **Hon. Sir J J Bossano:** Well, I have not got that figure with me. The figure that I have got is the amount that is pending. There is no expectation that they will be asking for any more, so this figure can only move in one direction—down.

190 **Hon. D J Bossino:** The Hon. Minister must surely appreciate—he is a man of more experience than I certainly have in this Chamber—where I am trying to arrive at. And I would ask him please to state as candidly as he is able to, because he says he does not have a specific figure, but is he able to give at least a roundabout figure of the total amounts which have been expended on this project, which would have been, one assumes, financed through the Savings Bank?

195 **Hon. Sir J J Bossano:** Well, the amount that has been financed by the Savings Bank at the moment is the £35 million. Even if they were to spend £900 million, it would not be financed by the Savings Bank. So, I do not answer for what the owner of the Rooke site does. I answer for the connection between the Savings Bank and the customer whose loan notes the Bank has bought. I mean, you know, hypothetically, they could be funding from another source, as well as from the Savings Bank. I am not saying it is happening, I am saying hypothetically.

200 **Hon. D J Bossino:** Yes, but maybe one does not understand these things, and look, I am more than willing to accept that. The Hon. Minister, again, has a lot of experience in this, and he has certainly one further advantage over me in that he has all the facts and information available to him, and I do not. But—and I hope I am not repeating the question—is he able to at least say how much, to put it in simple terms, has flowed from the Savings Bank to this particular project to date? From when it started to date, how much?

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210 **Hon. Sir J J Bossano:** I have told him that the funding at the moment that has been provided is £35 million, and that if it was higher before, and it is lower now, it is self-evident, without him having to ask me, that it has started being repaid. Therefore, this is the money that the Savings Bank is owed on the project, and the project is not a project that is funded by the Government, owned by the Government, or anything else, as he knows, because that is what I have been saying in Parliament since the first day. So I am not here to provide information about something for which I am not responsible.

215 **Madam Speaker:** Anything else on Question 583?

Hon. D J Bossino: Well, I am being advised, but I think I am getting to the same place. And I think he knows that I am getting to the same place, but he is wishing not to answer the question. I have to put the preamble, I am afraid, with as much respect as possible in those terms. What is the highest level of lending which has been provided—therefore emanated—from the Savings Bank in respect of this particular project? I do not know, I am not sure whether we have asked that question before, I do not know from recollection whether we have—well, I think we do have the entity which is the borrower in this, I do not have it in front of me now—or the whole chain, a jungle, no doubt. But he knows what I am driving at. What is the highest?

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225 **Hon. Sir J J Bossano:** He already knows, because he has just quoted it, that it was £38 million at one time, so that was the highest level.

Madam Speaker: Any other supplementaries on the next questions?

230 **Hon. D J Bossino:** So this would be Question 584, and then try and analyse the answers he has given in respect of the following questions with a bit more time. When the Hon. Minister says in response to that particular question that, in effect, he hides behind the often-used defence mechanism by Members opposite—that this is information which is commercially sensitive—and this is in respect of the amounts, the names of the companies which have received payments in connection with this particular project, is he able to say at what point in time that information will
235 stop being sensitive in that respect? Or is it always going to be sensitive? Is that his position? And therefore it obviates the need for me or anybody else on this side of the House to ask questions in relation to that again, because he will not be providing that information—and he is already nodding.

240 **Hon. Sir J J Bossano:** It is information to which he is not entitled because he happens to be in this House. That is to say, Madam Speaker, the Savings Bank invests and supports projects. The Gibraltar International Bank lends people money. If the concept of the hon. Member is that, if a state-owned entity finances something, he then is entitled to know not just how much has been provided, but what they are spending it on, how much each contractor has in subcontractors...

245 Look, they do not ask those questions in the Government projects, which are 100 per cent funded from public money. Why does he think he is entitled to ask of a private building, with private contractors and private subcontractors—which I have told him before are many of the Spanish companies that have been producing the elements that have put the building together—who they are, what they were paying?

250 I mean, this is the kind of information that is not given to anybody in any Parliament or made public, and the only people who are entitled to make it public are the people that have used the money to pay for things, if they choose to make it public. But there is no obligation for me to go around asking people who are funded by the Savings Bank, any more than there would be for the International Bank, or for the £200 million in loan notes, or for the six companies in the United
255 Kingdom. What are they using the £200 million for?

Hon. D J Bossino: We do not fully share the answer that the Hon. the Minister has provided. We think that we are very much entitled to ask questions in relation to this particular topic because, very briefly, this is money which is being used from the Gibraltar Savings Bank, in respect
260 of which there are many taxpayers who have invested their pensions in all of that. And we want to understand, because the information that we are getting is that there are a number—I shall not even say many—but that there are a number of companies which are not being paid. Therefore, this is a matter, in our view, of public interest, in respect of which the Hon. Minister ought to be responding in this House, and not to choose whether, in respect of one issue, he
265 responds, and in respect of another, he does not respond. Because he could take the attitude and the view that he is not going to answer any questions in relation to the Savings Bank, because it is investing in a charity and all the rest of it.

But, having said that, can I ask him this—because I took a very quick note when he rattled through his bunched-up answers in respect of my questions—that the same response applies in
270 respect of Question 585, which is that he provides details of the amount outstanding to be paid in connection with this particular project. Is that the position, and is that going to be the position going forward?

Hon. Sir J J Bossano: The fact that there are people in the Savings Bank that are putting their
275 money there—which clearly is the thing that he is concerned about in order to concern them—is

not one iota different if I tell him the name of a subcontractor, or I do not tell him the name of a subcontractor. That will have no effect on the money in the Savings Bank.

Secondly, if there are people who have not been paid by a contractor, then they have not been paid not by me, but by the company, because the company must have some dispute with them about what they have provided, or the price they have charged, or whatever. And if those people have got money that they are owed, which they are not being paid for, I am sure they have been given a reason why they have not been paid.

For example, I know that some of the things were designed, which the person that designed it got wrong, and had to be removed, and had to be done again. And that is one specific thing that I know—that the company is saying to that particular supplier, “I am not paying you twice for this thing because you got it wrong the first time, and it is your fault.”

But this is the kind of thing—this is not what I am here for. I happen to know that one because somebody told me about a particular area where a change had to be introduced in the way that something was put in, because what was originally put in was put in on the basis that was required. The people who took that decision were wrong, and apparently there is a dispute there that they expect to be paid for what they did wrong, and for what it costs to be put right. And the company is saying that, since the cost of replacing what was originally done was their fault, they are not paying.

This is not a matter that has anything to do with the fact that the funding is from the Savings Bank, or from the Bank of England, or from NatWest. This is something that eventually—that dispute—will be decided by somebody. And maybe he can make a few bob by taking the side of the guy that says we are wrong, because that would be coincidental with his political beliefs.

Hon. D J Bossino: I am so happy for the hon. Gentleman, because he is as sprightly and as energetic as ever—and I mean that. We even had a reference to a word that he used to use in the 1980s—“one iota.” I mean, that is classic Bossano. And the way that he has answered the question, again, is also classic of the Hon. Minister. At one point I would have said that I am confused, and he is obfuscating, but it is very clear what he is doing. It is very clear—which is precisely to confuse and obfuscate, so that people do not understand whether they are coming or going.

But anyway, be that as it may, moving on to the pre-war flats questions—I am not going to refer to the particular number, because it is just going to take a bit of time—but he bunched them all together. When the Hon. Minister refers to the £1 million in loan notes, is that what he referred to as the level of funding at present in being “very modest” in his letter to the Gibraltar Savings Bank investors and holders? Are we talking about that amount, as he described—I think, subject to his confirmation—as being very modest?

Hon. Sir J J Bossano: Yes, that is what I very modestly described as very modest, because we are talking about £1 million out of £1.9 billion. So perhaps I should have said “minuscule” instead of “very modest.”

Hon. D J Bossino: It is all relative in life, I suppose. He talks about me getting a bob or two—I would not mind a million, to be honest, in my bank account. Is it the case that—is this going to be forming part of a wider project? So, is the Hon. Minister now able to provide information as to whether he has plans in respect of pre-war flats, in connection with which he wants to spend—well, the Savings Bank will be spending—more money and providing further loans? Is he able to provide any further information in relation to it?

Hon. Sir J J Bossano: There are pre-war flats that have been empty for 20 years or more, and they are not repairable at reasonable cost in terms of the Government spending a lot of money repairing something which then can only be rented at a very low price. Because, of course, pre-war flats are rented at about 50% of the price of a post-war flat. So a pre-war flat would probably

be rented for about £45 a month or £50 a month. And something that costs many thousands of pounds to put right—that money would never be recoverable.

330 So, in the past, many of those properties have been put on the market, and what has happened, in fact, is that mainly people from outside Gibraltar have, sort of, basically paid for the land rather than for the building. And therefore, what has then happened is that these have entered the private sector free market, where, for example, the latest figure that I have seen for a 20 square metre bedsitter is £169,000—which is over £8,000 a square metre—and which is out of reach of many ordinary workers who earn £30,000 or £40,000 or £20,000. That kind of money they cannot afford.

335 So, I believe, in conjunction with the Minister for Housing, that we could make better use—instead of finishing up with money going to people from outside Gibraltar and making some people very wealthy and aggravating the housing problem—that we came up with this idea: that if there is a non-profit-making company that will produce homes for people, for them to buy at a more attractive price, at a more competitive price, then that is what we are going to be doing with as many derelict buildings as possible. So this is really the starting point.

340 The reality then is that this concept is not the same as what has been done so far with the 50/50s, where sooner or later they finally reach a point when they then go into the private sector, and then they go into the level of open market, and then again they are lost to people on smaller incomes.

345 So the idea is that these flats, once bought from the company, can only be sold back to the company. There will be no period of time after which it will become a free property to be sold to the highest bidder. It will always remain controlled. And therefore, the condition for buying one of these is that the person that buys the property either releases an existing Government-rented property, which can go to somebody else on the waiting list, or is a person on the waiting list that will come off the waiting list on the purchase of these properties.

350 And therefore, it is something that has not been tried before. It is, at this stage, experimental in the sense that we do not know how much demand there is going to be for this. But I am hoping to be able to supply perhaps as much as between 50 and 100. At the moment, with the £1 million that we have made available, probably we are talking about between seven or eight apartments being produced. I hope that satisfies his appetite.

Hon. D J Bossino: Well, it is a very long reply and it almost got there. It almost got there in terms of level of satisfaction. But this is, as I understand it—and I would ask the Hon. Minister to confirm or otherwise my understanding of it—this is something new. It is neither rent and repair, it is neither home ownership, it is not Government rental. From what I can detect from the answer, the closest thing that I can see which relates to this are the pensioner flats at Laguna. That is the closest—I am not saying it is exactly the same—that is, I think, the closest thing.

365 So, no—I mean, I am asked by the Opposition whether this is rent. It is not. This is to be offered for purchase. Now, given that it is something new, and given—whilst I understand what the Hon. Minister says—that it is almost on an experimental basis, which one can have a view as to whether that is satisfactory or not, at what stage, given further that there is already money on the table and that there are a specific number of flats which are going to be made available—there is going to be a lot of public interest—so, at what stage is the Government able to issue and publish specifically what criteria one needs to satisfy in order to accede and participate in this particular project? I will leave it there. I have one further question.

370 **Hon. Sir J J Bossano:** The Government will not be involved in selling this. The Government—that is, the Savings Bank—is providing Gibraltar Community Home Ownership with funding to do things with the conditions that I have explained, which the Government supports, because the funding that we provide from the Savings Bank is for things that are in the public interest in Gibraltar, in terms of infrastructure or providing low-cost housing. And this is a scheme of low-cost housing.

380 So, the company will sell at a price that covers their costs and a minimal profit, and the servicing and repayment of the funding from the Savings Bank—the flats—and it will be put on a estate agency webpage, where the owner of a webpage, as a way of supporting what is being done, has offered to the company to put these properties there at no cost to the company.

385 Therefore, people will be able to apply, provided they meet the criteria that they either have got a Government house that they want to release, or that they have got a place on the waiting list. And that is what will happen, and we will see how much demand there is for it. I mean, we do not know really whether this is something that is going to find thousands of people wanting it, or dozens of people wanting it, until we test the market. So clearly, you know, I believe that there will be a demand, but at the moment I do not know until it is tested. So, that is the position.

390 **Hon. D J Bossino:** This is the fundamental difficulty that we have on this side of the House, and we always end up with our jaws dropping when we hear and listen to what the Hon. Minister says in relation to these. You know, we have had this aggravation in the previous Parliaments, where there is a clear blurring between the private sector and the public sector—what the Government does. You know, it is just difficult to follow, in the sense that—because, I do not know—the way that we think about these things, these things ought to be either properly done by the private sector or properly done by the Government and the state and the public sector.

