



PROCEEDINGS OF THE GIBRALTAR PARLIAMENT

AFTERNOON SESSION: 3.00 p.m. – 8.50 p.m.

Gibraltar, Thursday, 22nd May 2025

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The Gibraltar Parliament

The Parliament met at 3.00 p.m.

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

[ACTING CLERK TO THE PARLIAMENT: K Balban Esq *in attendance*]

Questions for Oral Answer

CHIEF MINISTER

Q589-90/2025

Eastside Project –

Responsibility for beach nourishment; Impact of breakwater on beaches and village

Acting Clerk: Meeting of Parliament, Thursday, 22nd of May, 2025. Answers to Oral Questions continued. Questions to the Chief Minister. Question 589, the Hon. G. Origo.

5 **Hon. G Origo:** Madam Speaker, in light of the DPC meeting held on the 24th of April 2025, and with respect to the East Side Project, it was confirmed that “beach nourishment” would be undertaken by the developer, every two years over a 10-year period at both Eastern Beach and Catalan Bay. Given the admission that there will be beach deterioration; can the Government confirm who will be responsible to “nourish” those beaches once this 10-year period is over and
10 what are the expected costs?

Acting Clerk: Answer, the Hon. Chief Minister.

15 **Chief Minister (Hon. F R Picardo):** Madam Speaker, I will answer this question with Question 590.

Acting Clerk: Question 590, the Hon. G Origo.

20 **Hon. G Origo:** Following a site visit at Catalan Bay, members of the DPC confirmed that they had not been provided sufficient assurance that the southern end of the breakwater would not have an impact on the beaches and the village. The peer was described as an encroachment on the view of the village; however, the developer argued that the peer was necessary in width to protect the new proposed marina. Is the Government supportive of the marina aspect of this project, given the concerns raised?
25

Acting Clerk: Answer, the Hon. Chief Minister.

30 **Chief Minister (Hon. F R Picardo):** Yes, Madam Speaker, the Government is supportive of this project and the marina element of it, which is, incidentally, smaller than the marina the GSD supported when they were in Government, which would have destroyed our beloved Caleta. This

project, the marina arm of which is smaller, will not. Additionally, Madam Speaker, no Lords of the Realm are expected to be deployed in this development.

It will, nonetheless, be possible for members of the public to see over the seawall and peer into the Mediterranean Sea beyond. Madam Speaker, in relation to Question 454, a coastal dynamics report was submitted by the applicant of the Eastside project, which predicted that there would be changes to the south side of Eastern Beach and to the beach at Catalan Bay. Initial re-nourishment of critical beach areas is proposed with periodic maintenance of re-nourishments for ten years.

The purpose of these re-nourishments is to allow the beaches to reach their state of equilibrium. Beach monitoring through topographic and bathymetric surveys will take place twice a year for a minimum period of ten years by the applicant and the results of these will inform what, if any, maintenance requirements there are. The developer is responsible for undertaking the monitoring and beach nourishment.

There is also a condition in the contract between the Government and TNG that the developer will be required to share the monitoring results of the relevant Government departments, these being the Technical Services Department and the Department of the Environment, and that all proposed re-nourishment activities would need to be carried out in consultation with and to the satisfaction of these departments. Whilst it is anticipated that the beaches will have reached their equilibrium state within ten years, assessments of the beach will go beyond the ten-year period and further nourishment and monitoring will have to be undertaken by the developer if it is deemed necessary at the time.

The contractual obligation extends beyond the ten-year period and was made on advice that the beach would, in any event, likely reach the state of equilibrium in ten years. The Government is not aware of what the expected costs of these works are, as the Government is not required to pay for the works.

Hon. G Origo: Madam Speaker, I am grateful to the Hon. Chief Minister for his very in-depth reply to my initial question but can I ask, in respect of the first Question, which is Question 589, to do with beach nourishment, whether beach nourishment of this nature has taken place as often in the past with respect to Catalan Bay? Is this something, which is a normal procedure or is this something that is being done because of the development of this marina?

Hon. Chief Minister: Well, Madam Speaker, I am sorry to have to tell the Hon. Gentleman that is a matter, which is in the public domain because no Government of any particular complexion has ever re-nourished the beach in secret. It has been done in the sight of the 32,000 Gibraltarians. I wonder why he would want to come to this Parliament to ask me something that he should know.

Hon. G Origo: Madam Speaker, the purpose of my question with respect to whether beach nourishment is a common occurrence, which takes place in our beaches, is brought about on the nature that I think, and I take the view, that the beach nourishment, which has taken place, indeed constitutes harm. Can I ask the Hon. Chief Minister whether he thinks that the nourishment taking place in this nature, happening twice, I think you said, every year, does indeed constitute harm to our beaches?

Hon. Chief Minister: Madam Speaker, I am sorry to break it to the Hon. Gentleman, but the purpose of his question is really quite irrelevant. Really, the issue is whether his question is about something, which is in the public domain, and if it is in the public domain, then whatever the purpose of it may be, then the question is not one that the Government is obliged to answer.

Neither with respect, Madam Speaker, would it necessarily be a proper question in keeping with the rules of the House because if something is in the public domain, then it is not something

that can be the subject of a question in this House. The Hon. Gentleman then says to us that he would consider that beach nourishment of this sort is somehow not a positive thing.

85 Well Madam Speaker, given that what I am telling him is that the answer to his question is in the public domain, he might like to refresh his memory about how often it is happened in the past from the public sources and indeed, not just in this beach. Then he might realise that there is nothing akin to a relationship to this marina, which is going to cause anything which is unusual in respect of this beach, and which has not happened before.

90 Now having said that, Madam Speaker, and just referring to the things which are in the public domain, perhaps the Hon. Gentleman is blessed with youth sufficient that he cannot remember when the Mamela was out in what looked like the middle of Catalan Bay and yet there are years when it is completely covered in the sand because without even a thought of a marina, that beach gets bigger and it gets less big, depending on many atmospheric or environmental aspects.

95 That is before the GSLP/liberals do a deal with the TNG Foundation for a marina that is not there yet. That is even before the GSD do a deal for a much larger marina with a marina-arm, a pier, P-I-E-R, which extended all the way across where Catalan Bay is. So that when, on occasions during National Day, we have hosted parliamentarians here, including some peers, P-E-E-R, they have been able to observe the beauty of Catalan Bay without that obstruction which the GSD sought to construct, and which will not be there on the basis of the plans that we have approved.

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Hon. G Origo: Madam Speaker, and if I may, the Hon. Chief Minister questions why I query whether or not the beach nourishment of this nature constitutes harm, but I will also want to put it to him other things which are also in the public domain. One of the things that the Hon. Chief Minister said during the last Election campaign was to the residents of Catalan Bay, and he spelt out this to them.

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He would not allow any harm to be done to Catalan Bay because of the development of this new marina. So I ask, what does the Hon. Chief Minister have to say to those residents who he promised he would not allow harm of this nature to take place, and reconcile this position with the fact that there is an admission that deterioration to the beach is in fact taking place?

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Hon. Chief Minister: That the Hon. Gentleman is trying to construct a case where there is none. The Government is complying fully and entirely with its commitment with the people of Catalan Bay, and indeed the people of Gibraltar as a whole, that there will not be harm to Catalan Bay. That in fact in the long term this will be better for Catalan Bay.

115

That in fact, the fact that Catalan Bay needs to potentially have its beach re-nourished is something that has happened in the past, and cannot be said to be something that simply arises from this marina because as I have told the Hon. Gentleman, or perhaps he didn't appreciate that this is what I was telling him, because he is perhaps blessed with sufficient youth that he has no memory of this, during the lifetime of this Government, that is to say since 2011, we have had to nourish Catalan Bay. Not only have we had to nourish Catalan Bay, before this marina was even thought of, indeed their marina was thought of, which was much bigger but we hadn't approved, we had to completely, completely, completely re-nourish Sandy Bay, which was properly at that time more adequately referred to as Shingle Bay, and indeed a few shingles bay.

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We then had to create, believe it or not, a marina arm, perhaps better called a pier, P-I-E-R, or a groyne, and fill it with sand at a cost of approximately from memory, don't quote me, check my Hansard, £13 million, with nothing to show for it in terms of an east side development. Therefore, the Hon. Gentleman is seeking to create a link between concepts of harm, which are obviously, objectively, unrelated. But Madam Speaker, I can understand that the Hon. Gentleman is sitting with a party that says one thing at general Elections and actually means the other.

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130 As we saw yesterday, at least I saw in Technicolour, that now they believe that LNG is a good thing. When they went into a general Election in 2015 saying that we were going to blow up Gibraltar, the only thing blowing up is their credibility.

135 **Hon. G Origo:** Madam Speaker, and if I may take the issue just back to Catalan Bay, which is a
premise of this question, when the beach nourishment, which takes place in the DPC plans, they
referred that it would happen at two yearly intervals, but now the Hon. Chief Minister says that it
will happen twice a year, can the Hon. Chief Minister confirm whether public access to the beach
will be affected as a result of these beach nourishment projects and what is being done as a result
to minimise that disruption?

140 **Hon. Chief Minister:** Madam Speaker, I am surprised that for somebody so young, the Hon.
Gentleman should be taking the view that history will teach us nothing. It is quite dangerous to
take that approach. Indeed, if I may say so with respect, and it is not up to me to give him any
advice in respect of his burgeoning political career, he would do better to look at history in order
145 to better inform his questioning.

Indeed, given what I have had to point out in respect of his questions, which obviously were
not necessarily checked by anyone for him, he would do well to check the dictionary when he puts
his questions, let alone Hansard. Madam Speaker, the history of Catalan Bay shows us that actually
the nourishment does not in any way affect public access, because as I have told him over and
150 over again, perhaps over a coffee I can be more explicit and explain it to him in more layman's
terms, but he'll forgive me for being a bit formal across the floor of the House. We have re-
nourished Catalan Bay in living memory, not history, living memory.

When we did it, it did not affect public access to the beach. Look, there were people who were
concerned it was a bit dusty. There were people who thought that they were finding scorpions.

155 There were people who loved what was happening. That is politics, I guess. You do something
just over half like it.

In 2015, Madam Speaker, when we were accused of being about to blow up Gibraltar, about
two-thirds liked it, I seem to recall, and some don't but I don't know why the Hon. Gentleman is
asking me questions about things that have happened already, and he should know the answer
160 to. Not from even having to go and check *el Chivatito*, Hansard, but from knowing what has
happened in the beach.

Because he is blessed with youth, perhaps he does not remember seeing it here, but I would
have thought, given that when we are all blessed with great youth, we spend most of our time in
Catalan Bay, he would remember from sunning himself there.

165 **Madam Speaker:** Next question.

Hon. Dr K Azopardi: On this question, Madam Speaker.

170 **Madam Speaker:** I have called the next question. Well, there has been four supplementaries
on this, one brief one and no more.

Hon. Dr K Azopardi: None on 590. There has not been on 590, anyway.

175 **Madam Speaker:** No, I am taking the two together.

Hon. Dr K Azopardi: Yes, I understand. I just wanted to ask on this. So, this question, surely
Madam Speaker and the Chief Minister must see that it is not about whether Catalan Bay has been
provisioned before, nourished before, or indeed whether Sandy Bay was nourished before, or
180 there was a building of the GSLP's groyne, G-R-O-Y-N-E, at Sandy Bay. I mean, surely it has about
correlating the beach nourishment with the development because if the development was not
going to have an effect on Catalan Bay, why is it the developer's obligation to nourish the beaches
for 10 years and beyond?

185 My hon. Colleague's question was about the 10 years. The Chief Minister's original answer explains that the contractual obligation will lead to monitoring results that will then bite on the developer beyond the 10 years. Clearly, someone in Government thinks the development is having an effect on the beach, doesn't the Chief Minister?

190 **Hon. Chief Minister:** Madam Speaker, the Hon. Leader of the Opposition has to get up all of the time during the course of this session to bolster his junior questioners, I see. Watching yesterday's session from afar was instructive, given that the Hon. Leader of the Opposition obviously has to earn his pay.

195 It is a pity he doesn't check people's questions before they are put, sufficiently to see what it is that's being said, given that I didn't need groyne spelling out for me, but the Hon. Gentleman to his left obviously needed peer spelling out for him. Successive Governments of Gibraltar have re-nourished Madam Speaker, for many generations, Catalan Bay. What we have been able to achieve in the arrangements with the TNG Foundation is that in future, if Catalan Bay needs to be re-nourished, it will be re-nourished not at the taxpayers' cost.

200 So Madam Speaker, it is not, in my view, purely simply an issue related to harm arising from the redevelopment of the area. It is the need for re-nourishment that is going to be funded by the TNG Foundation. In any event, Madam Speaker, Hon. Members opposite need to remember that if you are a serious political party and you have been in Government and you have done a deal that goes further than the deal that you are criticising now, you damage your credibility by
205 pretending to now be more papious than the Pope.

Because if Hon. Members had said, we are never going to redevelop the east side, there will never be a marina on the east side, we will insist that for the sake of Catalan Bay, the reclamation as it is when we have entered Government in 1996 is as far as it is going to go, then I would take the criticism from them on the groin, Madam Speaker, G-R-O-I-N. But when they, Madam Speaker,
210 approved in a DPC that was secret, not public, plans which provided for a marina pier, P-I-E-R, which extended all the way across the front of Catalan Bay, and that is, and the Hon. Gentleman is saying from a central position that is not true, the Hon. Gentleman should know that if the Hon. Mr Origo wants to ask me about the things I said at Catalan Bay, he should accompany that recantation of my electoral statements at Catalan Bay with the leaflet that we issued, which
215 included the designs that they had approved in the DPC.

Turn the page and show the other part that shows the plans that they approved. They completely cut off the mouth of Catalan Bay and they sit there and open their mouths now in defence of Catalan Bay. Madam Speaker, I have not seen such political hypocrisy in my life.

220 The Hon. Gentleman who started this line of questioning is young enough to not have to tarnish himself with that level of political hypocrisy. What a pity that he is.

Madam Speaker: Next question.

225 **Hon. Dr K Azopardi:** Madam Speaker, Madam Speaker, on this...

Madam Speaker: Next question.

Hon. Dr K Azopardi: The Hon. Chief Minister has...

230 **Madam Speaker:** I have called the next question. We have explored this subject enough. We are moving on to the next question.

Hon. Dr K Azopardi: Madam Speaker, on a point of order, the Chief Minister has made a statement. Has made a statement that I want to give him the opportunity to correct.

235 **Madam Speaker:** All right.

240 **Hon. Dr K Azopardi:** Madam Speaker, doesn't the Chief Minister accept that what he just said, that the development that was proposed by the party on this side when we were in Government, that was going to cut across the entirety of Catalan Bay, is a misstatement because... And I give him the opportunity to correct the record, because whatever differences we have politically as to the impact of the development, because we take a particular view about the impact of this development on Catalan Bay, and it is the only one that is happening because the GSD development did not actually happen, the accompanying photograph on his electoral leaflet shows that it does not cut across the entirety of Catalan Bay. Will he withdraw that statement?

245 **Hon. Chief Minister:** Madam Speaker, the old chestnut of a point of order in order to camouflage the further supplementary. No, Madam Speaker, I do not accept that. The Hon. Gentleman is the one who is raising matters which are far from accurate, and therefore he is wrong, Madam Speaker.

250 What is certainly, absolutely, I hope, common ground between us is that that was approved in ADPC, which was secret, which is the DPC that he presided over when he was in Government, and the DPC, the GSD, insisted to us when we made it public, we should keep secret, that it was a much larger project, Madam Speaker, that whatever the merits or demerits of the extent of the closure of the mouth of Catalan Bay, their project would have had the same effect in terms of the beach, if not worse, and that is my point and Madam Speaker, therefore, I salute the Hon. Gentleman with the ingenuity that he has been able to ask a further supplementary whilst pretending it was not, but nothing else.

260 **Madam Speaker:** Next question.

Q591-2/2025
Borders and Coastguard –
Frequency of machines operated by Officers at Gibraltar Airport; Staff shortages

265 **Acting Clerk:** Question 591, the Hon. J Ladislaus.

Hon. G Origo: Madam Speaker, at the start of my supplementaries, I did say that I was taking supplementaries to 589 and have not been given an opportunity to deal with 590.

270 **Madam Speaker:** I explained that they were both very connected. The answer had not been given separately. There's a ruling on this where I said that when the Government Minister groups questions together and refers to each question in their answer, then I ask the Opposition member to say which question they are on.

275 If they are grouped together, I take an overall view, and certainly with a question like this, which is so interrelated, that is the view I have taken. Therefore, we are moving on to the next question.

Acting Clerk: Question 591, the Hon. J Ladislaus.

280 **Hon. Dr K Azopardi:** Madam Speaker, I will take it because I know my hon. Colleague is in a meeting right now. I will take it on her behalf.

When were the machines operated by Borders and Coastguard officers at the Gibraltar Airport purchased? Please provide details as to the maintenance carried out on those machines and the frequency and whether there are any plans to replace the machinery in the near future.

285 **Acting Clerk:** Answer, the Hon. the Chief Minister.

Chief Minister (Hon. F R Picardo): Which I will do with 592, Madam Speaker.

Acting Clerk: Question 592, The Hon. the Leader of the Opposition, on behalf of the Hon. J Ladislaus.

290

Hon. Dr K Azopardi: Madam Speaker, have the Borders and Coastguard Agency raised any issues in the past 12 months as to staff shortages? If so, please provide details as to the exact issues raised and what is being done to address this.

295

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

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Chief Minister (Hon. F R Picardo): Madam Speaker, no staff shortages have been raised with Government by the BCA in the last 12 months. Additionally, in relation to Question 591, BCA officers operate all of the security equipment at Gibraltar Air Terminal. The equipment can be divided into various categories, namely passenger cabin baggage and hold baggage screening X-ray machines.

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There are also different types of specialised equipment used for explosive trace detection and liquid explosive detection systems. The cabin baggage X-ray machines were handed over to HMGOG in November 2011 as part of the new air terminal project. In those days, I think it was called GOG because it was November 2011.

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These are in the process of being replaced by new equipment, which uses CT technology to meet the new standards in aviation security. The hold baggage X-ray machines were also handed over in 2011 but were replaced in 2019 to meet new security standards. The last batch of five explosive trace detectors were purchased in 2024 in line with increased screening requirements.

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Every item of equipment is tested every day before it is placed into service and they each have to pass a detection test, which is set by the Civil Aviation Security Regulator in the United Kingdom with the UKCAA and two UKCAA and DFT standards. Preventive maintenance is carried out on every item of equipment on a twice-monthly basis by specialist contractors. These same contractors provide a 24-hour on-call reactive maintenance service with a 12-hour on-site response time.

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Hon. Dr K Azopardi: Madam Speaker, in relation to 591, can I ask that the Chief Minister has given an indication about the replacement of some of the equipment when that replacement is intended to take place?

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Hon. Chief Minister: Imminently, Madam Speaker, and no extra machines will be required for the cruise liner terminal that is no longer going to be on the east side pier as was the case under their plans.

330

Hon. Dr K Azopardi: In relation to 592, can I ask if the answer to the Borders and Coastguard Agency raising issues as to staff shortages is no, is the Government aware whether the staff representatives have raised issues with the Borders and Coastguard Agency as to staff shortages?

Hon. Chief Minister: Not in a manner, that has made its way up to me, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker: Next question.

Q593/2025

**HMGOG, Government Owned Companies, Agencies and Authorities –
Payments towards legal fees**

335

Acting Clerk: Question 593, the Hon. the Leader of the Opposition on behalf of the Hon. J Ladislaus.

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Hon. Dr K Azopardi: What payments have been made by HMGOG, Government Owned Companies, Agencies and Authorities towards legal fees incurred by its employees during financial years from 2018/2019 to date, broken down by:

345

- (i) Value of payment;
- (ii) Entity; and
- (iii) Date of payment?

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

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Chief Minister (Hon. F R Picardo): Madam Speaker, the information requested by the Hon. Gentleman on behalf of the Hon. Lady is too voluminous to provide with any degree of reliable accuracy in the timeframe available or at all. My officials advise me that answering this question will require large manual exercise on an invoice-by-invoice basis going back to 2018. In any event, I am told that invoices are sometimes anonymised so it will not be possible to provide an accurate answer.

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Hon. Dr K Azopardi: So can I just ask, when the Chief Minister prefaced that within the time available or at all, given the tail end of his answer, are we in the realms of the or at all? In addition, that my hon. Colleague should reframe her answer in a different way. Her question, sorry.

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Hon. Chief Minister: Madam Speaker, I have been in Opposition, I know how these things work. If Hon. Members are trying to find one particular thing, if they are more precise we might be able to give it to them, but if they are trying to find that particular thing but they don't want to indicate that and they cast a very wide net, I am told it is impossible to do that exercise without bringing the Civil Service almost to a halt.

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Madam Speaker: Next question.

Q594/2025

**Government Departments –
Inter-departmental transfer of personal information**

370

Acting Clerk: Question 594, the Hon. C Sacarello.

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Hon. C Sacarello: When will the Government address the need to allow reasonable and restricted inter-departmental transfer of personal information to unshackle the public and the business sector from the repetitive and unnecessary need to submit the same information repeatedly to each department they approach?

Acting Clerk: Answer, the Hon. Chief Minister.

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Chief Minister (Hon. F R Picardo): Yes, Madam Speaker, we already have.

385 **Hon. C Sacarello:** Madam Speaker, there is a concept which is endorsed by the UK and an eGov concept endorsed by the UK and the EU called the once-only principle, which is certainly not endorsed by the Government of Gibraltar to date, despite there being a certain move towards eGov and a certain move towards streamlining, granted, some of the submissions, particularly in the business sector, from his fellow Minister.

Nonetheless, there are still many areas where the same information is required to be submitted repeatedly. Will the Government make moves to introduce legislation, regulations and the correct working practises within the Civil Service to reduce this burden on the public?

390 **Hon. Chief Minister:** Every aspect of that, the Hon. Gentleman's prepared supplementary, is wrong, Madam Speaker. We do subscribe to this principle and we are in the process of doing so already.

395 **Madam Speaker:** Next question.

Q595/2025
MOD –
Radar maintenance

400 **Acting Clerk:** Question 595, The Hon. D J Bossino.

Hon. D J Bossino: Is the Government in contact with the MOD to prevent further disruption to flights, more recently in connection with radar maintenance?

405 **Acting Clerk:** Answer, the Hon. Chief Minister.

Chief Minister (Hon. F R Picardo): Madam Speaker, may I start simply by going back to the question I answered a moment ago and referring the Hon. Mr Sacarello to a press release of the 16th of March 2015, which is headed the launch of the Tell Us Once scheme. I omitted to refer to that. However, the Hon. Gentleman said we had not subscribed to it.

410 It is there. It was a statement issued over two months ago. Sorry, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker: Is there any supplementary on that?

415 **Hon. P A Orfila:** Madam Speaker: Well, make it.

Hon. C Sacarello: Will the Chief Minister not agree that my comment was actually saying that they were making steps, but that much more steps were needed and that it was so far so insufficient? That was my point.

420 **Hon. Chief Minister:** I will not agree with that, Madam Speaker, at all, because the Hon. Gentleman actually said there is a principle, which the United Kingdom and the European Union subscribe to, which the Government of Gibraltar does not subscribe to. That is what he said. Hansard, *el Chivatito*, will show that, Madam Speaker, sooner than he might wish now, given that it has been done so effectively and so efficiently in-house.

425 When he checks *el Chivatito* and sees what he said, he will realise that there was actually a Government press release issued two months ago that does the opposite of what he said in his prepared supplementary. That is the point I was making, Madam Speaker. Was it a prepared supplementary, Madam Speaker?

430 As he is saying from a sedentary position, I do not know what it is that he was reading from. It must have been his palm.

Madam Speaker: All right. We were on 595, and I cannot remember where we were. Was it a supplementary?

435 **Hon. D J Bossino:** No, Madam Speaker. I think we were waiting for the Hon. Chief Minister's response, and I must say that I have really missed him yesterday. He was absent for most of the proceedings, and I really did say that to him yesterday.

440 **Madam Speaker:** Well, it is nice to be laughed at, but let us carry on with the process. The Hon. Chief Minister was about to answer.

Hon. Chief Minister: I was, Madam Speaker.

445 **Chief Minister:** And I was about to deliver my prepared answer.

Hon. D J Bossino: I am not pressing the button.

450 **Hon. Chief Minister:** I was, Madam Speaker, and I was about to read my prepared answer when Mr Bossino got up and confirmed to me that it appears to me to be his ambition not to be Chief Minister anymore or Leader of the Opposition. It appears that he wants to be Speaker, Madam Speaker, given that he gets up and speaks out of what the procedures require and allow. Madam Speaker, Government is permanently in contact with the MoD on all aspects of airfield operations that may affect civilian flights into Gibraltar Airport.

455 **Hon. D J Bossino:** As I said, I really have missed the Hon. Chief Minister and when he is finally gone, I will continue to miss him, assuming I am still here and I do not make any pressure of the Speaker or whatever capacity. Madam Speaker, that response, if I may say, is a very general response.

460 I would ask him, please, to descend into particulars insofar as this particular most recent incident is concerned, where we saw a significant disruption of flights, I think for a period of two or three days, which had a significant impact on the ability of planes to fly to and from Gibraltar Airport. Is he able to provide any information in respect of the radar maintenance issue?

465 **Hon. Chief Minister:** No, Madam Speaker, I cannot give any information about the radar maintenance issue. It is not an area of Government responsibility. I have told him we were in touch with the MOD.

470 The MOD was in touch with us and with the airlines to deal with how this contingency will be dealt with. The Hon. Gentleman has to understand, as the world sometimes forgets but is crudely reminded, for example, the huge power cut affecting southern France, Andorra, Spain and Portugal, that technology has to be understood to both be fallible, require maintenance, etc. and if you want radar to be there to assist you, you have to maintain it.

475 You do that in a way that advertises the fact to the airlines and then the airlines make the decisions that they may wish to make. Unfortunately, Madam Speaker, airlines might sometimes make decisions which we, as consumers might not think are the ones best designed to suit our needs or that we as a Government might not think are the ones best designed to fit Gibraltar as a tourist destination or as an airport destination.

480 They make commercial decisions which are designed to look after their pockets because at the end of the day, they have shareholders and they are businesses and they might decide to bus people in particular directions. They might decide to cancel flights. They might decide to change the timing of flights.

That is in the nature of industry and, in particular, an industry as cost-intensive as the airline industry.

485 **Hon. D J Bossino:** The Hon. Chief Minister is waffling and is rambling, I get the sense, and the impression that he is not actually prepared for it. His mind is clearly on other things and we wait with bated breath what his Ministerial statements will contain after he completes his questions.

Hon. D J Bossino: May I ask him...

490 **Hon. Chief Minister:** Madam Speaker, that is a point that the Hon. Gentleman has made which is very unfair and contrary to the rules. He is pre-empting something on the Order Paper. If there is to be a Ministerial statement, it is later in the Order Paper for a reason and to refer to it now is inappropriate in parliamentary terms and he should know that because, although he is very much my junior in terms of the years that he has been here, he has been here for more than most of
495 the others on his side except for the Leader of the Opposition.

Madam Speaker: Let us not refer to what is on the Order Paper. Let us proceed with...

500 **Hon. D J Bossino:** Madam Speaker, I...

Hon. Chief Minister: The criticism remains insofar...

Hon. D J Bossino: Do I sit down or...? Insofar as the Chief Minister's, waffle in his response. The issue is not focused on what airlines do commercially or what they may not do commercially. The
505 issue is focused very specifically in respect of another incident, in respect of Gibraltar's airport, which emanates from the Ministry of Defence, which has caused a disruption to the ability to these commercial airlines to come to Gibraltar. That has an effect potentially on our economy.

We cannot on the one breath say, oh, it is an MOD airport and then on another boast, as I am sure the Hon. Minister for Tourism will no doubt do during the course of the Budget Address that
510 we have more flight arrivals and his efforts in relation to that. In relation to the supplementary, I ask him again, in respect of this particular incident, I am not asking about general contact that there has been, what pressure is he putting to bear on the Ministry of Defence to ensure that something like this does not reoccur so that therefore we have no further disruptions on commercial flights?

515 **Hon. Chief Minister:** The Hon. Gentleman gets up to accuse me of waffling. I mean, it is really quite remarkable. The Hon. Gentleman would like to pretend that things are black and white.

That is the politics that gets nations into trouble. That is the politics that gets nations obsessed with whether Brussels is going to permit a bent banana or not. Whether baseless Brussels
520 bureaucrats are going to require us to have sprouts that look one way or another.

That is the sort of politics, Madam Speaker that is not the politics that made the GSD a party of Government. The complexity of operating a military airfield that extends into the sea on the western side and which takes aircraft into the eastern side, or the western side, and is run by the MOD, but is operated daily as a civilian terminal, is huge. Now, if the hon. Gentleman thinks that
525 he can get up and simply put it strenuously that the Government should be putting more pressure on the MOD, and he thinks that that is useful for the airlines, for the MOD, for the Government of Gibraltar, for Gibraltar's tourist industry, he is much less deserving of being given the opportunity to be in charge of Gibraltar's affairs than I might otherwise have thought and I already thought.

