



PROCEEDINGS OF THE GIBRALTAR PARLIAMENT

AFTERNOON SESSION: 12.06 p.m. – 7.00 p.m.

Gibraltar, Wednesday, 27th November 2024

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The Gibraltar Parliament

The Parliament met at 12.06 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, 27th November 2024.

Order of Proceedings: (i) Oath of Allegiance; (ii) Confirmation of Minutes – the Minutes of the Tenth meeting of the Fifteenth Parliament, which was held on 23rd and 24th October 2024.

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Madam Speaker: May I sign the Minutes as correct?

Chief Minister (Hon. F R Picardo): Madam Speaker, before you do, I would note that the Minutes reflect the absence from the Chamber of Mr Origo, who was not at our last meeting because he had done a serious injury to himself whilst trying to do a good deed for the community. I see that he is back. We very much welcome 'Hopalong' Origo back to the Chamber and look forward to him forming part of many charitable endeavours in the future, but ask him, please, not to break anything else in the process.

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Madam Speaker: Yes, I would endorse that. The Hon Mr Origo, welcome back to Parliament. If at any time you feel uncomfortable or unable to sit, then please feel free to ... I was going to say hop out, but just move out.

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Madam Speaker signed the Minutes.

Questions for Oral Answer

INWARD INVESTMENT AND THE GIBRALTAR SAVINGS BANK

Q896-98/2024

Road to the Lines –

Community Homes Ownership Ltd

Clerk: (iii) Communications from the Chair; (iv) Petitions; (v) Announcements; (vi) Papers to be laid (vii) Reports of Committees; (viii) Answers to Oral Questions.

20

Questions to the Hon. the Minister for Inward Investment and the Gibraltar Savings Bank.
Question 896. The Hon. D J Bossino.

25 **Hon. D J Bossino:** Is the Government supportive of the plans submitted by Community Homes Ownership Ltd in respect of Road to the Lines?

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

30 **Minister for Inward Investment and the Gibraltar Savings Bank (Hon. Sir J J Bossano):** Madam Speaker, I will answer this question together with Questions 897 and 898.

Clerk: Question 897. The Hon. D J Bossino.

35 **Hon. D J Bossino:** Is the Government financially assisting, either directly or through the National Economic Plan, the project submitted by Community Homes Ownership Ltd in respect of Road to the Lines?

Clerk: Question 898. The Hon. D J Bossino.

40 **Hon. D J Bossino:** Has a tender been awarded to Community Homes Ownership Ltd in respect of Road to the Lines?

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

45 **Hon. Sir J J Bossano:** Madam Speaker, the answer to each of the three questions is no.

Madam Speaker: Any supplementaries?

50 **Hon. D J Bossino:** In relation to Question 898, why is it that a tender has not been awarded? How has this come about? The Hon. the Minister is being supremely unhelpful, as is his wont, by answering the way he has, but may I ask him why ...? If I can start with that question, Madam Speaker, the fact that according to the Hon. Minister, the tender has not been granted to this particular company, yet it is in the throes of an application in respect of a development of the
55 site?

60 **Hon. Sir J J Bossano:** Let me say, to the prelude to the supplementary, that the hon. Member does not like getting answers unless they are the answers that he wants. The questions are very simple; it is either yes or no, and the answer in each case is no. He wants to know why a tender has not been awarded. Why should a tender be awarded? The land belongs to the Crown. It has not been put to tender. It has not been given to anybody.

65 **Hon. Dr K Azopardi:** In relation to Question 896, where the Minister says that the Government is not supportive of the plans submitted by Community Homes Ownership Ltd – he said the answer to all three questions was no, so the Government is not supportive of the plans submitted by
Community Homes Ownership Ltd – Community Homes is a company whose shareholder is Community Supplies and Services Ltd, as the Minister may be aware; I am sure he is. We have had discussions, debates ... not debates, but question and answer in previous meetings of the House about the role of CSSL and the fact that through CSSL the Minister has been implementing part of
70 his National Economic Plan. May I therefore understand why the Government is not supportive of a project by a company that is owned by CSSL, when CSSL is a vehicle that the Minister has previously said he is using for the purposes of certain projects in Gibraltar?

Hon. Sir J J Bossano: Madam Speaker, the fact that it is not supportive does not mean that it is against it. It is that, at this point in time, which is the point at which I am being asked, a decision to support it or not has not been taken because it is at a very early stage of the process. I am being asked whether the Government is supportive at the point of the plans being submitted. We have to see whether the plans that are submitted are successful and whether the project is viable, and then we decide.

Hon. Dr K Azopardi: The Minister will be aware that there are distinct issues here. Plans are submitted before the planning process and the Planning Commission will take a decision, but quite apart from that, the Government can take an in-principle decision as to whether a project should happen as the Crown. Indeed, in the last meeting of the House, despite the fact that the Planning Commission had not determined an application in respect of a building at the Montague Pavilion, the Chief Minister indicated that that project did not have the support of the Government; it would not get consent. So, in terms of these plans, was the Government not aware that Community Homes Ownership was going to submit these plans? He has given a very distinct answer, which is that the Government is not supportive of the plans. 'Not supportive of the plans' is not being neutral and kicking the decision into the future, which is what he has suggested now in his supplementary. I am giving him the opportunity to clarify whether the position is that the Government is not supportive, which is the original answer, or whether the Government has not taken a decision in relation to whether it would consent or not consent to a project submitted by Community Homes Ownership, which is owned by CSSL, which is a vehicle that he uses for his National Economic Plan.

Hon. Sir J J Bossano: Madam Speaker, the answer that I have already given makes it very clear that not supporting it at this stage does not mean that we are opposing it. He wanted to know whether we are supporting. At this point in time, that decision has not been taken. We have to wait and see.

Hon. D J Bossino: Is the Hon. Minister really telling this House and the people who are listening that the Government currently ...? He alights on the stage at which I am asking whether he is supportive or not of the plan, but can the Minister for Economic Development state at least whether he has seen the plans? May I ask him further whether he is supportive of those plans? It cannot be that difficult. Is he minded to support those plans? He knows full well the answers that I am seeking from him, but if he wants to be cagey about it, that is a matter for him.

Hon. Sir J J Bossano: I think what the hon. Member ought to do in future is send me the questions and the answers he wants me to give. If he wants me to give him certain answers, he should add it to the question and then perhaps I can help him to feel more at ease by giving him all the answers he wants. It is very simple. I cannot go beyond what I said because that is the position at the moment. He is asking me whether this is happening at the moment. What will happen tomorrow or in a year's time is hypothetical when and if a decision is taken, and if he asks me again I will tell him whether there is any change.

Hon. D J Bossino: Does the issue of the time when the Hon. the Minister is going to be taking these decisions also apply in respect of Question 897 – that is to say whether the Government, either directly or through the National Economic Plan, is financially assisting this particular company, which my hon. Friend the Leader of the Opposition has rightly pointed out forms part of the CSSL structure, which we know from answers that the hon. Gentleman has given in the past are part of the National Economic Plan? Is the answer he has given in the negative – it is so frustrating – in respect of the timing? Is he saying, when he answers no to the question that I posed as to financial assistance, that that is the position at the moment but it is possible that the

125 hon. Gentleman will in the future say that the Government may directly assist this company in this particular project, or that the assistance may come from the National Economic Plan structure?

Hon. Sir J J Bossano: If the hon. Member asks me the same question in the future, I will tell him if the position is the same or has changed.

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Hon. D J Bossino: The Hon. the Minister has seen that I have drafted and posed these questions ... He is smirking. He is really enjoying this; I know he is. So, be it. I am not particularly enjoying it, maybe I am not in the mood. *(Interjection)* Can the Hon. Minister – he obviously knows that I have drafted these questions on the basis of the target company being Community Homes Ownership Ltd – explain why it is that when I first researched the matter on the DPC website, the applicant's name was in fact another of these companies which form part of this group under the National Economic Plan, First Home Ownership Company Ltd? Can he explain why there was a change from one day ...? I think I looked at this on a Saturday and by Monday it had changed to Community Homes Ownership Ltd.

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Hon. Sir J J Bossano: I am not sure, Madam Speaker, that I have to answer why somebody who submitted something changed it later to something else, given that this is not something that has been done by the Government, but if he wants his curiosity satisfied, the name that was there originally does not exist.

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Hon. D J Bossino: The hon. Member chooses to answer questions in relation to this sphere either by providing some information, which he helpfully does, because at the end of the day, the National Economic Plan is part of Government policy and he has answered questions in relation to these companies in the past, or it depends on which side of the bed he gets up. He says, 'No, it has nothing to do with us,' but actually, can he therefore explain ...? I think in his answer the hon. Gentleman said that the company entity that I refer to does not exist, but is it not, may I ask him, the same company that was referred to in his manifesto, described as the 'not for profit entity ... which is part of the group of registered charities under the umbrella of Gibraltar Community Initiatives'? Is it not the same company? Are we talking about the same company?

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Hon. Sir J J Bossano: It is the same name, but the company did not exist then and does not exist now.

Hon. D J Bossino: May I ask the Hon. the Minister whether he has the intention of creating and registering a company of that name at some point in the future, or is he going to say, 'I do not know yet, if you are asking me now,' but I can ask in the future?

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Hon. Sir J J Bossano: I can tell him that it is not the intention to register that company because the companies in question are not registered by us in the first place; and secondly, the name is not there because the Companies Registry said there was a company with a similar name and did not allow it.

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Hon. D J Bossino: How can the Hon. Minister answer in those terms when this company is referred to in their manifesto as part of government policy in respect of which they are going to be providing, apparently, 1,000 homes? People voted for this. The hon. Gentlemen won the election a year ago.

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1000 homes in the next four years. The homes will be studio/1 bed apartments with an estimated market value of £252,000, at current prices.

As detailed as that. How can the Hon. Minister answer in those terms? I am aghast but, I must say, sadly, not surprised by the way he is answering these questions.

175 **Madam Speaker:** I think the question was how can the Hon. Minister answer in these terms, yes?

Hon. Sir J J Bossano: I cannot help the extraordinary manner in which the hon. Member behaves. He seems to think that if the name of the company in the manifesto had been a different
180 one, they might not have voted for us, that they were voting for the name. They were voting for the houses. The houses will be delivered. The name of the entity that delivers them will be of no interest to the people who will get the houses, I can assure him of that.

Madam Speaker: Next question.
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Hon. D J Bossino: May I? It is in relation to the plans, if I may.

Madam Speaker: There have been six questions from the hon. Member on this. I will allow one more. Decide between you, because there have been two from the Hon. Mr Azopardi. I will allow
190 one more question from either of you. *(Interjection)* Are they separate questions?

Hon. Dr K Azopardi: Madam Speaker, may I just say this before you decide? I have asked a supplementary on Question 896. I wanted to ask a supplementary on Question 897 without
195 cutting across my learned colleague being able to ask his final question.

Madam Speaker: Yes, except that the Hon. D J Bossino has asked six questions on Question 896. I am not allowing any more questions on Question 896. I will allow the Hon. the Leader of the Opposition a question on Question 897, and if the Hon. D J Bossino wants to ask a question on another one, he can, but no more on Question 896.
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The Hon. the Leader of the Opposition.

Hon. Dr K Azopardi: May I ask, on Question 897 –? Sorry.

Chief Minister (Hon. F R Picardo): Madam Speaker, may I just make a point of clarification, please? I do not want to labour the point, but the hon. Gentleman has made what can only be
205 described as an accusation against the Government and against the Minister. Could the hon. Gentleman clarify, because I want to make sure that I am right, which is the company that he said is referred to in the manifesto? Is it First Home Ownership that he is referring to?

Hon. D J Bossino: May I ask the Hon. the Chief Minister to finalise the point he is going to make, because I will not be entering into a trap if ... What I will not allow myself to be subjected – the Speaker may intervene at this stage – to what looks, from this side of the House, like cross-examination.
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Hon. Chief Minister: Madam Speaker, they are here to ask the questions. The people decided that they should be the ones asking the questions, not us. All I am doing is seeking clarification of what the hon. Gentleman has said is the company which is referred to in the manifesto and which the Hon. the Father of the House has told him has not yet been incorporated. I have asked him whether it is First Home Ownership or Community Homes Ownership Ltd because those are the
215 two that I can see would be referred to. The reason I have asked him that is because I want to clarify, for the purposes of *Hansard*, what is and is not said in the manifesto. It is that simple. If he perceives a trick there, Madam Speaker, I am surprised that he thinks that asking him to clarify what he has said is a trick. That is all I am asking: which company? That is all I have asked.
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225 **Hon. D J Bossino:** If I may, in order to assuage any concerns that the Hon. the Chief Minister may have as to the record of *Hansard*, I can confirm that the hon. Gentleman has expanded on where he was going, that indeed it is an entity described in the manifesto, as I read out before, as a not-for-profit entity, and I can tell the hon. Gentleman that it is First Home Ownership.

230 **Hon. Chief Minister:** I am grateful, Madam Speaker, because in fact the manifesto does not say – as the hon. Gentleman has said, and therefore, in my view, may have misled those listening – that that is a company. What the manifesto says is that that will be undertaken by the not-for-profit entity First Home Ownership, which the manifesto goes on to say is part of the group of registered *charities* under the umbrella of Gibraltar Community Initiatives. I just want to clarify that that entity does not have to be a company, and indeed join the Father of the House in saying
235 that I am sure that if the entity, whether it ends up being a company, a trading name or a charity, would not for one moment be a different entity if it were called First Home Ownership, X, Y, Z or anything else. Therefore, the apparently heinous offence that we might have caused by changing the name of an entity, or indeed changing the nature of the entity from a company to a charity or anything else, would not have been committed, and all that we have therefore been subjected to
240 is a what might be described as a vociferous attempt to overemphasise a non-point. The Government would see it that way and would ask people in the streets of Gibraltar to be calm because it may indeed be that there may have to be a slight change of name of an entity, but it may not be a company, it may be a charity, and what they have been subjected to should not cause them any concern whatsoever.

245 **Hon. D J Bossino:** The Hon. the Chief Minister predicates the intervention by seeking to clarify the matter for the House and to have the record of *Hansard* absolutely clear, and then he loads what he has saying with partisan points and making attacks on me. Are we really dancing around this particular point? Really? The hon. Gentleman knows what I said, and I stand by it, but I have
250 clarified the position for him. I am referring to the profit entity, and it so happens that the applicant in respect of this project is called First Home Ownership Company Ltd. That is what I am saying. That is it. It is no more complicated than that –

Madam Speaker: There is no question there, so we will move on to the Hon. the Leader of the
255 Opposition (*Interjection by Hon. D J Bossino*) on Question 897.

Hon. Chief Minister: I am grateful, Madam Speaker, because that is the whole point.

260 **Madam Speaker:** There is no question to answer.

Hon. Chief Minister: No, Madam Speaker, there is not, you are absolutely right, but the hon. Gentleman has got up and made a partisan point, which I would respectfully say I should be allowed to answer, if you would permit, in five words: he danced round the pinhead.

265 **Madam Speaker:** The Hon. the Leader of the Opposition on Question 897.

Hon. Dr K Azopardi: Thank you. I counted six, by the way. (*Interjection*) Six, yes, and I have to say that everything that the Hon. the Chief Minister has said in answer to the hon. Member is undermined by the fact that yes, of course there are there can be entities that are not companies,
270 but it so happens that every single charity structure that has been used by the National Economic Plan happens to be a company. CSSL is a company and so on. But look, let's not –

Madam Speaker: I would ask the Hon. the Leader of the Opposition to put the question.

275 **Hon. Dr K Azopardi:** The Minister has answered that the Government is not financially assisting, through the National Economic Plan or otherwise, Community Homes Ownership Ltd. As I pointed out, the Community Homes Ownership shareholders are CSSL, a charity and a company, the directors of which are C I directors, I understand. If you look at their profiles, I understand the directors contain civil servants. May I just ask the hon. Member is the Government
280 discussing financial assistance with Community Homes Ownership Ltd? We have had previous exchanges in this House. The only things that CSSL have done have been through the National Economic Plan with the assistance of the Government either in resources, in planning or in finance. So, are they in discussions on financial assistance? How, otherwise, would Community Homes Ownership come up with the brainwave of doing this project?

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Hon. Sir J J Bossano: There are no discussions and none are envisaged.

Madam Speaker: Next question.

HEALTH, CARE AND BUSINESS

Q899/2024

Prescription exemption – Determination of eligibility

Clerk: Questions to the Hon. the Minister for Health, Care and Business. Question 899. The
290 Hon. A Sanchez.

Hon. A Sanchez: Could the Government provide clarity on the criteria used by the relevant board or authority to assess and determine eligibility for prescription exemption through the Gibraltar Health Authority?
295

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

Minister for Health, Care and Business (Hon. G Arias-Vasquez): Madam Speaker, the information requested by the hon. Lady is publicly available information.
300

Hon. A Sanchez: Madam Speaker, could the Hon. Minister direct me as to where I can find this information?

Hon. G Arias-Vasquez: Madam Speaker, the information is contained in the Medical Group Practice Scheme (Amendment) Regulations, but in fact, if we go to *Hansard*, throughout the years numerous people in my shoes have answered the same question. If I take the hon. Lady to *Hansard* Question 291/2001, she will find that the hon. Member of the Opposition answered this same question. The information, as I said, is publicly available, but I will read the statement that the Hon. Leader of the Opposition made:
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... Regulation 6A basically says that and it links in with the other provisions of the Ordinance. It creates two categories of people that are exempt, the District Medical Scheme and those under Regulation 6A. Regulation 6A provides an income level and if one falls under the income level, one is deemed to be allowed to be exempt. It is linked to a determination made by the Government and it is scheduled to the GPMS Regulations and the Regulations provide that in the fixing of the determination, it is clear that it is cross referred to pensionable income de facto. My understanding of it was always that pensioners usually fell within that criteria Regulation 6A and once the 20p fee was removed,

310 – that no longer exists, by the way –

to a very large extent, probably it has become academic, but it may be used ...

It goes on about this 20p that was required at the time but which has fallen away.

So, Madam Speaker, the information is publicly available in regulations. It is a shame that there is no communication between the Members opposite, because the Hon. Leader of the Opposition answered that very question in 2001.

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Hon. Dr K Azopardi: I am grateful for the hon. Lady reminding the House of what I said 23 years ago. I was answering a question – I am sure that was the case, I do not have it in front of me, but I am sure I was answering a question – from the Hon. the late Mari Montegriffo, who had been a previous Minister for Health. I did not take the position that I should not answer the previous
320 Minister for Health's question on the basis that she had been the Minister for Health and was aware, because I took it as a legitimate question – which I answered, clearly, because she has just read it to the House, meaning that she wanted to clarify whether there had been a Government policy change. I think my hon. colleague is doing the same now. She is simply asking whether there has been any kind of policy change affecting the criteria used by the relevant board on prescription
325 exemption. I think the hon. Lady should have given her a proper answer deserving of the respect of a Member of this House.

Hon. G Arias-Vasquez: Madam Speaker, I am capable of giving a fuller answer than the one that the hon. leader gave in 2001, and I am very happy to give that answer to this House. The
330 Department of Social Services is the one that determines the District Medical Scheme. The criterion has not changed since the hon. Member answered the question in 2001. The persons who fall under the Social Assistance Fund are the same people who fell under the Social Assistance Fund, and for the avoidance of doubt, those are state pensioners, unemployed retired individuals and their dependents.

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Hon. A Sanchez: Apologies, Madam Speaker, I am slightly taken aback by the tone of the Hon. Minister's answer. In essence, the Hon. Minister is saying that there is a financial cap on the criterion. Could the Hon. Minister clarify whether those receiving disability benefit are automatically exempted or whether they receive prescription exemptions?

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Hon. G Arias-Vasquez: Madam Speaker, the criterion is applied by the Department of Social Services and is not necessarily linked to whether you are receiving benefits or otherwise. The criterion is linked to whether or not the individual receives a pink card, which is the way that it always has been, and that criterion is set and evaluated individually for each applicant, depending
345 on the specific needs of each applicant. The assessment is conducted on a case-by-case basis and, as always since 2001, it takes into account factors such as household circumstances and the number of individuals involved etc.

Hon. A Sanchez: Does the Government have any plans to review the criteria, to take into
350 account long-term, chronic health conditions, and perhaps the possibility of extending this exemption to those who receive disability benefits?

Hon. G Arias-Vasquez: We are currently undergoing an exercise, Madam Speaker, to review the GPMS generally. We do not know whether the specific criteria which the hon. Member
355 opposite just described will be included or otherwise, but there is a review that will be ongoing.

Madam Speaker: Next question.

Clerk: Question 900. The Hon. A Sanchez.

Madam Speaker: Just a minute. The hon. Member had a question, which I will allow.

Hon. J Ladislaus: I am grateful, Madam Speaker. Perhaps the Hon. the Minister does not have the answer there, but perhaps she could clarify. Given that the Hon. Minister has mentioned dissemination of public information and where this information is available, could she confirm whether this is actually available in a more easily accessible fashion to the public? For example, I would not expect my grandmother to search the legislation and regulations to find these points, so perhaps the criteria should be published on the GHA website. I have not found it there, but perhaps the Hon. the Minister could clarify that.

Hon. G Arias-Vasquez: Madam Speaker, it is distinctly not a GHA issue. That is why the criterion is not on the GHA website. The criterion – specifically the criterion applied for the District Medical Scheme – is a Department of Social Security matter. I am unaware of the contents of their website, as they do not fall within my portfolios.

Madam Speaker: Next question.

Q900/2024
ERS facilities –
Safety guidelines to prevent abuse and neglect

Clerk: Question 900. The Hon. A Sanchez.

Hon. A Sanchez: Could the Government outline the guidelines it follows to ensure the safety of adults in ERS facilities, particularly in relation to preventing abuse and neglect?

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

Minister for Health, Care and Business (Hon. G Arias-Vasquez): Madam Speaker, the ERS follows the same guidelines as the GHA for the prevention of abuse and neglect. We report all incidents via the Datix system, which leads to an investigation by the multidisciplinary team, including abuse and neglect.

Hon. A Sanchez: Madam Speaker, could the Hon. Minister state the name of the multidisciplinary team that she is referring to and perhaps direct me to where we can find the current legislative framework that provides the procedures to be followed in cases of abuse and neglect or safeguarding issues that have been raised?

Hon. G Arias-Vasquez: Madam Speaker, these are internal guidelines that the GHA has.

Hon. A Sanchez: Madam Speaker, is there anything in our current legislative framework that provides anything in statutory regulation to deal with issues of abuse or neglect, or suspected issues of abuse and neglect when dealing with vulnerable adults in ERS facilities or care homes or vulnerable adults in the community in general?

Hon. G Arias-Vasquez: Madam Speaker, not as a direct answer to this question, so I do not have the detail of where it sits in the legislation, but I am aware that under the responsibility they have for the Care Agency, the Care Agency does have a committee in which safeguarding issues

are raised, and there is legislation on the safeguarding of adults that I believe is proposed in a Bill
405 which is the responsibility of the Care Agency.

Hon. A Sanchez: Madam Speaker can the Hon. Minister state whether she is aware of any cases of abuse and neglect within the ERS facilities within the last 13 months?

Hon. G Arias-Vasquez: Madam Speaker, because I thought that the question might be going in
410 this direction, I asked that specific question. There is one incident in which a resident has made an allegation of verbal abuse, and that is being looked into at the moment – GHA Workforce is looking into that matter; and there is an ongoing issue with a resident in respect of another resident. Those are the two issues that we are aware of.

Hon. A Sanchez: In cases like these, where there might be suspected abuse or neglect ... The
415 Hon. Minister mentions a multidisciplinary team. Is this a particular board? Does this board or team have a name?

Hon. G Arias-Vasquez: Madam Speaker, multidisciplinary teams are convened as and when
420 required, so there is not a board that looks into this, but it is the multidisciplinary team that is required in the instance of whatever has happened. It would be, for example, the nurse involved, the doctor involved and an overseeing entity. It would not be a specific board that is convened for this purpose. The entity which oversees this is GHA Workforce.

Madam Speaker: Last question.
425

Hon. A Sanchez: Madam Speaker, can the Hon. Minister state whether information by way of
advice, education, awareness or guidance is provided to residents or close relatives in ERS facilities
430 about their rights and how to raise safeguarding concerns at point of entry or during their stay as residents in these facilities? I ask because, as she might be aware, I am a close relative of two residents and it seems that this is not something that is done. During my conversations with constituents who come to see me, with close relatives, it does not seem that they receive much education or awareness about this. Can she advise whether there is a policy or any information that is given to residents and close relatives about this?

Hon. G Arias-Vasquez: Madam Speaker, not that I am aware of. I am not aware of there ever
435 having been training provided to residents in any institution in Gibraltar, and I am not sure that this issue has ever been raised; it certainly has not with me.

Madam Speaker: Next question.
440

Q901-92/2024

ERS –

Investigation re staff walkouts; catering department industrial action

Clerk: Question 901. The Hon. A Sanchez.

Hon. A Sanchez: Could the Hon. Minister confirm whether the investigation into four separate
445 staff walkouts at the ERS has been concluded; and, if so, provide clarity on how the matter has been resolved to address any ongoing concerns?

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

Minister for Health, Care and Business (Hon. G Arias-Vasquez): Madam Speaker, I will answer this question together with Question 902.

Clerk: Question 902. The Hon. A Sanchez.

Hon. A Sanchez: Could the Government clarify whether all matters concerning the ERS catering department and the industrial action have been fully resolved, or if any issues remain outstanding?

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

Hon. G Arias-Vasquez: Madam Speaker, in answer to Question 901, we can confirm that the investigation into staff walkouts at ERS has been concluded. Because these events involved detailed human resource investigations, it would be wrong to provide any further details as it relates to individuals and their contractual rights.

In answer to Question 902, there are ongoing HR issues in the catering department which are currently being reviewed with the objective of resolving these issues as quickly as possible.

Madam Speaker: Any supplementaries?

Hon. A Sanchez: Madam Speaker, the information that we have –

Madam Speaker: Could I ask the hon. Member to tell me in respect of which question the supplementary is put: Question 901 or 902?

Hon. A Sanchez: Madam Speaker, this is a supplementary in relation to Question 901. The information that we have is that there has been a significant reshuffle of staff members within the ERS with many having been transferred out and many transferred in. Could the Hon. Minister confirm whether this has been as a result of the investigations, and the conclusion of the investigations?

Hon. G Arias-Vasquez: Madam Speaker, I refer the hon. Lady to the answer I gave a few moments ago, in that it is an HR issue which has been resolved. I have no concerns in relation to this issue.

Madam Speaker: Next question.

Q903-95/2024
ERS structure –
Management changes

Clerk: Question 903. The Hon. A Sanchez.

Hon. A Sanchez: Could the Government confirm whether there has been a restructure within the higher or senior management of Elderly Residential Services?

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

Minister for Health, Care and Business (Hon. G Arias-Vasquez): Madam Speaker, I will answer this question together with Questions 904 and 905.

Clerk: Question 904. The Hon. A Sanchez.

495 **Hon. A Sanchez:** Could the Government confirm whether there have been any changes in the appointments of the ERS Care Manager and ERS Facilities Manager, both based at Mount Alvernia; and, if so, whether these changes have involved any adjustments in remuneration or increments?

Clerk: Question 905. The Hon. A Sanchez.

500 **Hon. A Sanchez:** Could the Government clarify whether there has been any change in the appointment of the Head of ERS or Older People Services?

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

505 **Hon. G Arias-Vasquez:** Madam Speaker, in answer to Question 307/2024, it was confirmed that the post of Head of Older People Services was the same post as was previously the Care Manager with Nursing Responsibilities/Director of ERS. The nomenclature had changed. We are currently in the middle of a restructure in the ERS, where two posts are about to be advertised –
510 ERS Administration Manager and Nursing Co-ordinator. Additionally, we are looking to appoint an executive member of the Gibraltar Health Authority Board with direct responsibility for ERS.

Hon. A Sanchez: Madam Speaker, I will take them one by one. In relation to –

515 **Madam Speaker:** The Hon. the Minister has not specified her answer for each question, the Hon. Minister has given a general answer, so you do not need to specify which question.

Hon. A Sanchez: Could the Hon. Minister clarify for what reason the restructure is taking place?

520 **Hon. G Arias-Vasquez:** Madam Speaker, because of the issues that have arisen in ERS, we have determined that a restructure is necessary in the management of the ERS, and therefore these positions are coming out in the manner described.

Hon. A Sanchez: I did not hear that the Hon. Minister addressed Question 904 specifically in relation to the appointments of ERS Care Manager and ERS facilities manager, whether there have been any changes in these appointments and whether these changes have involved any adjustments in remuneration or increments. Can she address this?
525

Hon. G Arias-Vasquez: Madam Speaker, over the summer period there were several adjustments made to the management structure in the ERS as a stop gap. The vacancies will be coming out in the next few days for the two posts that have been mentioned. The ERS Administration Manager and a Nursing Co-ordinator will be coming out. Those vacancies should be coming out before the end of this week. The individuals put there on a stop-gap basis will return to their usual places unless they are successful in the interview process.
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535 **Madam Speaker:** Next question.

Q906/2024
Ocean Views –
Detox programme

Clerk: Question 906. The Hon. A Sanchez.

Hon. A Sanchez: Could the Government clarify whether entry into the detox programme at Ocean Views is immediate, or if there is a waiting period?

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

Minister for Health, Care and Business (Hon. G Arias-Vasquez): Madam Speaker, the Government can confirm that entry into a detoxification programme through the GHA is not automatically tied to admission at Ocean Views. There are various methods of delivering detoxification, and the majority of cases are managed without the need for in-patient admission at Ocean Views. Referral to Ocean Views for detox is considered only after a thorough assessment of the individual patient, during which clinicians evaluate the most appropriate method of treatment based on the patient's specific circumstances and clinical needs. Once a decision is made to refer a patient to Ocean Views for in-patient detox, there is no enforced delay in admission. However, delays may occur due to capacity constraints, which can affect both Ocean Views and St Bernard's Hospital, depending primarily on the availability of beds.

As at 20th November, there were four individuals on the waiting list for admissions. I have actually had an update on that just before coming here, and there is currently one individual waiting for admission. So that was as at 20th November, but I have an update today and there is one individual waiting.

The GHA remains committed to providing timely and effective care for those requiring detox and works diligently to prioritise patients based on clinical urgency and need.

Hon. A Sanchez: Madam Speaker, the information that we receive from families and service users is that they still experience a delay to access the detox programme in Ocean Views for those who need it. Is the Government looking to increase bed capacity or improve the pathway so that service users do not experience the delay that they are currently experiencing?

Hon. G Arias-Vasquez: Madam Speaker, the delays arise not so much from there being a lack of availability at Ocean Views; the delays arise in the specific instances when there is detox required which requires a bed at St Bernard's. Those are specific instances. For example, if there is a risk of severe withdrawal symptoms, if there is a co-existing medical condition, it is deemed best for the patient to be admitted into St Bernard's Hospital for the detox to occur in a more medicalised environment. That is where the delay sometimes occurs, because of beds.

What we are actively looking into, and what used to happen several years ago is that there were a couple of beds that were set aside for a detox programme. During Covid, that was done away with, for obvious reasons, and we are now looking in different ways at whether or not that can be achieved again.

Hon. A Sanchez: Madam Speaker, in relation to alcohol detoxification, could the Hon. Minister state whether this takes place in Ocean Views or in St Bernard's Hospital?

Hon. G Arias-Vasquez: Madam Speaker, it depends on the specific individual and the specific individual's circumstances. For example, as I mentioned, there could be reasons why it would require admission to St Bernard's. These would be if it is envisaged that there would be severe withdrawal symptoms and, therefore, the risk of complications; if there are coexisting medical conditions such as cardiac issues, liver failure or renal failure, which would require a more medicalised environment; if there are coexisting mental health conditions which would require a more medicalised environment; or if there is polysubstance use, in which case, again, you would require a more medicalised environment. So, it very much depends on the individual circumstances in each and every case whether or not the individual is deemed best to be detoxed at Ocean Views or at St Bernard's.

590 **Hon. A Sanchez:** Madam Speaker, this particular issue was flagged as a major concern in the
last mental health inspection report. It very rightly stated that alcohol withdrawal can give rise to
very serious medical emergencies. Since St Bernard's Hospital is the one with the medical facilities
to deal with such events, delays and transfers can lead to fatal consequences. Is the Hon. Minister
595 satisfied that this issue has now been addressed, or is there still work to be done to improve the
pathway?

Hon. G Arias-Vasquez: Madam Speaker, again, there is a multidisciplinary team that is set up
between the GHA and the Care Agency in order to facilitate the pathways for admission, whether
it be into St Bernard's or Ocean Views. There is one patient awaiting admission. The delays for
600 admission, I am informed, are not significant. In that case, the clinicians tell me that every case is
appropriately dealt with. So, yes, I am satisfied.

Madam Speaker: Next question.

Q907/2024

**Community mental health facility –
Consultation with Care Agency and location**

Clerk: Question 907. The Hon. A Sanchez.
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Hon. A Sanchez: Is the Care Agency being consulted regarding the location of the new
community mental health facility, and could the Government provide an update on the intended
location of the site?

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

Minister for Health, Care and Business (Hon. G Arias-Vasquez): Madam Speaker, yes, the Care
Agency is being consulted. As answered in response to GBC questions, nothing has been cancelled.
The Government is fully committed to building a new community mental health facility and
615 changing the model of care delivered by the mental health practitioners in Gibraltar. All options
are currently being explored and a further announcement on details will be made in the coming
months.

Hon. A Sanchez: Madam Speaker, the Hon. Minister made an announcement that the site was
620 going to be located at the old *Gibraltar Chronicle* building. Has this changed, or is it the intention
for the site to still be located in the same area?

Hon. G Arias-Vasquez: Madam Speaker, this site, along with an alternative, is being looked at.
As you said, we are currently exploring all options from a cost benefit analysis.
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Hon. A Sanchez: Madam Speaker, could the Minister share with us the other site that is being
considered?

Hon. G Arias-Vasquez: No, Madam Speaker. An announcement will be made in due course.
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Madam Speaker: Next question. The Hon. the Leader of the Opposition has a question?

Hon. Dr K Azopardi: Yes, I do, thank you, Madam Speaker. Given that there was an
announcement already – the hon. Lady says an announcement will be made, but an

635 announcement was made, and indeed the hon. Lady featured in a video announcing the decision to locate it at the ex-*Chronicle* building – what has now caused this reconsideration so that that site is no longer the site and it is being considered alongside a different site?

640 **Hon. G Arias-Vasquez:** Madam Speaker, I make no secret of the fact that I think that the most important thing here is what is best for the patient. We are considering a different site because it may be better than the site that is currently available for patient use. It may be more conveniently located and it may have better resources, and it has become available subsequent to that announcement being made.

645 I have no issue doing a U-turn on a building. Let me be clear on that: I have no issue making a U-turn on a building which is to be used if I think that the alternative building is going to be better for patients. I am happy to say that. What is important here is that we are considering a new model of care for mental health patients, a model of care which the Mental Health Board has been calling for, a model of care which numerous different pressure groups have been calling for, a model of care about which we are listening to the clinicians on is what is necessary. The building is not
650 important, and I would urge hon. Members opposite to focus on the new model of care that we are looking to provide, rather than the bricks and mortar of where it may be provided from.

Madam Speaker: Next question.

Q908/2024
GHA board –
Whether CEO of Care Agency a member

655 **Clerk:** Question 908. The Hon. A Sanchez.

Hon. A Sanchez: As referenced in Government Press Release 244/2024, could the Hon. Minister confirm whether the CEO of the Care Agency now forms part of the Gibraltar Health Authority's board?

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

Minister for Health, Care and Business (Hon. G Arias-Vasquez): Madam Speaker, the CEO of the Care Agency does not presently form part of the GHA board.

665 **Hon. A Sanchez:** Madam Speaker, can the Hon. Minister provide a timeframe for when she expects the CEO of the Care Agency to sit or form part of the board?

670 **Hon. G Arias-Vasquez:** Madam Speaker, the components of the Care Agency board are a statutory function, so the GHA Act would need to be amended in order for the CEO of the Care Agency to form part of the Gibraltar Health Authority's board. The legislation is currently being amended. The amended version is now going to be circulated again to the CEO of the Care Agency and the Director General. Once that is done, it will then go to the different unions for their confirmation that the legislation accurately reflects the discussions that we have had in the consultation period. We then have to amend the legislation and pass it as a Bill, at which point the
675 CEO of the Care Agency will be able to form part of the Gibraltar Health Authority board.

Hon. A Sanchez: Madam Speaker, when the Hon. Minister speaks about the draft legislation and amending the legislation, could she clarify how she is intending to amend the legislation and how the new legislation is being drafted? Will the Care Agency Act and the Gibraltar Health

680 Authority Act remain as separate Acts, or will the drafting of the legislation involve the merging of the two Acts to form a Health and Care Authority Act? Can she elaborate on what she intends to do with the legislation?

685 **Hon. G Arias-Vasquez:** Madam Speaker, I am not trying to be obstructive. The question here is in relation to whether the CEO of the Care Agency forms part of the board. I am happy to go further and say that the envisaged legislation I would want to be blessed by the CEO of the Care Agency, by the Director General and by the unions prior to me informing the House of what that will look like. So, I am not trying to be obstructive in not informing the House of what that legislation will look like; I just want to make sure that I go through all the proper steps before
690 confirming what that eventual legislation will look like.

Madam Speaker: Next question.

Q909-10/2024

**Gibraltar Health and Care Authority –
Rationale; consultation with stakeholders other than unions**

Clerk: Question 909. The Hon. A Sanchez.

695 **Hon. A Sanchez:** Could the Government clarify the rationale for the proposed merger of the Care Agency into the proposed Gibraltar Health and Care Authority?

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

700 **Minister for Health, Care and Business (Hon. G Arias-Vasquez):** Madam Speaker, I will answer this question together with Question 910.

Clerk: Question 910. The Hon. A Sanchez.

705 **Hon. A Sanchez:** In relation to the proposed merger of the Care Agency into the Gibraltar Health and Care Authority, could the Government clarify whether it is consulting with stakeholders other than the unions?

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

710 **Hon. G Arias-Vasquez:** Madam Speaker, the position remains as set out in my answer to Question 814/2024.

In relation to Question 910, yes, the Government has consulted stakeholders other than the unions.

715 **Hon. A Sanchez:** Madam Speaker, perhaps the Hon. Minister cares to elaborate a bit further in her answer as to the rationale behind the proposed merger. Since she did not want to go into the details as to the drafting of the legislation in the previous supplementary, even if she does not want to go into detail, perhaps she could just clarify whether it is her intention to keep the Act separate – at least that, to give us a bit more clarity as to the rationale behind the proposed merger
720 and how she plans to carry it forward.

In relation to Question 910, could she clarify who these stakeholders are?

Hon. G Arias-Vasquez: Madam Speaker, as with everything that we try to do, the proposed merger of the GHA, the Care Agency and the ERS is to improve the patient experience. This has been explained in Parliament, it has been explained on GBC and it has been explained in interviews with the *Chronicle*.

The rationale for the merger is that there are several functions which are duplicated in the numerous organisations. There are certain processes which need to be more streamlined. If I take an example, one that has been raised in Parliament today, the detox procedure sometimes can start in the GHA and then go Bruce's Farm. Bruce's Farm sits within the Care Agency. It is in everyone's interest that everyone involved sits around a table to make decisions. This is the case with, for example, packages of care. If there is an elderly resident in the hospital who is fit to be medically discharged, that elderly resident would be discharged with a package of care. The package of care is provided by the Care Agency. In order that all these processes are streamlined, it makes sense that everyone involved in the decision-making process sits around a table.

For example, in the last GHA board that was held, the CEO of the Care Agency did not form part of the board, he was not legally part of the board, but he was invited as an observer to the board. Even in this instance, it was already visible that him sitting on the board could help with the discussions that we were having, because he is privy to information on what the service users need in the Care Agency, which was relevant to the discussions that were being held in the board. Rather than have a discussion at the GHA board and have to go and consult with the CEO of the Care Agency, it is in everyone's interest – in the patients' interest and the service users' interest – that everyone sits around the board and is capable of making decisions in relation to the matters at hand. That has always been the rationale for the proposed restructure of the GHA and the Care Agency. That is what I have said throughout, and I have always said that it is in the interest of the patients that we are looking to do this, to streamline procedures for the benefit of the patients and service users.

In relation to Question 910, the Government has consulted with the Director General and other executives at the GHA, the CEO and the Deputy CEO of the Care Agency, all the heads of service at the Care Agency, and the Disability Society. I can confirm that every individual who has wished to raise the matter with the Government throughout the consultation process has been given a meeting, in order to raise any concerns that they may have, with me.

Hon. A Sanchez: Could the Hon. Minister clarify whether there will be some sort of service level agreement or mechanism in place to mitigate against potential issues that might arise from merging entities with different governance structures, cultures, operational systems, goals and expectations?

Hon. G Arias-Vasquez: Madam Speaker, it is unlikely that there will be any SLAs in place, as the restructure itself should take care of any of these issues which may arise.

Hon. A Sanchez: Madam Speaker, there seems to be a genuine concern in the community and, in particular, disability groups, that those requiring social care, particularly long-term social care, might see their needs sidelined if the merged entity should go down the route of prioritising acute medical care over non-medical social care and support. How does the Hon. Minister intend to mitigate against this and allay the concerns of these individuals moving forward if this merger were to proceed?

Hon. G Arias-Vasquez: Madam Speaker, the Disability Society made it clear that they wanted to come and speak to me on this matter, and a meeting was arranged with the Disability Society at which I assuaged their concerns. If the hon. speaker wants to extend an invitation to any other group that wants to come and speak to me rather than bashing me in public, I would be very happy to speak to any other pressure group that wants to come and speak to me on the proposed merger. Indeed, I sat with the Disability Society and I assuaged these concerns that they had. The

CEO is sitting on the board of the GHA. The complements of each entity will remain separate, as I informed the Disability Society, and the budgets of the three entities will remain separate. I had a detailed conversation with the Disability Society and I am happy to have a conversation with any other group that extends the arm of friendship to come and speak to me. I am happy to have a discussion with them and allay any concerns which they may have.

Hon. A Sanchez: Madam Speaker, firstly, if any group wants to come and speak to the Hon. Minister, they can write to her directly. That is their right. Secondly, I am not bashing her in public, I am asking questions. That is my role as an Opposition Member.

Does the Hon. Minister intend to introduce a separate health and social care charter to ensure that both sectors are equally prioritised?

Hon. G Arias-Vasquez: Madam Speaker, I was referring to the press release that was issued that was bashing the merger rather than the hon. Lady. I am fully – *(Interjection)* No, a press release that was issued by – *(Interjection)*

Hon. Chief Minister: The lady doth protest too much.

Hon. G Arias-Vasquez: I extend the invitation publicly to any society that wishes to come and speak to me.

In answer to the charter, yes, there is a proposal to have a separate patient charter and a social users' charter, so one for the service user and one for patients.

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

Hon. Dr K Azopardi: Yes, Madam Speaker. May I just ask about the rationale ... a couple of the supplementaries that the hon. Lady has given in answer? A lot of what she said, in terms of the supplementary where she explained the rationale on working together and all of that could be achieved through interdepartmental co-ordination; it would need a formal merger, it seems to me.

In her last supplementary, she mentioned the Disability Society. May I just ask whether it is still the position of the Government that they are going to proceed with a merger? I am not asking her to comment on what the Disability Society said was the outcome of their meeting, but certainly they then commented publicly that the Minister had assured them that there would not be a merger. They may be talking at cross purposes here, so I am giving her the opportunity to clarify whether there is going to be a formal merger of the Health Authority and the Care Agency, which is an important issue of public interest, or whether what is really happening behind the scenes is better interdepartmental co-ordination between those two statutory authorities, who will retain their separate budgets, which is the last supplementary answer that she has just given. Are there still going to be existing separate entities that will work better together, or is there going to be a formal merger; and if there is going to be a formal merger, can she explain a bit more how all these entities are keeping separate budgets as well, so as to understand that?

Hon. G Arias-Vasquez: Madam Speaker, we have said throughout that there will be a merger and it is intended that there will be a merger. You are correct in referring to the press release, where the Disability Society, I think, has slightly misunderstood the point. There will be a merger, but it was explained to the Disability Society that the three complements would remain separate. It is envisaged that the board sits together but that the Care Agency still runs as the Care Agency and the GHA still runs as the GHA. As the hon. Member knows, the GHA currently encompasses the ERS as well, so the ERS and the GHA are one statutory body already but with two separate complements. That will continue to be the case. I think that answers the question.

Hon. Dr K Azopardi: And if there is going to be a formal merger, will there be some kind of assessment and production of cost savings in terms of the management of what will become a humongous entity at that stage? Is that envisaged as well by creating this one mega entity?

Hon. G Arias-Vasquez: It is not one mega entity; it is an additional 300 complement to the overall entity. As I have said, it is three separate complements. The Care Agency board will continue to run the Care Agency and the GHA executive board will continue to run the GHA. It is envisaged that the admin functions will work better together, and that is where it is envisaged that there will be savings.

Madam Speaker: Next question.

Q911/2024
Adviser to Minister for Health –
Cost to date

Clerk: Question 911. The Hon. A Sanchez.

Hon. A Sanchez: Is the Government now in a position to confirm the cost to the taxpayer of Professor. Cumming's advisory role to the Minister for Health, inclusive of any benefits or allowances?

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

Minister for Health, Care and Business (Hon. G Arias-Vasquez): Madam Speaker, there has been no cost to the taxpayer to date.

Hon. A Sanchez: Madam Speaker, can the Hon. Minister confirm when she will be able to inform us of the cost to the taxpayer of Professor. Cumming's advisory role to the Minister for Health?

Hon. G Arias-Vasquez: Madam Speaker, Professor. Cumming currently owes the Ministry 19 days from services that have been previously paid. When those 19 days are looking to be exhausted, we will confirm the cost. We have not entered into negotiations with Professor. Cumming yet.

Madam Speaker: Next question.

Q912-13/2024
Weight-loss drugs containing semaglutide –
Number of individuals reporting adverse reactions; natural alternatives

Clerk: Question 912. The Hon. J Ladislaus.

Hon. J Ladislaus: Madam Speaker, how many individuals in Gibraltar have reported or been found to have had adverse reactions or an adverse event to weight-loss drugs containing semaglutide, such as Ozempic, in the past 12 months?

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

Minister for Health, Care and Business (Hon. G Arias-Vasquez): Madam Speaker, I will answer this question together with Question 913.

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Clerk: Question 913. The Hon. J Ladislaus.

Hon. J Ladislaus: Has the GHA investigated natural alternatives to semaglutide-based drugs for weight loss?

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

Hon. G Arias-Vasquez: Madam Speaker, in answer to Question 912, one person has been found to have an adverse reaction in the form of severe diarrhoea as a consequence of the weight-loss drug. No other adverse reactions have been reported to the GHA in the last 12 months.

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In answer to Question 913, the GHA employs a comprehensive multidisciplinary approach to weight management, emphasising natural and lifestyle-based interventions. Patients are enrolled in a structured programme that includes a minimum of six months of dietary guidance from qualified dietitians, alongside recommendations for lifestyle modifications such as increased physical activity. These interventions are designed to promote sustainable weight loss and improve overall health outcomes. Pharmacological treatments, including medications like semaglutide, are considered only when these natural and lifestyle-based strategies have not achieved the necessary results. The GHA remains committed to prioritising non-pharmacological methods in weight management protocols, reserving medications as a secondary option when clinically indicated.

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Hon. J Ladislaus: I am grateful, Madam Speaker. I ask this question – I will give the Hon. Minister some context – because there are studies that are emerging at the moment suggesting that adverse reactions have increased by 40% in the past six months as usage of these drugs expands. It has been linked to 162 deaths in the US, which does not seem high in terms of the population, but this is the reason for the question.

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Madam Speaker, as a supplementary to Question 912, could I ask whether the Hon. the Minister could clarify whether there is a medication safety management strategy at the GHA, much like the NHS Patient Safety Strategy, which would ensure that safe prescribing procedures are in place? Could the Hon. the Minister confirm that?

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Hon. G Arias-Vasquez: Madam Speaker, all medications are under review permanently but we do follow NHS guidelines, so if the NHS were to emerge with restrictions on the use of semaglutide, then we would follow.

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Madam Speaker: Any other supplementaries?

Hon. J Ladislaus: Just one further, and I suppose it is a supplementary to both. For how long has the GHA been prescribing semaglutide-based medications for weight loss?

