



# PROCEEDINGS OF THE GIBRALTAR PARLIAMENT

**AFTERNOON SESSION: 3.00 p.m. – 7.08 p.m.**

**Gibraltar, Thursday, 15th January 2026**

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## The Gibraltar Parliament

*The Parliament met at 3.00 p.m.*

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

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

## Questions for Oral Answer

### CHIEF MINISTER

5

**Q925-9/2025**

**“Proof-of-life” exercise –**

**Non usage of information; Public awareness campaign; Old age pension; Life certificate process; Previous proof of life exercise**

**Clerk:** Meeting of Parliament, Thursday the 15<sup>th</sup> of January. Answers to Oral Questions continued. Questions to the Hon. Chief Minister.

10      Question 925, the Hon. A Sanchez.

**Hon. A Sanchez:** Why did the Government not use the information already held centrally by the Civil Status and Registration Office and other relevant departments for the purposes of the “proof-of-life” exercise, rather than oblige all persons over a certain age to respond?

15      **Clerk:** Answer, the Hon. Chief Minister.

**Chief Minister (Hon. F R Picardo):** Madam Speaker, I will answer this question together with Questions 926 to 929.

20      **Clerk:** Question 926, the Hon. A Sanchez.

**Hon. A Sanchez:** Does the Government agree that a more effective public-awareness campaign should have been undertaken prior to the commencement of the “proof-of-life” exercise, so that affected individuals were better informed in advance and there was wider public understanding of the process to be followed?

**Clerk:** Question 927, the Hon. A Sanchez.

30      **Hon. A Sanchez:** Could the Government provide the following information:

- 35 1. The total number of individuals who did not receive their Old Age Pension on the October monthly pension run, detailing the specific reason for each case; and, where this was due to the proof-of-life exercise, whether the Government can confirm in each such case that the individual had submitted the completed form/certificate by the required deadline and that it had been received by the relevant Department.
- 40 2. The total number of individuals whose Old Age Pension for October had to be paid later via a subsequent run because they were initially omitted from the main October payment, specifying the exact dates of those additional payment runs and the reason each payment had to be re-processed.
- 45 3. Whether there remain any individuals who have still not received their October pension, and if so, the number affected and the reason or reasons for the continuing non-payment.

**Clerk:** Question 928, the Hon. A Sanchez.

**Hon. A Sanchez:** Will the Government explain the operation of the “Life Certificate” process used by the Department of Social Security for pensioners living outside Gibraltar, stating how often these certificates are requested for submission, and provide data for each of the last three years on (a) the number of certificates issued and (b) the number of pension payments that were suspended due to non-return of the certificates?

**Clerk:** Question 929, the Hon. A Sanchez.

**Hon. A Sanchez:** Will the Government state when the last prior Gibraltar-wide proof-of-life exercise covering residents was carried out before the current 2025 exercise?

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

**Chief Minister (Hon. F R Picardo):** Madam Speaker, as I rise I note what a pleasure it is to start my 15th consecutive year answering questions in this House. Madam Speaker, the last comprehensive Gibraltar-wide proof of life exercise led by the Department of Social Security was undertaken in 2009. On this occasion, it was carried out by the Department without notice to Ministers as an administrative exercise.

The proof of life exercise carried out recently was based on pension registers held by the Department as this is customarily the most updated and accurate record of the recipient. The Department acknowledges that there are personal records held in other Government entities such as the Civil Status and Registration Office. However, these also capture a specific moment in time when the document is renewed and there was no guarantee that these records would be more accurate.

Whilst the Department had anticipated that the percentage of pensioners might have failed to notify of address changes, they recognised in retrospect that the proportion of outdated records was considerably higher than initially expected. Social Security currently administers circa 14,000 pension payments per calendar month as well as numerous other benefit claims. If the section were to continuously invest time updating records from other Government entities, we could ensure more up-to-date information.

However, the administrative burden of this would drain resources and renders this approach impractical. Likewise, the option of investing departmental staff resources *en masse* to track, verify and process information on this scale prior to embarking on the proof of life exercise is unfeasible, we are told. The Department of Social Security does acknowledge that a more effective public awareness campaign would have been beneficial to ensure that our local community was notified of the proof of life exercise in advance.

Nonetheless, it is important to emphasise that proof of life letters were distributed three months in advance of the deadline, providing clear instructions and timelines for submission. This measure allowed pensioners ample time to complete submission of the form as well as allocating the pension section with the necessary time to update account statuses. Although the Department acknowledges that the challenges encountered are mostly associated to change of addresses that were not officially notified to Social Security, a significant number of pensioners who had the proof of life letter posted to the correct address did not submit the form by the prescribed deadline anyway.

The total number of individuals who did not receive their old age pension due to non-submission of proof of life letters was as follows. A in the 90 plus age range, 147 and B in the 80 plus age range, 806. On learning that various pensioner accounts with completed proof of life forms had been temporarily suspended, the Department opted to undertake a full review of all email and counter submissions since May 2025.

This register is held in Excel format and statuses have been continuously updated throughout the course of the past week, so regrettably the Department is unable to extract a snapshot of time that would indicate the exact number of accounts that were suspended erroneously.

Records indicate that the total number of suspended pensioner accounts as at 8 January 2026 are as follows: In the 90 plus pensioner demographic, 35, 15 of whom are local and 20 of whom are overseas and in the 80 plus pensioner demographic, 191, 109 of which are local and 82 of whom are overseas.

Pensioners living outside Gibraltar are categorised under two distinct departmental sections depending on the method of payment. The first is non-local pensioners with sort code banking services, which are classified under the pension section and paid via BACS. This means that the standard pension section has both local and overseas pensioners under their responsibility. The second is non-local pensioners paid via Crown Agents, and these are pensioners who do not have international banking services with sort code and cannot be paid via BACS. These pensioners are categorised under the overseas pension section.

The third is non-local Moroccan pensioners with or without international banking services who have opted to receive their pension via Banque Populaire. These pensioners are also categorised under the overseas pension section. Pensioners who are categorised under the standard pension section as described in the first of the categories I just described were included in the proof-of-life exercise that is departmentally led and currently taking place.

The last comprehensive exercise undertaken for all pensioners, local and non-local, was in 2009. The total number of certificates that have been and will be issued to non-locals under this category, although the exercise is not yet complete, will amount to in the region of 1,649. Proof-of-life services for pensioners are categorised under Crown Agents. Bank payments are contracted on a yearly basis. Crown agents commence the current year's exercise in September, so data for 2025 is not yet available in a final form but I will give the House the following details.

In respect of calendar year 2022, 1,446 pensioners are categorised, of which 364 are currently suspended due to non-submission of the proof-of-life information. For 2023, the number is 1,459, of which 206 were suspended. For 2024, 1,435, with 203 suspended and for 2025, 1,539, as at 10 October 2025, although the deadline for the final submission was 31 December 2025, and we do not have the final number of those that will be suspended as a result.

The number of pension accounts initially suspended decreases as pensioners are located or make contact with the Crown Agents. The figure listed, which I just gave the House, is the hopeful final number, although inevitably there are always individuals that cannot be located and remain suspended in status for a set period until this is updated to presumed dead.

In terms of the proof-of-life services to the category of individuals which I described as non-local Moroccan pensioners, the work in respect of this category is undertaken directly by the Overseas Pension Section, and suspensions due to non-return or relocation of property in Morocco tend to be high in number. The reduction is customarily prompted through suspension of payment. There was no exercise undertaken in 2022 and in 2023-2024.

Of 1,938 pensioners who were paid in this way, 131 have seen their payments suspended, finally, and in 2025 of 1,735 pensioners who were paid in this way, 97 were suspended.

140 **Hon. A Sanchez:** Madam Speaker, I am grateful to the Hon. Chief Minister for that extensive answer.

145 In relation to Question 926, and the need for a more effective public awareness, I note that the Hon. Chief Minister has noted that there were letters sent three weeks in advance. I believe that he said but given that there are a lot of elderly individuals that may rely on relatives to check their mail, there might be elderly individuals that might have been in hospital during this time or other such examples.

150 Would the Hon. Chief Minister be able to elaborate as to why there was not an official announcement made in relation to the Proof of Life exercise, which gave information to the public about this exercise, and would perhaps have alerted family members to be aware that this was going to take place, and perhaps be aware that they had to be on top of the mail?

155 **Hon. Chief Minister:** Madam Speaker, can I start by thanking the hon. Lady directly for her very kind messages at the time that I was not able to be in this House, which demonstrates that despite our political differences, we are all supportive of each other when we are down for health reasons. I was very grateful to receive her message.

160 165 Madam Speaker, there was no public communication about this because I was not told it was happening. I will be very frank with the House, I found out that this Proof of Life exercise was happening because I got complaints from pensioners that they had not been paid their pensions, and when I asked what had happened, I found out that this Proof of Life exercise had been undergone, and as a result, some people were not getting their pensions. But at the same time, it is also true that if we had put out a public statement, that might have put on enquiry those who might want to try and take advantage and continue to receive pensions that they might not be entitled to. In other words, the family of individuals who might have passed away, who want to continue to receive pensions illegally, might then have been able to return the Proof of Life information because they would have been alive to it.

170 175 So, it is a combination of factors. My view is that we need to be a little bit more careful about how we carry out these exercises in future. I commend the Department for doing this exercise. It is absolutely right that they should do it. They were right to take the initiative to do it, because none of us can believe that it is right to continue to pay monies to pensioners who have passed away, and we do need to check that periodically because systems are not yet talking to each other, in particular when individuals are not resident in Gibraltar. My view also is that as technology changes, the methods in which departments speak to each other are accelerating massively, and the Government is doing a lot of work in that respect, and so therefore the registration of a death should automatically trigger notification throughout Government departments.

I am very pleased to see the work that ITLD and other departments are doing to join up these systems, which I hope will mean that these issues are not as prevalent in the future.

180 **Hon. A Sanchez:** Madam Speaker, in relation to Question 927, I appreciate that these questions were filed in October, but does the Hon. Minister have information as to whether all of the issues that arose in October and indeed we have information that they arose as far back as August, and were affecting payment runs as far back as August... Does the Hon. Minister have information as to whether all of these issues have now been addressed, and whether they have been ongoing in November and December, or whether they have been addressed and there are no more issues in relation to pension payments?

185 **Hon. Chief Minister:** Well, Madam Speaker, I have the information that I have given the House, but I can also tell her anecdotally that I have had absolutely no further complaints from old-age pensioners getting in touch with me to say that there are issues, so I should commend the

190 department for having resolved those issues quite quickly. As soon as the problem arose, and they saw that the problem had arisen because they themselves were getting complaints from pensioners, and they got a call from my office asking for information because I was getting complaints, they immediately moved to resolve the problem. That does not mean that there are not perhaps some pensioners who may not have received their pensions, but I certainly have not had any further communication in that respect, and if there are such pensioners, no doubt they will have got in touch with the department and the department will have resolved it the minute 195 the pensioner, alive, as we wish them all to be, has got in touch with the department and said that there is a problem.

**Madam Speaker:** Next question.

200

**Q930/2025**  
**Long term sickness –**  
**Monthly breakdown**

**Clerk:** Question 930, the Hon. J Ladislaus.

205 **Hon. J Ladislaus:** Can the Government provide a monthly breakdown in relation to long term sickness since January 2022 to date, including the number of days employees have been on long term sick, grade and reason for sickness?

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

210 **Chief Minister (Hon. F R Picardo):** Well, Madam Speaker, I am advised by my officials that this information is too voluminous to provide in the timeframe available.

215 **Hon. J Ladislaus:** I am grateful for an indication, Madam Speaker, but if I could have an estimate as to how long it would take to compile and whether we hope to receive that information or not, and whether it is going to be across the floor of the House, behind the Speaker's chair, how is that information going to be conveyed?

220 **Hon. Chief Minister:** In fact, Madam Speaker, I am told that this requires a very intense exercise going through papers, literally, from 2022 to date, and that it would be much more laborious than is worth doing in terms of the costs that would be involved. So, I am afraid I have to tell the hon. Lady that it is not possible for us to give the information. If she agrees, and this is something we could do, we could keep a record of this going forward so that we are able to provide it from now, but this record does not exist and creating the record is far too voluminous to do.

225 **Hon. J Ladislaus:** Yes, Madam Speaker, if the Hon. Chief Minister could perhaps just confirm that that record will be kept from now on and obviously I will revisit the point at some point in the future.

230 **Hon. Chief Minister:** Well, Madam Speaker, I can, but she and I have one thing in common, amongst many others, no doubt, that we are Members of this Parliament, we are not in the Administration, we are not the bureaucrats. So can I, because we are saying this today, perhaps invite her to put this question again with your leave, perhaps in three months' time so that we have time to build a record, not six months' time, and in that way test that in fact the record is being kept. So, I should then have the information, at least from January of 2026, to provide for

235 her, which should, given the nature of the information that she is seeking, which is about long-term sickness, actually disclose information going back even before January 2026.

**Madam Speaker:** Next question.

240

**Q931/2025**  
**GHA, former Medical Director –**  
**Application for the detailed assessment of legal fee costs**

**Clerk:** Question 931, the Hon. J Ladislaus.

245 **Hon. J Ladislaus:** Has the application for the detailed assessment of costs as to the GHA's former Medical Director's legal fees relating to proceedings against him in respect of a bullying claim now been heard by the Court and judgment handed down, or has the matter been settled between the parties? If the matter has concluded, please provide details as to the amount recovered, if not please provide an indication as to when this matter is likely to conclude.

250

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

255 **Chief Minister (Hon. F R Picardo):** Madam Speaker, the matter has still not been heard by the courts. I understand we are awaiting a hearing date.

260

**Hon. J Ladislaus:** Does the Hon. Chief Minister have any information as to whether the matter is perhaps likely to settle before a hearing date is identified?

**Hon. Chief Minister:** Madam Speaker, I am afraid not, and it is not something on which I think we can do much. We have to await a date.

265 **Hon. J Ladislaus:** Madam Speaker, the only reason I ask is because at 3.5.13 of the Auditor's Report for 2018-2019, which is a fair few years ago now, it does state that the Medical Director's lawyers subsequently filed a response to the point of dispute in respect of costs. However, the Senior Executive Officer at No. 6 Convent place explained that the Medical Director's lawyers had been discussing with the appellant's lawyers the possibility of settling the matter without a hearing.

270 So, I will ask, but I am sure that I am correct to infer that those discussions were not fruitful and did not reach a settlement. Am I correct?

275

**Hon. Chief Minister:** Madam Speaker, as we would have each have said to each other in a different place, *res ipsa loquitur*.

**Madam Speaker:** Next question.

275

**Q932-5/2025**  
**Marine Maritime Services Ltd –**  
**Training; Occupational health referrals breakdown; Occupational healthcare costs breakdown;**  
**Re-tender for the occupational Health Service contract**

**Clerk:** Question 932. The Hon. J Ladislaus.

280      **Hon. J Ladislaus:** What training and to who has Marine, it should read, Medical Services Limited provided in accordance with the occupational health contract?

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

285      **Chief Minister (Hon. F R Picardo):** Madam Speaker, I will answer this question together with Questions 933 to 935 in relation to Marine Maritime Services Ltd.

**Clerk:** Question 933. The Hon. J Ladislaus.

290      **Hon. J Ladislaus:** Can the Government provide a breakdown as to how many occupational health referrals have been managed since January 2022 to date?

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

295      **Hon. J Ladislaus:** Can the Government provide a monthly breakdown of occupational healthcare costs for the period between January 2022 to date for all Government entities, authorities and agencies which are being provided with occupational health services by Marine. Again, Medical Services Limited?

300      **Clerk:** Question 935. The Hon. J Ladislaus.

305      **Hon. J Ladislaus:** As outlined in the Principal Auditor's Report for 2018/2019, why did not the Government re-tender for the occupational Health Service contract, in accordance with the Procurement (Public Sector Contracts) Regulations 2016, and instead entered a contract with a value of £1,190,000 directly with Maritime, again should read Medical Services Limited?

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

310      **Chief Minister (Hon. F R Picardo):** Madam Speaker, Marine Maritime Medical Services Ltd. have no such contracts with the Government. Madam Speaker, a total of 1,182 occupational health referrals have been managed by His Majesty's Government of Gibraltar agencies, authorities and Government-owned companies since January 2022 to date.

The breakdown of occupational health referrals undertaken per calendar year is as follows: In 2022, 130; In 2023, 340; In 2024, 295; In 2025, 405; and in 2026, 12.

315      **Hon. J Ladislaus:** Madam Speaker, we have heard that the breakdown is in respect of Government-owned companies. Can the Hon. Chief Minister perhaps outline which Government companies he is referring to?

320      **Hon. Chief Minister:** I cannot, Madam Speaker, because I do not have an information that gives me a breakdown. The hon. Lady has asked the question, but I do not have in the information I have available a breakdown of what companies are referred to.

325      **Hon. J Ladislaus:** Madam Speaker, are any of the companies that the Government seeks occupational health care services from Marine, sorry, Maritime Medical Services Ltd.?

**Hon. Chief Minister:** Yes, Madam Speaker.

330      **Hon. J Ladislaus:** So, Madam Speaker, I will ask the question. Why did not the Government re-tender for the occupational health service contracts in accordance with the Procurement Public

Sector Contracts Regulations 2016 and instead enter the contract with a value of £1,190,000 directly with Maritime Medical Services Ltd.?

335 **Hon. Chief Minister:** Well, Madam Speaker, if she is asking the question about Maritime Medical Services Ltd, I would need notice of the question.

340 **Hon. J Ladislaus:** So, Madam Speaker, am I correct in saying that the Hon. Chief Minister is, just like his colleague did yesterday, the Minister for Health, refusing to answer the question due to a simple typo? Because the Hon. Chief Minister definitely knows what I am referring to.

345 **Hon. Chief Minister:** No, Madam Speaker, because that is not a typo. A typo is when you type something incorrectly and you misspell something. This is not a misspelling, this is a different company name and for the reasons, therefore, that the Hon. Minister for Health and Business gave yesterday, and in the same trenchant terms that she expressed the position, the Government takes the view that the hon. Lady needs to get right the name of the companies that she is asking about so that the Government can properly answer their questions.

I mean, as the Hon. Minister for Health said yesterday, they have one job.

350 **Madam Speaker:** Next question.

**Q936/2025**  
**Hospital Fees –**  
**Arrears write-off**

355 **Clerk:** Question 936, the Hon. J Ladislaus.

360 **Hon. J Ladislaus:** Have the arrears write-off requests outlined at 2.12.13 of the Principal Auditor's report for 2018/2019 amounting to £2,465,075 which relate to hospital fees been approved by the Financial Secretary? Why have these outstanding sums been left unaddressed for such a lengthy period of time?

365 **Clerk:** Answer the Hon. Chief Minister.

370 **Chief Minister (Hon. F R Picardo):** No, Madam Speaker, the write-off has not yet been approved by the Financial Secretary.

375 **Hon. J Ladislaus:** Madam Speaker, for what reasons have not they been approved?

**Hon. Chief Minister:** Because the Financial Secretary is awaiting information in respect of one of the matters.

370 **Hon. J Ladislaus:** And does the Hon. Chief Minister have a timeline as to when that information would be forthcoming for that decision to be taken?

375 **Hon. Chief Minister:** No, Madam Speaker, because necessarily it is not information in the hands of the Government and therefore, I would be speculating about when we might be able to obtain it from a third party.

**Hon. J Ladislaus:** Madam Speaker, can the Hon. Chief Minister perhaps elaborate to which of the debtors that information relates perhaps?

380       **Hon. Chief Minister:** No, Madam Speaker, because I do not have the names, I have numbers.

385       **Hon. J Ladislaus:** Yes, in terms of numbers, because as I understand it, Debtor 1 owed invoices from 2010 to 2018 of £1,967,957 and so on and so forth for Debtor 2 and Debtor 3, and that is in respect of a total of £2,465,000. So can the Hon. Chief Minister perhaps just reference which of the three debtors it is, just so we know, because the sums obviously differ significantly.

390       **Hon. Chief Minister:** Madam Speaker, in the information I have, it is not clear which of the debtors is relevant to the information being outstanding or whether it is more than one of them etc but I do not see what the hon. Lady would gain if I were to say number 2 or number 1 or number 3. How does that avail her, the community or the House of any useful information?

395       **Hon. J Ladislaus:** Madam Speaker, the point to be made there is that there are serious debts in respect of these three debtors, some of them dating back in respect of Debtor 1 to 2010. So is the Hon. Chief Minister happy that these debts should date back that long without them having been addressed?

400       **Hon. Chief Minister:** Madam Speaker, that is not what the question is about. The question is about writing off the amounts. So is the hon. Lady asking me whether I would like to see the amounts written off?

405       My answer to that question would be no. I would like to see the amounts recovered and repaid and further work done in that respect. Work which I know is diligently being done by the Financial Secretary and the Central Arrears Unit.

410       Why would it be helpful to the Government or to the taxpayer that we should accelerate writing off the amounts due and giving up on recovering them? I would have thought Madam Speaker, that it is in the interest of all of us that we more diligently pursue the recovery of those amounts even if it takes more time than we might all like to recover at least part of that because to pursue the line that the hon. Lady is suggesting is simply to wave goodbye to £2,465,000.

415       **Hon. J Ladislaus:** Madam Speaker, the reason that I put the question in these terms is because at 2.12.13 of the Principal Auditor's Report 2018-2019 it states that these irrecoverable arrears pertain to three long-stay patients. Now I ask the question, does the Hon. Chief Minister expect that these sums are indeed recoverable? Because that would be fantastic given that it is over £2,000,000 but is that an expectation now, a reasonable expectation?