395 But this is this mishmash of the Savings Bank providing lending to a charity for the public good, in respect of which the Minister says that he has—the Government has—conditions which he wants to impose. But when I ask specifically—when I ask specifically in a good-intentioned way, because I agree with him, given that I also have the housing portfolio—that there is a lot of demand for housing, and I think if people are listening and this is purported, that that demand—I think he will find—would be there.

405 **Madam Speaker:** I would ask the hon. Member for the question.

Hon. D J Bossino: Why is it—and surely he would agree with me—that the Government itself, he himself, who has these different roles—Savings Bank, Government—not issue, publish a statement setting out very simply, as I said before, the criteria that one needs to meet to benefit, so that one's social need, which is housing—which is such an important housing need—is properly satisfied?

415 **Hon. Sir J J Bossano:** Well, Madam Speaker, I know and I hear what he says, and I do not agree with him. And he needs to understand that I do not have to agree with him because that is what he thinks. I think the company will do what I have said they will do, and I have said that the conditions that the company will make are the conditions that benefit the demand for rented houses. Because the whole idea is that, instead of these buildings finishing in the open market and therefore removing property from the stock that is available to ordinary working people, what we are trying to do is—with something that has not been tried before—to find a way of doing it, and not doing it as the Government, but doing it independently.

420 I do not know why he is so shocked by this idea, because consistently, when they were in Government, they used to tell us in this Parliament from the Government benches that the problem was that when the Government did things, they were overcharged because people put higher prices to the Government in the private sector. And therefore, it was better to outsource and have somebody running things for the Government, because even though they paid somebody to do it, it would still be better value for money.

425 So, you know, it was a convincing argument when I was there, and I thought, well, look, if people are overcharging, it is a pity they are not able to stop them overcharging. But given that most of the people who were there in the Government were in business, and they are saying they are what—the business people overcharge the Government—they must know what they are

talking about. And if the way of preventing that is by using an intermediary, then fine, there is nothing wrong with that.

But of course, I am here to provide information. I am not here to seek his approval. So, if he does not approve of what I am doing, or he does not like the way I am doing it, okay—well, we beg to differ, and that is it. But I am giving him, in fact, the information that he says I should be making public. Well, I make it public by telling him what it is that the company is going to do.

The company is going to say: if you are interested in this property, people will want to see—they will want to look and see if it is value for money. And in many instances, these houses are in very inaccessible places to get to, because it is the old part of the town that has been neglected for so many years. So that may be something that makes them less attractive. But I think people who have got more limited means will be glad of an opportunity of being able to enter the property market at a much lower level than is possible at the moment. And this will be coming in at prices less than 50/50.

Madam Speaker: I am going to allow—so that you know, you can plan—I am going to allow two more supplementaries, so you can decide amongst yourselves who wants to ask them. The Hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Hon. Dr K Azopardi: Yes, thank you, Madam Speaker. And my hon. Colleague is going to go after me. But can I just ask the hon. Member to see if I have understood it? I think one of the things that he said was that, as part of the controls, whoever is interested in these properties from the company would then—when you buy it—would then need to... One of the conditions is that you then have to—you cannot then just do whatever you want with this property. You cannot then sell it as a property at triple the price.

And he has just said, under the 50/50 kind of market price—let us say, for example, let us put a price on it—that you buy a property for £200,000, and in five years' time your family is much bigger, so you aspire to buy somewhere else. You have got to sell back to the company. That is the only available option. How is that going to work in terms of price. Is it that you are only going to be able to sell back to the company at the price that you bought it, or at an elevated price—index-linked or something like that? How is that going to work?

Hon. Sir J J Bossano: The formula is partly to protect the company. It will be inflation-linked, unless inflation is very high. If we enter a period like we had some years ago of eight or nine or ten percent inflation, then one would find, potentially, that inflation after several years actually was more than the market value.

So, it is the lower of the inflation on the original price or the discount to the market value of the original price. Let us suppose, for example, using the example the Hon. Leader of the Opposition put—let us suppose we say, “OK, well, look, this property is now available.” This would be something like a two-bedroom apartment. It would be two hundred thousand pounds, but if it was in the open market, it would be four hundred thousand. So, we are selling it at fifty per cent, right?

So, you have got then somebody that buys it. The reduction on the market price in ten years' time would be fifty per cent of what the market price is in ten years' time, and the inflation in the ten years' time. So, ten years later, you look at the inflation since it was bought at two hundred, and the prices since it was bought at two hundred, and whichever is lower of the two—which I would imagine, unless there is very high inflation, the probability would be that the inflation would be lower. Because at the moment, I think in the last four or five years, the general price index has been rising slower than the property index. So, the property index has been going up much faster.

But the only reason why it is not just inflation is because, if it was only inflation and there was a slump in property values, for example, the company might have a situation where it was obliged by the contract to pay a price and then could not resell it for that price. So, that is why it has got the two—the formula has got two sides.

Madam Speaker: Last supplementary. I know the Hon. Mr Sacarello had a question. I am going to let you argue between you.

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Hon. D J Bossino: Who is going to take it? Well, discuss.

Madam Speaker: Discuss is a better word

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Hon. D J Bossino: What we have just been treated to has just made the case that we are making, which is that we need this information published and set out. It is not that I want him to accept what I am saying—it is actually that it requires a specific paper. I mean, I was looking at the faces of my hon. friends, and it is, you know, an expression of utter confusion. So, he can imagine, you know, what people out there listening to me...

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Madam Speaker: I am going to press the hon. Member for a question.

Hon. D J Bossino: If I may two very specific questions, and I am really, really incisive, and it is going to be really short.

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Madam Speaker: No statements. Question one, two, and we are done.

Hon. D J Bossino: I am really grateful, Madam Speaker, for your indulgence. One is: which address or addresses does the other information refer to when he refers to Hargraves Court? And secondly—and finally, finally—what estate agency, as he described it, is going to be providing, in its webpage—I think he said—some information in relation to this? What is he referring to when he says “by estate agency”?

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Hon. Sir J J Bossano: He is incredibly absurd, and he is also incredibly susceptible to confusion. I am sorry for him—you know, life might be very difficult if he suffers from those two ailments.

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The company is going to produce what I have told him, to assess the market. Who the generous owner of the estate agency is, is not his business. It does not matter who it is. If there are twenty, and one of them has made this offer, why is it a matter of importance that he should know which of the twenty it was? Because if he does not, he is going to be confused and have a sleepless night? Well, I am sorry for him.

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The problem with giving to the hon. Member information—where I think I go beyond the line of duty of what I have to produce—is that, however much I give, they have got an insatiable appetite. The more I give, the more they want. The more detail... You know, this is like trying to understand quantum physics. It is never-ending.

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Madam Speaker: Next question.

Q668-70/2025

Gibraltar Savings Bank –

Gazetting of audited accounts; Maturity date and security given for the Community Elderly Homes Ownership Limited loan; Maturity date and security given for the Community Homes Ownership Limited loan

525

Q671-2/2025

General Sinking Fund –

Balance; Public debt

Clerk: Question 668, the Hon. R M Clinton.

Hon. R M Clinton: Yes, Madam Speaker, I was going to ask the Hon. Minister whether he believed in string theory or not, but anyway...

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When does the Government intend to gazette the audited accounts for the Gibraltar Savings Bank for the year ended 31 March 2024?

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

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Minister for Inward Investment and the Gibraltar Savings Bank (Hon. Sir J J Bossano): Madam Speaker, I will answer with Questions 669 to 672.

Clerk: Question 669, the Hon. R M Clinton.

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Hon. R M Clinton: Can the Government advise the maturity date and security given for the Community Elderly Homes Ownership Limited loan note of £2 million held by the Gibraltar Savings Bank at 31 March 2025?

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Clerk: Question 670, the Hon. R M Clinton.

Hon. R M Clinton: Can the Government advise the maturity date and security given for the Community Homes Ownership Limited loan note of £1 million held by the Gibraltar Savings Bank at 31 March 2025?

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Clerk: Question 671, the Hon. R M Clinton.

Hon. R M Clinton: Can the Government advise the balance on the General Sinking fund on the following date?

555

1 May 2025

Clerk: Question 672, the Hon. R M Clinton.

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Hon. R M Clinton: 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?

1 May 2025

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

Minister for Inward Investment and the Gibraltar Savings Bank (Hon. Sir J J Bossano): Madam Speaker, I refer the hon. Member to the answer to Question 72 of 2024 as regards the Savings Bank accounts being put in the Gazette. In relation to the £2 million loan, this will be repaid on the 24th of March 2026, and the £1 million loan will be repaid on the 24th of February 2026. So, there is no request for any further guarantee because the companies have already confirmed that they have got the money and they will be paying on that date.

The balance on the General Sinking Fund on the requested date is the same as previously stated. The gross public debt and the aggregate debt after the application of the sinking fund to gross debt, cash reserves, and net debt figures on the 1st of May 2025 were:

- Gross debt: £871.2 million
- Aggregate debt: £845.3 million
- Cash reserves: £146.2 million
- Net debt: £699.1 million

Hon. R M Clinton: Madam Speaker, I thank the hon. Gentleman—and also you—bear with me, he has bunched them all up. Madam Speaker, it may be something that may require some clarification as to procedure in this House, but for the hon. Gentleman to refer to potentially a question from far back—and I do not know, Question 74/2024, what it refers to—but it would be useful if the Minister would at least give the answer that he gave at the time, because I do not have the photographic memory that he has. Would he be willing to give us the answer he gave to Question 74/2024?

Madam Speaker: Question 72 of 2024.

Hon. Sir J J Bossano: The similar question was tabled by him, Madam Speaker, in January 2024 for the years 2019 to 2023, and this was the answer that I provided: the Gibraltar Audit Office website now includes GSB accounts for financial year 2022–2023. These were made public by the Principal Auditor when the Government of Gibraltar and all accounts for the financial years 2016–2017 and 2017–2018 were tabled. And then I went on to explain that, when the Principal Auditor produces the audited accounts for the next year, the accounts of the Savings Bank would be put in the Gazette. That was the position then, and it is still the position today.

Hon. R M Clinton: I am grateful to the Minister for refreshing our memory. Can the Minister confirm that he does, in fact, have in his possession the audited accounts for the year ended 31st of March 2024, as is required by the Savings Bank Act?

Hon. Sir J J Bossano: The information in the 2024 accounts of the Savings Bank, I think, was eventually audited by about October last year. It usually takes—after the financial year—about six months from when the books are closed in March.

Hon. R M Clinton: So, Madam Speaker, if I understand correctly, it is the Minister's continued position that, despite having the audited accounts for 31st of March 2024—and the Savings Bank Act actually suggesting they should be gazetted—his position is that he will not gazette them until the audited accounts of that particular year are published. Is that his position? And I would remind him that, given the size—or suggestion—of the deposits in the Savings Bank, there is no logical reason why he should not gazette the audited accounts which he has in his possession.

Hon. Sir J J Bossano: Well, Madam Speaker, that is the position he has taken on this, and I do not know whether it is logical or non-logical, but being logical or non-logical is not relevant. He is asking the question: is this where we are going to do it? It is the same thing that I told him the last time he asked me.

Hon. R M Clinton: Madam Speaker, I shall move on to the next question, which is Question 669. Madam Speaker, if I understood the answer the Minister gave, repayment is effective in January 2026. Now, for this particular entity—and I am happy to be corrected by the Minister—Community Elderly Homes Ownership Limited, I believe this is the one that was going to be doing the pensioner flats at Laguna. In which case—and there is no security given for these notes—and yet he has been given to understand that this will be repaid in January 2026.

But is it, Madam Speaker, that the Minister is telling us that the project is not going to go ahead? Because I cannot see how, in the space of seven months, the entire project can be completed and sold to be able to make repayment of his loan notes. Or is it that there is going to be a different level of funding, and that this is some kind of seed capital that will be replaced by something else? I would be grateful for some clarification.

Hon. Sir J J Bossano: The clarification that he is seeking has nothing to do with the question that he put, because he wanted to know the maturity date and the security. And I am telling him: this is the maturity date that they requested when they asked for the loan notes to be purchased. That is to say, this is the maturity date of the loan note, right?

So, the Savings Bank invested in buying a loan note that matures on a particular date, and he has asked me when that maturity date is and what the security is. The security is only required if there is some doubt about whether they will be able to pay when the maturity date arrives. There is no other reason for needing security.

What happens if they do not repay on the 24th of February 2026? Then the security comes in. They will be repaying the loan note on the date that they promised when they issued them. So, this is not something that is an afterthought. That is to say, they issued loan notes with these dates. And, you know, if it was something that they were issuing for much longer, then I would say to him, in all probability, “Well, look, if they are building something, then the security would be that, if when the thing is finished they do not pay, we will take the property,” which would probably be worth much more in the open market than what we are funding, because we are funding things that are below market prices.

