



# PROCEEDINGS OF THE GIBRALTAR PARLIAMENT

**AFTERNOON SESSION: 4.15 pm. – 6.10 p.m.**

**Gibraltar, Monday, 30<sup>th</sup> June 2025**

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# The Gibraltar Parliament

*The Parliament met at 4.15 p.m.*

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

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

## **Appropriation Bill 2025 — Second Reading — Debate continued**

**Madam Speaker:** Yes, the Hon. Prof Cortes.

**Minister for Education, the Environment and Climate Change (Hon. Prof J E Cortes):** Thank  
5 you Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, before I start, just to say that the published version of the  
speech will be issued as usual as a Government press release and will contain some more detail  
that I'm not going to read out here for lack of time. It's long enough as it is, given the wide  
portfolio.

Madam Speaker, before I enter the body of my speech, I must begin by making reference to  
10 some of the comments made by the Leader of the Opposition in his Of course, the Hon. the Chief  
Minister will go to town with him in his reply, but I do feel that I must make some comment.

First, I must of course disagree with his somewhat feeble attempt at playing with words to  
discredit our record in meeting manifesto commitments and remind him that some of their  
manifestos have been little more than pamphlets with wish lists, while we have delivered time  
15 and time again on the great majority of our commitments, as well as on the unpredictable and  
non-scripted, like COVID and Brexit.

Those of us who still remember the dark days of GSD Government know that December 2011  
was indeed a bright new dawn, upon which foundations we have built a much greener Gibraltar,  
steadily and successfully getting the job done, as we clearly continue to do.

Madam Speaker, the Hon. Leader of the Opposition seems also to have forgotten his Party's  
recent history. Need I remind the benches opposite of the rapid succession of post-Sir Peter  
opposition leaders and leadership elections which they have gone through, one not much more  
than a year ago, which makes it quite extraordinary to hear him suggest in his Netflix allusion, that  
because in his view the GSLP has more than one person who feels that they could succeed the  
25 Chief Minister as Leader, that that is somehow a bad thing!

The GSLP Madam Speaker is not about personalities vying for position, the GSLP is a party of  
strong belief and socialist principles, which would not fall at the hurdle of a leadership election,  
but emerge even stronger after it.

And on departmental spend Madam Speaker, the implication in his words here, and on GBC  
30 last night, is that the Civil Servants, the controlling officers, are in some way not disciplined and  
are responsible for negatively affecting the quality of the public service. These are dedicated,  
hard-working Gibraltarians who are diligent in their delivery to the public, and who have to deal  
with circumstances often unpredictable, and which may indeed lead to a higher spend, but which  
they do with diligence and commitment and a tremendous sense of responsibility. There seems  
35 to be an insinuation that they in some way curtail pay rises, which is not just bizarre, but could

even be seen as an attempt to undermine them. That is simply not correct, and I stand up firmly for our public servants.

Madam Speaker, this is my fourteenth Budget speech. Considering that I entered politics thinking that I would only have to deliver four, I suppose that being here a decade later is not bad going.

In all this time, Gibraltar has moved forward in leaps and bounds, despite the challenges of Brexit and Covid. Meanwhile, the world gets hotter and hotter. Sadly, it has also got tenser and tenser. And yet, we have pulled through with our future looking brighter than it has done for a long time.

First, Madam Speaker, let me summarise some of the strictly ministerial work that I have undertaken in the past year, which has included meetings in London with the Minister for Nature, Mary Cray, and Minister for Education, Stephen Morgan, meetings in the Commons and the Lords on Environment with senior officials in Morocco, the joint ministerial council between His Majesty's Government and the Overseas Territories, and my continuing work in chairing the Overseas Territories and Crown Dependencies Environment Ministers' Council. In this context, I am looking forward to shortly supporting the launch of His Majesty's Government's biodiversity strategy for the Overseas Territories, which I have been involved in developing.

Madam Speaker, departmentally, I start with the area of responsibility that I have held the longest, that of the environment.

I will resist the temptation to look back over the whole of my ministerial career. I might do that in my last Budget Speech, whenever that may be, and I have no intention that this will be my last one. But it is fair to remind ourselves that 14 years ago we had no grassy parks in the middle of town, we had a greasy, slimy diesel power station in a built-up area, we had no renewable energy, uncontrolled fishing along our shorelines with no enforcement, and monkeys and seagulls were overrunning our town.

Madam Speaker, I must credit the work of the staff of the Department, a very large and complex one, which delivers across a very wide spectrum, contributing to the fantastic quality of life we are happy to have in Gibraltar.

Madam Speaker, Gibraltar's latest available carbon emissions inventory, that for 2022, showed a very slight increase in emissions of 2% since 2021, although this is still well lower than the 2019 pre-Covid emissions.

Emissions from electricity generation have stayed static since 2021 but have decreased by 37% since 2015. The amount of electricity consumed has remained fairly stable, while there have been increases in renewable energy generation.

Emissions from waste decreased by 7% since 2021, and by 16% since 2015, due to a decrease in total waste arising sent to landfill.

In other areas they have remained static or somewhat increased, which must serve as a call to the community to be more aware of our responsibility and our ability to live in more energy-efficient ways.

The Net Zero Delivery Body, chaired by my hon. Friend the Deputy Chief Minister, continues to meet and discuss how we can progress on the challenges Gibraltar faces in terms of decarbonisation. Most recently it discussed the output of two projects funded by the FCDO's Climate Security Programme, a heatwave response plan and an offshore wind pre-feasibility study. The Body also continues to engage with its learner ambassadors to better understand perspectives from young people.

It has considered the results of the pre-feasibility study on offshore wind power and unanimously agreed to proceed with a full feasibility study, given that the initial report points to real potential solutions to Gibraltar's power generation if offshore wind were responsibly harnessed.

The Government has concluded its assessment of the responses received to a recent expression of interest for solar PV and is now entering the next stage of tendering for specific projects. The Department of Environment, in conjunction with the GEA, has also issued a tender

for a consolidated monitoring system for all PV systems, which will provide better oversight on renewable energy generation in Gibraltar.

90 My friend, the Minister for Utilities, will provide more information on these aspects in her speech.

The Aspire Conference on Sustainable Built Environments, held recently, brought together industry leaders, policy makers and innovators to focus on reshaping how we design, build and inhabit our urban spaces.

95 Sponsored by private sector players, the conference urged attendees to reimagine the built environment through the lens of nature, resilience and human well-being.

Regenerative design was a core theme of the conference, emphasising the importance of building with nature and using it as a blueprint for our cities and urban spaces. Already, some of what was presented in the conference is beginning to find its way into the design stage of some  
100 of our future developments. As we look to a post-Treaty Gibraltar, we must ensure that we embrace sustainable innovation and make Gibraltar a global example in responsible development. We have the opportunity now and we must grasp it, and grasp it we will.

Another major highlight was the launch of the ground-breaking Dynamic Simulation Model for Gibraltar, a cutting-edge tool that can evaluate the interaction of form, façade and thermal mass  
105 with active engineering solutions to explore all aspects of a building's design. Developed by Integrated Environmental Solutions, the software will empower industry to deliver a built environment that supports wider climate goals.

With Gibraltar's dense urban footprint and limited land, another key theme of the conference was the urgent need to make every inch of space work harder. This includes reimagining rooftops,  
110 streets, car parks and public spaces to serve multiple functions, such as generating energy, aiding biodiversity and fostering social connection.

We remain committed to this and to reducing traffic and prioritising walking, cycling and public transport to cut emissions and reconnect people with their surroundings.

The feedback received on the consultation draft of the 25-year environment plan was valuable.  
115 We have considered the views and taken on board as much as possible. The now final draft of the plan will be published today on the Government website. It will be reviewed once again in the light of the forthcoming Treaty and will have a formal launch in early autumn.

This past year has seen important changes in the management of our waste. New bins for the separate collection of organic matter and textile waste have been rolled out.

120 Since we commenced these collections earlier this year, there have been 67 tonnes of textiles and 282 tonnes of organic waste collected.

A new contract for the provision of a waste management facility has been entered into and a new collective agreement with Gibraltar Industrial Cleaners has been signed. All of these changes will serve to improve Gibraltar's local environment, increasing waste separation and recycling  
125 rates and delivering better value for money for the tax payer.

Madam Speaker, in relation to the Wastewater Treatment Plant, the sewage plant, I am very pleased to announce that I was yesterday advised by the tender board that a decision has been made to award the tender to Eco Waters Ltd, who were the preferred bidder. The tender evaluation process has been thorough and lengthy by necessity, given that Gibraltar's sewage is  
130 not what is typically found all around the world as salt water is used. As we know, this complicates the treatment process and also the evaluation process. The project team put together by the Government includes specialists, international technical consultants who have thoroughly evaluated the proposals made. The contract will be for a 25-year term. The annual costs of running the plant to treat our sewage are yet to be finalised as there are still a number of commercial  
135 points to be agreed.

Madam Speaker, the Environmental Agency continues to play a vital role in advising my Ministry across a wide range of environmental and public health matters.

In 2024, the Agency responded to 1,720 public complaints. As of May this year, it has handled 579. The Agency's after-hours service responded to 310 urgent callouts in 2024 and has undertaken 119 this year.

Most complaints received concern nuisances, food safety, pest infestations and housing conditions.

Between 2024 and up to May 2025, the Agency has issued 35 abatement notices.

In situations of serious non-compliance or significant risk to public health, they escalate matters to the courts. Several successful prosecutions have been carried out, resulting in meaningful penalties. Over the same period, fines levied have totalled £18,100.

Ensuring the safety of our food supply remains a cornerstone of the Environmental Agency's work.

The Agency has acted decisively where food safety risks have been identified. In 2024, 12 food establishments were voluntarily closed due to hygiene concerns and so far, this year there have been six such closures.

Additionally, the Agency is working in close consultation with the law offices to review and modernise the food hygiene regulations, including efforts to finalise legislation relating to food allergens.

The Port of Gibraltar became a recognised international port for the issuing of ship sanitation certificates in 2015. Ship sanitation inspections are part of the international health regulations administered by the World Health Organisation and are typically required when ships dock at ports. In fact, I recall successfully negotiating the application to Gibraltar of the IHF during my time as Minister for Health.

It is interesting how, as the years go by, the achievements of the Government and of us as individual Ministers get lost in the midst's of time, even to ourselves.

The Agency carried out 234 ship sanitation inspections in 2024 and so far, this year 168.

The Agency and Government continue to assess and enhance the air quality monitoring network to ensure it remains fit for purpose.

Apart from the monitoring stations, five operational air quality mesh pods are deployed across Gibraltar. This flexible approach allows targeted investigations and improves our overall understanding of Gibraltar's air quality.

All measurements from the pods are accessible online.

One area where the public continues to raise concern on air quality is the impact of activities at GibDoc. We have facilitated positive engagement between residents of the area and GibDoc management to better understand the issues and reduce the impact of these activities.

Madam Speaker, I am very pleased to report air quality compliance. All pollutants show compliance with the limit values defined in the Gibraltar Air Quality Standards Regulations and the Air Quality Directive.

There is a continued downward trend in concentrations of pollutants across the 20 years that the Gibraltar Air Quality Monitoring Network has been operational.