420       **Hon. Chief Minister:** Madam Speaker, if there were not at least the slightest chance they would have been written off. If there is at least the slightest chance, should we not pursue it and not write it off?

425       My answer to that rhetorical question is that we should and for that reason, because that is the view of the Financial Secretary, who is the person with responsibility for this, this is not a political issue. The Financial Secretary has rightly, in my view, taken the view that he needs to keep these cases open.

**Madam Speaker:** Next question.

425

**Q937/2025**  
**Former Police Constable –**  
***Ex gratia* payment**

**Clerk:** Question 937, the Hon. J Ladislaus.

430

**Hon. J Ladislaus:** Why was a former Police Constable who had been dismissed in 2010 after the Disciplinary Board recommended termination of service without loss of pension, as outlined at paragraphs 3.6.20 to 3.6.24 of the Principal Auditor's report for 2018/2019, paid an *ex gratia* payment of £170,669 on 26 January 2024, even after the Principal Auditor had questioned the propriety of awarding the former police constable a full pension?

435

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

**Chief Minister (Hon. F R Picardo):** Madam Speaker, the *ex-gratia* payment made in January 440 2024 did not recognise any legal entitlement to a pension, which does not exist. It was a discretionary and exceptional payment made after considering the matter in the round, including the long passage of time and the specific personal circumstances involved.

445 As I have stated previously in this House, *ex gratia* payments are a lawful and established mechanism used by Government on legal advice to resolve cases where there is no legal obligation, but where it is nonetheless judged to be in the public interest to bring a matter to a close and to avoid the greater financial and litigation risks that can arise if disputes are allowed to continue.

**Madam Speaker:** Next question.

450

**Q938/2025**  
**Public Interest Disclosures (Employment Act) –**  
**Transfer of former police officers to civil service jobs**

**Clerk:** Question 938, the Hon. J Ladislaus.

455

**Hon. J Ladislaus:** Of the 24 former police officers transferred from their RGP posts into other Civil Service posts after 4 February 2022, how many were given protection under the provisions of Part IV A Public Interest Disclosures of the Employment Act in the context of the 2024 McGrail Inquiry?

460

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

**Chief Minister (Hon. F R Picardo):** Madam Speaker, none.

**Madam Speaker:** Next question.

465

**Q939/2025**

**Royal Gibraltar Police officers –  
Early retirement *ex gratia* payments**

470

**Clerk:** Question 939, the Hon. J Ladislaus.

475

**Hon. J Ladislaus:** Please provide the reasons behind the *ex gratia* payments totalling £799,714 relating to the early retirement of 4 Royal Gibraltar Police officers made during the period May 2023 to July 2023, as outlined at paragraphs 5.5.21 and 5.5.23 of the Principal Auditor's Report 2018/2019. For what reason(s) was the Principal Auditor not provided with this information when requested?

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**Chief Minister (Hon. F R Picardo):** Madam Speaker, as I already told the House during the very recent debate on the Principal Auditor's Report, an *ex gratia* payment is by definition a discretionary settlement made without any admission of legal liability and without any legal obligation to pay. These are standard tools used in both the public and private sectors to resolve disputes cost effectively.

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They are used to avoid greater financial exposure, uncertainty and legal fees associated with litigation and are made on legal advice. As to the second part of the question, I am advised the Principal Auditor was provided with all information held on record in respect of these four payments. He was also expressly offered access for his staff to review the files directly, but that offer was not taken up and no further queries or acknowledgements were received.

**Madam Speaker:** Next question.

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**Q940-2/2025**  
**GHA recruitment process –**  
**Bulletin no. NUR 11/25**

**Clerk:** Question 940, the Hon. J Ladislaus.

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**Hon. J Ladislaus:** On what basis were 8 retired fire officers awarded increased pension and gratuity awards by way of equivalent *ex gratia* payments to reflect an enhanced CPD allowance, which came into effect after all 8 officers had retired?

**Hon. Chief Minister:** Answer, the Hon. Chief Minister.

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**Chief Minister (Hon. F R Picardo):** Madam Speaker, I will answer this question together with Questions 941 and 942.

**Clerk:** Question 941, the Hon. J Ladislaus.

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**Hon. J Ladislaus:** Why did the Government approve the revision of the pensions of 24 Gibraltar Fire Rescue Service retirees to include an enhanced CPD allowance which came into effect after they had retired, even after the Principal Auditor had voiced his opinion that these were irregular payments and that it was highly improper for them to be awarded?

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**Clerk:** Question 942, the Hon. J Ladislaus.

520 **Hon. J Ladislaus:** Above and beyond the 32 Gibraltar Fire Rescue Service retirees who were referred to in the Principal Auditor's Report at paragraphs 3.6.7 to 3.6.19, have any further Gibraltar Fire Rescue Service retirees, who retired before the enhanced CPD allowance was introduced in 2015, had their pension and gratuity awards revised to reflect that enhanced CPD allowance?

525 **Clerk:** Answer the Hon. the Chief Minister.

530 **Chief Minister (Hon. F R Picardo):** Madam Speaker, the individuals in question were active participants in the negotiations on the enhanced CPD regime and retired with the agreement of the Government in the negotiations that they would benefit from the agreed changes once finalised. However, upon the agreement's conclusion, it became evident that they had been excluded. Accordingly at the request of Unite the Union and with the agreement of the Government, steps were taken to rectify this omission.

Madam Speaker, in relation to Question 941, the Government did not agree with the position of the Principal Auditor.

535 And in 942, I am advised that no other GFRS personnel have had their pension and gratuity awards revised in the form of ex gratia payments on the basis of the 2015 CPD increase, given that the 32 retirees referred to captures all those who had been in receipt of the allowance since its introduction in 2007 and up to 2015.

540 **Hon. J Ladislaus:** Madam Speaker, is this now Government policy and does it apply to other departments? Can the Hon. Chief Minister perhaps comment as to that?

**Hon. Chief Minister:** Madam Speaker, this has always been Government policy.

545 **Hon. J Ladislaus:** Madam Speaker, just for the avoidance of doubt, so Government policy now is to give retirees of any department an enhanced CPD allowance once they have retired? That is Government policy?

550 **Hon. Chief Minister:** No, Madam Speaker. Government policy is that when we are negotiating with a department and that negotiation involves a group of people who are covered by the negotiation, if they retire during the period of the negotiation, we honour the result of the negotiation in respect of those who were imposed whilst the negotiation was ongoing or otherwise covered by the negotiation. The hon. Lady might like to reflect that this relates to the quite remarkable circumstances that we inherited from them, where people were paid for not doing work.

555 That is to say, there was a group of people in the City Fire Brigade, in the Gibraltar Fire and Rescue Service, who were being paid an ambulance allowance for not going and pursuing ambulance duties, because ambulance duties had been taken away from them, but they were nonetheless still being paid to do the ambulance work. That is why the Government entered this negotiation. This is why the Government honoured, in respect of those who were imposed when we were negotiating, that even though they retired before the negotiation was completed, they would get the benefit of the negotiation.

560 In doing so, the Government has reduced the liability to the taxpayer very considerably indeed, because we no longer have to pay the higher amount in respect of the ambulance allowance, which we were liable to pay for people who were no longer anywhere near an ambulance or involved in anything to do with an ambulance.

570 **Hon. J Ladislaus:** May I ask the mechanism by which the CPD allowance was paid? Just to clarify, CPD relates to Continued Professional Development Allowance. If I may ask, was that paid up to a certain date? Did it take into account specific dates on which these retirees would have been doing CPD, supposedly? Or how was that worked out? Was that an arbitrary manner in which it was worked out?

575 **Hon. Chief Minister:** Madam Speaker, I think I actually gave that information in the context of my first answer. I think the hon. Lady may just not have understood it or heard it.

580 **Hon. J Ladislaus:** Madam Speaker, I think the question is, was this an enhancement to the ultimate pension that these firefighters received? So was there a set amount or was it different for each firefighter, for example, to take into account the CPD that they had undertaken whilst they were at work because otherwise, we are in a position whereby somebody retires and is somehow getting an allowance for Continued Professional Development. It seems a bizarre scenario. So, if the Hon. Chief Minister can explain what that allowance took into account when it was paid over.

585 **Hon. Chief Minister:** I do not think the hon. Lady has understood what I said in relation to what the CPD allowance replaced, Madam Speaker. It replaced the ambulance work that they were not doing, and they would have got a pensionable allowance for.

590 **Madam Speaker:** Next question.

**Q943-8/2025**

**Import duty –**

**Current levels; Increase from new transaction tax; Impact study; Plan of action to support ailing businesses; Possible disappearance of strong British brands; VAT restrictions**

**Clerk:** Question 943, the Hon. C Sacarello.

595 **Hon. C Sacarello:** Could the Government please provide information on the current levels of import duty received broken down into two sections, namely by UK trade and by EU trade? Please provide figures for the financial years 2020, 2021, 2022, 2023, 2024 and 2025 to date.

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

600 **Hon. Chief Minister:** Madam Speaker, I will answer this question together with Questions 944 to 948.

**Clerk:** Question 944, the Hon. C Sacarello.

605 **Hon. C Sacarello:** Could the Government please provide details on estimated increased import duty revenues resulting from the new Transaction Tax?

**Clerk:** Question 945, the Hon. C Sacarello.

610 **Hon. C Sacarello:** Could the Government please provide details of any impact study undertaken on the impact of the forthcoming Transaction Tax on the local economy in terms of business costs, consumer behaviour, profitability and business viability, particularly in the retail and wholesale sectors?

615 **Clerk:** Question 946, the Hon. C Sacarello.

**Hon. C Sacarello:** When will the Government provide the business community with a detailed plan of action to support ailing businesses that may be directly affected by the transaction tax.

620 **Clerk:** Question 947, the Hon. C Sacarello.

**Hon. C Sacarello:** How does the Government presume to address the risk of Gibraltar losing some of its British identity via the possible disappearance of strong British brands which have for so many decades anchored Main Street and beyond, where businesses are facing payment of tariffs in addition to the proposed Transaction Tax?

625 **Clerk:** Question 948, the Hon. C Sacarello.

**Hon. C Sacarello:** Can the Government please confirm that a Gibraltar B2C Company business to consumer will be able to sell online into Spain and Europe without any VAT restrictions and limits on value.

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

**Chief Minister (Hon. F R Picardo):** Madam Speaker, the information requested in respect of Question 943 is in the schedule I now hand over. The Government has carried out the estimates referred to by the hon. Member in Question 944. Nonetheless, we will not divulge that information at this juncture since these figures remain commercially and politically sensitive.

In relation to 945, it is the case that negotiations on our agreement with the EU have now been completed, but it would not be prudent to provide the hon. Member with any of the details requested, much of which is commercially sensitive at this juncture and before the Treaty is implemented. The Government can nonetheless confirm that it has undertaken the assessments that the hon. Gentleman refers to.

In relation to 946, as I have already said, and as the hon. Member knows, in September 2025 I created the Business Transition Advisory Group to support our business community as we prepare for and implement our Treaty arrangements with the EU.

I have said many times that we simply do not accept that businesses will need support as a direct result of having to pay the transaction tax at higher rates than that which apply under the current import duty regime. The Government will in any event assist businesses as we transition to the new indirect taxation regime established under the Treaty and take action to redress any collective or individual situation which may arise without breaching relevant State Aid rules. Our agreement with the EU will not in any way, shape or form erode our uniquely British identity, our Gibraltarian identity, our way of life and our way of doing things.

The agreement will benefit not only British brands in Main Street, but Main Street as a whole. Visitors in their millions, eager to shop, will be able to come to Gibraltar with an ease that has never been known to us by land, sea and air. All attracted by the British appeal which is one of the hallmarks of our products. Visitors will come to British Gibraltar to buy British products. The demand will remain. What we have avoided with this agreement is a Main Street with no footfall, a Main Street open only to local consumers.

That was the choice we faced. The Government has and is working with the retail sector in Gibraltar to ensure that they will be able to make a success of this agreement and the Government has said that it will lend its support to those businesses in any way possible, subject as I said before Madam Speaker, to not breaching relevant State Aid rules. Madam Speaker, the Government can confirm that there will be no limits on value with respect to what a business in Gibraltar is able to sell online to a customer in Spain or a customer anywhere in the EU and the same destination

665 principle rules would apply in respect of sales as would between Member States of the European Union.

ANSWER TO QUESTION 948

ANSWER TO QUESTION 943

YEAR	REGION	TOTAL
2020	EU	£44,070,524.62
2020	UK	£2,563,325.42
2021	EU	£42,626,326.24
2021	UK	£1,678,426.69
2022	EU	£42,483,867.52
2022	UK	£3,042,865.33
2023	EU	£42,871,951.05
2023	UK	£4,331,315.65
2024	EU	£42,016,025.90
2024	UK	£3,482,599.81
2025	EU	£30,188,758.13
2025	UK	£3,381,594.57

670 **Hon. C Sacarello:** Madam Speaker, I will take them one by one and start off with 943. Actually sorry, 943 is the schedule, 944.

**Madam Speaker:** Does the hon. Member want to revert to 943 later? No?

675 **Hon. C Sacarello:** So, with regards to 944, I understand that the Government has prepared as the Chief Minister has explained but refuses to divulge for politically and commercially sensitive reasons. However, could I ask the Chief Minister, will part of this additional revenue generated from the transaction tax which is slightly larger be ring-fenced for these ailing businesses?

680 **Hon. Chief Minister:** Madam Speaker, for the millionth time we do not think there will be ailing businesses.

Second, if I said yes to the question I have just been asked by the hon. Gentleman, I would be immediately flagging that Gibraltar intends to breach the Treaty on Day 1 because we would be in breach of European State Aid rules immediately.

685 **Hon. C Sacarello:** Madam Speaker, there are different ways of supporting businesses, and the Chief Minister knows that. So does the Government have plans, are they willing to divulge where the additional revenue is earmarked to be spent?

690 **Hon. Chief Minister:** Madam Speaker, so the hon. Gentleman would ask that I answer his question by saying that yes, we will make the money available in a way that circumvents State Aid rules. In other words, he wants me to immediately flag to the European Commission and the European Council and the European Parliament, who have not yet ratified the Treaty, that the Government will find ways of getting round the State Aid rules. So the hon. Gentleman really does need to reflect a little more on the way that he poses questions because just by posing the question in a particular way he can be suggesting a desire to see Gibraltar be put in breach of the international legal obligations that the United Kingdom is going to acquire on our behalf if this Parliament asks the United Kingdom to ratify the Treaty.

700 So, Madam Speaker, in that context any increased revenue that will be received by the Government's general account will go to the expenditure of Gibraltar on the magnificent public services that are offered under the GSLP Liberal Government.

705 **Hon. C Sacarello:** Madam Speaker, I thank the Chief Minister for the answer there, but reassert that there is no circumstance whatsoever that myself or indeed my party or any one of us on this side as individuals would ever seek to circumvent in contradiction with international law and rules on trade and commerce. It is simply about supporting local business and they will be most disappointed to hear that there is no resolute answer from the Chief Minister.

710 Moving on to 944, sorry that was 944, 945, why will the Government not share part at least the essence or summary of some of the work that they have put into this impact study that the Chief Minister says has been conducted?

715 **Hon. Chief Minister:** Madam Speaker, I would not want the hon. Gentleman to think that I have said that he would circumvent anything in contradiction because such a phrase is nonsensical and means nothing and I do not want him to think that I have suggested that because I would not know what it is he means I have suggested. And it would not be true to say that I have given no resolute answer to helping businesses through the transition period.

720 I have just given a resolute answer to not doing it in the way that the hon. Gentleman has suggested which is a breach of State Aid rules and Madam Speaker, we will not provide the information set out that he is asking for in 945 for the reasons I have already given in my first answer.

725 **Hon. C Sacarello:** Still on 945 Madam Speaker, will the Chief Minister kindly give some information on who carried out the impact study and who was consulted?

730 **Hon. Chief Minister:** Madam Speaker, the impact study was carried out by the Government itself.

735 **Hon. C Sacarello:** Madam Speaker, on 946 the Chief Minister mentioned that he would set up a business advisory group and that he was not willing to give any further information or detailed commitments as to how to help but I do latch on to the fact that there is an angle of support there which he mentioned in the summer and I will move on to 947 which is about our British identity.

740 Madam Speaker, the Chief Minister says that there is no impact at all, that British brands will continue to work strongly and operate strongly on Main Street but speaking to owners of such businesses, they know that for any product sourced from a British business where they have originally sourced their products from a third country, so in other words where the supply line exists between Gibraltar and the UK and the UK supplier has brought in products from a third country, they will be subject to an additional 12% tariff. That means at 15% it goes up to 27% and at 17% transaction tax it would then be up to 29%, just shy of a third and this would render the businesses uncompetitive. I have been informed by a lot of these companies that that is a huge concern of theirs. There is some doubt that they will be able to exist. So, there will be an erosion of British and certainly British brands on our High Street and my question is, what is the Government doing to address this?

745 **Hon. Chief Minister:** I am very grateful, Madam Speaker, for the hon. Gentleman's realisation at last that there is what he calls an angle of support. It is the support I have been saying all along is going to be there but in relation to 946, which is when he made that remark, I insist we do not believe that there will be alien businesses in Gibraltar.

750 And in relation to 947, Madam Speaker, the Government just does not agree with the analysis. The hon. Gentleman needs to understand what he is talking about in the context of the geographic area in which we are and in which these brands are offered and will be available for offer to the whole of the 480 million people of the single market. Indeed, we should now start to say the 480 million and 38,000 people of the single market, because we will now be included in that market, Madam Speaker.

755 The hon. Gentleman is right. If a product comes from the United Kingdom, it would come under the trade, the TCA. The TCA requires that if something comes from the United Kingdom and is not produced in the United Kingdom but comes from a country which is subject to tariffs, that pays 12% duty when it comes into the EU single market. Not when it comes into Gibraltar, when it comes into the EU single market. That is to say, when it comes to Gibraltar or whether it comes to Spain or France or Italy, Denmark or Germany or the other member states of the single market and in addition to that, he is absolutely right to say, in Gibraltar, it will suffer the transaction tax.

760 That is to say, 17% or 15% in the first year, 16% in the second year, or depending on what product it is, the reduced rate of 5% or 0%, because in some instances it may be 0% or 5%. Except, of course, Madam Speaker, the same is true of that product going into Spain but not at an increased transaction tax on top of the 12% of 17%, but actually an additional 21%. So that product, when it comes from the United Kingdom, because under the TCA it attracts 12%, will in Spain have to be offered at price plus 12 plus 21, 33 and in Gibraltar at 12 plus 17, 29. So actually more affordable in Gibraltar than in the rest of the Member States of the European Union, other than Luxembourg, which has the same VAT rate as we will have transaction tax, because remember that we will never be lower than the lowest in the Union, but we do not have to be higher.

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770 So actually, what you are going to have is the jurisdiction in the single market, in the south of Europe, which will have the lowest taxation indirectly on that product and indeed, Madam Speaker, we have had discussions with traders who have these concerns, etc. etc. And recently I saw on the national broadcaster a report of a new British brand coming to Gibraltar and establishing, indeed re-establishing itself in Gibraltar as a British brand on the high street after the photograph of the 11th of June 2025. Coming because obviously the retailers, the entrepreneurs, the people who have skin in the game are taking a view quite contrary to what the hon. Gentleman is saying, that Gibraltar is going to be a very attractive place to continue to offer these British brands from. And brands, Madam Speaker, that perforce, because of international economics on which I am not able to lecture, but the Hon. Father of the House could lecture us all, will almost entirely be completed outside of the United Kingdom. So, a new British brand coming to the Gibraltar high street, re-establishing itself because it is not new, it has been here before, with products principally produced outside of the UK, knowing that the 12% will be attracted, actually setting it up in Main Street.

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780 As I said before to the hon. Lady, Madam Speaker, and will be more in the understanding of the lawyers amongst us, *res ipsa loquitur*, which is Latin for 'the thing speaks for itself'.

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**Hon. C Sacarello:** Madam Speaker, I would like to highlight that the businesses that can afford to come to Gibraltar, the British businesses that can afford to are ones that will have a European set up and have therefore avoided the 12% tariffs. So, without competing, there are loads of substitute products in the market and there will no doubt be an erosion on the Britishness, certainly in terms of the brands reflected in town. That is the concern I have been given and one which I express today.

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Moving on to 948, Madam Speaker, would the Chief Minister be able to express the limits on value, beyond which require a greater level of clearance documentation for a B2C business to consumer company?

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**Hon. Chief Minister:** Well Madam Speaker, I do not agree with the hon. Gentleman. There will be some top shops coming to Gibraltar's Main Street, which will demonstrate that British brands are very interested in continuing to start to trade from here, for all of the reasons I have already given him. What tittle-tattle he shares with people in Main Street, I do not know Madam Speaker.

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Perhaps as a member of the Opposition he has more time to mosey his way up and down Main Street. Unfortunately, we are still too busy trying to ensure that we have a final text, approve the un-scrubbed text and undergo the process of ratification and implementation of this treaty to spend our time walking up and down and chatting. Madam Speaker, in relation to the amounts

805 that the hon. Gentleman is referring to, first of all he is being as ever imprecise about what it is that he is trying to get me to address.

810 There are many different amounts in respect of many different parts of the tariff and we would be here for days if I had to take him through what each category requires. In any event, Madam Speaker, I am not here to give him a lecture. I hear the Hon. Leader of the Opposition utter under his breath from a sedentary position that the Leader of the House lectures us on everything all of the time.