But what I am telling him is that the loan notes have a maturity date. They have confirmed that they will be paying on that maturity date, and they have got the funding to repay the money on that maturity date.

Hon. R M Clinton: Madam Speaker, yes, I understand what the Minister is saying. But nevertheless, there are few entities that will lend any money—let alone £2 million—with no form of security. Now, either—as the Minister said in the past—it is a Government-owned company or Government entities lending money to, and therefore why should he take security from a Government company or something similar?

But in this case, it is, to all intents and purposes—and he will correct me if I am wrong—an entity of which the Government has no equitable interest in the equity of this entity. It is a registered charity with charitable purposes. So, what makes him so confident that he will repay this money on the 1st of January 2026? What form of guarantee does he have?

Hon. Sir J J Bossano: Well, we are dealing with people that we know are serious, honest people. And if he had to pay the Savings Bank next February, and he told me that he will have the money and that he has the money and he will be able to pay—because I respect him and trust him—I would not say, “Well, I need somebody else to be your guarantor because I do not believe in you.” You need security only if there is any doubt about whether the money is going to be paid when the loan matures.

Look, with the 46 companies in the United Kingdom that have got £200 million of loan notes, all maturing in the future, they may not be there in the future. And there is no other form of guarantee, because there is nothing—you know, when a company goes bust, the only guarantee that the notes have is that we would be debtors, which would be a priority over the shareholders.

But I am telling him that—because of the question—I have contacted them to say, “Well, look, these two things are going to have to be repaid quite soon.” But remember, Madam Speaker, that is not us telling them when we want the money. We have not set these maturity dates. The issuer has said, “I want to borrow money for one year,” and that is why they are issuing a loan note that has a life of one year. So it means that, from the moment they issued it, they did not expect to need this money for more than one year. That is the logic of this.

I am telling him that, to put his mind at ease, they have confirmed that there is not going to be any problem in paying it when it matures. And I do not think it is a problem, but I would not want him to lose sleep anyway.

Hon. R M Clinton: Madam Speaker, I am grateful to the Minister for his brief run-through about loan security. Far be it from me to add to that and the angst in the House as to the joys of security for loans. But if I can move on to the next question, which is Question 670, I suspect most of my question, Madam Speaker, will be answered in the same vein.

A £1 million loan, again repayable in February 2026. Now, given the discussion the Minister has had with my hon. Friend Mr. Bossino about Community Homes Ownership Limited—and what he described was the project at Hargraves Court—but £1 million, which will be repaid in February next year, is hardly going to be of much use in getting this project to any stage of completion.

Madam Speaker: Just like that, that supplementary is more relevant to the previous question from Mr. Bossino. I am giving the hon. Member a little leeway, but...

Hon. R M Clinton: In that context, Madam Speaker, can I ask the Minister—I mean, £1 million for such a short period of time—is he going to give us the same answer as he just gave us to the previous question?

Hon. Sir J J Bossano: I need to repeat to him what I have said. This is not a date imposed by the Savings Bank. It is not what the Savings Bank has said to the company: “I will only buy a loan note from you if it is for one year...” Right? So, logically, they need the money for one year. Well, so they think that having the money for one year is what they need, and that is why they issued loan notes. Because nobody is going to want to issue loan notes and pay interest for money that they no longer need.

So, clearly, in their calculations, the work that is going on in the refurbishments of the flats—which is being done from the £1 million—presumably would finish at or very near that date that the repayment is due. And that, therefore, having done the work with the money and having then recovered the money with the properties, why should they want to have that loan stock alive any longer? That would be the logical thing to deduce from the fact of the dates.

Hon. R M Clinton: Madam Speaker, just my last one on this. Could I ask the Minister to consider, for the future, in terms of the presentation of the information that I request on the Savings Bank investments, that the maturity date be included with loan notes?

Hon. Sir J J Bossano: There is nothing involved in the loan notes to say what the loan note is being used to pay—whether it is to pay for the site, or to pay for the insurance, or to pay for the contractors. It is a loan note to a company for a project. When you raise money for a project, the loan note is not then broken down into specifics.

Hon. R M Clinton: No, no, Madam Speaker, I think the Minister misunderstood me. What I was asking for is—in the schedule that he provides to me every month—if he would consider just adding the maturity date next to the loan notes. Then that would avoid me asking these questions.

Hon. Sir J J Bossano: It ought to be there, but if it has been omitted, then certainly I will make sure it is included.

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Madam Speaker: Next question.

**Q673/2025
2022 Census –
Time taken to publish**

Clerk: Question 673, the Hon. Leader of the Opposition

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Hon. Dr K Azopardi: Why has it already taken over 2.5 years to publish the 2022 Census?

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

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Madam Speaker: Question 673.

Minister for Inward Investment and the Gibraltar Savings Bank (Hon. Sir J J Bossano): It has taken two and a half years to publish the 2022 census because it was not ready to publish earlier.

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Hon. Dr K Azopardi: All right. Do we know when it is going to be published?

Hon. Sir J J Bossano: The draft census is now finished and, you know, I would say probably within a month it will be published.

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Madam Speaker: Next question.

**Q674/2025
2022 Census –
Delay in publication**

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Clerk: Question 674, the Hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Hon. Dr K Azopardi: Is the delay in publication of the 2022 Census an issue of lack of resources in the department?

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

Minister for Inward Investment and the Gibraltar Savings Bank (Hon. Sir J J Bossano): Well, there was a slightly shorter delay—but not that much shorter—in the previous one, ten years ago. So, in effect, what happens is that the resources that we have are the resources for what is happening every year, and every once in ten years there is a higher volume of work being done. And this is not something that you can bring people in from other areas of the Government to do. To speak to the Statistics Office—these are specialist people, and this is what they do.

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In the UK, what they have done to deal with the problem is, in fact, that they have spread the census over a number of years. That is to say, the publication of the census. So, over a period of three or four years, they publish one third or one quarter of a census. They have concentrated maybe on population increase, you know, and then when they finish that part, they publish it.

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The law in Gibraltar would have to be changed to do what they do in the UK, and I am not sure that that is a good idea, because I think the census is one snapshot of society on one date. And if you get a picture of what is happening in one corner, and then a year later you find another bit of it—I think it is better to wait.

The time it took last time was something like 21 months, and it has taken longer now because there are many more people. You know, we are nearly on 38,000 now, and therefore the work is higher. And I think the thing to do—which I will be starting now—is to see to what extent we can bring in more technology in the processing of data between now and the next census, which hopefully will mean, with the advances that are being made now in data processing and the use of artificial intelligence, we might bring the timescale dramatically down.

Hon. Dr K Azopardi: And may I be the first one to say that I hope to see the Father of the House in this House still at the time of the next census. And I share the view, by the way, that it should not be a snapshot now and a snapshot later. I mean, it makes sense that if you are taking a snapshot of daily life in Gibraltar—the social-geographic, social impacts, employment impacts—it should all be published at the same time. I agree.

Can I ask, though, in terms of the question that I originally asked: are there current vacancies in the Statistics Department—accepting that, of course, this is specialised work—are there current vacancies in the Statistics Department that have impacted on this work?

Hon. Sir J J Bossano: Well, what the Statistics Department has that is almost unique is that it has not grown. But of course, I have had the Statistics Department all the time, so that is probably the reason why it is still the same size that it was in 2011. And during COVID, we lent a statistician to the Health Authority, and he never came back. So, I think there may be one post that has been held by people who have not been permanently there. So, we have got the same—I think we have got eight employees, and it has been eight employees all the time.

Madam Speaker: Next question.

Q684-5/2025

Gibtelecom's revolving credit facility – Amount drawn to date; Repayment/extension details

Clerk: Question 684, the Hon. C Sacarello.

Hon. C Sacarello: How much of Gibtelecom's revolving credit facility, which in September 2021 stood at £13.6 million, has been drawn down to date, and what amount remains outstanding net of any repayments made since July 2020? Please provide details of these repayments.

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

Minister for Inward Investment and the Gibraltar Savings Bank (Hon. Sir J J Bossano): I will answer this question together with Question 685.

Clerk: Question 685, the Hon. C Sacarello.

Hon. C Sacarello: Gibtelecom's original revolving credit facility, signed with the Royal Bank of Scotland International in July 2020, was due to expire in June 2025. Has this been repaid in full, or has it been extended, and if so, please provide details of the extension to the facility.

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

Minister for Inward Investment and the Gibraltar Savings Bank (Hon. Sir J J Bossano): Madam Speaker, the question that the hon. Member wants to know about the revolving credit is a matter for the management of the company and not a policy decision of the Government. Therefore, as far as I am concerned, this is information that is internal to the workings of the company and will be reflected in the next public accounts, just as it is now reflected from the last accounts.

Hon. C Sacarello: Madam Speaker, thank you very much to the Hon. Minister for the answer. Would—and I understand his remarks—would he at least be able to offer comfort on the extension or the repayment of the loan?

Hon. Sir J J Bossano: Well, what I can say is that if the decision is to extend it, I do not think it is a problem with the bank. There is no indication that the bank has got any concerns about providing funding to the company. I myself might prefer to fund it from the Savings Bank, but that is a separate issue.

Madam Speaker: Next question.

EDUCATION, THE ENVIRONMENT AND CLIMATE CHANGE

Q620/2025

National Theatre Project – Commencement

Clerk: Questions to the Hon. Minister for Education, the Environment and Climate Change. Question 620, the Hon. G Origo.

Hon. G Origo: Can the Minister confirm when the National Theatre Project will commence?

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

Minister for Education, the Environment and Climate Change (Hon. Prof. J E Cortes): Madam Speaker, as I have said on several occasions in this Chamber, this is a project led by the National Theatre Foundation. However, I am pleased to report that funding discussions are in an advanced stage, and I hope that an announcement will be made soon.

Hon. G Origo: Madam Speaker, can I ask the Hon. Minister, with respect to the funding, how far along are we with securing the funding necessary? I know that announcements have been made on the methods in which funding is going to be secured—particularly by selling naming rights: £15 million for naming the theatre, £4 million for naming the studio. Can the Hon. Minister—amongst others—but can he confirm that these funding mechanisms which have been put in place have already been obtained?

Hon. Prof J Cortes: I am afraid not, Madam Speaker. As I said earlier, this is a matter for the National Theatre Foundation. In any case, I am aware that the discussions at this moment—which are hopefully being finalised—it would be detrimental to the project if any details were given, and that is why they are holding back until they have everything in place before making an announcement.

Hon. G Origo: Madam Speaker, and if I may, with respect, the National Theatre project featured across six pages in the Government's manifesto. In three of them, it featured with very

860 detailed plans of this project, and in one of the sentences dedicated to this project, it said, “The Government will ensure that this project is completed during this term of office.” Can the Hon. Minister therefore confirm that this project will go ahead and indeed be completed within this term of office, as said in its manifesto?

865 **Chief Minister (Hon. F R Picardo):** Madam Speaker, can I just clarify something for the hon. Gentleman? The Government does not have a manifesto. The party has a manifesto. So, “they said in its manifesto” is not correct—just as a point of clarification or of order. It is the party’s manifesto; it is not the Government’s manifesto.

870 **Hon. Prof J Cortes:** Madam Speaker, in relation to the question—and obviously I totally agree with the hon. Member—there is often confusion in the ranks opposite as to what a manifesto actually is. In fact, I am sure they can learn from ours every time. But, Madam Speaker, in relation specifically to this, I am not answering that question on behalf of the National Theatre Foundation, because I cannot do that in this House. But I personally am confident that the theatre can be completed during the lifetime of this Parliament.

875 **Madam Speaker:** Next question.

Q621/2025
Eastern Beach –
Current state and cleanliness

Clerk: Question 621, the Hon. G Origo.

880 **Hon. G Origo:** Is the Government satisfied with the current state and cleanliness of Eastern Beach?

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

885 **Minister for Education, the Environment and Climate Change (Hon. Prof. J E Cortes):** Madam Speaker, the Government is not satisfied with the current state of some specific sections of Eastern Beach. As a result, I have tasked the Department of the Environment with increasing cleaning efforts and, in parallel, investigating reports of excessive dust along some parts of the upper reaches of the beach. These efforts include daily cleaning and raking, both by machine and
890 by hand.

Hon. G Origo: Madam Speaker, and if I may, I am grateful for the Hon. Minister’s confirmation that they are indeed not satisfied with the cleanliness of the beach. He did say that he is going to task his department to increase the processes in which they are attending and cleaning the beach.
895 He also said that they are going to investigate the issues. Can he confirm what issues, which have been investigated, have been highlighted by his department?

Hon. Prof J Cortes: Madam Speaker, the investigation is largely to do with the granulometry, which is analysing the different proportions of particles of different sizes.

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Hon. G Origo: Madam Speaker, and if I may, with respect to the works by the Department of the Environment, is the Minister committed to confirming to this House that the department will indeed test the sand? And if so, will it be committed to publishing the results so that members of the community can be satisfied that the beach is indeed safe?

