



PROCEEDINGS OF THE GIBRALTAR PARLIAMENT

AFTERNOON SESSION: 3.15 p.m. – 6.10 p.m.

Gibraltar, Friday, 13th December 2024

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The Gibraltar Parliament

The Parliament met at 3.15 p.m.

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

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

Questions for Oral Answer

EQUALITY, EMPLOYMENT, CULTURE AND TOURISM

Q1055/2024

National Disability Strategy– Scope and reach of private sector strand training

Clerk: Answers to Oral Questions continued.

Question 1055. The Hon. the Leader of the Opposition on behalf of the Hon. A Sanchez.

5 **Hon. Dr K Azopardi:** Madam Speaker, as part of the National Disability Strategy's private sector strand, does the Government plan to provide training on disability and support needs to the private sector? If so, can they confirm the intended scope and reach of this training?

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

10 **Minister for Equality, Employment, Culture and Tourism (Hon. C P Santos):** Madam Speaker, we still need to confirm what scope of training will be given to the private sector strand with regard to the National Disability Strategy. Work on this will commence in January 2025.

15 **Hon. Dr K Azopardi:** The original question asks whether the Government plans to provide training. The way that the Hon. Minister has answered suggests that the answer might not be yes or no. Is that my understanding, given what he said, or is it that the answer is yes but they are doing the planning? It was slightly equivocal, at least when I heard it.

20 **Hon. C P Santos:** The answer is yes. The answer I gave was that we still need to confirm the scope. I apologise. It was a given that it was yes, but what the scope of this is we do not know yet.

25 **Hon. Dr K Azopardi:** I see, so it is yes, and they are considering the scope of it. Does the Minister expect that there will be a decision on this early in the New Year?

30 **Hon. C P Santos:** Work will start in January 2025, so hopefully by the first part of the year we will be able to give more specific answers as to the scope of the training. The private sector is much larger than the public sector, so we are looking at how this is done in the UK based on how charities, NGOs and organisations work to provide training over there. We are going to see if we can model something similar that would work locally.

Madam Speaker: Next question.

Q1056/2024

Careers Fair –

Feedback received and intended improvements for the future

Clerk: Question 1056. The Hon. G Origo.

35 **Hon. G Origo:** Madam Speaker, is the Government satisfied with the way the Careers Fair was run, and has it received any feedback on how the event could better be improved in the future?

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

40 **Minister for Equality, Employment, Culture and Tourism (Hon. C P Santos):** Madam Speaker, I would like to express my sincere gratitude to the hon. Gentleman opposite for once again providing me with the opportunity to showcase another success story, this being our recent Careers Fair. This event was something I was particularly eager to relaunch as it had not been held since the pandemic. A brief conversation between the Chief Secretary and myself was all it took
45 to ignite the initiative, resulting in the successful Careers Fair we witnessed last month.

The feedback we have received has been overwhelmingly positive, underscoring the dedication of the exceptional organising team, whom I wish to publicly thank today. The event successfully showcased a wide array of industries to our young people, serving as a valuable platform for career exploration. Stall representatives also commended the event's excellent
50 organisation. However, it is worth noting that a few expressed concerns regarding the smaller than expected stall sizes. This feedback was promptly addressed by the support team to ensure that the event ran smoothly.

Looking ahead, plans for future editions of the Careers Fair include reviewing the stall layouts to better meet exhibitors' needs, enhancing networking areas and considering the inclusion of
55 universities to offer attendees a broader range of academic and career development opportunities.

The Government values the constructive feedback it has received and will continue to take it into account as we plan for next year's event.

60 **Hon. G Origo:** Madam Speaker, thank you to the Hon. Minister for his reply. On this side of the House it must be noted that several concerns or criticisms were raised and particularly brought to my attention. In particular they stemmed from the structure of the Careers Fair this year, which I understand was led by sectors, associations and representatives, as opposed to individual businesses. Some of my constituents described their disappointment with the lack of depth of the
65 answers given in some instances from the persons manning the stalls. A good comparison drawn was like going window shopping for clothes without really trying them on. Some people have described it as a tick-box exercise. The whole point of this fair is for people to get as much insight as possible into careers, but in some instances some of these youths have left with more questions than answers. Has such criticism been raised with the Hon. Minister; and, if so, has he had time to
70 consider how best to resolve these issues?

Hon. C P Santos: Madam Speaker, none of that has got back to us, so I cannot answer with regard to any of those complaints. We have changed the structure because the Careers Fair used to be about companies putting on a stall and not necessarily about the field of work. How we have
75 done it this year is to have 35 different industries, 77 stalls, so, as opposed to having private businesses putting on a stall, we had industries like public service and green careers that had 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, eight different stalls within green careers. So, as opposed to promoting businesses, we were promoting industries. I went around myself. I met the hon. Member opposite, who actually congratulated me for the success of the event, and he seemed to quite enjoy it at the time. Every
80 stall was collecting details of children or young adults who were interested in their particular

industry, so they could pass on their information. I have a list here of everyone who took part. The main thing that changed was the header of how it was presented, but there was plenty of information and there were plenty of big organisations. In finance, we had Connect Hub, insurance, the Gibraltar Bankers Association, so we had groups as opposed to particular independent businesses.

I have not received any of that feedback myself. We had over 2,500 attendees and, other than little things here and there about the structure of where the tables were, we have not received that feedback. If we do, I will look into it; but, until I do, I cannot take hearsay into account.

Madam Speaker: Next question.

Q1057/2024

**Violence and control in relationships –
Statistic re number of young people affected**

Clerk: Question 1057. The Hon. the Leader of the Opposition.

Hon. Dr K Azopardi: Madam Speaker, does the Government hold statistics on how many young people have experienced violence or control in relationships?

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

Minister for Equality, Employment, Culture and Tourism (Hon. C P Santos): Madam Speaker, the RGP will record any instance where a juvenile reports or is reported to have experienced violence or control in relationships.

Hon. Dr K Azopardi: So, beyond the RGP recording reports, the Government itself is not doing statistical work to collate information here – is that the situation?

Hon. C P Santos: Madam Speaker, the RGP collects all the information for us. I can also collect statistics from different organisations, like Women in Need, that we have more contact with. If we get reports via the Youth Service or other organisations, like the Care Agency, we have statistics particularly of 25 and above. The question stated young people. We do not have statistics for those yet. We have the statistics from the RGP, especially since the introduction of the Domestic Abuse Act 2023, where children who have been exposed to domestic abuse are now recognised as victims of domestic abuse as opposed to just witnesses, which used to be the case before. So, we have statistics for 25 years of age and older but it is the independent organisations that have them from 16 to 25, which would quantify young people.

Hon. Dr K Azopardi: When the Minister says he does not have statistics yet in relation to people who are 16 to 25, what does he mean by that? Does it mean that the Government is intending to do some work here?

Hon. C P Santos: The statistics we have and we rely on currently are from the RGP. We have a working group for the Domestic Abuse Strategy, so this is something that I would need to discuss with them when we next meet and see what their plans are. We have some information and statistics that are voluntary, but those are not particularly ... I would not say they are not trustworthy, but they do not have the full numbers of people because they are voluntary contributions to a questionnaire. This is something that I will discuss with the Domestic Abuse Strategy Committee.

Hon. Dr K Azopardi: I appreciate the emphasis that the Minister puts on the reporting by the RGP, but of course the reporting of the RGP is of possible criminal allegations; I was really asking for a wider approach to understand what the Government's work, if any, in this area is.

I do not know if the Minister is aware, but he may have seen that there was a report conducted by the Youth Endowment Fund in England recently on violence and control in relationships of young people over 16, primarily focusing on teenagers, 13-to-17-year-olds. Those statistics, or at least that survey, revealed worrying features in England related to control in sexual relationships, youngsters reporting that they were undertaking sexual activity against their will, 20% of people feeling that they were physically assaulted and another 17% had been exposed to explicit images of themselves being shared online against their will. That survey did not just reveal those things; it also revealed an underlying concern that the teaching of issues of consent at schools perhaps was not hitting the right target. And so I bring it to the Minister's attention, if he is not aware. Does he agree with me that it might be useful for there to be a Government-led – with his Department and perhaps with the Education Department also – reach-out to young people, to try to collate statistics more targeted in this area, to see to what extent there are things that we can improve in the educational system so that there are no reports of violence or control? It would be helpful to understand if some of these concerns are also present among our youngsters here, and does he agree that if they are – because you would have to test it first – there may be improvements out there to be made?

Hon. C P Santos: Madam Speaker, thanks to the Hon. Leader of the Opposition. I am aware of this study. I am also aware of another study with regard to relationships in under-16s after the case of Holly Newton, a 15-year-old who was stabbed by her partner and because she was under the age of 16 it did not count as domestic abuse. There are a lot of things with regard to young people that we are looking into and a lot of cases.

The question stated 'young people have experienced violence or control in relationships'. I am not being facetious here. I think I more or less understood that it meant intimate partner violence, but with regard to relationships and in cases of domestic abuse, 'relationships' encompasses fraternal, paternal, guardians and partner relationships. With regard to intimate partner violence, which is, I think, what you were referring to, we are doing some work in the Education Department with regard to statistics. We have not got any statistics on that exclusively because we have been working on statistics for young people as a whole regarding domestic violence, including all types of relationships, not just the intimate partner violence. This is part of the Domestic Abuse Strategy. This is something that we are working and collaborating on with the Education side. The Youth Service also holds workshops on this and it is something I will look further into. Domestic abuse is something I am very much involved in with the team at Women in Need. It is something that I have taken on very recently and it is something that we are working very hard to put more emphasis on with the working group, which we are now going to be working closer with from my Ministry.

Madam Speaker: Next question.

EDUCATION, THE ENVIRONMENT AND CLIMATE CHANGE

Q1058/2024
Corral Road –
Paving stones

Clerk: Questions to the Hon. the Minister for Education, the Environment and Climate Change. Question 1058. The Hon. G Origo.

170 **Hon. G Origo:** Madam Speaker, does the Government have any plans to replace the public paving bricks on Corral Road following the works carried out just opposite the bus stop at the Market Place terminus?

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

175 **Minister for Education, the Environment and Climate Change (Hon. Prof. J E Cortes):** Madam Speaker, I can confirm that the Technical Services Department is making arrangements for the paving stones in the area of Corral Road to be replaced. TSD does not currently hold stock for these particular materials and an order has been prepared for these to be delivered. Works to repair the area will commence as soon as these are received in Gibraltar.

180 **Madam Speaker:** Next question.

Q1059/2024
Jews' Gate –
Broken barrier

Clerk: Question 1059. The Hon. G Origo.

185 **Hon. G Origo:** How long has the barrier at Jews' Gate in the Upper Rock Nature Reserve been broken?

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

190 **Minister for Education, the Environment and Climate Change (Hon. Prof. J E Cortes):** Madam Speaker, I can confirm that a fault with this particular barrier was reported on 23rd October this year. The contractor for these barriers has done what works it could, but these proved to be short lived as the barrier continued to malfunction. We are currently awaiting spare parts to arrive in order for it to be functional once more.

195 **Hon. G Origo:** Madam Speaker, may I ask the Hon. Minister whether he can confirm if the issues relating to the barrier have affected any other part of the service in respect of the ticketing system at the Jews' Gate?

200 **Hon. Prof. J E Cortes:** No, Madam Speaker, it has not. Even though the barrier has not been working, there are staff and security at the entrance and therefore it has not had any effect on the operation of the Upper Rock.

205 **Hon. G Origo:** Madam Speaker, I am grateful to the Minister for his answer. Essentially – may I just get his confirmation? – he is saying that despite the barrier not being operational, the officers working at the Jews' Gate barrier have been able to stop the cars that have been coming up because of the security guards – they are on foot, I imagine – and they have also been able to ticket and charge the tourists coming to visit the Nature Reserve in the ordinary course of things, despite the barrier not working. Is that the case?

210 **Hon. Prof. J E Cortes:** Madam Speaker, that is the information that I have. If the hon. Member is aware of anything untoward, then I would be grateful to know and it will be looked into, but my information is that despite the lack of barrier the processes have continued.

215 **Hon. D J Bossino:** May I ask the Minister when he expects the spare parts to arrive? And if I may, Madam Speaker, just fit in another supplementary: can he provide information as to who the contractor for the barrier is, if he has that information with him?

Hon. Prof. J E Cortes: Madam Speaker, I do not have either item of information.

220 **Madam Speaker:** Next question.

Q1060/2024
Bicycle electronic counter –
How long broken

Clerk: Question 1060. The Hon. G Origo.

225 **Hon. G Origo:** Can the Government confirm how long the cyclist electronic counter has been broken for?

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

230 **Minister for Education, the Environment and Climate Change (Hon. Prof. J E Cortes):** Madam Speaker, the bicycle counter is not broken; it is working without any issues and has been collecting data on a 24/7 basis since its installation in June 2023.

235 **Hon. G Origo:** Madam Speaker, I am surprised at the Hon. Minister's reply, given that I have seen many images on social media. I have actually walked past the counter myself on the way to Bayside Road and the counter was not working. It did not seem to be taking count, at the time, of people travelling to and from, so how is it that the Hon. Minister is telling me that the counter has been operational for all this time when there are clearly images, and I have seen it myself, showing that the counter was not turned on?

240 **Hon. Prof. J E Cortes:** Madam Speaker, very simply because there is nothing wrong with the counter; the problem has been with the counter display, which is a different system. That has malfunctioned a number of times due to failure of components within the display and connectivity issues, but I am glad to say that in discussion and collaboration with the Electricity Authority, the display was repaired finally on 6th December and we hope that the remedial measures will mean that it will not fail again, at least not anytime soon. But I repeat: the counter has been working and the data have been collected, so we have a full set of data of every person who has cycled or passed the area on a scooter since June 2023.