815 I wish I had time to spend more time listening to lectures from the Leader of the House, who would fascinate us all with his encyclopaedic knowledge of economics and other things too but all of these things, Madam Speaker, are public. The hon. Gentleman just needs to consult the tariff. It is all available on the Commission's website. He can go on there and he can educate himself about all of the different criteria that apply to the movement of goods between Member States even in the single market if the trade is online business to customer. Why should the Government entertain questions which relate to information which is public?

820 **Hon. C Sacarello:** Madam Speaker, would the Chief Minister be prepared to, in the spirit of cooperation of the House as I was absent for this event, perhaps refer to a talk given at the Gibraltar Day event in London recently by the Attorney-General where he alluded to a value of £10,000 beyond which there would be a greater level of documentation required for B2C transactions between companies and people within the EU?

825 **Hon. Chief Minister:** Madam Speaker, the hon. Gentleman was invited to the event. He was not able to attend. I am not going to say whether that was a good thing or a bad thing. He just was not able to attend.

830 The Attorney-General there was with me and with Peter Montegriffo, the founder of the GSD, setting out to an invited audience the things that are highlights about the Treaty but the things that the Attorney-General referred to relate to what is the publicly available information set out in the Commission website of what the EU rules are.

835 I am not here, Madam Speaker, to give the hon. Gentleman publicly available information. That would be a breach of the rules if I were to do that and if I were to do so, Madam Speaker, we would open a door that would mean that we would be here forever as Hon. Members would be entitled to ask the Government to go away and bring them information that is available, but they do not wish to research themselves.

840 Now, Madam Speaker, AI is there for all of us to use. Can I suggest one of the many artificial intelligences to the hon. Gentleman so that he asks for the information because it is public, the AI will be able to provide it with him. They really are quite remarkable tools. I commend the use of them to the hon. Gentleman.

**Madam Speaker:** Yes, the Hon. Leader of the Opposition.

845 **Hon. Dr K Azopardi:** Madam Speaker, in relation to 944 and in relation to others, the Hon. Chief Minister said they had done the assessment on the transaction tax forecast on 944 and also had done the impact study and so on, and that for politically confidential reasons he would not be willing to give more details across the floor of the House. Is he willing to share those matters and information with us on a confidential basis?

850 **Hon. Chief Minister:** Madam Speaker, I am prepared to do more than that as Chief Minister. I am prepared to invite the hon. Gentleman and such a number of his team as he thinks is appropriate to come to my office and to hear from the Deputy Chief Minister, the Attorney General and myself what the information provides, and how it was compiled and to give him a briefing on the text of the Treaty.

**Madam Speaker:** Next question.

**Q949/2025**

**Mr Jonathan Fisher KC –  
Legal fees**

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**Clerk:** Question 949, the Hon. R M Clinton.

865 **Hon. R M Clinton:** Can the Government advise the total amount of fees charged by Mr Jonathan Fisher KC, of Red Lion Chambers, in respect of his legal opinion on the Principal Auditors report for 2018/2019?

**Clerk:** Answer the Hon. Chief Minister.

870 **Chief Minister (Hon. F R Picardo):** Madam Speaker, I understand we do not yet have a final fee note as work is ongoing. When we do, the information will be posted online in the usual way.

875 **Hon. R M Clinton:** Madam Speaker, given that the opinion was evidently delivered, can the Chief Minister advise what further work would be necessary given the extensive debate we had on the report? It was fairly evident that the Chief Minister was relying on an opinion that had been delivered, so what further work could possibly be required?

**Hon. Chief Minister:** Further work to finalise the work that we are doing in respect of the former Principal Auditor's report in question.

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

885 **Hon. Dr K Azopardi:** Hon. Leader of the Opposition, Madam Speaker, the Chief Minister's original answer talks about the final fee note. Have there been interim fee notes paid? If so, how much has been paid to date?

**Hon. Chief Minister:** I do not have that information with me, Madam Speaker.

890 **Hon. Dr K Azopardi:** Madam Speaker, the question asks the Government to confirm the total amount of fees charged, so perhaps officials would have foreseen that this was an obvious question if there has not been a final note, but there would have been an interim payment made so far.

895 **Hon. Chief Minister:** Well, in that respect, Madam Speaker, I imagine officials would have been thrown by the use of the word total.

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**Hon. Dr K Azopardi:** Well, Madam Speaker, I do not think we are here to play games. It is obvious what my hon. Colleague was asking. Fees charged in relation to providing an opinion, an opinion was provided, it was discussed, at least it was relied upon at length in the debate.

**There may not be a final fee note that has been advanced because further work is being done, but an opinion was relied upon and therefore what we are asking, and it was obvious that what we are asking is what are the fees that have been paid. If there are more fees to be paid, that does not mean that the fees have not been paid so far, and if they have been paid, what are they?**

905      **Hon. Chief Minister:** Well, Madam Speaker, I understand that if they had been paid, they would have been put online, so I refer the hon. Gentleman to the answer I gave a few moments ago.

910      **Hon. Dr K Azopardi:** Does the Chief Minister say that he does not have that in front of him on his sheet, that normally there will be a prepared answer and some sort of supplementary information, is he saying he does not have that? But does he have that information with him today, that is really what I am asking. (*Interjections*)

915      **Hon. Chief Minister:** No, Madam Speaker, I do not.

915      **Madam Speaker:** Next question.

**Q950/2025**  
**GHA recruitment process –**  
**Bulletin no. NUR 11/25**

920      **Clerk:** Question 950, the Hon. R M Clinton.

925      **Hon. R M Clinton:** Can the Government advise if Community Credit Union Co-operative Limited has a money lending licence?

930      **Clerk:** Answer the Hon. Chief Minister.

935      **Chief Minister (Hon. F R Picardo):** Madam Speaker, Community Credit Union Ltd. did not apply for a money lending licence, instead it applied and was awarded an exemption under section 31E of the Financial Services Money Lending Act on the basis that they are acting in the public interest of Gibraltar and its people.

940      **Hon. R M Clinton:** Madam Speaker, can I ask the Chief Minister for the date of the grant of that exemption?

945      **Hon. Chief Minister:** 26th July 2023. I have it there in the supplementary information provided on the same page as I had my first answer.

950      **Hon. R M Clinton:** Madam Speaker, when the Father of the House yesterday told the House that Community Credit Union Limited had a money lending licence, he was perhaps misconstruing the fact that it had an exemption rather than actually had a money lending licence. Would that be the Chief Minister's characterisation?

955      **Hon. Chief Minister:** It has all the attributes of a holder of a money lending licence for that reason, Madam Speaker.

960      **Madam Speaker:** Yes, the Hon. Leader of the Opposition.

965      **Hon. Dr K Azopardi:** If it has got an exemption under the Money Lending Act, because it is acting on, I think, I did not take an exact note, but the Chief Minister said in the public interest of the people of Gibraltar or something like that, or the public interest of Gibraltar, presumably to get an exemption of that type it needs to have Government support, is that right?

**Hon. Chief Minister:** Madam Speaker, it needs to make an application to the Minister for Finance.

955      **Hon. Dr K Azopardi:** And does the Chief Minister know whether, he is the Minister for Finance, whether he has ever given any other company a public interest exemption under the Money Lending Act?

960      **Hon. Chief Minister:** Madam Speaker, I am loath for the purposes of Hansard of speaking from memory, but I believe there may have been one other. I believe there may have been one other which used the same mechanism, but I would ask the hon. Gentleman to give me notice of the question so that I can go back and check whether that other was handled in the same way, and I cannot remember the exact name of the company that I believe may have benefited from this particular clause, if it did.

965      **Hon. Dr K Azopardi:** And what was in this particular case, given that application had to be made to him as Minister for Finance, what was the basis of it? So essentially, as we understood the exchange with the Father of the House, this is a structure set up under a charity, so it is a private company, although quite clearly it is in receipt of Savings Bank monies, ultimately sanctioned, and others, ultimately sanctioned the decision-making the Father of the House is part of. So what was the sort of rationale for the public interest exemption?

970      Why could this, whatever this company is doing, why could it not be done by the Government, by a Government-owned company more directly?

975      **Hon. Chief Minister:** Madam Speaker, the application for the exemption stated that it was a not-for-profit company and that any profits would be retained within Gibraltar Community Initiatives Limited to be utilised for the benefit of the community and for charitable purposes.

980      **Hon. Dr K Azopardi:** Again, I mean, we understand from the exchanges with the Father of the House that this company receives money, it is basically loaning it out to private entities, some of which have then bought other businesses. If the Government was interested in making an ultimate decision to then use Savings Bank monies for that purpose and loan it to an entity, why would the Government not retain control rather than park it in this vehicle? I am trying to grasp the rationale of doing it this way and the public interest case for this convoluted structure.

985      **Hon. Chief Minister:** Well, Madam Speaker, because the Father of the House took the view that this was a better way of doing it than the manner in which the hon. Gentleman has suggested it might also have been done in the context of the explanations that he has given but this is an application made by this company for the reasons I have set out in a structure that is as the Father of the House has explained.

995      **Madam Speaker:** Next question.

Q951/2025  
Community Credit Union Co-operative Ltd –  
Money lent

**Clerk:** Question 951, the Hon. J Ladislaus.

1000      **Hon. R M Clinton:** Can the Government advise to whom Community Credit Union Co-operative Limited has lent any money and on what terms?

**Chief Minister (Hon. F R Picardo):** Madam Speaker, as this is not a Government-owned company, we are unable to provide this information.

1005      **Hon. R M Clinton:** Madam Speaker, given what the Chief Minister said a moment ago about the design of the structure being something the Father of the House desired as opposed to using another structure, and given the Father of the House told us yesterday that he ultimately makes the decision as to whether certain lending will be approved or financed, does the Chief Minister really have no information at all about what this entity is doing and to whom it is lending money?

1010      I already disclosed to the House yesterday that it is apparent this company is lending money to a private concern to buy businesses. Now, I would be interested to hear what the Chief Minister has to say as to whether and how this is in the public interest.

1015      **Hon. Chief Minister:** In doing so, Madam Speaker, the hon. Gentleman is going to hear me refer him to the answers given by the Father of the House.

1015      **Madam Speaker:** The Hon. Leader of the Opposition.

1020      **Hon. Dr K Azopardi:** Madam Speaker, the Father of the House indicated to the Parliament, I think it was yesterday, I lose track of the days sometimes because we live an intense life, that he was part of the ultimate decision-making structure. Indeed, a case is put and there is an assessment and he in effect decides, or in part decides, how this money is to be used and loaned through this structure to private entities. The Father of the House sits atop of the Savings Bank structure, he has got the ministerial responsibility, he is a Minister of the Crown.

1025      These are savers' monies, but in taking those decisions, he is not taking it as a private individual. He is taking those decisions as a Minister of the Crown. Why is not it right that he, and indeed the Chief Minister, should tell the Parliament how this money has been used?

1030      **Hon. Chief Minister:** Madam Speaker, I refer the hon. Gentleman to the answers given by the Father of the House yesterday when all of those issues were referred to already.

1035      **Hon. Dr K Azopardi:** Well, Madam Speaker, he can refer me to the answers that the Father of the House gave, but I did not ask the Father of the House, because he is not the Chief Minister, whether the Chief Minister thinks it is a right in principle that a Minister of the Crown should not account to decisions which are financial in nature that end up in significant money, millions, being dispersed to private entities to purchase other businesses in Gibraltar.

Is it not right that there should be accountability to this Parliament for that decision-making taken as a Minister of the Crown and to the people of Gibraltar?

1040      **Hon. Chief Minister:** There is, Madam Speaker.

1040      **Hon. Dr K Azopardi:** Well, if there is accountability, let it be said where that money has gone, to whom and for what purpose and let it be said now.

1045      **Hon. Chief Minister:** Madam Speaker, we have spent 15 years in this House having the same argument with Members opposite, and the public have agreed with us by returning us to Office every time that when money is lent to third parties, then whatever entity is doing the lending, there are obligations of confidentiality and respect of those lendings. We have had it in this House since the issue of the Sunborn first arose. No bank, no lender is required to provide information as to who it lends money to, because to do so, Madam Speaker, puts the lender in the impossible position of not being competitive because it becomes a lender that has to account publicly for what it does.

Most lenders, although they might not be publicly owned by the taxpayer or might not be sovereigns like a Government, are PLCs. They are public limited companies. They do not have to account to the stock exchanges on which they are quoted.

1055     Indeed, they do not have to account to their shareholders as to who they lend money to, because those are private transactions, because that is in the nature of loaning money. The issue is, does the Government believe that the Minister for Inward Investment and the Savings Bank, also known as the Father of the House, is ensuring that depositors' money in the Savings Bank is being properly invested in all of the many ways in which it is invested, some of it outside of 1060     Gibraltar, some of it in Gibraltar? The answer on behalf of the Government is a resounding yes.

The answer on behalf of the public has been a resounding yes at successive General Elections, despite Hon. Members making the same point in various different ways.

Indeed, the answer on behalf of depositors in the Savings Bank has been even more resoundingly yes, because deposits in the Savings Bank have only increased in all of this period.

1065     **Hon. Dr K Azopardi:** There is a series of red herrings there. First of all, the analogy that is being sought to be drawn of a bank that is a private entity lending money and you do not disclose it, if it is an entirely private transaction from top to bottom, that may be so, but this is not in that sense.

1070     There is decision-making here by a Minister of the Crown, with a specific ministerial responsibility and role within the Savings Bank. Not only does he have a role within the Savings Bank, but he has also got a role in the actual decision-making of the specific transactions, because he said so yesterday. And he does so not because he is the Chief Executive of NatWest Bank, and therefore does not need to account to this Parliament, but he does so because he is a Minister of the Crown, elected by the people of Gibraltar, and accountable to this House and the only reason 1075     he is making these decisions is because he is an elected member of this House. Otherwise, he would not have that responsibility. In the context of all that, the analogy does not hold good.

1080     And I repeat, does the Chief Minister think in those circumstances, a Minister of the Crown should not account to this Parliament, and I am asking him to account to this Parliament, for financial decisions made with monies that are triggered and loaned only because that person is a Minister and we are talking about millions and millions of pounds. We are not talking about pence here.

1085     **Hon. Chief Minister:** Well Madam Speaker, I do not agree. For all of the reasons that we have been setting out consistently for the past 15 years, we have a different view to the hon. Gentleman.

1090     We have a different view to the hon. Gentleman. We have a different view to the Hon. Mr Clinton. We have a different view to the Hon. Mr Daniel Feetham, who set out the same position repeatedly for the number of years that he was responsible for leadership of the GSD and therefore Madam Speaker, the hon. Gentleman is not going to persuade us to change our minds in that respect.

1095     We can ventilate the issue as much as possible, and indeed, for the purposes of his next TikTok, his next Tweet, or his next Facebook, I am very happy for him to get up and once again dramatically ask the question, so that he can then put subtitles on what he says and put it on Facebook, but he is not going to change my mind.

1100     **Madam Speaker:** Next question.

**Q952/2025**  
**GFA Ltd or subsidiaries –**  
**Loan write offs or financial contributions**

**Clerk:** Question 952, the Hon. RM Clinton.

1105 **Hon. R M Clinton:** Can the Government advise whether it has written off any loans to, or made any financial contributions to GFA Limited or its subsidiaries in respect of the development of the Victoria Stadium and if so in what amount and when?

**Clerk:** Answer the Hon. Chief Minister.

1110 **Chief Minister (Hon. F R Picardo):** Madam Speaker, in a slightly less staccato style, other than as already set out in previous answers on funding made available, the Government has not written off any loans to GFA Limited or made any financial contributions to GFA Limited or its subsidiaries, in respect of Victoria Stadium.

1115 **Hon. R M Clinton:** Madam Speaker, the Chief Minister, I do not know if he has made available to him at any point in time, the Audited Financial Statements of GFA Limited for 30 June 2024, in which in note 14 it says the capital contribution relates in respect of £787,483. It says the capital contribution relates to the payments made by HMGOG, in respect of Stadium Development Limited, a subsidiary of GFA Limited, as contributions towards the construction and development of a new sports stadium project in Gibraltar, on the current Victoria Stadium site, incorporating a UEFA category 4 national football stadium at an adjacent residential commercial retail complex. The last line of that statement, Madam Speaker, reads, HMOG have confirmed they are not seeking reimbursement of the payments made.

1125 So, in light of that, Madam Speaker, I ask the Chief Minister whether what he has just told the House is correct, or whether they may need to seek further information.

1130 **Hon. Chief Minister:** Madam Speaker, what I have said is absolutely correct, and I refer the hon. Gentleman to the answer to questions 221 of 2024, 361 of 2024, and 598 of 2025. That is the position, Madam Speaker, whatever the GFA's accountants might say.

1135 **Hon. R M Clinton:** Madam Speaker, my question was quite clear as to whether there had been any financial contributions, and the Chief Minister said no. Now, the GFA's own auditor indicates they have had written a confirmation saying that those contributions, or those loans, or whatever they may be called, have been waived. I mean, does this still stand by a simple answer, no?

**Hon. Chief Minister:** Yes.

**Madam Speaker:** Next question.

1140

**Q953/2025**  
**Office of Immigration and Home Affairs –**  
**Cost of refurbishment and move**

**Clerk:** Question 953, the Hon. D J Bossino.

1145 **Hon. D J Bossino:** What is the total cost of the refurbishment and move of the Office of Immigration and Home Affairs to Leane Place?

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

1150      **Chief Minister (Hon F R Picardo):** The total cost of the refurbishment and move of the Office of Immigration and Home Affairs to Leanne Place was £685,643.52.

**Hon. D J Bossino:** And just by way of confirmation, if you may, can the Hon. Chief Minister confirm that no further costs are expected in relation to this into the future?

1155      **Hon. Chief Minister:** Madam Speaker, I understand that is the final amount. That includes all of the final amount from the CM Info that I have on the pages starting on the first page and continuing thereafter.

1160      **Hon. D J Bossino:** Presumably, these are costs which are going to be totally incurred by the Government. Is that the case?

**Hon. Chief Minister:** Yes, ma'am.

**Madam Speaker:** Next question.

1165

**Q954-6/2025  
West View Park –  
Reclamation; Expected date of units; Number of units**

**Clerk:** Question 954, the Hon. D J Bossino.

1170

**Hon. Chief Minister:** Please confirm whether the Government will be carrying out the reclamation by Westview Park in place of TNG.

1175      **Chief Minister (Hon. F R Picardo):** Madam Speaker, this is the one that I will answer with Question 955 and 956 with thanks to the Clerk.

**Clerk:** Question 955, the Hon. D J Bossino.

1180      **Hon. D J Bossino:** When is it now expected that the units available at the reclamation by Westview Park will be made available to purchasers?

**Clerk:** Question 956, the Hon. D J Bossino.

1185      **Hon. D J Bossino:** How many units are expected to be made available at the reclamation by Westview Park with details of the numbers broken down by their categorisation into 50/50 affordable; young purchasers at a special rate; pensioner rentals; and affordable pensioner purchase?

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

1190

**Chief Minister (Hon. F R Picardo):** Madam Speaker, the Government is currently finalising the options of the reclamation and will make a detailed statement once agreement has been reached. Answers to all other questions will follow thereafter.

1195      **Hon. D J Bossino:** Madam Speaker, further to the answer that the Hon. Chief Minister has given this House, he did say on the 9<sup>th</sup> of January in an interview with GBC that, and I quote:

We have not been able to do with the TNG Foundation the reclamation at Westview Park. We have thoughts, we had, we signed some heads of terms, we could not turn that into a contract.

1200      I close a quote there for now but is he able to reveal why the deal was not able to go through with TNG Foundation?

1205      **Hon. Chief Minister:** Yes, Madam Speaker, because we could not reach agreement.

1210      **Hon. D J Bossino:** The Hon. Chief Minister is being rather flippant today in his responses but so be it. Can he explain why it is that he was not able to reach agreement with this particular entity?

1215      **Hon. Chief Minister:** Well, Madam Speaker, for a number of different reasons, but we were just not able to reach agreement. We had heads of terms we were not able to turn those heads of terms into a contract. Does the hon. Gentleman really expect me to go through the detail of a commercial negotiation and say, well, we could not agree this, we could not agree that, they wanted this, we wanted that?

1220      I mean, first of all, Madam Speaker, that would require a detailed brief to be given to me in respect of those who were holding the negotiations on behalf of the Government. I was getting some information as to what was going on, but I was not getting a blow-by-blow and frankly, Madam Speaker, that is the sort of commercial to-and-fro-ing that there is.

1225      If the Government was to have to come to this House to explain every time why it cannot reach an agreement, we might also have to come to this House to explain why we do reach an agreement. It just makes it very difficult, Madam Speaker, to do business, and that would not make sense, because we are accountable, of course, for the things that we do. We are not necessarily accountable for the things that we said we might do and did not do.

1230      **Hon. D J Bossino:** I am not expecting the Hon. Chief Minister to do anything, but the reality is that there are many people waiting for housing. The reality further is, and he deals with it sort of in a very light-touch sort of way, the reality is that in an interview on GBC and in his New Year's message last year, he made very specific promises in respect of this reclamation. So I think it is our duty as an Opposition to ask him why it is that this particular deal, which now cannot go through and will be there for the subject of further delay, has not happened and I am not asking him, and I do not expect him to give me a full blow-by-blow detail as to why, but surely politically he can tell us, and the public are entitled to know, why it is that this particular deal, at least in broad terms, did not go through.

