



PROCEEDINGS OF THE GIBRALTAR PARLIAMENT

AFTERNOON SESSION: 3.00 p.m. – 6.55 p.m.

Gibraltar, Wednesday, 22nd November 2023

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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: J B Reyes Esq *in attendance*]

PRAYER

Madam Speaker

CONFIRMATION OF MINUTES

Clerk: Meeting of Parliament, Wednesday, 22nd November 2023.

Order of Proceedings: (i) Oath of Allegiance; (ii) Confirmation of Minutes – the Minutes of the last meeting of the 14th Parliament, which was held on 15th, 20th and 26th June, and 3rd, 11th, 12th, 13th, 14th, 17th, 18th and 19th July 2023; and the first meeting of the 15th Parliament, which was held on 10th November 2023.

Madam Speaker: May I sign the Minutes as correct?

Members: Aye.

Madam Speaker signed the Minutes.

COMMUNICATIONS FROM THE CHAIR

Clerk: (iii) Communications from the Chair.

Madam Speaker: I have two announcements to make. Before I do so, you will each notice that you have an invite in front of you. I urge you all earnestly to make every effort to attend.

Speaker's entry to and departure from the Chamber – New practice to be adopted by Madam Speaker

Madam Speaker: Firstly, going forward from today, I shall be adopting a new practice upon entering and leaving the Chamber. I shall bow only once in the direction of the mace, thus paying my respects with one bow to the whole of this Hon. House. If you wish to return the courtesy thereafter, you should bow to the Chair in unison, or as close to unison as may be achieved.

**Modernisation of proceedings –
Introduction of calendar of sittings**

20 **Madam Speaker:** In respect of the second statement, last week I invited the Hon. the Chief
Minister and the Hon. the Leader of the Opposition to meet with me jointly. I am grateful to them
both for giving of their time. We had an open and useful discussion. Our common aim is to
modernise proceedings in this hon. House as soon as practically possible, so as to make them more
user friendly for the public as well as for hon. Members. To this end, we are working on creating
25 a parliamentary calendar of sittings. This would be circulated in advance and, as well as dates,
would identify time slots on those dates for the tabling of questions and answers of each of the
ministerial portfolios, thus giving hon. Members and the public prior notice of when questions are
intended to be taken.

In anticipation of implementing those changes, I ask that hon. Members of the Opposition pay
30 careful attention to the rules governing supplementary questions, in particular with regard to the
length of preambles and the necessary link between the supplementary questions and the original
questions. Similarly, I ask that Hon. Ministers have regard to the length of answers given, which
should be no longer than is necessary to answer the question effectively.

I have shared this statement with the Leader of the House and the Leader of the Opposition,
35 and I know it has the support of both of them.

PAPERS TO BE LAID

Clerk: (iv) Petitions; (v) Announcements; (vi) Papers to be Laid – the Hon. the Chief Minister.

Chief Minister (Hon. F R Picardo): Madam Speaker, I have the honour to lay on the table the
40 Qualifying (Category 2) Individuals (Amendment) Rules 2023, the High Executive Possessing
Individual Skills (Amendment) Rules 2023 and the Ombudsman's Annual Report for the year ended
31st December 2022.

Madam Speaker: Ordered to lie.

45 **Clerk:** The Hon. the Deputy Chief Minister.

Deputy Chief Minister (Hon. Dr J J Garcia): Madam Speaker, I have the honour to lay on the
table a consultation paper on lowering the age of voting to 16.

50 **Madam Speaker:** Ordered to lie.

Questions for Oral Answer

EDUCATION, THE ENVIRONMENT AND CLIMATE CHANGE

Q541/2023

**School nurses –
Complement by school**

Clerk: (vii) Reports of Committees; (viii) Answers to Oral Questions.
Questions to the Minister for Education, the Environment and Climate Change.
Question 541/2023. The Hon. Mrs A Sanchez.

55

Hon. Mrs A Sanchez: Madam Speaker, could the Government provide the current complement of school nurses, broken down by school?

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

60

Minister for Education, Environment and Climate Change (Hon. Prof. J E Cortes): Madam Speaker, the information the hon. Lady seeks as to the complement is publicly available. It is set out in the Estimates Book for the financial year 2023-24. All the school nurses are at St Martin's School.

65

Hon. E J Reyes: If I may, Madam Speaker? Thank you. I thank the Minister for his answer. I know the Estimates provide a figure of what the complement should be, but can the Minister confirm that the complement is actually complete and that there are no vacancies at present?

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Hon. Prof. J E Cortes: I believe, Mr – Madam Speaker, I do apologise. It is a little bit like drifting into 'Her Majesty' when we should refer to His Majesty.

Madam Speaker: We all need to be patient with each other, so do not worry.

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Hon. Prof. J E Cortes: I believe that the complement in the Estimates Book is actually complete, but, as usual, I will check it and provide the answer if that is not correct.

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Hon. E J Reyes: I am extremely grateful, Madam Speaker, for that. Yes, it is accepted that the Minister checks and lets us know in an open meeting, so it can be recorded in *Hansard* for any future reference we may have.

Chief Minister (Hon. F R Picardo): Madam Speaker, I can be of assistance. I checked, and it is complete.

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Madam Speaker: Next question.

Q542/2023
St Martin's School –
Investigation into allegations made

Clerk: Question 542/2023. The Hon. Mrs A Sanchez.

Hon. Mrs A Sanchez: Madam Speaker, could the Government provide information on the anticipated conclusion date of the investigation into the series of allegations leading to the temporary stepping down of the head teacher of St Martin's School, as reported in the GBC news article dated 3rd August 2023?
90

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

Minister for Education, Environment and Climate Change (Hon. Prof. J E Cortes): Madam Speaker, the Government cannot comment on live investigations.
95

Hon. Mrs A Sanchez: Madam Speaker, could the hon. Member disclose who has been appointed to investigate these allegations?
100

Hon. Prof. J E Cortes: Madam Speaker, I do not have that information, but, again, I am very happy to share it, if it is provided to me. It is not directly something that I would have known, answering this particular question.

Hon. Mrs A Sanchez: Madam Speaker, has the hon. Member engaged with the parents and the pupils of this school, to understand their concerns regarding the duration of the resolution process and the potential impact that this might be having?
105

Hon. Prof. J E Cortes: Madam Speaker, no, I have not. It is not for me to get involved in a matter of this type of investigation, but the Department is aware. If I were approached directly, obviously I would give them the time and comment to the level that I could, but it is very important that I should not, myself, be involved in a matter relating to an investigation of this nature. The Department is working very closely in ensuring that the school is well looked after.
110

Hon. Mrs A Sanchez: Madam Speaker, does the hon. Member acknowledge the vital need for continuity and stability in St Martin's School and that the continuity is now partly hinging on the resolution of this investigation and the appointment of a permanent head teacher? Could the hon. Member outline the measures that have been taken to minimise the disruption caused?
115

Hon. Chief Minister: Madam Speaker, I am afraid that I have a concern about the way that that supplementary has been phrased, because it presupposes that the outcome of the investigation will be that the person who has temporarily stepped down will not be the person who returns. We cannot go anywhere near what the outcome of that investigation would be. I wonder whether the hon. Lady might want to rephrase just that element of it, because we will not be able to answer anything that supposes what the outcome of the investigation should be.
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Madam Speaker: Yes, well, in any event, I remind the hon. Lady that, pursuant to the rules, you should not be asking for an expression of opinion. If you would like to rephrase your question, I will allow you to rephrase it, so that it is better put. Otherwise, you may feel you have asked as much as you can on this.
130

Hon. Prof. J E Cortes: Madam Speaker, I am happy to answer the first part, which is: is continuity important? Clearly, yes, ma'am, I am satisfied that we are dealing with that matter. As for the other part, as the Hon. Chief Minister has said, I do not think that would be appropriate.

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Madam Speaker: Next question.

Q543/2023
Urban Renewal Committee –
Date of last meeting

Clerk: Question 543/2023. The Hon. G Origo.

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Hon. G Origo: Madam Speaker, can the Government confirm when the last time the Urban Renewal Committee met?

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

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Minister for Education, the Environment and Climate Change (Hon. Prof. J E Cortes): Madam Speaker, the Urban Renewal Committee last met on 10th May 2022.

Hon. G Origo: Madam Speaker, can the hon. Member please confirm how many meetings the committee has had since it was commissioned?

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Hon. Prof. J E Cortes: No, Madam Speaker, I do not have that information. This is an informal committee which the Government set up some years ago in order to develop policy and strategies, so it is not a committee that has to meet regularly in order to enforce anything. These policies and strategies have been set up and would be reviewed periodically. It met more frequently as these policies were set up. Again, it is information that can be made available, but I cannot recall how many times that committee has met.

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Madam Speaker: Next question, please.

Q544/2023
Great Siege Tunnels light show –
Commissioning of project

Clerk: Question 544/2023. The Hon. G Origo.

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Hon. G Origo: Madam Speaker, can the Government confirm whether the commission of the Great Siege Tunnels light show will be a project that will be tendered out to the private sector, or whether this will be a Government/Gibraltar Tourist Board initiative?

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

165

Minister for Education, the Environment and Climate Change (Hon. Prof. J E Cortes): Madam Speaker, the Government is considering how best to progress this project.

Madam Speaker: Next question.

Q545/2023

**Devil's Tower Road cemetery –
Birdwatching activities**

170 **Clerk:** Question 545/2023. The Hon. G Origo.

Hon. G Origo: Madam Speaker, several complaints have been raised with regard to the increasing activity of birdwatching occurring at the cemetery on Devil's Tower Road, resulting in disturbances to those already there and respecting their loved ones. Does the Government
175 propose to take any action to curtail such activities?

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

Minister for Education, the Environment and Climate Change (Hon. Prof. J E Cortes): Madam
180 Speaker, no.

Hon. Dr K Azopardi: Madam Speaker, may I just ask about that? Does the Government accept that there is birdwatching activity in the cemetery; and, if it does, does it not consider that activity of that nature, depending on how it occurs, may be in conflict with what is the natural use of and
185 visits of people to the cemetery, and, indeed, burials?

Hon. Prof. J E Cortes: Madam Speaker, the basic tenet of this question is an acceptance of an increasing activity of birdwatching. I started birdwatching in the cemetery, probably at the age of 13 or 14, and used to go almost daily, and more frequent than daily is hard to achieve. Therefore,
190 I do not accept that there is an increase in activity. Cemeteries around the world are known to be refuges for wildlife, and in fact there are often official tours of cemeteries to show ornithologists and nature lovers the wildlife of the cemetery.

Madam Speaker, the Hon. Leader of the Opposition has actually got it quite correct: it depends on how it occurs. The vast majority of birdwatchers, yours truly included, are very respectful. In
195 fact, I will go further. I carried out my PhD research in the cemetery looking at the ecology of lizards, and I never once was disrespectful to anybody there. Therefore, it is not the action of birding or the action of researching lizards that is disrespectful; it would be the actual approach of the individual.

There have been no complaints to the cemetery authorities about this. If there were any
200 complaints about the behaviour of anybody, action would be taken and perhaps they would be requested not to return, but I do not think we can correctly say that any inappropriate behaviour can be linked to that particular activity, which can be a very passive activity and a legitimate activity to be carried out in any area with interesting natural resources.

Hon. D J Bossino: Madam Speaker, if I may, the second premise of the question related to disturbances in the area and respecting loved ones; it was not just a question of increased activity. He mentions that any reports about –

Madam Speaker: May I just interrupt? Hon. Member, the first time you address someone on
210 the opposite side, you should use 'the hon. Member', and then you can use the pronouns after that.

Hon. D J Bossino: Thank you for that reminder, and, of course, Madam Speaker, I will take that
215 on board.

Can the hon. Member, given the premise of the question that I have asked, explain – and he answered, I think, a bit of it in relation to what can be done should there be disrespectful behaviour by individuals who attend the cemetery for that particular activity, and there is nothing,

necessarily, intrinsically wrong with that – what powers of enforcement the cemetery authorities have? He mentioned that fleetingly, but I wonder if he has any information in relation to that.

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Hon. Prof. J E Cortes: Madam Speaker, we have not had complaints of this nature for as long as I can remember, and I have been responsible for it for quite a period of time – certainly reports of this nature that have come to me. The cemetery authorities will, of course, if there is such an incident of any nature, consider what action to take. It may be just talking to the person concerned, counselling them. Hopefully the response would be a positive one. If it were anything of a really worrying nature, perhaps the Police should be involved. I do not recall any such incident, but certainly I think it is worth looking into. There should be rules and protocols in place, but I do not have detailed information. It has never been invoked.

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Madam Speaker: Next question.

Q546/2023

**Devil's Tower Road cemetery –
Pay and display parking spaces**

Clerk: Question 546/2023. The Hon. G Origo.

Hon. G Origo: Madam Speaker, can the Government confirm whether it has any plans to increase the number of designated pay and display parking spaces outside the immediate vicinity of the cemetery on Devil's Tower Road?

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

Minister for Education, the Environment and Climate Change (Hon. Prof. J E Cortes): Madam Speaker, there are no pay and display parking spaces on Cemetery Road adjacent to the cemetery, and there are currently no plans to designate any parking spaces on this road as pay and display. The Devil's Tower Road multi-storey car park is pay as you go parking which caters for the area, including St Theresa's Church and the cemetery. However, I am reviewing all parking provision, so there may be changes in the future.

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Madam Speaker: Next question.

Q547 and 564/2023

**Electric vehicles –
Incentives to encourage transition; charging points**

Clerk: Question 547/2023. The Hon. G Origo.

Hon. G Origo: Madam Speaker, what sort of incentives is the Government proposing in order to facilitate the transition from fuel to electric vehicles?

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

Minister for Education, the Environment and Climate Change (Hon. Prof. J E Cortes): Madam Speaker, I will answer this question together with Question 564.

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Clerk: Question 564. The Hon. C Sacarello.

Hon. C Sacarello: Would the hon. Member please explain the Government's plan on rolling out EV charging points across Gibraltar, in particular in estates?

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

Hon. Prof. J E Cortes: Madam Speaker, Government has had a policy of zero import duty on electric vehicles and a cashback incentive on electric vehicle purchases for a number of years now. There is also tax relief available on the cost of installing a home charging system. The levels of these are currently being reviewed.

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Availability of and access to charging infrastructure is recognised as a critical barrier to the adoption of electric vehicles. In light of this, an Electric Vehicle Infrastructure Strategy prepared by the Net Zero Delivery Body is currently being considered by Cabinet. The strategy will set a vision and action plan for the rollout of electric vehicle charging infrastructure to keep pace with growing demand. The strategy will include rapid chargers, as well as neighbourhood mobility hubs. We shall be making further announcements in due course.

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Hon. Dr K Azopardi: Madam Speaker, can I just ask the Minister, in the context of the strategy that they intend to roll out, has there been an assessment of the number of EV points that are required or that they are aspiring to?

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Hon. Prof. J E Cortes: Madam Speaker, there will have been a similar problem – I may have mentioned this before – when horse-drawn carts were being replaced by petrol-driven cars and people asked, 'Are we ever going to have stations or places where petrol can be delivered around the geography?' This is part of the process. The EV strategy, which is being considered by Cabinet and which was prepared by the Net Zero Delivery Body subcommittee, looks into the challenges. We do not have exact figures now. There are issues with infrastructure, but this is something that is happening, the industry is now pushing this along and clearly we will have to do a little bit more work to refine the details.

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The strategy, once it is approved, will be a public document and obviously will be subject to either conversations with Members of the Opposition who may be interested, as I assume they are interested in moving this along, or even further questions in Parliament.

Hon. D J Bossino: I have a question in relation to the EV strategy in particular. Does he have an idea as to –?

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Madam Speaker: Mr Bossino, 'does the hon. Member have', and then you go into the pronoun. I shall keep on, until you get it.

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Hon. D J Bossino: Is the hon. Member, in relation to the EV strategy, able to give an indication to the House as to when he thinks that that will be up and running and ready for publication?

Hon. Prof. J E Cortes: I suspect very soon, Madam Speaker. I circulated it to the new Cabinet recently and I have had one or two replies, so I suspect it will be, probably, within no more than a couple of months at most, and it could be sooner.

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Hon. D J Bossino: If I may, Madam Speaker, is the hon. Member able, at this stage, given that I think he has referred to a draft which is already available, to give an indication as to what the issues in relation to infrastructure are?

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Hon. Prof. J E Cortes: Madam Speaker, the issues are identifying those places where electric charging points, particularly fast charging points, can be placed and how far they may be from the correct availability of power. It may be that power has to be taken to different points in order for there to be enough capacity in that particular location for vehicle charging points. That is essentially what we are talking about.

Hon. D J Bossino: One final question, if I may – and, again, I accept that this is the beginning of a process. Is the Hon. Minister able to give an indication at this stage to this House as to what the likely cost of the rolling out of that strategy and the infrastructure is likely to be?

Chief Minister (Hon. F R Picardo): Madam Speaker, that really is not a question for the Department of the Environment. It is a question for the Gibraltar Electricity Authority, not one which I think we will be able to answer today. There is another question on the Order Paper which deals with grid capacity, preparing the grid etc., so I think it may be helpful for the hon. Member to wait till that question comes up, to pursue that line of questioning further. However, it does not relate to cost, it relates to capacity.

Madam Speaker: Next question.

Q548/2023
Taxi service issues –
Steps to resolution

Clerk: Question 548/2023. The Hon. G Origo.

Hon. G Origo: Madam Speaker, aside from hosting regular meetings with the Taxi Association, what steps can the Government take to guarantee a swift resolution to the service issues which have historically been reported within the service?

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

Minister for Education, the Environment and Climate Change (Hon. Prof. J E Cortes): Madam Speaker, acting promptly on the outcomes of such meetings.

Hon. G Origo: Madam Speaker, could the hon. Member please confirm when the last time such a meeting took place with the Taxi Association?

Hon. Prof. J E Cortes: Madam Speaker, it would have been this morning, but unfortunately it was in my diary for 10 o'clock and in theirs for 11, so it did not happen. This would have been the first formal meeting since I took on responsibility for transport, but I have had regular meetings, every couple of months, with the Taxi Association because of my responsibility for areas such as the Upper Rock. As I said, this was scheduled for today and it has been rescheduled for within the next couple of days.

Hon. Dr K Azopardi: Madam Speaker, given that the Minister says that acting promptly is the best course of action and that he had been having regular meetings before the dissolution of the House, what steps precisely have been taken to guarantee a swift resolution to the service issues which have historically been reported with that service?

350 **Hon. Prof. J E Cortes:** Madam Speaker, in relation to the Upper Rock, which is what I used to meet with them on, again, a lot of steps have been taken and I think they are very satisfied with the outcomes. In relation to other matters of my recent transport portfolio, the discussions would have taken place this morning. Sadly, they did not.

355 **Hon. Dr K Azopardi:** Does the Minister accept that, despite what he thinks are prompt steps that have been taken in relation to the meetings that he has held, the public consider that there continue to be problems with the service?

360 **Hon. Prof. J E Cortes:** Madam Speaker, that might well be the case, but I am not going to speculate here on what the public might or might not think. I do not know on what basis the hon. Member is reaching that conclusion. I am very much looking forward to initiating my regular contacts with the Taxi Association, contacts which have been very fruitful over the past 12 years. I am looking forward to working together with them to make improvements for everybody, themselves and the community.

365 **Hon. D J Bossino:** Madam Speaker, the hon. Member comes here today as if he were a new Minister. The hon. Gentlemen have now been in office for 12 years, and it is well known that there are very significant issues in relation to service, particularly, I can tell him, in relation to the service which is, or is not, properly provided at the Airport.

370 I will ask him this specific question, if I may, Madam Speaker. One of the issues that was identified to us when we have historically met with the GTA is that one of the ways to address many of these issues is to employ more transport inspectors. Can I ask the hon. Member whether the Government intends to do that, in order to improve the service that the GTA can provide to its users?

375 **Chief Minister (Hon. F R Picardo):** Madam Speaker, the hon. Member seems to have forgotten that in the last Parliament, the hon. Member he is asking questions of was not the Minister for Transport. He seems to have attributed to him 12 years of responsibility for transport, which is really quite remarkable, because the hon. Gentleman was not the Minister for Transport.

