



## PRESS RELEASE

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### THE BUDGET 2024 – MINISTER ARIAS-VASQUEZ’S ADDRESS

Madam Speaker,

Thank you

Given that this is the first Budget Debate in the history of this House presided over by a women, before I begin, let me say that I, and indeed every female in Gibraltar, am grateful to the Leader of the Opposition for reducing the first time that a female appeared at the United Nations to defend Gibraltar’s right to self-determination to a *‘photo opportunity’*.

I am sure all the women of Gibraltar join me in thanking the Honourable Mr Azopardi for his generous political “mansplaining”.

I understand his need to make a political meal out of something that, in reality, is no such thing.

However, Madam Speaker, I assure you that I, and every other woman in Gibraltar, am far more than a *‘photo opportunity’*.

So, Madam Speaker, it is an honour to rise today to deliver my first budget address to this House.

It is indeed a real privilege to do so as the Minster for Health, ERS the Care Agency, Quality of Care, Public Health, Business, Town Planning, Procurement, Utilities, Port and the Maritime Administration.

I hate to say this but because of the number of portfolios and the differences between them –  
PREPARE FOR A LONG SPEECH!

Madam Speaker, as you know, it is no secret that throughout the election campaign last year, I clamoured for the Health portfolio.

I said I wanted the Health portfolio, Madam Speaker, because the experience of watching my son fight for his life at a neonatal unit in Spain had a huge impact on my family and I.

It made me experience, first hand, the vulnerabilities of our healthcare system and the critical need for comprehensive support for families facing such crises.



I do not apologise for the fact that this experience has shaped who I am.

But it also made me appreciate how lucky we are to live in Gibraltar.

Becoming the Minister for Health, Care, Business, is not just a political appointment for me, it is a commitment to ensuring that no family goes through the hardships my family and I endured.

I am constantly in touch with families who are in difficulties, listening to what their issues are.

My ministry now calls those Gibraltarians in Calpe House or any tertiary institution they may be in – to ask if they require any assistance.

We will show people that we remember them, and that we care.

I want to listen.

Madam Speaker, every decision I make as the Minister for Health is influenced by the memories I have of those dark days in the neonatal unit and the resilience of my son, Andrew.

These lessons are not just personal, they are the driving force behind my dedication to deliver a healthcare system that is a pillar of support for everyone, especially during their most vulnerable moments.

Change, however, does not always happen at the pace that one would like.

Change, therefore is and will continue to be an ongoing process.

A forward moving propulsion of constant improvement.

So Madam Speaker, every decision I have taken to date, everything I have already announced in relation to the Health and Care portfolio, and everything I will set out in my budget speech today, has been done with the interest of patients and service users at heart.

Although, Madam Speaker, important though it is, this will NOT ONLY be a Budget address solely about Health.

I will also, of course, try to set out in as much detail as possible all the work I am doing, alongside the most incredibly hard working individuals in the many departments falling under my Ministerial portfolio.

Initially, when I was given the portfolio it looked enormous.

However, what a portfolio this size does do is gives you the opportunity to learn how Gibraltar works.

It gives you an oversight into the synergies of the different portfolios and how they interact.



It has been a steep learning curve into how Gibraltar operates.

Simultaneously, it works to illustrate that no portfolio is a silo and government works at its best when working as a whole.

Although, Madam Speaker, it is just not possible, without being here all day, to mention everything that we are doing at the GHA, at the Port, in Town Planning, at ERS, at the Care Agency, at Public Health, at AquaGib, at GibElec, in Business, at the OFT and in Procurement!

But I will try...

So I guess this is probably a good moment to thank the Chief Minister for his trust in me by giving me this rather large, and I must say challenging, portfolio.

As I've said, I consider it a great honour and will do my level best in trying to make significant and positive changes to the areas for which I am responsible.

I must also, of course, Madam Speaker, mention that I am the constituency MP for the Westside Area.

Although it is not a Ministerial portfolio in the traditional sense, it is something which the Chief Minister and Deputy Chief Minister introduced after the last elections and which I really enjoy.

I have already held various specific constituency clinics and have met with countless constituents as and when they have requested to see me.

I have an open-door policy and take this opportunity to remind those living in the Westside Area that they can arrange a meeting with me by emailing [Westsidearea@gibraltar.gov.gi](mailto:Westsidearea@gibraltar.gov.gi).

### **GIBRALTAR HEALTH AUTHORITY (GHA)**

Madam Speaker, I turn now to my first Ministerial portfolio, the Gibraltar Health Authority.

This is, without a shadow of doubt, the portfolio that takes up most of my time.

And you would expect that, Madam Speaker.

Healthcare is something that affects each and every one of us at some point in our lives.



It affects us directly, and indirectly.

It is personal.

And when you interact with the Gibraltar Health Authority it is normally because you have a problem.

And when you have a Health related problem you quickly realise that nothing else matters.

It is, therefore, my responsibility to ensure we continue to develop and modernise the GHA to ensure it delivers the world class service we expect it to, with the world class funding it receives.

Madam Speaker, I think we should pause to reflect on the fact that this year nearly £211 MILLION POUNDS will be spent on the Health and Social Care budget.

£211 MILLION POUNDS.

Let me be bold enough to stop here a second to explain the discrepancy between this figure and the figure provided by Hon Mr Clinton.

The figure he gave yesterday is the figure in the Appropriation Bill, which is not actually the amount given to the three entities.

If I take the Honourable Member to page 205 of the estimates book, the figure given to the GHA to spend is £156,430,000. The ERS figure to spend is (on page 213) £26,078,000 and the Care Agency figure (on page 221) is £28,183,000.

The total is therefore £210,691,000.

The figure given by the Honourable Mr Clinton of £207 million is the figure appropriated, excluding the contribution from the social insurance fund and the statutory benefit fund (page 205).

This is the importance that this government gives this portfolio.



Madam Speaker, let me contrast this to the 2011/2012 Budget for the GHA and the Elderly Care Agency, as it was then called, which together was £96,058,000.

To split that up:

The Budget for the Care Agency and what was then the equivalent of the ERS was £17,178,000.

Today, the Budget for the Care Agency ALONE excluding the Elderly Residential Services is £28,183,000 with a further £26,078,000 on ERS.

I think that puts everything into perspective.

It shows the level of investment in our people that this government is willing to make.

But let me take you one further, Madam Speaker.

The Honourable Member stood here before us on Monday and stated that the GHA overspend was outrageous.

The Honourable Mr Clinton said the same thing.

The message was then repeated on Question Time last night.

I would remind this House that the Honourable Leader of the Opposition was Minister for Health from 1996 to 2000.

In each and every one of those years, there was an overspend, when the Budget of the GHA was between £22 and £27 million.

Madam Speaker, with an eighth of the budget, 24 years ago, there was between 5-8% overspend on average per annum.



I am PROUD to form part of a government that puts its money where its mouth is and invests heavily into health care.

And whilst I am often told that this is not enough – we need to stop and take stock of just how much that is and focus on how amazing it is that we have that budget.

Globally, Healthcare is under significant pressure.

As countries around the world continue their post pandemic recovery, they are facing increasing pressure due to aging populations, populations with co-morbidities and significant workforce shortages.

Indeed, workforce pressures will be the most significant issue faced by the health and care sectors over the coming years with countries competing globally to attract the appropriate number of trained and experienced staff.

Despite these quite significant pressures, I am immensely proud of the fact the GHA continues to improve and evolve to meet the post pandemic needs of our community.

Madam Speaker, in this address today, I intend for the benefit of Members Opposite, and indeed for those watching, to set out the main achievements of this passed financial year and the aspirations and challenges we expect to face in this next financial year across the GHA's main service sectors.

## **HEALTH AND CARE RESTRUCTURE**

Madam Speaker,

As Honourable Members Opposite will have seen, earlier this year I announced the commencement of a consultation for a significant Health and Care Restructure.

I am pleased to report to the House the consultation is going well, with meetings with the Unions (both Unite the Union and the GGCA) taking place every two weeks as well as adhoc meetings with other stakeholders.



The proposed restructure, Madam Speaker, has been carefully thought out and specifically designed to improve services and increase efficiency in what is the largest area of public expenditure.

Madam Speaker, as from September 2024, I will be taking over as Chairperson of the GHA Board and I will be appointing the Chief Secretary as its Vice-Chair.

The Financial Secretary will also be appointed as a Board member.

This will provide, in my view, the necessary oversight expected from a health and care budget of £211 million a year.

Yes, once again, Madam Speaker, two hundred and eleven million pounds!

By joining the board it brings policy closer to the GHA and it helps the Government understand the issues of the GHA.

Madam Speaker, I make no apology for the fact that I consider it my aim and indeed my duty to make sure that every single pound spent in that budget, is used to its absolute maximum effect for patients and service users.

My role is to continue to develop policies which expand services whilst ALWAYS keeping an eye on costs, and ensuring that we are being efficient with our resources.

Indeed, we are introducing an Internal Audit Function in the hospital, to ensure this is the case.

As is appropriate in a budget debate, I will go into detail on how that will be done later on in my speech.

At the GHA board meeting held in April, Prof Ian Cumming announced his intention to step down at the end of his term in June.

Madam Speaker, given Prof Cumming's exceptional knowledge and experience, I have asked him to continue to support me, as Minister for Health, and also the GHA, in an advisory capacity going forward.



We will always seek advice from professionals, when their expertise will deliver a better service in a more streamlined manner and save costs.

And I am happy to say this, despite criticism from the benches opposite.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank Prof Cumming on behalf of the Government, and I'm sure the whole House, for his work during his time as interim Chair of the GHA Board and, in particular, for his work in assisting us with the fight against COVID-19.

I am therefore very pleased that Prof Cumming was bestowed the Gibraltar Award in May by the Former Governor Vice Admiral, Sir David Steel.

Madam Speaker, I want to make something abundantly clear.

We are NOT re-politicising the GHA.

The GHA will remain COMPLETELY and ENTIRELY clinically independent and us politicians will NOT be able to interfere with any clinical decisions whatsoever.

This will be set out in an Accountability Agreement which I intend to publish before the changes take place later this year.

But there does have to be a closer interaction between those delivering on policy and those who set it.

The GHA and HMGoG have to work hand in glove to ensure administrative and policy oversight.

Madam Speaker, I emphasise again, the Government's involvement as Chair of the GHA Board will be focused upon the setting of policy and budgetary oversight.

I will also be publishing, Madam Speaker, a Patient Charter setting out patients' rights and responsibilities within our health and care services and, to show that we are serious about these things, the Government is committed to enshrining this charter into law.





I am pleased to report that the drafting of such a Charter has already commenced and I expect to be in a position to publish it later this year.

Additionally, as part of the consultation, we are reviewing what changes are required of the existing Gibraltar Health Authority Act.

At this stage, Madam Speaker, it is envisaged that the Care Agency CEO will form part of the Gibraltar Health and Care Authority's Board.

In my view, Madam Speaker, this essential to ensure that all three heads of the patient/service user services are sat around ONE table, discussing policies and pathways to improve the services for the patient.

This, Madam Speaker, was highlighted by the Mental Health Board in their annual report as a way of improving the Mental Health services in Gibraltar and has also been raised with me by NGO's such as the Gibraltar Mental Welfare Society.

And I could not agree more.

Madam Speaker, as I have said time and time again regarding the proposed changes to our health and care services, **none of these changes will result in anyone losing their job.**

That is absolutely not what we are doing.

In fact, I was happy to provide the Unions with these assurances when we first met ahead of my health and care restructure announcement in April of this year.

We are proposing these changes to further improve the service, to modernise the service, and to make healthcare and social care provision more seamless across the board and to future proof the service.

All these changes, as I have already said, are being designed with the interest of patients as our primary focus.



## THE COVID FUND

Madam Speaker,

Before I continue, the House will know that in December, I announced that the previously published plans to redevelop the entrance to St Bernard's hospital using the COVID-19 Fund would not go ahead given the response received from the public and presented to the Government via a petition.