1235      **Hon. Chief Minister:** I am very conscious that there are people who are expecting homes and who need homes. Every single day that I go to the office, indeed every single day that I have gone to the office since 9 December 2011, for almost 15 years already now started, I have been working on more housing in Gibraltar, except perhaps for the period that dealt with COVID. But even when we were dealing with treaty matters, almost every day there was an issue that deals with housing and further provision of housing and further plans for housing.

1240      So far from being flippant, Madam Speaker, what I would do is I would remind Hon. Members that I am able to say to them in particular that in the time that I have been in office, I have delivered already, which is less than the 16 years that they were in office, more affordable homes for Gibraltarian families than they delivered whilst they were in office. And what I am trying to do now is to break my own record and deliver even more. That is a process on which I am very frustrated not to have been able to make more progress but at the same time, I have to be conscious of how I engage the public purse in respect of these matters.

1250 Look, it is very easy to say you are taking too long, but the hon. Gentleman is also the same individual who came to this House to complain that Phase 2 of the Hassan Centenary Terraces was going to cost so much more than Phase 1 of the Hassan Centenary Terraces and that is despite the fact that we spent a long time negotiating to keep that second cost down, even though it was more than the first cost.

1255 So, there is a balance to be done, Madam Speaker, and that is what the role of Chief Minister requires me to do. That is what I am doing. That is what I am not being flippant about. That is what I am very serious about. That is one of the things that motivates me to ensure that I can continue to deliver for the people who need those homes. I am working very closely with the Minister for Housing, who is doing an exceptional job and, Madam Speaker, I think that we will be able to demonstrate to people that we are serious about not just delivering the housing that we have already delivered and are in the process of delivering, but delivering even more housing. That is taking longer than we would wish and that the people waiting for homes would wish. But it is not taking quite as long as hon. Members opposite would like, because what they would like is for us not to deliver in the end, so that they can exploit that for the purposes of their own politics, which of course is perfectly fine in an adversarial Westminster system like the one we have but that is the reality, Madam Speaker.

1260 1265 **Hon. D J Bossino:** Are these the considerations that he considers when he looks himself in the mirror every morning, as he referred to in one of the many interviews he has given after the publication of the Openshaw report? Is it the case, therefore, that we have been able to at least eke out from him an element of a response, when he refers to the public purse? Is it a question of cost? Was it a question of a commercial reality in terms of cost? Is he able to at least say that, and that that is what scuppered the deal, irrespective of which head of terms was signed with TNG Foundation?

1270 1275 **Hon. Chief Minister:** Madam Speaker, there are many things that I think about when I look at myself in the mirror every morning, the key one of which is whether I am doing what my parents have taught me to do, and that which I would be proud to explain to my children I have done. And every morning I reach the conclusion that I can proudly look my children in the eye, and when God has decided that he should take me back to my parents, that I can see them wherever they may be and tell them they can be proud of the work that I did. The deal with TNG was not scuppered, Madam Speaker. That is the wrong word to describe our inability to reach an agreement. It is possible for two parties who wish to reach an agreement not to be able to reach an agreement for myriad commercial reasons. I do not think it is fair to describe that as a scuppering, or indeed to simply suggest that it is a matter relating to costs, because it was not just a matter relating to costs, Madam Speaker but given that honourable members are always concerned, rightly so, about the cost of things, they should support us when we say that one of the things that we are looking at in the context of being able to deliver the new affordable housing schemes that we want to deliver in the categories that the hon. Gentleman has referred to, which he has cribbed from our manifesto, is cost. Of course it is. How could it be otherwise?

1280 1285 **Hon. D J Bossino:** Let us try and progress matters further. I am going to try and assist the Chief Minister... Because he says that he has not reached a place where he has reached further agreement with an entity, one would assume, he says he is unable to answer the further questions in the order paper that I had in relation to this issue.

1290 1295 But one of the questions, which is of very significant public interest, is when these houses are to be built, and more particularly to be delivered to individuals, because people are absolutely desperate for housing. Now, in that context, can he at least confirm the obvious, one would have thought, but I would ask that it come from his mouth publicly and officially across the floor of the House, is that his promise made in an interview last year, once again I repeat, 12 months ago, that

keys would be delivered during the course of the first half of 2028 will now not be met as a result of the inability to reach a final outcome in respect to the negotiations with TNG Foundations.

1300

**Hon. Chief Minister:** No, Madam Speaker, I still believe that that is likely to be met. But, Madam Speaker, all of this debate in the context of 2,141 units, which we have delivered or are in the process of delivering, versus, that is in 16 years, versus 801 units delivered by Hon. Members in 16 years.

1305

So, the hon. Gentleman is right, there is desperation for houses but why is there desperation for houses? Well, Madam Speaker, the first GSLP administration delivered 2,442 affordable housing units in 8 years. 2,442 affordable housing units in 8 years.

1310

That is a remarkable record, Madam Speaker. All credit to the individuals who made up that first GSLP administration. We have only delivered 2,141, Madam Speaker, in 15 years but given that Hon. Members delivered 801 units in 16 years, we are not going to take any lessons from them on what has caused the desperation for housing. It is very clear, I think hon. Gentleman have now adopted our thinking on this, that you need approximately 200 units a year to stay ahead of the curve of demand. The failure to stay ahead of that curve of demand is in the period 1996 to 2011.

1315

Madam Speaker, as we say at the Bar, and as I have repeated already on two occasions, *res ipsa loquitur* but in this case, it is not just the *res*, Madam Speaker, that speaks for itself, it is the numbers and it is the years on which the numbers of homes were delivered, and the years in which the numbers of homes were not delivered, that explain why some may be desperate.

1320

But we will continue working hard to deliver affordable housing to Gibraltarian families, to continue to help Gibraltarian families, to help and to recover from that dearth of delivery in the period from 1996 to 2011, which the hon. Gentleman often tells us, left us a golden legacy, indeed, of desperation for homes, Madam Speaker. Nothing more and nothing less.

1325

**Madam Speaker:** It is a different supplementary, but we are going to keep rehearsing the same subject...

1330

**Hon. D J Bossino:** The *res* that he should be applying to himself are the findings of the Openshaw Report, because the *res ipsa loquitur* definitely applies there, and he should be resigning but putting that to one side, the Hon. Chief Minister, in response to that report, asks us, in relation to events which happened six years ago, not to look at the rear view mirror. It is too old. It does not apply anymore.

1335

Yet, he is asking us here and now, in relation to our housing record, our housing record, to go back to 1996, for goodness sakes. The hon. Gentleman and Ladies opposite have now been in Office, as he keeps on reminding us, for the last 14-15 years, going on to 15 years.

1340

The rear view mirror there does not apply but may I ask him whether I can at least eke out this further information from him, again, by way of confirmation, because I do not believe for one minute that he will be able to stick to his promise, or his intention to provide keys in the first half of 2028, despite the delays. I mean, it is quite remarkable that he should say that.

1345

But is he able to at least say the number, one of the questions was, Madam Speaker, how many units are expected to be made available? That is one of the questions in the order paper, which I cannot answer until I reach agreement. Is he able to say that at least there is going to be a minimum of 1,500 because he told the interviewer, in the same interview that I quoted to him earlier, that he has a total of 3,000 homes in development, and that the ones in Westview Park are at about 1,500.

**Hon. Chief Minister:** Well, Madam Speaker, in the immortal words of Meatloaf, objects in the rear view mirror can appear closer than they are and the hon. Gentleman should remember that when he talks about the years going back to 1996, because there is no one like the GSD when it comes to trying to go back to 1995 and 1996. They love that, Madam Speaker. They love going

1350 back to 1995 and 1996, except perhaps the hon. Gentleman, because he was not in the GSD at the time. Of course, at that stage, Madam Speaker, he had started his, I suppose in his mind, successful political career, which involves seeking to become a Minister on four occasions and not having succeeded, seeking to become leader of his Party on three occasions and not having succeeded.

1355 I mean, that is a good reason to resign, Madam Speaker, if they will not have you on three occasions in your own home. You might want to decide to pack up and go home but given that I am still 53 and I did not have the chance to wish him a happy 54<sup>th</sup> birthday yesterday, across the floor of the House, I have to say, Madam Speaker, that he is, apart from Mr Clinton, the oldest person in this House who has sought ministerial office on four occasions and not achieved it. Quite a record. Quite a record.

1360 But given the way that he has phrased his preamble, as he likes to call his perorations before a question on this occasion, I do have to say to him, Madam Speaker, although he has traditionally been thinner than me, he is no scalpel when it comes to questioning, because he is hardly surgical. He is more of a blunt instrument and a hammer than he is surgical in his approach.

1365 To try and bring the Openshaw report in on a question on housing, which I believe was his last question, the last chance to make the point before he makes the point, on the motion to note and then makes the point again on the motion of no confidence, is really quite the blunt instrument approach. But given how he has now asked the question, which is not how he asked it before, because he asked for a breakdown of the composition of the homes that are going to be there, I confirm to the hon. Gentleman the things that he has said, I said in the interview, are the things that I believe about the numbers.

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

1375 **Madam Speaker:** This time it is one more.

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

**Madam Speaker:** You are on notice. (*interjection*) I am very glad...

1380 **Hon D J Bossino:** I must say I am normally a stickler for that.

**Madam Speaker:** Well the hon. Member was not yesterday is all I can say, but I am very glad to see that he is today. One more question.

1385 **Hon. D J Bossino:** Today and normally I am, I try and follow rules and orders. If we are going to be following or quoting precedents that he used in the very barbed way as he normally does, below the belt, the usual things that I describe him, the usual words I use to describe him, attempted on four occasions, unprecedented. He is the Chief Minister who in unprecedented ways, the only Chief Minister who has been found by a public inquiry, and I read it again because it is highly relevant.

1395 **Madam Speaker:** No, no, no. I am going to give the hon. Member, thank you for sitting down, one more opportunity to put a relevant supplementary question. I am not going to allow either side now to talk about the Openshaw Report. We will have time for that. We are not doing it now. Is there a further supplementary question on point or not? No preamble on anything else.

1400 **Hon. D J Bossino:** Madam Speaker, the question is whether he can provide further information. He did not look at me so smugly. I am just following the request from the Speaker, and I was not able to make the point, which I thought was a killer point, but anyway.

Is to say, oh, they switched it off. Is to say, is to ask him rather, what options, can he provide any further information? Yeah, he laughs, but I laugh too. What further, what options are being considered in respect of a new commercial arrangement so that this thing can get off the ground and we can start seeing sand being deposited in that area?

1405

**Madam Speaker:** In a similar way, I am going to ask the Hon. Chief Minister not to report to the Openshaw Report. Let us answer the question directly.

1410

**Hon. Chief Minister:** Openshaw Report. Let us answer the question directly. Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. The hon. Gentleman is to killer points what a sloth is to killer points. Let us face it, Madam Speaker, given that he wants to talk about my record as Chief Minister, not in relation to the Openshaw Report, I will remind him, Madam Speaker, that I am the person to have served for the shortest period as Leader of the Opposition, to have gone from being Leader of the Opposition in April to winning immediately thereafter in December in 2011, Madam Speaker. And indeed, that I will be the only Chief Minister to retire undefeated since Sir Joshua Hassan, having won four general elections consecutively. So, I am very happy, Madam Speaker, to talk about my record but, Madam Speaker, it is really quite remarkable to see a Member of this House making a virtue of the fact that he is following the rules. All Members of this House follow the rules or should follow the rules. If one of them has been found, as he was yesterday, in the manner that you had to reproach him, that he was not following the rules of the House, that is a manner in which he needs to reflect, Madam Speaker.

1415

Perhaps tomorrow, when he looks in the mirror, given that he is more attractive with a beard than I am, Madam Speaker, perhaps he does not have to look every morning like I do to make sure I do not cut off my nose as I am trying to shave my face, so he might not look in the mirror every day, but he might want to reflect on his behaviour in this House yesterday, Madam Speaker, because I have certainly never seen you have to get up having to deal with any other member of the House. It was a moment, I think, that certainly brought him into less than good repute and put him in less than a good light in the face of the way that this place operates. Madam Speaker, the hon. Gentleman asked when we expect to be putting sand in the water in relation to reclamation, and I refer him in that respect to my first answer.

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**Madam Speaker:** Next question.

1435

**Q957-8/2025**

**Public Sector Pay and Industrial Relations Framework Agreement –  
Publication; Main terms**

**Clerk:** Question 957, the Hon. Leader of the Opposition.

1440

**Hon. Dr K Azopardi:** Will the Government publish the Public Sector Pay and Industrial Relations Framework Agreement entered into between it and the trades unions on 11<sup>th</sup> September 2025?

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

1445

**Chief Minister (Hon. F R Picardo):** Madam Speaker, I will answer this question together with Question 958.

**Clerk:** Question 958, the Hon. Leader of the Opposition.

1450 **Hon. Dr K Azopardi:** What are the main terms of the Public Sector Pay and Industrial Relations Framework Agreement entered into between the Government and the trades unions?

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

1455 **Hon. Chief Minister:** Madam Speaker, I refer the hon. Gentleman to Government Press Release 658 of 2025, which sets out the information requested.

**Hon. Dr K Azopardi:** Madam Speaker, I saw the press release, but I did not get the impression when I read the press release that it was the publication of the agreement itself. That is hence the question that I asked at 957, will they publish the agreement.

1460 I took that to be a document that had been entered into. I am not sure whether it was signed or not signed. There was a press release referring to it, but I did not see there was a publication of the agreement, unless I missed it and perhaps the Chief Minister will clarify.

1465 **Hon. Chief Minister:** No, Madam Speaker, but it is a very full press release that sets out the terms of the agreement. I think verbatim.

1470 **Hon. Dr K Azopardi:** I see. Well at least that answer confirms, I suppose then, that the answer to 957 is no, although I think he implied yes, so they are not publishing the agreement, or at least they have not yet, and that the main terms are contained within their press release. So that is a useful at least reference point for me to go back to it and try to understand. Is there any other relevant material term that is excluded from that Government press release?

**Chief Minister:** I do not believe so, Madam Speaker.

1475 **Hon. Dr K Azopardi:** And now that we are on the subject, is the Chief Minister in a position to set out the current state of play of those discussions?

**Hon. Chief Minister:** Simply to say that they are ongoing, Madam Speaker.

1480 **Hon. Dr K Azopardi:** Next question.

**Q960/2025**  
**Victoria Keys project –**  
**Contractual arrangements, development licence or building lease**

1485 **Clerk:** Question 960, the Hon. Leader of the Opposition.

**Hon. Dr K Azopardi:** Have the Government now entered into any contractual arrangements or development licence or building lease in respect of the so-called Victoria Keys project and if so what are the main terms of those arrangements and with whom?

1490 **Clerk:** Answer, the Hon. Chief Minister.

**Chief Minister (Hon. F R Picardo):** Madam Speaker, the contractual arrangements have not yet been entered into. I see.

1495

**Hon. Dr K Azopardi:** I mean, these are long-standing discussions. Can the Chief Minister give us an indication? Are they still negotiating with the same parties, or is it that they are negotiating with a different set of parties?

1500 Can he speak to the reason why this was first announced back in 2019, why we are still, seven years on almost, the Government is still in negotiations, what the relevant issues are? Clearly, they have not reached agreement, but what the relevant issues at the moment are?

1505 **Hon. Chief Minister:** Well, we have had a discussion about these matters before, Madam Speaker. I told you, hon. Gentleman, that the whole nature of the relationship had changed, because at one stage, the reason for the original arrangement was because the transportation of the rubble on the east side was going to be down to those who were going to assist us with the creation of Victoria Keys, so that meant they were going to take responsibility for that, and in exchange for that, they were going to be provided with a share of the land at Victoria Keys, which was what we would explore at the time. But then, after the signature of the agreement with the 1510 TNG Foundation in respect of the east side, there was no need to move the rubble, and therefore, the potential for the arrangement with the parties that we would be talking to changed.

1515 Of course, now, we are still in a negotiation about the same type of arrangement, which does not require them to move rubble, and the reclamation is being created by rubble that is brought there from sites around Gibraltar. But there are other opportunities for benefits to the Gibraltar taxpayer, and so we are pursuing that benefit to the Gibraltar taxpayer, and I hope to be able to make an announcement very soon that will then crystallise these arrangements, the reasons for them, the manner in which they will be crystallised, sorry, and the benefit to the taxpayer and the public interest.

1520 **Hon. Dr K Azopardi:** And is it still the objective that the project itself will span the same amount of reclaimed land or a larger plot, and when he says he hopes soon to make an announcement, an announcement presumably would follow entry into at least some kind of Memorandum of Understanding or contractual arrangements. Would that be right, or would they be making an announcement which would be an announcement of objectives, like they did in 2019, like we now 1525 understand they did in 2019, without first having entered into contractual arrangements?

**Hon. Chief Minister:** The amount of land we are seeking to create remains the same. My understanding is that we should be in a position to make an announcement about something that is now final.

1530 Now, it is true to say that the announcement that we made in the past was about, I think, heads of terms as well, not agreements but if we had not made that announcement and honourable members had caught wind of the fact that we would enter into heads of terms, they would ask us here to disclose the heads of terms. But I am always of the view that there are some 1535 circumstances in which it is best to follow the advice of the Hon. Mr Clinton, which is not to say anything until the ink is dry on the paper, as he told us. Now, I think on this occasion we will be able to pursue that advice and make an announcement when the ink is dry on the paper.

1540 **Madam Speaker:** Next question.

**Q961/2025**  
**Clemence Suites –**  
**Owned, leased or rented flats**

**Clerk:** Question 961, the Hon. Leader of the Opposition.

1545      **Hon. Dr K Azopardi:** Does the Government or any Government-owned company presently own or lease or rent flats in Clemence Suites and if so how many and since when (stating (if owned or leased) the purchase and/or agreement dates and prices and their addresses) and whether these are occupied or rented out or sub-let at 5<sup>th</sup> January 2026?

1550      **Clerk:** Answer, the Hon. Chief Minister.

1555      **Chief Minister (Hon. F R Picardo):** Madam Speaker, the information in respect of the flats purchased by a Government-owned company in that development was provided in answer to Question 408 of 2025 on 20<sup>th</sup> March 2025, as at 5<sup>th</sup> January 2026, GSTR Ltd. owns three flats at Clemence Suites, of which currently two are rented out.

**Hon. Dr K Azopardi:** So, there has been no change in the ownership information since the Government provided that information in 408 to 2025?

1560      **Hon. Chief Minister:** Madam Speaker, I have now given the hon. Gentleman information and referred him to 408. I am now being asked by the hon. Gentleman to go back to 408, compare it to the answer I have given him, both of which are now public, and tell him whether there is any difference. It is a matter for him, Madam Speaker.

1565      **Madam Speaker:** Next question.

**Q962-3/2025**  
**Donald Trump Jr –**  
**Meeting; Investors**

1570      **Clerk:** Question 962, the Hon. Leader of the Opposition.

**Hon. Dr K Azopardi:** Apart from the Chief Minister who else was at the meeting with Donald Trump Jr in Gibraltar on 14<sup>th</sup> November 2025?

1575      **Clerk:** Answer, the Hon. Chief Minister.

**Chief Minister (Hon. F R Picardo):** Madam Speaker, I will answer this question together with Question 963.

1580      **Clerk:** Question 963, the Hon. Leader of the Opposition.

**Hon. Dr K Azopardi:** Which investors did the Chief Minister meet on 14<sup>th</sup> November 2025 at the Madison Building?

1585      **Clerk:** Answer, the Hon. Chief Minister.

1590      **Chief Minister (Hon. F R Picardo):** Madam Speaker, I was invited to a meeting by a client of Hassans International Law Firm, of which I am a partner on sabbatical, I should declare, who was hosting Mr. Trump Jr to give a courtesy welcome to Gibraltar to the son of the 47<sup>th</sup> President of the United States.

I was accompanied by the Minister for Inward Investment in the Savings Bank.

1595      **Hon. Dr K Azopardi:** Madam Speaker, it will be clear that the Chief Minister has not really provided the information, I do not think, at least it does not seem to me on hearing it, because I asked, apart from the Chief Minister who else was at the meeting, is he saying that apart from himself and the Father of the House, there was only Mr. Trump and the client of Hassans? Is that what he is saying?

1600      **Hon. Chief Minister:** Madam Speaker, the client of Hassans who invited us, namely the Minister for Inward Investment in the Savings Bank, Mr. Trump Jr and the people who came with him, and the lawyers from Hassans who represent the client of Hassans and were making their offices available to that client.

1605      **Hon. Dr K Azopardi:** And so, in asking the Chief Minister which investors did he meet, who precisely did he meet?

1610      **Hon. Chief Minister:** Well, I refer the hon. Gentleman to the answer I gave a few moments ago.

1615      **Hon. Dr K Azopardi:** So, is he saying that Mr. Trump is the investor or the client of Hassans is the investor? In which case, I am asking who he met. I mean, when he left the Madison Building, obviously because it was a high-profile visit, there was media there, and he, on the way, was asked, and he said, I have met investors, so I am asking him which investors he met.

1620      **Hon. Chief Minister:** The client of Hassans.

1625      **Hon. Dr K Azopardi:** Is he willing to say who he met or not?

1630      **Hon. Chief Minister:** Madam Speaker, I think it has been already publicly aired that it is the Pelagos Group.

1635      **Hon. Dr K Azopardi** And there was no one else at that meeting, no other investors were met by the Chief Minister. That is the only investor.

1640      **Hon. Chief Minister:** In corporate terms, it is one. In personal terms, it is more than one.

