PROCEEDINGS OF THE GIBRALTAR PARLIAMENT

MORNING SESSION: 9.00 a.m. – 9.56 a.m.

Gibraltar, Friday, 16th October 2026

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The Gibraltar Parliament

The Parliament met at 9.00 a.m.

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

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

Clerk: Meeting of Parliament, Friday the 16th of October 2026.
Answers to Oral Questions continued. Questions to the Hon. Chief Minister continued.

Questions for Oral Answer

CHIEF MINISTER

Q446/2026
Specific Government or wholly owned Government entity –
Project to refurbish St Joseph's school

Clerk: Question 446, the Hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Hon. Dr K Azopardi: Via what specific Government or wholly owned Government entity or other structure is the funding for the project to refurbish St Joseph's school being carried out?

Clerk: Answer, the Hon. Chief Minister.

Chief Minister (Hon. F R Picardo): Madam Speaker, this question was answered four months ago. This is publicly available information.

Hon. Dr K Azopardi: I am not sure the specific entity is, well, I mean the reason for the question, so I just put it to the Hon. Chief Minister, was that the Minister for Education answered last time, that he could not say specifically what the actual entity was in response to another colleague and therefore we are asking that question.

Is the Chief Minister clear that it is publicly available information? I am not sure we have been able to track that given the Minister for Education's answer.

Hon. Chief Minister: The Minister for Education gave an answer on Tuesday the 8th July 2025, which you can find at page 56 of the Hansard in respect of that date, where he sets out the entity that is the borough. It was in the course of the Committee Stage of the Budget and he had the

benefit of having the whole of the financial services team, finance, sorry, finance Ministry team behind him and that is why he was able to provide it, but it is there.

Madam Speaker: Next question.

Q447/2026
Government now entered into –
Proposed Victoria Keys development

Clerk: Question 447, the Hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Hon. Dr K Azopardi: Have the Government now entered into any licence agreements or development licence or building lease or memorandum of understanding or any other contractual arrangement in relation to the proposed Victoria Keys development and if so with whom (naming the parties) and what are the nature of the arrangements (specifying the salient terms)?

Clerk: Answer, the Hon. Chief Minister.

Chief Minister (Hon. F R Picardo): Madam Speaker, no agreement has yet been signed by the parties, although we are very close to finalising a detailed heads of terms. At this stage, it is therefore not possible to comment any further.

Hon. Dr K Azopardi: If they are close to finalising a heads of terms, are the parties therefore identifiable, the prospective parties identifiable and if so, who would they be?

Hon. Chief Minister: Madam Speaker, I do realise this is becoming a bit like the story of the good sunflower seed, so to speak, but yes, the parties are identifiable. I do not have the name of the parties here, but the hon. Gentleman will see that they are, from my understanding, SPVs and therefore the parties will not say much to him. I am very happy when we sign this agreement, which I expect will be very soon because an announcement is pending based on the signature of the agreement, to say who the parties are, because although they are using SPVs, it is not as if they want to hide behind those SPVs. They are parties who are known and the reference will be to those parties, not necessarily to their SPVs.

Hon. Dr K Azopardi: Yes, I suppose the sunflower seed has been gestating since 2019. Indeed, but he speaks about the finalisation of a heads of terms, so the heads of terms will simply, I imagine, set out the objectives of an agreement, but this is, there would then be, I assume, but I am asking him really, the heads of terms will presumably then envisage that there will be further documentation between the parties in relation to licence agreements, development licence, building leases, things like that. Would that follow shortly thereafter or is it envisaged that there would then be further negotiations or will the heads of terms seal the negotiation, as it were, between the Government and those parties?

Hon. Chief Minister: Madam Speaker, a lot of water has passed under the bridge since 2019 to water the sunflower seed, and so what hon. Members would see is a very developed heads of terms, where a lot of time has been taken also to already advance draft licences, draft leases, the agreement that there will be between the parties in respect of one particular aspect of the development which has come later, but which will be also part of the announcement, so it will be much more than just a skeleton of what the project will be, it is quite a developed bionic structure that will be put out.

Hon. Dr K Azopardi: Yes, well, and a lot of sand has flown into the water that is germinating the seed, and if we carry on with the analogies, and can I just ask him, SPVs, but are the underlying parties below the SPVs, are they different to the ones that originally were part of the announcement in 2019? Has there been any change in the underlying parties?

Hon. Chief Minister: I do not believe so, Madam Speaker, and so when it flowers it shall be as beautiful as most sunflowers are,

Hon. Dr K Azopardi: and when it flowers, can I ask him, will the flower look like it was presented in 2019, or is this a different forest?

Hon. Chief Minister: No, it will look like it was intended to look in 2019, except for the shape of the reclamation, so instead of being larger on the southwestern side, it is slightly concave to comply with blast requirements from the MoD, that I think was already advertised in the context of DPC applications for the reclamation, but other than that, what is going on it is expected to look like what was set out in the 2019 view of the development, prospective development there.

Hon. Dr K Azopardi: Finally, because is the extent of the reclamation, the plot, the same size, because he had said to me some time ago that there was a possibility the plot would be even larger, is it going to be the same size, and is the configuration, the mix of development still as originally intended, or will it be different, and if so, we have got to wait for the announcement for that.