530 **Hon. D J Bossino:** Madam Speaker, we have gone from commercial airlines to bananas, and I attribute the bananas fruit to him, because the Hon. Gentleman seems to have gone bananas. This is something that needs to be addressed, and the sooner it is addressed, the better, and it is his

and his Government's political responsibility to ensure that things like this do not happen again. However, look, if the Hon. Chief Minister has not come well prepared and well briefed to deal with this issue that is a matter for him.

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By way of a question, and I predicate this question on this information that we have been given direct from the horse's mouth, we are told that these are pre-planned maintenance works, which occur on a three-yearly maintenance basis. Therefore, that must beg the obvious question. In fact, there are two.

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Why on earth does the Government not know this and have this information and intelligence to hand? And two, why is it that they do not put proper and greater efforts to ensure that these things are done in a pre-planned way so that the commercial airlines can be warned about this in advance and not have to make eleventh-hour changes, which has an impact not just directly on passengers, but also more nefariously and potentially more dangerously to our sustainability as an economy? Does he not appreciate that, as the Minister responsible for finance, for goodness sakes?

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Hon. Chief Minister: Well, Madam Speaker, I am sure his fan will tell him that he has done very well today, just as he used to tell me. However, really, it is really quite remarkable that this community is paying for that sort of question. The Hon. Gentleman has managed to contradict himself during the course of asking his question on a number of occasions.

550

Let me point out why. He says that he has it from the horse's mouth. Well, I put it to him, Madam Speaker that black beauty also spoke to us.

Indeed, Madam Speaker, black beauty told us months before the radar was going to be maintained that it was going to be maintained. Black beauty told the airlines. The airlines, Madam Speaker, told their customers.

555

And so all of the things that he has said that we should have known, we knew because black beauty told us, Madam Speaker, just like it told the airlines who he said should have known, so that they could have planned, except that the airlines planned and told their clients. That is what I told him in my first answer, Madam Speaker, before referring him to the bananas that seem to be what inform his questioning.

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However, Madam Speaker, if I had got up and said the contradictory things that he has said in his question, I would, having had the opportunity to reflect upon such a convoluted, dog-eating-its-own-tail question, later get up and apologise to the public for being such a waste of their money. Madam Speaker, what a disrespectful response from the Hon. Chief Minister.

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Hon. D J Bossino: What a usual below-the-belt response from the Hon. Chief Minister, where the Hon. Chief Minister gets personal but that is a matter for him and as I always say, it is up to him and his conscience but let me ask him this.

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The Hon. Chief Minister and he cannot get away with, well, that is for the airlines to answer, and it is not for me to answer. He has said, the Chief Minister has said, that he knows, on authority, he has information, he says, that the airlines told their passengers that this was going to happen. Does he not appreciate that that may be accurate to one extent, but it doesn't deal with the point that I made, is that they did tell their passengers at the eleventh hour, once these things had been booked, that this matter has featured in the press, where we have had interviews of passengers complaining about the effects it is going to have on the Gibraltar economy, how bad an effect it is going to have on our reputation. Does he not understand, and I ask him this, does he not understand that the information was passed on to customers and to clients at the eleventh hour, which then caused a disruption, which is precisely what we need as a community to stop from happening ever again, because if it is not this, it is phone lines to Sevilla, it is always something.

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Hon. Chief Minister: Madam Speaker, well, the MOD. know that they have a friend in him. Remarkable. The Hon. Gentleman's style, Madam Speaker, seems to be that he can come here and punch as much as he likes, but whenever a fist flies back in his direction, it is always aimed below his belt.

Angelito, Madam Speaker. *Pobrecito* Madam Speaker, *pobrecito*. I have no doubt, Madam Speaker, that his fan will tell him that he is right. I have no doubt about that, and he should have that comfort, no doubt, tonight.

Madam Speaker, of course it is down to the conscience of the individual churchgoer to decide how it is that they should run their parliamentary life as much as their personal life. In the way that I have run my parliamentary life, I have enjoyed the support of the whole of this community sufficiently to be able to pip him to this post repeatedly on four occasions. Well, sorry, not on four occasions.

He bottled it once. I think on three. For that reason, perhaps I have a better relationship with the M.O.D. and for that reason, Madam Speaker, Black Beauty, to ascribe to the MOD the nomenclature that he has chosen of the horse that spoke because it can only have been the MOD if you had it from the horse's mouth and there was only one entity doing maintenance for the radar, it must have been the MOD, unless he is trying to lead us up a garden path.

I have it from the MOD that they informed the airlines. The airlines have accepted that they were informed by the MOD The airlines then informed their customers. Who is he criticising, Madam Speaker?

The airlines for when they told their customers. Therefore, Madam Speaker, perhaps at the end of this torturous road, what there is a criticism by Mr. Bossino of the airlines because they informed their customers late. By the way, operational changes are nothing new.

I have booked a summer holiday with my children. No sooner had I booked it, I had a notification that actually our departure time has changed for one of the legs of one of the flights. In good time and quite inconsequentially.

However, if hon. Members look at the terms and conditions of carriage that you sign up to when you buy an airline ticket, the hon. Gentleman is a lawyer, he understands that he is entering into a contract for carriage under the Chicago Convention when he buys a ticket to fly on an airline. The airline tells you that they can tell you at any time that the conditions might change. Therefore, when the airlines chose to tell their customers, may not be down to Black Beauty and it is certainly not down to us.

So, perhaps, Madam Speaker, on reflection, but again, it is a matter very much for the conscience of the individual churchgoer, he might wish to think that he's got this line of questioning completely wrong. Madam Speaker, he should have no doubts. His fan will tell him he was right.

Madam Speaker: Next question.

Q596/2025
GibDock –
Service to aircraft carriers

Acting Clerk: Question 596, the Hon. the Leader of the Opposition.

Hon. Dr K Azopardi: Madam Speaker, has Government discussed with GibDock its plans to provide services to aircraft carriers and the various economic and other implications of the same?

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

Chief Minister (Hon. F R Picardo): Madam Speaker, yes, ma'am.

635 **Hon. Dr K Azopardi:** Sorry, I thought there was going to be more trouble after that. So, can I ask, then, the Chief Minister, can he give us a bit more detail about the discussions that have been had with GibDock? Some of it, some of the plans, obviously, are in the public domain because there have been stories.

640 Indeed, the UK, one of the UK Government Ministers has been quoted in the press about this. Can I ask the Chief Minister, can he give us a bit more detail about those discussions and has there been discussions between the Government and the UK Government in respect of this matter?

Hon. Chief Minister: Well, Madam Speaker, yes, GibDock has delivered a presentation to the Government on its future plans and we have discussed those also with the Ministry of Defence.

645 **Hon. Dr K Azopardi:** Apart from receiving the presentation, did part of the presentation refer to possible economic consequences, in other words, benefits that might be derived from the project? In addition, did the presentation contain also material in respect of possible impact on the residential environment and if not, to that extent, has the Government considered the possible environmental impact or other impact of the development of the proposed project?

Hon. Chief Minister: Yes to all, Madam Speaker.

655 **Hon. Dr K Azopardi:** I see and do I take it from the Chief Minister's rather contained answers, which is not his normal style, sometimes his style is to give brief answers but then to be quite explanatory in following detail, but do I take it from his reduced answers that they are in very early discussions on these matters and that there might be developments in respect of those matters in coming months?

660 **Hon. Chief Minister:** Madam Speaker, I cannot win. When I am staccato, they do not like staccato. When I extend myself, they do not like that, I extend.

Either I waffle or I am too short. I mean, it is a good thing I was never trying to convince them to vote for me, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, the Hon. Gentleman is talking about a project, which belongs to a third party.

665 They have spoken to us about it. We have spoken to the MOD about it. They have not yet done anything about it.

Many of the things that the hon. Gentleman is talking about would be in the process of that third party delivering its project if it wishes to do so. There are criteria. This matter would have to go to the DPC.

670 There would have to be extensive consultation. The consultation would include environmental factors in the area. They would include more general environmental factors.

They would, of course, include very technical factors and consultation with the MOD at a technical level, not just at an economic level. There would be economic benefits. There would be other economic issues that would arise.

675 Madam Speaker, this is an area where it is fraught with issues in the detail, but those details are not yet engaged. The Government is alive to those details. We have raised some of those issues of detail with both the Ministry of Defence and with GibDock, but until the third party, whose project this is, takes the step forward, other than just to say that they would like to, it is really quite inappropriate for the Government to answer questions on it because this is not a Government project.

680 The Government is not answerable for what GibDock might seek to do and that is simply why I am being a little more staccato.

685 **Hon. Dr K Azopardi:** Yes, of course, the Government is not answerable for GibDock. It is
answerable for its, to the extent of its discussions with GibDock, which is really what my original
question was about and I appreciate that, the Chief Minister's explanation that of course, if
GibDock were to proceed, there are all sorts of planning issues and at that point you'd have to
consider environmental impact and residential impact, indeed security issues, etc., etc. but can I
ask him this? To the extent of the current holding of GibDock, of lease or any agreement with
690 Government, etc., does the proposed project, beyond the presentation it is made to the
Government for information or for other reasons, does it require for it to happen a renegotiation
with the Government of any aspect of its current status, its current agreement?

Hon. Chief Minister: Madam Speaker that is a question on which the Government is taking
695 legal advice and so I would not like to be drawn at this stage.

Madam Speaker: Next question.

700

Q597/2025
Waste collection –
Reduction of personnel

Acting Clerk: Question 597, the Hon. the Leader of the Opposition.

Hon. Dr K Azopardi: Madam Speaker, is it simply a reduction of personnel that would account
705 for the Government's expected savings of up to £900,000 in waste collection services or is it
something else and if so what?

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

710 **Chief Minister (Hon. F R Picardo):** No, Madam, the expected savings are not solely due to a
reduction in personnel. The savings stem from a broader streamlining of the waste collection
service under a new collective agreement.

This agreement has modernised operations by removing outdated processes and working
practises, which has allowed for a reduction in personnel and a significant cut in overtime
715 payments. Additionally, operational changes such as the adjustment of waste collection routes
and timings, including the removal of the dedicated cardboard collection route and the mid-
afternoon collection run are also contributing to the cost reductions. The cost savings, as
calculated by the Department of the Environment on 26 March 2025, are circa £685,000.

720 These savings are based on the removal of covers for vacant posts, which are no longer
required due to the reduction in complement, as well as the removal of the cardboard collection
and mid-afternoon collection runs. The removal of the mid-afternoon collection run will also be
closely monitored to determine whether this will need to be reintroduced, albeit with different
conditions. The savings do not arise slowly or even primarily from a reduction in headcount.

725 They are the product of a comprehensive, carefully negotiated agreement between the
Government, Unite the Union and Gibraltar Industrial Cleaners.

Hon. Dr K Azopardi: The press release that the Government issued makes clear that there is
going to be a reduction in ten posts. I get from what the Chief Minister has just said that the
savings are not just about that, not just the reduction of ten posts, it is about the reduction in
730 overtime, but also he has been keen to stress a modernisation of practises and a streamlining, he
said, of services. In fact, one of the things that is changing and in that context perhaps I ask him
this, one of the things that is changing, and I believe because it is obvious from the press release,

that there are new collection times that will shift from to 8pm for the first round and 11pm for the second round, replacing the previous early morning start.

735 Is the Government satisfied, cost savings aside that that is the best way forward in terms of the service provided to the public to remove the early morning collection, especially in a period of summer, and then have two collections very close to each other in the evening?

Hon. Chief Minister: Very much so, Madam Speaker, especially in the period of summer, 740 because this will mean that waste will not fester overnight in the heat. Most people put out their waste in the evening or late at night, but usually no later than about 11 o'clock. I mean, the run, when we say 11 o'clock, it does not start and finish at 11 o'clock.

It will start at 11 o'clock and it will go through. This is actually, we think, a much better way of doing it, based on the advice that we have from the people who are professionals in the field, both 745 in GIC and in the Department, who believe that this was a better thing to do. Indeed, it is not a secret; I am delighted to see future generations of politicians with us at last, Madam Speaker.

Let us not put them off, Madam Speaker, quite right. There is unanimity across the floor. We are told this is a better way to do things, and I can understand why, Madam Speaker, because I am often awake when the truck comes at the early time of the morning, but not everyone is, 750 Madam Speaker, and it is disruptive to some in the mornings.

Is there a perfect mechanism? Well, Madam Speaker, given, perhaps, some topical calls for a referendum, if you had a referendum about what time we each think our waste should be collected, it might be different. Some of us might say, well, we have all usually finished dinner by 8.30; we have put the rubbish out by 9.00, delighted if you could take it by 9.25 and others might 755 say, 9.25? We have not even sat down for dinner at 9.25. Please do not come and collect my rubbish until quarter to 11 and in summer, do not bother turning up before midnight. Look, Madam Speaker, this is about what is right in this community.

This community is very Anglo-Saxon in its approach, despite the fact that we live in the Mediterranean, with some allowances for how we eat compared to how others might eat in 760 Bournemouth or in Bilbao. Therefore, the experts tell us, the best system is this system. The thing that I was going to tell the Hon. Gentleman, before I was distracted by so much youth arriving, is that we in the department led by the hon. Member Prof. Cortes have long been seeking to negotiate these arrangements.

In addition, we have not been able to do so. So we are very satisfied indeed with the 765 cooperation that we have had from GIC and from Unite the Union, because we have been seeking to achieve this new timetable for some time.

Hon. Dr K Azopardi: Yes, Madam Speaker. I think the problem with the analysis and obviously they have the benefit of having taken the official's advice and we have not. However, seeing on 770 this side, given that the explanation is about modernisation and streamlining, it just occurs to us on this side of the House, when you consider all that in the round, that in effect what we are saying is we are not going to pick up rubbish for 21 hours. While there may be certain people who follow that kind of more Germanic or Anglo-Saxon view of life in terms of putting out rubbish, the reality is that it leaves a very big chunk of the day where there is no rubbish collection and while of course 775 it is annoying for there to be the noisy truck in the morning, perhaps a shift in times might have made that better from that perspective. Perhaps I imagine that the answer is that there must be flexibility in the agreement that has been negotiated to review those arrangements but because my question was about savings, can I just ask him, he mentioned in his answer, in his original answer, that apart from the reduction on posts and the streamlining, there will be a reduction of 780 overtime.

Can you give us an indication of the kind of savings that are being forecast on overtime?

785 **Hon. Chief Minister:** Madam Speaker, let me start where he started before I go to the element of supplementary that he's put because the way that he's put it, he has suggested that there's going to be a greater interval now between the collection of rubbish than there is today and that is not the case, Madam Speaker.

All that has happened is that we are changing when the interval occurs. So instead of occurring from 5 in the morning to 5 in the morning, a 24-hour interval, exactly the thing that he has said is the problem, it is now going to be from 11pm to 11pm. Therefore, Madam Speaker, I do not see how he can alight upon that being an issue.

795 Especially if he were to, give me a moment to explain to him how this has worked. Something, which I am sure, he would have been aware of. In the evenings, the practise was that one or two, one person from each of the runs would go around pulling out the rubbish between 8 and 11, and bringing all of the large bins out into the public highway.

So that at the time of the collection, at five in the morning, it would be easier and less disruptive, because at five in the morning it makes a lot more noise to open the doors, etc., etc., than it might otherwise have been. Therefore, I do not understand what it is that the Hon. Gentleman does not like about this system because now, the same thing will happen between eight and eleven o'clock at night, except that we will take the rubbish instead of leaving it on the highway.

805 So this is more hygienic, it is more environmentally in keeping with what we want to see, and as the Hon. Gentleman said, as he carefully, as usual, quite unlike others, prefaced his question, he has not had the benefit of having experts' advice. We have. And so with the benefit of the experts' advice, it would be the same experts that would be advising him if he had pipped us to the post at the last Election, and assuming that all of us think that we have experts for good reason, and we don't take the gavis approach, that we are sick of experts, and that they're experts who know more than us, but a mere inconvenience, then, Madam Speaker, he would be defending this position, if he had achieved it, as we have achieved it, after many years of seeking to negotiate it.

810 Madam Speaker, on overtime, I do not have the exact figure, but it would be the difference between 685 and 900.

Madam Speaker: Next question.

815

Q598/2025

New Victoria Stadium –

Extent of any funding, contribution, financial assistance or loan

Acting Clerk: Question 598, the Hon. the Leader of the Opposition.

820 **Hon. Dr K Azopardi:** Madam Speaker, can the Government confirm the extent of any funding, contribution, financial assistance or loan made to date towards the new Victoria Stadium development project by the Government directly or indirectly or any Government-owned company or the Savings Bank and to whom (which entity), by whom (which entity) and in what amount and on what terms?

825 **Acting Clerk:** Answer, the Hon. the Chief Minister.

Chief Minister (Hon. F R Picardo): Madam Speaker, as per answer to Question 361 of 2024, his Majesty's Government is assisting Stadium Developments Limited in respect of management services, design and construction of the new stadium, and the basis that we will be repaid any such amount advanced in full to date an amount of £2,040,005.12 has been advanced for costs in this regard and repayment is anticipated before the stadium is built.

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Hon. Dr K Azopardi: Madam Speaker, before the stadium is built or before the stadium is commenced?

835 **Hon. Chief Minister:** I am told, Madam Speaker, built.

Hon. Dr K Azopardi: Madam Speaker, perhaps the Chief Minister can check that, because in answer to Question 221 of 2024, he said, in answer to a question from me, that this was use of the taxpayers' money for the purposes of advancing, but to be repaid with interest. So by the time that the building of the stadium starts, we will have been repaid in full and with interest. So perhaps he can, if he does not mind, can check that and then confirm.

Hon. Chief Minister: Madam Speaker, I think it would probably be inconvenient for both of us that I have to go away and check it. What I can tell him is that I do not believe there is any attempt to change the tense of the answer and that would probably be sufficient for Hansard. What was said is what is being said, although perhaps a different word has been chosen.

There has been no change in the terms and the terms were properly set out in the previous answer.

850 **Hon. Dr K Azopardi:** All due respect, start and end is not a tense. It is a moment in history. Does he not agree?

Hon. Chief Minister: No, Madam Speaker, because I do not think that the word built means finished building. It says built. That is why I am giving him the greater clarity that I thought he was seeking by saying that I am sticking to the terms of the original answer, which were the ones that referred to the agreement with Gibraltar Stadium Developments Limited or Stadium Developments Limited.

Therefore, he has the benefit of that certainty, Madam Speaker, although moments in history entertained us earlier when I was answering questions from Mr. Origo.

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Madam Speaker: Next question.

Q599/2025

Eastside project / reclamation –

Complaint by environmentalists laid before the Spanish court

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Acting Clerk: Question 599, the Hon. the Leader of the Opposition.

Hon. Dr K Azopardi: Is the Government monitoring the progress of the complaint laid before the Spanish court (in La Linea) by a Spanish environmental organisation in relation to the Eastside project and/or reclamation?

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

Chief Minister (Hon. F R Picardo): Madam Speaker, yes, ma'am.

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Hon. Dr K Azopardi: ...And monitoring it informally or doing so formally or in discussions with the developer?

880 **Hon. Chief Minister:** Well, Madam Speaker, I do not know what it is that the hon. Gentleman means when he says whether we are doing so formally or informally. As a Government, I suppose everything we do is formally done. It is not being done informally.

It is not being done on the quiet. It is being done on the basis that we need to know what is happening there. Is he asking me in legal terms whether we are intervening in the proceedings?

885 The answer is we are not intervening in proceedings in a foreign court that purport to exercise extraterritorial jurisdiction, which we do not recognise. That is for sure... and the tail end of his question was whether we were doing so with the developer.

890 We are there, I could say, informally doing it with the developer in the sense that the developer and we have not got a contract to do this but, of course, we are working together with the developer because we are giving the lease for them to be able to develop and we are monitoring together that there should not be any adverse consequence in their ability to enjoy peaceful enjoyment and development of the land properly and legally ceded by His Majesty's Government of Gibraltar in respect of that area. Which, by the way, is the area, which they seem to be not in favour of us developing, given the earlier line of question.

895 Although I have no doubt that, the Hon. Leader of the Opposition will agree with me that we should defend Gibraltar's right to develop in that area, whether or not British peers join us in support of that.

Hon. Dr K Azopardi: Whether British peers or British groyne join us in that effort. He certainly can have our assurance that it is common ground between us that there is no jurisdiction of Spain in those waters or any attempt to develop that area which we believe to be sovereign Gibraltar territory. What I was asking when I said informally, and formally, what I really meant was, is he reading it in the columns of El País or are they going further and taking formal legal advice without intervening, are they taking formal legal advice in Spain in respect of the remit of that investigation and in any event is he aware whether the developer is being asked to attend the Spanish court?

905 **Hon. Chief Minister:** Well, Madam Speaker, I am not one to fall for the trap of saying that you should never believe anything that you read in the newspapers in terms of anything because there are some things that you read in the newspapers which are true. Sometimes, for example, the date... but not always.

910 El País is one of the better newspapers in the world, one of the more reliable sources of information in Spain. Sometimes on Gibraltar, their views are contrary to ours when it comes to views but in respect of information, it is not fair to say that they are always wrong. In any event, the Government would not rely just on what it reads in the press in these matters.

915 The reliable press or the unreliable press which even though unreliable sometimes gives one useful tips a little like a clock or a blogger that is wrong most of the time but is right at least twice a day for example but Madam Speaker, of course the Government is diligently pursuing understanding all of the legal issues that could arise but in particular not just in Spanish law, in public international law which is what really matters here and the contest of jurisdictions that could ensue. A contest of jurisdictions, Madam Speaker, that I am sure he like I would relish because he will recall as I recall that it was the Spanish who refused to take the matter of Gibraltar's waters to the international tribunal for the law of the sea when it was offered by the United Kingdom.

920 It is the Spanish that have run scared of a determination by an independent international tribunal of the issue of jurisdiction in the waters and it is the Spanish that might end up putting it there if they were to seek to do something in their national courts that would make the matter justiciable in international fora either at the suit of an individual, perhaps a developer for example, that might find its rights somehow unfairly impaired or at the suit of a Government in some other guise, Madam Speaker, perhaps in terms of seeking an advisory opinion which doesn't require the other side to agree.

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Madam Speaker: Next question.

Q600/2025
UK GHIC style card –
Extending the service to Gibraltarians/residents

935 **Acting Clerk:** Question 600, the Hon. the Leader of the Opposition.

Hon. Dr K Azopardi: Madam Speaker, has there been any progress in the possibility of extending a UK GHIC style card scheme to Gibraltarians and residents of Gibraltar so that healthcare in the EEA can be accessed if needed?

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

Chief Minister (Hon. F R Picardo): Madam Speaker, yes, the Government continues discussions with the United Kingdom on the possibility of extending a UK GHIC style card system to Gibraltar.

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Hon. Dr K Azopardi: So let me understand that because I suppose progress can be made in one of two ways. They are not exclusively of each other. It can be made perhaps by an extension of a UK GHIC scheme in talks with the UK, as the Chief Minister has now alluded on in his original answer, by perhaps piggybacking on that scheme, extending it to the people of Gibraltar residents or there can be access to healthcare through, I suppose, an agreement with the EU.

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Are both options being considered or is it just the option of a discussion with the UK in respect of perhaps the extension of that scheme to Gibraltar?

Hon. Chief Minister: Madam Speaker, quite unlike Members opposite when I was in Opposition, I have never criticised them for being anything other than excellent professionals when they are exercising their professions. The Hon. Gentleman is a lawyer, he is a masterful cross-examiner and I am not going to fall for the trap that that question sets because if I answer in the way that he has suggested, I will be opening a door, ajar into one of the things that if I were to answer in one way might disclose something that might be at the negotiating table in respect of the treaty negotiation.

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Something which we will come to in a moment in the next question, but that I have been very careful not to do in any public statements that I have made and therefore the Hon. Gentleman will allow me to simply refer him to the answer I gave him a few moments ago which was about one particular strand of the two that he offers me and I was very circumspect and clear in the way that I answered.

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Hon. Dr K Azopardi: Well, I do not think it was a closed door. I thought the door was at least a bit ajar because I have asked the Chief Minister about this before and he has danced around it but implied that he will not answer because it is related to the discussions that are being had. Therefore, I thought rather than it being firmly shut in my face under lock and key, there was at least a glimpse of light coming through the little crack of the open door that at least he would confirm that it might be part of the discussions with the EU. Does he resist even that question?

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Hon. Chief Minister: Yes, Madam Speaker, I would ask him to leave my crack alone and to know that those of us who might remember the late 80s will know that I am a very bad dad dancer and he should not be asking me to do any dancing on this issue.

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Madam Speaker: Next question.

Q601/2025
Treaty with the EU for Gibraltar –
State of negotiations

980 **Acting Clerk:** Question 601, The Hon. the Leader of the Opposition.

Hon. Dr K Azopardi: Madam Speaker, yes, my hon. Colleague says this is the classic question. Will the Chief Minister update the House on the state of negotiations between the EU and UK aimed at concluding a Treaty for a new relationship with the EU for Gibraltar?

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

Chief Minister (Hon. F R Picardo): Madam Speaker, I do not know whether Mr. Bossino was here here-ing the question or the subject, but one never knows with him. Madam Speaker, as I said earlier this week, we are now excruciatingly close to securing a treaty between the UK and the EU on Gibraltar. Indeed, Madam Speaker, we have been 99.9% of the way there since mid-2023. That is not just my assessment. It is echoed by Antonio Costa, Kier Starmer, Jose Manuel Albares and Maroš Šefčovič, who all recognise we are very close to agreement. The meeting in Madrid earlier this month, with all parties present, delivered progress on the handful of issues still outstanding.

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Work continues daily to close those final gaps but Madam Speaker, let me be very clear, in case I have not been clear enough so far. No deal will be done that compromises our sovereignty.

Not now, not ever and if that means excruciating a little longer to get it absolutely right, then so be it, because getting it right for Gibraltar is what matters most.

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Hon. Dr K Azopardi: Well, Madam Speaker, not everyone has been as excruciatingly close as the Chief Minister has. He mentioned a rattle of a number of names, including Antonio Costa, but Antonio Costa certainly wasn't 99.99% of the way there two years ago, because he took a journey of 0 to 100 miles in the space of one second in the press conference the other day from being very far to very close but that on an aside, can I ask you that whether there has been a lot of moved music in the last few days, not just about the EU-UK recalibration, but also about the possibility of an agreement.

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There have been statements by the foreign Minister in Spain, the British foreign Minister, and all that moved music is positive, of course but can he give us a sense of how long he thinks that these discussions need to go on for? More precisely, can I ask him, does he expect when the moment comes, and we hope the moment does come, that there will be an announcement that entails the publication of the treaty text, or will it be a political declaration with the treaty text to come?

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Hon. Chief Minister: Madam Speaker, can I start by just seeking to confirm that it was your view that we should be asked one supplementary at a time? Because that is a double header.

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Madam Speaker: It was my view, it is my view, but I do not want to stop the flow. That was two supplementaries, but they will count as two supplementaries.

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Hon. Chief Minister: Not in terms of counting, but two substantive issues, and I may therefore need to extend myself a little because they are two substantive issues. First of all, Madam Speaker, in relation to the first, I have told the Hon. Gentleman repeatedly in this House, it would not be in the interests of Gibraltar for us to say, well it is all going to be finished by X date, until we know that we can finish by X date because if I say it will be done by this date, or it has to be done by this date, and it cannot be done by this date, then my own statements would become the stranglehold around Gibraltar's lead negotiator.

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1030 Now, I know that they would like to see a stranglehold around Gibraltar's lead negotiator, but they would not like to see it around Gibraltar and so, Madam Speaker, therefore, that is why I have always resisted setting a deadline that would be used against us all and I think that they agree with that.

1035 In other words, although I think they wish the demise of Fabian Picardo, the politician, I don't think they wish to see the demise of Gibraltar's opportunities to land a safe and secure and beneficial deal, simply because it happened to be Fabian Picardo, the politician, that was Elected by the people instead of them to be the one leading Gibraltar's cause. Therefore, tortuous though that is, and torture me though they might wish to, I am not going to fall into the trap of making a mistake for Gibraltar. Which I am reminded by the Hon. Mr Bossino, as ever in biblical terms, is the principle of self-mortification, Madam Speaker. As one of the many other sacraments that he would like to remind us of today.

1040 The other point, Madam Speaker, that the Hon. Gentleman raises, is whether the conclusions when announced will be announced as one, that is to say, we have reached an agreement, this is what the agreement is about, and this is how it is documented in the terms of an international treaty, because that's what an agreement between the United Kingdom and the European Union would be. It would be an international treaty.

1045 Although, Madam Speaker, if I can just as an aside, before I answer his question, remind the House that this is not a treaty like Utrecht is a treaty. The reason I say that does not arise from anything the Hon. Leader of the Opposition has said, but because in many publications there is the thought that what is, being negotiated is a treaty about the status of Gibraltar. When status is referred to, or indeed when somebody refers to the issue of Gibraltar, the immediate thing that springs to the international mind is something to do with the sovereignty of Gibraltar.

