



PROCEEDINGS OF THE GIBRALTAR PARLIAMENT

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

Gibraltar, Wednesday, 27th November 2024

Contents

Prayer	4
Confirmation of Minutes	4
Questions for Oral Answer	4
Inward Investment and the Gibraltar Savings Bank	4
Q896-98/2024 Road to the Lines – Community Homes Ownership Ltd	4
Health, Care and Business	10
Q899/2024 Prescription exemption – Determination of eligibility	10
Q900/2024 ERS facilities – Safety guidelines to prevent abuse and neglect	12
Q901-92/2024 ERS – Investigation re staff walkouts; catering department industrial action	13
Q903-95/2024 ERS structure – Management changes	14
Q906/2024 Ocean Views – Detox programme	15
Q907/2024 Community mental health facility – Consultation with Care Agency and location	17
Q908/2024 GHA board – Whether CEO of Care Agency a member.....	18
Q909-10/2024 Gibraltar Health and Care Authority – Rationale; consultation with stakeholders other than unions.....	19
Q911/2024 Adviser to Minister for Health – Cost to date	22
Q912-13/2024 Weight-loss drugs containing semaglutide – Number of individuals reporting adverse reactions; natural alternatives	22
<i>The House adjourned at 1.25 p.m. and resumed its sitting at 3 p.m.....</i>	<i>24</i>

Q914/2024 Identification of emerging viruses – Monitoring of donated blood	24
Q915/2024 Consultant rheumatologist – Contract	24
Q916/2024 Notification of test results to service users – Method and timeframe	25
Q917/2024 St Bernard’s Hospital – Contingency plans re ward capacity.....	26
Q918/2024 X-rays – Waiting time from referral	29
Q919/2024 Cancellation by patients of surgical procedures – Mitigation	29
Q920/2024 GP appointments – Statistics re availability and attendance	31
Q921-23/2024 St Bernard’s Hospital – Water ingress	33
Q924-25/2024 St Bernard’s Hospital basement – Measures to mitigate flooding; storage..	35
Q926/2024 GHA communication protocols – Whether standard guidelines provided to staff	36
Q927/2024 Communication between GHA departments – How information is shared.....	37
Q928/2024 GHA communication audit – Whether conducted in last 12 months.....	38
Q929-31/2024 Legal claims and settlements since 2011 – Pre-action letters received; negligence claims; moneys paid out	39
Q932/2024 Ambulance fleet – Neonatal transport incubators; issues with frontline ambulances; tender for fleet management services	40
Q925/2024 GHA appointments for teaching and LSA staff – Availability outside classroom hours	43
Q936/2024 Cross-border unregistered trade – Plans to tackle problem	43
Q937/2024 AquaGib – Industrial action	45
Q938/2024 Repeat prescriptions – Reasons for difficulties in obtaining	49
Q939/2024 Health providers in Spain and the UK – SLAs and MoUs	51
Q937/2024 AquaGib industrial action – Clarification by the Chief Minister	52
Q939/2024 Health providers in Spain and the UK – SLAs and MoUs – Supplementary questions	52
Q940/2024 GHA Director of Workforce – Current role	54
Q941/2024 Recruitment – GHA delegated decision making	57
<i>The House recessed at 5.07 p.m. and resumed its sitting at 5.30 p.m.</i>	59
Q931/2024 Legal claims and settlements since 2011 – Moneys paid out.....	59
Industrial Relations, Civil Contingencies and Sport	60
Q942/2024 Gibraltar Fire and Rescue Service – Training, manpower and equipment for fighting high-rise building fires.....	60
Q944/2024 Upper Rock Nature Reserve – Containment in the event of fire.....	63
Q945-51/2024 Europa Sports Complex – Arrangements made with Gibraltar Football, Rugby, Cricket, Squash, Darts and Rhythmic Gymnastics Associations and commercial entities.....	64
Q952/2024 Europa Sports Complex – Expansion of spectator facilities.....	68
Employment, Equality, Culture and Tourism	69
Q953/2024 National Disability Strategy – Finalisation and publication	69

Q954/2024 Drugs and Alcohol Rehabilitation Service dry house – Composition and staffing	71
Q955/2024 Youth clubs – Data collection	72
Q956/2024 Laguna Youth Club refurbishment and extension works – Projected costs	73
Q957/2024 Gibraltar Christmas Fair – Entities running attractions and selection process ...	76
Q958/2024 Christmas Festival of Lights – Setup cost and identify of private companies contracted.....	77
Q959/2024 Duke of Edinburgh International Award Scheme – Approved Activity Provider status	79
Q960/2024 World Travel Market visit – Details	79
Adjournment.....	81
<i>The House adjourned at 7.00 p.m.</i>	81

The Gibraltar Parliament

The Parliament met at 12.06 p.m.