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Hon. G Arias-Vasquez: Madam Speaker, I do not have that information available, but if you ask me next time I can provide you with that answer – if the hon. Member were to ask me.

Madam Speaker: Next question.

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Clerk: Question 914. The Hon. J Ladislaus.

Chief Minister (Hon. F R Picardo): Madam Speaker, before the hon. Lady asks the question, I am conscious that it is already 1:25pm. It might be a convenient moment for us to break now and return at 3 p.m.

Madam Speaker: All right, we will adjourn and return at 3 p.m.

The House adjourned at 1.25 p.m. and resumed its sitting at 3 p.m.

Q914/2024

**Identification of emerging viruses –
Monitoring of donated blood**

Clerk: Answers to Oral Questions continued. Question 914. The Hon. J Ladislaus.

Hon. J Ladislaus: Madam Speaker, in line with the NHS approach, will the GHA be launching a system to monitor donated blood for newly emerging viruses that may not yet be present in Gibraltar but may pose a threat in future due to climate change?

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

Minister for Health, Care and Business (Hon. G Arias-Vasquez): Madam Speaker, the GHA's Infection Control Committee is currently reviewing the NHS guidance and, as such, no decision has been taken yet.

Hon. J Ladislaus: Could I just ask when the system is expected to be launched – a rough estimate?

Hon. G Arias-Vasquez: Madam Speaker, it is not a case of when it is to be launched. In order to explain that answer, the NHS routinely checks for syphilis, hepatitis B, C and E, HIV human lymphatic viruses, and there are additional tests that the NHS is doing if there is an indication to do so. These are malaria, Trypanosoma cruzi, the West Nile virus and cytomegalovirus. The NHS is also considering testing blood donors for tick-borne encephalitis and the Usutu virus. These are viruses that are not common in Gibraltar and therefore we are seeing whether any of these viruses are present. The additional tests are tests for viruses that are not common in this geographical location. There has been one reported case in Spain of the West Nile virus, hence the committee is considering that, but it is an ongoing process which the Infection Control Committee does. It is not a case of when it is expected to come up with a decision. They monitor the viruses in the area.

Madam Speaker: Next question.

Q915/2024

**Consultant rheumatologist –
Contract**

Clerk: Question 915. The Hon. J Ladislaus.

Hon. J Ladislaus: Has the incoming in-house consultant rheumatologist commenced employment at the GHA? If so, what is the nature of their contract?

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

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Minister for Health, Care and Business (Hon. G Arias-Vasquez): Madam Speaker, yes, the consultant rheumatologist commenced employment on 21st October 2024 on a 12-month fixed-term contract.

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Hon. J Ladislaus: I am grateful for that indication. Could the Hon. Minister perhaps clarify what happens after that initial 12 months? Will the service be left with a gap once again?

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Hon. G Arias-Vasquez: Madam Speaker, the service is continuously under review, so it is a case of seeing how the patients are dealt with, seeing how she fits in, seeing whether the complement requires this. We will, as always, be guided by the clinicians on these questions.

Madam Speaker: Next question.

Q916/2024

Notification of test results to service users – Method and timeframe

Clerk: Question 916. The Hon. J Ladislaus.

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Hon. J Ladislaus: What procedures are currently in place at the GHA to notify service users of test results and within what timeframe must test results be communicated to a service user?

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

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Minister for Health, Care and Business (Hon. G Arias-Vasquez): Madam Speaker, the GHA processed over 3.2 million laboratory results last year, which does not include the numerous additional diagnostic tests performed in other clinical settings. The procedure for notifying service users of test results is determined by the nature of the test and the clinical significance of the result. In cases where a result indicates an immediate and life-threatening condition, this is communicated without delay. The relevant clinician is informed immediately via telephone, followed by written confirmation, to ensure urgent action is taken. For other tests, the method and timing of notification vary. General practitioners may communicate results directly to patients by telephone or text message when a prompt follow-up is necessary. In some instances, results are provided during scheduled follow-up clinic appointments, allowing clinicians to offer detailed explanations and discuss management plans in person. Certain normal results, such as those arising from routine screening programmes, may not be communicated directly unless further action is required.

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The GHA is committed to ensuring that test results are communicated in a timely and clinically appropriate manner. However, given the vast number and variety of tests performed, the timeframe for communication is contingent on the specific type of test and its clinical urgency. Should the hon. Member wish to inquire about the procedures related to a specific test, I would be pleased to provide a more detailed explanation.

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Hon. J Ladislaus: Could the Hon. Minister perhaps clarify whether there are any guidelines to be followed by clinicians within the separate departments as to these varying tests? It seems that we are getting a lot of reports coming in that test results are just not being received by individuals. It leaves a lot of people in a state of anxiety, particularly when test results pertain to, for example, some serious illnesses like cancer etc. that have been looked at, and sometimes the test results

are just not coming back, with people having to chase constantly. It has been flagged as a real issue, so could the Hon. Minister perhaps clarify whether there are guidelines for clinicians to follow in these circumstances?

Hon. G Arias-Vasquez: Madam Speaker, a distinction has to be drawn in this instance between test results and CT or MRI scan results. I have not been informed that there are any guidelines in place for the notification of patients, but I do not think ... The notification of laboratory results is normally a relatively quick process. Where the delays may sometimes arise – and I draw this simply from the hon. Member referring to the word ‘cancer’ – is in terms of CT scans or MRIs. In these cases, when the results come in from a third-party institution, the radiologists have to review the results before they are given to the patient, and that sometimes incurs a slight delay.

Hon. J Ladislaus: No, I was not necessarily thinking of that time; I am thinking more of the laboratory tests, things like blood samples etc. I am aware that the NHS service users can access some test results that have been sent back to their GP via online platforms. Is this something that the GHA is considering and perhaps rolling in the near future?

Hon. G Arias-Vasquez: Madam Speaker, I would love to be able to confirm that we would have this app. I have indeed seen the app that the hon. Member is referring to. It is something which we are in very preliminary discussions on, with the possibility of that being done. As with every discussion, it is determinant on cost, the timing of the rollout etc., but I can confirm that we are in the very preliminary stages of reaching out to look at that.

Madam Speaker: The Hon. C Sacarello.

Hon. C Sacarello: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. The core of this question appears to be the concern from patients not knowing when or if they will receive blood results. Given the wide scope of this, the complexity and the fact that there are not any set guidelines for the clinicians, would the Minister consider perhaps coming up with a proposal which would be visible for the public, where they could see, based on the tests that they have undergone, when and how they can expect to receive the result? That would (a) save time with the appointments and (b) provide them with some peace and comfort as to when and how they will be receiving their test results? Granted, this will take time.

Hon. G Arias-Vasquez: Madam Speaker, I cannot confirm that. That would be up to the GHA executive board, which would then be passed up to the Authority. However, what I can say is that we are in the very preliminary stages of looking at ways in which these results can be delivered to the patients in a timely manner via an app.

Madam Speaker: Next question.

Q917/2024
St Bernard’s Hospital –
Contingency plans re ward capacity

Clerk: Question 917. The Hon. J Ladislaus.

Hon. J Ladislaus: If a ward at St Bernard’s Hospital is at maximum capacity, what contingency plans are in place to deal with the overflow of patients?

1045 **Clerk:** Answer, the Hon. the Minister for Health, Care and Business.

Minister for Health, Care and Business (Hon. G Arias-Vasquez): Madam Speaker, the GHA defines surge capacity as a healthcare system's ability to manage a sudden or rapidly progressive influx of patients at a given point in time. Such a sudden increase may be the result of seasonal outbreaks, random variation in patient numbers or unusual events – for example, a MAJAX, manmade or natural disaster, event.

1050 St Bernard's Hospital was designed and currently has the capacity to house 159 adult beds within the four main wards, CCU and Calpe Ward. Currently 142 beds are active daily managed beds. The capacity of St Bernard's Hospital to meet a surge in demand consists of a contingency plan which includes a flexible review of elective hospital activity, routine surgery and procedures, to free up beds and staff; moving patients to other clinical areas or GHA facilities; invoking enhanced discharge protocols to facilitate more discharges or transfers to alternative facilities entirely; additional beds being placed in existing wards or alternative clinical areas.

1060 **Hon. J Ladislaus:** Madam Speaker, I would ask your indulgence at this stage because I am about to give a few statistics, but I think they are important in terms of context for the public.

I asked a question back in September, and the figures that were provided by the Hon. Minister showed that the maternity ward in particular was at the maximum capacity of 23 beds on 22 days. That was just between the months of June and mid-September. That is roughly – my maths is terrible – a fifth of the timeframe we are talking about. The rehab ward was completely empty on 40 days within that same timeframe, which is over a third – we are talking completely empty – and the long stay ward was completely empty on 63 days during that timeframe, which is over half. Can the wards perhaps be reconfigured, Madam Speaker, to take into account wastage on some wards versus maximum capacity of beds in others, like we have seen with maternity and these other wards that have been practically empty for the better part of almost three months?

Hon. G Arias-Vasquez: Sorry, Madam Speaker, did the hon. Member say that the maternity ward was at full capacity? That is unusual. I would have to go back to the statistics, because normally it is the maternity ward which is not at full capacity. But yes, indeed, the second point I made is that the action plan when wards are at capacity is to move patients to other clinical areas or other GHA facilities. There are wards, for example maternity and Rainbow Ward, which cannot be used. Obviously you cannot mix adults and children, so there are certain wards that cannot be used for these purposes, but the plans which the GHA has in place do allow for patient movement around different wards.

1080 **Hon. J Ladislaus:** The figures that I have in front of me do show that maternity was at full capacity on those days. I did the calculations, I counted the dates: for example, on 4th June it was at 23 beds, and that is what the maternity ward seems to have, 23 beds, available. So, it seems that there was quite a high number, whereas if we look at the long stay ward, which is Victoria Mackintosh, it has 30 beds, and the rehab ward has another 25 beds. Rehab was absolutely empty the better part of 40 days, so it seems to me that there is quite a bit of wastage. This is on the figures that I have in front of me. Perhaps it could be looked at in terms of the sizes of the wards and the number of beds that each of these wards holds. Perhaps maternity would be better placed in another ward is my point.

1090 **Hon. G Arias-Vasquez:** Noted, and apologies because I do not have the figures in front of me. I am happy to sit with the hon. Lady to go through these figures, because it does not sound right. Maternity cannot have 23 beds full, because that would mean that 23 children were born within a certain period; John Ward has long stay patients in it, so it is impossible to be empty. I am happy to sit with the hon. Lady and go through those figures outside, but from my day-to-day knowledge of the Hospital, those figures do not sound like they reflect the reality on the ground. Like I said, I

am not questioning the veracity of what she is saying, I am just saying that we might want to sit down and go through those figures. What I have said is that yes, the Hospital does look at the wards on a daily basis and it does look at bed management daily. It has bed management meetings daily to move patients to other clinical areas or GHA wards.

Hon. J Ladislaus: Madam Speaker, I wish to correct the record. It is my fault entirely and I do apologise to the Hon. Minister. I have checked back at the Written Answer and it does not state the total number of beds that were taken up; rather, it says the total number of free beds available daily. I do apologise. Maternity seems to be empty at least a third of the time. I do apologise for that.

Chief Minister (Hon. F R Picardo): Is it possible, Madam Speaker, for hon. Members opposite to reflect that probably it was the other way round? That is to say that it might have been John Ward that was full and maternity that was empty, which would be something that would be a not uncommon situation? I think that might be helpful for the hon. Lady in formulating her question.

Hon. Dr K Azopardi: Obviously this question is about bed capacity and has been acknowledged, I think, in the past, in view of the surgical cancellations that people sometimes have to endure because they are told that there are not beds available. May I just ask the Minister – obviously these things are dynamic and bed capacity is in the Hospital at any given moment will depend on circumstances that sometimes may arise unexpectedly – who is taking these dynamic decisions? Is there a specific person within the GHA who is designated that responsibility, or is this a group of clinical managers that would coalesce and take these decisions?

Hon. G Arias-Vasquez: Madam Speaker, I seem to recall that this was a specific question which arose in the last session of Parliament. I think the answer is that there is a bed management meeting which is held by numerous clinicians on a weekly basis to analyse the number of beds and the flux of patients, which, as the Hon. Leader of the Opposition rightly says, is a dynamic situation which changes weekly, but there are clinicians designated to do these bed management meetings on a weekly basis.

Hon. Dr K Azopardi: I see, thank you, I am grateful. My hon. colleague has reminded me of the question because she had it with her. The hon. Lady opposite tested my memory at the outset of her intervention this morning. I do recall during my time certainly that there was a moment when we had a designated bed manager, as was called in those days. I am not sure when it happened that there is not someone who is designated with that responsibility, but does she think that that is something that the GHA wants to look at in future, so as to have a better system in place on these issues?

Hon. G Arias-Vasquez: Madam Speaker, up until recently there was a position of bed manager, who was part of the Bed Management Committee, and indeed that individual was part of the move to ERS. When the vacancies come out, the individual will either move back to the GHA or the post will be filled by someone else. There is a designated bed manager who joins the bed management meetings on a weekly basis as part of her role, and there is also a designated social worker who joins these meetings. Obviously the social workers are part of the process because people can be moved to a package of care out of the Hospital, so that is part of the process.

Hon. Dr K Azopardi: Let me try to understand that answer because, given the sheet of paper that my hon. colleague put in front of me, which was the answer in the previous meeting, I thought that the answer at the previous meeting was that there was not a designated bed manager but that rather there was a team meeting of clinical managers. The way that the hon. Lady has just answered suggests that there is a person who has that responsibility for bed management but

1150 perhaps moved to ERS temporarily. Is she saying that at some point that person will come back
and that responsibility will be renewed, a designated bed manager job will be done by someone?
Is that what she is saying?

1155 **Hon. G Arias-Vasquez:** Madam Speaker, there is a nurse, part of who's job is bed management,
and that individual is, right now, at ERS, as the hon. Member opposite has said. The part of the
designation of a nurse's role will be designated to another nurse if that person is successful and
does stay at ERS; or, if that person returns, she will return to her previous job as a nurse, part of
whose job is a designated bed manager. But separately, there is a social worker from the Care
Agency, which is an entirely separate role. The social worker is part of the bed management team
1160 that meets weekly, and she is part of that team because the packages of care form part of the
process to get people out of hospital.

Hon. Dr K Azopardi: Okay, so, in a nutshell, if that person is successful at ERS, somebody else
within the GHA will be given those tasks – that is how I have understood the Minister – so there
will be, perhaps, in the future someone with that designated role in the GHA, unlike today?

1165 **Hon. G Arias-Vasquez:** That is right. As I have said, today what is happening is that there is a
bed management team that meets weekly to look at bed management and how many beds are
available on any given week.

1170 **Madam Speaker:** Next question.

Q918/2024
X-rays –
Waiting time from referral

Clerk: Question 918. The Hon. J Ladislaus.

1175 **Hon. J Ladislaus:** What is the average current waiting time for an X-ray to be undertaken by
the GHA from the time of referral?

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

1180 **Minister for Health, Care and Business (Hon. G Arias-Vasquez):** Madam Speaker, the radiology
department provides a walk-in service for plain X-rays. Therefore, there is no waiting list to have
an X-ray.

Madam Speaker: Next question.

Q919/2024
Cancellation by patients of surgical procedures –
Mitigation

Clerk: Question 919. The Hon. J Ladislaus.

1185 **Hon. J Ladislaus:** How is the issue of the number of cancellations of surgical procedures at St Bernard's Hospital which are directly attributable to patients being mitigated?

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

1190 **Minister for Health, Care and Business (Hon. G Arias-Vasquez):** Madam Speaker, the GHA has implemented a policy to address the issue of surgical cancellations directly attributable to patients. The policy is designed to ensure the efficient use of resources whilst maintaining fairness and compassion in patient care. Under this policy, patients are permitted to refuse a proposed surgery date up to three times. If a patient declines more than three dates for non-medical reasons, they are removed from the active waiting list. It is important to emphasise, however, that
1195 this policy does not apply to cases involving cancer surgery or other life-threatening conditions, where the utmost flexibility and urgency are maintained. Patients also have the option to be placed on a dormant status on the waiting list if they anticipate being unavailable for surgery for a defined period. This approach allows patients to rejoin the waiting list when they are ready, without disrupting the overall scheduling.

1200 **Hon. J Ladislaus:** I am grateful. Could the Hon. Minister confirm whether there are any stand-by lists, where another patient can perhaps be called in at short notice so that the slot is not lost if it happens to be very close to the date of the operation or procedure?

1205 **Hon. G Arias-Vasquez:** Madam Speaker, whilst I do not know whether there is a standby list, I know that there is a standard procedure where the slot is tried to be filled. I do know that the surgeons actively try to fill any slots that they have available if enough notice is given.

1210 **Hon. J Ladislaus:** In terms of pre-operative communication, are there guidelines in place for that? Again, I have had reports that some individuals who are due in for certain procedures have not been given the correct pre-operative information, so that they either arrive at their scheduled procedure without actually knowing what they should or should not have done to prepare – for example, not having eaten anything for the past 12 hours – and that that information is sometimes lacking. Are there any guidelines across the board?

1215 **Hon. G Arias-Vasquez:** Madam Speaker, whereas I am unaware of whether there are actually active guidelines in place, I am very conscious that, for example, in day surgery you are brought in for a pre-op assessment and in that assessment you are told exactly what the procedure is likely to be on the day. So, you will have an active pre-op session where everything is laid out to you and a family member, normally, on what is expected of you as you arrive in hospital. Are there
1220 written guidelines? I cannot confirm, because that was not exactly the nature of the question, but I do know that the pre-op sessions actively manage the procedures.

Madam Speaker: The Hon. C Sacarello.

1225 **Hon. C Sacarello:** Thank you, Madam Speaker. Could the Hon. Minister point us in the direction of where we can find statistics on the number of patient-led cancellations per annum and what the subsequent cost to the GHA is?

1230 **Hon. G Arias-Vasquez:** Madam Speaker, it is not public information but I am happy to give you the statistics, for example, for July, August, September and October 2024. In July there were 64 cancellations; 28 were patient cancellations, 28 were clinical cancellations and four were cancelled for non-clinical reasons. In August there were 43 three cancellations; 10 were by patients, 22 were for clinical reasons and 11 were for non-clinical reasons. In September 2024
1235 there were 37 cancellations; 14 were patient cancellations, 18 were cancelled for clinical reasons

and five were cancelled for non-clinical reasons. In October there were 50 cancellations, 16 of which were patients, 29 clinical and 5 were non-clinical. Patient cancellations are directly attributable to the patient, non-clinical cancellations are cancellations which are due to emergency admissions, equipment not being available or lists overrunning, and clinical reasons are attributable directly to the patient – for example, the patient becomes acutely ill, has Covid-19 or the procedure is no longer necessary.

Hon. C Sacarello: Madam Speaker, I am extremely grateful for that information, which is actually quite informative. Also, I think it may be useful for a figure to be put on this for perhaps a public awareness campaign to be made available, so that people are aware of the impact these cancellations are having. Perhaps that could be part of a campaign to reduce the costs to the GHA.

Hon. G Arias-Vasquez: Madam Speaker, I am grateful for that intervention from the hon. Member, and indeed yes, it could be made publicly available. For example, the figures for ‘do not attend’ appointments are now made publicly available on the Facebook page of the GHA regularly, so this could be part of that procedure.

Madam Speaker: Next question.

Q920/2024
GP appointments –
Statistics re availability and attendance

Clerk: Question 920. The Hon. J Ladislaus.

Hon. J Ladislaus: Can the Hon. Minister provide statistics as to (1) the number of appointments available to book at the PCC daily; (2) how many appointments on average are booked at the PCC on a daily basis; (3) how many appointments have been cancelled in the past six months, broken down by month; and (4) how many appointments were no-shows in the past six months without having previously been cancelled?

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

Minister for Health, Care and Business (Hon. G Arias-Vasquez): Madam Speaker, the number of GP appointments that were available to book at the PCC, on average, on a daily basis, excluding weekends, for the last 12 months was 611.

The number of GP appointments booked, on average for the last 12 months, was 561.

The number of GP appointments which have been cancelled in the past six months are as follows: May, 1,047; June, 2,373; July, 2,360; August, 2,001; September, 2,507; October, 2,354; and, as at 21st November, 1,352.

There have been 2,577 GP appointments which have not been attended in the past six months.

Hon. J Ladislaus: I am grateful. It seems to be quite a high number, from the figures given. What is the GHA doing in order to mitigate this? I draw inspiration from what my hon. colleague said a few moments ago. Are there any campaigns, perhaps, in the pipeline to mitigate this, because it does seem to be quite a big problem in Gibraltar?

Hon. G Arias-Vasquez: Madam Speaker, yes, it is a problem. We look to monitor appointments that have not been attended on a monthly basis. At the moment, there is an information campaign providing the public with information as to how many appointments are not attended. We can

then look at the data as to who is not attending the appointments etc., and we are looking at different options as to how to mitigate the do not attend without being draconian. So, we are looking at how to try to mitigate the problem in numerous different ways.

1285 **Hon. J Ladislaus:** In terms of the no-shows and the statistics collected in respect of the last six months, could the Hon. Minister perhaps give some information as to the demographic that is most likely not to attend an appointment or be a no-show?

1290 **Hon. G Arias-Vasquez:** Madam Speaker, the demographic is across the board and therefore different reasons. One of the things that we can look at is ... For example, would the hon. Member agree to support us in sending everybody who does not attend an appointment a letter, in the first instance, informing them that we are aware that they have not attended an appointment and this means that there is an appointment that has been put to no use and has a cost to the GHA?

1295 **Hon. J Ladislaus:** Madam Speaker, we are not here to answer questions in respect of whether we are going to support that. We do not have the full picture. I have what I am given here in Parliament, and therefore I cannot openly support the sending of these letters, but of course we wholly support the concept that people should be attending their appointments, because it is costing the Health Service, clearly, quite a bit for these appointments to be cancelled, especially
1300 last minute or no-show.

Chief Minister (Hon. F R Picardo): Madam Speaker, if I may just say we are not asking them a question. What we are saying is this is a problem; they agree it is a problem. One of the things we could do ... And this is the opportunity that we are giving them. We could do it with the support
1305 of the whole Parliament. Something as uncontroversial as advising people – not charging people, advising people – that their failure to attend an appointment, which may have been for good reason, hence not the charge, has deprived someone else of that appointment and has cost the public purse, the taxpayer, that is to say they themselves, x amount. I am surprised that the hon. Lady has not jumped at the opportunity to simply say, ‘That sounds like a good idea – let’s talk about it later,’ rather than say, ‘We are not here to answer questions.’
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We are here to formulate laws together, to check the Government in this Question Time, and the Government is trying to be constructive in proposing something that hon. Members, I would have thought, would have wanted the whole community to know is something that we could do together. As it is, the hon. Lady, who knows I have a very high regard for her, has said that the
1315 only thing that she will agree to is that people need to attend their appointments. Well, I would have thought that is the least we should all agree on.

Hon. Dr K Azopardi: Madam Speaker, we are, of course, here to hold the Government to account, but also, when the circumstances arise, to work together in the interest of the
1320 community on a constructive basis. There is plenty that we could do if the Government were to holistically behave towards us in a constructive way. There are many things that we could probably do. This might be one of them. There are many I could list that we could do. To take it forward, we would need to understand the complete picture. So, if the Government agrees – and I am asking this question because I acknowledge and recognise I am on my feet at Question Time ...
1325 Does the Government agree that the Minister should sit down with her counterpart on the Opposition side to give us the complete picture? If so, it might be possible for us to reach a position which is an agreed position in the public interest, and there are others that we could do if they were really genuine about that attempt.

1330 **Hon. Chief Minister:** Madam Speaker, what we will do is adopt exactly the same attitude. In other words, if the Opposition are holistically going to work with us on a constructive basis, then of course we would be prepared to do that. But what does that mean? If there is a word that was

overused in the 16 years that hon. Members were in Government, it was the word ‘holistically’. Everything was to be done holistically. I was only here for eight years when they were in government and I was in opposition, and the word ‘holistically’ was used more in those eight years than it has ever been used in the 13 years that we have been in Government. I understand that it is a word that they find attractive because it has very little meaning and therefore they can deploy it when they like, but I am going to be even more generous than that. I am going to do the thing that might be recommended of a good Catholic. I am going to turn the other cheek (*Banging on desk*) because although I know that politics is a gladiatorial sport and *Gladiator II* is presently striking across every cinema screen in the country, I will consider this less of a bear pit and more the place where we should be working together.

Of course, the Government will agree that hon. Members should sit together and try to have the information so that we can do something across the floor of the House, which should, therefore, have even more impact when people receive it, but in terms of sharing the information that the hon. Gentleman talks about, it is on the GHA website. I know that they like to sometimes make more noise than actually deliver substance, but when they ask us for information that is already publicly available, we will once again turn the cursor to the other cheek and provide them with a copy of that which is already publicly available, and then, perhaps, after all of that sport, the people of Gibraltar might say this to their politicians [*Thumbs-up gesture*] rather than this [*Thumbs-down gesture*], when we are able to communicate to those who do not attend appointments *not* for a good reason – because some might not attend for a good reason – that they have put the public purse to a huge, unnecessary expense and have taken an appointment that somebody else might need. Let’s work together. It is what the people would expect of us.

Madam Speaker: Next question. (*Interjection by Hon. Dr K Azopardi*)

Q921-23/2024
St Bernard’s Hospital –
Water ingress

Clerk: Question 921. The Hon. J Ladislaus.

Hon. J Ladislaus: Madam Speaker, when were the flat roof gullies at St Bernard’s Hospital initially fitted, how often are they checked and serviced, and when were they last replaced?

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

Minister for Health, Care and Business (Hon. G Arias-Vasquez): Madam Speaker, I answer this question together with Questions 922 and 923.

Clerk: Question 922. The Hon. J Ladislaus.

Hon. J Ladislaus: Have there been any water ingress issues at St Bernard’s Hospital from 18th September to date? If so, please provide specifics as to where in the building and the exact nature of the issue or issues.

Clerk: Question 923. The Hon. J Ladislaus.

Hon. J Ladislaus: Please provide specifics as to the cost of the damage done by, and any repairs undertaken because of, water ingress at St Bernard’s Hospital in the past 14 months.

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

Hon. G Arias-Vasquez: Madam Speaker, in answer to Question 921, the flat roof gullies at St Bernard's Hospital are the original ones and have been in place since the building was built. The gullies within the flat roof are checked weekly and serviced once a month, except for the summer months, when the need for checks is relaxed due to the better weather. Within the last year we have replaced 16 gullies as we laid tarmac by the podium for the ambulance bay and replaced one gully on the roof.

In answer to Question 922 and 923, since 18th September 2024 to date, St Bernard's Hospital has suffered water ingress in various areas. In theatres 2 and 3 this is due to inadequate falls on the flat roof and the original drainage points of the gullies; this has allowed ponding to occur in certain key areas, which has resulted in water ingress. In the basement, in the post-mortem area, the lack of drainage points at the podium level have allowed for the accumulation of water, resulting in water ingress. In the basement, in the new stores for the CCU and Cath Lab, and A&E, the lack of drainage points at podium level have allowed for the accumulation of water, resulting in water ingress. On various windows within the building, faulty window seals have allowed water ingress, especially when it is wind-driven rain. On the executive floor of block 1, on the seventh floor, the male and female toilets extractor fan protection covers have been exposed to the elements and are rotten, allowing for water ingress.

In answer to Question 923, the costs of damage and repairs at St Bernard's Hospital as a result of water ingress over the past 14 months is £28,733.

Hon. J Ladislaus: Madam Speaker, I will start at Question 921. Perhaps the Hon. the Minister could just clarify when the building was initially built – and I am sorry, perhaps that answer is out there, but I have not come across it.

Hon. G Arias-Vasquez: Madam Speaker, I am unaware of when the building was initially built. I am aware that it was during the reclamation but not the exact date. Apologies.

Hon. J Ladislaus: Madam Speaker, we have heard, quite helpfully, that 16 gullies have been replaced. How many gullies does the Hospital actually have? I am curious because I do know that they have a lifespan and therefore I ask the question because if 16 have been replaced, there may well be a lot more that will need replacing imminently.

Hon. G Arias-Vasquez: Madam Speaker, I am unaware of the number of gullies the Hospital has, but the 16 have been replaced within the last year. I believe that the gullies are replaced as and when they are required, rather than 16 have been replaced in the lifespan of the building.

Hon. J Ladislaus: My limited understanding is that there are other effective ways to drain water from flat roofs and gullies, and they include things like installing inner drains, scuppers, gutters, siphonic roof drains. My understanding is that the fact that the roof gully is flat is not the issue in and of itself, and that issues arise when there are no mitigating solutions put in place. Therefore, I ask: have any other solutions been explored?

Hon. G Arias-Vasquez: Madam Speaker, I am unaware of whether other solutions have been explored or otherwise. If that question is put to me specifically, I can answer the question.

Madam Speaker: The Hon. C Sacarello. Which question is the supplementary on?

Hon. C Sacarello: Thank you, Madam Speaker. My supplementary relates to Question 923, the damage and the repairs undertaken because of water ingress. I believe the Hon. Minister has mentioned that there was water ingress to the basement, and I believe – I stand to be corrected

1430 if wrong – that she mentioned the stores. Could the Hon. Minister please provide any information as to whether any equipment was damaged as a result of the flood?

Hon. G Arias-Vasquez: Madam Speaker, the new stores in the basement are in relation to the CCU Cath Lab project in A&E. It is a new store which is currently empty, so there was no damage to any equipment or materials.

1435 **Madam Speaker:** Next question.

Q924-25/2024
St Bernard's Hospital basement –
Measures to mitigate flooding; storage

Clerk: Question 924. The Hon. J Ladislaus.

1440 **Hon. J Ladislaus:** Madam Speaker, what does the basement at St Bernard's Hospital have in place to mitigate flooding?

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

1445 **Minister for Health, Care and Business (Hon. G Arias-Vasquez):** Madam Speaker, I will answer this together with Question 925.

Clerk: Question 925. The Hon. J Ladislaus.

1450 **Hon. J Ladislaus:** Does the basement at St Bernard's Hospital house stock? If so, please provide specifics as to what is stored and what security is in place to limit access to the basement.

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

1455 **Hon. G Arias-Vasquez:** Madam Speaker, in answer to Question 924, we have a channel drain system in the basement of St Bernard's Hospital. Flooding is mitigated as the drain system flows into a collection manhole. The water accumulated in this manhole is then pumped into the sea. The basement does not, therefore, suffer from flooding. Recently, there have been two issues that have resulted in water accumulation in the basement of St Bernard's. The first issue related to back siphonage of the system as a result of heavy rain, high tide and swell. The second was due to
1460 a blocked drainpipe, which has now been rectified.

In answer to Question 925, the basement accommodates several different storerooms which hold hospital stock for General Stores, Pathology, Pharmacy, Dialysis, Linen, and Domestic. Most of these separate storerooms have restricted access and are only accessible to authorised stores and/or respective departmental staff. They are under lock and key or swipe card access only.
1465 There are open areas assigned for the delivery of stock and/or stock that is deemed in transition. Open areas have been fitted with industrial-grade racking systems to safeguard stock and maximise space. Some areas are fenced off and monitored via CCTV by Hospital Security. A specific area of the basement also accommodates separate colour-coded designated silos for the temporary storage of decommissioned equipment and recyclable materials, which is cleared
1470 routinely. Access to the basement via the stairwells in the Hospital is restricted to authorised staff via swipe cards with a self-closing door mechanism in place. The main entrance access ramp is controlled by an on-duty security guard during daylight hours with access to authorised staff. Access via the ramp is closed – large roller-shutter doors are dropped – during silent hours, but

the area is nonetheless closely monitored via CCTV by the duty Hospital Security Team, who also conduct routine foot patrols of the area.

Madam Speaker: Next question.

Q926/2024

**GHA communication protocols –
Whether standard guidelines provided to staff**

Clerk: Question 926. The Hon. J Ladislaus.

Hon. J Ladislaus: Madam Speaker, does the GHA have standardised communication protocols in place and written guidelines provided to staff? If so, can a copy of those guidelines be provided?

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

Minister for Health, Care and Business (Hon. G Arias-Vasquez): Madam Speaker, the GHA does not have standardised communication protocols other than guidance in the use of social media sites. The guidance for GHA employees using social media sites is signed by them upon commencement of employment. A revised social media policy is currently being drafted, and this will be presented to the GHA executive and Unions before implementation and ratification.

Hon. J Ladislaus: Madam Speaker, perhaps the wording of the question has not got at what I meant by communication. What I mean is communication between departments and communication into and out of the Hospital, for example with patients. The issue that seems to come back to us constantly is reports of people not being communicated with. Service users are not receiving information from the Hospital in respect of various issues. For example, we already touched upon test results, so test results is one; pre-op is another. There are issues with appointments not being effectively communicated, which may actually also impact the number of people missing their appointments. Issues with phone lines are still being picked up by a lot of members of the public because the phone lines are not answered a lot of the time. That is the information that is coming to us.

I note, Madam Speaker, that NHS England has an accessible information and communication policies document. Does the GHA have something akin to that, or will it be implementing something like that in future?

Hon. G Arias-Vasquez: Madam Speaker, if I can pick apart some of those elements, the figures that were provided for the 'do not attend' in hospital were provided in respect of PCC appointments. Those PCC appointments are either made by the individuals on the day or are made by the individuals online, so in terms of cancellation of the appointments, there is no way that the individual cannot know about those appointments, because they are largely made by the individuals themselves either online or on the day via the telephone. The issue of 'do not attends' is not really relevant to communication issues, for example, in relation to the individuals not knowing about the appointments. Where the individuals might suffer from lack of awareness is in respect of a consultation with a consultant. However, there is now a programme called Hero Health, which text messages patients to notify them of appointments that are made with consultants, so individuals should be receiving ... When the appointment is made, they receive a blue slip which gives them the information on when the appointment is due. You then get a text message reminding you of the appointment and when it is due to take place. There will be communication issues. I am not aware of any guidelines in relation to communication to patients

1520 of issues, but that is not what I thought the question was getting at, so apologies for answering the question in that manner. I am not aware of any communication policies such as the NHS has in place in the UK.

1525 **Hon. J Ladislaus:** Would the Hon. Minister perhaps commit to looking further into those policies, because it really is coming across as quite a significant issue? We also have issues with notes getting lost and test results getting lost. I have had various reports of this within the past few months. I would urge the Hon. the Minister perhaps to commit to looking into something, a document perhaps, a protocol, that can be followed by staff.

1530 **Hon. G Arias-Vasquez:** Madam Speaker, I am happy to take that back to the GHA executive board, but as I already commented earlier, we are actively looking, albeit in the early stages, at the possibility of introducing an app which communicates all that information to patients.

Madam Speaker: Next question.

Q927/2024

Communication between GHA departments – How information is shared

1535 **Clerk:** Question 927. The Hon. J Ladislaus.

Hon. J Ladislaus: Does the GHA have any individuals assigned a specific communication liaisons between departments? If not, how is information shared between GHA departments and medical professionals?

1540 **Clerk:** Answer the Hon. the Minister for Health, Care and Business.

1545 **Minister for Health, Care and Business (Hon. G Arias-Vasquez):** Madam Speaker, the GHA has many means of communication with and between departments. This communication could be formal and informal meetings, emails, letters, blogs and use of social media. The exact method of communication used between departments in the GHA will depend upon the issues involved. For example, staff personnel issues will be dealt with differently to clinical correspondence and communication.

1550 **Hon. J Ladislaus:** Madam Speaker, I have touched upon the concept of perhaps a centralised system in the past, and I appreciate that there are data protection issues. Nevertheless, would the Minister commit to looking into a centralised system, even if, for example, passwords are needed to access certain areas of that system, and there are varying levels of access in order to accord with data protection legislation? These things are present in other health systems. There are platforms within which doctors, medical professionals or anybody present within the health system, admin staff, can access this information quickly and at the touch of a button, so to speak. We are small enough and we can, I would suggest, uphold standards of excellence in these basics, so would the Hon. the Minister commit to looking into such a platform?

1560 **Hon. G Arias-Vasquez:** Madam Speaker, fortunately I do not have to commit to it: the platform exists. HISS is the system that consultants use to communicate and there is an email system that GPs use to communicate. The HISS system is an information system that consultants use to put in information about patient care etc., which is accessed by all the professionals relating to a certain case. The HISS system is audited, so that each and every time someone accesses your information

we know who has accessed the information, to mitigate any data protection concerns. So, I am very happy to confirm that such a system exists.

Hon. J Ladislaus: Madam Speaker, I am grateful for that clarification. Nevertheless, even within that system we have had information of issues occurring. For example, I have attended an appointment where the visiting consultant was unable to access records online, was unable to provide a prescription because they were unable to access those areas within the system. I do not know how the system is set up, but he was unable to access it, so there had to be a period of waiting for somebody else to come along within their own busy practice to actually fill out a prescription – something as simple as that – and it was impacting the amount of time the consultant was taking to see patients. So, I would suggest that there are issues even within that system. Would the Hon. the Minister therefore commit to perhaps going back to this, because again, as I said, communication appears to be the big one with a lot of the issues that are being brought to us?

Hon. G Arias-Vasquez: Madam Speaker, I am aware that we have had this communication in Parliament prior to this. There are issues when a visiting consultant comes to Gibraltar, in terms of them being able to sign into the HISS system, and I am aware that Clinical Informatics, who are the people charged with maintaining these systems, are aware of these issues and are on top of them. I fully agree with the hon. Member opposite that we should not be wasting visiting consultants' time trying to sign into the system, and therefore I will look into Clinical Informatics, but I am sure that since the last time we had this exchange in Parliament, the Clinical Informatics team have been on top of this.

Madam Speaker: Next question.

Q928/2024

GHA communication audit – Whether conducted in last 12 months

Clerk: Question 928. The Hon. J Ladislaus.

Hon. J Ladislaus: Has a communication audit of the GHA been carried out in the past 12 months? If so, what were the key findings; and if not, why not, and are there any plans to commission such an audit?

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

Minister for Health, Care and Business (Hon. G Arias-Vasquez): Madam Speaker, I do apologise, but we have researched 'communication audit' and we are unclear exactly what the hon. Member means by the communication audit.

Hon. J Ladislaus: Madam Speaker, obviously I am not an expert in the area, but some research did show that it basically would take the same format as any other audit, to look at the systems that are in place within an organisation in terms of communication, in this case the GHA. Obviously there would be professionals out there who could carry out that task and then produce a report on the key findings, just as would be done in any other area, as the basis behind that.

Hon. G Arias-Vasquez: Madam Speaker, the answer is no, a communication audit has not been carried out in the GHA.

1610 **Hon. J Ladislaus:** Again, given what I have just said in supplementaries on the previous questions, I ask the same question: would the Hon. the Minister commit to looking further into such a potential audit?

1615 **Hon. G Arias-Vasquez:** Madam Speaker, it is a matter for the GHA Board to consider, and I am happy to put it to them.

Madam Speaker: Next question.

Q929-31/2024

**Legal claims and settlements since 2011 –
Pre-action letters received; negligence claims; moneys paid out**

Clerk: Question 929. The Hon. J Ladislaus.

1620 **Hon. J Ladislaus:** How many pre-action letters were received annually by the GHA and/or its legal representatives on the GHA's behalf since 2011, broken down by year?

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

1625 **Minister for Health, Care and Business (Hon. G Arias-Vasquez):** Madam Speaker, I will answer this question together with Questions 930 and 931.

Clerk: Question 930. The Hon. J Ladislaus.

1630 **Hon. J Ladislaus:** How many negligence claims have been issued against the GHA annually since 2011, broken down by year? Of those claims, how many (i) concluded in an out-of-court settlement; (ii) concluded following a trial; (iii) were discontinued by the claimant or claimants; (iv) were struck out by the court?

1635 **Clerk:** Question 931. The Hon. J Ladislaus.

1640 **Hon. J Ladislaus:** How much has the Government of Gibraltar paid out since 2011, broken down by year, in respect of (i) out-of-court settlements following pre-action letters to the GHA and/or its legal representatives in respect of the GHA, claiming negligence; (ii) out-of-court settlements following discontinued legal proceedings against the GHA in respect of negligence claims; and (iii) court orders arising from negligence claims against the GHA?

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

1645 **Hon. G Arias-Vasquez:** Madam Speaker, I now hand over a schedule with the information requested from 2015 to date.

Answer to Question 929/2024

Year	No. of Pre-Action Letters
2015	10
2016	5
2017	12
2018	19
2019	33
2020	37
2021	39
2022	48
2023	33
2024	37

Answer to Question 930/2024

Year	i	ii	iii	iv
2015	2	-	-	-
2016	4	-	-	-
2017	6	-	1	-
2018	8	-	1	-
2019	8	-	-	1
2020	10	-	1	-
2021	3	-	1	-
2022	4	1	1	-
2023	2	-	1	1
2024	-	-	-	-

Answer to Question 931/2024

Year	i	ii	iii
2015	-	-	-
2016	-	£44,196.00	£29,723.34
2017	£50,000.00	£148,451.91	£92,238.66
2018	£72,329.07	£37,632.08	£149,865.79
2019	£52,093.86	£83,581.39	£281,493.57
2020	£99,944.42	£215,510.00	£166,431.81
2021	£39,090.14	£204,261.25	£128,083.00
2022	£64,454.50	£145,913.75	£135,147.00
2023	£73,663.28	£45,098.00	£1,822,599.50
2024	£55,851.00	£73,137.00	£36,513.50

Madam Speaker: I will give the hon. Member time to consider that, and we will move on to the next question.

Q932/2024

Ambulance fleet –

**Neonatal transport incubators; issues with frontline ambulances;
tender for fleet management services**

Clerk: Question 932. The Hon. J Ladislaus.

1650 **Hon. J Ladislaus:** Are any of the vehicles that make up the GHA's ambulance fleet fitted with neonatal transport incubators?

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

1655 **Minister for Health, Care and Business (Hon. G Arias-Vasquez):** Madam Speaker, I will answer this question together with Questions 933 and 934.

Clerk: Question 933. The Hon. J Ladislaus.

1660 **Hon. J Ladislaus:** In the past two months, have there been any issues with the frontline ambulances, Alpha 3 and Alpha 4 and the High Dependency Unit ambulance? If so, what was the nature of those issues, have they now been addressed, how long did they take to be addressed and at what cost?

1665 **Clerk:** Question 934. The Hon. J Ladislaus.

Hon. J Ladislaus: Has the tender for fleet management services, including the maintenance, repair and replacement of the GHA's ambulance fleet 2024-34 been awarded? If so, please provide specifics as to the successful tenderer, when the tender application was submitted and when the contract is due to commence.

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

1675 **Hon. G Arias-Vasquez:** Madam Speaker, in answer to Question 932, neonatal transport incubators are a separate medical device prepared by trained clinicians to transport neonates with critical conditions to a specialised hospital by ambulance. Alpha 3, Alpha 4, Alpha 5 and the High Dependency Unit ambulances in the GHA fleet are all equipped and capable of transporting a neonatal incubator. However, the High Dependency Unit ambulance is the ambulance of choice for these critical transfers due to the additional space and specifications designed to meet rigorous challenges of enhanced manoeuvrability to allow clinicians to provide the highest standard of clinical care for neonates in a practical, safe and effective working environment.

In answer to Question 934, the tender for fleet management services, including the maintenance, repair and replacement of the Gibraltar Health Authority's ambulance fleet 2024-34 has not been awarded to date.

1685 Regarding any issues with the frontline ambulances Alpha 3, Alpha 4 and the High Dependency Unit ambulance over the past two months, there has been one issue worth noting. Alpha 4 experienced an oxygen leak due to a faulty oxygen outlet. As this component was still under warranty from the coachbuilder, we had to await the visit of a technician from the company. Upon arrival in Gibraltar, the technician replaced the faulty outlet and conducted a comprehensive quality assurance check on all oxygen outlets in Alpha 3, Alpha 4 and the HDU ambulance. The results of the technician's tests confirmed that all outlets were sound, except for the one faulty outlet in Alpha 4, which was promptly replaced. Importantly, since Alpha 4 has two oxygen outlets, it remained fully operational during this time. This issue has now been fully resolved. The replacement was covered under warranty, so there was no cost incurred for the repair. The matter took approximately three weeks from identification to resolution, primarily due to the scheduling of the technician's visit.

1695 **Hon. J Ladislaus:** May I, just on Question 932? So, Alpha 3, 4 and 5 and the HDUs are capable of carrying the transports incubators. Nevertheless, in the past few months I have had reports that an ambulance from St John Ambulance has had to be used because these ambulances were not fitted with the correct equipment to carry a baby to a hospital in Spain. For what reason, therefore,

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were these ambulances not able to be used in these scenarios? If they are fitted to carry the incubators, do they actually have the incubators available to be used?

1705 **Hon. G Arias-Vasquez:** Madam Speaker, as far as I am aware, as from September onwards the ambulances have been available and have the equipment available for them to be able to do the transfer. As the hon. Member opposite is aware, I have used these ambulances in the past. It is a unit which is rolled on to the ambulance. As far as all the information I have available to me, the equipment is available in the GHA.

1710 **Hon. J Ladislaus:** In respect of Question 934, the tender has not been awarded to date. Have there been any applications, though, for the tender, if it has not been awarded to date? I understand that the process closed in September. What is being done in the meantime, in terms of maintenance for the ambulance fleet?

1715 **Hon. G Arias-Vasquez:** Madam Speaker, the closing date of the tender was 23rd September 2024. There was one tender submitted, on 20th September 2024. As there was one sole bidder, the tender process shifted from an open procedure to a negotiated procedure without prior publication, in accordance with Regulation 32A of the Procurement (Public Sector Contracts) Regulations. Under this regulation, the GHA has entered into discussions regarding the quoted costs.

1720 **Hon. J Ladislaus:** I am grateful. I am glad to hear that there was at least one tender application. Nevertheless, I am just heading back to when I asked ... I did ask this question in the September session and the process had closed just days, I believe, prior to the session commencing. If this application came in on the 20th, the Hon. the Minister would have known that an application had been submitted, but when I asked the question at the last one, the answer I got – which is why I have renewed the question in a different manner – was that there had been no tender applications in respect of the ambulance maintenance tender at that point in time. Now I am told that this application was submitted on the 20th. Is there a specific reason for that?

1730 **Hon. G Arias-Vasquez:** Madam Speaker, I am not withholding information. The information that I have available today tells me that the tender was submitted on 20th September. If the questions were prepared for me a couple of days earlier, it might simply have been that the information was not available, that the tender had not been submitted when the answers were prepared. I am not in the habit of withholding information from Parliament.

1740 **Hon. J Ladislaus:** No, I am not suggesting that the Minister is, and I take the answer from the Minister. The Hon. the Minister knows that we have quite a good relationship and that we work quite well. Nevertheless, I ask because I do need clarification as to the reason why I was told that there had been no tender applications at that point in time, when in fact there had been at least one. In any event, we find out now that that it has not been awarded, but I must put the question because it is what the record will reflect once *Hansard* is drawn up.

1745 **Madam Speaker:** Is there a question at the end of that?

Hon. J Ladislaus: No, I simply sought clarification. I wanted to clarify that I was not accusing them of withholding information.

1750 **Madam Speaker:** Next question.

Q925/2024

**GHA appointments for teaching and LSA staff –
Availability outside classroom hours**

Clerk: Question 935. The Hon. E J Reyes.

Hon. E J Reyes: Madam Speaker, are teaching and LSA staff are being catered for by the Gibraltar Health Authority in order to book and attend medical appointments outside normal school hours, so as to comply with headteachers' guidelines to staff?

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

Minister for Health, Care and Business (Hon. G Arias-Vasquez): Madam Speaker, the data does not provide preferential scheduling for any specific professions when booking medical appointments. This policy ensures equitable access to healthcare services for all individuals, regardless of their occupation. To accommodate various schedules, the GHA offers appointments throughout the day, including lunchtime, late afternoons and evening hours, facilitating attendance for those with standard working hours. However, it is the responsibility of each individual to arrange appointments that align with their personal and professional commitments.

Hon. E J Reyes: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I can understand the Minister explaining that equal treatment is given all round, but perhaps at some stage she can have a conversation with our mutual hon. Friend the Minister for Education, because the headteachers in schools are trying their best – let's put it that way – to get teaching staff and LSA staff directly involved with pupils, and they pull a bit of a face saying, 'Why do you have to attend a medical appointment at two o'clock?' and the teaching staff are saying, 'When I contact the GHA and request an appointment post 3.30,' which is when normal class time has finished, 'there is no positive co-operation coming back.' So, the guidelines being issued by one Minister do not seem to meet that touch of co-operation extra from the Health Authority side. It is something that I put to the two Ministers. Would they be willing to at least work together and discuss if some more amicable solution could come forward for the benefit of the teaching and LSA staff who are being asked to get appointments outside teaching hours for the ultimate benefit of students?