905 **Hon. Prof J Cortes:** Madam Speaker, absolutely. Madam Speaker, if I had the slightest suspicion that the beach was not safe, then we would be having a different conversation, Madam Speaker. But absolutely, any test results that we receive—it is absolutely certain that we would be very happy to make them public.

910 **Hon. G Origo:** Madam Speaker, and with the issues that he has already intimated across the floor, which have been investigated upon, can he confirm the source of the problems which are plaguing the beach? Is it in respect to a particular development? Does he have that information?

Hon. Prof J Cortes: Madam Speaker, it is very difficult to allocate cause and effect. It is impossible, if I may say, to do that. Eastern Beach is in an area where there is traffic not too far away—a little bit less now, perhaps, with the tunnel—where there has been reclamation dating from several decades. Therefore, particles can be blown by the wind, there is erosion, there is deposition by the sea.

915 In fact, the hon. Members might well remember the biggest cases we had of dust on our beaches—and not just Eastern Beach, but particularly Catalan Bay—was as a result of the dredging and sand-adding that the hon. Members opposite created when they were in Government, when there was dredging and its silt came to the shore. And those years, which were 2009, 2010, 2011, there were dust clouds in Catalan Bay and Eastern Beach.

920 So, there are many different possible causes for this. It is very difficult to ascertain. Perhaps when we have the results of the testing, we may be able to speculate. But at the moment, everything else would not just be hypothetical or speculative—we would be speculating on the hypothetical.

Madam Speaker: One more question, I am happy to whoever wants to take it.

930 **Hon. Dr K Azopardi:** Madam Speaker, we have had reports of concerns—I am sure the Hon. Minister has seen that as well—people being concerned about skin reactions being caused by the state of cleanliness of Eastern Beach. I am sure—does the Minister agree—that therefore, given where we are in the period of summer, towards the end of June, we are going straight into summer next week, really, that there is a sense of urgency to deal with this and reassure the public?

935 It may or may not be down to the state of cleanliness, but those people who are concerned, who are listening to the Parliament today, would want reassurance that everything is being done to address the issues of cleanliness, if they are having an effect on people and health—and in particular, the health of children.

Hon. Prof J Cortes: There are several things here. We are cleaning every day, which is not usually done, just to ensure that this is done on an absolutely regular basis. In fact, Britannia has engaged additional staff in order to ensure that they are able to do it.

945 There has not been any indication that any reactions are due to contact with anything on the beach. I dare say that if, as some people are saying, it is cement dust, our biggest ally there is that there has been so much rain this spring that any cement dust would have reacted and therefore would now be inert. So, I do not think that is a concern.

950 In any case, we have checked with the GHA and with A&E, and they have not seen any significant increase in ailments which, in any way, they suspect would be related to contact with material at Eastern Beach. But in any case, the tests are being undertaken, and as soon as we have the results—which should be quite soon—we will obviously be willing to share them.

Madam Speaker: Next Question.

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Q622/2025

**Beach Attendants—
Commencement date of service**

Clerk: Question 622, the Hon. G Origo.

Hon. G Origo: Can the Government confirm by what dates the Beach Attendants have begun
960 carrying out their services at the respective beaches this year?

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

Minister for Education, the Environment and Climate Change (Hon. Prof. J E Cortes): Madam
965 Speaker, beach attendants began offering weekend service at Camp Bay as from Saturday, the
19th of April, being Easter weekend. Service was extended to all beaches except for Western
Beach and Sandy Bay for the weekend of the 7th of June, in advance of the official bathing season.
Daily beach attendant service has been available on a daily basis from all beaches except Sandy
Bay as from Saturday, the 14th of June, which marked the beginning of the official bathing season.
970 Government is looking to make arrangements to bring forward the official bathing season to the
weekend of the late spring bank holiday as from next year.

Hon. G Origo: Madam Speaker, I am grateful for his answer. I believe he confirmed that, as of
the 19th of April, they were working on one of the beaches of the five or six that we have in
975 Gibraltar. So, can I ask what the reason for the delay has been in deploying them across the other
main beaches in Gibraltar, not least given that lifeguards are deployed, as he said, as early as April
in respect of every other weekend?

Hon. Prof J Cortes: Madam Speaker, it is not a delay, it is an advancement. We are committed
980 to providing this service from the official bathing season, but we advance it to Easter—at least in
one beach—in order to add availability to the people who use these services. So, it is not that the
rest were delayed, it is that this was advanced. But realising that summer seems to come earlier
and come suddenly, as it has done this year, we are looking into making arrangements to bring
forward the official bathing season, as I said, to the weekend of the late spring bank holiday.

985 Sometimes it is difficult to man all the beaches while we are still in school and university term
time, because the hon. Member will know that a lot of our lifeguards and beach attendants are
students. So, there is a bit of a challenge there, but we are nevertheless committed to doing our
utmost to be able to have all the facilities available from the late spring bank holiday as from next
year, and hopefully we will be able to deliver on that.

990 **Hon. G Origo:** Madam Speaker, firstly I appreciate that he said that he will look at committing
to do this differently next year and perhaps even advance it further with respect to the other
beaches. But are beach attendants any less important than lifeguards with respect to providing
this facility? Is that the Minister's position? And if not, why has he not advanced it to the
995 remainder of the beaches? Because we have had concerns on this side of the House that there
are members who have tried to access the other beaches of Gibraltar but have been impeded in
doing so because of the lack of accessibility—particularly those who require these beach
attendants.

1000 **Hon. Prof J Cortes:** Madam Speaker, I repeat, we provide all the necessary attendants as from
the official bathing season. We have not been able to resource it to advance them all. We have
advanced one, and I think that is a positive, and in no way can that be turned into a negative.

Hon. G Origo: Can I ask how the Minister—or rather his department—decided, or what process was engaged upon, to select Camp Bay as the beach to roll out the accessibility service and employ the beach attendants? Will the Minister be able to confirm whether he has indeed consulted with disability groups or persons of interest?

Hon. Prof J Cortes: Madam Speaker, it is the logical place to go. The accessibility is better, being largely hard-standing and not relying on the nuances of sand during a period—Easter—where you could still have bad weather, which could affect the beach much more on the eastern side, for example Eastern Beach, than it would at Camp Bay. So, it is logical that it is probably the more sheltered, most accessible beach, and that that should be the first one that is made available.

Hon. G Origo: Madam Speaker, and if I may just seek clarification—because he has used the word “logical” in his answer to determine which beach—but then can I take it that he has not consulted with the advocacy groups and the persons who are affected and need this facility the most?

Minister for Equality, Employment, Culture and Tourism (Hon. C P Santos): Madam Speaker, I will take this one on, because the proposal of opening in April for accessibility came after consultation via the SNDO—the Supporting Needs and Disability Office—who are in constant contact with different charities and disability advocates.

Madam Speaker: All right, next question.

Q623/2025
Rosia Road –
Cause of sinkhole

Clerk: Question 623, the Hon. G Origo.

Madam Speaker: I am going to invite the hon. Member to put the question, but there is something I want to raise in relation to this question. Just put the question so that we know what we are talking about.

Hon. G Origo: I am grateful, Madam Speaker.

Can the Government confirm whether it has concluded its investigations into the cause of the sinkhole that appeared on Rosia Road in March this year, and if so, what were the findings of that investigation?

Madam Speaker: Yes, before I invite the Hon. Minister to answer that question, I would say that the Hon. Mr. Origo brought to my attention that that Oral Question was submitted to Parliament on Friday, the 13th of June, and that subsequently, on Tuesday, the 17th of June, there was an article—or the question was covered—by GBC, I believe, in answer by the Government in response to questions from GBC. Potentially, that contravenes the rules of procedure, and I would invite the Hon. Minister to provide Parliament with an explanation, please.

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

Minister for Education, the Environment and Climate Change (Hon. Prof. J E Cortes): Thank you, Madam Speaker. I had indeed noticed this, and I had raised this with the Press Office when I

1050 realised what had happened, and I had prepared a preamble to my substantive answer in order to explain that. So, if I may, Madam Speaker, I am going to read it out.

I was going to say—I will say it now, Madam Speaker—before my substantive answer, may I say that on Friday, the 13th of June, at 10:50, I received a text from the Government Press Office, which was a draft reply to a press question from GBC on this very matter. I replied approving the draft at 10:56, and the Press Office emailed the reply promptly at 10:57 on that day. It was not until 15:30 on that day that I received a Notice of Questions—indeed, as an email from the Clerk to this House—so that was at 15:30 that the Notice of Questions was received. So, at the time of my approving the draft, neither I nor indeed the Press Office were aware that a Parliament question on the subject was being tabled.

1060 **Madam Speaker:** All right, well in light of that I accept that explanation.

Chief Minister (Hon. F R Picardo): Madam Speaker, if I might, I also think I must say that, as we have said in the past—as I think the rule provides for—if the matter is one of pressing public interest, the Government must provide the information in public and not wait for the answer in Parliament. If the media is asking us questions, that tends to push the dial towards a suggestion that the matter is one of public interest.

If we were to say to the national broadcaster every time that they ask us questions simply that there is a question in Parliament, that would potentially put us outside of dealing with matters that are of public interest and could be problematic. The Government would nonetheless assess that on a case-by-case basis, which I think is what your earlier ruling requires us to do. In other words, to make an assessment for ourselves of whether or not the issue is one of pressing public interest—not simply because we are asked a question by the national broadcaster, which suggests that the dial is moving towards it being a matter of public interest—but also to bring our own assessment into play in order to decide whether we come within the exemptions of this convention, which you usefully set out some months ago in your ruling.

In this instance, however, the case is not one of believing it to be a public interest or not, but simply one of not being aware of the question.

1080 **Madam Speaker:** As I say, I accept the...

Hon. Dr K Azopardi: Madam Speaker, can I just—on this issue, because the Chief Minister has risen to express a view—can I also just say this: that of course it is for the Government to use its judgement on questions like this. But only last week, in the context of the questions on Eastern Beach, the Government answered the GBC's interest on the issue—which probably is much more contemporaneous, much more of public interest, and raises issues about families being concerned about skin reactions and so on—in the way that it did, which was to say, “There is a parliamentary question, and I am not going to answer it until it is delivered in the House,” quite rightly, may I say.

On this particular issue about the sinkhole—the sinkhole collapsed in March—we are now at the end of June. I appreciate that this is not, in our view, a public interest question. I appreciate the explanation that the Hon. Minister has given as to the timings—whether, after being on notice of the question, he could or should or would have said to the Press Office, “Look, there is now a Parliamentary question, you should bring that to the attention of GBC”—that is a different matter. That is for the Government to exercise its judgement, and I am not criticising the Government on this issue at this instance.

But I think it is important to bear in mind, given the explanation of the Chief Minister, that the Government had already, on a different matter—and while the dial might turn towards public interest on real issues where you feel public interest—and I have said to this House and to Madam Speaker before that when we see in this House, and one of my colleagues brings to my attention

1100 a matter on which the Government has answered a Parliamentary question, I assess whether it is an issue of public interest. And if it is, in my judgement, we do not even raise it.

But in this particular case, this is a matter of a sinkhole collapse in March, so it is well out of, in our view, public interest. But the Minister has explained that this is not a public interest matter—this was a question of timing—which we accept.

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Madam Speaker: All right. So, no—I do not want this to become, with respect, I do not want this to become a debate. It is a matter I raised. I have had an explanation from the Minister. I accept that explanation as to why this got into the press. I think the Hon. Chief Minister has surmised the situation correctly. I am sensitive to the matters raised by the Hon. Leader of the Opposition, and I say that it is quite right that if they have any doubt about it, they should raise the matter with me behind the Speaker's chair for me to raise in Parliament. It is true that whether or not it is a matter of public interest is a matter for the Government to assess, and that assessment may or may not be different to what the Opposition assess or what I assess. But it is not for us—it is for the Government to assess. But that is a hypothetical situation in this question, because it was not, as the Hon. Chief Minister said, a matter of public interest. It was that the Hon. Minister was not aware that the question had come in. So, I accept that and will move on.

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Hon. Prof J Cortes: I am grateful, Madam Speaker, for your consideration. I will now resume the answer to the question in relation to the sinkhole. Madam Speaker, I can confirm that the Technical Services Department has concluded its investigation and determined that the cause of the sinkhole was a defect in the main sewer which runs close to the wall. A small hole had formed on the crown of the main sewer, and this had resulted in fine soil from the surrounding ground being washed away, ultimately resulting in the sinkhole.

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The location of the defect in the main sewer is very difficult to access, and although temporary works have been carried out, Technical Services is currently working on a more permanent solution, which is expected to be carried out in the coming months. In the meantime, they are continuing to monitor the area and will take action as necessary.