250 **Hon. Dr K Azopardi:** Madam Speaker if the display was malfunctioning – and he said 'due to connectivity issues' – how is he confident that the connectivity issues have not also affected the underlying data?

255 **Hon. Prof. J E Cortes:** A number of ways. The connection is a different one, but in any case we have data which have recorded people passing through even when the display has been not working. So, we have a period of time – for example two or three days – where there has not been a display but the data has continued to be generated and we have figures showing that there have been people passing through.

Hon. Dr K Azopardi: And for how long did he say – *did* he say, and, if he did, can he just remind me? – this malfunction took place?

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Hon. Prof. J E Cortes: Madam Speaker, I do not know and I do not have the detail. There has been a problem over the last few months where the display has not been working. It seemed at one stage that it might have been due to water ingress and so on. I am told it was connectivity to the actual display, but I could not tell him exactly how many days the display has not been working.

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Hon. D J Bossino: May I ask what the costs of the repairs are, if any, to the Government? It may be under some form of guarantee, therefore at no cost to the Government.

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Hon. Prof. J E Cortes: Yes, Madam Speaker, this has been defrayed by the people who constructed or supplied the counter.

Hon. D J Bossino: Does he have the information as to the people he has referred to now?

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Hon. Prof. J E Cortes: No, Madam Speaker, this pre-dates my being in this particular role. I do not have that information.

Madam Speaker: Next question.

Q1061/2024
Waterport Fountain –
Commencement of works

Clerk: Question 1061. The Hon. G Origo.

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Hon. G Origo: Madam Speaker, when will the Government begin works to enhance and beautify the Waterport Fountain and create a two-way vehicular carriageway as part of its phase 3 of the Active Traffic Strategy?

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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, these plans are being drafted and costed before works can commence.

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Hon. G Origo: Madam Speaker, does the Hon. Minister have any more details he can give in respect to costs and timings? Could he also indicate, for instance, who is going to be doing the works?

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Hon. Prof. J E Cortes: No, Madam Speaker. As with other works that we are considering, we need to develop this, then we need to prioritise and, if necessary, bring them before this House during the Budget session.

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Hon. G Origo: Madam Speaker, if I may ask, in terms of the actual project itself, does the Minister have any details as to what this is going to look like in practice? For instance, has this idea been piloted and tested? I ask because this is one of the biggest and busiest intersections in Gibraltar and we cannot really be finding ourselves doing U-turns like we did with the Line Wall Road.

I refer to the GSLP manifesto at page 128 when referring to the Traffic Active Strategy. It says that the enhancement of the fountain will include a carriage that will go around the circumference. Does the Minister have any details on whether this has been piloted? Does he
305 know it is going to work and what will it look like? It does say very clearly it is going to go around the fountain, so I ask if he has any details on that.

Hon. Prof. J E Cortes: Madam Speaker, first of all, I am of the opinion that there is nothing wrong with U-turns – but perhaps that is not something that many politicians will care to say.

310 The designs are being worked on by my excellent team in the Ministry for Transport. They are experts in this and they will have worked it all out or are in the process of working it all out. When we are in a position to make it public and consider whether to proceed, we will share that.

Madam Speaker: Next question.

Q1062/2024
Taxi service phone system –
Problems

315 **Clerk:** Question 1062. The Hon. G Origo.

Hon. G Origo: Madam Speaker, it has been reported that the taxi service is having issues with its phone system, a service which is provided by a government-owned entity. Is the Minister aware; and, if so, what is being done to resolve this issue?

320 **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 am aware. However, the question is about the Gibraltar Taxi Association and Gibtelecom and I am unable to answer for either of these entities.

325 **Madam Speaker:** Next question.

Q1063/2024
Taxi Association membership –
Plans to make compulsory for tax licence holders

Clerk: Question 1063. The Hon. G Origo.

330 **Hon. G Origo:** Madam Speaker, can the Government confirm whether it has plans to amend legislation to make it a requirement for taxi licence holders to be members of the Taxi Association?

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

335 **Minister for Education, the Environment and Climate Change (Hon. Prof. J E Cortes):** Madam Speaker, the draft legislation is currently being drawn up and will be reviewed before coming to this House as a Bill.

340 **Hon. G Origo:** Madam Speaker, can the Hon. Minister then clarify: is it the Government's intention to put through this Bill because it wants to legislate for these licence holders to be members of this association? And if that is the case, can the Hon. Minister confirm whether such a decision has the support of (a) licence holders and (b) the Taxi Association?

345 **Hon. Prof. J E Cortes:** Madam Speaker, I know that the hon. Member is in favour of such legislation, as he said on a recent *Viewpoint* programme just two weeks ago, so I am assuming that he is encouraging me to go in that direction. As in all other legislation of this nature, we are drafting it, we will be talking to stakeholders and then we will bring the Bill and will have every opportunity to debate it when it comes to the House.

350 **Hon. Dr K Azopardi:** I appreciate we are going to debate the Bill when it comes to the House, but he has, in effect, in different words said exactly the same as in the answer. My hon. colleague was simply asking whether the Bill will contain plans to amend legislation to require the taxi licence holders to be members of the Taxi Association. It is a simple question, really: will the Bill contain that?

355 **Chief Minister (Hon. F R Picardo):** Madam Speaker, the public sees Bills when they are published as Bills. It does not see what are perhaps properly called *travaux préparatoires* when we are preparing a Bill, where we are discussing a Bill and considering what should go in a Bill. That is the process of us preparing a Bill. If an individual is in Government, they get to see or work on the preparation of the Bill; if they are in the public, they get to see the published Bill. If we feel that we need advice on what should go into a Bill, we publish a thing called a Command Paper, which is something that we introduced after 2011. We do not feel we need to publish a Command Paper. We will publish a Bill when we have finished deliberations internally and with stakeholders on what should be in the Bill.

365 **Hon. Dr K Azopardi:** For the third time, no answer, but let me try one more time. Has the Government, as a matter of policy, decided to legislate to require licence holders to be members of the Taxi Association?

370 **Chief Minister (Hon. F R Picardo):** Madam Speaker, for the third time, I refer the hon. Gentleman to the answer I gave a few moments ago about the Government's decisions about what is going to go into a piece of legislation. The Government is undergoing the process of internal deliberation, discussion and consideration with draughtsmen. When we have made the decision that the hon. Gentleman is asking us about, he will know because it will be published on a Thursday or another day in the thing called the Gazette, which will tell him what we have decided to put into the Bill. At the moment there is no Bill because it has not been published. There are various iterations of different drafts that are being considered, which will at some stage crystallise into the thing that is the Bill. Until then what the hon. Gentleman is asking about is not a decision, it is about a deliberation, and we are not going to answer about deliberations because they are just processes of thought and consideration which are being undergone before the policy decision is made.

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Madam Speaker: Next question. (*Interjections*)

Q1064/2024

**Personalised number plates –
Government's intention re proceeds of sale**

385 **Clerk:** Question 1064. The Hon. G Origo.

Hon. G Origo: Madam Speaker, can the Government confirm what it will do with the proceeds generated from the new initiative relating to the sale of personalised number plates? Which Government Department or entity, if any, will these proceeds go to and how will these funds be used?

390 **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, the proceeds generated have been added to the Government's Consolidated Fund revenue. These funds will, therefore, be used in keeping with the provisions of the Appropriation Act 2024-25.

Hon. G Origo: Madam Speaker, may I ask the Hon. Minister whether he is able to confirm how much money has been raised so far by this initiative?

400 **Hon. Prof. J E Cortes:** Yes, Madam Speaker, the information in regard to the revenue is approximately £1.3 million.

405 **Hon. G Origo:** Finally, Madam Speaker, if I may, with respect to the funds being retained by the Consolidated Fund, in conversations with the Hon. Minister I was under the impression that these funds would be retained by the Transport Department or some transport-related Government entity. Is this no longer the case; and, if so, why not?

410 **Hon. Prof. J E Cortes:** Madam Speaker, this was never the case. We had an informal conversation at the end of *Viewpoint* and were discussing what the possibilities were, but there was never any confirmation. Normally in this kind of fund generation it does go into the Consolidated Fund.

415 **Madam Speaker:** Next question.

Q1065/2024

**Behaviour and discipline issues in schools –
Talks with teachers' representatives**

Clerk: Question 1065. The Hon. E J Reyes.

Hon. E J Reyes: Madam Speaker, can Government update this House in respect of the talks or discussions it has held with teachers' representatives this academic year – that is since September 2024 – arising out of teachers' requests to review behaviour and discipline issues in schools?

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

425 **Minister for Education, the Environment and Climate Change (Hon. Prof. J E Cortes):** Madam Speaker, the Department of Education, together with the Government's Industrial Relations

Office, has jointly held remote and face-to-face meetings with the UK senior official-led NASUWT delegation to address matters in regard to concerns about behaviour which had been raised by the union. The relevant contact points included two in-person meetings hosted locally and four remote meetings. Of these, five have been held since September. There is a keen desire to respond to the concerns in order to address all issues identified through the process of engagement. Clearly identified milestones from now until the end of January have been formulated collaboratively by the negotiating parties and are already in place.

Hon. E J Reyes: Thank you, Madam Speaker, for that update from the Minister. I gather it is work in progress, and he has mentioned a date of January and so on. Is there anything that has been settled or agreed upon on a definitive basis that this House can be updated with?

Hon. Prof. J E Cortes: Madam Speaker, I do not think it would be helpful if I were now to divulge milestones or otherwise in the current negotiations. Obviously I am not directly involved in the negotiations and therefore I think it would not be correct or helpful if I were now to try to slice it up. I think it is better to wait. There is a timetable from now to the end of January when we hope it will be resolved, and therefore I think it is best that we let the negotiators carry on with their work and await the outcome.

Hon. E J Reyes: Madam Speaker, in accepting that explanation, would I be correct to assume that nothing has been implemented that can be seen by pupils and staff alike, and that will probably not take effect until that conclusion in January? Or has something started to be implemented already? Perhaps I have not explained properly what I am getting at. Have there been any particular changes or any particular policies that, rather than waiting until the end of January, the school management have decided to start to implement now?

Hon. Prof. J E Cortes: Madam Speaker, the negotiations are in relation to general behaviour policy. That policy is being discussed and therefore the policy has not changed. The day-to-day implementation of that policy is a matter for the senior management in the school and I cannot comment on that specifically without notice.

Madam Speaker: Next question.

Q1066/2024
Mobile phone use in schools –
Pouch system

Clerk: Question 1066. The Hon. E J Reyes.

Hon. E J Reyes: Can Government provide detailed information to this House in respect of its intentions to install a pouch system to control the use of mobile phones in local schools, together with details of estimated costs?

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, the policy in relation to mobile phone use continues to be under discussion with stakeholders, and the decision on whether to introduce the pouches is one which will be taken, if necessary, when the consultation is complete.

Hon. E J Reyes: Madam Speaker, I was prompted for this question because the Minister, in a public interview, had indicated that he was looking into the system of the pouch. My understanding from the answer is that no firm decision has been taken yet, but it would be an interesting question – which I am asked and I have absolutely no idea – how much this would potentially cost. Does the Minister at least have a ballpark figure?

Hon. Prof. J E Cortes: No, Madam Speaker.

Hon. C Sacarello: Madam Speaker, is the Government currently considering applying similar legislation in Gibraltar to that applied in Australia recently, whereby under-16s are prohibited from accessing certain social media platforms?

Hon. Prof. J E Cortes: Madam Speaker, the Government has not yet considered that possibility.

Madam Speaker: Next question.

Q1067/2024
Bicycle racks –
Supplier

Clerk: Question 1067. The Hon. Sacarello.

Hon. C Sacarello: Which company or entity was responsible for the supply of the bicycle tie-ups distributed around town and beyond?

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, the company responsible for the supply and installation of the latest rollout of bicycle racks and parking throughout Gibraltar was Site Trading Ltd. The Sheffield cycle racks – that is the name of that particular model – were ordered from an internationally renowned UK manufacturer, Marshalls UK, who have supplied and installed cycle racks successfully for many years now.

Hon. C Sacarello: Thank you, Madam Speaker, and yes, I agree that these cycle racks are extremely useful and much needed. However, they are showing signs of wear and tear and rust. Would the Minister be able to explain whether the repair, cleaning up and replacement, if needed, is covered in the contract? And, if so, when will this be carried out?

Hon. Prof. J E Cortes: Madam Speaker, the latest additions to the cycle racks have been installed in various locations in Gibraltar in consultation with the Sustainable Transport Group. It seems that there was a rogue batch and there have been some problems with that particular one. That is being corrected by the manufacturers at no cost to Government, and maintenance will, of course, continue after that.

Hon. C Sacarello: I am much obliged, Madam Speaker, for the Minister's answer. Would he be able to inform the House of the value of the tender for that particular project?

Hon. Prof. J E Cortes: Madam Speaker, I would need notice of that. It was awarded through the Government's e-procurement system, so that information will be available and I am happy to forward it directly to the hon. Member after the meeting.

Madam Speaker: Next question.

Q1068-69/2024

**Raw sewage pollution in harbour –
Public health risks and measures to combat**

520 **Clerk:** Question 1068. The Hon. the Leader of the Opposition.

Hon. Dr K Azopardi: Madam Speaker, what measures are being taken and have been taken to safeguard marine and sea users from the public health risks of raw sewage pollution in the harbour following the recent sewer overflow/outflow incident in November 2024?

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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 1069.

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Clerk: Question 1069. The Hon. the Leader of the Opposition.

Hon. Dr K Azopardi: What measures are being taken and have been taken to 5th December 2024 to combat the raw sewage pollution in the harbour following the recent sewer overflow/outflow incident in November 2024?