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

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

PRAYER

Madam Speaker

CONFIRMATION OF MINUTES

Clerk: Meeting of Parliament, Wednesday, 27th November 2024.

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

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Madam Speaker: May I sign the Minutes as correct?

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

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

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Madam Speaker signed the Minutes.

Questions for Oral Answer

INWARD INVESTMENT AND THE GIBRALTAR SAVINGS BANK

Q896-98/2024

Road to the Lines –

Community Homes Ownership Ltd

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

20

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Madam Speaker: Any supplementaries?

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Madam Speaker: Next question.

HEALTH, CARE AND BUSINESS

Q899/2024

Prescription exemption – Determination of eligibility

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

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

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

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

300

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

305 **Hon. G Arias-Vasquez:** Madam Speaker, the information is contained in the Medical Group Practice Scheme (Amendment) Regulations, but in fact, if we go to *Hansard*, throughout the years numerous people in my shoes have answered the same question. If I take the hon. Lady to *Hansard* Question 291/2001, she will find that the hon. Member of the Opposition answered this same question. The information, as I said, is publicly available, but I will read the statement that the Hon. Leader of the Opposition made:

... Regulation 6A basically says that and it links in with the other provisions of the Ordinance. It creates two categories of people that are exempt, the District Medical Scheme and those under Regulation 6A. Regulation 6A provides an income level and if one falls under the income level, one is deemed to be allowed to be exempt. It is linked to a determination made by the Government and it is scheduled to the GPMS Regulations and the Regulations provide that in the fixing of the determination, it is clear that it is cross referred to pensionable income de facto. My understanding of it was always that pensioners usually fell within that criteria Regulation 6A and once the 20p fee was removed,

310 – that no longer exists, by the way –

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Madam Speaker: Next question.

Clerk: Question 900. The Hon. A Sanchez.

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

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

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

Madam Speaker: Next question.

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

Clerk: Question 900. The Hon. A Sanchez.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Madam Speaker: Last question.
425

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

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

Madam Speaker: Next question.
440

Q901-92/2024

ERS –

Investigation re staff walkouts; catering department industrial action

Clerk: Question 901. The Hon. A Sanchez.

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

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

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

Clerk: Question 902. The Hon. A Sanchez.

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

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

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

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

Madam Speaker: Any supplementaries?

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

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

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

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

Madam Speaker: Next question.

Q903-95/2024
ERS structure –
Management changes

Clerk: Question 903. The Hon. A Sanchez.

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

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

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

Clerk: Question 904. The Hon. A Sanchez.

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

Clerk: Question 905. The Hon. A Sanchez.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Hon. A Sanchez: I did not hear that the Hon. Minister addressed Question 904 specifically in relation to the appointments of ERS Care Manager and ERS facilities manager, whether there have been any changes in these appointments and whether these changes have involved any adjustments in remuneration or increments. Can she address this?
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Hon. G Arias-Vasquez: Madam Speaker, over the summer period there were several adjustments made to the management structure in the ERS as a stop gap. The vacancies will be coming out in the next few days for the two posts that have been mentioned. The ERS Administration Manager and a Nursing Co-ordinator will be coming out. Those vacancies should be coming out before the end of this week. The individuals put there on a stop-gap basis will return to their usual places unless they are successful in the interview process.
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535 **Madam Speaker:** Next question.

Q906/2024
Ocean Views –
Detox programme

Clerk: Question 906. The Hon. A Sanchez.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Madam Speaker: Next question.

Q907/2024

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Madam Speaker: Next question.

Q908/2024

GHA board –

Whether CEO of Care Agency a member

Clerk: Question 908. The Hon. A Sanchez.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Madam Speaker: Next question.

Q909-10/2024

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

Clerk: Question 909. The Hon. A Sanchez.

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

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

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

Clerk: Question 910. The Hon. A Sanchez.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Madam Speaker: Next question.

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

Clerk: Question 911. The Hon. A Sanchez.

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

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

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

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

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

Madam Speaker: Next question.

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

Clerk: Question 912. The Hon. J Ladislaus.

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

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

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

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Clerk: Question 913. The Hon. J Ladislaus.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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Madam Speaker: Any other supplementaries?

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

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

Madam Speaker: Next question.

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Clerk: Question 914. The Hon. J Ladislaus.

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

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

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

Q914/2024

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Madam Speaker: Next question.

Q915/2024

**Consultant rheumatologist –
Contract**

Clerk: Question 915. The Hon. J Ladislaus.

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

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

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

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

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

Madam Speaker: Next question.

Q916/2024

Notification of test results to service users – Method and timeframe

Clerk: Question 916. The Hon. J Ladislaus.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Madam Speaker: The Hon. C Sacarello.

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

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

Madam Speaker: Next question.

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

Clerk: Question 917. The Hon. J Ladislaus.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

1170 **Madam Speaker:** Next question.