Hon. Chief Minister: So Madam Speaker, the size is likely to be larger, even though you now have the concave element of the reclamation on the northwestern side, and you no longer have what was referred to in the context of the internal discussions as the snoopy head, because you had like a nose there, and you now have a concave, but what is lost in the snoopy head is gained in a new area of reclamation towards the northwestern end, which provides actually additional space. The mix is expected to be the same. The super yacht facility is provided in just a slightly different way, with more capacity for super yachts, and there is an additional element which is affordable housing also.

Madam Speaker: There ends the story of the sunflower seed. Next question please.

Q448/2026
AA and AO vacancies –
Established complement of departments

Clerk: Question 448, the Hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Hon. Dr K Azopardi: How many AA and AO vacancies are there within Government departments at 16 September 2026 having regard to the established complement of these departments?

Clerk: Answer, the Hon. Chief Minister.

Chief Minister (Hon. F R Picardo): Madam Speaker, as of the 16th of September 2026, there are 59 vacancies at the level of AA, and 12 vacancies at the level of AO.

Hon. Dr K Azopardi: I think since the filing of this question, there might have been actually an advert, and I think people have been sitting exams for this kind of thing, so I assume that it is envisaged that some of those people will fill those vacancies. Is it the case that the Government therefore expects to fill all these vacancies relatively shortly?

Hon. Chief Minister: Yes, Madam Speaker. In fact, I have had discussions with the Chief Secretary and the Minister for Business about how we are going to fill these vacancies, and that is why the exam was important. I think interviews may already have taken place, or are taking place, one of the two.

Madam Speaker: Next question.

Q449/2026
Agency workers in any civil service department – Numbers of agency workers in each department

Clerk: Question 449, the Hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Hon. Dr K Azopardi: Are there currently any agency workers in any civil service department and if so how many and where naming the numbers of agency workers in each department?

Clerk: Answer, the Hon. Chief Minister.

Chief Minister (Hon. F R Picardo): Madam Speaker, there are 164 agency workers in the Department of Education.

Hon. Dr K Azopardi: So, what would be the nature of the employment of those agency workers in the Education Department?

Hon. Chief Minister: Well, Madam Speaker, I think that some of them may be cleaners. I do not think any of them are lunch ladies anymore.

Hon. Dr K Azopardi: But there are no agency workers now in perhaps other departments, like more core departments. So, I remember asking some time ago, and the Chief Minister said to us at the time that in Treasury, I think, there were some agency workers, but that practice has been discontinued. Will the Government confirm that?

Hon. Chief Minister: It is confirmed, Madam Speaker. It was not a practice, it was a holding position, and there are none in any other Civil Service departments.

Madam Speaker: Next question.

Q450/2026
Public sector pay agreements – Announced at the Budget

Clerk: Question 450, the Hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Hon. Dr K Azopardi: Will the Government publish or provide the Opposition with a copy of the public sector pay agreements that it announced at the Budget?

Clerk: Answer, the Hon. Chief Minister.

Chief Minister (Hon. F R Picardo): Madam Speaker, there is no written or signed pay agreement to publish or provide. The settlement I announced in my 2026 Budget address was the product of a sustained process of meetings, negotiations and correspondence between the Government and the four representative bodies, Unite the Union, the GGCA, Gibraltar NASUWT and the Gibraltar Police Federation. Each organisation advanced its own proposals and positions during that process. These were considered by Government in determining the final terms of the settlement. I set out those final terms in full in my Budget address, and that published statement constitutes the public record of that settlement. Accordingly, there is no separate written agreement beyond the terms already announced to Parliament and published. I am, nonetheless, Madam Speaker, pursuing that there should be such an agreement.

Hon. Dr K Azopardi: Well, I mean, I would encourage the Chief Minister to do that. I am slightly surprised, I have to say, at the answer because, of course, I can understand that it is the product of negotiations and discussions. Certainly, on this side, listening to the Chief Minister talk about an agreement seemed to then mean that there must be something in writing. Then, of course, if there is not anything in writing, there is fertile ground for there to be thereafter disagreement about the recollection of what was or was not concluded verbally and so on. So, if the Chief Minister is pursuing a recording of what he views as the terms of the agreement in agreement with the Unions, when it comes, will he provide a copy to the Opposition?

Hon. Chief Minister: Madam Speaker, I expect that such an agreement, when it comes, as I expect it will come because it is in everybody's interest to have things recorded in a way that is not just reference to Hansard, it will be published by the Unions and by the Government with a press release.

Madam Speaker: Next question.

Q451-452/2026
How often does mail leave Gibraltar –
Treaty implementation issues affecting the departure or receipt of mail

Clerk: Question 451, the Hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Hon. Dr K Azopardi: How often does mail leave Gibraltar now on a weekly basis and how often did it go out by air before the provisional application of the Treaty?

Clerk: Answer, the Hon. Chief Minister.

Chief Minister (Hon. F R Picardo): Madam Speaker, I will answer with 452.