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

540 **Hon. Prof. J E Cortes:** Madam Speaker, the incident in question occurred as a result of works to the main sewer. The Environmental Agency and the Technical Services Department had been liaising on the works and no overflows were expected. However, as soon as the problem was identified, the Environmental Agency advised relevant stakeholders, including the Med and Calpe Rowing Clubs, the Yacht Club, the Small Boats Marina and the Mid Harbours Association, that the area was not fit for bathing. Technical Services dealt with the necessary remedial works on the
545 main sewer, which were completed within 24 hours of the incident being reported. No measures are possible to remove the contamination, and the natural process of flushing by water flow has to be awaited. The Environmental Agency continues to monitor water quality in the area.

The latest sampling result, on preparation of the answer, was on 4th December, which indicated that levels of E.coli and intestinal enterococci were unacceptable. However, I have an
550 update. Samples were taken again on 10th December and levels were acceptable. Heavy rain has fallen since then, which can further dilute the water to make it better but can also cause storm drain overflow. Therefore, water quality will continue to be monitored. I believe there were samples taken today and we will obviously advise the public if those are also clear. We expect them to be clear, but as a precaution we are not advising the public until we have the results of
555 today's sampling.

Hon. Dr K Azopardi: What I take from that answer is that marine and sea users were given advice but no measures were taken to combat the raw sewage pollution because, the Minister says, no measures can be taken, you have to allow natural flushing. Is that based on advice that
560 he is getting from his Department, that nothing can be done other than wait? This happened three weeks ago now, I think, and there was still raw sewage that people were seeing in the area only a few days ago.

565 **Hon. Prof. J E Cortes:** Madam Speaker, the events happened on I think it was the afternoon or evening of 25th November. The samples on 4th December were still unacceptable. It took, as I said, 24 hours to resolve the problem of the sewer, so that is a few days. The fact that you cannot do anything to reduce that kind of contamination in the sea did not come from advice; it comes from my knowledge of natural systems. You would have to dilute the seawater, which rain can do, or the natural flow of currents within the area can clean it up. There was clearly an improvement
570 between the 4th and the 10th, when it became acceptable, and we are hoping that it still is.

Hon. Dr K Azopardi: If there is an oil pollution slick, they put some down booms and stuff. Can they not do the same thing? The information that I have received is that sea users, marine users, have been using that vicinity – and this is not just about dissolved raw sewage in there, but they
575 have been seeing holistic lumps of raw sewage. It beggars belief that nothing can be done at all to at least put something in the water to try to assist in the safeguarding of marine users.

Hon. Prof. J E Cortes: There is a difference. If there were lumps, then clearly there were a lot of concentrations and there would be a process of removing or containing them, provided they
580 were floating – sorry to give so much detail. I answered the question in relation to the bacteria which are in suspension in the water, and that you cannot scoop out or contain with a barrier. That is what I was referring to.

I think it is important to note that the area is not an official bathing area, but, despite that, we do take samples because we know that people bathe in it. As I said, the danger to health is more
585 in the bacteria in suspension, over which you can do nothing, than the uncomfortable unpleasantness of swimming into a lump.

Madam Speaker: Next question.

Q1070/2024

Northern Defences project – Clearance and construction works

Clerk: Question 1070. The Hon. the Leader of the Opposition.

590 **Hon. Dr K Azopardi:** Madam Speaker, what were the costs of clearance or construction works in the Northern Defences project from 2015 to date and to whom has money been paid in that respect, listing the names of the particular entities, companies, persons or contractors and the total sums paid to each?

595 **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, as the Hon. the Deputy Chief Minister has previously informed the House, the sum spent
600 on the refurbishment of the Northern Defences since 2014 is a matter of public record and is available in the approved Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure. Similarly, the only contractor carrying out works for the Northern Defences project is also in the public record.

Hon. Dr K Azopardi: Is the Minister saying that the name of the contractor will be in the Budget
605 Book? Is that what he is saying?

Hon. Prof. J E Cortes: No, Madam Speaker, what I am saying is that the name of the contractor is on the public record. There have been press releases which name the contractor, and therefore it is something that that is on the public record.

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Hon. Dr K Azopardi: Can he assist me with the name of the contractor because I cannot recall the name?

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Chief Minister (Hon. F R Picardo): Madam Speaker, if something is a matter of public record it is a matter of public record. We are not here to assist hon. Members on what is public record. The Rules of the House say that the question cannot be asked and I respectfully say that probably it is just as inappropriate as a first question as it is as a supplementary, although that is a matter entirely for you.

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Hon. Dr K Azopardi: The question asks what the costs of clearance were to date. Does the Minister have that figure, or is he really asking me to go back to every single Budget Book and collect it?

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Hon. Chief Minister: Madam Speaker, this data is in the Estimates Book. The hon. Gentleman is asking us to go back to the public record and provide it to him. It really is not what we are here for. That is not to say that we do not want to answer, it is that the information is in the public domain and the Government is here to give information which is not in the public domain.

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Madam Speaker: If the information is a matter of public record, well, that is the answer you have been given. If that is the case, then I am not going to allow further pressing on this because if the information is in the public domain, then it is in the public domain. If there is a different supplementary I will allow it, otherwise I am going to ask the hon. Member to move on.

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Hon. Dr K Azopardi: Madam Speaker, I want to understand because if it is in the public domain I can do the calculation myself. Is the Minister saying that if I go through every single Budget Book and look at every single item there will be an item that refers to the Northern Defences, I can add them up and that will be the total cost? Is the Minister saying there will be no other cost other than those included in those items?

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Hon. Prof. J E Cortes: Madam Speaker, the project was run, until very recently, by the Deputy Chief Minister. I have conferred with him now and that is, in fact, the case. It is actually specified in the Estimates Book under 'Northern Defences'.

Madam Speaker: Next question.

JUSTICE, TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Q991-92/2024

Dry house –

Reports of anti-social behaviour

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Clerk: Questions to the Hon. the Minister for Justice, Trade and Industry.

Question 991. The Hon. the Leader of the Opposition on behalf of the Hon. A Sanchez.

Hon. Dr K Azopardi: Madam Speaker, in relation to the Drugs and Alcohol Rehabilitation Service's dry house, could the Government state how many police reports have been received regarding anti-social behaviour connected to dwellings directly adjacent to the dry house?

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

Minister for Justice, Trade and Industry (Hon. N Feetham): Madam Speaker, I will answer the question together with Question 992.

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Clerk: Question 992. The Hon. the Leader of the Opposition on behalf of the Hon. A Sanchez.

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Hon. Dr K Azopardi: With regard to the dry house for drugs and alcohol rehabilitation services, could the Government state how many times the Police have been required to attend incidents of anti-social behaviour or similar disturbances, including calls made to the Police, in dwellings directly adjacent to the dry house since its establishment?

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

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Minister for Justice, Trade and Industry (Hon. N Feetham): Madam Speaker, since 31st October 2022 when the dry house was established, there have been three reports of anti-social behaviour from either residents of the dry house or the authorities managing it. In addition, there have been seven reports from anonymous informants reporting similar behaviour during the same period. The Police have attended on all occasions.

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Hon. Dr K Azopardi: Has the Minister, in compiling this answer, been advised what the nature of the anti-social behaviour has been?

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Hon. N Feetham: The supplementary information that I have, Madam Speaker, is that the anti-social behaviour reported includes reports of nuisance by neighbours but where no offences were disclosed. I also have here, in my supplementary information, that there were no arrests and therefore no one was cautioned or charged in relation to any of these complaints.

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Hon. Dr K Azopardi: Might I ask the Hon. Minister to perhaps discuss with those providing him with the information – perhaps he wants to follow this up – whether the nature of the anti-social behaviour is drugs or alcohol related, and hence the concern of the questioner was that the dry house might be located in an area where there are reports of alcohol and drug abuse and therefore it is counterintuitive to locate it there, but it might be something that the Hon. Minister perhaps would agree to look into.

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Hon. N Feetham: I am grateful to the Hon. Leader of the Opposition and I will be doing so. Thank you.

Madam Speaker: Next question.

Q993/2024

New police station – Plans and timeline

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Clerk: Question 993. The Hon. J Ladislaus.

Hon. J Ladislaus: Madam Speaker, can the Hon. Minister provide specifics as to the plans for a new police station and a timeline as to when those plans are expected to come to fruition?

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

Minister for Justice, Trade and Industry (Hon. N Feetham): Madam Speaker, the Government is looking at new plans for the refurbishment and extension of the existing police station at New Mole House. A series of concept designs have been produced and the project is progressing to the technical survey stage.

Hon. J Ladislaus: I am grateful. Madam Speaker, I am going to refer the Hon. the Minister to a section in their manifesto because I think it is important to give him context as to the question that I am about to ask. At page 68 of the 2023 manifesto, in a bright red box, it stated:

NEW POLICE & FIRE STATIONS

We have been working to deliver new stations for the Gibraltar Fire & Rescue Service as well as for the Royal Gibraltar Police. It is envisaged that both will be at Rooke. The designs for these have now been agreed and signed off. The final execution of the grant of the tender for Rooke will enable these plans to go ahead in coming months.

705 I ask, therefore, why now the RGP is not indeed getting a new police station, which it appears was in the pipeline and had already been signed off on? What has happened now for this U-turn to occur?

Hon. N Feetham: Madam Speaker, I think the operative word is 'envisaged'. In our discussions in Cabinet we have been informed that there were technical problems in locating the police station where it was originally identified, in the Rooke – and the Deputy Chief Minister would have more detailed information than I, but as a result of those limitations the decision was taken to progress with the refurbishment and, indeed, extension of the existing police station at New Mole House.

715 **Hon. J Ladislaus:** Madam Speaker, could the Hon. the Minister perhaps give a little bit more detail as to the limitations that were identified? The manifesto commitment stated that the plans had actually been signed off already. It is not simply that ... it is envisaged, but then in the next sentence it says that the plans had been signed off. Perhaps the Hon. the Minister could give a bit more information as to the actual limitations prohibiting a new station being built there.

Deputy Chief Minister (Hon. Dr J Garcia): Madam Speaker, the issues that arose subsequent to that related to the height of the building and to concerns in relation to the proximity of the city walls. The size of the plot meant that the building ... I stand to be corrected and I do not want to mislead the House, but it was something like five or six storeys and it was felt subsequently, on reflection and on considering the design, that this was too large a structure to place at that particular location, so the decision was taken to refurbish and restore New Mole House and so there is now a series of technical surveys underway to establish whether that will indeed be possible.

730 **Hon. J Ladislaus:** I am grateful for that indication, but could the Hon. the Minister perhaps give some information as to the costs that are expected for the refurbishment of New Mole House itself? My understanding is that the RGP has practically outgrown that building now. I have actually been in there – because I did practise law and I did do some defence work and therefore I have been in there myself – and the building is rather dilapidated at this stage, if I may say so, and is not reflective of a modern building for a Police Force. If the Hon. the Minister could perhaps give some more information as to costs of the refurbishment?

Hon. Deputy Chief Minister: Madam Speaker, that is exactly what is being worked on at the moment. The design will then lead to a full costing of the project.

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Hon. R M Clinton: Madam Speaker, I would just ask the Minister to explain in a little bit more detail because we are trying to understand what was originally envisaged. If I recollect correctly, at the Rooke site, i.e. the development, a little piece was carved off at the end in order to accommodate the fire station and the police station. The Minister just said 'its proximity to the city walls', but unless my geography has gone completely haywire, surely Midtown is closer to the city walls – which is, I do not know, 10 storeys high – than a five-storey development at this carve-out at the end of the Rooke site. Can the Minister help us, because I just cannot envisage it?

Hon. Deputy Chief Minister: Madam Speaker, the policy in relation to that area, as far as the Government is concerned, is that we do not want a high building on that particular plot in the part that is nearest to the city walls, so that was a policy decision taken, to move the station from there.

Hon. R M Clinton: Sorry, Madam Speaker, but the Minister will appreciate that what he is saying makes no sense, because there is a development, probably at the other end of the plot, which is quite high, and five storeys ... Again, I cannot see, when he says 'proximity to the city walls' ... That area that was carved out is quite a distance from the city walls compared to Midtown, so how can the Government policy determine that the Midtown plan is fine but somehow a more remote area is not? I do not understand. Can the Minister perhaps be more honest with the House and say the technical problem is, in fact, a financial one?

Chief Minister (Hon. F R Picardo): Quite the opposite.

Hon. Deputy Chief Minister: Madam Speaker, the Midtown development was not given planning permission in our time, so this was a development that preceded our time in office. We took the view in Cabinet that we did not want a high building right next to the King's Bastion and that it was better to have an open space in that particular corner of the plot, which is the way that we would like to see things developing. So, it is a policy decision. They may agree with the policy decision, they may not agree with it, but that is what it was: a policy decision.

Hon. D J Bossino: It is a policy decision as it is now, but does it then not amount to a massive U-turn, given that –? (**Hon. Prof. J E Cortes:** Good.) The Hon. the Minister for the Environment is saying good, but then they need to admit that that is the case, because the way that my hon. Friend has set out ... the quote in the manifesto was very specific and very clear that they envisaged after seeing plans and all the rest of it. The hon. Gentlemen opposite, and Ladies, must have known how tall the building was going to be, so can't he simply say, 'We changed our mind; the policy is now, in effect, a U-turn from the position as it was set out in the 2023 manifesto'?

Hon. Deputy Chief Minister: Madam Speaker, the Government can say exactly what it is saying, and that is that we took a policy decision based on the information available at the time, and the information available at the time was that because of the growth in the number of officers and the need to provide certain facilities, the building suddenly grew from what was originally intended, and because of that we found a better solution, which was to move it somewhere else.

Madam Speaker: Next question.