380 Given that the then Minister for Transport is not here, I will answer on behalf of the Government, Madam Speaker, which has been in power for 12 years and will be for another four, despite their best efforts some weeks ago. I will answer shortly by saying that, in fact, our meetings with the Taxi Association also related, inter alia, to one of the things that could be done relating to the appointment of transport inspectors. Indeed, just before the election, a senior transport inspector was appointed. I understand that there may be other vacancies. So I think that given that the taxi drivers are known to be honourable people, they are some, perhaps, of the few who were telling them the same things that they were telling us, and we acted upon the things that they were suggesting should be done.

390 **Hon. D J Bossino:** May I ask the hon. Member, Madam Speaker, when he says he understands that more vacancies are going to be made available, can he be more specific in relation to that: how many vacancies and whether he feels that that is going to be sufficient to address the issue at stake here, which is a lack of service in some pockets of Gibraltar?

395 **Hon. Chief Minister:** Madam Speaker, I cannot be more precise; if I could, I would have given the exact figure. The hon. Gentleman knows that if I give a figure, I am required to come back to the House and correct that figure if I have got it wrong. Because I do not have the exact figure, I have not given it, but I know that in our discussions with the Taxi Association we have reached an agreement with them as to what the right figure should be. Whether that is more than one more is not something I can exactly recall because I was not the Minister for Transport, but I was, of course, involved in approving the number of vacancies at the time, and if I recall correctly, one

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went immediately and I cannot recall whether more were to come. That is what I am trying to communicate to the House, because I cannot be more precise at this stage.

405 **Hon. D J Bossino:** Madam Speaker, in relation to that, and as to timings, is the Hon. the Chief
Minister able to indicate when he will be in a position to make that announcement, or is it
information which is available but he does not have available with him today in the House? Is it
something which requires a future decision in relation to the specific numbers, or should we
410 simply ask the question again, with the Speaker's leave, in relation to the appointment of new
transport inspectors?

Hon. Chief Minister: Madam Speaker, I do not anticipate an announcement. I am telling the
hon. Gentleman something that has been done already which arises from his question, and
therefore I am providing information. Neither do I think, with the very greatest respect to the
415 Chair, permission is necessary for that question to be asked, given that that is not the question
that was asked. The question that was asked is a generic one. I know that the hon. Gentleman has
been here for eight years and he knows that already and does not need me to remind him.

Madam Speaker: Next question.

Q549/2023
Household waste –
Fines issued for illegal dumping

420 **Clerk:** Question 549/2023. The Hon. G Origo.

Hon. G Origo: Madam Speaker, can the Government disclose how many fines it has issued in
respect of illegal dumping of household waste for the year 2022 and so far in 2023?

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

Minister for Education, the Environment and Climate Change (Hon. Prof. J E Cortes): Madam
Speaker, in total, 51 tickets were issued in 2022; 58 were issued to date in 2023, plus another four
that we will be issuing this week. I will qualify that: this answer was drafted last week, so it may
430 mean last week, but either last week or this week another four.

Madam Speaker: Next question.

Q550/2023
Considerate Contractor Scheme –
Proposed establishment

Clerk: Question 550/2023. The Hon. G Origo.

435 **Hon. G Origo:** Madam Speaker, by when does the Government intend to establish the
proposed Considerate Contractor Scheme, ensuring that all construction projects adhere to the
highest standards of professionalism, safety and environmental responsibility?

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

440 **Minister for Education, the Environment and Climate Change (Hon. Prof. J E Cortes):** Madam
Speaker, such a scheme was discussed at the Aspire Conference on a Sustainable Built
Environment this summer. It is an idea that was initially proposed to Government by a developer.
In the UK, the Considerate Constructor Scheme is not a government-run scheme but is run by an
445 independently managed, not-for-profit organisation, working with the construction industry.
Government is highly supportive of the aims of this scheme, which seeks to raise standards within
the industry and build trust with the public, and is considering how such a scheme could be
managed and monitored. There is no fixed date in mind for its introduction, but we are seeking to
have constructive dialogue with developers to ensure that the principles of such a scheme are
450 adopted, even if the official framework is not yet in place. The Government will not, however, be
establishing the scheme itself.

Q551/2023

**Sewage treatment plant –
Commencement date and timescale for completion**

Clerk: Question 551/2023. The Hon. G Origo.

Hon. G Origo: Madam Speaker, when does the Government believe that we will see the
commencement of the sewage treatment plant, and what timescale is expected for completion?
455

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

Minister for Education, the Environment and Climate Change (Hon. Prof. J E Cortes): Madam
Speaker, the tender for the wastewater treatment plant is currently at preferred bidder stage.
460 Discussions are ongoing with the preferred bidder to deal with technical and commercial matters
which require further details. It is, therefore, not possible at this moment to provide a definitive
start date until the process is completed. Completion and commissioning of the plant are expected
to take in the region of two and a half years from starting works on site.

465 **Hon. Dr K Azopardi:** Madam Speaker, given that they are at preferred bidder stage, can I also
assume that the Government is not ready to confirm the likely cost until there is a formal award?
Is that the position, or is the Hon. Minister able to share the projection of it? Can I just also ask,
while I am on my feet, if he can say the number of bidders there were for this project?

470 **Hon. Prof. J E Cortes:** Madam Speaker, as I said in my answer, the board – not me – is looking
at technical and commercial matters. Therefore, I am not in a position to give detail on that. I
cannot recall the exact number of bidders. It was half a dozen, more or less, but again, that is
something that can be confirmed. There is no problem with that, but I do not have the figure with
me now. I think that answers all the hon. Member's questions.
475

Hon. D J Bossino: Madam Speaker, just drilling down on the timings and the details of it, can
the Hon. Minister say whether he has any information as to when it is expected that the preferred
bidder stage is likely to be completed? That will have a corollary effect in terms of when the project
is likely to start. If he has any information in relation to the expected ETA in relation to the start
480 of the project, that will be useful as well.

Hon. Chief Minister: Madam Speaker, if I can be of assistance, I know that there were, in the
end, only two bidders, and it is impossible, at this stage, to give the information the hon.
Gentleman has sought.
485

Madam Speaker: Next question.

Q552/2023
Air pollution in vicinity of Port area –
Source

Clerk: Question 552/2023. The Hon. G Origo.

490 **Hon. G Origo:** Madam Speaker, multiple reports have been seen online regarding the strong stench of fuel oil in the vicinity of the Port area and neighbouring estates. Does the Government have any idea as to what is causing such air pollution?

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

495 **Minister for Education, the Environment and Climate Change (Hon. Prof. J E Cortes):** Madam Speaker, I am grateful for the Chief Minister confirming there were two. I had, in my mind, several more because there had been several enquiries, but, in the end, only two were presented. I am grateful for that clarification and that is now clear across the House.

500 In relation to Question 552, the Environmental Agency has received four complaints of smells. One complaint was from the Westside area, another complaint was from the South District and two complaints were received from the Town area. Environmental health officers investigated and could not establish the source of the smells for three of those complaints. One complaint was received from the South District regarding smells emanating from Gibdock. However, upon investigation it was established that a local business within New Harbours was conducting painting operations, and this was promptly dealt with by the Environmental health officer. The Agency also made enquiries with the Gibraltar Port Authority, which did not receive any reports of smells from maritime activity. At present, based on the limited evidence, the most likely source is transboundary.

510 **Hon. G Origo:** Madam Speaker, could the hon. Gentleman please confirm whether the Government has any plans or steps it can take to mitigate and limit such pollution when it does arise?

515 **Hon. Prof. J E Cortes:** Madam Speaker, in relation to the painting operation by a business, that was dealt with immediately by the officer. When it is transboundary, we cannot take action to mitigate. We try to identify possible sources, but this takes time because there is online information from air monitoring stations around the region and we do try to see whether there are similar peaks, if there are peaks at all, in the different pollutants, and try to get an indication. However, it is very difficult to deal with it when it is transboundary, because there is a lot of industry in the surrounding area. Fortunately, most winds do not blow in this direction, but when they do, it is very difficult to pinpoint.

Madam Speaker: Next question.

Q553/2023
BREEAM certification and Net Zero Building Standard –
Proposed introduction

Clerk: Question 553/2023. The Hon. G Origo.

525 **Hon. G Origo:** Madam Speaker, when does the Government propose to introduce Building Research Establishment Environmental Assessment Method (BREEAM) certification and the development of a Net Zero Building Standard?

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

530

Minister for Education, the Environment and Climate Change (Hon. Prof. J E Cortes): Madam Speaker, apologies, it is a longer answer than usual but there is a lot of information that I need to share.

535

The Government has already begun the process of consulting with industry on the question of BREEAM standards for new projects and is pleased to note that there are now a number of individuals in Gibraltar, albeit still a small number, who are qualified to undertake BREEAM assessments. BREEAM is a voluntary standard and new developments are already able to use this method to evaluate and certify the environmental performance of a building's design, construction and operation. The framework setting out when and what level of BREEAM certification is required for different types of development will be included in the new Development Plan.

540

In terms of a Net Zero Building Standard, we are monitoring the UK's development of their standard closely and note that the industry group developing it hopes to have a version of the Standard available for beta testing within the next six months. Government will liaise with industry groups such as the Gibraltar Sustainable Buildings Group to review the beta version, once available, to ascertain what elements of it are suitable for Gibraltar and what would need to be revised or redefined to make sense for our climatic context. As such, it is unlikely that a final version of this standard will be available for at least two years. However, the commitment to BREEAM certification is already included in the Climate Change Strategy as policy, and, indeed, there is already at least one major development that will be assessing its project against these standards as part of its planning conditions; so, in a sense, we have already introduced BREEAM certification.

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The Net Zero Building Standard in the UK is being developed by leading UK organisations such as the Building Research Establishment, the Carbon Trust, the Institute of Structural Engineers, the Royal Institute of British Architects and the Royal Institute of Chartered Surveyors, among others. It is the first cross-industry standard of this nature that brings together net zero requirements for all building types. Gibraltar's building rules are based on UK standards and legislation, and, as such, it makes sense to rely on the extensive work already being done by professionals there whilst relying on our own built environment professionals to make sure that, in areas where it is relevant, the standard reflects the Mediterranean climate in which we live and work.

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This is not a job that can be rushed and, at present, we are not in a position to give a definitive timeframe. Nevertheless, the Government will continue to work with the industry, through the planning and building control process, to ensure that the operational and embodied energy of buildings are minimised as far as possible in all new projects.

565

Hon. D J Bossino: There is a lot of information there. Madam Speaker, the Minister talks about one major development which is adopting the standard that he refers to. Is he able to identify which – he is shaking his head – major development he is talking about?

570

Hon. Prof. J E Cortes: No, Madam Speaker, I do not think it would be appropriate for me to do that here, because there could be commercial implications.

Madam Speaker: Next question.

Q554/2023
25-Year Environmental Plan –
Proposed introduction

575 **Clerk:** Question 554/2023. The Hon. G Origo.

Hon. G Origo: Madam Speaker, could the Government please confirm when it will be in a position to publish the 25-Year Environmental Plan?

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

Minister for Education, the Environment and Climate Change (Hon. Prof. J E Cortes): Madam Speaker, the 25-Year Plan will be published before the end of the year.

585 **Hon. Dr K Azopardi:** Madam Speaker, is that plan being prepared in house, or is it with the assistance of consultants; and, if so, who are they? Does the Minister have an idea of cost?

Hon. Prof. J E Cortes: Madam Speaker, in house by the Scientific Technical Team of the Department of the Environment and Climate Change.

590 **Madam Speaker:** Next question.

Q555/2023
School cleaner vacancies –
Breakdown by school and when expected to be filled

Clerk: Question 555/2023. The Hon. E J Reyes.

595 **Hon. E J Reyes:** Madam Speaker, can Government provide details of how many vacancies currently exist for school cleaners, providing a breakdown of schools concerned, together with details of when these posts are expected to be filled on a permanent basis?

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

600 **Minister for Education, the Environment and Climate Change (Hon. Prof. J E Cortes):** Madam Speaker, the current complement of school cleaners is 278. There are 21 vacant part-time posts.

605 **Hon. E J Reyes:** Madam Speaker, in my question I did request the Minister to provide a breakdown of the schools concerned. I want confirmation of the stories I hear that some schools have very big numbers of vacancies and others may not; hence my request for a breakdown of the schools concerned.

610 **Hon. Prof. J E Cortes:** Madam Speaker, yes, I should have clarified that there is certain movement between schools and therefore it is hard to pin it down. I can give an approximate figure and I can bring that back on another occasion, if that would be helpful.

Hon. E J Reyes: Yes, thank you, Madam Speaker, I appreciate the Minister doing that. Whilst he is doing that verification and providing the data for me, I will give an indication that I am trying, also, to establish whether there is any veracity behind a school like Bishop Fitzgerald being down

615 by as many as 11 cleaners. It sounds a big number to me, but the Minister, with his investigation,
may be able to come back to this House and confirm those figures being bandied about.

Hon. Prof. J E Cortes: Madam Speaker, I suspect that if Bishop Fitzgerald were down by 11
620 cleaners, I would have had representation in my office before now. I have no information as to
that. What may, perhaps, have led to that comment is the fact that because it is a larger school,
we are going to need a larger number and, for a period of time, the recruitment process has
commenced, including the 21 vacancies, and there is some cross cover with extra hours. However,
it is not that they are down by 11 cleaners, because the work is being done and covered, so there
is no major crisis, certainly that I am aware of.

625
Hon. E J Reyes: Thank you, ma'am. The Minister has touched upon it – I believe he led us to
believe that there is a process of filling those vacancies and so on. I had asked in my original
question when does he have an expectation that these will be filled on a permanent basis. He may
have the information now and we can have it; if not, it is something I look forward to receiving.

630
Hon. Prof. J E Cortes: Yes, Madam Speaker, the selection process has commenced. I recall
having signed, a short time ago, the appropriate form that comes to me for filling of vacancies so
the process has commenced.

Q556-57/2023
BTEC Level 3 Music Performance courses –
Location of classes

Clerk: Question 556/2023. The Hon. E J Reyes.

635
Hon. E J Reyes: Madam Speaker, why is the BTEC Level 3 National Extended Certificate in Music
Performance being delivered at premises other than the Gibraltar College, as stated in both
Bayside and Westside Schools' Curriculum 2023 booklet issued to students?

640
Clerk: Answer, the Minister for Education, the Environment and Climate Change.

Minister for Education, the Environment and Climate Change (Hon. Prof. J E Cortes): Madam
Speaker, I will answer this question together with Question 557.

645
Clerk: Question 557/2023. The Hon. E J Reyes.

Hon. E J Reyes: Why is the BTEC Level 3 National Extended Certificate in Music Performance
(Acting) being delivered at premises other than the Gibraltar College, as stated in both Bayside
and Westside Schools' Curriculum 2023 booklet issued to students?

650
Clerk: Answer, the Minister for Education, the Environment and Climate Change.

Hon. Prof. J E Cortes: Madam Speaker, because these courses are being delivered at the
premises of the Gibraltar Academy of Music and Performing Arts.

655
Hon. E J Reyes: Madam Speaker, if the booklet issued to students both at Bayside and Westside
in respect of these two courses has a note that says that these courses will be delivered at the
Gibraltar College, I am asking why they are being delivered at premises other than the College, as
stated in the booklet. I am grateful that the Minister has confirmed where they are being

660 delivered, but it does not answer the question of why they are being delivered other than where
the booklet said they were going to be delivered.

Hon. Prof. J E Cortes: Madam Speaker, as the hon. Member is well aware, because these
665 questions have arisen time and again in this House in the previous Parliament, there is an
agreement between the College and the Gibraltar Academy of Music and Performing Arts for the
delivery of these courses.

Hon. E J Reyes: Madam Speaker, why were students and parents led to believe, at the end of
670 academic year 2022-23, that for the academic year 2023-24 the courses were actually going to be
delivered at the Gibraltar College? It has now been confirmed that they are being delivered in
premises other than those that fall under the direct control of the Director of Education. It is, in
my opinion, misguidance to the parents.

Hon. Prof. J E Cortes: Madam Speaker, a multi-campus approach is very common in higher and
675 further education. It is a way to expand the availability of courses. It happens all over the world.
The courses are run and accredited by the College. They are delivered by the Gibraltar Academy
of Music and Performing Arts in the same way that other vocational courses are run in places
other than the Gibraltar College. It is the correct way of allowing the College to expand despite its
680 confinement in space. I make no apology for that, whatsoever. I think this is the right way to
expand the opportunities that our young people have for more and more courses, in more and
more subjects.

Hon. E J Reyes: Madam Speaker, I hope I am not pushing your patience, but –

685 **Madam Speaker:** Last question.

Hon. E J Reyes: – it requires me to seek further clarification. The Minister referred to a campus.
I can understand the concept of consortium, if one wants to call it that, between Bayside School,
Westside School and the College of Further Education because they are catering for an A-level and
690 A-level equivalent academic route, but I was never aware that GAMPA was part of this consortium.
If it is, it is news certainly to the House. As a result of what the Minister is trying to explain in his
answer, is he signifying that there is no availability within the existing, relatively new buildings of
Bayside and Westside which were built within the last parliamentary term of office? Are there no
rooms available to deliver these courses there? Why do we need to ask students to move to
695 another location?

Hon. Prof. J E Cortes: Madam Speaker, there are university campuses which are probably larger
than Gibraltar, so we are not talking of more than perhaps a 10-minute – 15 minutes at most, if
you go slowly – walk between the different sites.

700 It can be considered an extension of the consortium. It is not a question of availability, it is a
question of choice. Some of the courses are delivered by people from GAMPA, who have their
facility there and it is made available to the College, and we welcome that. I am afraid that the
hon. Member is going to be quite upset as we roll out further arrangements with other
organisations in order to have courses delivered elsewhere than at the College, because this is the
705 way to expand.

I must add that these courses are extremely successful and have opened up opportunities for
young people, who are doing things that would not have been possible had we not taken this
initiative.

710 **Madam Speaker:** The Hon. the Leader of the Opposition.

Hon. Dr K Azopardi: Thank you, Madam Speaker. On the point that the Hon. Minister mentioned, that there was an agreement with GAMPA for the delivery of these courses, can I ask when this agreement was entered into? When were the courses first delivered at GAMPA?

715

Hon. Prof. J E Cortes: Madam Speaker, our recollection is 2021. We have already had some successful people completing the course, so I think two to three years, because this would be the third academic year.

720

Madam Speaker: We are exhausting the subject.

Hon. E J Reyes: I know, Madam Speaker, but the Minister said something there –

Madam Speaker: Right, one more.

725

Hon. E J Reyes: – which raises a further ... Can I clarify as well, Madam Speaker, for the record, that I am, by no means, upset in any shape or form – the Minister was hinting towards that – that any delivery of lessons happens anywhere outside the schools. It is the last thing on my mind. Let that be clear for the record.

730

What I want to set out here is that in my original statement I said parents and students are being told this is going to be delivered at the College and it then happens to be delivered elsewhere. I concur with the Minister's date, it was at about the start of the academic year in September 2021 when this started happening. When it was repeated for the academic year that started in September 2022, I know that teaching staff from both Bayside and Westside held a meeting with the Director – I am not 100% certain, but they may have, later, even met the Minister himself – expressing concerns. They are qualified teachers employed by the Department of Education, with the accredited qualifications to be able to deliver these courses in house, in the school buildings where the facilities are available, and yet it was being contracted out, so something there does not quite fit the picture, Madam Speaker.

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Madam Speaker: Your question is?

Hon. E J Reyes: My question is why were these teachers, who reassured the Director of Education that they had the qualifications and the resources necessary to teach them in house within Bayside and Westside School ... why was their offer not taken up and why are these courses not being delivered there?

745

Hon. Prof. J E Cortes: Madam Speaker, the accreditation for these courses was, in fact, achieved by GAMPA and offered to the Department of Education at a time when the schools were not delivering or were not about to deliver. The relationship became a very helpful one. The courses have been extremely successful and the decision was taken that these vocational courses would continue to be delivered under the auspices of the College, under the tutorship of GAMPA as well as the College. It was a satisfactory arrangement which has proven very successful and has continued to the present day. It was a conscious decision made after all the different aspects were considered.

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Madam Speaker: Next question.

Q558/2023
Delivery of BTEC courses –
Payments made to providers

Clerk: Question 558/2023. The Hon. E J Reyes.

