



PROCEEDINGS OF THE GIBRALTAR PARLIAMENT

MORNING SESSION: 11.01 a.m. – 12.36 p.m.

Gibraltar, Friday, 4th July 2025

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The Gibraltar Parliament

The Parliament met at 11.01 a.m.

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

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

Appropriation Bill 2025 — Second Reading — Debate continued

Clerk: Meeting of Parliament, Friday the 4th of July 2025.

Madam Speaker: Yes, the Hon. Leslie Bruzon.

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Minister for Industrial Relations, Civil Contingencies and Sport (Hon. L M Bruzon): Thank you, Madam Speaker. As I rise to deliver my second Budget address to this House, I do so with the same honour, humility and purpose that accompanied me last year. If anything, that sense of duty has only deepened with time.

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Public life, Madam Speaker, is not a path we walk alone. It is one shared with our families, our partners, our children. Those who often bear the weight of our responsibilities without ever stepping into this Chamber. To them, I again offer them my deepest gratitude.

Much has changed, Madam Speaker, since the October Election of 2023. A date that marked the beginning of a new chapter, not only for me personally, but for all of us Elected to serve.

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Over the past year, I have had the immense honour of serving as Minister for Sports, Industrial Relations, Civil Contingencies and the Fire Service. I have had the chance to meet inspiring individuals, to listen closely and to try to act meaningfully. Whether on home ground or representing Gibraltar abroad, the sense of pride in our people and our potential has never left me.

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Today, Madam Speaker, I rise not just to speak of numbers and figures, but to reflect on progress, to acknowledge the challenges still ahead, and to reaffirm my commitment to the community that placed its trust in me. This Budget is a continuation of our vision, one that puts people at the centre of everything we do. Honestly, I will commence with my responsibility as Minister for Sports and Leisure.

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As is the norm in a dynamic environment like sports and leisure, much has happened in the last twelve months, with a lot more to come. However, I must start by expressing my delight at the extraordinary change at the Europa Sports Complex (ESC). As is well documented, several management arrangements have been considered for this facility.

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However, as from October 2024, and as I confirmed in answer to questions in this Parliament, the Gibraltar Sports and Leisure Authority, the GSLA, were tasked with the management of the internal areas of the ESC, with the Gibraltar Football Association, the GFA, responsible for the outdoor areas and adjacent amenities. I am delighted to report that the new arrangements are working very well, and the trust placed in both the GSLA and the GFA has not been misguided.

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In terms of the outdoor areas, the GFA has already invested over £1.2 million and is in the process of investing another £1.2 million in additional facilities, with more investment coming. This has not only included a replacement of the playing surface to UEFA, FIFA and World Rugby

standards, but also an upgrade to floodlighting, as well as repairs and continued maintenance to changing rooms, offices etc. This has been at no cost to the taxpayer and the facility continues to be used by the Gibraltar Rugby Football Union, the Gibraltar Cricket Association and the community at large. The upgrades have also meant that the GFA were able to host European club qualifiers, Senior Men's Nations League and the first ever participation of the Women's Nations League – an important milestone for the Women's game on the Rock.

More upgrades are currently being undertaken, which will hopefully mean that other competitions may be hosted locally. I am extremely proud of the GSLA team who did not hesitate when given the opportunity to manage the complex. The turnaround in the first 12 months was very clear for all to see.

The appointment of three centre managers from the internal ranks of the GSLA, as well as the absorption of six sports operatives on TUPE transfer, has meant that there is now a stable, solid and effective management and shift structure at the ESC, which is proving its worth in the day-to-day running of the complex. The GSLA has not only tackled areas of concern but has also revamped and commercialised the fitness gym. Membership packages were designed, approved and made available to the general public.

The uptake was far greater than expected, with the number of active paying members currently standing at 610, which translates to £82,000 of revenue in only half a year of active operation. Additionally, the hire of other areas has meant that the total revenue for the ESC in Financial Year 2024/2025 stands at £93,150.93. Looking forward, the revenue forecast for Financial Year 2025/2026 is close to £200,000.

Aside from the continued gym revenue, the GSLA has also regularised the areas held by associations as well as commercial areas. The tenant on the first-floor kitchen continues to pay rent and utilities, and after an expression of interest process held under the auspices of Land Property Services, the ground floor cafeteria is now also paying rent, rates and utilities. The change in management at the ESC has meant that the facility has now become available for large-scale events in a properly regulated manner.

The highly successful 'Audience with David Walliams' is a prime example of this. Also, the two recent boxing events highlight the versatility of the facility. It would be improper to mention the last boxing event without referring to the historic events of the night.

It was the professional debut of two local fighters, namely Chris and Evan Montegriffo, with Tyrone Buttigieg finally having his homecoming bounce. All three fighters were successful in what was an enthralling evening of boxing. His Majesty's Government of Gibraltar continues with its policy on event-led and sports-led tourism, and the events at the ESC are a prime example of this.

Only last weekend, we hosted the Pool Association's Festival of Pool, the Gibraltar Squash Open and the Gibraltar Rugby Sevens. The GSLA continues to support events from both a financial and logistical perspective, while Gibraltar continues to hold an excellent reputation with international partners. The list of suitors continues to grow, with requests received constantly.

The development value of these events to local associations is a major factor in deciding whether to host them locally or not. In 2024/2025, the following international events were hosted in Gibraltar. The Squash International Open, Gibraltar Target Shooting Association Open Championships, the JDC World Darts Championships and associated events - This contract has now been extended for another three years. City Mountain Bike Eliminator Race, - the contract has been extended for another year. International Backgammon Tournament, Harley-Davidson Motorbike Rally, FIBA Europe Under-16 Women's Euro Basket C Division, Euro Hockey Club Challenge 2, Eagles Hockey Club, Gibraltar Regatta, Gibraltar Rugby Sevens, Eurafrika Trade.

This list is not exhaustive, but captures some of the major events, with the total financial contribution to these being £209,834.23. If we consider that this contribution accounts for over 4,200 bed nights, then it is clear to see that continued investment in this field is beneficial to the Gibraltar economy. In this respect, I am also glad to announce that the Gibraltar Badminton Association has managed to secure the hosting of the Small States of Europe Championships in 2030. It is an exciting landmark for Gibraltar badminton and shows forward planning.

We cannot simply sit back and let others grasp such excellent opportunities. Madam Speaker, one cannot mention the hosting of events in Gibraltar without making special mention to the Netball World Youth Cup to be held in September this year. Preparations for what will be Gibraltar's highest calibre event ever are progressing extremely well, with both the Executive Committee and Local Organising Committee working very hard.

My personal thanks goes to all of them. It was a pleasure to receive the World Cup trophy from the official party, led by GNA, Gibraltar Netball Association President, Mrs Moira Gomez. It was also an honour to be an integral part of the World Cup draw and welcome World Netball President Dame Liz Nicholl last November.

Dame Liz was extremely impressed with the progress of preparations and in particular the extended support from Government at all levels, something which she has not seen at other similar events. I am truly excited to welcome the 19 countries that are participants and accompanying family members to Gibraltar for an event that will no doubt prove to be a great success and will at the same time leave behind a legacy of empowerment and inclusivity that will resonate for years to come. Madam Speaker, aside from the aforementioned the World Cup will also leave behind infrastructure investments that will continue to be enjoyed by the local sporting fraternity beyond September 2025.

A wooden sprung floor has been purchased for use at the European Sports Complex for the event and it will later be laid at the Tercentenary Sports Hall, fulfilling a manifesto commitment. Madam Speaker, I would like to take this opportunity, like I have done many times before, to thank the army of local volunteers who run the 51 registered sporting associations. These individuals give up an immense amount of their personal time to be involved as coaches, administrators, Committee Members and in other roles, so that local sports can function and flourish. Their contributions are often forgotten, but the reality is that without them there would be no sports on the rock.

Madam Speaker, aside from running local activities, many of these entities are full members of their respective international governing bodies. This is not just a tick-box exercise, as being active members not only involves participation at international competitions, but also attendance at annual general meetings and conferences.