Q1071/2024
Company Tax –
Amount collected and reported in October 2024

Clerk: Question 1071. The Hon. Clinton.

790 **Hon. R M Clinton:** Madam Speaker, further to the answer to question W148/2024, can the Government advise if there was any exceptional or advance receipt of Company Tax included in the £30 million reported as collected in October 2024?

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

795 **Minister for Justice, Trade and Industry (Hon. N Feetham):** Madam Speaker, the reason for this increase is that a number of payments related to the September 2024 corporate payments on account were credited to the Government bank account on 30th September but were not posted to the tax system until 1st October. The timing discrepancy led to the payments being reflected in the October revenue figures. This is normal procedure for bank payments, I am told, Madam
800 Speaker.

Hon. R M Clinton: I am grateful to the Minister for his explanation. That would explain why there seems to be an unusually large tax receipt recorded for October. But if the Minister combines the previously disclosed tax receipt for September, which is about £18.5 million, and
805 adds the thirty-odd million, the combined total comes to about £110 million for September/October. Just to compare to the best-ever revenue year in the past in terms of Corporate Tax, there was £77 million in the year 2018-19 recorded for September/October. Is there anything in the September/October combined amount of £110 million that the Minister would deem as exceptional in terms of tax receipts for Company Tax?

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Hon. N Feetham: Madam Speaker, I do not have that information available to me now, but if the hon. Member would care to give notice of the question I will endeavour to provide the answer.

Madam Speaker: Next question.

Q1072/2024
Company Tax –
Amount collected in November 2024

815 **Clerk:** Question 1072. The Hon. R M Clinton.

Hon. R M Clinton: Madam Speaker, can the Government advise the amount of Company Tax collected in November 2024?

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

Minister for Justice, Trade and Industry (Hon. N Feetham): Madam Speaker, the amount of Company Tax collected for the month of November 2024 is £0.6 million.

825 **Madam Speaker:** Next question.

Q1073/2024
Income Tax –
Amount collected in November 2024

Clerk: Question 1073. The Hon. R M Clinton.

Hon. R M Clinton: Madam Speaker, can the Government advise the amount of Income Tax collected in November 2024?

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

Minister for Justice, Trade and Industry (Hon. N Feetham): Madam Speaker, the amount of Income Tax collected for the month of November 2024 is £22 million.

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Madam Speaker: Next question.

Q1074/2024
Income Tax (Amendment No. 2) Bill 2024 –
Intention to proceed

Clerk: Question 1074. The Hon. the Leader of the Opposition.

Hon. Dr K Azopardi: Madam Speaker, is Government still intending to proceed with the so-called 'Property Tax' Bill, namely the Income Tax (Amendment No. 2) Bill 2024?

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

Minister for Justice, Trade and Industry (Hon. N Feetham): Madam Speaker, yes, in the session of this Parliament.

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Madam Speaker: Next question.

HOUSING AND THE GIBRALTAR UNIVERSITY

Q1075/2024
Queen's Hotel and Sunrise Motel hostels –
Numbers with licence agreements and occupying rooms as at 5th December 2024

Clerk: Questions to the Hon. Minister for Housing and the Gibraltar University.
Question 1075. The Hon. the Leader of the Opposition, on behalf of the Hon. A Sanchez.

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Hon. Dr K Azopardi: Madam Speaker, could the Government provide the exact number of people at 5th December 2024 who have licence agreements for a room in either Queen's Hotel Hostel or Sunrise Hostel and who are residing or living in Queen's Hotel Hostel and Sunrise Hostel?

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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, the Sunrise Motel has 127 residents who have licence agreements. The Queen's Hotel has 2 residents who have licence agreements. In total, 234 individuals reside at the Queen's hostel and at the Sunrise Motel.

Hon. Dr K Azopardi: So that must mean – asking the Minister – that there are over a 100 people at the Queen's Hotel or Sunrise Hotel who do not have licence agreements? Can she indicate to me if that is correct; and, if so, how that breaks down in each, if I have explained myself correctly?

Hon. P A Orfila: Yes, Madam Speaker, they do not have licence agreements because they refuse to pay the rental arrears. That is why they do not get license agreements.

Hon. Dr K Azopardi: Yes, okay, let me ask about that in a second, if I may, but can I just understand? The 100-plus – 105, I think, on my mathematics, but perhaps the Hon. Minister has a different figure; I think it is 105 – is it 105 in one in particular or, if it is 105 in both, how does it break down? That is really what I am asking first.

Hon. P A Orfila: There are 127 in the Sunrise Motel and we have ... let me see ... 158 in the Sunrise and 76 in the Queen's.

Hon. Dr K Azopardi: All right, the Minister has given me the total to allow me to work back the figures, as it were. There are 158 at the Sunrise and 76 at the Queen's, so 127 at the Sunrise have licence agreements – so, that is about 31 at the Sunrise that do not have licence agreements, and the vast majority, 74, at the Queen's do not have a licence agreement. The Minister indicated generically that the reason those persons do not have licence agreements is because they refuse to pay rent. Is that the case in respect of every single one of the 105?

Hon. P A Orfila: Madam Speaker, as far as I am aware, yes.

Hon. Dr K Azopardi: And has that been obvious from the beginning of the occupation of each of those individuals?

Hon. P A Orfila: Madam Speaker, it has been obvious from the moment I have taken it on board, checked it and verified everything.

Hon. Dr K Azopardi: I appreciate that, but that is, I think, a slightly different answer in the sense that if it has been obvious to the Minister from the time that she looked at it, it could have been no longer a duration period than October last year, because she has been in post since October last year. I am trying to understand. Presumably those individuals have been at the Sunrise or Queen's for much longer than a year. How long has it been that those people have not recognised or wished to pay a licence fee?

Hon. P A Orfila: Madam Speaker, I inherited the hostels four months ago, not a year ago. As I said, I have been checking everything. We are getting it organised. We are getting it back on steer again. Remember we had Covid, so there was a time when they were not paying, but now we want to sort things out and we are asking them to pay their arrears and their rent. Some are refusing to do this. This is why we have so many who do not have a licence agreement.

Hon. Dr K Azopardi: I am not sure I am understanding it. Let me say I am not, in any of the questions that I am asking, putting it to the Minister as if she should not be putting her answers perhaps in a slightly defensive way about what she is doing. I am not. I am trying to seek information, which is simply how long is it that that these individuals have not been paying a

910 licence fee. Presumably, for them to be paying a licence fee it must be because they have had an agreement there for a licence fee, so when she says that they are chasing up the arrears, that in itself implies that there is an agreement in place but they may be ignoring it. That is a very different situation to there not being licence agreements, which was her original answer. So, can I just ask her to clarify, perhaps?

915 **Hon. P A Orfila:** Madam Speaker, the hon. Gentleman has answered the question himself.

Hon. Dr K Azopardi: I was not intending to answer the question. I have postulated different possibilities. I am just trying to understand it. It cannot be, presumably, that there are no licence agreements in place if the Government is chasing arrears; it must be that there are agreements in place but there are arrears in relation to those agreements. Is that the situation? Is it that there are agreements and that there are arrears?

Hon. P A Orfila: Madam Speaker, of course there are agreements, and yes, there are arrears.

925 **Hon. Dr K Azopardi:** And does the Hon. Minister know from the information that she has in front of her, that may have been supplied by officials, what the extent of the arrears are?

Hon. P A Orfila: Madam Speaker, it would be a lot better if the hon. Gentleman would ask me that question next time, when I will have the figures in front of me and can give them to him.

930 **Madam Speaker:** Next question.

Q1076-80/2024

Housing waiting list –

**Updates re figures on government website;
number of termination notices resulting in flats being vacated**

Clerk: Question 1076. The Hon. D J Bossino.

935 **Hon. D J Bossino:** Please provide the current number of applicants on the housing waiting list broken down as shown in Table H.1 of the Government website.

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 Questions 1077 to 1080.

940 **Clerk:** Question 1077. The Hon. D J Bossino.

Hon. D J Bossino: Please provide the current number of applicants on the housing pre-list broken down as shown in Table H.2 of the Government website.

945 **Clerk:** Question 1078. The Hon. D J Bossino.

Hon. D J Bossino: Please provide the current number of applicants on the housing waiting lists who have been allocated a flat broken down as shown in Table H.7 of the Government website.

950 **Clerk:** Question 1079. The Hon. D J Bossino.

Hon. D J Bossino: Please provide updated information of the number of termination notices issued by month in 2024, as shown in Table H.9 of the Government website.

Clerk: Question 1080. The Hon. D J Bossino.

Hon. D J Bossino: Of the termination notices issued in 2024, how many have resulted in the flats being vacated?

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

Hon. P A Orfila: Madam Speaker, all the information requested by the hon. Gentleman is publicly available on the Government website and is updated monthly in arrears.

Out of the 25 termination notices issued in 2024, 21 flats have been vacated.

To answer Question 1076, the current number of applications on the housing waiting list, broken – (**Hon. Chief Minister:** No.) No?

Hon. D J Bossino: Whilst the hon. Lady consults with the Hon. the Chief Minister as to the extent of the answer – it seemed that she was going to be a bit more helpful and provide a bit more detail, but she has been stopped in her tracks by the Hon. Chief Minister in terms of providing further information – I think, in terms of the statistical information that I have sought from the Hon. the Minister for Housing, she says that it is publicly available; publicly available, I imagine, in the tables that I have referred the hon. Lady to in the Order Paper questions. When I filed the question – and perhaps she can assist me – the information, I think in all the cases, takes one, certainly as far as H.1 and H.2 are concerned, to September inclusive, so that the information was up until 30th September. What I wanted from the hon. Lady as far as those two tables are concerned – and I think those impact on Questions 1076 and 1077 – is the updated information, which would include, I would have thought, up to 30th October, and then possibly, I would have thought, given that we are now in the second half of December – or close to it, rather; the first half is very close to the middle of December – up to 30th November. Is that information available to her? I sense that that is the information she was going to be providing to me.

Chief Minister (Hon. F R Picardo): Madam Speaker, the hon. Gentleman is right: when he might have filed the question, the information was available to the end of September. That is why he has been told that the information is updated monthly in arrears. Therefore, at the end of November he would have got the information for the end of October, which is now online; at the end of December he will get the information for the end of November.

The information that the hon. Lady was going to give him was to refer him to the relevant tables, in case he were to need to be referred to the relevant tables. I do not think he needs to be, but as he will know, on Question 1076 it is Table H.1, on Question 1077 it is Table H.2, on Question 1078 it is Table H.7 and on Question 1079 it is Table H.9. That, Madam Speaker, is the information that he would have been given, but that is to assist him, to refer him to where it is publicly available and will continue to be publicly available monthly in arrears, which is the information the Government will provide.

Hon. D J Bossino: Madam Speaker, the hon. Lady and certainly the gentleman opposite are being supremely unhelpful. When I filed the question it was not in breach of the rules. When I filed the question, which was allowed, it is obvious that the information – I checked it just before filing the question – was not available, and it says very clearly that the last update was on 16th October. We filed it when? Last Friday, I think, and that was the position. I took a screenshot because I know this has happened to me in the past when, in previous Parliaments, previous Ministers have given me the same answer. With the greatest of respect to them, they are totally and utterly wrong, and all I ask the hon. Lady to do is to please provide me this information across

the House today. At this stage, because I need to consider the others, all I am dealing with is with Questions 1076 and 1077, but I think it applies to ... if the House bears with me ... Yes, they were all updated on 16th October, and the information which I sought, which are the subjects of the questions on the Order Paper, was not available.

Hon. Chief Minister: Madam Speaker, we will continue to make it available online. If there is sometimes a delay, well, it is much more information than has ever been made available online. It is updated when it is updated. It is now publicly available information. This House is not going to be able to function with business efficacy if information that is put up by the Government on the statistics side of the website is also going to be the subject of questions and supplementaries in this House. It is now available. It will continue to be available monthly in arrears. The hon. Gentleman can ask as many times as he likes. He is being supremely unhelpful to the progress this House can make on questions of political substance by insisting that we should answer his statistical question in the way that he wants, because he wants it on a particular day. The information is made available by the Government. It is available now publicly. It was going to be made available, if not on the day that he checked, then on another day. Sometimes we may be a little bit delayed, but it is being made available and that is the information the Government will give. We put more information into the public domain than has ever been put before. He has all of the information. He might not have had it on the day that he wanted it; he has it now. He can get it again tomorrow and he can get it again monthly in arrears every month because we are not hiding the information. We are putting it out there, not across the floor of this House just for hon. Members, we are putting it out there for everyone to see from the comfort of their own home, more information than has ever been put in the public domain by any Government in the history of our democracy. I know he does not like that, and I know he is about to spring up, nervous, trying to make the point of relevance of his own presence in this place, but that is what we are going to answer, however many times he asks.

Madam Speaker: We are going to move on from this particular part of the question because the information is in the public domain, it appears, and it may be with some delay. If there are any supplementaries on Question 1080, I will allow those; otherwise –

Hon. D J Bossino: There is a point of order I wish to raise, Madam Speaker, by way of guidance as to the interpretation of the rules.

Madam Speaker: Interpretation of what rule? Take me to the rule and tell me what the point of order is.

Hon. D J Bossino: Well, I do not have it in front of me.

Madam Speaker: If you tell me what the rule is, I may be able to assist the hon. Member.

Hon. D J Bossino: I think it is 16, and then there are various sub –

Madam Speaker: Rule 17 and the rules governing the right to ask questions?