760 **Hon. E J Reyes:** Can Government provide a detailed breakdown showing how much has been paid to whom in respect of all costs over the last three and current academic years related to the delivery/provision of BTEC courses for students registered at Bayside School, Westside School or the Gibraltar College of Further Education?

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

Minister for Education, the Environment and Climate Change (Hon. Prof. J E Cortes): Madam Speaker, I hand over a schedule with the information requested; I believe the first schedule of this Parliament.

Answer to Q558/2023

ANSWER TO QUESTION 558

Course Provider	Course	Course Delivery	Equipment
Mayfair On Main	Vocational Hair & Beauty Course September 2019 Westside/Bayside	£1,800.00	
Mayfair On Main	Vocational Hair & Beauty Course October 2019 Westside/Bayside	£1,800.00	
Mayfair On Main	Vocational Hair & Beauty Course November 2019 Westside/Bayside	£1,800.00	
Mayfair On Main	Vocational Hair & Beauty Course December 2019 Westside/Bayside	£1,800.00	
Mayfair On Main	Being payment of supply of equipment for Westside/Bayside course		£222.89
Mayfair On Main	Vocational Hair & Beauty Course January 2020 Westside/Bayside	£1,800.00	
Mayfair On Main	Vocational Hair & Beauty Course February 2020 Westside/Bayside	£1,800.00	
Mayfair On Main	Vocational Hair & Beauty Course March 2020 Westside/Bayside	£1,800.00	
Mayfair On Main	Vocational Hair & Beauty Course April 2020 Westside/Bayside	£1,800.00	
Mayfair On Main	Vocational Hair & Beauty Course May 2020 Westside/Bayside	£1,800.00	
Mayfair On Main	Vocational Hair & Beauty Course June 2020 Westside/Bayside	£1,800.00	
Mayfair On Main	Vocational Hair & Beauty Course July 2020 Westside/Bayside	£1,800.00	
Mayfair On Main	Vocational Hair & Beauty Course August 2020 Westside/Bayside	£1,800.00	
Mayfair On Main	Being payment of supply of equipment for Gibraltar College course		£2,205.10
Mayfair On Main	Vocational Hair & Beauty Course September 2020 Westside/Bayside	£1,907.50	
Mayfair On Main	Vocational Hair & Beauty Course October 2020 Westside/Bayside	£1,907.50	
Mayfair On Main	Vocational Hair & Beauty Course November 2020 Westside/Bayside	£1,907.50	
Mayfair On Main	Vocational Hair & Beauty Course September 2020 Gibraltar College	£5,489.92	
Mayfair On Main	Vocational Hair & Beauty Course October 2020 Gibraltar College	£5,489.92	
Mayfair On Main	Vocational Hair & Beauty Course November 2020 Gibraltar College	£5,489.92	
Mayfair On Main	Vocational Hair & Beauty Course December 2020 Westside/Bayside/College	£7,397.42	
Mayfair On Main	Vocational Hair & Beauty Course January 2021 Westside/Bayside/College	£7,397.42	
Mayfair On Main	Being payment of supply of equipment for Gibraltar College course		£2,624.05
Mayfair On Main	Vocational Hair & Beauty Course February 2021 Westside/Bayside/College	£7,397.42	
Mayfair On Main	Vocational Hair & Beauty Course March 2021 Westside/Bayside/College	£7,397.42	
Mayfair On Main	Vocational Hair & Beauty Course April 2021 Westside/Bayside/College	£7,397.42	
Mayfair On Main	Vocational Hair & Beauty Course May 2021 Westside/Bayside/College	£7,397.42	
Mayfair On Main	Vocational Hair & Beauty Course June 2021 Westside/Bayside/College	£7,397.42	
Mayfair On Main	Vocational Hair & Beauty Course July 2021 Westside/Bayside/College	£7,397.42	
Mayfair On Main	Vocational Hair & Beauty Course August 2021 Westside/Bayside/College	£7,397.42	

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CONTINUED ANSWER TO QUESTION 558

<u>Course Provider</u>	<u>Course</u>	<u>Course Delivery</u>	<u>Ancillary costs</u>
GAMPA	Vocational BTEC Music Performance September 2021	£2,050.00	
GAMPA	Vocational BTEC Music Performance QVQO Registration Fees and equipment		£1,400.00
GAMPA	Vocational BTEC Music Performance October 2021	£2,050.00	
GAMPA	Vocational BTEC Music Performance November 2021	£2,050.00	
GAMPA	Vocational BTEC Music Performance December 2021	£2,050.00	
GAMPA	Vocational BTEC Music Performance January 2022	£2,050.00	
GAMPA	Vocational BTEC Music Performance February 2022	£2,050.00	
GAMPA	Vocational BTEC Music Performance March 2022	£2,050.00	
GAMPA	Vocational BTEC Music Performance April 2022	£2,050.00	
GAMPA	Vocational BTEC Music Performance May 2022	£2,050.00	
GAMPA	Vocational BTEC Music Performance June 2022	£2,050.00	
GAMPA	Vocational BTEC Music Performance July 2022	£2,050.00	
GAMPA	Vocational BTEC Music Performance August 2022	£2,050.00	
GAMPA	Vocational BTEC Music Performance September 2022	£2,558.00	
GAMPA	Vocational BTEC Music Performance October 2022	£2,558.00	
GAMPA	Vocational BTEC Music Performance QVQO Registration Fees and equipment		£3,473.68
GAMPA	Vocational BTEC Music Performance November 2022	£2,558.00	
GAMPA	Vocational BTEC Music Performance December 2022	£2,558.00	
GAMPA	Vocational BTEC Music Performance January 2023	£2,558.00	
GAMPA	Vocational BTEC Music Performance February 2023	£2,558.00	
GAMPA	Vocational BTEC Music Performance March 2023	£2,558.00	
GAMPA	Vocational BTEC Music Performance April 2023	£2,558.00	
GAMPA	Vocational BTEC Music Performance May 2023	£2,558.00	
GAMPA	Vocational BTEC Music Performance June 2023	£2,558.00	
GAMPA	Vocational BTEC Music Performance July 2023	£2,558.00	
GAMPA	Vocational BTEC Music Performance August 2023	£2,558.00	
GAMPA	Vocational BTEC Music Performance September 2023	£2,558.00	
<u>Course Provider</u>	<u>Course</u>	<u>Course Delivery</u>	<u>Ancillary costs</u>
GAMPA	Vocational BTEC Performing Art (Acting) September 2023 (Part-time variable)	£378.00	

CONTINUED ANSWER TO QUESTION 558

Mayfair On Main	Vocational Hair & Beauty Course September 2021 Westside/Bayside	£1,809.67
Mayfair On Main	Vocational Hair & Beauty Course October 2021 Westside/Bayside	£1,809.67
Mayfair On Main	Vocational Hair & Beauty Course November 2021 Westside/Bayside	£1,809.67
Mayfair On Main	Vocational Hair & Beauty Course December 2021 Westside/Bayside	£1,809.67
Mayfair On Main	Vocational Hair & Beauty Course January 2022 Westside/Bayside	£1,809.67
Mayfair On Main	Vocational Hair & Beauty Course February 2022 Westside/Bayside	£1,809.67
Mayfair On Main	Vocational Hair & Beauty Course March 2022 Westside/Bayside	£1,809.67
Mayfair On Main	Vocational Hair & Beauty Course April 2022 Westside/Bayside	£1,809.67
Mayfair On Main	Vocational Hair & Beauty Course May 2022 Westside/Bayside	£1,809.67
Mayfair On Main	Vocational Hair & Beauty Course June 2022 Westside/Bayside	£1,809.67
Mayfair On Main	Vocational Hair & Beauty Course July 2022 Westside/Bayside	£1,809.67
Mayfair On Main	Vocational Hair & Beauty Course August 2022 Westside/Bayside	£1,809.67
Mayfair On Main	Vocational Hair & Beauty Course September 2022 Westside/Bayside/College	£10,393.66
Mayfair On Main	Vocational Hair & Beauty Course October 2022 Westside/Bayside/College	£10,393.66
Mayfair On Main	Being payment of supply of equipment for Westside/Bayside course	£1,579.15
Mayfair On Main	Being payment of supply of equipment for Gibraltar College course	£5,177.16
Mayfair On Main	Vocational Hair & Beauty Course November 2022 Westside/Bayside/College plus adjustment for Sept and Oct 2022	£10,669.33
Mayfair On Main	Vocational Hair & Beauty Course December 2022 Westside/Bayside/College	£9,571.33
Mayfair On Main	Vocational Hair & Beauty Course January 2023 Westside/Bayside/College	£9,571.33
Mayfair On Main	Vocational Hair & Beauty Course February 2023 Westside/Bayside/College	£9,571.33
Mayfair On Main	Vocational Hair & Beauty Course March 2023 Westside/Bayside/College	£9,571.33
Mayfair On Main	Vocational Hair & Beauty Course April 2023 Westside/Bayside/College	£9,571.33
Mayfair On Main	Vocational Hair & Beauty Course May 2023 Westside/Bayside/College	£9,571.33
Mayfair On Main	Vocational Hair & Beauty Course June 2023 Westside/Bayside/College	£9,571.33
Mayfair On Main	Vocational Hair & Beauty Course July 2023 Westside/Bayside/College	£9,571.33
Mayfair On Main	Vocational Hair & Beauty Course August 2023 Westside/Bayside/College	£9,571.33
Mayfair On Main	Vocational Hair & Beauty Course September 2023 Westside/Bayside	£3,663.19
Mayfair On Main	Vocational Hair & Beauty Course October 2023 Westside/Bayside	£3,663.19

Cont...

770 **Hon. E J Reyes:** Madam Speaker, if it helps you, with previous Speakers we had a practice where, when a schedule came round, we moved on to the next question, and a few minutes later the Speaker would allow us to come to a question, rather than having the whole House silent for a few minutes whilst we studied it. I do not know whether you, ma'am, would like to entertain that past practice.

775 **Madam Speaker:** Whilst it may be a blessing to have the whole House silent for a few minutes, I think it is a sensible practice, so we shall adopt it.
Next question.

**Q559-63/2023
Scholarships –
Funding and repayment**

Clerk: Question 559/2023. The Hon. E J Reyes.

780 **Hon. E J Reyes:** How many new mandatory scholarships have been awarded in 2023 and what is the total number of mandatory scholarships currently being funded?

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

785 **Minister for Education, the Environment and Climate Change (Hon. Prof. J E Cortes):** Madam Speaker, I will answer this question together with Questions 560 to 563.

Clerk: Question 560/2023. The Hon. E J Reyes.

790 **Hon. E J Reyes:** How many new discretionary scholarships have been awarded in 2023 and what is the total number of discretionary scholarships currently being funded?

Clerk: Question 561/2023. The Hon. E J Reyes.

795 **Hon. E J Reyes:** How many new distance learning scholarships have been awarded in 2023 and what is the total number of distance learning scholarships currently being funded?

Clerk: Question 562/2023. The Hon. E J Reyes.

800 **Hon. E J Reyes:** How many students who were beneficiaries of scholarships are active debtors or must make arrangements to pay back government grants given to them, due to not successfully completing the course for which they were funded?

805 **Clerk:** Question 563/2023. The Hon. E J Reyes.

Hon. E J Reyes: What is the total debt owed to Government by students, and/or their guarantors, who did not successfully complete the courses for which they were funded?

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

Hon. Prof. J E Cortes: Madam Speaker, I will take them in sequence. In answer to Question 559, the number of new mandatory scholarships awarded in 2023 is 374. The total number of

815 mandatory scholarships currently being funded, inclusive of those awarded for academic year 2023-24, is 893.

The number of new discretionary scholarships awarded in 2023 is 149. The total number of discretionary scholarships currently being funded, inclusive of those awarded for the current academic year, is 175.

820 Distance learning scholarships are awarded from both mandatory and discretionary funding, as some school leavers are now opting to pursue their choice of degree through online learning. The number of new distance learning awards are broken down as follows: mandatory, 11; discretionary, 31. The total number of distance learning awards, inclusive of those awarded this academic year, is as follows: mandatory, 38; discretionary, 38.

825 The number of scholarship students who are debtors, actively repaying debts or otherwise, amounts to 240.

The total outstanding debt related to scholarship arrears amounts to £1,650,894.08.

Hon. E J Reyes: Madam Speaker, I thank the Minister for all that information broken down and so on. If I can refer, first, to Question 563, where we have a grand total owed to Government, the
830 Minister may recall a few months ago, probably a year ago, we had a similar question and, at the time, the Minister provided me with a schedule, without identifying particular names, with the number of students owing. It arose from that that I noticed that some students or their guarantors had failed to meet whatever commitment they had on the repayment facilities. They are supposed to make monthly or quarterly instalments. Is the Minister aware if the practice has now been done
835 away with, or are there cases that need to be chased up, which possibly could even lead to legal action against those who have failed to make the commitment to repay?

Hon. Prof. J E Cortes: Madam Speaker, there is a whole range of situations. Some students are paying more, some are paying less. There are personal circumstances, sometimes, that come into
840 play. This is dealt with, mainly, by the Department but also with the support of the Central Areas Unit. There is a whole range of different conditions. There are no two the same, as the hon. Member will remember from that long list that I provided at that time. I do not believe he actually asked for that amount of detail in this particular question; otherwise, it would have been provided, as it was last time.

845 **Hon. Dr K Azopardi:** To be clear, so that I understand it, the amount of £1.65 million, which relates to the figure of 240 students, these are students who owe the money because they have dropped out – is that really the thrust of it?

850 **Hon. Prof. J E Cortes:** Essentially, yes, students who, over a long period of time, clearly, have not completed their studies. There is an assessment. In some cases, where there is a documented medical reason, there is an exemption made and that is waived, but this is students who have not completed their course.

855 **Hon. Dr K Azopardi:** Presumably these decisions are taken by the Education Department. Is there some kind of protocol to allow appeals being made on hardship grounds by particular students?

860 **Hon. Prof. J E Cortes:** Yes, this is possible, and the Department will allocate time, if necessary, to consider appeals on grounds of hardship, health perhaps, and other grounds that may have led to it.

Madam Speaker: Next question.

Q565-66/2023

**Bicycle lanes –
Cost to date**

Clerk: Question 565/2023. The Hon. R M Clinton.

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Hon. R M Clinton: Madam Speaker, can the Government advise the cumulative cost, as at 30th September 2023, of the construction of the bicycle lanes?

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

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Minister for Education, the Environment and Climate Change (Hon. Prof. J E Cortes): Madam Speaker, I will answer this question together with Question 566.

Clerk: Question 566. The Hon. D J Bossino.

875

Hon. D J Bossino: Please state what the total cost to date is of the cycle lane from the Sundial roundabout to the Waterport roundabout.

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

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Hon. Prof. J E Cortes: Madam Speaker, the Government has, to date, spent the following amounts on the bi-directional bicycle lane infrastructure: Phase 1, Bayside Road, £490,773.31; Phase 2, Glacis Road, £252,413.74; Phase 3, Waterport Wharf roundabout, £286,373. The figures for the bicycle lane infrastructure at the Kingsway and Regal House junction are not included, as these works were funded within their respective projects.

885

Hon. R M Clinton: Madam Speaker, if you will give me two seconds just to add up those numbers, because he has not given me the – (**Madam Speaker:** Counting.) By my reckoning – and the hon. Member can correct me – that comes to £1,028,000 in the round. Would that be the number he would recognise?

890

Hon. Prof. J E Cortes: No, I have not added it up.

Chief Minister (Hon. F R Picardo): Madam Speaker, we are not here to check the hon. Member's mathematics.

895

Hon. R M Clinton: Madam Speaker, I asked the Government for the total cumulative cost. I would have thought they would have that to hand, but I will do the maths for the Minister if he cannot do it himself. It comes, at my reckoning, to over £1 million.

900

Can I ask the Minister, and perhaps he can confirm this: in the Estimates Book for 2023-24, within the Sustainable Traffic, Transport and Parking Plan, there is a total estimate of £1.2 million, so he is very close to reaching the total budget for the entire project on sustainable traffic, transport and parking. Can I ask the Minister: is that as much as he expects to spend on the bicycle lanes, or does he expect to spend more; and, if so, how much more?

905

Hon. Prof. J E Cortes: Madam Speaker, it is likely that that is about as much as we are spending in this financial year. I propose to continue with cycle lanes as per the plans, and looking, perhaps, at rejigging some of them, but I do not expect that any significant spending on that will happen in this financial year and would be left to the next financial year and subsequently.

910

Hon. R M Clinton: Madam Speaker, I am very grateful to the hon. Member for his answer. Does he have with him, perhaps, a breakdown of those numbers in terms of the type of work, the painting, digging up the road, or anything of that type?

915 **Hon. Prof. J E Cortes:** Madam Speaker, the hon. Member is telling me the very opposite of what he said before. He asked for the cumulative costs, which he complained I had not given, and now he asks me for a further breakdown. The answer is I do not have that information with me here.

920 **Hon. D J Bossino:** Madam Speaker, if the hon. Member will indulge me for a moment ... I am assuming that he has answered my question on the Order Paper, because he took them together. I would, therefore, seek his assistance as to whether my understanding is correct, because I asked specifically in relation to one point to another geographically, and that is because it was asked in this House in the previous Parliament in almost exactly the same terms that I drafted them for the
925 purposes of that particular question. However, he then answers and helpfully splits them in respect of three different phases. Is that, therefore, the total amount, as has been added up by my hon. Friend here to my left, of the cost of the cycle lane from the Sundial roundabout to the Waterport roundabout, or is he able to assist any further as to whether there is a breakdown within those three phases that would assist me in understanding what the answer to that specific
930 question is?

Hon. Prof. J E Cortes: Madam Speaker, no, that is it. I do not want to give the hon. Members opposite a lesson in geography, but if you look at the questions, they are actually pretty much the same and we could have questioned the repetition, but the bicycle lanes from Bayside Road to
935 Waterport roundabout are essentially the Sundial to Waterport roundabout, which is the total cost I have given, so we are talking about the same thing.

Hon. D J Bossino: If I may, Madam Speaker, is the hon. Member able to state and confirm that that is the final figure – in other words, that there will not be any further costs to add upon the
940 quite astronomical figure, if I may say, of in excess of £1 million in relation to this small stretch?

Hon. Prof. J E Cortes: Madam Speaker, I have to comment on the last, almost throwaway, comment, in that the benefits to the community in reduced emissions and cleaner air cannot be measured in monetary terms proximately. They can be in the long term, in reduction in costs of
945 healthcare, but I do not accept the implication. Having said that, I have forgotten, Madam Speaker, the first part of his question.

Hon. D J Bossino: I will assist the hon. Member, Madam Speaker: basically, whether there are going to be any further costs beyond the figure he has given across the floor of the House.
950

Hon. Prof. J E Cortes: My apologies, a momentary lapse. Madam Speaker, the question asks the cost to date. I have given those figures. I am still fairly new in the portfolio. I do not envisage any further costs coming in – perhaps a little bit of tweaking here. At the very end of the Waterport area I think there was a little bit more to do, but not anything significant. I would need to confirm
955 that. I have given the cost to date. I do not think there will be much more, if any.

Hon. D J Bossino: Madam Speaker, in terms of perhaps a wider question, does the Government have an idea of what the cost of the further bicycle lanes project, if I may put it in those terms, might amount to? We have, at least, an immediate view in relation to what this is costing for that,
960 in our view, small stretch of road. If their plans are as ambitious as I think they are, can he state here and now what he expects the likely costs of delivery of his plans are going to be?

Hon. Chief Minister: Madam Speaker, first of all, they are not *his* plans, they are *our* plans. They are the plans of the Government, they are not the hon. Gentleman's plans. And second –
965 (*Interjection by Hon. D J Bossino*) Sorry, the hon. Gentleman –

Madam Speaker: Yes? (*Interjection by Hon. D J Bossino*) No, you cannot make a comment that is audible from a sedentary position.