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Hon. G Origo: Madam Speaker, can the Minister confirm whether other sections along this main sewer line, particularly in Rosia Road, have been inspected for any other potential vulnerabilities? I am not sure if the Minister is aware, but in 2022—just three short years ago—there was a similar incident where I believe a pavement experienced a sinkhole of this nature. There was another collapse of this kind. So, has the Minister, in light of these two incidents, been able to carry out further investigations with respect to the rest of the sewer line in this particular area?

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Hon. Prof J Cortes: Yes, Madam Speaker, the whole area is constantly being monitored. But obviously, it is impossible to predict absolutely every eventuality. But yes, Madam Speaker.

Hon. G Origo: Madam Speaker, with respect to the permanent solution—I believe in the press article also—it said that the Technical Services Department were going to carry out works in this area. Can the Minister confirm whether these works will include strengthening and improving or replacing the rest of the sewer line, or is this just a localised patch repair job in this particular area?

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Hon. Prof J Cortes: Madam Speaker, the hon. Member seems to have a problem with Technical Services and sewers, and the implication that in any way they may be a little bit less than serious in tackling these problems is something that clearly I cannot accept. They will take whatever steps are necessary. It is up to them to determine what steps those are. It could be relining of the sewer—as the hon. Member knows, this is happening throughout many different parts of Gibraltar—which would mean that any leaks would be contained within the new lining. It may be

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strengthening. I would have to ask for the detail in relation to any particular fault that may be identified. But I certainly have every confidence in the ability of Technical Services to deal with these issues.

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Hon. G Origo: Madam Speaker, firstly, I would like to say I have no issues with the Technical Services Department, but just that it seems that the many issues with respect to the sewer line keep reappearing. Madam Speaker, he did say in his answer that they will be monitoring—I believe is the word he used—this site. So, can I ask how or what process is going to be engaged with closely monitoring this issue, given that he also said that this was a particularly hard-to-access fault within the sewer line? So, with respect to that process, how often will they be monitoring, and how is that going to be engaged?

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Hon. Prof J Cortes: Madam Speaker, I do not know the detail. I would have to request information on the specific technical methods that are going to be used. But I am amused at the hon. Member reminding us all of the issues in respect of the sewers that were virtually abandoned during the length of the ten years of the GSD in Government. As I have said very often here, we are now investing much more in sewer repairs. So, the hon. Member should not be surprised that these issues keep coming up. Perhaps if they had been more diligent in looking after the sewers when they were in Government, we would not have these issues now.

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Hon. G Origo: Madam Speaker, if I may just say, we may clearly need to be spending more money in this area. But moving aside from that, can I ask whether any audits or structural assessments have been carried out with the neighbouring surrounding sites? So, I understand that the two most recent collapses, which I have described, took place in a very concentrated area. So, have any audits been carried out with, for example, Jumper's Building? Can he reassure the residents in that building that the area is safe, given that it appears that the sewer, which is very close to the wall, as you said before, is collapsing?

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Hon. Prof J Cortes: Madam Speaker, I have every confidence that if the Technical Services Department had the slightest suspicion that there was any danger at all, they would have alerted me and taken remedial action. As I say, I have full confidence in their ability and in their diligence. I cannot give the hon. Member the technical details. I can ask them, but he may be wanting to consult his fellow Member of the Opposition, the Hon. Mr. Sacarello, who was given a full briefing on the sewage system in Gibraltar here in this House just a few weeks ago.

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Madam Speaker: Next Question.

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Q624/2025

Upper Rock tourist sites – Contract in respect of security services

Clerk: Question 624, the Hon. G Origo.

Hon. G Origo: Can the Government confirm the scope of the work for the contract awarded in respect of *security services* at the Upper Rock tourist sites, which were quoted for more than £25,000, and recently awarded by ministerial application?

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

1200 **Minister for Education, the Environment and Climate Change (Hon. Prof. J E Cortes):** Madam Speaker, before I answer, I would just like to correct a misnomer—and I know how the hon. Member has come up with the word “Ministerial application.” This appears in the heading of Table GC.6 in the published statistics, but this is an inheritance from of old, because it is certainly not by Ministerial application, and that heading is going to be changed. It is done departmentally and not Ministerially. Perhaps it dates from our predecessors here—maybe they used to apply it Ministerially—but we certainly do not.

1205 So, Madam Speaker, having considered the hon. Member's question, it appears from the context that it has been based on information recently published on the statistics website under this table, Table GC.6. To this effect, Madam Speaker, I am advised that the figures may have been recently uploaded in error, as the value quoted relates to fees paid in respect of a historical agreement for services for the general provision of security services throughout the Upper Rock Nature Reserve, and it is not a new contract—therefore, not recently awarded. The officers at the department responsible for providing figures to the Statistics Office shall be bringing this to their attention so that this may be corrected.

1215 **Hon. G Origo:** So, can I get the Minister's clarification, therefore? Is he saying that there has been no new deployment, no further personnel, and that this, as he said, is just an error which has been uploaded on the Government website in respect of the fact that it appeared on the data that we had been given that a new contract for new security was being awarded. Is that the case?

1220 **Hon. Prof J Cortes:** Madam Speaker, it is not a new contract. This, in fact, was assigned back in 2009 by the previous administration.

1225 **Madam Speaker:** Next question.

Q625/2025
Gibraltar pedestrian wayfinding signs –
Contract awarded

1230 **Clerk:** Question 625, the Hon. G. Origo.

Hon. G Origo: Can the Government confirm whether the contract awarded for the design and development stage for the Gibraltar pedestrian wayfinding signs, which was quoted for more than £56,000, includes its installation?

1235 **Clerk:** Answer, the Hon. Minister for Education, the Environment and Climate Change.

1240 **Minister for Education, the Environment and Climate Change (Hon. Prof. J E Cortes):** Madam Speaker, the contract for the proposed wayfinding signs for the sum of £56,235 was awarded for the design and development stage only and does not include the manufacture or installation.

Hon. G Origo: Madam Speaker, can the Minister then confirm whether a separate process—or a tender process—will be engaged upon for the installation? And is it anticipated that the person who is designing and developing these signs is going to install them?

1245 **Hon. Prof J Cortes:** Madam Speaker, that has not been determined yet.

Hon. G Origo: Madam Speaker, can I ask the Minister how many signs we can expect to be developed at this cost? Does he have that information?

1250 **Hon. Prof J Cortes:** Madam Speaker, more than 50, and each one will show the distance and the time estimated or taken between the different points throughout the whole of Gibraltar, in order to encourage walking. It is part of the Sustainable Transport, Traffic and Parking Plan.

1255 **Hon. G Origo:** Madam Speaker, can I ask whether the Government is considering the digital integration of these wayfinding signs? That is to say, are we going to be able to find them online? Are people going to be able to walk up to the sign, take a picture of what I presume would be a QR code, and be taken to, for example, Google Maps to therefore show them exactly where they are? Are these matters being considered as part of the development and design stage?

1260 **Hon. Prof J Cortes:** Yes, ma'am.

Hon. G Origo: And with respect to timeline, Madam Speaker, can the Hon. Minister confirm when he expects these design and developments to finish, and following which, how long does he think or expect it will take to install these signs?

1265 **Hon. Prof J Cortes:** I suspect, Madam Speaker, with summer in the way, certainly by the autumn. I do not think more than a few months.

1270 **Hon. G Origo:** And finally, Madam Speaker, can I ask whether the Hon. Minister thinks that 50 signs—I think, or just more than 50—at a quoted price of £56,000 indeed represents value for money? Because I am struggling to think how development and design of a Gibraltar map, which presumably already exists, should incur such a cost like this.

1275 **Hon. Prof J Cortes:** Madam Speaker, the hon. Member clearly is not working in this world, because the elaboration of complex maps of this nature, integrated digitally, is not inexpensive. But the quality of the work that this entity—which has experience in cities worldwide—will bring to Gibraltar will prove, once the whole system is operational, just how much value for money it is, not just for our community, but certainly for the increase in tourism that we are already seeing and that we are expecting to see in the coming months and years.

1280 **Madam Speaker:** Next Question.

Q626/2025

Department of the Environment (including the Environmental Agency) – Employees earning more than 20% over their basic salary in overtime

1285 **Clerk:** Question 626, the Hon. G Origo.

1290 **Hon. G Origo:** Can the Government provide details on the total number of employees from the Department of the Environment (including the Environmental Agency) earning more than 20% over their basic salary in overtime payments during the following financial years, 2021/2022; 2022/2023; 2023/2024; and 2024/2025, broken down by post, grade or title, and further broken down by basic salary, allowances and overtime payments on a yearly basis?

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

1295 **Minister for Education, the Environment and Climate Change (Hon. Prof. J E Cortes):** Madam Speaker, I have just handed over the schedule with information for the Department of the Environment staff only. That is because the Environmental Agency is a private company

contracted to the Government. In relation to the way the data is presented, it is Government policy not to provide personal information on Civil Servants, and therefore it has been anonymised.

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ANSWER TO QUESTION 626

Post/ Grade/ Title	2021/2022			
	Basic Salary	20% of Basic Salary	Allowances	Overtime
Employee A	£ 57,921.00	£ 11,584.20	£ 630.08	£ 27,475.57
Employee B	£ 39,443.24	£ 7,888.65	£ -	£ 13,221.58
Employee C	£ 40,655.04	£ 8,131.01	£ -	£ 43,049.75
Employee D	£ 40,655.04	£ 8,131.01	£ -	£ 45,479.67
Employee E	£ 23,633.63	£ 4,726.73	£ 5,515.52	£ 13,333.27
Employee F	£ 38,699.04	£ 7,739.81	£ 10,254.82	£ 24,026.34
Employee G	£ 40,980.96	£ 8,196.19	£ 15,367.31	£ 12,307.48
Employee H	£ 28,894.17	£ 5,778.83	£ 6,095.84	£ 15,606.74
Employee I	£ 30,981.96	£ 6,196.39	£ 7,463.54	£ 20,656.14
Employee J	£ 30,981.96	£ 6,196.39	£ 6,818.16	£ 21,703.29
Employee K	£ 30,981.96	£ 6,196.39	£ 4,533.10	£ 13,999.68
Employee L	£ 21,193.71	£ 4,238.74	£ 296.64	£ 9,775.50
Employee M	£ 21,550.69	£ 4,310.14	£ 828.27	£ 4,330.51
Employee N	£ 26,278.54	£ 5,255.71	£ 5,109.16	£ 13,491.79
TOTAL NO. EMPLOYEES EARNING MORE THAN 20% OVER THEIR BASIC SALARY IN OT PAYMENTS	14			

Post/ Grade/ Title	2022/2023			
	Basic Salary	20% of Basic Salary	Allowances	Overtime
Employee A	£ 57,921.00	£ 11,584.20	£ 571.78	£ 27,708.02
Employee B	£ 40,247.50	£ 8,049.50	£ 230.22	£ 23,241.96
Employee C	£ 40,655.04	£ 8,131.01	£ -	£ 44,491.88
Employee D	£ 40,655.04	£ 8,131.01	£ -	£ 44,758.63
Employee E	£ 24,848.23	£ 4,969.65	£ 4,614.97	£ 19,717.12
Employee F	£ 38,699.04	£ 7,739.81	£ 8,509.91	£ 34,405.67
Employee G	£ 40,980.96	£ 8,196.19	£ 15,830.67	£ 40,866.87
Employee H	£ 29,598.22	£ 5,919.64	£ 5,716.74	£ 25,643.24
Employee I	£ 30,981.96	£ 6,196.39	£ 8,630.18	£ 31,276.51
Employee J	£ 49,803.23	£ 9,960.65	£ 2,179.36	£ 28,638.35
Employee K	£ 30,981.96	£ 6,196.39	£ 15,605.80	£ 36,759.62
Employee L	£ 30,981.96	£ 6,196.39	£ 3,872.76	£ 14,707.39
Employee M	£ 56,274.10	£ 11,254.82	£ 2,604.94	£ 29,328.73
Employee N	£ 26,907.26	£ 5,381.45	£ 4,402.81	£ 16,719.02
Employee O	£ 37,137.00	£ 7,427.40	£ -	£ 8,955.20
TOTAL NO. EMPLOYEES EARNING MORE THAN 20% OVER THEIR BASIC SALARY IN OT PAYMENTS	15			

Cont...