Clerk: Question 452, the Hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Hon. Dr K Azopardi: Have the Treaty implementation issues affecting the departure or receipt of mail from and to Gibraltar now been resolved and if so how?

Clerk: Answer, the Hon. Chief Minister.

Chief Minister (Hon. F R Picardo): Madam Speaker, yes, issues relating to mail have now been largely resolved, although frequency remains a concern. Prior to the provisional application of the treaty, air mail left Gibraltar 6 times a week, from Monday to Saturdays. Under current arrangements, which remain under review, mail leaves Gibraltar twice a week through the land Frontier. I am advised that the Royal Gibraltar Post Office is exploring various options to increase the frequency of mail leaving Gibraltar via the land Frontier to 6 times a week in short order.

Hon. Dr K Azopardi: I mean, certainly we encourage that on this side of the House. You know, we have been approached by people precisely on this issue and their concerns about outgoing mail, and anything that can be done on that score would be helpful. Does the Chief Minister have any sense of the discussions the mail, the Gibraltar mail, are having in terms of the timescale of when there would be an expectation that perhaps the frequency of mail would be increased? And can he perhaps inform the House what precisely determines the frequency? I mean, why is it not something that can be changed relatively quickly? Why does it require discussions and perhaps it is more problematic than would otherwise seem without information, internal information, of the problems that may arise?

Hon. Chief Minister: Well, Madam Speaker, it is cost. The Royal Mail is now used a lot less than before. A lot less than before. There are options for the Royal Mail to be used more, which would be helpful. But we are paying, I do not want to give the figure across the floor of the House, but I am happy to tell him when we finish, Madam Speaker, a huge amount per trip at the moment. That makes the mail, it was likely to make the mail go from an area of profit to the Government to an area of huge loss to the Government. That is because the use of the mail has been so reduced these days that it becomes very difficult to make it cost effective. There are options which might make it cost effective in the future. As a result of the Treaty, there are opportunities for businesses in Gibraltar, which the RGPO is already talking to those businesses about. They are very interested in doing certain things. That would mean that the RGPO is used a lot. That would make the whole thing easier to resolve. So, these are the issues that we have to deal with, which arise not so much because of the Treaty, but because of the world in which we live being much more electronic.

Madam Speaker: Next question.

Q453/2026
Government update the House –
Expected timescales for the ratification of the EU-UK Treaty

Clerk: Question 453, the Hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Hon. Dr K Azopardi: Will the Government update the House on the process leading to and expected timescales for the ratification of the EU-UK Treaty on Gibraltar by the UK and European Parliaments?

Clerk: Answer, the Hon. Chief Minister.

Chief Minister (Hon. F R Picardo): Madam Speaker, I heard the hon. Gentleman just say under his breath that he expects to be on the other side very soon. I know it is early, but he should stop dreaming. He should wake up and smell the coffee. He is still on that side.

Madam Speaker, as the hon. Member knows, the agreement was signed on the 14th July 2026 and laid before the UK Parliament on the same day for scrutiny under the UK Constitutional Reform and Governance Act. This is what is referred to as the CRAG process. Under the Act, the

UK Government may ratify the agreement after it has been laid before Parliament for 21 sitting days, subject to the provisions of the Act concerning resolutions against ratification. The first 21 sitting day period is due to conclude on the 22nd October 2026. On the EU side, the agreement requires the consent of the European Parliament before the Council can adopt the decision concluding the agreement. The agreement is currently under consideration by the European Parliament with relevant parliamentary procedures ongoing. The indications that we have are that the plenary sitting at which the consent of the European Parliament will be provided will take place on the week commencing the 14th December 2026 in Strasbourg.

The Government is working closely with relevant stakeholders to support the timely completion of the respective parliamentary and legal processes in both the UK and the EU. All is progressing well as expected. We will provide further updates to the House as the ratification process continues.

At a practical level, and as far as the implementation of the agreement is concerned, nothing changes as these formalities are completed because the agreement entered into force in full, even though provisionally, on the 15th July 2026. By that, Madam Speaker, I mean that there is no part of the agreement that has been said not to be in force provisionally pending ratification. It is all provisionally in force.

Hon. Dr K Azopardi: The Chief Minister mentioned on the EU side, which is really the helpful explanation about the UK timescale, but on the EU side, which is, I suppose, a less administrative process and therefore one that concerns us a bit more, I suppose, because of the history of other issues. After I filed this question, I saw a European Parliament paper on Gibraltar, which had been updated recently. I had seen it before, but it had been updated. The Chief Minister says that this vote is expected on the week commencing the 14th December. That paper that I read suggested that it actually would be on the 14th December. So, is the information slightly different now? Is there no specific date for this expected ratification debate if it does require some kind of debate in the European Parliament?

Hon. Chief Minister: In the EU Parliament, he means? Yes. So, Madam Speaker, I think that the way that the EU Parliament announces its business is for the week of. In other words, it is the Strasbourg week when these votes take place, and the Strasbourg week is the week of the 14th. The information that we have is that the vote is expected on the 14th, perhaps on the 15th. Like most parliaments, a lot will depend on whether people keep to timescales or do not keep to timescales. This is listed for the 14th with the possibility that it may go over to the 15th. That is the understanding that we have.