1050 Nothing could be further from the negotiating table. What we are talking about, really, is a trade deal and this is why I think it is important to express it in this way.

1055 Although it is a treaty because trade deals, indeed deals, that is to say agreements between states are treaties when they are reduced to writing and signed. This is not a treaty like Utrecht. This is not about the sovereignty of Gibraltar.

This is about how goods can get from north of the border to Gibraltar, and how goods that are south of the border can get back to north of the border, who can buy them, and what rates of taxation indirectly apply to them. We already have them. We call them import duties.

1060 They used to be 16%, 12%. Many of them are now 6% or 3%. In addition, whether those duties change.

1065 And on immigration, how you create a common immigration zone between Gibraltar and the Schengen area, so you haven't got to show your passport when you cross the frontier between Gibraltar and Spain, which is in effect the frontier between Gibraltar and the Schengen area, and how you would therefore be able to go from Europa Point to Rovaniemi in the Arctic Circle, without having to show your passport.

That is what we are talking about. It is a treaty that we are negotiating, but it is not a replacement to the Treaty of Utrecht, which is the treaty on sovereignty in respect of Gibraltar, and deals with the status of Gibraltar, and is a session in perpetuity, Madam Speaker. Therefore, when people think about a new treaty, it is not a new treaty on those issues.

1070 It is a treaty only on the issues of goods and immigration and it is important that we remind people of that, Madam Speaker. That is the sound of my morning alarm, Madam Speaker.

It strikes fear in me. I feel I have woken up really late today. Madam Speaker, the question the Hon. Gentleman put was when we announce it, do we publish the treaty, or do we say we have reached an agreement the treaty to follow?

1075 Madam Speaker, I will refer the Hon. Gentleman to the answer I've given him some time before, which is that even that at the moment is not something that I would wish to venture an opinion on. There are different possibilities, there are different periods in time that might apply to one text versus another text, but eventually, a treaty does have to be published, whether that is on the day that we think that we have reached the agreement on what is in the treaty, but there

1080 might be issues. In the context of treaties involving the European Union, Madam Speaker, the
European Union is reticent on publication of a treaty if that treaty text has not already been
subjected to what they call the legal scrub, the legal translator's scrub, and it is been translated
1085 into the 20-odd languages of the EU and checked in each of those languages because the EU
doesn't publish in English or in Spanish or in French, it publishes in all of the languages. So Madam
Speaker, the Hon. Gentleman will understand that that is the reason behind my inability to give
him a direct answer at this stage, but I shall at some stage, I believe soon, be able to provide him
a clearer answer.

Hon. Dr K Azopardi: I mean, I get that, I understand that, but of course I have asked this a few
1090 times before, and as the months go by, and because the Chief Minister had indicated to me before
that in parallel with the discussions to unblock the principles, they were also drafting the text, I
thought it might have arrived at a point where, subject to unblocking of the principles, the treaty
text was sort of agreed.

His indication now is that I think we are still disconnected on those moments, but he can
1095 confirm. I certainly understand the point he's made about the requirement to go through all the
legal drafting and the translation into all the various community European Union languages, but
is it that the delay to the publication of the treaty would be related solely to that issue, or does he
consider that there would be some bargaining on text, because he will appreciate, I am sure, that
everyone would, a lot of people would welcome the final conclusion and a political declaration,
1100 but what people will really welcome is the clarity of the text, because that's when businesses can
consider the text and its implications. So, can I ask him at this level whether he is actively briefing
the business community on the travelling text and the implications to them of these issues?

Hon. Chief Minister: Madam Speaker, the Hon. Gentleman, again, as one of the leading King's
1105 Council in Gibraltar, again, I don't denigrate them like they used to denigrate me, just because
they're in Opposition, will no doubt not have asked a question he doesn't know the answer to,
and therefore he will know, because he will have enough people in the business representative
organisations, indeed some of them in his own law firm, who will know that they have been
briefed by the Government. Madam Speaker, the issue on the text is not that we are for some
1110 reason not continuing where possible to negotiate principles, which sometimes are translatable
immediately into text of treaty. It is that for the EU, even if you were to do that, just, I mean,
conceptually, I am not opening another crack into the negotiation, but conceptually, if you
negotiate with the EU a treaty, and you negotiate it in Italian, the text negotiated in Italian is not
going to be published by the EU once it is agreed in Italian until it is translated into the twenty-
1115 odd other languages of the community.

I am not going to say twenty-seven because it probably isn't twenty-seven and therefore
Madam Speaker, it is not that we are failing to continue the process of seeking to have as much
text agreed as possible, it is that even if all the texts were agreed on the day that we were to make
the announcement, the full political agreement has been reached on the treaty, it is very unlikely
1120 that the EU would be comfortable in agreeing to it publishing or anybody else publishing a treaty
text at that stage until it has been circulated in all of the scrubbed languages of the EU to all of the
member states for them to consider and probably having to go through one of the processes, the
Co-RIPA process, etc., etc. So Madam Speaker, I hope the Hon. Gentleman understands that this
is not any failure on the part of the Government to want to have an agreed text that is, in my view,
1125 now all of the potentially devil-in-detail issues are clear for treaty text purposes is what I am saying
because as we have often said for Gibraltar, this could be an issue and let's be very clear Madam
Speaker, there are devils in the detail. This is a negotiation.

This is a negotiation, Gibraltar is not the world's only superpower, and we have not gone to
Brussels to negotiate the European Union's surrender to the people of the Rock. People should
1130 not believe Rumours to the contrary.

Madam Speaker: I think that concludes the questions for the Hon. Chief Minister.

Acting Clerk: Suspension of standing orders. The Hon. the Chief Minister.

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Hon. Chief Minister: Madam Speaker, I now beg to move under Standing Order 7(3) to suspend Standing Order 7(1) in order to proceed with the Government 's statement.

Madam Speaker: All those in favour? (**Members:** Aye) Those against? Carried.

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Hon. Chief Minister: Madam Speaker, the Prime Minister has just announced that the United Kingdom has entered into a treaty with Mauritius for the exchange of the sovereignty of the Chagos Archipelago. The United Kingdom, Madam Speaker, has made the right decision on the Chagos Islands.

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This is a decision that protects national security whilst respecting international law. For all of the reasons that the Hon. Sir Joe Bossano, the Father of the House, has set out so eloquently in Dili in Timor-Leste this afternoon at the seminar of the United Nations Special Committee of 24, the read-across to Gibraltar is positive and is particularly relevant in the defence of British sovereignty over the whole of the territory and the British territorial waters around the Rock.

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I am very clear that there is no aspect of this decision, the advisory opinion or the treaty being entered into, which has any negative read-across to Gibraltar. In fact, quite the opposite is true. Madam Speaker, Prime Minister Starmer, Foreign Secretary Lamy and Minister Doughty enjoy my Government 's full support in the implementation of this decision and I know that we enjoy their full support in the defence of full British sovereignty in respect of the whole of Gibraltar and its waters.

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I commend this statement to the House.

Madam Speaker: Are there any questions for the purposes of clarification? The Hon. Leader of the Opposition.

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Hon. Dr K Azopardi: Madam Speaker, on this side of the House, we note the statement that the Chief Minister has made and of course we share the position that he concluded on about the strength of the position on sovereignty of Gibraltar and he knows he always has our support on issues which go to the sovereignty of Gibraltar and of course we welcome any support and statements that have been made recently by the British Government in respect of our sovereignty and status, both in the context of discussions with the EU and outside the context of discussions in the EU, whether the statements are made in the UN or not.

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Can I just ask him in relation to the impact that he says that they have considered the advisory opinion and the agreement and whether it has any impact in respect of our international law rights and so on. When he says that, does he mean that they have considered it on a political level or does he mean that they have taken legal advice on it?

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Hon. Chief Minister: Well Madam Speaker, I am grateful for his commitment to support the Government in relation to all matters, which relate to the sovereignty of Gibraltar. It could not be otherwise. Successive Governments and Oppositions have always been together on this subject, except of course for the short period in which the GSD supported the Brussels process contrary to the GSLP Government of 1988 to 1996.

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Madam Speaker, we have both politically and legally analysed the advisory opinion in respect of the Chagos Islands. The advisory opinion is particularly helpful to Gibraltar and the Hon. Gentleman I am sure will have done his own legal and political analysis. But essentially so that people understand it Madam Speaker, what the advisory opinion says, what the International Court of Justice has said in its advisory opinion is that when you put as an administering power a colonial territory on the list of non-self-governing territories in the United Nations at the UN, you

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1185 must put it as administered on the day that you put the territory on the list and that territorial
unit cannot be subject to division in the process of decolonisation. What that does Madam
Speaker, in the context of Gibraltar is to preserve now as a result of international jurisprudence,
the unit of Gibraltar in international law as we have all long argued it should be and others have
argued it should not.

1190 This goes to the question of the plural in the Brussels process, the issues of sovereignty versus
the issue of sovereignty where claimants have argued that they have a claim to the isthmus in
respect of Gibraltar to the waters in respect of Gibraltar and indeed to the rest of Gibraltar in
different degrees of legitimacy. So although we say they have no legitimacy whatsoever in any
respect the argument is that Gibraltar from the base of the rock was ceded by treaty and Spain
1195 would like it back, that Gibraltar's waters were never ceded and therefore in Spain's eyes they
remain Spanish and that the isthmus was never ceded, it was usurped and should be handed back
immediately that is the Spanish position, there is no secret there.

What the international advisory opinion does is not just take our position which has been
consistently across the floor of the House and across many generations, that the whole of the
territory of Gibraltar from where the frontier is today with Spain, out into the international
1200 dividing line for the strait on the east side into the centre of the bay of Gibraltar and three miles
out as provided for in the UNCLOS convention on the eastern side, the whole of Gibraltar is one
unit and is subject to decolonisation that has been our position. That is now the position of the
international court of justice in the advisory opinion because what it said is that the Chagos
archipelago could not be cleaved off from Mauritius and have Mauritius put on the list and not
1205 Chagos which was the position and then Mauritius decolonised by the UN special committee
under the auspices of the UN special committee but not the Chagos archipelago.

That the whole of that area which was one British administrative region must have been put
together must be deemed to have been put together and must be decolonised together that
therefore, Madam Speaker, drives a coach and horses through any potential legal argument forget
1210 the moral argument that we have but any legal argument that others might have pretended to
have that the isthmus could somehow be seen as divisible from Gibraltar in international law
indeed that its waters could be seen as divisible from Gibraltar in international law because of the
UNCLOS was done in 82 at the time that we were put on the list, the United Kingdom was already
1215 claiming waters around Gibraltar on the basis of the older principles of the cannon shot rule which
gave rise to the three mile limit and so Madam Speaker this is a very, very, very welcome decision
of the court which the United Kingdom is implementing now for national security reasons but
which we from Gibraltar are particularly comfortable with and we think enhances and further
protects in international law the positions that we have defended for generations and
demonstrates that we have been right since Sir Joshua first appeared at the Committee of 24 in
1220 New York to take the positions that we have taken that we have all consistently taken and I have
no doubt we shall all for many generations continue to take.

Madam Speaker: Any other questions? All right, we will continue with the order paper.

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HOUSING AND THE UNIVERSITY OF GIBRALTAR

Q529/2025

Halfway house –

Development of project; Establishment of working group; Eligibility criteria

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Acting Clerk: Answers to all questions continued. Questions to the Hon. the Minister for Housing and the Gibraltar University. Question 529, the Hon. A Sanchez.

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Hon. A Sanchez: Regarding Bridge House – the halfway house announced earlier this year by the Government as a lifeline for men experiencing separation or divorce – could the Government elaborate on the following:

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- (a) How many official meetings have taken place to discuss the development of this project following the initial meeting that was publicised.
- (b) Whether a working group has been established, and if so, who forms part of it.
- (c) Whether the eligibility criteria for access to Bridge House been agreed and finalised.

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

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Minister for Housing and the Gibraltar University (Hon. P A Orfila): Madam Speaker, we have had four official meetings of Bridge House. We are still to appoint the official and final working group. The eligibility criteria has not yet been finalised. It will be determined with the advice of the working group.

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Hon. A Sanchez: Madam Speaker, grateful for that answer. Would the Hon. Minister be able to elaborate on who is being consulted in relation to the development of the project and the different stakeholders that are taking part in these meetings?

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Hon. P A Orfila: Madam Speaker, not at this stage because now it is a charity and I do not think we can disclose that at this point.

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Hon. A Sanchez: Just by way of clarification, does the Hon. Minister mean that the meetings are taking place with a charity that the discussions are being held with a charity or that the Halfway House is going to be run by a charity?

Hon. P A Orfila: Madam Speaker, Bridge House will be run by a charity and at present, we are taking internal consultations.

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Hon. A Sanchez: Grateful, Madam Speaker. Could the Hon. Minister clarify whether this is a newly formed charity that is just being set up specifically for the Halfway House or is this a charity that is already established and the Government is consulting with?

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Hon. P A Orfila: Madam Speaker, this is a newly formed charity. We must bear in mind one thing that what is important here is that it will not cost the taxpayer a penny and there will be many who will be benefiting from this.

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Hon. A Sanchez: Yes, I understand Madam Speaker but we are just trying to get a bit more information in relation to the project. Would the Hon. Minister be able to elaborate as to the name of the charity that she is consulting with or she is not in a position to give this information out?

Hon. P A Orfila: Madam Speaker, as soon as we are ready we will make an announcement.

1285 **Hon. D J Bossino:** Can the Hon. Minister elaborate a bit more in relation to this charity? Is it expected somehow to fall under the auspices of the Government? Is there going to be any involvement from the Governing from her side in terms of the structure or the running of it?

1290 Because I appreciate that she is not giving much information and is being rather coy in her replies, but I think my Hon. Friend is being absolutely reasonable in her line of questioning. I think it is only right that the public should know and have a bit more information at this stage as to what type of structure the Hon. Minister is considering in terms of running this new venture.

Hon. P A Orfila: Madam Speaker, I refer the Gentleman to my previous answer.

1295 **Hon. D J Bossino:** I ask the Minister which aspects of her previous answer she is referring us to. She has given various answers as a result of four supplementary questions that my Hon. Friend has posed. Which specific answer is she asking me to consider?

Hon. P A Orfila: The ones that pertain to the supplementary, Madam Speaker.

1300 **Hon. D J Bossino:** No, no, no, Madam Speaker. The Hon. Minister simply cannot get away with saying that I am to refer to her answer. I am asking her specifically which answer is she asking the Opposition to consider in response to the question that my Friend and I have posed in terms of the structure of the charity.

1305 **Chief Minister (Hon. F R Picardo):** Madam Speaker, I would have thought it was obvious the part where she told him that she could not tell him any more at this stage.

1310 **Hon. D J Bossino:** Given that the Minister made an announcement in respect of this, I think some months ago, in respect of this interesting venture, we will reserve our views in relation to the venture until we get more information. But she was very quick, the Hon. Minister was very quick to make the announcement and to have the photo in the press, which he is very prone to do but at what stage will she be in a position to give us further details?

1315 **Hon. Chief Minister:** Madam Speaker, I confess that Hon. Members really have us on this one. They do always manage to get their picture in the paper sooner than we do and for doing much less than we do. However, as soon as we are able, Madam Speaker, we shall be saying a lot more.

1320 This is a great venture; I commend the Hon. Minister for it. I think she is going to deliver in areas where others have failed to deliver before and she, I know, is dying to be able to say more so we shall soon be able to put the hon. Gentleman out of his obvious misery with more information.

1325 **Hon. D J Bossino:** Great, Madam Speaker. As Hon. Ministers opposite tend and are prone to do, they are always very keen, and we get this a lot from the Minister for the Environment, that it will not cost the taxpayer any money but where can she therefore tell us where in this House is the funding going to come from?

Hon. P A Orfila: Madam Speaker, either the hon. Gentleman has not heard properly or he is failing to understand my answer. It is a charity. It is going to be funded by a charity at no cost to the taxpayer.

1330 **Madam Speaker:** Next question.

Q530/2025
Queen's Hostel –
Total number of residents

Acting Clerk: Question 530, the Hon. A Sanchez.

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Hon. A Sanchez: As of the 1st of May 2025, could the Government provide the total number of residents officially registered as residing at the Queen's Hotel Hostel?

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

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Minister for Housing and the Gibraltar University (Hon. P A Orfila): Madam Speaker, there are 80 residents in the Queen's Hotel as of 1 May 2025.

Hon. A Sanchez: Apologies, Madam Speaker, just to clarify in case we have misheard. 80 residents.

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Hon. P A Orfila: Eight zero, Z-E-R-O.

Hon. A Sanchez: Madam Speaker, I am grateful for that answer and for the clarification because we have heard before in previous discussions in relation to the Queen's Hostel can the Hon. Minister confirm whether all of these 80 residents are residing in the hostel?

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Hon. P A Orfila: Madam Speaker, no. Although we say that there are 80 registered, we have 61 floaters and 19 who are permanent. By floaters, I mean people who come and go on a monthly basis, etc.

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Hon. A Sanchez: I am grateful, Madam Speaker. For the record, would the Hon. Minister be able to outline how this is monitored, how residency in the hostel is monitored and how the Government keeps a record of who is actually residing at the hostel on a daily basis?

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Hon. P A Orfila: Well, Madam Speaker, we have a very able security company that makes sure that they are on who comes in and who goes out and they of course monitor how many people are there.

Hon. A Sanchez: I am grateful, Madam Speaker, but could the Hon. Minister perhaps be more specific how is this monitoring done? Is it through CCTV? Is a log kept of individuals?

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Do they have to sign in? Do they have to sign out? Is there a process for this monitoring?

Hon. P A Orfila: Had the Hon. Lady given me this question prior to this, I would have made sure that I would have had the answer for her. More or less, and maybe I stand to be corrected, I don't want to give false information here. But I do know that there are CCTV cameras and there has been an extension to the reception area, which means that when they come in, they are seen and the gentleman who is there knows who they are now. Therefore, if they do not see someone for a while, they do go and knock on the door to see that they are okay.

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Hon. D J Bossino: May I ask the Hon. Minister, and, you know, with the greatest respect to her, and we had a lot of this yesterday, I think the question does arise from the answer that the Hon. Lady has given. However, may I ask her this, what criteria does the security company, as she puts it, apply to make the distinction between a floater, as she puts it, and a permanent resident? What criteria does that distinction, how does that distinction arise such that one arrives at a perhaps more attractive figure, may I say, politically for the Hon. Member's opposite, to suggest that of

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the high number of 80 residents officially registered at Queen's Hotel is actually probably a lot less because we are talking about just one under 20.

1385 So what criteria, the question is, what criteria is applied by the security company? Does she know?

Hon. P A Orfila: No, Madam Speaker, I do not.

1390 **Hon. D J Bossino:** Well, can I ask the Hon. Minister to find out because I think if the Hon. Minister is going to be providing important statistical information for the House; would she prepare herself better and have, in an anticipatory way, these obvious supplementaries, answers to these obvious supplementaries to hand? So can I ask her to please investigate and provide this information, either by way of a further question by the Opposition, or indeed of my friend to my right in relation to the criteria?

1395 **Chief Minister (Hon. F R Picardo):** No, Madam Speaker, because we will take no such childish admonition from a person who is not empowered to determine whether or not one should have anticipated a particular question as an obvious supplementary simply because the Hon. Gentleman should wish to say that he thinks it was. That is a subjective matter. It is a matter, 1400 Madam Speaker that is up to those who are answering questions, not up to those who are asking questions.

We had this yesterday. We have had it now today. We can have it as many times as hon. Members want but if hon. Members want specific information, specific statistical information, specific factual information, they are actually required to prepare better. They are the ones who 1405 should be putting the questions, which are specific. They are the ones who are coming to this House to waste its time.

Therefore, none of what the Hon. Gentleman has said by way of childish admonition will be accepted by Hon. Members on this side of the House, and neither will I, as Leader of the House and Leader of the Government, ask anyone of this House to try and pretend to get into their minds, 1410 which is not a place where any of us would want to be, to seek to predetermine what they might ask us.

Hon. D J Bossino: Madam Speaker, this is a very adult and mature question, which has been posed. It is not childish by any stretch of the imagination. It is an obvious question, which arises.

1415 Now, can I ask the Hon. Minister opposite? Because of course, if we start to go down the route of asking specific questions on the Order Paper, questions which the Hon. Ministers simply are unable, or their officials are unable to anticipate are going to be legitimate supplementary questions that we can pose, we are going to be here for a whole month. As it is, my friend has filed something like 50 questions to the Government in this session, and Mrs Ladislaus has filed 1420 something like in excess of 70 questions to the Government.

If we all do that, we are going to be here for a very long time but can I ask this, when is it expected that the very large number of 80 official residents, whether floaters or whether permanents, are going to be rehoused in separate accommodation? As I understand it from 1425 previous answers, but I may be mistaken, that location is at the Sunrise Hotel in Devil's Tower Road.

Hon. Chief Minister: Madam Speaker, I do not know what it is that the Hon. Gentleman is complaining about. He and all his fellow Members of Parliament stood for Election. When you stand for Election, you know that you might win the Election and become a Minister, or you might 1430 lose the Election and not be Elected at all, or become a Member of the Opposition.

If you become a Member of the Opposition, your job is to ask questions. So why is the Hon. Gentleman pretending there is anything wrong or improper or inappropriate about having to ask 50 questions? They get £35,000 a year to turn up nine or ten times a year and ask a few questions.

1435 They could at least ask questions, Madam Speaker, which are designed to elicit the answers they say they want. That is the reality. In addition, I did not say, as Hansard will show when he goes back, that the question was childish.

I said the admonition was childish. The purported admonition. Because for the third time today I will remind him, Madam Speaker, that he is not Mr Speaker.

1440 He is a Member of the Opposition. He can ask what he likes and we can answer whatever we think is appropriate and he cannot admonish us for answering in a particular way.

We have responsibility for the answers that we give, Madam Speaker. So no, none of that arises. In addition, if he wants that information, he can ask a specific question.

Even if he has to ask 12 or 13 or 71 or 50 questions or 51 questions. Yesterday we had the Hon. Minister for Health in this Parliament on her birthday answering 120 questions. It is her job.

1445 She made absolutely no complaint. How churlish of him to sit there and complain.

Madam Speaker: Next question.

Q531/2025
Queens Hostel –
Cost and details of repairs

1450

Acting Clerk: Question 531, the Hon. A Sanchez.

1455 **Hon. A Sanchez:** Could the Government provide a breakdown of the total costs incurred for all repairs and works carried out at the Queen's Hotel Hostel within the last nine months, including a monthly breakdown and details of the nature, description, and type of works or repairs undertaken (including details of costs and works carried out by subcontracted entities)?

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

1460 **Minister for Housing and the Gibraltar University (Hon. P A Orfila):** It would be difficult at this stage to provide a breakdown of the total cost as works are currently being carried out.

Electrical installations and cabling are being carried out and painting, tiling and general repairs are continuing on a daily basis.

1465 The General Repairs are being carried out by J T Security Maintenance Team and the Electrical is being carried out by Badaoui Refurbs.

I am happy to provide a costing of the breakdown as the Hon. Lady wants to once we are finalised.

1470 **Hon. A Sanchez:** Madam Speaker, would the Hon. Minister be able to provide the dates when the refurbishments started? We have seen a demonstration recently in relation to Queen's Hostel and one of the concerns that were expressed in the demonstration was a lack of progress in relation to refurbishments and refurbishments not having been carried out. Refurbishments that were promised before the Christmas period.

1475 Would the Hon. Minister be able to provide the dates on which these refurbishments started to be carried out?

1480 **Hon. P A Orfila:** Madam Speaker, the refurbishment period started a couple of months back but the thing is that it doesn't look as though, they didn't feel, I suppose, that things were happening quick enough. Before you do things, you have to create the mess and then you start clearing up and you start painting and tiling etc. I have been to the Queen's Hostel on various occasions now. In fact, sitting down to have a coffee with one of the gentlemen there, with no

pictures taken by the way and yes, I have found that there has been quite a difference in the maintenance.

1485 **Hon. A Sanchez:** I am grateful for that Madam Speaker. Some of the issues that we are hearing about are very basic issues like issues with lighting, not enough light bulbs working, cooking hobs not working, not being enough of them for the residents. These are issues that can be resolved quickly and the effects of them can be appreciated quite quickly.

Are these issues still ongoing and if they are, why are they taking so long to be resolved?

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Hon. P A Orfila: Madam Speaker, those issues are not there anymore. I have personally been there, the hobs are working, the lift does work, and the place is clean, much cleaner than it has been. So, no, those issues have been dealt with.

1495 **Hon. D J Bossino:** While the Hon. Minister has replied to my friend on terms that she will be able to provide the breakdown of the total costs, is she able to provide the House with the estimated costs? Does she have that information with her? Because this is a tax-funded refurbishment, so on that basis, if the works had been given the green light, I would have assumed that an estimate would have been provided which the Hon. Minister would have approved.

1500 So is she able to provide that information across the floor of the House?

Chief Minister (Hon. F R Picardo): Madam Speaker, no, for an obvious reason and I am repeating something that I have repeated on a number of occasions to the Hon. Gentleman and this is why sessions take so long. Not because they ask 50 questions but because they ask 50 questions many times over. The Government will not provide its estimate of costs because if we provide our estimate of costs and it were to be possible to bring it in below that, even though we have received a quote from a third party and they are doing the works, the third party will turn around and say, oh, by the way, footnote, without mentioning that I've heard in Parliament that you assigned £10,000 more than you were going to pay me for this project. I found things happening whilst I was doing the works and it is going to cost you £10,000 more. It is not in the taxpayers' interest.

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1515 But the Hon. Gentleman just needs to get up on every question and he needs to get up to ask again this question about estimates, which I have answered him before House after House, Madam Speaker, and it is not in the interest of taxpayers that we should ever provide estimates of costs when we have given the job to a third party because all that is going to happen is that the taxpayer is going to pay more.

1520 However many times he asks for it, the logic of that would not change and if he were here, Madam Speaker, if he were here and I were to fall into dementia and were to ask him the same question from that side, I would commend to him, Madam Speaker, the answer I am giving now that he should give to me.

Hon. D J Bossino: Madam Speaker, we won't be dissuaded to continue to get up despite the frustration that it may cause, rather, the Hon. Chief Minister and ask questions. Indeed, we are being admonished for not putting the questions in the Order Paper. That is what we are being asked to do by the Hon. Minister for Health yesterday and now it seems by the Hon. Chief Minister today.

1525
1530 Can I ask her this? Because we are waiting here on this side of the House with so much anticipation and with bated breath to find out what the costs of these works are. Can I ask, and I hope that on this occasion we may elicit a reply, not from the Chief Minister, but from the Minister who gets paid very handsomely, much more than us, and almost £110,000 a year to provide the answer on this occasion. When does she think that the works will be completed such that she can provide this information not just to us, but also to the people of Gibraltar and to everybody listening today?

1535 **Hon. Chief Minister:** No, Madam Speaker, for a simple reason. He will get the answer from
whomever on the Government side the Government decides to field and given that this question
does not stand in his name in the Order Paper, it stands in the name of the hon. Lady who is paid
£35,000 a year to ask a few questions over 10 months at the Parliament or 9 months at the
Parliament may sit. The fact that he has stood up should tell us that he is trying to deprecate the
hon. Lady in the same way as he is de facto deprecating his hon. Lady, Madam Speaker.

1540 And for a simple reason, Madam Speaker, for a simple reason, the hon. Lady gets paid £110,000
because instead of having to come to the Parliament 2 or 3 times a month 2 or 3 times a month,
that is to say Madam Speaker, instead of having to come to the Parliament 2 or 3 days a month, 9
months or 10 months a year that is to say Madam Speaker, 30 odd days a year, the hon. Lady
works 365 days a year as a Minister and has responsibilities for 365 days a year. In addition, that,
1545 Madam Speaker, does not mean that the salary is multiplied by 3 or by 12, as it should be, Madam
Speaker. So if the Hon. Gentleman wants to be the one who gets up every time somebody else
asks a question, he will forgive me if I decide that I am going to get up to answer him if I wish to.

1550 **Hon. D J Bossino:** I think he has just put them off here.

Hon. Chief Minister: Madam Speaker, I think what put them off was the repeated questioning
which is in keeping with the questions we have asked before because what I have not answered
yet, Madam Speaker, what I have not answered yet are the other things that he said. First of all,
Madam Speaker, there is no frustration on the part of the Government.

1555 There is no frustration. We are delighted to sit here and answer the same question repeatedly,
but we will do so. Asking us, the same question repeatedly is not going to change the answer that
he gets.

The question that he should put on the Order Paper is the question he wants the answer to. If
the question he puts on the Order Paper is one that we are not going to answer because he asks
1560 for an estimate, whether he puts it on the Order Paper or he does not put it on the Order Paper
is not going to change the answer that he gets, Madam Speaker. He is always going to get the
same answer that it is not in the interest of the taxpayer that we give out an estimate.

1565 Does he not understand? Genuinely, intellectually, has he not done the exercise of seeking to
understand what I am explaining to him? If I give him this number, the person who is potentially
charging us less is going to charge all of us, all of us, more.