Hon. G Arias-Vasquez: Madam Speaker, this has not been raised as an issue by the relevant teachers' union, the GGCA. However, I can confirm that there are 68 appointments available after 3.30 on any given day. The appointments at the Health Centre open at eight o'clock and there are numerous appointments available after 3.30. Therefore, the staff are catered for.

Madam Speaker: Next question.

Q936/2024

**Cross-border unregistered trade –
Plans to tackle problem**

Clerk: Question 936. The Hon. C Sacarello.

Hon. C Sacarello: According to local businesses, the impact of cross-border unregistered trade has significantly worsened. When will the Government uphold its manifesto commitment and tackle this illegal trade, as would be the case in the reverse scenario?

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

1795 **Minister for Health, Care and Business (Hon. G Arias-Vasquez):** Madam Speaker, the Government does not agree with the hon. Gentleman's analysis. We are, nonetheless, already working on detailed options to be the first Government in our history to tackle this issue.

1800 **Hon. C Sacarello:** Madam Speaker, I thank the hon. Lady for her answer. I will not go into the details, although I just highlight the fact that it was brought up at a GFSB event, I think only last week, by a number of businesses, one on the panel, so perhaps the Hon. Minister could speak to those associations. Would the Hon. Minister be able to elaborate on what their plans are and when they will implement them?

1805 **Hon. G Arias-Vasquez:** Madam Speaker, I am very pleased to be able to confirm that I had a meeting with one such group yesterday and they aired all their concerns and are very happy with the plans that we are putting in place.

HMGoG intends to tackle the illegal trade as from next year. Up until January 2025, we have embarked on an awareness campaign with these businesses in order to educate. For any business that is not registered, which is largely businesses coming in from across the border, we have embarked on a campaign in order to educate them on the requirement to be registered and licensed in Gibraltar. The awareness campaign has included the display of a bilingual video on the LED screen on the Spanish side of the border, and the video will have been played in excess of 25,000 times when the campaign closes this month. The video has also been promoted on social media channels, targeting an up to 20 km radius beyond Gibraltar. The video has received 20,000 social media users with over 70,000 impressions. The majority of this engagement is outside Gibraltar, which is where we are targeting. The social media channels are Facebook and Instagram and the video has been produced in house. We have also published a two-page infographic in Spanish, providing basic information on the registering and licensing requirements for foreign businesses operating in Gibraltar. The infographic has been produced in house and has been designed and implemented in close consultation with the GFSB and the Chamber of Commerce, both of which were welcoming and supportive of this initiative. The Chamber of Commerce has, in turn, shared the infographic with all of its sister organisations across the border, in order that these associations make their members aware. The initiatives are designed to raise awareness amongst businesses prior to any enforcement campaign being launched against unregularised businesses operating in Gibraltar. The enforcement campaign will see collaboration between various government departments, agencies and authorities, including HM Customs, the Department of Employment and the Office of Fair Trading. There is also an element of education for consumers, who have to be made aware that whilst they can receive a delivery of goods from a foreign business to Gibraltar, they are unable to receive services from a non-Gibraltar business that is not properly registered in Gibraltar. These services extend to installation of a kitchen or bathroom, for example, or the assembly of furniture.

1830 We have met with affected traders and explained the above strategy. These businesses have also been invited to provide evidence to us on the businesses that appear to them to be unlicensed and/or unregistered and are operating in Gibraltar. These businesses are being contacted and informed of the legal requirement to be licensed and registered. It is expected that come January 2025, this will move on to a more visible and active enforcement process. It has been explained to the business community that they know their sectors best and they are therefore best placed to identify whether there is there is a competitor business that may be unlicensed or unregistered. This will mean that any activity from HMGoG is targeted against potential offenders and also the sectors that are most impacted by the unregularised trade.

1840 **Hon. C Sacarello:** Madam Speaker, I would like to thank the Hon. Minister for that lengthy explanation and I welcome the fact that it is being tackled and commend them for doing so. This

is a big problem for businesses and it is a big problem for Gibraltar plc, as we end up with fewer jobs out there.

Could the Hon. Minister please elucidate a little bit on the enforcement side of things? I know she mentioned that HM Customs will be part of the plan, but they do have the legal ability at the moment to implement, but are not, and labour inspectors are found wanting when it comes to this as well. Does the Government have a target and does it have a number of staff that they will apply to this – in other words, give the campaign more teeth and produce a better outcome?

Hon. G Arias-Vasquez: Madam Speaker, I am pleased to state that HM Customs were present at the meeting that we had yesterday in my office with affected members, and they will be part of the solution.

As the hon. Member is aware, we were part of a union which allowed the freedom of movement of services. We are no longer part of that, so there has been a sustained educational process by which we are informing traders of the need for them to register in Gibraltar. We believe that we have the staff available in order to implement these procedures, and we believe that it is easy to identify people who are not registered in Gibraltar simply by other traders telling us where the problems are. So, we do believe that we have the resources available in order to enforce the campaign.

Madam Speaker: Next question.

Q937/2024
AquaGib –
Industrial action

Clerk: Question 937. The Hon. C Sacarello.

Hon. C Sacarello: What was the recent industrial action at AquaGib over, and has the dispute been resolved?

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

Minister for Health, Care and Business (Hon. G Arias-Vasquez): Madam Speaker, this is a question which should be directed at AquaGib Ltd.

Hon. C Sacarello: Madam Speaker, we are told on repeated occasions that as Members of the Opposition we are not allowed to contact AquaGib and that we should be directing our questions in Parliament. Is the Minister saying that I can contact AquaGib?

Chief Minister (Hon. F R Picardo): Madam Speaker, I do not think the hon. Gentleman can point to any occasion when he has ever been told by the Government that he cannot contact AquaGib. I would ask him to consider whether he can point to that occasion, because certainly it is not our view that he cannot contact AquaGib. He may not be able to contact ... not that he is not able to contact, he is not going to get a response from civil servants or from the GEA, which are part of the government structure we own. I do not know whether the hon. Gentleman cares to remember that we own one third of the shares of AquaGib. We do not yet own all of the shares in AquaGib. The Government has said it will announce when we own all of those shares. So, at the moment, there is nothing preventing him from contacting AquaGib. That they may or may not give him information – well, Madam Speaker, he might write to [insert the name of a well-known local company trading in the high street] and they may or may not reply to him, because

commercial entities do not have to reply to Members of the Opposition, they do not even have to engage with them, but we have not told him he cannot contact them.

Hon. C Sacarello: Madam Speaker, upon being elected into Parliament, I wrote, as part of the protocol, to the Hon. Minister responsible for AquaGib and asked permission to visit and understand how AquaGib works for the benefit of Gibraltar in terms of my questions for the future. I was told indirectly, at the opening of Parliament, by the Chief Minister that these letters should not have been written and that the place for asking these questions was here in Parliament. This seems to be another U-turn by this Government, which we are becoming accustomed to. If that is the case, are we allowed, then, to write to different entities that are within their responsibilities, to ask if we can visit?

Hon. Chief Minister: Madam Speaker, I think that the hon. Gentleman is getting used to seeing U-turns where there are none. There is just a deep lack of understanding, on his part, of what he is told. If the hon. Gentleman looks back at what I said at the opening of Parliament, I did not mention AquaGib. It is not up to me to allow him to do anything. We live in a democratic system where the hon. Gentleman is allowed to do what he likes. We similarly are allowed to respond in the way that we consider is appropriate and in keeping with the rules of how a modern democracy like Gibraltar, vibrant as it is, does scrutiny and accountability. The very use of the word 'allow' diagnoses the hon. Member's failure to understand what he is able to do and what will or will not elicit a positive response. To be clear, I restate what I said in the context of our opening. Hon. Members should feel free to interact with the Government through the Minister they shadow. That is the way it has always been done. It is the way that they used to do it when they were in Government, and we continued that process, which has been ongoing since democracy was born in Gibraltar.

Where there are companies which are not wholly owned government companies – and I restate for the record that AquaGib is presently two-thirds owned by a third party and one-third owned by the people of Gibraltar through its Government – the hon. Gentleman is entitled, as I have said before, in the context of my first answer, to write to that entity, phone that entity, engage with that entity. That entity is able to – let me use the hon. Gentleman's word, he might find it easier to understand, 'allowed' – to write to him in response or not write to him in response in whatever manner they consider is appropriate, and they are not required to answer him in any particular way.

I hope that that enables the hon. Gentleman to reconsider the allegation that he has made, once again erroneously, that the Government has in any way U-turned in any respect in relation to this matter or indeed any other.

Madam Speaker: The Hon. C Sacarello.

Hon. C Sacarello: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I would just like to come back on –

Madam Speaker: Just a minute. Did the Hon. the Leader of the Opposition ...? All right. The Hon. the Leader of the Opposition.

Hon. Dr K Azopardi: Madam Speaker, on 16th October 2023, the Chief Minister designated ministerial responsibilities for his Ministers. He designated the responsibility of being the Chair of AquaGib as a ministerial responsibility for the hon. Lady. As he said in his principal reply just now, the Government owns 33% of AquaGib. The question asks was the recent industrial action at AquaGib over and has the dispute been resolved. My hon. colleague has been directed to AquaGib, but given that the Minister, the hon. Lady, is the Chair of AquaGib, has been designated that ministerial responsibility and the Government owns 33% of AquaGib, does the Government

1940 not know what the industrial action at AquaGib was over and whether the dispute has been resolved?

Hon. Chief Minister: Madam Speaker, I designated the hon. Lady the Chairman of AquaGib in respect of the obligations that the joint venture partner and the Government agreed to in the context of the joint venture agreement which enables the Government to hold the chair of AquaGib in respect of matters relating to its board, despite the fact that the Government is the minority shareholder.

1945 I refer the hon. Gentleman to successive Speakers' rulings in respect of the obligations of Government Ministers in respect of government companies, even those that are wholly owned. He will find, therefore, the answer to his question and the Government's obligations in respect thereof in successive Speakers' rulings. Madam Speaker, we can go further into this if he wishes, but he might want to refresh his memory on what those Speakers' rulings provide for. We wish the Hon. Minister for Culture all the very best with his coughing fit and thank him for leaving the Chamber so that we can continue the debate. I think the Hon. the Leader of the Opposition will find that it is clear that the Government does not answer questions in respect of government-owned companies, in particular those that relate to industrial relations issues, because the whole point of these companies is that they have an independent management and it is not the Government managing those day-to-day issues. The hon. Gentleman knows I have given similar answers – I do not know whether to him or one of his, if I may say so, with respect, many predecessors in the role of Leader of the Opposition whilst I have been Chief Minister – in respect of, for example, GJBS, which is a wholly owned government company.

Hon. Dr K Azopardi: I am not asking the Government to answer for AquaGib. What I am asking the Government is, given that the Minister has been assigned the ministerial responsibility to chair AquaGib, and given that the Government is a 33% shareholder of AquaGib, is the Government not aware what the industrial action was about and whether it is over? I am asking the Government whether it is aware of it.

Hon. Chief Minister: Madam Speaker, if the question is whether the Government is aware of it, that question is a yes or no answer question, and given that a press statement has been issued on the subject, I would have thought that it is fair to say that the Government is as aware of it as Hon. Members opposite should be.

Hon. Dr K Azopardi: So, if the Government is aware of it ... The question asks what it was over, what were the details of the industrial action and has the dispute been resolved, so is the Government in a position to give the House that information?

Hon. Chief Minister: Madam Speaker, the Government is in a position to refer the House to the statement issued by AquaGib, which is what the Government would refer any individual to in the context of this request, because the Government is not going to be drawn on matters relating to the management of AquaGib. I am reminded that with an interesting synergy, the press release in question was issued on 23rd October 2024, exactly 365 days after I had designated the hon. Lady the chairman of the company, which the hon. Gentleman reminded us of.

1985 **Hon. Dr K Azopardi:** I regret to say it was not 365 days, because I think the designation was on 16th October, but anyway, the question is ... The Hon. Chief Minister can direct us to the AquaGib press release, but we are asking the Government whether they know more than the AquaGib press release has stated. That is what we are asking, in essence. I thought it was clear from the original question put by my hon. colleague. Is the Chief Minister or the hon. Lady in a position to illuminate the House as to the industrial action qua Government, because it has come into that information, because it is a shareholder?

Hon. Chief Minister: Madam Speaker, the Government is in possession of further information, but the Government is not required to say more here because the Government has to respect the rulings of previous Speakers and has to permit the management of AquaGib to manage, and we can be drawn into these matters in this House, which we will not be. That is why, on 25th March 1980, Speaker Vasquez ruled that ... and this was in respect of, I think, a GSLP Member, of an AACR Minister:

the Government ...

although it may surprise new Members, which the Hon. Leader of the Opposition is not –

is not answerable for the activities of a private limited company in which they are shareholders.

Then Speaker Canepa, on 30th January 2019, confirmed further and said this:

Ministerial responsibility is central to the parliamentary system, because it ensures the accountability of the Government to the Legislature and thus, ultimately, to the people. However true this may be as a general proposition, the accountability of companies with separate legal personality, boards of directors, accounts, etc., is a distinct matter, except of course to the extent that a minister may himself be a director of one of those companies or is responsible for its day-to-day operations. Even here, however, it is not clear that it is for the Speaker to compel disclosure of full financial information.

The Minister is not responsible for the day-to-day operations of AquaGib. She is the chairman of the board, Madam Speaker.

Hon. Dr K Azopardi: That is understood, and I do understand the distinction between accountability in that sense and what I am asking, because what I am asking is simply: is the Government in possession of information? I think the Hon. Chief Minister has answered that question in the affirmative but then said that he does not wish to go further in this House. I think that is what he has saying, is he not?

Hon. Chief Minister: Madam Speaker, what I am saying is that the Government is in possession of further information, and indeed so are the Opposition and every member of the public, because to the question of what it was about, the answer is in the press release October 2024, because we are told as a community by the company that it was about terms and conditions of employment.

Do we know more about which issues in the terms and conditions of employment were in play etc? Of course we do, from the board of directors of the company. If we enter into a public debate about that with the hon. Member opposite, what we are doing is taking away the day-to-day management of those issues and bringing them here to make them one of the public affairs of Gibraltar. We do not believe that it is in the interests of the community, and neither did they when they were in government because they did not debate the whys and wherefores of industrial action in government companies when they were in government, and indeed when the Hon. the Leader of the Opposition was a Minister.

Madam Speaker, we are not going to change the rules of accountability in this House in respect of boards of directors of which the Government are members, to upset an apple cart that comes from the late 1980s and has continued through in the past 40 years of operation of this Parliament. That is not to fail to be accountable. That is to be very true to the requirement of accountability that is fixed upon us, whilst being true to the protection of the independence of the operation of the boards of the companies in which the Government may have a stake on behalf of the people.

Madam Speaker: We are going to move on now.

2030 **Hon. C Sacarello:** Madam Speaker, would it be possible just to set the record straight on a comment, which I wanted to do before?

Madam Speaker: All right.

2035 **Hon. C Sacarello:** Thank you very much, Madam Speaker, I appreciate your indulgence. The Chief Minister accused me of making an error in saying that I was not allowed. I have a letter from the Chief Secretary in which he mentions that the Chief Minister instructed him to write to me 'to respectfully decline your request'. This was for a visit specifically to AquaGib. In my understanding, declining my request is not the same as not allowing. Would the Chief Minister be able to agree?

2040 **Hon. Chief Minister:** No, Madam Speaker, because my recollection of the correspondence with the hon. Gentleman is completely different and it related to a correspondence that he had sent to a number of entities, not just in relation to AquaGib, and indeed that that letter was sent, as I understand it – and I need to review it; I do not want to be told that I am, for one moment, misleading, if I get it wrong, because I am operating solely from memory – to a number of
2045 Members of the Opposition who had written to a number of entities, and the Chief Secretary responded not just to him but to a number of Members who had written in that way, not just in relation to one entity but to many. So, I am afraid, Madam Speaker, I do not, for one moment, share the recollection or the reference that the hon. Gentleman is making.

2050 **Madam Speaker:** Next question.

Q938/2024

Repeat prescriptions – Reasons for difficulties in obtaining

Clerk: Question 938. The Hon. the Leader of the Opposition.

2055 **Hon. Dr K Azopardi:** Madam Speaker, have there been technical or other problems or difficulties with the online or telephone system for the obtaining of repeat prescriptions by patients during the last six months?

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

2060 **Minister for Health, Care and Business (Hon. G Arias-Vasquez):** Madam Speaker, the only instance where problems or difficulties with the online or telephone system for the obtaining of repeat prescriptions have occurred was on 19th July 2024, when there was a global technical outage, the 2024 CrowdStrike strike incident.

2065 **Hon. Dr K Azopardi:** Okay, but presumably the Minister has asked officials when we tabled this question ... The information that we have received, which is why the question has been put, is that there have been issues. I know that some persons have raised it with my hon. colleague. They have also raised it with me directly, different people, that they have had difficulties in getting through on the phone for the repeat prescription service. I have to say that I, myself, have not received complaints about the online system but I have received complaints about the telephone
2070 system, not being able to get through. So, that is the reason for the question.

I would ask the hon. Lady, having now heard the explanation for why the question was put, whether she wants to discuss that matter with officials. It was put to me in terms that people were either not being able to get through or they would get through and the phone would be hung up.

I am not sure... I am simply repeating the complaint that I have heard directly, which I promised I would raise with the Government, so I am raising it with her and would be grateful if she would take it up with her officials.

Hon. G Arias-Vasquez: Madam Speaker, of course I will take it up with the officials. Recently, on 23rd August, we introduced the call waiting system for the repeat prescriptions. Previously, when clerks were attending to the repeat prescription line, patients would get the busy tone and there were complaints about them being unable to get through. We know that that has been corrected. However, I will ask for an update in relation to what the Hon. Leader of the Opposition has raised.

Hon. Dr K Azopardi: That may explain it, because the way that she has now put it – which I would have still defined as a technical issue, perhaps – that people could not get through, or at least there were complaints that people could not get through, certainly accords with the way it was put to me at the time. We are now in late November, so I would have received this information at some point after we tabled questions in the last House. So, it would have been in October at some point when I would have received this information, and I received it on a couple of occasions at least, maybe three – if that is helpful for the Minister, it may put it in context. I think my hon. colleague received the information around the same time also.

Madam Speaker: Next question.

Chief Minister (Hon. F R Picardo): Madam Speaker, may I just say that although we stand by everything that we have said in the letter to the hon. Members about contacting civil servants, of course if this was information that hon. Members received a month ago, they should have felt free to contact the Minister or me or anybody else, because if there was a problem for this community – which we are not aware of; we do not believe there was, for the reasons the Hon. Minister set out, although we will check – almost a month ago, I would have thought we would all have wanted to fix it as soon as possible, not to come here to ask a question simply to try to embarrass the Government. I gently encourage hon. Members opposite, if they have such an instance again in the future, to put a call through to any of us on this side so that we can resolve it, and we, of course, would happily then field the question with hon. Members if they wish to earn brownie points saying ‘Pursuant to the communication between us, has the Minister now been able to resolve the problem that ...?’ because that can allow them to earn the brownie points. If there had been a problem, which we do not believe there was, we should have all been working to resolve it – holistically.

Hon. Dr K Azopardi: Well, holistically we should, of course, be all working to resolve it, but it is the function of the Opposition to raise matters with the Government in the manner that we think might be the most useful and conducive. There have been moments when we have reached out to Ministers – not the hon. Lady; I cannot put her in that guise right now – but have not received the information. We get a patchy reply. Sometimes we get good replies from other Ministers. We certainly take on board what the Hon. Chief Minister has said, but he can hardly reply in a manner that suggests that we are now part of the problem when we are trying to raise the issue that constituents have raised with us to try to find solutions.

I appreciate, Madam Speaker, that at the end of that, the only question I can ask is, ‘Do you agree?’

Hon. Chief Minister: Madam Speaker, I do not agree, for a simple reason: that hon. Members can get in touch with us for many reasons, some of which might relate to their convenience and political matters, if we can call them that, and then there are issues which can be raised in this House which relate to the well-being of individuals in our community. If a Member of the

Opposition receives information that the well-being of individuals in our community is being affected – and it can be described in no other way if people who need repeat prescriptions are unable to communicate the need for that repeat prescription – then surely one of the things that we would have expected them to do, given the hon. Gentleman says that he is a constructive politician and wants to achieve results, is both to put the question during the session after the one in which they get the information, so that they can raise the point – that is a matter for them and the manner in which they raise it is a matter entirely for them; they are ‘allowed’ to do so, to adopt Mr Sacarello’s inappropriate language – and, at the same time, try to resolve the matter for the well-being of those in our community who may be affected.

Madam Speaker, if the hon. Gentleman believes that constructive politics is just about asking questions to seek to embarrass, then he and I have different definitions of constructive politics.

Madam Speaker: Next question.

Q939/2024

Health providers in Spain and the UK – SLAs and MoUs

Clerk: Question 939. The Hon. the Leader of the Opposition.

Hon. Dr K Azopardi: Madam Speaker, what are the dates of the service level agreements or MoUs entered into by the Gibraltar Health Authority with various health providers in Spain and the United Kingdom?

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

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

Answer to Q939/2024

Please find below list of Service Level Agreements and or MoU with corresponding commencement dates:

Vithas Xanit International	11 September 2019
Vithas Parque San Antonio	11 September 2019
HLA Jerez	21 March 2024
Quiron Marbella	22 January 2019
Quiron Campo de Gibraltar	22 January 2019
Clinica Universidad de Navarra	26 March 2019
Genesis Care	1 March 2016
Clinica Medrano	19 August 2024
MD Anderson	1 January 2022
Miranza	10 October 2023
Opivision	Pending Contract

UK MoU's

Guy's and St Thomas NHS – Cardiology, Urology (Evelina hospital included under this contract for paediatric services)	Yearly MoU 1 st April 2024
Moorfields NHS - Ophthalmology	Yearly MoU 1 st April 2024
King's College NHS – Endocrine, liver.	Yearly MoU 1 st April 2024
UCLH NHS – Mix of oncology, neurology, orthopaedics.	Yearly MoU 1 st April 2024
Royal Marsden NHS – Cancer/Oncology	Yearly MoU 1 st April 2024
Bramley Health – neuro rehabilitation services.	Yearly MoU 1 st April 2024

2150 **Madam Speaker:** We will come back to this later and, in the meantime, carry on with the questions.

Clerk: Question 940. The Hon. the Leader of the Opposition.

Q937/2024
AquaGib industrial action –
Clarification by the Chief Minister

2155 **Chief Minister (Hon. F R Picardo):** Madam Speaker, I want to just refer the House to the letter that the Hon. Mr Sacarello referred to earlier, because I want to clarify the record for the purposes of *Hansard*. The letter the Hon. Mr Sacarello referred to earlier was sent by Glendon Martinez as Acting Chief Secretary, on 25th October 2023. The first paragraph reads as follows:

Thank you for contacting Minister Feetham and Minister Arias requesting to visit the Departments you will be shadowing. Both have referred your request to the Chief Minister as Minister responsible for the Public Service. The Chief Minister has referred this to the Chief Secretary as the Head of the Civil Service. I must respectfully decline your request. The reasons for this refusal are set out hereunder.

There is no reference there to AquaGib at all, Madam Speaker. There is a reference to Departments, the public service and to the Chief Secretary replying as the Head of the Civil Service.

2160 **Madam Speaker:** All right. Can we move on now to Question 940?

Hon. Dr K Azopardi: Yes, Madam Speaker, except I am in a position to ask supplementaries to the previous ...? I am in your hands.

2165 **Madam Speaker:** To the one with the schedules? (**Hon. Dr K Azopardi:** Yes.) All right. We will finish with that one, then. I had flagged it for later. Question 939 supplementaries.

Q939/2024
Health providers in Spain and the UK –
SLAs and MoUs –
Supplementary questions

2170 **Hon. Dr K Azopardi:** I am grateful for the schedule with the particular dates of the contracts. Under the heading 'UK MoUs', there is one called 'Bramley Health – neuro rehabilitation services'. That SLA, which was apparently on 1st April 2024, although it says yearly before that, so I am not sure if that is the renewal date or something. That MoU was not on the list provided to this House in answer to Question 842. May I just ask what that MoU is about? I know it says neuro rehabilitation services, but perhaps, as she did last time, in relation to the other MoUs, she can give us a bit more information about that.

2175 **Hon. G Arias-Vasquez:** Madam Speaker, unfortunately I do not have that information to hand. I can get it, and if there is a follow-up question on that specifically, I am very happy to answer it.

Hon. Dr K Azopardi: Well, perhaps the hon. Lady would write to me with that information, just to understand what that MoU is about.

2180 May I also ask her, in relation to the SLAs themselves, these have different dates between 11th September 2019 ... well, from 22nd January 2019 ... well, one goes back to 2016, but apart from that one, most of them are from 2019 onwards. Is the Government reviewing any of these SLAs at the moment?

2185 **Hon. G Arias-Vasquez:** Madam Speaker, the Sponsored Patients Department in the GHA is consistently reviewing these documents, as well as a price list attached to these documents. So, yes, there is a consistent review of all of these SLAs.

2190 **Hon. Dr K Azopardi:** In the preparation of this answer, I am not sure if the hon. Lady was informed by her officials that at some point in the recent past the Government indicated that some of these SLAs were going to be reviewed in terms of their performance. Is the hon. Lady or her officials engaged in any kind of performance review of some of these SLAs in a more significant way than simply the way that she has indicated, which appears to be a run-of-the-mill operational review?

2195 **Hon. G Arias-Vasquez:** Yes, our clinicians are consistently updating us on the performance and the outcomes that are received by the GHA from all of these institutions, which informs our decisions as to whether or not to renew the contracts with the different institutions.

2200 **Hon. Dr K Azopardi:** I see. So, these SLAs presumably have some kind of embedded break clauses or review dates – would that be correct also? – and that requires a dynamic review of the type she has indicated.

2205 **Hon. G Arias-Vasquez:** Absolutely, and there is no obligation to send a minimum number of patients to any institution, so it is an ongoing relationship with all of the institutions to see which is best placed to receive Gibraltarian patients.

2210 **Hon. Dr K Azopardi:** And in terms of the Opivision entry, which is the last entry under the SLA head, it says ‘pending contract’. That is an ophthalmology SLA, as I understood it from the interaction with the last question, but does the Hon. Minister have more details as to what this entity does? I do not even know where this entity is. Perhaps she has that information.

2215 **Hon. G Arias-Vasquez:** Unfortunately, I do not have that information. The larger contracts are the ones that we tend to have an overview of. I do not know what Opivision is, and I do not know the type of services they are likely to provide.

2220 **Hon. Dr K Azopardi:** Can I ask, then, if she does not have that information and she is not aware, how are these contracts entered into? Who decides that these contracts are entered into? Is there a board, a panel? Who takes these assessment decisions and decision making on whether someone gets a contract? Opivision are pending contract, so who are they dealing with and who makes these determinations? If the Hon. Minister is unaware, I am assuming she has not involved in that, so that is presumably somewhere down the line.

2225 **Hon. G Arias-Vasquez:** Absolutely. The decision as to where to send individuals is led by clinicians. Clinicians decide where individual patients should go and where they get the best outcomes for Gibraltarians in each of these institutions. The discussions with the different institutions are usually led by Sponsored Patients. The contract would be signed by the director general of the hospital, and the negotiations would be ... Usually, a medical team of the GHA would visit the site or the tertiary institution and a view would be taken by clinicians as to whether or not the standards of the GHA were met by the tertiary institutions. That would include infection control standards, the qualifications of their surgeons, the names of their surgeons and all of this.

2230

All of these things are things which are clinician led, and we let our clinicians take a view as to where is the best place to send patients.

2235 **Madam Speaker:** Next question.

Q940/2024
GHA Director of Workforce –
Current role

Clerk: Question 940. The Hon. the Leader of the Opposition.

2240 **Hon. Dr K Azopardi:** Madam Speaker, given the assumption of the responsibilities of the Director of Workforce in the GHA by the Government's Director of Personnel and Development, what role is the former Director of Workforce now undertaking or being engaged for, or transferred to?

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

2245 **Minister for Health, Care and Business (Hon. G Arias-Vasquez):** Madam Speaker, the Government does not answer questions about individual officers.

2250 **Hon. Dr K Azopardi:** The Government issued a press release on 21st October that precisely talked about this issue and said that the responsibilities of the Director of Workforce were now going to be absorbed by the Director of Personnel and Development. So, all we are asking is what is the Director of Workforce doing. Presumably he does not have the responsibilities of Director of Workforce anymore, so what has he been assigned to do – that is what we are asking – which follows from their public statement.

2255 **Chief Minister (Hon. F R Picardo):** Madam Speaker, what the Government says in press releases is governed by the rules of etiquette relating to press releases. What the Government talks about in this House is governed by the rules of etiquette and the rules of conduct in this House, and we do not talk about individual officers in this House. That is the question that has been asked, because we are being asked about the role of the former Director of Workforce. That is about an individual, and I have always understood that we are not able to talk about individuals in this House.

2265 **Hon. Dr K Azopardi:** Well, we do not name individuals but we certainly talk about individuals. Previously, the Government has answered questions on the salaries of individuals. The Government answered a question two hours ago on what fee was being paid for the advisory services of an individual. I am surprised that the Chief Minister is taking this line, because there are numerous examples where we have raised matters in relation to individuals and they have been answered. There has been a strategic restructure that they have announced which absorbs the responsibilities of former Director of Workforce by a particular individual who happens to be the head of the Personnel and Development Department, and we are simply seeking to understand what that means for the entity within the GHA that was in charge of workforce in that way. Integral to that was the person who was at the head of that unit, so we want to understand what that person is now doing.

2275 **Hon. Chief Minister:** Well, Madam Speaker, I do not for one moment agree with the hon. Gentleman's interpretation in relation to the officer that we are dealing with. We are dealing with

a civil servant whose role is set out in the Estimates Book and his salary is set out in the Estimates Book. In relation to the other individual, in respect of whom we answered the question before, he is not in complement, he is not an officer of the Government; he is an individual who is providing services to the Government and we have answered questions in relation to his remuneration because it is not in the Estimates Book.

If what the Hon. the Leader of the Opposition is trying to ask us – and let's see whether we can get to the bottom of it – is what the role of Director of Workforce now entails, given that some of the responsibilities of the role of Director of Workforce have been moved to the Director of Personnel and Development, then that is one thing, but if he is asking us what is the role of the former Director of Workforce, that is to identify the individual, and we both know who we are talking about, and asking us what *he* is doing. If what the Hon. Leader of the Opposition is trying to get at is what functions does the post of Director of Workforce now have, it is a complemented post, it is in the Estimates Book. Given that some of those functions have been taken by the Director of Personnel, that question is a different one to the one that we see on the Order Paper. If that is the crux of what the hon. Gentleman is asking about, then it would not necessarily be him, her or anybody else that he is talking about; he would be asking about the role of that office, Director of Workforce, in which case we would happily engage in setting out what it is proposed that that role holder should do.

Hon. Dr K Azopardi: Well, in the first place, I would say that the Government has answered questions in this House not just about people who are not in the complement and are providing advisory services, because the Chief Minister knows that we have asked, for example, questions in relation to specific officers who are within the GHA – the Director General's salary or whatever, or whether the Director General was going to continue in post last year. We have asked lots of questions; there are many examples of this.

To be clear, and perhaps there has been a misunderstanding, what we want to understand is ... and perhaps we had been led to believe that the word 'former' should be introduced in front of 'Director of Workforce' because of the press release that they had issued. We had understood that the press release could only lead to the conclusion that those responsibilities had entirely disappeared, leading to the Director of Workforce role to be redundant. I ask, then, just to be clear, is the consequence of the restructure that there is no longer going to be a Director of Workforce within the GHA? And if the answer to that is no, there will be, what role will that person have?

Hon. Chief Minister: Madam Speaker, with your indulgence, to provide the hon. Gentleman with as much information as possible, I am going to deal with the generic points that he has raised in the first part of his question, and the Hon. Minister for Health will deal with the particular point that he has asked in relation to the role.

When we talk about the salary of the chief executive because hon. Members ask, we are talking about the salary that relates to a post, and it is right that we should do that because in the same way as the Estimates Book provides information, if there is a suggestion of a deviation from that, or if the period of contractual engagement of a contractual officer is being asked about, that, of course, is something that we give across the floor of the House, but we are not talking about the individual officer, although we are talking about the contract which relates to an individual officer. It is also true that when we are talking about contract officers, their terms and conditions are not the same as others because they have a contractual arrangement which can differ from case to case, whilst the others, which are in complement and provided for as members of the Civil Service or employees of the GHA, are subject to those terms and conditions. Indeed, the hon. Gentleman will remember that at either the last session or the one before that, we did not engage in a discussion about a particular officer, which he was seeking to direct us to. I hope that that clarifies that the Government's view as to discussions of individual officers and their attributes is different to that which the hon. Gentleman has put.

2330 In relation to what I might call the second part of his question is clarified where they were coming from and why they were led to that conclusion, I will allow the Minister for Health to answer, as that relates directly to her portfolio and is not across the board in the public service.

2335 **Hon. G Arias-Vasquez:** The reason why the Director of Personnel and Development has now been appointed to the post is so that there is a consistency within the application of different policies throughout the public service, so that, for example, occupational health, disciplinary procedures etc. are dealt with consistently throughout the public service and the GHA. The best way to achieve this was thought to be to appoint the same individual to have oversight of the entirety of it.

2340 **Hon. Dr K Azopardi:** That only partly answers the question. My question went on to ask whether there is going to be a continuing role called 'the Director of Workforce', and if so, what that person is going to do.

2345 **Hon. G Arias-Vasquez:** There will be a Director of Public Service and the Director of Public Service will take the role of the Director of Workforce on the GHA board.

Hon. Dr K Azopardi: Is there such a role called Director of Public Service now, or is there going to be the creation of a post called Director of Public Service which will absorb these roles?

2350 **Hon. G Arias-Vasquez:** Madam Speaker, the press release refers to the Director of Personnel and Development and the Director of Workforce. What is in consideration is whether the Director of Personnel and Development will also be the Director of Workforce or whether there will be a position which is Director of Public Service. That is currently under consideration.

2355 **Hon. Dr K Azopardi:** So, if there is a Director of Public Service role created, it will replace the Director of Workforce role – is that correct? Secondly, is the role of Director of Public Service within the GHA wider than the Director of Workforce?

2360 **Hon. G Arias-Vasquez:** Yes, if there is a Director of Public Service created, that will consume the Director of Workforce, but the Director of Public Service is wider in that it is the director of what was workforce and the Director of Personnel and Development in the wider public sector.

2365 **Hon. Dr K Azopardi:** I am sorry, I am not understanding, because the press release already says that the Director of Personnel and Development has assumed the responsibilities of the GHA Director of Workforce. To be precise, it says, 'will now also take on the responsibilities of the GHA Director of Workforce'. So, that is my question: if, over and above that, there is going to be a creation of something called the GHA Director of Public Service, what does that role entail over and above what the Director of Personnel and Development is already doing, given that he has already assumed the responsibilities of the Director of Workforce?

2370 **Hon. G Arias-Vasquez:** Nothing. What it would be is a change in nomenclature between having two distinct positions and having one position which encompasses both.

2375 **Hon. Dr K Azopardi:** I see. So, the Director of Public Service, if it is created, is simply to retitle the Director of Personnel and Development as the Director of Public Service. That is how I have understood the hon. Lady's explanation. Is that correct?

2380 **Hon. G Arias-Vasquez:** Let me try to recast it in a different way. There is currently a Director of Personnel and Development in the Civil Service. That Director of Personnel and Development has now taken on the role of Director of Workforce. The question is are those two roles separate, or

is there one role that is created to encompass them both, which is effectively what he is doing; are we having one role, as the Director of Public Service, which encompasses what is now the Director of Personnel and Development and Workforce, or are we having two separate roles, which are the Director of Personnel and Development and Director of Workforce.

2385

Madam Speaker: I am allowing one more question but no more, because it is the ninth question and we are going to be here all afternoon. One last question and one last answer.

2390

Hon. Dr K Azopardi: I understand, but given the explanation, the crossroads that the Government seems to be facing is do we create a Director of Public Service, which is a change of nomenclature for the person currently doing the responsibilities of personnel and development and Director of Workforce? So, do we call this new beast – not to suggest that that person is a beast – the Director of Public Service, or do we not? And if we do not, what we have, since this press release, is that the Director of Personnel and Development has assumed the responsibility of the Director of Workforce. So, in either eventuality, what I am asking is: is there still going to be a role called the Director of Workforce, and if so, what is that role going to do?

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Hon. Chief Minister: Madam Speaker, the debate is wider than just the GHA and Director of Workforce because if we do decide to go down the road of a Director of Public Service – personnel, public sector – then that is not just the Civil Service and the GHA; it is a wider jurisdiction than all of that. If we go down the route of only the GHA and the Civil Service, it is a narrower jurisdiction. I think in either scenario the post of Director of Workforce in the GHA either disappears or changes very materially indeed.

2405

Madam Speaker: Next question.

Q941/2024
Recruitment –
GHA delegated decision making

Clerk: Question 941. The Hon. the Leader of the Opposition.

2410

Hon. Dr K Azopardi: Madam Speaker, will the GHA continue to have delegated decision making in the recruitment of personnel?

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

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Minister for Health, Care and Business (Hon. G Arias-Vasquez): Madam Speaker, yes, the GHA will continue to have delegated decision making in the recruitment of personnel, in accordance with HMGoG's policies and procedures.

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Hon. Dr K Azopardi: So, the recruitment of personnel is not going to be affected by the absorption of the responsibilities of the Director of Workforce by the Director of Personnel and Development. Is that correct?

Hon. G Arias-Vasquez: Yes, that is correct. The recruitment of staff by the GHA is quite different to the recruitment of staff by the Civil Service generally, because a lot of those posts are clinical posts, so the way in which the clinical posts will be recruited will continue to be the same.

2425 **Hon. Dr K Azopardi:** And who would ultimately take the decisions on recruitment within the GHA?

2430 **Hon. G Arias-Vasquez:** The decisions on recruitment in the GHA will continue to be taken in the same way that they have to date. At the moment, it is a procedure which the Director of Workforce, in conjunction with the DG, takes on a case-by-case basis.

2435 **Hon. Dr K Azopardi:** Yes, precisely. So, given that the Director of Workforce ultimately takes those decisions with the Director General, how is it possible that the GHA is retaining the decision-making power when the Director of Workforce role may be no more and has been absorbed by the Director of Personnel and Development?

2440 **Hon. G Arias-Vasquez:** The Director of Personnel and Development will not absorb the role, he will subsume the role, so either the Director of Personnel and Development will be a part of the GHA board, whether in the capacity of Director of Public Service or as Director of Workforce, or he will be simply the Director of Workforce on an ongoing basis as well as his current responsibilities. But the decision-making process in terms of clinical appointments etc. will continue to be delegated to the GHA.

2445 **Hon. Dr K Azopardi:** Madam Speaker, the hon. Lady talks as if it is in the future, but it has been in the past. The Government has already announced that the Director of Personnel Development has taken on those responsibilities from 4th November, so there is no change in the composition of the board yet, they have taken on this role already, so how is it possible for that to be compatible with what she is saying?

2450 **Chief Minister (Hon. F R Picardo):** Madam Speaker, this is based on a whole misunderstanding of what the role of Director of Workforce was. The hon. Gentleman seems to be suggesting that the Director of Workforce was the one who made the decisions in the recruitment of personnel. Nothing could be further from the truth. The Director of Personnel, who has now taken on the responsibility of the Director of Workforce, is doing the same thing the Director of Workforce would have done, which is giving effect to the decisions of the GHA board and others. He would not have made the decisions to employ or to open a vacancy or to recruit. He would have given effect to those decisions. So, the instrument of action is moving from Director of Workforce to Director of Personnel. As the hon. Lady has said, the Director of Personnel, just like the Director of Workforce, would have formed part of that decision-making process but is not the decision maker. That is to say, for example, that the Director of Personnel in the Government today is the decision maker in every aspect of recruitment to the Government when he is not; there is still the Chief Secretary, just as there is the Chief Executive of the GHA.

2465 **Hon. Dr K Azopardi:** As my hon. colleague Mr Bossino likes to say, a word salad, Madam Speaker, because I asked precisely who takes the ultimate decision making and the hon. Lady says the ultimate decision making was taken by the Director of Workforce and the Director General. I am afraid to say the Hon. Chief Minister may not have been listening at that point, but the answer he has just given is a reconstruction, or at least a re-explanation of a decision of the basis of how things are done, which is very different to what the hon. Lady has said. That is the reason why I put the question. Perhaps the dilemma that we have on this side is because we are not understanding this new role of the Director of Workforce because it has not been properly explained, so perhaps the Chief Minister might want to take the opportunity to explain how the Government views this new role.

2475 **Hon. Chief Minister:** Madam Speaker, I am minded to remind the hon. Gentleman of the magnificent sketch in *Fawlty Towers* about Waldorf's, because the only aspect of what I have said

which amounts to a salad is his inability to, in my view, understand what is the crux of this, which relates to authority and decision making. That is the point, Madam Speaker. The GHA will continue to have delegated decision making. Just because you change where the person who is the Director of Workforce is in respect of some aspect of what is done does not mean that the processes change. As the Hon. Minister has specifically explained, it is the DG that signs off on these vacancies and on recruitment. That is not going to change. Just because the person who is going to form part of that process is going to be a different one, it does not mean that authority or power has changed. You can change things in structures without moving centres of power. You can change the administrative process. A director of workforce and a director of personnel are the administrative arm of decision making. That is the point, and I hope that he does not see any rocket mixed up in that salad, because we are just intending to explain to him in the clearest possible terms.

Madam Speaker, I am conscious that it is now five past five, and I wonder whether this might be a convenient moment, given that I think we are at the end of the hon. Lady's questions – one is tempted to say 'at last' – to propose a 20-minute adjournment.

Madam Speaker: I am happy to propose a 20-minute recess, but we have Questions 929, 930 and 931 of the Hon. J Ladislaus, which she is entitled to ask supplementaries on and which are also the Hon. Minister for Health's.

Hon. Chief Minister: May I propose that we do that after the recess?

Madam Speaker: Yes, if the Hon. Minister is going to be here, then we will take the supplementaries after the recess.

The House recessed at 5.07 p.m. and resumed its sitting at 5.30 p.m.

Q931/2024

Legal claims and settlements since 2011 –

Moneys paid out

Madam Speaker: Does the Hon. J Ladislaus have any supplementaries on Questions 929, 930 and 931?

Hon. J Ladislaus: Just one on Question 931. I note that in 2023, there is a spike at court orders and it goes just past £1.8 million, so £1,822,599 paid out in respect of court orders. Could the Hon. the Minister perhaps clarify whether that is in respect of one case, or is it a variety of cases that went through the courts in that year and orders were given? I would be grateful for some clarification on that.

Hon. G Arias-Vasquez: Madam Speaker, that is indeed in relation to one case which was £1.637 million. That is because the insurance payments had been exhausted and therefore the GHA itself had to pay out in that individual case.

Hon. J Ladislaus: I am grateful for the reply. Just one question arising from that: given that the insurance payments were exhausted, could the Hon. Minister perhaps clarify the total of the entire award, if the Hon. Minister has that in front of her?

Hon. G Arias-Vasquez: Madam Speaker, unfortunately I do not have that information available, but if the hon. Member were to put it as a question next time, I am happy to answer with specifics.

2520 **Madam Speaker:** Next question.

INDUSTRIAL RELATIONS, CIVIL CONTINGENCIES AND SPORT

Q942/2024

**Gibraltar Fire and Rescue Service –
Training, manpower and equipment for fighting high-rise building fires**

Clerk: Questions to the Hon. the Minister for Industrial Relations, Civil Contingencies and Sport. Question 942. The Hon. J Ladislaus.

2525 **Hon. J Ladislaus:** Madam Speaker, since the completion of some of the blocks at Hassan Centenary Terraces, have the GFRS's firefighters received any additional training or resources to deal with fires and rescues within high-rise buildings? If so, how often is that training reviewed?

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

Minister for Industrial Relations, Civil Contingencies and Sport (Hon. L M Bruzon): Madam Speaker, I will answer this question together with Question 943.

2530 **Clerk:** Question 943. The Hon. J Ladislaus.

2535 **Hon. J Ladislaus:** If an evacuation of the tower blocks at Glacis Estate, Hassan Centenary Terraces or other such high-rise buildings is necessary, do the GFRS have (1) the necessary numbers of firefighters in place and (2) the correct appliances and equipment to enable such an operation to take place successfully?

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

2540 **Hon. L M Bruzon:** Madam Speaker, the GFRS has a vast array of hazards and risk to contend with. Training for these, including high-rise incidents, forms part of their annual training schedules. Specifically, though, this may take the form of lectures, walkthrough exercises, scenario-based training events or tabletop exercises. It is not uncommon for the service to liaise with partner agencies to secure buildings or sites, in an attempt to recreate real-life scenarios. Coupled to this,
2545 the GFRS has recently introduced a training and development department to oversee and co-ordinate such training and ensure competence is maintained throughout the organisation. Any training conducted is measured against specific performance criteria and forms part of our standard operating procedures.

2550 In relation to Question 943, building methodologies in respect of tall and complex buildings will vary depending on their age of construction and applicable building regulations at the time. The passive and active fire safety measures designed and incorporated into tall and complex buildings are designed to ensure the protection of residents and property, as well as firefighter and other emergency responders, in the event of a fire. In such circumstance, the GFRS responds with the full complement of on-duty firefighters. Following the initial Incident Commander's
2555 dynamic risk assessment, additional personnel may be requested by way of recall to duty protocols. Like with any other process, as new technologies and building methodologies evolve, so does the need for the Fire Service to adapt and keep abreast of these changing demands.

2560 The GFRS is constantly scanning the horizon for new and emerging risks. This assessment includes analysing the suitability and adaptability of current resources, including appliances and equipment. Such an example is the eventual acquisition of a new high-reach aerial appliance, for which a tender has already been issued. Given the unique and complex characteristics of our urban road network, this vehicle's specifications are very unique and specific to our needs.

2565 **Hon. J Ladislaus:** Madam Speaker, I am grateful for the response. The tender that the Hon. the Minister refers to, have there been any applications already?

Hon. L M Bruzon: Madam Speaker, I am not sure. I know there was initial interest from three parties, but I do not know what stage they are at, at the moment.

2570 **Hon. J Ladislaus:** Perhaps the Hon. the Minister could clarify. My understanding is that there is such a concept as a firefighting lift in some high-rise blocks. Are there any in high-rise blocks in Gibraltar? Just to give some background as to what a firefighting lift is, it is like a normal lift but apparently it has a special electrical circuit which allows firefighters to take control of the lift and it stops normal controls from working. The electrical supply is separate to the other circuits in the building. Is that something that exists in any of the buildings in Gibraltar?

Hon. L M Bruzon: Madam Speaker, I am not aware. I will try to find out for the hon. Member.

2580 **Madam Speaker:** The Hon. D J Bossino.

2585 **Hon. D J Bossino:** If I may? I am grateful. In relation to the answer that the Hon. the Minister gave to my hon. Friend Ms Ladislaus to Question 943, and I think it was the answer that the Hon. the Minister gave in respect of the whether the GFRS has the necessary numbers of firefighters, I think he said in that context that the GFRS has the full complement of firefighters, or words to that effect, and that they can also rely on the recall facility. I am not sure that that necessarily answers the question, so I would ask him, please, to answer the question as to whether it is the view of the GFRS that it does have a sufficient complement of firefighters to deal with the scenario that the question posits, which is the evacuation of the tower blocks at Glacis Estate and Hassan Centenary Terraces.

2590 **Hon. L M Bruzon:** Madam Speaker, the GFRS has a full complement. Although some of the officers have been redirected to the new training department, they have the numbers of officers that they need per shift. That is the information that I have. They have not asked me for more officers.

2595 **Hon. D J Bossino:** Can the Hon. the Minister state with any degree of confidence now – he may need to check the position with the Fire Service – whether they have raised any concerns themselves in relation to their staff capabilities to deal with this we hope unlikely scenario, but which could happen? I know that my learned and hon. Friend has had these issues raised with her, and indeed many of us on this side of the House have had members of the public asking that question. I think it is an important point to raise across the floor of the House, so I would ask him whether he has an answer to the point I have raised in relation to the raising of concerns in relation to the specific circumstances and scenario arising.