We advocate that all those who are full or affiliate members of their international governing bodies need to be active within their international frameworks. Given that we encourage this, it stands to reason that we support associations on many levels, not least financially. To this end, the financial support received in the last financial year by sports associations is £338,574.

This represents support offered to registered associations for participation at international events, sports development, attendance at AGMs and conferences and minor improvements to facilities. Applications were received and painstakingly scrutinised by the Gibraltar Sports Advisory Council, GSAC. I would like to take this opportunity to thank those voluntary members of GSAC who work very hard for very little recognition.

In my second year as Chair of GSAC, I am still taken aback by the magnitude of what happens behind the scenes. The process ensures that associations themselves vote for experienced and knowledgeable members of the community to safeguard their interests. Given the dynamic nature of sport, the criteria and policies are constantly under review.

Madam Speaker, some of the policies that GSAC review involve the safeguarding of children. This subject rightly continues to gain more prominence as lessons are learnt, and legislation and Government policies are updated. Awareness and training are key factors in the fight to protect our most vulnerable.

Self-awareness is also critical, as we may come across practises that may have been accepted years ago but are no longer tolerated in modern day sports. During the last year, the GSLA has had to deal with four separate instances of a safeguarding nature, with one of them still ongoing. I am glad to report that most of these have resulted in support for local volunteers with positive outcomes, being a testament of the training that is currently being undertaken.

140 The GSLA Sports Development, Training and Inclusion Unit has over the course of the last year delivered safeguarding training to 375 individuals, bringing the total figure on the database to over 1,300. This means that children and young adults can continue to thrive in a safe environment. Madam Speaker, it would not be right for the GSLA to expect registered associations to meet safeguarding criteria and not have the same requirements for their own staff.

145 All GSLA staff complete safeguarding training, which all forms part of the integral summer sports and stay-in-play induction programmes. Those selected undergo an intensive period of preparation that ensures that when parents register and leave their children every morning between July and August, they can be confident that those looking after their children meet the highest standards of safeguarding.

150 Madam Speaker, Summer 2024 saw a total of 868 children registered for the sports programme, with 42 of them registered on stay-in-play. This was made possible by the recruitment of 61 temporary leaders. Additionally, Madam Speaker, the GSLA partnered with PossAbilities to provide extra support for those children who wished to participate in the sports training programme but needed extra help. This was only first available last summer and will be available for this summer and future years, thus offering more children greater access and opportunities.

Both programmes also counted on the support of an additional 31 volunteers, 21 Level 1 and 10 Level 2 qualification holders, thanks to whom we are able to grow year on year. The Lathbury Sports Complex was first used for the programme last year and it proved a very welcome addition. 160 This summer, it will be the turn of the European Sports Complex to be added to the list of facilities available for the delivery of daily sessions.

This year, we have new sports on offer, such as pickleball, chess and squash. Last year, the family fun evenings proved to be a great success again. There was an average attendance of 90 people per night, with the highest attendance being 125.

165 This initiative was first piloted a few years back and has gone from strength to strength and we are looking to expand it even further this summer. Madam Speaker, as mentioned, the Stay and Play programme attracted record numbers with 42 children registered. The programme caters for children with learning disabilities and they are engaged through the delivery of innovative and detailed sessions that consider their individual needs.

170 Communication with parents, guardians and carers is key and this continued last year via an interactive app that provided instant two-way communication so that important information was available to both parents, guardians and carers and leaders alike. The challenge for those delivering both the summer sports and Stay and Play programmes continues to be to adapting to new ideas and practises. They do this year on year and ultimately continue to raise the bar in what they deliver. The numbers speak for themselves.

175 During these summer months, those on the summer programmes as well as hundreds of members of our community enjoy both the bathing pavilion and the Europa Pool, colloquially known as the Nuffield Pool. Last summer saw maintenance and upgrades to both facilities.

180 The overall cost of maintenance was as follows: Europa Pool, £58,697.30; and the GSLA Bathing Pavilion, £162,326.78. These figures account for chemicals, cleaning, the services of professional divers and other maintenance matters that are required before, during and after the summer bathing season. While the summer season lasts approximately 14 weeks, these areas need to be looked after all year round.

185 Both facilities are fully accessible and cater for those members of our community with mobility issues. Moving on to playgrounds. In the last financial year, the maintenance programme as undertaken by the GJBS crew in conjunction with the GSLA team has continued and evolved.

Maintenance is as proactive as possible, and when items do become damaged, reaction times for repairs have decreased significantly. Our teams cannot be everywhere, so I am happy to report that there has been increased public engagement in terms of the reporting of items that require attention. Unfortunately, and as I have mentioned before on many occasions, vandalism is 190 commonplace.

The actions of a few continue to spoil enjoyment for the majority, and I once again implore those responsible to stop these practises and look after the areas that we provide for them with public funds. The total cost of repairs and maintenance for the last financial year was £178,032.39.

195 This year, we will see some new areas added and significant works undertaken in others. Madam Speaker from a personal perspective and as a sports enthusiast myself, travelling to events to watch Gibraltarians represent us fills me with great pride.

I very much look forward to attending the Island Games in Albany in a few days' time, my first Island Games as Minister for Sport. Aside from supporting our athletes, I will continue to foster
200 and strengthen relationships with members of the International Island Games Association. It is extremely important that we utilise these networking opportunities and promote Gibraltar as a sporting destination.

This is exactly what I did at the 11th Commonwealth Sports Ministers' Meeting held in Paris on 25 July last year. The theme was Building Inclusive and Resilient Societies through Sport and was
205 hosted by the Canadian Government, represented by the Minister for Sport and Physical Activity, the Hon. Carla Qualtrough. Accompanied by the GSLA's CEO, Reagan Lima, I met with colleagues from the Commonwealth and discussed matters of mutual interest in relation to sport, physical activity and other related issues, some of which I have since pursued with my colleague, the Minister for Health, the Hon. Gemma Arias Vazquez.

210 I also had the pleasure of making contact with Mr Chris Jenkins, President of the Commonwealth Games Federation. Among other things, we discussed the future of the Commonwealth Games. To this end, we are keeping a close eye on the Youth Commonwealth Games and are monitoring progress on their future hosting possibilities.

During the course of the year, I also had the opportunity to travel to Siestra in Turin, Italy, to
215 witness greatness in the form of our Special Olympic athletes. The Games were a humbling experience. Marching out with the team at the opening ceremony was an experience I will never forget.

I was also immensely proud to be in attendance for the arrival of the Flame of Hope, escorted by members of the law enforcement torch run, runners which included Gibraltar Fire and Rescue
220 Service's leading firefighter, Matt Coulthard. Whilst in Turin, I also attended the Global Coalition for Inclusion. Gibraltar is one of the original signatories to the Coalition, and I confirmed our commitment to Dr Tim Shriver, Chairman of Special Olympics International, David Evangelista, President and Managing Director of Special Olympics Europe, and Mary Davies, CEO of Special Olympics International.

225 It is important for the international community to see that Gibraltar is an active member of international bodies and initiatives. Finally, and aside from the record medal haul, which is the result of a lot of hard work by coaches and a team led by Annie Risso, I would like to send my warm regards to our athletes, Ryan, Merlin, Sally-Anne, Francis and Samuel. They are true ambassadors and we should all be very proud of them.

230 Madam Speaker, I will end my contribution on Sports and Leisure by thanking members of the GSLA team at all levels. I see first-hand the work that goes on behind the scenes, and I can honestly say that a lot more goes on than they are often given credit for. Morale continues to be high, and this was very evident when we undertook negotiations relating to a long-standing issue affecting a cross-section of the department.

235 Negotiations and meetings held in such an atmosphere are very useful and helpful for all. Again, my thanks to all the GSLA for their continued hard work. They are an incredible team and sharing moments with them, such as the round-the-rock swim this past weekend for the 5 on 5 charity, serves to strengthen bonds.