That is what we should be against, Madam Speaker. Which part of that does he not
understand? Alternatively, is he too frustrated by having lost three successive General Elections
that he just cannot get it into his head?

1570 **Madam Speaker:** Before the hon. Member arises, I presume he wants to. I am just going to ask
for a breath. I will allow one more question, if it is a question in its own right, not a debate on
what has been said, not an answer.

I do not want toing and froing. If the hon. Member has a genuine question he needs to answer,
I would allow it, but I am not going to have a debate continuing.

1575 **Hon. D J Bossino:** Madam Speaker, is it possible that among all of that diatribe and going
around the houses that I may have missed the answer to the question which was posed. I may
have missed the answer. Therefore, I am humble enough to accept that in all of that woolly
response and quite angry reply and despicable response that we have been subjected to by the
1580 Hon. Chief Minister, which in many respects borders on...

Madam Speaker: I am going to push the hon. Member for a question and ask him to sit down.

1585 **Hon. D J Bossino:** ...of misogyny, quite frankly, because I intend...

Madam Speaker: The hon. Member cannot carry on where he left off when I am asked the question, I am being as patient as I can but I am not calling attention again.

1590 **Hon. D J Bossino:** Madam Speaker, is the Government not the Chief Minister, is the Government and I would ask the Minister on this occasion who is responsible to please respond to the question that was posed able to say with any degree of precision please, when it is that these works which have been going on for so long and is having such an impact on the residents at this particular institution will be completed? I do not think we received an answer to that.

1595 **Madam Speaker:** Can I ask the Hon. Chief Minister to be brief in his answer.

1600 **Hon. Chief Minister:** Yes Madam Speaker, absolutely. Nothing that the Government has said through me or anybody else is a diatribe or despicable. This Government created the Ministry of Equality when we were first Elected in 2011 we have promoted gender equality and if I have been accused of anything legitimately in the past it is of promoting women too often to the top jobs where possible.

Madam Speaker: Next question.

1605

Q532/2025
Action of Housing Meetings –
Non-attendance by Minister

Hon. Chief Minister: Question 532, the Hon. D J Bossino.

1610 **Hon. D J Bossino:** Why did the Minister for Housing stop meeting Action for Housing for 6 months since September last year?

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

1615 **Minister for Housing and the Gibraltar University (Hon. P A Orfila):** Madam Speaker, I have not met with Action for Housing because I have left these meetings in the very capable hands of my senior officials who in turn report back to me. I understand that meetings between Action for Housing and Housing senior officials have taken place in October last year and January, March and May of this year. In fact, it was the GSD who stood for Election in 2011 who stopped meeting with
1620 Action for Housing and the GSLP/Liberals who reconvened them on a return to Government in 2011.

Hon. D J Bossino: Madam Speaker, the honourable will go to speak to her once again. The Hon. Minister has not responded to the question. The Hon. Minister has explained what has happened during that six-month period but she has not said why she decided to stop the practise, which has
1625 been the case for many years.

Indeed, I would say during our time in office that Action for Housing, a very respected NGO in respect to this very important, still pressing despite the hon. Members being in office for the last almost 14 years social issue which is housing meets Ministers on a monthly basis. It has been the
1630 subject of continuous public statements by this particular NGO who had complained very recently that the Minister refused to see them. On what basis has she taken that policy decision, which I am assuming, still exists?

1635 **Chief Minister (Hon. F R Picardo):** Madam Speaker, the history of that question as posed by
the hon. Gentleman is all wrong. When I was Elected in 2011, Action for Housing confirmed to me
as they had publicly already that they had not had meetings with the GSD Government for many
years. They had stopped those meetings so therefore when the hon. Gentleman has said the
opposite, he should consider going back, checking and correcting the record at the next meeting
of the House when he realises that what he has said is incorrect and I give him the opportunity to
1640 do that before I raise that he may have done something else in doing that.

The Government has met with Action for Housing since I was Elected directly, Ministerially and
directly through officials in varying natures of meetings since 2011 and will continue to do so when
there is Ministerial time available with Ministers, when there isn't Ministerial time available
without Ministers on an issue that we have recognised repeatedly as a pressing one with a group
1645 that we have repeatedly recognised, although we sometimes disagree with them, is a meritorious
one and in order to achieve our objective which is to reduce the housing waiting list to as low as
possible, Madam Speaker, so the hon. Gentleman will forgive me for having to completely
disagree with every aspect of the question as he has phrased it because it is factually incorrect.

1650 **Hon. D J Bossino:** We are now being subjected to different criteria. We have heard from the
Hon. Minister for Housing in, I think, in this House that she intends to reduce the housing waiting
list to zero. Now we are hearing that the Chief Minister is saying that it will be as low as possible.
There is already another of the hon. Member's U-turn but it seems that she has also subjected
herself to what the Hon. Chief Minister has characterised as our policy.

1655 It may be the case. I am not too sure. I stand by what I said before but look, if I am wrong, I am
wrong and I am willing to accept that.

But is she therefore saying that she has adopted GSD policy if the Hon. Chief Minister is correct
and even if that is correct or partly correct or wrong the Hon. Minister and I give her one further
opportunity to please answer the question. The question in the order paper. This is not a
1660 supplementary.

The Hon. Minister has noticed we have done on this occasion what they ask us to do what they
childishly and I think erroneously admonish us for not doing. We have put it in the order paper.
Can she please state and if she will not I can read it to her again why did she stop?

1665 Why? Can she give an explanation as to why the Hon. Minister stopped meeting Action for
Housing for six months since September last year?

Hon. Chief Minister: No, Madam Speaker. The hon. Gentleman thinks that he can do these
twists and turns in the wind and recreate the facts as he goes along. There is no U-turn between
us because Pat Orfila might say zero and I say as little as possible.

1670 Madam Speaker, the hon. Gentleman needs to understand as again I told him before; these
things are not black and white. You cannot get something to zero if on every day of the year people
are going to turn of age. That is to say, if you have numbers reducing but people become 18 and
are eligible to go on the housing waiting list, the number immediately becomes one.

1675 That is why I have told him, Madam Speaker, that reducing the housing waiting list to zero
means reducing it as far as possible. There is no U-turn. In fact, there is not even a scintilla of
doubt between us that we mean the same thing but there should not be a scintilla of doubt
between us that we should mean the same thing. Everybody says that Pepe Baldachino was the
best Minister for housing in Gibraltar's history. I do not just say it.

1680 I proclaim it and when there are Elections, I go around the estates saying, that Pepe Baldachino
was the best housing Minister Gibraltar's ever had and that all of us are merely actors trying to
imitate him. What was the housing waiting list when Pepe Baldachino left?

It was 480. That is what close to zero means. What is 480, Madam Speaker, in the context of
housing?

1685 It is one generation of Gibraltarians. Sorry, not one generation. One year of Gibraltarians. That
is it. You have done it for everyone. What number of houses do you need to deal with one year of

Gibraltarians? 200. Because those 400 people end up getting married, etc., etc., or whatever and they end up in 200 houses. That is what we are talking about.

1690 However many times you might try to twist in the wind, whenever I catch him out on something he said which is wrong, he gets up and says something completely different, turns it around, stands on his head and says the opposite. It is not going to change that, Madam Speaker and it is not a question of us adopting GSD policies.

The GSD had no meetings with Action for Housing. No meetings. It is different now.

1695 What we are saying is we sometimes have Ministerial meetings, we sometimes have meetings with officials, and we sometimes have Ministerial meetings with officials, with Action for Housing. We are having meetings with Action for Housing in different levels of political and official engagement from time to time. They had, he needs to remind himself, no meetings.

1700 No meetings. They stopped the meetings. GSD policy was do not meet Action for Housing, neither with officials nor Ministers. So this is not a question of us doing a U-turn, this is not a question of us being at loggerheads with each other, this is not a question of us adopting their policy, this is a question of him changing the goalposts every time I demonstrate to him that his question is factually and entirely wrong. Madam Speaker, he can try to do it again if he likes. I will simply point it out once again, not out of frustration, but out of desire to help him, Madam Speaker, to better fashion the way that he presents his case to the public in Gibraltar so that he might achieve which of his ambitions, I don't know, to be leader of his party, to be Chief Minister of this country, or to be speaker, which seems to be the latest fad.

Madam Speaker: I am allowing one more supplementary and then we are going to move on.

1710 **Hon. D J Bossino:** We remain, despite all the words that have emanated from the Hon. Chief Minister's mouth, without an answer, without a response as to why it is that there was a stoppage of meetings for six months. Can I ask the Minister this question and ask her to reconsider perhaps the response that she has given me across the floor of the House? Is the Hon. Minister saying that although the Minister herself personally was not seeing Action for Housing on a monthly basis for the period of six months, her officials were seeing the representatives of this NGO for the period that I set out in the order paper?

1715 Is that the Minister's response because I need to tell her that the information that I have is that that is not correct. That in fact, nobody within the Ministry of Housing, for which she is politically responsible, was seeing Action for Housing.

1720 And they remain, we remain, therefore the people of Gibraltar remain, without an explanation, a reasonable explanation, as to why that stopped all of a sudden, and not for one month, but for six long months when they have pressing issues to put before the Ministry. Why was it stopped? Was it some sort of childish reaction to something that they said?

1725 Was it something childish that I may have said when I have been accused of being the MP for Action for Housing, for goodness sakes? What was it? What was it?

Please let us have an answer once and for all.

1730 **Hon. Chief Minister:** The hon. Gentleman really starts his question with a misnomer that means that everything else that he says thereafter is entirely without credibility. Why is it that there was a stoppage of meetings for six months? Madam Speaker, we do not accept that that is the case; therefore, everything else that he has said thereafter is entirely wrong.

1735 There may have been delays in being able to fix meetings, there may have been other priorities in doing things, there may have been a meeting in six months, and there may not have been a stoppage for six months. We are saying, Madam Speaker, that the information that he says he has is not correct information as far as we are concerned, or not in any way driven by any desire not to meet for a particular period of time. There could have been a summer in between; there could have been other Government business in between, nothing absolutely, Madam Speaker, in particular, nothing absolutely to do with him.

1740 What makes him think, Madam Speaker, what sort of narcissism there is there at a political level in the hon. Gentleman's mind that makes him think that we would not meet with a third party because of something he said? Madam Speaker, the hon. Gentleman is not half as important as he thinks he is.

Madam Speaker: Next question.

1745

Q533/2025
Government Housing estates –
Security

Acting Clerk: Question 533, the Hon. D J Bossino.

1750 **Hon. D J Bossino:** We are getting a reality check here. Which company has the contract for the security of estates and which estates does it cover?

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

1755 **Minister for Housing and the Gibraltar University (Hon. P A Orfila):** Madam Speaker, the company that provides security of estates is OSG. The estates that are covered are Laguna, Glacis and Varyl Begg.

1760 **Hon. D J Bossino:** May I ask the Minister for how long these contractual arrangements have been in place?

1765 **Hon. P A Orfila:** They have been in place since the tenants came to us with complaints that they wanted peace and tranquilly in the estates and so therefore we have put in the patrols. Let me also tell you that in Varyl Begg they do patrol during the lunch times because of the proximity of the school and they tend to go into Varyl Begg and so therefore, they patrol the area during school times.

1770 **Hon. D J Bossino:** The Hon. Minister has given by way of response the rationality behind the decision to employ this company to provide security but that was not my question. The question was when, i.e., which dates, the Hon. Minister doesn't have to give me a specific date but can she give me an estimation of how long this company has been providing security in those particular estates?

1775 **Chief Minister (Hon. F R Picardo):** Madam Speaker, I did it. I did it after a visit to Glacis Estate. I did it, I think, the year before the Elections must have been 21 or 22. There was serious antisocial behaviour and we contracted with the company that he represents.

1780 **Hon. D J Bossino:** Madam Speaker, there are other housing estates which have been excluded in the Hon. Minister's response. She mentions three. Is it the case by way of deduction that the other estates do not have this facility? Is that a correct assumption to make because the question was put in very wide terms and the Hon. Minister has only mentioned these three estates. I am going to stick to the one question rule.

1785 **Hon. Chief Minister:** Madam Speaker, because these are the estates that have the security. Nobody has been excluded. This is where the security was needed.

Hon. D J Bossino: That is fine. As I understand, it and I would welcome the Minister's response to this that representations are made to the Government. On this occasion, it seems, this is being done in a public chamber, which is being watched and reported upon.

1790 Therefore, people need to see from the Hon. Chief Minister's response. People need to go to him in order to obtain something because it is he personally who gave the contract in respect of these three estates but is she not aware that there are other estates?

1795 I can think of one in particular. I think there was a representative of that particular estate at last week's Viewpoint programme who also complained, this is a Mid Harbours estate, about anti-social behaviour. Is this something that the Government would consider providing also for that particular estate?

Hon. Chief Minister: Madam Speaker, the hon. Gentleman can seek to trivialise the most serious matters however much he likes. This is not people having to approach me. This is that I went to see something that had been raised with the Ministry of Housing and with my office. I went to interest myself in how it might be resolved. It was extraordinarily serious. Extraordinarily serious and it had to be dealt with and people elect a Government. They elect Ministers and they elect a Chief Minister for us to be able to act to resolve things when necessary.

1805 We will not hesitate to act when we must. That is what we are here for. The hon. Gentleman seems to now want to make that something to be seen through a negative light.

Actually, people watching will know and will understand it is absolutely positive. It had positive effects where we had to act. It will have positive effects if we have to act elsewhere.

1810 We have already issued a tender for CCTV in these estates and other estates also to address current and burgeoning antisocial behaviour and we shall deal with it also in relation to our relationship with the Royal Gibraltar Police who should be able to deal with these matters also. However, Madam Speaker, if the hon. Gentleman would support that and subject that to a negative view also, no doubt he will.

Despite the attempts that they have made to paint everything in a negative light, we are still here, they are still there.

1815 **Hon. D J Bossino:** Madam Speaker, the Hon. Chief Minister keeps on reminding us that we are on this side of the House, did not win the last Election by a whisker, and that he won the Election, they won the Election and the Government Ministers. This is what we are tasked to do. He himself has said that this is what we are tasked to do and we are tasked to ask questions.

1820 If he wishes to characterise my questions or any of my friends' questions as being overly negative, so be it but we have to probe every statement that they offer by way of answer because we do not have clarity. He can characterise that as negative if he wants to, but that again, once again, is a matter for him.

1825 In addition, he says that because he paid a visit to these estates and he received the representations personally that they were extraordinarily serious. Is he suggesting that the concerns and worries that residents of Mid Harbour's estate are not extraordinarily serious at all to be addressed?

1830 **Hon. Chief Minister:** No, Madam Speaker. In fact, I have been to Mid Harbour's estate. I have considered the very serious issues that they raise. They are being dealt with in a different way because they are different issues. The hon. Gentleman does not know what he is talking about. He does not understand the concept of seriousness and some of the social issues that have arisen. He has no ability, Madam Speaker, it appears to me, to understand some of the things that happen in Gibraltar, how serious they are and the consequences that they have for people's lives, in particular children's lives, and how these things have to be dealt with and for the lives of elderly residents who have to enjoy peaceful existence of their properties that they are tenants of and the Government has obligations to and I didn't go to a visit and receive representations and act.

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1840 I received very serious representations, not just from tenants' associations but also from social services departments, also from parents, also from people who could see that people were experiencing real-term suffering and that there were long-term consequences to young children about what was happening in the estates. If he wants to trivialise that, if he wants to try to make a political point, that is his politics, it is not ours. If he wants to try and scrimp a few votes in one estate because of something serious that was happening in another, pretending that we are not also acting in that estate, then, Madam Speaker, that's his politics, not ours.

1845

Madam Speaker: Next question.

Q534/2025
Housing rents –
Increase

1850

Acting Clerk: Question 534, the Hon. D J Bossino.

Hon. D J Bossino: Why have public housing rents increased by 5%?

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

Minister for Housing and the Gibraltar University (Hon. P A Orfila): Madam Speaker, the rent increases are yearly and this is required to cover the costs of estates upkeep and fund the refurbishment costs. As estates get older and are refurbished, the maintenance budget also increases because there is more to service and renovate. Housing rents did not increase from 1983 and the process of increasing them was met by support from members opposite whose support, I hope, is not going to start to wane.

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Rent relief is, of course, available for those who need it.

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Hon. D J Bossino: Madam Speaker, can I ask this question because it does not feature at all in the Hon. Minister's response. Is the decision, which is her decision, by virtue of the statutory provision, the relevant statutory provision, I can refer her; it is in Housing Miscellaneous Provisions and Regulations. In fact, it is interesting when I was looking at this in terms of preparation that the Minister only has the power to increase and not to go the other way.

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Is it the case that the considerations which she brought to bear before deciding, one, on an increase and two, on an increase at that particular level, i.e. 5%, that it wasn't influenced in any way as a result of any contractual or other obligations that may be as a result of, if I can put it in these broad terms, the mortgaging of these estates which were announced by the Hon. Chief Minister during the course of his 2016 Budget address. I think that the relevant party, which I think is the beneficiary, because I haven't looked at the detail of this, but I am just putting it to her in these terms because I want to understand whether the increases as a result of the financial arrangements with Gibraltar capital assets limits, whether that had any bearing or any influence.

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Hon. P A Orfila: Madam Speaker, not at all. These decisions are taken in Cabinet. They are not just taken by me. Therefore, if there was a 5% increase, it was a Cabinet decision, not just mine. Let me also remind the Hon. Gentleman that they did agree to this in 2017. The Housing Act was amended in Parliament to make provision for the variation of rent Government and rental stock annually.

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This amendment was supported unanimously by all in the Parliament with both the supported Government and Opposition. This is in 2017. All parties indicated their approval for the bill before

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this was debated and voted on in Parliament to make legal provision for the annual increase in rent.

1890 Let me also remind the Gentleman that at the time of the amendment to the Housing Act 2017, it was noted that the modest increases would continue on an annual basis in a manner that would nonetheless remain considerably below where they would have been had they been increased inconsistently in line with inflation. Let me also remind the hon. Gentleman that it is the cause of nature that materials and labour has gone up, it has increased and therefore so has the rent got to go up. We have to maintain our housing stock of which we have over 5,000 and therefore it has to be furnished with the right rent.

1895 So yes, I mean for the hon. Gentleman I know would very much like to see means testing which is something that I would not go into because then what he is saying is don't raise 5%. In fact, instead of raising 5%, let us give it market value rent. Let us means test people in Government housing and really put up their rent.

1900 That is what the hon. Gentleman has always pioneered for. He wants means testing which is something that this Government is hesitant and certainly does not want to do.

1905 **Hon. D J Bossino:** I will try as best I can to unpack a lot of what the Hon. Minister has said and it is indeed absolutely correct and accurate to suggest that our policy since 2015 has been to means test social housing. We have no difficulty with that. Now, and there is clear blue water between them and us in relation to that issue.

How it is done and how it is implemented is a different matter altogether. Can I ask the Hon. Minister this? The initial question was whether the financial arrangements that I referred her to, and I think she has knowledge of that, had any bearing on the increase to 5%.

1910 As I understand it, there is a fixed part of those financial arrangements, and she can correct me if I am wrong, that part of those financial arrangements are such that there has to be an annual increase of rent in order to finance the loan arrangements. So, is the 5% increase, and I think it was set at 3%, but is the, and indeed, according to the auditors' reports, there have been consistently 3% increases since 2017, which is the date that she accurately refers to the introduction of the regulations, other than in 2022 when there was also an increase of 5%, and then it went back down to 3% in July. I forgive Madam Speaker that the question is rather lengthy, but the response is also very long.

1915 Can I ask her whether the 3% is included within the 5%, if what I have said is indeed accurate and correct?

1920 **Chief Minister (Hon. F R Picardo):** Madam Speaker, the hon. Gentleman that wants to talk about financial arrangements, and I am responsible for, not the Minister of Housing, but his question can be summed up as this. Is 3% inclusive of 5%?

Yes, Madam Speaker, 3 is less than 5, and therefore if you do something at 5, it includes 3. Mathematically obvious.

1925 **Hon. D J Bossino:** I know, the Hon. Chief Minister once again rises, and he has tried to characterise me as not understanding, and having to repeat things, and I know where he's, I know, I know where he's trying to get to with that, but look, water off a duck's back. One has developed sufficient thick skin with him and being in politics for so long that these things really do not bother me but I still miss him when he is not around. I still miss him.

1930 Now, so, because I do not think the answer that the Hon. Chief Minister has asked the Minister on this occasion, this, fully clarifies the position. So, in effect, the 5% is the 3% which the Government is obliged as a result of these financial arrangements to increase on an annual basis, but on this occasion, because of the considerations that she referred to in her official initial reply, come into play, she's increased it by, she talked about repairs and all the rest of it, she's had to increase it by a further 2%. Is that description accurate?

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Hon. Chief Minister: Madam Speaker, no, it is not accurate. It is not accurate in any material regard. There is no obligation to raise the rent.

1940 There is an obligation to meet the raised rent, but that can be met from general taxpayers' funds. Therefore, the hon. Gentleman is making connections, which are not there, and he is pretending that they are there. V-Day, the fact that we did not put the rent up during the period of COVID, it was not a contractual obligation that had to be pursued, so Madam Speaker, the hon. Gentleman needs to be reminded that they voted in favour of provisions to increase the rent.

1945 They supported that the rents should go up. The ombudsman called for the rent to go up. The rent is going up pennies a week. Pennies a week. They pretend to want to be fiscally responsible. They go to General Elections saying, we are going to do the hard things to be fiscally responsible, and they come here and challenge us about raising rents a few pennies.

1950 So, Madam Speaker, if they are resigning and U-turning from their position on the Housing Amendment Bill 2017, which they voted in favour of, if they are resiling from needing to keep housing rents current, if they are resiling from all that, I would encourage them to go back to the debates we had at the time, which show that even if we increase rents by 3 or 5 per cent every year over a period of 30 years, it will take 30 years for them to become current to the rate they would have been in 2017 if they had been raised by inflation from 1983 to 2017.

1955 He may have forgotten that. That is the rent that we are talking about. That is what he appears to be complaining about.

1960 Therefore, Madam Speaker, I hope that genuinely, fully clarifies it for him. If not, no doubt he will want to ask another incisive question, which will remind me that if it quacks like a duck and it asks like a duck, then it probably is a duck and the water will roll off its feathers because it simply won't understand complex finance because it is a duck.

Madam Speaker: Next question.

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Q535/2025

**Varyl Begg refurbishment –
Measures to alleviate parking issues**

Acting Clerk: Question 535, the Hon. the Leader of the Opposition.

1970 **Hon. Dr K Azopardi:** Madam Speaker, what measures will be taken to alleviate parking issues for residents of Varyl Begg during the current refurbishment and construction works?

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

1975 **Minister for Housing and the Gibraltar University (Hon. P A Orfila):** Madam Speaker, the question from the Leader of the Opposition is prospective. In fact, measures have already been in place since the start of the refurbishment programme some 12 months ago in May 2024. The Midtown car park has been offered as an alternative parking where scaffolding intervenes with the parking bays.

1980 There are 66 spaces allocated to Varyl Begg during the refurbishment period and temporary passes have been given to people with disabilities to continue to use the area.

1985 **Hon. Dr K Azopardi:** Madam Speaker, always a pleasure to hear from the Minister for Housing. We have had discussions about this question before and I appreciate the background she's given on the Midtown parking but she'll recall that I have enquired about this issue before and the reason for the question is because months on I am still getting representations from residents because yes, there has been provision at Midtown car park but a lot of the residents there in Varyl

1990 Begg are now elderly because they have been there a long time and Midtown car park may work for younger people but it doesn't really work for the elderly. So really the purpose of my question is having found that temporary solution but given the length of the works is there no other progress so as to alleviate the parking issues for the elderly so that at least they could identify whether there are some parkings that could be found much closer to the estate if not within the estate for the elderly citizens.

1995 **Hon. P A Orfila:** Madam Speaker we are trying at the moment what we are doing is instead of keeping the same parking area within the estate we are now trying to move as the scaffolding moves so we can now start bringing cars in back into the parking bays. It is a bit difficult because we have Morrison's car park very nearby but it is not viable anymore so the nearest we have is Midtown and at the moment it seems to be working but we are hopeful that as the progress of the building starts to bring down the scaffolding etc. we shall be able to get back parkings as soon as possible. That is our intention.

2005 **Hon. Dr K Azopardi:** Can I ask is there also work going on to consider whether some of the building materials that are deposited on site could be moved because the last time I went there was a huge amount of material there waiting for eventual use which could be months and some of the residents were complaining that that in itself you know led to a deposit of material that was just there and would eventually be used but it was taking a very long time and I wonder whether that also could that's a matter for the contractor clearly but with the agreement of the Government there can only have been that deposit but can there be thought given also as to whether that an alternative location for the material might be useful to alleviate the parking situation?

2010 **Hon. P A Orfila:** Madam Speaker, yes. I do understand the plight of the people of Varyl Begg. Recently I had a meeting with the tenants and this was brought up and we are in the process of trying to establish some corner somewhere else out of the way that will not disturb any parking space that might be available to the residents. Therefore, that is at the moment being looked at.

Madam Speaker: Next question.

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INDUSTRIAL RELATIONS, CIVIL CONTINGENCIES AND SPORT

Q526-7/2025 Glacis Estate – Play area

Acting Clerk: Question to the Minister for Industrial Relations, Civil Contingencies and Sports. Question 526, the Hon. D J Bossino.

2025 **Hon. D J Bossino:** Why is the play area within Glacis Estate closed?

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

2030 **Minister for Industrial Relations, Civil Contingencies and Sports (Hon. L M Bruzon):** Madam Speaker, I will answer this question together with Question 527.

Acting Clerk: Question 527, the Hon. D J Bossino.

Hon. D J Bossino: When will the play area within Glacis Estate be re-opened?

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

Minister for Industrial Relations, Civil Contingencies and Sports (Hon. L M Bruzon): Madam Speaker, the play area at Glacis Estate is closed due to anti-social behaviour. The Tenants Association are in the process of meeting and discussing this with the relevant Ministers to consider the possibility of reopening the park.

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Hon. D J Bossino: OK. Can I ask the Minister what the nature of the anti-social behaviour is such that, two things, it requires the closure of a much needed play area within the estate and also whether given the responses that we have had from the Chief Minister in respect to OSG who does have the carriage and responsibility of security in respect to this particular estate as well as to others, whether that is assisting in any way such that it will facilitate the reopening of this much needed activity.

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Hon. L M Bruzon: Madam Speaker, as mentioned, a moment ago the Chief Minister visited Glacis on the 4th of November 2023 to see for himself the effects of the anti-social behaviour affecting neighbours, cleanliness and damage to the equipment and so on. As a consequence of the worries expressed by the tenants, it was decided that the best option at that point would be to close the park to stop children congregating in that area and causing problems.

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Hon. D J Bossino: This presents a difficult situation because anti-social behaviour both the Minister for Housing and I in the course of last week's programme referred to that in many respects is symptomatic of underlying issues. Without wanting to, I am hesitating because I would be venturing into the hypothetical and expressions of views which are not allowed as part of asking questions but... Is the Minister confident that he will be able to reopen the play area or is it the case and is it within the possibilities that he is looking at that because of the reasons why this thing has closed that it may not ever reopen is that for me part of the decision making process?

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Hon. L M Bruzon: Madam Speaker the Hon. Minister for Housing and myself meet regularly with the tenants associations in my case I was at a different estate yesterday regarding parks as well we are seriously looking at how we can reopen the park and even when we do it will have to be with strict restrictions such as opening it during the day and closing it in the evening so that is what we are hoping for but at this moment in time we are not exactly sure on how to do it.

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Hon. D J Bossino: Can one get from that answer that the focus of the problem is at night is that the issue such that a different opening time regime which includes closure for a part of the period during the day or night will be a resolution to the problem.

Hon. L M Bruzon: So Madam Speaker, the issue of vandalism and antisocial behaviour happens throughout the day obviously it is at night when it affects the neighbours the most during the quiet hours. We do have a regime in other estates where we close parks at night but that does not always have the desired results.

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Hon. D J Bossino: If I may press him further in relation to OSG's contribution, is there something that can be done there by having a greater presence is that again another possibility beyond opening and closing times that the Minister may be considering?

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2085 **Hon. L M Bruzon:** Madam Speaker that is not really a question that I can answer because I am not sure about the remit of OSG and so on perhaps once we have CCTV that will be the proper deterrent which will stop I think the Minister for Housing wants to add...