Throughout the COVID-19 pandemic countless individuals and commercial entities donated monies to assist the GHA in its fight against the pandemic.

This money was consolidated into a special fund and has, to date, not been used.

Madam Speaker, the COVID-19 Fund currently stands at £2.7 million.

Earlier this year I announced a public consultation on the use of the COVID-19 fund.

Madam Speaker, I am pleased to report that we have had an excellent response to this public consultation with approximately 100 responses, many of which have been carefully thought out and are extremely detailed.

I have therefore appointed a referral panel, consisting of both of healthcare professionals and lay people, to look into these cases and recommend to me how the £2.7 million should be spent.

This panel has now convened to determine the feasibility of the responses.

Madam Speaker, I should mention though at this stage that it is the Government's intention to distribute this money as widely as possible and not spend the £2.7 million on a single project, as was previously announced.

I would like to thank the public for engaging with us at the Ministry for Health on this and I look forward to making an announcement after the summer on how exactly this money will be spent, breaking it down to the penny in order to be completely transparent.



## ACUTE SERVICES AT SBH

Madam Speaker, I turn now to Acute services at St Bernard's Hospital.

The modernisation of the GHA's acute services under the Reset, Restart and Recover banner continued at pace during 2023/24.

Successful waiting list initiatives, new pathways of care and significant capital developments all took place throughout this year.

Madam Speaker, just to put some of these waiting list initiatives into context, in January 2023 there was an average of 96 weeks wait for a Hip and Knee Clinic appointment.

The latest figures provided to me are now at 9 weeks. That is a reduction of 87 weeks waiting time.

Madam Speaker, for routine endoscopy procedures, the waiting times have dropped from 34 weeks to 6 weeks in the same period.

Whilst I accept that there is definitely more yet to be done, this is a significant step in the right direction.

Madam Speaker, the 16-year long-term strategic partnership with Philips in the form of a Maintenance Equipment Service contract is now in place.

A mobile x-ray unit, six ultrasound systems and a brand new fluoroscopy unit for real-time moving x-ray imagery have been installed and are already in use.

After a very successful first 12 months, this has been expanded beyond diagnostics with over 300 pieces of legacy equipment including ventilators and monitoring equipment on boarded onto the contract.



Madam Speaker, the design for the new Cath lab is now complete and works on the construction and installation began in May.

As I confirmed in Parliament only last week, work is also apace to staff the new Cath Lab, with the recruitment continuing.

As I announced earlier this year to mark Cardiac Awareness Month, the Government is committed to delivering the Cath Lab during the third quarter of this year and, Madam Speaker, I am happy to announce that we are expecting this to be ready on schedule.

This means that angiograms with the potential to introduce stents will be able to be done in Gibraltar.

I was delighted to have visited the site, together with the Gibraltar Cardiac Association, in May to see for ourselves the commencement of works.

This is an important service development and is a crucial part of the Government's commitment to deliver more services locally if it is safe and beneficial to do so.

We said we would repatriate and that is precisely what we are doing.

Madam Speaker, once the new Cath Lab is online, patients will be able to be transferred from A&E to the Cath lab in approximately 90 seconds!!

Madam Speaker, this is not just political.

**THIS. SAVES. LIVES.**

This will save Gibraltarian lives and unfortunately everyone in this room will, at some point, have a family member affected and will thank HMGoG for this initiative.

A remarkable improvement to the current situation which involves having to be transferred to a tertiary centre in Spain, with the consequential delays that could involve.



No Government has repatriated the amount of services we have back to Gibraltar. And we are committed to continuing to do so.

We want our people to go to Europort for world-class services, and to be able to go to the comfort of their own home after having received treatment.

Unfortunately, I know from personal experience quite how difficult it is to travel with a sick family member back and forth to the UK for treatment.

Although I must say, Madam Speaker, for those who must do so, we are absolutely blessed to be able to use the magnificent facilities at Calpe House – Gibraltar’s Home away from Home!

Separately, we have launched a cancer tracking service in conjunction with the breast clinic which, following positive feedback, will be rolled out to other specialties in due course.

We are also making considerable progress with the digitisation of our patient records, which is already providing vast improvements to the way we operate, by making patient records more easily available to clinicians.

We have carried out a major review of all our stores and stock control systems, and have introduced automated dispensing cabinets and an electronic stores management, stock control and procurement systems.

Madam Speaker, last month I was delighted to visit the theatres and stores team to see for myself the new Omnicell stock control system.

Standing here and describing it does not quite do credit to the system.

I would be more than happy to invite the Hon Shadow Minister for Health, Ms Ladislaus to attend with me to see for herself how this new stock control system functions.

Put simply, this is a fully automated stock control system which assists greatly with the management of medical supplies.



In effect, Madam Speaker, the Omnicell system is a huge system which acts like a huge dispensing machine where items get dispensed individually.

This is then recorded online to have an accurate control of stock.

Madam Speaker, the GHA's theatre department has been the first department to see this new system introduced with staff telling me they are extremely happy with it.

Not only does this system assist with stock management and procurement, but it also has the added benefit of freeing up clinical staff who would otherwise need to be dedicating time to the purchasing and management of stock levels.

Additionally, Madam Speaker, this new system flags low stock and allows the GHA to purchase items that are essential which, in turn, has a positive impact in reducing the amount of cancellations that take place at theatres as a result of a lack of stock in a particular area.

Madam Speaker, operations cancelled for this reason are now the exception.

Madam Speaker, although we began the rollout of this new system in the GHA's theatre department for obvious reasons, the intention is to continue this rollout over coming years to the entire GHA.

This is a slow process which is already proving to provide hugely positive results, not only in terms of cost savings and reduction in medicinal waste, but also in terms of resource allocation and reduction in cancellations.

We will be in a position to confirm quite how much will be saved later on this year but initial indications suggest this could be in the region of a saving up to 40% in terms of medical supplies.

This is a great example of how money can be saved with an improvement made to patient outcomes with no negative impact AT ALL on patient services.

Madam Speaker, we are also listening to our clinicians.



It is interesting to note that our budget submissions are prepared long before the 18<sup>th</sup> June – the date of the Honourable Lady opposite’s article in the Gibraltar Chronicle.

But possibly she did not understand the lines in the budget.

Let me take you through this and let me take you through this for the benefit of the LOTO as well, who believes we are massaging the numbers.

If you look at the detail on the complement on page 201-202 of the book, the complement of medical and allied professionals is now 258.5 from 242.5 in 23/24.

This is the same for the Ambulance service, and whilst the complement seems to be slightly down from 23/24 for nursing, the difference is found in the supernumerary posts.

The salaries section on page 205 has gone up from the forecast outturn last year – which shows that we are realistically budgeting for an increase in clinicians.

Locum cover has, consequently been reduced.

Visiting consultants however have been reduced by £120,000 – and this is due to the repatriation of services.

We are bringing the consultants here permanently.

This has been done in a calculated manner.

You see, Madam Speaker, Locums are often (1) expensive as they charge more than consultants / doctors / nurses employed on fixed term contracts, - we also have to supply accommodation to these locums - and (2) are not as committed as doctors employed on fixed term contracts in the jurisdiction.

There is no “morrison’s factor” i.e. you are going to bump into your patients at Morrisons.



It was also agreed that every time a Locum was required, simultaneously, a fixed term post would be advertised, to make sure that we had a fixed term position covering the post.

Madam Speaker, this is already in motion.

This is already being done BECAUSE we listen to the clinicians and consultants in the GHA.

Madam Speaker, we also carried out a review of our Pathology Laboratory practices and output, which has led to improvements in how services are delivered.

The brilliant team at the Lab, who I thank publicly here today, carried out over 3.2 million tests last year.

A remarkable statistic, Madam Speaker.

Additionally, our patients can now enjoy a new purpose built Day Infusion Unit with extra capacity for the care of our patients.

And we started our new trauma network with Kings Trauma Centre in the UK and have already had our first patient airlifted there.

Additionally, we have opened a new laminar flow theatre where we can undertake more complex procedures in specialties such as orthopaedics.

Importantly, we are investing in training our people.

I have said this numerous times in Parliament.

We will be running a course for advanced healthcare practitioners in order to train up to 30 nurses in the next two years. This will assist in freeing up capacity in A&E and will provide us with resilience at the Hospital.

Madam Speaker, we need to look to train more Gibraltarians and we are committed to doing so.





Madam Speaker, two new front-line ambulances were delivered in 2023/24, with two further front-line vehicles and a new High Dependency Unit vehicle purchased for delivery in 2024/25.

These new ambulances are now expected to arrive after the summer and, I am advised, that these 3 new vehicles will be operational from the day they arrive in Gibraltar.

Additionally, Madam Speaker, Members opposite will recall that a new Ambulance Dispatch System was introduced at the GHA on 30<sup>th</sup> April 2024.

The dispatch of the ambulances has moved from the Fire Service and is now undertaken by the GHA.

This new system is based upon international best practice with the introduction of an initial clinical triage process, which will prioritise the dispatch of ambulances to the sickest patients first.

This new dispatch system is a significant undertaking and I would like to thank the team for their hard work and professionalism in ensuring the smooth handing over and enhancement of the system.

Madam Speaker, as we move into 2024/25, planning and design is well underway for a new Chemotherapy suite and Aseptic Suite and I really look forward to seeing these come to fruition over the coming year or so.

Madam Speaker, in order to assist the house, on current planning, the completion date for the new Chemotherapy suite is early 2025.

This new suite will greatly enhance the service user experience and make the journey for those with cancer that little bit easier.

Madam Speaker, this is a huge development, of which we should be rightly proud.

The new suite is larger, making patient experience better overall and will improve service provision.



Madam Speaker, again, I must stress this because it is very important – everything we are doing in healthcare is being done with the interest of patients as our primary focus!

The GHA is looking into upgrading its endoscopy equipment and replacing washing units to ensure we have state of the art medical kits.

And regarding our Day Surgery Unit, the GHA is always exploring ways on how to improve this unit by increasing its throughput and ensuring more activity is undertaken locally as Day Cases rather than patients being transferred to Spain or the United Kingdom.

The Day Surgery Unit and the team there are always praised for the brilliant services offered.

Madam Speaker, the 2023/24 financial year was extremely busy for the GHA with some headline activity figures being as follows:

A&E attendances saw a 4.4% increase in activity between 2023/24, yet in spite of this increase, overall A&E performances still, remains excellent.

Madam Speaker, I think with the introduction our of new Minor Injuries Unit at A&E, (which with two young boys I have had to use on more than one occasion!), combined with the exceptionally phenomenal work carried out by A&E staff 365 days a year, the experience for patients at A&E is significantly improved and I will support them to continue to improve.

Although I accept that we can, of course, still do more and indeed we will.

Madam Speaker, if you look at the number of cases going through theatres, you can appreciate the year on year increase in activity and productivity that is being delivered.

Financial Year 2022/23	-	3,576 cases
Financial Year 2023/24	-	3,888 cases

This represents, Madam Speaker, a 9 % increase in activity from 22/23 to 23/24.

In all of these areas, the additional activity represents real people who have been treated.



As we look forward, the GHA will continue to be diligent in reviewing all its waiting list numbers and times to ensure our communities receive the best and timeliest service possible.

Finally, Madam Speaker, we are looking at ways to allow our consultants more autonomy with their budgets.

Starting with theatres, we will be looking to pilot a scheme to devolve all budgets to divisional heads.

Madam Speaker, we will look to empower them, whilst being able to hold them to account on departmental expenditure.

This is very important as we are asking the teams to improve efficiency.

Separately, Madam Speaker, it is important to note that the GHA is there for those who have consistently paid into the system.

We need to be conscious and protect that which we have, as it really is a great system.

For that reason, Madam Speaker, we are, **FIRSTLY**, strengthening the administration and accounts team to ensure that all non-entitled patients are properly charged when using our Hospital.