Hon. D J Bossino: Yes, and I think it deals ... and it is simply by way of guidance. I think it may indeed be the last subsection, where it says:

a question shall not be asked seeking for information set forth in accessible documents or ordinary works of reference

which I assume is the one that the Hon. the Chief Minister is referring to, but the point of clarification which I think would be useful to me, and indeed to the rest of the Members of this House – and certainly it has been the practice in this House on previous occasions that the answer has been provided... Is this applicable at the time that one files the question or is it simply that a question is allowed because it is not available publicly, which was the case when I filed the question, then it becomes available, which is what the hon. Members opposite are telling us? I have not been able to check it; apparently it is on the website now. Does that mean that that question invalidated as a result of the information being provided post-submission to the Parliament?

Madam Speaker: First of all, I do not think that the question is invalidated. I think the issue is that the answer to the question then moves into the public domain and there is not a need to rehearse that. It is not a question of the question being invalidated. I will have to look at that.

Hon. Chief Minister: Madam Speaker, may I be *audi alteram partem*? The hon. Gentleman refers us to Rule 17(xv), which is about the question. I did not for one moment say that his question should not have been asked. I did not make the submission that the question was one which should not have been asked or should not have been allowed. I said that the information is now in the public domain, that the information is regularly updated in the public domain, on the Government website, and where that is happening that is the Government's answer because we update it every month. It might be slightly later each month, but it is updated every month monthly in arrears, and therefore that is what the answer is going to be, because the hon. Members have the information. They may want it sooner, they may want it this week, but the whole community is being given the information monthly in arrears. That is what the answer is going to be. I refer the hon. Gentleman to Rule 16, which deals with answers, and I would submit that our answer does not infringe the rule as to answers.

Madam Speaker: Does the Hon. E J Reyes wish to comment?

Hon. E J Reyes: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Because on previous occasions I have had a similar incident, I recall a ruling by Speaker Canepa, who said that if information that was not available at the time of the deadline for the question later on became available on a website or whatever, he deemed that the Government should answer that question across the floor of the House because that information – *(Interjection)* Madam Speaker, because I think you want to cut this instead of going on forever, I suggest that, perhaps by doing some research work, it may acquaint you with what Speaker Canepa has said in the past.

Hon. Chief Minister: There is a wider point, Madam Speaker. I do not accept that that interpretation is correct for a moment, but with the very greatest of respect to the hon. Gentleman, and indeed to you, Madam Speaker, the hon. Gentleman should know – he has been a parliamentarian for a very long time – the Speaker cannot direct the Government to give a particular answer. The Speaker can direct the Government to keep to the rules on answers, but he or she cannot direct what the answer must be. The Government gives the answer, and the Government has pointed the hon. Gentleman to where the information he wants is. Regarding the information he is asking in the question we are saying, 'This is where it is.' I have actually told him which table to look at, and I have told him it is available there. *(Interjection)*

Madam Speaker, the hon. Members are addressing the question of whether the question is parliamentary or not. The question is parliamentary. Nobody is suggesting it is not.

Madam Speaker: So, then, the situation is this. The question was clearly allowed by me. The question was proper. The answer that was given is the answer that is given. The Hon. the Chief Minister is right that whether a Minister answers a question or not is a matter for the Minister

and what answer the Minister gives is a matter for the Minister. In the interim, I will certainly look at the ruling that the Hon. E J Reyes has suggested I look at, but for the moment that is the answer that quite properly the Government can give. I refer to what I said earlier, which is if there are any supplementaries on Question 1080, which is the termination notices, I will allow it, but we are closing this subject – *(Interjection) We are closing this subject now. (Interjection) No.*

Hon. D J Bossino: I can ask supplementaries on the information, surely?

Madam Speaker: On the information that is publicly available, yes.

Hon. D J Bossino: Exactly. So, one does this now and refers to the information, which I think could very easily have been provided by way of a schedule –

Madam Speaker: Can we ask a question rather than make further statements? Otherwise, we are never going to move on from this subject matter and we are going to going to move on.

Hon. D J Bossino: But I think it is an important point of clarification.

Madam Speaker: No, the point is to ask the question.

Hon. D J Bossino: In relation to Table H.1, where the immediate observation that one arrives at ... This was updated a few days ago, on 9th December. Looking at it very quickly, we have, in effect, a snapshot of almost the entire year. This was, just to help those listening in, the number of applicants currently on the housing waiting lists in 2024. I thought it would be interesting to see how matters were progressing. It seems at this stage, as things stand, that we are dealing with a figure which is oscillating, putting it in really rough terms, between the high 800s and the low 900s. Does the hon. Member have any comments in relation to that and why we are not seeing those numbers going down significantly? It seems that we have a steady number throughout and there has not been much in the way of change.

Hon. P A Orfila: Madam Speaker, I would like the hon. Gentleman to know that the work that we are doing will eradicate the housing waiting lists at the end of our tenure.

Hon. D J Bossino: And this is why this is, I think, a useful way to explore the figures as they stand, because I think that that statement has been made by the Hon. the Minister in the past publicly – indeed, probably in that TV debate that she and I attended. Just to pin her down slightly, when she talks about eradication of the housing list, what figure would she be ...? How shall I put it in terms which do not offend the rules? At what stage would she say that she has reached that milestone, unless the hon. Lady is saying zero? For me, the ordinary interpretation of eradication would be that the hon. Lady is saying that in the next three years the figure will go from 800-900 to zero, but I am assuming that that is not the case because there will always be applicants, so at what stage will she say, 'I have now complied as far as this particular commitment is concerned – no U-turns; I had committed to do this and I have complied with the promise that I made to the people of Gibraltar'? On that basis, can I ask her to answer the point I made?

Hon. P A Orfila: To no more than 400.

Hon. D J Bossino: The hon. Lady has confirmed the position in relation to what the Government's view is as eradication of the housing waiting list. In effect, it means 50% of the current figures.

Moving on to Question 1077, which made enquiries in respect of Table H.2, which again has been updated on 9th December, only a few days ago, and we have a similar picture on – again,

1155 for the assistance of those listening – the number of applicants currently on the housing pre-list
in 2024, and we have the figures up until 30th November and the figure in terms of total numbers.
It is very difficult for me to look at the individual room categorisation, which is also very helpfully
set out. We have a figure which, in fact, seems to be creeping up, from 257 in January to 367 on
30th November. Again, what is her policy aim in relation to this? Does the promise to eradicate
1160 the housing list also apply – and I assume it does – to the pre-list? And, if so, at what figure would
she pin the eradication point in her mind?

Hon. P A Orfila: Madam Speaker, our commitments are exclusively referring to the housing
waiting list. The pre-list will eventually get there, but we are concentrating on the waiting list we
1165 have at the moment.

Hon. D J Bossino: Does the hon. Member have any policy, any ambition in relation to the ...? It
may be because I do not fully understand the mechanics of how this works, but what impact does
the hon. Member think the eradication, as she put it, of the housing waiting list, in respect of
1170 which she says she has an ambition, have on the pre-list, and can she give us a number or is she
not willing to commit at this stage?

Hon. Chief Minister: Madam Speaker, it is right that the hon. Gentleman does not understand
how the pre-list works, obviously; the hon. Gentleman was absolutely right about that.
1175 *(Interjection)* The pre-list is something that that the hon. Gentleman's party introduced. The pre-
list is one of the things that the hon. Gentleman is given to describe as the golden legacy of the
GSD. The pre-list works on the basis that you go in it for a year, so there is nothing about the pre-
list that is magical or related to policy, other than people go on it for a year, and that is how they
designed it. So, there can be no relevance to what we do with the housing list in respect of what
1180 happens to the pre-list, because you go on the pre-list, you do your 12 months and then you go
on to the housing waiting list.

I hope that is helpful, Madam Speaker, and that I have helped him to understand the pre-list,
which he confessed he did not know the workings of.

1185 **Madam Speaker:** One more.

Hon. D J Bossino: Madam Speaker, there are no further questions by way of supplementary on
Question 1077. *(Interjection)* I am grateful to the Hon. the Chief Minister for elucidating how the
system which the bad old GSD, according to him, worked out.

1190 I am moving on, for the House's assistance, to Question 1078, which enquired about Table
H.7. Again, lo and behold, this form was updated on 9th December, the same date as all the others,
and once again the figures ... This is the number of applicants on the Government's housing
waiting list which have been allocated a flat in 2024, and we have a division of months in terms of
composition of bedrooms. If one looks at the total numbers in terms of allocation on a monthly
1195 basis, it is very difficult to work out an average technically but we are talking about 15 or
thereabouts; some of them are 18, some of them are 10. Again, I am assuming that given her aim
to eradicate the housing waiting list, we will see at some point an increase in terms of allocation
as well, and I would ask her when she thinks we are likely to see an increase in the number of
allocated applicants. Does she have a view as to when we are likely to see an increase, because
1200 clearly then that will have a correlating effect on the housing waiting list and its eradication?

Hon. P A Orfila: Madam Speaker, in order to answer the gentleman's question I would have to
take out my crystal ball. I am not about to do that, but I can tell the hon. Gentleman that in my 11
months I have already allocated 155 flats to date. That excludes the 17 rent and repairs that we
1205 have given also.

Hon. D J Bossino: The hon. Lady, with the greatest respect to her, I think rather glibly responds to the question that I put to her. The sense I get from the answer that the Hon. Minister has just given ... it almost comes across, reading between the lines, that it is as a result of her own efforts, approach and work ethic and all the rest of it, that the hon. Lady is confident that she will be able to allocate more flats to applicants on the housing waiting list. The question is this, because, in fact, this cuts across all the questions that I have been posing: if we are talking about an eradication, albeit as the hon. Lady describes it and defines it, how is that going to happen? Is the achieving of that figure going to be based ...? Well, how is it going to be based? By way of the rent and review policy, which she wants to no doubt continue with? Or, if I can get to the point, is it that the Government is committing itself to building more flats to increase the stock, which would then allow it to improve the situation in terms of the housing waiting list?

Hon. P A Orfila: Madam Speaker, by the application of the policies that we have set out in our manifesto we shall bring this down to zero.

Hon. D J Bossino: I think the hon. Lady may need to clarify the position for the purposes of *Hansard*; I think there is an inherent contradiction. I think the hon. Lady may have said that before outside of this House, that she would reduce it to zero, but I think the position of the Government is that they will deem the list to have been eradicated – rather bizarrely, if I may say – if they are able to reduce the figure to round about 400.

Hon. Chief Minister: He has not asked a question, but I assume he wants to, so if he gives way I would just clarify, Madam Speaker, that the reason we are using that figure is because we are calling that the housing list issue having been resolved in the same way as hon. Members used to say that full employment in Gibraltar, which others might have interpreted as zero, was to have in the region of three to five hundred people unemployed, which is equally difficult to understand. When we say full employment, we say 20-odd unemployed; when they said full employment, they meant three to five hundred unemployed. We had that debate across the floor of this House in a time before he was elected, although he might have been here already because I think in his first term, under the leadership of Mr Feetham, that is what they had said during the course of the time that Mr Feetham had been a Minister in the GSD Government in 2007-11. When we say, dealing with the housing waiting list, we are talking about going back to what a churn should be, and we have always interpreted a churn to be in the region of two to four hundred people in a parliamentary term, and that is why he will recall we have always all referred to our great friend the Hon. Mr Joseph Baldachino, also known as Pepito Baldachino, having been the best Housing Minister Gibraltar ever had because he got it down to about 490, I think, at the time that the GSLP left office in 1996. That is why when we say zero, in churn terms we mean in the region of 400 on the list and being allocated a home in the same way as when they said full employment they meant up to 500 people unemployed.

Madam Speaker: We are going to move on very swiftly, so if there is one more question ... And then we are moving on. We are spending far too much time on this.

Hon. D J Bossino: I am finding it difficult because I am having to consider what the... thanks to my friend Mr Sacarello, who is producing these for me.

In terms of the number of termination notices issued by month, again that has been updated on 9th December and there are not any, on 30th November, in terms of termination notices issued in November. Does the Minister have any anything to add or any comments in relation to that?

Hon. P A Orfila: Madam Speaker, no terminations in November.

Madam Speaker: Next question.

Q1081/2024

**Public housing stock –
Refurbishment by private landlords**

Clerk: Question 1081. The Hon. D J Bossino.

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Hon. D J Bossino: Does the Government have a policy whereby public housing stock can be refurbished by private landlords in exchange for the decanting of tenants from the landlord's property into the refurbished flats, as raised by Action for Housing in its press release of 6th November; and, if so, what is it?

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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, yes, and this has also been confirmed publicly before the deadline for questions.

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Hon. D J Bossino: I am not aware of it, but I take the hon. Lady's word for it. I will look for it. I dare not ask where it is, whether it is by way of a press release or whether it is on a website somewhere, because then the Hon. Chief Minister would rise to his feet.

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Madam Speaker: Is there a question?

Hon. D J Bossino: Is the Hon. the Minister able to set out the basic terms of that policy, because I do not think – and I stand to be corrected, but I do not think that there was ever a response by her Department to the criticisms which were laid by Action for Housing in its press release, which I referred to in the question. I do not think there was an answer and I am surprised by that, given that it would have given the hon. Member a perfect opportunity to address the concerns which Action for Housing, as an NGO, raised in relation to this supposed allocation of flats in exchange for the private landlord refurbishing those Government flats so that then that particular private landlord, according to Action for Housing, was able to decant those individuals from his or her premises; I do not know who the landlord is. Is she able to provide some information as to what the policy is and what the criteria are, so that other private landlords can approach her and offer the same?

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Hon. P A Orfila: Madam Speaker, the Chief Minister explained all of this already; I think it was during a *Direct Democracy*. Action for Housing got it wrong and they went publicly with something that was wrong. It was erroneous. It was not like that. This was a case of a Gibraltar landlord who had a property in Gibraltar and was willing to provide affordable rental in the private sector. The property was blocked by two tenants who were high up on the social waiting list and both were in their 80s; one was 82 or 84. I was able to persuade the landlord – to the taxpayers' benefit, by the way – that he would have to refurbish the flats for the two individuals. The refurbishment was carried out at the expense of the landlord instead of using taxpayers' money. The landlord also refurbished a further two flats for the Housing Department, and at my request, at no cost to the taxpayer. So, in fact, we ended up with four flats being refurbished and Government did not pay a penny.

