



HM Government of Gibraltar

Ministry of Tourism, Equality,
Social Services and Housing

PRESS RELEASE

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Budget Speech 2015 - The Hon Samantha Sacramento MP - Minister for Tourism, Equality, Social Services and Housing

Mr Speaker,

This has been my first Parliament. It is quite amazing how time flies and that this is my last budget address of this parliament, making it important to pause for a moment and reflect on all that has been achieved for our community by this Government.

SOCIAL SERVICES

Of all the departments I am responsible for, nowhere is the change as apparent or as rewarding in my view as the tremendous progress that has been made in social services in such short period of time.

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We have gone from a haphazard disjointed service, that, by the very nature of its disorganisation, failed to support and reach out to people as it should, to one that is now a far cry from that.

The priority has been to reorganise and restructure in a way that has best worked for the service and the service continues a process of self-assessment and review as needs and priorities change.

To say that in the history of social services it is the first time ever that there is a full complement of staff is an achievement in itself, but this Government has not stopped there and we have invested in increasing the number of social workers and support staff. Following restructures, investment in staff, resources and tools means that Social Workers are now able to discharge their professional duties and are no longer put in a position where they have to work with their hands tied behind their backs and can now go further and have the capacity to develop strategic policies.

Historically, recruitment of social workers has always been a problem as traditionally this is not a profession that has been very popular locally. We have tackled this head on and in the short term we have teamed up with a specialised recruitment agency in the UK to ensure that the recruitment process is quick and effective and we have a steady supply of social workers, and through the department of education we are engaging with the comprehensive schools and the college to raise awareness of training in this profession. In order to properly support social work graduates so that they properly trained with the right amount of support and experience, 2 years ago we introduced 4 additional posts for newly qualified social workers where they undertake rotations throughout the service benefitting from the experience of their colleagues.



Since the reshuffle, the Care Agency exclusively deals with social services and no longer elderly residential services. This was the final piece in the jigsaw to enable the organisation to fully focus on social services for the community and work more cohesively at senior management level and I will deal with the 3 teams in turn. The exemplary team provide a better service year on year.

Mr Speaker, during this term in office, we have increased the complement of social workers by 4, introduced 4 new posts for newly qualified social work graduates, 2 social worker assistants and more administrative support. With this investment we have been able to take social services to a whole new level.

Children and Families services

The Children's Services is made up of a number of different Services providing for children and their families when in need.

Investments into "early Intervention work" helps avoid family breakdown, criminality, domestic abuse, and substance misuse amongst others.

As part of the restructure of the service we have introduced a Duty Team to deal with initial referrals to the service. They have developed databases within the last three years so as to gather information on referrals received. This will assist in highlighting trends within society, and as a consequence, identify where the need lies.



The development of a Database for Domestic Abuse within Families has highlighted families where this is a common occurrence and intervention is required; however it has also helped identify families where this difficulty has begun to arise, and support is offered so couples can learn to resolve their issues without this impacting on their children.

Two Social Workers and the Agency's Psychologist attended a Training Programme in UK so as to work with Victims and Perpetrators of Domestic Abuse. The work carried out under this Programme is carried out following an assessment; and it is usually incorporated into a Child Protection Plan. It is no longer good enough to safeguard and protect victims and their children. We recognized that the perpetrators continue to act out a behaviour they have learnt, and punishment in itself is not the only solution. These perpetrators will continue to act out their behaviours; they continue to be parents, and must be assisted in making the necessary changes.

Long-Term Team

The Long-term Team deals with the following services:

- Child Protection
- Adoption and Fostering
- Court Welfare
- Children with Disabilities
- Children in Need

Court Welfare



Thanks to the investment and increasing the number of social workers there is no longer a delay in preparing court reports, a problem that was endemic for many years before we took office.

Respite Service

Respite is provided for children with disabilities, this is a new service and fulfils one of our manifesto commitments.

Child Protection Committee

The Child Protection Committee is a statutory one and is made up of the Heads of all Government Departments that have a responsibility towards the protection of children. The Committee continue meet every quarter and tackle Safeguarding and Child Protection issues. It also ensures that Safeguarding training is offered to all those who work with children.

