



HM GOVERNMENT OF GIBRALTAR
MINISTRY FOR HOUSING AND THE ELDERLY
CITY HALL
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GIBRALTAR

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Government continues to invest time and resources on Mid Harbours

The Government deeply regret the timing of the news item carried by GBC last night which highlighted a number of issues relating to Mid Harbours Estate. That such a statement should be issued on the very day that the Housing Minister was buried betrayed a profound insensitivity and lack of respect. Government has already dealt with many major issues and is tackling all remaining areas of concern.

While the Government understand that there are a number of issues in the estate which need to be tackled, the fact remains that many of these have been ongoing ones inherited from the previous administration and the consequences of the policies that were adopted at the time.

Indeed, it is misleading to claim that the tenants' association spent months trying to arrange a meeting with the Minister for Housing. The reason why such a meeting did not take place initially was because there was one person on the Committee who lives on the estate but is not a registered tenant. It was explained again and again that under the relevant housing rules only registered tenants can represent the residents of an Estate, for obvious reasons. These rules were not put in place by the current Government, they have been there since time immemorial. It is therefore not a question of "petty rebuffs or rebuttals" but rather of repeated and constant explanations that a person who is not a registered tenant cannot represent the Estate.

Meetings have been offered time and time again with estate representatives who are registered tenants. A request for a copy of the Committee's Constitution and a copy of the agenda for the meeting, the norm in tenant association meetings with the Government, were not met. Despite all this, in February the acting Housing Minister Paul Balban, following the agreement of the Cabinet, agreed to meet the Committee with the unregistered resident included, on a without prejudice basis and as a goodwill gesture. It was agreed in that meeting that the said person would regularise his position within the estate through inclusion in his partner's tenancy. This has not happened to date.

It is therefore totally incorrect to say that there has been little response or action from Government departments to these issues. The following details illustrate that action has actually been constantly ongoing on many important fronts.

1: The complaint about traffic flow in the garage was, by their own admission, seen to immediately and traffic signs were installed.

2: The complaint about dirt and dog fouling was, again by their own admission, seen to immediately with the Government's "EL Turno" scheme under which the cleaning of internal communal areas are carried out by a Government appointed cleaning contractor. This scheme was advertised as an electoral commitment during the last general election and has also been given publicity since. It is incredible how anyone genuinely interested in the cleaning issue can claim to know nothing about it.

3: The empty hall is not a housing issue. This was originally planned as a social club when the estate was designed and discussions have been taking place as to its possible use precisely because the Committee are unsure what they would like to use the hall for.

4: The Government reacted immediately by roughing up the existing surface in a specific test area as soon as the issue of skidding vehicles in the garage was highlighted. It should be noted that there is a speed limit in the garage.

5: The problem of the leaking roof and podium relates to the construction process under the previous administration. A full explanation of this issue and the measures already taken to combat it through the Government owned company GJBS was made public last year. The water penetration issue into the garage is now much reduced and at the end of last year only around 30% of water penetration issues remained unresolved. Works are still ongoing in this respect.

6: The Cabinet has already started progressing the installation of cameras in all relevant Government-owned housing estates. Mid Harbours is one of those in which Government is working on plans for the installation of CCTV. Anyone who is concerned that illegal activity may be taking place in Mid Harbours or anywhere else should report the matter to the Royal Gibraltar Police.

7: The maintenance work on the estate is now regularly carried out through GJBS.

8: The playground was dismantled in order to deal with the water penetration issue. The playground equipment has already been refitted, although the exercise equipment is still pending waterproofing of the area. The contractor is working on this at present. It is contradictory to claim that the Government has done nothing, on the one hand, and then complain that a number of different surfaces have been put on the playground in the last few months in order to test the water penetration issue. This shows precisely how much the Government have done and how seriously we take the issue.

9: The Government was presented with a report into the water penetration issues and other problems at Mid Harbours by GJBS and we acted on the report. Indeed, by October of last year the earthquake joint and other joints had been repaired and a waterproof membrane had been installed on top of the slab in the play area.

The reality is that a number of mistakes were made in the construction and indeed the design of the estate, with little thought being given to potential future maintenance problems. GJBS has been carrying out works for over a year in order to improve the situation. Some may not like it when the finger of blame is pointed at the previous administration in relation to these construction issues, but the Government has already proved, in this and in other areas, that it is possible to make the previous administration accountable for its serious shortcomings and get on with the job at the same time. Roofs are regularly inspected and cleaned by GJBS, the last time being four weeks ago.

The Government takes pride in its housing stock and will soon be embarking on a major refurbishment of its older housing estates. Provision has now been made for the internal cleaning of communal areas for the first time ever. The Government has also invested considerable time and resources into improving Mid Harbours and will continue to do so. What the Government cannot accept is that a certain individual with a very obvious axe to grind should seek to spread misinformation and distort reality.