**SECONDLY**, strengthening the supporting legislation.

This is in no way intended to catch people out when their health card is expired.

It is intended to ensure that those who are travelling from abroad pay for the services they receive.

The aim here, Madam Speaker, is to ensure world class services are provided to those Gibraltar residents who are entitled to healthcare, because, as anyone who travels outside Gibraltar knows, if you go to any other healthcare system in the world, you are likely to be asked for payment/insurance details **BEFORE** healthcare is provided.

That, Madam Speaker, is a source of revenue that we must ensure is not lost – particularly when we are already providing the care to those individuals.



Acute services are your first port of call with the GHA when you are seriously ill.

Ensuring a streamlined service in theatres, in A&E and other acute areas means that the overall experiences with the GHA will be much improved.

Investing in acute services will ensure timely diagnosis treatment plans which will improve patient care: reducing complications ultimately reducing cost in this area.

### **PRIMARY CARE AND THE PRIMARY CARE CENTRE**

Madam Speaker, I turn now to a hugely important, and often controversial, area of our Health Service – Primary Care.

The PCC saw 144,267 GP appointments in 2023/24 which was up from 132,408 in 2022/23, that is to say, a 9% increase.

Madam Speaker that is an average of 12,022 appointments a month!

On a less positive, but very important note, I would also like to mention the 17.7% increase in missed GP appointments, which is a poor use of valuable clinical time and a waste of resources and an area we will focus upon reducing in this coming year.

Madam Speaker, the number of missed GP appointments in the last financial year has equated to 3.8% of all appointments.

In reality, that equates to an average of 459 appointments every single month being wasted, with no one able to take up those slots.

Madam Speaker, I have tasked the GHA Director General and his team at PCC to propose ways in which the Government can attempt to reduce this figure and I look forward to making announcements on this front in coming months.



The increases in activity year on year show no sign of abating and we are predicting similar increases in activity across all GHA areas in 2024/25.

Despite this increasing demand, access to see a GP is good in Gibraltar especially when compared with the UK and internationally.

But Madam Speaker, don't get me wrong, I fully accept we can improve this even further and I am currently looking at ways to achieve this.

We need to stop the mad scramble for appointments at 8am!

To assist us to achieve this, we will be appointing someone tasked to do this by the end of the summer.

We are actively looking at ways in which we can increase access without increasing cost.

The use of Advances Health Care Practitioners and the use of Advanced Paramedics to take pressure off, for example.

I am very proud that we have recently appointed five senior paediatric support workers who are the foundation of the Neurodevelopmental pathway, linking with psychiatrists, paediatricians, speech and language therapists, occupational therapists and dieticians to provide better support for parents and schools.

These will assist in delivering the neurodevelopmental pathway.

Madam Speaker, I am pleased to say that we have now shared this with the Opposition, Ms Ladislaus and Ms Sanchez in particular, and are looking to release this as soon as possible after the budget, once they have a chance to review.

This financial year has also begun with a review of the administrative processes in the PCC, as well as the GHA more generally, with the objective of improving further the access to GP's.



During 2024/25 I'm very keen to develop a Primary Prevention Strategy for Gibraltar that will cover all our screening programmes and be based upon a Covenant for Health between individuals, our communities, HMGoG, Charities, the Private Sector and Health and Care agencies.

This work will focus upon keeping people fitter and stronger for longer in their own home settings and out of hospital.

Because, Madam Speaker, prevention ALWAYS better than cure.

The Director General and Director of Public Health are already working upon a Covenant for Health for Gibraltar which I expect to be in a position to publish before the end of the year – more on that in a little while.

## **MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES**

Madam Speaker, I turn now to Mental Health provision in Gibraltar.

I recently brought a motion related to Mental Health to Parliament and I appeared on a GBC Viewpoint programme, together with the Hon Member Opposite, Ms Ladislaus, last month.

I am not shying away from criticism when it comes to Mental Health.

It is true to say we have come a long way, but I absolutely accept there is a lot more that needs to be done and I am determined to tackle the issue head on.

We are looking to take the final steps set out in the strategy produced in 2021.

Mental Health Services have seen significant change and development over the past year.

I will attempt to set out some of the most significant changes.

### **Community Mental Health Team**

Madam Speaker,



I am delighted to confirm that we have identified a building in the town centre, which will house the new CMHT.

The building is located right at the heart of the town centre – albeit in a discreet location.

It is a beautiful art-deco building with lots of light, which historically has had to have a huge entrance installed – perfect to make the building wheelchair accessible.

The entrance had to be created, you see, to allow the printing presses to enter the building.

It is a building linked to a library – the Garrison Library.

We will be refurbishing the Old Gibraltar Chronicle Printing Press building to accommodate the new Community Mental Health Facility.

However, this will not purely be a “lift and shift” of the current services.

We will be using the opportunity of the relocation to deliver a whole new model of care integrating physical and mental health and which will provide support for employment, accommodation, rehabilitation, therapies, and financial advice.

It is intended to be a net to ensure that people find the support they need in the community, so that matters do not escalate till they then require hospitalisation and they do not fall through the net.

And all of this, largely, though the donations of a benefactor who will be providing the lion’s share of the funding.

A short video showing the location will be uploaded onto the Government’s social media page shortly.

We will be commencing the design phase of this project shortly.



### Housing Outreach Team:

Madam Speaker, the Housing Outreach Team is a newly developed team who have been in post since early last year. They provide oversight on all houses belonging to clients with severe and enduring mental health concerns, both in private and Government housing.

The service monitors cleanliness of houses, together with furnishings, basic needs (i.e. food, internet, soft furnishings, etc.), up to date utility bills, personal paper work (i.e. ID, passport, GHA health card, etc.)

The housing outreach team have served as a reinforcement for preventing inappropriate admissions thereby proving success in the community

### Gibraltar Young Minds

Madam Speaker, the Gibraltar Young Minds team has undergone a significant transformation.

They now have 1 Registered Mental Health Nurse, 2 Enrolled Nurse, 2 Counsellors, 1 Child Psychologist, 2 Psychiatrists, and 1 part-time external Child Psychiatrists.

Madam Speaker, I am pleased to inform the House that this restructure has greatly reduced the waiting list for children to be seen within the service.

This year, on average, from time of referral to first contact with the team was 2 weeks.

The Gibraltar Young Minds team conduct allocation meetings every week attended by all professionals within the team, together with the Head of Child Social Services and a representative from the Department of Education.

This process reinforces accountability and governance to all referrals made to the service.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank all the staff of Gibraltar Young Minds for their efforts and dedication to improving our children's mental health services in Gibraltar.

### Introduction of Clinical Governance lead

Madam Speaker, the GHA has a newly appointed Clinical Governance Lead who will ensure a framework is developed where the Mental Health services are accountable for continuously improving the quality of care and safeguard the quality of our service.





There will be quarterly reports delivered to the GHA Board, promoting accountability and transparency.

We will be exploring different options here to optimise access to the service.

### Registered Mental Health Nursing (RMN) BSc:

Madam Speaker, I am pleased to announce, the first ever Registered Mental Health training is due to commence in September 2024, running for three consecutive years.

The BSc programme has been developed to meet Gibraltar's local needs and is in line with the Mental Health Strategy 2021-2026, where we emphasise care in the community over in hospital admission.

### **SPONSORED PATIENTS**

Madam Speaker, our Sponsored Patients Department oversees expenditure of over £11 million annually and is responsible for ensuring patients receive good clinical care from tertiary services in both Spain and the UK.

Madam Speaker, the reality is we are a small hospital dependent on tertiary centres.

Over the past few years, Gibraltar has successfully repatriated services from both Spain and the UK, a good example of this being that in 2023 we undertook our first local Cochlear Implant.

During 2024/25, we will continue to review all external referrals with a view to repatriating services where it is safe to do so, but also to ensure we are getting the maximum return for our money.

Madam Speaker, the Honourable LOTO criticised the fact that this budget has been reduced.



The reason for this, Madam Speaker, is that we are repatriating services to Gibraltar.

If we are repatriating services and sending the bulk of patients to the UK under our reciprocal arrangement, it is self evident that the sponsored patients budget is to go down.

However, Madam Speaker, this service is patient led and we will not shy away from sending patients from tertiary institutions if this is required.

Therefore, if there is over expenditure under this head, it is because it is purely required.

Let us not forget that the Honourable LOTO was the Minister for Health between 1996-2000.

In every single year that he was Minister for Health there was overspend in this section of the budget. So yes, we have allocated a budget of £11 million against a forecast outturn of 23/24 of £16.06 million.

But to give but one example, in 98/99, there was an overspend of 20.83% from a budget of £1.9 million to a spend of £2.4 million.

Despite repatriating activity, we will continue to need the support of external providers in both the UK and Spain as there will be certain specialist procedures that it is neither safe nor cost effective to undertake in Gibraltar.

With this in mind the Sponsored Patients department has been reviewing all our external arrangements with a view to improving the services offered to our patients. If any external centre does not meet our exacting requirements, we will have no hesitation in moving services to another provider.



During 2023/24, the GHA also entered into an arrangement with the local private provider GibMed for the provision of MRI scans thereby increasing the provision of diagnostic services offered locally.

Whilst there were some teething issues here, the service we hope is now up and running, with patients now being sent to the new facility.

### **ELDERLY RESIDENTIAL SERVICES**

Madam Speaker, as with most western countries, Gibraltar is seeing an increase in its elderly population.

We are lucky within Gibraltar that elderly care services are provided by ERS and that ERS is always looking to improve and develop its services to meet the needs of our communities.

Madam Speaker, I would like to draw the House's attention to a number of important initiatives that took place over the course of the last year at ERS.

Firstly, the Government launched a new Dementia Strategy that is aimed at coordinating all local resources to improve the quality of care for Dementia patients.

I'm sure the Dementia Strategy will be very impactful and a steering group has been set up under the leadership of the Director General.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank the Gibraltar Alzheimer's and Dementia Society, which until very recently was so ably led by the late Daphne Alcantara, for their work throughout the year, alongside our National Dementia Coordinator, on all matters Dementia Related.

The National Dementia Coordinator was something GADS, and Daphne in particular, had been lobbying Government on for some time and I am delighted to say that, as part of the Dementia Strategy, a dementia qualified person has been appointed to this role.



This is just part of the legacy which Daphne leaves behind and which was so clearly demonstrated across Gibraltar, not least with the symbolic lighting of the Moorish Castle in purple – the colours of GADS, following her sad, untimely passing.

As I have mentioned in the past, the Government is committed, as set out in our Manifesto, to working with GADS on all matters Dementia related.

We will be looking to further develop the dementia strategy with the assistance of relevant clinicians and GADS.

Only together will we be able to further improve dementia provision for those living with the condition and their families.

Madam Speaker, additionally ERS, in conjunction with colleagues from St Bernard's have been reviewing the frailty pathway to ensure seamless multidisciplinary working and much more will be seen of this work over the coming financial year.

The 2024/25 financial year will see some exciting developments within ERS, including the revaluation of the care delivery model with outsourced sites to prevent discrepancies in care provision and ensure cost-effective healthcare delivery.

Madam Speaker, there is a need for ongoing training and professional development programmes for both clinical and non-clinical staff to enhance staff skills and knowledge. Investing in the workforce will improve service delivery and outcomes for the organisation.

Finally, Madam Speaker, we will develop sound financial strategies to ensure the long-term viability of ERS with cost-effective operations and prudent financial management.

As I announced in April, ERS will be re-tendering for its external service provision at Hillside, John Mackintosh Wing and Bella Vista, and this process is now well underway.

The objectives of this exercise are to improve service delivery by holding external contractors accountable to high quality standards whilst at the same time delivering improved value-for-money for the taxpayer.



I am confident therefore, that 2024/25 will see new and improved services for our communities under the auspices of ERS.

Elderly patients are vulnerable and have given a lot to Gibraltar.