2090 **Minister for Housing and the Gibraltar University (Hon. P A Orfila):** Madam Speaker I can just interrupt here. OSG plays a vital role in the estates in that it monitors the behaviour. Let us not forget that education starts at home and it is the parents who have to educate the children. If you lived in a particular area where you are getting a ball being banged on your window every day, foul mouth interactions with people whenever you go out to tell them off, it is how shall I say it is inflicting pain in your quality of life and that is what we want for our tenants. It was for this decision that we took the decision to close and start monitoring the situation. Presently it has got
2095 a lot better. At the moment there is a youth club which is being built which I am sure when it is built it will attract the children or the young adults into a much better and safer place not to be bored and to get up to no good. But the bottom line is and I said it in the interview and I reiterate this again we are all in this together. We all have to put a little piece there to make sure that the community is going to be a peaceful place to live in and it is up to the parents to do a lot of this
2100 monitoring not OSG, not the police and not the Government Ministers it is certainly the parents who have to take now ownership of the actions of those children. Having said this I commend OSG for the job that has been done and I do know now from the meetings that we have been holding that the RGP is very much hands on too and all you have to do is when you have antisocial behaviour is report it to the police report, report and report.

2105 **Hon. D J Bossino:** Can I associate myself with what the Hon. Minister for Housing has just said I couldn't agree with her more I think she is absolutely right, indeed it was the message that I was trying to portray in the course of the same interviews that the Minister is referring to, it starts at home she is absolutely right and I think it is an indictment on our society that this should be
2110 happening and that we are having to expend valuable taxpayers money it is bizarre the thought that in Gibraltar we have to contract security companies to sort out these type of problems. I know I am fully appreciative that I am really stretching it here because it doesn't arise from the original answer but it arises from the reply that the Hon. Minister I think, helpfully in her contribution, has given just now. The youth centre that she refers to which is being constructed is that the one that
2115 is being constructed as part of the Laguna... it is not going to be within Glacis it is going to be in the Laguna area is that the one as part of the national economic plan project?

Hon. C P Santos: Yes, the new Laguna youth club has moved as previously discussed to the Glacis Estate there is an extension being built at the top so it caters for more young people.

2120 **Madam Speaker:** Next question.

**Q528/2025
Rooke site –
Fire Station**

2125 **Acting Clerk:** Question 528, the Hon. D J Bossino.

Hon. D J Bossino: I hope to have more than one Minister responding to this question. When is the Fire Station to be built at the Rooke site going to be completed?

2130 **Acting Clerk:** Answer, the Hon. Minister for Industrial Relations, Civil Contingencies and Sports.

Minister for Industrial Relations, Civil Contingencies and Sports (Hon. L M Bruzon): Madam Speaker, the project to provide the new fire station is currently at design stage. It is therefore not possible at present to provide the completion date.

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Hon. D J Bossino: Given that the Hon. Minister refers to that it is at design stage does the design contemplate the location that is to say is the fire station going to be built where the hon. Members opposite said it was going to be built in the electoral programme which is the 2023 manifesto at the Rooke site.

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Hon. L M Bruzon: The project as I said is currently at the design development stage where various options are being explored in consultation always with the experts which are the GFRS themselves and the site developer. These so far have included, for example, the location of a training tower and the positioning of the fire station itself in relation to dock number 4. So basically, we have had to modify it slightly because we want to expose and use the dock, which is currently where the car park is. Once all designs are finished we will be able to submit further information but at present, it is all being done for the Rooke site.

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Hon D J Bossino: At one stage when the Hon. Minister was responding I thought he was going to leave open the possibility that it wasn't going to be built at the Rooke site but I think what the Hon. Minister is saying is that it will be built at the Rooke site because we have had in response to questions from Mrs Ladislaus an indication that the police station won't be built where it was originally envisaged at the Rooke site. Can I ask him this, have I understood this aspect of his answer correctly, is it called the training tower, is that going to be dislodged from where the fire station... so there are going to be two separate sites, is that correct? So we are going to have a fire station, I don't want to put words in his mouth so he can correct me, where it was originally designed to be built at the Rooke site but the training tower will be elsewhere and that elsewhere is round about where the dock? No, okay, then he can explain to me if he does not mind.

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Hon. L M Bruzon: As the plans stand at the moment, the plan is to have the fire station in one location and then have all the training facilities at a different location. Does that make sense? So basically, you will have all the training facilities separate

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Hon. D J Bossino: I know this is wholly inaccurate in the way I am going to pose this question but the Minister will understand. When the hon. Member says at a different location are we saying at a different location within the Rooke development footprint or thereabouts or could be anywhere in Gibraltar?

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Hon. L M Bruzon: Different site Madam Speaker.

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Hon. D J Bossino: One more question I am really eager to try and extract that information from the Hon. Minister again I appreciate that he wasn't able to answer the question on the order paper which related in effect to a completion date because it is still at the stage it is but he has been very helpful I think in providing answers in respect of the design. Part of the design is the location so can I press him further is he able to say what options he is considering to establish where the fire station is going to be but he has helpfully said that the training aspects will be elsewhere. Where?

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Hon. L M Bruzon: Madam Speaker we are looking at more than one location so I cannot pinpoint or commit to one at the moment.

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Madam Speaker: One more question from the hon. Mrs Ladislaus because I am feeling kind.

2185 **Hon. J Ladislaus:** I am grateful Madam Speaker. I just have a hands on open from March 2024
where I know that the Hon. the leader of the Opposition in fact asked a question as to the fire
station and the Rooke site and the Hon. Deputy Chief Minister stated at that point in time this is
14 months back that there was a draft concept design which he understood had been cleared with
the management at the fire station but the first step before there is a tender would entail the
project going to planning going to the DPC first. Is it the case therefore that 14 months on, they
2190 are still at the same point or has that moved on now because if there was a draft concept design
14 months ago and we hear today that they are still at the design stage what has happened in the
interim?

2195 **Hon. L M Bruzon:** So Madam Speaker the designs are far more advanced than they were 14
months ago but the important thing here is that we are building a fire station which we have to
futureproof and I can only take advice from the experts, which in this case are the Chief Fire
Officer. I cannot tell them what their needs are with regards to training or facilities or anything
else they have to tell me what they need. So I take advice from them and it takes unfortunately
quite a while because it is a very unique and particular building that we are building again we have
2200 to futureproof for the sake of our community.

Madam Speaker: Next question.

2205

EMPLOYMENT, EQUALITY, CULTURE AND TOURISM

Q536/2025

**Bruce's Farm –
Post of Homes Manager**

Acting Clerk: Questions to the Minister for Employment, Equality, Culture and Tourism.
Question 536, the Hon. A Sanchez.

2210 **Hon. A Sanchez:** Could the Government state whether there has been an expression of interest
for the post of Homes Manager at Bruce's Farm? If so, could the Government provide further
details?

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

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Minister for Equality, Employment, Culture and Tourism (Hon. C P Santos): Madam Speaker
an expression of interest was released on the 8th of April 2025 for the temporary substitution of
the homes manager post at Bruce's farm the EOI closed on the 11th of April 2025.

2220 **Hon. A Sanchez:** I am grateful Madam Speaker would the Hon. Minister be able to confirm
whether individuals or the individuals actually expressed an interest for this post, were they
actually interviewed for this post.

2225 **Hon. C P Santos:** No Madam Speaker there was a move within the ministry for that role it is an
interim homes manager it was someone who was doing a similar role within another department
and the person that was covering interim anyway wanted to move so we did, we moved people
around both of whom were very adequate in the roles that we have assigned to them.

2230 **Hon. A Sanchez:** So just by way of clarification, it is my understanding that the bulletin went
out with expression of interest for the role and individuals did apply, expressed an interest, but

then the expression of interest was withdrawn or retracted and the reason was given that this post was going to be filled by alternative means or arrangements. Can the Minister clarify what was meant specifically by alternative arrangements?

2235 **Hon. C P Santos:** As mentioned what went out was an expression of interest, it was not a vacancy. It was to see who had interest in filling the homes manager role on an interim basis so we had people who expressed an interest and then we found that there were other people who were more adequate for the role and that is the person that is covering that role.

2240 **Hon. A Sanchez:** Did the individual who is currently covering the role express an interest in the original expression of interest?

2245 **Hon. C P Santos:** The person covering the role did not express an interest but as I said it is an expression of interest, it is not a vacancy, it is not a vacancy for a permanent role and we found that there was someone that was working within one of my ministries that was more adequate for the role.

Madam Speaker: Next question.

2250

Q537/2025
Skills for Care apprenticeships –
Individuals enrolled

Acting Clerk: Question 537, the Hon. A Sanchez.

2255 **Hon. A Sanchez:** Could the Government provide figures for how many individuals have enrolled to date on Skills for Care apprenticeships, broken down by each specific apprenticeship?

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

2260 **Minister for Equality, Employment, Culture and Tourism (Hon. C P Santos):** Madam Speaker, the total number of enrolled trainees for the skills for care apprenticeship is 18.

2265 **Hon. A Sanchez:** Grateful Madam Speaker. Could this be broken down by type of apprenticeship or is there just one type of apprenticeship in relation to care that is offered?

Hon. C P Santos: At the moment the skills for care apprenticeship is just that one. It is just that skills for care at the moment is just for the level one I think it is.

2270 **Hon. A Sanchez:** Would the Hon. Minister be able to elaborate on who provides the training?

Hon. C P Santos: Yes, Madam Speaker, the training is carried out by the Care Agency.

2275 **Hon. A Sanchez:** At the end of the apprenticeship, I assume that there is a qualification that the individual receives. Could the Hon. Minister elaborate on who the accrediting body is?

Hon. C P Santos: I am afraid I would need notice of that question. I have other details with regards to the training but I am not the accrediting body. I can find that out and let the Hon. Member know.

2280 **Hon. A Sanchez:** In relation to when individuals complete or successfully complete the skills for care apprenticeships, would the Hon. Minister be able, to elaborate on any career progression opportunities or any partnerships or collaborations that are in place in relation to career opportunities in relation to these apprenticeships?

2285 **Hon. C P Santos:** Well the intention is for candidates who successfully complete their training period to be on boarded as part of the Care Agency once the six months are over and these will fill in current vacant positions within the complement of care workers.

2290 **Madam Speaker:** Next question.

Q538/2025
Youth Clubs –
Little demand

2295 **Acting Clerk:** Question 538, the Hon. G Origo.

Hon. G Origo: Given the Minister's recent admissions that there is little demand for youth clubs; can the Government confirm whether it has any plans in place to reignite young people's appetite for youth clubs in general?

2300 **Acting Clerk:** Answer, the Hon. Minister for Employment, Equality, Culture and Tourism

Minister for Equality, Employment, Culture and Tourism (Hon. C P Santos): I have not made a comment implying there is little demand for youth clubs the question is therefore misleading.

2305 **Hon. G Origo:** Madam Speaker, and if I may I am quite surprised from the Hon. Minister's answers because within my notes I have an extract from what is commonly now being referred to as *El Chivato* which is a Hansard from a few months ago and when this discussion came about with respect to the opening times of closure on weekends, and I'll quote directly from Hansard, the Minister for Youth said:

2310 We started opening on Saturdays and the usage was hardly any, it was just negligible so we decided to use our resources in a better way.

2315 Madam Speaker, with that commentary which was given only just a few short months ago together with the fact that when asked whether or not the Minister could confirm whether the youth centre was going to remain in development with respect to the Rooke site having looked at the plans and seen myself that it wasn't included, both things together in my mind seem to me an admission that there is little demand in youth clubs. So, with all that taken into consideration and irrespective of whether the Hon. Minister thinks or not that there is little demand as I think that there is, can he confirm whether there is an active plan in place which is, irrespective of his opinion, being carried out to ignite young people's interest in youth clubs in light of both statements which I've just made?

2325 **Hon. C P Santos:** Madam Speaker, where to begin. The question says that there is little demand for youth clubs. What we discussed back in March was about closing and opening times on Saturdays so Saturdays proved not to be the most popular date and we are instead using that time of the staff and our resources during the week when young people use the youth service a bit more. I will take it back to November when I received a question about the zone and the youth

2330 and I told him that we are seeing a rising number of young people using the youth clubs. There is actually an increase of 8% of young people using the youth clubs. What we need to do is make sure that we actually ask a question within the context so, there was not a lot of interest for Saturdays, so instead we realised there was interest for the weekdays therefore we have moved our resources and our staffing to offer more opportunities during the week.

2335 **Hon. G Origo:** Madam Speaker as I said before, whether or not he agrees or disagrees with me, whether demand in youth clubs is diminishing or not, can I ask him to answer the question whether or not the Government has any plans in place to reignite interest whether this is on the basis that he thinks that there is a diminishing interest or generally is there a plan by the youth clubs in general despite uptake being up or down to garner interest from youths to attend youth clubs.

2340 **Hon. C P Santos:** We go back to language. Why are we asking for a plan to reignite interest when there is clearly already interest? We have a plan that is working and consistently sees more and more young people involved. The hon. Member might want to rephrase his question or alternatively, accept that the youth centre is going very well the youth service provides great service for young people not just within the youth centre but during the daytime activities that they do in schools and they work with the Care Agency and they work with all the different organisations in Gibraltar. We therefore don't need to reignite something that is already ignited and working so we will continue with the plans that we are doing now which are clearly working because we are seeing numbers of young people engaging with the youth service more and more each year.

2355 **Hon. G Origo:** Madam Speaker given the Hon. Minister for youth submission that in his data appears that youth attendance seems to be on the rise, is it his intention to revisit the possibility of opening these clubs on the weekend given that there is a fire and appetite for youth clubs and members seem to be going up?

2360 **Hon. C P Santos:** I seem to explain the same thing every month. The Saturday openings as a drop in did not seem to work. The appetite for a drop in centre was not there. We offer a lot of different activities for young people. What young people have available to them nowadays is not what was available to kids in my day when I used the youth centre. I am not sure what was available in his hon. Member's time I am not even sure he's even stepped into a youth club so the Saturday openings are usually for pre-determined outings or events so that we don't waste our resources waiting for someone to come on a Saturday morning in case they want to drop in. The youth service is not about a leisure provision it is about informal education and for children to engage in activities that are more meaningful so we are going to always use our resources in the best way possible.

2370 **Madam Speaker:** Next question.

**Q539/2025
Youth Committee –
Confirmation of existence**

Acting Clerk: Question 539, the Hon. G Origo.

2375 **Hon. G Origo:** Can the Government confirm whether there is a Youth Committee, which empowers young people to organise activities at youth clubs or the youth centre?

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

2380 **Minister for Equality, Employment, Culture and Tourism (Hon. C P Santos):** Madam Speaker, there is no specific youth committee to organise activities at the youth centres however, there is the youth symposium made up of young people from several sectors including the youth service, NGOs, schools and other organisations. The youth symposium has given way to a group of young people who have taken it upon themselves to form an organisation dedicated to arranging social and youth activities called the Gibraltar Students Society. They already began with a games night, 2385 which took place on the 5th of April 2025 for children aged between the ages of 10 and 11.

Hon. G Origo: Madam Speaker I believe the Hon. Minister has confirmed that there was not such a youth committee in place so can I ask the Hon. Minister whether he thinks that there should be one and whether or not he thinks it is important to empower youth committees of this kind 2390 made up by youth members within their respective different youth clubs which they go to.

Hon. C P Santos: The youth clubs each have representatives all four clubs have representatives that shape the informal education curriculum within the clubs and it gives young people a voice in the programme development so there is a group of people, there is not a separate committee that just does leisure activities... The process of how activities come about are very much decided 2395 between the youth that attends the club and the youth workers

Hon. G Origo: Can I ask the Hon. Minister whether these youth club representatives are young people or whether they are made up of youth workers or people who are more senior and how do these representatives get selected is it by way of appointment or do the members themselves 2400 vote between each other just to have an indication.

Hon. C P Santos: The youth representatives are young people that attend the club and I am unaware of how they are selected. 2405

Madam Speaker: Next question.

**Q540/2025
Youth Exchange –
Last time event took place**

2410 **Acting Clerk:** Question 540, the Hon. G Origo.

Hon. G Origo: Can the Minister confirm when was the last time a youth exchange took place?

2415 **Acting Clerk:** Answer, the Hon. the Minister for Employment, Equality, Culture and Tourism.

Minister for Equality, Employment, Culture and Tourism (Hon. C P Santos): Madam Speaker I refer the hon. Gentleman to the answer to Written Question 131 of 2024.

2420 **Hon. G Origo:** Madam Speaker, I do not have access to that written answer right now here with me and I was unaware that there was an answer previously posed in this respect with relation to youth exchanges. However, from my research I can see that the last youth exchange, which took place, was in 2014. Does the Hon. Minister or does he have the information with him to confirm that that was indeed the last time a youth exchange of this nature took place. 2425

2430 **Hon. C P Santos:** I would like to note that the question was asked by the hon. Member himself in October 2024 and the sentiment still stands. It is the last formal youth exchange organised by the youth service took place in 2024 with a group that went to Wales. In place of these long-term exchanges, the youth service has successfully shifted towards delivering alternative high impact travel opportunities that continue to support personal development cultural awareness and leadership.

2435 **Hon. G Origo:** I am grateful to the Hon. Minister for his reply and for refreshing everyone's memory here. Can he confirm whether he thinks or, in his mind, are these youth exchanges going to now be given a priority given that they spent so many years without having been undertaken and whether any future youth exchanges are planned in the coming months?

2440 **Hon. C P Santos:** Youth exchanges are not necessarily going to be a priority because as opposed to having one youth exchange a year that took a lot of investment and commitment from young people with regards to fundraising and that we have decided or the youth service has been for the past 11 years doing more regular shorter trips. So youth exchanges had a great value I remember when I was younger when we did not have access to holidays or meeting people from other countries and it was a very different time then and the value of the youth exchange was greater at that time. I feel that now we are able to give young people the opportunity to leave Gibraltar and not necessarily via a youth, exchange programme so at the moment in discussions with the team a youth exchange in the way that they used to work in the 90s and early 2000s is not something that we are prioritising at this time.

2450 **Madam Speaker:** Yes, next question.

**Q541/2025
Youth Clubs –
Number of trips**

2455 **Acting Clerk:** Question 541, the Hon. G Origo.

Hon. G Origo: Can the Minister provide details on how many trips have been carried out by youth clubs on weekends broken down by month and for the years 2023, 2024 and 2025, to date?

2460 **Acting 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 information is as follows:

Weekend openings			
Month	2023	2024	2025
January	2	2	3
February	5	0	1
March	4	0	0
April	4	3	1
May	5	1	2
June	4	2	
July	0	0	
August	0	0	
September	2	1	
October	2	3	
November	4	1	
December	3	3	

2465 **Madam Speaker:** Taking me back to the football pools when I was young and my grandfather used to buy the paper. Any supplementaries?

2470 **Hon. G Origo:** Madam Speaker, I would have been grateful for a table as it is normally handed over in the ordinary sense but no matter, I was able to jot down some of the numbers and given them tables so I know which years we were talking about. Can I ask the Hon. Minister whether he thinks this number is good enough? Is he satisfied with the level of weekend trips that have been undertaken? Not least because as we have dealt with the earlier supplementaries these weekend trips are supposed to make up for the fact that we are closing the youth clubs on weekends so instead of having 52 Saturdays a year where people would be able to attend youth clubs, the expenses and money was better directed to these activities. So given the number of activities that we have is he happy with the level of activities taking place?

2480 **Hon. C P Santos:** Madam Speaker, I am not quite sure whether I may be speaking in English in my head but it is coming out in another language. I spend minutes of every month explaining the Saturday issue that the Hon. Member seems to have with the youth service. The youth service used to open on Saturdays not for trips because the youth service is not a tour operator. It provides different activities for young people, part of which are trips abroad because it is a great experience part of which are day trips in Gibraltar. The Saturday closing is not to... we have not closed just so we can do organised trips on Saturdays. For example, today they came and this is like an extra session that they have done so instead of using maybe the time on a Saturday, they have come today. They've used it for the zone, they've used it for a drug awareness campaign that we are doing a new drug awareness programme in collaboration with the Drugs Advisory Council, we use it for any extra sessions that we need because we find more value in organising... It could be a trip on a Saturday but this is not what the focus of Saturdays was because that is not the focus of the youth service. The youth service provides a lot of different services not just on youth clubs, but during the day, during the schools collaborating with the Care Agency with whatever involves young people the youth service is involved so we find that we can use our resources and our time more productively, there seems to be me parroting the same phrase throughout the week. Could it be a trip to Grazalema maybe that is where we decide to go. Is it a drug awareness

2495 campaign that we are doing throughout the whole week on a five-day week, maybe it is there but
we want to give variety to the young people so that they learn different skills and it is a way for us
to give more contact time of more value to young people.

Hon. G Origo: Looking at the statistics which have been provided across the floor of the House,
2500 it appears that there's no real consistency with respect to the number of trips in every given month
and they appear to vary, so can I ask the Minister whether what's affecting the numeracy of the
number of trips and outings is taking place a resource issue or an engagement issue?

Hon. C P Santos: I really do not understand at what point the youth service became literally
2505 saga trips. We need to realise that the trips that we do have to be of value to the kids that are
involved regarding what we are offering throughout the week. I seem like I am getting annoyed, I
am not getting annoyed at all I just do not understand this obsession with the youth service
apparently having to take kids to day trips on Saturdays. They do when it is of use, they do not
when it is not of use because we use that time and resources differently. It is the same funds that
2510 are used in different ways and if he looked at the Budget, he would see that it is the same year on
year the Budget remains the same for extra activities. Is it used to take the kids to Grazalema,
maybe, is it used to take the kids for a day trip to Alameda, maybe, is it to spend that time and
resources of a workforce somewhere else on a Friday it is there, we need to find the best use of
resources we are not MH Bland, we don't need to provide trips to people we do because it is of
2515 value, but it is not what the youth service is there for.

Hon. G Origo: I don't think he answered the question which I posed whether it was the issue
which determines the number of trips that are taking place, a resource issue or an engagement
issue, that is to say if there was more money, would we have more trips or would we not have
2520 more trips because there's not enough engagement from young people, is there a balance that's
struck in between which of the two is it, can you just clarify on that point.

Hon. C P Santos: The hon. Member really needs to listen to what I say, get his face out of his
pre-prepared nose and listen to what I am saying. The budget is the same, the numbers of kids
2525 that I mentioned two questions ago is rising, so it is clearly not about engagement and it is clearly
not about budget we have more people engaging with youth service and we have the same budget
plus there's always fundraising because that's part of what we teach kids to do. We have found
that there are things that are more important at times than maybe taking the kids to McDonalds
I just don't know how to explain it for the hon. Member to understand, I think I have answered
2530 the question three times in a row, maybe the issues with not understanding it and not about me
not explaining it.

Madam Speaker: Next question.

2535

Q542/2025
Youth strategy –
Career's advice programme

Acting Clerk: Question 542, the Hon. G Origo.

Hon. G Origo: In line with its youth strategy, can the Government confirm what sort of career's
2540 advice programme it has developed for young people?

Acting 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 strategy has not been completed or published yet, however I am happy to give a synopsis of the work we are undertaking to develop careers advice programmes for young people. At present, we are in the process of centralising all career pathways for young people across Government. We have recently met with the Ministry for Education and the Department of Personnel and Development whereby we will be bringing together all pathways currently being offered in a one-stop shop under the careers.gi current website and Instagram sites, which will include future pathways and the careers fair.

Just this Monday we have seen the launch of the young leadership programme designed to cover leadership communication, safeguarding, conflict resolution and more. Recognising that not all young people follow the same route as you might already be aware, we also offer the zone a targeted project for 16 to 25 year olds who are not in education, employment or training which offers tailored one to one support on CV writing job search, signposting to relevant services and liaising with other Government departments to support individual progression.

Hon. G Origo: I think I heard correctly that the Hon. Minister said that the programme is not yet completed but referring if I may just briefly to a section in the manifesto which deals with youth strategy and careers advice it said in parts of the commitment that we aim to expand the existing voice of young people programme into the youth symposiums. Can the Hon. Minister clarify with respect to that commitment because I wasn't quite sure having looked at the voice of young people it seems that they haven't posted a video since November of 2020 and I wasn't able to determine whether this group is still active or whether it has been swallowed up by what is now the youth symposium. Does he have any comments on that?

Hon. C P Santos: This apparently has absolutely nothing to do with careers which is the original question but I am fine to answer it. As he mentioned, as the hon. Member mentioned the I think I stated that the voice of young people will be expanded into the youth symposium which it has. Therefore, the voice of young people as opposed to being a small group for just people youth service users it has been expanded to everyone.

So all young people from different NGOs are invited to attend and individuals also attend and the voice of young people was always different representatives from the clubs which were the reps that we discussed earlier on as well in the questions and they attend as representatives of the youth service.

Hon. G Origo: If I may Madam Speaker, in the original answer I believe the Hon. Minister stated that the youth careers advice programme was going to be multifaceted and it had a number of different components to it. Looking at one of the components I saw that last year in February 2024 there was a future pathways programme which was a three-day event for year 12 students which took place in February but I realise it hasn't taken place this year. Can I ask if the intention of the Government is for this future pathways event to be done again or have they decided not to do so anymore?

Hon. C P Santos: Madam Speaker, it just happened I think maybe four, five, six weeks ago maybe. It happens every year for the year 12 and that is led by the Department of Education with collaboration from our youth service.

Madam Speaker: Next question.

Q543/2025

**Zone: Step Up and Thrive services –
Use by young people**

Acting Clerk: Question 543, the Hon. G Origo.

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Hon. G Origo: Can the Minister confirm how many young people that are not in employment, education or training; have made use of the Zone: Step Up and Thrive services from October 2024 to date?

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Acting 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 hon. Member has not specified the age range of young people but in this context, we will use age range 16 to 25. 11 young people from ages 16 to 25 have attended the Zone Step Up and Thrive project from October 24 to present May 2025.

Madam Speaker: Next question.

2610

Q544/2025

**PATHS program –
Enrolment by young people**

Acting Clerk: Question 544, the Hon. G Origo.

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Hon. G Origo: How many young people have enrolled on the PATHS program, broken down by months from June 2024 to date?

Acting Clerk: Answer, the Hon. 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 hon. Member has once again not specified a date range of the young people to whom he is referring but in our view the term young people refers to those between 16 and 25 and also up to age 30 for people with supported needs. Therefore, I will therefore give the breakdown as follows per month.

Month	Young people		
	Young people Total	16-25	26-30
Jun-24	1	0	1
Jul-24	4	2	2
Aug-24	5	3	2
Sep-24	3	2	1
Oct-24	3	2	1
Nov-24	7	4	3
Dec-24	0	0	0
Jan-25	0	0	0
Feb-25	9	5	4
Mar-25	5	2	3
Apr-25	5	2	3
May-25	22	17	5

2625

Hon. G Origo: Madam Speaker, may I ask whether the Hon. Minister had some type of enrolment target in mind and whether the figures of enrolment, which he has just given, how do they measure up with those targets? I do not have an overall total so perhaps it would be helpful to give me the total number.

2630

Hon. C P Santos: Madam Speaker, there was no target set. It was a programme that is there for anyone that may need it. Not just young people.

There are many more people that have enrolled in the PATHS programme but I have just given the details of those between 16 and 30 and as I mentioned, there is no target. This is open to however many people require this service.

2635

Hon. G Origo: Madam Speaker, and if I may, if the Government had no sort of target or sector that it was trying to target in mind then how did it go about allocating the adequate resources of young people that were to take up this course? Is this done on an ad hoc basis? So if in the month where there's one person who's signed up, we may have enough resources but in the month where we have five people who want to take part in the upskilling there may not be enough because we haven't really taken a view on how many people we'd be able to service.

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So can I ask the Hon. Minister in those terms, how was he able to prepare and plan ahead of the resource allocation if we had no idea of the target group, which we were going for?

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Hon. C P Santos: I was asked about a target number, not a target group. Therefore, the target group are those people who need to upskill, who do not have the necessary qualifications. Therefore, this falls under an employment programme.

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We are targeting those people that do not have qualifications or do not have a lot of qualifications due to whatever circumstances in life and are able to upskill. We have a classroom that fits up to eight people at one time and we have staff within the different departments. So we have someone that mans it for the supported employment programme, we have people that man it for the EDEC programme, we have people that man this in the prison under Coracle, we have people that man it in Bruce's Farm.

2655

Therefore, we have all different members of staff from different areas that are able to man this. It is according to where they are. The people in prison have their own programme. We have five computers so five people can do it at one time. We have eight in the classroom and we are able to just turn over as many people as required. We have not found any issues at the moment.

2660 **Hon. G Origo:** Madam Speaker, may I ask the Hon. Minister how, if I can put in these terms, meaningful these courses are. Therefore, what type of benchmarks do we have in place to ascertain or then assess in future, whether these PATHS programme initiatives is actually working? So for instance, I understand that in December, there were 17 people who ordered certificates of completion of this PATHS programme but how do we ascertain whether this course is actually
2665 functioning beyond enrolment and beyond these certificates?

Is the measure that the Government is going to take whether they end up getting employed? Is that how we are going to assess whether this programme per se is actually really working? I just want to put the question in those terms and just note for the record that I am fully supportive of this programme.

2670 I just want to ensure that we have benchmarks so we can then say that these are actually doing what they are supposed to do and if there are any changes that we have to do to get these people to upskill them better and get them into employment that we do so as a result.

Hon. C P Santos: The PATHS programme is like any other qualification. Can you ascertain that
2675 anyone who gets a Masters in Psychology is going to become a psychologist? Is the benchmark for success becoming a psychologist or becoming employed in any different sector?