One last minute addition, Madam Speaker, is to mention the resurfacing of the pitch at
240 Lathbury that started earlier this week. I wasn't going to mention it, but seeing that the work is coming this week, I will refer to it quickly. Madam Speaker, I now turn to my responsibility with the King's Bastion Leisure Centre (KBLC).

The performance of the centre in the last year was positive, despite a slight dip in income of approximately 1% over the previous year. However, this needs to be viewed in the context of an exceptional 2023, which saw a 7% increase in revenue. A significant share of revenue of around one-third was generated by the most popular attraction, which is still the bowling lanes.

The fitness gym and amusement arcade also remain key drivers of footfall and income. This year, several arcade machines were replaced, keeping the total at 63 units and offering a wide array of entertainment options for younger visitors. Other income streams include the boulder park, the popular Cannonball Store and room rentals.

The boulder park benefited from two complete route resets, carried out by professional route resettlers from the UK. These updates ensure the climbing experience remains fresh, challenging and engaging. Seasonal attractions like Santa's Grotto and the VR sleigh ride continue to delight visitors of all ages. Re-affirming their place as firm favourites in our annual calendar.

As in previous years, the management team at KBLC continues to set ambitious targets, aimed at increasing revenue while reducing operating costs. Their commitment to efficiency ensures the centre remains a vibrant and sustainable community hub.

Looking ahead, exciting projects are in the pipeline, which, if successful, will significantly transform the Leisure Centre. Among the key improvements this year were the full recommissioning of the fire alarm system and the installation of new air-conditioning units at the fitness gym. We also replaced all treadmills in the gym, several pool tables in the arcade and equipment section in the toddler's play area, all with modern alternatives.

Importantly, equipment still in good working order was donated to Ocean Views, HM Prison, Bruce's Farm and a local children's charity. As we look to the future, the focus remains on further enhancing the facilities and visitor experience.

The success of KBLC is a shared achievement, and it is the enthusiasm and support of the community that continues to drive them forward. In closing, I extend my heartfelt thanks to the staff, the management team and also to the community for their continued dedication and support.

Moving on to my responsibility for the Gibraltar Fire and Rescue Service (GFRS). This has been a year of significant progress for the GFRS in a number of respects.

It is true that Gibraltar continues to grow, and with that growth comes new challenges for staff, whether related to fire prevention and protection or to operational response. HMGOG recognises those challenges and is supportive of efforts to adapt and grow in parallel, but also in a manner which is sensible and which makes financial sense. The GFRS is an organisation that prides itself on setting high standards of performance in the service that they provide to our community.

Our aim is to continue to work closely with the GFRS to improve their resources. With the continuous development and review of fire safety standards across the globe, particularly in the UK, and continued innovative fire engineering solutions, the GFRS fire safety team is constantly challenged and continues to do a magnificent job in the anticipation of risks. Recent events in the UK are a clear demonstration that risk is at our very doorstep and complacency will be our worst enemy.

Aside from all the challenges that we face, it is important that excellence remains the top priority through continued teamwork between the GFRS, the Ministry and all HMGOG departments, in our attempts to develop and achieve short- and long-term goals. The GFRS depends fully on support from the leaders to ensure that fire officers have the tools necessary to achieve optimal standards in every aspect of the service, and I believe that we have gained positive ground in this respect. I have listed some items for ease of reference.

Aerial Platform - after obtaining the support from HMGOG, the GFRS went out to tender for the purchase of this specialised fire appliance. Securing funding approval of £1.3 million cabinet. Not only will this enhance response capabilities to high-rise incidents, but it is an incredibly versatile piece of equipment that enhances capabilities for a more varied approach to other incident types.

It is expected that an order will be placed within the next few weeks and delivery estimated for the third or fourth quarter of 2026.

300 BA Overhaul - after conducting a review of the most important piece of equipment, the suppliers were engaged for a complete overhaul of the breathing apparatus. Funding was approved and the process was initiated. We are now waiting for the delivery of five new BA sets with the latest technology to contribute towards the safety and well-being of the frontline crews. This exercise comes at a significant cost of approximately £80,000 but is an investment in both the safety of our firefighters and in the safety of our community.

305 Madam Speaker, regarding complement, Senior Management continues to review GFRS resources in alignment with UK National Operational Guidelines and Gibraltar's risk elements. Whilst we must be ambitious in our approach to this matter, it is also important that we are sensible and realistic. A detailed proposal is expected to be submitted to HMGOG by the end of this year, with a view to determine requirements.

310 Database - the GFRS continues to work with Piranha Designs in liaison with the Government's own IT department. They are now in Phase 4 of this project, and it is proving a huge success. More specifically, this phase features bespoke performance management, computer-aided dispatch and operational support systems, as well as incident and asset management. This technology is making the GFRS more effective in daily working practises, and they are becoming even more efficient as an organisation. The software is currently being tested for potential introduction into the wider Civil Service.

315 Restructure - the GFRS is in the process of completing the first phase of the longer-term restructure recently approved by Government. Firstly, the dedicated training team has been established, and while still in its embryonic stages, it is already proving to be a success. Secondly, the Fire Safety Department has now been restructured, and they are also looking to improve this capability in parallel with Gibraltar's ongoing growth and development. Thirdly, the current restructure has provided promotion opportunities, and they are currently in the final phase of the selection process for five leading firefighter posts.

320 The Fire Safety Department - one of the fire safety officers is due to retire in August and has already left. Therefore, considering the vast number of building applications to be processed, the service is doing everything in its power to maintain full functionality. They are in the process of re-establishing the complement to its normal state. However, there will inevitably be a period of time while newly appointed individuals undergo the necessary extensive training. The GFRS continues to work extremely hard in liaison with Building Control to ensure that new buildings comply with standards of fire safety. Now more than ever, it is important to continue to ensure that buildings provide assistance to our frontline crews, given the challenges that incidents in high-rise buildings can pose for both fire crews and residents. The introduction of a fire safety consultation fee is looking imminent, and this will improve departmental revenue by approximately £70,000 a year. Also still under review with the Government Law Offices are the petroleum licence fees.

335 Firefighter retirements - there may be around three retirements, senior and junior ranks, during the financial year 2025/2026, and this will, as usual, lead to new recruitment. The GFRS considers that this should be a seamless process, given that we currently have three shortlisted candidates. The retirements will also inevitably create promotion opportunities for those hoping to develop their careers within the GFRS.

340 Incident course and qualification - the GFRS continues to work closely with its counterparts in the UK Fire and Rescue Service. The recently introduced Promotion Qualifications model brought with it the Incident Command Level 1 development course that provided delegates with the required skill set to carry out acting-up duties to the rank of leading firefighter. This course has proved to be a success and has presented opportunities for a wider pool of interested officers.

345 The GFRS City Management continues to review the current legal framework to align it with the roles and responsibilities of a modern day Fire and Rescue Service. The department will be consulting the Gibraltar law offices, as well as subject matter experts, for advice.

With regards to Mental Health, the departure of the counsellor, former firefighter Alfred Rovegno, the head of the Welfare Division, Officer Adrian McComb, continues to work hard with the GFRS wellbeing champions to ensure that they maintain the essential support mechanisms with clear policies and guidance for the staff. Recent incidents have put this system to the test and it is proving to be effective.

The GFRS is hoping to engage with the second phase of the review carried out late last year by an independent former HM Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire and Rescue Services Inspector, Mr Phil Cox. This will entail carrying out a strategic assessment of risk that will feed the next Community Risk Management Plan (CRMP). This exercise will lead to a steer with clear objectives that will contribute towards a more structured approach to the service. In essence, this will become the guide for how they will conduct operations for the next five years.

With regards to staff vehicles, the two 17-year-old support vehicles have now been replaced with two new electric vehicles in support of HMGOG green agenda.

With training, HMGOG are working with both fire services to provide the facility that will serve to provide our firefighters with the minimum expected training. The aim is to enhance the existing facilities.

The GFRS continues to form a vital part of Gibraltar's ongoing development as a modern and, more importantly, safe community. With significant involvement in major projects, public events and residential developments. The aim of their involvement in these projects is not only to familiarise themselves with potential risks, but also to ensure that new builds comply with fire protection and safeguarding standards, aimed at saving lives and assisting fire services operations.