They deserve the best care, dignity and respect and we will ensure that this is the case going forward.

## **THE GHA AND ITS EVOLUTION**

Madam Speaker, Gibraltar should be rightly proud of its healthcare services.

I am rightly proud of our healthcare services.

However, as with every healthcare system in the world, the GHA needs to adapt and evolve to the increasing needs of its population.

As we move into this next financial year, the GHA is reviewing its workforce strategy to ensure it has the appropriate skilled workforce for the future and is engaging more fully with local schools and the University of Gibraltar to ensure a continuous stream of talent for years to come.

The GHA is also reviewing its financial controls and procedures to ensure it gets best value for money from each pound of public expenditure.

Madam Speaker, if I may, I think the appointment of the Chief Secretary and Financial Secretary onto the GHA board will assist greatly on this front.

This review, Madam Speaker, is looking at workforce contracts but also all tenders for external goods and services.



Additionally, Madam Speaker, importantly, we have also separated complaints from the Patients Advice and Liaison Services (PALS).

This separation provides independence for anyone concerned about the quality of service they or their loved ones have received.

The first call for anyone with concerns continues to be the GHA PALS service, but if this then develops into a complaint, it is referred to the Complaints department, which is independent of the GHA and overseen by my Ministry.

Madam Speaker, I hope this gives confidence to our services users that complaints, as and when they arise, will be dealt with quickly and transparently and action taken when necessary.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank Alex and Daniel from my ministry for their efforts in running the complaints department successfully. I am sure they are already known to many in our community.

As I have already stated, the 2024/25 financial year will see the strengthening of financial controls within the GHA and will build upon the substantial work undertaken in 2023/24, highlights of which include:

- The establishment of a Finance Sub-Committee.
- The establishment of an Internal Audit Function at the GHA, sat within the GHA but entirely independent from the GHA.
- Phases 1 and 2 of the Theatre Inventory Transformation project completed.
- Appointment of a Legal Services Manager to streamline claims.
- Divisional clinical leads appointed in Medicine, Primary Care, Surgery, to improve operational activities enabling greater efficiency, leadership and enhanced patient care.
- EMIS Project Board established.
- The new CMHT project.
- GPMS removal of claw back legislation amended and to be gazetted in 2024.

The list goes on.

Madam Speaker, modern technology will play an increasing role in how health services are delivered for the future.

With this in mind, I have specifically instructed the GHA to review how it will future proof our services using Artificial Intelligence and Digital Technology.



My objective is to present an AI / Digital Strategy for the GHA during 2024/25 and I am very excited about how this technology can be deployed to improve patient care services.

This continued modernisation of the corporate functions of the GHA will ensure it can continue to evolve and maintain the quality of clinical services delivered at the highest level and comparable to those delivered internationally.

## **GHA CONCLUSION**

Madam Speaker, before I turn to other areas of my Ministerial portfolio, I hope that I have been able to provide an accurate snapshot of the state of the Gibraltar Health Authority at present.

It is clear to us on this side of the House that the GHA continues to develop and improve its service.

At the heart of any healthcare system are a group of dedicated, professional and hard-working staff and I would like to say a big thank you to each and every member of staff at the GHA.

From the Director General and the rest of the GHA Exec team down, every single member of the GHA has worked flat out throughout the year to ensure that no matter what the GHA continues to provide the first-class standard of care expected from it.

I continue to try and meet every single member of this outstanding team, to listen to the views of the GHA – at every level.

Madam Speaker, I have no doubt that 2024/25 will continue to bring new challenges to the GHA, but I am also convinced that the GHA can rise to the challenge and continue to deliver outstanding care for us all!

And I wish to take this opportunity to assure the GHA that I will continue to fight their corner – as I know that each and every individual working for the GHA is consistently looking out for patient interests in step with HMGOG's view.



## PUBLIC HEALTH

Public Health is a portfolio which I always thought needed to go hand in hand with the health portfolio.

Our aim ALWAYS has to be to keep healthy and out of hospital.

Incidentally, this reduces costs in the best way possible.

Keeping people healthy and out of hospital, reduces the spend of the GHA because people do not get ill in the first place.

Madam Speaker, I turn now to Public Health.

How healthy we are and how long we live are impacted by a range of factors.

Some of these, such as our genetic makeup, we cannot change but other factors we can personally influence - for example, living a healthy lifestyle, the environment we live in, our jobs, our housing and our education.

These are called the wider determinants of health or the 'cause of causes'.

This is why the public health team have been working on developing the Covenant for Health that I will be personally leading on, with the Director of Public Health and the Director General.

Madam Speaker, this new Covenant for Health will be the primary prevention strategy for Gibraltar.

It goes hand in hand with our health strategy.

The Director of Public Health and her team have been developing the building blocks for the Covenant over recent months.

These include the Joint Strategic Needs Assessment or JSNA, tobacco and nicotine control including vaping - more to come on vaping in a moment - starting a 6 step whole systems approach





to healthy weight including a physical activity strategy, and breaking the intergenerational cycle of Adverse Childhood Experiences.

Firstly, the Joint Strategic Needs Assessment or JSNA.

The first phase of the JSNA will be launched today!

It is a website with information about various illnesses, with statistics, relative to the population and can be now found on the GHA website on <https://www.gha.gi/jsna-main-page>

This is an important aspect of the public health system because it starts exploring trends in the wider determinants of health.

This Madam Speaker, I'm advised, will help us identify what is driving and causing our ill health and what policies and interventions are needed to address these as a result.

Indeed, some interventions are already contained in our manifesto, for example, the significant and systematic public awareness campaign making explicit the links between obesity and cancer and investing in weight reduction programmes and medication.

The JSNA will help us track and demonstrate the impacts of the interventions whilst fully recognising that change at a population level often takes many years to achieve.

Madam Speaker, there is no short term quick fix solution.

Secondly, tobacco and nicotine.

Madam Speaker, all the evidence suggests the greatest risk to our health remains smoking.

We know that, locally, upon becoming pregnant nearly 20 % of our mum's smoke and about half manage to quit during their pregnancy.

Madam Speaker, the Government considers this figure is too high.

Smoking not only affects a mother's health but also that of the baby in some of the most formative years of their lives.

Smoking is hard to quit.

Nicotine is a highly addictive substance and this is why the focus over the previous year has been strengthening the GHA smoking cessation service through improving access to booking appointments, expanding the range of doctors who can prescribe Nicotine Replacement Therapy and advocating the message that you are far more likely to have a successful quit attempt with support.



Madam Speaker, Public Health alongside the Mental Health team has set up a “coalition of the willing” to assist those who wish to quit smoking.

There is a specific nurse who has set up a smoking cessation support group in Clubhouse and offers Nicotine Replacement Therapy.

Madam Speaker, I would like to take this opportunity to recognize the fantastic support which are offered by mental health charities in Gibraltar.

Whether it is Clubhouse, GibSams, Childline or the Gibraltar Mental Welfare Society, they all provide valuable support to our services.

And this support needs to grow and be encouraged – as it will be with the new Community Mental Health facility.

Again, Madam Speaker, we achieve better outcomes when we work collaboratively – GHA, Public Health and all the charities.

In 2023, 731 people were seen in the smoking cessation clinic.

During October, as a direct result of our Stoptober campaign, 98 people were seen by the smoking cessation clinic - the greatest number by month by far, indicating that people do want support and help to quit.

The National Focal Point for Tobacco Control, that I chair as Minister for Health, continues to meet and coordinate the strategic agenda for tobacco and nicotine control.

Madam Speaker, I am pleased to report that Gibraltar was presented with an award for the work we are undertaking on the tobacco control agenda by the UK Health Overseas Ambassador in 2023.

Vaping has been an issue of significant debate over the last 12 months with many parents expressing concerns to me regarding the number of young people vaping.

Whilst it is generally recognised by the scientific community as being less harmful than smoking, vaping is not harm free and the long term effects are yet to be determined.

There is the perception that all young people are vaping in Gibraltar.

The public health team undertook a survey in 2023, in partnership with the University of Gibraltar, where nearly two thirds of the children in years 7 to 13 responded.

This represented 2,179 children all of who were questioned on their vaping knowledge, habits and experiences.

The majority of children have not vaped, however, as much as this may be reassuring, a third of the children had vaped at least once in their life and this increased with age.



Of those children who did vape, when we compared this internationally, our children vaped more than in other countries.

This is why we are progressing with plans to ban the sale of vapes to children and working closely with the Department for Education and Head Teachers to try and prevent our young people starting and continuing to vape.

This study also identified a concerning finding that of the Year 13 pupils who responded to the survey 1 in 10 had smoked cigarettes in the last month.

This indicates that we still have a considerable way to go in terms of reducing the lifelong impacts that smoking has upon the health of our population.

These young adults will be the smoking parents of the future, affecting not only their health but through passive smoking the health of those around them.

This is why I am pleased to announce that a consultation will be launched this September to explore the feasibility of developing a smoke free generation for the future.

The third aspect of the Covenant for Health is supporting our population to achieve a healthy weight.

Another significant risk to our health is not being a healthy weight.

By this I mean being underweight, or overweight, or in the normal range for weight but not having a healthy balanced diet rich in vitamins and minerals.

Being underweight can lead to osteoporosis, or brittle bones, and infertility.

Being overweight leads to an increased risk of developing cancer, increased risk of having a heart attack and increased risk of developing type 2 diabetes.

The drivers of obesity are complex and related to personal, environmental and societal factors.

It is sadly not as simple as 'eat less and move more'.

We have commenced a 6 step whole systems approach to healthy weight.

The focus during the last 12 months has been to establish our data monitoring and mapping our local drivers of obesity.

Madam Speaker, I am advised that we have identified nearly three thousand adults with type 2 diabetes.



This is a condition that is strongly linked to being overweight and there is now an established evidence base which finds that reducing weight can revert most people back to not being diabetic.

We need to strengthen our focus on this group of people to help support them reduce their weight to enable them to stop using their medication and in turn reduce the complications of type 2 diabetes.

Finally, in terms of the Covenant for Health, a focus on our children.

In 2023, the Director of Public Health established a working group to address the inter-generational cycle of Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs).

ACEs refer to situations where children face negative experiences, such as domestic violence or parental substance abuse, that can have long-term detrimental effects.

ACEs can lead to mental health issues, increased risk of substance abuse, domestic violence, unstable employment, and legal troubles in adulthood.

These impacts not only affect individuals but also place economic burdens on services like rehabilitation.

The working group has adapted the concept of ACEs for Gibraltar, mapped relevant services, and is now reviewing protective factors and exploring ways to strengthen them.

These efforts align with the Youth Strategy for Gibraltar and initiatives by the Department of Education and the Care Agency.

Madam Speaker, the inter-generational cycle of ACEs can be stopped and we are determined to do so.

Finally on this section, we are also looking to set up a group to focus on the effects of screen time on children.

We are currently scoping this out between the Director of Public Health, Paediatricians and the Education Department.

I will now move onto the health protection aspects of public health.

The global health threats from infectious disease remains a risk for us all in this post-pandemic world.

In most countries the threat of a future pandemic remains at the top of national risk registers.

Global coordination of responses is undertaken through the International Health Regulations framework, or IHRs.



The Director of Public Health continues to work in partnership with many different agencies and Government Departments to protect the health of the population of Gibraltar including the Office of Civil Contingencies, the Environmental Agency, the GHA, the Port, Airport and the Department of Education.

Additionally, Madam Speaker, we are improving and strengthening our ability to detect and manage outbreaks through our surveillance systems.

The Director of Public Health launched an electronic notification system in May 2023.

From May to December 2023 over 100 infectious disease notifications were submitted and managed.

Examples of outbreaks include the Legionnaire's disease outbreak where we identified 4 cases, one of which sadly passed away.

Madam Speaker, we rapidly identified the outbreak through our surveillance systems and I personally chaired 5 Strategic Coordination Group meetings to ensure that we had a robust, coordinated and resourced response.