Hon. Members will know that the issue is also to be dealt with in Select Committees or the equivalent of Select Committees of the European Parliament. Those votes are expected during the course of the period in November. Those votes inform the Parliament, as would be the case in our Select Committees. They do not determine the parliamentary vote. The parliamentary vote is then taken in the usual way. We are optimistic that the parliamentary vote will be in favour of the ratification of these arrangements.

Hon. Dr K Azopardi: Is the Government engaging with EU parliamentarians on this directly or through the UK or through a different body? I mean, obviously, the UK being a party to the agreement, not because anymore it has MEPs, obviously. But is the Government in active engagement with EU parliamentarians on this issue or not?

Hon. Chief Minister: Yes, Madam Speaker, and indeed, there was a recent press release showing that the Minister for the Environment had been to Brussels and had spent considerable time speaking to Green MPs with great success in being able to demonstrate the truth of what goes on in this area compared to some of the just brazen lies that we hear told by purported environmentalists about the things that go on in this area on the part of the Government of

Gibraltar, entirely ignoring the many things that go on, on the part of other authorities in the area. I want to commend the Minister for the Environment for the success he has had in being able to explain the truth and the science behind what goes on in this area to a lot of the MEPs in the European Parliament who are concerned about the environmental issues, not just in the Green Party represented in the European Parliament, but throughout the ideological scope of that Parliament.

Hon. Dr K Azopardi: The Chief Minister has expressed confidence that the Select Committee process will deliver votes that inform the debate, but that will be positive. That is based on information received, or is this sort of the hope and confidence that this has the backing of the Commission and so on?

Can I just ask him, in the context of that, am I right in understanding that those processes will be finished before the end of November, before the 29th November in particular, and am I right also in understanding that the ratification process in the European Parliament will be subject to a debate in that Parliament?

Hon. Chief Minister: So, it is information that we have about the committees, Madam Speaker. The process of the committees, I do not know whether it ends before the 29th or the 30th of November, but it is a freestanding process. It is an issues-driven process. It is not nationally driven.

Yes, there is expected to be a debate on the floor of the European Parliament, which will lead to the vote. That may be shorter or longer, depending on what the issues are. That Parliament has timed interventions, and so it should not go on for very long. But there will be people who we know will want to express virulently opposing views to the ratification, and there will be large blocks that will want to express supportive views for ratification.

Hon. Dr K Azopardi: Finally, can I just ask him, I think he said on another occasion, either in this House or outside this House, that it was only because he commented as part of his original answer that there is full provisional application of the treaties, but I think he has said also that it was only when there is ratification that the EU will insert that footnote in the Schengen Border Code about Gibraltar residents. Can he confirm that that still is the position, that it will require ratification to do that, which would presumably facilitate information again to Schengen authorities across the EU?

Hon. Chief Minister: So yes, Madam Speaker, although the Treaty is in full application, there are things that are not happening yet. For example, we have not yet had the meetings of the Specialised Committees, et cetera. Those are not held up by ratification, but you need enough of a period of application to see what are the things that you need to put down in those committees, et cetera. Disputes, for example, are likely to be things that are not going to happen until after ratification. But if ratification was delayed, but not refused, you could see some of those things happening.

The footnotes, however, are the sort of thing that we think will happen only after ratification. The Commission has nonetheless acted to ensure communication is reinforced to all of the Schengen entry exit points, to all of the Governments in the Schengen Aquis, in order to ensure that people do not have the problem at entry points. Similarly, the United Kingdom has ensured that all of its embassies and consulates across the Schengen area are aware, of course, of these arrangements. They are also going in to talk to the relevant immigration authorities, who should have also received the notifications, again, from the European Commission in order to ensure that there are not the issues that we have seen in the run-up to this initial 90-day period since provisional application.

Madam Speaker: Next question.

Q454/2026
Spanish Police or Guardia Civil –
Notified the Gibraltar authorities that they wished to enter Gibraltar

Clerk: Question 454, the Hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Hon. Dr K Azopardi: At 16 September 2026 how many times have Spanish Police or Guardia Civil notified the Gibraltar authorities that they wished to enter Gibraltar under the surveillance or uninterrupted pursuit or other provisions of the various Administrative Arrangements or mechanisms established by the EU-UK Treaty on Gibraltar or Gibraltar law giving effect to those various arrangements and provisions?

Clerk: Answer, the Hon. Chief Minister.

Chief Minister (Hon. F R Picardo): Madam Speaker, as of the 16th of September 2026, the Royal Gibraltar Police has received no notifications from the Spanish National Police or the Guardia Civil regarding entry into Gibraltar for surveillance operations, uninterrupted pursuits or other relevant mechanisms established under the UK-EU Treaty concerning Gibraltar or related domestic legislation.

Madam Speaker: Next question.

Q455/2026
Sufficient security, monitoring and policing resources –
Combat attempts at illegal migration

Clerk: Question 455, the Hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Hon. Dr K Azopardi: Are the Government confident that there are sufficient security, monitoring and policing resources to combat attempts at illegal migration?