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We have to deliver to all taxpaying members of our community and not just those on the housing waiting list, and we have to release investment into the old Town, which is always good for the GDP. What I have done, Madam Speaker, is square the circle in a very positive, forward-looking and commercial way. I hope that answers the hon. Gentleman's questions.

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Hon. D J Bossino: I think it is certainly much more helpful, if I may say, than her original answer, which is that it has been made public. I am also grateful to the hon. Lady for having identified the

source of where that came from, and I do recall the answer that the Hon. the Chief Minister gave in the *Direct Democracy* programme.

1310 She has helped to set out the considerations which would have played on her mind when she arrived at an arrangement with this particular private landlord, but what I am asking the hon. Lady is whether there are criteria, which one can refer to, that the Government would implement so that other private landlords can benefit. As I understand it, the answer would be no but that she does have her door open to this type of arrangement in respect of other private landlords who would approach her to offer similar terms.

1315 **Hon. P A Orfila:** Madam Speaker, let us make my role here perfectly clear: I am here to save taxpayers' money, I am here to look after the public purse, and if that is the case and anybody wants to come to me and refurbish our flats in Gibraltar for the Gibraltarians for free, then they are very welcome. *((Banging on desks))*

1320 **Hon. D J Bossino:** Whilst I allow the jubilation on the other side to run its course, that is fair enough in terms of an answer. I am not suggesting that we as a party would agree with that policy necessarily, but that is fair enough. How does she then square one of the criticisms, which I think she must understand is legitimate, raised by Action for Housing that one of the results of the
1325 implementation of this particular arrangement is that the individuals that the hon. Lady referred to – these 80-plus, in terms of age, individuals – jumped the housing waiting list because of a private landlord's interest? I understand that there is also an interest to the taxpayer because what the taxpayer is getting on the other side of the equation are refurbished flats at no cost to the Government, but how does she address in her mind that jumping of the queue, if I can put it
1330 in those terms?

Hon. P A Orfila: Madam Speaker, the Hon. Shadow Minister for Housing – Action for Housing – gets a lot of things wrong. Nobody jumped any queues, okay? Nobody jumped anyone. Everybody there has got an earmark. In fact, there was one gentleman in front of this gentleman who was
1335 offered a house and he rejected it, so nobody is jumping anything. We have to look at lots of other factors that come into play here. We have to look at the position on the list, the age of the applicant too: whether we want to make the last few years – whether they be many or not – of a person's life a bit more comfortable or are we going to be judgemental and say no? We have to look a lot of factors. It is not just giving a house to whomever one pleases. It does not work like
1340 that. We have to look at the social status. We have to look at the availability, if there is anything available for them. We have to look at the state of the property, because if we are going to do this, they have to really fork out money, which is going to be beneficial to us as taxpayers. At the end of everything, we are the winners – the taxpayer, the public purse, is the winner. This is what I am here to do, and I am fed up of having ... Sorry, I do not think I should be talking like this. The
1345 hon. Gentleman sometimes brings the best out of me. *((Laughter))* At the end of the day, like I said, I am here to do a service for the people of Gibraltar, and that is exactly what I am trying to do. *((Banging on desks))*

Hon. D J Bossino: More! More jubilation!

Madam Speaker: One final supplementary before we move on.

Hon. D J Bossino: I seem to provoke this: the blood pressures immediately rise each time I pose questions. But look, if I –

Madam Speaker: One final supplementary.

1360 **Hon. D J Bossino:** If I bring out the best in her, then so be it, that is very good news. Just one point of clarification, which I may not have understood because the hon. Lady is saying, I think, that there were two applicants who were granted the flats subject to the arrangements that she has already spoken about, that those two individuals did not jump the queue – (*Interjection*) that sounded a bit odd (*Interjection and laughter*) – as a result of that questioning. It sounded like a gag. The Hon. Minister is fine. But in terms of the statistics, did she say there were two applicants but four premises which were refurbished? Is that understanding correct, because it does not quite ...?

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Hon. P A Orfila: Madam Speaker, this is getting awfully tiresome. Two got the flats. I managed to get the landlord to refurbish another two flats for us, at no cost to the taxpayer. Have you understood that now? You have got that?

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Madam Speaker: I am sure the hon. Member has understood that. Next question.

Q1082/2024
Queen's Hotel –
Number of residents on government housing list

Clerk: Question 1082. The Hon. the Leader of the Opposition.

1375 **Hon. Dr K Azopardi:** Madam Speaker, how many residents of the Queen's Hotel are on the government housing list?

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

1380 **Minister for Housing and the Gibraltar University (Hon. P A Orfila):** Madam Speaker, 12.

Hon. Dr K Azopardi: The Hon. Minister gave the figure of 76 – I think, in relation to the other question – residents of the Queen's Hotel, so only a relatively small number on the housing list. I see. And of those on the list, are they all on the ordinary list or are some of them on the medical or social lists?

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Hon. P A Orfila: We have some on the pre-list. So there is a number of them on the pre-list. There are a couple on the category A. In fact, the one on number 1A was offered a flat and said he did not want it. The others have been on our list since 2023, 2011, 2014, 2012, 2017 and 2024.

1390 **Hon. Dr K Azopardi:** So there is quite a range there. The Minister's information in that supplementary answer is that the of the 12, some have been on the list since as far back as 2011, some of them as recently as 2024. I think that is what she said. How many of those 12 would be historic? And when she says that they are category A, does she mean medical or social?

1395 **Hon. P A Orfila:** I believe that these are social.

Hon. Dr K Azopardi: Does she have a breakdown of how long they have been there?

1400 **Hon. P A Orfila:** Madam Speaker, there is the one of the social, who I said refused the flat. There was another one, down since 2018, but when we have tried to contact him he does not seem to register anywhere, so we want to find out whether he has passed away or whether he is

actually living still. The other one is 2017, and the reason why there is a little bit of delay is because he has been a previous homeowner. So yes, there is a very mixed bag.

1405 **Madam Speaker:** Next question.

DEPUTY CHIEF MINISTER

Q1083/2024

**Washington internships –
Position re resumption**

1410 **Clerk:** Questions to the Hon. the Deputy Chief Minister.
Question 1083. The Hon. G Origo.

1415 **Hon. G Origo:** Madam Speaker, in its manifesto the Government promised to examine how to resume the Washington internships for young people. Has this exercise been carried out; and, if so, what is the position and when can these young people expect these internships to resume, if at all?

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

1420 **Deputy Chief Minister (Hon. Dr J J Garcia):** Madam Speaker, the Government, as promised, examined how to resume the Washington internships for young people in order to make the policy more cost effective. The final decision will, therefore, be reflected in the Estimates of Revenue and expenditure for 2025-26.

1425 **Hon. G Origo:** Madam Speaker, I am grateful to the Deputy Chief Minister for confirming that they have indeed examined the position on the internships, but may I ask – because in its manifesto commitment the Government talked about looking how to restructure this programme – in the context of restructuring are we looking at changing the location? Is it a timing of which part of the academic year they are going? Are we looking at changing the state, the country even? What is the restructure itself entailing? Does he have any more details on that?

1430 **Hon. Deputy Chief Minister:** Madam Speaker, the Washington internship will obviously be in Washington, but the funding for that has always come through my colleague the Minister for Education and the Department of Education budget, so I do not want to say anything which might pre-empt the discussions the Government will have internally in relation to budgets and the and
1435 Estimates of Revenue for next year, but essentially a restructure to make it more cost effective, if that helps the hon. Member.

1440 **Hon. G Origo:** May I just ask, then, is it the position from the Government, or indeed the Minister, that this programme should be in place for the next academic year in 2025, or is he looking at how to fund that in the next Budget session and perhaps we are looking at starting in academic year 2026?

1445 **Hon. Deputy Chief Minister:** Madam Speaker, that is a discussion. What I have informed the House and the hon. Member already is that we will be having that discussion in the context of the estimates for next year.

Madam Speaker: Next question.

Q1084-85/2024
Land Registry –
Number of property sales and deeds registered 2014-24

Clerk: Question 1084. The Hon. the Leader of the Opposition.

1450 **Hon. Dr K Azopardi:** Madam Speaker, how many sales (assignments or conveyances) of property have been registered in the Land Registry in the period 2014-24, broken down by the number of sales in each calendar year?

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

1455

Deputy Chief Minister (Hon. Dr J J Garcia): Madam Speaker, I will answer this question together with Question 1085.

Clerk: Question 1085. The Hon. the Leader of the Opposition.

1460 **Hon. Dr K Azopardi:** Madam Speaker, how many deeds have been registered at the Land Registry in the period 2014-2024, broken down by the number of deeds in each calendar year?

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

1465 **Hon. Deputy Chief Minister:** Madam Speaker, the information requested is in the schedule I will now hand over to the hon. Member.

Madam Speaker: We will move on to the next question and revert to this one for supplementaries.

Answer to Q1084-85/2024

Year	Assignments	Conveyances	Number of Deeds
2014	637	27	1934
2015	472	27	1632
2016	1361	17	5481
2017	1095	17	2259
2018	869	36	2682
2019	918	17	2378
2020	1291	30	2223
2021	922	14	3151
2022	1067	41	3397
2023	1498	23	4224
2024	358	12	2502

Q1086/2024

**Intergovernmental Committee for a Non-negotiated Outcome –
When established**

1470 **Clerk:** Question 1086. The Hon. the Leader of the Opposition.

Hon. Dr K Azopardi: Madam Speaker, when was the NNO the Intergovernmental Committee for a Non-negotiated Outcome established?

1475 **Clerk:** Answer, the Hon. the Deputy Chief Minister.

Deputy Chief Minister (Hon. Dr J J Garcia): Madam Speaker, the existing NNO board first met on 28th June 2021.

1480 **Hon. Dr K Azopardi:** What does he mean by 'existing' NNO?

Hon. Deputy Chief Minister: Madam Speaker, there were previous boards before that, and in June 2021 the UK and Gibraltar Governments took the decision to call it the NNO Board.

1485 **Hon. Dr K Azopardi:** I see. The Hon. Deputy Chief Minister will know that the reason I posed this question is because we had an exchange in last House about the number of meetings and all of that. I was not aware that there had been previous boards. Was the scope of the previous boards the same? Did he hear my question? Does he want me to repeat it?

1490 **Hon. Deputy Chief Minister:** Madam Speaker, previous boards referred and related also to contingency planning but in relation to the Withdrawal Agreement and the Withdrawal Treaty. This one was set up in June 2021 in the context of the future relationship negotiations, which started in October.

Q1084-85/2024

**Land Registry –
Number of property sales and deeds registered 2014-24 –
Supplementary questions**

1495 **Madam Speaker:** Is the Hon. the Leader of the Opposition in a position to ask supplementaries on Questions 1084 and 1085, or would he like some more time? All right, we will take those now before we move on.

1500 **Hon. Dr K Azopardi:** I am grateful for the schedule given to me by the Hon. Deputy Chief Minister. In terms of the specific question on the number of deeds, may I ask him this: can I assume that the total number of deeds, 1,934, would include ...? Let's say, for example, 2014: the 1,934 total deeds would include 637 and 27, firstly? And secondly, if so, or irrespective of the answer to that question, does he have information in front of him, compiled by officials, as to what the nature of the other deeds would be? Is there a breakdown of the nature of deeds?

1505 **Deputy Chief Minister (Hon. Dr J J Garcia):** Madam Speaker, I am told that the number of deeds includes all documents submitted for registration at the Land Registry and that the number of deeds of assignment and conveyances year on year have been included, as requested.

1510 **Hon. Dr K Azopardi:** That answers the first one, but can he give me information in relation to the second question that I posed, which is; does he have a breakdown on the basis that, again taking 2014, the figure of 1,934, the total number of deeds, includes the 637 assignments and the 27 conveyances ... what the other over a thousand – 1,200, I think – deeds are? Does he have a breakdown of the nature of those deeds?

1515 **Hon. Deputy Chief Minister:** Madam Speaker, I do not have a breakdown. I am happy to provide that to hon. Member if he tables a question, but what I am told is that all other types of documents have been disregarded for the purposes of this report.

1520 **Hon. Dr K Azopardi:** But given that he has answered in that way, it is possible to provide a breakdown if I submit a question. That is how I understand his answer.

Hon. Deputy Chief Minister: Madam Speaker, we shall seek that information from officials. If it is available, we will be happy to provide it.

1525 **Madam Speaker:** Next question.

INWARD INVESTMENT AND THE GIBRALTAR SAVINGS BANK

Q1087/2024

Government and government company debt –
Reason why accrued interest not shown in WA157/2024

Q1088-89/2024

Sinking Fund –
Source of £100,000 increase; balance on 1st November 2024

Q1090/2024

Public debt –
Figures at 1st November 2024

Q1091-97/2024

Government debentures –
Whether £75 million repaid or refinanced; total amount in issue at 1st November 2024;
term sheets/prospectus for all in issue at 31st October 2024; interest rate structure; GSBA Ltd

Clerk: Questions to the Hon. Minister for Inward Investment and the Gibraltar Savings Bank. Question 1087. The Hon. R M Clinton.

1530 **Hon. R M Clinton:** Madam Speaker, can the Government advise why, in answer to Written Question 157/2024, accrued interest is not shown for Government debt or Government company debt?

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

1535 **Minister for Inward Investment and the Gibraltar Savings Bank (Sir J Bossano):** Madam Speaker, I will answer this question with Questions 1088 to 1097.