To provide some examples, particulate matter PM<sub>10</sub> levels were at 20µg/m<sup>3</sup> in 2006 and are now at 6 µg/m<sup>3</sup>. Sulphur dioxide levels were at 45µg/m<sup>3</sup> in 2010 and are now at 4µg/m<sup>3</sup>. Nitrogen dioxide in the South District was at 58 µg/m<sup>3</sup> and is now at 21µg/m<sup>3</sup>.

We are always looking to enhance the standard and integrity of the evidence base and to adopt best quality scientific practise. To this end, we plan to review the new European Air Quality Directive to ensure Gibraltar remains aligned with it.

Madam Speaker, the Agency conducts systematic treatments of main sewers and utility manholes, particularly in densely populated areas such as Government housing estates and the city centre. It has increased its focus on mosquito control in response to the growing threat of mosquito-borne diseases emerging in neighbouring regions of Spain. Targeted surveillance and larvicide operations are being carried out in known breeding areas, especially during the warmer months.

I can report, Madam Speaker, that five of our bathing sites have consistently maintained the excellent classification, while Western Beach has once again achieved a good rating, now for the fifth consecutive year.

We go beyond legal requirements, including those of the EU, by increasing sampling frequency during the bathing season. The Agency also conducts monthly sampling of the potable water supply throughout the distribution network, as required by the Public Health Potable Water Rules.

Additionally, it monitors and licences water supply to ships at the port, ensuring it meets health standards.

It has recently strengthened its expertise by participating in key international fora and will host the next UK and Republic of Ireland Drinking Water Inspectorate meeting in Gibraltar later this year.

The Agency continues to play a central role in the Government's anti-dog fouling work. Officers are increasing enforcement against owners who fail to register or licence their pets, or who allow fouling in public areas.

The DNA sampling programme enables retrospective identification of offending dogs, and their owners particularly, through collected samples. In 2024, 215 DNA samples were taken, resulting in 26 fixed penalty notices, and so far 113 samples have led to 33 FPNs.

This work complemented licence and registration checks. Regular patrols allow officers to check for unlicensed or unregistered dogs. In 2024, 27 FPNs were issued for these offences, 20 FPNs have been issued so far in 2025.

In 2025, eight successful prosecutions were brought against individuals who failed to pay.

Madam Speaker, with regard to radiation emergencies, as Chair of the Radiation Response Committee, I remain engaged in close collaboration with the Office of Civil Contingencies, the Ministry of Defence and other key stakeholders to ensure strong emergency preparedness, resilience and effective response capabilities in the event of an incident involving nuclear-powered warships.

After the last radiation response exercise in 2022, regulators confirmed Gibraltar's strong emergency protocols and its highly effective response capabilities. The next exercise is due this autumn.

Madam Speaker, a tremendous amount of work is done by the beaches team in order to get the beaches in condition for the summer. It's a pity that some choose only to highlight the negatives, often beyond the team's control, and fail to recognise all this work.

Every year, remedial works are carried out at all our beaches, which suffer from the elements in the winter and spring, and from vandals.

These include rendering and painting of flooring, walls, seating areas, stairs and public access, replacement of furniture when needed, and so on. This year, new radar locks are being installed in accessibility toilets at all beaches.

Work cannot be done too soon, as late spring storms can then undo this, and so demands that all be absolutely ready before the official season are not reasonable. Nevertheless, it is our intention to bring forward the official bathing season as from next year to the weekend of the late spring bank holiday.

A detailed list of the works done on the beaches this year will be provided in the published version of this speech.

I would like to take the opportunity to recognise the excellent work done by our young lifeguards in keeping beachgoers safe.

Madam Speaker, in a decisive step toward ensuring the long-term sustainability of Gibraltar Territorial Waters Marine Biodiversity, we will be introducing a new set of marine conservation and protection measures. These measures have been drawn up with the Fishing Working Group and in consultation with the Nature Conservancy Council.

The first is the designation of a new no-take marine conservation zone, which prohibits all fishing activities and provides critical spawning and nursery areas for key species.

240 The second is the introduction of seasonal closures targeting vulnerable fish populations of Sea Bass, Spotted Sea Bass, and Groupers. Scientific research strongly supports seasonal closures, particularly during the spawning period, which have a substantial positive impact on fish populations.

245 To further support sustainable fishing management, the Department has also updated the minimum legal-size limits for key marine species, once again with the full approval of the Fishing Working Group, which represents the fishing fraternity. These revisions are based on growth and maturity and are intended to allow fish to reach reproductive age before capture.

250 The Environmental Protection and Research Unit have had a particularly busy year, and I commend these officers for their sterling work. In addition to supporting other departments at sea, such as the Port Department during oil responses or the RGP and Customs as needed, they really are delivering in their primary role of Environment enforcement, research and monitoring, as well as wildlife rescue. Some statistics to prove this, Madam Speaker.

255 In the past year, 75 reports for illegal fishing, 35 fin whales recorded transiting BGTW, 21 dog owners warned for offences such as non-renewal of licences and being on beaches, 27 persons warned for fishing in BGTW without a permit, one seal spotted and monitored until it moved out of our waters, 40 birds rescued, and additionally, officers were involved in the search and rescue of a man who had fallen off a ferry from Morocco to Spain, and the officers assisted other authorities and found the individual at sea.

260 I am sure, Madam Speaker, everyone in this House will agree, excellent work indeed by a unit that would not even exist were it not for the GSLP Liberal Government that created it.

Madam Speaker, the population of the Yellow-legged Gull in Gibraltar needs to be controlled because, as we know, the birds have an ecological impact on habitats and other species, cause nuisance to the public when nesting in the urban zone, can be a public health problem and a safety risk.

265 I can report, Madam Speaker, that the trend of Yellow-legged Gull population in Gibraltar continues to be one of significant decline as evidenced by yearly surveys. I am delighted to report that this year has seen the fewest pairs nesting since records began. The Avian Control Unit thus continues to do excellent work, providing an excellent service to the public.

270 Madam Speaker, on bird of prey rehabilitation, working in collaboration with GONHS, we continue to receive and rehabilitate migrating raptors from Black Vultures to Scops Owls.

The team supervises drone flights and other human activities that could pose a danger or threat to these nesting birds.

Led by the now famous and hugely experienced Vincent Robba, the unit continues to monitor local species of birds of prey.

275 Their monitoring has revealed a stable population of Peregrines and Common Kestrels with at least 14 young of each fledged this year, while the Ravens have successfully nested for the second year in a row after becoming re-established on the rock, and Jackdaws have fledged young for the first time in Gibraltar since the 1960s.

280 Captive breeding and reintroduction programmes are top priorities. We are currently working on programmes for the repopulation of the Bonelli's Eagle, Lesser Kestrels and little Owls, and of course our Barbary Partridges. The young will be hacked back to the wild to repopulate existing numbers, or in the case of the Bonelli's Eagles, to hopefully reintroduce the species back into Gibraltar and the adjacent hinterland where they are endangered.

285 Madam Speaker, I am happy to report that the monkey population remains stable at around 200 Macaques, divided into seven groups. Selective laparoscopic sterilisation of females has allowed for this, with enough births in each group to maintain their social cohesiveness. This, coupled with the investment by the Government at the sites providing ponds and supplemental feeding to the monkeys' natural foraging, has stopped the large Macaque incursions that were evident previously. Problems with monkey bites are localised to one pack by the cable car station, 290 which is the result of illegal feeding, and we are taking active steps in stopping this with fines and educating the public and operators alike.

Madam Speaker, I would like once again to recognise the work of our environmental NGOs in helping to promote environmental education, as well as furthering our understanding of the pressures we face with their advocacy and their work. They are an important part of the jigsaw of environmental management, and coming as I do from that very world, I will always value their role and contributions in these critical issues. If I may highlight just one aspect for each, the ornithological research carried out for decades by GONHS, the exciting seagrass reintroduction project being undertaken by the Nautilus Project, and the untiring work on Clean Up the World by the ESG all merit mention.

Madam Speaker, the National Park Coordinating Board continues to meet and discuss ways to continue to develop and market this product. This highlights the extremely close and successful collaboration that exists between my friend and colleague, the Minister for Tourism and his team, and myself and my team, in our delivering an ever-improved product and their relentless and successful marketing.

We are investing in transformation, reinventing and perfecting the visitor experience, all through the lens of sustainable tourism, and with the consequent benefit to our own residents. New and improved facilities coming online in the next two years include the Moorish Castle, the Dungeons, the Discovery Trail, the Northern Defences, the Jungle Park, Jews Gate, Ape's Den and Queen's Road, Tunnel Macaque, Interpretation Centre, King's Pathway, Devil's Gap, and Charles V Wall, Lower Section, O'Hara Battery, the City Under Siege, Southern Battery, and Tovy Cottage. All of this, Madam Speaker, continuing from the great work already done at the World War II tunnels, St Michael's Cave, and building on the new experiences brought by this administration, such as the Skywalk and Windsor Bridge.

The Skywalk is a feature in our landscape which has more photographs taken of it than all the other sites combined, a site which appeared as Microsoft Bing's backdrop image, a search engine with upwards of 100 million daily users. We believe in quality and meaningful investment in the tourist product.

And all of this now is being done through private investment and will be paid for by a part of the revenue from ticket sales into the Nature Reserve, in other words, paid for by the tourist, not the tax payer.

Madam Speaker, the Nature Reserve is one of the component limbs of the National Park. We continue to manage it with regular maintenance of the sites and pathways, including, of course, Mediterranean Steps.

The Hon. Chief Minister very clearly dealt with the Hon. Mr Bossino. I think he called him Nostra Damons, which was quite a coining, quite a phrase. I was quite impressed by that. But I will refer to him as the Hon. Mr Bossino, even though it's not my feast day today, and his sadly total misjudgement of my firm actions in dealing with Upper Rock fees and investment.

I am grateful to the Chief Minister for having put the Hon. Mr Bossino firmly in his place. Hon. Mr Bossino should know by now that I know my job well enough to have confidence in my decisions and that they usually work out. To reiterate this, the revenue from ticket sales in the until then pre-Covid bumper year 2018-2019 was £3.7 million, while that in the financial year 2024-2025 was £11.5 million, that is over three times the amount. The year 2023-2024 saw 188,263 additional tickets sold compared to 2018-2019, with ticket sales reaching nearly 819,000 versus 631,000 in that other year. Not fewer, as the Member Opposite seemed to fear as he predicted a veritable collapse of tourism.

This represents a 30% increase in visitors to the Reserve. Our marketing strategies are clearly working, and the financial year 2024-2025 saw an additional 270,000 tickets sold over 2018-2019, bringing total sales to over 900,000 as opposed to 630,000, a 44% increase.

This year is already delivering record numbers, with one-day figures exceeding 5,000 visitors and £100,000 sales in just one day. I estimate, Madam Speaker, that we will generate around £15 million in direct revenue in 2025-2026.

The truth is, Madam Speaker, nevertheless, that we are the victims of our own success, and as numbers of tourists increase, we must move with the times in order not to collapse access to the



Nature Reserve. We work very closely with tour operators to improve the Upper Rock experience, and we will now have to move firmly together to resolve the issues facing the transport system of the Upper Rock.