Qualifications are exactly that. We give the people the tools to be able to upskill whatever the qualification may be according to people's different levels of education and what they are capable of doing. We offer in Gibraltar a very broad spectrum of qualifications. We offer GCSEs, A levels,
2680 BTECs, different certifications, we offer a lot of different apprenticeships within the training centre, nursing, insurance, and we have the PATHS programme. Our aim is to give people as many different pathways as possible in order for them to become the best that they can be. Now hopefully all these qualifications from the huge fan that we offer will hopefully aid and support people getting into employment.

2685 The good thing about the PATHS programme is that we are getting a lot of people who maybe had to leave employment for a while and are trying to get back. People who maybe need extra support in computer skills or it is as successful as being able to offer people the chance to upskill. We also have the other part, which is about confidence building because a lot of people need to get back to work or those who have not had the opportunity to maybe have a full education as
2690 maybe others have.

We have found that there have been people with issues of self-esteem so we do a lot of different workshops and different types of programmes with alternative art therapies as well. Therefore, for us success is when someone comes and wants to upskill and get better. Therefore, for me that is success and hopefully together with the employment programmes that we have
2695 going, our aim is to give people pathways into employment.

Madam Speaker: Next question.

2700

Q545/2025
Alternative Tours –
How many

Hon. C P Santos: Question 545, the Hon. G Origo.

Hon. G Origo: Is the Government able to confirm how many “Alternative Tours” have been
2705 given by tour operators to date, since its introduction in May 2024, broken down by months?

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

2710 **Minister for Equality, Employment, Culture and Tourism (Hon. C P Santos):** Madam Speaker, these tours would be operated by private local operators so it is obviously not Government information.

2715 **Hon. G Origo:** Madam Speaker, if I may, I understand that they are being carried out by private local operators. I think they are advertised on the Nature Reserve website and on the private operators' pages themselves but can the Minister confirm whether they have been in his respective Ministry for Tourism given any sort of feedback with respect to these alternative tours? Has he had feedback from the operators themselves in terms of uptake? Is it popular or is that information not given to him?

2720 **Hon. C P Santos:** My discussions with the tour operators tend to be about Gibraltar's product in general so I have not really received any feedback, positive or negative, either way on how the booking of the alternative tours is. I do not get it for the Marmalade run either and I do not get it for how many day trips they take up to wherever they go. I do not get that type of detail.

2725 **Hon. G Origo:** Madam Speaker, if I may, I believe that one of the rationales behind this alternative tour in the first place was to achieve what I think was described as a decongestion in the Upper Rock Nature Reserve and to offer repeat visitors an alternative tour, as it is so titled, something different in Gibraltar because they have already come in the past. Has this alternative tour programme achieved that decongestion which they were trying to achieve?

2730 **Hon. C P Santos:** From what I hear from my hon. Colleague, it has not yet achieved decongestion.

2735 **Hon. G Origo:** Separately, may I ask, because the plan behind this tour was really to decongest and offer different alternative tours to what was going on in the nature reserve, can I ask, having visited the Visit Gibraltar website, why I couldn't find any trace of this alternative tour on the website, not least given its very important aim behind it to decongest such a site such as the Nature Reserve? So why is it not being advertised on the website, which we advertise every other tour, every other bar, most shops and amenities of the like?

2740 **Hon. C P Santos:** I would need to check if we advertise tours, because I think we advertise products that is what we do. We advertise what Gibraltar has to offer, but I do not think we sell tours. I would have to double-check.

2745 It is a very big website. We worked on it last year, but I do not remember us selling tours, in particular because we cannot necessarily promote private businesses in that way but I stand to be corrected. I will go tomorrow and check fully whether that is the case.

2750 **Hon. G Origo:** I can confirm for the record, having looked at it just only yesterday, that there are different tours that are being advertised as tours specific to the Gorham's Cave, the St. Michael's Cave, the Upper Rock, maybe not tours as packages per se, but there wasn't any reference whatsoever to the alternative tour and that package in that sense being referred to on the site but there were different other tours by different other operators which were earmarks within the site, and I just query why this was one which was not there.

2755 **Hon. C P Santos:** Madam Speaker, I need to check this. I think what we do is we do not advertise particular tour packages, but every different site within the alternative tours is within the website as well, because we need to promote the site and the destination. As I said, I am going to double-check if it is that you can click in and go to a tour operator with a prearranged tour. I do not think we do that on the website, but as I said, I will double-check.

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Madam Speaker: Next Question.

Q546/2025
Arts Advisory Council –
Number of meetings

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Acting Clerk: Question 546, the Hon. G Origo.

Hon. G Origo: Can the Government confirm how many times the Arts Advisory Council have met since the last Election?

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Acting 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 Gibraltar Arts Advisory Council has met on three occasions since the last Election.

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Hon. G Origo: Madam Speaker, can I ask, is this the same council which was appointed only recently on the 16th of January 2025, or is he including meetings of a differently constituted council? Just for clarity, is this the same council, which was only constituted a couple of months ago and has met three times?

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Hon. C P Santos: Madam Speaker, the Arts Advisory Council was constituted as soon as I came in. It just became statutory in January but this Arts Advisory Council was already meeting as soon as I came into office.

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Hon. G Origo: Can I ask, Madam Speaker, whether this Arts Advisory Council is a paid role for those persons who are members of the council, or is this voluntary work, which is carried out?

Hon. C P Santos: This is voluntary work, Madam Speaker.

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Hon. G Origo: May I ask you, Hon. Minister, for the purpose of and sake of transparency, whether there are any summaries of the minutes of the meetings and the matters discussed within these council meetings? If not, does the Government have any intention of publicising them?

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Hon. C P Santos: Every meeting I walk into is minuted. We do not usually publish the minutes of meetings of councils of this nature.

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Hon. G Origo: Finally, can I ask for the purpose of clarity, what is the remit of this council? How are we then going to assess whether or not the council itself has carried any success with respect to informing cultural policy, per se?

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Hon. C P Santos: The remit, as its name implies, is an advisory council. I have different representatives from the different art forms, and we discuss where Gibraltar is at culturally at the moment, any new ideas, any new projects and any new collaborations. I am unsure how we can mark success on something that is so subjective.

I find it very successful already that I can meet with different people from the arts community, and we have an open debate to see how we can work to improve what our already very successful offering in Gibraltar is.

2810 **Madam Speaker:** Next question.

Q547/2025
“Elite Funding” programme –
Number of young people benefited

2815 **Acting Clerk:** Question 547, the Hon. G Origo.

Hon. G Origo: How many young people have benefited from the “Elite Funding” programme designed to support the pursuit of professional careers in the respective arts’ vocational schools?

2820 **Acting Clerk:** Answer, the Hon. the Minister for Employment, Equality, Culture and Tourism.

Minister for Equality, Employment, Culture and Tourism (Hon. C P Santos): Madam Speaker, I refer the hon. Gentleman to the answer to Questions 728 of 2024.

2825 **Hon. G Origo:** Madam Speaker, if I may, I believe I was just navigating through the Hansard of May and March of 2024, and I could not identify how many people had benefitted from this elite funding programme. Therefore, could the Hon. Minister, for the purposes of passing on information and being helpful, just confirm how many people have benefitted from this course, because I can see that the funding programme has been around for at least a better part of the
2830 last year, and I just wanted to ascertain how many members have used it.

Minister for Equality, Employment, Culture and Tourism (Hon. C P Santos): The question was asked by the Leader of the Opposition in October, and I will actually repeat what I answered the
2835 Leader of the Opposition back then. We have spent £10,000, as budgeted, and have had 12 applicants that have applied for the elite funding programme, of which 9 have been successful and 3 unsuccessful.

Hon. G Origo: Madam Speaker, can I ask the Hon. Minister what sort of criteria is used to determine which applicants are successful and unsuccessful, and how that process is carried out?
2840 Is there such a committee, group, and individual that takes these decisions?

Hon. C P Santos: Goodness, it is like being back to the future. I had this whole conversation with the Leader of the Opposition already, and sometimes I would encourage the Hon. Member to do his research, because it is like the second question that I have already answered previously.
2845 The criteria is based around vocational schools under the DADA, the UK DADA organisation, and it is for vocational schools of art and music and dance and drama, and then there's a committee that chooses who needs the support.

A lot of it, as I explained the last time, tuition fees for some of these vocational courses are more expensive than the ones for the traditional degrees, so normally you top that up if there is
2850 a difference. If they have got funding already from the Gibraltar Government, it may not fall under the criteria. If it is a university course, not a vocational school, it does not fall under the criteria.

Therefore, the criteria is set and it is published and it can be found on the website, and there is a committee of people that look. It is very much mathematics. It is about who needs the help and who falls under the approved organisations.
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Hon. G Origo: Madam Speaker, can I just pick up on one of the points that the Hon. Minister has just stated in the tail end of his question, was that the criteria is on the one hand set and it is available online, but a few days ago I was on – so I'll ask where this criteria is available – I was on

2860 the Gibraltar Cultural Services website and one of the directions it takes me is to look up forms to make applications for this type of elite funding, but when you go to the section on forms for elite funding, it just isn't there.

2865 So how are prospective applicants that want to make benefits of this elite funding programme going to be able to ascertain what criteria they are going to be judged upon if the data is actually not online? I ask that in the same vein and taking into consideration that the fact when this programme was announced last year that the applications came out and were announced on the 17th of July and closed on the 31st of July, which was a two-week period. So why is it that if the criteria is not online and the period is so narrow that the Government is taking this position where it seems that they do not want that many people to apply, not least because the criteria is not there and readily available and the window is very short to then submit the application?

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Hon. C P Santos: Madam Speaker, I am going to have to double check on that because when in October I myself searched online because I could predict that this could have been one of the questions that was asked. I do not know if there is an issue now or whether the hon. Member cannot find it. I am just going to ask about it because normally all the forms are online, especially under scholarships.

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2880 The reason why it is in July and only a short period is because it was the first time that we were adding it and I couldn't really commit until after the Budget session. Therefore, as soon as the Budget was approved, I sent out the advert and I had to make sure that the young people applying had time to confirm and know that they had this funding. Therefore, if I did not do it in that short period of time within the month of July, maybe those leaving in September may not have found out about the scholarship that they were given. So it is the complete opposite of what the hon. Member is trying to imply and there is no secret where I come from, where I trained and what my background is. So there is nothing more that I can do or would bring me joy than to support people going into vocational schools, into the arts. So there is nothing sinister about us trying to hide this information. It is the complete opposite.

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Hon. G Origo: Madam Speaker, if I may ask, I take it from the Hon. Minister's reply that then, because there's nothing sinister with the two-week application window, that the intention is to open it for a much longer period, perhaps this time around once the Budget session is approved.

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Moving away from that, can I ask, given that this programme seems to be one which will be a recurring one and one that he fully supports, whether the Government or his ministry is going to offer any opportunities to young people who are beneficiaries of this course to be able to come back to Gibraltar, work and benefit the arts community. Is there some sort of project or plan to be able to attract these people back to Gibraltar? Alternatively, are they going to qualify for elite funding, then go, and work elsewhere?

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Hon. C P Santos: Every scholarship in Gibraltar is given with that hope that you can come and give back to your community but we are not that draconian that we are going to force people to have to come back. This is the way that Gibraltar can support these young performers that we are very proud of are currently working within the West End.

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There is a growth in people actually taking the arts as a career, many of whom are currently performers professionally. Therefore, we support them and we want the Gibraltarian to be able to succeed. If he succeeds in Gibraltar, great. If he succeeds abroad, fantastic.

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I am one of those examples of someone that got a discretionary grant to be able to study in the arts. I went away, I worked abroad for 12 years and then I came back and I put my knowledge and everything I had learned into practise here and now we have an academy of performing arts and we have a Minister here that is vying for culture as well as many other things.

So ideally at some point they would come back but for us it is about supporting the Gibraltarian to be able to be successful whether it is in Gibraltar or whether it is abroad.

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2915 **Hon. G Origo:** Thank you Madam Speaker for indulging me. Yes, just like the Hon. Minister has just noted, I could get a law degree and decide to work in the UK but that is not the premise of my question. The point of my question was whether any opportunities were being offered back in Gibraltar to attract these people to come and work here or were we going to just have to wait another 10 or 12 years for them to get experience to come back and then get their expertise within the arts and culture community.

That was the premise of my question. What kind of opportunities are available to these people who are given the benefits of this elite funding programme?

2920 **Hon. C P Santos:** This is the same opportunity that is awarded to any Gibraltarian that gets a scholarship. We give people the opportunity to train and upskill, get degrees, and get qualifications. That does not come with an assurance of a job. We cannot ensure everyone is going to be employed, everyone who we support with a scholarship to train abroad. Right now, we will support people as much as we can but us supporting someone to go and study abroad is not an assurance of a job here when you come back but normally there are a lot of opportunities for people.

2925 Are we going to offer them opportunities to become a professional actor here in Gibraltar? Well I don't think we have that type of extent in the field but could they form part of one of the many educational facilities, both private or Government subsidised, in order to be able to continue? Yes, but I am not planning to put a stop to anyone that wants to be a professional dancer because they might not be able to do so in Gibraltar.

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Madam Speaker: Next question.

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Q548/2025
CEO/ex-CEO of the Tourist Board –
Ministry for the Environment

Acting Clerk: Question 548, the Hon. the Leader of the Opposition.

2940 **Hon. Dr K Azopardi:** Madam Speaker, does the CEO/ex-CEO of the Tourist Board now work for the Minister for the Environment?

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

2945 **Minister for Equality, Employment, Culture and Tourism (Hon. C P Santos):** Madam Speaker, I will answer this question together with Question 549.

Acting Clerk: Question 549, The Hon. the Leader of the Opposition.

2950 **Hon. Dr K Azopardi:** Who will be directing Gibraltar's Tourism strategy from now on?

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

2955 **Minister for Equality, Employment, Culture and Tourism (Hon. C P Santos):** Madam Speaker, the product development side of Gibraltar's tourism strategy will be led by the CEO of Tourism Product Development, Mr Kevin Bossino, under the Ministry of the Environment, which also oversees and manages the Upper Rock Nature Reserve and tourist sites. The marketing side of Gibraltar's tourism strategy will continue to be led by the Gibraltar Tourist Board.

Hon. Dr K Azopardi: But who is in charge of the Gibraltar Tourist Board?

2960 **Hon. C P Santos:** The Gibraltar Tourist Board has SEOs. We have a marketing representative in the UK that deals with the marketing side in the UK and then we have an SEO in the Tourist Board.

Hon. Dr K Azopardi: So the CEO of the Gibraltar Tourist Board is no longer in charge of the marketing of the Tourist Board. Why would that be?

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Hon. C P Santos: Historically, the Gibraltar Tourist Board used to manage the sites, the Upper Rock Nature Reserve and marketing and then the sites got taken over by the Ministry of the Environment due to the sites mainly being within the Upper Rock Nature Reserve and then the Gibraltar Tourist Board took on the marketing.

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The CEO, Mr Bossino, came in at a time when we needed a lot of support with marketing. It was at a time post-COVID when the figures needed to get better and improve and now we find that with the new investment, private and public investment, and the new product development that is going into the Upper Rock Nature Reserve there needed to be someone leading on that.

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This has been a sideways move and it is about semantics. The only change is that he is under the Ministry of Environment and not the Ministry of Tourism but we are in close collaboration in the same way we were before. We just need a closer collaboration with the Ministry of Environment due to the product development as opposed to site management but there is a lot of work that we are still going to collaborate on and the tourism strategy has already been completed by Mr Bossino and that's what we are following and we are going to be very much in touch in the same way that we have been in touch in the past.

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Hon. Dr K Azopardi: To whom do the people who are in charge of the marketing strategy the tourist board, to whom do they work to Ministerially? Do they work to the Minister for Tourism or to the Minister for the Environment?

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Hon. C P Santos: The marketing team works under the Ministry of Tourism.

Hon. Dr K Azopardi: I see. I mean, does the Minister not see that all of that sounds really, really strange because Mr Bossino is brought in with great fanfare by the Government as a local person that I have finally identified and the previous Minister, Minister Daryanani said, you know, we found someone with a great track experience in tourism to come and lead the tourism strategy and product development for Gibraltar.

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This person comes in as CEO of the Tourist Board but the Tourist Board continues to exist. It continues to have personnel dealing with the marketing strategy who are accountable to the Minister for Tourism and the only one who is accountable to the Minister for the Environment is the CEO himself, who is moved sideways. I mean, all of this sounds very strange, doesn't it? It sounds as if there is some kind of problem here, isn't it?

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Hon. C P Santos: This is very simple. The press randomly made a story out of something that is not really a story. If the tourist sites were still under the Gibraltar tourist board, there would not have been a shift.

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At the time we were working, the CEO of tourism was working on marketing but we found that we needed someone now that there is a lot of product being developed and there was a lot of different issues that were falling under marketing that had nothing to do with marketing. A lot of new products that we were dealing with, that both Mr Bossino and myself were being approached with and we were like, this is not a marketing this has nothing to do with marketing, it is got to do with product. Therefore, we were ending up having meetings for people who wanted to offer new products into Gibraltar.

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Therefore, we have worked very closely together throughout this process and we found that really we needed now a person to head the development of new products as to where Gibraltar is now. I am not sure this has been discussed here but I know everyone is aware here of an

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expression of interest for all the areas in the Upper Rock and there is a lot of management and directions that has needed to develop the product. I understand that all this needs to be made sound like oh look; there is a problem as said by the Leader of the Opposition.

3015 It sounds like it is a problem. It could sound however, you want it to sound. For us it really is not a problem. It has been something that was not even news and the press just made it into a story but it is about being in a different office under someone who manages the areas where we need more support from a CEO that was brought with a lot of experience and we want to use his experience in the best way we can.

3020 **Hon. Dr K Azopardi:** Madam Speaker, but it is strange because the product is not just a sideways move. You are putting the CEO of the Tourist Board that continues to exist and is accountable to the Minister for Tourism under a different Minister in relation to and with a slightly different title to concentrate on product development but product development of what?

3025 Product development of tourism. Tourism being a pillar of the economy. Therefore, the product development of tourism as a pillar of the economy is given to the Ministry for the Environment. That is like giving the product development of financial services, another pillar of the economy, to the Income Tax Department. It makes no sense whatsoever. So perhaps the Minister can give us the real reason why this has happened.

3030 **Minister for Education, the Environment and Climate Change (Hon. Prof. J E Cortes):** Madam Speaker, if I may assist. Mr Bossino continues to work for the Government. I think we have to remember that he works for the Government and increasingly there is trans-Ministerial cooperation and we work extremely closely together. This is one Mr Bossino that I really can work with. I really think very highly of him and get on extremely well with this particular Mr Bossino and his knowledge of tourism will help us because as it is well known, the tourist sites are managed by the Ministry for the Environment, by the Department of the Environment and the Heritage Section and, as is well known here, because this has been a bone of contention with the other Mr Bossino. We are developing these sites extraordinarily well using tourist money to improve them to a level never seen before in Gibraltar.

3035 I don't want to sound like Mr Trump by saying better than ever before but it actually is the case that we need someone with that kind of experience who can work with me and with my team linking across with the team of my hon. Friend the Minister for Tourism and he will be working and attending events with him. We are actually merging in a way. We are trying to not have such strict lines between Ministers when Ministers can work together and when officials can actually work across ministry.

3045 This is going to be extremely successful and the Hon. other Mr Bossino will find it very hard to flaw the things that we are doing in tourist sites in Gibraltar.

3050 **Hon. Dr K Azopardi:** We equally, I think we welcomed at the time the appointment of Mr Bossino as CEO of the Tourist Board because the Government had alighted on a local individual with experience who could lead in the area. We badly thought that there should be localisation of the post and that the person should be working in Gibraltar. Remember those debates here in this House where we made a big thing about it.

3055 What we cannot fathom is that suddenly years later this broken up approach and isn't this the problem that you have got a Minister for Tourism, Ministerially responsible to drive that area forward, who has ceded in some way product development of that pillar of the economy to the Ministry for the Environment who really has other responsibilities and other views and the product development of tourism is not just the upper rock or the management of certain sites
3060 traditionally under the Ministry for the Environment. It is much wider than that and is not this the issue of what is at the heart of the directionless tourism policy of the Government?

Hon. C P Santos: Nothing could be further from the truth. I understand that their job is to ask questions and make it all sound like the Government is this wicked monster. This is very simple.

3065 I have not ceded product development because I do not manage product. We market the product. Therefore, the staffing of product development is over here with my colleague.

3070 So imagine if someone from another ministry, let me put it to the hon. Member who works in a law firm and there is another law firm that also works in family law and they just move over and start giving instructions to that law firm. Listen, we cannot have someone in one ministry instructing people in another ministry. That is why it is a silly sideways move.

3075 We have kept CEO tourism product development because it is essentially the same. We could have within the next 18 months a lot of new products, a lot of things working and then maybe we'll need to bring it back and it is one of those things that it is about having someone under a Minister on an official on paper this is who you report to and this is who your team is because that's where it is. It is not. It does not go further than that.

3080 As much as this is laboured and tried to make it seem like there is not. Last year I went with someone from the Ministry of Environment on a conference on sustainability. I am already going with Mr Bossino when it comes to things that are product based like the World Travel Market but he will go under his guise of CEO of product development but we will still work together because the marketing of the product still needs to work together. It is not like, oh, there you are.

I have ceded the CEO of tourism to you and therefore here I am. It does not work like that.

3085 **Madam Speaker:** All right. I am not going to call the next question. I am going to suggest that maybe we have a short recess.

Hon. Prof J Cortes: We have been here since three o'clock and certainly, yourself and the Clerk have been here literally without being able to leave. Therefore, I suggest that we have a recess of about 15 minutes and we reconvene at quarter past seven so we do not stay too late and then we will be dealing with my questions.

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Madam Speaker: Yes, we will recess for 15 minutes.

The House recessed at 6.55 p.m. and resumed its sitting at 7.10 p.m.

EDUCATION, THE ENVIRONMENT AND CLIMATE CHANGE

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Q550/2025

St. Martins School –

Number of pupils expected to leave; Services used

Acting Clerk: We continue with questions. Question 550, the Hon. E J Reyes on behalf of the Hon. A Sanchez.

3100 **Hon. E J Reyes:** Sorry Madam Speaker on behalf of my colleague who had a previous appointment.

I ask the Government, Could the Government provide the number of pupils expected to leave St. Martin's School at the end of the current academic year, indicating:

3105 (a) How many are expected to begin using the services provided at St. Bernadette's Centre; and

(b) How many have alternative arrangements in place with the Government to access other services, including a breakdown of what those services are.

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

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Minister for Education, the Environment and Climate Change (Hon. Prof J E Cortes): Yes, Madam Speaker, there are five pupils expected to leave St. Martin's School at the end of this academic year. It is the Department of Education's understanding that all five pupils leaving St. Martin's this year will start attending St. Bernadette's in September 2025. The Department of Education is not aware of any plans for any of these children to have alternative provision elsewhere.

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Hon. E J Reyes: Thank you for those figures, Madam Speaker. I detract from what the Minister is saying, that all five have taken up the facilities that will be offered by St. Bernadette's. However, can the Minister confirm that should a particular family wish to avail themselves of other facilities, other programmes that they feel might better suit the children, is the Department of Education open to this?

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If so, would there be sort of any Government financial contribution and non-financial assistance in helping find those places? Because one size does not fit, all and perhaps some of those pupils might be better or might be more beneficial to that individual not to have to necessarily go to St. Bernadette's.

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Hon. Prof J Cortes: Madam Speaker, ultimately it is up to the parents to decide what they want their children, what they think is best for their children. These children would probably be over 16 in most cases, so they would be beyond compulsory school age. If there are other opportunities available, then obviously the parents can follow that and if they wish to contact the Department of Education, if they should need some assistance, then they should do so.

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I think that alternative opportunities are limited, but certainly, they would be considered.

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Hon. E J Reyes: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Yes, the Minister is correct in his assumption that we are talking of those who are past the compulsory school age. I am thinking more in the lines towards some sort of, within their capabilities, some sort of sheltered employment, shall we call it that, where the Government departments could help to absolve these people into the bigger, wider adult world, because their condition could be such that although not entirely 100% self-sufficient, shall we call it that, they could benefit there. Hence why I ask, would there be support from the Minister's area, and would there be perhaps a financial contribution, because we could enter into a partnership with the private sector. I know some individuals who, in days gone past, certainly when I was sat on that side of the House, they were employed by a private company, but there was a contribution and understanding with Government funding.

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Hon. Prof J Cortes: Madam Speaker, some of the young people who go to St. Bernadette's also attend the Gibraltar College, and there they are assisted in linking up with employers, and I also know that the Ministry for Equality works very hard in trying to assist these young people to find employment with the support of employers. The exact arrangement will depend on the employer and on the child, but certainly, this is something that can be taken up and would be supported as much as possible.

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Hon. E J Reyes: Madam Speaker, I am very grateful for that answer. Above all, I make a special note when I debrief my colleague that the Minister has not answered in a negative or defensive tone, and perhaps if she requires anything further in consultation with the Speaker, you might allow her to press any question that may arise out of the answers that have been given. I will leave that for the future, Madam Speaker.

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Madam Speaker: The opportunity to ask supplementaries is now, and can be asked by any member of the Opposition, but I am not going to allow supplementaries on this at a future date.

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Hon. E J Reyes: You are correct, Madam Speaker. What I meant is, should a new topic arise out of...

Madam Speaker: That is hypothetical... Yes, the Hon. D J Bossino.

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Hon. D J Bossino: Madam Speaker, I wanted to probe the Minister further in connection with the second limb of the question under B, which poses the question about the... Seeks from the Minister a breakdown of the alternative services beyond St. Bernadette's which are on offer, and in response to one of the supplementary, the Minister refers to the parents taking part in the decision-making process, but of course it is not just limited to the parents. Particularly if they are of limited means, they rely a lot, on what the Government, on the Government side, can provide. And that is, I think, what the question from Mrs Sanchez is seeking to elicit from the Government by way of replies and he said that the choices are limited, but can he specify what those choices are beyond St. Bernadette's?

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Hon. Prof J Cortes: Madam Speaker, I have answered the question. It says, how many have alternative arrangements in place for the Government to access other services, including a breakdown of what those services are? I have said there are none, as far as we know, with alternative arrangements. Therefore, I cannot include a breakdown because there are not any who are requiring any alternative services.

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Hon. D J Bossino: I appreciate the clarification, which the Minister, I think, quite rightly has provided, but I would ask that he answers the question, which is inherent to what I asked him in my previous supplementary, which is what alternatives are in fact currently available to parents in respect of these children?

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Hon. Prof J Cortes: Madam Speaker, the Hon. Member is asking me to be kind to him and I hope that he will continue in that light and be very kind to me for what is left of today's meeting.

Madam Speaker, as I have said, one of the options that is open and many young people do take it up with and they make a good deal of progress is to attend the Gibraltar College for a number of sessions and I believe that the charity PossAbilities also provides facilities and opportunities for young people of that age.

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Hon. D J Bossino: Is it also possible for students or pupils to remain in St Martin's? Is that currently available and if it is not, is it an option that the Government may be considering?

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Hon. Prof J Cortes: Madam Speaker, it is an option. It would, I think, be important that the teachers who know the child assess this. We have to be careful if young people over 16 remain. It would be exceptional if they remain in St Martin's. Obviously, it would be possibly not in their best interests but every such case is different and I think that this would have to be dealt with on a case-by-case basis.

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Madam Speaker: Next question.

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Q551/2025
Gibraltar Taxi Association –
Number of disability-friendly taxis

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Acting Clerk: Question 551, the Hon. G Origo.

Hon. G Origo: Can the Government confirm how many disability-friendly taxis are available to the Gibraltar Taxi Association and whether they have been fully operable these last few months?

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

Minister for Education, the Environment and Climate Change (Hon. Prof J E Cortes): Madam Speaker, this matter is one for the Gibraltar Taxi Association. However, we have discussed this with them and they are happy for me to answer and provide the information. There was one fully functional disability taxi but another one was imported last week making a total of two. The GTA is currently making arrangements to purchase a further seven in the very near future.

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Hon. G Origo: Madam Speaker, I am grateful to the Hon. Minister for his answer. My understanding and the information I had was also that recently up until now there was only one disability-friendly taxi available. Part of my question concerned whether they had been fully operable during the last few months because the information I had was that the only then available disability-friendly taxi had not been on service and therefore there were many concerns by people who needed to use these taxis that were unable to move around Gibraltar because the only one disability-friendly taxi available was not working. Is that the case?

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Hon. Prof J Cortes: Madam Speaker, no. As I say, this is a matter for the Taxi Association. They have provided us with this information.

One functional, another one is brand new, so therefore I am assuming that that one is functional but certainly I do not believe that that is enough and that is why we have encouraged the GTA and they have agreed to purchase a further seven.

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Hon. G Origo: Madam Speaker, if I may just quickly concur with the comments of the Hon. Minister. I don't believe that one is enough and I am very pleased to hear that he has agreed and negotiated with the Association to get a further seven taxis, not least in light of recent statistics that we have seen from the Disability Society that there are at least around 1,400 persons in Gibraltar with disabilities and I accept...