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CONTINUED ANSWER TO QUESTION 626

Post/ Grade/ Title	2023/2024			
	Basic Salary	20% of Basic Salary	Allowances	Overtime
Employee A	£ 57,921.00	£ 11,584.20	£ 154.16	£ 30,397.79
Employee B	£ 40,655.04	£ 8,131.01	£ 318.52	£ 15,657.03
Employee C	£ 45,690.44	£ 9,138.09	£ -	£ 27,276.19
Employee D	£ 45,690.44	£ 9,138.09	£ -	£ 32,376.45
Employee E	£ 46,025.50	£ 9,205.10	£ 261.65	£ 31,307.78
Employee F	£ 40,655.04	£ 8,131.01	£ 182.02	£ 8,498.59
Employee G	£ 28,460.21	£ 5,692.04	£ 5,556.46	£ 19,890.89
Employee H	£ 43,044.85	£ 8,608.97	£ 8,958.51	£ 34,240.55
Employee I	£ 43,749.96	£ 8,749.99	£ 10,465.90	£ 51,909.76
Employee J	£ 6,126.58	£ 1,225.32	£ 1,121.76	£ 2,388.56
Employee K	£ 35,411.86	£ 7,082.37	£ 6,538.32	£ 29,237.04
Employee L	£ 41,455.19	£ 8,291.04	£ 8,187.99	£ 39,311.74
Employee M	£ 51,379.34	£ 10,275.87	£ 2,746.92	£ 50,156.52
Employee N	£ 41,756.98	£ 8,351.40	£ 7,883.47	£ 42,903.49
Employee O	£ 29,234.47	£ 5,846.89	£ -	£ 21,676.07
Employee P	£ 30,981.96	£ 6,196.39	£ 3,872.76	£ 14,554.45
Employee Q	£ 35,003.04	£ 7,000.61	£ -	£ 16,305.81
Employee R	£ 22,451.00	£ 4,490.20	£ 690.15	£ 8,409.36
Employee S	£ 42,472.66	£ 8,494.53	£ 1,549.80	£ 12,991.58
Employee T	£ 31,665.31	£ 6,333.06	£ 4,861.32	£ 14,539.52
Employee U	£ 37,137.00	£ 7,427.40	£ -	£ 16,889.12
TOTAL NO. EMPLOYEES EARNING MORE THAN 20% OVER THEIR BASIC SALARY IN OT PAYMENTS	21			

Post/ Grade/ Title	2024/2025			
	Basic Salary	20% of Basic Salary	Allowances	Overtime
Employee A	£ 53,340.00	£ 10,668.00	£ -	£ 23,080.43
Employee B	£ 46,758.22	£ 9,351.64	£ -	£ 23,592.19
Employee C	£ 41,455.04	£ 8,291.01	£ 339.78	£ 20,806.16
Employee D	£ 31,900.96	£ 6,380.19	£ 6,245.04	£ 18,517.73
Employee E	£ 46,949.00	£ 9,389.80	£ 9,289.98	£ 24,518.03
Employee F	£ 47,318.96	£ 9,463.79	£ 10,629.69	£ 40,921.07
Employee G	£ 26,850.70	£ 5,370.14	£ 4,418.33	£ 10,806.81
Employee H	£ 41,465.96	£ 8,293.19	£ 8,249.25	£ 30,675.44
Employee I	£ 46,949.00	£ 9,389.80	£ 8,968.50	£ 36,220.15
Employee J	£ 50,763.00	£ 10,152.60	£ 2,188.80	£ 35,083.35
Employee K	£ 46,949.00	£ 9,389.80	£ 9,602.73	£ 41,196.92
Employee L	£ 39,499.04	£ 7,899.81	£ -	£ 51,328.44
Employee M	£ 31,781.96	£ 6,356.39	£ 3,972.76	£ 14,964.53
Employee N	£ 35,803.04	£ 7,160.61	£ -	£ 24,891.82
Employee O	£ 27,554.67	£ 5,510.93	£ 254.76	£ 9,824.37
Employee P	£ 57,645.96	£ 11,529.19	£ 1,557.60	£ 22,151.51
Employee Q	£ 34,676.28	£ 6,935.26	£ 5,107.47	£ 9,612.59
Employee R	£ 40,663.00	£ 6,935.26	£ 977.68	£ 9,261.42
TOTAL NO. EMPLOYEES EARNING MORE THAN 20% OVER THEIR BASIC SALARY IN OT PAYMENTS	18			

1310 **Madam Speaker:** I will give the hon. Member some time to look at the schedule. We will revert to this later. So, next question.

Q627/2025

East Side –

New schools for children that will live in the area

Clerk: Question 627, the Hon. E J Reyes.

1315

Hon. E J Reyes: Given the expected increase in residency at the East Side, does Government have any plans to build schools to cater for children who will end up living in this area?

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

1320

Minister for Education, the Environment and Climate Change (Hon. Prof. J E Cortes): Madam Speaker, there are no such plans at this point in time. However, the Government is constantly reviewing pupil numbers to ensure that it can cater for our entire school population, delivering the extremely high standards that it does, and if at any time it became necessary, it will then plan accordingly.

1325

Madam Speaker: Next Question.

1330

Q628/2025

**Policy on drug testing –
Schools**

Clerk: Question 628, the Hon. E J Reyes.

1335 **Hon. E J Reyes:** Does the Department of Education have a Policy in respect of Drugs Testing in schools?

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

1340 **Minister for Education, the Environment and Climate Change (Hon. Prof. J E Cortes):** Madam Speaker, no ma'am.

1345 **Hon. E J Reyes:** Madam Speaker, although my question is not worded as such, I was going to ask: is there a differentiator between pupils and members of staff? Given that there is no policy, what should the school management do if they have serious suspicions of encouraging drugs by either pupils or members of staff, if there is no written policy or guideline per se?

1350 **Hon. Prof J Cortes:** Madam Speaker, if it is in relation to staff, there are Civil Service procedures that would deal with that from a disciplinary perspective. In the case of pupils, there are procedures in relation to concerns, which would include interviewing parents and having some counselling perhaps brought in and making recommendations. If there is an allegation of laws being broken, then, as an extreme procedure, the RGP could be involved. But there are processes that deal with this sort of thing. There is no specific policy requiring drugs testing in schools. I do

not believe that a general drug testing policy would be appropriate. In the case of staff, it would be a more general Civil Service process, and certainly in the schools we do not have that.

1355

Madam Speaker: Next question.

Q629/2025
Policy on drug testing –
Schools

1360

Clerk: Question 629, the Hon. E J Reyes.

1365

Hon. E J Reyes: Have Government now concluded the talks or discussions it has held with teachers' representatives arising out of requests to review pupil behaviour and discipline issues in schools?

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

1370

Minister for Education, the Environment and Climate Change (Hon. Prof. J E Cortes): Madam Speaker, the Government, through the Department of Education and of Industrial Relations, continues to work collaboratively with NASUWT, the Teachers' Union, concerning the matters the Union has raised.

Further to the information shared in response to the last Parliament question on this matter, which was provided in late March, there have been the following developments:

1375

A final draft of the revised behaviour policy for Westside School was shared with members of NASUWT, the Teachers' Union, and with all Westside School staff. The Government understands that the Teachers' Union have been consulting the members for feedback on the draft policy.

1380

The Government is also, on its part, currently actively seeking feedback from all Westside staff members through an anonymous and independently assisted survey. All Westside staff members were invited to attend a meeting at Westside School so that the Government could update them on the process thus far, advise on the Working Party's next steps, and invite their feedback on the policy.

1385

Once this consultative period is at an end, the plans are to make available to the Working Party the anonymous feedback received by the Government and to consider this together with the feedback that members have provided NASUWT, the Teachers' Union. The Working Party will then consider the feedback carefully and review and revise the draft policy as deemed necessary and appropriate.

1390

Hon. E J Reyes: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I am glad to note the Minister has said we have at least reached a stage where we have a draft based on feedback and so on. However, seeing that we are now in the last days of the current academic year, is the Minister confident or able to claim whether this will be in place by the start of the next academic year, which is over two months away? But yet, there will probably be very few meetings able to be held with staff or staff-representatives during the months of July and August.

1395

So, the Minister has not mentioned any timescales or whatever. I know I keep on pressing on this, but the start of the academic year is probably the best time—at least from my experience in the teaching profession—when to implement something and make it well known to staff, pupils, and all concerned.

1400 **Hon. Prof J Cortes:** Yes, Madam Speaker, I agree that the beginning of Term 1 is the best time. But I think, realistically, I will be satisfied if we are able to finalise this policy during Term 1, and that is my intention.

Madam Speaker: Next Question.

1405

Q630/2025
Mechanics Level 1 Course –
Secondary Schools

Clerk: Question 630, the Hon. E J Reyes.

1410 **Hon. E J Reyes:** Will the Mechanics Level 1 Course be offered at our Secondary Schools for the academic year 2025/26?

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

1415 **Minister for Education, the Environment and Climate Change (Hon. Prof. J E Cortes):** Madam Speaker, a Mechanics Level 1 course will not be offered as our secondary schools in the academic year 2025/26.

1420 **Hon. E J Reyes:** Madam Speaker, I am surprised that the Minister has confirmed no, because seeing that we have catered for what can be called a specialist room to cater for that course, and the past announcement by the Minister of being able to develop further on vocational—more vocational—courses and so on. What are the plans then for the future of Mechanics Level 1 type of courses?

1425 **Hon. Prof J Cortes:** Yes, Madam Speaker, grateful for the opportunity. Introducing vocational courses in our schools is of high priority, and we have successfully done that over the past years, including—I think the latest one was—construction. We have another one on sports that I am going to be talking about in the Budget session soon, and, as I say, Construction City and Guilds Level 1 is the one we have most recently introduced.

1430 We are currently exploring the introduction of motor vehicle-related courses at the secondary school for September 2026. Changes in the automobile industry, particularly in relation to electric cars, have required exam boards to adapt their specifications, and new ones are currently being developed while older specifications are being discontinued. So, it was not quite the right time to bring it in. We are waiting for that. We are hoping then that the new, updated and upgraded
1435 motor mechanics qualification will be ready, and we have every intention of being able to introduce that, because we have the workshops that we designed when we built the new schools. So, we are hoping to be able to start that in 2026.

1440 **Hon. E J Reyes:** Thank you for that answer, providing some sort of vision for the future. When the Minister says “we hope to introduce this into the future,” is he expecting to be able to introduce this to both current secondary schools and also the college, or is it just going to be home to one particular academic area?

1445 **Hon. Prof J Cortes:** Madam Speaker, both secondary schools would be able to use them, as currently both use the hair salon for the Hair and Beauty course, even though that one is on Bayside and the Mechanics is on Westside. The college—the plans for the new college—will include facilities for that, and certainly not at Level 1, but at higher levels. These three secondaries,

including the college, work as a consortium, so they do interchange facilities. So, they will be available to any student who needs it.

1450

Madam Speaker: Next question.

Q631/2025

Teachers –

Employment estimate for academic year 2025/26

1455

Clerk: Question 631, the Hon. E J Reyes.

Hon. E J Reyes: How many new teachers does Government estimate they will employ for the academic year 2025/26?

1460

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

Minister for Education, the Environment and Climate Change (Hon. Prof. J E Cortes): Madam Speaker, there has been a review of the teaching complements, and I will provide the details next week during the Budget session.

1465

Hon. E J Reyes: Yes, Madam Speaker, I am aware—on a confidential basis—you know, that sort of establishments are changing and so on. Perhaps he can explain further. There is always great anticipation by recently qualified teachers, either those who graduated this year or those who graduated last year, awaiting more substantive employment. Therefore, one ends up with a question of a calculation. If we know, for example, ten teachers are retiring, then Government expects or estimates—that is why I even used the word “estimated”—I do not want to tie him down. So, does the Minister have some sort of figure so these teachers pending that substantive employment have an idea? Are we talking about a turnover of ten teachers leaving and ten new coming in? I have not even homed it down to school sector, whether lower and upper primary or secondary. Are we talking of figures as high as what?

1470

1475

Hon. Prof J Cortes: I will be going into some detail. I think I will answer most of those questions next week. By your leave, Madam Speaker, if the hon. Member does not mind, I think it would be more in context if he waits just one week for me to be able to give all those details.

1480

Hon. E J Reyes: Yes, Madam Speaker, I will wait one week, given that I hope the order will be as in the past—that the Minister will deliver his Budget address first and then, if need be, I can address whatever in my contribution.

1485

Madam Speaker: Right, before we proceed with the questions, are there any supplementaries to Question 626?

Q626/2025

**Department of the Environment (including the Environmental Agency) –
Employees earning more than 20% over their basic salary in overtime – Supplementary**

Hon. G Origo: Madam Speaker, grateful for the time to consider the schedules. Can I ask the Hon. Minister whether he accepts that the level of overtime which he has provided in answers to Question 626 represents what appears to be a potential chronic understaffing within the Department? And if so, what steps are being taken to address this issue?

Minister for Education, the Environment and Climate Change (Hon. Prof. J E Cortes): No, Madam Speaker, I do not accept that. Therefore, I do not have to explain what steps.

Hon. G Origo: Madam Speaker, does the Minister consider that this is an efficient and sustainable use of taxpayers' funds? That is to say, does he consider these levels of overtime acceptable? Because it appears to me from the table given that in most years—or the financial years that we have been given—at least more than half of the individuals on the list are earning over double their basic salary in overtime payments. Does he think this is a sustainable use of funds?