2605 **Hon. L M Bruzon:** Madam Speaker, the GFRS itself has not necessarily raised concerns of lack of personnel. I am sure that if we offered them more firefighters, they would take them, just like most other departments, but specific concerns have not been raised with regard to numbers.

2610 **Hon. D J Bossino:** Has the Hon. the Minister received any reports or expressions of concern once again at the current circumstances? The Hon. the Minister has told this House that there is currently a tender process in train in respect of the high-reach aerial appliance. Judging by the term, I can imagine what it is, and I am sure it would be a very useful appliance to deal with any fires in those high-rise buildings, but given that we do not currently have it and something like this could happen, God forbid, today, are there any concerns about safety surrounding the fact that we are deficient as far as the non-availability of this appliance?

2620 **Hon. L M Bruzon:** Madam Speaker, the GFRS train for high-rise building fires. In fact, in the newer buildings they have the latest equipment thanks to the GFRS involvement. Of course, they will always welcome more equipment – that is why they have requested the ladder and that is why we have commenced the tender process – but forward planning is as much as ... when it is brought to our attention, we deal with it as best we can see.

2625 **Hon. D J Bossino:** The Hon. the Minister puts it in terms of, 'Well, every department will want more staff, almost every department will want more equipment,' but this is different, we are dealing with people's lives. One does not want to raise concern unnecessarily, or alarm, but it is obvious to any observer that there could be an issue, so I am pressing him further. In relation to the appliances, can he state ...? The Hon. Leader of the Opposition mentions to me, quite rightly, that the Hon. Minister talks about forward planning, but that we were building a 35-storey-high building in Hassan Centenary Terraces has been known for many years. Indeed, it has been separately the cause of criticism from this side of the House of the hon. Gentlemen and Ladies opposite. But can I ask him this specific question: how many of these high-reach aerial appliances are being tendered for?

2635 **Hon. L M Bruzon:** Madam Speaker, one.

Hon. D J Bossino: Is the Hon. the Minister satisfied that one is sufficient to deal with the scenario that the question presents, which is an evacuation, I would put to him, as a result of a fire in the tower blocks in Glacis Estate and Hassan Centenary Terraces?

2640 **Hon. L M Bruzon:** Madam Speaker, all I have to be satisfied about is to see the request from the Fire and Rescue Service and see how we can give them what they are asking for. If they are asking for one ladder, they are asking for one. It is not up to me to overrule them.

2645 **Hon. D J Bossino:** Fine. If we have any further information in this House which challenges the premise on which the Hon. the Minister has answered the question – I have not formulated the question, it is my friend – we will bring it to this House, or indeed bring it to him separately. May I ask, therefore, does he have any information about the cost of this particular equipment?

2650 **Hon. L M Bruzon:** Madam Speaker, it is around a million pounds.

Madam Speaker: The Hon. C Sacarello had a question?

2655 **Hon. C Sacarello:** Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. Could the Hon. Minister please indicate if the Government is considering introducing into legislation the need for developers to implement a double staircase – in other words, two sets of staircases – for buildings above a certain height, as is encapsulated in law and other jurisdictions, by means of fire escape?

2660 **Hon. L M Bruzon:** Madam Speaker, the GFRS is involved in building regulations and so on. They have to bring that to our attention. As far as I am concerned, they have not. (*Interjections*)

Madam Speaker: I am concerned that we are spending too much time on this and it is going to cut into time on other things, so I am minded to say 'Next question'.

Q944/2024

**Upper Rock Nature Reserve –
Containment in the event of fire**

Clerk: Question 944. The Hon. J Ladislaus.

2665 **Hon. J Ladislaus:** In the event of a fire breaking out in the Upper Rock Nature Reserve, what is in place to avoid the fire spreading?

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

2670 **Minister for Industrial Relations, Civil Contingencies and Sport (Hon. L M Bruzon):** Madam Speaker, before the declaration of the high-risk season, the GFRS send an annual report to the Department of the Environment detailing the state of the Upper Rock, including overgrown vegetation, debris accumulation and the state of the firebreaks. Strategically placed and well-maintained firebreaks play a vital role in the mitigating of any potential fire spread.

2675 **Hon. J Ladislaus:** I am grateful. Just on the point of the firebreaks, could the Hon. the Minister perhaps just give a bit more detail as to what the firebreaks are? Are they vegetated firebreaks – there are various firebreaks, apparently – disked firebreaks? They will not be grazed because grazed are by animals, apparently. If the Hon. the Minister could perhaps just give a bit more detail
2680 as to the nature of the firebreaks. It could be roads as well.

Hon. L M Bruzon: Madam Speaker, the fire breaks are just areas in the Upper Rock which have no vegetation, with the aim of preventing fire spreading from one area to another.

2685 **Hon. J Ladislaus:** Are those firebreaks manmade? Are they maintained regularly, and how often?

Minister for Education, the Environment and Climate Change (Hon. Prof. J E Cortes): If I may assist, Madam Speaker, as the management of the firebreaks falls under the Department of the
2690 Environment – the firebreaks are cleared of vegetation at the end of the growing season, usually the first week of June when the vegetation, which is green and low lying, starts to dry up and becomes a fire risk. That is done regularly every year. In fact, the fire breaks are extended by one or two metres every year in order to increase both the fire safety element and the diversity of wildlife because the wildlife of the open areas, in fact, is more diverse than in the dense scrub. So,
2695 they are maintained on a regular basis, yes.

Hon. J Ladislaus: Sorry, I am not trying to be difficult, but just so I can understand it, just to confirm, are we talking about vegetated firebreaks that are manmade or other types of
2700 firebreaks?

Hon. Prof. J E Cortes: Yes, Madam Speaker, these are manmade, they have been there for decades and they maintained every year.

Madam Speaker: Next question.

Q945-51/2024

**Europa Sports Complex –
Arrangements made with Gibraltar Football, Rugby, Cricket, Squash, Darts and
Rhythmic Gymnastics Associations and commercial entities**

2705 **Clerk:** Question 945. The Hon. E J Reyes.

Hon. E J Reyes: Can Government provide full details of any arrangements entered into with the Gibraltar Football Association in respect of the use of the Europa sportsground and facilities, together with details relating to payments to be made for usage?

2710

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

Minister for Industrial Relations, Civil Contingencies and Sport (Hon. L M Bruzon): Madam Speaker, I will answer this question together with Questions 946 to 951.

2715

Clerk: Question 946. The Hon. E J Reyes.

Hon. E J Reyes: Can Government provide full details of any arrangements entered with the Gibraltar Rugby Football Union Association in respect of the use of the Europa sportsground and facilities, together with details relating to payments to be made for usage?

2720

Clerk: Question 947. The Hon. E J Reyes.

Hon. E J Reyes: Can Government provide full details of any arrangements entered with the Gibraltar Cricket Association in respect of the use of the Europa sportsground and facilities, together with details relating to payments to be made for usage?

2725

Clerk: Question 948. The Hon. E J Reyes.

Hon. E J Reyes: Can provide full details of any arrangements entered with the Gibraltar Squash Association in respect of the use of the Europa sportsground and facilities, together with details relating to payments to be made for usage.

2730

Clerk: Question 949. The Hon. E J Reyes.

Hon. E J Reyes: Can Government provide full details of any arrangements entered with the Gibraltar Darts Association in respect of the use of the Europa sportsgrounds facilities, together with details relating to payments to be made for usage?

2735

Clerk: Question 950. The Hon. E J Reyes.

Hon. E J Reyes: Can Government provide full details of any arrangements entered with the Gibraltar Rhythmic Gymnastics Association in respect of the use of the Europa sportsground facilities, together with details relating to payments to be made for usage?

2740

Clerk: Question 951. The Hon. E J Reyes.

Hon. E J Reyes: Can Government provide full details of any arrangements entered with the commercial companies or entities in respect of the use of any areas within the Europa sportsground complex, together with details relating to payments to be made for usage?

2750

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

Hon. L M Bruzon: Madam Speaker, the Gibraltar Rugby Football Union, the Gibraltar Cricket Association, the Gibraltar Squash Association and the Gibraltar Darts Association continue to use facilities in practically the same manner as before. This is particularly true for the Gibraltar Squash and Darts Associations, who use indoor facilities now under the auspices of the GSLA. Rugby and Cricket now liaise directly with the GFA in respect of allocations, and this is working well.

There are no fees for the use of sports facilities by national sporting associations.

In terms of association premises or member areas, the GSLA are working with LPS so that the areas are regulated as per all similar facilities across Gibraltar. I am also glad to report that the GSLA is keeping these entities up to date with all developments.

In respect of the Gibraltar Rhythmic Gymnastics Association, they continue to use facilities at Europa under the Community Use Scheme. This means that their allocations have been unaffected and there are no fees to consider.

Arrangements for management with the Gibraltar Football Association in respect of the Europa sportsground are currently based on a proposal that was drawn up by the GFA and agreed to by HMGoG. There is a draft management agreement but this has not been finalised, due to the nature of ongoing improvements. Like other national associations, the GFA does not pay for the use of the facilities, although it is important to note that they have already invested over £1 million into the Europa Sports Complex for the benefit of our community.

Finally, Madam Speaker, the GSLA are also liaising with LPS in respect of commercial entities within the Europa Sports Complex. Once this is finalised, information will be available. This will also take into account the commercial sensitivities of any arrangements.

Hon. E J Reyes: Madam Speaker, thank you for the answer. I hope to be as succinct as possible, as guided by your good self.

On Question 945, on the Football Association, the Minister says that there is a draft agreement. I had been led to believe through previous answers – maybe my conclusion was wrong – that there was some agreement in place, but maybe it was in a draft form awaiting finalisation. Does the Government have intentions to make public what the agreement is, or is it a question that I should pose again in the future?

I will add to that, because it is related to Question 945. The Minister has kindly provided the information that the GFA seems to have invested around a million pounds, or whatever he said. A million pounds in respect of what? Spectator facilities or the pitch facilities? I would be grateful for some clarification on that one.

Hon. L M Bruzon: Madam Speaker, with regard to the management agreement, there was a previous draft agreement, which was never implemented, with another entity. The agreement with the GSLA has been in a draft format for a number of months, although, as I said, it has been changing along the way.

With regard to the investment, we have new turf on the pitch, we have new equipment to look after that turf, and we have a lot of money invested in general facilities, upkeep, maintenance, repairs and so on.

Hon. E J Reyes: Just for my own satisfaction, Madam Speaker – I accept that there is a draft agreement in place, they have been working on it for some months and so on, but from a practical and perhaps legal point of view, because these agreements are in draft, ultimately what happens were an incident to occur today? Is it ultimately, can the Minister confirm, that it all falls under the auspices of the GSLA? Who is responsible? Who is answerable for what is what I would like to get at.

Hon. L M Bruzon: Madam Speaker, the GFA have insurance in place for public liability and so on for the areas that they are responsible for, in the same way as anyone having an incident within the GSLA part of it would be covered by Government.

Hon. E J Reyes: Moving on to Questions 946 and 947, Madam Speaker, the other big users of the facilities, which are rugby and cricket ... The Minister said that they have to co-operate and come to agreements with the Football Association, which I believe seems to be working in some cases. Is the Minister aware that certain – what word shall we use? – grievances are sometimes put forward, in that in the nature of football itself, one does not know until a particular match takes place whether a particular club is going to qualify for the next round and when they are going to need the pitch. The league winners end up in the qualifying group and may or may not need to play games next June, July or August, which could infringe upon the traditional calendar of people like the Cricket Association, who sometimes want to plan visits from overseas tours. Is the Minister aware that there could at times be a conflict of vested interests? And if that were to be the case, does the Minister, wearing his hat as Chairman of the Gibraltar Sports and Leisure Authority, have a role to play in mediation?

Hon. L M Bruzon: Madam Speaker, as with most sporting venues in Gibraltar, they have to be shared by multiple users because, unfortunately, we do not have sufficient stadia to offer each sport its own particular space.

I have to make very clear that it was brought to my attention that there was a video circulated via Twitter – X, or whatever it is called now – about rugby. The Rugby Association was very quick in sending an email disassociating itself from said video. To give an example – he mentioned cricket – the GFA will be having a break in the new year from the local league in order to allow cricket to host an event, so they seem to be doing very well in managing the place. On a weekly basis – I believe it is Mondays – allocations are made public. That, at the current moment, includes the Victoria Stadium. I think it is this week, or last week, for example, that the rugby had allocations to use the Victoria Stadium. So, for the time being they are working really well and are accommodating each other as best they can.

Hon. E J Reyes: Thank you. Madam Speaker will be pleased to know that I think we are progressing quite well.

The answers were pooled together and my supplementary refers to all of them. I know that cricket, rugby, even darts and so on, have got no payments to be made for the usage. However, these entities, I know, in some of the events, run a bar with refreshment facilities. Even if the profits stay in house for the association, is there absolutely no charge made if they have a liquor licence? What brings this to the forefront is that there was recently an official notice put out by the Darts Association, who wanted an extension to the licence – I do not know, I am not that knowledgeable, but probably to be able to serve drinks in an outside area. So, obviously there must be some income from there, and other than the licence, if profits are being made, whether it is by a registered charity or a national association, is Government, ultimately the custodian of taxpayers' money, making anything out of that?

Hon. L M Bruzon: Madam Speaker, the hon. Gentleman is totally correct in what he says. The clubs in question have not been paying anything to date. I did mention in my reply that the GSLA are working with LPS to ensure that areas are regulated, as they would be in other places around Gibraltar. The GSLA and LPS are working together with these associations. Rugby have the members' area, cricket have the members area, and so on. We are looking to regularise matters as quickly as possible, so that they will be paying rent and they will be responsible for their own tavern licences and so on, obviously at a reduced rate, as is normally the case with clubs and associations.

2855 **Hon. E J Reyes:** Thank you for that, Madam Speaker. I hope we get to a solution soon, because the Hon. Minister and I have shared refreshments in these areas, and we both need to make sure that we set an example in regulated areas.

2860 Can I home in a bit more specifically in respect of arrangements or concessions for the Squash Association? I am told that members of the Squash Association have a more reduced rate of payment for use of the gymnasium or other facilities. Can the Minister confirm, if that is the case, it means that if I am not a member of the Squash Association, I have £x to pay for the use of certain facilities, which I take it will be paid to the GSLA, whereas if my namesake the Clerk were to use the facilities but as a member of the Squash Association, he pays £x minus 50%? Someone is losing out financially. Is the GSLA the loser, and what are the costs involved?

2865 **Hon. L M Bruzon:** Madam Speaker, until very recently, the way that people became members of the gym was by becoming members of the Squash Association. They could do the same with rugby, but the main one was squash. People would pay a monthly fee to Squash, and Squash would give most of the money to Government. They will keep some because the members would be allowed to use the squash courts as well, as part of the deal. As from 1st October this year, it has been taken over by the GSLA, so now all memberships are controlled by the GSLA. Members have a QR code which they use on their phone in order to gain access to the gym, and all moneys are coming in, through the GSLA, to Government.

2875 **Hon. E J Reyes:** I am grateful for that answer, which I think in many ways, I want to add, is good news. I should declare publicly – I do not know if the Minister is aware or not – that I have a vested interest. I am a past committee member of the Cricket Association. I am glad to see that my old colleagues are not losing out on that one, and I share the Minister's views for the future, so far.

2880 Can I just home in now, to try to finalise this, on Question 951? I know that there are commercial entities that have been operating there for some time, and despite the Minister's assurance that LPS are working on that, they are working commercially at the moment, so there must be some income coming in, subject to review. What are the commercial rates and whose is the ultimate benefit? Is that payment made to the GSLA and then accounted for in the GSLA's account, or is there some other agreement made for that? I would be grateful for some clarification in this final respect.

2890 **Hon. L M Bruzon:** Madam Speaker, officially there are two locations within the building which are being used as commercial premises. One of them is paying rent, and for the time being we are happy because not only are they paying a reasonable amount of rent but they are also looking after the equipment and maintaining everything. The other is one of the bars within the building, and that is going out to expressions of interest to make sure that the taxpayers get the best deal possible.

2895 **Hon. E J Reyes:** I know the Minister has attempted to answer, but because of my hearing difficulties ... One of them is paying rent, I take it subject to review. The other is one of the bars, which is managed by a different sporting entity. Is that what is happening? When we have shared that location, if it is a rugby event it is rugby people running it, and if it is a cricket event it is ... Is that what happens? And then, pro rata for that use, is income derived?

2900 **Hon. L M Bruzon:** Madam Speaker, one of the associations that offer a service also to the public is also running a commercial element to the bar area in order to supplement the running costs and so on. That is the one that is going to go out to expressions of interest, to make sure that we are getting the best deal we can.

2905 **Hon. E J Reyes:** And –

Madam Speaker: I will just say to the hon. Member that we are coming to the end of supplementaries on this very soon.

2910 **Hon. E J Reyes:** Madam Speaker, we are coming to the conclusion, but in the interim period, whilst we come to a conclusion, or not, some payment has to be made, and my question was is it made to the GSLA or is it made to some other fund? If it is made to the GSLA, one can then look into the GSLA's annual accounts and see that income. Tomorrow or next month, how can I trace what income has come into the sportsground? You can name this rental of facilities or whatever, but it has to be accounted for somewhere, otherwise the Financial Secretary will run down our throats.

2920 **Hon. L M Bruzon:** Madam Speaker, I am not sure whether it goes to the GSLA or directly to the Government General Account, but I will get the information and pass it on to the hon. Member.

Madam Speaker: Next question.

Q952/2024
Europa Sports Complex –
Expansion of spectator facilities

Clerk: Question 952. The Hon. E J Reyes.

2925 **Hon. E J Reyes:** Madam Speaker, can Government provide details and estimated costs relating to the plans to expand upon spectator facilities at the Europa sportsground main pitch?

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

2930 **Minister for Industrial Relations, Civil Contingencies and Sport (Hon. L M Bruzon):** Madam Speaker, the current seating capacity at the Europa Sports Complex is 777 and we are extending the capacity by an extra 800 seats. The cost is approximately £1.1 million, which will be paid for by the GFA via UEFA hattrick funds.

2935 **Hon. E J Reyes:** Thank you, Madam Speaker. I think it should have been clear in the building application, but can I get it verified and for the record that these are extra spectator stands to be built in what is geographically the south end of where the football pitch stands at the moment? When I was there last week and looked at the space, there does not seem to be too much space unless we are encroaching on the terrace area at the top of the facilities. Can he orientate us a bit more clearly as to where these stands are going to be? Are we losing any particular facilities now, to make room for the new stands?

2940 **Hon. L M Bruzon:** Madam Speaker, we are not losing any facilities. To give the hon. Gentleman an idea, the new stands will go up to the height of the existing balcony area, if that makes sense.

2945 **Hon. E J Reyes:** The existing balcony area is at the same level as the existing spectator seating area, and if, at present, along the whole length of the pitch we only have 777 seats, how can we fit 800 seats in what is really a narrow area? Normally a football pitch is, on average, 50 m wide – or 50 yards, it used to be – behind the goal, so mathematically, unless the seats are going to be closer together than here and I will have difficulty in sitting down there ...

2950 **Hon. L M Bruzon:** Madam Speaker, the 800 seats include more seats where the current seating areas is. There are dead spaces, I am told – I am not an expert – which will be used for extra seating as well. So, some of the seats will be where we currently sit.

2955 **Hon. E J Reyes:** Finally, Madam Speaker, it is good news to hear that using the availability of UEFA funds and so on ... one deduces that instead of from the taxpayer, the £1.1 million is going to come in through UEFA. When the GFA at long last hopefully inaugurate the newly refurbished Victoria Stadium and we celebrate them there, will the GFA or UEFA expect any payback for whatever facilities are left that have been built with their investment, or is that going to be a free, gratis and for-nothing Christmas present to the people of Gibraltar?

2960 **Hon. L M Bruzon:** No, Madam Speaker, there will be no payment.

Madam Speaker: Next question.

EMPLOYMENT, EQUALITY, CULTURE AND TOURISM

Q953/2024

National Disability Strategy – Finalisation and publication

2965 **Clerk:** Questions to the Hon. Minister for Employment, Equality, Culture and Tourism. Question 953. The Hon. A Sanchez.

Hon. A Sanchez: Has the National Disability Strategy been finalised; and, if so, when will it be published?

2970 **Clerk:** Answer the Hon. the Minister for Employment, Equality, Culture and Tourism.

Minister for Equality, Employment, Culture and Tourism (Hon. C P Santos): Madam Speaker, there are two strands to the National Disability Strategy: the internal HMGoG strand, and the private sector strand. The HMGoG strand has been finalised with 31 departments. There are eight departments left and this will be completed before Christmas. Work on the private sector strand begins in January 2025. The National Disability Strategy will be published once the private sector strand is completed.

2975 **Hon. A Sanchez:** Madam Speaker, can the Hon. Minister clarify in terms of the internal strand that he has stated has been completed, if I understand correctly – is that now being implemented?

2980 **Hon. C P Santos:** Madam Speaker, the team at the SNDO office is going around all the different departments to run through it on what will affect them. It is a consultation phase. There have been very few changes. We currently, this week, are training up disability co-ordinators in order to have a representative in each department, in order to be able to implement it fully. We will also be overseeing this from the SND office.

2985 **Hon. A Sanchez:** Madam Speaker, if I refer the Hon. Minister to Government Press Release 725/2024, just so that I can clarify and understand where the Disability Strategy is, the Hon. Minister for Health and Care speaks about the establishment of an office in the GHA as the liaison point for disabilities and supported needs. She specifically says that this has come about as a result of the implementation of the National Disability Strategy, so I am trying to understand ...

It suggests that the Disability Strategy has been completed and it is being implemented, if you read that press release and what she quotes.

2990 **Hon. C P Santos:** The Disability Strategy has been completed. We are going through departments. We are implementing things that do not need to wait for us to consult with all the other different departments. We consulted with the GHA and the Care Agency to begin with. This role is something that we identified quite early on, so, as opposed to waiting for the other eight departments to go through a consultation period, we are implementing things as we go along. The
2995 same is happening with the Youth Strategy, in that we have not completed the consultation phase but there are things that we can implement, so we are going ahead in the way that has already been explained.

Hon. A Sanchez: Will there be an actual document of the strategy that will be published, so that the community can see what the strategy is?
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Hon. C P Santos: Yes, that is the plan. As I stated in the original answer, we will publish it once the private sector strand is also completed, so that we can publish one document as a whole.

3005 **Hon. A Sanchez:** One final question, Madam Speaker: would the Hon. Minister consider sharing this strategy with the Opposition in the Select Committee on People with Disabilities? I assume that it is due to meet soon, and since at least the internal strand is finalised, would he consider sharing it with us for consultation or discussion, or at least for us to have sight of it?

3010 **Hon. C P Santos:** I will discuss this with the team. I have no issue in sharing this with the Members of the Select Committee in the slightest; I just want to make sure that when I do, it is a complete document, and then we will also consult with them. I am just going to ask the team whether it is okay to subdivide and consult on this area or wait until both, but I have absolutely no issue with sharing it. That is the essence of what we are doing, working together for disabilities,
3015 which is something that we are working on very closely together with the Opposition as well.

Madam Speaker: The Hon. D J Bossino.

Hon. D J Bossino: I am grateful, Madam Speaker, and I am grateful for what the Hon. Minister has just said in his latter response. May I also ask him this: what is the rationale behind waiting for, as he puts it, I think, the private sector strand to be completed before the full publication of the strategy document? If, as he says, he is expecting the first strand, the public sector element of it, to be completed before Christmas, as he, I think, put it, is there any reason why that element of it be made public. If not, I am just trying to seek an answer as to why he is holding back
3025 for the private sector element to also be completed.

Hon. C P Santos: Madam Speaker, I think it would be more productive to publish the strategy as a whole, because currently I would be publishing a chapter of it as opposed to the full strategy. That is my only thought; it is nothing other than that I feel we have been able to subdivide it, but
3030 the National Disability Strategy would not be complete, so we would be publishing it in parts. I do not know if that is the most productive way of doing it.

Madam Speaker: Next question.

Q954/2024

**Drugs and Alcohol Rehabilitation Service dry house –
Composition and staffing**

Clerk: Question 954. The Hon. A Sanchez.

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Hon. A Sanchez: In relation to the Drugs and Alcohol Rehabilitation Service's dry house, could the Government provide the following information: the number of bedrooms available; whether the facility is a mixed sex/gender apartment or dwelling; and whether the dry house is staffed 24 hours a day?

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

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Minister for Equality, Employment, Culture and Tourism (Hon. C P Santos): Madam Speaker, the dry house is a 3RKB property with two bedrooms which can cater for up to four clients, currently with a mixed sex dwelling with separate rooms for males and females. The Drugs and Alcohol Rehabilitation Service does not have specific staff assigned to the facility given the whole aim is to provide a reintroduction into society and therefore enable independence. However, they do attend daily to carry out health and safety checks, perform quality assurance checks and random drug tests and provide direct support if required. They are also available on call 24/7.

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Hon. A Sanchez: Madam Speaker, could the Hon. Minister clarify the level of support offered in the dry house? Compared to the dry houses and recovery houses available in the UK, is this one and the level of support offered akin to what is commonly known in the UK as an Oxford House? Is that the level of supervision that is offered? Is it monitored by a member of staff? What level of support is offered?

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Hon. C P Santos: Madam Speaker, I am not quite sure about the Oxford House and how that is comparative to what we offer here. I am told that we do not have specific staff who work there because the whole point is that it is a transitional home for clients. The support is offered on a 24/7 basis whenever it is required – it is not a house that is staffed – and whatever other support they need. As part of the contract that they sign, they need to have completed the 12-week programme as well as attending some of the sessions that are offered, as well as all the sessions that are offered outside of the rehabilitation facilities. So, as far as I am told, if there is a need for staff, they are available on a 24 hour, seven days a week service.

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Hon. A Sanchez: Can the Hon. Minister shed light on any analysis or any data that might have been collected since the establishment of the dry house in order to assess the effectiveness of the current model for service users in relation to increased abstinence, successful recovery, pathways into independent living, education, training and employment?

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Hon. C P Santos: I am sure I could get this data, but I would need some foresight of this question in order to be able to give the details that the hon. Member requires.

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Hon. A Sanchez: But is the Hon. Minister aware of whether this data is being collected and whether this analysis is being done?

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Hon. C P Santos: I would need to check, because I would be giving incorrect information. I work with the Head of the Care Agency on this and I have data on absolutely every everything that I have asked for and required, so I am sure that he is probably up to date with data. As I said, I will check, and if I am given foresight of this question, I will be able to hand in the details.

Madam Speaker: Next question, which I see from the Order Paper comes from the Hon. G Origo. If the hon. Member would prefer to ask the questions sitting down, provided we can get a camera on the hon. Member I have no issue with that.

Hon. G Origo: Madam Speaker, if I may, before we move to my questions, I just want to take a moment to briefly thank you and the other hon. Members for the warm welcome and wishes on my return to Parliament this morning. I have not been quite as vocal on what has happened over the last few weeks, and just to highlight and take the opportunity to note that in the past eight weeks I have endured a leg break which resulted in my sidelining, and during this time I have been operated on, recovered and commenced my rehabilitation. On that note, I also wanted to thank the wonderful staff at the Health Authority, the people who operated on me, and everyone who has helped with that aftercare. I thought this would be a good moment to appreciate that, so thank you all and it is good to be back. *(Banging on desks)*

Madam Speaker: Next question.

Q955/2024
Youth clubs –
Data collection

Clerk: Question 955. The Hon. G Origo.

Hon. G Origo: Can the Minister confirm whether the youth clubs collect any data on youths; and, if so, what that data entails and how we are using this to enhance club usage?

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

Minister for Equality, Employment, Culture and Tourism (Hon. C P Santos): Madam Speaker, the Youth Service collects various types of data on its members and these include personal details, daily attendance, activity tracking, incident and accident reports, statistical data on participation and demographics, youth club reports, questionnaires for feedback and evaluation forms.

We have, since April 2024, been using an online system called Upshot, whereby data is collected and designed to help organisations such as our youth clubs to track and evaluate the effectiveness of the programmes. This data is used to enhance club usage by measuring impact and understanding how well the programmes delivered are achieving their objectives, identifying areas of improvement in their activities based on feedback and insights and allowing the Youth Service to refine its approach to be more effective and responsive to the needs of its participants; taking evidence-based decisions on what works and what does not work; tailoring support for its participants; accountability and transparency sustainability by continuously tracking data and outcomes and being able to demonstrate long-term success and therefore long-term support on their initiatives. Data is also used to ensure the safety and well-being of members, improving communication with parents, guardians and carers, analysing attendance patterns and participation trends, all of which the youth clubs use to improve their services more efficiently.

Hon. G Origo: Madam Speaker, I am grateful for the comprehensive answer and I am happy to note that the youth clubs are actually recording data and using this to enhance youth club usage. However, the reason I have asked this question is because it was raised in youth discussions that we had with some of our members, and generally the feeling is that most young people view youth clubs as a place which just offers a safe space or a place where they can just feel secure. The point that was made by the youth members that I was speaking to was whether youth clubs could do

more to engage with organisations such as the Scouts or sports clubs or associations, so that these youth clubs can then offer more opportunities to those youths who are attending the clubs. Is that something the Minister may be minded to agree with and support, and something that we could look at together, if he does not do it already?

Hon. C P Santos: Madam Speaker, I am not quite sure who the young people they are engaging with are, but the Youth Service currently provides a lot of informal educational projects. If the impression from the outside perspective is that it is just about having a safe space, I would that is actually very correct, it is a safe space for all to attend. In every session there are different activities, different projects. I used to volunteer at the Youth Service for a long while, and I led on a lot of projects, so I know how it works internally. The Youth Service engages with the Department of Education, so they are in schools during the day. They engaged with the GFA when we did the street football project. They have engaged with GAMPa and they have engaged with other music academies when they have started their own community choir – I do not remember what it is called. And they do have a lot of projects that are not just drop-in sessions. I think once a week there is a drop-in session, but all the others tend to be project based.

So, I do agree it is a safe space for young people in Gibraltar to attend, but it is more around informal educational projects.

Hon. G Origo: Madam Speaker, I agree with the Hon. Minister that these youth clubs are indeed safe spaces and they should be doing and offering more to those youths who attended them, which I am sure they do tend to do. On the premise and questions on data and information collection, I just want to ask the Hon. Minister if he is aware, because he may not be, but having looked in preparation for these questions leading up to this session, I was navigating through the Gibraltar Youth website and it appeared not to be operating at the time. I just want to note that I looked at it a couple of days ago, and I checked it last night and again this morning, and I do not know if the Minister is aware that it is not working. It may be under maintenance, and that is why I wanted to flag it at this stage, but would the Minister not agree that for young people who are wishing to get information on how to access the youth clubs and seek further opportunities, the Youth Gibraltar website is a website that should be up and running given the cost that we have put into this website and what it means to the youth by way of information?

Hon. C P Santos: Madam Speaker, I cannot confirm. I am happy to take his word for it, and I will ask the team and see what is going on with that. I know a few weeks ago I needed some information and it was working, but I will check with them and see if it is working. What I am very sure of is that they are very active on social media, and their social media is working. They use their social media platforms to promote every different activity they do. This Saturday, for example, they have a residential, where all the clubs are going across the border to a residential. I am aware of all this not just from the team themselves, but also through their social media. So, I think that they interact very well with young people through different mediums but I will check on the website, and I do agree it is a very important medium to communicate.

Madam Speaker: Next question.

Q956/2024
Laguna Youth Club refurbishment and extension works –
Projected costs

Clerk: Question 956. The Hon. G Origo.

Hon. G Origo: Madam Speaker, what are the projected costs of the refurbishment of the existing facilities and extension works at the Laguna Youth Club?

3175 **Clerk:** Answer the Hon. the Minister for Employment, Equality, Culture and Tourism.

Minister for Equality, Employment, Culture and Tourism (Hon. C P Santos): Madam Speaker, the Government is not incurring any costs in this refurbishment.

3180 **Hon. G Origo:** Madam Speaker, firstly, it is pleasing to see that investment and refurbishment works are being pushed into youth clubs, as we feel that the better these facilities are kept and the more investment put into them, the higher the potential youth uptake will be.

3185 Although the Minister may not be able to provide costs, I do refer to a DPC planning application approved a few weeks ago, in mid-November, and on that planning application I can read out that the works approved were for proposed refurbishment of the existing club facilities and an extension to providing multi-purpose hall to the external terrace area. May I ask the Hon. Minister what the refurbishment to the existing facilities would entail? Is he aware or does he have that information with him?

3190 **Hon. C P Santos:** Madam Speaker, the refurbishment is currently on the ground floor and then there is an area above where we are building a new multi-purpose area, as well as, outside, a children's park that can be used for the benefit of the whole estate. The refurbishment at the bottom is basically refurbishing what already exists. There is a new kitchen. There are some issues with water ingress that are being looked into. There is a computer suite. We are just going to bring everything up to date so that it feels like a new facility. So, all the facilities that are currently there with the addition of the top, which is an extra hall, and all of this will benefit the area of Laguna and Glacis Estate.

3195 **Madam Speaker:** The Hon. G Origo, and then I will allow additional Members.

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Hon. G Origo: I am grateful, Madam Speaker. In respect of the new hall, could the Hon. Minister give a bit more detail on what the purpose of the multi-purpose hall would be and whether this hall would be exclusively used by the youth club, or are some of the facilities in the youth club, like this hall, going to be made available to maybe other groups or residents in the state? I understand, and he has also mentioned just now, that some of these youth clubs have kitchens, have bigger facilities, and I have been asked and approached by older members in the community, some within certain estates, some association groups, whether they could have access to some of these clubs when they are not in use by youths, given the extent of the facilities that they have.

3205 **Hon. C P Santos:** Madam Speaker, none of the youth clubs at the moment are used by any other members of the community. They tend to be used most of the time during the week by the Youth Service. It is basically because we are seeing rising numbers of young people using the youth clubs, so giving more space for young people to be able to do more projects. It is good to have an external area, but the extension to any youth club is always so that we are able to offer more services and be open to more people. We are seeing that the demographic of children from both Glacis and Laguna Estates ... The Laguna Youth Club is now housed in Laguna Estate and it caters for both and is an area that we feel needs bigger facilities.

3210 **Madam Speaker:** The Hon. the Leader of the Opposition.

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Hon. Dr K Azopardi: The Minister says that the Government is not paying for this. Does he know who is and what the cost will be?

3225 **Hon. C P Santos:** Madam Speaker, this youth club was originally part of the project at the old Laguna Youth Club area, which is the works for the flats that are being built for the pensioners who are already homeowners and want to downgrade. The bottom floor of that facility was going to be a youth club. We felt that we needed that area for more houses and we felt that we could refurbish and expand on the one that we have. So, the funding will come from the not-for-profit company that is dealing with the houses in Laguna.

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Hon. Dr K Azopardi: I see. The not-for-profit company, to be clear, is Community Supplies and Services (CSSL), which we have spoken about before, (*Interjections*) and not Community Homes Ownership. I think it is CSSL in that particular case, which is part of the Father of the House's National Economic Plan. Does the Minister know how much it will cost, which is the other part of the question that I had asked?

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Hon. C P Santos: Madam Speaker, at the moment we are getting the cost. Accurate costs will be available once the designs progress to a more detailed stage. We are currently engaging with designers on this matter. We do not have an accurate idea of costs. We are currently getting quotes.

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Hon. Dr K Azopardi: And given that CSSL is a charity and all its projects have been funded via the National Economic Plan, isn't it the case that the funds for this project will indirectly come from funds controlled by the Government one way or the other, through the Savings Bank or otherwise?

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Hon. C P Santos: Madam Speaker, I am not the correct person to answer this question. I work on the side of the designs of the youth club, the funding of it. I discussed it with the Father of the House, and he is the person to ask regarding funding for this project.

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Hon. Dr K Azopardi: I am asking the Government. They can answer through whoever they want. It happens to be that the Minister is fielding these questions. We were taken by the way that he answered the question, which was the Government is not paying for it, but presumably national economic funds are going to be used for this.

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Hon. C P Santos: Madam Speaker, as I mentioned, I am not privy to the funding or how the funding of this project works in particular. I understand that they are asking the Government, but I am sure that they understand that all nine of us will not be able to answer questions on absolutely every topic. That is why we all have our own Ministries and our own portfolios. I understand that I am answering this question with regard to the youth clubs, which is what I am responsible for. The funding of it falls under another Minister, and I think that I would be giving a very inaccurate, uninformed answer if I were to give one.

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Hon. Dr K Azopardi: But that is a different answer, because the Minister was bold enough, if I can put it that way, to assertively say the Government is not paying for it. The way he has just answered it does not suggest that. The way that he has just answered it suggests, 'I do not actually know where this money is coming from.' Is that the case?

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Hon. C P Santos: No, Madam Speaker, that is not the case, and if that is the way it has come across, I have worded it incorrectly. My part in this project is the design and the services required for the youth club. This project is managed by CSSL, funded by CSSL. We have just moved the floor of the youth club, which is going to be that building where the homes for the pensioners are going to be, and we have moved it somewhere else. It is part of another project, but I am the Minister for Youth, who has been involved in what the youth needs in the club.

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3275 **Madam Speaker:** One last one from the Hon. D J Bossino.

Hon. D J Bossino: It is a very short question and I am not going to press the Hon. Minister in relation to the structure and where the funds are coming from. That has been the subject of question-and-answer sessions on how many occasions, I ask my friend here, in the previous
3280 Parliament and in this one, but may I just pin him down in relation to timing? It is a very simple question. Is he able to state when he will be in a position specifically to provide an idea of costs in respect of the element of the project that he is responsible for, and can the Hon. Minister commit – and I think he already has, but I am going to pin him down in respect of this aspect as well – to provide answers in relation to the costs, so that we are not subjected to the very short,
3285 negative responses that we got from the Minister for Business Development, who has overarching responsibility for this area of policy?

Hon. C P Santos: I could not give a timeline on this. I know that they are engaging designers at the moment, but if it is not funded by Government, I do not think I need to give any costs.

3290 **Madam Speaker:** Next question. (*Interjection*) No we have had 8 questions. I allowed the Hon. the Leader of the Opposition to ask a question but he asked five questions, and then I allowed the Hon. D J Bossino to ask a question. We have had eight questions on this. I apologise to the hon. Member, but that is sufficient supplementaries on this one.

3295 Next question.

Q957/2024
Gibraltar Christmas Fair –
Entities running attractions and selection process

Clerk: Question 957. The Hon. G Origo.

Hon. G Origo: Madam Speaker, can the Minister confirm which entity or entities are running the Gibraltar Christmas Fair attractions at John Mackintosh Square and what process was used to select the successful applicants?
3300

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

Minister for Equality, Employment, Culture and Tourism (Hon. C P Santos): Madam Speaker, Gibraltar Cultural Services, on behalf of the Ministry of Culture, are responsible for organising and producing the Christmas Fair. The attractions are provided by Hermanos Guerrero Toledo, who have been providing this service for over 30 years under successive administrations. The Christmas Fair attractions come at no cost to Government, as costs, including insurance, are met by the fair operator.
3305

3310 **Hon. G Origo:** Madam Speaker, could the Minister please provide, if he has them, more details of the arrangements with the Hermanos Guerrero, which he has just given across the floor of the House? In looking at the Christmas Fair attractions, I came across a tender process application that was issued by the Government with respect to the Christmas stalls, and rightly, as he put it,
3315 the fair attractions, which is a ride, according to a statement, will come at no cost to Government because the costs, the insurance and the premiums were being footed by fair stallholders. I want to understand how the arrangements between Government and the fair attractions are operating, because it seems to be that the fair stallholders are entering into a tender process, perhaps even

3320 applying or paying a profit-sharing arrangement of some kind, but that arrangement is not the case with the fair attractions. Could he please just clarify the position on that?

3325 **Hon. C P Santos:** Madam Speaker, the fairground attractions are a niche market and it is not easy to find companies of the same standard. Hermanos Guerrero Toledo have always upheld our health and safety regulations. They have been providing the fair rides for the past 30 years. I think it is a historical arrangement where they are contacted; we know the service they bring. The fair was changed at one point, if I remember correctly, to a company from the UK. It did not necessarily work the same. Sometimes it is about working with someone you know who will abide by rules and regulations here in Gibraltar.

3330 The Christmas stalls are different, because whilst the fair does not cost us any money, it is something that has been happening and that the whole Gibraltarian community expects will happen annually, not just at Christmas but also during the end of the summer period. The Christmas stalls, on the other hand, are something that that Government Cultural Services would have needed to invest in. Therefore, there was a tender process to see if there was interest in people having a stall and paying rent for it, so that it was at no cost to the taxpayer. We did not
3335 get as much interest as we had envisaged, so there were no stalls.

Hon. G Origo: Madam Speaker, may I ask the Hon. Minister – and I am not asking, if he has not got the figures in front of him, for the exact numbers, but can he confirm whether the arrangements with this company, Hermanos Guerrero, that runs the fair rides ...? Is there some
3340 premium that is paid to Government for having acquired the whole premises of what is John Mackintosh Square? Is it a profit-sharing arrangement which they enter into with Government for how many rides they sell? What commercial arrangement, if any, is in place?

3345 **Hon. C P Santos:** Madam Speaker, I do not have these details to hand. If I am given prior notice, I will be able to get it, or if you send me an email or get in touch with me, I will be able to send it to you that way, if you so wish – if the hon. Member so wishes. Apologies.

Madam Speaker: Next question.

Q958/2024

Christmas Festival of Lights – Setup cost and identify of private companies contracted

3350 **Clerk:** Question 958. The Hon. G Origo.

Hon. G Origo: Can the Minister provide details of the cost for the setup of the Christmas Festival of Lights show and what private companies, if any, have been contracted for this project?

3355 **Clerk:** Answer, the Hon. the Minister for Employment, Equality, Culture and Tourism.

Minister for Equality, Employment, Culture and Tourism (Hon. C P Santos): Madam Speaker, the event is organised by Gibraltar Cultural Services on behalf of the Ministry of Culture, in conjunction with the Gibraltar Electricity Authority and two private companies, GibMedia and Fresh Entertainment. The cost to the taxpayer is £50,000 – of which £40,000 is paid by the Ministry
3360 of Culture and £10,000 by the Gibraltar Electricity Authority – and is provided for in the sums allocated to each of these in the Estimates Book.

Hon. G Origo: Madam Speaker, I am grateful to the Hon. Minister for that answer. Before I move on to my supplementary, I wanted to congratulate the Minister and his team for the wonderful work put into holding such an amazing Christmas Festival of Lights. The feedback generally has been great, and I think this event was one which was thoroughly enjoyed by all, but that is not to say it is also important to ask and understand the costs of such events, their viability and whether or not we are going to be able to provide them in the future. So, on that, does the Hon. Minister have an idea of the cost difference between this year's show and last year's show? Although I appreciate he might not have that in front of him, he would have been in office at the time, so he may have some indication of whether the differences between this year's show and last year's may be double or triple or ... just an indication of the kind. I just wanted to have some feel.

Hon. C P Santos: Madam Speaker, the cost of the event to the taxpayer is exactly the same year on year, in that we have a budget of £50,000 per year for this event.

Hon. G Origo: Madam Speaker, is it the intention for the Hon. Minister to continue large-scale events of this kind going forward?

Hon. C P Santos: Madam Speaker, it is my intention to continue providing our community with events that are enjoyed by as many people in the community as possible. So, yes, I will continue with the large-scale events and I will continue with smaller events that provide cultural development to maybe more niche markets. For me, it is about a broad spectrum of culture. To answer his question specifically, yes, I want to continue with large-scale events.

Hon. G Origo: Madam Speaker, I am grateful for that clarification but I just want to seek further clarification on this point. The Hon. Minister said something to the effect that each year Gibraltar Cultural Services has about a £50,000 budget, but I can starkly remember that the performance of this year and the one of last year were stark differences apart – one looked a lot more grand than the other. Is it the case, therefore, that there may be other sources of funding, or donations, charitable in nature, of any kind, that must have gone to funding this project? I think that the two comparable events, this year and last year ... if they both cost £50,000, one would think that maybe more money would have been put towards this year's event.

Hon. C P Santos: The cost to the taxpayer is exactly the same every year. We do have support from sponsors that are advertised very openly on the screens and are mentioned. We have always had support from sponsors, year on year, since as far as I can remember. I used to present this event, and for the past 10 or 12 years we have always had support from sponsors. There was not such a vast difference. I think we had one more sponsor than we did last year. It is all about production a lot of the time, so it may have looked grander but the cost was very similar. It was exactly the same to the taxpayer; but including sponsorship it was not much more expensive. And in actual fact, the larger expense this year, if I have to really break it down, is on security and not on the production side, which cost the same.

Madam Speaker: One last question on this. *One* – and that is probably one too many because there have already been three, so choose it carefully.

Hon. C Sacarello: Fair enough. Thank you for your indulgence. Relating to what the Hon. Minister has just said, how much did the private sponsorship contribute to this event, please?

Hon. C P Santos: I would need to check. I know we had four sponsors, but I do not have the exact numbers of what they contributed. I would be very happy, if you write to me, to give you the amount. No issue on this side.

Madam Speaker: Next question.

Q959/2024

**Duke of Edinburgh International Award Scheme –
Approved Activity Provider status**

Clerk: Question 959. The Hon. G Origo.

3420 **Hon. G Origo:** Madam Speaker, can the Minister provide details on the appointment of Gibraltar Cultural Services as an Approved Activity Provider for the purposes of the Duke of Edinburgh International Award Scheme and specifically its Gold Residential Project in Gibraltar?

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

3425 **Minister for Equality, Employment, Culture and Tourism (Hon. C P Santos):** Madam Speaker, Gibraltar Cultural Services, on behalf of the Ministry of Culture, applied to become an Approved Activity Provider for the Duke of Edinburgh International Award. After the successful application, GCS, as explained in Government Press Release 754/2024, intends to expand its offering to include the Silver and Gold Award levels and potentially offer the Gold Residential Project.

3430 **Hon. G Origo:** Madam Speaker, it is on that press release that we came across the fact that Gibraltar Cultural Services had been successful in its application, but may I ask the Minister about the actual proposed arrangement? Could he give details on that? I know that we have applied and successfully been awarded Approved Activity Provider specifically with a residential project in
3435 Gibraltar. Can the Hon. Minister explain how that will work, where will those individuals be housed, and is the scheme going to come at a cost to the Government?

Hon. C P Santos: Madam Speaker, firstly, to answer the last part of the question, this comes at no cost to the Government. There is a 16-week programme that would be manned by staff at GCS.
3440 They will be training for the different activities for the 16-week period in January. There are members of the Ministry who also volunteering their time, members of my team who will be able to help in these activities. Currently we are only doing the bronze award, but as mentioned in the press release that I have here, it states, and I quote:

Over time, GCS intends to expand its offering to include the Silver and Gold Award levels, and potentially offer the Gold Residential Project ...

3445 which means that we are going to start with the Bronze, see how that develops, and hopefully then be able to offer the Silver and then the Gold.

Madam Speaker: Next question.

Q960/2024

**World Travel Market visit –
Details**

Clerk: Question 960. The Hon. G Origo.

3450 **Hon. G Origo:** Please provide the following details relating to the recent visit to the World Travel Market: who comprised the Government's delegation; the total cost of the trip broken down into air travel costs, lodgings and entertainment; who the Minister or any member of his

delegation met; what new or prospective business has been secured as a result of the trip; and the duration of the trip.

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

Minister for Equality, Employment, Culture and Tourism (Hon. C P Santos): Madam Speaker, I am very grateful to the hon. Member for this question. As a proud Gibraltarian, nothing gives me more satisfaction than being able to promote my country abroad, and this is the perfect platform to share all the work that takes place at the World Travel Market.

The Government delegation to the World Travel Market consisted of five members of staff as follows: me, my PA, the CEO for the Gibraltar Tourist Board, the UK Head of Media and Marketing and our Gibraltar Tourist Board Marketing Officer.

The total cost of the trip was as follows: air travel, £2,626.79; accommodation, £2,161.97; transport, £192.18; entertainment and food, £692.59.

I met personally during my time there with the following: easyJet and easyJet Holidays, British Airways and BA Holidays, OTT UK and Ireland, Travel Weekly, Allied Media, Visit Jersey, European Cultural Programmes and Barrhead Travel.