Clerk: Question 1088. The Hon. R M Clinton.

1540 **Hon. R M Clinton:** Madam Speaker, can the Government advise the source of the £100,000 increase in the Sinking Fund as at 1st October 2024?

Clerk: Question 1089. The Hon. R M Clinton.

1545 **Hon. R M Clinton:** Can the Government advise the balance on the General Sinking Fund on the following date: 1st November 2024?

Clerk: Question 1090. The Hon. R M Clinton.

1550 **Hon. R M Clinton:** Can the Government please provide the total gross debt, aggregate debt after application of the Sinking Fund to gross debt, cash reserves and net debt figures for public debt for the following date: 1st November 2024?

Clerk: Question 1091. The Hon. R M Clinton.

1555 **Hon. R M Clinton:** Can the Government advise if the £75 million five-year Gibraltar Government debenture was repaid on 10th October 2024, or has it been refinanced with the Gibraltar Savings Bank; and, if so, on what terms?

Clerk: Question 1092. The Hon. R M Clinton.

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Hon. R M Clinton: Can the Government confirm the total nominal amount of Gibraltar Government debentures in issue as at 31st October 2024?

Clerk: Question 1093. The Hon. R M Clinton.

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Hon. R M Clinton: Can the Government provide copies of the term sheets or prospectus for all Gibraltar Government debentures in issue as at 31st October 2024?

Clerk: Question 1094. The Hon. R M Clinton.

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Hon. R M Clinton: Can the Government advise when the interest rate structure of Gibraltar Government debentures was decreased and who gave the instruction to do so?

Clerk: Question 1095. The Hon. R M Clinton.

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Hon. R M Clinton: Can the Government advise the interest rate structure of the Gibraltar Government debentures in issue as at 31st October 2024, broken down by issue and amount with a comparison to that as at 31st January 2024?

Clerk: Question 1096. The Hon. R M Clinton.

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Hon. R M Clinton: Can the Government advise why GSBA Ltd has issued £16 million of 20-year debentures to the Gibraltar Savings Bank?

Clerk: Question 1097. The Hon. Hon. R M Clinton.

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Hon. R M Clinton: Can the Government advise why the 25th July 2044 debenture issued by GSBA shows a nominal value of £10,457,866.15 as at 30th September 2024, as held by the Gibraltar Savings Bank, as opposed to £10.5 million as at 31st August 2024? Does this debenture repay capital?

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

Minister for Inward Investment and the Gibraltar Savings Bank (Sir J Bossano): Madam Speaker, as regards the accrued interest in GSB investments, this has always been limited to loans quoted on the Stock Exchange.

The increase in the level of the Sinking Fund on 1st October 2024 was due to the receipt of interest rates to the fund.

The balance on the General Sinking fund on 1st November 2024 stood at £18.6 million.

The gross public debt and the aggregate debt after the application of the Sinking Fund to gross debt, cash reserves and net debt figures at 1st November were as follows: gross public debt, £872.7 million; aggregate debt, £854.1 million; cash reserves, £95.7 million; net debt, £758.4 million.

The £75 million five-year Gibraltar Government debenture has been refinanced with the Gibraltar Savings Bank.

The total nominal amount of Gibraltar Government debentures in issue at 31st October 2024 is £372.7 million.

The Government cannot provide copies of the terms sheets/prospectus for all Government debentures in issue at 31st October 2024.

The interest rate structure of Gibraltar Government debentures was decreased on 1st April 2023 as per Directives 2/2023, 3/2023, 4/2023 and 5/2023 issued by the Financial Secretary.

The interest rate structure of the Gibraltar Government debentures in issue at 31st October 2024 broken down by issue and amount with a comparison to that as at 31st January 2024 is as follows: 1.5% on 31st January for all the debentures, and on 31st October, 3.5% for the £100 million debenture and 2.7% for the rest.

The issue of the debentures from GSBA to the Savings Bank is because the GSBA sources funding for potential investments.

The 25th July 2044 debenture issued by the GSBA shows a nominal value of £10,457,866.50 at 30th September 2024 due to the repayment of some of the capital.

Hon. R M Clinton: Madam Speaker, I will crave your indulgence as you will appreciate they are all bunched together and some of these are quite technical questions.

If I may direct the Minister to his answer to Question 1087, he states that the practice has been to only give the accrued interest for quoted securities, but if you were to look at the position which is provided in March 2024 he will see that there is accrued interest presented there. I would ask if the Minister would be willing to go back and ask the officials why they cannot present the information that I asked for in the same way as they provided it as at 31st March 2024.

Sir J J Bossano: Madam Speaker, what I can tell the House is that in the 52 years that I have been here the only breakdown in the Savings Bank investments that showed an element of the accrued interest is the one that I am being provided with. Clearly, I do not know who, before the 52 years, suggested the system but it is a system that makes sense as far as I am concerned; I do not know if that was the reason why they did it. The reality is that one thing is to have the accrued at the end of the financial year, which is one calculation, and the other thing is to do it every month, which means 12 calculations. Of course, in the case of the quoted stock it is done on a monthly basis, and indeed it could be done on a weekly basis and on a daily basis and on an hourly basis, because the stuff that is quoted is changing in price all the time, and part of the value of the stock would be how soon the transaction is happening in terms of when the next interest is paid. If you buy or sell a stock that within 24 hours would pay interest, that would be reflected in the value, so the valuation that is done on a monthly basis shows what the capital value is and the accrued interest that would be resulting from a disposal. That is not the case with local debentures from the Government of Gibraltar or from Gibraltar Government Companies. From the perspective of analysing why there is a difference, that would be the logical explanation that I

would provide if the decision had been mine. I would say that if the hon. Member mentions that in March 2024 it is shown, it is, of course, because in March 2024 everything gets closed, but if they were to do the same thing every month then it would mean creating more work for no apparent reason, whereas in the case of a stock the importance is that if we were to sell it the day after that figure was there, the interest rate would have an impact on the valuation.

Hon. R M Clinton: Madam Speaker, I am grateful for the Minister's answer.

If I can move on to the next question, Question 1088, I believe the Minister said it is receipt of interest. Would that be the interest on the balance of the Sinking Fund, which I presume is held on deposit? Is that what the Minister is telling us?

Sir J J Bossano: Yes, it is the interest earned on the money in the Sinking Fund. It cannot be anything else.

Hon. R M Clinton: I thank the Minister for that answer.

If I can move on to Question 1089, the balance the Sinking Fund: the Minister says it is £18.6 million, which I believe – the Minister can correct me if I am wrong – is a £100,000 increase on the last reported number to the House.

Sir J J Bossano: Yes, Madam Speaker, and I imagine that that, again, is receipt of interest.

Hon. R M Clinton: Madam Speaker, I do not intend to ask any supplementaries on Question 1090.

I move on to Question 1091. The Minister has indicated that the £75 million 5-year Government debenture was refinanced with the Savings Bank, but he did not indicate to the House what the terms were.

Sir J J Bossano: Madam Speaker, the hon. Member has another question which deals with the interest rates on the debentures and includes the £75 million.

Hon. R M Clinton: Yes, that is correct, Madam Speaker, but in my book 'terms' is not just the right but also the period.

Sir J J Bossano: He has also got a question, Madam Speaker, on the terms of the debentures.

Hon. R M Clinton: Madam Speaker, I presume when he gave the answer he was referring to Question 1095. I do not believe I heard the terms but I am happy to be corrected. (**A Member:** Question 1093.) I am happy to be corrected if he has given that information in Question 1095, but can he at least advise was it a five-year rollover as in the past, or what time period was this £75 million rolled over for?

Sir J J Bossano: Madam Speaker, the hon. Member has other questions which deal with the terms of the debentures to the Government. The position is that the terms of the debentures to the Government can be changed in terms of times of repayment or rates of interest because it is not something that is being done with an external source.

Hon. R M Clinton: I am very grateful to the Minister for his answer; it is not, in fact, what I asked, but it is interesting to hear what he had to say. I am asking specifically about this £75 million that was refinanced with the Savings Bank. Can the Minister advise for how long this £75 million has been refinanced? Is it indefinite? Five years? Three years? Can the Minister advise?

Sir J J Bossano: Madam Speaker, all the debentures of the Government of Gibraltar held by the Savings Bank can have their dates of repayment changed by mutual consent, given that the person who has to negotiate the repayment, whether it is to make it later or make it earlier, happens to be the same person on both sides. That is to say the Financial Secretary as the Financial Secretary will negotiate it with the Financial Secretary in his role in the Savings Bank, so the reality is that we are not dealing with ... If you have a debenture, as they used to have, from NatWest, then it will have a term which you then have to negotiate if you want to change. That is not the position when the public debt of the Government is held by the Savings Bank because the Savings Bank has the flexibility that it will do what is of best benefit to the Government finances in terms of either the length of the repayment or the rate of interest. The hon. Member needs to understand that this is not something where we are dealing with an external body.

Hon. R M Clinton: Madam Speaker, I do not know what to say, but ... Basically, what the Minister is advising the House is that the government debentures issued to the Savings Bank are effectively an open IOU and the Government quasi Savings Bank can change the terms at any point in time it desires and change the repayment dates and the rates.

Is that why the Minister advises the House it is not possible ...? I am moving on to Question 1092. In Question 1092 I am pleased to see that the nominal amount has not changed in terms of the total amount of government debt in issue, but in terms of Question 1093, when he says it is not possible to give copies of term sheets of prospectuses is it because, as the Minister has indicated to the House, the terms are fluid, they can be changed at any point in time and therefore, in the Government's mind, there is no point issuing a prospectus other than literally writing on a piece of paper, 'I owe you £372.7 million, repayable at whatever rate I choose and whenever I choose'? Is that the position of the Government?

Sir J J Bossano: The position of Government is to give factual answers to factual questions, and the reason why I cannot provide the terms sheets or prospectus is because they do not exist. If the hon. Member opposite switches from talking about debentures to talking about IOUs in the expectation that an IOU would sound nastier to anybody listening, he needs to understand that unnecessary structures are not efficient. If he thinks there is some great efficiency from the Government saying, 'I am going to issue a five-year debenture to the Savings Bank,' and he thinks that any government that has the situation of the relationship that exists between what is a special fund ... that they would be treating the Government as a bank that is privately owned and as an outside lender would treat the Government, then I am afraid that his knowledge from his banking past must know that this is not the case. If a government goes to an external bank, they have a lot of legal paperwork to do with the external bank. That legal paperwork does not exist and there is no need for it when it is an internal relationship between the Savings Bank and the Government. This is one of the benefits of the Government using exclusively, as it is now, the Savings Bank, and the other one is that, unlike the situation in their time ... In their time, Madam Speaker, the situation was that they stopped using the Savings Bank and they were using the services of the local banks here, where they were paying interest at a much higher rate to the banks, like NatWest and Barclays and so on, and at the same time paying a much higher rate to depositors and losing £9 million a year in the process. For the Government to put public money in a bank and then pay more on loans than they need to is not the most efficient way to deal with the finances of Gibraltar, and I think the way the system is operating now is what gives us best value for money.

Hon. R M Clinton: I thank the Minister for his answer.

If I can move on to Question 1094, my question was when the structure of the Gibraltar Government debentures initially decreased, and he indicated 1st April 2023. Then he rattled off a list of directives given by the Financial Secretary. For my benefit and maybe the benefit of the House, if he could repeat those directives to the House, I would appreciate it.

Sir J J Bossano: Madam Speaker, the directives are all in 2023 on 1st April, and therefore the directives are number 2, number 3, number 4 and number 5.

1750 **Hon. R M Clinton:** Madam Speaker, I know I have asked in the past for directives from the Financial Secretary and been blankly refused by the Government. Would the Minister be willing to provide the House with copies of those directives?

1755 **Sir J J Bossano:** Madam Speaker, the problem with giving the hon. Member information is that there is nothing finite about any information. If you say to him there is a sentence, he wants to know where there is a full stop. If you give him where the full stop is he wants to know where the comma is. This is an internal document between two Departments of Government and this is not made public. I think, frankly, if it had been my decision, he probably would not even have got the date because the result that is important is not whether it is done at nine o'clock in the morning or at five o'clock in the evening. That is the level of detail that the hon. Member wants to have
1760 about things, which he may well get if he ever is in Government and spends all his time supervising directly the staff in the Savings Bank or in the Treasury. Frankly, I only knew there was a directive because the answer has been provided for his benefit. As far as I am concerned, in my responsibilities to this House and to the public I have no need to know what was in the directive and when it was issued, because these are the internal workings of Government. This is done by
1765 the professionals in the system; these are not political decisions.

Hon. R M Clinton: Madam Speaker, this will be the last one on this particular question, Question 1094. The Minister is not an uncurious individual, I am sure; I know he has an inquiring mind, which I fully respect. But can he explain why it took five directives to change these interest
1770 rates?

Sir J J Bossano: I have an inquiring mind, Madam Speaker, but I direct it to trying to understand quantum physics, not why they did it in four tranches instead of doing it in one. I do not know why – I did not even know it had happened – but this is a mechanical element, this is not a policy
1775 element. Obviously there are internal rules on how things are done, and those rules, I imagine, dictate that it should be done in this way. In the Civil Service, rules tend to be kept alive for a very long time unless somebody takes a decision to change them. It is the same as I told him in the earlier answer about the Government not accruing debt with the interest rate that was accumulating, and I thought of a sensible explanation for it but that does not necessarily mean
1780 that the original decision was taken in the way that I have analysed it *post hoc*. As a general rule, all the methodology of doing things in the Government stay in place, maybe in some cases after they are needed for whatever reason they were done previously, unless somebody comes along and questions it. If I said tomorrow, 'Why couldn't you do it in one instead of four?' then probably
1785 somebody would look at it and either come back with an explanation or say, 'Yes, really there was no need to do four, it could have been done in one.' But it is not the kind of thing that normally would involve a policy decision; this is a mechanical thing.