Finally, the GFRS, in partnership with HMGOG, will continue to be fully committed to working effortlessly in fire prevention, protection and the maintenance of an effective response to a wide range of operational incidents, with one overarching aim – to safeguard our community.

The GFRS is fully committed to support frontline firefighters who are exposed to risk by ensuring that they are provided with the tools necessary to perform effectively in the fire ground and to maintain their skills at the highest possible level.

I move on to the Airport Fire and Rescue Service (AFRS). During the past financial year, the AFRS has experienced an intense period of activity, marked by staff training, organisational revalidation and external assurance reviews. As part of its continuous personal development and recertification programme, numerous firefighters and officers completed a variety of courses to either recertify or attain new qualifications across several key disciplines.

Three AFRS station officers undertook the Multi-Agency Goals Incident Command course. Additionally, Station Officers attended several senior airport managers' courses, which included modules focused on operations and emergency planning.

Other courses attended by AFRS personnel included the Aviation Supervisor course, Breathing Apparatus Instructor, VA Care Maintenance, a Recruit Basic course and an Aviation Firefighter Bridging course.

As active members of the UK Airport Fire Officers' Association, AFRS representatives participated in their annual conference and also attended the Hazardous Materials (HAZMAT) Conference.

This exposure to industry-specific events provided valuable networking opportunities, which, when coupled with continuous training, ensured that staff remained well-prepared and suitably qualified, in line with AFRS' structured approach to career progression and succession planning. The entire AFRS team participated in a two-week operational revalidation programme, conducted locally with instructors flown in from the UK. This approach was not only highly successful but is also significantly more cost-effective than sending all the personnel abroad to achieve this four-year revalidation.

In collaboration with the Office of Civil Contingencies and the Royal Air Force, AFRS also led on the planning and delivery of its first multi-agency night-time air emergency exercise. This complex scenario incorporated a maritime response element and was closely observed by inspectors from the Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) and a Defence Fire Safety Regulator (DFSR) with additional

remote oversight by a representative from the Air Accident Investigation Branch. Feedback on the exercise was overwhelmingly positive, with inspectors commending the professionalism in planning, coordination and response. As with all such exercises, important lessons were identified and noted to inform future improvements.

Following this, the CAA and DFRS conducted a joint audit of AFRS operations, reviewing all aspects of its emergency response capabilities, administrative processes and record-keeping systems. This rigorous inspection resulted in a favourable report with no major findings, offering strong assurances that the AFRS is performing and delivering a service operating in compliance with aviation industry regulations and standards.

On the infrastructure front, AFRS continues to implement phased refurbishment works aimed at enhancing the working and logistical environment of the fire station. A major focus will be the development of improved facilities for the handling and decontamination of protective clothing and equipment. Once completed, this facility will feature designated clean and dirty zones, fully separated from the living quarters.

Additionally, as explained previously, there are plans to expand the fire training facilities, allowing for certain types of specialist and mandated training to be delivered locally. This initiative is expected to result in cost savings and operational efficiencies by reducing the need for overseas training. A purpose-built training facility will also help enhance the ability of the services to respond to MOD assets in addition to local emergencies.

The AFRS places the highest priority on the health and safety and welfare of the personnel, viewing it as a fundamental duty of care and central to its response model. Despite its small size and the considerable external scrutiny it faces, AFRS continues to perform effectively as a lean, dynamic and versatile unit. It remains firmly committed to supporting the Gibraltar Fire and Rescue Service whenever required and actively promotes inter-working through close and dynamic collaboration with partner agencies at all levels.

Organisational and personal development remains central to the AFRS's service delivery. The team continually strives to ensure that its firefighters are fully equipped, both in skills and resources, to meet the complex and ever-changing challenges of the critical role within Gibraltar.

I now move on to my responsibilities as Minister for Civil Contingencies. The work undertaken by the Office of Civil Contingencies, operating under the strategic direction of the Gibraltar Contingency Council, plays a significant role in ensuring that Gibraltar continues to remain ready to respond to the full spectrum of emergencies and threats we may face as a community. Worldwide regional events over the last 12 months have further shown the unpredictability and vulnerability of the world that we live in. Conflict continues to rage in Europe, the Middle East and in other parts of the world.

The use of new technologies, such as drones for offensive purposes, demonstrates the need to remain alert to the dangers that these bring. In terms of the threat from cyber, this is becoming more diverse and dramatic. Hostile nation states continue to weaponise their cyber capabilities. China, Russia, Iran and North Korea are waging acts of sabotage, and cyber criminals remain active in this field, with ransomware remaining a growing threat. The crowd-strike IT outage and the catastrophic power outage in Spain and Portugal remind us of the huge impacts of technology failure on critical services.

The effects of climate change are also becoming more visible. The devastating floods in Valencia and the destructive wildfires around the world show that these types of events are suddenly becoming more common. We must therefore continue to anticipate and understand how these risks may affect us in the future, so that we can be best prepared to respond to them.

At the core of our national resilience lies the Gibraltar National Risk Assessment (GNSRA). A living document owned by the Gibraltar Contingency Council and maintained by the Office of Civil Contingencies, it provides an evidence-based assessment of key risks, ranging from natural disasters and public health emergencies to malicious threats, including terrorism and cyber-attacks. The GNSRA underpins the design of all contingency plans and informs strategic

investment in capability development. This is especially important as risks are ever-changing, and we must therefore continue to keep up with the fast-moving threats.

As we know, the last five years have significantly tested us. Gibraltar has had to grapple with emergencies such as the COVID-19 pandemic, the OS35 collision and disruption to our potable
455 water supplies. In the last year alone, our emergency services and other responding agencies have had to respond to several notable incidents, such as a fire in the North Mole in July, a residential block fire at Mid-Harbours, drone incursions into controlled airspace and a major fire in a commercial premises at Devil's Tower Road.

Each of these incidents have served to rigorously test our emergency management framework
460 and have validated the regular multi-agency training and exercises that are held throughout the year, and the utility of our integrated response protocols.

Our portfolio of civil contingency plans has been significantly enhanced and exercised over the past year. Key documents include: the Updater Major Incident Response Plan, which provides a scalable framework for multi-agency command, control and coordination; The Mass Casualty
465 Incident Plan, which outlines triage and search procedures within the constraints of a single hospital jurisdiction; Site-specific emergency response plans have also been reviewed and enhanced for key critical national infrastructure assets, including the airport, energy terminal, operational berths for nuclear-powered submarines and the Upper Rock Nature Reserve; The evolving Chemical, Biological, Radiological and Nuclear (CBRN) Response Framework, developed
470 with the support of the National CBRN Centre of the UK's National Terrorism Policing Training, continues. In terms of capability development, the Government has made significant investment in its detection, identification and monitoring capability for chemical agents, as well as procuring CBRN next-generation personal protective equipment for specialist police responders.

Madam Speaker, training and exercising remain pillars of our resilience. Over the past four
475 months, the Office of Civil Contingencies has planned, led and delivered a large number of multi-agency training events, courses and exercises at the strategic, tactical and operational levels of command, including marauding terrorist attacks and armed response deployments, structural collapse of buildings and urban search and rescue, wildfires in the Upper Rock Nature Reserve, air crash response at Gibraltar International Airport, and counter and crewed aerial systems,
480 workshops to enhance threat detection and response protocols.

The Joint Emergency Services Interoperability Programme (JESIP), which we have fully adopted from the UK, continues to be rolled out by this Office of Civil Contingencies to all the emergency services and all other responding agencies. It is embedded into our national doctrine and ensures that all responders, regardless of the cloth they wear, speak the same operational language and
485 work effectively and efficiently together to save lives and prevent further harm and it works because we train together, rehearse together and, when necessary, we respond together.

At the strategic command level, the Office of Civil Contingencies, together with the Royal Gibraltar Police, also facilitated one of the UK's College of Policing flagship command courses. The Multi-Agency Gold Incident Command (MAGIC) Course was delivered to a number of our strategic
490 commanders across the emergency services and responding partners, including the military.