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Madam Speaker: I must ask the hon. Member for a question.

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Hon. G Origo: ...With respect to the fact that we have only had one taxi, we now have two and seven are yet to come.

Can I ask the Hon. Minister whether there are any contingency plans in place when these taxis break down? Is there any sort of arrangement where persons who need access to these taxis are given some kind of alternative measures subsidised by the Association so they can actually move around Gibraltar through other private means? Is there any such contingency measures in place or what are they expected to do if the taxis are not operable?

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Hon. Prof J Cortes: Madam Speaker, I would not be able to answer in detail as this is run by the Taxi Association. I would have thought that if one is brand new it is unlikely that it will break down any time soon and I have no information as to whether the other one is not in good condition. However, I am hopeful that these further seven will arrive very soon and therefore I think we would be able to cater much more adequately than they are doing now.

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Madam Speaker: Next question.

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Q552/2025
Taxi service –
Improvement of service

Acting Clerk: Question 552, the Hon. G Origo.

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Hon. G Origo: Given the recent Chamber of Commerce comments that the taxi service is “sub-standard” particularly in the case of private hire; does the Government have any plans to further improve the service?

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

Minister for Education, the Environment and Climate Change (Hon. Prof J E Cortes): Madam Speaker, I don't agree with the comments, certainly not without qualifying them by adding praise to the Taxi Association for the way that it is working with my team in order to improve the service. This was clearly visible during the Christmas period, for example, and it was clear then that the GTA can provide an excellent taxi service. I would like to add that the newly established airport taxi service is running extremely well and residents and visitors alike are now experiencing the level of availability expected at any international airport.

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Transport inspectors and the GTA themselves report to the Ministry daily on the quality of the service and it has been excellent since inception.

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In April, the implementation of a year-round city service commenced. This is the first time we have had this and it will improve the availability of taxis tremendously.

The GTA also provides daily school runs for children with supported needs, shuttle services for crewmembers who work within our bunkering sector and for cruise liner passengers, just to mention some of the unseen but very important services they provide. We recognise that there is much more to do, such as the provision of card machines in every taxi as well as better availability and improvements to the app. In saying this, I must praise the GTA committee who have been working with my Ministry proactively to bring about the many improvements already seen and are fully committed to continuing the work and deliver the taxi service that Gibraltar expects and deserves.

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I am pleased to say too that following some input from my office, a meeting is being arranged between the GTA and the Chamber of Commerce, which will, I am certain, prove fruitful. In the words of St Francis of Assisi, Madam Speaker, where there is discord, may we try to bring harmony.

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Hon. G Origo: Madam Speaker, if I may just qualify that the statement made on the GTA came about in respect of the recent changes, which took place in the airport mandating a number of taxis to stay within the airport premises whilst planes were coming to Gibraltar. My understanding is, Madam Speaker that the taxi drivers themselves want to be part of the solution and not the problem. So may I ask the Hon. Minister, given that we both agree that improvements can be made and there should be changes to improve the service in the future, how are we engaging with the drivers themselves so that they are also involved in this process?

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Hon. Prof J Cortes: Madam Speaker, I do not know what the Hon. Member is referring to. Obviously, we cannot engage with every individual driver, but I can say that we engage with the representatives in the Taxi Association and I also meet with those taxi drivers or a representation of the taxi drivers who are not members of the Taxi Association and they know that I am accessible

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and I have had discussions with all of them and I often have conversations with taxi drivers. Therefore, I am aware of where they are coming from and what their needs are and their aspirations are. I actually find that they are all reacting very positively and we are seeing improvements.

Madam Speaker: Next question.

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Q553/2025

Museum –

Drop in visitors; plans to improve the product

Acting Clerk: Question 553, the Hon. G Origo.

Hon. G Origo: The number of museum visitors by month, appear to be dwindling, having had a total number of 2,855 visits between January to March of this year, whereas 3,311 visitors were recorded last year for the same period, representing a 14% drop. In light of this, does the Government have any plans to improve the overall museum product?

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

Minister for Education, the Environment and Climate Change (Hon. Prof J E Cortes): Madam Speaker, I know that the GSD are sworn enemies of Knightsfield Holdings and the Hon. Mr Bossino in particular is such but this question really does take the custard cream. Madam Speaker, the differential between last year and this year falls within the realms of stochastic statistical processes and it cannot be concluded with such limited data to be necessarily significant.

Many factors can affect visitor numbers and a purported drop such as this one could be influenced by a wide range of factors and need have nothing to do with the quality of the product on offer. For example, in terms of the weather, the month of March this year was exceptional as we are all aware because of unusually high rainfall, which will have impacted on visitors. In any case, trends cannot be determined on the basis of two points on a graph, which is what the Hon. Member has provided.

In actual fact, the 2025 figure is the second highest achieved for this period since 2005. Therefore, we hardly need to panic. When we look at the fluctuations between years, positive or negative, as they have been both for the January to March period between 2000 and 2025, the mean fluctuation is 63.5%. I do not want to be accused of manipulating the data by adding the significant fluctuations in this period during the COVID years. Therefore, if we remove the data sets from the years 2020, 2021 and 2022, the mean fluctuation is 17.5%, still higher than the 14% at 2024 to 2025 fluctuation, which the Hon. Member purports to be a drop. It is simply not significant, Madam Speaker. Having said this, I can assure the Hon. Member that the great professional team at the Gibraltar National Museum continues in its incessant efforts to improve this product which he will recall is not limited purely to visitor numbers, but includes also a vibrant research facility, educational facility and other areas related to museum activity.

Finally, I would like to draw the attention of the Hon. Member that in terms of revenue, the figure for the January to March period actually increased by 36.78% compared to the previous year, in spite of the slight drop in visitor numbers. This, the Hon. Member will agree, indicates that the current Government strategy of pricing entry to its sites at a level which reflects the site's quality is having a clear and immediate effect.

Hon. G Origo: Madam Speaker, if I may, by way of assistance, just give the Hon. Minister a much wider than different points for him to assess, because he said that the three months for the

two years are not very representative, accurate representation of the drop that we have at hand but I have a statistics website for museum visitors from the year 2000 to 2025 and they are broken down by month and by year and with the exception of 2023, which had a few hundred visitors over the threshold since 2022, 2023, 2024 and 2025 to date, we have had the worst records on date with respect to museum visitors for each respective year.

Does the Hon. Minister not agree, given these points which I've given them, which is a span of 25 years, that the last four or five years do actually show a drop in visitor numbers in the museum?

Hon. Prof J Cortes: Madam Speaker, what I am saying is that it is not statistically significant. I do not accept that it is statistically significant and we also have to bear in mind, I have mentioned other possible explanations for that, and also the fact that nowadays a lot of visits are actually virtual visits. I know that that is not what the Hon. Member is referring to, but I do not recognise this as being a statistical problem.

Madam Speaker: The Hon. D J Bossino.

Hon. D J Bossino: Madam Speaker, the Minister says that I am a sworn enemy of this particular company. I am not a sworn enemy of this company. I am a sworn friend of the Gibraltar taxpayer. That is where my concern and our concerns come from and our concern is that more than a million pounds, I think the last figure is 1.25 million pounds, is given to this particular company to run various sites and in fact, that contract has been extended.

Therefore, I just wanted to correct the record but ask him this question. Whilst he boasts, in effect, that there has been a near, as he puts it, or tries to put it, as a 14% drop in the figures that and the time period that my learned and hon. Friend, Mr. Origo, points out in his question, aren't the absolute numbers, forgetting the fluctuation for a moment, aren't the absolute numbers, whether it is 2,800 or 3,300, quite frankly, for a site which is so important and in the centre of town, which ought to be attracting many more visits, quite frankly, derisory?

He shakes his head and I just put it to him and ask him to comment on that. Do I take it from the shaking of his head that he is satisfied with these numbers?

Hon. Prof J Cortes: I think the hon. Member is betraying, surprisingly, a lack of understanding of how visitors visit Gibraltar because the vast majority of visitors actually do not go to the centre of town. They go around the different tourist sites, particularly in the Upper Rock and that is where the figures are, I believe, at an all-time high this year.

Therefore, I do not agree that the fact that it is in the centre of town actually makes it more accessible to the majority of tourists. I think probably the opposite is correct. I think that for the size of the museum in particular, I am absolutely satisfied.

As to certainly the product, clearly it would be good to have more visitors. However, as I also said in my answer, the income generated has also increased and as the hon. Member is so concerned about the taxpayer, clearly he will be very satisfied to hear that the taxpayer is getting more income from the museum than probably ever before.

Hon. D J Bossino: Is the Hon. Minister's position really that he is satisfied with the numbers? Furthermore, he also betrays, he says I am betraying something, he also betrays a concern on his part that actually the numbers are low but the reason why the numbers are low is because of the location of this particular attraction.

Does he not accept that this product in many respects is failing? It is failing because it has not been looked at, it has not been refurbished. I went there last summer and it is the same as when I went to school on a school trip. It is hardly changed and many of the signs and all the rest of it look jaded and this is a company which is receiving a lot of money from the taxpayer but do I take it that he says it is all fine, the product is fine, and it is simply a question of location. Is that his position?

3410 **Hon. Prof J Cortes:** The person who said it was a question of location was the hon. Member who said he would expect high numbers because it was the centre of town. Therefore, the only thing I said is that most of our tourists actually do not go to the centre of town. That is one point that I would leave to one side.

3415 It is not correct that it has not moved since the days he was at school. I am glad that he was one of the visitors last summer. Clearly, he is one of the statistics but Madam Speaker; I have myself opened at least three different exhibits in my time as Minister for Heritage over the last few years including the Neanderthal model, including the reconstruction of the Neolithic person, including the Neolithic woman, including the discovery of a Phoenician urn. So clearly it is developing. The hon. Member perhaps would notice the difference if he went more frequently because obviously his memory from when he used to go when he was a child may be failing him.

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Madam Speaker: Yes, the Hon. G Origo.

3425 **Hon. G Origo:** Yes, the honourable jury member. Madam Speaker, may I ask, because the Hon. Minister makes references to the fact that the number of revenue that we have generated from visits has been going up but it is my understanding that the fees from the entrance fees for the museum has also gone up. My information is that it used to be £5; it has gone up to £15. Is that correct? If so, since when was this change implemented?

3430 **Hon. Prof J Cortes:** Madam Speaker, the fees went up recently. I cannot recall exactly what the new fee is but they did go up.

3435 **Hon. G Origo:** Madam Speaker, just finally if I may, because based on the discussion that we have just had, it clearly appears that the numbers of visitors, at least in the numerical visitors, even though it is generating more money, has been going down. When things go bad, at least in the medical sense, we carry out what is called a post-mortem to see what has gone wrong and identify issues and how can we improve. So given that it is clearly evident that things are going wrong with the marketing and development of the museum, can I ask the Hon. Minister whether he's minded to carry out a similar exercise, a post-mortem on the museum, if we could call it, to see how we can better improve the product.

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Hon. Prof J Cortes: Madam Speaker, I think it is a bit late to do a post-mortem on one particular exhibit, the mummy but Madam Speaker, I do not accept that I have said that I recognise that the figures are going down and there is a problem with the museum. I simply do not accept that.

3445 Therefore, I have no comment to make on the post-mortem, other than the one on the mummy.

Madam Speaker: Next question.

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Q554/2025
Tower of Homage –
Restoration works

Q567/2025
Moorish Castle –
Running of site post refurbishment

Acting Clerk: Question 554, the Hon. G Origo.

3460 **Hon. G Origo:** Given the recently announced restoration works to take place at the Tower of Homage, can the Government confirm whether it still has plans to provide studio spaces for artists adjacent to this site – in line with its manifesto commitment?

3465 **Acting Clerk:** Answer, the Hon. the Minister for Education, the Environment and Climate Change.

Minister for Education, the Environment and Climate Change (Hon. Prof J E Cortes): Madam Speaker, I will answer this question together with Question 567.

3470 **Acting Clerk:** Question 567, the Hon. D J Bossino.

Hon. D J Bossino: Is it the intention that a company or other entity will run the Moorish Castle site post refurbishment; if so, has this company/entity been identified and if so which one is it?

3475 **Acting Clerk:** Answer, the Hon. the Minister for Education, the Environment and Climate Change.

3480 **Hon. Prof J Cortes:** Madam Speaker, Fortress Attractions Limited will be managing the Moorish Castle facility as a subcontractor to the Gibraltar National Museum. With regards to the restoration of the outer keep, which is the area the Hon. Member is referring to, its future use is under consideration at this point in time in the context of the refurbishment of the Moorish Castle as a whole.

3485 **Madam Speaker:** The Hon. G Origo.

3490 **Hon. G Origo:** Yes, Madam Speaker, and if I may just take supplementaries on my Question, which is Question 554. I note that I made the question on the premise that I found on the Government's manifesto that there was a commitment very specific to say that studio spaces would be provided within this area. He now says that the use of the outside area is under consideration.

Can he clarify on how these two positions reconcile? On the one hand, we have a promise, a manifesto commitment to put these and produce the studio spaces and on the other hand, he is telling us that these are still up for consideration. Could you please provide clarity on that?

3495 **Hon. Prof J Cortes:** Yes, Madam Speaker, when the manifesto was prepared and in fact this was prepared at the time when I was Minister for Culture, we had not yet embarked on the extensive refurbishment of the Moorish Castle and we were not quite clear where that was going to go. In the context of that refurbishment and the success that that is seeing, it may be that there may be an alternative use for that particular area. It is something that the Hon. Minister for Culture and I would have to discuss if they still have that requirement.

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There has been considerable interest from outside Gibraltar in that area by way of enhancing it in the Moorish style including potential funds from outside Gibraltar and this is why we are still looking at an option without discarding any.

3505 **Hon. G Origo:** If I may Madam Speaker, I am very pleased on the one hand, to hear from the Hon. Minister that parts of the considerations at stake is that they are reconsidering whether to maintain the integrity of this site as a stand-alone heritage landmark by not tainting it, if we can call it that, with studio spaces. Can the Hon. Minister then confirm, I think that is the effect of the statement that he has made, that he is going to take into account the historical and architectural
3510 status of this site and therefore that will be the basis of the consideration of whether or not he goes ahead with the studio spaces because in the manifesto commitment it did say that they had already consulted and approved designs with heritage stakeholders but it appears that now different heritage considerations are at play and I would be grateful for his clarification on that.

3515 **Hon. Prof J Cortes:** All that was correct and we did have the discussion with the heritage stakeholders. Now on seeing the way that the Moorish Castle is developing there has been an interest from potential philanthropic funders to develop that also as part of the Moorish theme but it is something that is still under discussion and as I said in my answer, the whole thing is under consideration as to which direction we go.

3520 **Hon. G Origo:** If I may just finally, given that we are steering towards the premise that the Moorish Castle will be preserved as a stand-alone heritage site, is the Government still committed to providing studio spaces to artists, which was the premise of the initial question, whether or not to take form next to the Moorish Castle site or otherwise.

3525 **Hon. Prof J Cortes:** I think we need to tackle that question once we have determined the use of that space.

Madam Speaker: The Hon. D J Bossino on Question 567.

3530 **Hon. D J Bossino:** As I have understood it, the Hon. the Minister has replied to my friend Mr Origo in relation to the refurbishment works, whilst my question was more about what's going to happen thereafter and he referred to the specific area which is the outer keep element of the site. Now I think that is still in abeyance, still has not been decided but may I ask him this, is he able, is
3535 that element going to go out for tender? On the face of it, it is not because of that, but I just make an observation that it will be, I would have thought, a lucrative venture for whoever gets it and that's the question, is it going to go out to tender and not necessarily assigned to the structure that is currently now carrying out the refurbishment works, which is the infamous Knightsfield Holdings and Fortress Attractions.

3540 **Hon. Prof J Cortes:** Madam Speaker, the potential use of the outer keep would not; certainly, the uses we are looking at would not be lucrative.

Hon. D J Bossino: The Hon. the Minister, with respect, has not answered my question. He has
3545 made a comment on my observation, which he says is inaccurate but can he answer the question in relation to whether this particular activity is going to go out to tender?

Hon. Prof J Cortes: Madam Speaker, it depends on what we determine the activity is. If the activity is to develop it for argument's sake as cultural facilities for the Government, it might be
3550 the Government that does it. It may be that the philanthropic donation may be to develop for argument's sake an Arabic-type garden a la Granada. That would not necessarily be something that would have to go out to tender because it could perhaps be done internally by the

Government. Therefore, it really depends on what the outcome of this consideration is. I think it is too early to say.

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Hon. D J Bossino: Will it in any way be impacted that decision-making process, or is it separate to the announced expressions of interest which was issued, I think, during the course of last summer, in respect of which we still haven't alighted on a decision?

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Hon. Prof J Cortes: This particular area was not included within that expression of interest.

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Hon. D J Bossino: Insofar as the answers and the replies that the Hon. Minister has currently provided is predicated on the outer keep element of the site, are there any differences in respect to the other bits of the site, i.e. the inner keep? Are there separate considerations? I would ask him to expand on that.

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Hon. Prof J Cortes: The inner keep and the Tower of Homage are part of the current project that we have already discussed. The only part that is not included in this particular project is the outer keep, which is where the Hon. Member, Mr Origo, has been referring to.

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Hon. D J Bossino: To clarify, when the Hon. Minister says it is part of the current project, it is part of the current refurbishment project. Is that correct? Therefore, whilst I did not distinguish the position, I simply said the Moorish Castle site, the Hon. Minister has and has taken me down that particular path under the guise of the outer keep, but I would ask him please to provide me an answer with the inner keep.

So once the restoration and refurbishment work has been completed insofar as the inner keep is concerned, what is going to happen to the running of it thereafter?

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Hon. Prof J Cortes: That is the answer that I provided, it would be run by Fortress Attractions Limited.

Fortunately, before too long he would be able to ask the other Mr Bossino all these questions, perhaps over Sunday lunch.

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Hon. D J Bossino: Oh sorry, I see. Therefore, Fortress Attractions Limited is the successful company, which has been assigned the future running of the inner keep.

Did that go out to tender? If not, why not and if it did, when did it go out to tender?

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Hon. Prof J Cortes: Mr. Speaker, the Moorish Castle, Tower of Homage inner keep are part of the contract of the museum, Knightsfield Holding and it has been subcontracted by them.

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Madam Speaker: You have asked six supplementaries on this. I know we are having fun back and forth, but I have to cut it. Next question.

Q555/2025

Rosia Bay aquarium project – Support by Minister for the Environment

Acting Clerk: Question 555, the Hon. G Origo.

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Hon. G Origo: Does the Minister for the Environment support the Rosia Bay aquarium project, which proposes an oceanic display and research centre?

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

3605 **Minister for Education, the Environment and Climate Change (Hon. Prof J E Cortes):** Madam Speaker, I need to be satisfied as to the implications on heritage, on animal welfare, on the acquisition of specimens, on the quality and relevance of the intended research and the entity that will carry out this research as well as keeping within the law. I will present my views on the proposal at the meeting of the Development and Planning Commission. Once I have fully considered the plans and listened to the various representations, I will be able to form a view.

3610 **Hon. G Origo:** I had a series of supplementaries which I wanted to take, but given that the Hon. Minister is saying that he has not taken a view and that is still pending, I don't think that the relevance of my supplementary is coming to play at this stage, so I will take the opportunity once he does take a view and once we do see these plans materialise to perhaps submit the question on the basis that the project is going ahead.

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Madam Speaker: Next Question.

**Q556/2025
Recycling rates –
Below target**

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Acting Clerk: Question 556, the Hon. G Origo.

3625 **Hon. G Origo:** Given that recycling rates are well below the Government's target, with just 12% of waste being recycled, how is the Government proposing to reach the targeted 55% by the end of this year?

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

3630 **Minister for Education, the Environment and Climate Change (Hon. Prof J E Cortes):** Answer, the Hon. Minister for Education, the Environment and Climate Change. Madam Speaker, the 55% target will be extremely challenging to reach within the proposed timeframes. Nevertheless, there are a number of measures envisaged that will assist in this.

3635 First is the commencement of the commercial recycling regulations. They have already been commenced, Madam Speaker. This requires all places of business to recycle the municipal waste and will have a significant impact, particularly in respect of glass and cans from the hospitality sector.

Secondly, the introduction of new recycling streams such as textiles and organic waste. The textile bins in particular have been extremely well utilised with over 31,000 kilogrammes having been collected since they were introduced.

3640 Thirdly, the recent announcement of an agreement for a new waste management facility. The facility will include a sorting and processing plant comprising ballistic separators as well as manual sorting to maximise the recovery of the recyclable fraction of waste. Ultimately, however, achieving these targets will require a community-wide effort and to this end, the Department of the Environment will also be engaging in public awareness initiatives to increase awareness and understanding and is exploring the possibility of introducing recycling incentives as well as stricter enforcement of penalties for non-compliance.

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Hon. G Origo: Madam Speaker, if I may, can I just, on the tail end of his question, ask what sorts of incentives the Hon. Minister is considering and whether these are specific to businesses

3650 or will they apply to individuals in order to get them to encourage to recycle more because I am very interested and fully supportive of that so I just want to elaborate and expand a bit more on what kind of incentives or disincentives the Minister is considering.

3655 **Hon. Prof J Cortes:** Madam Speaker, a disincentive, as I said, is a stricter enforcement of penalties and closer observation of how people recycling, it is now illegal to put the wrong sort of thing in the wrong type of bin and that can be monitored particularly with cameras and so on but by way of incentive, we are looking at both commercial and individual and we are looking at schemes such as a prize for recycling initiatives perhaps some financial incentives as well and we are discussing various options and some of these things are seen in other parts of the world and
3660 we are looking to see whether we can introduce some of these here.

Hon. G Origo: If I may briefly ask a few questions with respect to the recycling plant which he introduced in the response to his question he did say that there is a recent announcement that was in the press as a new separation plant which is being built or going to be built before 2026 near the Europe point. Can I ask whether this plant is going to be able to deal with under-recycled items or is it just a separation plant on its own right?
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Hon. Prof J Cortes: Madam Speaker, I think this is stretching the supplementary because I have not been asked to answer details on the plant. I think the question is will it only separate or will it treat? It will separate and without going into too much detail some of the recycling most of the recycling, the intention is to export it because it has a commercial value.
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Madam Speaker: Next question.

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Q557/2025
Refuse collection –
Reduction in number of employees

Acting Clerk: Question 557, the Hon. G Origo.

3680 **Hon. G Origo:** Given the reduction to the number of employees overall and the number of refuse collectors per truck, is the Government satisfied that these new changes, albeit potentially cost saving, will produce a better service for Gibraltar's refuse collection?

Acting Clerk: Answer, the Hon. Minister for Education, the Environment and Climate Change.
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Minister for Education, the Environment and Climate Change (Hon. Prof J E Cortes): Madam Speaker the Government has engaged in extensive and constructive dialogue with GIC and Unite to ensure that these changes result in cost savings for the taxpayer at no detriment to the service provided. Government will be closely monitoring the situation to ensure that this is indeed the case and retains the right to intervene as necessary should the service ever drop before the required standards.
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Hon. G Origo: Madam Speaker and if I may I believe the Hon. Minister said that he will continuously be reviewing the changes and carry out any amendments to that should it be necessary to remedy the situation but as a current system stands in place now are there any contingency measures available to deal with any uptakes and volumes with respect to waste increases or decreases because I understand that we are proposing less routes with less trucks
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and less employees so I wonder how we are going to be able to manage the current refuse collection if everything seems by resources point of view going down.

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Hon. Prof J Cortes: Madam Speaker they would have to provide the service to the satisfaction of the Government if not there are provisions in the agreement where the Government would act.

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Madam Speaker: Next question if there is one.

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Hon. C Sacarello: Thank you Madam Speaker. I have a couple but I will do one at a time. The first one is will the Government consider returning to the lunchtime or the two o'clock collection in the summer months when tourism levels are higher turnover is greater particularly for the collection in town when smells and obviously the visible nuisance that it causes would be more prevalent in the summer months. Would it consider increasing it at least for that particular period?

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Hon. Prof J Cortes: I believe that the department has already made arrangements for that to be tackled. I stand to be corrected but I believe that is the case.

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Hon. C Sacarello: Madam Speaker will the Hon. Minister be able to clarify whether the cost savings will cause a knock on impact now or in the future however small within the realms of possibility that at some point in the future the private sector whether companies or private residents within certain estates would be charged for refuse collection.

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Hon. G Origo: Madam Speaker, if I may just briefly refer to I believe what was the Government statement and press releases relating to this new change part of the rationale behind the changes in times workload routes and number of employees was in much respect due to the wish to achieve a better work-life balance for these employees given that a work-life balance and the notion of trying to reduce costs was the premises of achieving this deal. Can I ask whether there were any kind of pilots or trial runs, which were taken place in order to establish whether these changes would actually work or is this some kind of experiments that we may have to then go back on in the future.

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Hon. Prof J Cortes: Madam Speaker the personnel in my department particularly management have a lot of experience in this and it is their assessment that this will work. I do not believe there was a need for a pilot but the best pilot would be when the system changes and if we find this not working then as I have already said we will ensure that it does work because we need this service to work for the public.

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Madam Speaker: Next question.

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Q558/2025
Lover's Lane –
Details of emergency works

Acting Clerk: Question 558, the Hon. G Origo.

3745 **Hon. G Origo:** Can the Minister provide details on the emergency works carried out at Lover's Lane, which required the hire of pumps, to the cost of more than £120,000, and whether the issue is now resolved?

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

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Minister for Education, the Environment and Climate Change (Hon. Prof J E Cortes): Madam Speaker we are continuing the works of redressing almost two decades of neglect under the GSD and this cannot be concluded in a decade but we remain committed to continuing to fix what they broke. The £120,000 was spent specifically on the hiring of specialist pumps from a company in Spain, which were hired through Wastage Products Ltd who are the local agents for these pumps. The pumps were brought in as an emergency given the extent of sewage that was pouring out to the walls at Wellington Front as we have discussed here before. The pumps allowed the main sewer to be blocked and the sewage over pumped past the works area thus allowing operatives to work safely within the sewer.

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Hon. G Origo: Madam Speaker if I may, could we not in hindsight have done more to prevent these emergency works because the Hon. Minister has just noted that there was decades of neglect much of which includes 14 years of their own Government being in charge. In light of the fact that they have been supervising over these issues for 14 years, did we really have to wait until the breaking point until sewer was pouring out to the walls in Wellington Front before we had to address the situation? Was the Government not aware that such works would be required and therefore could we have not done regular normal works as opposed to emergency ones in order to remedy the situation given that emergency works normally come at a higher cost?

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Hon. Prof J Cortes: Madam Speaker I think the hindsight would have to refer to those members of his party who used to sit here once upon a time happily long, long ago. As I have said here before Madam Speaker, the investment that this Government has made in the sewer system accounts to millions and much, much more. I don't have the figures here but they have been mentioned here before in previous answers to very similar questions many millions more than they ever spent and there was so much to do that unfortunately we haven't been able to catch up and unfortunately when a system is so old and had been abandoned for so long you can try and refurbish as much as you can but you never know where the problem is going to arise. So Madam Speaker I totally reject the implications of the Hon. Member.

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Hon. G Origo: Madam Speaker can I ask whether given this experience are we going to learn from it or we are just going to remain idle until we have another emergency of this nature arise before we have to carry out emergency repairs to fix the situation. In that vein I refer to a recent campaign that I think the Government has introduced which was the Pipe Monster Campaign in which they are trying to educate and bring to people's attentions what they should or should not put down the toilets or down the drains. With respect to that campaign which I think goes to the heart of this issue how is the Government going to assess whether the people are indeed getting the message or are we going to just have to wait for another emergency to take place before we fix the situation and see whether we have to educate people more on what should or shouldn't go down the toilet.

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Madam Speaker: That is two questions.

Hon. Prof J Cortes: Madam Speaker I am feeling almost exactly the same as my hon. Friend felt when he was answering questions from the hon. Member. I do not know whether he does not listen or he forgets. How can he possibly say that the Government has remained idle on sewage with the millions it has literally pumped into improving the sewage network.

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It is actually now planning very soon to lay a whole new north-south sewage line. The amount of work that the Government has done is incredible so there is no question of being idle. They were idle when they were in Government.

3800 I don't like reminding them and sometimes when I actually mention the lack of investment and the lack of work that the former GSD Government did I almost hold back a little bit but never again because they are seemingly trying to make us believe that when they were in Government they did wonderful things for the sewage network. Madam Speaker they did virtually nothing. We are the ones who have done it.

3805 We are not idle. The hon. Member has referred to the campaign that our hon. Friend the Minister for Housing has started because of the particular problem in housing estates but the problem is the same throughout Gibraltar. People have to not throw wipes and so on in the sewers and down the toilets but I totally reject the implication that the Government has been idle because it hasn't and all he has to do is go through estimates book for the past 15 years compare them to
3810 the previous 15 years and it will all be there for everyone to see.