The most significant developments in child protection is the commissioning of a comprehensive child protection policy for Gibraltar which will be truly landmark. This has been a 2 year project led by social services but involves all government departments and key stakeholders and is in the final stages.

Adult services

The purpose of Adult Services is to assist vulnerable people aged 18 years or over to live as independently as possible within the community. We believe this is best achieved by supporting people with care needs to work with everyone involved , including carers, social workers and other agencies to identify and agree their needs and access available services to meet these needs.



Adult Services meets 8 separate areas of responsibilities:

- I. Adult Social Work Service
- II. Domiciliary Care Service
- III. Lead Agency for Safeguarding Adults at Risk
- IV. Daycare Services for People over 60 years
- V. Out of Hours Emergency Social Work Service
- VI. Overseas Placements for Adults with Disabilities and people over the age of 18 years requiring specialist placements abroad
- VII. Looked After Children leaving care transition to Adult Services
- VIII. Multi-agency Public Protection Arrangements for Risk Management of Sex Offenders

There have been significant achievements this year

- A one point of contact referral system is now firmly in place and being used by the different professionals wishing to secure social care services for a range of potential service users.
- There are clear pathways and points systems in place to ensure fair and transparent access to the different services to include domiciliary care, daycare, respite and residential services
- The Gibraltar Multi-agency Safeguarding Adults at Risk of Abuse procedures have been very successful with the number of referrals being received from other professionals continuing to increase over the past year. This is due to the increase in awareness around safeguarding as a result of a rolling programme of multi-agency training in raising basic awareness as 174 people have undertaken this training over the past year. The course has been attended by both practitioners and managers within the different professions to include medical, social care professionals and the police.



- The Housing Department is now represented on the Gibraltar Multi-agency Safeguarding Adults at Risk Committee.
- The Gibraltar Public Protection Panel has been set down to ensure effective communication and a joint approach to the monitoring of people who could pose a threat to the general public.
- The head of service is assigned the role of Safeguarding Officer and the senior social worker that of Data Controller for the Care Agency under the procedures. They are responsible for ensuring all relevant information is made available to the GPPP in order to ensure effective communication between the different parties and information is available when carrying out a range of risk assessments on the individual sex offender.
- Professionals from Social Services, Police, Probation and the Police have been trained in the assessment of people on the Sex Offenders Register and 'people of interest' in order to offer the level of support and monitoring required by the individuals.
- The number of people coming under the MAPPA procedures has more than doubled over the past year.
- A multi-agency Domestic Violence working party has been established and is drafting procedures within their different professional areas to ensure they work effectively in partnership and reduce the risk to survivors and their families.

But there have been 3 major and significant developments in this term of office

First of all is the establishment of a brand new purpose built day centre for the elderly at Waterport Terraces. This consolidates the service that used to be provided at different locations and this means that now not only can people meet in more pleasant and comfortable



surroundings, which are completely accessible, but by having large premises we can open the service up to more people

Then there is the establishment of a focus on dementia and social services is a key player in that alongside colleagues in the GHA. A multi-agency Dementia Working party was convened by this government to draft Dementia Strategy for Gibraltar and support dementia services.

Finally Mr Speaker one of the things that I can be most proud of is this government's unprecedented investment in domiciliary care which has seen the biggest injection of recurrent expenditure in the agency.

The GSD's budget for this service when they were in office was £600. Ours was increased to £2.5m a year so imagine how many people have received home help, and it is not just them but also their families who have benefitted from this service.

Mr Speaker, it is an important way of caring for our community and it helps more of our elderly citizens remain safely and independently at home.

To make sure that this runs as effectively and efficiently as possible we are constantly reviewing the administration of it. We recently invested in a new database system to more effectively and efficiently control the domiciliary care service, a senior social worker is dedicated to overseeing the service and the team regularly attend Ward and Bed Management meetings at hospital where necessary as well.



Disability services

Before I turn to speak about the service i would like to say this about the Dr Giraldi inquiry, it was necessary, it showed that there was abuse and we have to move on from that and we have. Our focus is to improve the current service/

Mr Speaker, the Disability service comprises St Bernadette's the Day Centre for adults with learning disabilities, Dr Giraldi home and service in the community.