To improve our health protection capability further our Director of Public Health has been providing specialist public health advice into the re-drafting of the 1950 Public Health Act to strengthen this to encompass an all hazards approach including notification of suspected chemical and radiological hazards.

This will mean that we will have some of the strongest public health legislation out of any UK Overseas Territory to enable us to rapidly identify and respond to the health threats of our population.

Madam Speaker, vaccines play a vital role in terms of protecting the health of our population too.

We have a well-established childhood and adult immunisation programme provided by the GHA.

Vaccines are monitored through the GHA Immunisation Committee that the Director of Public Health chairs.

In this committee they monitor uptake, review the evidence for developing new or amending existing programmes and review any adverse vaccine event reporting.

Madam Speaker, the reason this is important is because in the early part of the year the UK reported that they were experiencing a significant measles outbreak and the World Health Organisation reported growing levels of concern regarding outbreaks across Europe and globally.

Although often a mild disease in children, measles in adults can result in miscarriages, still births and deaths.



This is a vaccine preventable disease and, as a result, our Director of Public Health developed a Gibraltar measles plan drawing upon the previous experiences from our last outbreak in 2008.

As a consequence of the move into enhanced surveillance, by offering an MMR vaccine catch up programme we have had no confirmed cases of measles in Gibraltar.

This, Madam Speaker, should remind us of the importance of ensuring we continue to achieve high levels of vaccine uptake in our population.

Madam Speaker, finally, I am pleased to announce that I have initiated a review of the Medical and Health Act 1997 that provides the legal framework for the functions of the Gibraltar Medical and Registration Board and the Nursing Registration Boards.

These Boards are responsible for both the registration of doctors, nurses, allied health professionals, pharmacists and dentists and deals with complaints regarding their professional conduct.

The health sector workforce is evolving and new roles are being developed emphasising the importance of patient safety through robust and proportionate regulation of health professionals.

The review is looking into whether this should be an independent body.

Madam Speaker, in summary therefore, there are many aspects to the public health agenda that cover health, well-being and health protection.

Working across the various different Government Departments is vital for us to be able to influence and change the wider determinants of health and enable us to become one of the healthiest places in the world to raise our children.

I would like to thank the Director of Public Health, Dr Helen Carter, and her incredible small but hard working team at Public Health for their great work in ensuring the protection of our population.

Dr Carter is a great example of a leading women in her speciality – whose job it is to look out for the well-being of the population.

As I think I have demonstrated, Madam Speaker, the work they carry out is often quite gloomy but incredibly necessary and the Government is grateful to Dr Carter and her team for this.



Madam Speaker, I turn now to the Care Agency.

Madam Speaker, the budget of the Care Agency is indeed £28,183,000.

Forecast outturn for 23/24 was indeed £31,420,000, but, I am pleased to announce, we are looking for efficiencies in this area.

Efficiencies including the allocation of children to foster carers, which is an improvement on the quality of lives of the children who are placed into care.

They include working with our housing department to ensure that all 18 year olds are allocated homes.

They further include changing the set-up of the housing provided to individuals so that the number of carers can be rationalised -whilst always working within safe parameters and the appropriate guidelines.

Madam Speaker, far from being sham budget, we are requesting that the Care Agency finds efficiencies in the way it is run.

We are actively going through proposals to ensure this is the case.

### **LEARNING DISABILITY SERVICES**

Learning Disability Services continues to rapidly expand in all areas.

The demand is primarily transitioning students from St Martin's School to attend the Centre and new admissions into Residential Services.

The Community Learning Disability Team also remain an essential service to families who require support in the form of Social Work input and Respite Services and there is also a steady intake of referrals and demand, resulting in full caseloads for each member of the team.

Madam Speaker, the House will have seen the Government's announcement last week regarding the successful tender award for the provision of Domiciliary Care and Home Support services to Lifecare Limited for an accumulated amount of £3,836,573.28 based on the rates submitted and the existing requirements of the service.

Madam Speaker, this decision was made through the Government Procurement department.

I am very pleased that we now have a modern, contractual framework in place, ensuring the Government, through the Care Agency, can provide better continuity of care at agreed rates, ultimately benefiting the service users.



There are also clearly defined service standards included in the tender package which will mean that the Care Agency is better able to hold the service provider to account.

As at end of the 2023/24 financial year, the team remains with 107 open cases which are actively being worked on.

A further 50 remain on records as children in need who may need support in the future.

This year has seen the addition of 1 full time social worker to this team.

Learning Disability Services continues to strive towards excellence in services and adhere to their main aim which is to provide person-centred support to individuals with learning disabilities, recognising and honouring their unique identities.

Madam Speaker, the Care Agencies' dedicated staff actively support individuals in achieving their aspirations and promoting their inclusion within the community.

Madam Speaker, a plan to move all of Learning Disability Services to a new purpose-built facility is in the initial stages of development.

Over the next 10 years it is projected there will be an additional 20 residents requiring housing in Learning Disability Services and approximately 200 service users attending the centre.

Madam Speaker, as Minister with responsibility for the Care Agency, and indeed also, separately, for the Quality of Care, I believe it is only right that we do whatever we have to do now to ensure we future proof this service – even if the benefits are not seen for another 10 years.

Madam Speaker, decisions in this area should not and are not taken for short term politically designed electoral gains.

They are taken for the long term benefit of the service user.

## **ADULT SERVICES**

Madam Speaker, referrals into Adult Services has plateaued and the number of care packages at year end has slightly reduced by 11 packages although this still remains high at 692 packages.

Assessments were carried out on 486 over 60 year olds which is an increase of 100 assessments within 23/24.

A total of 233 packages of care were reviewed and adjusted to meet the assessed needs of the clients.

The Community Social Work teams ended the year with a total of 277 open cases, 85 Homecare Support, 84 Domiciliary Care and 108 Social Work support.





60 cases were supporting clients with mental health which is an increase of 21 from 22/23.

The very successful Waterport Day Centre for the elderly accommodates 106 clients with an average daily attendance of 18-24 clients.

There are currently 125 clients registered at the Day Centre with an allocation of at least one day per week.

Madam Speaker, this is another service which will be going out to tender, with a view to improving the efficiency of the service.

### **CHILDREN'S SERVICES**

Madam Speaker, moving onto the Care Agency's children services.

This service encompasses a wide range of support and interventions designed to ensure the well-being and safety of children and families.

These services are typically provided by qualified and experienced social workers, who play a vital role in safeguarding children and promoting their welfare.

Social workers in children's services are dedicated professionals who work across various teams to address the complex needs of children and families in their care.

Social Workers within Children's Services have statutory duties under the Children Act 2009 in respect of various matters relating to children including safeguarding, providing interventions for children in need, including those with disabilities and providing accommodation and care for children who need this.

As a regulated profession they are bound by Care Agency policies, professional guidance and a code of ethics which uphold professional standards to ensure that we provide our targeted client group with quality care and interventions.

Within children's services, social workers operate in multidisciplinary teams, collaborating with professionals from diverse backgrounds such as education, health, and the RGP.

Their primary responsibility is to assess and evaluate the needs and risks faced by children, often working closely with families to develop intervention plans that address those needs.

Social workers engage in direct work with children, conducting interviews, observations, and assessments to gather information about their circumstances. They also provide guidance and support to families, empowering them to make positive changes and overcome challenges.



Additionally, social workers liaise with external agencies and community resources to coordinate services that promote child welfare, including mental health support, educational provisions, and alternative care arrangements when necessary.

Through their tireless efforts, social workers strive to create a safe and nurturing environment for children, ensuring their rights and best interests are upheld.

What is done within this service for a very vulnerable group of children is truly remarkable, and I want to acknowledge that here today in Parliament.

### **PSYCHOLOGICAL AND THERAPEUTIC SERVICES**

Madam Speaker, the Therapeutic service provides specialised therapeutic interventions within the context of high intensity and high-risk cases.

New referrals have reduced for 23/24 by 52 referrals although the ongoing active cases have increased by 71 in the same period.

This would suggest, Madam Speaker, cases are more complex and therefore remain open for longer.

Bruce's Farm is a residential facility to support clients with substance abuse or addictions.

Madam Speaker, it may be beneficial to members opposite, and indeed those watching, if I explain the referral pathway for Bruce's Farm.

Individuals can self-refer to DARS – the Drugs and Alcohol Rehabilitation Services or be referred by a GP or any other health professional.

The DARS team will carry out an assessment and then refer to the Consultant Psychologist who will assess and decide whether detox at Ocean Views is required or not.

Madam Speaker, if a Detox at Ocean Views is required, the patient goes on a waiting list followed by admission to Ocean Views when a bed becomes available.

And after detox has been completed, the patient is transferred to Bruce's Farm from Ocean Views.

If however a Consultant Psychologist decides that detox at Ocean Views is not required, the patient can be admitted directly to Bruce's Farm.

Madam Speaker, bed capacity at Bruce's Farm has increased from 13 to 16 with admissions increasing from 39 to 52 in 23/24.

Additionally, the Therapeutic Team provides support to clients in the community and in 23/24 they provided 624 hours of clinical support.



## **FINANCE, PROCUREMENT AND ADMINISTRATION**

Madam Speaker, it is no secret the Care Agency has exceeded the 23/24 allocation finishing at year end with an outturn position of £31m.

Against an allocation of £19.8m this equates to an overspend of £11.2m

The most significant variance against the budget was £9.8m which relates to relief cover of £13.8m for the year against a budget of £4.0m.

Relief cover accounts for circa 45% of the overall expenditure of the Care Agency and is something this Government has increased exponentially, much to the benefit of the most vulnerable in our community. We are however looking at ways to control the expenditure without affecting service.

Domiciliary Care and Home Care also present a cost pressure, with a budget of £3.2m and expenditure of £3.6m and a variance of £0.4m but the Government is proud of its investment in this area!

Madam Speaker, let me be clear, in 2011/2013 the domiciliary care budget was £750,000.

In 2024/25 we have allocated £3.5 million to this head alone – now called Home Support – Supported Living in the Community.

These figures, however, are the figures that we wish to invest further certainly by the award of the tender, and by training and increasing the fixed complement of care workers.

The figures are simply incomparable to what they were in 2011.

## **STAFF ACHIEVEMENTS**

Madam Speaker, the Care Agency held their Annual Award Ceremony earlier this year which I was delighted to attend, alongside my colleagues the Minister for Equality and the Minister for Justice.

This event recognised the dedication, commitment and professionalism of the staff who go constantly go above and beyond in carrying out their duties.

13 individual awards were presented and one team award.

Additionally, and I am particularly proud of this, Madam Speaker, at the Excellence and Innovation Awards Ceremony hosted by the Chief Secretary, the Care Agency's Tank Ramp – Dry House Project also came runner up in the Project Achievement Award which recognises a department which has successfully executed an innovative project.



The Care Agency also received their second star for Wellbeing at Work by GibSams in November 2023 as well as receiving the His Excellency the Governor's Award for Merit in May 2023.

Madam Speaker, on behalf of the Government and, I am sure, all sides of the House, I wish to extend our heartfelt thanks to the CEO of the Care Agency, Carlos Banderas, and all of the very passionate Heads of Service Heads, Giselle, Julie, Jennifer, Rachel and Monique, as well as their dedicated teams for their extraordinary work throughout the year in supporting the most vulnerable members of our society.

Their efforts frequently go unnoticed, but today, I want to recognise the hard work and dedication the staff put in 365 days a year.

## **TOWN PLANNING**

Madam Speaker, I move away now from Health and Social Care into something rather different, Town Planning.

The Town Planning department continues to handle a high volume of applications with almost 500 received during 2023.

In the last year, the department has successfully filled a number of vacant professional posts in both the Town Planning and Building Control sections, and I am pleased to report that within the next few months it is expected that the department will have its full complement of professional staff – solely because this recruitment is taking place.