Among the further improvements coming to the Nature Reserve, I mentioned the refurbishment of Devil's Gap Battery.

This iconic site will be accessed from Devil's Gap Path, a project which was only a vision when I started here back in 2011.

Adding to this will be the opening of the lower section of Charles V Wall and its connection to Green Lane. The potential of linking Green Lane to the Town Area has always been a dream of mine, which I am hoping will soon be achieved.

The improvements that we are seeing, Madam Speaker, in all the sites will continue, much to the consternation of Members opposite, or of one particular member at least, who really cannot get round the fact that we are doing so much so quickly.

On that note, Madam Speaker, I am once again pleased to update Parliament on the considerable progress that continues to be made in the field of heritage.

Over the past year, our commitment to preserving, promoting and integrating our cultural legacy into the daily life of Gibraltar has deepened further through legislative reform, interpretative expansion, physical conservation and our enduring partnerships with civil society.

The ongoing enhancements to the Heritage Antiquities Act are evident in the recent designation of new sites, including the Mediaeval Round Tower, plots at North Front Cemetery and 27th Hospital Ramp. These additions reflect our effort to recognise the broad spectrum of Gibraltar's built and cultural environment while supporting private stewardship.

We are in the process of designating both the Northern Defences and Europa Foreshore as archaeological conservation areas, ensuring that these historically rich areas receive stronger formal protection for both their visible and buried heritage.

Our Ministry remains heavily engaged in shaping the new development plan and revising the Old Town Design Guide.

Madam Speaker, I am pleased to confirm that all 28 interpretation panels announced last year have now been installed, now forming part of the visual fabric of our town, offering residents and visitors a deeper understanding of our historical sites. Their content covers a wide spectrum of themes from Military and Maritime history to Natural Heritage and Civic Architecture.

A new phase of panels is already in development. These will focus on Rosia Bay, Catalan Bay, Devil's Tower, the Neutral Ground, the Royal Calpe Hunt, Castilian history and Gibraltar social history from 1704 to the present. Together they will continue our mission to widen access to the whole of our history and make our past visible.

We have also supported the Multilingual Society in the Gibraltarian Street Name Project. Ceramic signs with a QR code linking to historical information will remind us of the street names once spoken by earlier generations and some of our own, and celebrate Gibraltar's multilingual identity. And I am grateful to the continued partnership with the Gibraltarians for a Multilingual Society whose commitment to linguistic preservation has been integral to this project.

To further animate our streetscape, we will install a series of colour-coded historical timelines in one of the Watergate tunnels leading into Casemate Square. Each timeline will represent a distinct historical period and provide an accessible way for residents and visitors to visualise Gibraltar's evolving identity.

Our Memorials Initiative, launched last year to honour notable Gibraltarians from ancient times to the modern era, has reached its first milestone. We remain open to expanding this scheme to include additional figures deserving of public recognition.

Madam Speaker, we were proud to commemorate HMS Calpe Royal Naval Reserve Unit with a permanent plaque and interpretation panel at Campion Park. This tribute honoured the dedication of the officers and ratings who served in this distinguished unit. An emotional moment for my family, given that my late father-in-law, Ernest Pearce, had been a long-serving Left Tenant Commander in the unit.

As already mentioned, major restoration and interpretation works are currently underway at Northern Defence's Tower Homage and Inner Keep, and World War II Tunnels, soon to be extended in scope.

400 The Deputy Chief Minister has already mentioned the works which are currently ongoing at the Northern Defence's, a unique area which was virtually inaccessible until recently. The clearing of walls and creating of fire breaks this year has exposed our historic assets, making the view up to the Northern Defence's and the Castle Beyond look more like that of a mediaeval castle than it has done for many years.

405 In addition, the Department of Education launched a programme and teacher resource package at this year's CPD Conference.

We are especially excited about the upcoming Road to the Lines restoration, a major project that will revitalise this historic corridor, provide needed housing and improve access into the Northern Defence's. It represents a key example of how heritage enhancement can go hand-in-hand with wider urban regeneration.

410 We continue to engage actively with our UK counterparts on the extension of key international instruments to Gibraltar. These include the 2003 Convention on Intangible Cultural Heritage, the 1954 Hague Convention on the Protection of Cultural Property in Armed Conflict, and the 1970 Convention on the Illicit Import, Export and Transfer of Cultural Property. These efforts will align Gibraltar more closely with international heritage best practise and help safeguard both tangible and intangible heritage.

415 Our work in supervising archaeological works and restoration continues constantly across Gibraltar.

The long-awaited relocation of the 9.2 Gun will be to Levant Battery, and we are working closely with local teams and liaising with UK counterparts to give this project one final determined push.

420 Madam Speaker, heritage is not only about preservation, it's about connection, identity and pride. I am grateful to the small but dedicated team at the Ministry for Heritage, our Government archaeologists, our project managers, some of which were already acknowledged this morning by the Deputy Chief Minister, and our many partners across the public and voluntary sectors who continue to strengthen this work.

425 This of course includes the Gibraltar National Museum, and I am delighted to report on continuing progress across a number of fronts, building upon the solid base that it has generated over the years.

The focal point for the achievements was undoubtedly the inscription of Gorham's Cave Complex as a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 2016.

430 Achievement of World Heritage status would be hard to match, but there is an exciting project underway that will certainly bring to the fore Gibraltar's most important heritage monument. I am of course referring once again to the Moorish Castle.

435 We are now awaiting the mouth-watering prospect of opening this jewel to the public for the very first time. I am confident that the end result will be one that will make us, or should make us all, very proud.

440 As in the Northern Defences at the Tower of Homage, important conservation works are being carried out, including the restoration of original floors, conservation of the historic wall, and a new interpretative pit-out. This is the first time that so much has been done to improve this mediaeval site in over 1,000 years.

My confidence lies in the knowledge that the project is in the hands of the National Museum team of professionals, who have done so much over the years to bring to light the rich mediaeval heritage of our rock.

445 Going back to the mid-1990s, when they conducted Gibraltar's first ever urban excavations in the museum itself, the Cathedral of St. Mary, the Crown, the Atarazana (Galley House), Casemates, and many other sites. Their proven track record in monument conservation is there

for all to see. Going back to 2005, with the conservation of the Moorish Baths, and 2007, with the reopening of the Tower of Homage, which had been restored by the same team of professionals.

450 I say all this, Madam Speaker, because we have in the museum a team who have dedicated their lives to Gibraltar, its history and heritage. We should all, independently of political affiliation, embrace the work of these Gibraltarian professionals and be proud of them. We should all of us here, be jointly celebrating their achievements.

455 Madam Speaker, to provide independent corroboration of this work, none other than the UNESCO World Heritage Centre in Paris, through its advisory body ICOMOS, have written to the United Kingdom Government, saying the following about the Gorham's Cave Complex World Heritage Site. After the latest cycle of periodic reporting, and I quote:

460 *"ICOMOS finds that the management plan requires no further development. In many regards, it is an exemplary management plan, not least in demonstrating how a management plan can and should reflect an ongoing, proactive management system for a World Heritage Property."*

Madam Speaker, this management plan was drafted entirely by the Gibraltar National Museum team, who run the World Heritage Office for us, without any need to bring in expensive external consultants or experts.

465 Just checking, Madam Speaker, that I may have skipped a page, which I am going to include now, with your permission, when I finish my bit on the museum.

Madam Speaker, the annual Calpe Conference continues, this year being the 29th year. It will be dedicated to the subject of Gibraltar in the Second World War, and in other global conflicts, the importance of geography.

470 I am pleased to report that the event will appropriately be held within the World War II tunnels at Hays level. This new facility includes provision for conferences, and I am delighted that the museum and the tunnel management have come together to hold the event there. This collaboration will be the first of many.

475 Next year, we will be celebrating the centenary of the discovery of the Gibraltar Neanderthal Child Skull at Devil's Tower, and a number of events are planned, including the Calpe Conference itself.

480 Madam Speaker, the international interest in our heritage continues. In May, we had a crew from Discovery Channel visiting our sites, including the Moorish Castle. National Geographic Television are currently in touch with the museum, in order to come out and cover another story on our history. And a senior feature writer from Kyoto News in Tokyo will be visiting Gibraltar in August to cover the recent publications on Neanderthals. This reflects the importance of the research effort which the museum undertakes on many fronts, still making ground breaking discoveries.

485 Madam Speaker, I am going to just briefly go back to two aspects of the environment that I left out. One is on green areas.

Work continues in monitoring, managing and, where possible, increasing green areas. Over 100 trees have been planted in the past year. The recent renewal of the hanging baskets in Main Street is the first stage of a programme partly to be funded by businesses in the area to green up the centre of town.

490 And I also want to acknowledge the work which the re-energised Horticultural Society carries out in other projects with similar aims.

495 In relation to the Botanic Gardens, they continue with their core objectives of maintaining and beautifying the grounds, educating the public and researching the ecology and conservation of plants and animals, including Gibraltar's endemic plants. They also have an important advisory role to the Department of the Environment in Ecology and Landscaping. Improvement to the gardens' aesthetics continue, and the hard work of the grounds staff is obvious, there and in Commonwealth and Champion Park. Moreover, the gardens coordinate a large group of volunteers who visit weekly to help maintain the grounds and who deserve our thanks. The Alameda's new

bespoke education area, inaugurated last year, is in use on a daily basis, for example by their Gardening Club and many school groups. Its development has been a resounding success and was fully funded by contributions of many generous donors.

Madam Speaker, I now go on to the Garrison Library, which has since 2011 become a central hub for visitors and researchers alike. There is a strong indication of how the library has continued to develop during these 14 years as a central research hub and a key site for visitors to Gibraltar. In terms of visitor footfall, they have an average of 5,000 per quarter, not including those who use the collections for research in person and electronically.

The gardens are clearly a big attraction, as are the collections and indeed the newsprint collections, which are an invaluable resource for local and international researchers. What is clear is that Gibraltar has currency as an area of research and this brings a new type of visitor to us in order to research and attend conferences, such as the Mediterranean Studies Association Conference, which took place during the last week in May at the initiative of the library's director, and which saw about 120 delegates from Japan, the US, the Eastern Mediterranean and North Africa. The Regional *Instituto de Estudios y Campos Gibraltareños* also held their history conference in the library, jointly opened by Susana Custodio, President of the *Mancomunidad de Municipios* and myself, and with participation by historians from all over the region, including Gibraltar.

We have plans, Madam Speaker, to open the library up even further to the public and will soon be announcing further initiatives.

Madam Speaker, as in environment, the work of NGOs is important in heritage. I am delighted to say that the mutual support between the Gibraltar Heritage Trust and the Ministry on day-to-day work and projects continues. To highlight one project for them, two I must mention, their excellent voluntary work at Witham's Cemetery and the adjacent cottage.

Madam Speaker, collaboration is part of my working ethos and we can only truly deliver when we engage with all stakeholders.

Madam Speaker, I now move to transport.

Madam Speaker, I never made a secret of the fact that I was not terribly excited in having been given responsibility for transport after the last Election. And I remember that the Hon. Chief Minister told me that once I'd got my teeth into it, I'd end up thanking him for it. Well, Madam Speaker, as is often the case, he was right. And I hereby acknowledge that point and thank him publicly for having given me the challenge and the opportunity.