Mr Speaker, this service has come on in leaps and bounds. I make it a point to visit the services regularly and meet with service users and their families and i am proud of all that we have achieved. The unprecedented strategic approach to the recruitment of staff and the intense professional training, both inhouse and external, offered has clearly made a difference.

The service is about having structured and meaningful activities, many of which are in the community. There are clear support plans for the maximum benefit of the service users.

There have been to many changes and innovations for me to list but the overriding principle is that service users enjoy their time in tour service and the structure allows them to make the most of their abilities.



We have also extended the respite service at Dr Giraldi to meet the growing needs of the community

And there has been further refurbishment of the premises as well as investment in equipment

We work on raising awareness of people with learning disabilities all the time.

The service is about making people matter, and showcase abilities, Gibraltar Christmas stamp designed by users of St Bernadettes is a perfect example of this.

Training

Mr Speaker, training is dedicated and needs led and more focused than ever before and given that the agency is now smaller this will be easier to deliver but it must be recognised that the training team has provided intense training not only to the numerous care worker recruits in house, but has also teamed up with ETCL and has been running courses in elderly care for ETCL at Bleak House for almost two years now, such is the interest to work in this field.

Our partnership with ETCL that is a real success story. We have a successful training programme for carers. Our endeavours has resulted in 69 of our employees having commenced as ETCL trainees. Some of those are now in elderly residential services.



It is quite significant Mr Speaker, that while yesterday Mr Netto, who spoke of everything under the sun for the past 20 years, and was extremely critical of equality issues and in particular disability policies, there was not a single mention or criticism of social services. This to me is very telling, because I see it a rubber stamp by the opposition on how well we are doing. The legacy the GSD left in social service was shameful, of all my portfolios, it is certainly the worse department that I have come across, and when I say that I refer to government priorities, investment and support and not the actual professionals and individuals who work for the organisation.

I am glad that with the hard work and sheer dedication of the teams who work with me we have managed to turn the service around. The development in the service means that we have moved on from a reactive service to one that is able to strategically plan and also work in preventative measures.

This unprecedented investment in social services, and particularly in training, is an investment in the future of the social work profession, and in turn, an investment in the betterment of our community.

Not enough recognition has been given to social work professionals in the past, but I can honestly say that the team of professionals who work at social services today, whether social workers, care workers, management or administrative support, make up an essential service in our society and should no longer continue to be unrecognised. They are a dedicated team of professionals who have my full support and I thank them and the management and support staff of the care agency for the difficult work that they do, and that they do very well.



EQUALITY

Mr Speaker, I now turn to the Department of Equality. As I have said in previous Budget Speeches, equality is at the heart of this Government and our commitment to equality shows a natural progression towards an inclusive society and it is recognition of a modern Gibraltar. The Government has been progressing the equality agenda over this term, an advancement of civic and human rights. It was indeed a proud moment to have been appointed the first Minister for Equality

GAY RIGHTS

I was immensely proud that the first Bill I moved in Parliament was the Civil Partnership Bill 2014; the fulfilment of a manifesto commitment, it is legislation that enabled the formal recognition of relationships between couples of the same sex. A momentous occasion in the history of our parliament. On the 28th March this year, we celebrated the first anniversary of the commencement of the legislation. The passing of this legislation last year sent a clear message that same-sex couples deserve recognition and respect and it demonstrates the Government's commitment as strong and unequivocal. It provides a further step on the road to a fair and inclusive society and the right to be treated equally in the eyes of the law. We heard the Chief Minister inform us yesterday that there have already been 35 civil partnerships.

We are a Government that believes that the respect of a person's sexual orientation is a fundamental human right. This, Mr Speaker, is a far cry from the denial of gay rights demonstrated



by the GSD. While Mr Netto attempted to re-write history in his speech yesterday, the reality is that the GSD tried everything that they could to deny the advancement of gay rights. Mr Speaker, they even went as far as resisting an application to a joint Government tenancy by a same sex couple in what over the years was known as the “gay housing case”. It was resisted all the way to the Privy Council, Gib’s highest Court of Appeal at a cost to the tax payer in excess of a quarter of a million pounds.