Hon. Prof J Cortes: Madam Speaker, that generalisation is not a valid one, because without knowing exactly what these different Officers do, you cannot make such a generalisation. So, I do not agree with his assessment.

Hon. G Origo: Madam Speaker, given the figures which we have been provided, can the Minister confirm whether there are any systems or processes in place to check or prevent what appears to be this systemic reliance on overtime payments?

Hon. Prof J Cortes: Madam Speaker, almost by definition, there are some grades that have to work excessive hours. Without going into details—because I have to be careful that across the floor we do not identify individuals, and in a small place like Gibraltar we are always running that risk—but there are people who are called out after hours for things that happen after hours. For example, a tree collapses and it has to be dealt with at three in the morning.

So, without the hon. Member knowing what it is that these officers do, he cannot justify that comment. I would be very happy to sit down with the hon. Member and go through the list with him behind the Speaker's chair. If he then identifies any issues that he wants to bring up, he is in his perfect right to do so. But I think it would be unfair to condemn everybody in the Department of the Environment—including those who appear here—to working overtime in an abusive manner without understanding what it is they are doing after hours.

Hon. G Origo: Madam Speaker, so I take it from the answer from the Hon. Minister that there has been an exercise where we carry out a review or an audit of the overtime which is undertaken. And having conducted that review, there should be no cause for concern in the manner in which it appears that these people, over the course of four different calendar years, have a systemic reliance on this overtime necessity. Unless it is the case that the trees are falling every single year, I do not see why we should see these figures repeat year after year.

Hon. Prof J Cortes: Madam Speaker, I think the hon. Member is putting it the wrong way round. It is not that they have a systemic reliance. As I say, no two cases are the same. And it is not just trees that are falling—clearly, I gave that as an example. There are other things that happen after hours that certain officers have to be available for. It is very complicated, and it is something that, again, we run the risk of identifying individuals if we go into more detail here.

1535 I repeat the offer to discuss item by item with the hon. Member, and he is very capable of identifying those that he wants to challenge me on across this House. But I think it would not be comfortable for us to explore that in that detail.

Madam Speaker: The Hon. E J Reyes has a question?

1540

Hon. E J Reyes: Yes, thank you, Madam Speaker. I accept the Minister's answer before that the Environmental Agency was a private entity and therefore it could not enter into details. By looking at the schedule, if you add how much has been paid in overtime for each of the employees, you come to a grand total. Does any overtime incurred by the Environmental Agency—is that then billed as a separate and additional cost to the Government? And if that is the case, what has been that overall overtime bill?

1545

Hon. Prof J Cortes: Madam Speaker, the operator is a private company. They have their budget and they manage that. They do not ask for the additional funds.

1550

Madam Speaker: Yes, one more question.

Hon. R M Clinton: Thank you, Madam Speaker. When I first entered into politics about ten years ago, I came across a concept, Madam Speaker, which is called "paid unworked overtime," which—coming from the private sector—I found remarkable, but apparently does exist in some Government Departments. Is the Minister aware whether any of this payment is effectively of that nature, where it is somehow in people's contracts that they will be paid what would be termed overtime, even though they are not necessarily working it?

1555

Hon. Prof J Cortes: I am not familiar with that term. I have no indication that that is the case. We are talking about people who are either on shifts or are called out for specific events. There are exceptions to that, which, as I say, I have offered to discuss. But as far as I can tell, that is not the case. I would have to analyse the data with that in mind.

1560

Madam Speaker: Next Question.

1565

Q632/2025

Nature Reserve –

Companies running the ticketing system and fees received from the Government

1570 **Clerk:** Question 632, the Hon. D J Bossino.

Hon. D J Bossino: Please state which companies run the ticketing systems for access to the nature reserve and how much do they each receive by way of fees from the Government?

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

1575

Minister for Education, the Environment and Climate Change (Hon. Prof. J E Cortes): Madam Speaker, the answer is stated in Answer to Question 810 of 2024, and the situation has not changed.

1580

Hon. D J Bossino: Given that I do not immediately have access to the answer that the hon. Gentleman is referring to, can he humour me and provide me with that information across the

floor of the House now? And may I take this opportunity—and maybe convince him to provide that answer—to wish him a happy Saint's Day?

1585 **Hon. Prof J Cortes:** Madam Speaker, the hon. Member has tried to sweet-talk me for the first time in his political career and mine. Madam Speaker, I shall do this, but I have to assume then that for the remainder of his questions—which I think are three in number—he will be just as convivial and kind as he has been in wishing me a happy Saint John's Day. And I probably should not do this, but it is TREEUS Ltd, and the amount paid for ticketing services is 10% of sales.

1590 **Hon. D J Bossino:** Yes, I shall try and carry on in that vein, so long as he does not make partisan and comments and then sort of provokes me into a different place. So it is one company, is it? Just to remind him, I thought that from my notes he replied during the course of the Committee Stage of last year's Appropriation Bill that the fee which is cited in the book—it is either £3.85 or £3.58 million—goes to three separate companies. I do not know whether that may jog his memory or improve his answer in any way.

1595 **Hon. Prof J Cortes:** I suspect that that is because that head includes more than just the ticketing, and I am happy to answer that during next week's Appropriation Bill debate. It is one company. It is one company that does the ticketing.

1600 **Hon. D J Bossino:** Yes, I think there may have been some marketing elements in that, perhaps, in that figure. But is the spelling of the company T-R-I-A-S?

1605 **Hon. Prof J Cortes:** It is T-R-E-E-U-S.

Madam Speaker: Next question.

1610

Q633/2025
Upper Rock –
Expressions of Interest – Improvements of Visitor Sites

Clerk: Question 633, the Hon. D J Bossino.

1615 **Hon. D J Bossino:** Has the "Expressions of Interest – Improvements of Visitor Sites to the Upper Rock", issued in July 2024, been awarded and, if so, to which entity or entities?

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

1620 **Minister for Education, the Environment and Climate Change (Hon. Prof. J E Cortes):** Madam Speaker, discussions are proceeding with a number of the entities expressing an interest in response to the call. So far, there has been one confirmed successful applicant, which is Wrightech Limited, for an extension to their fabulous facility at the World War II Tunnels, which will include several more sites in the area.

1625 **Hon. D J Bossino:** Sorry, if I may, on the minutiae of the answer the Hon. Minister has given—when the Hon. Minister refers to "in the area", is that beyond the World War II Tunnels or in the wider Upper Rock?

1630 **Hon. Prof J Cortes:** In the area of the World War II Tunnels—so adjacent areas, most of which are in that sort of section—so includes the City Under Siege and that sort of area.

Hon. D J Bossino: And given the way that the Hon. Minister has answered, and the information that we have either across the floor of the House or in press releases of the Government in respect of other sites within the Nature Reserve—like, for example, Moorish Castle, which was the subject of a question and answer session last month, and the Northern Defences—is it the case that the Government has moved away from the initial Expressions of Interest, which was issued in July 2024, gave the impression that it was going to relate to the Nature Reserve in total? So, is the intention now to move away from that and make it more site-specific? I am not sure if he has understood my question.

Hon. Prof J Cortes: Not really. The discussions with other entities that submitted proposals include other parts of the Upper Rock, some of which are site-specific, some of which are not.

Hon. D J Bossino: I see. So the Expressions of Interest, which was in July 2024—the date is on top—refers to a Government intention to obtain responses from service providers for new services, and then it lists the various areas. But then the Government uses its discretion as to how it is going to be delivering that—whether certain sites or... Well, I suppose, in effect, what the Hon. Minister is saying is that it will not be the entire Upper Rock; it will be more of a piecemeal fashion.

Hon. Prof J Cortes: The Upper Rock is the Upper Rock. It is a Nature Reserve, it is part of the National Park, and there are different elements of it which will be managed for the Government by different entities. But essentially, the Upper Rock is one entity, but there will be different players who will be working with the Government in order to develop and manage them.

Hon. D J Bossino: So, when is one going to be able to establish when that process is complete? Because if one reads the Expressions of Interest, it is rather woolly in terms of some aspects of its language. It does list some sites, A to F, but indeed, for example, F says "other sites, walkways and paths", and then as part of its introductory language it talks about "some or all of the following sites". And the reason why I ask this—just to put it in this context to assist the Hon. Minister—he knows that I asked a question either one session or two sessions ago as to how the distribution of the fees was going to work and which amounts each of these companies was going to be receiving. And the response came in terms of, "It is not that I am not going to provide you with that information, but that I will not be in a position to provide that information until the Expressions of Interest is announced." At the time, I thought it was going to go all to one entity. Now that he has confirmed and explained the situation, how can one know when the whole process has completed?

Hon. Prof J Cortes: Madam Speaker, the whole process is very close to completion, and there are advanced talks with different entities—I think probably about three or four. The reason why we have not announced this one is that we were waiting for all of them to be agreed and then, obviously, announce them all together and give some additional work to the hon. Member's brother, who is actually working very closely in this area. And I say that—I do not say that in a negative way at all, Madam Speaker—but in the spirit of conviviality that we have developed today. So, Madam Speaker, we should be able to announce the whole package—maybe we are going to miss the beginning of the summer, but certainly early autumn at the latest.

Hon. D J Bossino: Yes, I am not sure that he is within the rules of the House by referring to a relation. I think he can refer to Mr Bossino, but not to my brother.

Hon. Prof J Cortes: I referred to him in an affectionate way.

Madam Speaker: I think the Hon. Mr Bossino is correct in his interpretation, but I also accept the manner in which it was meant. But yes.

1685

Hon. D J Bossino: Yes, we have this running joke that he is the other Mr Bossino. Okay, that is helpful to a degree, and whenever he announces, then I can always file further questions—in particular in relation to the issue that I referred the hon. Gentleman to earlier. But if I may, is he able—and I suspect that he will be able—to confirm that the current terms which the current, I think it is something like thirty-odd Civil Servants who are employed in the Nature Reserve currently enjoy, will be maintained and respected beyond the announcements that he is going to be making with respect to the various sites?

1690

Hon. Prof J Cortes: Absolutely, Madam Speaker. They will not be affected at all. In fact, the proof is that we have a private entity running St Michael's Cave and the World War II Tunnels, and the staff continue there and they work together, and they are not going to be negatively affected at all.

1695

Madam Speaker: Next question.

1700

Q634/2025
Parsons Lodge –
Number of visitors per year

Clerk: Question 634, the Hon. D J Bossino.

1705

Hon. D J Bossino: Please state how many visitors have visited Parsons Lodge for each month in each of the years between 2020 to date.

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

1710

Minister for Education, the Environment and Climate Change (Hon. Prof. J E Cortes): Madam Speaker, I have handed over a schedule with the information requested.

ANSWER TO QUESTION 634

The breakdown for number of visitors to the Natural History Museum at Parson's Lodge from 2020 to September 2023 is as follows:

Year	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec
2020						2	4	2			9	
2021					44	185	12	33	8	8	3	
2022	2	8	15		48	8		18			3	3
2023			25									

The breakdown for number of visitors to the Natural History Museum at Parson's Lodge from October 2023 to May 2025 is as follows:

Year	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec
2023										244	335	154
2024	171	224	312	249	193	117	101	137	154	261	128	88
2025	121	166	363	201	138							

1715 **Madam Speaker:** The hon. Member would like some time to look at that when we come back.
All right, next question.

Q635/2025**Upper Rock –****Expressions of Interest – Improvements of Visitor Sites**

Clerk: Question 635, the Hon. D J Bossino.

1720

Hon. D J Bossino: Please state how many visitors have visited the 100 Ton Gun, Gorham's Cave and the Stay-Behind Cave for each month in each of the years between 2020 to date.

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

1725

Minister for Education, the Environment and Climate Change (Hon. Prof. J E Cortes): Madam Speaker, I am handing over another schedule. I would like to caveat it, though, because the figures for the 100 Ton Gun will not be complete in the sense that anyone who has purchased an Upper Rock ticket also gets access to the 100 Ton Gun, but they may not all be logged on arriving at the 100 Ton Gun. So this is a minimum figure—there will be more. These figures are purely those that pay for the access ticket to the 100 Ton Gun. Now that we have been alerted to this, we will pick them up in the future, but there will be more who have Upper Rock tickets and have visited the 100 Ton Gun, but they are not included in these figures.