Among the challenges to come will of course be dealing with changes in traffic flow around the frontier and the potential influx of additional vehicles. I am confident that with the excellent professionals that I have in my transport team, we will successfully deal with these challenges.

We have carried out a number of improvements over the past year in relation to sustainable travel, in relation to new and improved footpaths and crossings, and we've provided benches in different parts of Gibraltar also as an assistance to pedestrians. Within the next few months we will introduce additional cycling routes and joint pedestrian and cycling spaces which will allow the bypassing of much of Queensway and Rosia Road and we are working with developers to ensure cycling infrastructure is provided along any new developments at their costs, such as at Europort. We will be providing improved pedestrian crossings and bicycle repair stations. As from next academic year, we will be providing opportunities to become pedal-ready in our schools. Cycling as an important form of transport is now embedded in our city culture, and I must say that having learnt to cycle this year, I realise its benefits more than I ever have.

As part of our commitment to reducing our carbon footprint, we will continue to prioritise the expansion of our electric vehicle infrastructure. This will not only support existing EV users, but also encourage more individuals and businesses to make the switch.

We have installed dedicated electric charging points for taxis, have engaged on a structured study of possibilities for expansion, continue to be engaged on identifying electric buses for our bus service, and to work with providers, including the service stations, in order to increase charging capacity around Gibraltar.

We have carried out an audit of the Government fleet and are working towards its further electrification across departments.

This is just one way in which we are preparing Gibraltar for a sustainable, modern transport future, one that protects our environment, enhances quality of life and aligns with our climate goals.

We have commenced a design phase for new timed walking signs that highlight the short walking distances to many of Gibraltar's key destinations. This supports active travel by encouraging the choice of walking as a convenient, healthy and sustainable mode of transport.

Additionally, we have commenced work on a pilot project to install real-time information signs at bus stops, which will include text-to-speech functionality to support those who are visually impaired. This initiative forms part of our ongoing efforts to enhance Gibraltar's public transport system while supporting both our climate objectives and our commitment to accessibility for all.

The 2025 review of the Sustainable Traffic Transport and Parking Plan was carried out by my team to assess progress made since its implementation, identify new challenges and opportunities, and ensure the strategy remains aligned with Gibraltar's evolving mobility needs and environmental goals.

During 2024, the Traffic Commission convened seven times, reviewing a total of 19 new items.

So far this year, the Commission has met three times, deliberating on 34 new submissions.

The Commission continues to be a vital part of the infrastructure and planning ecosystem. We aim to ensure that the road use and parking policies serve the public well, enhance safety and align with broader planning goals.

And Madam Speaker, Gibraltar car parks continue their excellent work on the management of parking and car parks across Gibraltar. They always respond to requests and advise constructively on parking-related issues. We are currently improving the condition of car parks and introducing a number of positive changes to the regulation of parking.

This is important, as too often in the past the impact of changes, short- and long-term, on parking has not been taken enough into account, and I am committed to changing that.

But, Madam Speaker, this portfolio includes the Driver and Vehicle Licensing Department (DVLD). Over the past year, this department has made significant progress on key reforms and initiatives aimed at modernising services for the public.

We are continuing a full review of the department, working closely with the Government Law Officers, the DVLA in the UK, and the Gibraltar office in Brussels to ensure compliance and to secure the necessary bilateral agreements for the exchange of driving licences.

DVLD is actively working to roll out an online service platform with the goal of becoming fully digitised by the end of 2025. This user-friendly system will serve both the public and staff, providing each user access to their individual profile. Through this profile, users will be able to complete all essential transactions online, from booking the compulsory basic training and driving tests to applying for or renewing driving licences and registering vehicles.

Our vision is for every licence holder and vehicle owner to have secure access to a digital portfolio with all related documents and services consolidated in one place. This is a key step forward towards reducing waiting times, minimising paperwork and improving the efficiency of DVLD services.

Madam Speaker, the Chief Minister referred yesterday to the success of the new personalised number plate service, now fully available to the public.

The introduction of personalised plates has been well received and not only adds a personal touch for drivers but also generates additional revenue for Government. As the Chief Minister mentioned yesterday, the initiative has raised over £1.7 million from over 700 plates.

The Department recognises the critical importance of both EREG and EUCARIS, the European Car and Driving Licence Information System, in enhancing cross-border cooperation and information sharing. Our ongoing work in this area ensures secure and rapid data exchange between States for vehicle registration, driver licensing and enforcement purposes.

We are in active discussions with additional European States to finalise agreements that will further solidify our participation in the EUCARIS network.

605 We continue to deliver the Driver Certificate of Professional Competence training course through UK certified instructors. This ensures that commercial drivers meet the latest regulatory and safety standards while enhancing transport, industry, professionalism and accident prevention capabilities.

To increase the awareness and uptake of e-vehicles, all EVs will now have a green mark on their registration plate.

610 As I have stated in this House previously, we are carrying out an updating review of all licencing legislation which will be completed within this financial year.

I want to thank the staff of the DVLD, including the technical staff, for their work and dedication in delivering the service while managing the improvements.

615 I turn now to the Taxi Service. As part of our continued efforts to modernise and enhance Gibraltar's public transport system, I am very pleased to report on key developments within the Taxi Service. I have continued to work in close collaboration with the Taxi Association, and I once again extend my sincere thanks to Luis Debono and his committee for their constructive engagement and progressive outlook. Together with the support of the Transport Commission, we have driven legislative changes that are already delivering tangible improvements in the efficiency, reliability and availability of the Taxi Service.

620 The following have been delivered to improve the Taxi Service.

Two cars, one licence, with the second car only being used for the Taxi Service, which means that the one licence can offer 16 hours of coverage for the public, including a night city service. The Airport Service now ensures a minimum of five taxis are available outside the airport to meet arriving flights.

625 The 365 City Service, for the first time, Gibraltar has a 365-day city service, which means that at least nine taxis are available for service every day of the year, when in the past there was no prescribed taxi service between January and April.

630 Transport inspectors are now enforcing all taxi-related legal requirements, such as signage, city service, uniform and so on. Fines being issued for non-compliance of city service are now £300,000, £500,000 and £1,000, along with suspension of the licence under the three-strike policy. Transport inspectors are acting very effectively and offering an effective deterrent, with the number of infringements dropping drastically. Transport inspectors now have access to live data to assist with enforcement.

635 New disability taxis. The Ministry is assisting the GTA to acquire a number of disability taxis. One has already been purchased, registered and is being used extensively, and there are another seven on the way very soon.

And the Night City Service has been legislated, which means that at least nine taxis are available up until 2am.

640 Further improvements to come include card payment facilities on all taxis.

I am excited to announce an initiative by the Government to assist taxi drivers in acquiring electric London-type taxi cabs, which will add a decisively British flavour to our road scene the moment one steps into Gibraltar. We are expecting the first cab to be in Gibraltar soon for a trial.

645 Our work with the public bus system has been tremendously important in improving customer experience and paving the way towards sustainability in transport. A new ticketing and tracking system has been purchased and will be rolled out in the coming months. We have introduced car payment in all buses. We have revamped the school bus service, extended routes, introduced new bus stops based on a change in demographics, for example Europa Point and Hassan Centenary. And we have set up a working group with relevant stakeholders, including the staff, to ensure we continue to deliver and better our bus service.

650 I am also happy to report that the new Upper Town Buses tender process is complete and awaiting the award to be announced, which I am told by procurement, will happen very soon.

We have also assisted CityBus, the private operator, in upgrading their fleet to cleaner emitting buses.

655 The working group with bus drivers has assisted Bus Company Management Limited in delivering improvements where possible. This has seen a better shift distribution system, a better annual leave allocation system and changes to the shifts themselves, all at the driver's request.

We have recently announced the long-awaited steps to regulate delivery drivers in terms of employment status, food hygiene and conduct on the public highway.

660 Legislation will soon be published to ensure that thrust-controlled e-bikes will be classified as a PLET, a Personal Light Electric Transport Vehicle, or SCOOTER, which means that users of these vehicles will have to comply with the relevant regulations, including use of helmets, aid restrictions and being banned from driving on pavements.

We continue to see the increased usage of e-scooters, including those from the locally based company Hoppy. Some view these as a nuisance, however they are a great alternative to mopeds and significantly reduce the number of vehicles on our roads when used on cycle lanes as well as reducing pollution.

Hoppy has seen nearly 50,000 trips completed on their scooters, covering 59,700km and saving over 5,000kg in carbon emissions.

670 Their correct regulation and usage, however, are essential for safety and we will continue to work on improving this. We are currently looking into ways, for example, in which these vehicles can obtain insurance.

The Transport Commission continues to update policies on applications for PSV licences. The Commission has renewed, suspended, rejected and withdrawn a couple of PSV licences based on conduct and has overseen the improvements to the city service and the airport taxi service.

675 Specifically on the transport inspectors, the team plays a vital role in policing transport-related activities throughout Gibraltar, overseeing the taxi and bus services. They have issued over 40 FPNs to taxis not fulfilling City Service and are overseeing the implementation of the airport service. They have also acquired new tachograph equipment to ensure EU standards for heavy goods vehicles are maintained in Gibraltar.

The DVLD remains committed to innovation, service excellence and alignment with international standards. Our modernisation programme, including full digitisation, the launch of personalised number plates and enhanced international cooperation, places the Department at the forefront of public service transformation.

685 Specifically in relation to heavy goods vehicles, improved overnight parking facilities at Halifax Road have been set up which give HDB operators a place to park their trailers overnight and a designated place when they return from Spain in the early hours. This has improved the area and also ensured that lorries are no longer parked around Gibraltar, including in the recreational area of Europa Point.

690 Madam Speaker, I now refer to Technical Services. The Technical Services Department (TSD) has continued as ever to provide technical support to Government Ministries and departments on a wide range of construction and traffic-related matters as well as dealing with considerable challenges in respect of the main sewer.

695 Whilst the Department has shown prudence in its spend and concentrated its efforts on essential and critical items, it has nonetheless been able to meet its core objectives of maintenance and has been involved in a large number of projects covering a wide range of responsibilities.

700 With regards to highways maintenance, the works programme has once again been successful over the last year with ongoing reports to roads, footpaths and retaining walls. In addition, the Department has installed a number of traffic calming measures on various roads in an effort to improve safety.

This year we will see the continuation of our very successful and comprehensive road surfacing scheme. Last year, a very significant number of our roads have been resurfaced, totalling over 12,250m<sup>2</sup>.

705 Funding in the order of £1.5 million has been requested in this session for highways maintenance and resurfacing projects, reflecting the Government's commitment to ensure our road network is kept to a high standard.

The replacement and enhancement of pelican crossing lights and equipment continued during the last year, working jointly with the Gibraltar Electricity Authority. The Government will provide  
710 countdown timers so that in future all traffic lights have countdown timers as standard.

The Department has also carried out extensive maintenance work to the pedestrian footbridge at Winslow Churchill Avenue and will be carrying out repairs to the Iron Bridge at Smith Dorian Avenue.

It also continues to successfully manage road closures and diversions on the public highway,  
715 both for its own in-house works and for all other utility companies and contractors.