1645      **Madam Speaker:** Next question.

**Q964-71/2025**  
**eGov –**  
**Issues concerning the renewal of expired ID cards**

1650      **Clerk:** Question 964, the Hon. Leader of the Opposition.

1655      **Hon. Dr K Azopardi:** Is Government aware of issues concerning the renewal of expired ID cards via the eGov site?

1660      **Clerk:** Answer, the Hon. Chief Minister.

1665      **Chief Minister (Hon. F R Picardo):** Well, Madam Speaker, I will answer this question together with Questions 965 to 971.

1670      **Clerk:** Question 965, the Hon. Leader of the Opposition.

**Hon. Dr K Azopardi:** How many new entrant recipients of residence cards have there been since 2015 broken down by calendar year?

1645      **Clerk:** Question 966, the Hon. Leader of the Opposition.

**Hon. Dr K Azopardi:** What is the breakdown of new entrant recipients of residence cards by nationality over the last 5 years broken down by calendar year and nationality?

1650      **Clerk:** Question 967, the Hon. Leader of the Opposition.

**Hon. Dr K Azopardi:** What is the breakdown of new entrant recipients of residence cards by industry sector over the last 5 years broken down by calendar year and industry sector?

1655      **Clerk:** Question 968, the Hon. Leader of the Opposition.

**Hon. Dr K Azopardi:** How many applications to renew ID or civilian registration cards were pending at 6<sup>th</sup> October 2025 and 5<sup>th</sup> January 2026 respectively?

1660      **Clerk:** Question 969, the Hon. Leader of the Opposition.

**Hon. Dr K Azopardi:** How many residency registrations/applications were pending at 6<sup>th</sup> October 2025 and 5<sup>th</sup> January 2026 respectively?

1665      **Clerk:** Question 970, the Hon. Leader of the Opposition.

**Hon. Dr K Azopardi:** How many residence applications have been received since 6<sup>th</sup> October 2025 and of these how many have been granted to 5<sup>th</sup> January 2026?

1670      **Clerk:** Question 971, the Hon. Leader of the Opposition.

**Hon. Dr K Azopardi:** When will the residency criteria which the Government has been working on be published?

1675      **Clerk:** Answer, the Hon. Chief Minister.

**Chief Minister (Hon. F R Picardo):** I am advised by the eGov team that at the request of the Department for Immigration and Home Affairs, renewals and new ID card applications had been paused for a period of time, whilst they assessed a very large number of applications received to ensure that no administrative errors were made on the issue of these cards. All services have now resumed. The information requested in respect of Questions 965 and 966 is the information I now hand over in the schedules.

1685      I am advised by the Department for Immigration and Home Affairs that the Department does not record the applicant's employment industry when issuing residence cards. The ID card system only records the individual's immigration status, such as worker, pensioner or dependent, in accordance with the Immigration (Asylum and Refugee) Act, which sets out the categories required to be recorded. To produce the breakdown request, it will require a manual review of each individual immigration file for the past five years, amounting to approximately 5,000 to 6,000 files, and the information is therefore not readily available in the format requested.

1690      No applications to renew ID or Civilian Registration Cards were pending at 6<sup>th</sup> October 2025 and 5<sup>th</sup> January 2026, respectively, as per the Department of Immigration and Home Affairs departmental standards of service. All renewals were up to date.

1695 There are 79 applications being worked through in respect of 969, as at 6<sup>th</sup> October 2025, and 10 applications were being case-worked as at 5<sup>th</sup> January 2026. All other residency and application renewals were up to date.

The Department of Immigration and Home Affairs, in respect of 970, tells me that they have formally received 1,024 residence applications since 6<sup>th</sup> November 2025. In addition, the department has also received 4,590 visits to their two immigration and residence counters since this date.

1700 A significant proportion of these counter visits related to individuals seeking to apply for residence. Many were advised at counter level that they did not meet the requirements and were therefore not permitted to submit a formal application. As a result, these cases are not captured within the figure provided.

1705 It is therefore important to note that the department has been actively managing demand by screening and filtering out increased non-compliant or ineligible cases at the counter level before a formal application is accepted and a fee is paid by the applicant. To this, Madam Speaker, we would also have to add that thousands of phone calls the department has received since this date from persons attempting to apply via other channels. 150 new applications have been granted up to 5<sup>th</sup> January 2026, in line with the provisions of the Immigration (EU Exit) Regulations 2025.

1710 In relation to 971, the Immigration Criteria Consultation Committee, which I created at Budget time last year, has been working intensively on the development of a revised residency framework to ensure that Gibraltar is properly positioned for the next phase of our relationship with the European Union, including the potential operation of a treaty. This work is necessarily complex and highly sensitive. It must ensure that any criteria adopted are legally robust, operationally deliverable, compatible with treaty obligations and aligned with Gibraltar's long-term economic, social and security interests.

1720 For those reasons, it would have been neither responsible nor in Gibraltar's interests to publish partial or provisional criteria while negotiations were still ongoing. Premature publication would have risked confusion and speculative behaviour, which might not be in the interests of the jurisdiction at this juncture. The Government expects it will now be able to publish the revised residency framework by mid-February.

In the meantime, the Government has put in place a clear interim framework to ensure that residency decisions continue to be taken in a controlled, fair and lawful way, protecting Gibraltar's interests whilst this critical work is concluded.

1725

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1730 **Hon. Dr K Azopardi:** Madam Speaker, in relation to the last question, if I may, 971, so Chief Minister talks about the consultation committee and the interim framework. Can he tell us who is on the consultation committee specifically? I think he has already indicated that the Father of the House may even chair it, but can he tell us who is on the consultation committee and is this interim framework that was put in place pending the final framework, is this an interim framework in writing? Is there a document?

1735 **Hon. Chief Minister:** Madam Speaker, I thought that it was public that Sir Joe was chairing the committee and that he had had various meetings of it. I think that has already been said.

1740 I thought the composition of the committee was also public. It includes the Hon. Minister for Business and officials from the Department of Immigration and Home Affairs. It includes individuals from the business sector, in particular those involved in the Category 2 area of work in the financial services sector, and it includes the Minister for Gaming and Financial Services with the equities that those particular areas have in respect of residency.

The work of the committee has actually been completed and what I am talking about is the publication of the fruit of the work of that committee, which is now in progress.

1745      **Hon. Dr K Azopardi:** And on the second one that I asked, is the interim framework in writing?

**Hon. Chief Minister:** Well, yes, Madam Speaker, it is the exemption in relation to business which is in the regulation I referred to in my first answer.

1750      **Hon. Dr K Azopardi:** I see. I had understood that he meant some other document that had been produced which was assisting or guiding the department. Can I ask in terms of 970, I think he said 150 granted or was it 115? I did not quite hear it, but it is one of those numbers, and 1,024 I think received since the dates that I asked there.

1755      Given the answer that he gave, that there have been a much larger number of people enquiring about submission and the fact that they are being screened, do I take it therefore that if they have been received and have gone through the screening process, they are in principle eligible?

1760      **Hon. Chief Minister:** I would not agree to the language that the hon. Gentleman has used, in principle eligible, because that might create a legitimate expectation in some way, but they have at least passed the screening process for consideration for eligibility.

1765      **Hon. Dr K Azopardi:** I see, okay and in relation to 968, when he says that there were no applications pending, presumably he is just speaking there to the fact that the department will have processed those, but not that none have been received between 6<sup>th</sup> October and 5<sup>th</sup> January. That would be my understanding. Is that right?

**Hon. Chief Minister:** Yes, because the language that I used in reply was that there were none pending.

1770      **Hon. Dr K Azopardi:** But the Chief Minister does not have, for example, he would not have in front of him how many applications for ID cards have been received. He would not have that.

1775      **Hon. Chief Minister:** The hon. Gentleman says ID cards. He means red ID cards? I am not here to ask him questions, thank goodness. I am here to answer them, for quite a while still but just for the purposes of ensuring I give him an accurate answer, he is not using the vernacular ID card. He means ID card, red ID card, not Civilian Registration Card, which is every other colour.

1780      **Hon. Dr K Azopardi:** Yes, because that is why I phrased the question ID or Civilian Registration Cards. I recognise ID as the red. Yes, but that was shorthand for, do you does the Chief Minister have the numbers of received applications in respect of ID or Civilian Registration Cards? If he does have it. He may not, but if he does.

1785      **Hon. Chief Minister:** Madam Speaker, let me just see the information I have that might assist the hon. Gentleman. I can give him the numbers of new Civilian Registration Cards. For the year 2005, if that is helpful. Sorry, 2025, if that is helpful. I can give it broken down by colour.

<b>British civilian registration card (magenta)</b>	503
<b>British civilian registration card (blue)</b>	10
<b>EEA civilian registration card (green)</b>	198
<b>EU civilian registration cards</b>	10
<b>Non-EU civilian registration cards</b>	165

But that is not the period October to January, that is the year.

1790      **Madam Speaker:** Does the Hon. Leader of the Opposition have any supplementaries on the tables or would he like me to revisit that later on? 965 and 960. The Hon. Mr Clinton.

1795      **Hon. R M Clinton:** Thank you Madam Speaker, In relation to the tables we have been given, I was doing a quick cross-check between the answer to 966 and the answer to 965.

1800      966 effectively gives you totals by nationality and I was looking specifically at British nationals and the answer to table 956. Logically, if you add up British civilian registration card magenta to British civilian registration card blue, you would add it to the same numbers you would have in the answer to question 966. Indeed, that is the case at least for 2021 through 2022, 23, 24, 25. I would just ask the Chief Minister to check the numbers for 2020 because the total for 2020 is 596 but the total of magenta and blue cards is only 113. It just seems to be out. There might be a typo or some error there. I would be grateful if you could check.

1805      **Hon. Chief Minister:** I am very happy for the Parliamentary team to check, Madam Speaker. My tally for 2020 is in total 1,165 across 9 British civilian registration cards magenta, 104 British civilian registration cards blue.

1810      Those two together, I agree with the hon. Gentleman, is 113. Two green of EEA civilian registration cards, 867 EU civilian registration cards blue and non-EU civilian registration cards green, 183. It does not get to the 500 number even if you take out the 867 and add the 813. It may be because in that year, Madam Speaker, we might have been dealing with a backlog from another year and that is the total that is given or because that was the COVID year, there may be some correlation to the year after, and they have been given together.

1815      I am very happy for somebody in the Parliamentary team to check that and see what the discrepancy is.

1820      **Hon. D J Bossino:** I do not know exactly how these immigration matters work, but it was pointed out to me by my hon. Friend Mr Clinton, I do not know why to me, but in relation to answer to Question 966, the schedule says that in 2025 we had a massive influx from the Holy See of 21. Given the question, the answer is the number of new entrant recipients of residence cards. I wonder if the Hon. Chief Minister could comment in relation to that.

1825      Do we have an immigration problem as far as that particular State is concerned?

1830      **Hon. Chief Minister:** I think it is a miracle, Madam Speaker. I think it is a miracle related to the facility to be able to cross into the European Union as a citizen of the Holy See, perhaps, if you have that passport.

1835      So if you had another passport and you had a civilian registration card, it might have been harder to cross into the Schengen area in 2025.

1840      But if you had the passport of the Holy See, then it might have been easier to cross into the Schengen area. And perhaps, Madam Speaker, there was just not the faith in those who are eligible for citizenship of the Holy See that we would conclude a secure and beneficial treaty for Gibraltar that would enable citizens of the United Kingdom, residents of Gibraltar and all other nationalities to cross easily into the Schengen area but thank God, Madam Speaker, we have concluded such an agreement.

1845      **Madam Speaker:** Next question.

**Q972/2025**

**Schengen area –**

**Information provided to airlines or passport control in respect of travel with a Gibraltar issued passport**

**Clerk:** Question 972, the Hon. Leader of the Opposition.

1845      **Hon. Dr K Azopardi:** Not so fast with the Amen, by the way. We have not seen it yet.  
(*Interjections*)

Is the Government aware of information being provided to airlines or passport control authorities in respect of travel within the Schengen area on a Gibraltar issued British passport or the need to produce a Gibraltar Red ID Card?

1850      **Clerk:** Answer, the Hon. Chief Minister.

1855      **Chief Minister (Hon. F R Picardo):** No, Madam Speaker, and it would be premature for airlines to do so. That is the answer I have been given because I think the assumption has been that the hon. Gentleman's question is about post-treaty travel. If he is asking about pre-treaty travel, perhaps he can ask me what it is that concerns him and I may be able to answer.

1860      **Hon. Dr K Azopardi:** Yes, I am asking about now actually because I was wondering if the Government was aware, I mean it is not a trick question, I was wondering if the Government was aware privately about information that may have been provided to airlines or passport control authorities in respect of travel within the Schengen area on a Gibraltar-issued British passport because it has happened to me and it has happened to other persons that have contacted me that they have been asked when in travelling, it happened, in my case, it happened to me when I was travelling to a destination within Europe that is within the Schengen area, the airline saw my passport, saw it was Gibraltar-issued and asked to see my ID card and there was a bit of a discussion as to whether I could travel on this passport or not and it was acceptable or not and it has happened to at least two or three people who have contacted me, similar things, that they have been asked to produce the ID card. In all cases, I have to say, everyone has been allowed to travel but I was just wondering whether this was in some way triggered by some kind of information that people had received to make a distinction between the British passport holder and the passport holder who could demonstrate that they were resident of Gibraltar.

1870      So that is really the purpose of my question as to whether some information, the Government was aware whether information had been given and I suppose it takes you to the situation where in a post-treaty environment presumably there would be some kind of proper information given to people so that there is no confusion.

1880      **Hon. Chief Minister:** Well, Madam Speaker, it happened to me in a different way. I was travelling with my family and it was in the days when we were able to enter the Schengen area with our ID cards even if we were going beyond Spain we were not stamped and we turned up in the Schengen State, Switzerland, travelling out of the Schengen area from Switzerland having entered through Gibraltar and flown to Switzerland from Malaga. We came across Swiss Frontier guards who saw that we had British passports issued in Gibraltar and we had no entry stamp into the Schengen area and they asked the question and answered it themselves.

1885      They said you have no Schengen entry stamp because you are Gibraltarian and you came in through the land Frontier at Gibraltar in Spain. Of course, that accounts for it. No problem at all, stamp out and remember to stamp in when you arrive, if you arrive once again through Zurich.

So, information has been provided and this is part of what the Schengen Border Code requires and the manual, the Schengen Border Code manual which is provided and is an official publication of the European Union and is provided to all guards at different entry points. That manual will

1890 contain specific provision in relation to the arrangements in such manner as the European Commission may consider appropriate after the ratification of the arrangements for the Safe, Secure and Beneficial Treaty.

1895 **Hon. Dr K Azopardi:** If it helps the Chief Minister, in the cases that I had heard, it was more of a border guard enquiry. In my case, it was nowhere near that. I mean, I was not anywhere other than Malaga Airport and I was not asked by a border guard, I was asked by the airline itself. So, that is really the reason of the question but I take what the hon. Member says, there does not appear to be at least any, you know, conveyance of information at this stage in any formal way and it may simply have been misunderstandings along the way. But I would ask the Government perhaps to be alive to those issues because it may be that in a post-treaty scenario there will be a degree of confusion. Perhaps the Government would take that on-board.

1900 **Hon. Chief Minister:** Well, Madam Speaker, we are very conscious of that. That is why we are saying that the manual will be amended. This will be a very high-profile thing. Then, of course, we expect it will be widely reported. We expect that Schengen will be informing its States, its States will be informing its border forces, such as they may be, and that, of course, this is designed to ensure that travellers should have no difficulty but, for example, if I can tell the hon. Gentleman, Romania, a Member State of Schengen and the European Union, I am now much more alive to the circumstances of which they might usually have been before, recently joined Schengen. And then, 1910 in that moment, that was announced, the border guards were alive to that, and Romanian citizens were able to travel freely without having to show their passports. Was there no instance when a border guard in Schengen might have asked to see a passport or – well, in great measure, Madam Speaker, what happens is that the border controls disappear and you only face them when you are travelling in or out of the Schengen space and when you are coming into the Schengen space 1915 or you are coming out of the Schengen space is when these things could happen.

But we anticipate that there should be no more than teething trouble when it happens and that the Commission will, with our support and encouragement, be doing everything it needs to do to ensure that that teething is not like a toddler's and is resolved in days and does not take months or years.

1920 **Madam Speaker:** Next Question.

**Q973/2025**  
**Frontier (Spanish side) –**  
**Practical arrangements for the new Entry Exit System**

1925 **Clerk:** Question 973, the Hon. Leader of the Opposition.

**Hon. Dr K Azopardi:** Have there been discussions as to practical arrangements that would be put in place at the frontier (on the Spanish side) when the date for expected implementation on the new Entry Exit System [EES] throughout the EU arrives?

1930 **Clerk:** Answer the Hon. Chief Minister.

**Chief Minister (Hon. F R Picardo):** Madam Speaker, yes, sir. Yes, ma'am. Yes, ma'am. I am answering to you, Madam Speaker, not to him.

1935

1940 **Hon. Dr K Azopardi:** Okay, (*laughter*) thank you for the clarification and can the Chief Minister give us a bit more information about the practical arrangements that would be put in place when that moment arrives? As I understand it, that moment is the 1<sup>st</sup> of April.

1945 **Hon. Chief Minister:** Madam Speaker, as I understand it, the date is the 10<sup>th</sup> of April, not the 1<sup>st</sup> of April. I think everybody is wanting to avoid the 1<sup>st</sup> of April for egg-on-face purposes, as that date implies but, Madam Speaker, I do not want to be drawn at this stage, but we are seeking to avoid all issues that would arise. I think it is fair to say that all of the relevant parties are working very hard to try and avoid EES causing any difficulties at all on that date or before or after it.

1945 **Hon. Dr K Azopardi:** But that would be – well, we will see when we come to the other questions, but that would be presumably because either there have been practical arrangements that allow us to straddle over into a further period in a non-concluded treaty scenario or because, I assume, the treaty is concluded and somehow there are provisions that therefore cater for this in some way. Would I be right in postulating those two as the alternatives?

1950 **Hon. Chief Minister:** Madam Speaker, because I was listening for a moment to the Deputy Chief Minister, I did not hear the second. I heard the first, which was the brace, but I did not hear the second. I am sorry.

1955 **Hon. Dr K Azopardi:** So I was saying that I assume that that is because either they have reached some kind of practical arrangements to straddle over a not concluding a treaty or not ratifying it in time, or because in a concluded and ratified treaty scenario there are provisions that have been agreed which may cater for this in some practical way.

1960 **Hon. Chief Minister:** Madam Speaker, I think that there are other options, but they would not want to be drawn at this stage, and I would ask the hon. Gentleman to rest on the fact that I am giving him the comfort that the outcome we are seeking is that EES should not cause any difficulties after 10<sup>th</sup> April on the assumption that that date cannot be extended any further.

1965 **Hon. Dr K Azopardi:** And without pulling too much on that, because I understand the sensitivity of the time, certainly, of the moment that we are in, in terms of discussions on the finalisation of the treaty, is this in any way connected, or is it connected, with the document that is hoped to be concluded?

1970 **Hon. Chief Minister:** It is all connected to the document that is hoped to be concluded. I mean, there is no route to avoiding EES without the document that it is hoped has been concluded and that members of the Holy See may sing amen to.

1975 **Madam Speaker:** Next question.

**Q974/2025**  
**Treaty with the EU –**  
**Tariffs on products that arrive in Gibraltar from UK (not UK original products)**

1980 **Clerk:** Question 974, the Hon. Leader of the Opposition.

**Hon. Dr K Azopardi:** How are Government intending to address the concern by some business sectors that, following the possible new Treaty with the EU, tariffs on products that arrive in

1985 Gibraltar from UK (but that are not UK original products) will have a negative impact on prices or on the viability of continuing to bring these products to Gibraltar?

1990 **Chief Minister (Hon. F R Picardo):** Madam Speaker, because of parliamentary respect of the Office of the hon. Gentleman, I did not link this question to the one I answered earlier, because I thought he might want to pursue supplementaries himself but it is very similar to the one I answered earlier from Mr Sacarello earlier. Madam Speaker, my first answer is as follows.

Madam Speaker, the Government does not envisage such a negative impact affecting the viability of continuing to bring these products to Gibraltar.

1995 **Hon. Dr K Azopardi:** Madam Speaker, I was probing what the Federation of Small Businesses themselves, almost word for word, said in what was headed important updates of following meetings of the Government's new Business Transition Advisory Group. So I was picking up on their concern. I do not pretend to be an expert in this area, but they say in that particular update, word for word, there is real concern about the effect that tariffs will have a negative impact on products sourced in the UK but made in third countries, something that covers a very large number of UK products.

2000 So is the Government, having considered the point, is it still of the view, because presumably this was brought up in the Business Advisory Group, is it still of the view that the FSB has nothing to worry about in this regard?

2005 **Hon. Chief Minister:** Madam Speaker, for all the reasons I gave earlier, we do not share that concern. We actually believe that these products will be cheaper in Gibraltar than they will be in the rest of the European Union, other than Luxembourg. Madam Speaker, as I have indicated before, without mentioning any names, because it would be unfair to promote one over any other, there will be some top shops that will be opening in Main Street that represent such British businesses, and they are coming to Gibraltar after the announcement of these arrangements.

2010 So, a number of entrepreneurs, in particular the ones that have been given public interviews, are members of the GFSB and of the Chamber, are betting with their investment that actually the opposite will be true.