Hon. Chief Minister: Madam Speaker, the Government's plans relate to different areas of Gibraltar, and in different areas of Gibraltar we expect that there will be different developments that will have to include the provision of the cycle lanes, which include the Government's plans, and therefore the Government's costs will be greatly reduced in some areas. Therefore, it is not possible to give an indication of the order of costs at this stage, although the Government believes,
970 quite contrary to what is being indicated by the hon. Gentleman opposite, that this is actually money *very* well spent, both in terms of traffic flow and in terms of reduction of pollution and the encouragement of people to get on their bikes, which is a very good and healthy thing to do.
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Hon. Dr K Azopardi: Madam Speaker, can I just clarify from the Minister? He has answered the question on construction, so I take it – should I? – that the costs that he has confirmed to my hon. Member to the left are construction costs and are exclusive of maintenance. Would that be right, maintenance from the commencement?
980

Hon. Prof. J E Cortes: Madam Speaker, I could not confirm it 100%, but I believe so. This is the cost of construction. There has been no maintenance. This would be – (*Interjection by Hon. Dr K Azopardi*) Just to just to point out that it is currently within a guarantee period.
985

Hon. Dr K Azopardi: So when there has been repainting of these cycle lanes, this is not maintenance, it is the guarantee period works. Is that correct?
990

Hon. Chief Minister: Yes, Madam Speaker, there has been repainting but with a different paint because the paint has failed. The contractor provided paint which failed and the contractors had to replace the paint.

Madam Speaker: One last question, Mr Bossino.
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Hon. D J Bossino: I am grateful, Madam Speaker. The figure that the hon. Member has provided, is that within budget? I have, here, *Hansard* from when the answer was provided by the predecessor Minister, Mr Balban, when he talked about possible hidden costs. At the time, the figure that he was able to give to the House was £14,000. This was in June this year. Is he able to say whether this figure is within budget? Basically, that is the sum total of my question.
1000

Hon. Chief Minister: Madam Speaker, as the Hon. Mr Clinton referred to the House a few moments ago, the budget was £1.2 million, which was provided for in the Estimates Book, so I refer the hon. Gentleman to the question posed a few moments ago by the person sitting a little bit further to his left.
1005

Hon. R M Clinton: Madam Speaker, if I may add to the Chief Minister's clarification – I do not know if it is within the rules – of course, the £1.2 million budget which I referred to is for the entire sustainable traffic budget. I think my hon. Friend was referring specifically to the bicycle element of that budget.
1010

Hon. Chief Minister: Yes, Madam Speaker, I am aware of that, but the hon. Gentleman also had the answer that told him that we had no plans to exceed that budget, and therefore, within

1015 the context of what we expected to spend during this financial year in respect of the transport plan, we were within budget because we expected to do the bicycle lanes and we have.

Madam Speaker: The question has been answered as fully as can reasonably be expected.

Q558/2023
BTEC Level 3 Music Performance courses –
Location of classes –
Supplementary questions

1020 **Madam Speaker:** I am going to interject now, and we are going back to Question 548. Hon. Member, I think you have some supplementaries, now that you have considered the information in silence.

Hon. E J Reyes: I am extremely grateful, Madam Speaker, and I will be brief. I just need a little bit of clarification.

1025 On the last page of the schedule that the Minister provided, I see the vocational BTEC Music Performance QVQO registration fees and equipment, and the same a bit further down, just after October 2022. Can the Minister confirm that those figures refer only to the equipment that was purchased, necessary, obviously, for the delivery of that particular course in that academic year, and that the registration fees are in respect of the students only and not in respect of any fees that may be due by the examination centre? From previous answers we know the licence holder for that happens to be GAMP A and not the schools. Can we have confirmation that we are not actually paying GAMP A for their licence and we are only paying for the registration fees pertaining to the students? And once a course has been completed, is the equipment purchased accounted for under government accounting instructions and then held safely in the custody of the school, or is it automatically donated somewhere? I would be grateful for some clarification on that part first, Madam Speaker.

1030

1035

Madam Speaker: Just an observation: if we are going to ask long questions, perhaps you could take one at a time. You can ask more than one, but it might be easier to focus our minds if you ask one question of length at a time in the future.

1040

Hon. E J Reyes: Noted, and very useful advice, ma'am.

Minister for Education, the Environment and Climate Change (Hon. Prof. J E Cortes): Madam Speaker, thank you for that because I am not sure I captured all the elements. I am going to answer what I think I understood, and I am very happy to then have the question repeated if I have not ...

1045

I note the hon. Member mentioned registration. That is given. He is referring to the last page? Yes. We have a fee, there, of £3,473.68 for registration and equipment. The equipment would remain available for the use of the College students, because this course is being offered by the College through a provider. What other clarification does the hon. Member want?

1050

Hon. E J Reyes: Madam Speaker, I was asking whether the registration fees refer to the fees to register the actual student, not to register the accreditation of delivering the course.

1055 **Hon. Prof. J E Cortes:** Yes, ma'am.

Hon. E J Reyes: In respect of the equipment, ma'am, I was saying that more or less at the start of each academic year they need to purchase equipment. When their course is completed, could

1060 equipment be held by the student? The equipment has been purchased with taxpayers' money. Who is the custodian of that equipment, and who accounts for it under the Government's accounting instructions?

Hon. Prof. J E Cortes: Madam Speaker, the hon. Member is an old friend but he certainly does not like this course.

1065 Part of the equipment was provided by GAMPA. I am advised that there was a need to boost that with one or two additional laptops, which were provided as part of the College, and all the equipment will remain available for use by the students – that purchased by the Department through the College and that which was provided by GAMPA, which they had purchased for the course and for which they did not charge.

1070

Hon. E J Reyes: That helps to clarify. I know I may be a bit pedantic, but if the audit department were to come and say, 'We bought this equipment: where is it now?', who actually has to account for it to Government's audit department?

1075

Hon. Prof. J E Cortes: If the equipment has been purchased directly with Government funds through the Department of Education, the Department of Education will register it and they will be the custodians of that equipment, absolutely.

Hon. E J Reyes: Thank you, Madam Speaker, that clarifies it.

1080

I know the Minister can only provide information as and when he is provided with it, but I see that the registration fees and equipment came more or less between September and October in 2021 and between October and November in 2022, yet for 2023 there is no other expenditure after September, which was two months ago. Does the Minister have any details of the registration fees and equipment, which should have been paid by now, in 2023? I suppose the 1085 October 2023 payment will have been made. I want confirmation that I can safely assume that the monthly payments will probably be the same as for September, but the registration fees and equipment in 2022 are higher than in 2021, which I deduce will be due to an increase in the number of students, but I have no indication of what is happening in 2023. Are there more or fewer students? Is the expense increasing or decreasing?

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Hon. Prof. J E Cortes: I can confirm, Madam Speaker, that the higher number, the second time round, reflects a higher number of students.

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In relation to the preparation of the information, this is the information that was available at the time. I believe that it is paid a month late, so September payments would have been paid sometime in October, and it may be that that information was not available at the time, but I can update it. If the hon. Member, as he often does, reminds me, I will provide that additional information so that it is recorded here, if it is, in fact, already available.

1100

Hon. E J Reyes: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I think you gather the Minister and I do happen to have a good line of communication. With your leave, ma'am – I know we are only in November – perhaps if I wait until January, you might allow me to pose a question asking for updated information since September, to allow his accounting department at the Ministry to update those figures.

1105

One final thing, ma'am –

Madam Speaker: For the avoidance of doubt, I grant you leave.

1110

Hon. E J Reyes: Under Vocational BTEC Performing Art (Acting), there are no details prior to September 2023. In my question I asked what happened in previous years. Is this because it only commenced for the first time in 2023? Can I have confirmation of that? When the Minister stands

up to answer that, can he, please, for the sake of clarity and for my record, explain what exactly is meant by 'part-time variable'?

1115 **Hon. Prof. J E Cortes:** Madam Speaker, this course commenced this September. It is a new course and it is part-time cover. The amount of time spent during the course may vary because it is cover, so that is why it is a variable sum, because it depends on the number of hours actually worked.

1120 **Hon. D J Bossino:** I am grateful, Madam Speaker.
Can the Hon. Minister answer this question: is he able to say whether the information that we have on the last page that has taxed Mr Reyes for the last few questions in relation to the costs of GAMPA is the total cost to the Government in relation to its contractual relations with GAMPA?

1125 **Hon. Prof. J E Cortes:** Yes, Madam Speaker, the cost is actually detailed here.

1130 **Hon. D J Bossino:** If I may assist, in his prepared answer the hon. Member talked about the contractual relationship which the Government has with GAMPA because it farms these courses out to it. I am asking him whether, if we tot up these numbers in the schedule which he has provided in respect of the answer to this question, that is the cost to the Government of the contractual relationship we have with GAMPA. Is there anything else, or does the answer lie therein?

1135 **Hon. Prof. J E Cortes:** Madam Speaker, there is a grant to GAMPA which is separate to this, which is included in the Estimates. This is an arrangement for the delivery of these courses specifically, and the costs are here.

Madam Speaker: Next question.

1140

Q567-68/2023
Highways Resurfacing Programme –
Roads to be resurfaced, duration and cost

Clerk: Question 567/2023. The Hon. D J Bossino.

1145 **Hon. D J Bossino:** Please state which roads the Highways Resurfacing Programme is expected to encompass and the duration of same.

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

1150 **Minister for Education, the Environment and Climate Change (Hon. Prof. J E Cortes):** Madam Speaker, I will answer this question together with Question 568.

Hon. Chief Minister: Question 568. The Hon. D J Bossino.

Hon. D J Bossino: Please state the cost to date of the highways resurfacing programme.

1155 **Hon. Chief Minister:** Answer, the Minister for Education, the Environment and Climate Change.

Hon. Prof. J E Cortes: Madam Speaker, the cost to date of the 2023-24 Highways Resurfacing Programme has been £1,373,510.81.

1160 The 2023-24 Highways Resurfacing Programme has been completed. The roads resurfaced during the latest Highways Resurfacing Programme were as follows: Queensway, in the area of Campion Park; Windmill Hill Road; Crutchett's Ramp; Europa Road, from the Old Casino to Bella Vista; Smith Dorrien Bridge to Casemates Hill; and Victualling Office Lane.

1165 **Hon. D J Bossino:** I may have misunderstood the Minister in his reply. Can he assist in clarifying the position for me? Are there any further roads expected, or is he saying that that is the totality of the Road Resurfacing Programme for this financial year?

1170 **Hon. Prof. J E Cortes:** Madam Speaker, that is the complete list of the programme for this financial year. Clearly, if there should be any emergency works or other reasons for doing anything else in a non-programmed way, that would have to be dealt with, but that is the end of the current year's programmed works.

1175 **Hon. D J Bossino:** Madam Speaker, I am not talking about maintenance works, which is, I think, what the hon. Member is referring to; I am talking about something a bit more ambitious. Does he have ambitious plans to continue with the resurfacing programme? I must say that, certainly in the area where I live, it is being done very well and it is something which not only seems good quality, in that you hardly hear the cars whooshing around, but also it actually looks aesthetically quite attractive. Can he say whether he has plans to implement a future resurfacing programme, and what those plans are?

1180 **Chief Minister (Hon. F R Picardo):** Madam Speaker, I am very grateful for the hon. Gentleman's recognition of the work done by the Government, in particular the former Minister for Transport, who led on a resurfacing programme which went through the 12 years that he was Minister.

1185 The hon. Gentleman will benefit from knowing that the way that resurfacing works, because we have to import plant and because these things have to be hot, it is usually a spring and summer endeavour, and so at the beginning of each financial year we receive plans from the particular Ministry, money is voted for a plan that goes through the spring and the summer – that is when you do your large resurfacing – and then, in the period of the autumn and the winter, you plan for the next one. Plans for resurfacing, which are contained in the manifesto which we fought the election on, will be fixed for the next financial year at the time of the next Budget. So there are plans, but where we can go with that will depend on the appropriation, and that will happen in time for the plans to take effect once again in the spring and summer months, which is when you can do these things. It will be done to exactly the same standard and quality which the hon. Gentleman has referred to.

1195 **Hon. D J Bossino:** Yes, and he can quote me on that, if he wishes to in the future, because I think it has been done very well, especially in the area where he and I live. I say 'especially' because that is the one I frequent.

1200 Can I ask the hon. Member ...? I know that it may be pedantry, in the sense that it is a slight increased overspill in terms of what was budgeted. He knows that we voted in the House for expenditure, in June-July, of £1 million, and he explained to this House that it is, in effect, in excess by £373,000-odd. Can he explain what the reason for that increase is? I appreciate that in the scheme of things it is not a particularly big figure.

1205 **Hon. Prof. J E Cortes:** Madam Speaker, not in detail. I would need a detailed breakdown of the costs. I think the hon. Member will realise that when you are working in that kind of situation, things might arise that need a little bit more attention, and perhaps that will increase the amount of detailed work that has to be done. I do not have that information available. It is something that, if he really wants to know, I could look into.

1210 I want to reiterate the Hon. Chief Minister's appreciation in praise of the workmanship. I live in the area, too, and I can assure him that it was not done for his benefit or for ours. It was done because it needed to be done.

1215 **Hon. Chief Minister:** If I can be of assistance, Madam Speaker, the request for additional funding came to me, and the reason I approved it was because a new area had been identified which required resurfacing. We were in time and we had the kit mobilised to Gibraltar. The mobilisation, of course, is one of the things that costs money, and for that reason the more extensive area was agreed to be covered. In fact, I think, from memory, it was actually in part of the area which he is referring to as done so well, where we decided that we should go that little
1220 bit further because mobilisation had happened. There was further deterioration which had happened or was expected during the course of the winter months, and therefore the additional amount was done in that period.

Madam Speaker: Next question.

1225

Clerk: Questions to the Minister for Industrial Relations, Civil Contingencies and Sport. Question 569/2023. The Hon. E J Reyes.

1230 **Chief Minister (Hon. F R Picardo):** Before we get there, Madam Speaker, would this be a convenient moment to break for 10 minutes?

Madam Speaker: All right, we will recess. We will come back at ten to.

The House recessed at 4.37 p.m. and resumed at 4.53 p.m.

1235

INDUSTRIAL RELATIONS, CIVIL CONTINGENCIES AND SPORT

Q569/2023

**Play parks –
Jet-washing**

Clerk: Question 569/2023. The Hon. E J Reyes.

1240 **Hon. E J Reyes:** Madam Speaker, can Government provide details of the frequency in respect of the scheduled jet-wash cleaning process carried out at all children's play parks?

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

1245 **Minister for Industrial Relations, Civil Contingencies and Sport (Hon. L M Bruzon):** Madam Speaker, the playgrounds are jet-washed fortnightly, with the rubber flooring done once monthly. The rubber flooring at the Europa Sports Park is jet-washed on a weekly basis.

1250 **Hon. E J Reyes:** I am grateful for that answer, Madam Speaker, because what prompted me to ask this question was, as a frequent user of the Europa Sports Park – I tend to frequent it lots on Saturday mornings when rugby activities are taking place for youngsters – I noticed, from one week to another, a decline in the standards and the amount of dirt that accumulated, so I asked if there is a frequency. I can see it is swept quite frequently, because dead leaves and so on are cleared, but on a weekly basis one fails to see that. I am grateful to the Minister for his answer. I just ask him, can he please ensure that despite whatever feedback he is getting, the jet-washing

1255 part is actually taking place in the effective manner for which Government is contracting the services?

Hon. L M Bruzon: Madam Speaker, I am advised that, the rubber flooring being porous, some of the stains are very hard to remove and therefore it may seem as if they are not being cleaned as frequently as they are.

1260

Madam Speaker: Next question.

Q570/2023

**Gibraltar Netball Association –
Rebalancing of allocations**

Clerk: Question 570/2023. The Hon. E J Reyes.

1265 **Hon. E J Reyes:** Can Government provide details of any rebalancing of allocations recently adjusted in favour of the Gibraltar Netball Association?

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

1270 **Minister for Industrial Relations, Civil Contingencies and Sport (Hon. L M Bruzon):** Madam Speaker, there has been no recent rebalancing of allocations in favour of the Gibraltar Netball Association. This was done in early September, with the community use programme having been in full swing now for over two months.

1275 **Hon. E J Reyes:** Madam Speaker, because there exists a commitment from that side of the House to rebalance the allocations and so on, does the Minister have any dates to which he is working to make this a reality?

Hon. L M Bruzon: Madam Speaker, I held a meeting last night with the Netball Association and there was no request from them for such a rebalancing.

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Hon. E J Reyes: Madam Speaker, there may not have been a request specifically last night but it was certainly recognised from that side of the House when a letter was sent, in the run up to the elections, to the Gibraltar Netball Association assuring them that a rebalancing of allocations would take place. So the problem was identified beforehand. One takes it that there is a commitment, especially in the letter signed by today's Chief Minister saying that the rebalancing would take place, and I am a bit surprised to see that the Minister does not seem to have this on his radar in the immediately pending 'in' file or desk that he has.

1285

Chief Minister (Hon. F R Picardo): Thank you Madam Speaker, the letter stands in my name, as the hon. Gentleman has referred, and he can rest assured that we will act upon it when necessary. Yesterday's meeting, which was actually scheduled to be with me and with the Hon. Minister but which I could not keep to because of other responsibilities, was one in which we were not advised of the need to pursue that at this stage. The rebalancing that the hon. Gentleman has been referred to occurred in September, but that may, once again, be necessary as the season proceeds, as we get through different stages of leagues etc. When it is necessary, it will happen. That is the point: it will happen when necessary, before we have the home of netball. Once we have the home of netball, that issue will go away.

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Madam Speaker: Next question.

Q571-72/2023
Europa Sports Complex –
Ball-stop nets; contract re management and manning levels

1300 **Clerk:** Question 571/2023. The Hon. E J Reyes.

Hon. E J Reyes: Can Government provide an update in respect of the still outstanding problems in providing a permanent solution to the ball-stop nets at the Europa sports grounds?

1305 **Clerk:** Answer, the Minister for Industrial Relations, Civil Contingencies and Sport.

Minister for Industrial Relations, Civil Contingencies and Sport (Hon. L M Bruzon): Madam Speaker, I will answer this question together with Question 572.

1310 **Clerk:** Question 572. The Hon. E J Reyes.

Hon. E J Reyes: Can Government update this House with full details in respect of the contract or other arrangements entered into to permanently settle the management and manning levels at the Europa Sports Complex?

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

Hon. L M Bruzon: Madam Speaker, I am currently acquainting myself with the ongoing processes and operational requirements at the Europa Sports Complex. The Europa Sports Complex is to be viewed in line with HM Government's wider vision for local sports, taking into account manifesto commitments and other sporting developments.

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Any decisions related to the management of the Europa Sports Complex will be designed and delivered in a manner that serves the best interests of all the local sporting fraternity housed at the complex. I am currently reviewing all existing proposals related to the prospective management of the complex and will be in a position, shortly, to initiate a long-lasting and permanent structure.

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I will also be looking into the issue of the replacement or repair of the ball-stop nets, once the discussions and the management of the complex are finalised.

Hon. E J Reyes: Madam Speaker, I appreciate that the Minister for Sport has only recently taken over that particular responsibility, but if one casts back to prior to the summer recess of the last Parliament, the then Minister for Sport told this House that it had been fixed, and then I had to pose the question again the following month, saying that the nets were still not fit for purpose. The Minister said he had received an update and that it was work that was being tackled, leading us to believe it should be a short-term solution. I noticed, having been there recently, that we, unfortunately, still have to place notices in the children's play park advising them of the danger of the possibility of a good batsman hitting the ball quite hard and it coming over. In fact, there were certain stages – and it did not even affect weekends, which is peak use time at those parks – when the park had to be physically closed, I suppose for user safety, because of the ongoing cricket games that were next door. So it is not something new, despite my accepting that the Minister has only recently taken office.

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Can I have an assurance from the Minister that this problem will be tackled as soon as possible, so that it has little effect upon users, mainly the children wishing to play within the magnificent park up there? I will ask that part of the question first, Madam Speaker, following your advice.

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Madam Speaker: Thank you.

Hon. L M Bruzon: Sorry, can you repeat the question, please?

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Hon. E J Reyes: In short, ma'am, I refer to previous answers and commitments. I would like a commitment from the Minister to assure this House that this problem will be tackled, to prevent the possibility of dangers occurring to children, as soon as possible and hopefully within a matter of days, or weeks at the most.

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Hon. L M Bruzon: Madam Speaker, it is being looked at as we speak.

Hon. E J Reyes: The other part I wish to refer to: I understand the Minister said in his answer that he is getting more to grips with the small print, if one wants to call it that, of the managerial arrangements for the Europa Sports Complex, but can the Minister confirm that the contract has actually been signed already with an entity for the management of that facility?