With regards to coastal engineering, TSD continues to monitor and carry out maintenance and repair works. Most recently, works have been completed at Camp Bay following damage caused to the small pier during severe storms.

It also continues to provide advice to developers and DPC on all aspects of coastal engineering and is currently working closely with the developers of the Eastside project.  
720

It has been involved in a number of projects on rock fall protection. Most notably, it engaged in a major project to remove the rocks caught behind the catch fences located on the slopes of the south of Sandy Bay. This was the first phase of a scheme which aims to repair and upgrade the catch fences located in this area. In addition, the department successfully installed a new catch  
725 fence at the southern end of the old water catchments following a number of rock falls in the area. While rock falls are unfortunately something that we have to live with in Gibraltar as we saw this last weekend, the department continues to monitor the risk and takes action when necessary.

During this past year, TSD was also involved with works on a number of retaining walls, including works that road to the lines which have been considerably challenging given the heritage  
730 value of the wall and has seen close inter-departmental cooperation between Technical Services and Heritage.

Moving on to sewers and drainage, during the past year, the infrastructure section has continued to maintain the public sewerage network as part of our commitment to the area.

As we are all aware, this year has been particularly challenging given the problems  
735 encountered at Wellington Front. The section already carried out significant remedial works in the area and these will continue over the summer months with a view to completing them prior to the rainy season.

As has been the case for previous years, the department pushed to complete another section of relining of the main sewer. These were focused in the area directly behind the John Mackintosh  
740 Hall and saw the successful relining of over 100 metres of the old sewer. The phase of works brings us to over 80% of the main sewer trunk within the city walls having been relined. The works are critical to ensure the continued structural integrity and improving its hydraulic characteristics.

As part of the delivery of Chatham Views and Bishop Fitzgerald School, TSD worked on a reconfiguration of the storm water network in the area, carried out in a manner which caused the  
745 least disruption to the public. It has taken a network with a volumetric capacity to hold just 11,000 litres and delivered a network capable of holding 320,000 litres of water designed specifically to deal with extreme weather conditions, providing additional attenuation within the network which not only serves upstream areas but forms part of a wider network which covers most of the West Side reclamation area and northern parts of Town. Within this reconfiguration, TSD has also  
750 integrated specifically designed manholes to act as a settlement tank to collect solids released by any foul water overflow upstream of this location and avoid it getting into the sea.

This holistic, strategic and forward-looking approach has also been taken with the current development of the Bayside area. What is in place is heavily influenced by tidal swings and at high tide has no attenuation, so what will be installed will have the capacity to attenuate over 220,000  
755 litres of water at high tide and over 550 litres at low tide. This reconfiguration is specifically designed to deal with extreme weather events, disruption to serviceability of the outlet and



projected tidal rises over the next 200 years, drastically increasing the network's ability to serve half of Devil's Tower Road, the southern half of Winston Churchill Avenue, Laguna Estate and Glacis Estate.

760 And these are just two examples, Madam Speaker, of strategic bespoke approach that we are taking to the public network in general with emphasis on resilience, maintenance and providing a network that will stand the test of time.

The condition and upkeep of the devoted main sewer and stormwater drainage network continues to be a matter of great importance to the Government and the Department will  
765 therefore this year be continuing its major desalting and cleansing works and will be carrying out upgrading works where necessary.

It is abundantly clear, Madam Speaker, from the financial provisions made by the Government that the maintenance and upkeep of the sewer network is considered critical.

Madam Speaker, I would once again also like to take this opportunity to publicly thank the on-call Officers of the Technical Services Department and of course all Departments for the hard work and commitment during those times in the past year when Gibraltar has suffered from storms and very heavy rain. It is thanks to the hard work and dedication of this team while most of us are at home that the impact of these storms is not greater on both our sewerage and road networks.

Madam Speaker, the Technical Services Department is one of those departments that is rarely  
775 in the limelight but which works tirelessly behind the scenes to deliver on their responsibilities maintaining public infrastructure and supporting and providing technical advice to other Government Ministries and departments.

Madam Speaker, as Minister responsible for infrastructure, I have set up regular meetings of all the different service providers to ensure overall coordination of works. Specifically, I chair  
780 regular meetings of all services and private developers involved in projects in the Bayside area to ensure cohesiveness and cooperation between the different entities and to avoid unnecessary inconvenience to the public and duplication of effort. All those involved have responded very positively and I believe that the project as a whole will be all the better for it.

In this context, I will also be keeping a watchful eye on progress in other infrastructure works  
785 including the new North-South sewer line and the Eastside project.

Madam Speaker, my Morocco portfolio continues to explore and strengthen ties with this neighbouring kingdom. There are many areas in which mutual collaboration can be developed and I highlight some of the initiatives designed to enhance our relationship with our Moroccan friends. I must thank my small but enthusiastic Morocco team and I acknowledge the sterling work being  
790 done by the Gibraltar-Morocco Business Association, the Strait of Gibraltar Association, as well as the Tarourate Charity and Rifcom, works that I will continue to support in any way that I can.

During my recent trip to Rabat and Tangier in October last year, I was encouraged by the energy and positive outlook of the Senior Officials that I met, their willingness to cooperate in the fields of education, sport, research, university exchanges, the environment, tourism, climate change and  
795 commerce. They were most encouraging. I am extremely grateful to the outgoing Ambassador to Morocco, His Excellency Simon Martin and his team, and that of the British Council for their hospitality and support throughout, and I am very much looking forward to meeting his successor, Alex Pinfield, in the autumn.

As a result of the contacts made during this trip in December 2024, the Gibraltar Tourist Board  
800 attended the Regional Conference on Tourism in Tangier-Tetouan-Al Hoceima Region, held in Tetouan; Gibraltar being the only foreign destination in attendance.

In February, a joint delegation from my ministry and the University of Gibraltar, which included my friend and colleague, the Minister for the University, visited Abdelmalek Essaadi University facilities in Tangier, Tetouan and Larache. A Memorandum of Understanding was signed and  
805 discussions held on possible collaboration in academic fields. Other progress and events to note include the establishment of links between the Tangier Donabo Botanic Gardens and the Gibraltar Botanic Gardens, a visit to Gibraltar of the Tarab Al Ala Choir, and a day dedicated to Gibraltar at the Everest International School in Tangier.

The school's management, which is keen to develop links with Gibraltar, visited Gibraltar in January. I am already witnessing much progress, and we will continue to work to further knowledge and understanding between our communities and our rich cultures.

One small but significant example was the successful return to Morocco's Forestry Development Centre in Asilah of a satellite tag on a Rüppell's Vulture that suddenly drowned in trying to cross the strait and washed up at Camp Bay.

The network we now have with Morocco resulted in this rapid and successful cooperation. Madam Speaker, I am in contact with the Gibraltar representative office of Banque Populaire, the main bank in Morocco. Matters of common interest are being discussed with the manager, Imane El Haraki, such as how the bank can assist Gibraltar businesses wishing to trade in Morocco and Moroccan businesses with an interest in Gibraltar.

We are also exploring future links between our finance centre and Casablanca's and tapping possible external finance for commercial work between Gibraltarian, Moroccan and UK businesses.

I must also mention the relevance of this of my work with the community in Gibraltar of Moroccan origin. I keep in constant touch with the community and my office offers assistance whenever possible in dealing with any issues that they may have.

Madam Speaker, I continue to hold town hall meetings in my South District constituency where valuable matters have been raised, discussions held and solutions found. The meetings are well supported by residents who are always willing to share their concerns and their vision for this area of Gibraltar. Positive feedback has been received on some of the issues resolved while other issues raised are in progress, particularly matters relating to traffic which form part of a holistic traffic plan for the area.

The meetings offer open dialogue and discussion where constituents can raise any matter that may influence their way of life, providing liaison between the citizen and Government bodies.

I very much enjoy these meetings, Madam Speaker. They are showing that they provide a valuable interaction directly with Government and allow for more widespread engagement by citizens.

Madam Speaker, I now turn to Education. Madam Speaker, I have had responsibility for education for the best part of nine years and no one can deny the positive changes that have taken place in this time, changes that continue as new challenges emerge. This is not just with reference to real estate and new schools. As the Chief Minister recognised yesterday, we have world-leading education provision. We leave no stone unturned in ensuring that all the children and young people in our schools have all the support that they need, no matter how complex these needs. From nursery to postgraduate, we care and look after them. This is not matched anywhere else, Madam Speaker. And so if it means that our budget goes over because we need additional support for a child or because of the success of our students in obtaining places at university, I will not hold back in order for the Leader of the Opposition not to complain. No, Madam Speaker, our children come first.

We are blessed in Gibraltar to have extraordinary teachers, from supplies and entry grades to heads, amazing SNLSAs and all the hard-working support and admin staff in schools and centrally, strongly professional education advisors and a hugely proactive Teachers' Union, which collectively make for an unmatched education team.

Madam Speaker, the work we all do is, of course, for the children.

Most importantly, we are continuing our proactive ethos in nurturing well-being so that all children are better equipped to face adverse life situations. Our efforts remain firmly rooted in building the capacity of school staff to support children and young people experiencing social, emotional and mental health difficulties, particularly those resulting from trauma, bereavement or other vulnerabilities.

This year, we have extended and embedded this through ongoing professional dialogue, staff training and focus groups. A wide array of targeted training has been delivered, including bereavement through suicide, setting up nurture groups, low arousal techniques and de-

escalation, sexual exploitation, developmental trauma, the impact of screen time on social media, mental health first aid, youth training.

Our close collaboration with the Royal Gibraltar Police has continued. Operation Encompass Gibraltar remains active and impactful, enabling real-time information sharing with schools so that children affected by domestic abuse incidents receive timely, appropriate support, both overt and covert.

The Teaching and Learning Centre, the TLC, has continued to thrive and evolve with the additional support of an experienced teacher.

This leadership capacity has enabled the team to work more intensely with at-risk children and young people. TLC's outreach programmes have also benefited a number of young people and helped them access support.

Madam Speaker, significantly, we are establishing a new pre-16 pathway into the Gibraltar College for a small cohort of Year 11 pupils who have disengaged from mainstream secondary education due to trauma, illness or other complex needs. The aim is to re-engage these pupils through a personalised and meaningful educational programme that rebuilds their confidence and in turn supports their academic progress. Each young person will follow a personalised learning plan, including Level 1 Maths and English, elements of Health and Social Care and the development of other skills through individualised learning projects. Pupil wellbeing and safeguarding are central to this programme and with a dedicated member of staff from the existing TLC team assigned to provide support to these young people.

Importantly, I can report that work has commenced on a Children's Wellbeing Bill which will seek to enshrine in law the principle that the wellbeing of our children is not peripheral to education, it is central to it. It will bring Gibraltar into alignment with progressive standards being set across England and Wales through certain aspects of the Children's Wellbeing and Schools Bill in advance of the UK. It represents a bold, compassionate step forward, one that puts the mental health, emotional resilience and holistic development of our children and young people on equal footing with academic attainment.

The legislation will aim to remove barriers to opportunities in schools, support children with complex needs, raise standards of teaching and embed a culture of care and support into the very fabric of our education system. Gibraltar's young people deserve nothing less.