Clerk: Answer, the Hon. Chief Minister.

Chief Minister (Hon. F R Picardo): Madam Speaker, I am advised that there are various security and monitoring systems in place at Gibraltar's point of entry to mitigate threats and risks arising from a range of transnational crimes, including illegal migration and migrant smuggling.

I am further advised that these arrangements are supported by intelligence-sharing partnerships with local, regional and international partners and that the wider security and monitoring framework also incorporates maritime surveillance and monitoring capabilities operated by other agencies, including British Forces Gibraltar and the Gibraltar Port Authority. These capabilities therefore extend across a number of Government departments and agencies.

Hon. Dr K Azopardi: Do the Government envisage any changes in resources or monitoring in respect of these issues as a result of the more open border, or indeed other things like, for example, I mean, we have seen in the press the attempts at a landing of illegal migrants close to La Linea and other reports. So, is there any changes envisaged as a result of things like that?

Hon. Chief Minister: Madam Speaker, changes have been implemented already. For example, the live facial recognition cameras, which have been very good at spotting a number of individuals who are wanted and who are in Gibraltar. I will tell the House that there was a recent case of an

individual who was an illegal migrant in Spain and had been declared illegal in Spain. His identity was on the system and therefore he was picked up trying to come into Gibraltar immediately. As he was illegally in Spain, he was illegally in Gibraltar, and he was immediately turned away.

We also have seen how the live facial recognition camera network has been talked about further afield than Gibraltar, so that it is now known that if you are wanted and you come into Gibraltar, you are going to be picked up. So, Gibraltar is not a good place to come if you are wanted because there is not live facial recognition everywhere else in the Iberian Peninsula. So, you are safer not coming close to Gibraltar. The key message here has to be this, Madam Speaker. If you are illegally in Gibraltar, you are arrested and you go to jail. You do not get benefits. You do not get a cushy number. You do not get anything from the Government other than 2 meals a day, maybe 3 meals a day and a warm shower. Then we deport you to where you have come from. That is the message that we have been sending out consistently under successive administrations of the Government of Gibraltar and we will continue to send out for now, I hope, whatever the administration of the Government of Gibraltar. So, less asylum claims that keep people here forever and more clarity that if you are illegally in Gibraltar, you are out on your ear and you are in jail until then.

Hon. Dr K Azopardi: Well, I mean, that is common ground between us. Indeed, I can certainly confirm that he has our support in that. If we were on that side, the position would be entirely the same. Can I ask him about the facial recognition cameras? I mean, are these, without telling me exactly where they are, but are these scattered around Gibraltar or are they only strategically placed at the Frontier and in the coast and things like that? Is the system, because of what he has just described, is the system sort of logged into or has access to a database that is much wider? Because as I understood, I had understood the, you know, our systems would not, I mean, there was a kind of jealousy that our systems would not be, have access to the Schengen information systems because that can only be operated by the Schengen authorities. But in terms of picking up things like that, people who are on their databases and so on, presumably these facial recognition systems can only recognise people that are on our database, whatever our database is or not. I mean, he is shaking his head. So perhaps he can explain it to me and that may give us also further comfort on the issue.

Hon. Chief Minister: I do not want to explain it across the floor of the House, Madam Speaker, but I do want to correct this aspect of what the hon. Gentleman is saying. Because you do not have access to the Schengen database, it does not mean that you do not have access to other international databases or other national databases on the basis of agreements. Now, it is not a good thing for us to set out the detail of that, but it is good for bad actors to know that it is not just if their photograph is on the Gibraltar database. In other words, if they have offended in Gibraltar before, that they will be looked out for. In fact, I gave the House an example a moment ago which should have led the Leader of the Opposition not to have to ask this question. I said, somebody who had been declared illegal in Spain was flagged by our live facial recognition cameras. That is not the Gibraltar system.

So, there are other systems that we are accessed to. I think it would be helpful for the Leader of the Opposition and perhaps the hon. Lady with responsibility for Justice to have a briefing on this so that they are aware of the reach of these cameras and of the issues that there might be with them and how those are being resolved. The reach is much further than just the facials of those who have outstanding warrants with the Gibraltar Magistrates Court, to put it that way. It is a wide net and the message that should go out from here today is if you are on a wanted database anywhere in the world, it is Russian roulette for you to try and come into Gibraltar because it is very likely that we have got access to your face. We know that you are wanted and if you come here, you will be arrested here and taken to where you are wanted.

Madam Speaker: Next question.

Q456/2026
Adequate cooperation between our authorities and Spanish authorities – In respect of risks of illegal migration

Clerk: Question 456, the Hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Hon. Dr K Azopardi: Is the Government satisfied that there is adequate cooperation between our authorities and Spanish authorities in respect of risks of illegal migration?

Clerk: Answer, the Hon. Chief Minister.

Chief Minister (Hon. F R Picardo): Yes, ma`am.

Hon. Dr K Azopardi: Well, I mean, there is another question in the Order Paper, but the suggestion that the answer is yes is somewhat incongruous given that the press release that the Government issued in relation to the other matter on the Order Paper suggests that there was no notification and indeed not that great cooperation, at least initially, in respect of that particular incident. So why does the Government actually think there is adequate cooperation in light of instances such as that?