Hon. Dr K Azopardi: Before my hon. colleague moves on, may I just ask on this question? The hon. Member says it is not a political decision, it is a decision of Financial Secretary. Is he saying
1790 that there was no political involvement in a discussion before the rate structure change? On something as important as the interest rate structure on Government debentures is he saying that there was no prior discussion with either himself or the Minister for Finance, the Chief Minister, on the issue of changing the interest rate structure on the Government debentures? I hear what he says, that the instruction was given by the Financial Secretary, but was there a prior discussion
1795 on that which then gave rise to the instruction?

Sir J J Bossano: Madam Speaker, any discussions that we have in the Government are not things that we put in the public domain, but the responsibility for implementing decisions to arrive at the results that we want to arrive at in terms of the public finances are taken on the advice of officials if it requires a policy decision. So, there might have been options. Some options sometimes are advised and we are given a choice and then a political decision is taken on whether it should be done one way or another, but only to that extent.

Hon. Dr K Azopardi: So is it that what he is saying now – at least the way that I have understood it – is that there was a discussion at a political level and then what followed was an instruction given mechanically by the Financial Secretary, but there had been a prior policy view taken by the Government on this issue?

Sir J J Bossano: No, I am not saying that. I am saying that he knows, having been in Government, how these things work, and that the decisions that are taken and I am not limiting what I am saying to this specific decision, I am saying in general terms this is what happens. Whether it would happen on this occasion or not, I am telling him that the discussions that happen on specific things are not things that we are going to put in the public domain any more than he and his Government put in the public domain when they were the Government. These are things that are the internal workings of the Government and he knows that because he has been there.

Hon. Dr K Azopardi: So he is answering generically but not specifically on this issue. That is how I understand it. Can I ask him in this way: would it ever be the case that the Financial Secretary would issue an instruction like this without there being a policy view of the Government?

Madam Speaker: That is essentially a hypothetical question.

Hon. Dr K Azopardi: I am trying to ask it in a different way; I am not asking hypothetically. Let me put it in these terms, Madam Speaker, if I may rephrase it on my feet. The Financial Secretary has issued an instruction in relation to an important issue of the interest rate structure of Government debentures. Is it not the case, therefore, that the conclusion must be that the Government has taken a political view beforehand? He would not be doing it off his own bat.

Sir J J Bossano: Madam Speaker, he is not asking for information; he is asking me to confirm or deny his speculations.

The Government policy in the Savings Bank is that we want to finish with £100 million in the kitty by 2027 and not leave the Savings Bank with £1,444.05, as we got from them. So, as long as we are comfortable that the £100 million – the target that we have put in the manifesto – is going to be met, we do not interfere with the professionals' decisions that are not in conflict with the Government policy. The policy is where we want to be. Whether the rates of interest to debentures in the Government at some point in time are higher or lower, as long as it does not put at risk the eventual level of our commitment, is fine.

Madam Speaker: Is the hon. Member moving on to supplementaries in relation to the next question?

Hon. R M Clinton: Yes, Madam Speaker, I am moving on to Question 1095. Question 1095 is a very technical question, which the Minister will appreciate. I did ask for a comparison, but I believe he gave some numbers and some rates. What I would like the Minister, if it is possible – he probably has it in front of him ... I imagine there will be one number of £147.7 million, another number of £100 million, and maybe another number combined coming to £125 million. Would he be kind enough to indicate the numbers he has in front of him, with the rates beside him? I think I caught one – 2.7% for the rest, and I imagine the rest would be £125 million, if he could confirm

that; 3.5% I imagine would be £100 million, but I did not quite catch the first bit – is it £147.7 million at 3.5%?

Sir J J Bossano: The figures that I have given him are the structures of the debentures on the two dates that he mentioned. All of them were at 1.5% at one stage, and at the second stage only one was at 3.5%, so obviously the balance were at 2.7%. I think this is simple arithmetic.

Hon. R M Clinton: Sorry, Madam Speaker, I really cannot follow him. Could he just set it out? He says the 1.5% ... I am asking at two points in time, 31st October 2024 and 31st January 2024. Can he provide the information in that format?

Sir J J Bossano: Madam Speaker, it is not a question of the format. The information does not change because of the format. The position is that on 31st January ... In the other answers he has the list of debentures, he has the total and the amounts in each debenture, and I am telling him the whole of the £372 million debenture, all the debentures, all the public debt, is in the Savings Bank. So, in January the public debt was costing the Government of Gibraltar 1.5%, and then at a later stage it was changed so that one of the debentures, the £100 million one, was at 3.5% and the others – three, I think it is; I think there are four in total – at 2.7%. What is it that he thinks I need to say more to give him the information that he wants?

Hon. R M Clinton: Madam Speaker, that is a lot clearer. Thank you very much. I am grateful to the Minister. So, as at 31st January 2024, of the entire nominal balance of Government debentures in issue – and the Minister will correct me if I have got this wrong: £372.7 million – was paying interest at the rate of 1.5%. At some point – and if the Minister has the information in front of him I would be grateful if he could advise the House when this changed – the £100 million debenture changed to 3.5%, and then the balance, being the difference between £372.7 million and £100 million, which would be £272.7 million, is paying interest at 2.7%. If I have got that wrong, I would be grateful if the Minister could advise me. But can he advise the House: these rates, are they fixed or are they a percentage over LIBOR or some other structure?

Sir J J Bossano: No, they are not a percentage of anything; they are fixed.

Hon. R M Clinton: Madam Speaker, this is the bit that I find hard to understand because, as the Minister knows, I ask regularly for the position of the investments of the Savings Bank and the answer I got to my Written Question W23/2024, in terms of a breakdown of where and how all the moneys and deposits in the Savings Bank had been invested and the rates of return on each of these investments as at 31st January 2024, was 'His Majesty's Government of Gibraltar debentures at 6% and 8.3%'. Can the Minister advise how that reconciles with the 1.5% he has advised the House?

Sir J J Bossano: Not as a supplementary, but I can certainly go back and find out.

Hon. R M Clinton: Well, I would be grateful if the Minister would because we ask questions in this House for a purpose and it is a bit disconcerting to be given a number which is widely different to 1.5%. If, as at 31st January, we were being told Government was paying 6% and 8.3%, only now to be told they were in fact paying 1.5%, that is a huge difference and I would be grateful if the Minister would go to his officials and ask them how they arrived at these numbers. I do know from past questions it was fixed at 6% for a number of years and the 8.3% was a result of a 3.05% spread over LIBOR at the time, which will bring us to the 8.3%, so at that point in time I saw no reason why that information was not correct, but the Minister is telling us now that it had changed and that information is no longer correct. Madam Speaker, this is where I get to the crux of the matter. We seem to have a very fluid arrangement through Government debentures, and the reason it is

important, as the Minister will know, is the interest charged on Government debentures goes to the Consolidated Fund as a direct charge of the Consolidated Fund. If you play around ... I apologise for using the word 'play'. If you change the rates on Government debentures, you change the results on the Consolidated Fund by definition. So if at 1st April 2023 ... and certainly we had no indication at the last Budget that the rate on Government debentures was as low as 1.5% ... the projected estimates will obviously have a much lower interest rate, although I do not think, looking at the Budget, that was reflected. And now we are told £100 million is paying 3.5% and £272.7 million is paying 2.7%. The Minister previously said – Madam Speaker, I am coming to a question; I apologise – that they want to do in the Savings Bank what is of best benefit to Government finances, which is really a confession, so I ask the Minister: if it is the avowed intention to increase the reserves of the Savings Bank to £100 million, how is this 'investment' of £372 million, which is giving them a return lower than the Bank of England base rate, a good investment?

Sir J J Bossano: Madam Speaker, the purpose of the Savings Bank is not to make money for shareholders, because *they* thought it was not necessary for the money to be in the Savings Bank at all. When they were in Government they decided to take all the reserves out, and we decided to put them back. In fact, at the beginning of our first term, in 2011, we said we would not commit ourselves to the 10% that used to be there before, but that we were committed to target increasing levels of reserves, and that is what we do. If we are satisfied that the level of reserves that we have taken a political judgement on as our objective – just like they took a political judgement that it was really not necessary to have reserves – is going to be met, then there is no conflict between the efficient use of funding for the Government in a way that benefits the Government finances, which is what we all want to see happening. I have already answered in his first part that I will go back and give him an answer because I cannot give him an answer standing on my feet on this, that he should wait and I will give him the answer when the time comes.

Hon. R M Clinton: Madam Speaker, this really is an important and crucial point. If I understand the Minister correctly, he criticises the GSD for running down the reserves to zero, but what he was saying is that so long as he has some money in the Savings Bank it does not matter if the Savings Bank is subsidising the Government. It is the same thing. He is effectively giving a subsidy to the Gibraltar Government. They are borrowing at below market rates from the Savings Bank. They are actually operating at a loss. Joe Bossano has written – sorry, Sir Joe, the Minister; I apologise, Madam Speaker – has written to depositors accusing me, by name, of wanting to create losses in the Savings Bank – is there on public record – but he is, in fact, now admitting that the Savings Bank is subsidising the Government. He is the one who is causing a loss in the Savings Bank, and in fact the value of the subsidy at 2% on £372 million is over £7 million. He is giving £7 million from the Savings Bank to the Gibraltar Government. Is that not the case?

Sir J J Bossano: Madam Speaker, this is the third time that I have to tell the Member that he is raising new matters which I will give answers to when I have gone back and obtained the answers. It is not that I am criticising him for leaving the Savings Bank with £1,444.05; it is that if he defends that, then clearly £76 million in the Savings Bank today means that we can be comfortable if there is a loan to the Government at a rate that is not the market rate outside. Perhaps the hon. Member would prefer us to do what they used to do, which was to lend money to the banks at a rate which was below what they were borrowing, and they were borrowing their own money and creating losses. If there is a situation where tomorrow we were to decide that the Savings Bank should actually pay a dividend, as they used to call it, of say £5 million, I would still not be doing what he urged me to do a couple of years ago, which was to transfer the entire reserves. That is what it said to me in one of the Budgets: I should take the reserves out and give it all to the Government. If he thinks that that is what I should be doing, then he should be rejoicing that in his book I am doing a very small part of what he wanted me to do.

Madam Speaker: Any supplementaries on the next question? There have been six on this. Anything on Question 1096?

1955

Hon. R M Clinton: Madam Speaker, thank you for your patience, but it is quite a lot of questions to go through.

1960

Madam Speaker: Well, I am keeping a note, but you have had six on Question 1095, which is why I am asking you to move on to Question 1096 now.

Hon. R M Clinton: You will appreciate that it is an important matter.

1965

Madam Speaker: That is why I have allowed them; move on now to Question 1096.

Hon. R M Clinton: Madam Speaker, I think his answer to Question 1096 was not very clear, but can he explain to the House why GSBA is now issuing 20-year debentures when it has never seen the need to do so before?

1970

Sir J J Bossano: Well, I think there are some potential investments that may need longer funding than others, but the bulk will be much shorter than that.

1975

Hon. R M Clinton: I will move on to my final question, Madam Speaker, you will be pleased to hear, Question 1097. The Minister seems to have indicated or I believe he has indicated that there is a repayment of capital on this bond. Would the Minister be willing to provide the House with the capital repayment terms or schedule, or the rate of repayment of capital? It is unusual that a bond should repay capital so soon; it has only just been issued. Can the Government advise what the repayment rate is? Is it a straight line over the life of the debenture to 2044? Is there some other formula for the repayment of capital? Is there any interest rate paid as well on this particular bond? And is it that the capital is repaid monthly? It seems to be a change from one month to the next. He kind of indicates that it might be a monthly repayment of capital. If there is a repayment of capital, does that roll into an effective interest rate? Is there interest paid on top? Can the Minister provide some information to the House?

1980

1985

Sir J J Bossano: I will try and find all those elements that the hon. Member ... I cannot provide him with any of that. The question is quite simple, whether it was repaid, and the answer is yes, it was repaid. He gave me the original figure and the new figure, and he asked me if the difference between the two was that the level in between was a repayment of capital, and the answer is yes, It was a repayment of capital. Whether any of the other elements that he mentioned exist or not, I do not know.

1990

Hon. R M Clinton: Madam Speaker, I am grateful to the Minister for his frank answer, but would he exercise his inquiring mind and perhaps find out what exactly are the repayment terms of this bond and come back to the House?

1995

Sir J J Bossano: I am not saying that any of the elements that he listed exist. I do not know whether they do. I do not know whether this was just a one-off thing that happened or there is a debenture with a schedule that requires repayments. The question was a straightforward question saying is the reason for the difference in the figures on two dates a repayment, and the answer is yes. That is what the question was, and that is what the answer is: confirmation of what the hon. Member assumed had happened.

2000

Madam Speaker: Is that the end of the Questions?

Adjournment

Clerk: The Hon. the Chief Minister.

2005

Chief Minister (Hon. F R Picardo): Madam Speaker, thank you. I would propose that the House should now adjourn to Monday at four o'clock in the afternoon, when it is the Government's intention to suspend Standing Orders and proceed with Bills and to then come back to deal with my questions, which I believe are the ones that are still outstanding, on Thursday at 3 p.m., as is the usual custom.

2010

Madam Speaker: I now propose the question, which is that this House do now adjourn to Monday at 4 p.m.

I now put the question, which is at this House do now adjourn to Monday at 4 p.m. Those in favour? (**Members:** Aye.) Those against? Passed.

2015

This House will now adjourn to Monday at 4 p.m.

The House adjourned at 6.10 p.m