Madam Speaker, school attendance has improved in Secondaries to be the highest since Covid and has remained more or less stable in Primary. Nevertheless, at below 90% we feel that further improvement is needed. Our attendance strategy has advanced significantly. This year's strategic oversight has been enhanced, enabling us to proactively reach and better support children and young people who are experiencing significant school-based anxiety and persistent absence. This centrally-coordinated strategic work complements the embedded work of pastoral leads and staff in schools and ensures that there is consistent follow-up and support for pupils with the highest need.

Madam Speaker, safeguarding practises continue to be strengthened across the Education Service. In addition to continued training, inter-agency collaboration and consultative work, we have this year delivered bespoke safeguarding training to all SNLSAs, equipping them with the skills and competence to respond effectively in their settings. Our close relationship working with the Care Agency, the RGP and GHA underpins our efforts to ensure that all children are protected.

A significant new initiative this year is the launch of Targeted Youth Support (TYS) in collaboration with the Gibraltar Youth Service. YYS provides tailored interventions for young people who have disengaged from education and require structured support to re-engage, rebuild their confidence and find positive focus.

In addition, the Gibraltar Schools Mental Health Festival entered its third year and continues to grow in visibility and reach. This year's focus was the impact of screen time and social media on young people. Contributions from visiting specialists enhance the scope and quality of the programme with particular appreciation extended to GIBSAMS for their ongoing sponsorship and support.

As in previous years, the number of children presenting with additional needs continues to rise. In response, I have worked with a team at the Department to proactively plan and invest in increasingly inclusive needs-led provision across all sectors.

In September 2024, a new Learning Support Facility (LSF), was opened in the lower years of St Bernard's Upper Primary School, allowing children requiring additional support to remain in the Catchment area with siblings and peers. As a result, all schools except one Lower Primary, St Bernard's, and one Upper Primary, St Joseph, now have LSFs in place. Conversations are already underway to identify suitable spaces within the two remaining schools with a view to achieving full LSF coverage in the near future.

Our LSF expansion has helped reduce reliance on centralised specialist settings and supported the inclusion of more children in their local schools. The formalisation of our outreach and in-reach policy ensures that transitions between settings are well planned and responsive to individual pupil needs. This year, St Martin's has collaborated with more schools than ever before, a natural result of this increased LSF presence.

We remain committed to early intervention. Our close working relationship with the GHA, particularly with paediatric therapies, has enabled us to identify children who would benefit from attending the Early Birds nursery as from the age of two. We have also built strong new links with the GHA's paediatric speech and language therapy team, which have already yielded tangible benefits for early year learners.

St Martin's School continues to benefit from the school's partnership with a headteacher from an outstanding rated UK special school, a collaboration which supports the school's development in key areas such as curriculum, policy and resource planning.

Other key developments this year include appointment of a third school nurse based at St Martin's School, also supporting the wider Wessex campus, the use of St Martin's underground car park for pupil drop-off, improving safety and traffic flow, and the addition of a temporary educational psychologist on a one-year contract to boost team capacity while two individuals recruited to undertake traineeships begin their training in the UK.

The work of the SENCO review is ongoing and I believe is finally very close to resolution.

Our educational psychology team has worked closely alongside colleagues in the GHA to deliver training to support parents and families such as the National Autistic Society EarlyBird Plus Programme and the Teen Life Programme.

The Education Act has been updated to reflect clearer SEND language, processes and appeals procedures. Further amendments are planned as the wider legislation continues to be reviewed and refined.

Across all our work, our focus remains firmly on needs-led, personalised provision rooted in close collaboration with families, schools and partner agencies.

Now approaching its 5th anniversary Madam Speaker, the school counselling service continues to be a vital part of our holistic pupil support strategy. The service is well established across schools and is recognised for its trusted, confidential support to children and young people. Engagement levels remain high with many pupils actively seeking and benefiting from the support offered.

All four members of the team have now completed a course on dyadic developmental psychotherapy and parenting practise, an important step in strengthening the therapeutic tools available.

In partnership with the Gibraltar Health Authority's Gibraltar Young Minds Service, we have co-developed a new non-urgent pathway for mental health and behavioural concerns in schools.

The team also continues to support the development of Gibraltar's therapeutic workforce by offering placement opportunities to students enrolled on the Level 4 diploma in therapeutic counselling at Gibraltar College. To date, three aspiring therapists have completed the practical placements under the team's guidance, gaining valuable real-world experience.

And the hydrotherapy programme at St Martin's School continues to thrive, providing meaningful and personalised physical support to a growing number of pupils. The facility is now

an established part of the school's therapeutic offer and is being used more extensively thanks to improved scheduling, staffing and training.

This year saw the launch of a significant Phase 2 milestone, the introduction of an in-reach component allowing selected pupils from mainstream schools to access hydrotherapy sessions following a formal process of referral, assessment and parental consent. This model ensures that specialist support is delivered to those most in need, while also enabling children and young people from other schools who are identified by GHA and school staff as having needs that would benefit from access to this therapy to access the service.

In parallel, school counsellors and members of the school team are currently exploring how hydrotherapy could be used to support mental health and emotional wellbeing, especially for pupils experiencing anxiety or difficulties with emotional regulation. Early pilot sessions are being discussed and will be evaluated for broader roll-out potential.

These forward-looking developments highlight how the hydrotherapy facility has evolved from a school-based resource into a wider community asset, serving multiple stakeholders and improving outcomes for children with complex needs.

We continue to prioritise investment in high-quality professional development, empowering staff to adapt to the evolving needs of our learners and educational settings.

Our two-day Education 2025 training event was a major milestone this academic year, bringing together over 1,000 staff from across the service to engage in more than 140 bespoke workshops. This large-scale training event enabled us to provide targeted sessions for different staff cohorts, helping to ensure widespread dissemination of learning and best practise.

To support inclusive practise, we have reintroduced monthly inclusion workshops. These provide ongoing opportunities for staff to deepen their understanding of key issues, such as trauma-informed approaches, learning differences and intervention strategies. We have also expanded our engagement with international experts.

In addition to inclusive practise, we have also focused on core subject areas.

A service-wide English improvement strategy is now underway, led by an external consultant and supported by structured phonics training across all key stages. Curriculum working parties for Mathematics, English, Science and Spanish continue to meet, driving improvements in subject-specific pedagogy and curriculum design.

A key objective for the coming year will be to develop the work of these curriculum groups further, with a particular focus on actively exploring how to enhance the teaching and learning of mathematics across all educational sectors.

Our support for early-career teachers continues through a comprehensive two-year induction programme bolstered by mentorship and structured contributions from advisory team members and Senior Leaders.

We continue to take a strategic and long-term approach to refining our staffing structure across the education system, ensuring that it is equitable, responsive and aligned with our service priorities.

At St Martin School, the enhanced leadership structure introduced last year has matured into a well-functioning team. Their collective leadership has contributed significantly to improved strategic planning, strengthened communication with families and better home-school relationships. Staff morale is high, with a strong sense of shared purpose evident across the school, which is palpable when you visit. The school is well-placed to continue evolving its provision to meet the growing complexity and volume of pupil needs.

Our strategic work continues, with the aim of ensuring that teaching and learning responsibility roles across schools are fairly distributed. Previously pending TLR posts have been filled at Westside and Bayside. The remaining TLR posts are under review, with the majority expected to be resolved next term, and some are awaiting a more strategic, longer-term analysis.

In tandem, we are reviewing the management structure at the Gibraltar College, ensuring that it aligns with future curriculum planning and the needs of the new College site.

In other developments in the schools, the school attendant role has undergone a structural shift, reclassified from industrial to non-industrial. This aligns the role more appropriately with its evolving managerial duties and facilitates improved workforce planning and progression. I cannot emphasise too much the importance in our schools of school attendants, who we used to call caretakers.

This academic year, we have taken a number of steps to further stabilise our supply workforce. A total of 70 part-time supply cleaners were recruited in January 2024, and we have since regularised a number of these staff into permanent posts where vacancies existed. A full review of the school cleaner establishment is underway and will be informed by the physical measurement of all schools.

We have also established a supply pool for school secretaries, adding important flexibility and continuity to essential school administrative services, enabling schools to maintain small operations during staff absences.

In order to expand capacity, a new bus driver support services assistant role was created at St Martin's School, which is helping to meet the transport needs of a growing pupil population.

We have also made notable progress with our SNLSAs. A dedicated working party has been meeting to ensure that this review is robust, evidence-based and informed by the practical realities of the SNLSA role.

A similar review of the work of lunchtime attendants is also nearing completion.

Our commitment to valuing all staff is further demonstrated by the continued development of professional pathways. The enhanced induction programme for SNLSAs remains in place, including essential safeguarding training and targeted sessions tailored to the deployment, such as phonics, manual handling and intervention strategies.

Finally, the collaborative relationship with trade unions continues to evolve positively.

The Department meets regularly with representatives from NASUWT, Unite and GGCA. Monthly meetings with the NASUWT have helped us to gain a closer working relationship with the Teachers' Union, which has provided a conduit through which to channel particular matters of concern, and which has also allowed us to address areas of specific interest to the Union and its members.

The social partnership forum with the Teachers' Union has recently been re-established and will help to address matters of particular relevance to the Department of Personnel and Development and the Chief Secretary's Office. In addition, the Department's relationship with Unite, supported by regular meetings, is vital in resolving staff matters proactively.

As has been announced previously, we are reviewing summer hours in schools, usually referred to in the community as half-days. The public consultation showed overwhelming support for the review, and so we are to discuss suggested changes with staff, with a view to introducing a new regime once agreed from Easter 2026.

Madam Speaker, our ongoing curriculum development work remains focused on expanding opportunity, strengthening progression and aligning our educational offer with the evolving needs of our learners and community.

This year, we have continued to build on our efforts in both vocational and academic curriculum pathways. In particular, a new Level 3 sports studies vocational qualification is planned for introduction at the Gibraltar College in September 2025, expanding our post-16 vocational offer and supporting student progression into sport-related fields.

Planning and collaboration with the Gibraltar Academy of Music and Performing Arts continues to deliver the CBQ BTEC Music Performance and Performing Arts programmes. We are maintaining our support for vocational hair and beauty training delivered through Mayfair on Main, and a two-year City & Guilds Level 1 award in Construction Skills was introduced last September.

Madam Speaker, The Department of Education is also looking to develop a centralised and consolidated library of reliable and accurate information about Gibraltar, with a view to making this readily available to all its schools and staff so as to facilitate and enhance the work of

educators, building on resources and curriculum plans to which each teacher and school already has access. The long-term plan is then to create high-quality resources which would directly support learning and teaching of Gibraltarian culture, history and language, and we will share more details about this exciting project in due course.

Madam Speaker, Sport and the importance of physical activity and a healthy lifestyle remain integral aspects of our curriculum. In partnership with various local sports associations, we have supported the reintroduction and maintenance of inter-school sports competitions across the upper primary sector. These events have been enthusiastically embraced by pupils, staff and families alike, promoting physical activity, teamwork and community spirit.

And we have revised our approach to English as an additional language provision, improving identification processes and tailoring interventions more effectively to meet the needs of learners for whom English is not their first language.

On scholarships, we continue to enhance and streamline our scholarship processes to ensure they are equitable, efficient and aligned with the needs of both students and the wider community.