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Hon. L M Bruzon: Madam Speaker, unfortunately, at this point all I can do is repeat what I said, which is that I am currently reviewing all existing proposals related to the prospective management of the complex.

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Hon. E J Reyes: Maybe my hearing is not working properly. Can I have a confirmation that the contract has been signed, Madam Speaker?

Hon. L M Bruzon: Madam Speaker, I have to refer the hon. Gentleman to the answer I gave a moment ago.

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Madam Speaker: Is the Hon. Minister able to say whether a contract has been signed?

Chief Minister (Hon. F R Picardo): Madam Speaker, the Hon. Minister gave an answer which has been carefully considered by the Government for reasons which it is better not to ventilate across the floor of the House.

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Hon. E J Reyes: Madam Speaker, can I ask will the Government be providing this House, perhaps by laying on the table, details of the contract – as and when, if it has not already happened, it is signed – for the management of those public facilities?

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Hon. Chief Minister: Madam Speaker, the Government is in receipt of a number of representations and, at this stage, would not wish to commit to any aspect of an answer to the terms on which the hon. Gentleman has put the question.

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Madam Speaker: Next question.

EQUALITY, EMPLOYMENT, CULTURE AND TOURISM

Q573/2023

**Christmas Wonderland events –
Measures to ensure access for all**

Clerk: Questions to the Minister for Equality, Employment, Culture and Tourism.
Question 573/2023. The Hon. Mrs A Sanchez.

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Hon. Mrs A Sanchez: Madam Speaker, can the Government elaborate on the measures being implemented to ensure equitable access for all individuals interested in attending the Christmas Wonderland events recently advertised by the Gibraltar Cultural Services, including any provisions for reasonable adjustments where needed?

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

Minister for Equality, Employment, Culture and Tourism (Hon. C P Santos): Madam Speaker, Christmas Wonderland will be held on 24th and 25th November at various venues throughout town; I trust as many hon. Members as possible will attend.

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At our public events at Casemates Square, the organisers are providing a wheelchair-accessible viewing platform as per Government Press Releases 784 and 796/2023, as well as ear plugs donated by GHITA. At John Mackintosh Square, GCS will be setting up fair attractions. The fairground will be providing an inclusive and sensory-friendly event from 6 p.m. to 7.30 p.m. on Friday, 24th November.

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Hon. Mrs A Sanchez: Madam Speaker, I am grateful for that answer. Commendable as these initiatives are, could the hon. Member provide details on any further plans, if any, to help individuals who have issues that go beyond mobility issues for some of these events, more specifically the events such as the Festival of Lights and the Christmas party?

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Hon. C P Santos: Madam Speaker, the Festival of Lights is not just about mobility. The viewing platform is on a first come, first served basis for anyone with mobility issues or a Disability Information Card. Because we know that there are a lot of young children who have sensory issues, we have made provision for this – at the fairground, where there will be no lights and no sound, at the same time as the Festival of Lights will be happening at Casemates – so that every child has an opportunity to enjoy the start of the Christmas period at various venues in Gibraltar.

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Madam Speaker: Next question.

Q574/2023

**Supported Employment Scheme –
Government entities and government-owned companies participating**

Clerk: Question 574/2023. The Hon. Mrs A Sanchez.

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Hon. Mrs A Sanchez: Madam Speaker, could the Government provide clarification on which government entities or government-owned companies employ individuals in need of supported employment?

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

Minister for Equality, Employment, Culture and Tourism (Hon. C P Santos): Madam Speaker, the following government entities and government-owned companies employ individuals in need of supported employment: Gibraltar Air Terminal Ltd, the Care Agency, the Gibraltar Archives, the Department of Education, the GHA, the Housing Works Agency, Supported Employment Company Ltd (SEC), the GSLA, the GEA and the Ministry for Equality, Employment, Culture and Tourism.

Hon. Dr K Azopardi: Can I just ask for clarification? As I understand the list that the Hon. Minister has given, these are entities that are employing people in need of supported employment, but one of the companies that he read out – he rattled them off rather quickly, can I say, and it was impossible to take a note – is a company called Supported Employment. I had understood that that company plays some kind of central role in running a scheme, which is specific. Is it that that company places individuals within different other entities, or is it that beyond the individuals the company places or employs, who may be placed in other entities – the GHA, for example, which is, I think, one of the ones that he read out, is also employing people directly itself and it is not people that they are getting from the Supported Employment Company?

Hon. C P Santos: It is a combination. Supported employment is a transitional programme, so when we have people with different disabilities or different support required, there are people who go through ... We cannot place them in companies for a short period of time due to ill health, or people with severe anxiety issues – I have a list – and that is when the Supported Employment Company takes over, so that these people are not out of the employment circuit for the amount of time that we need to support them as well. Supported employment is not just about getting people into a job but supporting them through the employment process.

Hon. Dr K Azopardi: For me to understand, if there is an individual who needs assistance in this supported employment, do they first go to the Supported Employment Company and are either employed by the Supported Employment Company and sent somewhere ... or are they pushed to a particular entity and are employed directly? Does it act as a sort of transition vehicle, or is it that beyond those individuals who are structured and employed through the Supported Employment Company, the GHA or Care Agency, or whoever it is, in accordance with some kind of guidance or protocol that is being devised for supported employment, is actually assisting people who need supported employment?

Hon. C P Santos: They start off employed by SEC. We find a placement in view of them securing a permanent placement. For example, we have had two just start in supported employment and they have taken employment up at the Citizens Advice Bureau.

Hon. Dr K Azopardi: I see, so they start under the Supported Employment Company and they would then be placed somewhere, and so the employer becomes the new entity, as I understand what the Minister is saying – is that correct?

Can I just ask, while I am on my feet, to short circuit the answer that he may give: is the transition through the Supported Employment Company for a specific period until the prospective employer is happy to directly employ that person for a longer period?

Hon. C P Santos: Madam Speaker, first of all, apologies – I have skipped the ‘Madam Speaker’ the other times, but I am back on it.

The point is that supported employment will support the person throughout their career, so if we do not manage to find them permanent employment, we will continue to support their individual needs in employment. Ideally, we will also find people, as we have in the past and as I have just given examples, companies that will employ them as part of their complement; but if not, we will continue supporting them, and not just in the public sector. This is in combination with the private sector. It is just that I have just been asked about government entities.

1480 **Hon. Dr K Azopardi:** A final question, Madam Speaker. Sorry, because I did say 'final' before, but just to ask about something that the Hon. Minister just mentioned. When the Supported Employment Company is going to support them through their career, as he said, does that mean that, for example, if you place an individual in a particular entity that does not work out, it is financial support as well as placement, to the extent possible, in different entities? So the individual will get financial support – is that right?

1485 **Chief Minister (Hon. F R Picardo):** Madam Speaker, if I can assist, because I have dealt with a number of these in the past, they will be able to return to supported Employment Company Ltd to continue their employment in Supported Employment Company Ltd, but they will not be paid by Supported Employment Company Ltd to be at home. They would have to revert to the employment of SEC. We have not had many of those instances, which is the success of this programme.

1490 If I can give the hon. Gentleman an example which might be helpful, this has worked a little like the Future Job Strategy that they like to criticise so much. The Future Job Strategy would employ people in the strategy whilst they were deployed in the private sector entity, and then they would eventually no longer be employed by the Future Job Strategy and would be employed only by the private sector entity. I think we started there with a six-month period originally, then we whittled it down to six weeks. In the Future Job Strategy you are paid for six weeks, even though you are in the private sector entity, and once the private sector entity says, 'He fits', or 'She fits', then you move to their employment. With SEC it is a little like that, except that the fit, we appreciate, may change as the supported employment needs of the individual may change, or, indeed, if employee is not failing but the employer has issues. SEC continues to provide an element of a safety net for those individuals and they could come back to being in the employment of SEC and go to another entity where the fit might be better. There are some instances where the individual's characteristics may change over time, and it may be harder to find employment in the same sort of sector. It may be necessary to provide a different sort of support, and in some instances – very few – that support can only be provided by what we might call the wider public sector, rather than even including private sector entities.

Madam Speaker: That has been fully answered. Next question.

Q575/2023

Supported Employment Scheme – Numbers by employing entity

1510 **Clerk:** Question 575/2023. The Hon. Mrs A Sanchez.

1515 **Hon. Mrs A Sanchez:** Madam Speaker, could the Government provide precise figures detailing the number of individuals employed under the Supported Employment Scheme at the following dates, and could these figures include the entity they have been employed under: 1st January 2012, 1st January 2013, 1st January 2014, 1st January 2015, 1st January 2016, 1st January 2017, 1st January 2018, 1st January 2019, 1st January 2020, 1st January 2021, 1st January 2022 and 1st January 2023?

1520 **Clerk:** Answer, the Minister for Equality, Employment, Culture and Tourism.

Minister for Equality, Employment, Culture and Tourism (Hon. C P Santos): Madam Speaker, I now hand over a schedule with the information requested, setting out the number of people

employed each year on this scheme, which started only when the GSLP-Liberals were first elected in 2011.

1525 In respect of the breakdown of the individuals and the entity they are employed under, it is not in the employees' interest to disclose this across the floor of this House, as it could render them identifiable. I am, nonetheless, happy to provide this to the hon. Member behind the Speaker's Chair, on the basis that it will remain confidential.

Answer to Q575/2023

1st January 2012 - 38 Employees
1st January 2013 - 48 Employees
1st January 2014 - 50 Employees
1st January 2015 - 57 Employees
1st January 2016 - 57 Employees
1st January 2017 - 57 Employees
1st January 2018 - 59 Employees
1st January 2019 - 63 Employees
1st January 2020 - 63 Employees
1st January 2021 - 63 Employees
1st January 2022 - 63 Employees
1st January 2023 - 65 Employees

1530 **Hon. Dr K Azopardi:** Madam Speaker, in the previous question the Minister was giving clarification on people employed in government entities, and he is now being asked to give us figures on how many people were employed under the Supported Employment Scheme. And so, for example, if I just take the highest figure, which is 65, which is the latest figure but it oscillates between 38 and 65, that includes government entities, the Supported Employment Company and private ... any employer? That is the extent of the Supported Employment Scheme under any
1535 employer, including all the ones that he rattled off – the Care Agency, the GSLA, all of that? That is the extent of it, is it?

Hon. C P Santos: Madam Speaker, yes, that is the extent of the people we employ in the public and the private sector, and in those that I apparently rattled off.

1540 **Hon. Dr K Azopardi:** I apologise for using the words 'rattled off' twice. It was not meant to be a criticism; the first time, it was just an observation.

Does the Minister agree that much more could be done in respect of support for people who need employment of this nature, given the numbers that he has just given us?

1545 **Chief Minister (Hon. F R Picardo):** Madam Speaker, I think that is based on an assumption that this is the total number of people helped by supported employment since 2012. That is to say there are 65 people who are, today, in Supported Employment Company Ltd, but the hon. Gentleman should factor in what I have said before. Some may have prospered in private sector employment and no longer be in the number recorded here, because some may not have come
1550 back to Supported Employment Company Ltd. And so this is the current number of people in employment who are employed in the public sector entities, are on the books of Supported Employment Company Ltd, even though they are in the private sector. But that is not the total number of people who would have passed through Supported Employment Company Ltd since
1555 2012. Perhaps if he reflects on that element, he might accept that 65 is not the total number of people helped, and that much more has been done, therefore, since 2012. I do not know whether that has a bearing on how he would pose his question.

Hon. Dr K Azopardi: Yes, it does have a bearing. I understand the point that the Chief Minister is making, but I suppose the question that then arises is to what extent are some of those names

common? Without asking for names, does the Minister have information as to how many of those people have commonly been on the same list for the last 10 years? Otherwise, we cannot really appreciate whether the scheme has helped 700 people or, actually, 65.

1565 **Hon. C P Santos:** Madam Speaker, I would need notice of that question, but I can assure you that I am unaware of names, I am working on figures, due to data protection. I have chosen not to get involved in individuals. I can tell you, as I said before, I know three people have retired this year and two people have moved into permanent employment just a few months before I took office, so I know that 65 is not the cumulative number in the past 12 years.

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Madam Speaker: Next question.

Q576/2023
Autism Pathway –
Timeline for publication

Clerk: Question 576/2023. The Hon. Mrs A Sanchez.

1575 **Hon. Mrs A Sanchez:** Madam Speaker, could the Government specify the expected timeline for the finalisation and publication of the new Autism Pathway?

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

1580 **Minister for Equality, Employment, Culture and Tourism (Hon. C P Santos):** Madam Speaker, the Autism Pathway is almost ready to be published. Logistical issues are being analysed before its publication. This is crucial for the pathway to be successful once published.

1585 **Hon. Mrs A Sanchez:** Madam Speaker, given a press release that was issued by the Government on 13th April regarding the development of a new, comprehensive Autism Pathway which was being finalised after a two-year consultation period, can the Government confirm and perhaps elaborate on the delay and why it has taken so long to finalise these pathways and be more precise on when they will finally be published?

1590 **Hon. C P Santos:** Madam Speaker, I do not consider it a delay. We have done an exercise whereby we have consulted with the professionals at the GHA, Education and Care Agency in order to identify what exactly is needed right now to reduce waiting lists and what is needed thereafter to maintain an efficient service. We want to make sure that we publish it when everything is in place, so we do not just make it happen with empty promises and we do it when everything is in place and ready.

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Madam Speaker: Next question.

Q577/2023
Supported Needs and Disability Co-ordination and Liaison Office –
Annual report

Clerk: Question 577/2023. The Hon. Mrs A Sanchez.

1600 **Hon. Mrs A Sanchez:** Madam Speaker, could the Government specify when the first annual report providing updates against objectives will be published by the Supported Needs and Disability Co-ordination and Liaison Office?

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

1605 **Minister for Equality, Employment, Culture and Tourism (Hon. C P Santos):** Madam Speaker, the Supported Needs and Disability Office is under no obligation to publish an annual report and does not consider it helpful, advisable or necessary to publish such a report.

1610 **Hon. Mrs A Sanchez:** Madam Speaker, considering the commitment to publish annual reports in the opening presentation delivered by this Office since its operational inception in September 2021, would the hon. Member care to clarify the change in this policy and why the Office now has chosen not to publish annual reports against objectives?

1615 **Hon. C P Santos:** Madam Speaker, our position has not changed. We are not saying we are not going to publish, I am just saying we are under no obligation to publish and so we have no set date to publish the first annual report.

1620 **Hon. Mrs A Sanchez:** Madam Speaker, it is not, obviously, that you are under an obligation, but it was a commitment that was made during the presentation and was delivered by this Office to the public and was clearly stated in the presentation that the Office made. I am trying to understand why the position has changed and why you do not want to establish when the annual reports are going to be published.

1625 **Hon. C P Santos:** Madam Speaker, I repeat: I am saying we are under no obligation, I am not saying we will not publish it. We do not have a set date at the moment. I am very recent in the Office and I am working with my team very hard to get all the information necessary, working on databases and getting as much information as I possibly can. I am not saying we are not going to, I am saying that we are not under any obligation and therefore we cannot confirm a date right now for publication.

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1635 **Hon. Dr K Azopardi:** I understand the nuance, the difference between being under no obligation and having made a commitment to do so two years ago. I think the legitimate question that arises is, having the commitment first being made two years ago in respect of a period that has obviously now elapsed, why is the Minister not in a position to say, having spoken to his Office on sight of this question, whether the 2021-22 report will be published soon?

1640 **Chief Minister (Hon. F R Picardo):** Madam Speaker, the hon. Gentleman prefaces his question, as the hon. Lady did a moment ago, saying that there was a 'commitment' to do so, and yet it is very clear from what hon. Members are saying in the context of their questioning that what they are referring to is a presentation made by the officials who set up that Office, which suggested that an annual report might be published. That is not a political commitment of the Government or indeed a political commitment entered into by Ministers, which is the sort of commitment that hon. Members would refer to across the floor of the House. That presentation was made by the people who established the Office. They now tell us that they do not believe it is advisable or helpful to be publishing annual reports at this stage, and, for that reason, we have reflected that in the answer that we have provided to the House, so that the public is aware.

1645 The hon. Gentleman has indicated already, in the course of his answers, that there are a number of workstreams which are being developed. It is likely that there will be publication, at some stage, of the fruit of that work in a way that is going to help the community to understand the work that is being done by that Office, but I do not think that we should consider that there is

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a political commitment here which is in any way not being adhered to, because that is not the case.

1655 **Hon. Dr K Azopardi:** I was not saying that there was a political commitment, Madam Speaker, I was just reflecting that there had been a commitment made by those people who had done that presentation. The Hon. Chief Minister makes this distinction between the Government – which I understood to be the political Government, obviously – and the Supported Needs and Disability Co-ordination and Liaison Office, but ultimately that is staffed by civil servants who are part of the administrative Government, and they made a presentation that said that they were going to do
1660 an annual report. Have I taken from his answer that when the Minister said that it was not advisable, it is the same people who said in 2021 that they wished to make annual reports who are now saying that they do not think it is advisable to do so? Is that the tenor of what the Chief Minister said?

1665 **Hon. Chief Minister:** Madam Speaker, yes. I would tell the hon. Gentleman that the Government does not include professionals in this field; we are professionally guided in this respect. The presentation that the hon. Gentleman is referring to, and the hon. Lady referred to, was made by the individuals who set up the Office as they explained to the users of those offices
1670 how they envisage that things would develop. They have seen things develop, obviously, in a different way, and they are the ones now saying it is not advisable at this stage to proceed down the route of providing annual reports.

If I might just indicate what I believe is behind this, because I have experienced this generally in liaison with this Office, the number of people with disabilities in Gibraltar is relatively small given the size of the population. A lot of what we might say in the context of those individuals
1675 might render them identifiable. We have this issue, for example, with GHA reports, where you are dealing with the whole population. You still have to be very careful with what you say in a GHA report, because it might render some people identifiable if you look at the numbers that are suffering from a particular malaise. In the context of these issues, because the population that you are dealing with is smaller, identifiability becomes, once again, a practical problem that you
1680 have to deal with, especially if you are going to do this annually.

We know, from seeking to share data across the Government, that we have data protection issues in order to ensure protection of individuals' identities when dealing with these issues, when sharing data across the Government, which is, of course, the new issue that one must be alert to
1685 always on data protection. You might call it the tyranny of data protection, but there is a good reason for it, and we have to be alive to it. I believe this is the sort of issue that is changing the view of those who started with the view, not the commitment, that they would be publishing an annual report.

Madam Speaker: Next question.

Q578/2023

UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities – Extension to Gibraltar

1690 **Clerk:** Question 578/2023. The Hon. G Origo.

Hon. G Origo: Madam Speaker, can the Government confirm whether the UK has provided any feedback with respect to our request for the extension of the UN Convention on the Rights of
1695 Persons with Disabilities to Gibraltar, and how long does the Government expect this process to take?

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

1700 **Minister for Equality, Employment, Culture and Tourism (Hon. C P Santos):** Madam Speaker, the UK team assigned to Gibraltar's request for extension is in the process of considering the request that has been made. There is no specific feedback yet. The Government cannot say how long the extension process will take given that there are a number of third parties involved.

Madam Speaker: Next question.

1705 **Hon. Dr K Azopardi:** Madam Speaker, can I just understand the reference to the third parties? Meaning who: the United Kingdom government and who else?

1710 **Hon. C P Santos:** This is the UK team. *(Interjection)* Yes. Madam Speaker, all we can do is present the request for the extension, then it is in the hands of the UK team assigned to it.

Madam Speaker: Next question.

Q579/2023
World Travel Market –
Expectation of business generated

Clerk: Question 579/2023. The Hon. G Origo.

1715 **Hon. G Origo:** Madam Speaker, could the hon. Member opposite please indicate what business, if any, has transpired or is to be expected to be generated from his recent visit to the World Travel Market in London, to which he went to promote our Literary Festival and Gibraltar more widely?

1720 **Clerk:** Answer, the Minister for Equality, Employment, Culture and Tourism.