Hon. Chief Minister: Well, Madam Speaker, I am tempted to just say to the hon. Gentleman, I refer him to the answer I gave a few moments ago, where somebody who was illegally in Spain was on our database and we were able to identify him and quickly get rid of him.

We are always rightly, and I emphasise rightly, going to be very concerned about any incursion into our waters by Spanish vessels or indeed the vessels of any other state, but in particular Spanish vessels because of the history of the sovereignty issue.

In order to answer the Leader of the Opposition's question properly, we need to look at the question of illegal migration and see what cooperation is like there. We did not have cooperation on illegal migration when we saw the incursion of the Spanish Guardia Civil vessel into the port. We had no notification. We did not know what they were doing. We did not know whether they were chasing drug traffickers. We did not know whether they were being, as we have seen in the past, a little bolshie about wanting to see somebody's documents on any vessel, we did not know what we were dealing with until we had the engagement with them. It is true, it was in the immediate aftermath of the large numbers of people who entered Ceuta, the Spanish enclave in North Africa.

Now, it appears that that vessel from the Guardia Civil was not from the Algeciras area, which is where the relationship usually is. We have not seen in the past cross-strait activity of this sort. It would appear that there was no communication even with others in the Guardia Civil. This was like a run because of the paranoia at that time. As a result of that event, we have gone back and said, we do need to be cooperating on these things. We have opportunities here to work together. If we work together, you do not have people running off. We have no suspicion, at least the RGP has no suspicion, that any illegal migrant was permitted to come into Gibraltar as a result of that chase, which was not cooperative. It would appear that we were dealing with the human traffickers who had already tried or succeeded in doing an operation of illegal immigration into Spain. It was in the getting away from the authorities after having carried out that operation, that the human traffickers sought refuge in Gibraltar and were chased into Gibraltar. The message that we send is very clear to the Spanish authorities or the authorities of any other state in this region that we are ready to cooperate and we are ready to work together with them on the issue of illegal immigration. Because this is a problem that faces all of Europe and we have an open border with Europe. We will be more protected than most of the rest of the places in Europe for the reasons I have already indicated on which I am very pleased to see there is a confluence of view across the floor of the House.

Hon. Dr K Azopardi: Madam Speaker, I am going to hold on any supplementaries on that because of my next couple of questions. Can I just ask him on the issue of illegal migration, this particular one, on cooperation on illegal migration. Is there a specific written kind of understanding? Is there an MOU between our authorities and Spanish authorities on issues of illegal migration in particular? I say that not just because of the current international political backdrop but rather because it has been one of the obvious places for illegal migration is the Straits of Gibraltar for some time and given the Treaty and so on. Is there a specific MOU between our authorities on this or is it envisaged that because of the developing situation it might be something that would be looked at between our authorities to improve any and eliminate misunderstandings?

Hon. Chief Minister: Well, Madam Speaker, there is the Treaty, there is the administrative arrangements that touch upon these things and now there will be the working groups. So, at last, there will be specific working groups dealing with these issues where our law enforcement agents will be sitting with Spanish law enforcement agents to work specifically on these issues. I think that is very much welcome.

I think this is something that has to be done at the sort of sharp end of law enforcement. I think them sitting together considering these issues and working together is a very good thing.

Madam Speaker: Next question.

Q457&458/2026
Statement to update the House –
Presence of the Guardia Civil vessel in Gibraltar port waters

Clerk: Question 457, the Hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Hon. Dr K Azopardi: Will the Government make a further statement to update the House on the circumstances surrounding the presence of the Guardia Civil vessel in Gibraltar port waters on 4 September 2026?

Clerk: Answer, the Hon. Chief Minister.

Chief Minister (Hon. F R Picardo): Madam Speaker, I will answer with 458.

Clerk: Question 458, the Hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Hon. Dr K Azopardi: Has the Government been in contact with the Spanish Government or British Government in respect of the presence of the Guardia Civil vessel in Gibraltar Port waters on 4 September 2026?

Clerk: Answer, the Hon. Chief Minister.

Chief Minister (Hon. F R Picardo): Madam Speaker, in answer to Question 457, around 1800 hours on Friday, the 4th September, 2026, the RGP were informed by a member of the public that the Guardia Civil vessel was towing a speedboat in the area of Small Boats Marina and Peter Isola Promenade. It was reported that the vessel being towed had dropped off two migrants. A multi-agency law enforcement response was initiated based on potential landing of illegal migrants in Gibraltar.

An RGP Marine crew were on patrol when they noticed the Guardia Civil vessel towing the speedboat and therefore approached to engage with the Guardia Civil. A cordial, amicable and cooperative conversation was had between the two law enforcement agencies, the RGP pointing out the jurisdictional boundaries and the port area restrictions and the Guardia Civil stating that they had conveyed their actions to their control room but this message had not been received in Gibraltar. The speedboat was handed over to the RGP and seized as part of the investigation.