The importance of preparedness and training of commanders and responders has certainly been a common theme in recent UK enquiries, such as the Manchester Arena attack and Grenfell Tower fire. While these tragic events have taken place outside of Gibraltar, its lessons and recommendations are widely applicable to every community and, for this reason, we must
495 consider them and act accordingly.

From a technological standpoint, our Geographic Information System (GIS) incident management platform, continues to be enhanced to enable dynamic mapping and command level visibility during live incidents.

This tool ensures a structured operational picture across all stakeholders. Our remit also
500 extends to public safety at major events, and we have sadly seen how things can very quickly go horribly wrong, as was unfortunately witnessed in Liverpool, where a car drove into a crowd of people. Through the events Safety Advisory Group (SAG) mechanism, we engage with organisers,

emergency services and other partners to assist and mitigate risks associated with public gatherings, ensuring that safety protocols align with public safety standards.

505 Looking ahead, we have a further programme of major live exercises, including the Triannual Exercise Rocket Vision, which is a nuclear emergency response exercise and further CBRN and air accident training. These efforts ensure that we are not only prepared to respond but recover swiftly and effectively. On the subject of contingency planning for an EU-UK Treaty non-negotiated outcome, NNO, the Office of Civil Contingencies has played a key role in support of the Deputy
510 Chief Minister, who leads the Brexit Strategic Group.

The group works closely with FCDO, MOD and other UK departments, and aims to mitigate the potential impacts of an NNO, as well as manage the impacts of the introduction of an EU Entry Exit System. In conclusion, Gibraltar's resilience is not accidental. It is built on deliberate, coordinated and sustained efforts across Government, emergency services and the wider
515 community, led by the Civil Contingencies Coordinator, Mr Ivor Lopez.

The past year has continued to test us, but it has also proven our capacity and the pressure to collaborate across agencies, and most importantly, to protect our community. I take this opportunity to commend the entire team at the Office of Civil Contingencies, our uniformed services and all frontline responders for their continued service and dedication to the safety of
520 our community.

Madam Speaker, I will now move to my final portfolio, which is Industrial Relations. I have the privilege of leading the Industrial Relations Team, which is an area that is both wide-ranging and complex, involving many parts of our public service and several important relationships. It requires careful thought, constant communication and a balanced approach, all of which I remain fully
525 committed to.

Over the past year, the Government has made solid progress in resolving several long-standing industrial issues. These matters have been waiting for attention for some time, and it was clearly in the public interest that they were brought to a close. We have also made important changes to legislation that supports workers' rights, including the recently announced updates to the TUPE
530 Regulations, which aim to give employees more protection when changes happen at their workplace. Many departments and organisations, including the Training Centre, Gibraltar Air Terminal Ltd and Procurement have had their terms and conditions or working practises updated. These improvements were made to better meet the needs of both the public and the staff, while always keeping value for money in mind. This work is ongoing, and we have more changes being
535 developed across other areas of the public service.

Throughout this process, the Government has continued to work closely with the unions. We have held regular meetings, listened carefully to the concerns they raised, and looked for fair solutions. While we don't always agree on everything, our conversations have always been respectful and constructive, and that is how we will continue to work.
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Looking to the year ahead, our commitment to partnership remains strong. No matter what challenges may come our way, we will always continue to speak with Unions openly and honestly to find the best way forward together. Good relationships are vital to build a better public service, and the Government believes that by working together, we can make real improvements for everyone.
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I want to take this opportunity to thank the Unions, the members, and indeed the entire public service, as well as the team at Industrial Relations, Fred, Pablo, Lynn and James, for their hard work, dedication and continued effort to provide public services. Their role is a key part of the progress we have made, and we look forward to continuing this important work in the months ahead.
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In conclusion, as I draw this Budget Address to a close, I do so with a renewed sense of responsibility, clarity and conviction.

It is easy in a wave of figures, forecasts and public commitments and comments to lose sight of what truly anchors our work. Behind every policy, every line, every item, every decision are

people, and I am deeply grateful to the people who stand alongside me in this endeavour. The staff across every department that I am privileged to lead on or work with, thank you.

Your quiet commitment powers the progress we often take for granted. To you, Madam Speaker, and to all Parliamentary staff, thank you for the patience and professionalism that keep this House moving. But if I may, I must also pause again to thank the core team, Alison, Dylan, James, sorry, Alison, Dylan, Jayden, Sinead and Demelza.

Your names may not often appear in speeches or headlines, but your impact is profound. Your loyalty, humour and determination carry me through the hardest days. You are not just friends and work colleagues; you are my rock.

A special mention, Madam Speaker, goes to Sinead, Aidan and Callum, who are expecting the imminent arrival of a new baby to the family. Madam Speaker, I have never been one to fit into boxes. I think differently and speak honestly, but I do so from a place of purpose.

I do so because I know there are people outside of these walls who don't yet believe there is a place for them inside of them. So let us all be that message. The difference is not a weakness, it is our greatest strength.

To the Chief Minister, the Deputy Chief Minister, the Financial Secretary, Chief Secretary and my fellow colleagues in Cabinet and across the House, thank you. To all my family, especially my wife, Joyleen and teenage children Farrah and Ashton, thank you too. Not only for your unwavering support and for your patience, through the countless work commitments and events, but also for your unconditional love and remaining steadfast every time that a five-minute walk down the street or a quick trip to the supermarket turns out to be an hour or two.

To the younger generation out there, never forget that the work we do in this Chamber is for you and your future. One day it will be your turn to take over. Politics can often be difficult, but I still believe in its ability to change lives when we remain grounded in who we are.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker: Yes, the Hon. Craig Sacarello.

Hon. C Sacarello: Thank you Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, this House meets at a pivotal moment in Gibraltar's modern history. Across our community, people are seeking reassurance, clarity and above all purpose. They want to know that their Government has a plan, not only to get us through the here and now, but to chart a better course for tomorrow.

Our role on this side of the House is to offer that vision, not just to hold the Government to account, but to present a compelling alternative rooted in optimism, pragmatism and ambition. We acknowledge the scale of the challenges before us. Inflationary pressures, fiscal strain and infrastructure fatigue are just some of the realities we face.

But in every challenge lies opportunity and it is through ambition, not inertia, that Gibraltar will prosper. The GSD's vision is clear - A stronger economy, a more resilient community and a nation that holds its head high.

As Churchill once said, to each there comes in their lifetime a special moment when they are figuratively tapped on the shoulder and asked to do something unique to their talents. Gibraltar's moment is now. We must meet it with courage, ambition and conviction.

Madam Speaker, when I took the plunge into the world of politics, it was with the vision of leaving Gibraltar in a better place than that in which I found it. This included economic growth at a macro level and it also, equally importantly, included helping those less fortunate who feel they do not have a voice that represents them.

When I left the Chamber on Monday following the Chief Minister's Budget speech, I bumped into a pensioner who was furious at the injustice that he felt, and indignity indeed, on hearing the latest Budget measures. He could not understand how his £625 a month pension could be expected to meet the cost of living for he and his wife of this day and age, even with the 3% rise which was announced in this year's Budget, which equates to a mere £19 extra per month. Is this

social justice? The Chief Minister's actual Budget measures, once all the frills are removed and stripped away, are scant and few.

This was a mirage Budget, Madam Speaker, glinting with promise at a distance but offering little real relief up close. Beyond a modest public sector pay rises and a modest increase in pensions and disability benefits, there was no relief for businesses and there was no real comfort profit for the average citizen. It was a Budget of missed moments and strictly limited ambition.

The Government's presentation of Gibraltar's finances, while outwardly optimistic, does not hold up to scrutiny when examined in context. The headline corporation tax figure of £213 million for the year ending March 2025, while welcome, might appear impressive at face value. However, this is only part of the picture.

The Chief Minister in his Budget speech alluded to the fact that this increase in revenue generated was due to extra receipts received from a few companies who were found to be paying less than they ought to, inferring that this was a bit of a blip. Minister Feetham himself said, let us not mistake it for permanence. Note the careful placement of the word mistake and not assume.