Hon. D J Bossino: Madam Speaker the Hon. Minister seems to want to assume the mantra of the Chief Minister. He needed to get excited about these things but the reality is that in his prepared reply no doubt added on by him when it was originally drafted by his officials was very
3815 partisan and very political and in fact inaccurate when he refers to two decades we weren't there for that long but the reality is that they have been there now for 14 years so the criticism levelled by Mr Origo is absolutely and utterly justified and in fact I thought the campaign that was started by a former Minister on the other side which was PPP so it is pee, paper and poo are the only things that ought to go down the toilets and it stayed with me and this was about 10 years ago so
3820 I think it is quite effective but can I ask him this question, this was Mr Balban, in relation to the question which cites a cost of 120,000 pounds is it the case that the problem is now completely and utterly resolved it is not just a and I don't want to put it in derogatory terms but nothing else comes to my mind a patch up job because it was done on an emergency basis but then they're going to have to be further substantive works done what is the current position.

3825 **Hon. Prof J Cortes:** Madam Speaker first of all I am honoured to be compared to my friend the Chief Minister. It is really touching that he should actually say it secondly almost two decades, mathematically 16, which is more or less the time they were in rounded up to the nearest whole decade I think that that is mathematically acceptable Madam Speaker. I believe there is still work
3830 to be done in that so I am told that there is a couple more months to do remembering that very often work has to be done at weekends or overnight and therefore it might take longer than expected.

Madam Speaker: Next question.
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Q559/2025

Traffic (Licensing and Registration) Regulations – Medical review cases required to pay for renewal of driving licence

Acting Clerk: Question 559, the Hon. J Ladislaus.
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Hon. J Ladislaus: Why are individuals who are required to submit to a medical review and renewal of a driving licence within specified intervals under the Traffic (Licensing and Registration) Regulations required to pay for their driving licence renewals?

3845 **Acting Clerk:** Answer, the Hon. Minister for Education, the Environment and Climate Change.

Minister for Education, the Environment and Climate Change (Hon. Prof. J E Cortes): Madam Speaker, this payment is to cover the administrative fees relating to the production of the licence. However, this will fall under the review of the traffic licencing and registration regulations that as mentioned in past meetings of this House I have asked my team to carry out.

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Hon. J Ladislaus: I am grateful for that indication. Is the Hon. Minister aware that the UK does not appear to charge such a fee?

Hon. Prof J Cortes: Madam Speaker I am sorry I did not hear the question.

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Hon. J Ladislaus: Is the Hon. Minister aware that the United Kingdom does not appear to charge such a fee.

Hon. Prof J Cortes: No Madam Speaker I am not aware but I am aware that there is a charge and it is something that I have asked to be addressed and would consider perhaps taking a view that this should not continue to be the case.

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Hon. J Ladislaus: I am grateful for the indication. Will the Hon. Minister go a step further and actually commit to abolishing it on the basis that it appears to be discriminatory on the basis that somebody has to pay to renew a driving licence to comply with legislation simply because they have a medical condition and it is in breach of the of the Disability Act and the description of what or the meaning of what discrimination is under that act so would the Hon. Minister commit to abolishing it?

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Hon. Prof J Cortes: Madam Speaker the fee is not high for a medical condition for somebody under 70 is £15 every 3 years for certain categories it is £25 every 5 years or £9 every 3 years it varies but I agree with her assessment and therefore it is my intention to recommend to those reviewing the legislation that this should not continue. I do agree that it seems not acceptable in this day and age.

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Madam Speaker: Next question.

Q560-3/2025

Masters degree –

Qualifying criteria to cover tuition fees; Criteria needed to receive a maintenance and travel allowance; Government support areas/unsupported areas; Maximum annual tuition fee

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Acting Clerk: Question 560, the Hon. E J Reyes.

Hon. E J Reyes: Can the Minister confirm what qualifying criteria are required in order to achieve a Government scholarship to cover the tuition fees for a Masters degree?

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

Minister for Education, the Environment and Climate Change (Hon. Prof. J E Cortes): Madam Speaker I will answer this question together with Questions 561 to 563.

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Acting Clerk: Question 561, the Hon. E J Reyes.

Hon. E J Reyes: What criteria need to be met in order for a Masters student to receive a maintenance and travel allowance and what is the maximum amount awarded?

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Acting Clerk: Question 562, the Hon. E J Reyes.

Hon. E J Reyes: The award of Government grants for Master's programmes are discretionary; which areas of this level of study does the Government support and, importantly, which are the areas which it will not consider granting financial aid for?

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Acting Clerk: Question 563, the Hon. E J Reyes.

Hon. E J Reyes: What is the maximum annual tuition fee paid for a Masters degree?

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

Minister for Education, the Environment and Climate Change (Hon. Prof. J E Cortes): Thank you Madam Speaker I am combining the answers to these questions as they overlap greatly but my answer I believe contains all the information requested.

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Madam Speaker there are different routes that individuals take into Masters Qualifications. Some pursue a Masters course immediately after having completed their undergraduate degree. In cases where the individual's undergraduate degree was funded through a mandatory school award the individual is able to automatically access mandatory funding for their Masters Qualification if it is undertaken as a continuation to the undergraduate course with the application being made within two years of them having completed their undergraduate qualification and if it is within the same field of study. That is one way.

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Individuals who are not in this position can access Government funding through the discretionary route if their application is found to be successful post-application. Applications received through the discretionary route are carefully considered by the scholarship committee which is a gazetted panel consisting of ten individuals both from within the Department of Education and Independence. Applications for Masters Qualifications received through a discretionary route are scored against all of the following criteria: Total cost of the course; individual needs of the candidate to follow a career path; calibre of the application the needs of Gibraltar; and if they are a second chance learner.

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The needs of Gibraltar scoring criteria are determined each year by Government. Most recently, these have been set mainly for medical or related degrees. The scores for all the discretionary applications received are totalled and then ranked in descending order with individuals whose scores rank them above the threshold for funding available for the subsequent academic year as voted for by Parliament at the Appropriation Bill being funded.

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All applicants for discretionary Masters funding must meet the eligibility criteria of ten years of continuous residency in Gibraltar and be otherwise eligible to receive funding by meeting any other current eligibility criteria. For example, not being a Government debtor.

Once it has been determined that a Masters Qualification will be funded, specific funding details are determined. The length, type of course and location of study will all have an impact on the amount of funding support received. The length of Masters Qualifications varies depending on whether they are taken as full-time or part-time programmes. Most full-time courses can be completed in one to two years, whereas a part-time Master's Degree can take anywhere between two and four years.

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In some instances, for example Masters of Medicine, MMed, the Masters Qualification is a full-time course and can take three years. Different courses have different tuition fee rates, which are set by the respective university. However, tuition fees for all Masters' Qualifications regardless of the course duration or university are capped at a total of £12,000. The assistive grant we used to

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3945 call it the maintenance grant for Masters Qualifications is £7,200 irrespective of the course duration.

The travel allowance for Master's qualifications is £1,300 in total irrespective of the course duration.

3950 **Hon. E J Reyes:** Thank you Madam Speaker for the detailed information. The Minister made reference in his reply about the sums of money that have been approved at Budget time. Am I correct in assuming, because if I recall correctly, we vote X amount of money to be allocated to scholarships.

3955 When it comes to Masters, which end up being discretionary, shall we call it that, is that dependent year upon year on how much is left, how much money is left over after we have given the mandated scholarships to all the undergraduates or is there a fixed sum per year? I ask this question because it seems that in some years, there are more master's scholarships being granted than others and I was wondering if that was a contributing factor. It depends how much money has been left over after the payment of the undergraduates.

3960 **Hon. Prof J Cortes:** Madam Speaker, there is a specific allocation for discretionary so it is a specific sum but I did miss one thing out in my reply there is an appeals procedure which goes to a separate board and maybe on appeal some will get through if there are particular circumstances which the board considers should be met and then sometimes there is a little bit of a leeway so there is an appeal procedure for anyone who is rejected.

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Hon. E J Reyes: Yes, thank you. It saves me from asking that I know the appeal procedure is undertaken by exactly the same people who are composed on the discretionary grants board or a totally different entity.

3970 **Hon. Prof J Cortes:** Madam Speaker, it would not be appropriate for the appeal to be heard by the people who determined the original scholarship. It is a different panel, which includes the director of education who is not part of the original one and a couple of other people, I cannot remember exactly the composition of the board. I will share if we meet tomorrow Madam Speaker, the hon. Member and I will be meeting tomorrow to discuss a number of things that
3975 have arisen in past meetings and I can clarify that for him.

3980 **Hon. E J Reyes:** I think it is a final thing Madam Speaker the scholarship award committee and so on are technically an advisory body to the Minister because they are not the controlling officer of the funds that I think legitimately lies with the director. Am I correct and if that is the case does the Minister recall any occasions when their decisions or recommendations may have been overruled for some particular circumstances? I may be asking for something he may not have the notes but we can discuss further if need be.

3985 **Hon. Prof J Cortes:** Not so far because there is the avenue for appeal and they would come perhaps for me for some special consideration if their appeal fails and then perhaps if there are particular circumstances which might be determined that it would be exceptional because it would be the third time round that they would come.

3990 **Hon. C Sacarello:** Thank you very much Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker the main issue here particularly this year is that the application release date is normally scheduled for the end of March early April over recent years and at the moment it has not been released and there are plenty of worried parents, not just worried parents but students writing to me on an almost daily basis explaining their situation and their concern that they have to book accommodation for the next year that they have to book themselves into courses that they have a life to move on with

3995 and the only message they get from I assume a disgruntled member of staff at the Department of Education is that try next week, look at the website but the website simply shows nothing.

Why is the Government silent on this? Does it not realise the harm and stress it is causing to, sure it is only a small cohort of people but what they may feel is a disturbance or an interruption or perhaps just hang on for a bit, an inconvenience for a short while is actually for them hugely stressful so it is stressful for the parents, the students and I assume the Department of Education staff themselves who are having to countenance this. So will the Government explain why it has not yet released this officially, why the criteria are not on the website and why they will not if that is the case move the date for closing which is the 8th of June I believe or 6th of June back further.

4005 **Hon. Prof J Cortes:** Madam Speaker I am aware there have been some administrative delays, which is regretted, and we will have to reconsider the closing date. It is imminent but not the closing date the publication date. I think I would like to reassure those students on the first option, those who are directly following a Masters within two years in a similar course to their original that that is virtually automatic, that is not discretionary what has not gone out really is a discretionary one but it is due to appear within the next day or two.

4010 **Hon. C Sacarello:** Madam Speaker I am very glad to hear that given the fact that students and their parents who have spoken to the Department of Education have been told this for the last few weeks and in fact they have been looking since the end of March but my next question would be something that the Hon. Minister mentioned in his reply that the tuition fee was capped for I believe it is the second level the discretionary level at £12,000. The website for I think it is gibraltastudents.gi which is a very detailed explanation of and something like that for the postgraduate would be extremely useful but the only information on postgraduate details that I found there states that the cap is actually for tuition fees is at £18,000 I don't know if that is a discrepancy that is wrong or if the Government has reduced it from £18,000 to £12,000 and I am just wondering if the Hon. Minister could clarify that point. Thank you.

4020 **Hon. Prof J Cortes:** Madam Speaker, I would have to seek advice because my prepared answer refers to £12,000. I am not sure whether that is an error or it may be some other thing that neither the hon. Member or I can quite latch on to now. I would have to seek some advice and I will share it with Mr. Reyes tomorrow and he can advise.

Madam Speaker: Next question.

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Q564/2025
Vehicle Learners Licences –
Emailed as well as or in lieu of being posted

Q565/2025
Licensing Authority –
Issues with SMS text messaging system

4035 **Acting Clerk:** Question 564, the Hon. C Sacarello.

Hon. C Sacarello: Can the Minister please explain why Vehicle Learners Licences are not emailed with a secure pdf as well as or in lieu of being posted?

4040 **Acting Clerk:** Answer, the Hon. Minister for Education, the Environment and Climate Change.

Minister for Education, the Environment and Climate Change (Hon. Prof. J E Cortes): Madam Speaker, I will answer this question together with Question 565.

Acting Clerk: Question 565, the Hon. C Sacarello.

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Hon. C Sacarello: Can the Minister please explain why issues with the Licencing Authority SMS text messaging system, where garbled and contradictory messages are sent at unsociable hours such as 2am, remain being sent in a continuous, maniacal loop of messages for months on end?

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

Minister for Education, the Environment and Climate Change (Hon. Prof. J E Cortes): Madam Speaker, I must say that maniacal loop really reminds me, Madam Speaker, is it a Muppets movie where there is a maniacal laugh? It reminds me of that.

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Madam Speaker, DVLD are in the process of acquiring a new licencing and vehicle registration system, which will have the functionality to send provisional licences via email. That functionality sadly does not exist in the old system and there is an ongoing issue with the SMS maniacal system being used to send reminders to those whose MOT certificates had expired. This has been reported to the IT&LD who are rectifying.

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I was hoping they would tell me today that it had been rectified, but I have not heard back, but it is being addressed imminently.

Madam Speaker: Next question.

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**Q565/2025
City Walls –
Weed growth**

Acting Clerk: Question 566, the Hon. C Sacarello.

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Hon. C Sacarello: It has been brought to our attention that the proliferation of weed growth on our City Walls has reached levels where their removal must be addressed with urgency. Does the Government not share this concern and why has the weed growth been allowed to reach such levels on such an important element of our heritage?

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

Minister for Education, the Environment and Climate Change (Hon. Prof J E Cortes): Madam Speaker, in my vocabulary there is no such thing as a weed, except perhaps in the dark crevices of the Opposition benches, of course. Sorry, I could not resist that. Madam Speaker, I call them plants in places where rather they were not. While these can on some walls and in some conditions be unsightly, they are for the most part not a threat to their structure if they are herbaceous. They can be if woody. In the latter case as recently by Southport Gates, this is tackled immediately.

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The removal of plant growth on city walls is not a simple matter as it requires specialised access work and depending on the fabric of the wall will need curatorial supervision and it is expensive. On occasion in addition, there are species of plants that may be growing on a wall that are rare or protected and these must be treated in a different way, for example, being removed after they have shed seed. However, I am pleased to inform the House that we are preparing a programme to have plant growth removed from the walls along Queensway in the coming months.

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4090 Additionally, and despite the members' hyperbole, I can assure the public that the walls of our great city are not about to tumble and our defences are stronger than ever.

4095 **Hon. C Sacarello:** Well, I am very glad to hear that, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, I am not sure if one's, as in one in general's mother, ever taught the importance of the value of washing behind one's ears and also cleaning or polishing one's shoes because at the end of the day that is the image that is portrayed and the discipline of keeping oneself clean and tidy.

Madam Speaker: I am sure the hon. Member is coming to the question.

4100 **Hon. C Sacarello:** You are absolutely correct in that, Madam Speaker... As for the city walls, well, to use the analogy, we wouldn't want plant growth coming out of our ears and from our shoes but the point I am trying to make is that they are extremely important bastions of our heritage and of our tourist products and they reflect the image of Gibraltar. Some view it slightly differently, as the Hon. Minister.

4105 So my question is, thank you for confirming that a certain section will be cleared but will this be done regularly and consistently throughout or is this just something that's done at this moment in time?

4110 **Hon. Prof J Cortes:** Madam Speaker, the huge surface area of walls, so therefore it would be extremely expensive and time-consuming if I wish we had but if I was spending that much money I would probably be criticised by the Opposition benches for spending too much money on this. There are certain areas that are worse than others and certain areas that are easier to tackle than others and we will begin, certainly once the walls are cleared it does take a little bit of time maybe a few years for the growth to grow back and be visible and offensive and I have agreed in my answer that it can be unsightly and therefore we are going to start some work on it. It is expensive
4115 so we have to phase it in and my intention is that we should do some stretches of wall every year and hopefully that will resolve particularly those areas which are particularly unsightly.

Madam Speaker: Next question.

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Q568-9/2025

Westside School emergency civil contingency plan – When shared with all teachers; ongoing review of security measures

4125 **Acting Clerk:** Question 568, the Hon. E J Reyes on behalf of the Hon. the Leader of the Opposition.

Hon. E J Reyes: Madam Speaker when was the Westside School emergency civil contingency plan put in place and uploaded onto the teaching platform in use by teachers and when was it shared with all Westside teachers?

4130 **Acting Clerk:** Answer, the Hon. the Minister for Education the Environment and Climate Change.

4135 **Minister for Education, the Environment and Climate Change (Hon. Prof. J E Cortes):** Madam Speaker I will answer this question together with Question 569.

Acting Clerk: Question 569, the Hon. E J Reyes on behalf of the Hon. the Leader of the Opposition.

4140 **Hon. E J Reyes:** Is there an ongoing review of civil contingency and security measures at our schools following the trespassing incident of March 2025 at Westside School and are improvement measures being taken?

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

4145 **Minister for Education, the Environment and Climate Change (Hon. Prof. J E Cortes):** Madam Speaker, first answer in relation to Question 568. Westside's emergency response protocol was developed from the original fire response plans through consultation and departmental input from early 2023 onwards with engagement with staff including teachers, SNLSAs, counsellors and auxiliary staff through operational updates meetings and inset sessions. While the precise date of
4150 upload on the staff handbook cannot be evidenced digitally, it was in place and actively referred to by the return to school whole staff meeting on the 2nd of September 2024 when all staff were asked to review it. Following a post incident evaluation in March this year, the ERP, the Emergency Response Protocol, was re-uploaded to the new platform and reviewed again by staff in April.

4155 In relation to Question, 569 all school emergency response plans have been developed and reviewed as part of an ongoing civil contingencies work stream in consultation and collaboration with the Office of Civil Contingencies and the Royal Gibraltar Police Crime Prevention and Counter Terrorism Security Advisor. Individual school plans continue to be cascaded to staff in line with security risks identified while facilitating an environment conducive to teaching and learning.

4160 **Hon. E J Reyes:** Thank you for that information Madam Speaker. From what I can deduct in March, a couple of days after the incident that happened, it then came to light that in preparing a more user friendly format of revised platform there seems to have been some, let's call it clerical error and the updated information has not been included. That does not leave us in a position that new members of staff who were joined in the school in September 24 were therefore not
4165 aware of what the procedures were because the Minister refers to information having been available before, they have been working on things from 23 onwards and so on in one of the Government press releases the Minister kindly informed us that in February 24 there was even an inset training day but members of staff who start on that or this current academic year anything that happens prior to September 24 is something that they are not privy to information. Is the
4170 Minister able to recognise that through some admin or clerical error there seems to have been a lack of communication and information that perhaps had been taken for granted was available but in reality was not.

4175 **Hon. Prof J Cortes:** My information is that the procedure was in fact online in 2023. There is this discussion as to when it was and we cannot determine exactly when it was posted, there if that is the right expression for this and then it was re-uploaded to a new platform after March but certainly my information is that the procedure was there from early 2023 onwards.

4180 **Hon. E J Reyes:** Yes, thank you. I am not disputing that in 2023 some procedure was noted down and so on. I hope the Minister understands my concern is that if I just start working in that school as from September 24, what had happened before is not something that was privy to and unfortunately it was only a couple of days later that we noticed that in moving things to a more user friendly format on the Revive platform there had been an error. I just want the Minister to at least be able to verify that having learned from that mistake we are trying to ensure that the two
4185 days' gap there will be avoided in future when we transfer things.

Hon. Prof J Cortes: I don't think the Hon. Member is actually correct because he's saying that any staff who joined in September wouldn't have been privy to what had happened before but they would be privy to the procedures that were available then and as I said in my original answer

4190 there was a whole staff meeting on the 2nd of September 2024 where all staff were asked to review the procedure so that was I am told when they were told look even if you're new this is the procedure and here it is so I don't think that concern is a correct one Madam Speaker.

4195 **Hon. E J Reyes:** Well we don't seem to agree because my understanding at least of the feedback coming out from teachers is that in whatever briefs happened in September 2024 they were mainly concerned with school evacuation and at some stage another Government even were able to publish that in February 25 there was a year 7 fire drill taking place and so on. The incident that happened on the day did not require, in fact it was a wrong decision to try and evacuate children but rather it was a question of getting ourselves locked in. Can I at least get the Minister to agree that he will try and look and perhaps like an auditor does you know there was a discrepancy at least from the teacher's point of view of a couple of days where it had been taken for granted and information was there but because the exercise had undergone some clerical errors which is the way I prefer to call it in updating information there was a couple of days when information was missing and that could have been a big contributing factor you know they brought along these 4200 worries and I am not going to enter into now or trying to form a trial to shoot whoever is responsible I just want an assurance that this will be borne very much into mind so we have no reoccurrence even if it is just for a two day period where information is not available to staff. 4205

4210 **Hon. Prof J Cortes:** Madam Speaker, it is your own member's assessment that there was a clerical error or that information was missing that is not the information I have before me. What I do know is that every incident I think we have to respond by learning lessons and clearly there have been further reviews of procedures throughout all the schools and I think they are now much more robust as one would expect after one has had an incident and they are lengthy documents which have been prepared in conjunction as I said before with civil contingencies of the RGP. I am 4215 very happy to share them with the hon. Members there is about 70 odd pages of it but so I cannot say that I agree with the hon. Member with what the hon. Members say but I can say that lessons have been learnt and that we are now even more robust in our procedures.

4220 **Hon. E J Reyes:** Thank you Madam Speaker. I just ended by saying yes I am grateful I know the Minister likes to sit down we cover it together. What I do have as a note here was that the teacher's union was saying that the school handbook was not updated until the 28th of March which is two days later hence I reinforce my point you know that although the Minister has been told it is there in March it is a question of a discrepancy of two days which jointly we share concern and jointly we will work if the Minister agrees to make sure it does not reoccur in the future. 4225

4230 **Hon. Prof J Cortes:** Madam Speaker now I understand what the hon. Members have said I have discussed this with the union the upload on the 28th of March is the second one that I mentioned I am told that it was in another site before I haven't checked so this is what I am told but I do get what the hon. Member says I have discussed this at length with the union and we are working together in fact I have set up a sub-committee to look at emergency procedures which includes members of the Department of Education and the Health and Safety representative of NASUWT and they are having regular meetings to make sure that we are all on the same wavelength.

4235 **Hon. D J Bossino:** Thank you Madam Speaker very short question just by way of clarification if the Hon. Minister may the lessons which would have been learnt as a result of the YouTuber incident as I would call it the March 2025 incident when we had this group of individuals I think from across the way strolling into the school and resulted in the locking down in a rather alarming way of the classrooms. The 70 odd page document that the Hon. Minister is referring to is that the result of the lessons learnt or is it still a work in progress which is the way I thought he had 4240 answered it initially and if it is the latter is he able to say when we are going to have a consolidated document that can be distributed to teachers and the like?

4245 **Hon. Prof J Cortes:** Madam Speaker it is a dynamic document it is a document that exists and is constantly reviewed there will be new inputs, new considerations learning from events like this so it is a document that is subject to constant and continual revision and review but as I say I am very happy to share with hon. Members and very happy to listen to any comments that they may wish to say.

4250 **Hon. D J Bossino:** With respect it was an alarming incident and a potentially serious incident what I am trying to understand is whether the lessons which have been learnt are now reduced to writing is the answer no not yet but it will at some point in the not too distant future is that the position? It may be dynamic and I understand that but there was an incident, lessons ought to be learnt as a result of that particular incident and do we have a document that reflects the learning from that incident?

4255 **Hon. Prof J Cortes:** Yes Madam Speaker, lessons have been learnt and steps have been taken to ensure that what happened doesn't happen again and we have carried out actual works on the ground and changed procedures so yes that is now included in this dynamic document. So yes.

4260 **Madam Speaker:** Right that I think unless I am mistaken brings us to the end of oral questions.

Questions for Written Answer

4265 **Acting Clerk:** Answers to written questions.

Minister for Education, the Environment and Climate Change (Hon. Prof. J E Cortes): Madam Speaker I have the honour to table the answers to written questions number W61 to W88 of 2025 inclusive.

4270 **Hon. D J Bossino:** Madam Speaker if I may I am not sure whether this is the right moment or before this part of the procedure is formally happens but there are Ministers who are absent in respect to which questions are remaining and need to be answered so presumably we follow the same process that we indicate to the Clerk if we wish it to be in writing.

4275 **Madam Speaker:** I remind hon. Members of pursuant to Rule 16(2) I think it is of the rules any questions which are unanswered in this session are effectively automatically converted into writing unless a member wishes to carry those questions to the next session by way of oral questions I think they have three days in which to write to Parliament exclusive of Sunday, Saturdays, public holidays, three days running next from the adjournment so anyone who wishes their questions that have been unanswered to be dealt with at the next session needs to write in within the time frame.

4285 There is one more matter that I wanted to raise in relation to a Written Question the Hon. G Origo behind the Speaker's chair raised this with me and I thought it was the correct thing to raise it in the House. There was a written question filed on the 14th of May 2025 I understand by the Hon. G Origo which asked for Government to confirm the results of the checks on health and safety that were carried out by the Department of the Environment following the chemical reaction which took place in New Harbours.

4290 As I understand it, an article appeared in the press on the 19th of May 2025. I don't know whether it was in the press or GBC covered it but when I say press I mean it loosely because I didn't see the article which I understand, well I've seen it since the hon. Member has pointed it out to me and the article gives information on the incident which came that information came

4295 from the Government in answer to questions from GBC and it appeared to provide an answer to that question. Hon. Members on my right side will be aware of my ruling of the 25th of September I think it was 2024 which essentially said that should not happen unless it was a matter of urgency oppressing public interest and so really I call on the Government or one or more Ministers to explain to the House what has happened and why.

4300 **Hon. Prof J Cortes:** Yes of course Madam Speaker let me just reiterate what the Hon. Chief Minister said before that we totally support your ruling and respect it in fact only last week there was a request from GBC to interview me on another matter which had been raised in a question and I was under quite a lot of pressure to go on today what is it? The lunchtime... Gibraltar Today and also on the news and I declined this incident that you are referring to Madam Speaker, if I may just give the explanation that you have requested, it was not a statement that was initiated by the Government as you yourself have said Madam Speaker it was in response to press
4305 questions and there were also a lot of enquiries directly to the Government from the environmental safety group expressing great concern and almost fear for the possible implications to the public. Therefore it was in no way intended to break the Speaker's ruling but it was a matter Madam Speaker of great public interest as there were concerns which can only be termed as legitimate concerns in hearing about chemical reactions near the public highway so there were
4310 concerns as to danger and safety issues and it was probably important that the public should be reassured that there was nothing to worry about. Madam Speaker I believe that there were exceptional circumstances and they should not in any way be viewed as a disrespect to yourself or to your rulings and I offer that explanation in these exceptional circumstances of something that the public could have been afraid could have had great repercussions on public health and
4315 safety.

Madam Speaker: On the specific facts of this case I can see why it may have been necessary to allay fears in the face of a chemical reaction, so I accept the Minister's explanation on this particular matter. Obviously, everything is fact specific but on this particular matter, I find that
4320 there has been no breach of Parliamentary procedure but in any event where there was doubt I thank the Hon. Member for bringing that to my attention.

Hon. E J Reyes: Madam Speaker if I may on a different issue because I am aware, I think we are about to adjourn *sine die* and I am going to take advantage Madam Speaker indeed I wouldn't
4325 overstep but in the absence of both the Chief Minister and the Leader of the Opposition who were present earlier today but have had to move away and in the absence and we certainly missed him of the Father of the House it puts me today in a position I didn't think would ever happen. I happen to be the acting Father of the House the longest serving member in the Parliament. I am the second eldest because my evergreen colleague Professor Cortes is a few months older than I am
4330 but with that Madam Speaker as a mundane thing I want to recognise the efficiency of the acting Clerk because he's normally helpful to members on both sides of the House and I have been on both sides of the House quietly well behind the scenes but today he's proved to me he's on the ball and he's certainly made sure that older folks like [*inaudible*] and myself are kept awake and on our toes he's always a couple of questions ahead warning me when I am coming for colleagues
4335 and if I could I'll even buy him a cup of coffee so thank you Madam Speaker to your staff for their efficiency.

Madam Speaker: Thank you to the Hon. Member. I'd like to endorse that Mr Balban has stepped in to cover staff absence and I am very grateful to him for the professional manner in
4340 which he has carried out a task which maybe people don't realise is actually quite a difficult one particularly under the eyes of the camera so thank you to him.

Hon. Prof J Cortes: Thank you Madam Speaker and thank you for your consideration on the explanation as to your ruling it is appreciated.

4345 Madam Speaker let me echo the Father of the Houses... that's one definition there's another definition which says the oldest member in that case it would be me Madam Speaker but we'll argue that out tomorrow over a cup of tea as we discuss proper Government and Opposition business but I would like to echo his praise for Mr Balban who's always there at everyone's beck and call and here has been on the front line and with that Madam Speaker in the absence of the
4350 Chief Minister I have the honour to move that this House do now adjourn *Sine Die*.

Adjournment

4355 **Madam Speaker:** I now propose the question, which is that this House do now adjourn *sine die*. I now put the question, which is that this House should now adjourn *sine die*. Those in favour? (**Members:** Aye.) Those against? Passed.

This House will now adjourn, *sine die*.

The House adjourned at 8.50 p.m.

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