As of June 2025, we have received 273 school-leaver applications for September, and we continue to support 654 continuing students already enrolled in higher education classes.

This academic year, we have further developed our administrative system and student support mechanisms.

Work is also underway to review the scholarship schedules and student undertakings legislation with the aim of modernising and clarifying key elements to ensure they reflect current expectations and responsibilities.

And Madam Speaker, we remain firmly committed to embedding sustainable practises across our schools and to empowering young people to take meaningful action in response to the climate emergency in keeping with the requirements of the Education Act.

Now in its fourth year, the ClimACT Schools Gibraltar Award Scheme continues to grow. The scheme celebrates schools that actively embed environmental awareness into their daily routines and culture. The creativity and commitment demonstrated by pupils and staff was again evident during World Environment Day, which showcased the depth of climate literacy across the school system and the enthusiasm of children to lead and participate in positive change.

Our Net Zero Plan remains its departmental policy, and a number of its core strands have advanced this academic year. We have continued to roll out carbon literacy training to staff, and the Climate Action Policy and Bespoke Curriculum for Gibraltar have been drafted.

In addition, the Department has continued to convene a team of Net Zero Learner Ambassadors from Bayside, Westside and Gibraltar College.

Looking ahead, we will continue to prioritise strategic investment in training and curriculum design, the use of school projects and pupil leadership opportunities to amplify youth engagement and alignment with the government's broader climate objectives and partnerships across the Government.

We continue to make significant investments in technology to advance the learning experience of all pupils and to ensure that our schools remain future ready.

This academic year, we have expanded the availability of smart boards, interactive TVs, desktop computers and Sphero robots, supporting interactive and engaging teaching across the curriculum. The number of iPads in schools has continued to rise, with our long-term aim remaining the same, to ensure that every pupil has access to a personal device supporting digital literacy and independent learning. This is, of course, balanced with our policy on screen time and personal mobile devices, to which I will refer later.

To support greater efficiency and accuracy in data management, we are planning to roll out a management information system platform across all schools, which will centralise pupil information across the service, improve access, analysis and sharing of data, reduce duplication and the risk of error, and streamline communication between the schools and the department's central office.

1120 This is a critical step in consolidating data across our wide-ranging and multi-sited education estate, and will significantly improve daily operations for school leaders, administrators and support staff alike.

Alongside this, we are developing a comprehensive suite of policies for all departmental and school-related procedures. Many of these are now complete, and the remainder are being  
1125 prioritised in alignment with operational needs and strategic goals.

We continue to support the use of technology in communication and learning platforms. Seesaw continues to be widely used across primary schools, with additional CPD offered this year to support staff in using the platform more effectively for pupil engagement, assessment and home-school communication.

1130 Madam Speaker, recognising the growing influence of artificial intelligence across society and industry, we are actively exploring how AI can enhance the delivery and strategic direction of education in Gibraltar.

At the classroom level, AI holds a real promise as a tool for teachers, enabling more responsive and personalised approaches to learning. From generating tailored feedback to adapting  
1135 resources for different learner profiles, AI has the potential to support more efficient, engaging and inclusive practises.

There is also a growing imperative to prepare Gibraltar's learning not just to use AI, but to understand and critically evaluate it. Work is beginning to explore how AI literacy and development skills can be meaningfully embedded within the taught curriculum, enabling pupils  
1140 to become informed users and, where appropriate, confident creators of AI tools and systems.

In parallel, the Department is considering how AI might also support operational processes, such as automating repetitive administrative tasks, improving internal workflows and supporting early identification of student needs through data-informed insight.

As this work progresses, the Department remains committed to ensuring that any use of AI is  
1145 ethical, secure, human-centred and compliant with Gibraltar's data protection framework, always enhancing rather than replacing the professional judgement and care that define effective education.

The Department has been working closely with colleagues from the GHA, Public Health and the University of Gibraltar to develop a coordinated, inter-agency, Gibraltar-wide strategy on screen  
1150 time. Following numerous strategic meetings and careful planning, the first phase of this work focused on gaining a better understanding of children's behaviours and mindsets to achieve this, two surveys were rolled out with local stakeholders.

The results of both surveys have now been carefully considered and will inform the coordinated next steps in this strategy, which ultimately seeks to provide the community with  
1155 age-appropriate guidance, while also advising on the impact and potential consequences of children's screen use.

On AEDs, Madam Speaker, all schools now have direct access to Automated External Defibrillators and this second tranche of deployment was made possible thanks to the continued generosity of the Gibraltar Cardiac Association, which donated the devices, and we are deeply  
1160 grateful to them, the Gibraltar Ambulance Service and St John Ambulance for their support in making this vital initiative a success.

Madam Speaker, the Department of Education continues to work in close partnership with the Office of Civil Contingencies and the Royal Gibraltar Police Counter-Terrorism Security Advisor to further strengthen emergency preparedness across all schools.

1165 This year, significant progress has been made in the development and refinement of Emergency Response Plans (ERP) tailored to the specific layout, risks and context of each school.

The emergency preparedness agenda is being progressively cascaded across school teams. School secretaries and attendants have now participated in table top exercises and head teachers have been given target dates by which all school staff must be fully briefed and confident in their  
1170 ERP responsibilities. The next phase will be for all schools to complete some in-set training on civil contingencies and their ERP.



The much publicised incident this year at Westside, although it fortunately proved to be minor, served as a reminder as to the importance of this work.

1175 A full audit of all schools has been conducted, resulting in a comprehensive report and recommendations document that has been compiled, which outlines individual school vulnerabilities and risk ratings, suggested improvements to infrastructure, communication systems and emergency planning, development of school maps containing critical information and photographs with technical services support, recommendation for works planning and budget allocations based on the assessed level of need and urgency.

1180 These findings will now inform both departmental action and inter-agency collaboration.

In addition, and significantly, I have formed a Working Group on Emergency Response and Health and Safety with representatives from the Department and NASUWT, the teachers' union.

1185 The Department remains committed to ensuring that all school staff are fully informed, trained and empowered to respond effectively to a range of emergency situations. This includes close coordination with the RGP, GHA and Civil Contingencies to ensure that all response plans are current, tested and proportionate.

1190 Strong inter-departmental and cross-sector relationship, Madam Speaker, you will have gathered from my speech, remains fundamental to the delivery of safe, inclusive and responsible education in Gibraltar. Our collective focus remains on delivering needs-led support that addresses not just educational, but also social, emotional and developmental needs, ensuring that no child is left behind.

Madam Speaker, there has been considerable debate over the past year about pupil behaviour, how it is perceived and how it is dealt with, with concerns communicated to me in particular by the teachers' union.

1195 Madam Speaker, the vast majority of our pupils and young people show exemplary behaviour and commitment and are regularly enriching us with good news on their activities and achievements, be it in initiatives like Young Enterprise, essay competitions, representation in the Youth Parliament, or in sports, dance, music or drama.

1200 I am extremely proud of our young people, as we should all be, and I often see them and talk to them in my very regular visits to schools and other activities and in my discussions with their representatives.

But it is true that there are worrying instances of concerning behaviour outside what most would consider acceptable, and I will not play this down. While these are mostly dealt with successfully using established procedures, some cases are serious enough to require other action.

1205 There is a tension, Madam Speaker, not just in Gibraltar, but in many other jurisdictions, between the punitive and restorative approaches to behaviour. To help us negotiate this dilemma, the Department and Industrial Relations have been involved in discussions with NASUWT in developing a new behaviour policy that will tackle this and ensure the safety and wellbeing of staff, as well as the long-term interests of the pupils and their families.

1210 Madam Speaker, in my discussions with teachers, including head teachers, I have become aware of the issues of greatest concern to us as a team as we work to improve the way children progress through education. Issues include a significant drop in school readiness, with children entering school in the early years with fewer motor skills, less communication ability and lack of toilet training. Possible reasons are regularly discussed and action planned.

1215 One of these causes seems to be screen time.

1220 Screens and mobile devices are the present and the future and are not going away. We as educators need to recognise this. It is vitally important to teach our young people to use these as tools and resources. The responsible use of mobile devices, such as iPads in education, is therefore important, but they must also learn to not let them dominate their lives. This is where we need to achieve a balance.

And this brings me to the issue of mobile phones in schools. There is a strict policy in our schools on the use of personal mobile phones and I have seen for myself how strictly it is

implemented. We will be backing this policy in law, while being careful of course not to criminalise children, but as usual there are challenges to enforcement.

1225 I have mentioned before in this place that we have been studying the possibility of introducing the pouch system whereby children place their mobiles in signal-proof pouches during the school day.

Only last Friday, the Director of Education and I were in a school in the UK where we saw the success of this system.

1230 To provide some data, since the system was introduced in their school in January 2024, there has been an 80% reduction in the number of sanctions and after-school detentions, a drop in truancy of over 80%, students are no longer spending extended periods of time in toilets or between lessons, reports of online abuse or cyber-bullying are at a 5-year low, and students have reported that the reason for this is that they are now talking to each other more, they are socially  
1235 engaged and therefore events do not spiral like they do on social media.

In a recent staff survey in that school, over 95% of teachers reported little misbehaviour in their lessons compared to 88% at the National level, 40% said there was no disruption compared to 22% nationally, and over 72% of staff are reporting that they are very content at work compared to a national benchmark of 57%.

1240 Areas in which it is harder to measure but where there has been a visible difference include break times, they are seeing noisier play times, but with students playing more, talking more and engaging in more play. Pupil manners, staff are reporting that pupils are politer, holding doors open etc.

They believe this is due to students feeling more part of the school community and therefore  
1245 engaging with it in a more positive and productive manner. And a drop in unannounced parent drop-ins, they are no longer seeing parents arriving at their reception unannounced, asking to speak to a Senior leader because they had received a message from their child.

While it is in no way a magic wand, or should I say a magic pouch, we are nevertheless convinced that it will make a difference in student concentration and is likely to assist in improving  
1250 behaviour. Therefore, we have decided to start the process of introducing the system in the new academic year, aiming for full implementation in years 7 to 11 by next January. We will of course engage with all stakeholders as we proceed.

Madam Speaker, as all of us know, since being Elected in 2011, this Government has built 10 new schools and significantly upgraded another, making it in effect 11 of the 14 schools be born  
1255 again. We are already in the process of achieving 100%.

Madam Speaker, preparatory work has already commenced on the complete renovation of both St Joseph's Upper and Lower Primaries, which will provide them with much-needed space and facilities to the standard of all our new schools.

There will be a new Hebrew Primary School in keeping with our 2023 manifesto commitments.  
1260 Air conditioning will be provided in the schools remaining in situ that still do not have this in every classroom, St Bernard's Upper and Lower and St Paul's.

We have commenced preparation for building the new Gibraltar College at Europa Point, replacing the tired site at Ragged Staff and allowing it to expand its offer and finally fulfil its potential as a centre of excellence in education.

1265 The proposed site will offer expanded classroom capacity, improved workshop and practical learning spaces, and opportunities for collaboration with community and industry partners.

Already the academic offer is increased, and this year saw the introduction of much-needed daytime adult classes. The move will also allow the College to better cater for young people with supported needs, something that it is working actively on, including assisting these young people  
1270 in achieving employment.