The CEO of the Gibraltar Tourist Board, the UK Head of Media and Marketing and the GTB Marketing Executive met with the following: TTG Media, Travel Bulletin, CAA Group, Budget Traveller, Inspire My Holiday, Sailawaze/Family Traveller, Rough Guides, Adventurize, Media Partnerships, Sports Events, Acetrip – MyGibraltar.co.uk, Business Traveller Magazine, Besser Urlauben und Holiday Pirates.

The team was also introduced to influencers and bloggers, which I will now list: Our Bucket List trips, The nomads you know, Adventures Of Alice, Special Duo Explorers, Rel Repro Ltd, Wander.Licious, London Ultimate Guide, Shine with Shauna, El Burrito Monster, Trending Travel, Pro Deep Travel, Travel Connoisseur, Those Travel Guys, Dream Beach Media, Toven Trip and Serena Palladino.

On his own, the CEO of the Tourist Board met with IAG, Seven Dragons and Travel Link.

The CEO of the Gibraltar Tourist Board and the GTP Marketing Executive also attended the Sur in English event.

The trip provided a networking platform with a variety of stakeholders from travel agencies to tourism board, hotels, airlines, technology providers and destination marketers, in order to expand our networking connections so we can build on existing partners and so we can find new partners to work with.

A broadcast interview was arranged with OTT, an online travel agent training platform with over 280,000 registered travel professionals that use its e-learning services. They will produce a video, which will be broadcast directly to all the agents on the platform, where I speak about everything Gibraltar has to offer. This was a great opportunity to directly address a wide section of the UK travel agent market.

Additionally, we have already been in discussion for holding a destination partner conference for 2025, having a joint sporting venture, wedding destination planning holiday destination, road shows, journalists and influencers' visits to name but a few.

The World Travel Market was from 5th to 7th November, three days in total. I attended on 5th November and in one day attended eight meetings. The GTB team attended from 5th to 7th November and in three days attended 17 meetings as well as attending an event and meeting influencers and bloggers.

I have answered the question in as detailed a way as it has been asked, I hope.

Hon. G Origo: Madam Speaker, I am very grateful to the Minister for his very comprehensive and long answer; I believe he has responded to most of the points.

If I may just refer him back to a previous reply, given to Question 415/2022, the then Hon. Minister for Tourism confirmed, having taken a trip to the same destination, that he took, at that

3505 time, a delegation of three persons at a total cost of £2,596. Can the Minister really justify the
increase in the delegation he has taken, and also the increasing costs, which I calculate roughly at
£5,500, which is almost a 100% increase to this trip? Could we not do it at a lower cost, like we
did in 2022? I ask this in the context of the recent cost of living crisis, Covid and the harsh Budgets
that we have had. Is this really an effective use of taxpayers' money when we have already been
3510 doing the same for less?

A Member: Hear, hear.

Hon. C P Santos: Madam Speaker, this is a great concept for a question, but 2022 was a small
3515 World Travel Market. There was a stop for two years and this was the first one. It was held at a
completely different venue. It was a smaller area, so all stalls were smaller, all teams were smaller.
It was the first one coming back, so we did not have as open a space. That is why it cost that. It
might be an idea to maybe have a look at what happened before 2020. One person I took lives in
the UK. I went with my PA because there is a Ministers' Congress that I go to. It is not the type of
3520 conference that I would necessarily attend, but it is the way that everyone does marketing
business at the moment and it gives you a chance to meet with easyJet, British Airways and BA
Holidays.

I do think it is a great investment. For my part, this is always a working trip, so it is something
that if I did not need to go, I would not go. But if we look at, for example, hotels today, 27th
3525 November, of the four hotels, three of them are at 100% and the other one is at 93%, which is the
best November we have had for a long time. We have had the best summer we have had in a long
time, so I think that all investment in marketing Gibraltar as a destination has been and proves to
be working.

3530 **Madam Speaker:** Any other supplementaries?

Adjournment

Clerk: The Hon. the Deputy chief Minister.

Deputy Chief Minister (Hon. Dr J J Garcia): Madam Speaker, the Chief Minister advises that he
is unable to be in Parliament tomorrow at three for his questions, so I have the honour to move
3535 to adjourn the House to tomorrow morning at 10 o'clock for Chief Minister's Questions.

Madam Speaker: All right. We will adjourn until tomorrow morning at 10 a.m. I now propose
the question, which is that this House should now adjourn to tomorrow morning at 10 a.m.

I now put the question, which is that this House do now adjourn to tomorrow morning at
3540 10 a.m. Those in favour? (**Members:** Aye.) Those against? Passed.

This House will now adjourn to tomorrow morning at 10 a.m.

The House adjourned at 7.00 p.m.



PROCEEDINGS OF THE GIBRALTAR PARLIAMENT

MORNING SESSION: 10.03 a.m. – 1.00 p.m.

Gibraltar, Thursday, 28th November 2024

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<i>The House adjourned at 1.00 p.m.</i>	<i>48</i>

The Gibraltar Parliament

The Parliament met at 10.03 a.m.

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

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

[ASSISTANT CLERK: K Balban Esq *in attendance*]

Questions for Oral Answer

CHIEF MINISTER

Q996-97/2024

**ASYCUDA customs entry system –
Technical problems; resilience and backup system**

Clerk: Meeting of Parliament, Thursday, 28th November 2024. Questions to the Chief Minister. Question 996. The Hon. C Sacarello.

5 **Hon. C Sacarello:** Could the Chief Minister please explain the reason behind the technical glitch of the ASYCUDA Customs entry system on Monday 18th November 2024 that took it offline and prevented HM Customs from clearing any inbound commercial traffic on the busiest day of the week?

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

Chief Minister (Hon. F R Picardo): Yes, Madam Speaker, and I will do so with Question 997.

15 **Clerk:** Question 997, the Hon. C Sacarello.

Hon. C Sacarello: Could the Chief Minister clarify what is being done to improve the ASYCUDA Customs entry system's resilience, and is there a back-up system?

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

25 **Hon. Chief Minister:** Madam Speaker, the server hosting the ASYCUDA platform suffered a technical issue during routine maintenance. As is common practice, this maintenance was carried out on a Sunday to minimise disruption to trade. To solve the issue and restore the data from the backup, access to an ITLD server was required. Unfortunately, further difficulties were encountered when accessing that server as well. Consequently, because of the size of the data involved, the restoration spilt onto the afternoon of Monday, 18 November 2024.

The Collector has requested a report on the matter. Notwithstanding, this has already resulted in contingency measures being put in place to pre-empt and avoid the technical issues that arose. In addition, the contingency protocol to declare and clear goods using paper form has been

30 revived in order to keep delays to a minimum. This would be in the unlikely event that the system was to fail again.

Furthermore, for the last few months, HM Customs has been working on upgrading the ASYCUDA platform to the latest version available. This will not only provide greater functionality and trade facilitation but will also bolster the system's resilience in relation to outages and
35 technical issues.

Hon. C Sacarello: Madam Speaker, I am very grateful to the Hon. Chief Minister for his extensive reply. Could the Chief Minister just confirm that there was not any external interference causing the glitch, that it was purely internal?

40 **Hon. Chief Minister:** Madam Speaker, I refer the hon. Gentleman to the answer I gave a few moments ago.

Hon. C Sacarello: Thank you for that. Madam Speaker, could the Chief Minister please confirm
45 who the Senior Technical Officer with overall responsibility for the ASYCUDA is, and are they suitably qualified to manage this equipment?

Madam Speaker: I assume the hon. Member is not asking for a name.

50 **Hon. C Sacarello:** No.

Hon. Chief Minister: Madam Speaker, there is an individual charged with management of ASYCUDA in Gibraltar. That person is so eminently qualified for this job that he was one of the people who was involved in the original installation of ASYCUDA in Gibraltar, which was a
55 groundbreaking development and is an example to other customs authorities of a one-window interface for people to be able to declare to customs, so I am able to give the hon. Gentleman the assurance that he seeks. I am surprised that he has sought that assurance because if he had spoken to anyone with any knowledge of using ASYCUDA, they would have told him that it functions almost without a glitch, although unfortunately, like all software systems, there may
60 sometimes be a problem. We have not had the problem, for example, that British Airways had recently, which stopped all of its flights for more than a day, but even the most resilient systems, unfortunately, sometimes come down.

Madam Speaker: Next question.

Q998/2024

UK-EU treaty –

Emergency fund to support businesses during transition period

65 **Clerk:** Question 998. The Hon. C Sacarello.

Hon. C Sacarello: In the event of a negotiated outcome, is there an emergency fund set aside to support ailing businesses during their time of transition, allowing them to re-orientate their business while retaining their employees?

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

75 **Chief Minister (Hon. F R Picardo):** Madam Speaker, there is no specific emergency fund set aside for this purpose, as these circumstances will not appertain and would, if they did appertain, not be within the definition of an emergency.

Hon. C Sacarello: Madam Speaker, could the Chief Minister provide an indication in this scenario of which sectors would likely be most affected?

80 **Hon. Chief Minister:** Madam Speaker, we do not accept such a scenario.

Hon. C Sacarello: Madam Speaker, I was talking about a successful outcome of the negotiation.

85 **Madam Speaker:** That was a hypothetical question, on which I did not intervene but it is a hypothetical question, so I am going to hold it inadmissible.

Madam Speaker: Next question.

Q999-1000/2024
Bassadone Group –
Office space rented by Government

Clerk: Question 999. The Leader of the Opposition, on behalf of the Hon. D J Bossino.

90 **Hon. Dr K Azopardi:** Madam Speaker, please provide the number of leases or other agreements together with the rental amounts entered into by the Government with the Bassadone Group in respect of Government office space.

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

Chief Minister (Hon. F R Picardo): Madam Speaker, I will answer with Question 1000.

Clerk: Question 1000. The Hon. the Leader of the Opposition, on behalf of the Hon. D J Bossino.

100 **Hon. Dr K Azopardi:** How much has been paid by the Government in respect of the properties it is renting from the Bassadone Group in the dockyard area to date?

Clerk: Answer, the Hon. the Chief Minister.

105 **Hon. Chief Minister:** Madam Speaker, Government entered one deed of sub-underlease with the Bassadone Group in respect of government office space.

In the period from 1st July 2023 to date, the Government has paid a total of £610,866.69 in rent in respect of the property rented from the Bassadone Group in the dockyard area. Hon. Members will have been able to work out, relying on their excellent mental arithmetic skills, that
110 this amounts to a sum of £21,816.66 per month. The new arrangements will release upwards of £8,844,000 of capital value in the properties that will be surrendered by the departments moving to this new area. I should add that that amount of £8,844,000 is conservatively estimated.

115 **Hon. Dr K Azopardi:** May I just ask what is the square area that is being occupied in the dockyard area? And, if the Chief Minister permits me while he is consulting his notes, what is the term of the lease?

Hon. Chief Minister: Madam Speaker, if the hon. Gentleman will allow me to speak from memory and not hold me to it for the purposes of *Hansard*, I believe it is a 21-year lease which will have the usual break clauses in. I am afraid I do not have the areas broken down in a way that I can share. I have been very helpfully given the plans, which are to scale, but I would need a ruler in order to be able to make for the hon. Gentleman, from the scale, the exact areas, because I do not think I have been given the areas in the designs, I am sorry to say.

Hon. Dr K Azopardi: I see. And will the Chief Minister refresh our memory – because this may have been the subject of a question before but I cannot recall – what is the specific address of this property?

He mentioned in his original answer that £8 million of capital value will be released by the departments that have gone to the Bassadone Group property. Can he tell us which departments have gone there? And what does he mean by £8 million of capital value being released? Does the Government intend to sell these Crown properties?

Hon. Chief Minister: Madam Speaker, I can in fact confirm to him that it is 21 years. I did have that on another page of the supplementary information that he knows is helpfully provided by those who help us to prepare for these answers.

The address is 80A Queensway. I am trying to go through the list of questions that he has asked in the course of that one supplementary, Madam Speaker. I can tell him that I think the full answer to his supplementary as to the departments that will be moving is the Care Agency, the Treasury – I think that is part of the Treasury, not all of the Treasury; the hon. Gentleman will know that the Treasury has outposts in many different buildings – ITLD, the Department of Education and the Technical Services Department.

In the context of the answer that relates to £8,844,000, that is the capital value of the properties. In fact, there is another property that is also potentially released that will bring the total capital value to over £10.2 million. It is the intention of the Government to potentially put these properties out to tender with reserve prices that should produce that capital value, where there is not another call from another department to move from another area to one of these, and potentially release another building that might release even more capital value for the Government. For example, just looking at what we have here, I have already had it proposed to me that one of the units that becomes available as a result of this move is taken by another government department that released another freestanding building that is more valuable than the unit being released by one of the departments moving.

Hon. Dr K Azopardi: But does the Chief Minister think that is value for money? If the intention is to, in effect, put these properties out to tender to maximise the capital value of £8.8 million, they are paying £610,000 in rent to Bassadone for the property in Queensway. Over 12 years, that is already going to be £8.4 million, roughly speaking, so the Government is going to pay more in rent than the capital value it will deliver from the properties that are being vacated. Is that value for money?

Hon. Chief Minister: The excellent mental arithmetic skills that I referred to in the context of my first answer, Madam Speaker, seem to have eluded the Hon. Leader of the Opposition because that is for 28 months, not for a year. The question asked me how much had been paid in the period since we had started the lease, which was July 2023. I worked it out for him as approximately £21,600 a month, so it is slightly different.

We do believe it is value for money. We also believe it is the right investment in our people in the sense that Government is the owner-occupier – as he knows and he has, in some time in his career as a Minister, enjoyed/suffered this reality – of buildings that are old, that require a lot of expense. In some instances, the Government is unable to carry out the deep refurbishment required to these buildings in order to produce offices that we would consider to be modern and

170 fit for purpose for the people who do such an excellent job of working for the Government. Indeed,
we just have to look at this building to see how difficult it is to refurbish whilst we continue to use
it and the cost involved in refurbishing a very old building, going back to the brick and rewiring
etc. Moving to bespoke modern office buildings gives us a modern environment for those who do
175 the job that we need them to do on behalf of the public and also reduces the maintenance cost in
the long term and reduces the periodic maintenance investment required in the fabric of
buildings. So, we judge that this is, for all of those reasons, the right use of taxpayers' money and
a better way to house sections of the public sector. We do not discard the possibility of potential
new builds in the future, where the Government would be the owner-occupier of new buildings
180 that would not suffer the liabilities that I am referring to in the context of the majority of the
Government's existing estate. Madam Speaker, I hope that that answer satisfies the hon.
Gentleman as to our view in relation to properly, and in a modern environment, housing members
of the Civil Service and Public Sector.

Hon. Dr K Azopardi: I am grateful for the Chief Minister clarifying the level of rent per month,
185 which I had not taken a note of. I am pretty sure he had said £610 million from July 2023 (**Hon.
Chief Minister:** Yes, to date.) to date, but if there is a monthly figure of around £21,000, by
18 months it works out at £378,000, so I am not sure where the discrepancy comes from. Perhaps
he can clarify that for me.

190 **Hon. Chief Minister:** I will look at that. I think the lease date is earlier but there was a rent-free
period which is all rolled up and the rent comes to this, as I understand it, the £21,000.

Hon. Dr K Azopardi: Can he perhaps clarify, because given the answer he has given in response
to my supplementary about the old buildings, which I perfectly understand, but in terms of the
195 value for money question that people will be trying to work out themselves when they are hearing
that these issues are being done, has there been an assessment of the works that need to be done
to the properties that are currently being occupied by these departments, in terms of
refurbishment? Has there been an assessment? Paying £22,000 a month, practically, for the
occupation of a private office premises rather than occupying a place that you are not paying rent
200 on ... you have to do a calculation as to whether it is worth doing in that way. Has there been an
assessment of the kind of refurbishment that would be needed for the Government to remain in
these buildings?

Hon. Chief Minister: Yes, Madam Speaker, and that is what led us to this, because the costs
205 were increasingly astronomical. I do now have, thanks to those listening, the area, which I think
the hon. Gentleman might find helpful, which is 3,618m². My calculations whilst he was on his
feet suggest that that is 2p shy of £6 per square metre, which I think he will recognise as a very
decent rate. And so, Madam Speaker, for all of those reasons, because the cost of investment in
the Government's current properties, and indeed the opportunity cost, because not all of these
210 departments are in older buildings ... Some of them are, for example, releasing areas in New
Harbours which are very sought after; businesses want them, it helps businesses to expand or to
start up. I think we have two or three units in New Harbours that are released on here, where we
already pay a rent anyway. In the context of the way that Government calculates its cost per
department, we do think this is the right and appropriate value for money approach and
215 gives us very decent modern office space for the public servants that this community relies on and
whom we are investing in by taking these steps.

Hon. Dr K Azopardi: Madam Speaker, a final question, if I may, on this one. Can the Chief
Minister confirm whether those Civil Service departments are now in occupation of that building
220 in Queensway?

Hon. Chief Minister: We are in the process of the fitting out, Madam Speaker.

225 **Hon. Dr K Azopardi:** So, the Government has been paying rent since July 2023 – perhaps even for an earlier period – and has paid £610,000. Is the Chief Minister saying that the rent has been paid but the Civil Servants are not using the building?

230 **Hon. Chief Minister:** Madam Speaker, when you buy a house you start paying the mortgage whilst you refurbish it, unless you are very desperate and you move in without a bathroom, kitchen, curtains and all the rest of it. We are fitting out in this period. We are required to pay the rent whilst we fit out, and that would be normal in every single arrangement ever done in any circumstances. You get a short rent-free period but you cannot do the sort of fit out that you have to do to the standard that we require, the cabling that we require, in the rent-free period. That is the reason why we are paying the rent and fitting out at the same time.

235 I know that it is possible to raise this to a level of expectation that the Government is incredibly paying rent and the civil servants still are not in there, but when you actually descend to particulars and analyse how things have to be done, of course we are suffering costs whilst refurbishing, in exactly the same way as if we had done the opposite of what we are doing and we were refurbishing a building. If we were refurbishing a building, unless you had fewer people than you
240 needed use of a building for, you would have to put them somewhere else whilst you were refurbishing. So, as has been the case in every instance where the Government has rented – including the GSD Government when it did its now, if I may say so with respect to the hon. Gentleman, notorious sale and leaseback in respect of the hospital at Europort when they were paying the rent or interest on that sale and leaseback whilst the building was a building site – we
245 are paying because we need to pay to have possession whilst we are carrying out the fitting out before the Civil Servants can move in to the offices that they deserve to be working in, which should be modern and fit for purpose and which should have all of the attributes that you need today, including – I lose touch, Madam Speaker – Cat 6 cabling and all of the other stuff that is required in order to be able to move into a modern piece of office space.

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Madam Speaker: Next question. There have been seven supplementaries on this.

Hon. Dr K Azopardi: Madam Speaker, this adds a new dimension to the questions, if I can just be permitted one final question.

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Madam Speaker: That is even worse. One more.

Hon. Dr K Azopardi: I am grateful, Madam Speaker. I understand that that you have to fit out the building, but in the course of the negotiations people might have expected that a better deal
260 could have been done to land this property, because we have paid already 18 months' rent, it still has not been fitted out and the Civil Servants are not there. How much longer is it going to take for the Government to be paying rent without the Civil Servants being there? Has the Chief Minister got visibility of the kind of time that we are talking about?

265 **Hon. Chief Minister:** Madam Speaker, I am always impressed by the Hon. the Leader of the Opposition's optimism of what he might hypothetically have been able to do. He has in the past told us that he would already have been able to do a deal – that he would no doubt have been able to do a better deal in respect of the Withdrawal Agreement and that he would have done a much better deal in relation to the Tax Treaty. All of the things that we have done, he would have
270 been able to do better. I am almost minded to see him in a frilly skirt, dancing next to me, singing 'Anything you can do, I can do better'. I have no doubt that in his philosophies and in his imagination he would have done better. We think we have done a very good job, actually. We

have got a very good rent. It is a very low rent per square metre. We think we have landed the deal right and we expect that Civil Servants should be able to move in in the next six months.

Madam Speaker: Next question.

Q1001/2024
New reclamation –
Location and commencement

Clerk: Question 1001. The Hon. the Leader of the Opposition, on behalf of the Hon. D J Bossino.

Hon. Dr K Azopardi: Madam Speaker, where will the new reclamation announced recently by the Chief Minister be located and when is it expected to commence?

Clerk: Answer, the Hon. the Chief Minister.

Chief Minister (Hon. F R Picardo): Madam Speaker an announcement on the new reclamation will be made by the Government at the appropriate time once the final designs and reclamation agreements have been respectively concluded and signed.

Hon. Dr K Azopardi: May I ask: these are reclamation agreements that the Government is entering into with parties it is negotiating with to undertake the reclamation, or are these commercial agreements with other entities to do some kind of reclamation or development together? Am I making myself clear, in terms of my question?

Hon. Chief Minister: Madam Speaker, only one party reclaims land and that is the Government of Gibraltar, because in doing so we create land, so all land created is created for the Government of Gibraltar. Once the land is created, the Government can then grant leases in respect of that land. We are looking to do an agreement for the creation of land for and on behalf of the Government of Gibraltar.

Hon. Dr K Azopardi: I see, but an agreement with commercial entities or an agreement with a provider who will undertake the reclamation?

Hon. Chief Minister: Madam Speaker, even a provider would be a commercial entity.

Hon. Dr K Azopardi: Let me try to be a bit more specific. You can do a deal with someone who will bring the trucks in and do the reclamation, or you can do a deal with someone who will participate with you in the development of the land or will develop the land that is produced by the reclamation. I am trying to ask: is the Government simply having discussions to reach agreements so that the land is produced, or is the Government also in negotiations to first produce the land and then agree how it will be developed? That is what I am asking.

Hon. Chief Minister: The Government is in negotiations, Madam Speaker, to produce the land, but the Government is also in other negotiations as well, in order to ensure that the Government, in the negotiation for the production of the land, gets the best deal for the taxpayer.

Hon. Dr K Azopardi: But if the latter is the case, which implies to me at least, and perhaps the Chief Minister can clarify, that the negotiations are entailing also the use and development of the land going forward. Won't the Government put whatever land is produced out to tender?

Hon. Chief Minister: Not necessarily, Madam Speaker. When I have spoken about this land, I have spoken about it in the context of the development of affordable housing, principally.

325 **Hon. Dr K Azopardi:** Principally, but not exclusively. Presumably when the Chief Minister makes his announcement, all of these issues will be clear, so that we do not have to dance around the subject in vague terms. Is that correct? When he makes his announcement, will not only the location be clear but there will be an identification of how the land will be used, not just for affordable housing if it is not going to be exclusively for affordable housing and will be used for other things? It will be clear in his announcement – is that the case?

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Hon. Chief Minister: Absolutely, Madam Speaker, as is always the case.

Madam Speaker: Next question.

Q1002-03/2024

Persons naturalised or registered as British Overseas Territory citizens – Numbers since 2019 and countries of origin

335 **Clerk:** Question 1002. The Hon. the Leader of the Opposition.

Hon. Dr K Azopardi: Madam Speaker, how many persons were naturalised or registered as British Overseas Territory citizens since 1st January 2019, broken down by calendar year?

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

Chief Minister (Hon. F R Picardo): Madam Speaker, I will answer with Question 1003.

345 **Clerk:** Question 1003. The Hon. the Leader of the Opposition.

Hon. Dr K Azopardi: What were the countries of origin of those persons naturalised as British Overseas Territories citizens since 1st January 2019, broken down by country of origin?

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

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

Answer to Q1002/2024

The number of persons naturalised or registered as British Overseas Territory Citizens since 1st January 2019 broken down by calendar year are as follows:

Naturalisation	
2019	91
2020	216
2021	116
2022	145
2023	135
2024	122

Registration	
2019	23
2020	41
2021	42
2022	24
2023	58
2024	26

Answer to Q1003/2024

The Countries of origin of those persons naturalised as British Overseas Territory Citizens since 1st January 2019 broken down by country of origin are as follows:

Naturalisation	
Algerian	1
American	10
Australian	7
Antiguan	2
Argentinian	2
Belarussian	1
Belgian	2
Bolivian	1
Brazilian	8
British National Overseas	3
Bulgarian	8
Canadian	4
Cameroon	1
Chinese	17
Colombian	2
Croatian	1
Cuban	5
Cyprian	3
Czech	5
Danish	6
Dominican	5
Dutch	6
Egyptian	2
Filipino	34
French	15
German	9
Greek	1
Guinean	1
Hungarian	8
Indian	38
Indonesian	2
Iranian	1
Irish	7
Israeli	39

Italian	22
Japanese	1
Jordanian	1
Kittitian	1
Latvian	1
Lebanese	2
Lithuanian	2
Malaysian	3
Maltese	4
Mauritian	1
Mexican	6
Moroccan	210
Nepalese	1
New Zealander	2
Nigerian	3
Norwegian	1
Pakistani	1
Palestinian	1
Peruvian	2
Polish	17
Portuguese	29
Romanian	14
Russian	12
Slovenian	3
South African	2
Spanish	182
Sierra Leone	1
St Lucian	1
Swedish	17
Swiss	4
Taiwanese	4
Thai	7
Tunisian	2
Turkish	1
Ukrainian	6
Uruguayan	1

Madam Speaker: All right. We will move on to the next question and come back to this for supplementaries in a little while.

Q1004/2024

**Statistics on government website –
Availability for period before 2015**

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Clerk: Question 1004. The Hon. the Leader of the Opposition.

Hon. Dr K Azopardi: Why are statistics for the period before 2015 no longer available on the relevant page of the Government website?

Clerk: Answer, the Hon. the Chief Minister.

Chief Minister (Hon. F R Picardo): Madam Speaker, I am advised that the statistics for the period before 2015 appear to have been temporarily removed from the Government website due to an IT issue relating to damaged links following a website update. The document links to the online statistics tables before 2015 have now been restored and all data tables are back online.

Madam Speaker: Next question.

Q1005-08/2024

**Government departments, companies, authorities and agencies –
Clerical and non-clerical vacancies**

Clerk: Question 1005. The Hon. the Leader of the Opposition.

Hon. Dr K Azopardi: Madam Speaker, how many vacancies for clerical grades were there in Government departments on 19th November 2024?

Clerk: Answer, the Hon. the Chief Minister.

Chief Minister (Hon. F R Picardo): Madam Speaker, I will answer together with Questions 1006 to 1008.

Clerk: Question 1006. The Hon. the Leader of the Opposition.

Hon. Dr K Azopardi: How many vacancies for non-clerical grades were there in Government departments on 19th November 2024?

Clerk: Question 1007. The Hon. the Leader of the Opposition.

Hon. Dr K Azopardi: How many vacancies for clerical grades were there in wholly owned Government companies and/or statutory and non-statutory authorities or agencies departments on 19th November 2020?

Clerk: Question 1008. The Hon. the Hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Hon. Dr K Azopardi: How many vacancies for non-clerical grades were there in wholly owned Government companies and/or statutory and non-statutory authorities or agencies on 19th November 2024?

Clerk: Answer, the Hon. the Chief Minister.

Hon. Chief Minister: Madam Speaker, on the basis that the Personnel and Development Department advise that an open vacancy is a vacancy that has been advertised and the closing date has not passed, there are currently no open clerical vacancies. I am further advised that on the basis of the same definition, there are five open non-clerical vacancies.

Hon. Dr K Azopardi: Five clerical vacancies, but in respect of which one? I have asked in relation to Government departments, but also in relation to Government companies, statutory authorities and agencies, so in respect of what are we talking about?

405 **Hon. Chief Minister:** That definition applies in respect of all of those.

Hon. Dr K Azopardi: Yes. I am just asking where the five vacancies are.

410 **Hon. Chief Minister:** Broken down by where?

Hon. Dr K Azopardi: Yes, where are they? I mean are they in Government departments or are they in Government companies?

415 **Hon. Chief Minister:** Madam Speaker, from the information I have, I believe one is in the Government itself, in the Civil Service, and four are in the Gibraltar Health Authority, so in an agency.

420 **Hon. Dr K Azopardi:** But given the preface to his answer – I did not take a note precisely, but it sounded like, ‘We are defining vacancies as we have put a job out and it is still out there.’ No? So perhaps he can repeat it, so I can put the proper question, because I may have misunderstood what I am about to say.

425 **Hon. Chief Minister:** Madam Speaker, the way that the Personnel Department has advised that it is appropriate to answer this question is to refer to open vacancies. Open vacancies are vacancies which have been advertised and the closing date has not passed. That is what they are advising is how we should interpret the hon. Gentleman’s question in order to be able to answer it precisely, because that is what we think he is trying to get at and that is what I have been given for that reason.

430 **Hon. Dr K Azopardi:** Okay. That is not what I was trying to get at. I was not trying to get at how many jobs have been advertised. I thought it was obvious, but if the Chief Minister does not have this information I will table new questions next time. What I was trying to get at was there is an established complement and there will be people in post, and there will be a difference between the numbers of people in post and the established complement: what I would interpret as
435 vacancies in the established complement. I was trying to find out how many vacancies there are with reference to the established complement in respect of clerical and non-clerical grades. That is what I was trying to get at. Does the Chief Minister have that information? If not, I will ask again.

440 **Hon. Chief Minister:** Madam Speaker, the information that the hon. Gentleman now appears to seek is the information that he has sought in the past when his questions have been about vacant posts, which is why we have wondered what the change is. He has always asked about vacant posts. This time he has asked about vacancies, and that is why we were advised to give the answer about ‘vacancy’ – that is to say something that somebody is applying for. I do have some information; I am just not sure that I can interpret it properly for the purposes of giving him
445 meaningful data. I wonder whether he might put the question next month with the reference he has always used in the past of ‘vacant posts’, and we will know that he is once again seeking that information and not the other information. He could actually, if he wishes and it might be helpful, across the floor of the House ask both about vacant posts and open vacancies, and then we can give him both numbers.

450 **Madam Speaker:** Next question.

Q1009-10/2024

**Gibraltar Industrial Cleaners Ltd –
Privatisation or transfer of services**

Clerk: Question 1009. The Hon. the Leader of the Opposition.

455 **Hon. Dr K Azopardi:** Madam Speaker, is Government intending to contractualise or privatise any services currently provided by Gibraltar Industrial Cleaners Ltd or transfer its functions or services to another provider or entity or transfer its shares to private interests?

Clerk: Answer, the Hon. the Chief Minister.

460 **Chief Minister (Hon. F R Picardo):** Madam Speaker, I will answer with Question 1010.

Clerk: Question 1010. The Hon. the Leader of the Opposition.

465 **Hon. Dr K Azopardi:** How many entities or persons have expressed an interest in providing the service or managing the service currently provided by Gibraltar Industrial Cleaners, and with which entity is the Government in discussions in relation to those services or any other municipal waste services beyond those currently provided.

Clerk: Answer, the Hon. the Chief Minister.

470 **Hon. Chief Minister:** Madam Speaker, the Government has already confirmed publicly that it is exploring options to ensure Gibraltar's resilience in handling municipal waste, in particular in the context of the ongoing UK-EU treaty negotiations. We are working closely with Unite the Union and the relevant collective staff to provide assurances that the options which Government is considering do not envisage any material or adverse consequences for all current GIC employees.

475 Three entities have been in contact with the company in respect of possible future arrangements. There is, as yet, no agreement with any entity and the Government will be in close contact with the Union before finalising any arrangements. We are talking in detail to one entity but as no more than a preferred bidder at this stage. The negotiations have been led by the Ministry of the Environment and have involved numerous other Ministries, including the Deputy Chief Minister and me, at different times.

485 **Hon. Dr K Azopardi:** Question 1010 actually asks which entity is the Government in discussions with. Does he have that information, which is what I asked in my original question?

Hon. Chief Minister: I do, and I am not going to provide it, Madam Speaker.

490 **Hon. Dr K Azopardi:** Why would that be the case.

Hon. Chief Minister: Madam Speaker, because of what I said in the context of my answer, which is that we are talking we have spoken to three, one has emerged as the preferred bidder but we are not there with that entity yet. We could change horses if we have to. If the negotiation does not go in the right way, we commercially might need to do that in the context of driving the bargain, and so if we reach a conclusion with any of the three – and we are now pursuing it with one – we would then make the announcement about which of the three we have done an agreement with. But there is still a long process to go, and we are talking to the union in a lot of detail about this.

500 **Hon. Dr K Azopardi:** To be clear, I am not asking him to give me the name of the preferred bidder. What I am saying is can he give us the names of the three entities. That way, he would not prejudice those discussions.

505 **Hon. Chief Minister:** Madam Speaker, at this stage I do not wish to be drawn on that, but I am happy to tell the hon. Member behind the Speaker's Chair and I indeed am happy to agree – because I think this is a process that in this instance will have to be followed – that the Government statement, if an announcement is made, will set out the three that we spoke to and why and how we have come to the conclusion that X rather than Y or Z have been the ones selected.

510 **Hon. Dr K Azopardi:** In his original answer the Chief Minister used the phrase that he is in discussions with them – I think I took the note accurately – 'in particular in the context of the negotiations'. That is somewhat different to the press release that was issued by the Government that said it was exploring options to ensure Gibraltar's resilience in handling municipal waste in case of a non-negotiated outcome, so it is very specific to a non-negotiated outcome. The way
515 that the Chief Minister has answered this morning suggests that it is wider than that. Is that the case? And if so, is it possible that there might be an arrangement with an entity even if there is a negotiated outcome?

Hon. Chief Minister: Madam Speaker, yes.

520 **Hon. Dr K Azopardi:** I see, and would that be for the handling of the domestic municipal waste in Gibraltar as well as trans-frontier waste? Presumably the element of resilience that was alluded to both today and in the press release is not about the handling of waste or refuse in Gibraltar. Presumably resilience is about then dealing with the product of the collection of the refuse once
525 you have got it. Will it be dealing with the dimension of exportation of the refuse, as well as the handling of the municipal refuse collection service in Gibraltar?

Hon. Chief Minister: Madam Speaker, this is about the whole value chain of waste. It does not start with collection; it starts with how we deal with waste in our homes and in our offices. It deals
530 with how waste is produced, then how waste is collected, and then how waste is disposed of. Those issues become very acute immediately in the context of a no negotiated outcome, but they are also, although less acute, acute nonetheless in the context even of a negotiated outcome, because of the issues of sustainability that arise and how the management of waste is changing the world over, in particular in Europe. Even in a negotiated outcome the hon. Gentleman will
535 know, like everyone in this community knows, that we rely on European solutions to manage the disposal of our municipal waste. Those European solutions are changing. They are becoming more expensive. They require different management of municipal waste, and sustainability is at the core of this. He will no doubt know, or should know, as he will have done his research before asking me this question, that this is about the whole value chain and the potential exponential
540 increase in cost or potential huge problem that this community could face very acutely in a negotiated outcome, and acutely even in a negotiated outcome.

Hon. Dr K Azopardi: Is it the expectation or at least the hope of the Government that if it does reach an arrangement, this is going to produce cost savings for the taxpayer? And when did the
545 discussions with the Union start? He mentioned, I think, in his original answer that they are in consultation with the Union. Did the consultation and discussion with the Union start before or after their demonstration outside No. 6?

Hon. Chief Minister: Madam Speaker, I did not get the first part of the question.

550 **Hon. Dr K Azopardi:** Whether we are going to save money.

Hon. Chief Minister: Those are two completely different questions, and I do wish the hon. Gentleman had dealt with in separate supplementaries. If I forget one of them in the context of answering each of them, please, the hon. Gentleman should feel free – with your leave, Madam Speaker, of course – to remind me.

The Government expects that this will produce a saving in respect of the huge, anticipated cost to come. In other words, there is a cost we have today; there is a massive cost coming in our direction, huge and massive in no negotiated outcome, massive even in a negotiated outcome because the cost of dealing with waste is growing, as the way of dealing with waste is changing because of the sustainability issues. Because landfill no longer takes compostable waste etc., all of these issues arise, so it is a question of mitigating cost increases. We are, I think, convinced that the approach that we are taking massively mitigates the potentially massive increase that is coming our way one way or the other.

The Government was not ready to start talking to the unions because we were not yet able to point to the key aspects of the negotiation which we would want to take to the Union in order to raise the issues with them. But the Members of the Union had concerns, which resulted in an exchange of information with the Government, which obviously did not satisfy the men of GIC. They, therefore, spontaneously demonstrated. The Union asked us for a meeting as a result of that demonstration, and I was very happy to host the meeting, after the demonstration, at my offices on Tuesday, where we had a very open, very positive exchange with the representatives of the members of GIC who attended. I was able to remind them, and they needed no reminding of the fact, that GIC was created by the GSLP Government between 1988 and 1996, that we wanted to do things which protected them, which guaranteed their terms and conditions of employment, that we would put that in writing, that we would happily listen to the concerns that they had about any issues, but that we did not yet have anything to put to them. The Union has sought, very reasonably, that we should consider not just the negotiation that we have ongoing and which we have not yet finalised with the third-party preferred bidder, but also their list of concerns, which they accept are based only on rumour and hearsay but which create concerns for them which they wish to have allayed. So we are in exchange of correspondence with the Union, to be able to allay those concerns and to work with the Union in the context of the negotiation, as we would have when the negotiation reached that level of maturity, to ensure that the protection that the Union seeks on behalf of its members, which is very likely identical to the protection that a GSLP Liberal Government will provide to the people who are employees of the GSLP-created company GIC, and ensure that those protections are enshrined in writing in any negotiation which leads to a contract being entered into, or indeed in ancillary documentation by which the Government guarantees terms and conditions of the individuals employed in GIC going forward.

Hon. Dr K Azopardi: The Chief Minister talks about the big cost coming, which I understood in his explanation to mean irrespective of whether there is an agreement or not. So, there will be a cost which may be higher if there is not an agreement or if there is. I am not sure which, because I am not as sighted on the detail as he is, no doubt, given his officials advising him on the issue, but there is a big cost coming, hence the discussions, though they may land an agreement with the entity. If that is the case, and they land an agreement with a private entity and there is a big cost coming, can he assure the people listening that that cost is not going to be passed on to private dwellings or businesses, directly or indirectly, by the private entity or by increases in taxation?

Hon. Chief Minister: Madam Speaker, the hon. Gentleman is a bit out of date. We are not anymore talking about people listening; we are potentially talking about people watching. One of the fantastic revolutions of the New Dawn was that cameras were finally invited into this place. I know that he sometimes still thinks that we are in the period 1996 to 2003, and some people no doubt still listen, but some are potentially also watching.

605 Madam Speaker, the Government does not wish to see any increased cost. We want to have one head to hit. We want to be able to ensure that all matters relating to waste are dealt with under one contract with one operator, and we want to mitigate the cost to this community. If there is cost to this community, it is impossible to say today how it will be defrayed and if he were standing where I am standing, he would have to give the same answer. For example, at home I have been doing very detailed recycling to try to understand what the arrangements that are now in place in most European countries entail and what will potentially have to be in place in Gibraltar. That is added cost to me: I have had to buy extra bins at home in order not to have different rubbish bags lying around the house. I have been put to cost and anybody who at home is going to have additional bins will be put to cost. It is impossible to provide any greater answer than that. Indeed, I am reminded of the attitude that the Hon. the Leader of the Opposition took in his fourth bid to become Chief Minister at the last General Election, in which he said, during the course of one of the many interviews that he gave, that he was unable to rule out whether or not taxation would go up if he became Chief Minister. Well, Madam Speaker, until we know exactly what those costs will be – and we will not know what those costs will be until we have been able to do an arrangement with a third party that might mitigate those costs – we cannot give a number to this community of what the additional cost to be defrayed between us all will be. That may be something that we can pay from the current resources available to us, or not. Indeed, there may be people who wish to pay for other services. I will give the hon. Gentleman an example. As a result of the experiment I have been doing in my own home – in respect of which the hon. Gentleman would be interested to know that future generations are much better at this than we are; my children really lead the way in my house in reminding me of where the yoghurt pot goes, where the top of the yoghurt pot goes, where the spoon goes and always remind me not to throw the kitchen spoon away and to put it in the sink – we have contracted privately with an entity that offers the service today, that comes to collect our plastic, cardboard and paper separately from the municipal waste that we put out. We have chosen to do that because we do not want to make the trek to the recycling bin, which we can do if we wish to. So, there are many different ways of skinning this cat. Things might be offered which you do not have to take up, but if you want a facility they will be taken up. But I can tell you for nothing that certainly it will not be possible, in the context of what is affordable value for money or indeed reasonable in the modern age, to expect that the dustbin will go up to the door of your apartment and ask you to collect today the plastic, tomorrow the cardboard, the paper, the glass, the cooking oil and the municipal waste. It would be impossible for anybody to believe that any serious political party that might want to use this issue as a carrot in a General Election could reasonably say that they would be providing that service on a daily basis in the same way, or indeed on any sporadic basis, in the same way that we collect municipal waste today. I would encourage the hon. Gentleman to continue down the route that he says he pursues of serious politics and not speculative politics, and not suggest that this was in any way something that is not the way it is going to have to be dealt with in the future in Gibraltar, as it is everywhere else in Europe.

Madam Speaker: Next question.

Q1011/2024

**Eastern Beach incident on 10th November 2024 –
Update**

645 **Clerk:** Question 1011. The Hon. the Leader of the Opposition.

Hon. Dr K Azopardi: Madam Speaker, can the Government provide information to the House on the alleged incident near Eastern Beach on Sunday, 10th November 2024 involving a Spanish state vessel and a number of RHIBs, and whether shots were fired?

650

Clerk: Answer, the Hon. the Chief Minister.

Chief Minister (Hon. F R Picardo): Madam Speaker, as I have previously stated, this forms part of an ongoing investigation and it would therefore not be appropriate for me to comment at this stage.

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Hon. Dr K Azopardi: I appreciate that No. 6 issued a statement to that effect, I think the day after, but as we are now almost three weeks on, I was hopeful that the Chief Minister would now have more information. Does he have some sense of when he would be in a position to inform the House about this matter in greater detail?

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Hon. Chief Minister: Madam Speaker, I am not happy to have to give the hon. Gentleman the answer I have had to give him, but I want to be very clear that if there is one thing that differentiates our law enforcement agencies from others is that our people do not shoot from the hip and we do not make statements which are not reliable. We are very careful when we are making statements about incidents of the sort, as everybody in Gibraltar would expect. Although he has the luxury – I am not criticising him for it – just like every other citizen, and I suppose I have the luxury, of being able to comment as a citizen on what we might see with our own eyes on a video that is widely circulated, when those videos are subject to very careful forensic analysis they might not demonstrate what it appears at first blush they demonstrate. For that reason, whilst that more detailed analysis is being done – and I want to be very careful with what I say – I am not able to tell the House anything other than a vessel from a foreign law enforcement agency spent time in BGTW on that night but it is not yet possible for me to say that shots were fired in BGTW or at all. I have seen the videos. The hon. Gentleman has seen the videos. If I was talking as a layman I would say it is f-r-i-g-g-i-n-g obvious that shots were fired, but when you analyse things forensically and you put the grid reference on and you analyse each apparent shot using the analysis that is necessary to confirm it is a shot in order to elevate matters beyond simply the observation of us as citizens, then you get the answer that I am giving, and therefore further investigation is required before being able to say more.

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As I started saying, Madam Speaker, I am not happy to have to give the hon. Gentleman that answer, but that is the law enforcement reality of where we are in order to ensure that our reputation and the reputation of law enforcement in Gibraltar in the context of this international issue is not in any way tarnished by shooting from the hip.

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Hon. Dr K Azopardi: I certainly agree that forensic examination and investigation have to be done to take Gibraltar to the position that it has at least proof, or as best evidence as possible, if it is going to elevate things. Certainly, if things have happened of that nature and shots have been fired, it does need elevation to a diplomatic level because these are serious and it would not be the first time, if you do have proof of it, because we have the February 2023 incident to hand, quite recently. So, I agree with the Chief Minister that that is the case, and I am sure he will agree with me that it does require elevation if that is the case.

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Given that this is a matter of public interest, with the Speaker's leave I ask him whether he can update the House at a future point, with some leeway, in a couple of months or so, to see where we are on the matter.

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Hon. Chief Minister: Madam Speaker, it is, of course, a matter for you to determine whether or not a question can be put. The hon. Gentleman, I think, is asking for my confirmation that we would not be objecting to it on the basis that it is within six months, and we certainly would not.

We agree that this is a very serious issue. The elevation, as he knows, is not something that is in the hand of the Government of Gibraltar; it is something which is in the hand of His Majesty's Government in the United Kingdom to make at the level of a diplomatic protest. But as a proud Briton, I would say that when His Majesty's Government in the United Kingdom raises a diplomatic process, it does so confident and sure of the ground on which it is relying, and indeed, as the Deputy Chief Minister and I have seen in our unfortunate expertise of having to see these things elevated with very detailed annexes which demonstrate that what is being elevated is forensically demonstrated so that there is no potential embarrassment or pithy comeback which we have to endure.

Madam Speaker, I am sure that there is nothing between both sides of the House on this issue, and I would therefore ask the hon. Gentleman to remember not just the February 2023 incident but also indeed the incident that we had with a jet ski being shot at with rubber bullets in the last 12 years, and another incident off the Eastside where a pleasure vessel was being pursued and was also the subject of rubber bullets being fired. On both of those occasions, once the forensic analysis had been done, including the analysis of the popping sounds that are heard to confirm against a digital audio signature that they are undoubtedly the sounds of rubber bullets being fired, those things were elevated.

The hon. Gentleman will also allow me to reflect, Madam Speaker, in the context of this answer that the question he has put has elucidated, in a recent statement by an individual who I regard as a friend of Gibraltar, who is the Mayor of San Roque, who is also a member of the Congress or Parliament of Spain, where he said that Gibraltar and Gibraltarians had to realise that members of the Spanish Guardia Civil were members of Spain's reputable law enforcement agencies and that we had to get used to the idea of a deeper interaction with them in the context of the treaty. I am not going to comment on why that was made. I consider Juan Carlos to be a good friend of Gibraltar, somebody who wants a treaty. He is now also the chairman of the Spanish Parliament's Foreign Affairs Commission, and so he will have been briefed, no doubt, by his party in government about how they view the state of the negotiations. I would simply, more in sorrow than in anger, reflect on the fact that incidents like the one that this House is having to consider in the answer to the Hon. Leader of the Opposition's questions, the incident with the jet ski, the incident in February 2023, incidents when agreements entered into by the national Governments of Gibraltar, Spain, the United Kingdom and the European Commission appear to be derailed by one officer of those law enforcement agencies, and indeed the historic issue going back 50 years, 60 years, does, of course, affect the psyche of the Gibraltarian. We cannot just blithely be told that the Guardia Civil is a reputable law enforcement agency of the Kingdom of Spain. I have no doubt that the Guardia Civil is a reputable law enforcement agency of the Kingdom of Spain. I have no doubt that there are very many good, honest, hardworking *Guardia Civils* and good, honest, hardworking *Policías Nacionales*. I also know that those making those remarks in Spain are alive to the fact that there are many who have failed to endear themselves to the people of Gibraltar in the past because of conduct that, no doubt being man bites dog and sporadic and ad hoc, have let down their very reputable law enforcement agencies, the Guardia Civil and the Policía Nacional, but they have done so having a further effect on the Gibraltarian human and political psyche.

Updates – Statement by Madam Speaker

Madam Speaker: For the avoidance of doubt, I will allow a further question in relation to updates. The Hon. Edwin Reyes will know that I held some of his questions inadmissible for this session because he was the hon. Member was seeking updates, and I appreciate that the Hon. Member cited comments from the Hon. the Chief Minister in which he said that he would have

745 no objection to questions being put as updates generally speaking, but for the reasons I shared
with the hon. Member, I think the chair has to be very careful about just allowing updates regularly
on any subject because it would open the floodgates to the same question being put ad nauseam
every month, just simply with a proviso that it is an update. So, generally speaking, I would not
750 allow that, but on matters of high public interest I will make an exception and I will allow updates
to be put, perhaps not necessarily every month but that is a matter for the Hon. the Leader of the
Opposition to assess.

Next question.

Q1012/2024

**Payments to construction companies –
Breakdown for period 2018-24**

Clerk: Question 1012. The Hon. the Leader of the Opposition.

755 **Hon. Dr K Azopardi:** I am grateful, Madam Speaker, for that indication.

Can the Government provide a list of total payments in excess of £100,000 made by the
Government or any government-owned entity or the Savings Bank to any construction companies
in relation to construction, building works, demolition or land-related contracts, broken down by
company, identifying the specific entity, and by particular contract or works for each of the
760 following financial years: 2018-19, 2019-21, 2021-22, 2022-23, 2023-24?

Clerk: Answer, the Hon. the Chief Minister.