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1735

ANSWER TO QUESTION 635

Visitors (excluding staff and researchers) to the Gorham's Cave Complex from 2020 to Date												
Year	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec
2020			10				19	27	6	9		2
2021							32	25	34	27		5
2022			3		15	23	23	2	9	17	2	
2023			2	1	3	6	9	41	13			
2024				11		6		21	18			
2025	2											

Visitors (excluding staff and researchers) to the Stay Behind Cave from 2020 to Date												
Year	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec
2020			3				6					
2021						6	2				7	
2022			4		5	13	2			1	3	7
2023	5		5									
2024			5	5	5	5			2			
2025				5	5	5						

Visitors to the 100 Ton Gun from 2020 to Date												
Year	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec
2020	67						14	46		84	9	
2021					26	62	37	40	90	123	65	15
2022	57	54	119	172	211	99	53	78	82	137	86	75
2023	79	74	118	158	152	94	58	40	74	196	52	27
2024	6	44	103	72	128	93	43	77	178	151	152	83
2025	64	123	107	160	135	91						

1740 **Madam Speaker:** We shall come back to supplementaries on this when the hon. Members have had time to consider the schedule. Next question.

Q636-7/2025
Knightsfield Holdings Limited –
Contract details; Restoration works

1745 **Clerk:** Question 636, the Hon. D J Bossino.

Hon. D J Bossino: Has the Knightsfield Holdings Ltd contract with the Government been extended to include further sites or part of sites over the last 5 years?

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

1750

Minister for Education, the Environment and Climate Change (Hon. Prof. J E Cortes): Madam Speaker, I will answer this question together with Question 637.

Clerk: Question 637, the Hon. D J Bossino.

1755

Hon. D J Bossino: Are the restoration works being conducted by Knightsfield Holdings Ltd being funded from the amount of approximately £1.3m it currently receives from the taxpayer or are further funds being allocated and if so how much?

1760

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

Minister for Education, the Environment and Climate Change (Hon. Prof. J E Cortes): Madam Speaker, the Tower of Homage was added in July 2024 to correct an oversight in the original contract and in order to regularise the situation, as the tower had for some reason not been included with the rest of the Moorish Castle but was *de facto* being managed by Knightsfield. Indeed, responsibility for the Tower of Homage had been given to the Gibraltar Museum years before by the GSD administration, as acknowledged, for example, by the Government press release of 11th June 2007, where the Hon. Joe Holliday sang the praises of their work precisely at this site—the Tower of Homage. All costs for the restoration works are being funded by Fortress Attractions Limited as part of their investment in the project. Knightsfield Holdings Limited contributes staff and expert supervision at no additional cost to the taxpayer. The National Museums Management Company carries out or supervises restoration work around Gibraltar with no additional taxpayers' money being allocated to it.

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1775

Hon. D J Bossino: Is the Hon. Minister, in relation to his answer to Question 637 where he refers to, in effect, Fortress Attractions Limited as the recipient company in respect of the funds that it needs in order to carry out the restoration works, able to state how much has been received by that company in order to carry out these works? Is he able to state that now?

1780

Hon. Prof J Cortes: Madam Speaker, that company is acquiring funds for investment, so it is their investment. Particularly in the sense that we are currently negotiating with other entities for other contracts in other parts of the Upper Rock, I do not think that those figures should be openly discussed here.

1785

Hon. D J Bossino: And it may be because of the question I asked earlier that those figures may come to light at some point in the future, from what I can gather from the reply. But if I can press him further—and I am not going to press him on the figure because he has made the position clear in relation to that as things stand today—but is he able to at least state that the source of the funding will be ticket sales? Is he able to say that?

1790

Hon. Prof J Cortes: The source of the funding will be whatever funding the company carrying out the works attracts. They will obviously look at paying back a loan, if it is a loan, using ticket sales. So it is not taxpayers' money, as we have discussed here before—it comes from ticket sales.

1795

Hon. D J Bossino: And just to confirm the position—we will come to a point when the Hon. Minister, and I would ask him to confirm this, will be able to provide us with the information as to how much, in this case, Fortress Attractions Limited would be receiving from ticket sales once all the various tenders in respect of the Upper Rock and the various sites have been assigned?

1800 **Hon. Prof J Cortes:** At this point in time, Madam Speaker, I do not see any reason why that should not be the case.

Madam Speaker: Next question. Well, I was going to proceed with the next set of questions to the Hon. the Deputy Chief Minister. I was going to say to give the hon. Member time to look at the schedule, but the questions are yours as well. At least the first one is. Sorry, I have got the questions the wrong way around. It is health now. It is health.

1810 **Chief Minister (Hon. F R Picardo):** Madam Speaker, the Hon. Minister for the Environment's questions are now concluded. I was going to move that the House should adjourn, but if there is something outstanding and there are other supplementaries, I shall wait until you indicate to me that Members opposite have had the opportunities that you wish to give them.

**Q634-5/2025
Supplementary**

1815 **Madam Speaker:** There are two Questions outstanding—634 and 635—on supplementaries. I do not know if the hon. Member has had a chance to look at the schedules. You might have to do so quite quickly.

1820 **Hon. D J Bossino:** Yes—if, in effect, I have to do so now so that then the Hon. the Chief Minister can move the adjournment for a small break, I think, which is what I think he wants to do, so that we then conclude. Oh—adjourn, adjourn—okay. In any event, we are in exactly the same situation. I am being asked to ask questions on the schedule.

1825 **Madam Speaker:** Let us take Question 634, and I shall indulge the hon. Member with a bit of time.

Hon. D J Bossino: So, in relation to Question 634, which concerns the visits to Parson's Lodge—these are presumably individuals visiting the site and not groups. Is that the case?

1830 **Minister for Education, the Environment and Climate Change (Hon. Prof. J E Cortes):** Madam Speaker, they are individuals. You will see, Madam Speaker, that until March in 2023, the visits were sporadic. They were groups that requested visits and so on. Whereas, as from the end of October 2023—which I believe, if memory serves me right, is more or less the time that it was revamped and opened—it was closed for a few months between March and September/October.
1835 So the figures have increased as a result of it being opened as a revamped Natural History Museum.

Hon. D J Bossino: Is the Hon. Minister satisfied with the figures? Because, I mean, from 2020 to 2023—which, in effect, is the period of time within my question but up to the point, I am assuming, of the refurbishment—the number in total is 434 visitors, which comes to a very, very low average. In fact, you have the actual absolute numbers of individuals—2, 8, 15, and so forth. And then there is an increase into the hundreds. Presumably, that must be the effect of the refurbishment and, presumably, marketing and all the rest of it. But even those numbers—at 244, 335—are not exactly significant when we are dealing with visitor numbers in Gibraltar. And I know those questions are questionable—that we are talking about 11 million visitors crossing the frontier—but there are many visitors who do go up to the Nature Reserve. So can he make a comment in relation to the low numbers, given the amount of money that this company, which runs this site, is given on an annual basis by the taxpayer?

Hon. Prof J Cortes: Well, Madam Speaker, the hon. Member—in fact, several Members of the Opposition—have given me cause and effect which, to me, do not relate one to another. I do not think we can judge the performance of the Gibraltar National Museum and all that it does on the number of visitors to Parson's Lodge. And that is the implication of what the hon. Member has said. I would like to see more visitors to Parson's Lodge—I think we have mentioned this before. I do not know whether in relation to questions from the Hon. Mr Bossino or perhaps from the Hon. Mr Origo in relation to that. A lot of it is in relation to the way that people are moved around Gibraltar, and there is a clear preference still for the Upper Rock, both from the tourists and, I believe, from the operators. And we are trying to redirect them into alternative tours. I think we will see more of that in years to come as we market things differently. But the museum is a wonderful facility. I think that this is more a reflection of the way that tourists are moved around Gibraltar and perhaps what everybody wants to do—go up the Rock and see the monkeys. And this is something that we are trying to change now. So I do not think it is a legitimate position to take to, in some way, blame the management of the museum. I think it is an artefact of the way that tourism works in Gibraltar and something that, together with my good friend and colleague the Minister for Tourism, we are working very well together to try and revamp the way that tourists use, visit, and enjoy Gibraltar.

Hon. D J Bossino: But he has not made a comment, I do not think, as to whether he is satisfied with those numbers. The reality is that he makes an observation—as indeed he made in respect of the Gibraltar Museum at the last session—when he bizarrely and shockingly suggested that tourists and visitors do not visit the town area and rather go up to the Upper Rock. Well, actually, probably the opposite is true. But the reality is, we would say—or at least one ought to have a question mark put over—the way that these sites are managed. Managed—and I do not necessarily suggest the state they are in. Some of them are in a deplorable state, I would add—but actually that they are not properly marketed, and this should be the hon. Member's job and indeed the Hon. Minister for Tourism's job. Does he not agree with that assessment as I put it to him? Because the reality is that, for example, I am informed that Parson's Lodge is closed on Sundays, for goodness' sake—or at one point was closed on Sundays. So how do you encourage people to visit these sites?

Hon. Prof J Cortes: Madam Speaker, I would like to remind the hon. Member that it is still St John's Day. Okay, having done that—no, that is okay, that is all right—okay, it is still St John's Day, and I was being very nice to him. I will resist any comments that are not nice back. Madam Speaker, I am not satisfied. I would love there to be more tourists visiting Parson's Lodge. We are working on the whole tourist product. The number of tourists in Gibraltar is increasing by leaps and bounds, and obviously we will see this filtering there. But we do need to encourage visitors not to just go to the Upper Rock but to visit all the many other sites, and we are working on that.

Madam Speaker: Did the Hon. Mr Reyes have a question on Question 634?

Hon. D J Bossino: The numbers in respect of the 100-Ton Gun, for example—indeed, of the other sites that I have referred to: Gorham's Cave and Stay Behind Cave—but the 100 Ton Gun in particular are pretty... That is the next question.

Madam Speaker: That is the next question.

Hon. E J Reyes: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Yes, on Question 634—when we have these statistics of the Natural History Museum of Parson's Lodge—I am wondering whether the Minister has, or perhaps he could collate it for future use. I know there are certain months—in fact, if one looks at March both in 2024 and in 2025—the numbers go over 300. From my knowledge, it does seem to coincide that month with particular local schools having, as part of the curriculum, site

visits, and they have taken advantage of what is on offer at the Natural History Museum. Does the Minister have any details of these visitor numbers—how many are actually tourist visitors to the Rock and how, or instead, how many are comprised... because, you know, a school visit could push your numbers up by 100 in a particular month, you know, when you take two or three classes along. If he does not have the information, I accept, but it is something that he could collect the data for in the future.

Hon. Prof J Cortes: Madam Speaker, the question said "visitors" without asking me to distinguish, and therefore I do not have any breakdown.

Madam Speaker: Any supplementaries on Question 635?

Hon. D J Bossino: Yes. Madam Speaker, I mean the Stay Behind Cave—if I can deal with that first—the numbers are pretty dismal. We are talking fives and fours and threes, and I mean there is only, I think, on one occasion where you see a figure of thirteen in June 2022. I mean, again, does he have any comments in relation to that? Also a site—I need to remind myself what the date is—a site that is under the auspices of the contractual arrangement that we were... that he knows that I keep on asking him about. But that is also a site in the Upper Rock—this was the last time I looked. So again, I give him the opportunity, with the greatest of respect to him on such an auspicious day for him, to make a comment in relation to that.

Hon. Prof J Cortes: Madam Speaker, I am resisting the temptation of referring either to wasps in bonnets or bats in belfries, because it is St John's Day. Actually, there is a good population of Schreiber's bats very close to Stay Behind Cave. Madam Speaker, Stay Behind Cave is closed to the public. You can only visit it with an expert guide by prior request because it is a very, very sensitive site that, if it had more visitors, it would be detrimental to it. And therefore, I make no apology for the fact that it has low numbers. I would be really worried if we had hundreds of people visiting Stay Behind Cave. Gorham's Cave is the next one, and that again is by appointment only. It is not always possible to visit because of weather conditions—in a rough easterly, you would be washed away—and also there is a limit, because of the sensitivity of the archaeological site, I believe, to about 20—a maximum of 20 in any given month. I think that answers, really, the questions that the hon. Member has asked me. He is clearly not aware of the ins and outs of these sites.

Hon. D J Bossino: Madam Speaker, I am fully aware of the ins and outs of these sites, and I do not need to be lectured by the hon. Member. Just one final question in relation to the 100 Ton Gun, which does not fall under the contractual arrangements, as far as I understand, and I am assuming would be under his department as the Department of the Environment. Are there any plans to refurbish that at all? Because I am told that it is in a rather deplorable and bad state of upkeep.

Hon. Prof J Cortes: Yes, there are. It has got to be done very, very sensitively because you cannot just move in with concrete or anything like that, but it is being looked at.

Madam Speaker: Right, that is the end of the supplementaries.

Adjournment

Chief Minister (Hon. F R Picardo): Thank you, Madam Speaker. And then, having completed the monthly assault on Knightsfield Holdings—which, no doubt, we shall be treated to again next month by the Hon. Mr Bossino—next week indeed, next week by the Hon. Mr Bossino who's Party

1950 gave the contract—I now move that the House should now adjourn until three o'clock tomorrow afternoon.

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

1955 This House will now adjourn to tomorrow, at 3 p.m.

The House adjourned at 5.44 p.m.