1725 **Minister for Equality, Employment, Culture and Tourism (Hon. C P Santos):** Madam Speaker, at the recent World Travel Market my team and I met with a wide range of industry players to attract business into Gibraltar. The intention at the World Travel Market is to showcase our facilities and ignite interest. We are currently discussing an expansion of our air routes with one of our current operators, as well as liaising with MICE planners, cruise companies, tour operators and wedding planners. As ever with such marketing initiatives, it is not possible to have any objectively reliable estimations of what interest will be generated by the work we have done.

Madam Speaker: Next question.

Q580/2023
Gibraltar Cruise and Maritime Tourism Officer –
Further details

1730 **Clerk:** Question 580/2023. The Hon. G Origo.

Hon. G Origo: Madam Speaker, can the Government expand on its plans for the introduction of a Gibraltar Cruise and Maritime Tourism Officer? How much would he expect to remunerate this role, and what responsibilities would it have?

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

Minister for Equality, Employment, Culture and Tourism (Hon. C P Santos): Madam Speaker, the introduction of a Gibraltar Cruise and Maritime Tourism Officer is being looked into. Details of remuneration will follow once responsibilities have been set accordingly.

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Hon. G Origo: Madam Speaker, given that the Government already employs a CEO of the Tourist Board, whose role is to promote tourism in Gibraltar more widely, how is the Cruise and Maritime Tourism Officer role supposed to be any different from that of the CEO of the Tourist Board?

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Hon. C P Santos: I understand we do have a CEO of Tourism. I think you are assuming that the Gibraltar Cruise and Maritime Tourism Officer role is on a par: it is not necessarily on a par. The CEO has to manage a team, and this role would probably be part of the team specialising in bringing cruises to Gibraltar.

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Madam Speaker: Next question.

Q581/2023

Landport Tunnel beautification project – Tender cost

Clerk: Question 581/2023. The Hon. G Origo.

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Hon. G Origo: Madam Speaker, can the Government disclose at what cost it has tendered the beautification project at Landport Tunnel which has recently been approved at DPC level?

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

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Minister for Equality, Employment, Culture and Tourism (Hon. C P Santos): Madam Speaker, the Landport beautification project tender has not been awarded yet. It is, therefore, not possible to provide the tender cost.

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Hon. G Origo: Madam Speaker, could the hon. Member opposite please, then, if possible, provide more details of when he would expect to have such approvals in place, so that we could then ask for the cost of this project at that stage?

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Chief Minister (Hon. F R Picardo): Madam Speaker, I hope it is helpful for all hon. Members just to set out what the practice usually is. When the Government awards a tender, that is published. In other words, the Government makes an announcement that the tender has been awarded, and that is the trigger for hon. Members to then be able to ask a question in this House. If we start to indicate how long it will take to award the tender, we start to interfere with the procurement process, which is not ministerially led, and therefore that is handled in keeping with our procurement rules and procurement laws. We get notified, or advice is given, and sometimes Ministers are given a choice or ask for a steer or an indication on a policy issue. Then the tender is awarded. As a result, a government press release is issued – usually, hon. Members might seek

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to complain that we have issued it with all bells and whistles – that a government tender has been awarded. That is the trigger for hon. Members to then know that they can ask their question at the following meeting of the House.

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Madam Speaker: Next question.

Q582/2023

Caleta Hotel –

Timescale for completion of new hotel

Clerk: Question 582/2023. The Hon. G Origo.

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Hon. G Origo: Madam Speaker, given the recent demolition of the Caleta Hotel, can the Government confirm when the new hotel will be expected to complete?

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

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Minister for Equality, Employment, Culture and Tourism (Hon. C P Santos): Madam Speaker, this is not a government project. The Government understands that the developers have stated that they expect the new hotel to be completed by the end of 2028. This is not a date which the Government is providing to the House, but simply a reflection of what the developer has said.

Madam Speaker: Next question.

1795

Q583/2023

Employment Tribunal –

Number of claims awaiting appointment of chairperson and when filed

Clerk: Question 583/2023. The Hon. E J Reyes.

1800

Hon. E J Reyes: Madam Speaker, how many claims filed with the Employment Tribunal are awaiting the appointment of a chairperson, and when were those claims first filed?

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

1805

Minister for Equality, Employment, Culture and Tourism (Hon. C P Santos): Madam Speaker, The total number of claims filed with the Employment Tribunal awaiting the appointment of a chairperson stands at 53.

I now hand over a schedule with the information requested.

Answer to Q583/2023

Claims awaiting appointment of chairperson by date are as follows:

2021		2022		2023	
Jul	3	Feb	1	Jan	2
Aug	3	Mar	1	Feb	3
Sep	3	May	4	Apr	2
Oct	1	Jun	9	May	1
		Jul	6		
		Aug	4		
		Sep	3		
		Oct	1		
		Nov	2		
		Dec	4		

1810 **Hon. E J Reyes:** Madam Speaker, whilst I await the arrival of the schedule which will give me details of the dates, can the Minister add any prior information? Why have these delays been encountered? Under the previous Minister for Employment, we were led to believe that chairpersons were being appointed, it was imminent and the cases were going to proceed, so can the Minister update this House in respect of delays?

1815 **Hon. C P Santos:** Madam Speaker, when this question was last asked in Parliament, last May, there were a total of 49 cases awaiting appointment of a chairperson. From May to now, we have appointed 19 chairpersons and a further 23 cases are now pending appointment of chairpersons, which brings the total to 53, so we have already ... Last time, we had nine chairpersons ... to have been more active – I have the list – and we have already reduced the backlog from 2020. We are
1820 now working through 2021 and 2022. As I said, we have had a reduction of 19, which has then moved the process forward. So we now have 53, because it is an addition of 23 as we have moved through the different levels.

1825 **Hon. E J Reyes:** Thank you, Madam Speaker. I now have the schedule in front of me. I am still a bit shocked to see that there are appointments waiting to be made from claims that were filed as far back as July 2021. That is well over two years ago. Is there any particular reason why it is taking so long to make an appointment?

1830 **Hon. C P Santos:** Madam Speaker, there is no particular reason. I do not particularly feel it is moving that slowly. We have worked on 19 moving upon appointment of a chairperson. We currently have 122 cases moving through the different stages of the process.

1835 **Hon. Dr K Azopardi:** Sorry, I thought my hon. colleague had finished, but let me just ask this question, as it relates to the statistic that the hon. Member gave. There are 122 cases moving through the system and 53 are awaiting the appointment of a chairperson. So, loosely – I do not know, my maths is not that great – 40%, 45%. When we posed questions in this House to the previous Minister before the appointment of chairpersons, I remember asking for and being given the statistic that there were 59 cases awaiting the appointment of chairpersons. We asked that consistently and were always given the same statistic and told that once there was an
1840 appointment of chairpersons it would be unblocked. There was a photograph in the press when all these chairpersons were appointed – there were eight or nine of them. The Hon. Minister has said that since May, they have appointed 19 chairpersons – in other words, in 19 cases – and there is a big panel there. Does he not agree that the unblocking of these historic cases is being rather slow, given the number of chairpersons that were appointed and the expectation of the previous
1845 Minister and his Government that that would lead to a complete unblocking? On the face of the

statistics he has given, and because they have appointed 19 and we are still back at the figure of 53, it does not seem to have dented it in any significant way.

1850 **Chief Minister (Hon. F R Picardo):** Madam Chairman, I do not agree with the hon. Gentleman's
assessment, for this reason: the number of appointments of chairmen, I think, demonstrates that
the two permanent chairmen that we now have are starting the process of dealing with what we
might call the backlog that there was, which had arisen because practitioners were not coming
forward to act as chairpersons of the tribunal. Now that we have two permanent chairmen, they
are really starting the process of getting through material, and, indeed, what we have seen is that
1855 the whole infrastructure of the tribunal is working quickly. That, of course, if you are just looking
at the statistics – and one is reminded of the concept of statistics, damned statistics and lies –
would suggest that the blockage is not being undone, quite the opposite, because as the whole
infrastructure of the tribunal is changing and becoming more agile, more cases are being brought
forward for appointment of chairmen more quickly. The tribunal is managing the caseload as it
1860 goes through – not particulars of claim; presentation of case, response, etc. – more quickly. That
is producing the cases ready for appointment of chairmen: 19 already cleared. That is the process
that is now becoming more agile.

The hon. Gentleman will be surprised to hear me say that I think that he might not be wrong,
but I think it is too soon for him to make that assessment. He needs to allow the chairmen to go
1865 through the process of dealing with the backlog. Perhaps in 18 months we might both be of the
view that not enough has been done to clear what we might call the backlog, but I am very
confident, given what I have been told by the former Minister and by the Director of Employment,
that in fact this process we are going through does lead to the reduction of the backlog.

Of course, the hon. Gentleman knows – and, if I may say so, with respect, you know, Madam
1870 Speaker – that legal cases cannot be cleared as if they were chewing gum on the street. You have
to go through the process. You have to permit people to present their defences etc. You appoint
the chairman, you then give the date and you start to deal with it. That is happening. The backlog
built up because that was not happening, because we did not have the chairmen, but we have to
give this time to actually work, and I would ask the hon. Gentleman to indulge the process for a
1875 little longer. Perhaps we might both agree, some months down the line, that not enough progress
has been made if those numbers do not start to shift, but not in a month. This is something that
takes six to 18 months, in my view.

1880 **Hon. E J Reyes:** Madam Speaker, one last thing. Seeing that the date range is obviously spread
out over the course of three years, is there a particular criterion that is used to prioritise the
appointment a chairman for the tribunal? Someone who has been waiting since 2021 may feel it
unfair that someone who only submitted a claim in 2022 or even 2023 has had their case coming
forward before them. Is there a set criterion that one can refer to?

1885 **Hon. Chief Minister:** Madam Speaker, the usual criterion is the age of the claim, but there are
so many different issues which can be live in a case. For example, if I can put it this way to the
hon. Gentleman, some parties may be on the list from 2021. They may be about to settle and both
parties may say, 'Don't set it down: we think we may have found a resolution.' Some parties may
be down from 2021 and their lawyers might not have finalised matters, and therefore the case
1890 cannot be brought forward. This is why I talk about the infrastructure of the tribunal dealing also
with those issues and trying to chivvy along those cases and say, 'When are you going to be ready
to have your chairman appointed?' There are many different issues. The tribunal is not as strict
on its procedure as a court might be, and therefore the parties may ... always seeking not to allow
the employer to delay, but there may be reasons why the employee may not be ready. Many of
1895 these cases are union led, where the union represents the employee. The union may be seeking
to settle with the employer, or there may be other issues in play, so it cannot simply be looked at
on the basis of somebody who is fired in March 2023 having their matter resolved by November

1900 2023 and somebody who was fired in May 2021 still not having been dealt with, not least because that person may have found employment immediately and they may be dealing with their new employment and their case. The issues are many and varied.

Madam Speaker: Next question.

JUSTICE, TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Q584/2023

**Royal Gibraltar Police –
Shortfall in complement**

Clerk: Questions to the Minister for Justice, Trade and Industry.
Question 584/2023. The Hon. Mrs J Ladislaus.

1905

Hon. Mrs J Ladislaus: Madam Speaker, how does the Government propose to tackle the shortfall in the Royal Gibraltar Police complement and its impact on policing?

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

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Minister for Justice, Trade and Industry (Hon. N Feetham): Madam Speaker, the Royal Gibraltar Police has recently employed 16 police officers, who started their police recruit training in September 2023 and should be operationally deployable in March 2024. Furthermore, the RGP has recently conducted an additional recruitment campaign and will soon be employing a further 12 police officers, who will start their police recruit training in January 2024.

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Hon. Mrs J Ladislaus: I am grateful, but can the hon. Member perhaps clarify whether anything is being put in place in the meantime? There are still a few months until the passing out of these initial 16 officers, and then there are 12 more, but the RGP was 34 down in its complement recently. Can that be clarified?

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Hon. N Feetham: Madam Speaker, His Majesty's Government of Gibraltar has also agreed with the Commissioner of Police that the Royal Gibraltar Police should not fall below the complement level. We have made that commitment very clear to the Commissioner. I met with the Commissioner and the senior leadership team. We have had a very constructive initial meeting. I was due to meet the Commissioner again. Unfortunately, the Commissioner has been away from Gibraltar over the last two weeks. He is back today, I understand. He has done sterling work outside the jurisdiction. I am due to meet him again, I believe, over the next few days.

1925

My understanding from the information that I have is that, additionally, the Royal Gibraltar Police continues to fulfil its obligations to recruit 10 command and dispatch officers and five retention officers as part of the civilianisation of police officers to release police officers into frontline policing. That is the information that I currently have available for the hon. Member.

1930

Q585/2023

**Young Offenders Institute –
Whether concrete plans in place to create**

Clerk: Question 585/2023. The Hon. Mrs J Ladislaus.

1935 **Hon. Mrs J Ladislaus:** Madam Speaker, are there concrete plans in place for the creation of a Young Offenders Institute?

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

1940 **Minister for Justice, Trade and Industry (Hon. N Feetham):** Madam Speaker, there are no concrete plans in place for this at this moment. His Majesty's Government of Gibraltar is considering the matter with relevant professionals in the field in order to create a secure and positive environment for children and young adults during custody and after sentencing.

1945 **Hon. Mrs J Ladislaus:** Does the hon. Member then agree that the current Prison is not adequate to house young offenders?

1950 **Hon. N Feetham:** Madam Speaker, we have made a very clear policy commitment in our manifesto, and the answer that I have given the hon. Member is entirely consistent with that commitment.

Hon. D J Bossino: May I ask the Hon. Minister which professionals he is consulting with? He talks about the relevant professionals in the field: I would ask him who he is undergoing these consultations with.

1955 **Hon. N Feetham:** Madam Speaker, as GBC reminded me just before I came to Parliament today, we have only been in office for six weeks. I am saying that we are considering with relevant professionals. 'Relevant professionals' includes all professionals in my Ministry and, indeed, in related Ministries as well. It is early stages in this Government's term of office and therefore we envisage that we will consult all relevant professionals and stakeholders.

1960 **Hon. D J Bossino:** Madam Speaker, is he saying that it is a statement of intent that he is going to be consulting relevant professionals in the field? It seems that the Hon. Minister does not know the answer. I know he has just assumed office, but I simply want to know whether he has an idea, at least, so that he can identify to this House which relevant – he says they are relevant – professionals in the field. If he does not know, then he can simply say, 'I do not know at this stage, and it is simply an intention that I will be consulting relevant professionals in the field.' However, it seems odd from this standpoint that the hon. Member who is the Minister for Justice does not yet know which those relevant professionals are.

1970 **Hon. N Feetham:** Madam Speaker, the relevant professionals are all professionals involved in the justice system, so clearly, to the extent that relevant stakeholders need to be consulted, that is precisely what the Government of Gibraltar will be doing. Thank you.

Madam Speaker: Next question.

**Q586/2023
Prison officers –
Increase in cohort**

1975 **Clerk:** Question 586/2023. The Hon. Mrs J Ladislaus.

Hon. Mrs J Ladislaus: Madam Speaker, when will the cohort of prison officers, in particular female officers, be increased?

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

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Minister for Justice, Trade and Industry (Hon. N Feetham): Madam Speaker, His Majesty's Government of Gibraltar expects that vacancies for prison officers, with specific provision for female officers, will be advertised within the next few months.

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Madam Speaker: Next question.

Q587/2023
Sex offenders –
Rehabilitation facility

Clerk: Question 587/2023. The Hon. Mrs J Ladislaus.

Hon. Mrs J Ladislaus: Madam Speaker, has work commenced to establish a facility for effective rehabilitation work to take place regarding sex offenders?

1990

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

Minister for Justice, Trade and Industry (Hon. N Feetham): Madam Speaker, yes, ma'am.

1995

Hon. Mrs J Ladislaus: When can we expect the fruits of this work?

Hon. N Feetham: Madam Speaker, His Majesty's Government of Gibraltar has identified premises for the Multi-Agency Public Protection Arrangements (MAPPA). The MAPPA facility plans are under way to allow for the relevant members of the responsible bodies and agencies to be able to jointly utilise these premises, so that this work can be undertaken even more effectively. The plan is to use Johnstone's Passage. I was due to pay a visit to the premises this week, but unfortunately, because of Parliament, those plans have now been delayed.

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Hon. Dr K Azopardi: Are the premises at Johnstone's Passage the offices that used to be occupied by the GHA?

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Hon. N Feetham: Madam Speaker, I do not have that information available to me at the present moment.

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Hon. D J Bossino: Is he, in answer to this question, able to identify which are – I think I have taken a proper note – the respective bodies and agencies? I want him to particularise his answers. We are not being given full answers, I think, to the questions that we are posing – and I refer to the answer he gave to Question 585. Can I ask him, therefore, a very simple question? If he does not have the information here and now, then fine, we will accept that, but is he able to identify which are the respective bodies and agencies he is referring to?

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Hon. N Feetham: Madam Speaker, that information, I am reminded by the Chief Minister, is publicly available information, but in answer to his question, the list of agencies which co-operate under MAPPA and, therefore, by definition, are the relevant professionals that are involved in this process, are the Royal Gibraltar Police, the Care Agency, the Probation Service, Her Majesty's Prison Service, the Gibraltar Health Authority, the Housing Department, the Department of Education, HM Customs, the Borders and Coastline Agency and the Gibraltar Sports and Leisure Authority.

2020

Madam Speaker: Next question.

Q588/2023
Sex offenders –
Rehabilitation facility

2025 **Clerk:** Question 588/2023. The Hon. R M Clinton.

Hon. R M Clinton: Madam Speaker, can the Government advise why the Income Tax Office is asking for a tax specialist to be seconded from the private sector?

2030 **Clerk:** Answer, the Minister for Justice, Trade and Industry.

Minister for Justice, Trade and Industry (Hon. N Feetham): Madam Speaker, the secondment of tax specialists from the private sector is a strategic move to bridge the knowledge gap and leverage specialised expertise from within the private sector. It is a natural progression from the steps already taken by this Government. This Government acknowledges the importance of upskilling and resourcing the Income Tax Office. This has been highlighted by the Chief Minister in his 2023 Budget address. It is also essential to adopt a proactive approach in aligning with the continually evolving international tax landscape. This initiative has already been positively received by finance centre professionals in Gibraltar.

2040 I am pleased to announce that the Commissioner of Income Tax and his team have already received numerous expressions of interest for consideration.

Hon. R M Clinton: Madam Speaker, I have a copy of the expression of interest here. Looking at the brief, it talks about optimising tax strategy, and the Minister has just referred to a natural progression of steps already taken, but the Tax Office is not a private sector concern. My concern from this side of the House is whether the public sector is being provided with the training in order to undertake its functions and not effectively privatising functions which should be properly within the public sector.

2050 Looking at the overall key responsibilities, yes, they are quite specialised: BEPS, base erosion, transfer pricing in accordance with OECD rules. However, more importantly, one of the requirements is to assist with the implementation of training, focusing on identifying and profiling taxpayer returns etc. I am a little surprised that the duration of secondment is only 12 months, so can the Minister advise the House whether the overall strategy that he just mentioned is not to privatise this function, but rather to provide training so that the public sector has the necessary skills? Does he believe that the 12-month period will be sufficient to do that; and, if not, what steps does he propose to undertake to ensure that public sector officials are properly trained in this area? I should add, Madam Speaker, that I have no interest in applying.

Hon. N Feetham: Madam Speaker, I reassure the hon. Members opposite that there is absolutely no intention of privatising the Tax Office or, indeed, any functions within the Tax Office.

2060 The Government of Gibraltar has acted on the advice of the Commissioner of Income Tax. In other words, we have accepted the advice that was given to us that the quickest means by which the Tax Office could be resourced in the short term was if we went out and asked for a secondment placement from the private sector. So we have acted on the advice received from the Commissioner. Having said that, the Government's position is that we would support – and I have communicated this position to the Commissioner of Income Tax – in this engagement process with the private sector any expression of interest from relevant professionals who might consider that a secondment is not something that they wish to pursue. In other words, if the right candidate

2070 comes across and they are currently in employment with the private sector but feel that they have the necessary skills to be able to do the job effectively, the Commissioner is not averse, and I have certainly supported him in that position, to engaging in discussions with individuals who might wish to take direct employment with the Tax Office, if that is something which the Commissioner is minded to recommend to the Government of Gibraltar.

2075 The whole point of doing this exercise is to ensure that we are resourced, that we have a Tax Office in this jurisdiction that is capable of challenging assessments which are submitted by large corporates. We believe the potential tax revenues that can be raised as a result of this could be significant for Gibraltar, and I am sure that Members on the opposite side would welcome that initiative.