The nature of applications to the Town Planner is variable and includes household developments, extensions to buildings, internal works, as well as major development proposals.

Major developments dealt with in the last year include the Bayside One residential project, the National Stadium, the redevelopment of the old Bayside and St Anne's Schools, various development proposals along Devil's Tower Road, the new Theatre at John Mackintosh Hall, the proposed new College and residential development to the rear of the Cross of Sacrifice, a new hotel on the site of the Marina Bay car park and the first phase of land reclamation at the Eastside.

Madam Speaker, the Development and Planning Commission continues to meet on a regular basis with a total of 11 meetings held in 2023.

The DPC meetings are open and transparent and continue to be held remotely and live streamed on the Government's YouTube channel ensuring that the DPC proceedings are easily accessible to the general public.

We will continue to keep under review the arrangements for DPC meetings to ensure that the planning process remains open and transparent.



Madam Speaker, as the House will know, the Government recently announced the successful tender award of the Gibraltar Development Plan.

The tender was awarded to Nathaniel Lichfield & Partners Limited following a competitive tender process conducted via the Government's Procurement department.

The tender award will mean that the existing 2009 Development Plan can now be evaluated with a new plan, reflecting a more modern Gibraltar prepared.

Madam Speaker, this is hugely important and will go a long way in ensuring we preserve Gibraltar's natural appeal whilst also protecting our economic interests.

Our aim is to ensure sustainable growth AND economic development.

I would like to thank all the Officials involved in the procurement process for their work and look forward to receiving a first draft of the new Development Plan as soon as practicably possible.

Madam Speaker, I should add, in the interest of full transparency that the tender was awarded for an amount of £634,973.25 and I am advised that the new Development Plan should be completed within a period of 24 months.

Madam Speaker, unfortunately the E-Planning service that allows the submission of applications online had to be taken off-line due to certain security vulnerabilities.

Implementation of a temporary interim solution was delayed but I am pleased to report that the new temporary portal for application submissions went live on Monday 10 June 2024.

Work had already started on developing a permanent replacement for the existing portal and this work will continue.

In the meantime, the department continues to work on its rolling programme of updates and improvements to the back-end of the E-Planning system to improve its functionality further.

The department is currently engaged in a process to evaluate the existing Building Regulations and multiple building codes to align them with the most recent standards.

This involves revising all 11 remaining parts to adhere to UK and European Standards.

Madam Speaker, this update will empower Building Control personnel to uphold standards, achieve best practices, and guarantee the health and safety of both occupants and users of the built environment.

At the same time, there is a review of pertinent sections of the Public Health Act underway to establish Gibraltar's inaugural Building Act.



Madam Speaker, the Government contracted an expert external consultant to develop a Seismic and Wind National Annex for Gibraltar which has now been drafted and is currently being reviewed before finalising.

Once the review has been completed, the annex will be incorporated into the Building Regulations to form part of the legal framework for Gibraltar Building design codes.

This will ensure that Gibraltar's buildings are constructed to internationally recognised standards for earthquake and wind loading.

Madam Speaker, we are looking into establishing the Considerate Contractor Scheme in Gibraltar modelled of that which currently exists in the United Kingdom.

The Considerate Contractor Scheme is a hugely successful scheme in the UK which determines how large scale constructors can build with minimum nuisance to their surrounding.

This will, in my view Madam Speaker, greatly assist the public in terms of minimising the disruption cause by construction.

The Government is committed to ensuring that we have an open and transparent planning system that is rigorous, efficient and effective, and that buildings are constructed to the highest standards.

I would like to thank the Town Planner, Mr Paul Norton Rumbo and his team for their work on this front.

## **GIBRALTAR MARITIME SERVICES**

Madam Speaker,

I turn now to the Gibraltar Maritime Services.

Before going into some detail on the work being done by both the Gibraltar Port Authority and the Gibraltar Maritime Administration respectively, I wanted to take a moment to speak about how we will improve the maritime product in Gibraltar going forward.

Madam Speaker, the synergies between these two entities are, in my view, crucial in ensuring the Gibraltar Port and the broader maritime sector's success and growth. We are therefore frequently marketing them under the same banner.



Both the Gibraltar Port Authority and the Gibraltar Maritime Administration are committed to maintaining and enhancing Gibraltar's status as a global maritime hub and, as a result, through their joint efforts, they will continue to drive forward the success of Gibraltar's maritime sector, ensuring that it remains an important and integral part of Gibraltar PLC's overall economic and strategic framework.

Madam Speaker, in order to facilitate this joint approach, I will be convening the Gibraltar Maritime Strategy Council every month to work on and develop the strategic aims and outcomes which will form part of a new Gibraltar Maritime Strategy.

Madam Speaker, these meetings will take place at my Ministry and will be chaired by me as Minister with responsibility for maritime services.

By taking an active role in these discussions, I aim to ensure that our maritime strategy is comprehensive, forward thinking, and aligned with both local and global maritime developments.

The council will focus on addressing current challenges, exploring new opportunities, and setting actionable goals to enhance Gibraltar's position as a leading maritime hub and global centre of excellence.

It will also co-ordinate the Maritime efforts of the Port and Maritime Administration.

This collaborative approach will ensure that Gibraltar continues to be an attractive place to do business and will, in my view, not only contribute significantly to trade but, importantly, also to our economy.

Madam Speaker, we need to ensure that we future proof our Port and we do not and will not rest in our efforts to attract further business and other maritime services to Gibraltar.

We will do this by continuing with our marketing strategy of direct engagement and face-to-face marketing with clients and potential partners as well as through new and innovative ways which I have no doubt will be discussed at the Gibraltar Maritime Strategy Council.

Madam Speaker, 2023 saw a number of events held under the umbrella of Gibraltar Maritime Services including attendance at the International Bunker Industry Association Annual dinner held in London, which saw attendance by some of the key players in the bunkering and maritime industry in Gibraltar.

One notable event was the London International Shipping Week, held in September 2023, which holds a distinguished reputation as an international shipping event, providing invaluable networking opportunities for leaders across various sectors of the international shipping community, including regulators, charterers, financing institutions, ship owners, and managers.



This event attracted guests such as the UK Secretary of State for Shipping, the IMO Secretary General and a very high calibre list of leaders in their industries and provided an exceptional platform in which to talk about Gibraltar Port and its potential.

Many of the Port's key players also attended what we plan will be the first of several marketing events using this model, in order to keep Gibraltar at the forefront of minds in the maritime world.

Additionally, the third Gibraltar Maritime Week took place in June.

This was, Madam Speaker, yet another successful locally held event that attracted international participants from Singapore, Maldives, Malta and other maritime jurisdictions.

Madam Speaker, Maritime Week serves as the perfect platform for us to recognise the contributions made by the maritime industry to our local economy and the global trade network and we are committed to hosting further similar events in the future as we on this side of the House believe it is very important to get people to appreciate the unique geographical and geopolitical advantages that Gibraltar offers – and there is definitely no better way to do that than by bringing them to Gibraltar to see for themselves.

Moreover, in January of this year, Gibraltar Maritime Services attended a reception at "The Yacht Club of Greece," hosted by HM Government of Gibraltar, where stakeholders from Gibraltar's maritime industry connected with the Greek maritime community.

Given Greece's significant presence in global shipping, commanding 21% of global tonnage, Gibraltar Maritime Services are optimistic about attracting interest from this strategic sector.

To that end, Madam Speaker, Gibraltar Maritime Services, once again hosted the Gibraltar stand at Posidonia 2024 Exhibition that was held in Athens in June.

This event remains one of the most anticipated and prestigious maritime events globally and the Gibraltar stand is always a popular stop for those interested in finding out more about the local maritime industry.

I was delighted to attend Posidonia this year as its Minister for the Port.

It was clear to me, purely based on the interest we had at the Gibraltar stand and the number of companies wanting to find out more information about Gibraltar and its Port, that Gibraltar remains a Global Centre of excellence.

Madam Speaker, I would like to take this opportunity to thank all our sponsors and partners involved in these events.

The reality is that without their support, both commercially and financially, it would be virtually impossible to promote the Gibraltar Port at the level that we do.

So thank you.





## GIBRALTAR PORT AUTHORITY

Madam Speaker, I turn now to the Gibraltar Port Authority itself.

2023 saw a number of events which impacted the Port of Gibraltar in one way or another.

These include:

1. the removal of the OS35 in July which took a lot of effort and impacted on the resources of the Port up until the time of its removal;
2. the ongoing impact of Russian sanctions on ships not being allowed to call at Gibraltar;
3. the disruption to port operations due to several bouts of bad weather during the course of the year, and;
4. the general slow recovery of the maritime sector from the COVID-19 pandemic as well as other global maritime incidents, including the incidents which have led to dramatically reduced traffic through the Suez Canal.

But the resilience of the Port of Gibraltar to adapt to these challenges has allowed the Port Authority to, once again, perform above expectations, both in activity in some of the sectors and also financially.

And all of this, Madam Speaker, despite the geo-political tensions affecting global trade.

Madam Speaker, the continuing seesaw effect in port activity seen in 2022 has continued throughout 2023 and into the early part of 2024 in different sectors of the port.

This can be seen in the figure for overall vessel calls to BGTW, where we saw an increase of 0.7% in all calls in 2023 against 2022 but for the first quarter of 2024, we have seen a small drop of -1.53% against 2023 figures, largely in part to port operations being suspended due to bad weather.

However, we expect to see a swing back into positive territory in the second quarter of 2024.



Madam Speaker, bunkering activity, the mainstay of port activity, saw an increase in bunker calls of just under 4% in 2023 against 2022 figures and we continue to see upward trends in the number of bunker calls in the first quarter of 2024.

Madam Speaker, Gibraltar is one of the very few ports worldwide that can offer both conventional fuels as well as LNG and bio-fuel deliveries to vessels opting to take up these currently viable fuels. Along with industry, we are consistently looking at ways and initiatives to make the Port greener.

As a result, Gibraltar remains an attractive port for bunkering and we see continued interest both from the vessel operators in calling at our port, as well as from prospective port operators seeking to set up in our port and offer their services to this trade.

Madam Speaker, LNG Bunkering is also growing with an additional LNG Bunker licence being granted during 2023 and growth in calls and volumes are picking up exponentially.

To quantify, we already see that the total number of supplies carried out in 2023 have been exceeded in 2024, and this also applies to the quantities of LNG supplied as a whole.

Gibraltar's support and positioning to offer this service shows the Government's progress in supporting the transition of the maritime industry towards greener fuels further reinforces our importance in this field.

Madam Speaker, we continue to work together with the industry to make sure we are ready to support the maritime sector when new fuel solutions achieve the level of maturity required for their uptake as a mainstream fuel for the maritime industry and is also part of the Government's effort to support greater sustainability in shipping.

Yacht visits to Gibraltar saw an improvement of some 6% overall in 2023 against 2022 figures and we anticipate that this positive trend will continue through 2024 given Gibraltar port's reputation as a reliable port to call at for crew changes, supplies and other important services.

Madam Speaker, it is well documented that the cruise industry continues to recover from the challenges of the fallout of the COVID19 pandemic, and repositioning decisions, changes to itineraries and stiff competition from regional ports who continue in their efforts to attract cruise companies to call at their ports, are added challenges.

Madam Speaker, this is one of the many areas with which I have the pleasure of working closely with my friend, the Minister for Tourism, and I must say he is doing a magnificent job in promoting Gibraltar abroad to cruise liner companies. I will therefore leave it to him to go through cruise figures.

Additionally, Madam Speaker, we are currently working on a port 'Master-plan' to identify how best to support the local industry within the constraints of the limited space available in Gibraltar, so that we are in the best possible position to support the maritime industry. This ties into plans for the new cruise liner terminal.



A key aspect of this initiative consists of drawing in the stakeholders and taking their views and needs into account as we plan the future of the Port.

Madam Speaker, I now turn to the Authority's finances.

As I already mentioned earlier, the Authority continues to perform well.