Chief Minister (Hon. F R Picardo): Madam Speaker, the information requested by the hon.
765 Gentleman is too voluminous to provide the timeframe available or at all. In fact, this would
require the extraction of every payment for any construction purpose for 72 months in respect of
a total of approximately between £3.5 billion and £4.25 billion, which is almost a forensic exercise,
unlike one ever carried out in the history of Gibraltar in any field, including criminal proceedings
or fraud.

770 **Hon. Dr K Azopardi:** Okay. Hopefully we will get there one day because the Chief Minister will
recognise that I asked a different question last time without putting a threshold, and in
supplementaries with the Chief Minister he mentioned that a threshold might be useful, so I put
a threshold thinking this would be it now. May I ask him, is it the threshold issue that is the
775 problem? I had understood, certainly from the exchanges that I had with him a few months ago,
that as long as I put a threshold it would be possible for an answer to be given to the Opposition
on this matter.

Hon. Chief Minister: Madam Speaker, this is not something we are trying to avoid doing; we
780 just think it is impossible for us to do. The threshold helps. In fact, in my prepared answer I have
£3.5 billion, and I said £3.5 billion to £4.25 billion, because that is worked out on the basis of
revenue and expenditure of approximately £750 million a year. Going back those numbers of
years, we end up in a situation where we have to go back all that way and check every payment.
Even payments as high as £100,000 is a hell of a lot of payments in that period. And so, what I
785 have suggested to my Parliament team, which was met with sighs - and I could hear the sighs from
the Ministry of Finance downstairs – is that we could do it going forward. That is to say, if we set
a threshold which is reasonable, we could then, in respect of every payment made going forward,
keep the record, and indeed, as I often say to hon. Members, if they are interested in information
and we are keeping it going forward, we can then add it to the data that is provided on the

Government website so hon. Members could see it, and then they could ask political questions about the data rather than having to ask for the data and then come back with political questions.

Having now understood what this means, he might take the same view I have taken, which is to say, 'Okay, I understand now this is impossible.' It will require a team dedicated only to this, going through every payment made in the last 72 months and analysing whether it contained any construction element to it. That is the difficulty, and that is why I have referred to it as a forensic exercise, because, as he knows and it would have been the case when he was in government, once we are preparing an answer for this House, we have to ensure it is an accurate answer for this House, and so every payment will have to be analysed and looked at to confirm whether there is a construction purpose to it. The answer I was given, for example, was if we are making a payment out of a company for something that would appear unrelated to construction, the money may end up being used for a construction purpose. So, a payment of £100,000 to the car parks company ... There is no suggestion that there is such a payment; I am just trying to use the parameters and the reference. The hon. Gentleman's parameter is £100,000. He includes companies in his definition, so a payment of £100,000 to the car parking company, which may be for the running expenses of the car parking company ... The car parking company may spend £10,000 looking at repairing a joist, so we should have to tell the hon. Gentleman that £9,966 paid to the car parking company in 2018-19 was used to repair a joist. To get there, we have to go through the near £700 million of expenditure that year. That is the difficulty. But there is no reason – and I think I said to this the Hon. Roy Clinton in relation to stamp duty – why we should not try to look at whether we can do this. In the context of stamp duty, it is going to require a change in the law, but in the context of this it is just to add a note to everybody's practice that when they make a payment which they are told has been used for a particular purpose, to note it separately, add it and publish it at the end of each month. That, we could do. I am told, additionally, that it would be more helpful if we could do that starting 1st April, to keep it to financial years rather than just start it from 1st of January, which would be the last quarter. I am told it would be better to do it that way. I hope that is helpful to the hon. Gentleman.

Hon. Dr K Azopardi: Yes, well, it is helpful in terms of the conundrum. It is certainly helpful if they are going to do it going forward, so at least we know going forward it is there, but going back ... Let me try to explore the problem with this question, because obviously the Chief Minister has had discussions on it, but and I have not, so I am not I am not sighted on this and obviously it has been a while since I have been in government and in those days there was a lot of paper-keeping, although there were computer systems then. Are the systems now not dynamic enough for a Minister to say, 'I want to know, in respect of X Company Ltd, how many payments we have made – it is a construction company'? Is it not dynamic enough to provide that information: 'During that financial year I want to know whether the approved list of construction companies have received these payments'? Is it not dynamic enough to do that even in relation to the approved list of Government contractors and companies etc?

Hon. Chief Minister: Madam Speaker, I am just making a note of what he has said. The hon. Gentleman has not said 'payments to construction companies' in his question. (**Hon. K Azopardi:** Yes, I have.) No. He goes on to add 'in relation to construction, building works, demolition or land-related contracts broken down by company'. He narrows it down to construction companies and then broadens it into all of those other purposes, and that is the difficulty. If the hon. Gentleman had said construction companies, then I would have said, 'Okay, let's agree a list of construction companies and then let's look at what he really wants,' because if what he wants is just a list of payments to companies registered with the company as construction companies, without us having to dig into the purpose of those payments, I might be able to go back and see whether our systems enable an extraction of that. But then he goes into the purpose of the payment, and that then becomes the difficulty. Let me give the hon. Gentleman the obvious example: GJBS. We might sometimes make a payment to GJBS which is not related to construction, building works,

demolition or land related contracts. We might sometimes make a payment to GJBS, for example, when GJBS is providing a service to us, like payroll, which the hon. Gentleman knows they provide, or we are making a payment to GJBS for another purpose. That stymies us in being able to accurately answer just by giving him the payments we have made to GJBS. Those are the difficulties that we are experiencing in seeking to honestly answer the question.

Hon. Dr K Azopardi: I see. It might be language, so I will have another go at making my question tighter still, if I may, and hopefully the Chief Minister will be in a position next time to provide an answer.

Hon. Chief Minister: Will he give way?

Hon. Dr K Azopardi: Yes.

Hon. Chief Minister: If he wishes, we could have a conversation as he formulates his question, where I could bring into play the views of the Financial Secretary also of what he could ask for that we can actually give him. That might be a helpful way of formulating the question in a way that can be answered, and then we can look at how we deal with the future separately.

Hon. Dr K Azopardi: He will understand that I am keen to have this discussion because this is an important issue. We are trying to get information. I understand from the tone of the replies that the Government is not trying to be difficult but is explaining a problem in terms of the massing of data. I am keen to have that discussion, and following that, and perhaps with input from the Financial Secretary, it would be important for us to receive that information with his assistance.

Hon. Chief Minister: Yes, Madam Speaker, I think it is very potentially useful information in doing the analysis, for example, of GDP. If you look at how much of our GDP relates to construction, you would then be able to see how much of the money put into construction in a particular year came from the Government. I think it is therefore helpful in doing wider and broader economic analyses going forward. The Government is not saying no, it is just saying it cannot do it like this that far back.

Madam Speaker: Next question.

Q1013/2024

Treaty on new relationship with EU – Update re discussions

Clerk: Question 1013. The Hon. the Leader of the Opposition.

Hon. Dr K Azopardi: Madam Speaker, will the Chief Minister update the House on the ongoing discussions aimed at concluding a treaty on a new relationship for Gibraltar with the European Union?

Clerk: Answer, the Hon. the Chief Minister.

Chief Minister (Hon. F R Picardo): Madam Speaker, together with the United Kingdom Government, we continue with our negotiations with the EU unabated and progress continues to be made. We are not yet in a position to announce that agreement at the political level has been reached but, as a result of the intensity and ingenuity with which teams have worked since the

last ministerial meeting, in Brussels on 19 September, we are even closer today than we were then.

890 We are ready to continue intense negotiations on every day available to ensure we reach
agreement or the end of the road in the shortest time available, but we cannot negotiate alone,
we cannot negotiate matters related to sovereignty, jurisdiction or control, and we cannot agree
anything that is not safe, secure or beneficial. We have put on the table solutions that guarantee
the safety and security of the Schengen Area and the integrity of the Single Market and which do
not cross any of our red lines or our commercial and practical concerns. If those were accepted,
895 we could declare agreement reached tomorrow. I commend all negotiators on all sides for their
diligence and continued hard work and commitment. I am sure we will get there with good will,
good faith and good, old-fashioned hard work.

Hon. Dr K Azopardi: In terms of the substance of what remains blocking an agreement, would
900 I be right to think that there are still issues that affect mobility of persons as well as other matters
perhaps in relation to trade or other aspects? Or is the Chief Minister in a position to say to the
House that the bag of issues that contains the unagreed matters are of a specific theme, or are
they diverse in nature?

905 **Hon. Chief Minister:** They are diverse in nature, Madam Speaker. They are not related to a
specific theme. The hon. Gentleman will forgive me for having smiled when he said, 'Do they affect
persons or goods?' Given that the agreement we are negotiating is about circulation of persons
and goods, they affect both of those two very broad pillars and not just one; and, if I may say, with
respect to the many journalists who are reporting on this matter, they do not relate to the things
910 that catch the imagination that journalists are speculating are the thing that is stopping the
agreement from being declared. Actually, there are much more technical issues that need sorting
out, many of them I think the Deputy Chief Minister and I had never expected would be an issue
and that, if I may say so, I think the politicians round the table did not expect to be the issue. They
are deeply technical issues that need to be resolved, that are not related to what I might call the
915 age-old politics between Gibraltar and Spain, to use a catch all-phrase. They are technical issues
that are in place. I never discount those issues coming back. We all know what happens at five
minutes to midnight in a negotiation, or indeed at one second to midnight in negotiations that we
have been involved in, but at the moment we are dealing with much deeper technical issues.

920 **Hon. Dr K Azopardi:** I appreciate that. I put my question quite obliquely, let me just say, in
relation to persons and goods, because I recognise that in the context of a highly complex
negotiation the Chief Minister might not want to go further in terms of the detail of the themes.
So, that is the reason for it. I was inviting him to give as much detail as he felt he could give on the
issue. Perhaps he can reflect on that in case he wants to add anything on that issue.

925 May I ask him, in terms of process, does he envisage that the technical discussions will continue
now – we are four weeks away from Christmas – or will there be discussions that are programmed
to be more than technical and involve a political element at senior level?

Hon. Chief Minister: Madam Speaker, I do not think I can be drawn on that at this stage. I
930 would be delighted to be able to give him a clearer chronology, but because of the nature of the
issues that are in play, it is not possible to be clearer at this stage simply because they have to play
out and we have to find those solutions, and then we might be able to start to see the chronology
that we all want to see for further political meetings and the progress that we want to materialise
actually happen. That is not to say that it is not actively something that we hope is being resolved,
935 but it is requiring very deep technical analysis to resolve issues, which again I want to remind
people are not what we might call the perennial issues. These are different issues. They are about
how you interface with the two pillars of the *acquis* that we would be interfacing with.

Q1002-03/2024

**Persons naturalised or registered as British Overseas Territory citizens –
Numbers since 2019 and countries of origin**

Madam Speaker: Before we leave, the Hon. the Chief Minister's questions, does the Hon. the Leader of the Opposition have any supplementaries on Questions 1002 and 1003?

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Hon. Dr K Azopardi: Madam Speaker, I only had one question, I think. Of the persons on the list, naturalisation and registration, are those ordinary naturalisation or registration applications? Does he have a number of those that might have sought that following asylum applications?

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Chief Minister (Hon. F R Picardo): No, Madam Speaker, I do not have that information.

Hon. Dr K Azopardi: I see, well, then, I will put that question perhaps another time.

Can he confirm to me whether the decision making on these matters continues to be as I understand it to be, but perhaps he will confirm to the House that the decision making on these applications still continues to be, albeit under the Nationality Act – it says Secretary of State – that it is, in effect, devolved by convention?

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Hon. Chief Minister: I do not think, Madam Speaker, it has ever actually been devolved by convention. I think what happens is that the Secretary of State looks to the Gibraltar administration for the recommendation that all of the requirements of the British Nationality Act have been complied with. We also carry out what you might call the due diligence exercise and the know your client exercise, where we look at this commercially in terms of intelligence analysis of the individual, which is carried out by law enforcement in Gibraltar in conjunction with law enforcement beyond Gibraltar. So, by the time it gets to the Secretary of State, it would be very unusual for any case recommended by Gibraltar not to be proceeded with and would probably result, if it ever resulted, from information between the time of recommendation and it reaching the Secretary of State for final decision, or indeed, as is sometimes the case with intelligence, because new intelligence comes to light – not that we had not done the work on intelligence being provided, but that new intelligence comes to light in that period. I think it is true to say that in respect of the successive administrations of Gibraltar since the 1982 British Nationality Act, no recommendation by the Government of Gibraltar has ever been turned down by a Secretary of State, and that is a testament to the diligence of those working in the Civil Status and Registration Office and the way that they do their work, and indeed all of the parts of the administration of Gibraltar, which are quite joined up in respect of recommendations, because of course somebody needs to be in good standing in respect of payment of Social Insurance and taxation, with no criminal convictions – all of those things need to come together – confirmation of residence in Gibraltar for the minimum period etc., so that the recommendation that is made by the Gibraltar administration to the Secretary of State is sound. We have never failed in that respect. That is why this is an area in which Gibraltar, I think, has demonstrated its competence and its ability like in no other, but we have to be very jealous to ensure that that continues to be the case and always look very carefully in respect of the work that is being done. I say that having, if I may say so to the hon. Gentleman with respect, been able to claim the political scalp of now dealing with these things in a way that is modern and proper. He will know that when we were elected – indeed, at that time he was a critic of his former colleagues in the GSD because he was leading the PDP – we had found thousands of applications which had not been dealt with, and we dealt with them all, making recommendations in most cases, but in some cases not because there were reasons not to make the recommendation. The number were hugely, principally, people of ethnic Moroccan origin who had been in Gibraltar for 40-plus years and also many people of ethnic Indian origin who had been in Gibraltar for many years and had not had their applications dealt with, although they fulfilled the requirement of the British Nationality Act of being resident in Gibraltar for more

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than five years in order to be able to apply for British nationality. We have done all that. We now have a process.

990 I am always fascinated by the fact that people sometimes think it is taking a long time because it is taking, sometimes, months, maybe in some instances over a year where people are making applications that are a little more administratively exotic if we have to get information from places beyond our shores etc. In the context of what we inherited when we were first elected – I will say that we inherited it from them, if not from him because he was then leading the PDP rather than the GSD – our record now is really quite remarkable. The work that CSRO do, now led by Karl Triay so ably, but before that by others also so ably, and always with the staunch support of Dorian, 995 who as we all know is an encyclopaedia of British nationality law, it is a remarkable achievement that that department has been able to demonstrate that Gibraltar can be trusted in respect of these issues.

Madam Speaker: Next question.

HOUSING AND THE UNIVERSITY OF GIBRALTAR

Q989-90/2024

Sunrise Motel –

Plans for extension; residents not willing to relocate from Queen's Hotel hostel

1000 **Clerk:** Questions to the Hon. Minister for Housing and the Gibraltar University.
Question 989. The Hon. A Sanchez.

Hon. A Sanchez: Could the Government state when it expects the plans for the extension of the Sunrise Motel Hostel to be completed?

1005 **Clerk:** Answer, the Hon. the Minister for Housing and the Gibraltar University.

Minister for Housing and the Gibraltar University (Hon. P A Orfila): Madam Speaker, I will answer this question together with Question 990.

1010 **Clerk:** Question 990. The Hon. A Sanchez.

Hon. A Sanchez: Could the Government provide an update on the solution it intends to offer to the residents of the Queen's Hotel hostel who are not willing or do not want to relocate to Sunrise Motel hostel?

Madam Speaker: I am going to interject here before the Hon. Minister gives an answer. I am aware that there has been a press release on the subject of Question 990 which was released after this question was filed. Given my ruling of 25th September 2024, which dealt directly with this 1020 issue, perhaps the Government could explain why they have taken this step at this moment.

Chief Minister (Hon. F R Picardo): Madam Speaker, yes, and thank you for the invitation to do that. It falls to me to rise to provide that explanation because, as the leader of government business and the person who is referred to in that statement – in fact, it carries a quote from me – 1025 I was reminded by the Press Office of your ruling and I had I was very mindful of it at the time that I made the decision that the press release should issue despite your ruling.

Your ruling was caveated on the basis that we should not issue press statements on matters which were the subject of Opposition questions in this House, unless the matter was urgent or of

1030 pressing public interest. The press release that we issued, if I can point hon. Members to the paper
record in Gibraltar, is today's *Gibraltar Chronicle* front-page lead story. It carries the whole of the
rest of page 17 and, indeed, with the four columns on the front page it would fill the whole of
page 17. I am going to do something I would not ever expect to do, Madam Speaker; I am going
to quote Henry Pinna of Action for Housing in that self-same article, where, in rebuking the
Government, he refers to something we do not accept but which is his view, that there has been
1035 a public uproar in respect of the issues relating to the hostel. And so, Madam Speaker, in the words
of Mr Pinna there was the public interest that you refer to in your ruling. In the fact that this is the
lead item in the *Gibraltar Chronicle*, I think the public interest is clear. In the fact that hon.
Members in the Opposition had issued, I think, two or perhaps three statements in respect of this
matter and had themselves attended the hostel and raised the issue previously in this House and
1040 subsequently and previously in press releases, I think certainly both limbs of your ruling were
made out. This was a matter of public interest, and because of the deadlines that were in place
for people to move – I have never recognised the use of the word 'eviction' as being appropriate
in the context of this matter – certainly the questions of urgency and public interest were engaged.
For that reason, Madam Speaker, mindful of your ruling, but particularly mindful of the caveats
1045 that you had included there, as previous Speakers had done, it was, in the Government's view,
appropriate, and we had to issue that statement. The information the Government had was that
the collection of signatures was going to start with a public move on Wednesday or Thursday, and
of course the Government's deadline for individuals to move out had already passed and
individuals needed the certainty and were calling for the Government to provide them the
1050 certainty that the arrangements we were proposing could be entered into and they would not
have to transfer at this stage, they could wait for the erection of the new facility before they were
required to move.

For all of those reasons, Madam Speaker, the Government would suggest that we have acted
properly and in keeping with your ruling in these exceptional circumstances that appertain and
1055 are demonstrated by the facts that I have referred to, but of course it is your view that will prevail
as to whether we have acted properly or not. We think we have.

Hon. Dr K Azopardi: Madam Speaker, may I make a contribution on this issue, with your leave,
to say this very briefly? The rights of these persons is a matter of public interest, very clearly, and
1060 indeed the Chief Minister is correct that there have been press releases issued by the Opposition
on the matter and it has been an issue of public comment. But addressing the timing issue, if I
may, the story is covered on the front page of the *Chronicle* today and it was covered late
yesterday, I think, by GBC and other media outlets on social media. We were in this House at noon
yesterday; it could have been the subject of a ministerial statement in this House, because we
1065 were here. Nothing that the Chief Minister has said addresses this point, which is that there is a
public interest caveat in your ruling, as has always been the case, and that public interest caveat
should be utilised when the House is not in session to make a statement on an urgent matter, but
when the House is in session, very easily either this question could have been taken earlier or the
Minister could have made a statement to the same effect as in the press release, showing
1070 deference to this House. I would say that, Madam Speaker, for your consideration, because it is
markedly different when the House is actually in session.

Hon. Chief Minister: Madam Speaker, if I could just address this issue of the statement: your
ruling is not about press releases or statements, it is about press releases. If we had come here
1075 with a statement at the beginning of the session, we would have been making a statement which
would have been issued as a press release the minute I sat down after making it, or the Minister
sat down after making it, ahead of the question. The ruling is about not heading questions off at
the pass. The Hon. Lady who has put the question now has the information, because it is in the
press release, but she also has the ability now to question us on it with the supplementaries, in
1080 effect, having read the press release. So, because we are so close to the question, I think less

damage is done, not more, and I would suggest, Madam Speaker, that what the Hon. Leader of the Opposition is talking about does not go to the nub of what your ruling dealt with, which was press releases in place of questions.

Madam Speaker, at the end of the day, you are the arbiter of these things here, and we will respect the view that you express as to whether we have acted properly or not. Of course, outside of this place I am the arbiter of what the Government has to do, and we do so with a view of the rules that you set in this place, trying always to respect that, but it is a very difficult balance as to what is urgent and what is in the public interest, especially when you know that people are going through concerns, that people in the hostel are going through those concerns, and assuaging those concerns where they are legitimate and proper and appropriate, and dealing with those issues, has to be more important than whether the Opposition gets to ask the question with or without the benefit of a press release. I have to weigh those in the balance when I am asked whether something is urgent or in the public interest, and be the arbiter of that as well, subject, Madam Speaker, to your views here, which we will, of course, respect.

Madam Speaker: The Hon. the Leader of the Opposition is right when he states that my ruling is silent as to whether the principles I set out apply when Parliament is sitting or not and there should be a difference, and perhaps that is something to address in the future. What we have before us now is clearly a question which was filed, which was held to be admissible, and there has been a press release post that question being filed. The general principles which I set out in my ruling are important to be borne in mind and they are general principles which I do not shy away from reinforcing at any time that I have. It is also right that there should be exceptions to the principle, but it is very important that those exceptions should be exercised only sparingly, only when necessary, and only on the grounds of urgency or pressing public interest. Clearly what is a matter, at least *ab initio*, on what is pressing public interest is a call that the Government makes, and in this case the Hon. the Chief Minister has provided an explanation premised on why this is a matter of public interest and why it was pressing at this moment in terms of timelines and people having to leave the premises. I accept that explanation, so I am not going to take the matter any further at the moment. The question, however, as filed, stands, and the hon. Member may wish to ask any supplementaries on that. *(Interjection)* Call the question, yes.

Clerk: Question 990. The Hon. A Sanchez.

Madam Speaker: I think the question was put. Yes, the question was put.

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

Hon. P A Orfila: Thank you very much for that, Madam Speaker. I am glad to see that there has been a solution found. We did meet several times behind the lens of a camera, of course. There were many issues that needed to be discussed. I am not here to amuse others, instil antagonism or score political points; what I do is try to find solutions behind the lens of a camera and not instigate uneasiness and confusion, worrying people unnecessarily.

The Sunrise Hotel ... I did go, and, like I maintain, everything was clean and well prepared because the developer wanted the people out of the Queen's. That was why we had to rush through this, because he wanted demolition to start. We met together with the Moroccan Community Association, the Moroccan Youth Association and many other Moroccan Gibraltarians we spoke to. We try to speak to the developer and push him to come to an agreement that this needed to be built before we put the people there, even though the Sunrise Motel was ready to take on board the people we had at the Queen's. The developer has come back to us and said fair enough, it is a very reasonable ... which should have been done before, actually, but it is being done, and now we are going to have the build of the extension before the people move across. In the meantime, of course, as we know, the Queen's Hotel is not in a very good condition, so we

are now committed to start refurbishing the Queen's Hotel in order for them to have a better life at the Queen's Hotel before they actually move into a new premises.

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Hon. A Sanchez: Madam Speaker, when the Hon. Minister says that she has had meetings, may I ask if any of the Hon. Ministers have had a meeting with the actual residents, with all of the residents of the Queen's at location, to hear from the residents directly and hear their concerns directly?

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Hon. P A Orfila: Madam Speaker, I do not have to go to the Queen's Hotel and talk to residents there. The residents walk down Main Street, the residents know me, the residents contact me, and of course I have had a lot of conversations with many people there. We all know that there were a couple of rabble-raisers who wanted the problem to escalate for their benefit and thankfully that has not happened. But yes, that is my answer.

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Hon. A Sanchez: Madam Speaker, can the Hon. Minister perhaps clarify why ...? It is evident that we have been raising the issue in Parliament for the last few months and the residents have had concerns for several months, but the answer that has been given is that the residents would have to relocate to the Sunrise Motel and there were no two ways about it. It seems only that there has been a shift in the Government's decision when there seems to have been uproar. This is what the Hon. Chief Minister has stated as the reason for the statement, and he has also said the press release has come out because the residents were distressed and concerned. I would argue that the residents were distressed and concerned a few months ago, and we have been asking these questions in Parliament. My question is why haven't meetings been held before, when the concerns were first put to the Hon. Minister and Parliament, and why has it had to get to the point where there has been such a public outcry for the Government to come to this decision?

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Hon. P A Orfila: Madam Speaker, it is very clear that anything that happens, no matter how small or how large, is going to be taken on board for political points by the hon. Members across the floor. Like I said, we have had concerns. I inherited the hostels four months ago. Since then, I can tell you, the hostels have had a very good clean up. I still insist that the residents who were there only became alarmed and distressed because all of a sudden there was an occasion for people to make political points, to make their voices heard, to bash their chests and say, 'We are so good and we are on your side.'

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Let us remind everyone that these fellow Moroccan Gibraltarians lived in Casemates in dire conditions, they lived in Devil's Tower Road cardboard-box rooms and then they were up in Buena Vista Road, in Buena Vista Hostel. When we took over, we put them into two three-star hotels. Of course, the places deteriorate with time, and it is time now for change. It is time now that they move to better premises, that they relocate. They will still have to relocate. We have just given them a further extension while the Sunrise Motel is being extended. It is going to be a very good hostel, with hostel conditions. Let us remember that we are talking about hostels, we are not talking about a hotel, and you do not acquire rights in a hostel. But yes, it has to be in good condition and we are now going to refurbish it for the length of time that they have to stay there. Whatever it takes, we shall improve on their standard of living until such a time when they move to the Sunrise Motel's extension.

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Hon. A Sanchez: Madam Speaker, I do not accept the Hon. Minister's point of Members of the Opposition trying to score political points on this issue. In fact, the only interest that we have in this issue is to make sure that the voices of these individuals and their concerns have been heard and addressed, which is what we have been trying to do in Parliament for several months. It is a shame that it has had to get to this level of public outcry for the Government to have to make a

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1185 decision which now allays their concerns, which suggests that it is the Hon. Ministers on that side who seem to be more concerned with political posturing and what the public thinks about them.

Moving on, could the Hon. Minister confirm, so we have clarity, how many residents are remaining in Queen's Hostel and are not willing to move down to the Sunrise at the moment?

1190 **Hon. P A Orfila:** Madam Speaker, we have no confirmation that there are people who are not willing to move to the Sunrise at the moment. I can understand why she feels the way she does, and she is within her rights to feel whichever way she wants to feel, but I did not go there. I spoke to the residents out of the camera. Like I said, I spoke to the community associations out of the camera because I do not want to score political points, because I have no need to and because I am also very concerned about the well-being of our fellow members of our community, and they know that; they know that very well. But, of course, we always have the one or two people who use it to their advantage. That is the way it is at times.

1200 Coming back to the hon. Lady's question, Madam Speaker, as far as I know, we have 21 people there, because they were so alarmed, so confused and so worried ... There was one particular gentleman, or a couple of them maybe, calling people, telling them to come over because they were going to be thrown out of Gibraltar because they had to be here. That is why we saw so many people in that photograph, people who, after four days here, went back to Morocco on the ferry. Now we have 21 people there. We have room enough so that when we start refurbishing the Queen's Hotel, they are able to be put into another room while rooms are being done up. So, at the moment and as far as my figures have been given to me, there are 21 who are still there and we are having no issues at the moment with them. In fact, we are trying very hard to establish people who should be there, people who have not been there for a while and whose names appear to be there. We are trying to put all the books in order, and at the moment we have 21 people who are quite happy to stay there for any length of time until we fix the Sunrise Motel for them.

1210 **Hon. A Sanchez:** Madam Speaker, because we have been to Queen's Hotel hostel and seen the conditions of Queen's Hotel hostel, something that the Hon. Minister claims she has not done, she has not been to the Queen's Hotel hostel location. As far as we can see, the conditions are quite questionable. They are not great living conditions and, as far as we know, even a couple of weeks ago the only washing machines that the residents had were removed, taken down to the Sunrise Motel, and they have been left without any washing machines to do their laundry. There are issues with the lighting, the water, the lift, cleanliness, and the list goes on. Can we have assurances from the Government that all of these issues will be resolved as a matter of urgency?

1220 **Hon. P A Orfila:** Madam Speaker, I have been to the Queen's Hotel, of course I have – not during this spate, but I have been there – because I have friends who are there. It surprises me – seeing the dire and diabolical condition that they were living in, it surprises me very much – that they wanted to stay in the first place. The reason why things had been shifted or moved was because the place was going to be demolished, remember, for a developer, so we wanted to make ready a place for them that was going to be suitable, healthy and clean, which we did. The Sunrise Hotel has had a complete facelift and it is ready to take on board anybody else should they want to move earlier. Of course, we enter into a compromise that everything is going to be fixed and that everything will be put back as it should be for their continued living conditions, so that they can live in conditions that are going to be far better. So, yes, we do enter into a commitment to that. Until such a time that the Sunrise Motel extension is built, they will be there because they want to be, because they can move to the hostel, if they want, at the Sunrise. But if they want to stay there, then we shall ensure that everything is put in place so that they do have suitable living conditions.

1235 **Hon. A Sanchez:** Madam Speaker, perhaps the residents did not feel they wanted to move because there were overcrowding issues at the Sunrise and the conditions at the Sunrise were not fit for purpose, as said by Action for Housing and a member of the community branch at Unite the Union. That might be the reason that they did not want to move down to Sunrise hostel.

1240 In relation to the plans for the extension of Sunrise Motel hostel, can the Hon. Minister confirm if these are ready and have been finalised?

Hon. P A Orfila: Madam Speaker, the Government will make an announcement on the extension completion date for the Sunrise Motel. This is expected in the early part of next year.

1245 **Hon. A Sanchez:** And given that the press release issued by the Government yesterday estimated that it is going to take about 18 months, do they already know who will be carrying out these works?

1250 **Deputy Chief Minister (Hon. Dr J J Garcia):** Madam Speaker, part of the premium for the development of the Queen's site was the provision by the developer of a refurbished hostel at the Devil's Tower Road, so it is the same contractor that will be doing the works at Devil's Tower Road.

1255 **Hon. C Sacarello:** Madam Speaker, I am very grateful for the Deputy Chief Minister's reply. Could he perhaps provide information as to when this arrangement was made, please?

1260 **Hon. Deputy Chief Minister:** Hon. Members will recall that there were several expressions of interest over the years for the Queen's Hotel site. This emerged as a result of the last expression of interest, where there were several proposals made, a preferred bidder was selected and the Government entered into negotiations with that preferred bidder. I do not have the dates in front of me, but this is the process by which it happened.

1265 **Hon. C Sacarello:** Which makes perfect sense, Madam Speaker, but also raises the question as to why the extension was not commenced and the application for planning permission was not filed much earlier, well in advance of this particular sector of our community being either evicted, or transferred, to the Sunrise Motel.

Madam Speaker: Question? Is there one?

1270 **Hon. C Sacarello:** Why wasn't it planned earlier?

1275 **Hon. Deputy Chief Minister:** Madam Speaker, there is a perfectly logical explanation for that. The development on the Queen's site is connected to the extension to the hostel. The developer wanted to make sure, first, because it was part of the premium, that they would obtain outline planning permission for their development before submitting permission for the hostel – because if the first thing did not happen, then the second one would not have happened as part of that chain of events – and that permission was only obtained a few weeks ago.

1280 **Hon. C Sacarello:** And so, Madam Speaker, why was it not the Government's position that the extension should be built first and allay everyone else's fears before they were asked to move out and before the permission was granted for the lease for this project?

1285 **Hon. Deputy Chief Minister:** Mr Speaker, very simply because the information available to the Government was that there was room at the Sunrise hostel for the residents that required to be accommodated, and that the majority of residents did not live in Gibraltar.

Hon. C Sacarello: Finally, Madam Speaker, was it a case, therefore, that the information provided was erroneous in that case, based on the number of people who could fit in?

1290 **Hon. Deputy Chief Minister:** Madam Speaker, in a sense, the information was correct but not accurate. The hon. Member has already explained, in terms of figures and numbers, where we were.

1295 **Hon. Dr K Azopardi:** Can I just ask on something that the Deputy Chief Minister has just said, when he says the information was that the majority of residents of the Queens Hotel do not live in Gibraltar? What is the basis for that information? Where does he think they live? What are they doing there if they are not actually living there?

1300 **Hon. Chief Minister:** Madam Speaker, would the hon. Gentleman agree to discuss this with me behind your Chair? I think it is in the community's interest that we no longer ventilate that aspect of this matter.

1305 **Hon. Dr K Azopardi:** I am certainly happy to have a conversation with him, but just stringing together the different answers, the Hon. Deputy Chief Minister said the majority of residents do not live there, the Minister for Housing indicated in one of her answers that the number was 21 once you took away the other balance, which suggests, from previous answers, that we are talking about 20 or 30 people. I am not really understanding why it is sensitive to discuss that, but if the Chief Minister wants to have that discussion behind the Speaker's Chair, then I would be happy to do that.

1310 **Hon. Chief Minister:** I am grateful, Madam Speaker, because there is great sensitivity there underlying all of the show that we have seen in the past month.

Madam Speaker: Next question.

DEPUTY CHIEF MINISTER

Q869/2024

Reciprocal measures at border – Impact on income from PAYE/SI

1315 **Clerk:** Questions to the Hon. the Deputy Chief Minister.
Question 869. The Hon. C Sacarello.

1320 **Hon. C Sacarello:** If reciprocal measures at the border are necessary, has the Government calculated the impact this would have on business and the subsequent loss in PAYE/SI that would result?

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

Deputy Chief Minister (Hon. Dr J J Garcia): Madam Speaker, yes.

1325 **Hon. C Sacarello:** Madam Speaker, I am grateful for the solid reply there. Would the Hon. Deputy Chief Minister care to elaborate and provide a little extra information on that?

Hon. Deputy Chief Minister: Madam Speaker, I know the hon. Member will understand that this is a very sensitive issue. There are implications in going into this across the floor of the House in great detail. What I can tell him is that the question has been looked at globally and also on a sector-by-sector basis in relation to the largest contributors, but I cannot go into that information in detail across the floor of the House. What I am happy to offer him, in fact, which we have offered and they have taken up in the past, is a detailed briefing on NNO and the plans for NNO, which would cover some of this.

Hon. C Sacarello: Madam Speaker, I very grateful. I would like to take up that that offer and thank the Hon. Deputy Chief Minister for it.

Madam Speaker: Next question.

Q870/2024

**Contingency preparations for NNO –
Composition of UK-Gibraltar intergovernmental committee**

Clerk: Question 870. The Hon. the Leader of the Opposition.

Hon. Dr K Azopardi: Madam Speaker, who, precisely, currently sits on the board of the NNO, the intergovernmental committee between Gibraltar and the UK on contingency preparations for a non-negotiated outcome?

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

Deputy Chief Minister (Hon. Dr J J Garcia): Madam Speaker, the ministerial NNO board is co-chaired by the UK minister with responsibility for Gibraltar and by me. In the absence of a UK minister, a deputy director at the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office will co-chair.

The board is composed of officials from the following. In respect of Gibraltar: the Office of the Deputy Chief Minister, the Civil Contingencies Department, the Gibraltar Law Offices and the Department of the Environment. In respect of the United Kingdom: officials from the Convent, British Forces Gibraltar, the Gibraltar Negotiations Taskforce at the FCDO and the Gibraltar Policy Unit at the FCDO.

Hon. Dr K Azopardi: Is this a permanent composition or is there a permanent composition and also an ad hoc component depending on what is being discussed in these meetings?

Hon. Deputy Chief Minister: Madam Speaker, yes, this is a permanent composition but there have been occasions when specific areas of policy are being discussed when experts are brought in to better inform the deliberations of the committee.

Hon. Dr K Azopardi: I see. How frequently does this committee meet? And are there meetings both here and in London?

Hon. Deputy Chief Minister: Madam Speaker, there are two levels. The first one is a ministerial board and then there is a more general board made up of officials, which as I said is chaired by a deputy director. There have probably been some 40 or 50 meetings so far. The intention is normally to meet every fortnight. The frequency of meetings may increase as the situation merits it.

Hon. Dr K Azopardi: So, if it is meeting once a fortnight and it has met 40 or 50 times, then it has been meeting for the last couple of years – would that be right? It has not met before, so what was the reason for its creation a couple of years ago?

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Hon. Deputy Chief Minister: Madam Speaker, I do not want the hon. Member to misunderstand the information I have given. That is a from memory, what I think the total number of meetings has been. There have been occasions when we have not been able to meet every fortnight for a variety of other reasons, including the pressure from the treaty side of the negotiations because some people are involved in both areas.

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The process started more than two years ago. I cannot give him an exact date, but if he tables a question I would be happy to supply that information.

Madam Speaker: Next question.

Q994/2024

Potential treaty outcomes – Advice to business sector

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Clerk: Question 994. The Hon. C Sacarello.

Hon. C Sacarello: Following its consultation with the business sector, will the Government be providing it with a select number of possible outcomes for both a deal and a non-negotiated outcome, in order that businesses can plan more precisely for the various possible outcomes?

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

Deputy Chief Minister (Hon. Dr J J Garcia): Madam Speaker, representatives of the business community are aware of the general scenario Gibraltar would face in the event of a treaty outcome to the ongoing negotiations. Indeed, many of the details the Government has sought to negotiate have been at the suggestion of businesses themselves. There have at the same time been numerous contacts with representatives of the business community over the years in order to discuss plans for a no negotiated outcome (NNO). In addition to this, detailed briefings, as well as several tabletop exercises, involving the private sector have also taken place. This operates on the basis of a reasonable worst-case scenario. If he comes to the briefing, he will get a better understanding of what I mean.

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Hon. C Sacarello: Madam Speaker, thank you very much to the Deputy Chief Minister for his response. I have no doubt whatsoever in my mind as to the hard work that has gone on and the conversations with the business community, in particular with the leading trade organisations. It is, however, the case that sometimes that information does not filter down to all of the businesses, and not all the businesses are part of these associations anyway, so they may not have access to any information that they disseminate and perhaps it would be more useful to be able to view this from Government, whether through the format of a press release or post on the Government website.

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Would the Deputy Chief Minister not agree that the possibility of laying out solutions – given the complexity of the negotiations and the different twists and turns, you could say – like some countries have in trade negotiations with other countries, where they have an A, B and C type of format for possible outcomes, so that companies can now look to at least back a winner, if you like, and come up with alternative plans of action with different outcomes? It is the case that businesses are finding it increasingly worrying as these negotiations become protracted and there

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is no finite date, understandably, for a solution or an agreement, and that they are reaching the stage where they need to hook their strategy on to something, and at the moment it is all rather tenuous.

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Hon. Deputy Chief Minister: Madam Speaker, it is true that sometimes the information we give to the business organisations may not filter down to the members. We do not have responsibility for that, but I accept it is something that could happen. But the Hon. Member will also know that we have issued a series of technical notices on very specific issues, some of them directly addressed to the business community as to what they need to do to prepare. In addition to that, we have also issued two booklets which were published and distributed all over Gibraltar but which are also available online in the Brexit section of the Gibraltar Government website. There is a considerable amount of information there. When businesses ask to see us, not necessarily the organisations, we meet them and they do get a briefing and a flavour of what NNO would entail, but there could be different grades of NNO, as he rightly says, and it is very difficult to pin down exactly what it is that might happen. If, when the hon. Member comes and looks at the brief which we intend to give to him, which is what the business community themselves have already received and understood, I think he will understand the scenario better and the planning that has been ongoing already, but it is very difficult to be specific because obviously the outcome is something we cannot predict.

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Madam Speaker: Next question.

Q994/2024

Queensgate –

Government support re proposals

Clerk: Question 995. The Hon. the Leader of the Opposition, on behalf of the Hon. D J Bossino.

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Hon. Dr K Azopardi: Madam Speaker, is the Government supportive of the current proposals regarding the Queensgate development?

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

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Deputy Chief Minister (Hon. Dr J J Garcia): Madam Speaker, it is not for the Government to be supportive or not supportive of a particular development in a conventional sense. Instead, there are administrative, policy and legal processes and procedures for prospective developers to go through. Queensgate received outline planning permission in September and also has the consent in principle of the Government as landlord. These two procedures were, as always, entirely separate consents.

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Hon. Dr K Azopardi: Madam Speaker, then the answer is yes to the question of whether they are supportive. I do understand the distinction between the planning process and Government consenting as landlords. The Deputy Chief Minister has indicated that there is consent, although he said 'in principle', from the Government as landlord. When he says consent in principle, is it because there has not been a development licence or a building lease granted over the land yet?

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Hon. Deputy Chief Minister: Madam Speaker, we are at the MoU stage of the process. That is why I say 'in principle', and also because the details and extent of the final design remain to be agreed, but in principle there is consent.

Hon. Dr K Azopardi: I see, and in the context of the Government still not having concluded the arrangements, the Government will be aware, as we are, that there have been concerns expressed by persons who have objected to the planning process and no doubt may have voiced those concerns also to Government qua landlord. Is the Government taking on board those concerns of people in its discussions with the proposed development?

Hon. Deputy Chief Minister: Madam Speaker, the consent of the Government as landlord may or may not kick in when the development has planning permission. As I said, they obtained outline in September. It is that a number of representations were made when the project first appeared before the DPC – I am talking about the planning aspects – and as a result of that the height of the building was reduced from something like 20 or 21 storeys to 15 or 16. That reduced, obviously, the concerns of people. It is also, I think, worth noting that when it went to the DPC, where there often are a variety of different opinions represented, including NGOs, nobody voted against the development as it is now at outline stage. I think there were two abstentions but nobody voted against development.

Hon. Dr K Azopardi: I understand, but that is a description of the planning process, and he is right to give us a description because it relates to the objections within the planning process, but my question was more directed to the Government in terms of its role giving consent in principle, because it has not yet concluded the arrangements. Will the Government factor in that there remain certain objections to the development in the context of its own negotiations with the developer on the building lease and or licence?

Hon. Deputy Chief Minister: Madam Speaker, the answer is we need to wait and see. It is very unusual for the Government itself to receive representations, and it tends, in my experience at least, to be that most of these representations are channelled through the DPC where they are then dealt with or addressed, as in this case, where the height was reduced by some five storeys. I think we need to wait and see what happens going forward, but the consent in principle is there.

Hon. Dr K Azopardi: I see, so would it be right to then conclude, by what the Deputy Chief Minister has indicated, that first they have not had those direct representations? I am assuming he is leading on the negotiations, so really I am asking him the direct question: has he received representations in relation to this matter by persons who have objected? And is it the Government's position that the Planning Commission acts as a filter and really the Government process will not be affected – the consent will not be affected by the views of residents?

Hon. Deputy Chief Minister: Madam Speaker, it is precisely the views of residents which has led to a reduction in the height and the massing. As I said before, it is very rare that representations are made directly to the Government. I do not recall whether on this particular occasion relating to this particular development there have been. There may have been on the original scheme which was submitted, which, as I said, was five storeys taller and had a bigger massing, but I do not recall whether after that there had been any specific representations made to the Government in its capacity as landlord. Certainly, we are looking closely at the DPC process and seeing what emerges from that, but they are entirely separate consents, as the hon. Member knows.

Hon. E J Reyes: Madam Speaker, the Hon. Deputy Chief Minister has on more than one occasion made reference that there has been a reduction in height, but is the Deputy Chief Minister aware that the objections in respect of the height are still there? Although it may have been reduced from the original plan, it is still not to the satisfaction of the neighbours. In fact, my latest understanding is that as it stands today, the proposed height of the building surpasses that of Trafalgar House next door, or Alameda House or the Alameda estate, and so on. I want to clarify,

1515 because we could get the impression that the Government has been supportive because the height has been reduced, but it is the Deputy Chief Minister fully aware and is going to take into consideration that landlords will give the go ahead, because the reduction of height still nowhere near meets the real concerns of the original objectors and more people who wish to object having come to light information, but apparently some process does not allow them to file these new objections?

1520 **Hon. Deputy Chief Minister:** Madam Speaker, the DPC process allows people to come forward and express their views within a defined timescale. The consideration of applications now happens in public – in fact, they are also live streamed – so the information is there and people can see for themselves and are entitled to object. The Government has approved in principle as landlord the consent for this particular type of development on that particular site. As I said, that approval and agreement in principle is subject to the final design and the extent of the development, which remains to be agreed. Essentially the point is that the Government does not object to that kind of development on that particular site – that is to say residential, commercial, an element of car parking, a dance hall for the Ministry for Culture and also specifically elderly residential. It is worth noting again that when this went to the Development and Planning Commission, at a meeting where I was not present, the general view of the Commission on the revised proposals, which reduced the height of the building, was that ... the outcome was that nobody voted against the development. I think it says something, having been in many of these meetings where all sorts of opinions and debates and deliberations take place, that in this particular case nobody there voted against it.

Madam Speaker: Next question.

EDUCATION, THE ENVIRONMENT AND CLIMATE CHANGE

Q961/2024

Main sewer system – Review and maintenance programme

Clerk: Questions to the Hon. the Minister for Education, the Environment and Climate Change. Question 961. The Hon. G Origo.

1540 **Hon. G Origo:** Madam Speaker, what sort of programme of regular review and maintenance work is in place, if any, of our main sewer systems?

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

1545 **Minister for Education, the Environment and Climate Change (Hon. Prof. J E Cortes):** Madam Speaker, the Infrastructure section of the Technical Services department is responsible for the maintenance, upkeep and management of the public sewer network, which also includes the stormwater drainage system. They are very closely linked. There is a constant review of the main drainage systems, with surveys being carried on a regular basis to inform maintenance plans. In addition, as a result of developments there is continuous review of the existing network to determine its ability to cope with additional loading. This often results in the upgrade of the network to ensure it continues to function as required.

1555 The Technical Services department is also responsible for the longer-term main sewer relining programme, which aims to strengthen the main sewer and increase its hydraulic performance by insertion of a smooth inner liner. This annual programme has been in place for some time and will

shortly see the whole of the main sewer within the city walls being relined. This provides longer-term resilience to the network and improves its overall performance. In addition, Technical Services carries out regular desilting works to the system which again aims to improve the capacity of the network.

In respect of the stormwater system, there has been a concerted effort in the past few years to improve the overall performance of the network. This is reflected in the huge reduction of flooding and standing water on our roads during periods of heavy rainfall which we used to experience regularly in the past. The department continues to identify further improvements to the stormwater network to ensure that it performs as required.

The work carried out by the Infrastructure section is continuous all year round and includes desilting, relining, replacement of defective pipework, replacement of manhole covers, maintenance and reconstruction of manholes, liaison with developers, laying of new infrastructure as required, and review of the network to increase capability and provide resilience.

Hon. G Origo: Madam Speaker, I am grateful to the Minister for his comprehensive answer. I may not have got it from his reply: did he mention whether the entity or entities that carry out this regular review and maintenance work is a government entity or a private company? He did mention that the Gibraltar Technical Services Department does some part of the work, but I just want to understand whether, in respect of review and the maintenance works themselves, this is done privately or through a Government Department.

Hon. Prof. J E Cortes: Madam Speaker, it is a combination. The Technical Services Department has a section responsible for the sewers which can take on some work, but for major works it is often the case that there needs to be a subcontract in place, depending on the scale of the work and the area.

Hon. G Origo: Madam Speaker, if I may, because it is highly relevant to the line of questioning and I think a news article broke yesterday – I do not know if the Minister is aware but he must have seen it. I believe it was in connection with works which are taking place on Line Wall Road – is that correct? – relating to the sewer systems. My understanding, pursuant to the press releases, is that some works have been carried out in Line Wall Road which resulted in sewage having displaced through the network or made its way out into the wider sea. I believe the press release urged and advised not to bathe. It was even reported that someone bathing had vomited as a result of the smell and the stench in the area. I just wanted to understand whether the Minister can provide details on the extent of the damage of these repairs and whether this is connected to the recent tender given to Wastage Products Ltd to refix parts of Line Wall Road. I think that tender was issued about two weeks ago. A few questions there, but I am happy to break them down.

Hon. Prof. J E Cortes: Madam Speaker, what I would like to say is that the press release yesterday, in case there is some misunderstanding, did not refer to programmes of regular review and maintenance work, and therefore it was a separate issue that had arisen and was not directly related; indirectly, clearly, because they are sewers. I would just like to preambule my answer with that.

The issue that the hon. Member, whom I also welcome back after his absence last time round; I had not heard and I did exchange words with him and wish him well earlier this morning. The issue that the hon. Member raises is separate and I will explain it as best I can in the layman's terms that I have to use here. There was an issue of sewage seeping out through the walls at Wellington Front down to the area of the recreational clubs. That was identified as being as a result of damage to the sewer at Line Wall Road, the Lovers Lane area, which meant that that had to be urgently carried out. That is the result of the works being carried out at the moment. Clearly, the problem there is that in order to carry out the works the sewage flow has to be stopped because people actually have to go into the sewers. That means that the actual sewage flow is

1610 reduced, builds up and can overflow. That is what was found was going into the sea because these overflows are there for dealing with stormwater and so on. That is what caused that, and this is why the message went out yesterday. It was an urgent message to put out because as soon as it was identified that it was getting to the sea – it had not been predicted, but it is logical in retrospect – it had to be mentioned.