2080 **Hon. R M Clinton:** Madam Speaker, I am grateful to the Minister for his reasoning for the secondment, but I must confess to being a bit concerned that he states, effectively, that the Tax Office is under-resourced, which is, obviously, of great concern to this House because we would all wish it to be properly resourced.

2085 If I can ask the Minister two basic questions: one is was this type of brief the one that was meant to be undertaken by the person who was seconded by Her Majesty's Treasury to Gibraltar recently, who I believe has since gone back to the UK? Secondly, how will the Minister ensure that there is no perceived conflict of interest if anybody from his firm applies?

2090 **Hon. N Feetham:** Madam Speaker, there are various strands of questions put by the hon. Member. On his comment in relation to being concerned about the Tax Office being under-resourced, it is not quite as bland a statement as that. It is a skilling statement. In other words, tax is a very complicated subject. I practised in the tax area years ago and I have a tax background, although I have not practised tax over the last 14 years, I believe, since the financial crisis in 2007 and 2008. Those of us who have been involved in this sector will understand that it is a question of keeping abreast of tax developments and, therefore, making sure that the tax authorities are in a position where they can challenge companies in terms of positions that they take when making and submitting tax returns which do not necessarily reflect the value that ought to be attributed to profits in Gibraltar, given the substance and activity conducted from within the jurisdiction. I do not think it is a matter of concern. I think what the Government is doing is ensuring that the skills are there. That is consistent with what other tax authorities all over the world are currently doing. Indeed, given that there are competing tax interests between tax authorities in different jurisdictions, we have to ensure that the Gibraltar view on taxation is also adequately represented, and that can only happen if we are properly resourced. That covers the first point.

2105 Secondly, you are absolutely right, we did have an HMRC officer seconded to the Tax Office, but I believe that was for a period of three months and there is only so much that somebody who is seconded for three months can do in terms of upskilling. This is really an exercise that will require having a short-, medium- and long-term vision of where the tax authorities need to be, in terms of skills.

2110 I think you have asked about whether there is a conflict of interest in somebody applying from my law firm. I actually do not expect many applications from within the legal profession, because what the tax authorities would like to see and certainly the expectation is to recruit professional tax accountants – in other words, an accountant rather than a lawyer.

2115 **Hon. R M Clinton:** I am grateful to the Minister for his answer. If I may deal with the last point first, he is fully aware that there are professionally qualified accountants as well as lawyers in his firm who could perhaps apply for this appointment. However, I take his point, and I assume that he will do what is necessary to avoid any perceived conflict of interest should one arise.

2120 I come back to the secondees from His Majesty's Treasury. May I ask: is that not an option that could be pursued as well?

Hon. N Feetham: Madam Speaker, the fact that the Commissioner of Income Tax is telling the Government that, in his view, the strategy ought to be the one that we have embarked upon would certainly suggest that the option that the hon. Member has highlighted is not one which they think is immediately available.

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Madam Speaker: Next question.

Q589/2023

Finance Bill –

Whether to be presented in 2024 Budget

Clerk: Question 589/2023. The Hon. R M Clinton.

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Hon. R M Clinton: Madam Speaker, can the Government advise whether the Minister for Taxation intends to present a Finance Bill in the 2024 Budget?

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

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Minister for Justice, Trade and Industry (Hon. N Feetham): Madam Speaker, no, the Minister for Taxation will not be presenting a Finance Bill in the 2024 Budget.

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Hon. R M Clinton: Madam Speaker, may I ask the Minister, firstly, why he will not be doing one? Secondly, does he think it is appropriate that there are outstanding Budget measures from years ago that have yet to be enacted in our statute because of the fact that there is no Finance Bill presented at the annual Budget?

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Chief Minister (Hon. F R Picardo): Madam Speaker, the hon. Gentleman knows what the position of the GSLP Liberal administration is in relation to a Finance Bill. This is an issue that we have debated ad nauseam for a number of years, usually during the course of the Budget debate. Our view is that a budget is about presenting all measures related to taxation etc. and other measures, not just matters related to taxation. Our view is that we do not do it with a Finance Bill. Our view has been explained on a number of occasions during the course of that debate and in answers to questions in this House. Our Government has not changed. The identity of Ministers may have changed, but the policy has not changed, so I refer the hon. Gentleman to the answers that we have been giving him since he was elected to this House.

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2155

Hon. R M Clinton: Madam Speaker, I am grateful to the hon. Member, the Chief Minister, for his answer, but my question was directed at the Minister for Taxation, not the Chief Minister. The Chief Minister is, I understand, the Minister for Public Finance, but we now have a Minister for Taxation. So I would ask the Minister again: does he think it is correct that there are Budget measures that have not been enacted in law due to the absence of a Finance Bill?

2160

Hon. Chief Minister: Madam Speaker, the hon. Gentleman can direct his question to whomever he likes, but it is the Government that decides who answers. Because I have been dealing with this issue for the past 12 years, I am answering as Minister for Finance because I retain responsibility for things that have happened in the past 12 years and going forward in respect of how public finance is going to be dealt with, including matters relating to taxation.

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The hon. Gentleman knows that we have all regretted the absence of the Statute Book catching up with Budget measures. That has arisen not because of the absence of a Finance Bill, but because of other pressures on government time, which would not be fixed by the simple device

2170 that the hon. Gentleman throws out there of a Finance Bill. We continue to regret the fact that there are some measures which have not yet found their way on to the Statute Book. We expect that we should be able to bring to the Statute Book, with alacrity, when we are able to, given other pressures, those measures that are outstanding, but once again, whether it is – if I may congratulate the hon. Gentleman, in giving this answer – the third Feetham to address this House or the same Picardo addressing this House, the policy of the Government has not changed and will not change.

Madam Speaker: I think this has been sufficiently explored. Next question.

Q590/2023
Removal from FATF grey list –
Update

2175 **Clerk:** Question 590/2023. The Hon. R M Clinton.

Hon. R M Clinton: Madam Speaker, can the Government provide an update as to Gibraltar's removal from the FATF grey list?

2180 **Clerk:** Answer, the Minister for Justice, Trade and Industry.

Minister for Justice, Trade and Industry (Hon. N Feetham): Madam Speaker, there is no update beyond the publicly available information provided in the Government press release of 29th October 2023.

2185 **Hon. R M Clinton:** Madam Speaker, I am grateful for the Minister's statement. I believe that announcement indicated there would be a visit to Gibraltar scheduled for February. I have two suggestions to the Minister that he may want to consider, perhaps as a question: (1) that in any meetings with the team, he would like to consider whether they would like to invite Members of the Opposition to provide support to the Government's arguments in terms of political commitment to the Moneyval objectives; and (2) would the Minister please consider, in line, again, with the Ministerial Code, making statements to this House rather than the private sector, in terms of progress on FATF grey listing? Thank you.

2195 **Chief Minister (Hon. F R Picardo):** Madam Speaker, both of those issues engage the Government generally, not just the Minister.

2200 Let me first say that I am very grateful to the hon. Gentleman for his statement about the Opposition's commitment in respect of the measures that need to be put in place to deal with the grey listing issue. Of course, if the visit had been scheduled for August with an election due during the autumn, it would have been absolutely appropriate that the Opposition should be there to show that commitment through the period which might affect a new listing. However, given that these reviews are held every three years and we have just been through a General Election, I thank the hon. Gentleman for his statement. I think that is sufficient at this stage. However, if it is considered by those who advise the Government that it might be helpful for members of the visiting team to meet Members of the Opposition or, indeed, anybody else, we would, of course, consider that. It has not been considered in the context of the programme that has been presented to the Hon. Minister and to me, because we already know the schedule: it is very tight and, on the advice of those who suggested to us who they should meet, it does not include the Opposition,.

2210 The hon. Gentleman asked another question, which I confess I have ... (*Interjection*) Oh, and of
course, in the context of whether a ministerial statement should be made or a statement to
Parliament on public statements should be made, the hon. Gentleman will want to reflect that he
has been referred to a statement by the Government on 27th October, when Parliament had not
yet met ceremonially and was therefore not in session. He knows that the rule is that the
2215 Government will try to avoid making a public statement in respect of a matter on which a question
has been asked by the Opposition, once questions have been tabled, and indeed will seek to bring
to this House, for a statement in this House, matters which are of general public importance.
However, because we do not have a Parliament in permanent session, that can only be relevant,
usually, in the week in which Parliament is sitting. Otherwise, we would not have been able to
2220 make that statement three weeks ago and we would not be able to make a statement in relation
to the FATF issue once again until Parliament sits again. Indeed, the Government makes many
statements which are of general public importance, and if they are not in this week, we would be
unable to make them until the next sitting of the Parliament if we were to observe a rule that is
made for a Parliament that is in permanent session.

2225

Madam Speaker: Next question.

HOUSING AND THE UNIVERSITY

Q591/2023

Rental housing market – Review

Clerk: Questions to the Minister for Housing and the University.
Question 591/2023. The Hon. D J Bossino.

2230 **Hon. D J Bossino:** What is the Government proposing in the context of its thorough review of
the regime of the rental housing market?

Clerk: Answer, the Minister for Housing and the University.

Minister for Housing and the University (Hon. Ms P A Orfila): Madam Speaker, the thorough
review to which the Hon. Gentleman refers is currently under way. It involves a detailed
consultation with all the affected stakeholders. This means landlords, tenants, lenders and others
who may wish to share views with the Ministry for Housing. The consultation includes
understanding both what can best stimulate the market and also protect the tenants.

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Hon. D J Bossino: Whilst I appreciate that the hon. Member has only just come to office and it
is a manifesto commitment which, in effect, as the Hon. Chief Minister, I think, stated on this
occasion, is now basically the policy of the Government – and I refer her to page 97, which talks
about the thorough review of the regime of the rental housing market – can she be more helpful?
2240 I appreciate and am grateful that she has listed – maybe her colleague to her left can learn from
what she has done – specifically the entities that she is consulting with. Can she give the House an
indication of where she thinks that review is going to lead to? In other words, does she and the
Government have a specific idea as to where she wants to take this?

2245 I remind her, if I may, Madam Speaker, that this was an issue which divided us during the course
of the election, where we were told that our manifesto had many references to reviews. Actually,
when I have been preparing my questions in relation to my current areas of responsibility, I have
seen a lot of those, and this is one of them. So can I ask her: when they used to boast, in the course

of the campaign, that they were the ones who provided specific commitments in relation to the areas ...? Now, here we have a review. Can I give her the opportunity to state where she wants to go with this review?

Hon. Ms P A Orfila: Well, a review is something in which you consult. I have only been in this post for a scant four weeks, getting to know a lot of things. This is one of the things that was there and that I am taking the interest, looking into it, so that we can properly propose what the final document will be.

Hon. D J Bossino: Okay. I appreciate that. I do not want to press her too much at this stage. I know it is early stages and she is, in effect, unable to provide this House with the idea of where she wants to go with this, but can I press her as to timings: when does she think that she will be in a position ...? Will this, for example – and I think it will, if I may offer that to her – include a change of the legislation? In that context, is it within the realms of possibility, as far as the Government's policy thinking is concerned in relation to this area, that, for example, they are thinking of a radical proposition as to whether ...? For example, they may wish to remove the concept, totally, of rent control, either throughout Gibraltar or in specific areas. I just offer that to her, to see if she can further assist the House in relation to the questions that I am asking at this stage.

Chief Minister (Hon. F R Picardo): Madam Speaker, where the Government has set out a timetable for something in our manifesto which is now the policy of the Government, of course hon. Members can ask us how we are going to keep to that timetable. Well, we have not set out a timetable; we have the whole of the lifetime of this Parliament to do that. The former Chief Minister, the leader of the party now opposite, famously reminded us that we were not elected to be his time keepers and that he had the whole sweep of the 48 months of the lifetime of the Parliament to deliver against his manifesto commitments. That, with respect, we actually agreed from the other side of the House. So in terms of the timetable, in particular in the first month after being elected, I do not think it is necessarily fair that the hon. Gentleman is trying to press us on that.

We are going to want to do this review properly. We want to ensure that we do not have a predetermined outcome for the review. Otherwise, there is no point in engaging with landlords, tenants and all the others that we have referred generically to we are engaging with. And so the hon. Gentleman, I think, will be as disappointed in the answer I am going to give him as he has pretended to be with all the answers he has been receiving during the course of this afternoon, when I tell him that we do not want to predetermine something that we are setting out to do in order to try to deliver a positive result for all those who are affected by this issue, and it would be unfair to press us further at this stage.

Madam Speaker: Next question.

Q592/2023

Number of rental homes vacant – Breakdown by number of rooms

Clerk: Question 592/2023. The Hon. D J Bossino.

Hon. D J Bossino: How many rental homes are currently vacant, broken down by number of rooms?

Clerk: Answer, the Minister for Housing and the University.

2295 **Minister for Housing and the University (Hon. Ms P A Orfila):** Madam Speaker, there are none.

Hon. D J Bossino: That is a very clear and simple answer, but I must say that it does cause some surprise on this side of the House. Can she expand on that? We find it very odd. The information that we have received in the long years that we have been in opposition is that there are many vacant houses. Certainly since I have been tasked with this responsibility for housing over the last two or three years, I am told – and I do not think I am raising rumour to the House, but I am told anecdotally that people see that there are many vacant houses in many government estates.

2300
2305 With the comment that I have just made, can I give her the opportunity to expand on that answer and comment on what I have just said, that there are many people who tell us that there are many vacant flats around Gibraltar, around many government estates in Gibraltar?

Hon. Ms P A Orfila: Madam Speaker, he asked how many rental homes are currently broken down to number of rooms and I said none, because, for example, we have ‘urban renewal’, we have ‘beyond economic repair’ and we have ‘earmarked’, so they are not, in fact, empty, they are earmarked for someone and they are in the process of being established so that people will be moving into them. That is why I said none.

Madam Speaker: Next question.

2315 **Clerk:** Question 593 –

Hon. Dr K Azopardi: Sorry, Madam Speaker, if I may –?

2320 **Madam Speaker:** If you want to ask a supplementary, you need to stand up and catch my eye within a reasonable period of time.

Hon. Dr K Azopardi: To understand what the Hon. Minister has said, the fact that they are empty in a particular area ... where there is a government property that is empty, it is not considered vacant – is that right? Is that what the Hon. Minister says, that even though it is empty, because it is, in principle, available for allocation, they are not categorising it as vacant?

2330 **Chief Minister (Hon. F R Picardo):** No, Madam Speaker, that is not the position. I think the hon. Gentleman has got it wrong. The position is that if a property is empty but we are not going to put it back into housing stock because it is beyond economic repair etc., we are considering it out of housing stock: it is going to be sold or it is going to be demolished. In other words, it is not an empty property that is going to be used for allocation. If it is already allocated and is just being prepared for handing over of the keys, it is not a property that is considered vacant because it is a property that has already got the name of a new tenant assigned to it and it is simply in the process of being painted etc.

2335
2340 What we would have to consider vacant is a property that, for some reason, has not come back to the Government, is lying there, not in any way being managed by the Government, which is the type that tends to be referred to us also – those which are, for example, properties that we believe are tenanted but actually are not; there is nobody turning up there for six months or for a year. In those cases, when one investigates further, they are usually properties that the former GSD administration sold, but people just see them lying empty because they were bought by an individual who has passed away, or an individual who no longer lives in Gibraltar. In many instances, it is what the hon. Members opposite did that is causing us these issues. Or there is an individual who is in long-term hospitalisation, not elderly care, and we have not been able to take the property back because the individual is in hospital and, therefore, supposedly coming back;

2345 they are not going to Mount Alvernia or to another residential home. Those are usually the
instances that we come across, but there is a very good system of managing property now, which
very quickly tells us that empty property is (a) sold; (b) tenanted to somebody who is still in
hospital; (c) beyond economic repair – take it out, we are going to sell it at tender or have another
use for it; or (d) in the system for refurbishment and repair and allocated to Mr, Mrs, Miss or
2350 Master X.

Therefore, the numbers of allegedly vacant properties that constantly come up ... Hon.
Members will have this experience, as I have, where people come to see me with the addresses:
'I need a three-bedroom and here are the four three-bedrooms I know are empty,' and I tell them,
'Well, in fact, two of them were sold by the GSD and are, therefore, not available anymore; one is
2355 Mrs X, who is in the hospital; and on the other, the refurbishment process is starting and it is for
another tenant who was ahead of you on the list.' That is usually the situation, unfortunately.

Hon. Dr K Azopardi: Madam Speaker, in all that rather long answer there was one category
that I do not think he has mentioned, so let me ask a very precise question very briefly. If there is
2360 an empty, unallocated flat in Glacis Estate, does the Government consider it vacant, using that
classification method?

Hon. Chief Minister: Yes, but there are no such properties.

2365 **Hon. D J Bossino:** I was going to seek that precise –

Hon. Dr K Azopardi: No –

Hon. D J Bossino: Sorry. (*Interjection*)

2370

Hon. Dr K Azopardi: Indeed. (*Interjection*) And maybe never.

Hon. D J Bossino: Or maybe never, the choice of the –

2375 **Madam Speaker:** Time is running out to answer the question.

Hon. Dr K Azopardi: Madam Speaker, how can it be that there are no vacant but unallocated
flats in housing estates? Let me just try to postulate a scenario for the hon. Member. This is why I
am having difficulty with the concept of there being none. I accept there is some ... When we have
2380 asked questions before in the House, previous Ministers have said, 'We have allocated the
following number of houses in a calendar year.' Presumably that involves a process where a flat is
occupied, it then becomes empty – I will not use the word 'vacant' – and then there is a process
of allocation. There must be a point at which the Housing Department says, 'I am going to allocate
this flat to this family', and there must be an interregnum between that decision and the point at
2385 which the flat has become empty in the interregnum. Surely it is vacant using the classification of
the hon. Member, because it has not been allocated. In other words, there has not been a decision
taken for allocation. That is what I am struggling with, because surely there must be properties
out there where there is that interregnum, where the Housing Authority has not taken those
allocation decisions because it is not a seamless process, because there is a decision-making
2390 process.

Hon. Chief Minister: The answer to that question which the hon. Gentleman poses, Madam
Speaker, is good planning, and that is what means that the interregnum is not one that sometimes
lasts hours, at all, because we have management of the list being done, which enables us to know,
2395 the minute somebody says to us ... They do not usually say, 'I have gone', they usually say, 'I am
going.' The minute somebody says, 'I am going', there is a process which is undertaken to ensure

2400 that the allocation happens, so the person who is highest on the list ... and also list management, so that you are then saying, 'And this person ...' Most people are not going from homelessness to property, they are going from the two-bedroom to the three-bedroom, from the three-bedroom to the four-bedroom ... management of the list, so that the four-bedroom that we are told is going to become vacant, usually when Mrs X moves to a pensioner flat or to ERS, is going to be allocated to Mr and Mrs X, who are in a three-bedroom. Their three-bedroom, even before it has become vacant – they do not yet know that we are going to assign it to them – is going to be handed over to Mr and Mrs Y, who are in the two-bedroom, and their two-bedroom is going to be assigned to Mr and Mrs W, who are in the one-bedroom, and so on and so forth. So there is almost none of the empty property scenario, which is an urban myth, because there is management of the property, but there are empty properties. There are what are de facto empty properties, because there is a property assigned under our list of properties which are not beyond economic repair, which are ready to be handed over or repaired etc., but they are empty. However, they are empty because, as I said before, the criterion has been that the person is in long-term hospitalisation, that there are individuals who have bought their properties etc.

2405 There can be a category which the hon. Gentleman has not alighted upon, which is the category that I would consider to be the gold dust category, which is the property that lies empty not because the tenants have passed away, because if they pass away we know, and have not moved to ERS, because if they move to ERS we know, but have decided that they are going to spend more time in Marbella, for example, but are holding on to the tenancy. Then you have to say, 'Hang on a minute, is there really nobody coming here every six months? This is not one of those that was sold by the GSD. This person is not in the hospital. This person is not in ERS. Where is this person?' In the time I have been in office, I have heard about those a hundred times a week, and I think we may have found one or two in the past 12 years. That is the reality.

Madam Speaker: One final question.