The reality of the matter is that this bumper £50 million increase in exceptional corporate tax revenue is a welcome reprieve, but next year's projected drop of 20% or £43 million in corporate tax revenue appears to be the harbinger of troubling times to come, despite the additional 2.5% of corporate tax revenue the Government will benefit from as a result of their second raising of the level from 12.5% to 15%. And this headline and much trumpeted figure of £230 million warrants further analysis. Let us consider the facts at play. For the purposes of this reality check, let us look at what the figures were pre-pandemic, as a reminder of where we were recently and as a guide to where we should be, now that sufficient time for our economy to recover from the shock has elapsed.

As at 31 March 2019, before the pandemic, corporate tax revenue stood at £163.8 million. Adjusting for inflation alone, using the Government's published figures and extrapolating it to today's level, the corporate tax figure equivalent to the 2019 level in today's terms would be £201.5 million. But more significantly, if we also factor in the Government's raise in the corporate tax rate from 10% to 12.5% and add to it the inflation adjusted figure, the real expected corporate tax figure should be around £251.9 million. The actual figure of £230 million, while a welcome increase, is therefore still £38.8 million short of where it should be, in linear and real terms. This underperformance is not simply a result of macroeconomic conditions. It is a reflection of a broader failure to stimulate private sector growth.

Despite tax increases, despite rising costs for business, revenue remains below par. This is not growth, it is stagnation. As a result of this, and high inflation, Gibraltar is suffering from low financial resilience.

This is the ability for households and businesses to absorb shock, and that has diminished. Where is the return on investment for the taxpayer? Where is the productivity strategy?

Where is the plan to attract new capital? This Government is presiding over an economic plateau, and in doing so, it is missing the opportunity to lay the foundations for the next phase of Gibraltar's prosperity. We on this side of the House offer a different path, rooted in responsible investment, growth-focused tax policy, and ambitious reform, because it is through ambition, not inertia, that Gibraltar will prosper.

Madam Speaker, economic growth is not just about numbers, it is about people, about opportunities, about a future worth staying for, and on all these counts, the Government's record is wanting. We have seen GDP figures flatten, inward investment decline, and key projects stall.

Despite the promises, the economic engine under this Government is sputtering. Business confidence is low, entrepreneurs are cautious, and established firms are feeling the squeeze. While the Chief Minister may point to headline GDP figures as proof of economic health, this narrative does not withstand scrutiny. When adjusted for inflation, Gibraltar's real GDP has effectively stagnated in recent years.

For example, although anomalous GDP may have grown post-pandemic, cumulative inflation since 2020, estimated at over 16%, has eroded much of that increase in real terms. Growth, where

it has occurred, has largely been confined to narrow sectors, with little spill over into wider productivity gains or household prosperity. Moreover, unplanned rising costs, astronomically rising debt, and diminishing returns on public investment, suggest we are not growing in a sustainable or inclusive way. A buoyant economy does not leave so many feeling squeezed. A credible economic strategy would focus not on headline metrics alone, but on a broad-based growth that improves living standards across society. I ask again, how far does £19 a month extra stretch for a pensioner and his wife who receives £625 a month?

The answer is not more bureaucracy, the answer is not more taxation, the answer is growth. Under a GSD Government, we will seek to streamline regulation for small and medium enterprises, create a single digital gateway for all business interactions with Governments, and provide targeted support for innovation, research and development, and new growth sectors. A dynamic economy requires dynamic leadership, and that is what we offer.

The father of the House, in his considered analysis on the shifting sands of global economics and the rapid ascent of artificial intelligence, spoke pointedly of our labour market. He declared that to fortify Gibraltar's standing, we must restrain the expansion of our labour force, particularly by reducing our reliance on cross-border workers. While the Minister's reasoning draws attention to productivity and national self-reliance, part of which I agree with, I find myself compelled to question the timing and necessity of such a call.

Just weeks ago, following four years of negotiations, Gibraltar reached a landmark political agreement with the United Kingdom, the European Union and Spain. Let us assume that the political agreement translates into a legally binding Treaty, as we were promised it would by the Chief Minister. This deal guarantees the free movement of people and goods across our Frontier, anchoring the rights of some 15,000 daily cross-border workers, whose labour is vital to our economic stability.

Why then would we now pivot to a policy of restriction of labour, a retreat into island mentality, at a moment when the Treaty reaffirms our openness and interdependence? The Treaty would explicitly secure our sovereignty. It would also preserve, one hopes, Gibraltar's self-governance, but it would not simply be a temporary reprieve.

Has our policy truly shifted from one of encouraging local employment to one of constraining external participation? Or are we actually witnessing a natural evolution in the labour market, driven largely by the inexorable rise of AI, automation and international competition? If that is the case, we must be clear-eyed. These forces are altering employment landscapes worldwide. So I would arbitrarily deny opportunities to businesses that wish to invest and create jobs in Gibraltar on the basis of a formulaic interpretation of output per worker, and to intervene and restrict the labour market would be to handicap ourselves in a changing world.

It is true that the type of labour we seek ought to be one that benefits the economy, and sustainably so but I urge this House to proceed with caution in this regard. We must not dismiss organisations willing to bring additional employment to our shores on the basis of limiting our labour markets alone. While wishing to increase productivity, or output per worker, as the Minister for Inward Investment phrased it, it must not be at the expense of wider economic growth.

Madam Speaker, we must also address the plight of small businesses, particularly in the retail and wholesale sectors, who now face significant headwinds. The introduction of the 17% introduction tax when it comes in, and new tariffs as part of the evolving post-Treaty trading landscape, poses an existential threat to many of these enterprises. This sector, which forms the bedrock of our local economy and community life, cannot be left to absorb the impact unaided.

Despite repeated appeals from the Opposition in this House, the Government has, until now, refused to establish any emergency funds to assist affected businesses in repositioning during the transition. Nor did their last manifesto provide any roadmap or relief mechanism for these sectors.

In the November 2024 session of Parliament, at line 72 in Hansard on Thursday 28th November 2024, in response to my question on whether the Government would provide ailing businesses such as the retail and wholesale sectors, subjected to the detrimental effects of the Treaty

710 arrangements, support during their transition process post-Treaty, the Chief Minister simply replied that these circumstances would not appertain. In other words, he either didn't, or he refused to see it coming, Madam Speaker. And that if they did appertain, in other words if businesses did suffer and struggle for their very existence as a consequence of the deal he negotiated on their behalf, that that would not be within the definition of an emergency.

715 Well, I suspect the business owners, all of their staff and all of their families, very much beg to differ on his view of what is urgent and requires immediate action. We note with cautious optimism, however, the Chief Minister's statement in response to my question on the 26th June only last week, finally acknowledging the need for support. A welcome U-turn in Government's policy in this area. This is very welcome news for business owners, desperate for reassurance, but it must be followed with concrete detail.

720 The sooner the Chief Minister adds meat to the bone, the sooner the business community will receive the comfort and certainty it deserves. To many of these businesses, the threat posed by these tax changes is not just commercial, it is existential. This is a moment for clarity, coordination and committed action to protect jobs and maintain the diversity of Gibraltar's economic ecosystem.

725 In addition to the domestic tax burdens, Gibraltar's retailers and wholesalers face an added layer of disadvantage in the international trading environment. The Chief Minister in Parliament recently set out the conditions which Gibraltar would be subjected to in relation to tariffs from third countries and our obligation to comply with the EU's Common Customs Tariff. It is apparent that the current draft Treaty arrangements are primarily focused on facilitating the import and
730 export of goods from Gibraltar to Europe.

It has failed, however, to deliver the tariff-free import of goods and food delivered here from the UK, which have been manufactured or grown in third countries and not transformed in the UK. To be clear to the general public, as it stands, companies such as Morrisons, Marks and Spencer, Next, Early Learning Centre, Emporium, Matalan, numerous toy shops to name but a few,
735 will see additional costs of 12% on many and in some cases of all of their products. When compounded with the 17% transaction tax, this adds a staggering 29% cost to areas of their business.