As at the end of financial year a total of £9,068,997 in revenue had been received. The estimated revenue figure for the financial year 2023/24 was £8,274,000.

A late payment of an invoice of £500K was received in this Financial Year, which should have been paid in the previous Financial Year and we also received an additional new licence fee of £250K which did not factor into our original estimate submission.

Expenditure was £6,883,168 against a budget of £6,807,000 for the full period.

Madam Speaker, the increase of £51,308 was as a result of the insurance policy renewal fee which was higher than anticipated at the time of the estimates submission.

Madam Speaker, a review of port tariffs is ongoing with some minor adjustments already being implemented, namely, to Tug operator licence tariffs and the LNG bunkering levy and green incentive scheme discount.

Further adjustments to Port tariffs will be considered where necessary, in consultation with stakeholders, to ensure a fair and reasonable approach is taken.

Madam Speaker, in 2023 it was reported that the refurbishment and repairs of the Watergardens Marina would commence.

I am pleased to confirm that this project has now been completed although some additional extras have been requested.

Madam Speaker, the GPA have a number of initiatives and small projects underway in order to improve services and in turn port activity as a whole and I hope to be able to report on these as they evolve in the coming months.

To this end our communication and engagement with the local maritime community is a fundamental factor in this process.

Madam Speaker, I would like to take this opportunity to thank the magnificent and extraordinarily hard working Captain of the Port, Mr John Ghio, and his team at the Gibraltar Port Authority for their efforts throughout the year.



## GIBRALTAR MARITIME ADMINISTRATION

I turn now, Madam Speaker, to the Gibraltar Maritime Administration – the GMA.

The GMA's reputation for having a robust legal framework, efficient registration processes, and a commitment to safety and quality standards, continues to attract interest from ship owners globally.

Although it is true to say the pace of new registrations remains sluggish, we are encouraged by recent expressions of interest some of which have resulted in several new vessels registering in the last few months.

The registered yacht fleet remain stable, showing no significant changes in numbers. Similarly, the Small Ship Register demonstrates consistent growth in line with recent trends.

As of May 1st, the fleet size consists of 130 ships, 860 yachts, and 373 small ships.

Part of the efforts of the Gibraltar Maritime Council will be to look at ways to grow this.

Our register remains “White-listed” within the Paris Memorandum of Understanding on port state control.

The Paris MoU “White List” represents quality flags with a consistently low detention record.

The GMA's ongoing vision is to uphold and enhance the reputation of its register by promoting a large and diverse fleet without compromising quality and continues to work towards trying to reach pre-BREXIT and pre-pandemic levels in terms of fleet size and revenue levels.

The Maritime Academy in the university is also doing very well – and is attracting vessels to Gibraltar. I will let the Honourable Minister for the University deal with this.

Madam Speaker, the GMA remains dedicated to improving and enhancing its e-services.

The Administration's Seafarers' Division continues to issue a significant number of provisional and full term flag state endorsements.

Madam speaker, the GMA's efforts in promoting its ship and yacht register abroad continued during 2023 to date.



Throughout the relevant period, the GMA's survey division has also continued to provide ongoing support to its global fleet 24/7 365 days a year through its emergency response service for safety and security matters.

The GMA continues to work closely with the UK Department for Transport and other UK Government agencies in the provision of this important service.

Domestically, the GMA maintains its commitment to offering technical assistance and support to the Gibraltar Port Authority as well as various other government departments, authorities, and agencies.

The GMA, in its role as port state authority, was part of the multi-agency team that investigated and brought about the successful prosecution case brought against the Master of the GAS VENUS following the oil spill that took place in the Bay of Gibraltar in August 2023 during a bunkering operation.

The GMA remains integral to the Gibraltar maritime cluster, serving as a facilitator of international trade and commerce by providing a maritime register committed to the highest standards of safe ship operation, protection of the marine environment, and the welfare of those working on board.

In partnership with local stakeholders, the GMA is committed to further promoting its high-quality service and the many benefits its register and Gibraltar as a maritime jurisdiction provide to ship owners and the broader international shipping industry.

Madam Speaker, I would like to thank the Maritime Administrator, Mr Dylan Cocklan and his team for their work, particularly in ensuring Gibraltar and its port remain in the mind of industry players.

### **GIBRALTAR ELECTRICITY AUTHORITY**

Madam Speaker, I turn now to the first of the Public Utilities that fall under my Ministerial portfolio - the Gibraltar Electricity Authority or GEA.

Madam Speaker, work continues at the North Mole Power Station to further improve the performance of the installation in terms of output, reliability and emissions.

On emissions, CO2 emissions again decreased by just over 3% from 118,669 tonnes in 2022 to 115,445 tonnes in 2023.

Madam Speaker, it should not be lost on the House, and in particular Members Opposite that in 2016, prior to LNG being used in Gibraltar as our primary fuel for power generation, CO2 emissions stood at 161,358 tonnes.

That is to say, Madam Speaker, our CO2 emissions caused as a result of Power Generation have dropped by almost 30% since then!



And this will continue to be the trend going forward.

The Battery Energy Storage System (BESS) will be operational in just over 13 months.

In fact, the contract between HMGOG and the provider was signed in my office on 14<sup>th</sup> May 2024!

This exciting new project will pave the way for the removal of our existing temporary power generating sets at North Mole whilst at the same time provide non-polluting power grid resilience as it will be used primarily as 'spinning reserve' and will reduce power outages which might be derived from mechanical and/or electrical issues at our main power station.

The commissioning of the BESS will also contribute towards a further reduction of our carbon footprint.

Although, events around the world continue to impact on fuel costs, in particular gas prices, the price the Gibraltar Electricity Authority pays for its LNG is locked into a pricing mechanism which provides shelter despite the volatility of fuel markets, resulting in significant savings when compared with natural gas spot market prices.

Notwithstanding this, it's important to note that the average consumer in Gibraltar only covers 50% of their actual consumption, with the Government subsidising the remaining half.

This practice sets Gibraltar apart from other regions around the world!

Madam Speaker, on the renewable energy front, more land should become available shortly for the development of further solar initiatives.

This will provide a significant boost to the total installed solar capacity in Gibraltar and contribute significantly towards achieving our green energy targets. We are working to deliver this project in this financial year.

Improvements to the public lighting network continue by replacing existing streetlights with LED and/or low energy lanterns thus further reducing overall consumption.

Works are on-going behind the scenes to provide the full required power capacity that it is envisaged for the Eastside Project in years to come.

High voltage cables totalling about 12KM in length are already being laid between a newly constructed high voltage distribution centre to the new Waterport Distribution Centre.

Madam Speaker, in fact, in the Financial year 2023-2024, £2,382,320.82 was invested into our network.

This includes new substations, upgrades to existing substations, high voltage and low voltage cabling as well as expenditure on road infrastructure.



Additionally, Madam Speaker, the availability of shore power to supply vessels calling in Gibraltar is progressing well.

The GEA together with the Gibraltar Port Authority will soon commission infrastructure and systems at the Extension Jetty that will allow vessels which are usually or temporarily berthed alongside to have access to shore power.

Again, jointly with the GPA, systems are being considered that will allow cruise ships to connect to shore power when visiting Gibraltar – a possibility that can only be seriously considered following the commissioning of the North Mole Power Station and its inherent surplus capacity whilst using of clean fuel.

I recently visited Malta with the Captain of the Port and the CEO of GibElec to explore these options further.

Madam Speaker, I would like to take this opportunity to thank the CEO of GibElec, Michael Caetano, and the rest of his magnificent team who work flat out throughout the year to ensure, in so far as humanely possible, that our lights are on 24/7 - 365 days a year.

We have committed to a Health and Safety review, further to issues recently raised by the workforce as well as looking at a workforce review, again, as requested by the workforce.

And finally, a new course for apprentices is due to start this September under the Apprenticeship schemes to be provided by the Honourable Minister Santos.

## **AQUAGIB**

Madam Speaker, I turn now to the second of the Public Utilities I am responsible for – AquaGib.

During the last financial year AquaGib has spent approximately £15m in order to maintain and improve the provision of potable and seawater supply and sewerage services in Gibraltar.

This expenditure, Madam Speaker, also includes an investment of £1.2m on asset maintenance projects, which included funds from the financial year ending March 2023 that were unable to be spent due to the fire at Powers Drive.

Madam Speaker, AquaGib have been working on a number of major projects, which include:

The replacement of potable and seawater mains where significant at the following locations:

- Red Sands Road
- Devil's Tower Road
- Hospital Ramp



- Engineers Road

- Cleaning & Maintenance of Service Reservoirs.
- Governor's Cottage Reverse Osmosis remineralisation system renewal.
- Replacement of customer's water meters, meter cupboards and meter manifolds.

Madam Speaker, following the fire at Power's Drive in July 2022, AquaGib has completed the repairs to its damaged asset inside the tunnel, including improvements to the location of the saltwater supply pipe which will, importantly, provide additional resilience to the asset for the future.

Works to remove the temporary diversion pipework has also been completed in this financial year, including burial of part of the pipework to provide additional resilience as an alternative supply route for the future.

These works were completed in August 2023.

Madam Speaker, AquaGib continues to work with its insurers to finalise the totality of the claim relating to the Powers Drive fire, with partial payments of £900,000 being received so far in relation to the costs incurred.

It is expected that the insurance claim will be finalised before the end of March 2025.

Madam Speaker, AquaGib's expenditure for the following financial year is estimated at £15.6m in order to maintain and improve the provision of potable and seawater supply and sewerage services in Gibraltar.

In addition to this, AquaGib will continue to work with HMGoG on the delivery of new projects, including the development of a new AquaGib site to relocate water production and other AquaGib facilities on North Mole, and the completion of the new infrastructure for Potable and Salt Water delivery from the Waterworks reservoirs to the entrance of the new Eastside development area.

I am looking at several issues raised by the workforce and remain committed to resolving these issues in a practical and conciliatory manner.

I am cognisant that I have to revert on some of the outstanding issues in the next couple of weeks.

Once again, Madam Speaker, I would like to thank Paul Singleton and his team for the work they do on a daily basis.

## **PROCUREMENT**





Madam Speaker, I turn now to the Government's Procurement department, another portfolio for which I have Ministerial responsibility.

The procurement department is the beating heart of government equity.

It is the department which ensures the award of all large projects go to the most efficient solution.

Importantly, Madam Speaker, is not all about cost.

Its about the provision of great service, efficiency and cost.

The Procurement Office is currently responsible for the on-demand value-for-money sourcing of goods, services, and works through tenders and requests for quotes, adhering to the legal and policy thresholds outlined in the various Procurement Regulations and the HMGOG's Purchasing and Procurement Policy for Government departments.

The Department's work over the past year has included the following:

- Provision of Respite Services for the Care Agency
- Provision of Domiciliary Care and Home Support for the Care Agency
- Insurance for the Care Agency
- Provision of Care and Facilities Management Services for Elderly Residential Services at Hillside, Bellavista, and John Mackintosh Home
- Tender for the provision of IVF to the Gibraltar Health Authority

And numerous others which I won't go into.

These are just a few examples of the numerous projects the office handles. In addition to these tasks, the Procurement Office is also involved in:

1. Managing cross-organisation contracts
2. Maintaining the Government's eProcurement system and providing helpdesk functions to both public service and private sector users
3. Integrating and updating contract data into the Government's Purchase to Pay and Finance systems
4. Monitoring purchasing practices within departments
5. Managing the Government's Preferred Suppliers etc etc etc



Additionally, Madam Speaker, the Procurement Office has been assisting the Chief Secretary with investigations stemming from the Principal Auditor's report, reviewing procedures to enhance efficiency, transparency, and effectiveness in public sourcing, and revising the Procurement Regulations, which are set to be amended in the coming months.

This office keeps us all in check.