The Guardia Civil also mentioned that the second speedboat was also being pursued and that this had headed towards the runway. This vessel was located in Ocean Village by His Majesty's Customs Officers and the two occupants, both Spanish residents, were also identified. A second Guardia Civil vessel from Algeciras also attended this area, remaining outside of the port area at all times.

The incident is being investigated by the RGP who retained primacy of all reasonable lines of enquiry including CCTV and other witness enquiries to identify the two people who fled the scene. Information suggests they were picked up by a locally registered vehicle which conveyed the illegal migrants to the Frontier with Spain. Enquiries carried out lead to the identification and arrest of the driver of that vehicle who has been interviewed and bailed out to return to the police station at a later date.

Fluid liaison between the RGP and local Guardia Civil commanders will continue in the effective exchange of the relevant information in regard to Treaty obligations and wider law enforcement and migration controls in the area. Media reports continue to portray the message of Gibraltar having a robust response to illegal immigration and prosecution and deportation of migrants. Gibraltar remains at a high level of readiness to respond and act in light of the ongoing migrant crisis in Ceuta and is determined to improve communications between jurisdictions. None of the activity in question in this matter relates to the application of any rights arising under the Treaty.

In answer to Question 458, on Monday, the 7th September, the Commissioner of Police, Owain Richards, provided a strategic briefing to His Excellency the Governor in accordance with his responsibilities under the Police Act. This briefing outlined the circumstances of the incident, the investigation, arrest and working hypothesis.

The report went on to address national security concerns, a community impact assessment and details around the media strategy, identify any vulnerabilities and learning from the incident and reassurance of the governance in place on the day of the incident. The RGP does not liaise directly with the British or Spanish governments in respect of this type of incident. The briefing was also copied to me and to the Chair of the Police Authority.

Hon. Dr K Azopardi: I mean, can I ask on 457? So, I mean, we also saw the video is on social media and it clearly there was, we then understood it to be an operation chasing suspected illegal migrants. And of course, we understand that there needs to be cooperation between our authorities in respect of that for the reasons we have indicated before.

But clearly, there also needs to be notification by the Spanish authorities if they are in hot pursuit of illegal migrants so that our authorities can then intervene when they are in Gibraltar waters and so on. The video suggested certainly that the Spanish Guardia Civil vessel was seeking to tow the vessel, the speedboats, away into Spanish waters. And it was only when it was hailed down by the Gibraltar authorities that that was stopped. So, it rather suggests that had that not happened, the Spanish authorities would have behaved in Gibraltar as if they thought they could do whatever they wanted.

Does the Chief Minister agree that, of course, there should be cooperation on illegal migration, but the jurisdiction in these matters within Gibraltar must be exercised by the Gibraltar authorities. There must be notification and certainly there should be cooperation, but it is for our authorities to act in these circumstances.

Hon. Chief Minister: I agree, Madam Speaker, and there can be no other interpretation.

Hon. Dr K Azopardi: Can I just ask him, generally on this issue of the port, because he mentioned that the investigation highlighted, or at least part of the investigation was that they were looking the police are looking at CCTV and so on. Are there, beyond CCTV, are there not more sophisticated security cameras under the police aegis there that would facilitate? And if not, should there not be a revision of the security arrangements in the port area?

Hon. Chief Minister: Madam Speaker, I do not want to give details of what there is already, but there is considerable ability to have eyes in that area, which is what the RGP will be reviewing.

Madam Speaker: Next question.

Q459/2026
Joint patrols of Gibraltar waters envisaged – Arrangements under the EU-UK Treaty on Gibraltar

Clerk: Question 459, the Hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Hon. Dr K Azopardi: When are the joint patrols of Gibraltar waters envisaged by the arrangements under the EU-UK Treaty on Gibraltar expected to commence?

Clerk: Answer, the Hon. Chief Minister.

Chief Minister (Hon. F R Picardo): Madam Speaker, as the hon. Member knows, the practical arrangements for the conduct of the joint maritime patrols by the Gibraltarian and Spanish authorities are laid out in the administrative arrangements on border checks and border surveillance. Before answering the hon. Member's question, I want to clarify a misleading element in the question, which I can only assume is purposely misleading, since I have been clear on this and the administrative arrangement is clear on this, which is that the envisaged joint patrols are not exclusive to Gibraltar waters, as the hon. Member suggests. The surveillance is anticipated to cover an area extending beyond BGTW into what we recognise as Spanish waters, as well as International waters.

That said, I am very pleased to be able to report today that the RGP and their Spanish counterparts are cooperating well. Agencies are being very constructive in their approach to the implementation of the agreement, including in relation to border surveillance activities, with the Working Group on Border Surveillance having already formally met twice since the administrative arrangement was agreed. The Working Group will continue to work towards the full and correct implementation of those arrangements.

For the time being, I cannot provide a definitive date by which this will be the case. In the meantime, I would stress that there is no heightened risk to border surveillance, public security, other essential security related activities as a result of these arrangements not yet being fully in place.