If routed via the EU, these goods, which never enter the EU market for sale, are nonetheless subject to full EU trade tariffs, tariffs which the EU retains. Gibraltar receives none of this revenue.

740 This is effectively a double blow. It renders our local traders uncompetitive and imposes what amounts to an indirect EU tax on the Gibraltarian consumer. These businesses, which are dependent on a UK supply line, would struggle to make a competitive rationale which will threaten their very existence. British brands and British products go to the heart of our Britishness, our very identity as a people.

745 These sectors will be the hardest hit. They have not been gifted a get-out-of-jail-free card, just as the services and bunkering sectors have. Unlike legal and financial services, they have been told to pivot and reinvent themselves. But they cannot plan for an ongoing future. They cannot rely on scraps of drip-fed information. They require certainty and clarity of exactly what the changes will be. Facts, figures clearly laid out, and logistical changes to current business practises at the
750 commercial Frontier explained with the precision of a surgeon. This is the absolute least these sectors deserve.

It is imperative that this fundamental and potentially existential issue is addressed clearly and definitively in the final Treaty text. The ink is not yet dry, or even there. The kiss was only a peck on the cheek. There are comparisons that can be drawn with the Canary Islands, whose general
755 VAT equivalent is 7%, or Andorra, whose standard indirect tax rate lies at 4.5%. Competitive retail and wholesale sectors are essential to price stability and economic diversity in Gibraltar. The Government must in its duty leave no stone unturned to preserve them.

While Gibraltar's strength lies in services, our ability to attract international investment has been hampered by a lack of clarity, consistency and ambition from this Government, set against
760 the backdrop of a sustained period of uncertainty. Nowhere is this more evident than in the

development of our fintech and banking sectors. Gibraltar has a unique offering, what we might call a golden formula, based on four key pillars. A competitive tax regime, robust regulatory access, speed to market and global marketing.

765 While the first two are broadly in place, they are under threat. Corporation taxes on the rise, reducing our fiscal competitiveness, and speed to market, particularly in the handling of licence applications and variations, remain sluggish. Take the example of one Bank, which recently had 983A applications pending. Delays such as these discourage investment and signal to prospective entrants that Gibraltar is not as nimble or responsive as it claims to be.

770 Part of the challenge lies within the Financial Services Commission (FSC) itself, a body full of hard-working and diligent professionals. While it performs a critical regulatory function, the FSC is, in certain specialist areas, under-resourced. According to leading professionals in this field, there is a lack of specialist knowledge that hampers its ability to process, find complex fintech and banking applications efficiently. A GSD Government will strengthen the FSC, with the specialist expertise it needs to remain both robust and responsive.

775 Marketing is another piece of the puzzle. The Gibraltar Finance Centre, the department charged with promoting our jurisdiction, is falling short, both strategically and in terms of return on investment. We must be proactive in attracting institutions that align with our strengths. Challenger banks, e-money institutions and mobile fintech providers.

780 The facts speak for themselves. Out of the nine banks currently operating in Gibraltar, only one has entered in the last five years. This despite the jurisdiction's unique selling points. Worse still, the Gibraltar Finance Centre recently pulled out of attending a major fintech conference in London, despite two entities offering to co-finance the stand. The reason given? No money. This is not how a forward-looking jurisdiction behaves. We must actively target growth sectors. And that means attending and investing in specialist fintech and banking conferences, developing a clear strategy with Budgeted targets, and reviewing return on investment annually to ensure accountability.

785 We must also understand the profile of the institutions we wish to attract. Smaller, mobile, digital-first banks that require regulatory certainty and a place to anchor mind and management. With smart regulation, focused marketing and improved licencing speed, Gibraltar can become a genuine hub for next-generation finance. The GSD will deliver on that promise through ambition, integrity and delivery.

But Madam Speaker, Gibraltar should not rely solely on the financial services and gaming sectors. It is crucial that we broaden our business base for the opportunities and challenges of the 21st century. Gibraltar should broaden its horizons.

795 While financial services remain foundational, our long-term economic resilience will increasingly depend on our ability to diversify into new, high-value sectors. We must proactively seek to attract companies in emerging fields such as artificial intelligence, scientific research, digital innovation and green technology, sectors that are looking for secure, well-regulated jurisdictions with niche market advantages.

800 The opportunity is clear. Global investment in AI alone is projected to surpass £1 trillion by 2030, with small jurisdictions that provide regulatory clarity and access to capital likely to be among the beneficiaries. Gibraltar must position itself to be one of them. To do so, we must prepare the right platform.

805 That means establishing clear regulatory frameworks tailored to these sectors, building strong links to financing, including venture capital, specialist funds and public-private partnerships, offering fiscal incentives and R&D credits to attract pioneering firms, partnering with local and international universities and research institutions to foster collaboration and talent development. An important cog in this wheel of endeavour is that we align education with these ambitions.

810 Technical and vocational education must no longer be a secondary pathway. It is a core pillar of a modern and inclusive economy. In the same manner, it is essential that we prepare the wider

labour market for the jobs of the future. Most of the workforce will require upskilling to ensure that Gibraltarians remain the business leaders and the innovators of the future economy.

815 Crucially, it is imperative that access to capital streams such as VC funding, crowdfunding, angel investors, micro-financing, grants and subsidies is firmly in place in order to attract and retain these burgeoning sectors. Equally, we need to ramp up our investment migration programme to attract high net worth individuals who can become part of this expanded capital ecosystem.

820 According to Henley & Partners, a record-breaking 142,000 millionaires are projected to relocate internationally this year, with Southern Europe emerging as a particularly attractive destination. Gibraltar must not miss out on this trend. High net worth individuals bring more than personal wealth. They bring networks, investment opportunities and an appetite for innovation. This translates into job creation. An exciting, cutting-edge economy which attracts further investors.

825 And let us not forget the philanthropic value added, evidenced practically everywhere you walk in Gibraltar. If we are serious about a dynamic, future-proof economy, we must act now before others do. In tandem, a revitalised Gibraltar Finance Centre must align its outreach and engagement efforts with this ambition, seeking out high-growth innovators and offering them the responsive support and regulatory clarity they need to flourish here. Gibraltar must lead with confidence, build on its competitive edge and speak clearly to the pioneers of tomorrow. This is a place where you can grow, invest and stay.

830 Moving on to utilities, Madam Speaker. Before I commence this part, I would just like to congratulate Mr Michael Caetano, the CEO at the Gibraltar Electrical Authority (GEA), on his retirement. And to thank him for his decades of service to the GEA and the wider community. I hope he enjoys a long and happy retirement.

835 I know that the Hon. Minister Arias Vazquez concluded her comments on the GEA in an upbeat tone, promising to modernise the infrastructure. I note and support the intentions but would also like to remind her of some of the recent exchanges in Parliament where certain other failings need to be addressed and have yet to be recognised by Government.

840 The Gibraltar Electrical Authority is suffering from a systemic shortage of academically qualified senior management, as I mentioned early last week. Despite the GEA's own policy manual requiring a minimum standard of chartered engineer status for all senior roles of grade D3 and above, only one out of six senior managers now holds that designation.

845 This chronic lack of qualified personnel undermines our grid's resilience and potentially increases the chance of future grid-related problems, which lead to economic losses, never mind the inconvenience caused to citizens. This is not acceptable, Madam Speaker. The Government's refusal to require GEA supervision during contractor works in sensitive areas, despite the potential for blackouts, further weakens public confidence.

850 The cost of a GEA supervisor could be borne by the contractor or developer. This would present a simple solution which would not only not cost the taxpayer a penny and would vastly reduce the possibility of general power cuts caused by contractual works in network-critical areas. But the Government so far has refused to take affirmative action.

We hope for a change. Gibraltar's commitment to achieve 20% of its energy production from renewable sources by 2019 has not been met. We are still languishing at around 2% of renewable energy production, this via photovoltaic primarily, and that at peak production too.