1615 I must mention that one of the reasons why these things happen is the pressure that builds up as a result of wipes that are still flushed. Even though everybody knows that you do not flush wipes, they still do, and that is causing huge problems. Sometimes, the sewage smells that we pick up here and there around Gibraltar, when you look into it there is a blockage caused by wipes, so I really have to call on the community not to flush wipes and similar down the toilet.

1620 I am not absolutely certain whether the tender that went out was related to these particular works. I suspect it may not have been, because a tender was going out anyway in relation to the ongoing maintenance relining, which is what I referred to in my prepared answer. I am not sure whether there is an overlap. It may be that because of the emergency of the works, there was a fast-track tender, but I do not have that information here. I think I have given enough information for the hon. Member to get a feel of what the issues were.

1625 **Madam Speaker:** Next question.

Q962-64/2024

**Pedal Ready cycling proficiency course –
Number of attendees to date; service provider; cost**

Assistant Clerk: Question 962. The Hon. G. Origo.

1630 **Hon. G Origo:** Madam Speaker, how many people have attended the Pedal Ready cycling proficiency course provided by the GSLA's summer programme to date, broken down by year?

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

1635 **Minister for Education, the Environment and Climate Change (Hon. Prof. J E Cortes):** Madam Speaker, I will answer this question together with Questions 963 and 964.

Assistant Clerk: Question 963. The Hon. G Origo.

1640 **Hon. G Origo:** Can the Minister confirm who is running the cycling proficiency course for the GSLA?

Assistant Clerk: Question 964. The Hon. G. Origo.

1645 **Hon. G Origo:** What has been the cost of running the Pedal Ready cycling proficiency course in this year's GSLA summer programme?

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

1650 **Hon. Prof. J E Cortes:** Madam Speaker, this summer's GSLA Pedal-Ready cycling proficiency course was undertaken by Pedal Ready Gibraltar, a private business, at no cost to Government. In 2024 it saw 31 children in total participating in two separate courses over two days, in 2023 it saw

24 children in five courses over four days, and in 2022 it saw 43 children in five courses over five days.

Hon. G Origo: Madam Speaker, may I ask the Minister if he can elaborate on how this Pedal Ready cycling course comes at no cost to Government? My understanding is that this is a course provided by the GSLA, so it may be that inadvertently this course is funded by GSLA money which is budgeted by the Government. Can he explain the answer that he has just given?

Hon. Prof. J E Cortes: Yes, Madam Speaker. Pedal Ready organises the course and they charge for it, so it is the parents of the children who will pay. Facilities are provided. I think some of them are actually carried out on the podium of the secondary schools, but they are provided at no cost, but it is the families who pay for these courses.

Hon. G Origo: Finally, Madam Speaker, does the Hon. Minister know – he may not have this information – at what stage the Pedal Ready cycling proficiency course was given to this private business? I understand that in the past it used to be done by the RGP; they used to liaise with schools and do it privately. I am not sure whether that is still the case, so I wanted to know at what point the view was taken by the GSLA or the Government to give this out to a private business, when it is something that used to be done by the RGP.

Hon. Prof. J E Cortes: Madam Speaker, the RGP, I believe, has not done this for many years. I have no recent memory of this.

Madam Speaker: Next question.

Q965/2024
Use of HVO fuel in buses –
Test results

Assistant Clerk: Question 865. The Hon. G. Origo.

Hon. G Origo: Madam Speaker, can the Minister provide details and does he intend to publish the results from the tests conducted on the two buses using HVO fuel designed to significantly reduce air pollution?

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

Minister for Education, the Environment and Climate Change (Hon. Prof. J E Cortes): Madam Speaker, a report on the results are being prepared by my Ministry team. I am informed that the test was very successful. An HVO 50:50 blend was used on two buses for a period of two weeks with various routes undertaken. Drivers and passengers did not experience any difference in trip comfort. Further, the emissions were reduced by just under 50%. Discussions are ongoing as to the next steps.

Hon. G Origo: Madam Speaker, thank you to the Minister for that answer. I do not know if he confirmed whether he was going to publish the results or not. He did say that they were producing them, but he can answer that in his reply.

I also wanted to ask whether he is aware – he said he is producing the results, but he may have had sight of part of them already – how this new HVO experiment would fare against low-emission

1700 buses. For example, my understanding is that the tests were carried out on Gibraltar buses which carried a Euro 6 or Euro 5 engine, which is on the end of the scale, so I wanted to understand how these tests would compare to new Euro 2 engine buses, which are the newer and cleaner engines. And then the question on that is: if it is not better to run a newer Euro 2 engine, then why are we doing this HVO experiment? Is it a capital investment issue?

1705 **Hon. Prof. J E Cortes:** Madam Speaker, Euro 2 is, in fact, worse than Euro 6. It is the other way round. Euro 6 is the cleanest. They are now developing Euro 7, but they are not out yet. No matter what engine burns it, HVO reduces the amount of carbon and other emissions by about 90%, so regardless of what engine you use, it is actually significantly cleaner. It is a more expensive fuel, but we are in discussions with the importers. If we are able to establish that it works well with no
1710 prejudice to the engines, and clearly it reduces pollution by so much, then we would be looking at converting all government vehicles to HVO, which would then reduce the cost. These are the discussions we are having at this point in time.

We are still planning to electrify as much of the fleet as we can. In fact, there is currently an electric bus in Gibraltar on trial, which I will be seeing tomorrow. If, for example, electric vehicles
1715 are not yet available for the specifications of our routes, then certainly we are looking at converting our buses to HVO, which will have a significant effect in emissions. So, it is something that is still in progress at the moment.

Madam Speaker: Next question.

Q965/2024
Europa Point World Heritage Interpretation Centre –
Update re plans

1720 **Assistant Clerk:** Question 966. The Hon. G. Origo.

Hon. G Origo: Madam Speaker, can the Minister provide an update on the proposed plans for the creation of a World Heritage Interpretation Centre at Europa Point, which was set to form part of a new walking route along Europa Advance Road?

1725 **Assistant Clerk:** Answer, the Hon. the Minister for Education, the Environment and Climate Change.

Minister for Education, the Environment and Climate Change (Hon. Prof. J E Cortes): Madam
1730 Speaker, there is already a World Heritage Interpretation Centre at Europa Advance Battery, an outdoor interpretation centre with reference to the World Heritage Site at Europa Point, and a third at the World Heritage Site monument on Europa Advance Road. These opened in 2016, 2018 and 2023 respectively.

1735 **Hon. G Origo:** Madam Speaker, the premise on which I ask this question resulted from an entry in the Government's manifesto which ran, at page 87:

NEW COASTAL CLIFF-TOP WALK

We will create a World Heritage Interpretation Centre at Europa Point displaying the archaeology and history of the caves and the Europa Point area. The centre will form part of a new walking route whose main feature will be a stunningly scenic cliff-top coastal path that will take you along Europa Advance Road to the two Gorham's cave viewing platforms.

1740 Whilst I can appreciate that these viewing platforms are already prepared [*inaudible*] – I think those relate to the flowers and the fauna along that area – is it the Government’s plan to do more with this coastal walking route? This is an initiative to increase interest, generate tourism and drive people who want to, to go and enjoy the scenic routes, but is it the Government’s plan to introduce stuff to complement these walking routes? We know and have heard in answers to questions that we have had that there all-time-high cruises, all-time-high flights, all-time-high visitors to Gibraltar, but then if we look at the Budget books and the Budget records, we have not been having the revenue generation that one would expect to have with these increased numbers.

1745 So, is it the Government’s intention to create other amenities – perhaps a tourist shop, restaurant, or some things that tourists can actually spend money on when engaging in these routes, interpretation centres and heritage sites?

1750 **Hon. Prof. J E Cortes:** Madam Speaker, I do not agree with the hon. Gentleman that we are not seeing the benefits of increased tourism. We are, and I think the figures will show that.

As regard to improvement in heritage sites in general, I will be answering questions later on from the Hon. Mr Bossino in relation to two wonderful new developments. I am hoping that the questions will end up with the Hon. Mr Bossino congratulating the Government on those initiatives. But to stick to the area of Europa Advance, the interpretation centres, and the outdoor interpretation centres in particular, do have reference to the World Heritage Site, as well as to the World Heritage Site’s primary purpose, which is the Neanderthals, but the World Heritage Site also has all the rest of its heritage, including the natural heritage.

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The main thing that we have not yet done, and we are planning the project at the moment, is the walk, which is intended to provide safe passage through the area. A lot of people walk in the area, me included, but I am not happy with the fact that there is not a proper pavement, and we are looking at how we can provide a walk on the other side of the wall, which will connect to the existing pavement. In some cases, it may have to be cantilevered. Clearly, it has to be safe. That project is being planned at the moment and that will link up these interpretation sites.

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In regard to additional interpretation, we are in the process of preparing 20 or 30 more heritage interpretation panels such as those that are around Gibraltar, which will increase interest for visitors and residents alike.

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Madam Speaker: Next question.

Q967/2024

Vehicles registered in Gibraltar – Measures to reduce numbers

Assistant Clerk: Question 967. The Hon. G. Origo.

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Hon. G Origo: Madam Speaker, is the Government considering any measures to reduce and tackle the vehicle numbers registered in Gibraltar; and, if so, what measures is it considering?

Assistant Clerk: Answer, the Hon. 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 Ministry is co-ordinating a number of initiatives to reduce and tackle vehicle numbers. One is improving sustainable transport methods such as bus and taxi services to encourage citizens to not use their private vehicles. Secondly, it is leading by example and carrying out a review of the Government fleet in order to electrify and downsize as much as possible.

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Hon. G Origo: Madam Speaker, I apologise to the Minister for maybe not wording my question so precisely, but I was more concerned with the registration of vehicles and usage by the wider public of Gibraltar, not so much Government, businesses and entities – but he did carry out part of the question with the buses and taxis.

The premise of my question came as a result of some of the points that were raised at the most recent Budget address, one of which was a proposed car tax. Despite that measure having been withdrawn after the Government had reconsidered its position, I thought perhaps maybe the Government would then go back to the drawing board, reconsider the approach and see whether they were going to try to achieve a similar aim, because I do not think that the situation at hand has gone away. The problem is still there. There seems to be an excess number of cars; I think there are more vehicles registered in Gibraltar than there are people. Is the Government's position that this is no longer an issue and not something that it wishes to tackle, or is the Government engaging in an exercise to reduce the vehicle numbers?

Hon. Prof. J E Cortes: No, Madam Speaker, this is a question of encouraging. There are a couple of things here. One is encouraging alternative forms of transport. In my prepared answer I did not mention something which I am glad for the opportunity to mention now in response to the supplementary, which is encouraging walking and cycling. We have a number of cycle lanes that are being planned at the moment and we are also going to be, working together with the Ministry for Tourism, encouraging walking by providing signs at intervals and showing the distances and times between different points to encourage people to walk, visitors as well as residents.

In relation to cars specifically, there is still a ban on the importation of vehicles over a certain age. That will continue. We are, at the moment, using carrot rather than stick, but we just have to see how these things develop.

Madam Speaker: Next question.

Q968-69/2024
Gibraltar Parking Management Services Ltd –
Tow truck services

Assistant Clerk: Question 968. The Hon. G Origo.

Hon. G Origo: Madam Speaker, has there been a tow truck available for GPMSL employees to operate in the past 12 months without any gaps in the service?

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

Minister for Education, the Environment and Climate Change (Hon. Prof. J E Cortes): Madam Speaker, I will answer this question together with Question 969.

Assistant Clerk: Question 969. The Hon. G Origo.

Hon. G Origo: When was the responsibility for providing tow truck services to Gibraltar Government assigned to GPMSL and why, and what arrangements were in place in respect of the tow truck services provided prior to the responsibility being assigned?

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

Hon. Prof. J E Cortes: Madam Speaker, there has been a service continuously operational other than perhaps on a very few occasions due to illness. GPMSL has always – I say ‘always’ relatively; for many years – provided a tow truck service as part of its operations. In September 2023 the Government’s tow truck service ceased to be operational. due to operational and financial considerations, it was decided to expand GPMSL’s existing tow truck services to cover all of Government’s requirements, including a 24/7 response to essential services. The six tow truck drivers were offered redeployment opportunities within other government departments.

Madam Speaker: Any supplementaries?

Hon. G Origo: Madam Speaker, thank you for the answer by the Hon. Minister. He did say a number of things, and I am just going to, whilst I stand and think on my feet, go through and process them. One was that the services provided by GPMSL have been largely continuous to the Government, but that the service really was not handed over until September 2023. So, is it fair to say that during that time, or prior to this assignment to GPMSL, there were more than one entity carrying out these services? In the instance where GPMSL did not have access to a tow truck or it was not operable, what was the position then? My understanding is that there must be other companies providing tow truck services, so if GPMSL could not provide the service to the Government, why didn’t the Government seek to obtain these services from some of the other companies?

Hon. Prof. J E Cortes: Madam Speaker I have to be cautious because a lot of this happened prior to September 2023 and I was not directly involved in Transport, so I may not have the direct information, which I am always happy to seek. With that caveat, GPMSL provided a tow truck – I assume they did it for private entities or individuals who had problems – and the tow truck drivers, I believe, were attached to the Royal Gibraltar Police at the time. Again, I am going on what I have heard, not my direct knowledge of the position. It became clear that the system operationally and financially was not efficient or effective, and therefore, as there was already a provider providing tow truck services to Gibraltar and to the Government and it was a company contracted to the Government, the decision was taken to expand that and absorb the work, which was relatively low in demand. It was not efficient to have this group of people there for relatively low demand. They have been redeployed into other vacancies in the Government and therefore there has been a saving in cost and the service now continues without, as far as I am aware, any problems.

Madam Speaker: Next question.

Q970/2024
Derelict vehicles –
Method of disposal by GPMSL

Assistant Clerk: Question 970. The Hon. G Origo.

Hon. G Origo: Madam Speaker. How have the derelict vehicles removed by Gibraltar Parking Management and Services Ltd in the past 12 months been disposed of? Have any of the derelict vehicles been sold; and, if so, what were the proceeds of sale and have any of those been retained by the Government or another entity? If any of the derelict vehicles were destroyed, how many were there, what was the cost of destroying them, and did GPMSL the Government or any other entity cover these costs?

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

1875 **Minister for Education, the Environment and Climate Change (Hon. Prof. J E Cortes):** Madam Speaker, all derelict vehicles are towed to the premises of Metalrock Ltd, which is contracted by Government to dispose and provide a certificate of disposal. The vehicles are disassembled into constituent parts as part of the end-of-life vehicles process. To date, GPMSL does not retain or recycle any vehicle for its own or Government's use, as everything is disposed of. GPMSL is contracted to recover all derelict vehicles from public places and remove all derelict vehicles marked for disposal by DVLD. This service is also offered to government departments. All vehicles reported by the public requesting disposal of their vehicles is done free of charge. A total of 368 vehicles have been disposed of between July 2023 and June 2024, and an additional 67 vehicles from June 2024 to 1st November 2024. Government does not pay for derelict vehicles, as such payment is made for disposal of tyres and waste, electrical and electronic equipment, which would include vehicle parts.

1890 **Hon. G Origo:** Madam Speaker, may I ask the Hon. Minister to please clarify what he ended his response with by saying that most of these destructions do not come at a cost to the Government? I would imagine that in the process destroying 368 cars ... Similar questions were alluded to earlier on the disposal and movement of waste from Gibraltar to Spain. Is it that GPMSL does not incur any costs on this disposal because the cost of movement of this waste is under the head of another expense and that is why he is telling me now that there is no cost to destroying and breaking down almost 400 vehicles? I do not understand.

1895 **Hon. Prof. J E Cortes:** Madam Speaker, GPMSL provides this service as part of its contract with the Government and therefore cannot actually subdivide whether the person is rescuing my car because it ran out of battery at Europa Advance Road – true story – or taking or taking a derelict vehicle, so I could not specify that. There is, of course, the fact that within general waste electrical and electronic equipment – and there is also the question of tyres – there are payments made, as I have said very clearly, to Metalrock, but it is not for vehicles as such; it is a subsequent process that leads to that.

Madam Speaker: Next question.

Q971/2024
Taxi licence holders –
Numbers fined and reasons

1905 **Assistant Clerk:** Question 971. The Hon. G. Origo.

Hon. G Origo: Madam Speaker, can the Minister provide details as to the number of taxi licence holders who have been fined, giving details as to the reason for the fine where possible, broken down into the following years: 2021, 2022, 2023 and 2024?

1910 **Assistant Clerk:** Answer, the Hon. the Minister for Education, the Environment and Climate change.

1915 **Minister for Education, the Environment and Climate Change (Hon. Prof. J E Cortes):** Madam Speaker, these are the figures for the number of fixed penalty notices issued to taxi licence holders for each of the years: 2021, zero; 2022, seven – all for city services offences; 2023, zero; 2024 as

at 1st November, 23 – 21 for not doing the city service and two for not displaying the identifying logo.

1920 **Hon. G Origo:** Madam Speaker, may I ask the Hon. Minister if he can explain whether there is a reason for the jumps in the numbers? I think in the first year he says it is zero, then it goes to seven, then it goes back to zero, and now it is 23. It seems, from an objective point of view, that some years we have good enforcement and some years they do not seem to be enforcing – or it would appear – anything at all. Can he please clarify why that appears to be the case?

1925 **Hon. Prof. J E Cortes:** Madam Speaker, I think this is a clear testament to the way that the new Ministry for Transport, since I was given that responsibility by the Chief Minister, is working and ensuring, in collaboration and with the full support of the taxi service, that taxi drivers do what they are supposed to do. That, together with other changes that we are bringing to the House by way of a number of Bills that that we will be taking forward, I have no doubt with the Opposition's support, will continue to improve the taxi service to be the one that Gibraltar deserves and the Taxi Association and the Government wish to achieve.

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Hon. G Origo: Madam Speaker, I hope that you will be patient and indulge me, because my initial intention was not to be highly critical, but the Hon. Minister has brought up the fact that new legislative changes have been brought to the taxi services and that is why he is taking the view that the service have improved. But I must note that yesterday I had a horrendous experience in trying to use the city taxi service. Having to attend Parliament at 12 o'clock midday, I had got ready by about 11 o'clock in the morning and decided to call for a city service. Having been on hold for 13 minutes, the answering machine told me that was the first in line. About two minutes later I was still first in line. The phone would sometimes ring, it would not be answered, and then I was first in line again, the answer machine would say. After 13 minutes, I hung up. I decided to call again. I think I did this exercise for another six minutes, and then I soon realised it was 11.30 and I had half an hour to get to Parliament. Given the situation – and it is no secret that I am currently carrying an injury – because of the time restriction, I thought the best option for me was to hop and make my way. My point to the Hon. Minister is: is this normal? Is it normal for 11 o'clock on a Wednesday morning, to call the taxi service, to be on hold for 26 minutes, to be first in line and not have my call attended to? Is this the reliability and the city service that the Minister thinks Gibraltar should really have, and is this the best that we have to offer? He has stated already that he has taken over the Ministry, changed the laws and improved the service, but from my experience, the service does not seem to have improved.

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Several Members: Hear, hear.

1955 **Hon. Prof. J E Cortes:** Madam Speaker, I will answer as much as I can, even though it is, I do not think, really a legitimate supplementary to the question. Out of deference to the affection that I have for the hon. Member opposite, I will give him an answer.

I do not think that is acceptable. I will take it up personally with the Taxi Association to see what is happening there. I would like to think that if it were not for the steps that we are taking, things would be even worse. The fact that we have this year fined 23 taxis for not doing city service ... Essentially, the likely reason is that they have been doing rock tours when they were supposed to be doing city service. I believe that is already making a difference. Clearly, the difference is not enough.

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The laws have not yet been passed on the Order Paper. We will be taking them up as soon as we do Bills in this House, and that will allow a number of changes, which includes the ability of having two vehicles, so that we can double up the number of trips and so on. The details will be with us when we discuss the Bills, and I am happy to discuss them with the hon. Member before

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we take them so that we he understands exactly what they will achieve, and hopefully to get his support. I believe that he is now responsible for Transport.

1970 So, there is work to be done, but I am absolutely convinced that the Taxi Association are committed to it and do not like having the bad name that some operators have given them. I am happy to work with them and with the hon. Member to make sure that that incident is not repeated.

1975 **Madam Speaker:** Next question.

Q972/2024

**Motoring offences –
FPNs issued for mobile phone use and failure to stop at red light**

Assistant Clerk: Question 972. The Hon. J Ladislaus.

1980 **Hon. J Ladislaus:** How many fixed penalty fines have been issued in the past 12 months for (1) driving whilst using a mobile phone and (2) failing to stop at a red light?

1985 **Assistant Clerk:** Answer, the Hon. the Minister for Education, the Environment and Climate Change.

Minister for Education, the Environment and Climate Change (Hon. Prof. J E Cortes): Forgive me, Madam Speaker, I got slightly distracted in sorting out a diary issue. My apologies.

1990 Between January this year and 11th November, 336 fixed penalty notices were issued for mobile phone offences and 43 were issued for traffic-light offences.

Hon. J Ladislaus: I am grateful for the answer, but I just query: I asked for the past 12 months – is there any reason why the Minister is unable to give me the statistics going back slightly further back to last year?

1995 **Hon. Prof. J E Cortes:** Madam Speaker, we are short of 12 months by one month and 15 days, so I do apologise. These were the figures that have been provided for us by the Royal Gibraltar Police, who are the ones who effect these. I am very happy to ask them to go back to 11th November 2023 if that would help. That would make it 12 months.

2000 **Hon. J Ladislaus:** That is the question.

Hon. J Ladislaus: I would be grateful, if possible, if the Hon. the Minister could get that information. I am just keen to see statistics and whether things are improving, or not, on the roads. I am grateful.

2005 **Madam Speaker:** Next question.

Assistant Clerk: Question 973. The Hon. E J Reyes.

Adjournment

2010 **Deputy Chief Minister (Hon. Dr J J Garcia):** Madam Speaker, if I may, the intention is to adjourn the House, so may I have the honour to move that this House do now adjourn to tomorrow, Friday, at 4 p.m.?

2015 **Madam Speaker:** I now propose the question, which is that this House do now adjourn to tomorrow at 4 p.m.
I now put the question –

Hon. D B Bossino: It is very tempting to say no. *(Laughter)*

2020 **Madam Speaker:** – which is that this House do now adjourn to tomorrow at 4 p.m. You know that the consequence of the hon. Member saying no is that we just carry on, so I wait with bated breath. Those in favour? **(Members: Aye.)** Those against? Passed.
This House will now adjourn to tomorrow at 4 p.m.

The House adjourned at 1.00 p.m.



PROCEEDINGS OF THE GIBRALTAR PARLIAMENT

AFTERNOON SESSION: 4.01 p.m. – 5.55 p.m.

Gibraltar, Friday, 29th November 2024

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The Gibraltar Parliament

The Parliament met at 4.01 p.m.

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

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

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

Clerk: Meeting of Parliament, Friday, 29th November 2024.
Suspension of Standing Orders. The Hon. the Chief Minister.

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

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

Freedom of the City of Gibraltar conferred on Sir Bob Neill KC

Clerk: Government Motion. The Hon. the Chief Minister.

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Chief Minister (Hon. F R Picardo): Madam Speaker, I have the honour to move the motion standing in my name, which reads as follows:

That THIS HOUSE:

RECOGNISES the outstanding contribution to Gibraltar by Sir Bob Neill KC during his time as a Member of Parliament in the United Kingdom.

NOTES Sir Bob's involvement in the All-Party Parliamentary Group for Gibraltar, in particular, as its Chairman for the past decade.

CONSIDERS that Gibraltar should rightly thank Sir Bob Neill KC for his continuous lobbying in the United Kingdom on all matters related to Gibraltar.

AND HEREBY DECLARES that the Freedom of the City of Gibraltar be conferred on Sir Bob Neill KC.

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I understand that this is a motion that will enjoy support from both sides of the House. I consulted with the Leader of the Opposition before I put the motion, and indeed I understand that that support was also confirmed in public statements that the hon. Gentleman, the Leader of the Opposition, made at the time that the motion was to be moved. I could not be happier, because Sir Bob Neill deserves the support of the whole House for the work that he has done for Gibraltar, treating us all as if we were his constituents, too, and as if Gibraltar had become an extension of Chislehurst, where he was the Member of Parliament for so long.

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Madam Speaker, the knighthood that was bestowed on Sir Bob Neill was not for matters related to Gibraltar; he was made a Knight Bachelor of the Order of the British Empire in 2020 in the Queen's New Years Honours List for his services to politics generally, and he was appointed King's Counsel this year. So, the honours that Sir Bob has already are not honours that the people of Gibraltar have directly influenced, although his political service of course includes the service

25 that he has provided in Parliament in the United Kingdom for the people of Gibraltar and I know
from Lord Cameron that he greatly appreciated the influence that Sir Bob was able to bring to
bear on his colleagues in the Conservative Party and the information that he could provide to him
directly in relation to matters related to Gibraltar when Lord Cameron was Prime Minister. I know
that because Lord Cameron and I have had opportunities to refer together to the excellent work
30 that Sir Bob has done in Parliament generally, and in particular in relation to Gibraltar as the
interface with the British government and other parliamentarians, as the head of the Gibraltar
APPG.

And so, this Knight Bachelor really was Gibraltar's knight in shining armour just after the
referendum and when he took up the chairmanship of the All-Party Group, not least from the
35 moment that the Deputy Chief Minister and I and every other Gibraltarian and Member of this
House were reeling from the Brexit result. We needed to engage directly with Downing Street,
and Downing Street was ready to engage with us. The then Prime Minister, now Lord Cameron,
was very clear that he was going to do everything he could in the short interregnum between the
result of the referendum being declared and his resignation on the steps of Downing Street and
40 him leaving Downing Street when a new leader of the Conservative Party had been elected – the
Rt Hon. Theresa May. Bob was able, in that short time, assist us in ensuring that the Prime Minister
could help us, as he wanted to help us, as much as possible.

The Deputy Chief Minister will remember, as I remember, quickly telling Sir Bob what we
needed in terms of the continuation of the single market in services between Gibraltar and the
45 United Kingdom, a single market which had existed between us since 1972 when we became
Members of the European Union, as that developed through the Single European Act etc. and how
that was fundamental for us. There is an interesting synergy in the numbers: 96% of the people of
Gibraltar voted to remain in the European Union; 96% of the work that our financial services firms
did outside of Gibraltar in the single market was done in the United Kingdom. So, that single
50 market access that was so fundamental to us was actually access to the United Kingdom market.
When I explained that to the Prime Minister, with Bob there, he said, 'Through Bob, get that to
me in a way that I can help you,' and so very quickly the Deputy Chief Minister, the Attorney
General and I set out to Bob Neill, literally in a conversation, in London, what we needed. In his
usual affable way, Bob was smiling at us, Bob was listening, but he was not taking a note, and
55 when the Deputy Chief Minister and I walked out of the room with the Attorney General I
remember saying to them, 'Bob's a clever man; I think he's got it, but' – I did wonder – 'he hasn't
made a note.' If he is watching, he will be surprised to hear that I was left with one of those feelings
that you are left with when you go to a good restaurant and there is an excellent waiter who does
not make one note, and there are 10 of you, you all order and you think he is really going to not
60 be able to bring you everything you have asked for. The letter that Bob Neill produced within an
hour set out better than I had explained to him exactly what it was that the thing that we now call
GAR – the single market in services between Gibraltar and the United Kingdom – should be, so
that the Prime Minister could quickly approve it and get the Treasury on board. As a result of that,
we now have that preservation of a single market, which secured the financial services business
65 that we have in Gibraltar and the online gaming business that we have in Gibraltar, and enabled
us to develop further strands, and indeed put us in the position where we were able to go to the
negotiation with the European Union without having to give anything up in exchange for access
to the single market in services in the EU, because we had preserved the access to the market that
we needed to preserve, thanks to Bob. That is just one of the strands of what he put in his letter;
70 there were other issues also which were of importance, like, of course, the ability of Gibraltar to
form part of the international trade deals that the United Kingdom was going to do. With his
disarming charm and ability, Bob very quickly turned the complex issues that we were putting to
him into a succinct explanation, put it to the Prime Minister and secured it.

That was probably the most important moment in which we have had to deal with Bob, but
75 not the only important moment. The past 13 years that we have been in government, the past 10
years that Bob was in the All-Party Group and the period of his chairmanship were complex years

for Gibraltar. I do not need to remind the people of Gibraltar what the past 10 years have entailed. And yet Bob has always been there, ready to support Gibraltar, ready to go out of his way to support Gibraltar, ready to persuade, ready to use his wisdom, his prudence and his charm as much for our benefit as he displayed it for the people of Chislehurst. And he does that, when we need him to, in his usual very balanced way. So, when Bob Neill appears on television, when he is persuading someone, when he used to be on the floor of the House, this was not a pugilist that would go out simply to score party-political points, and not for him the gladiatorial arena of politics in the style of some that might be so loud but might achieve so little; more, for him, the gentle persuasion, the ability to charm his way through with detailed and careful argument. We have also seen him on the floor of the House dealing with matters relating to justice in the United Kingdom, which sometimes have also been relevant to Gibraltar, but it is quite something that he was the Chairman of the Select Committee on Justice, because that shows you who Bob Neill was. He was trusted on those issues. He is a man of justice. He understands how the arc of the universe must always bend in the right direction in the end. This calm, softly spoken, eloquent but understated Knight of the Realm has very often come to our assistance, to such an extent that I was once told by a senior British politician who shall remain nameless that he had had his arm twisted by Bob on a matter related to Gibraltar but he had not felt it, but that he was, of course, prepared to agree what Bob had asked him to do.

Madam Speaker, given all that I have said, you would be forgiven for thinking that Bob was already 96% Gibraltarian and that making him a freeman just pushes him that final 4% to the full, 100% full monty of being one of us. His political career in the United Kingdom is well known to those who have followed his trajectory as a member of the all-party parliamentary group. I have said a little about the Select Committees that he has chaired. He has chaired others, and in every instance I think he has discharged all of the responsibilities he has had with distinction and without scandal, and these days that is saying something for a Member of the United Kingdom Parliament. And indeed, quite the opposite, in the context of Gibraltar he is one of what I would say are the minority of the friends of Gibraltar who was also a Remainer and therefore had no apology to make when he came to Gibraltar after the Brexit referendum, like others did.

A man of deep friendship, a man who has banged on doors during election campaigns and has banged on doors for Gibraltar, I think that everybody in this House will recognise that it is the loss of the Westminster Parliament that he is no longer a Member of Parliament, not because he was not chosen in the General Election by the people of Chislehurst but because he chose not to stand at this election for personal reasons.

Anne Louise, who is Bob's wife and partner, will have seen up close the many instances of Bob fighting for his constituents and fighting for Gibraltar, and will have had to wait on him as he did those things, on occasion, and accompany him as he did those things, on occasion, and follow him to Gibraltar, where we were always very pleased and will be very pleased to see both Bob and Anne Louise in the future. I want to thank her also for her contribution to his ability to defend Gibraltar as the very model of a modern major general, because given that their particular love is opera, I know they will have seen themselves in that way on certain occasions.

Bob was also the Chair of the Select Committee on Opera, not just on Gibraltar, the Chair of the Select Committees on London, on the Rule of Law, on Miscarriages of Justice, and on Strokes; the Secretary of the Financial Markets and Services Select Committee; and the President of the French Select Committee. But this unassuming man who did so much for Gibraltar was also Deputy Chairman of the Conservative Party between 2008 and 2010 and Vice Chairman of the Conservative Party from 2012. He was the Chairman of the Greater London Conservatives from 1996 to 1999, and the founding member of the Conservatives for Reform in Europe in 2016. What a pity that more did not listen to Bob and listened to other louder mouths. He was also a member of the EU Committee of the Regions and the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, so he understands Europe from inside out and understood the need more for reform than for withdrawal from Europe for the United Kingdom. He was also a member of the Joint Committee

on National Security Strategy on Liaison, and as I mentioned before, most importantly, the Chair of the Select Committee on Justice.

130 Madam Speaker, all I can say, apart from everything that I have said to date, is that I think it is fair to say that the Deputy Chief Minister, the Father of the House, I am sure the Leader of the Opposition as well, and those who have been longer in this Parliament – the putative Leader of the Opposition as much as the Leader of the Opposition, if I may be permitted a short gladiatorial moment – will happily also say that we can call Bob Neill a personal friend too. That is the beauty
135 of doing politics for all the right reasons. This is, as Tony Blair said, not just the arena of low skulduggery; it can also be a place to make enduring friendships, and I am delighted to call Bob a friend too.

I commend the motion to the House. *(Banging on desks)*

140 **Madam Speaker:** I now propose the question in terms of the motion moved by the Hon. the Chief Minister. Would any hon. Member like to speak? The Hon. the Leader of the Opposition.

Hon. Dr K Azopardi: Madam Speaker, I wish to associate us with the remarks of the Hon. the Chief Minister, except the ones about the putative Leader of the Opposition, of course, which I do
145 not recognise at all, but I do wish to associate myself with those remarks because Bob Neill is a friend of Gibraltar and a friend who deserves this just award by this House, by consensus, speaking with one voice.

A Minister once told me that you know who your friends are when you stop being a Minister, but it is also true that you know who your friends are when your friends stop being a Minister. On
150 National Day, wearing the red and white, when I spoke to Bob Neill, no longer a Member of Parliament, one of the first things he said to me was, 'How can I carry on helping Gibraltar?' That is the mark of the man, who, after being in Parliament, still wants to help Gibraltar.

As the Chief Minister has said, he's had a long and distinguished career well before his contribution to Gibraltar. The Chief Minister has remarked on his notable career as a member of
155 the Conservative Party, working through the grass roots of the party. For many years he was in the London Assembly as the leader of the Conservative Group in the London Assembly, and a well-known pro-European supporter of Ken Clarke during his leadership campaigns, a shadow Minister and Deputy Chairman of the Party, rising to very senior ranks in the Conservative Party. So, this was not just someone who became a friend of the Party but someone who came from the very
160 senior ranks of the Conservative Party, and testimony to that was his long and distinguished, illustrious career, as the Chief Minister has said, as Chairman involved in a number of Select Committees.

Madam Speaker, he was, of course, a very well-known friend of Gibraltar who did that sterling work in the post-Brexit era in particular, during which Members on that side of the House would
165 have worked very closely with him. I can do no better than simply endorse the remarks of the Chief Minister, who would have worked alongside Sir Bob on those matters, and he explained his contribution on obtaining UK market access in the post-Brexit era. That is a massive contribution to Gibraltar because it complements our economy and our ability to continue doing work in that area.

170 It is right to say that Sir Bob not just understood Gibraltar but I think also had synergy with Gibraltar, not to forget, of course, that he defied the Party whip over the issue of Brexit, as a remainer, as has been said before, and, because of that, has had that synergy with our European interests, with the fact that we voted remain, with the fact that our wishes and interests are different to those of the people of mainland UK, at least in relation to the type of arrangements
175 we want in a post-Brexit era. He has been very quick to listen to those issues, to understand them, to work with the people of Gibraltar and make a huge contribution to Gibraltar and its sustainability going forward, as Chairman of the All-Party Gibraltar Group, but also specifically on this issue of UK market access, and I confirm and commend the motion going forward, which will

enjoy the full support of the Members on this side of the House. (**Two Members:** Hear, hear.)
(*Banging on desks*)

Madam Speaker: Does any other hon. Member wish to speak? The Hon. the Deputy Chief Minister.

Deputy Chief Minister (Hon. Dr J J Garcia): Thank you, Madam Speaker. I am delighted to support the motion moved by my hon. Friend the Chief Minister. As the House knows, the Freedom of the City is the highest honour that this Parliament can bestow. There is no doubt in my mind that Sir Bob is a worthy recipient of this award. His time as a member of the All-Party Group on Gibraltar straddles two GSD administrations and four GSLP Liberal administrations, a record which speaks for itself. He has, therefore, been there regardless of who has been in power in Gibraltar.

Sir Bob was first elected to the Commons in 2006, and soon after that election he joined the Gibraltar APPG. The All-Party Group had already been bestowed the Freedom of the City in 1982, the House will recall. Members of the UK Parliament, as my hon. Friend the Chief Minister has said, are under no obligation to keep an eye on the affairs of Gibraltar, still less to stand up for us, but many choose to do so, and this House is grateful for their interest. They do so because they believe in the justice of our cause, in our right to remain a part of the British family, and in our right to self-determination.

Sir Bob served as a Minister in the Department of Communities and Local Government during the UK coalition government, in addition to everything else that has been said. After the 2017 general election, he took on the Chair of the Gibraltar Group, and this is not often an easy task. That role has sometimes led the incumbent over the years to clash with the leadership of their own party. Like Gibraltar, as has already been said, Sir Bob was a remainer who was strongly opposed to Brexit and he defied the Conservative whip, as the hon. Member said, on a number of occasions on this specific issue. The Chief Minister has quite rightly highlighted the role Sir Bob played in securing a written assurance from the Prime Minister at the time, David Cameron, in respect of our continued market access to the UK in financial services and online gaming. In his time in Parliament, he was a serious and respected MP. That meant, in turn, that he was taken seriously and respected when he rose to highlight the concerns of Gibraltar and its people.

Together with the Chief Minister, I have had the opportunity to work with Sir Bob during our many lobbying campaigns in Westminster over the years. When the pandemic and travel restrictions complicated in-person meetings with the APPG, he was quick to organise these virtually, instead, so Gibraltar and the views of Gibraltar continued to be heard throughout. Sir Bob Neill is and has been a passionate defender of Gibraltar and its people, so, Madam Speaker, I am delighted to support the motion. (*Banging on desks*)

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

Hon. Prof. J E Cortes: Madam Speaker, if I may just add a very few words to everything that has already been said, I have known Bob Neill for practically as long as I have had the honour to be in this House. I saw Sir Bob just a couple of weeks ago in London, and what never fails to strike me is not only how well connected he is across all the parties in Parliament and beyond, but how well versed he is in all things Gibraltar and how willing he is to continue to work for Gibraltar, as I am sure he is doing even now, as hopefully he is watching this debate. So, with those very few words and with very fresh memories of him just a couple of weeks ago, in London, still wanting to do the best he could for Gibraltar, I obviously support this motion as well. (*Banging on desks*)

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

Before I call on the mover to reply, I wonder whether I may break with procedure and, with the leave of the Hon. the Chief Minister, the Hon. the Leader of the Opposition and Members

generally, be permitted to say a very few words on this honour that is proposed to be endowed on Sir Bob.

I have known Sir Bob for some years now. He is one of a dying breed of traditional, charming gentlemen. Often during his visits to Gibraltar he called on the judiciary, and over the years, over a sip and a nibble, he has become a friend. He has fought tirelessly, bravely and vociferously for Gibraltar. This is a well-deserved, well-earned honour, and I hope to congratulate Sir Bob in person when we next meet.

I now call upon the mover to reply.

Hon. Chief Minister: Madam Speaker, it is not often one is called to reply to you, but I commend you for having impeccably addressed us without failing to refer to us as ‘hon. Members’ – the Leader of the Opposition, the Leader of the House; I am sure we all had our notebooks out, just in case we might have had a chance to win one back.

Madam Speaker, may I thank you for those very kind words about Sir Bob, because I was, in my response, going to also refer to Sir Bob’s time in the law, and because your references are to his time engaging with the judiciary, that very helpfully opens the door for me to do that and to remind the House that he is also a member of the Middle Temple, which I know you are, and I am too, and I think other Members of the House are also. So, he shares with the, I think, vast majority of the Members of the Bar in Gibraltar that membership, and he and I are always keen to remember the old adage, ‘Inner for the rich, Middle for the poor, Lincoln’s Inn for Chancery and Grey’s Inn for everybody else,’ *que se de por aludido el que se tenga que dar por aludido* whoever that may best refer to.

May I also thank the Hon. the Leader of the Opposition for reminding the House of the words of Sir Bob this National Day, when he was no longer a Member of the House of Commons. His reference was – to him and to me, and I think on television also in Gibraltar – ‘How can I carry on helping Gibraltar now?’ People will be delighted to know that he continues to work with us through Gibraltar House, because, as the Minister for the Environment has said, Bob Neill is really well known in the United Kingdom across the floor of the House, but he is also, perhaps more importantly, really well liked across the floor of the House, and that is the key. The key is not just to be known – hence why just being the pugilist is never going to get you anywhere – it is also about being well liked. If anything, Sir Bob is truly well liked. He is – if I can say so with respect to the other very well-liked Freeman of Gibraltar, Sir Andrew McKinley – the young Andrew McKinley. Both of them, I think, have demonstrated that they have Gibraltar in their hearts and they have used that love that people have for them always to further the cause of Gibraltar.

Madam Speaker, I always forget the terminology: it is the Gibraltar Authorisation Regime. It is shorthand GAR, and that is what we now call the mechanism, the paradigm for this single market between Gibraltar and the United Kingdom. I would say that that is the cherry on the cake of the contribution that Sir Bob Neill has made for Gibraltar, but it is just the cherry on a huge cake of contribution. To quote Boris Johnson, a politician who I think I quote less than I quote Margaret Thatcher, I would say with Bob Neill we really are going to be able to have our cake and eat it, in terms of someone who has given the best that he could for Gibraltar.

I have one anecdote that I have not told the House, which I should remind everyone of. I was, with Bob Neill, taken to see another great friend of Gibraltar, Robert Goodwill, who was the Transport Minister of the United Kingdom Government who did himself, the United Kingdom and us proud when he got up and walked out of a meeting of the European Commission in relation to matters to transport Snr Margallo, not so good a friend of Gibraltar, was rescinding the terminology of the Cordoba Agreements that had been agreed going into directives. Robert got up and left and that always, in my view, covers him in glory and demonstrates how much of a staunch supporter of Gibraltar he was, too. So, I was, with Sir Bob, going to see the Rt Hon. Robert Goodwill in the Commons when it was announced that Mrs May had become leader of the Conservative Party. It was confirmed that she was arriving in the House of Commons, and both Bobs said to this socialist, who was wearing a red tie – the Deputy Chief Minister was not with me

at that moment – ‘Come with us to St Stephen’s Gate,’ which is where, traditionally, Conservative Members of Parliament clap in their new leader; it sounded like a good idea. And there, amongst a sea of Conservatives was the leader of the Gibraltar Socialist Labour Party and Chief Minister of Gibraltar clapping in Mrs May, who was to become also a staunch supporter of Gibraltar as Prime Minister; she had been as Home Secretary. I felt as out of place as if I was having tea behind your Chair with all the Members of the Government here and all the Members of the Opposition there. But in my view it was good for Gibraltar that I was there because I was immediately able to greet Mrs May again. The Deputy Chief Minister and I would see her the following day when she was to take her first moment after David Cameron had done his last Prime Minister’s Questions and was on the way to the palace and she was getting ready to go to the palace. But all of that, also thanks to Bob Neill.

Madam Speaker, I am delighted that the whole House will support this motion. I am delighted that Sir Bob Neill KC is now going to become also a Freeman of the City and Garrison of Gibraltar, and I will be delighted when he joins us in Gibraltar for the ceremony of the bestowment of the Freedom on him as a result of the unanimous vote of this Parliament. I shall very much look forward to seeing him march his sheep up Main Street whenever he wishes.

I commend the motion to the House. (*Banging on desks*)

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

Questions for Oral Answer

EDUCATION, THE ENVIRONMENT AND CLIMATE CHANGE

Q972/2024

Motoring offences –

FPNs issued for mobile phone use and failure to stop at red light –

Supplementary information

Q973/2024

National Theatre –

Progress and completion date

Clerk: Answers to Oral Questions continued. Question 973. The Hon. E J Reyes.

Hon E J Reyes: Madam Speaker, is Government satisfied with the progress made to date in respect of providing a new Gibraltar National Theatre, and does it have any indication of possible completion dates?

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

Minister for Education, the Environment and Climate Change (Hon. Prof. J E Cortes): Madam Speaker, before I do that, with your indulgence, if I may very quickly refer to Question 972, the Hon. Lady asked for the full-year effect on the question of penalties. I have now been able to obtain that information, so if I may, I am going to give it now.

For the period 11th November 2023 to 31st December 2023, there were 16 FPNs for mobile phone offences and one for traffic light offences, bringing the figures to a total of 352 and 44 for

those 12 months. I think the hon. Member now has that information and I apologise that it was not made available to me beforehand. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

320 **Madam Speaker:** think the hon. Lady is asking to ask a supplementary on that, and although we have finished that question I am going to allow it because the information has been given.

Hon. J Ladislaus: I am very grateful to be allowed. Just one simple question: could the Hon. the Minister perhaps confirm whether any of the traffic lights – and I think I know the answer – in
325 Gibraltar actually have cameras?

Hon. Prof. J E Cortes: Madam Speaker, I would need to obtain that information; I do not have it here.

330 **Madam Speaker:** Perhaps the Hon. the Minister would like to turn his mind now to Question 973.

Hon. Prof. J E Cortes: Yes, Madam Speaker. As I have clarified several times in this House, the Gibraltar National Theatre project is being run by the National Theatre Foundation. I am aware
335 that the design phase is complete to RIBA Stage 3, prepared at no cost to Government thanks to philanthropic donations. The Government is aware of advanced discussions between the foundation and potential funders for the construction phase and is, of course, keen that these should be successfully concluded so that the project can be breaking ground soonest.

340 **Hon. E J Reyes:** Thank you, Madam Speaker. Yes, the Minister has reminded us of what he said in previous answers. The latter part of my question: is Government aware – and is it able to enlighten us – of possible completion dates for this project?

Hon. Prof. J E Cortes: No, Madam Speaker, it all depends on the foundation's discussions with the funders. It should take about 18 to 24 months to complete, but I have no further information
345 that I can share.

Madam Speaker: Next question.

Q974/2024
School suspensions –
Numbers since September 2024

350 **Clerk:** Question 974. The Hon. E J Reyes.

Hon. E J Reyes: Can Government provide details in respect of the number of pupils, together with generic reasons, who have been suspended from school since September 2024, indicating the school sector where the pupil is or was enrolled and duration of suspension?

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

Minister for Education, the Environment and Climate Change (Hon. Prof. J E Cortes): Madam Speaker, nine pupils have been suspended, all from the secondary sector. The generic reasons are serious behaviour and damage to property, and the suspensions have ranged from two to five
360 days.

Hon. E J Reyes: Madam Speaker, I do not quite know how to analyse it. If the school year starts in September and we are almost at the end of November – and the Minister was probably provided with these figures last week – in less than a 10-week period we have had nine pupil suspensions. Given that figure – and the Minister has the statistics to compare it perhaps to previous academic years – is there some concern being expressed amongst the teaching profession? I know the Minister, in respect of other questions, has answered that he was in discussions with the teachers’ representatives, looking into the wider picture of disciplinary matters and so on. Is there anything else that the Minister can say to calm down fears that some parents might feel that nine pupils is too many? I would like to hear the Minister’s updated views on that.

Hon. Prof. J E Cortes: Madam Speaker, that is not a question, it is asking me for a view, but I will try to assist, as I normally try to do. Suspensions can be for many reasons, and the threshold for suspension will vary depending on the student, how repetitive a particular behaviour is and depending on the school. Therefore, from such a small sample over such a small period, I do not think we can reach any final conclusions. Nine pupils suspended. Are nine pupils too many? There is the point of view that I would rather there were not any behaviour that teachers consider requires suspension. We continue reviewing the issues of behaviour in the schools. There was a press release, I think just issued now, not directly related to this but showing how we are engaging with specialists from outside in order to look at how we can support young people and children who have behavioural issues. I do not think we can read much into this particular statistic that I have presented today.

Madam Speaker: Next question.

Q975/2024
Teaching complement –
Numbers by establishment

Clerk: Question 975. The Hon. E J Reyes.

Hon. E J Reyes: Can Government provide details of the current number of teachers forming part of the teaching complement, showing who is employed on a substantive or supply basis as of today’s date and indicating what establishment they are assigned to?

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

Minister for Education, the Environment and Climate Change (Hon. Prof. J E Cortes): Madam Speaker, there is a schedule on its way to the hon. Member with the information requested.