2015 **Hon. Dr K Azopardi:** I mean, I take that the Government does not share that view, but presumably, given that this has been put out by one of the two major business organisations, presumably that there have been discussions with the Government by the business organisation with it, and those views that the Chief Minister is now saying has been directly communicated to them. Is that fair?

2020 **Hon. Chief Minister:** Madam Speaker, yes, they have told us that in the group that is chaired by the Hon. Minister for Business, but if they had not told us that, we would have read that that is what they think, because that is their public statement. So, we have certainly heard that. We have heard it on a number of occasions from different parties but what you hear is one thing, Madam Speaker, and you hear it respectfully, and you try and show people why you disagree, or why they might be able to mitigate something, or why they may be right as to what is going to happen, but they may be wrong as to the consequence but then what happens is something different.

2030 If what happens is that members of those organisations vote, not with their feet, but with their pockets, to make an investment that is entirely contrary to that fear, then it is not just the Government that does not necessarily agree that that is what is going to happen, it is the members that make up that organisation that are acting in a manner contrary to the representation being made by that organisation.

2035 I think, Madam Speaker, that is something that the hon. Gentleman also needs to bear in his consideration in pursuing this thinking, because as I have already said to the Hon. Mr Sacarello,

Gibraltar will be, except for Luxembourg at the moment, the place where those goods from the UK suffering that tariff and the application of either VAT or transaction tax will be cheapest in the single market of 480 million and 38,000 people. So that is also a huge opportunity in respect of those goods.

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**Madam Speaker:** Next question.

**Q975-7/2025**

**Treaty for a new relationship with the EU –  
Update on on-going discussions**

2045

**Clerk:** Question 975, the Hon. Leader of the Opposition.

**Hon. Dr K Azopardi:** Will the Government update the House on discussions to conclude a Treaty for a new relationship with the EU for Gibraltar?

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**Chief Minister (Hon. F R Picardo):** Madam Speaker, I will answer this question together with Questions 976 and 977.

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**Hon. Dr K Azopardi:** How soon after the conclusion of a Treaty for a new relationship with the EU for Gibraltar would the Government expect to bring a debate to the Gibraltar Parliament?

**Clerk:** Question 977, the Hon. the Leader of the Opposition.

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**Hon. Dr K Azopardi:** Post conclusion of any Treaty on a new relationship for Gibraltar with the European Union how will Government be approaching a ratification vote at the European Parliament?

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

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**Chief Minister (Hon. F R Picardo):** Madam Speaker, the hon. Member will be aware that the negotiations concluded on 12 December 2025. Indeed, Madam Speaker, I shall never forget because I was lying on my left side with one eye to help me through what the Deputy Chief Minister and the Attorney General were taking me through. Following the overall political agreement reached on 11 June 2025 on the key outstanding elements of the treaty.

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The text is now undergoing a thorough technical and legal review, commonly referred to as the legal scrub, to ensure that it is coherent from a technical and legal perspective. The Government looks forward to the text of the agreement being published in full once this process is complete. This will then pave the way for the formal ratification processes in both the United Kingdom and the European Union, which are the parties to the agreement.

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In international law, Madam Speaker, they are the high contracting parties. Insofar as the UK process is concerned, I have already made clear to this House that the UK will not complete its ratification until the agreement has first been debated and scrutinised in this Parliament, and that we have passed a motion confirming that Gibraltar is content to be bound by the agreement. Madam Speaker, I have often said before also that that would be what we call an amendable motion, therefore not a motion to note. It is a motion that will be amendable by the Opposition or any Member. I therefore expect to bring that motion to this House not long after the text is published following completion of the legal scrub. Additionally, Madam Speaker, the Cabinet in Gibraltar has in parallel been reviewing the full, un-scrubbed text this week, and I expect that review to conclude this week.

2085        Madam Speaker, international agreements negotiated by the European Commission on behalf of the European Union and which fall under the exclusive competence of the European Union require the European Parliament's consent before the European Council can formally conclude the agreement. Such is the case with our agreement with the EU. This process of ratification is an EU process, and it will therefore need to be managed by the relevant EU institutions and the EU Member States.

2090        The process in the EU will not be led by the UK or Gibraltar. Therefore, it will be important for the European Union Member States and for the European Commission to persuade a majority in the European Parliament to support the agreement and consent to it. The European Commission already commenced that work through the appearance of the Commission's lead negotiator, Ms 2095        Clara Martinez-Alberola, before the Parliament's Foreign Affairs and International Trade Committees in September last year.

2100        The role of the Spanish Government and of the political parties in Spain, which are in favour of the agreement, will also be fundamental in terms of influencing the European Parliament and the different political families which make up their pan-European political groupings. Now, having said that, Madam Speaker, this is a process which will be managed by the European Union within the EU, but that is not to say that this is not a process that we will not actively engage with. The Government is ready to deploy its assets in Gibraltar House, Brussels, to assist with that process, to engage with MEPs and to demonstrate to policymakers in the European Parliament that this is an agreement, indeed an historic agreement, which will be of mutual benefit to Gibraltar, the surrounding region of Spain, as well as the EU as a whole.

2110        Our officials in Gibraltar House have excellent working relationships with their counterparts in the UK mission to the EU, and this work will be co-ordinated with them, given the value 2 of this agreement, to the wider EU-UK relationship at a time when the UK and the EU are working on deepening their existing relationship.

2115        **Hon. Dr K Azopardi:** Madam Speaker, if I may, I will just take the process – the Chief Minister has gone through the steps – but let me just take the process chronologically, as it were, in terms of the steps that need to be taken. At the moment they are in the post-conclusion of agreement, but legal scrub, as he says, and he expects that to be published once that is complete. Does he expect publication to take place after the legal scrub, but before the translations, or are the translations done in parallel, or would it be after the translations and after the legal scrub?

2120        **Hon. Chief Minister:** Madam Speaker, I believe – that is to say, I do not know – but I believe that the legal scrub and translation process goes hand in hand.

2125        **Hon. Dr K Azopardi:** And does he have a sense of how long the legal scrub takes? I mean, I suppose it would be difficult to say unless he has some inside information in terms of the process that is ongoing, because the legal scrub, if the concluded agreement happened on 12 December – of course there has been an intervening Christmas, New Year period – but we are now in mid-January, so presumably they have had some days to conduct this, and I do not know how intensive this legal scrub is, because he has indicated that the Cabinet is going through the un-scrubbed text, which I guess gives you a good sense of principles, although there may be shifts of language or wording, but they may be material in effect, so you would have to look at the impact of the scrub. But does he have an idea of when the scrub finishes? And presumably the scrub also engages what I would call a bounce-back to the contracting parties, so that everyone can signify they are approving the scrubbed text of the treaty, and if so he will be given a sort of scrubbed text, and presumably, given the length of the document, there may be a need for a bit of time for them to signify approval, unless it is conducted on a kind of tracked document basis.

2135        **Hon. Chief Minister:** Of course I do have inside information, because I am involved in running the thing for Gibraltar, so I understand that we are looking at weeks, not months, and yes, I do

2140 understand that the un-scrubbed text of course comes back for approval, and I am very confident that actually nothing is going to change in the scrubbed version that would be material, and certainly not adversely material to Gibraltar but we will be looking at every change that happens in scrub to ensure that it does not produce anything which is adversely material for Gibraltar, or indeed which is adverse for Gibraltar full stop. And so, when the Cabinet is looking at the un-scrubbed text, it is looking at it from the point of view of its consideration based on the un-scrubbed text not being affected by the scrubbed text, and having the opportunity to look at the scrubbed text to be able to signify approval/agreement to the final text.

2145 In the context of Gibraltar, as we all know, one letter could make a change of tense sufficiently serious that it might make the whole thing unacceptable, but I think everyone is alive to that and I think I have now answered all of the questions he answered in that supplementary.

2150 **Hon. Dr K Azopardi:** Yes, thank you. Indeed, one word can change things. I always (*interjection by the Hon Chief Minister: one letter*) – yes, one letter can change things, for sure.

Issues. The 's', or as I recall someone once said to me that the UK had fought tooth and nail for the inclusion of 'the' in a particular treaty, but anyway. So, yes, I get that.

2155 Can you give us a bit of a sense of timescale of when he would think that it is possible that we might have a debate because – and again, this goes back to my previous question, so it may be that it is not relevant, but of course because there is the implementation of the EES system on the 10<sup>th</sup> of April, as he says, and to the extent that this is linked and of course he is indicated it is linked, then working backwards, given the ratification process under the UK, which is more administrative than is the European Parliament, I am not sure to what extent it is possible to obtain ratification in the UK and the European Parliament before April, but let us put that to one side and sort of make that assumption for a second.

2160 But given the CRAG procedure in England, in the UK, it would, just working through in my mind the timescales, one would have thought that this House would need to consider the question towards presumably late February or early March, and unless that were to happen it would not be possible to do all the relevant steps before the EES system is put in place. So to the extent that there is any correlation, no correlation, it may be that the Chief Minister's answer is well, it does not really matter in that sense, of course it matters in terms of practical effect, but in terms of it is not guided necessarily by that and it will come when it comes, but can you give us a sense of the kind of timescale, given where we are in the legal scrub process, the kind of timescale for when there will be publication, he thinks, of this scrubbed text approved by the UK, assuming it is approved by the UK and indeed by him, and the Government of Gibraltar, and when this House would have the debate post-publication, how much time will we get post-publication to have the debate?

2175 **Hon. Chief Minister:** Madam Speaker, I am not going to think that the job is done in this respect until the first person can cross from the immigration jurisdiction that is Gibraltar into the immigration jurisdiction of Schengen without showing a passport, because I have learnt from history, eloquently written by the Deputy Chief Minister, a *locus classicus* of Gibraltar's political history, of a people, and on what I have lived, both in Opposition and in Government, to know that this negotiation is not over until then. Therefore the hon. Gentleman will allow me to say that 2180 although I would love to give him the time estimate that I believe is relevant, I am going to avoid providing time estimates because I do not want them to be used as the noose that I have referred him to before against Gibraltar, because once I say that, our opponents would know that I have said that, and if they push on a particular issue, if they want to introduce an S, for example, and I have said that we are going to have the debate in the second week of February, they know I will fail in the time scale I have provided if I continue to insist that there is no S. So, I am going to rest on the fact that we are doing our best to complete this as soon as possible. I am going to rest on the fact that I believe that hon. Members will have enough time to read the numbers of pages that are relevant, to be able to come to this House to have the debate with us fully informed.

Indeed, given the speed with which they have read other lengthy material and made up their minds, I have no doubt that they would be able to make up their minds without any difficulty in relation to this text. And I do hope that therefore when we bring the motion, if the Gibraltar Cabinet has said that it approves the scrubbed text that they will agree with us, that they should approve it too and join us in approving it unanimously in this House, because it will represent a safe, secure and beneficial option for Gibraltar's future, which is what we have set out to achieve and we believe, subject to receipt of the final scrubbed text, we have achieved.

**Hon. Dr K Azopardi:** I am not going to pull the thread on the time scales because I was not intending for to certainly, at least not on the total time scales, I was more interested in the mechanical time that is within his gift to confirm today, or at least give us an indication today, I will not hold him to it, but to give us an indication, which actually does not affect the issues that he has raised because, for example, the time window that we will get between publication and debate is not something that would in any way affect the negotiating process. So is he in a position to give us a bit more of confirmation, not just the assurance that he is given us today, but rather something a bit more of what kind of time scale is he thinking between publication of the report and debate in this House, having regard to the fact that post-publication, of course the people of Gibraltar are seeing it for the first time also, so they may be interested in considering it, people want to read it and so on... Yes, I am a fast reader, but other people may also want to read it and to have a proper debate it may be that it is better to have the debate once people have a bit of time, but again, I do not think that tramples on the processes indicated on negotiation.

And then on that as well, on publication, am I right in thinking that what would be published is the treaty together with the annexes and whatever protocols also there are and that they are all subjected to the scrub and that there are no other documents that would then follow. In other words, if we are having a debate, it presumably is not a debate on the treaty that points to certain annexes, protocols or other documents that have not yet been entered into. Am I right in that?

**Hon. Chief Minister:** The treaty is only a treaty when its annexes and its protocols are there, it is one document. It cannot be signed and it will not be published until it is signed, until annexes and protocols are attached to it, otherwise those cannot be signed. But it might be leaked before, Madam Speaker, and indeed, every European document is leaked before it is published and the Government of Gibraltar and the Government of the United Kingdom will not be able to publish it, even though it will be leaked.

So there is a European publication which is able to get its hands on documents when they go to EU ambassadors and routinely publishes them, but the European Commission cannot publish them and the counterparty here, the United Kingdom, cannot publish them because they have not yet signed the agreement. They have been scrubbed, they have been circulated for people to look at. For example, when something is scrubbed and it is sent to UK departments and to Gibraltar because it is now finished its scrub, it is not yet signed because the UK departments in Gibraltar need to say, Okay, this is what we agreed.

But when it is finished its scrub, before it is signed, it also goes to European ambassadors and at that stage, there are 27 copies in the ether, one of them may make their way to a publication in the European Union that may publish it. The European Commission cannot publish it because the Member States have not yet told it that it is okay to sign it and it will not sign it until they have got that okay and they will not put it on their website, which is publication, until they have signed it. So it is very likely Madam Speaker, that the public will be seeing the leaked text and the Government of Gibraltar would not want the public to see the text of this agreement without the Government of Gibraltar publishing it to its citizens.

But we may be hamstrung by the proper process of the approval of a British treaty in the United Kingdom and for Gibraltar and the reality of the processes in Brussels that lead to many of these documents being leaked. So what is the value of that? The value of that is that the Hon. Leader of

2240 the Opposition will have probably longer to read the text than we would be able to provide publicly to Gibraltar and its citizens.

2245 But of course this is a dense legal text. I mean, there are few places as political as Gibraltar. But it would be unfair, Madam Speaker, to expect the general public to pass a judgement on a dense legal text and believe me, the hon. Gentleman as a lawyer may know, or he may not because he may have done more or less European practise. I did some European practise when I was in practise. Being in Government, I have had to consider a lot of directives when we were members of the European Union in their original EU terminology and in the process of this negotiation, we have had to understand European terminology for treaties and British terminology for treaties. This is an extraordinarily dense legal text. There are parts of the text, as with directives, where the hon. Gentleman will find that the first paragraph of a chapter will say one thing, and the next paragraph will say the complete opposite because that is the way that European legal drafting works. So, this, and then, ah, except that, actually that, no, in these circumstances, which is the circumstance that is relevant.

2255 So it is a very dense legal text and therefore, Madam Speaker, it is our responsibility, as elected representatives of the people, to understand that text and make our decisions here, as elected representatives of the people, as to what that text means, and not leave it, Madam Speaker, to the loudest, emptiest vessel, to give us their view on what this dense European text means or does not mean.

2260 This is not a debate for Facebook. This is not a debate for X, for Twitter, or for TikTok. This is a debate for this House, for the elected representative of the people of Gibraltar, bringing their background and their understanding to the debate where, in good faith, we all determine what we think this text means for the socio-economic future of Gibraltar, principally through the filter of sovereignty, safe in the safe, secure and beneficial, and through the filter of the economy of Gibraltar and the socio-economic benefit to Gibraltar, the beneficial filter.

2265 That, Madam Speaker, is a process that I am sure Hon. Members will have sufficient time to prepare for. I would not want to come to this House without them having had the opportunity to prepare for that debate. I am sure they will have the opportunity to prepare for that debate, not least because, as I have started by saying, they are very likely to be able to download the text from a well-known European publication before the Government is even able to give it to them and before the text is signed, Madam Speaker.

2275 But in terms of timing, even if the hon. Member would not hold me to it, I was not complaining about that, that he might or might not hold me to it. My concern is what people outside of this place might think I might be held to or might think I might be compelled to comply with once I have uttered a timetable. And for that reason, Madam Speaker, he will hear me repeat what I have been repeating for five years, which is to say I will not put a timetable on when these things will happen, but the hon. Gentleman can rest assured, and as I am sure he does not need me to say, that the Deputy Chief Minister, the Attorney-General and all of our teams are working as hard as we can to ensure that that process ends as soon as possible, not least because of the imperative of wanting to do it in order to avoid the issues we were debating in respect of the... (*alarm sounds*), that is my alarm Madam Speaker, in respect of the earlier question relating to EES.

**Hon. Dr K Azopardi:** A very gentle alarm. (*Laughter*) Normally alarms tend to bounce you up in bed!

2285 Madam Speaker, yes, well, the New Year's Eve agreement was published by *El País*, was not it? I mean, that is a good example, I suppose, of the kind of what the Chief Minister says and I will place an order for a consignment of cold towels to read this treaty, and I do agree with him that it is important and it is the responsibility of Members of the Parliament to have a proper debate and to direct our population as to what we think the judgement on this agreement is, this treaty is, whether it is safe and beneficial for Gibraltar. Of course, we cannot make that judgement, we have not seen it.

They will have made a judgement by the time they come to this House, but we need a period of time for us to properly consider the treaty so that we can have that informed debate.

2295 I agree with the Chief Minister that being a dense legal text, it is important for it to be properly scrutinised, understood and debated. However, we are living in the social media age that we are living in, and I am sure that plenty of people will come to lots of views on social media informed or not.

2300 Can I ask him on the European Parliament ratification process, just on my understanding, or if he can confirm my understanding, is that the European Parliament process would take a number of months. Am I correct in thinking that? Does he have information about that, of the average process? I had hitherto believed that it was a process of some months and that presumably, if we are taking a vote here and the vote is going to trigger UK ratification, of course we are still then waiting for European Parliament ratification before the implementation phase or at least before the fruits are delivered but that the implementation period and whatever needs to be done presumably can follow in parallel, I assume, but perhaps he will confirm.

2305 **Hon. Chief Minister:** Well, Madam Speaker, I have a soft alarm because if you are the Chief Minister of Gibraltar, you have to be a light sleeper. Things can happen in the dead of night if one is still relying on very strong alarms to wake one up. It does start to point to a disqualification.

2310 Madam Speaker, in terms of the noise on social media, these are things that are entertaining but best ignored. One should never be driven to do or not do something based on what people may be saying on social media. Social media is what David Cameron might have called in his early days as the great conversation, but it is no more than that. It is a conversation with everyone in the community pitching in and giving their views, whatever their qualification.

2315 This is not a document on which one should take any views based on what is said on social media. Even the most erudite and well-qualified, indeed legally qualified, comment there may be on social media because, you see, two Octobers ago, the people of Gibraltar decided that we had the responsibility to make decisions about what happens in Gibraltar, not people who blog or write on social media or give opinions on social media.

2320 In the end, a little like the story I have told the House before about the editor of the Financial Times telling John Major who had told him that he was doing everything possible to comply with what had been in the editorial, for goodness' sake, do not do the things I say in my editorial. I write that between three and five o'clock and I have got to get it out by five o'clock and it has to be 500 words. I do not give it any thought - you have got to run the country. We have to look at the consequences for decades of this treaty. We have got to make the relevant decisions. We have to value what is before us and what the alternative is, and we have to do it, Madam Speaker, not just thinking about what this may do to popularity. We are politicians. It would be foolish to pretend that people are going to look at this text and not think what does supporting it or not supporting it do for me, especially those on the way up trying to get in.

2330 Actually, those of us who are no longer looking for popularity will be the ones who can give the most neutral analysis of the treaty because we will not be looking to be elected next time round. But it is our responsibility to look at it in that way and ignore all of the noise on social media, such as it may be.

2335 Madam Speaker, in terms of the European Parliamentary procedure, short of giving the hon. Gentleman opinions and my own political observations, I am not here to answer his questions on that formally. I am also not able to give the House any empirical information in that respect. I am happy to have a chat with him about what I think is going to happen, but a chat is not something that we should do across the floor of the House and therefore, Madam Speaker, I am going to refrain from giving him my views of what happens in respect of the European Parliamentary procedure, what it means and what effect it could have.

2340

**HEALTH, CARE AND BUSINESS**

**Supplementary Questions – 845; 847; 850; 862; 867; 870; 877; 896; 897; 905/2025**

2345 **Madam Speaker:** All right, I think that concludes the questions to the Hon. Chief Minister so we will now turn to take, as I indicated yesterday, supplementaries to the Hon. Minister for Health, Care and Business.

The Hon. Mrs Ladislaus, do you have any supplementaries on 845?

2350 **Hon. J Ladislaus:** Madam Speaker, I have here the table provided to me yesterday by the Hon. Minister as to the health cards and the time it is taking to process them. I note that the average waiting time has increased sharply from July 2025 when it was between one to two weeks.

2355 **Minister for Health, Care and Business (Hon. G Arias-Vasquez):** Sorry, can I have the question number?

**Hon. J Ladislaus:** Yes, Question 845.

**Hon. G Arias-Vasquez:** Thank you.

2360 **Madam Speaker:** Perhaps we can just take a minute for the Minister to find...

2365 **Hon. J Ladislaus:** I am sorry, I have before me the table provided to me yesterday by the Hon. Minister for Health in respect of the times that it is taking to process the health card renewals. We see a really sharp increase from July 2025 when the average waiting time was between one to two weeks and it continues increasing steadily until December 2025 when it goes up to 11 weeks. Can the Hon. Minister give some detail as to the reason behind those sharp increases?

2370 **Minister for Health, Care and Business (Hon. G Arias-Vasquez):** Madam Speaker, there is an admin review currently going on in the PCC and the number of individuals that are working in registration is now four individuals. As a result of that, the number of weeks has gone up. However, I am informed that no one that is eligible will be denied GHA care because they do not have an up-to-date health card.