855 This is a failure not just of infrastructure but of vision. Why is Government not teaming up with cutting-edge research at university, or indeed aligning itself with market-leading technology in this area? We are an ideal, small and closed system which would be perfectly suited for testing and implementing cutting-edge technology.

860 To meet future energy needs and climate targets we must, among other things, invest in smart grids, roll out smart metres to empower citizens to contribute to the grid, and create incentives for households to produce their own clean energy. The failure to roll out smart metres once promised many years ago and now seemingly forgotten is emblematic of this inertia I refer to and lack of ambition. There exists simply an absence of political will to provide the consumer with

sufficient incentives for individual households to produce their own clean energy. This intransigence denies us all the ability to reduce household costs, reduce our collective carbon footprint, and reduce the cost of energy production.

A Government vision to engage the community and enable the production of renewable energy would not only put more pounds in people's pockets but will create economic activity which will drive further prosperity. And while I am happy to acknowledge that the LNG power station was a step forward in reducing our carbon footprint, it still remains, nonetheless, a fossil fuel and still run on diesel for the generator start-up and for maintenance works.

In fact, diesel was used for 38% of the time during March this year. There is clearly little appetite from the Government to move beyond this system. If we are serious about decarbonisation, then we must act decisively.

Moving on to other matters, we welcome the Minister for the Environment's announcement that the tender for the Wastewater Treatment Plant has finally been awarded. It will be a welcome relief for many, I am sure, to see the GSLP Liberals finally delivering a promise set out to the public in their 2011 manifesto and repeated ever since. So much for keeping their manifesto promises, which is yet to be realised. That particular clause in their so-called contract with the people has been broken time and again.

And yet Minister Cortes announcement on the award of the tender during his Budget address lacks all of the customary information that should accompany a major contract. There are no details on the cost of the build, no clarity on the running costs of this 25-year arrangement and, just as importantly, yet no firm timings. Or is this yet another mirage? How many more years of stench from the effluence released at the Lighthouse must locals and tourists alike be expected to tolerate?

There is a growing unease across some parts of society in Gibraltar, Madam Speaker. Families are feeling the financial strain from food and fuel to electricity and rent, costs have risen sharply, while wages and public support have failed to keep pace. This isn't political rhetoric. It is a lived experience recounted by many in our community, and it is the price we are paying for this Government's mismanagement of the economy, their own finances and the quadrupling of national Debt.

Utility price surges, as can be gleaned from Hansard. Commercial electricity rates rose by 20% and domestic rates by 16%, followed by a further 8% hike in electricity and water charges in recent years, resulting in a cumulative 24% increase over a 12-month period between 2022 and 2023.

These successive rises have compounded the burden on households and small businesses alike, with knock-on effects across the entire economy. Social insurance squeeze. While the Government claims to protect vulnerable groups, pension operating has remained below inflation.

Mind you, how far does £90 stretch for a married couple? And social insurance caps, recently increased by 5% across the board, will impose disproportionate burdens on low- to middle-income families. Stubborn freeze of thresholds.

With low-level tax bands unadjusted to reflect rising inflation, even modest pay rises have pushed workers into higher tax brackets more quickly. The effect, known as fiscal drag, is one where workers take home less money in real terms because the Government is effectively taxing them more. This is particularly acute for those earning under £64,000. When drawing a direct comparison with the UK personal tax model, Gibraltar employees earning less than £64,000 take home less pay after tax in SI than their UK counterparts.

Excessive fines. Traffic penalty notices remain at £300 for minor offences, the sum equivalent to a week's take-home pay for many families. A punitive tax by any other name.

Transparency vacuum. Parliamentary questions have gone unanswered on key issues like the latest missing years of the principal auditor's reports, funding schemes lost in the jungle of Government-owned companies and public service delays, risking public trust and introducing fiscal doubt.

Taken together, these are not isolated complaints. They represent a growing chorus of concern from workers, pensioners, families and health practitioners. The people are still feeling the pinch under this Government's policies.

These policies reflect a Government which has lost track of its socialist ideology and become out of touch with the working person. This is a crisis of economic confidence and until it is addressed, no amount of false narratives, fiscal tightening or flashy headlines will change the lived reality of our fellow Gibraltarians. This party believes in a fairer society, in policies that work for the many, not just the few, and in growth that lifts all boats, not just the biggest ships in the harbour. Because it is through ambition, integrity and delivery that we will build a more secure, more prosperous future for every household in Gibraltar.

I now want to speak over the section dedicated to standards of trust and the role of Parliament. Respect for politicians and for the institution of Parliament is not merely ceremonial. It is foundational. The rule of law is a fragile construct and is increasingly under insidious threat. As has been said, the opposite of love is not hate, it is indifference. The opposite of trust is not distrust, it is disengagement. And public disengagement in our politics is a direct threat to the rule of law and to our democratic system.

Standards in public life are not a luxury appendage. They are our frontline defence in protecting the institutions that underpin our democracy. We govern by consent, just as the police conduct their duties by consent and through the public's cooperation.

Society bestows on us the privilege of governing. It is our duty to fulfil our roles to the highest standards. That duty is reflected in the seven principles of public life, the Northern principles, selflessness, integrity, objectivity, accountability, openness, honesty and leadership. How we conduct ourselves in this chamber, the tone, the language, the respect shown, projects the democratic values we claim to uphold. Raucous mudslinging in exchanges may score temporary points, but they erode long-term public trust. Let us be clear and specific. When one side attacks the other as unworthy of their office and not worth the salaries they are paid, the public may rightly conclude that all politicians are unworthy.

Parliaments must sit at the very top of the standards tree. We have heard this week of the false narratives spun by a Chief Minister quoting my hon. Friend Mr Clinton completely out of context and taking it to extremes of fantastical proportions. I was subject to a similar slide last year where the Chief Minister attempted, rather bizarrely, and for an end only he can ascertain, as a cigar-smoking, whisky-drinking person I mean it was amusing but I don't see the relevance. I have never smoked, and I am teetotal. I put my head down, work hard, I do not covet recognition, and I take great joy in seeing others succeed through sheer honest endeavour.

We must rise above lazy stereotypes of this nature, and we must differentiate ourselves from the increasingly febrile tone of social media. If we are to defeat populism and its hollow slogans, we must drive up our standards and not join a race to the bottom. Rules must be respected and standards maintained so that the public can legitimately place their trust in this House.

Madam Speaker, to conclude we stand at a crossroads. The world around us is changing. The Treaty, if and when agreed, will reshape how Gibraltar engages with our neighbours in the wider world, but the Treaty alone will not define our future. That will depend on the leadership, the choices and the ambition we bring to the moment.

This is a watershed moment for Gibraltar, a generational opportunity to chart a bold and progressive course. If we fail to capitalise on it, we risk locking ourselves into another cycle of drift and decline but if we seize it with clarity of vision and the strength of purpose, we can springboard Gibraltar forward and deliver lasting change for the next generation. The people of Gibraltar deserve more than cautious management. They deserve a Government with vision, with discipline, with a plan.

The GSD offers that better path, a plan for growth, a passion for reform and a belief in Gibraltar's ability to lead, not just economically but democratically and ethically too. We offer ambition to unlock Gibraltar's potential. We offer integrity to restore trust in our public institutions, and we offer delivery to turn words into action because what matters most is not

what is said in speeches but what is done in office. Not slogans, not spin but action, delivery, progress.

The time has come to lift our sights, raise our standards and renew our purpose. We don't inherit the future; we earn it through effort and vision. Let us achieve it together. Let us rise to the moment. Let us make Gibraltar the success story of the next generation.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Adjournment

Chief Minister (Hon. F R Picardo): Well Madam Speaker, given that what matters most is not what is said in speeches but what is done in office and given what has been said in that speech is entirely to be disregarded by anyone who has any idea of what is actually happening in Gibraltar I move that those on this side of the House should now have the opportunity to return to their offices to do, which as the hon. Gentleman has said is what matters until 4 o'clock this afternoon.

Madam Speaker: All right. We will recess until 4pm this afternoon.

The House adjourned at 12.36 p.m.