Answer to Q975/2024

School/Establishment	Permanent Staff	Supply Staff
GMLP	25	0
NDLP	29	3
SPLP	24	3
SBLP	14	0

SJLP	25	5
SMLP	13	1
SMS	21	13
SJUP	27	2
SBUP	20	5
SAUP	31	6
BFUP	34	4
GC	26	4
BS	85	27
WS	92	23
TLC	0	4
LMT	4	0
EAL	2	1

Madam Speaker: We will carry on with the next question and revert to this for any supplementaries there may be later.

Next question.

Q976/2024
Teaching TLR posts –
Vacancies

Clerk: Question 976. The Hon. E J Reyes.

Hon. E J Reyes: Can Government provide details of how many teaching TLR posts are still pending to be filled on a substantive basis, indicating how many are currently being covered in an acting capacity?

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

Minister for Education, the Environment and Climate Change (Hon. Prof. J E Cortes): Madam Speaker, there are 30 vacant teaching TLR posts, 29 of which are currently being covered on an acting basis.

Hon. E J Reyes: Madam Speaker, mathematics is certainly not my forte. If there are 13 posts to be filled but 29 are being covered in acting posts, that difference of 16 is accounted for how?

Hon. Prof. J E Cortes: Madam Speaker, 30 vacant, of which 29 are covered on an acting basis.

Hon. E J Reyes: Yes, it makes a big difference. Thank you, Madam Speaker. So, it is just one post that is not being covered, for practical reasons or whatever, not something of great concern.

We spoke about this in the last academic year, and the Minister had indicated some hope that if not in time for the start of the 2024-25 year, which would have been September, very shortly thereafter he hoped to have all this settled. I think in his answer, if I recall correctly, he said that

on a couple of posts he was actually in discussion with the Unions to see whether the nomenclature or the duties could be changed. Can the Minister shed any light on that? Why are there still some posts that have not been settled on a permanent basis?

425 **Hon. Prof. J E Cortes:** Madam Speaker, this is a dynamic situation. The posts that are vacant now are not the same ones that were vacant last academic year. A lot of those have been filled and others have become vacant through retirement or promotion and so on, so they are not the same posts. At the moment, I know that 9 are in the process of being recruited in the sense that the adverts have gone out and the recruitment process is progressing. There are another 21 posts
430 that are pending, and many of these are due to more recent promotions. There is still a small nucleus of posts which I am told by the Department they are now tweaking. Hopefully by the end of this term, just a couple of weeks to go, we will be in a position to discuss them in detail with the Union, with a view to filling them, but I repeat that they are not the same posts that were vacant last year. There have been some filled and others have fallen vacant.

435 **Hon. E J Reyes:** I am grateful, Madam Speaker; it does shed a lot of useful information on that. May I take a bit of tongue in cheek, because neither the Minister for Education nor I are not members of the legal profession; therefore, we can sometimes be a bit more liberal with the language. Is the Minister able to at least give an indication by what date he would ideally like to
440 have this settled? I know quite often as a Minister you say, 'I want it done, and done as soon as possible,' sometimes when one asserts a bit of authority on the Director of Education ... This autumn term is nearly over and spring term will be over before we know it. Does the Minister have a particular target that he is asking his officials to aim for, to settle this?

445 **Hon. Prof. J E Cortes:** Yes, Madam Speaker. Clearly, I know that that is not the question that I have been asked. I suspect that we will never come to a situation when, in asking that question, I will say there are none vacant, because of the dynamic nature, but in respect of the post that we are trying to readjust, I have asked the Director of Education to have the recommendations by the end of this term. I am expecting it will be by the end of this term, and therefore there will be a
450 small period of discussion with the Union to tweak it, if necessary, and then I expect that this should be advertised and filled next term.

Madam Speaker: Next question.

455 **Hon. D J Bossino:** May I ask a supplementary on ...? Oh, this is the question that we are going to go back to eventually, the one where we have received the schedule in reply.

Q977/2024

Teachers with diverse family needs – Availability of part-time employment

Clerk: Question 977. The Hon. E J Reyes.

460 **Hon. E J Reyes:** Can Government confirm if part-time employment is available for teachers in order to cater for diverse family needs?

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

Minister for Education, the Environment and Climate Change (Hon. Prof. J E Cortes): Madam Speaker, yes. While it can be difficult to accommodate, depending on the teacher's specific role, if possible and there are justifiable circumstances, consideration will be given.

Madam Speaker: Next question.

Q978/2024

**DoE staff accessing well-being support –
Numbers**

Clerk: Question 978. The Hon. E J Reyes.

Hon. E J Reyes: How many LSAs and staff employed at the Department of Education have accessed the well-being support team during the academic year 2023-24 and, so far, this academic year 2024-25?

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

Minister for Education, the Environment and Climate Change (Hon. Prof. J E Cortes): Madam Speaker, in total, 46 members of Education staff, inclusive of SNLSAs, accessed support from the Government's well-being team in the academic year 2023-24. So far in academic year 2024-25, 28 members of Education staff, inclusive of SNLSAs, have accessed well-being support from the Government's well-being team.

Hon. E J Reyes: The Minister has not broken it down by those who are LSAs or otherwise. When he is talking about the non-LSAs, are they all members of the teaching grades, or in that figure are there certain administrative grades who are not necessarily qualified teachers in their own right? I do not know if the Minister has that statistic with him.

Hon. Prof. J E Cortes: I will give the LSA figures; I have them here. I do not have it specifically, but I would have thought that the majority are teachers, if only because they are the majority of the staff and by chance alone you would expect it to be more teachers. For those two years we are talking about 23 and 15 who are specifically LSAs.

Madam Speaker: Next question.

Q979/2024

**Gibraltar College –
Relocation cost and expected completion date**

Clerk: Question 979. The Hon. E J Reyes.

Hon. E J Reyes: Can Government update this House in respect of progress made to relocate the Gibraltar College, together with details of costs and expected completion dates?

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

Minister for Education, the Environment and Climate Change (Hon. Prof. J E Cortes): Madam Speaker, the College has been relocated to the Cross of Sacrifice site. The design details are currently being discussed with the full participation of the College team. A detailed timeframe and costs have not yet been finalised, but the plan is to open at the new site in September 2027.

Hon. E J Reyes: Madam Speaker, two things arise from that. The Minister says the plans and so on are being discussed. With exactly whom is it being discussed: with all members of staff of the College or with the managerial team of the College? And although at this stage, because of its design and so on, he may have little idea to be able to commit himself to costs, may I ask, additionally, will this eventually be a cost, the bill for which will be footed by Government, or will it be like other projects, for example, in respect of other developments that the Deputy Chief Minister alluded yesterday, where the developer had to provide those premises? Does the Minister have any indication of who is going to pay for this?

Hon. Prof. J E Cortes: Madam Speaker, at this point in time – (*Interjections*)

Madam Speaker: The Hon. Minister was talking.

Hon. Prof. J E Cortes: At this point in time, Madam Speaker, this is part of a larger project for the area. The exact details and costings and division of the plot, so to speak, are part of the discussion that I have described.

In relation the participation of the College, I meet regularly, about once a month, with the senior College team, the architects and the team from the Department, and they are cascading that down to the rest of the staff to get feedback. I will be doing a visit to the College very shortly, when I hope to speak directly to the staff about their expectations and requirements.

Hon. E J Reyes: Thank you, Madam Speaker, I am grateful for that. The reason why I asked, and perhaps the Minister can confirm ... My interest in involving in these discussions and planning the lower grades or the ordinary classroom lecturer is ... Can the Minister confirm: are we talking about not only the reprovision in new premises of existing subject areas, but is the Minister exploring, as well, the possibilities of extending the wider curriculum and range of subjects that the College could offer if moving to new premises and cater for certain specialist rooms, as an example?

Hon. Prof. J E Cortes: Madam Speaker, I would not choose the descriptive 'lower grades', but I know what the hon. Member means. The College, to my mind, is the biggest untapped potential in education in Gibraltar. It has huge potential. The opportunity will be taken now to see how we can expand, not just on site but also using other sites around Gibraltar. I work very closely with my hon. Friend the Minister for Employment, who runs training and the Training Centre, in developing schemes together, and we will continue to work that within the new premises as well.

Madam Speaker: Next question.

Q980/2024

Non-F-gases –

Reports of importation by non-local companies

Clerk: Question 980. The Hon. C Sacarello.

Hon. C Sacarello: We have received reports from local companies of the illegal importation of non-F-gas certified gases as refrigerants for air-conditioning units by cross-border companies, despite it being in contravention of EU directives due to the harming effects it has on the ozone layer. Is the Government committed to stamping out this malpractice?

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

Minister for Education, the Environment and Climate Change (Hon. Prof. J E Cortes): Madam Speaker, there is a regime in Gibraltar, legislated under the Environmental Protection (Controls on Ozone-Depleting substances) Act 2014 which transposed the EU's F-gas Regulation with the overarching aim of eliminating the sale of HFCs in the EU by 2050. The regulations introduced a quota system to local producers and importers to phase down the importation and production of the most common F-gases and to encourage the switch to climate-friendly alternative substances with lower global warming potential or non-F gas alternatives such as ammonia, hydrocarbons and carbon dioxide.

The Environmental Agency works closely with HM Customs to control these and other imports such as food stuffs. However, neither department has received any reports of these controlled gases being imported by non-local companies. Both departments welcome any information from the public, or indeed from the hon. Member, as to how these alleged importations are happening, so that both organisations can come together to investigate and take any necessary action.

Hon. C Sacarello: Madam Speaker, I am very grateful to the Hon. Minister for his explanation and for assuring that this would be tackled with immediate concern. This, of course, is something which is prejudicial to the environment, and not just us but obviously – the ozone layer – everyone else on the planet, and I think we should be doing everything possible to kerb this malpractice. The information did come from a very reliable source, a person of great standing within the community, and I have no reason to doubt his word. In fact, post this –

Madam Speaker: Question.

Hon. C Sacarello: – if the Minister is happy, I will liaise with him to help kerb this practice.

Hon. Prof. J E Cortes: Madam Speaker, the question is am I happy for him to liaise with me and provide me with the information. The answer is absolutely, we would take it up very seriously.

Q975/2024

Teaching complement – Numbers by establishment – Supplementary questions

Madam Speaker: Before moving on to the Hon. D J Bossino's questions, we will take any supplementaries on Question 975.

Hon. E J Reyes: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I have had the opportunity to look at the chart and I have a couple of very minor queries.

The abbreviation 'SMS': am I interpreting that rightly to be St Martin's Special School; and if that is the case, can the Minister enlighten us on why there are so many members of staff on a supply basis?

590 **Hon. Prof. J E Cortes:** Yes, Madam Speaker, it is St Martin's School and what I can say is that this is because of the specific needs of the children. Sometimes we have to bring in additional supply staff in order to deal with those specific needs.

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

595 Within the nomenclature 'BS' and 'WS', which one can deduce are Bayside School and Westside School, it seems that almost a quarter of the teaching staff in each school are on a supply basis. I know we will always have an element of supply because some are covering long-term maternity, as the first example that comes to mind, but as high as figures as those on the table? Is there something there that can explain the situation?

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Hon. Prof. J E Cortes: Yes, Madam Speaker, a lot of these supplies are due to maternity and some of them are due to career breaks. Clearly, the larger the school, the more likely it is that there will be teachers on those kinds of breaks. Remember that this is a snapshot at any given time, so it may be that the teachers are supplying for a brief period of time, perhaps with a particular speciality, perhaps with children with particular needs, but you would expect the larger schools to have more absences that have to be covered by supply teachers.

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Hon. E J Reyes: I am grateful that at least the Minister has enlightened us and we have on the record why that should be the case.

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In respect of – I want to make sure I do not have the wrong interpretation – the last three sets of abbreviations – TLC, LMT and EAL, the TLC has four supply members of staff and no one on a permanent basis, but I am not 100% certain on what those abbreviations mean. Can the Minister clarify that?

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Hon. Prof. J E Cortes: Madam Speaker, I believe that there must be an error in the abbreviations because I am struggling to recall at least one of them, so I would need to check because they are not the ones that I recognise. EAL, I believe, is Early Access Learning. TLC is the correct abbreviation and this is the unit which is based at the old St Bernard's Nursery which deals with particular special needs of children who cannot be taught within the school environment all the time and spend time at that centre. There the figures will be flexible because it will respond to whether there are any particular children accessing those facilities. On LMT I think there must be an error. I will check, hopefully during the course of this session, and I will clarify as soon as I have it.

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Hon. E J Reyes: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I must say, for the record and for your information, although you may have got a copy, in the previous session of Parliament, when the Minister said that he was missing some figures and he would find them out he did actually write to us, so at least there was a parliamentary record. So, I am grateful if the Minister has committed himself to do that for us. Likewise – Madam Speaker, I think you would probably guide me in the right direction – I can ask him in the future on the question of the TLC, for which he has explained the setup, if I am interested in finding out the future, more long – term basis for that. Am I correct in saying I had better pose it as a separate question in the next term? I do not think I would then infringe any rules because –

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Madam Speaker: At the risk of catching my fingers now, I will rule on the admissibility of a question once I have it before me. I cannot give you an indication until I see the question. In principle, what you are suggesting appears to be all right, but I will have to look at the question first.

640 **Hon. E J Reyes:** Thank you, Madam Speaker. I am going to ask a separate set of information which I do not think it would be reasonable for me to expect the Minister – otherwise, he would carry a file as big as a cabinet – to provide. Thank you.

Madam Speaker: The Hon. D J Bossino.

645 **Hon. D J Bossino:** I am very grateful and I am going to try to be as non-pugilistic as possible this afternoon. That is my undertaking; let's see if I am able to live up to it.

May I ask the Hon. the Minister specifically in relation to Bayside School and Westside School? As my hon. Friend Mr Reyes rightly pointed out, it is the highest number, and the hon. Member has explained why that may be the case, but may I ask him whether he is able to establish and provide a breakdown in respect of those 27 and 23 individuals who are on the supply list? Whilst he has put it in terms that they are there to fill gaps because of breaks in careers for whatever reason, and they are there for a short period of time and it is a bigger school, the information that we are receiving is that there is a number – I do not know how big that number is, but I understand it is a big issue, certainly a big issue for the individuals concerned – who are there almost on, and I know it is a bit of a contradiction, permanent supply, and then that has an impact on their livelihoods and the ability to obtain mortgages and all the rest of it. I am pretty certain that the hon. Member does not have that information here with him, but I would ask him whether he would be able to provide us with that answer should we ask that question, and secondly, whether he has any comment in relation to what I have just said.

655 **Hon. Prof. J E Cortes:** Madam Speaker, also, some of the supply staff will be covering vacancies. If there have been promotions and people have been promoted to TLR, for example, there will be current vacancies. I omitted to say that some of these are likely covering vacancies, and the recruitment of teachers from outside the service is done usually once a year, so there will be periods during which we will be covering with supply staff, but certainly that information can be obtained and made available.

670 **Hon. D J Bossino:** Do I take it that my request for a comment was the first part of his answer in relation to those who are, on a more permanent basis, on the supply list?

675 **Hon. Prof. J E Cortes:** Yes, Madam Speaker, but without my having an analysis of exactly who we are talking about and how long they have been on supply ... This is a snapshot. They could have been called in the week before or they could have been there a term or two. The circumstances will all be different. We could have somebody on maternity leave who may then take an extended maternity leave or a career break, and obviously we have to cover and we cannot replace them. So, it is a very dynamic situation but I do not have that intimate detail here.

680 **Hon. D J Bossino:** One final question, simply to encourage him to re-look into this, because again he puts it in terms of a short period of time, and in his response he has offered a term or two. Actually, we are talking about more than one or two academic years' worth of individuals who are on the supply list and see no end to circumstances for them, given that there is a clear need for them, to be given permanent employment as teachers.

685 **Hon. Prof. J E Cortes:** Madam Speaker, no two cases will be the same and there will be particular circumstances appertaining to each one, and I do not have that information here.

Madam Speaker: Next question.

Q981-83/2024

**Award of Northern Defences contract to Fortress Attractions Ltd –
Panel members; consultation with Antiquities Advisory Council and Gibraltar Heritage Trust;
authorisation by Minister for Heritage**

Clerk: Question 981. The Hon. D J Bossino.

Hon. D J Bossino: Who formed part of the panel of experts consulted in relation to the recent award to Fortress Attractions Ltd of the Northern Defences contract?

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

Minister for Education, the Environment and Climate Change (Hon. Prof. J E Cortes): Madam Speaker, I will answer this question together with Questions 982 and 983.

Clerk: Question 982. The Hon. D J Bossino.

Hon. D J Bossino: When were the Heritage and Antiquities Advisory Council and the Gibraltar Heritage Trust consulted in respect of the recent award to Fortress Attractions Ltd of the Northern Defences contract?

Clerk: Question 983. The Hon. D J Bossino.

Hon. D J Bossino: When was the recent award to Fortress Attractions Ltd of the Northern Defences contract authorised by the Minister for Heritage under the Heritage and Antiquities Act?

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

Hon. Prof. J E Cortes: Madam Speaker, the panel that initially considered the entities that responded to the call for expressions of interest included the Deputy Chief Minister as Chair, the Minister for Tourism, my colleague sitting here to my right, and me, as well as Kevin de los Santos of Land Property Services, Town Planner Paul Naughton-Rumbo, CEO of Technical Services Emil Hermida, and Carl Viagas, whose expertise in heritage projects is well known and who has been directing the Northern Defences works for many years. Prior to finalising the agreement, Government Archaeologist Dominic Lopez as well as the Heritage Trust and the Heritage and Antiquities Council were involved in discussions.

This was a long process. There had been an earlier call for expressions of interest in 2018 which did not progress. This latest call for expressions of interest was published on 14th and 18th December 2023. There were three applicants who were called to present to the panel. Following these presentations, the panel unanimously agreed that the best project was offered by Fortress Attractions Ltd, who were informed that they were preferred bidders on 27th March 2024. There were then extensive discussions on the details, with the contract finally signed on 15th October 2024. The Heritage and Antiquities Advisory Council discussed the project on 9th August 2024 and approved the issuing of the heritage licence. The licence was signed by me on 15th October 2024, once the agreement had been signed.

Hon. D J Bossino: The Hon. Minister has, as he is, of course, entitled to do, bunched those three questions together. If I may unpack them as best I can, because in his reply he has not then cross-referred to the question that I posed, which of course he is also entitled to do, but in respect of the last bit of the answer that the Hon. Gentleman has given, I think that that actually does accord – The Hon. Gentleman rises. He cannot wait until finish and is very eager to answer the question.

Hon. Prof. J E Cortes: Madam Speaker, I will sit but I will remove the lectern because we are directly opposite and I cannot see the hon. Member as he is addressing me. So, I will sit, but I will remove this; otherwise, I will have to stand if I am going to be able to see the hon. Member. I do apologise if that caused any inconvenience.

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Hon. D J Bossino: Am I that seriously vertically challenged that the hon. Member cannot see me? I did not realise the lectern was that high.

In relation to those two last answers, I think I can deal with those swiftly and, I think, in a co-operative way, if I may say. Would he agree with me that in terms of the chronology that the Hon. Gentleman has provided, the proper process has been adhered to under the relevant Act, so that there has been a process of consultation with the relevant parties under the Act? I can refer the hon. Member to section 15(4), which requires him, as the Minister, to consult, and the various entities of the Council, which is set out in its full name there – it is abbreviated in the Act and indeed the Gibraltar Heritage Act – and that is done before the Minister then authorises the works to be carried out. I would ask him to confirm that that is, in fact, the case, that I have understood it correctly.

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Hon. Prof. J E Cortes: Madam Speaker, before I sign the licence, which is *de facto* the permission to carry out the works, based on the heritage aspects, there are separate processes here. There is also the planning process and the selection process, which the Deputy Chief Minister has chaired, but in order for the works to commence several boxes have to be ticked. One of those is the heritage licence. There, I need to consult the Heritage and Antiquities Advisory Council. Following their recommendations – I may agree or disagree; I usually agree with the recommendation – I sign the licence if I am satisfied that it is consistent with the aims of the Act. So yes, I consult the Heritage and Antiquities Council before I sign the licence, and that is the case with every heritage licence that I sign.

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Hon. D J Bossino: In relation to the first question I posed, Question 981, which relates to the panel of experts, I think his answer, with the greatest of respect to him, was slightly confusing in the sense that he was bundling together and setting out the history, which I am fully aware of in respect of the first salvo, if I may put it in those terms, in relation to this site, which the Hon. the Deputy Chief Minister was heavily engaged in, and I think so were other individuals that he has referred to, and then it did not come to fruition, and now we have this. I am asking specifically, as he knows, in relation to the one in respect of Fortress Attractions Ltd, which has been the subject of debate outside of this House between him and I. In respect of that, he very specifically said in a GBC interview that the Heritage Trust formed part of the panel of experts. He knows that I raised it in one of my responses and I do not think he responded to that point. This is why I thought it was appropriate to raise it across the floor of the House. He said that they had been consulted, albeit under the umbrella of a panel of experts, yet the Heritage Trust, whilst broadly supportive of the project – and I am getting to the question, Madam Speaker – did say that that the Trust was not on the tender panel. I think he is eager to explain and I am sure that the distinction is something which he can address the Parliament on.

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Hon. Prof. J E Cortes: Madam Speaker, I am delighted to have the opportunity to clarify. The Trust was not on the panel at the interview. When it was recorded, I was under the impression that it had been, and I will explain the sequence. I had been asked by GBC to provide an interview on this. Because there had been several similar panels, I was trying to recollect who the members were, and I received a draft press release, which had been prepared by the Press Office, which actually said that the Heritage Trust was on the panel, and therefore I said, 'Oh, so they were on the panel. Shortly after, like half an hour, I gave the interview, referring to what the press release has said. Subsequently, the Deputy Chief Minister spotted and then recalled that they had not been, and he advised me. I immediately called the Heritage Trust and told them. I called Ian

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Balestrino, the Chairman, and said, 'Look, I have just said this. I was wrong. I do apologise, it was a genuine error.' I say this quite openly: it was an error. The interview had already gone out and it was not possible to withdraw it in time. It was a legitimate, genuine error for which I apologise particularly to the Heritage Trust, because they were not there and I said, in error, that they had been.

Hon. D J Bossino: One needs to acknowledge that the Hon. the Minister has accepted that he spoke in error, and I am glad that he has done so publicly, because it was an issue which did cause me concern. He will recall that the focus of the interview was not that. The focus of the interview was the criticism that we had about the individuals who are behind this company, who we say are very closely connected –

Madam Speaker: Question.

Hon. D J Bossino: The question, as I am asked by the Speaker to set out to him is this. How is it possible, unless I have misunderstood the initial response that he gave, that he fell into that error? I thought that he was fully involved and engaged in the process. Was he relying on somebody else, which is the way I understood it? He relied on the press release, but surely the Hon. Minister must have been so involved in the process that it is an error that should surely should not have been made.

Chief Minister (Hon. F R Picardo): No errors should ever be made.

Hon. Prof. J E Cortes: Madam Speaker, the hon. Member opposite may not have realised that I am actually human and I may have made one mistake in my political career – that was not even a mistake.

Chief Minister (Hon. F R Picardo): Going into politics.

Hon. Prof. J E Cortes: Thanks to the Hon. Chief Minister. I have him to thank for that particular error.

Madam Speaker, I just have to clarify that the press release that ultimately went out did not say the Heritage Trust had been a part of it. I think I can defend that error in the sense that – and the Hon. the Deputy Chief Minister will bear me out – we have had many similar panels of very similar composition dealing with very similar projects over the last year or two, and therefore my recollection of that particular panel made me doubt: 'Is it this one or is it the one before, and who exactly was there?' In that moment of doubt, seeing the press release which said they had been there, I said, 'Ah, that is one at which the Trust was present.' That was an assumption that I made based on what I had read, but obviously my memory then clicked on to an earlier panel where they had been present. We have done several of the Northern Defences, we have done Fortress Headquarters, we have done very similar panels, and this is how it happened.

Hon. D J Bossino: Once again, I am grateful to him. Just one very small point, and in fact it may even assist him. I think the position then is that at one point, i.e. on 9th August, he, as the Minister, would have consulted the Heritage Trust as part of the statutory process. Is that correct?

Hon. Prof. J E Cortes: Absolutely, Madam Speaker. I am not worried about the fact that they were not there on the panel, because subsequently, and before I signed the permit, the Heritage Trust was consulted at a number of meetings, including separately and as part of the Heritage Antiquities Advisory Council, and then subsequently they came out with the press release which supported the project.

840 **Madam Speaker:** Next question.

Q984-87/2024

Moorish Castle prison block –

Consultation with Heritage and Antiquities Advisory Council and Gibraltar Heritage Trust; authorisation by Minister for Heritage; identify of company commissioned to carry out works; whether works were subject to tender process

Clerk: Question 984. The Hon. D J Bossino.

845 **Hon. D J Bossino:** When were the Heritage and Antiquities Advisory Council and the Gibraltar Heritage Trust consulted in respect of the works to be carried out at the Moorish Castle prison block?

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

850 **Minister for Education, the Environment and Climate Change (Hon. Prof. J E Cortes):** Madam Speaker, I will answer this question together with Questions 985 to 987.

Clerk: Question 985. The Hon. D J Bossino.

855 **Hon. D J Bossino:** When were the works to the Moorish Castle prison block authorised by the Minister for Heritage?

Clerk: Question 986. The Hon. D J Bossino.

860 **Hon. D J Bossino:** Which company has been commissioned to carry out the works to the Moorish Castle prison block?

Clerk: Question 987. The Hon. D J Bossino.

865 **Hon. D J Bossino:** Were the works to the Moorish Castle prison block the subject of a tender process?

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

870 **Hon. Prof. J E Cortes:** Madam Speaker, I gave a history earlier in order to be helpful; I am going to give a history again now, trying to be helpful as well. I hope it is not too confusing.

875 The Heritage and Antiquities Advisory Council, of which the Heritage Trust is a part, was first informed of the proposed and long-awaited plans to improve the Moorish Castle Tower of Homage and Inner Keep – not the more recently used prison area – on 9th August 2024 as the plans were being developed; the same meeting as I referred to earlier. They had been worked on by the team at the National Museum for some months. There was a requirement for a heritage
880 licence and the application for this was circulated by the Government Archaeologist via round robin on 13th September and approved. This was subsequently signed by me as Minister responsible under the Act. Several additional meetings were held with the Government Archaeologist to ensure that the works were consistent with the heritage of the sites. The project was also discussed, together with many other matters, at my monthly meetings with the Gibraltar Heritage Trust, including on 20th September and 24th October. The project was again discussed at length at the Heritage and Antiquities Advisory Council on 5th November, a meeting which

included a presentation by the architects. This presentation was also given to the Gibraltar Heritage Trustees on the 7th November, with a site visit taking place on 8th November. The Heritage Trust did not object to the granting of a demolition licence of a more recent dilapidated structure – a 20th-century prison block – by the Development and Planning Commission, which was granted on 14th November. There will be monthly progress and review meetings, which I will Chair and which will include all the relevant stakeholders. The project team includes heritage experts, project managers and engineers.

The actual works will be carried out by Koala Construction, chosen for their extensive experience with heritage sites across the Upper Rock and the Northern Defences.

The Moorish Castle is contracted to the Gibraltar National Museum's management, and so the restoration works have been subcontracted by them as yet another Museum project. Therefore, there was no requirement for a Government tender.

Hon. D J Bossino: His hope not to confuse, I am afraid, has not been achieved because there is a lot of information and lots of dates there.

In respect of the first point – and I ask him more or less in a similar vein to the questions in relation to Fortress Attractions Ltd – in the whole list that the Hon. Minister has given us, can he particularise ...? As I would see it, but the hon. Member may have a different position to express by way of an answer – there would be one meeting, and I imagine it was 9th August, where this was discussed, the Heritage Trust consulted, and they gave the green light to it. They do not necessarily need to, the only thing that the Hon. Minister needs to do is consult them, but that happened before the Hon. Minister authorised the works, as he has to do from a statutory perspective. My question is: on which date did he consult and then on which date did the Hon. Minister give the green light in respect of these works?

Hon. Prof. J E Cortes: Madam Speaker, the consultation with the Heritage Trust will have been twofold. It will have been directly with them, and it will have been as a result of the round robin of 13th September. So, the official consultation with the Heritage and Antiquities Council was on 13th September by round robin. Subsequent to that, the heritage licence was signed. Those aspects which needed a heritage licence included the demolition of a structure, which was granted by the Development Plan Commission – a separate process but also with the support of the Heritage Trust – on 14th November.

Hon. D J Bossino: In all of that, has the Minister answered my question in respect of when he granted what termed the scheduled monument or building consent under the Act? When did that happen?

Hon. Prof. J E Cortes: Madam Speaker, could the hon. Member repeat? I did not quite catch the end of that.

Hon. D J Bossino: Yes, of course. I will just rise so the hon. Member can see me as well. On what date is the Hon. Minister saying that he gave, under the Act, the scheduled monument or building consent?

Hon. Prof. J E Cortes: It was probably around 13th September because I normally like to deal with these things quickly. I do not have the date of signature, but I suspect it will have been around that date.

Hon. D J Bossino: We have a bit of a difficulty here. This is not the type of supplementary question to which I think the Hon. Minister can safely say, 'I do not have the information in front of me.' This is a very specific question on the Order Paper: when did he authorise it? I am not sure whether I also need to spell out to the hon. Member that the authorisation from the Minister as

935 a Minister for the Crown in respect of these type of works, in respect of a very important
scheduled structure, has emanated from the Act. So, I ask him once again. The way I am
understanding it is that the Hon. Minister has not been able to provide an answer in relation to
the question on the Order Paper, not by way of supplementary. I am not getting it. All I am getting
is a mumble-jumble – with the greatest of respect to him – of dates, and what I have tried to glean
940 from that is when did he consult and when did he give authorisation, specific statutory consent.

Hon. Prof. J E Cortes: Madam Speaker, I said very clearly that there was a requirement for a
heritage licence under the Act. The application was circulated on 13th September and approved.
My recollection is that I did it right away, and therefore, subject to my getting a copy of the licence
945 and just checking that it was the 13th and not maybe the 14th because it was left on my desk
overnight, I would say it is 13th September. If I am incorrect, then I will very happily rectify that
and let the hon. Member and this House know.

Hon. D J Bossino: Madam Speaker, yes, I would appreciate that. This is wholly, if I may say so,
950 unsatisfactory because the question is very clear and the Hon. Minister should have had the
answer provided to me – not just available to him but actually provided to me when first asked –
in his prepared response. I am actually very surprised that we are here trying to get to the bottom
of this information. It is not satisfactory to rely on the Minister saying, ‘Probably I gave it when I
did the round robin’, which in itself I find slightly alarming that consultation should happen in this
955 way on something so serious. But putting that to one side, I would ask – I am not sure how this
can be resolved – that he answers my question.

Chief Minister (Hon. F R Picardo): Madam Speaker, this is an issue that relates to parliamentary
procedure. The question is: when were the works of the Moorish Castle prison block authorised
960 by the Minister? The first answer tells him ‘the application for this was circulated by the
Government Archaeologist via round robin on 13th September and approved. This was
subsequently signed by me as Minister responsible under the Act.’ And he has now said that day
or the day after. What is the issue that the Hon. Gentleman is trying to make? Is it that he does
not know the minute, he does not know the exact date, he does not know the exact second? And
965 why is that relevant? Why is the 13th or the 14th relevant to the hon. Member’s analysis? Or is it
that he is trying to set us a trap of the sort that he thought I was setting for him yesterday, when
the question of when has been answered at the very least with the accuracy of the Minister saying
it was either 24 or 48 hours after that? That is absolute accuracy and answer, and so, therefore,
the government side will not accept that we are failing to answer the question in any material
970 respect whatsoever.

Hon. Prof. J E Cortes: Madam Speaker, if I may just add, because there were two parts to the
question, perhaps my error is in being absolutely honest and saying it could have been the 14th if
the paper was there overnight, but I go exactly with what the Hon. Chief Minister has said.

975 In relation to the round robin, round robin is a process which is regularly used and all the
information necessary is provided, all the documentation is provided and there is ample
opportunity for discussion. Furthermore, as I have also said later on in my answer, there have
been many subsequent discussions in order to expand, clarify and expand more on the detail of
the project to the total satisfaction of the Heritage Trust.

980 Madam Speaker, what really disappoints me, if I may express disappointment on my part, is
that instead of the Government being congratulated for finally being able to move on these gems
of heritage ... In fact, the Hon. Mr Origo only yesterday was saying the Government is not doing
enough to improve its tourist product, expand on the value of its heritage and restore it and so
on, and now we are clearly doing it and the hon. Member is concentrating on a matter of maybe
985 a 12-hour difference. Even if it was a day or two different, it was approved on 13th September
and subsequently signed by me. How long it took me to actually put my signature down on paper

I do not think has relevance and fades into insignificance against the magnitude of the project that we are doing here such important heritage for Gibraltar.

990 **Hon. D J Bossino:** The hon. Member now seeks to wax lyrical about something that he wanted to do from the very beginning of this exchange, which is to extol the virtues of everything he does, particularly in relation to this project. I am asking a very specific question and it is a serious point.

I do not think we are going to get very far this evening in relation to this point, but may I ask him this by way of clarification: is the Hon. Minister saying that he has signed the written consent
995 under the Act and that he has the evidentiary proof to back that up? It is important to establish that the Hon. Minister consulted who he needed to consult under the Act before the consent was granted, and I am entitled to question and put the Government to proof in relation to that because that is what we are here to do. We are here to scrutinise what the Government does and take them to account.

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Hon. Chief Minister: We refer the Hon. Gentleman to the answers we gave a few moments ago, Madam Speaker.

Hon. D J Bossino: May I ask the Hon. Minister ...? When he states, in relation to my question
1005 dealing with the tender issue – and I know that he has used this in the past – that a tender is not relevant because in fact the Moorish Castle is already ... I am not sure if all of it or parts of it, the relevant parts, are under the management ... I cannot remember the full title, but under the Gibraltar Museum. I cannot remember the full title the hon. Member used. Is this the same entity, that is Knightsfield Holdings Ltd? Is that the legal position?

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Hon. Chief Minister: Madam Speaker, that information is in the public domain.

Hon. D J Bossino: I get what the hon. Members are doing: they are playing games, once again. It may or may not be in the public domain. I simply do not know that; one would need to check.
1015 As I have said many times in the past, I take everything the hon. Members, particularly the Chief Minister, say with a pinch of salt and I am *always* put on inquiry. But can I ask him this? He refers to an entity, describes it in a certain way, and all I am asking him to do is to confirm – and I think it is the position – that it is, in fact, Knightsfield Holdings Ltd that would have contracted Koala Construction to do the works.

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Hon. Chief Minister: Madam Speaker, in the context of somebody who is telling us that we are playing games, all I would tell the hon. Gentleman is that we can see the game he is playing, and we are not going to play. In the context of somebody who says that he does not believe anything that we say, why ask us to confirm things which are in the public domain? In the context of
1025 someone who says that he checks everything that we say, why ask us to counter-confirm the things that he can check for himself? And given that the Rules of the House do not require us to provide information that is in the public domain, and the question that he asked last and the question he has asked now is about information that is in the public domain, Madam Speaker, we refer him to the public domain, where no doubt his diligence will have told him the answer to the
1030 question that he is asking. I cannot imagine that we are going to advance the cause of this Parliament much further by, being the people he does not trust, giving him answers that he can check for himself.

Madam Speaker: Any other supplementaries?

1035

Hon. D J Bossino: Yes.

Madam Speaker: I do not want to continue labouring this point. I do not want to have a discussion. Any other supplementary?

Hon. D J Bossino: Of course, Madam Speaker, and I take on board what you say. It was my intention in any event; I think one needs to move on. It is what it is.

The Hon. the Minister said that there was a site meeting on 8th November. May I ask the Hon. Minister to provide information as to who attended that meeting?

Hon. Prof. J E Cortes: Madam Speaker, it was attended by trustees of the Gibraltar Heritage Trust, by the Government Archaeologist and by at least the Director of the Gibraltar Museum and possibly other members of the Museum staff. I was not present, so I cannot confirm exactly who, but that broadly, I think, explains the people who went.

Hon. D J Bossino: If I may, Madam Speaker, go back to the round-robin issue – just one point of clarification. I think the Hon. the Minister said that that the Council was consulted. I think that is the way he put it. May I also ask him specifically – and this was on 13th September – whether the Gibraltar Heritage Trust was also separately consulted in that manner?

Hon. Prof. J E Cortes: Madam Speaker, the Heritage and Antiquities Council was consulted on 13th September, and I have just seen that the word in the next sentence says this was subsequently signed by me, as Minister. Clearly, I had already said that I had consulted them before I signed, so that answers that question, if it needed answering. The Gibraltar Heritage Trust was consulted as part of that collective, and then subsequently there were further discussions, explanations and expansions leading up to the site visit on 8th November, and in fact, even further, two nights ago at the annual general meeting of the Gibraltar Heritage Trust, where the Chairman spoke in great welcoming terms about the work that we are going to be doing at the Moorish Castle, so they are very happy with this.

Madam Speaker: Next question.

Clerk: Question nine hundred –

Hon. Dr K Azopardi: Could I?

Madam Speaker: Yes, one last question, from the Hon. the Leader of the Opposition.

Hon. Dr K Azopardi: I was just trying to catch Madam Speaker's eye. May I just ask the Minister: in terms of the works themselves, what are or have been the cost of the works? Does he have that information?

Hon. Prof. J E Cortes: Madam Speaker, the works are being done for the Museum. I do not have all the information. One of the things that I have mentioned, actually, is the demolition of an old 20th-century prison block, which is dilapidated and in fact is dangerous, and there has already been – I know because I have seen it – removal of vegetation from the Tower of Homage and a lot of clearing of debris. The full plans will shortly be made public, but I wanted to await this meeting of Parliament because it would not have been appropriate for us to launch the project when we had this question pending. So, within the next couple of weeks there will be a public presentation of the works that are planned.

Hon. Dr K Azopardi: Madam Speaker, I was not asking about any of that. *(Interjection by Hon. Chief Minister)*

1090 **Hon. Chief Minister:** He's told you he can't give you the numbers because it's not work done for us.

Hon. Dr K Azopardi: I did not think he had said that specifically.

1095 **Hon. D J Bossino:** I think that is what you told him to say. *(Laughter)*

Hon. Dr K Azopardi: I am not sure that that is what he said.

Hon. Chief Minister: Well, it's what his first answer said.

1100

Hon. Dr K Azopardi: Let me ask the question again, and if that is the answer, well then let it be said. What I was asking was not when the presentation was going to be but if the Minister was aware what the costs were.

1105 **Hon. Prof. J E Cortes:** Ah, the costs. Madam Speaker, I did not hear that. Unfortunately, I have kept my hearing aids in my pocket today, so I missed that. I do apologise. No, Madam Speaker, I do not have that information here.

Hon. D J Bossino: Just one more, if I may, as it relates to –

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Madam Speaker: One. This is the last question on this and a separate one. All right.

Hon. D J Bossino: No preamble.

1115 **Madam Speaker:** Let's see. I am listening.

Hon. D J Bossino: The reply that the Hon. Minister has provided to my hon. Friend the Leader of the Opposition talks about costs and all the rest of it. Are we safe to understand on this side of the House that here will not be any further cost to the Government? Putting it in different terms, the Minister is confident that the Gibraltar Museum, whatever the entity is called, will be able to fund this from its own funds and the funds that it, the Government, provides to this entity?

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Hon. Prof. J E Cortes: Madam Speaker, the subcontractor is intending to access private funding in order to contribute to this as well, but I do not have the detail of that.

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Madam Speaker: Next question.

Q988/2024

Ferry links with Morocco – Impact of potential treaty with EU

Clerk: Question 988. The Hon. the Leader of the Opposition.

1130 **Hon. Dr K Azopardi:** Madam Speaker, is the Government willing to ensure that there is no ferry service from Gibraltar to Morocco in the event of a treaty on a new relationship for Gibraltar with the EU?

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

1135 **Minister for Education, the Environment and Climate Change (Hon. Prof. J E Cortes):** Madam Speaker, no. The specific arrangements for links to Morocco will be considered at the right time, and their nature and the detail will depend on the outcome.

1140 **Hon. Dr K Azopardi:** The nature and the detail will depend on the outcome of what?

Hon. Prof. J E Cortes: Madam Speaker, the outcome of the treaty. That is the question. The question is, more or less, put in other words, what will happen in the event of a treaty and a new relationship, and I have said that the detail will depend on the outcome of that.

1145 **Hon. Dr K Azopardi:** I am not asking about the detail but rather the principle of whether the Government is prepared to, in effect, put a stop to the ferry service as a result of an agreement with the EU.

1150 **Chief Minister (Hon. F R Picardo):** Nobody has asked us to do that, Madam Speaker.

Hon. Dr K Azopardi: Madam Speaker, the Chief Minister may not be aware but there was an interview given to the Spanish press by the Mayor of La Linea, who, in part of the interview, talking about Brexit and the consequences and the issue of mobility on persons said this, and I quote him:

Hay una linea que sale de Gibraltar una vez en semana a Tanger. Esa linea – Fabian Picardo me dice que come puede generar un problema – desaparece

1155 Loosely speaking: 'There is a route that sails from Gibraltar once a week to Tangiers. That route – Fabian Picardo tells me it might cause a problem – will disappear.' Has there been a discussion in the context of the EU negotiations under which the Government has either said or is contemplating the possibility of taking steps to cancel that route to Tangiers as a consequence of an agreement?

1160 **Hon. Chief Minister:** Madam Speaker, I believe one of the rules of the House states very clearly that the Government is not to be asked about the accuracy of any report in the media.

1165 **Madam Speaker:** That is absolutely right. I was not of the impression that the Hon. the Leader of the Opposition was asking about the accuracy of the statement, and certainly if he had been my ruling would have been that the Hon. the Ministers do not have to comment on the accuracy of that statement, but as I understood it, that was not the question.

1170 **Hon. Dr K Azopardi:** Madam Speaker has heard me correctly. I was very careful in repeating what has been said in the media and not asking him whether it was accurate, but rather to ask the Chief Minister whether there has been a discussion within the context of the negotiations in the EU and whether the Government was contemplating the possibility of taking steps to cancel the route to Tangiers.

1175 **Hon. Chief Minister:** Madam Speaker, it would seem to me that the Rules of the House can therefore be easily circumvented, because one can put the article, speculate about its accuracy and then just ask the question as if the article had not been put.

1180 I am very clear in all the answers I have given in this House and all of the answers I have given outside of this House, when things have been put to me which are accurate about things that are going on in the negotiation and things have been put to me which are inaccurate about things which are going on in the negotiation, that I am not going to confirm the accuracy or inaccuracy of anything, I am not going to going to discuss the detail of anything that has been discussed in the negotiation; I am going to preserve the integrity of the confidentiality of the negotiation, and

when the time comes we will make an announcement about the negotiation and what it has resulted in or not resulted in and I will not be drawn on anything.

I am surprised that the Leader of the Opposition, who tells us that he has given us space to be able to successfully conclude the negotiation, would try to draw us on something and no doubt do so in the context of an attempt to try to draw us out, or create speculation or concern in respect of a particular part of this community. I am getting used to it, Madam Speaker.

Hon. Dr K Azopardi: The Hon. Chief Minister sounds a tad too defensive. Of course, I am giving him space; he knows that. In his heart, he knows that. I put the question to him because it does cause concern to people, because people in this community have heard the interview. I gave him the context of the interview; I am certainly not asking him to comment on the interview. I put a straight question to him. I could have put the question to him without the context, but I want him to understand what the context is because the context has caused concern to people. So, I am putting a very straight question to him, and he could give a very straight answer rather than dance around the edges and say he is not going to comment on it. If the Government is not contemplating it, has not reached an agreement, has not discussed it, well then it can be said in those terms, so I give him the opportunity again: has there been a discussion about this in the context of the negotiations with the EU?

Hon. Chief Minister: Madam Speaker, I am neither defensive nor dancing; I am just determined not to give any detail of the negotiation, because if I start to rule out the things that he puts to me today, how do I not rule out something else tomorrow? I am going to do what I have to do to ensure that I defend the people of Gibraltar at that negotiating table, even if I have to suffer the wounds on my back of people trying to tarnish the Government and me in the process, or those who might wish to raise levels of concern in our community for their own party-political purposes.

If there were concerns about this matter – and that interview, I understand, appeared approximately 30 or more days ago – those concerns would have reached me already. If there were concerns about this matter, they would have been raised with other members of the Government. If there were concerns about that matter, they would have been raised with me, for example by the people who represent the collective that most relies on the link that the Hon. Gentleman is referring to. They have not been. So, this is not to raise concerns that have been potentially raised at a level of the community; this is to raise an issue to say that he has raised the issue, in order to be relevant, and to do so despite the fact that that delves into the negotiation.

So, not defensive, not dancing and not determined, because this ain't *Strictly Come Dancing*, this is a Parliament, and we have to be very careful and very serious about what we do here, in particular when we are dealing with the negotiation. He knows that, and in his heart he will know that today he has failed his own standard and test.

Madam Speaker: All right. Is that the end of –?

Hon. Dr K Azopardi: Madam Speaker, one –

Madam Speaker: I am not going to allow comment. (**Hon. Dr K Azopardi:** Of course.) If there is a specific question then I will allow the Hon. the Leader of the Opposition to put it, but I am not going to have a discussion across the floor.

Hon. Dr K Azopardi: I think Madam Speaker understands, having heard me, that my preambles are quite short and I rarely comment, so –

Madam Speaker: My direction was simply: is there a question as opposed to a statement?

1235 **Hon. Dr K Azopardi:** Yes, there is a question. The hon. Member does not need to cast aspersions on my motivations. When I come to this House, I ask him specific questions because he may not have received comments and concerns but I have.

Does he understand and is the Government seized of the importance of this link to Morocco to some people in this community?

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Hon. Chief Minister: Madam Speaker, the Hon. Gentleman does not need to call me evasive and question my motivations for not giving him an answer which is either yes or no, (*Interjection by Hon. Dr K Azopardi*) and accuse me of dancing if he does not want to have his own motivations questioned. What is good for the goose is good for the gander, and he and I are one and the other in that respect. The Hon. Gentleman will understand that this is far too important for two politicians to try to score a point off each other, because this is about the future of our children.

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Of course I understand the importance of the link, and of course I understand the commercial nature of operations that require those links to be profitable, or at least not loss making. Perhaps with that he might go away and give a thought to what the prospects of that link might be in certain circumstances and in others, and that might enable him to dance a little less and work it out for himself a little more.

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Madam Speaker: Is that the end of the questions?

1255

Q975/2024
Teaching complement –
Numbers by establishment –
Further information

Hon. Prof. J E Cortes: Madam Speaker, I have an answer to a question that I was asked earlier on the abbreviations. Shall I share those?

1260

Madam Speaker: Yes.

Hon. Prof. J E Cortes: My apologies again. In relation to the question as to what the abbreviations meant, EAL is English as an Additional Language, so we have to bring in specific teachers for children who do not understand English; LMT – and this is where I was confused because it used to be known as BEST – is now the Learning Mentoring Team; and TLC is the Teaching and Learning Centre. I think that covers all those abbreviations.

1265

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Questions for Written Answer

Clerk: Answers to Written Questions.

1270

Chief Minister (Hon. F R Picardo): Madam Speaker, I have the honour to table the answers to Written Questions W143/2024 to W160/2024 inclusive.

Adjournment

Clerk: The Hon. the Chief Minister.

1275 **Chief Minister (Hon. F R Picardo):** Madam Speaker, I move that the House should now adjourn
sine die. In doing so, I would just like to inform the Parliament and the community that on behalf
of the Government of Gibraltar, and therefore on behalf of all of the people of Gibraltar, the
Government and the people have donated to the GBC Open Day today ... that we have opened
private number plates for registration, the registration mark G1B, which reads GIB from a distance,
so that it can be auctioned by GBC, and that all the proceeds of that auction should go to the GBC
1280 Open Day, which I am sure all Members of this House will agree do an excellent job.

Madam Speaker, additionally, today I have heard the lion's share of a careful, sensitive,
considered and edifying debate in Westminster on the principle of assisted dying. Very often we
complain about politics being a bear pit, a gladiatorial exchange arena etc., but this morning the
Mother of all Parliaments was a place of considered, careful and sensitive debate. That Bill has
1285 passed. It is a Private Member's Bill. It has passed by a considerable majority and I think it is
important that we, as parliamentarians ... Certainly we as the Government, will be keeping a
careful eye on how that Bill progresses through its stages now as a Private Member's Bill.

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

1290 **Madam Speaker:** I now propose the question, which is that this House do now adjourn *sine die*.

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

This House will now adjourn *sine die*.

The House adjourned at 5.55 p.m.