Q918/2024
X-rays –
Waiting time from referral

Clerk: Question 918. The Hon. J Ladislaus.

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

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

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

Madam Speaker: Next question.

Q919/2024
Cancellation by patients of surgical procedures –
Mitigation

Clerk: Question 919. The Hon. J Ladislaus.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Madam Speaker: The Hon. C Sacarello.

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

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

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

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

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

Madam Speaker: Next question.

Q920/2024
GP appointments –
Statistics re availability and attendance

Clerk: Question 920. The Hon. J Ladislaus.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Clerk: Question 921. The Hon. J Ladislaus.

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

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

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

Clerk: Question 922. The Hon. J Ladislaus.

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

Clerk: Question 923. The Hon. J Ladislaus.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

1435 **Madam Speaker:** Next question.

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

Clerk: Question 924. The Hon. J Ladislaus.

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

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

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

Clerk: Question 925. The Hon. J Ladislaus.

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

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

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

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

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

Madam Speaker: Next question.

Q926/2024

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

Clerk: Question 926. The Hon. J Ladislaus.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Madam Speaker: Next question.

Q927/2024

Communication between GHA departments – How information is shared

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Madam Speaker: Next question.

Q928/2024

GHA communication audit – Whether conducted in last 12 months

Clerk: Question 928. The Hon. J Ladislaus.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Madam Speaker: Next question.

Q929-31/2024

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

Clerk: Question 929. The Hon. J Ladislaus.

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

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

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

Clerk: Question 930. The Hon. J Ladislaus.

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

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

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

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

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

Answer to Question 929/2024

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

Answer to Question 930/2024

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

Answer to Question 931/2024

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

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

Q932/2024

Ambulance fleet –

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

Clerk: Question 932. The Hon. J Ladislaus.

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

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

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

Clerk: Question 933. The Hon. J Ladislaus.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

1735 **Hon. J Ladislaus:** No, I am not suggesting that the Minister is, and I take the answer from the Minister. The Hon. the Minister knows that we have quite a good relationship and that we work quite well. Nevertheless, I ask because I do need clarification as to the reason why I was told that there had been no tender applications at that point in time, when in fact there had been at least one. In any event, we find out now that that it has not been awarded, but I must put the question because it is what the record will reflect once *Hansard* is drawn up.

1740 **Madam Speaker:** Is there a question at the end of that?

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

1745 **Madam Speaker:** Next question.

Q925/2024

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Madam Speaker: Next question.

Q936/2024

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

Clerk: Question 936. The Hon. C Sacarello.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Madam Speaker: Next question.

Q937/2024
AquaGib –
Industrial action

Clerk: Question 937. The Hon. C Sacarello.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Madam Speaker: The Hon. C Sacarello.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

the Government ...

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Madam Speaker: We are going to move on now.

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

Madam Speaker: All right.

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

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

2050 **Madam Speaker:** Next question.

Q938/2024

Repeat prescriptions – Reasons for difficulties in obtaining

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Madam Speaker: Next question.

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

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

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

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

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

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

Madam Speaker: Next question.

Q939/2024

Health providers in Spain and the UK – SLAs and MoUs

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

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

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

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

Answer to Q939/2024

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

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

UK MoU's

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

2230

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

2235 **Madam Speaker:** Next question.

Q940/2024
GHA Director of Workforce –
Current role

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

2390

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

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

2405

Madam Speaker: Next question.

Q941/2024
Recruitment –
GHA delegated decision making

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Q931/2024

Legal claims and settlements since 2011 – Moneys paid out

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

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

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

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

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

2520 **Madam Speaker:** Next question.

INDUSTRIAL RELATIONS, CIVIL CONTINGENCIES AND SPORT

Q942/2024

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Q944/2024

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

Clerk: Question 944. The Hon. J Ladislaus.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Madam Speaker: Next question.

Q945-51/2024

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

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

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

2710

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

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

2715

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

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

2720

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

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

2725

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

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

2730

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

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

2735

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

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

2740

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

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

2750

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

2905 **Hon. E J Reyes:** And –

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

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

2915 **Hon. L M Bruzon:** Madam Speaker, I am not sure whether it goes to the GSLA or directly to the Government General Account, but I will get the information and pass it on to the hon. Member.

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Madam Speaker: Next question.

Q952/2024
Europa Sports Complex –
Expansion of spectator facilities

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Madam Speaker: Next question.

EMPLOYMENT, EQUALITY, CULTURE AND TOURISM

Q953/2024

National Disability Strategy – Finalisation and publication

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Madam Speaker: The Hon. D J Bossino.