2375 The amount of work that goes into determining some cases where they may or may not be eligible is significant and that is hence the reason for the delays.

2380 **Hon. J Ladislaus:** Madam Speaker, is it the case that perhaps the use of the health cards, given that before they used to have the E111 behind them and we have heard in recent months, I have also asked questions and pointed to the convoluted nature of having to renew for students on an annual basis, is it perhaps time now to get rid of the health cards altogether? Is that something that the Hon. Minister and the GHA are looking into?

2385 **Hon. G Arias Vasquez:** Madam Speaker, as I confirmed yesterday, there is a wider exercise into the GPMS and the eligibility and the criteria for the eligibility, which ties into the work that is been done by the Hon. Chief Minister and the Treaty. As a result of that and preventing people from entering into the GHA that are not entitled to the GHA, part of that exercise is indeed looking at whether indeed GHA cards add anything or otherwise. So yes, we are looking into whether we believe that the GHA card *per se* should continue in use or otherwise.

2390 **Madam Speaker:** All right, any supplementaries on 847?

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**Hon. J Ladislaus:** Madam Speaker, I have got the information before me and if I may refer, because it is very relevant, the information given to me at Question 848 was the total number of beds, of acute beds that St Bernard's Hospital actually has available and that feeds into how many beds were occupied, which is what this table shows. So, if I may, I will just go back to my calculation, based on the information I was given yesterday in answer to 848, there are 95 acute beds in total in respect of adults, adding 21 in respect of children, we have 116.

That is my calculation as to how many acute beds we currently have at the GHA. Does the Hon. Minister agree with that calculation? Is that a fair assumption?

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**Minister for Health, Care and Business (Hon. G Arias-Vasquez):** Madam Speaker, it may be the number of acute beds, but that does not necessarily equate with the number of occupied beds, if that makes sense.

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**Hon. J Ladislaus:** Yes, I understand that. The point I am trying to make is this next point that I am going to make, which is that it is all well and good to say, because we see here that, for example, on 15<sup>th</sup> April, there were 59 acute beds occupied at St Bernard's but the point that I am trying to make here is that if we look at the amount of acute beds that St Bernard's, in fact, has available for admissions, it is significantly less than 116.

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For lack of a better term, I would term them mainstream beds, so to speak. Does the Hon. Minister agree with that assertion?

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**Hon. G Arias Vasquez:** No, Madam Speaker, that assertion is incorrect, because a lot of the long-stay patients which fill the occupied beds are actually in the calculations that the hon. Lady is looking at. So, when we look at the total bed capacity, and when I look at the number of beds, so when she looked at, for example, the number of beds that were available, I think it was May 15<sup>th</sup>, the figure, so 59 beds.

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And if I go back to her assertion that there are 116 beds, that still means that there is over 60 beds available in the acute setting. It is not a correct calculation of the number of beds, because actually the way that the beds are calculated, and a better calculation, is to remove maternity and paediatrics from the equation, and to look at, so maternity and paediatrics are completely separate from the number of acute beds, because for obvious reasons, a male having a heart attack will not be eligible to go to either of those. A male that is over the age of 18 will not be eligible to go into either of those wards.

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So, the way that the hon. Lady is formulating those numbers is not necessarily reflective of the reality.

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**Hon. J Ladislaus:** But then, Madam Speaker, on the same vein, we should remove, for example, infection control, 10 beds. If we remove the fact that you would not send somebody having a heart attack to infection control, supposedly, that inflates the figures given artificially. And then we have acute medical ward, that is 32 beds, that one would stay. The surgical operation, 6 beds, my understanding is that that is the day surgery. People would not be admitted to a day surgery. And then we have the surgical ward, that is 34 beds, fine. The long stay has 30, which does not count either. The CCU has 13 beds reserved, presumably, for the most sick patients, the most critically ill patients.

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So, the point I am trying to make is, is it the case that those numbers, so to speak, do not reflect the number of acute beds that the hospital in fact has to admit patients on a day-to-day basis, so that the figures shown here show a much more dire picture than what is being painted by the Minister.

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**Hon. G Arias Vasquez:** No, Madam Speaker, because the hon. Lady is calculating it in a very simplistic manner. So, the way the beds are calculated in the hospital is that the beds will always be available in the acute surgical and acute medical wards and for obvious reasons the CCU.

2445 So, when there are beds available, the beds will always be available in those wards, and the bed management team manage the beds so that there are always beds available there for patients to be able to access the beds.

So, when the hon. Lady yesterday asserted that there were three beds available on most days in the hospital, I can categorically say that that is the case on some very, very specific days in deepest, darkest January but that will certainly not be the case for the predominant number of months a year.

2450 There will usually be a number of beds which the hospital can play with, and which the hospital feels is an adequate number of beds to play with on a day-to-day basis. So, I think that the way that the hon. Lady is categorising it is not necessarily reflective of the reality of the ground.

2455 **Hon. J Ladislaus:** Madam Speaker, in order to play with these numbers, as the Hon. Minister has put it, is not it the case that people would have to be moved out, and not necessarily into the most appropriate ward for, for example, the ailment? Such as, for example, people being moved into CCU without a need for CCU care. Is that the case? That is what is happening?

2460 **Hon. G Arias Vasquez:** Madam Speaker, CCU is the most precious and expensive ward. It is highly unlikely that a person will be moved unnecessarily into CCU. CCU beds are precious and are reserved for the patients that actually desperately need CCU beds. So, in that example in particular, it is highly unlikely that a patient that does not need a CCU bed will be moved into a CCU bed.

2465 There will be other contingency plans that are put in place in the instance that the beds are tight in the hospital but, by and large, there will be a significant number of beds, apart from when there is a bed crisis where there are three or four beds but, again, we are talking about a few given days in deepest, darkest January when you would expect any hospital to be tight on beds.

2470 When I say that, Madam Speaker, we are not talking about an NHS crisis where there are people in corridors getting treated in corridors. We are talking about a hospital which continues to have beds available in the relevant wards and actively manages any shortages of beds in a way that is deemed appropriate by the bed management team.

**Madam Speaker:** Anything on 850?

2475 **Hon. J Ladislaus:** Madam Speaker, at the schedule that I was given in answer to 850, which breaks down long-stay patients at St Bernard's Hospital, or rather the top 50 I asked for, I have got 44 patients on here. And I note that of those patients, 14 patients have been at a long-stay ward for over a year, 8 of those patients for over 2 years, 4 of those patients for over 3 years, 3 of them for over 4 years, 2 of them for over 6 years, and 1 of them has been at this long-stay ward for over 7 and a half years. Madam Speaker, on what basis can those numbers and those lengths of stay in a long-stay ward be justified by the Hon. Minister?

2485 **Minister for Health, Care and Business (Hon. G Arias-Vasquez):** Madam Speaker, I went into this in some brevity yesterday in some of my answers. There are some patients that are on the wards for reasons where even though they are clinically discharged, they still need a significant input in terms of their condition. So, without wanting to go into specifics of any patient, the top 2 patients certainly have specific conditions which requires them to stay, or which means that the hospital is the best place for those patients because the level of care that they need is most suited to be in a hospital.

2490 Again, I am happy to let the hon. Lady know what those conditions are behind the Speaker's Chair, but I am not comfortable in speaking about the specific conditions across the floor of the House. There are some patients here which are long-stay patients because they have chosen not to go to ERS and we obviously cannot force anyone to go to ERS, and we are looking at different

2495 options now as to what to do once we have a new facility available for patients to move. The hospital has to be clear and Government policy has to be very abundantly clear on this.

2500 The hospital is an acute hospital for patients that are unwell and therefore if a patient is medically discharged, it is a policy of the Government that it is best they are not in hospital. And in fact, the point which I frequently make is that if it were to be my mother who needed to go to hospital, I would make sure that my mother is in hospital for the length of stay that she needs to be, but as soon as she is fit to be discharged, I would want my mother to be discharged from the hospital because a hospital is no place for anyone to be for a long period. However, over the years, as you can see from the data, there have been numerous individuals who have chosen to stay at the hospital and we now have numerous options with which to deal with these individuals and especially once there is a further facility opened, we hope to clear some of these long-stay patients.

2505 **Hon. J Ladislaus:** We have just heard the quote of the further facility. Does the Hon. Minister mean the Rooke facility?

2510 **Hon. G Arias Vasquez:** Yes, the Rooke or any other facility that the GHA intends to open. As for now, we are looking at opening the Rook as indeed was made clear today.

2515 **Madam Speaker:** Anything on 862?

**Hon. J Ladislaus:** Madam Speaker, I have here the route followed by the GHA for the assessment of suspected ADHD in children and I just have one question. At step one, there is a reference to the neurodevelopmental triage panel. Can the Hon. Minister give some detail as to the make-up of that panel?

2520 **Minister for Health, Care and Business (Hon. G Arias-Vasquez):** Madam Speaker, that would usually be made between the consultant, the paediatrician, the psychology team and any relevant therapists.

2525 **Madam Speaker:** 867?

**Hon. J Ladislaus:** I know that the Hon. Mr Reyes picked this up yesterday. There is a column missing or an apparent column missing from the answer that I have been provided with. I am just looking at 867.

2530 Perhaps it is easier if I just read the question out again just so we know what I am... It says: how many children have been referred to the Gibraltar Young Minds Service? I know that that is there.

How many children have been or are under the care of the Gibraltar Young Minds Service? That is missing, yes.

2535 How many children were or are under the care of a GHA psychiatrist? That is missing.

How many children were or are under the care of a GHA psychologist? We have here.

How many children are under the care of a GHA counsellor? I know that that is irrelevant because of the explanation given to me by the Minister yesterday.

How many children were or are awaiting to be seen by a GHA psychiatrist? We do have that column.

2540 How many children were or are awaiting to be seen by a GHA psychologist is here as well.

The last one is irrelevant as well for the reasons given by the Minister yesterday.

We do have a few columns missing there.

2545 **Madam Speaker:** My note was that the supplementaries in relation to this table were for columns 1, 4, 6 and 7.

Minister for Health, Care and Business (Hon. G Arias-Vasquez): Madam Speaker, those columns are missing. They are not missing because I gave the answer in my substantive answer to the House. If the hon. Lady prefers, I am happy to go through the answers again to make.

2550      **Madam Speaker:** The supplementaries outstanding, and I want to keep it tight, were in respect of columns 1, 4, 6 and 7 which relate directly to the table. I am going to invite supplementaries in relation to the table because I opened the supplementaries yesterday generally.

2555      **Hon. G Arias Vasquez:** Madam Speaker, just to be clear, 2, 3, 5 and 8 were addressed in my substantive answer.

**Hon. E J Reyes:** I am not disagreeing with you, Madam Speaker... I think you posed in a very open way. You said, shall I give you some time to be able to look at the column.

2560      Therefore, I did not jump in with any comment because then I would have made a comment on the supplementary.

**Madam Speaker:** So did we not take supplementaries yesterday at all on 8, 6, 7?

2565      **Hon. E J Reyes:** Not at all.

**Madam Speaker:** All right, thank you...

2570      **Hon. E J Reyes:** Madam Speaker, I know the Minister is saying that whatever misinformation may have been referred to in the text and so on. One of the reasons that we have Hansard is so that in a couple of months' time if one needs to refer to something, it makes life easier for all in this House, including the parliamentary staff who often help us out if everything is compiled in one area.

2575      And even the way it is answered, Madam Speaker, sometimes we are pressed for time. Sometimes we are pressed for time in looking at the schedule and my hon. Colleague has listed the 8 subsections in Roman numerals, and they are not even answered in the same order. So the column does not even follow chronologically down.

I am just saying to make life easier for those of us who have to take up all your time, Madam Speaker.

2580      **Madam Speaker:** I am going to open the question to the Hon. Mrs Ladislaus.

2585      **Hon. J Ladislaus:** I take the point, but I think the missing column that is very relevant to this information is in fact the one on psychiatry. Perhaps I am missing something here. We have a column that says children who are waiting to be seen by a psychiatrist, but we do not have a column to reflect those that are actually under the care of a psychiatrist.

I do not have a comparator there because the column is not there. So perhaps it is in the information that was given yesterday and I do apologise if I have missed that specific but that is what...

2590      **Hon. G Arias Vasquez:** Madam Speaker, in relation to Roman numeral 3, how many children are under the care of a GHA psychiatrist? The answer to the question was on average the GYM GHA psychiatrists are estimated to have approximately 100 patients under the care on a rolling monthly basis.

2595      **Hon. J Ladislaus:** Is it the case that they are discharged upon being seen fairly quickly but I am just not understanding the relationship between the other columns. For example, if they are under the care of a psychologist it is a protracted period of time, whether it is 2 weeks, 2 months, but it

2600 is not just the one time that they see them. My understanding with a psychiatrist is that that follows as well, so that a child may see a psychiatrist and may have to return so therefore they are under the care of that psychiatrist.

So why leave it out of the table? It does not really tally.

2605 **Hon. G Arias Vasquez:** Madam Speaker, this is the way that the officials have decided to answer the question. I assume that it is because the figure is approximately 100 on a rolling monthly basis and there is nothing more sinister than that. So, there are circa 100 children, some may be discharged, some may come in, but there are about 100 children who were or are under the care of a GHA psychiatrist.

2610 **Madam Speaker:** All right, anything on 869? 870?

**Hon. J Ladislaus:** Madam Speaker, I note at 870 I asked a question as to donors to the GHA and what the donations were. Should I read the question again? Otherwise, the public does not have any reference as to what this is.

2615 This one is particularly convoluted, that is why I say. Since October 2023, has the GHA received any donations for the purchase of medical equipment? I asked for breakdowns of amounts received towards the purchases, specific equipment that has been purchased, whether the equipment purchase has been commissioned and is in use or not, and where the responsibility lies for the maintenance.

2620 Again, I have not had all of those answered within this schedule. So, for example, whether the equipment purchase has been commissioned and is in use or not is not in fact in the schedule provided. Is there a reason for that?

2625 **Minister for Health, Care and Business (Hon. G Arias-Vasquez):** Regarding point 3 specifically, donated equipment is not always commissioned by the GHA clinical engineering team. Commissioning in some cases may be undertaken by the relevant specialist team and or the provider or manufacturer.

Therefore, given the short notice, the GHA was unable to collate the required commissioning information.

2630 **Hon. J Ladislaus:** Is it perhaps something that can be collated at a later date or within a specific period of time?

2635 **Hon. G Arias Vasquez:** Yes, Madam Speaker, if the hon. Lady were to message or email me, I am happy to ask for that information to be collated.

**Hon. J Ladislaus:** In the donation's column, I note that there are donations in respect of a surgical robot. Can the Hon. Minister give some more information as to what that surgical robot is?

2640 **Hon. G Arias Vasquez:** Absolutely, Madam Speaker, a surgical robot is a robot that is used for surgical purposes. I do not mean to be cryptic, but that is exactly what it is.

I can confirm that the robot has been purchased by the GHA. I can confirm that there is going to be a press call next week on it. The robot is actually cutting-edge technology which the GHA has commissioned specifically for its most prevalent uses in urology treatments so the men in the Chamber will be glad to hear.

2645 I suppose I can say that the first successful operation by the surgical robot was carried out yesterday.

2650      **Hon. J Ladislaus:** Am I reading this correctly? The donations received for the robot supposedly amount to £500,000. Is that correct? Am I reading that correctly?

**Hon. G Arias Vasquez:** That is indeed correct, Madam Speaker.

2655      **Hon. J Ladislaus:** So, what has in fact been spent on procuring the robot?

2660      **Hon. G Arias Vasquez:** Madam Speaker, the robot is significantly more expensive than £500,000. I do not have the exact figure with me. I am happy to provide it if notice is given of the question... It would be the surgical robot and or any equipment which is connected to the surgical robot.

**Madam Speaker:** Anything on 877?

2665      **Hon. J Ladislaus:** Madam Speaker, 877 pertains to a question as to the digital programmes, software systems and platforms which are currently in use in the GHA and a breakdown as to their uses where they are used, the date they were introduced and who has responsibility and the annual costs of these.

2670      Yesterday we did hear from the Hon. Minister that not all these systems actually communicate which is a bit concerning so to speak. I do note in the information provided that the annual costs for all these programmes, there are 10 in total provided, three of those programmes are the ones that are able to communicate seven of them are only able to communicate partially and the total cost per annum for the GHA is over £1,000,000 so it is £1,078,000 over the course of the lifetime of all of these contracts the GHA has paid £7,274,500 is that value for money given that these programmes do not actually communicate for the most part?

2675      **Minister for Health, Care and Business (Hon. G Arias-Vasquez):** Madam Speaker, when we talk about programmes not communicating, I think everyone in this Chamber understands how programmes work on computers.

2680      It is like closing Word and opening Outlook. So, you would have numerous systems running concurrently but when you say that they do not communicate what it means is that you have to have numerous systems running concurrently or numerous programmes running concurrently in order to get information.

2685      So, for example, you order your bloods on one system you order your x-rays on another. Your patient registration or your GP appointment is conducted by EMIS so when you say that all the systems do not communicate really that is what we are saying and, as I explained yesterday, in Gibraltar we are very fortunate and we often do not realise how fortunate we are to have a system where primary and secondary care communicate under one roof that is not the norm in the UK. That is quite different to what is usually the case in the UK. So, you cannot have an EMIS system which is a GP system which then communicates to secondary care I explained that in quite a lot of detail yesterday. So the GHA is working on producing its own systems but producing its own systems is necessarily quite difficult because of the amount of work and the amount of coding involved etc so when I explained yesterday about GHA1 it is the GHA creating their own systems in order to make that work and that has numerous different facets to it so is it value for money? When you call the GHA, you can book an appointment the GP sees it so EMIS for example makes everything within the GP system work effectively and it makes the connection with the pharmacies work effectively so is it value for money?

2690      I would argue that it is and it is the best system of those available that is purchased off the shelf. So, can we do better? We are looking at ways to have an in-House system that can communicate and when we talk about communicating, we are talking about having one system one Microsoft Office system to use a basic example where all the programmes can communicate to each other, but we are not talking about a fundamentally flawed programme that does not

work with anything else... We are talking about having your Outlook running at the same time as you have your Microsoft Word and your Excel running simultaneously.

2705 **Hon. J Ladislaus:** Madam Speaker, I think the point there and the question that follows so why has it taken this long because as we have seen and as I have been outlining now for almost the two years I have been here there have been issues with the programmes not communicating in that, for example, a doctor might not get to see notes and I have had people who have had this scenario a doctor might not get to see the notes of another doctor which is a problem so why has it taken this long and a spend of over £7 million to get to this point where we are now thinking, 2710 all right, we probably need to address this...

**Hon. G Arias Vasquez:** Madam Speaker, this is not like what we woke up one day and we decided that there is an issue with this. In the course of successive GSLP governments since 2011, we have explored different systems like EMIS.

2715 EMIS was a system that was purchased by my colleague the Hon. Dr Cortes. It is an evolving thing to see what has worked EMIS in itself was determined to be revolutionary when EMIS was purchased and we now think that we can do better. It is the case with healthcare that you are always consistently improving the AI programmes that I have alluded to in my interventions of yesterday are the GHA thinking of ways that they can improve what they currently have.

2720 The systems purchased were the systems that were purchased that were believed to be the best possible systems purchased at that point in time. If that evolves and if we think we can do better then we think we can do better to go to the specific example of what the hon. Lady is saying that doctors do not have access to the notes, normally we have a lot of consultants coming in from the UK, we have a lot of visiting consultants coming in and the issues normally relate to their access in the programmes.

We have a fantastic team of digital providers in the GHA which try to very quickly resolve those issues but it is about practitioners the system has to be safe and secure because the data that it holds is necessarily very sensitive data so the system needs sign-ins etc. and visiting consultants often have to sign in to numerous different programmes and that is where the problems lie.

2730 So it is not a case of we are resting on our laurels, and we are not doing anything about it, it is a case of it is a constantly evolving system and we are looking at ways to improve the system.

**Madam Speaker:** Anything on 896? ...897?

2735 **Hon. J Ladislaus:** Madam Speaker, here I asked about the number of unresolved employment related claims involving staff at the GHA and I have got a table here which shows that we still have 46 active claims as at the moment, from what I can gather from this table from the schedule and I have been provided as well with the finalised claims which were finalised last year, so in the past 12 months and those amounted to 32 claims. So 78 claims, and I note that a lot of these claims 2740 are not just individual, they are collective so that is a lot of people who have brought claims and who have issues with employment at the GHA does this point to general discontent at the GHA for staff is that what we are seeing here with these numbers?

**Minister for Health, Care and Business (Hon. G Arias-Vasquez):** No Madam Speaker, we are 2745 seeing a workforce that brings a lot of claims.

**Hon. J Ladislaus:** So, Madam Speaker, is the Hon. Minister then just blaming the workforce for complaining rather than, because they actually have real complaints that need to be addressed?

2750 **Hon. G Arias Vasquez:** No Madam Speaker, I am not blaming a workforce for anything, I am saying that the workforce tends to bring claims the workforce is a very dynamic workforce of 1,400

individuals that has brought a lot of claims there are a lot of historic claims, but as that table indeed shows, the claims are in the process of being resolved.