Hon. Dr K Azopardi: Madam Speaker, when I framed the question, I framed the question I certainly did not do it in a misleading way, and I deprecate his assertion that it is deliberately misleading, especially in this House when he is making that kind of allegation. He may want to reflect that he should withdraw it. I just drafted the question without more asking about the joint patrols.

Hon. Chief Minister: Well, Madam Speaker, now he has clarified I have no difficulty accepting that on his behalf, but the difficulty is that the joint patrols are not just of BGTW. I fully accept

that he might only be interested in what is happening in BGTW, but the joint patrols are not joint patrols of BGTW, they are joint patrols of the area beyond also.

Hon. Dr K Azopardi: Fine, but the hon. Member was alluding motives in the framing of the question that were not there, and it is not for me to clarify it, it is for him to actually withdraw that I was being misleading when he gets on his feet. Can I just ask him, the joint patrols, the administrative arrangements, envisage the purchase of vessels or at least the acquisition of vessels in respect of which will be sort of EU flag, kind of the sort of joint vessels. We are going to sort of take it in turns as it were.

Is there a timescale for that to happen?

Hon. Chief Minister: Madam Speaker, not yet, but I expect there soon will be because we are in the process of trying to determine a style, type and therefore potential timeline for acquisition of those types of vessels.

Hon. Dr K Azopardi: If that happens, so would we expect therefore that there will not be Guardia Civil incursions because there will then be joint patrols from time to time.

Hon. Chief Minister: Hope springs eternal, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker: Next question.

Q460/2026
Cost of consultants – Upgrade of digital systems

Clerk: Question 460, the Hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Hon. Dr K Azopardi: What has been the cost of consultants in relation to the upgrade of digital systems of the Government for the financial years 2023/24; 2024/25 and 2025/26 giving a breakdown of each financial year?

Clerk: Answer, the Hon. Chief Minister.

Chief Minister (Hon. F R Picardo): Madam Speaker, the cost of consultants in relation to the upgrade of digital systems is as follows: Financial year 2023/24, £1,519,569.60; Financial year 2024/25, £616,804.50; Financial year 2025/26, £104,617 and no pence.

Madam Speaker, I also have the information, if you might find it helpful, of who they are. They are APEX, INFO UK, DELOITTE LIMITED, INSPIRIT and BOOMI CORP LIMITED.

If the hon. Gentleman wishes, I can give him a breakdown of how much each has been paid in each of the years that I have reported to the House.

Hon. Dr K Azopardi: The breakdown would be helpful, but he could send it to me if he needs it or he can just set it out now.

Hon. Chief Minister: I am very happy to send it to the hon. Gentleman.

Madam Speaker: All right, I think that is the end. All the questions.

Answers to Written Questions

Clerk: Answers to Written Questions, the Hon. Chief Minister.

Chief Minister (Hon. F R Picardo): I have the honour to lay on the Table the answers to Written Questions numbers W43 to W68 of 2026.

Order of the Day

Clerk: The Order of the Day.

Adjournment

Chief Minister (Hon. F R Picardo): Madam Speaker, I have the honour to move that the House should now adjourn Sine Die.

Madam Speaker: Before we do that, I know the Chief Minister has to leave, by all means leave. I just want to say a few words which the Chief Minister can pick up later on Hansard. It is not important. Well, it is important, but it is not. It is not earth-shattering. No, because I need a quorum. But by all means, I know he is in a hurry.

All right, as you know, from time immemorial and certainly from 1999, when the Minister has finished answering their batch of questions, the Parliament, as a courtesy, has provided to the Opposition and press written copies of the answers which Ministers had prepared in advance and read out in their answer. I have recently become a little concerned over that practise when sometimes, albeit rarely, answers given in Parliament. Thank you, that means I can slow down. Answers given in Parliament are different to the text originally prepared. That may be because a Minister has realised on the hoof that the answer is wrong and substituted it with the right answer, or maybe a Minister has, for another reason, deviated from the prepared answer.

Where the answer given in the House is entirely different from the original prepared answer, it may be that on those rare occasions, those prepared answers will not be circulated and Members asked to refer to Hansard. Where the answer given in the House appears to be the same as, or substantially similar to the prepared answer, but for some minor omissions or additions, as is often the case, indeed as was the case yesterday with the lengthy answer given by the hon. the Chief Minister, then we shall continue to circulate the written answers, but always with the proviso that the answers provided by Parliament to the Opposition and the Press are for guidance purposes only and do not constitute an official, accurate or verbatim record of the responses delivered by Ministers in Parliament. They should not be relied upon as a definitive account of the proceedings for an authoritative and accurate record of the answer actually given during the Parliamentary session deference should be given to Hansard. Members and indeed the Press should take it as read that from now on that proviso will apply to all answers circulated by Parliament.

I think it is important because sometimes we are giving prepared answers to the Opposition and the Press, which do not actually accurately reflect what was said in Parliament. So, if that proviso is considered to be attached, we will continue to be doing that unless the answer is materially different.

I now propose the question which is that this House do now adjourn Sine Die. I now put the

question which is that this House do now adjourn Sine Die. Those in favour? (**Members:** Aye.) Those against? Passed. This House will now adjourn Sine Die

The House adjourned Sine Die at 9.56 a.m.