Hon. D J Bossino: I am grateful, Madam Speaker, and I am grateful for what the Hon. Minister
3020 has just said in his latter response. May I also ask him this: what is the rationale behind waiting for, as he puts it, I think, the private sector strand to be completed before the full publication of the strategy document? If, as he says, he is expecting the first strand, the public sector element of it, to be completed before Christmas, as he, I think, put it, is there any reason why that element of it be made public. If not, I am just trying to seek an answer as to why he is holding back
3025 for the private sector element to also be completed.

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

Madam Speaker: Next question.

Q954/2024

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

Clerk: Question 954. The Hon. A Sanchez.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Madam Speaker: Next question.

Q955/2024
Youth clubs –
Data collection

Clerk: Question 955. The Hon. G Origo.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Madam Speaker: Next question.

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

Clerk: Question 956. The Hon. G Origo.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

3295 Next question.

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

Clerk: Question 957. The Hon. G Origo.

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

Minister for Equality, Employment, Culture and Tourism (Hon. C P Santos): Madam Speaker, Gibraltar Cultural Services, on behalf of the Ministry of Culture, are responsible for organising and producing the Christmas Fair. The attractions are provided by Hermanos Guerrero Toledo, who have been providing this service for over 30 years under successive administrations. The Christmas Fair attractions come at no cost to Government, as costs, including insurance, are met by the fair operator.
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3310 **Hon. G Origo:** Madam Speaker, could the Minister please provide, if he has them, more details of the arrangements with the Hermanos Guerrero, which he has just given across the floor of the House? In looking at the Christmas Fair attractions, I came across a tender process application that was issued by the Government with respect to the Christmas stalls, and rightly, as he put it,
3315 the fair attractions, which is a ride, according to a statement, will come at no cost to Government because the costs, the insurance and the premiums were being footed by fair stallholders. I want to understand how the arrangements between Government and the fair attractions are operating, because it seems to be that the fair stallholders are entering into a tender process, perhaps even

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

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

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

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

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

Madam Speaker: Next question.

Q958/2024

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Madam Speaker: Next question.

Q959/2024

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

Clerk: Question 959. The Hon. G Origo.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Madam Speaker: Next question.

Q960/2024

**World Travel Market visit –
Details**

Clerk: Question 960. The Hon. G Origo.

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

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

3455 **Clerk:** Answer, the Hon. the Minister for Employment, Equality, Culture and Tourism.

3460 **Minister for Equality, Employment, Culture and Tourism (Hon. C P Santos):** Madam Speaker, I am very grateful to the hon. Member for this question. As a proud Gibraltarian, nothing gives me more satisfaction than being able to promote my country abroad, and this is the perfect platform to share all the work that takes place at the World Travel Market.

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

3465 The total cost of the trip was as follows: air travel, £2,626.79; accommodation, £2,161.97; transport, £192.18; entertainment and food, £692.59.

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

3470 The CEO of the Gibraltar Tourist Board, the UK Head of Media and Marketing and the GTB Marketing Executive met with the following: TTG Media, Travel Bulletin, CAA Group, Budget Traveller, Inspire My Holiday, Sailawaze/Family Traveller, Rough Guides, Adventurize, Media Partnerships, Sports Events, Acetrip – MyGibraltar.co.uk, Business Traveller Magazine, Besser Urlauben und Holiday Pirates.

3475 The team was also introduced to influencers and bloggers, which I will now list: Our Bucket List trips, The nomads you know, Adventures Of Alice, Special Duo Explorers, Rel Repro Ltd, Wander.Licious, London Ultimate Guide, Shine with Shauna, El Burrito Monster, Trending Travel, Pro Deep Travel, Travel Connoisseur, Those Travel Guys, Dream Beach Media, Toven Trip and Serena Palladino.

3480 On his own, the CEO of the Tourist Board met with IAG, Seven Dragons and Travel Link.

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

3485 The trip provided a networking platform with a variety of stakeholders from travel agencies to tourism board, hotels, airlines, technology providers and destination marketers, in order to expand our networking connections so we can build on existing partners and so we can find new partners to work with.

3490 A broadcast interview was arranged with OTT, an online travel agent training platform with over 280,000 registered travel professionals that use its e-learning services. They will produce a video, which will be broadcast directly to all the agents on the platform, where I speak about everything Gibraltar has to offer. This was a great opportunity to directly address a wide section of the UK travel agent market.

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

3495 The World Travel Market was from 5th to 7th November, three days in total. I attended on 5th November and in one day attended eight meetings. The GTB team attended from 5th to 7th November and in three days attended 17 meetings as well as attending an event and meeting influencers and bloggers.

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

3500 **Hon. G Origo:** Madam Speaker, I am very grateful to the Minister for his very comprehensive and long answer; I believe he has responded to most of the points.

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

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

A Member: Hear, hear.

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

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

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

Adjournment

Clerk: The Hon. the Deputy chief Minister.

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

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

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

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

The House adjourned at 7.00 p.m.