They have also been working with consultants to launch a new website and training the Gibraltar Health Authority's Procurement staff in the use of the Government's eProcurement system and processes governed by the Procurement Regulations, ensuring a standardised approach to sourcing that is easily accessible to businesses.

In the coming months, the Procurement Office will be working closely with the Digital Services' Purchase to Pay team to deliver further improvements.

When I say, Madam Speaker, that the breadth of the portfolio shows exactly how government works, this is a perfect example.

They will also work with the Department of Personnel and Development, formerly known as the Government's Human Resources Department, to provide additional training to departments.

Furthermore, they will partner with the Ministry for Equality to explore how social considerations can be incorporated into Government tenders, building on their current existing work with environmental considerations.

Madam Speaker, I would like to take this opportunity to thank Jordan Borg and the staff at the Procurement Department for their diligent work throughout the year in, what is, a crucially important area of Government business.



Madam Speaker, moving on.

I have left Business last because it is a Ministry with huge potential for Gibraltar going forward.

As will be known, we have recently appointed a new CEO for Business.

Businesses make a HUGE socio-economic contribution to Gibraltar.

Our Government fully values this contribution.

Not just in economic terms, through tax receipts and job creation, but also in terms of the wide selection of goods and services that businesses provide to our community.

This positive interaction between businesses and its customers underpins Gibraltar's success and prosperity as one of the world's smallest but well diversified economies.

12 years ago, I was fortunate enough to be appointed as the Chairwoman of one of Gibraltar's business representative groups.



A position that I proudly held for 6 years.

I was privileged to have been involved with that organisation since the Mari-Lou Guerrero era.

This was a formative experience, not only teaching me first-hand about the real issues that our local businesses face, but also about their resilience and their drive to succeed.

Above all, that is what makes me want to help them.

It also taught me a lot about Gibraltar and the way that it works which is exactly what Mari-Lou told me it would do.

I recently had the opportunity to look back at one of my first interviews as chairwoman.

And I was reminded that the inspiration I had back then is what continues to drive me today:

My enjoyment of working WITH Gibraltarians, FOR Gibraltarians.

There is a wider benefit to Gibraltar PLC that serves us all, Government included.



So against that backdrop, I am embarking on a new strategy for business.

The business community has been calling for this and we have listened.

As I deliver this budget speech, we are publishing a strategic plan that sets out how we intend to achieve the FOUR strategic goals we have set for the next 3 years.

Of course, this plan will be a work in progress that we continually improve and mould to changing circumstances.

We need the business community's participation to make it succeed.

If we work together, we can get the job done.

For now, our strategic plan plants the first seeds for transitioning the Office of Fair Trading towards a wider business remit, bringing together the OFT and several other Government-led functions like business registration, employment and other business-focused initiatives.

Some of our initiatives are already underway, such as the Gibraltar Enterprise Scheme loans, which I will touch on later.



We will rely on initiatives like these to shape and achieve our strategic goals.

At the core of our strategy is to **MAKE BUSINESS EASY**.

Easy for new businesses and also easy for existing businesses.

Every minute spent away from government red tape is another minute that businesses can invest in growing and thriving.

We have everything within our power to make this happen.

The ultimate aim is for the ease of doing business in Gibraltar to become an attraction in its own right.

By the time I leave this portfolio businesses will hopefully see a significant improvement in business interactions with Government.

And over time, working in conjunction with the wider Government, ease of business can be the flywheel to achieving our long-term ambitions.



We want to make business easy by tearing down red tape and improving coordination between Departments.

We've started by rolling out a temporary application form for new business licence applications.

I recently announced at the GFSB annual dinner that business registration will be transferred from the Department of Employment to Business.

So for the first time, we will see a joined-up approach between business licensing and business registration.

But rest assured, this is just the beginning.

Changes are being made to the eGov platform so that it works better for business users and for our Departments.

This is being done as we consolidate legislation and simplify our processes.

Advanced plans are already underway for improving entertainment licensing, leisure areas and tables and chairs regimes.



Our goal is to create a seamless experience as businesses to engage with Government.

Or as I put it at the GFSB dinner, for the setting up and running of your business to be as smooth and simple as the technology in your pocket.

We anticipate seeing the fruit this work within the next year.

But there are also other initiatives that we are working on now, to make business easier and less cumbersome.

In March this year, we launched a public consultation on the audit threshold for businesses.

We are grateful to all the individuals and businesses that gave feedback.

The audit threshold has not generally kept up with inflation.

Having considered the feedback with my cabinet colleague, the Hon Nigel Feetham, who has ministerial responsibility for taxation, we have decided jointly to raise the audit threshold to £1.75m.





We will monitor the impact of this increase, as there may be scope for a further increase in the future.

Along with that, the consultation also brought up suggestions relating to the individuals who can sign compilation reports.

We will be exploring this further with the Tax Office and, if necessary, the FSC.

We are also considering a number of other suggestions that were put forward by consultees.

Beyond improving ease of doing business, I also want to demonstrate **VISIBLE ENFORCEMENT**.

This is the **SECOND** strategic goal set out in our plan.

Enforcement is the key to ensuring businesses compete on a level playing field.

If that enforcement is visible, it will serve as a catalyst for non-compliant businesses to become compliant.



But enforcement cannot happen in isolation.

It needs to be preceded by a multi-pronged awareness campaign.

And we want to roll that out in a way that is effective and informative.

We must improve the quality of our product by ensuring our laws are fully complied with by everyone.

The THIRD key goal within our strategic plan is to IMPROVE COMMUNICATION.

The publication of our strategic plan is a first step in that direction.

I am grateful to the business representative groups that have kindly reviewed our strategic plan with us.

To the Gibraltar Chamber of Commerce,

The Gibraltar Federation of Small Businesses,



The Main Street Consultative Board,

The Business Advisory Board, and their underlying associations,

THANK YOU

Our relationship with each of these groups remains as important as ever:

Our communication with them provides us with crucial feedback that goes right to the very heart of our Parliament.

And I am pleased to report to this House that we have gladly incorporated the suggestions and improvements that they have put forward.

But we also want to push a culture change that sees us become more pro-active in our communication with business.

Our communication occurs at different levels, beyond our excellent engagement with these business representative groups.



To the interactions that we have with regulated businesses and their consumers.

We intend to put these interactions onto a more modern and interactive footing.

We want our communication to have value.

And so as part of improving our communication, we have also published a report with some of the OFT's highlights of the past year.

It has been almost 10 years since the OFT was established,

And in that time it has made steady progress.

But as with any project of this nature, there are always areas we can look to improve.

The annual publication of this report will provide an important overview of the business landscape in Gibraltar.



The 30 real estate agents that are regulated by the OFT have transacted over £300,000,000 between them in the past year.

And I am pleased to report that their compliance standards of Anti-Money Laundering have improved significantly.

The real-estate sector has played an important part in our White-Listing.

Together with the Anti-Money Laundering team at the OFT, they all deserve credit for their work and efforts.

The consumer protection team have also dealt with over 400 consumer complaints, leading to almost 60 investigations and 90 trader inspections in the past year.

Whilst navigating the transition to the new Fair Trading Act 2023, the business licensing team have issued 700 new business licence applications.

That brings the total number of active business licences in issue to 3,000.

Business is evidently on the UP.



That brings me to the last of the strategic goals within our plan: BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT.

Business is the driving force of Gibraltar's economy.

With my legal background and current portfolio, I see the synergies between the financial sectors, tourism and the Port.

All of these sectors also interact with business in one way or another.

In real economic terms, businesses falling outside these traditional labels also make up an invaluable contribution to our GDP.

And as I mentioned earlier, their importance is amplified as we, our community, are their main customers.

Recognising their value, we want to build a strategy that supports and grows their contribution by promoting business.

Business, as a sector, needs attention.



It deserves attention.

We want to bring new, high-quality businesses to Gibraltar.

We will seek to identify target sectors and markets where we see the potential for sustainable and diversified growth.

We need jobs in sectors that attract our highly qualified students.

We need to have an outlet for the extremely creative and talented people that our people possess.

We want to encourage them to return to Gibraltar to service an international clientele as well as our domestic one.

In today's day and age, the world can be their oyster.

We will therefore establish delivery bodies so that we can grow the sectors that best fit our long-term plans, identify their target markets outside Gibraltar and support them as a Government.



In order to encourage our young entrepreneurs, I am today announcing a waiver of business licensing fees for applicants aged 21 and under.

I am also pleased to announce to this House that we have recently opened a new round of applications to the Gibraltar Enterprise Scheme.

This scheme was launched to facilitate loans from participating banks to start-up businesses.

Further details can be obtained on our press release, or by emailing [GibraltarEnterpriseScheme@gibraltar.gov.gi](mailto:GibraltarEnterpriseScheme@gibraltar.gov.gi).

We have also put in place a phased plan for our One Stop Shop and I expect this to be rolled out in coming months.

We hope our strategic plan provides the business community with our vision on how we intend to help them stay ahead in an increasingly competitive and globalised environment.

We face a pivotal time with the Treaty.

We are on the cusp of a shift in the economic opportunities that lie before us.





Gibraltar's businesses have historically succeeded in the face of changing and challenging circumstances.

From the border closure in 1969 and the dockyard shutdown to the border reopening in the mid-80s, the pandemic and Brexit, our business community has consistently demonstrated resilience and strength.

Our Government is here to facilitate any transition to a treaty based economy, so that we can generate maximum prosperity from the opportunities that will come with it.

But we need to be ready in either scenario, be that facilitating the economic prosperity that comes with a treaty, or surviving and thriving without one.

Madam Speaker, I would like to take this opportunity to thank our newly appointed CEO of Business and the OFT, Mr John Paul Fa, as well as the wider OFT team for their great work throughout the year

I will also take this opportunity to state that the members on this side of the house intend to focus and work together to carry out the jobs that we were voted in for.



Myself, and all my colleagues on this side of the House are committed to working together to improve the business environment in Gibraltar.

There is no hunger games scenario going on over here.

However much Members Opposite might want to see us fighting each other that is not our style.

Winter is not coming.

Summer is here.

We will leave the Game of Thrones to the honourable members opposite.

We will double down and focus on the prosperity of Gibraltar.



My job, and indeed our job, is to bring in business, be they regulated business through the Financial Services Portfolio, or unregulated business through my own portfolio to increase the prosperity of Gibraltarians.

From my own perspective, I can assure members opposite, that no matter the goading that we are subjected to, our focus will be to work TOGETHER to ensure that Gibraltar Business is as attractive a proposition as possible.

That is what we were voted in to do, and Madam Speaker, that is indeed what we shall deliver.

## CONCLUSION

Madam Speaker,

Given the number of Ministerial portfolios for which I am responsible, and indeed the size and money appropriated to a them, it is just not possible set out every single area of work in each of those areas.

We have done a lot in these past 9 months together.

I could not have done even a fraction of that work without my team, who deserve all the credit for the things that get done right and on time.

Every single day I am amazed by the great work done by the many public servants that I have had the pleasure of meeting since October last year.

Madam Speaker, they constantly work behind the scenes quietly and efficiently, without seeking any recognition.

Far too often our public servants are criticised but, Madam Speaker, I can tell you, as someone who comes from the Private Sector, that the work our public servants put in for the benefit of us all is, frankly, remarkable.



Madam Speaker, I would not be able to do this alone.

My small but quite incredible team at my Ministry are the engine that allows me to work – often at 5<sup>th</sup> gear.

But I must say, despite being a very small team, the engine is well oiled and without them the transition and getting on to the numerous portfolios would have been impossible and I want each and every one of them to know how grateful I am to them for their diligence – at all hours of the day!

Adrianna, Edwina, Aaron, Annie and Stephen – thank you!

Thank you for your support from the very first day that you came onboard.

Madam Speaker,

I would also like to thank you, Mr Clerk and the rest of the Parliament Team for their assistance throughout the year and for making us new entrants to the Parliament feel so welcomed.

Madam Speaker, for these reasons I too commend the Bill to the House.

ENDS