2755 Now, the claims may not be resolved as quickly as some of the individuals like, but that is because all claims have to be referred to Industrial Relations and indeed to our new Senior Crown Counsel, who is now within the GHA, so responding to claims, we now have definitive procedures and processes in place in the GHA and responding to claims means looking at the historic setting of each and every claim, and the legal setting of each and every claim. So every claim has a process to go through and the answer may not always be yes, but we do have now a clear process in which we can identify claims we can identify claims that are valid, or we can identify claims which do not have any validity in the GHA's view and what we have done this past year in particular, is set up processes and procedures in the GHA, in order to expedite the claims, and in order to agree with the claims that have validity, and to say no to those individuals who we do not think the claims have any merit.

2760 2765 **Madam Speaker:** Onto 899?

**Hon. J Ladislaus:** Madam Speaker, I note that we seem to have missed 897, I have got a table for 897 as well on the schedule.

2770 2775 **Madam Speaker:** I am informed that I moved on to 897, but the hon. Member was on 896. Well, anyway. 897. We have to take 897, is that right?

**Hon. J Ladislaus:** Madam Speaker, again, I asked a question as to a breakdown of the current composition of the GHA's executive team, and I have here before me, I have that before me, and I note that five of the nine posts at executive team level are currently acting posts. Is the Hon. Minister comfortable with having so many people acting given the lack of continuity, particularly at such a crucial time in Gibraltar's history? We are at the door of a treaty.

2780 **Minister for Health, Care and Business (Hon. G Arias-Vasquez):** Madam Speaker, thankfully the treaty does not directly affect the executive team of the GHA, but there are several acting posts which will fall into place once one individual is appointed.

So, for example, the finance director is now acting, or the newly appointed finance director is now acting DG. So that is two posts which will be settled as soon as that goes in.

2785 There are numerous other posts that we have chosen to have acting posts to see how it develops, and actually I think that a lot of those posts are going very well. So, I do think that the acting posts, the majority of them, will be resolved as soon as the new DG is appointed, which will be imminently, and then everything else on the board will fall into place.

2790 **Hon. J Ladislaus:** Madam Speaker, I note that the Director of Nursing is actually seconded to the Ministry for Health, and then on the last column it says that that could be extended to the 10<sup>th</sup> of November 2028. Are we going to have a nursing director then in an acting capacity for the next few years? Is that what that reflects, and why is this person seconded when she is still there?

2795 **Hon. G Arias Vasquez:** Madam Speaker, this is the subject of a press release which will be coming out in the next few days. So, the Director of Nursing has now taken on a consultant post within the Ministry, leaving a vacancy in the Director of Nursing. We have done that for six months to make sure that everyone is happy, so no, we do not intend to have the Director of Nursing seconded until the end of 2028.

2800 We intend to have the Director of Nursing in an acting capacity for the next six months in order to appoint, in order to secure the appointment of a Director of Nursing.

2805 **Hon. J Ladislaus:** Madam Speaker, why move a Director of Nursing? What is the reason behind that, but keep her within the organisation and now presumably pay handsomely in respect of consultancy fees?

2810 **Hon. G Arias Vasquez:** Madam Speaker, the corporate knowledge which the Director of Nursing has is unenviable. In a time where we are looking at a possible reorganisation of the GHA, it has been determined that the individual who used to be the Director of Nursing is a key individual who can help us with the corporate history of the GHA in order to assist us in the next few months with the transition.

**Madam Speaker:** Anything on 899? All right, 905?

2815 **Hon. J Ladislaus:** Madam Speaker, just again, just for ease of reference because it is a bit convoluted, I asked as of the 16<sup>th</sup> of September how many unfilled vacancies there were at the GHA and I asked for breakdowns of the outstanding vacancies and the date on which each was opened and I note here that there are some vacancies that have been opened for a period of approximately seven years.

2820 For example, the vacancy for Nursing Assistants at Dudley Toomey Ward and there is another one for a Nursing Assistant on the second page. What is the reason for such a long wait? Has that just laid in wait open for this amount of time?

2825 **Minister for Health, Care and Business (Hon. G Arias-Vasquez):** Madam Speaker, as we went into in length yesterday, there is currently an acuity review which is ongoing in the GHA. Any moves of long-stay patients directly feed into that acuity review.

2830 If you actually look at the nursing figures and you compare them to the nursing figures that we handed over, sorry, if you look at the vacancies that we handed over this time compared to the vacancy figures that we handed over last time that the question was raised, you will see that the vast majority, and I mean 95% of the nursing vacancies, so the actual Registered Nurses, those vacancies have now been filled and it is precisely for the reason that I told the hon. Lady that we were holding onto those vacancies because there were 16 students that were coming from the universities that were going to walk into those vacancies and indeed that is exactly what we have done.

2835 What we are looking to do in respect to the nursing assistants is that we are holding those positions to see the nursing acuity review and to see how it all fits into the nursing acuity review and what will be required in the next few months in terms of any moves that are coming into St Bernard's Hospital.

2840 **Hon. J Ladislaus:** Madam Speaker, I note at the first page that Pathology Services Manager is pending sorry, it is very small, it is pending NOV approval process prior to advertisement, since when has that been pending approval because we do not have a date?

2845 **Hon. G Arias Vasquez:** I do not have that information available Madam Speaker, sorry.

**Madam Speaker:** Anything on 910? Ah, 910 was out of health. That is where we are starting now. All right.

2850

**Q910/2025**  
**Liquor licenses –**  
**Objected, rejected, granted and renewed**

**Clerk:** Question 910, the Hon. J Ladislaus.

2855 **Hon. J Ladislaus:** How many liquor licenses were:

(i) Objected to;  
(ii) Rejected  
(iii) Granted;  
2860 (iv) Renewed;

from 2011 to date? If objected to or rejected please provide the reasons.

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

2865 **Minister for Health, Care and Business (Hon. G Arias-Vasquez):** Madam Speaker, based on records held by the Department for Business for the period spanning 2021 to 2025, the number of liquor licences objected to, rejected, granted and renewed are as follows:

2870 In 2021, there were 21 liquor licences granted and 51 renewed;  
2022, there were 13 liquor licences granted and 67 renewed;  
In 2023, there were 5 liquor licences granted and 75 renewed; and in 2024, there were 2 liquor licences objected 2 rejected, 27 granted 70 renewed.

In 2025, there was 1 objected, 6 rejected, 12 granted and 58 renewed.

2875 **Madam Speaker:** All right, next question.

**Q911/2025**  
**Gibraltar Business Conference in London –**  
**Invitees and event advertisement**

2880 **Clerk:** Question 911, the Hon. C Sacarello.

2885 **Hon. C Sacarello:** I note with interest the recent announcement (this is back in September 2025) of a Gibraltar Business Conference in London on the back of Gibraltar Day this year. Would the Minister kindly provide us with greater detail on who has been invited from the UK and how has the event been advertised to attract the right UK businesses?

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

2890 **Minister for Health, Care and Business (Hon. G Arias-Vasquez):** Madam Speaker, the Government is funding the cost of the event entirely through sponsors and each sponsor receives an allocation of invites for UK based attendees. The sponsor is best placed to identify who in their UK network is of value to them and they would want to invite to the conference.

2895 In addition, Government has collated a network of over 100 Gibraltarian alumni. These are highly skilled and well-connected Gibraltarians currently working in London. We have invited this network to attend. Importantly, we have also asked them to introduce anyone in their network who they feel we should also invite.

Lastly, Government is also inviting its own business contacts and leads that are based in London. Government is also working with the GFSB and the Chamber to promote the event. The Hon. Shadow Minister for Business was also invited.

2900 Targeted invitations are also being sent to founder and entrepreneur networks and to senior management teams at up-and-coming start-ups and family offices. We also have a careful planning strategy for promoting the event and have already received requests for invites in response to our promotion through Government channels. This strategy includes press releases by Government, first calling for expressions of interest so that the event is designed with business requirements in mind and more recently announced in the event, and two, a series of social media posts and videos that we hope will be shared by all those participating and supporting us.

2905 Sorry, this response was drafted before the event, so it actually says I would like to extend the invitation to the hon. Member opposite at his own cost.

2910 **Hon. C Sacarello:** Thank you very much. Hence the vagaries of the Parliamentary timetable in the last few months.

I would like to thank the Hon. Minister for her reply.

2915 Would the Hon. Minister be able to answer if she thinks that it would be sensible to apply to some UK business and trade organisations for future events? As in to write in them?

**Hon. G Arias Vasquez:** The event was a huge success. It was actually oversubscribed. We actually had to change the venue because it was so well subscribed, which I am very pleased about, obviously.

2920 We are looking at larger venues and better set out venues for future events. I am very open to the possibility of looking to UK organisations to attend, but I do think our strategy of having leads that are Gibraltar based to invite to their network and people that are interested in Gibraltar or considering Gibraltar is the way forward because at the event there was significant networking going on and we got extremely good feedback of individuals who actually secured work off the back of that event.

2925 So whilst we are always open to different avenues of invitees, whilst we are always open to different ways of doing it, we actually think that the way that we did it made sure that there was significant percentage of individuals present who were not Gibraltarian, which I think is always very, very important in these events and I actually think that the work done actually meant that a lot of work came to fruition as a result of that business event.

2930 **Madam Speaker:** Next question.

**Q912/2025**  
**BESS Batteries –**  
**Operational capacity**

2935 **Clerk:** Question 912, the Hon. C Sacarello.

2940 **Hon. C Sacarello:** The BESS batteries were expected to become fully operational by August 2025, has this expectation been met?

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

2945 **Minister for Health, Care and Business (Hon. G Arias-Vasquez):** Madam Speaker, as we said in our press release at the time, the August 2025 date was an approximate one. I am informed that the BESS will be operational by the end of January.

**Madam Speaker:** Any supplementaries? Next question.

**Q913/2025**

**Main power lines cut by unlicensed contractor –  
Authorisation of works**

2950

**Clerk:** Question 913, the Hon. C Sacarello.

2955 **Hon. C Sacarello:** Following the general outage on 16<sup>th</sup> September 2025, where 3 mains power lines were cut by an unlicensed contractor, would the Hon. Minister confirm who authorised the works?

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

2960 **Minister for Health, Care and Business (Hon. G Arias-Vasquez):** Madam Speaker, the works were authorised by the Technical Services Department. The company's business licence was in vigour at the point that the TSD granted the permit. The business licence lapsed but the company is now fully licenced.

**Madam Speaker:** Next question.

2965

**Q914/2025**

**7-hour long power outage on the 16<sup>th</sup> September 2025 –  
Cable protection**

2970

**Hon. C Sacarello:** It was clear from video and photographic footage taken at the scene of the incident which caused the 7-hour long outage on the 16<sup>th</sup> September 2025, that the cables were not adequately protected but merely covered with gravel and sand. Does the Minister regard this as sufficient protection?

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

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**Minister for Health, Care and Business (Hon. G Arias-Vasquez):** Madam Speaker, I do not share the hon. Member's characterisation of the manner in which the cables were covered.

**Hon. C Sacarello:** So, would the Minister be able to confirm that they were indeed encased with concrete slabs or was there mesh or other form of tape advertised in their presence?

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**Hon. G Arias Vasquez:** Madam Speaker, the electrical installations in Gibraltar are laid in accordance with established engineering standards and safety specifications.

In this specific case the cables in question were enclosed in a 160mm PVC duct at a depth of 1.2m for the first cable, 1.4m for the second cable and 1.6m for the third cable. This is in the case that we threw some gravel and rocks on top as the hon. Gentleman characterised.

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This exceeds double the minimum requirement depth of 600mm for an 11,000v high voltage cable. Furthermore, the cables were protected by 150mm of reinforced concrete cover which formed part of the pavement providing additional mechanical protection. It must therefore be

emphasised that the cables were not merely covered but were protected in accordance with the approved engineering specification.

2995      Unfortunately, the damage was caused not by inadequate protection but by the contractor drilling through the cables.

3000      **Hon. C Sacarello:** I thank the Hon. Minister for her reply, Madam Speaker, but I certainly disagree with the opinion that there was plenty of cover. The protection that she mentions was the pavements which of course if you are working and digging through is the first to go beyond which was actually gravel and sand and to say that PVC pipes protect somehow these cables when the works are carried out by pneumatic drills is really quite shocking. This is an area Madam Speaker, where the electricity coming out of the generating station provides a power to the whole of Gibraltar.

3005      Would the Minister not agree that it would make sense to ensure that much greater protection in the form of concrete slabs and or mesh and ticker tape and hence strengthening our legislation to ensure that this occurs would help prevent future incidents of this nature.

3010      **Hon. G Arias Vasquez:** Madam Speaker, much the same as in the GHA I rely on clinical opinions. Here in the GEA, I rely on the experts telling me what is required and it is the expert opinion of the GEA that the cables were encased according to approved engineering specification. Now as the hon. Member is aware since the date of this incident and indeed since the date of a further incident, we have indeed amended our legislation to make sure that the contractor has an additional penalty if he indeed does this.

3015      In addition to that as I said in this House at that time, we are also looking at putting in law or codifying in law the service clearance regime which I think is what the hon. Gentleman is alluding to.

3020      **Hon. C Sacarello:** No Madam Speaker, it was not. It was more the practical element of physically protecting the site. Could I ask the Hon. Minister if they have sought advice from experts further afield?

3025      **Hon. G Arias Vasquez:** Madam Speaker, I imagine that at the time that the cables were laid they were but I cannot confirm or deny that since I have not specifically asked the question.

3030      **Hon. C Sacarello:** Madam Speaker, I think you misinterpreted my question if I could just repose it. The question was have they currently, are they presently seeking or have they presently sought advice from further afield on the methodology of laying cables and protecting?

3035      **Hon. G Arias Vasquez:** Madam Speaker, the hon. Lady criticises me when I bring in experts from further afield. In this instance we have not. We have sought to rely on our own experts from within the GEA who confirm that the way the cables are laid comply with international standards.

3040      **Madam Speaker:** Next question.

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**Q915/2025**

**Devil's Tower Road power outage on 25<sup>th</sup> October 2025 –  
GEA officer to oversee the works to ensure the contractor does not sever the cables**

**Clerk:** Question 915, the Hon. C Sacarello.

3045 **Hon. C Sacarello:** Did the power outage affecting the area of Devil's Tower Road on Saturday 25<sup>th</sup> October 2025, again caused by a contractor severing a power cable when excavating, leave the Hon. Minister regretting not following our advice to enforce the requirement for a GEA officer to oversee such works in grid-critical areas?

3050 **Clerk:** Answer the Hon. Minister for Health, Care and Business.

3055 **Hon. G Arias Vasquez:** Madam Speaker, no ma'am.

3060 **Hon. C Sacarello:** Madam Speaker, it defies logic. The process happens, the contractor asks for permits, permits are issued diagrams are issued, the works go ahead and, in this case, it was only in two successive months that we had two large power outages. Is the definition of madness not doing the same thing over and over again and expecting a different outcome?

I know they have legislated but there is nothing physically changing. Is the Hon. Minister going mad?

3065 **Hon. G Arias Vasquez:** No ma'am.

**Madam Speaker:** Next question.

**Q918/2025**

**Industrial uses carried out at the extension jetty near North Mole –  
Relocation location and date**

**Clerk:** Question 918 the Hon. Leader of the Opposition.

3070 **Hon. Dr K Azopardi:** Will they and if so to which location(s) will the industrial uses carried out at the current extension jetty near North Mole be relocated and when?

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

3075 **Minister for Health, Care and Business (Hon. G Arias-Vasquez):** Madam Speaker, we are currently in negotiations with all the relevant parties.

**Hon. Dr K Azopardi:** Can the Minister give us a bit more than that? How many parties are we talking about? What kind of locations are being discussed?

3080 Obviously it may have different needs, but land is scarce. Can she give us a bit more than just discussing it?

3085 **Hon. G Arias Vasquez:** Madam Speaker, given the nature of what we are talking about I would think it was self-evident of where the location would need to be. If we are talking about installations which are at the Port, any relocation would necessarily and as a Port Operator which has a business at the port it is self-evident that any discussions on relocations would have to be a

relocation in or around the area of the Port. It is also self-evident that there is one operator that would be affected and therefore discussions must be ongoing with that operator.

3090 **Hon. Dr K Azopardi:** Of course, I understand that it is going to be by the Port. The answer does not need to be that patronising.

I was saying where in the Port? What kind of locations are we talking about?

3095 **Hon. G Arias Vasquez:** Madam Speaker, I note that the hon. Member for a seated position must have been at the Rowing Club. That is not the part of the Port. The part of the Port is a very defined area, and we are currently in negotiations to see which location is viable.

We think that we are narrowing it down to one location but because there is no agreement yet in place I would be hesitant to say it until the location has been confirmed.

3100 **Hon. Dr K Azopardi:** Will the Minister make an announcement if that is the case or not? Because it may not be worthy of an announcement if they have reached an agreement which is just simply a relocation but given that it has an impact on other things which are worthy of announcements, I suppose, will they make an announcement?

3105 **Hon. G Arias Vasquez:** Madam Speaker, given that the move will require DPC consents and will require significant movement once an agreement is reached I am happy to confirm that we can make an announcement but I would then urge the hon. Gentleman not to criticise me for lacking my photo opportunities too much.

3110 **Madam Speaker:** Next question.

**Q919/2025**  
**MT Nisyros fatal accident –**  
**Action to be taken following investigation**

**Clerk:** Question 919, the Hon. Leader of the Opposition.

3115 **Hon. Dr K Azopardi:** What action will Government take following the findings in the investigation over the fatal accident on the MT Nisyros?

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

3120 **Minister for Health, Care and Business (Hon. G Arias-Vasquez):** Madam Speaker, the Government has considered the findings of recommendations of the MAKO investigation into the tragic fatal accident on the MT Nisyros and has been engaging with the relevant authorities to ensure that appropriate action is taken.

3125 The MAKO report includes a recommendation directed to the Gibraltar Port Authority concerning unannounced inspections of bunker vessels suggesting that such visits should also verify compliance with mooring procedures. However, the Government has been advised that the report does not accurately reflect the operational scope of these unannounced visits.

3130 These inspections are conducted once the bunker barge is already secured alongside the receiving vessel and therefore do not provide the visibility of the mooring process itself. Nevertheless, the Gibraltar Port Authority already verifies that the correct mooring procedures are documented within each vessel's safety management system and this is formally assessed during the annual licencing renewal inspections. The report also recommends that the Gibraltar Ambulance Service, Gibraltar Health Authority and the Gibraltar Port Authority, in consultation

3135 with other stakeholders, review the emergency response arrangements for attending vessels at anchor.

In relation to the MT Nisyros incident, the Government has advised that the decision to bring the vessel to berth was not the result of any deficiency in emergency medical response capability. It was necessitated by the fact that the deceased crew member was trapped within the vessel's mooring equipment and required specialist extraction equipment and by that stage the priority 3140 was a safe recovery of the body and the preservation of the scene for ensuring investigation and the coroner's processes.

Notwithstanding this, work has been ongoing for some time between the Gibraltar Port Authority and the Gibraltar Health Authority to examine how best to provide sustainable and effective paramedic cover for vessels calling at Gibraltar, particularly those at anchorage.

3145 This work predates the incident on the MT Nisyros and continues although a fully satisfactory operational model has not yet been identified. Additionally, Madam Speaker, I am advised that the Gibraltar Maritime Administration has acted on the recommendations arising from the fatal mooring accident on board the Nisyros.

3150 Mooring areas are routinely examined during ship visits which include flagged state inspections, ISM audits, statutory safety surveys and port state control inspections and this has been reinforced to ensure continued oversight of mooring procedures and arrangements.

3155 **Hon. Dr K Azopardi:** I am grateful for that comprehensive answer. Beyond what the Minister has said, is the Government, having considered the report and the recommendations, does it have to go beyond administrative measures into some kind of legislative underpinning by regulations? Do they need to be amended in any way for safety reasons or is it sufficient to have done what the Minister has indicated?

3160 **Hon. G Arias Vasquez:** Madam Speaker, the unfortunate incident was caused by the process and procedures and the equipment on board the vessel which is already the subject of controls which the Gibraltar Maritime Administration would carry out. Therefore, we do not consider that any necessary legislative underpinnings need to be amended. What I confirmed was that we are looking at the interaction of the GHA and the response procedures for the GHA but that does not necessarily necessitate an amendment in legislation and we are looking at that for reasons that 3165 predate the issuing of this report.

**Madam Speaker:** Next question.

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**Q920/2025**  
**Government's Business Transition Advisory Group –**  
**Composition**

**Clerk:** Question 920, the Hon. Leader of the Opposition.

3175 **Hon. Dr K Azopardi:** What is the precise composition of the Government's Business Transition Advisory Group?

3180 **Minister for Health, Care and Business (Hon. G Arias-Vasquez):** Madam Speaker, the group is comprised of the Attorney General, the CEO for the Department of Business, representatives from the Gibraltar Chamber of Commerce, the Gibraltar Federation of Small Business, the Retail, Construction, Tax, Marketing, Tourism, Automotive Industries and me, the Minister for Business.

**Adjournment**

**Madam Speaker:** All right, I believe that may be the last question.

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**Chief Minister (Hon. F R Picardo):** Therefore, I have the honour to lay the answers to Written Questions. W116 of 2025 to W170 of 2025 and Madam Speaker, I have the honour to move that the House should now adjourn to Tuesday 20<sup>th</sup> January at 10 a.m.

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**Madam Speaker:** All right, and I propose the question which is that this House do now adjourn to Tuesday 20th January at 10 a.m. I now put the question which is that this House do now adjourn to Tuesday 20th January at 10 a.m. Those in favour? (**Members:** Aye.) Those against? Passed.

This House will now adjourn to Tuesday 20<sup>th</sup> January at 10 a.m.

*The House adjourned at 7.08 p.m.*