In so far as the Court proceedings for a declaration on the age of consent, and not a judicial review, as Mr Netto put it yesterday. So concerned were the FCO on the issue that they even sent observers to participate in the case. Quite embarrassing I must say.

But then Mr Speaker, by Mr Netto’s own admission, the advances made by this Government on human rights are greater than those made by his government. And while yesterday he tried his best to retract that statement that he clearly made during a Newswatch interview on GBC on IDAHO, at least he qualified and conceded that we had, insofar as gay rights at least.

Mr Speaker, a GSD administration would not have seen the rainbow flag fly above N06 Convent Place.

This Government, Mr Speaker, has sent a clear message that gay people deserve recognition and respect and provides a further step to a fair and inclusive society.



I am proud to be part of a Government that was bold enough to send this unequivocal message and mark a milestone in the legislative process.

DISABILITY

The Department of Equality is able to co-ordinate and oversee matters relating to disability in all other government departments and is involved in all Government projects.

It is the policy of this Government to ensure that all new projects going forward are fully accessible and my department offers advice and guidance on this, for example the Department was heavily involved in advising and assisting the Gibraltar Tourist Board on accessibility to beaches and tourist sites. We have seen our beaches transformed into accessible places with improved walkways in beaches all year round, the refurbishment of the Camp Bay Pool, in which an accessible ramp has been built; colour contrast in steps into the pool to assist those with a visual impairment. Eastern Beach and Catalan Bay are also accessible now. Another innovation is the new Montagu bathing pavilion where as part of our policy on inclusion, is fully accessible with hoists in pools and easy access to the sea and saw the installation of accessible changing rooms and shower facilities as well as an inclusive children's play park. This facility can be enjoyed by the whole community.

Mr Speaker, in fact, wearing my Minister for Tourism hat, we were recognised by a tour operator specialising in holidays that we meet the requirements of people with disabilities as an accessible holiday destination, an achievement indeed for our initiatives to be recognised internationally.



Mr Speaker, access for all has been at the forefront in the refurbishment of No. 6 Convent Place and the newly opened Gibraltar International Bank. Works carried out in both buildings have been with inclusion in mind, not only the area for service users but for employees as well. The new university will be accessible, as will the new schools at the old St Bernard's Hospital.

Mr Speaker, this July will see the first ever purposed built building for Stay and Play Scheme opening its doors at the Victoria Stadium.

Of course while new builds are completely accessible on account of our new policy, we are also in the process of reviewing existing buildings, we heard Dr John Cortes yesterday speak of accessibility changes to St Bernard's Hospital, the Inces Hall Theatre will be accessible once refurbished. Accessibility to this Parliament is planned Mr Speaker, and the list goes on.

One of the most significant aspects of the work that we have taken so far is to review current legislation and provide laws modelled on the UN Convention on the Rights of the Disabled. Draft legislation is now ready and we are in the process of consulting relevant stakeholders. We will be in a position to publish a Bill in the coming weeks. The most fundamental change that the new legislation will bring is the statutory obligation to make premises accessible to people with disabilities. Consequently, the Department of Equality has embarked on a programme of auditing and advising government departments on the reforms.. This will also include public areas. It goes without saying that all new Government projects will continue to be fully accessible. The Government Technical Services Department, in consultation with the Ministry of Equality & the GHA Occupational Therapy department have already been busy identifying and making



improvements to our community and have undergone training on accessibility audits organised by my department.

Mr Speaker, I accept that our manifesto stated that we would do this in our first year. Of course with hindsight that was a bit ambitious of us given the complexity of the exercise, but the principle is just as important to us, it has just taken a bit longer than we expected because we have to make sure that we get it right and that is more important than rushing it and getting it wrong.

And furthermore, the principle is not just about the legislation itself, it is also about awareness, which is something that we have made immense progress on, and that is pivotal in order for the legislation to be embraced by our community.

Anyway Mr Speaker, because the legislation is not yet on the statute books does not mean that work on it has not been done.

Gibraltar's physical landscape is changing as we have embarked transforming it into a place which becomes accessible and we will continue with our schedule of works.