2425 **Hon. D J Bossino:** Very grateful, Madam Speaker. I am going to give the Chief Minister an opportunity to bash, once again.

Madam Speaker: I am going to remind you, again. Let's use the titles correctly: the 'Hon.'

2430 **Hon. D J Bossino:** Madam Speaker, I am going to give the Hon. the Chief Minister the opportunity to GSD bash once again. I just want to clarify one point of policy in which I may have detected a slight change, but I am sure it is not the case, because he has been persistent in the past and, indeed, now, in relation to what he says was our policy – and indeed it was our policy – to sell government flats. Another question is how many and all the rest of it.

2435 He talked about the different categorisations as to why a property is not vacant, and he has gone through some of them now. He said they may have been sold. Is he saying that in the context of his Government's policy, the only possibility of a property being under that category – unless he is saying it happened under the GSD's watch – is that the property is then sold through the tender process? Is that the case? I would not expect that to be the case in the traditional estates, but it may be, for example, in the Upper Town. I think I have a question on the Order Paper in relation to that.

2440 **Hon. Chief Minister:** Madam Speaker, the hon. Gentleman rightly does open up a flank for me to be able to attack, which I am going to resist.

2445 **Madam Speaker:** Well, I hope it will be a short flank, if you are minded to do so.

Hon. Chief Minister: It will be a short, sharp attack, however large the flack, Madam Speaker.

2450 The position that we have taken issue with consistently is the sale by the GSD of post-war housing. That is what we said was unacceptable and made no sense. They sold a number when they were in office. They committed to sell a number, which they did not complete while they were in office. We accepted that we should honour the contracts for sale that had been agreed by them when they were in government, but we would not sell any more of the post-war housing stock – that is to say, the estates. What we believed we should continue to do, which was the policy we had established from 1988 and which they continued ... In other words, we had a policy of sale of government rental flats, which they accepted and continued and which we have continued, which was the pre-war property sales. The pre-war property sales are sold because properties are beyond economic repair, and those properties are sold through the Land Management Committee at tender or to sitting tenants on the sitting tenant formula, which was established in 1988 and has continued, even under the GSD. Those are the criteria; criteria that they agreed with, because they continued it whilst they were in office.

2455 Their policy denuded us of the stock that we need in order to be able to house people, whilst with the pre-war stock, the difficulty that all Governments have is that the cost of repair means that most or all of it is beyond economic repair in the hands of the Government, because the sort of repair that you are talking about requires you to go all the way back to the brick, and eventually, 2465 nonetheless, you once again have damp and you are once again stuck with having to carry out the repairs. If we sell that stock, I think it is common ground across the floor of the House that the urban renewal that we want to see happens – because the pre-war stock is in the old Town – because people buy the properties from us and do them up themselves, and they do the facades up very well. However, it is the post-war stock that is the issue in dispute between us. None have 2470 been sold on our watch, other than those which were agreed by them and which we honoured when we took over.

Madam Speaker: Next question.

2475

Q593/2023

**Government rental properties in Upper Town –
Number to be available to those on waiting list**

Clerk: Question 593/2023. The Hon. D J Bossino.

2480 **Hon. D J Bossino:** Please state how many properties are envisaged will be made available from the Upper Town area to individuals on the housing waiting list.

Clerk: Answer, the Minister for Housing and the University.

2485 **Minister for Housing and the University (Hon. Ms P A Orfila):** Madam Speaker, the answer to this question is dependent on the turnover of flats. This is, itself, subject to various factors, such as tenants surrendering properties as a result of moving to ERS, demise of tenants, exchanges, etc. The Housing Department is, therefore, not able to provide any accurate figures in respect of the requested information for the Upper Town area or, indeed, for any other district in Gibraltar.

2490 **Madam Speaker:** Next question.

Q594-602/2023

**Medical A+, A, B and C, and Social Category A housing waiting lists –
Numbers and duration**

Clerk: Question 594/2023. The Hon. the Leader of the Opposition.

Hon. Dr K Azopardi: Madam Speaker, how many people were on the Medical A+ housing list at 15th November 2023?

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Clerk: Answer, the Minister for Housing and the University.

Minister for Housing and the University (Hon. Ms P A Orfila): Madam Speaker, I will answer this question together with Questions 595 to 602.

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Clerk: Question 595/2023. The Hon. the Leader of the Opposition.

Hon. Dr K Azopardi: How many people were on the Medical A housing list at 15th November 2023?

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Clerk: Question 596/2023. The Hon. the Leader of the Opposition.

Hon. Dr K Azopardi: Of the persons on the Medical A list at 15th November 2023, how long have those persons been classified as A, providing a breakdown of dates or time on the A list in respect of each?

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Clerk: Question 597/2023. The Hon. the Leader of the Opposition.

Hon. Dr K Azopardi: How many people were on the Medical B housing list at 15th November 2023?

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Clerk: Question 598/2023. The Hon. the Leader of the Opposition.

Hon. Dr K Azopardi: Of the persons on the Medical B list at 15th November 2023, how long have those persons been classified as B, providing a breakdown of dates or time on the B list in respect of each?

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Clerk: Question 599/2023. The Hon. the Leader of the Opposition.

Hon. Dr K Azopardi: How many people were on the Medical C housing list at 15th November 2023?

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Clerk: Question 600/2023. The Hon. the Leader of the Opposition.

Hon. Dr K Azopardi: Of the persons on the Medical C list at 15th November 2023, how long have those persons been classified as C, providing a breakdown of dates or time on the C list in respect of each?

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Clerk: Question 601/2023. The Hon. the Leader of the Opposition.

Hon. Dr K Azopardi: How many people were on the Social Category A housing list at 15th November 2023?

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Clerk: Question 602/2023. The Hon. the Leader of the Opposition.

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Hon. Dr K Azopardi: Of the persons on the Social Category A list at 15th November 2023, how long have those persons been classified as Social A, providing a breakdown of dates or time on the Social A list in respect of each?

2545

Clerk: Answer, the Minister for Housing and the University.

Hon. Ms P A Orfila: Madam Speaker, I will now hand over a schedule with the information requested.

Answer to Question 594/2023

The total number of people on the Medical A+ list is 125.

Answer to Questions 595 and 596/2023

The total number of people on the Medical A list is 63. The breakdown is as follows:

2012	1
2013	2
2014	2
2015	2
2017	4
2018	8
2019	14
2020	9
2021	1
2022	9
2023	11

Answer to Questions 597 and 598/2023

The total number of people on the Medical B list is 14. The breakdown is as follows:

2014	1
2016	1
2017	1
2018	.2
2019	2
2020	3

2022	2
2023	2

Answer to Questions 599 and 600/2023

The total number of people on the Medical C list is 1. The breakdown is as follows:

2016	1
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Answer to Questions 601 and 602/2023

The total number of people on the Social A list is 92. The breakdown is as follows.

2017	1
2018	1
2019	8
2020	15
2021	12
2022	21
2023	34

2550 **Madam Speaker:** We will go on to the next question and give you time to consider the schedule.

DEPUTY CHIEF MINISTER

**Q603/2023
St Andrew's Church –
Purchase**

2555 **Clerk:** Questions to the Deputy Chief Minister.
Question 603/2023. The Hon. D J Bossino.

Hon. D J Bossino: Madam Speaker, who has purchased St Andrew's Church?

2560 **Clerk:** Answer, the Deputy Chief Minister.

Deputy Chief Minister (Hon. Dr J J Garcia): Madam Speaker, St Andrew's Church is a freehold. The Government, therefore, has no details that any sale has been registered in the Land Registry.

2565 **Hon. D J Bossino:** This was the subject of press comment, I think. I cannot remember when; I do not have the press cuttings with me. Is he able to provide any information further than that? I

assume his answer is, which is fair enough, that there is nothing formally in the hands of the ...
[Inaudible]

2570 **Madam Speaker:** Can I remind the hon. Member: address. We either use it or we do not. It is difficult for me, too, but if we do, we need to stick to it.

Hon. D J Bossino: The address is 'the Hon. the Deputy Chief Minister'? I am grateful, Madam Speaker.

2575 I think he got the gist of what I was saying, so is he able to provide any further detail? This is a listed property. When I submitted the question, I was fully appreciative that it is not necessarily in the hands of the Government, because the Government is not selling it, but I took the view that it is of sufficient public interest, and that perhaps Hon. the Deputy Chief Minister and the Government could enlighten the rest of the public – I would give him the opportunity, to try to elicit some further information from him, but I understand if he cannot, he cannot.

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Deputy Chief Minister: Madam Speaker, what I am told by Land Property Services is that if this were a leasehold, then it would come to the Government for consent before the sale happens, in which case the Government would have the information and I would be able to supply it. Because it is a freehold, we have to wait until they register it in the Land Registry, and then we will know officially, as the Government, that the sale has happened.

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Madam Speaker: Next question.

2590 **Hon. D J Bossino:** Madam Speaker, if I may, with your permission and leave, is the Government – I am trying to push him slightly further – somehow using its authority and its power as the Government of Gibraltar, given the iconic nature of the building? I know that if someone, somewhere, decided to build a supermarket, by way of extreme example, there will be a planning process in place and the Government could object. Can the Hon. the Deputy Chief Minister give us any further information as to how the Government is expressing an interest in relation to what is going to happen to the property? Again, I appreciate the strictures of what he said, and he may not be able to go beyond that in this House, but can he provide us any further information?

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2600 **Deputy Chief Minister:** Madam Speaker, yes, the hon. Member is right, this is a private sale and it is a freehold, so the Government is not involved in it. In terms of the concerns that he has expressed, obviously whatever happens there will have to go through the planning process and it would separately and independently also require a heritage licence, so there is an element of control in terms of what can and cannot happen.

Madam Speaker: Next question.

HOUSING AND THE UNIVERSITY

Q594-602/2023

Medical A+, A, B and C, and Social Category A housing lists –
Supplementary questions

2605 **Hon. Dr K Azopardi:** Madam Speaker, I was going to ask for permission to go back to the schedule, if that was okay.

Madam Speaker: Yes, if you are ready.

2610 **Hon. Dr K Azopardi:** If I go back to the schedule of answers given by the Hon. Minister for
Housing, first of all, can I seek to persuade her ...? This is a point that I made to her predecessor,
but I will make it to her because, obviously, she is now in office and the Hon. Minister who was
her predecessor was, I think, unable to do this before he left office. Can I seek to persuade her
that these statistics of the number of people on these various lists is publicly available? When you
2615 go to the Government website, what is available is the number of people who get placed on, for
example, the Medical A list in a particular month or year, but you do not have the running total,
so it makes it difficult to know how many people are actually on the list at any given time; you
only know who is being placed on that list. The Hon. Minister can verify that for herself when she
goes to the statistics publicly available, and perhaps she can consider the suggestion that beyond
2620 the statistics that are currently available ... As the Minister will know, there is a table that is headed
'Applicants placed on the various medical lists by month', so that is the placement in January but
not the running total. Can there also be a table for the running total at any given time per month
on the various lists? If she would consider that ...?

2625 **Minister for Housing and the University (Hon. Ms P A Orfila):** Madam Speaker, of course. I
think it is a very good idea that we should give the public everything they need with regard to
housing. Yes, of course.

2630 **Hon. Dr K Azopardi:** I am grateful for that. Can I also urge her, because obviously she is a recent
appointee, so I am not going to –

Madam Speaker: I presume you are going to urge the 'hon. Member'.

2635 **Hon. Dr K Azopardi:** Yes, sorry, Madam Speaker. I thought that having already called her the
Hon. Minister, that was –

Madam Speaker: A separate supplementary.

2640 **Hon. Dr K Azopardi:** – every time, by calling her the Hon. Minister. Can I urge the Hon. Minister?
I know she is a recent appointee, but what is striking from the statistics when you look at them is
that there are some people who have been classified Medical A going back many years. A lot of
people come and see me about housing cases; some of them are A+ or A. I write to the
Department, I write to the Minister concerned, and I put their case. They tell me they have been
A or A+ for several years. It is quite striking that this is the case. Can I urge her, as a priority of her
2645 particular administration of this Department, to take an interest in these cases, to try to break the
backlog of people who have been classified as Medical A or Social A and still, after many years,
have not been allocated a flat?

2650 **Hon. Ms P A Orfila:** Madam Speaker, of course I am aware of what the hon. Gentleman is
asking, and I am pointing out, of course I am, but the thing is that there might be the person ...
Remember that you are referring to the A list. We have an A+, so it means that we have people
on the A+, and we still have to get to the A, the B and the C. The person you have seen on the A+
plus might have been there for a few years, the reason being that we have to align everything. It
is not just finding an 'empty house', as you like to call them, to give to someone. We have to talk
2655 with the doctors, the psychologists and the person, and we have to find a suitable house – not just
any house; it has to be a suitable house for that particular person. The OT has to go and see it. The
person themselves may not like the district or the area. It is not as easy as just placing a person
into a pocket, because that is not the way I want Housing to be. We want to care for people and
put them in the right pocket at the right time. Thank you.

2660 **Hon. Dr K Azopardi:** I certainly appreciate the Hon. Minister's point, and she is right to point
out that there is an A+ list. The reason for my questions in this order, without asking for a total on
A+, is because I put these particular questions to the Hon. Minister at the last session of the House,
but, because of the dissolution of Parliament, they were never taken. However, if I just give her
2665 the example that her predecessor answered in June that there were 113 people on the A+ list,
and when you look at the statistics that the Hon. Minister has given today – let's say there are,
notionally, a hundred people on the Medical A+ list, another 63 on the A and 14 on the B, and
then there are another 92 on the Social A – the Government is allocating about 120 flats a year,
so when you look at all that, I can certainly understand the backlog, which gives rise to issues
2670 about the speed of allocation of government housing, but also understanding the intricacies of
these cases.

It is, as I said, striking, when you look at all this and you look at the Medical A+ list, that some
people have been waiting for many years. I understand the point the Hon. Minister has made, but
I am asking her to focus on these as a priority of her administration. I hope she agrees with me
that this is a deep priority of the Housing Department.

2675 **Chief Minister (Hon. F R Picardo):** Madam Speaker, of course it is, and the hon. Gentleman is
speaking for the whole House in what he is saying. I am not going to get into what the figures were
on the Medical A+, Medical A, Medical B and Medical C when we were elected, but these are
lower than then, and I think that, whichever administration is in office, all hon. Members will want
2680 to see this issue dealt with. That is why, if I can expose myself to a little bit of GSLP Liberal bashing
by the hon. Members, it is absolutely true that we went to the last General Election saying that
we felt we had to build more rental homes for stock, which we had said before we felt we were
not having to build. However, because we are delayed in building affordable homes, we have
accepted that, actually, it has given rise to a backlog, and therefore we will build more affordable
2685 housing, more pensioner rental and more general rental as well. We have made that point in order
to be able to deal with this issue.

I think there is another issue, Madam Speaker, that will enjoy the understanding of the whole
House. In the Medical A+ list, which is the list that the hon. Gentleman has referred to in the
context of his last supplementary, the oldest individual, in terms of longevity, is from 2015. That
2690 individual, perhaps for very good reason, has refused an allocation. This is the point that the hon.
Lady is making. The hon. Gentleman, rightly, is asking, 'Why is somebody on this list for eight
years?' and the answer actually can be because they refused an allocation. For all the reasons the
hon. Lady has given, an allocation in these circumstances has to be in keeping with the
recommendation of the OTs and the doctors etc. If all of those stars align, you make the offer and
2695 the person says, 'I do not like the area ...' Maybe it is not that, maybe it is for good reason: 'I have
a problem with somebody, where there is an order that they cannot approach me. He lives down
the road, and although it is outside the exact measurements of the order, it is too close for
comfort.' I am not suggesting that the refusal would necessarily be frivolous, the refusal might be
for good reason, but Housing has made an offer to that person and it may be a medically complex
2700 case. The stars then have to align again on all the medical aspects, the OT aspects etc., and the
person has to say, 'Okay, this one works for me.' In that case, we would all agree that there is an
issue that has to be dealt with. Perhaps it has been dealt with in the way that any administration
could, and for good or not good reason – we do not know – that person has refused the flat.

The point that I would make, Madam Speaker, and I hope I will enjoy the support of the whole
2705 House in this respect, is that the Housing Department should not be regarded by people on the
housing waiting list as a real estate agency; very often, it is. People will come – and, no doubt,
they see him, but let's ventilate this issue, the same as they see me and other Members of the
House when they come to see us in clinics – and say, 'I would really quite like a pensioner flat, but
I want one with a sea view on a high floor – I do not want to be too hemmed in – and I want it to
2710 be near Morrisons.' You almost feel like saying, 'A pensioner flat, yes, but I cannot get into that

level of detail.' That happens more often than one would expect in the context of government rental housing. I am sure the whole House will agree that that is not appropriate.

The final point I would make, Madam Speaker, for the whole House to be aware of, is that the 125 on the Medical A+ list, the 63 on the Medical A list, the 14 on the Medical B list, the one on the Medical C list and the number on the Social list, which I think is 92, are also on the general housing waiting list. When you are on this list, you are also on the general list, so there is an element of double counting, not between these lists but if you are on the Medical A+ list for a 3RKB and there are 17 people there, the general 3RKB list includes these 17 as well, so we would be double counting if we counted them both.

Madam Speaker: Next question.

DEPUTY CHIEF MINISTER

Q604/2023

Parliament building – Commencement and completion dates for works to interior

Clerk: Question 604/2023. The Hon. the Leader of the Opposition.

Hon. Dr K Azopardi: Madam Speaker, what are the expected commencement and completion dates for the works to the interior of the Parliament building?

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

Deputy Chief Minister (Hon. Dr J J Garcia): Madam Speaker, works are expected to commence on 24th January with the expected completion likely to be during the course of the following financial year, barring, of course, any major issue.

Hon. Dr K Azopardi: During the course of the following financial year: the outer limit to that would be 30th June 2025. I imagine that the works would be programmed to take account of our sittings, unless we are going to sit less. I assume they are not doing any works to this particular Chamber; it is all going on downstairs. Would that assumption be correct, or do they need to do something, in the context of the works, that would affect this Chamber?

Deputy Chief Minister: Madam Speaker, yes, the hon. Member is right, we are talking about the end of the financial year, as in the end of March 2025. The intention is that it will not disrupt sittings, but sittings may disrupt the works. That is why I said barring any major issue it may take slightly longer than we had forecast. The only works to the Chamber involve the installation of the lift, which will be at the northern end of the Chamber. That is the only planned work in the Chamber – that I am aware of, at least.

Hon. Dr K Azopardi: I see, and is that work on the lift going to be done during the early part of the works? Can I just ask, while I am on my feet ...? The Hon. Minister remembers a presentation he made to us, on this side, as to the nature of the works. Are the works that are going to happen in line with the presentation given to us?

Hon. Deputy Chief Minister: Madam Speaker, yes, the layouts that the hon. Members saw in the presentation that we gave them are the basis of the works, but I am told that the project director wants to meet with them again to go over the exact nature of what they want to produce

2755 there. I am told, also, that they have been presented to the Clerk and to Madam Speaker – if that has not happened already, the intention is that it will happen – and obviously an effort will be made to incorporate any observations into the design. The meetings of Parliament will dictate the pace and the nature of the works, rather than the other way round.

Madam Speaker: Next question.

Adjournment

2760 **Chief Minister (Hon. F R Picardo):** Madam Speaker, I think that might be a convenient moment to move the overnight adjournment, to tomorrow at three o'clock, and thank all hon. Members for the way that the Parliament has, today, conducted itself at its first session with this genteel sparring that I hope will go on as much as possible in the next 48 months. I am particularly pleased to have come to this Parliament for the first time in my time here, in 20 years, to be invited to a very convivial event on 6th December, which I shall do my best to attend, and no doubt I speak for all Members of the House when I say that we shall all seek to attend and to have an opportunity to meet in less rarefied circumstances than these.

I move now that the House should adjourn to tomorrow at 3 p.m. to take my questions.

2770 **Madam Speaker:** Adjourn to Tuesday at 3 p.m. I now put the question, which is that this House do adjourn to Tuesday at 3 p.m. Those in favour? (**Members:** Aye.) Those against? Passed. (**A Member:** Thursday.) Did I say Tuesday? (**A Member:** Yes.) Well, it is good to know that I am kept on my toes, too. Thursday at 3 p.m.

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

The House adjourned at 6.55 p.m.