This move will provide a modern, fit-for-purpose facility tailored to meet the evolving needs of post-16 education and vocational training in Gibraltar.

In addition, we are significantly expanding St Martin's School, a school which the GSD is on record of saying it would not re-provide from the old site at Glacis. It will be increased by over 50% in number of classrooms at ground level, with a further rooftop expansion.

To bind the school over for a year, the old Strength Factory at Glacis is being converted to house the Early Birds Nursery this September.

And we are now looking at other sites. In order to build a new school to cater for the growing number of SEND pupils by dividing St Martin's into a lower and an upper primary school.

As always, the staff of all the schools are very closely involved in planning their new and refurbished facilities.

Madam Speaker, to finish on Education, it continues to adapt to increasing demands in opportunities offered in increasing student population and in complexity of needs. Therefore, I am pleased to announce that following a review of teaching needs, we will this year be increasing the complement of permanent teachers by a further 49 posts, bringing the complement to an unprecedented 521 teaching posts.

This will clearly increase opportunities for young teachers seeking permanent employment, helped also with the policy on supply workers that we are on the point of agreeing with NASUWT, the Teachers' Union.

The increase in our teaching sub-complement directly addresses a shortfall that has grown in recent years, a long-term reality shaped by several critical factors. Rising pupil numbers across our school settings and particularly at St Martin's. Expansion of specialist learning support facilities, the LSFs, and growing special education supported educational needs and disabilities demands across the service.

Curriculum development with equal provision across Key Stage 3 in Bayside and Westside and broader Key Stage 4 and 5 subject offerings for our young people and a continued high number of mid-year enrolments.

To date, the service has coped to these increasing demands through reliance on non-permanent staff, a necessary but ultimately unsustainable approach and unfair on the staff. Responding to the increasing needs which evidently continue to exist as non-permanent staffing offers little stability for schools and is ultimately unfair, we are increasing the complement.

The adding of these 49 additional permanent posts allows us to regularise staffing, reduce dependency on non-permanent contracts and ensure a resilient future-focused education system. By strengthening stability through permanent staffing, the service can invest more confidently in developing staff expertise.

This investment is about more than staffing, it's about securing the life chances of our young people, especially those with additional needs. Ultimately, this is a strategic realignment, a necessary step to uphold quality, inclusion and long-term service sustainability.

So I am delighted to announce this significant growth in complement.

Madam Speaker, I'd just like to inform the House that following discussions with UK Education Minister and good friend of Gibraltar Stephen Morgan last week, we are strengthening the links with the UK Department for Education, which will be providing access to their work and developing policies on such matters of great interest as our behaviour, wellbeing and artificial intelligence.

Madam Speaker, as ever, I wish to express my thanks to all staff, including my amazing personal Ministry staff, every single one of them. It's beyond doubt the best Ministry team that I have ever had. They look after me, they work hard in support of my many areas of responsibility. I simply could not do my job without them. For those out there who decry the work of public servants, think again. They do so much for all of us.

Thanks too, of course, Madam Speaker, to my heads of Department and CEOs and the staff in every area, in all my departments and my project managers and so many more committed public servants for their own hard work every day and for their constant support. Once again, extraordinary commitment.

My thanks too to all the schools and all the staff who invariably make me feel so very welcome in all my visits, to all the staffs in the agencies, companies and contractors that work to my departments. I want to once again thank the Union, NASUWT, Unite and GGCA. Over the past year, I have been personally involved in constructive discussions with NASUWT and Unite on a wide range of issues, most of them positively resolved, and I consider that we have an excellent understanding of each other and an excellent working relationship. To the Chamber of Commerce and the GFSB, to all the NGOs, Environmental, Heritage, Transport, who are so committed to what they believe in.

To all those many citizens appointed to voluntary commissions, boards, working groups and committees for which I am responsible.

And to all those in other departments with whom I have regular contact, such as the staff in No. 6, including the officers of the Chief Minister and the Deputy Chief Minister, the Chief Secretary, a source of wisdom, pragmatic problem-solving and strength, if ever there was one, and his staff, and the Financial Secretary and his staff, the Chief Technical Officer and his, the Civil Contingencies Coordinator and his, the Director of Employment and her team, the Director of Personnel and Development and his team, the whole team at Industrial Relations, as well as the Attorney General and all other Gibraltar law officers, the Gibraltar office in London and Brussels, Land Property Services, ITOD and Digital Services, for their constant support and for always being there when I need them, and probably I have forgotten somebody who would be very, very upset, but my apologies to them in advance.

And thanks also, of course, to the Chief Minister, the Deputy Chief Minister and all my ministerial colleagues whose friendship and companionship I really treasure, as well as to you, Madam Speaker, the Clerk and the staff of Parliament.

So to end, Madam Speaker, after almost a decade and a half in this House, and being one of those current Members who has served the people of Gibraltar here continuously the longest, I think I am fifth in that line, I trust that I will be allowed to address matters a little wider than my portfolios.

Madam Speaker, I have a lot of memories of a Frontier, a Frontier open and a frontier closed. I remember long, hot queues without air-con in the car when I was a young child, before the closure in 1969, and I remember the closed Frontier years with both fondness and frustration. Fondness because it jailed us as a people, frustration because it was unjust punishment by a fascist regime to a people who just wanted to be true to its identity, and because to a young man it made no sense at all. When the Frontier reopened years later, when I was in my mid-twenties, there were fears, mine included, about how renewed contact with Spain would somehow dilute our identity, make us less British, less Gibraltarian, how it would be the beginning of the end of us as a people. But of course, that never happened, how could it? Quite the contrary, we have developed and matured further as a people, not because we were forcibly separated, but because we know exactly who we are.

Osmosis, as many called it, just couldn't happen, because being British Gibraltarians linked to a small but majestic homeland is not something that someone can chip away at, that anyone can soften, it simply is not possible, come what may.

But it's because throughout our history we have wanted good relations with our neighbours, many of them family, with mutual respect like anyone would want with any neighbour. While in the European Union, and as citizens of Europe, a citizenship that was wrenched away from us against our will, we felt entitled to flowing free across all European borders, including ours. And with our Referendum vote, we showed the world that we were confident in our identity, that freedom to travel, as was our right, could not threaten who we are.

And Madam Speaker, it's taken a great deal and a long time, but finally there was a breakthrough.

I remember a cabinet meeting some years ago now, when we heard of the possibility, a dream perhaps, that despite Brexit, we could achieve an agreement that would restore our right of movement, while not affecting our sovereignty or our identity. It was hard to believe, and I was

excited at the possibility, coming as it did, after having to deal with the burdens that Brexit had brought us, burdens that many in the community to this day will not have realised, but burdens nonetheless.

I remember the days when discussions were progressing, optimism moving forward, then receding. I remember cabinet meetings throughout a Christmas period, taking down to the last minute one New Year's Eve, and then constant back and forth, briefings and expectations, dashed one minute, restored the next, only to once again recede. It was exciting, unnerving, then exciting again. And for the main players, Fabian, Joseph, Michael, Daniel and the teams, they will no doubt tell their story. But from where I was sitting, I can say that the whole process had a profound effect on me, and on the business of Government, potentially catastrophic, in practise, liberating.

Because finally, one hot Gibraltar June day, there was an outcome. There's a lot more detail, detail that will emerge in years to come, as memoirs are written.

I can only imagine the memoirs of the Deputy Chief Minister; they will be a classic. So, memoirs will be written and intimate thoughts will be shared, but there was an outcome, and I am very happy with it. After living my whole life, proud of being a British Gibraltarian, moulded by the closed Frontier days of almost my entire youth, after spending my life loving my country and working for it, I am happy with the outcome.

My lifelong fight for the environment in Gibraltar stems from a love for my country. Later, over the past nearly 14 years, I have worked harder than ever for Gibraltar, and I would never support anything that in any way, even slightly, threatened to let any of that pass into the hands of anyone other than us.

So now I look at the possibilities, the challenges, positive challenges, to be met with solutions that are good for Gibraltar, for our prosperity as a people, and not just in economic terms, but environmentally, socially and culturally too.

Madam Speaker, we like to use that oft-repeated phrase, that Gibraltarians punch above our weight. Now we will be able to punch even higher, with the opportunities about to come our way, we will attain even greater heights, dedicating our time and energy not at seeing how we will cope with threats from Brexit and a closed border, but how we are to take full advantage of the myriad possibilities that this deal now lays open before us. Madam Speaker, I should be so, so tired, not just after two hours talking, but after nearly 14 years in politics, years of hard work, converting the Health Service, the Education system, improving the Environment, pushing through the Covid years and Brexit.

Madam Speaker, I should be exhausted, but somehow, I'm not. This achievement of Fabian and the team, the Hon. Chief Minister and the team, excites me. It tells me that so much is possible.

I am excited with more energy than ever. I see so many possibilities before us, possibilities that need to be embraced with any pitfalls, and there will be those too, with any pitfalls overcome. Madam Speaker, I'm finished.

Our neighbour's strategy historically has been to restrict our movements, wanting to stifle us and put pressure on us to capitulate, as if we ever would. I think there was also a secret fear that our resourcefulness, our entrepreneurship and our clear ability to excel would be unshackled and unlimited by an open border with endless possibilities.

In a world that right now seems to be reeking of conflict and hostility, we have stood firm against the tide to arrive at a peaceful solution to a centuries-old conflict, as only we can.

Madam Speaker, we are about to show the world just who we are.

And so, in commending the Bill to the House, Madam Speaker, let me say that I for one, in whatever way it will be, just can't wait to play my part in our renaissance. Thank you.

1425

**Adjournment**

**Deputy Chief Minister (Hon. Dr J J Garcia):** Madam Speaker, I have the honour to move that this House now adjourn to tomorrow at 11am for the contribution of the Father of the House.

1430

**Hon. D J Bossino:** The motion to adjourn the House, given that we are stalemates in terms of numbers, six against six. But can I use this leverage and try and extract some information from the Honourable Deputy Chief Minister in order to enlist our support in respect of that particular motion of his? Can he provide us information as to when he, with which speaker does he think we will be completing tomorrow's session?

1435

So we are starting with Sir Joe Bossano, but it will be interesting for our own organisation and diary to understand which will be the last speaker, either on the Government side or indeed on the opposition side.

1440

**Hon. Dr J J Garcia:** Madam Speaker, I think notice has to be given of debates on the adjournment. But let me say that I don't have the information with me. I think it depends, normally with a budget what happens, it depends on the length of speeches as well.

So we would need to wait and see until tomorrow. But we will start with the hon. Father of the House and then take it from there.

1445

**Hon. D J Bossino:** We haven't been able to extract much information, which is normally the case from my good friend the Deputy Chief Minister. But I think in order to facilitate matters we will be voting in favour of the motion.

1450

**Madam Speaker:** I am at least very happy that we can all retire for the evening tonight. So before anybody else has any ideas, I am going to propose the question, which is that this House should now adjourn to tomorrow at 11am. I now put the question, which is that this House should now adjourn to tomorrow at 11am. Those in favour? **(Members: Aye.)** Those against? Passed.

This House will now adjourn to tomorrow at 11am.

1455

*The House adjourned at 6.10 p.m.*