In line with that Mr Speaker, is the Disability Action Plan that we are formulating. Essentially, Mr Speaker, that is a strategic approach to disability issues which is what we now have through the Department of Equality. While the plan is not yet published many strategies have been developed and introduced. It is obvious to all that a lot of it has been implemented. This piece of work has been thoroughly researched.



We must not forget our legacy Mr Speaker in that in such matters we are starting from scratch because the GSD never laid any foundation in this respect.

Mr Speaker, we have come a long way in dealing with issues related to disabilities both in relation to learning disabilities and physical disabilities in this term of Parliament and in fact it is unprecedented.

The Honourable Member opposite Mr Netto in his vicious diatribe of insults yesterday demonstrated that he is either blinded by a jealous rage that we have achieved so much, when he achieved so little, or simply cannot see. Does he not look around and see all that has been achieved? Everybody else can, even Enable Holidays the UK tour operator. He has made a song and dance on the Disability Action Plan. He had the opportunity of doing it for 16 years but failed to do so. He had since 2007 to implement the UN Convention and when it was his responsibility he did not do it. Therefore Mr Speaker, I will take no lessons from him. May I remind the Honourable gentleman that this is not about ticking boxes but a roadmap for the next 5 to 10 years.

Mr Speaker, as my Honourable friend the Chief Minister announced yesterday support for our disabled has already been outstanding; with another increase to disability benefits, increase to the blind persons allowance, 50% increase rates for sponsored patients, significant increases in income tax allowances for our disabled; reductions in import duties on goods used by our disabled and elderly community.



Mr Speaker, I am not suggesting that everything that needs to be done has been done but a lot has been done so far and certainly this is a work in progress and we can be proud of our achievements so far. We continue to work closely with related groups and societies - that is one of the benefits of the Government's open door policy because we are a govt that consults and listens.

The Department also continues to develop policies and strategies in relation to gender equality. While we consider the new census to update information that we had to hand when undertaking an analysis of gender issues in the workplace so as to inform our work programmes and initiatives to promote gender equality and address inequality where it exists.

We are particularly looking at educating and raising awareness with the youth; we are also in discussions with the Department of Education to explore how to reach out to children of school age we are also working with the senior section of the Girl Guides and we are working together on planning initiatives.

We are also working closely with the GFA on initiatives and organised courses on empowering women through sport. It was a pleasure to be invited to the girls' fun football development programme during one of its weekly sessions, which aims to encourage girls' participation in football from an early age with the message that football is just as much for girls as it is for boys.

Finally, on education and awareness, I am delighted to announce that I have been in discussions with the Vice Chancellor (designate) of the University of Gibraltar to explore collaboration with



the Ministry for Equality to progress the issue of gender equality awareness through the University.

While we raise awareness on issues throughout the year, I make public statements on gender equality on International Women's Day in March. My message is clear – that girls and women are empowered to achieve their full potential but ultimately people should always be appointed on merit regardless of gender or quotas.

Twice during my term, I attended the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women at the United Nations Headquarters in New York. The Commission on the Status of Women is instrumental in promoting gender equality and empowerment of women. The UN Women's focus is on priority areas that are fundamental to the equality of women and supports all aspects of the Commission's work.

I also form part of a steering committee of Commonwealth women parliamentarians. Through this forum I hold regular meetings with like-minded colleagues and have been invited to speak at conferences of Women Parliamentarians that I have attended. It is an excellent forum to learn and share best practice.

In this capacity, in February I hosted the second British Islands and Mediterranean Commonwealth Women Parliamentarians Conference. The conference explored the role of Parliamentarians in ending violence against women and girls. High level Speakers including the



former Attorney General of England and Wales, the Right Honourable Baroness Scotland of Asthal QC.

The conference and I am sure that Mrs Ellul-Hammond who was also invited, will agree, was a resounding success. Meeting fellow women Parliamentarians was an invaluable opportunity to learn from best practice and take away some important insights on how we can most effectively work to eradicate violence against women and girls. Although strictly speaking a conference for parliamentarians, local professionals were invited to the conference to speak as well as learn from shared experiences.

Significantly for the first time in Gibraltar, we have a strategic approach to domestic abuse. This is a huge task.

In order to understand the extent and the impact of the problem of domestic abuse in Gibraltar, we are undertaking research and gathering statistical data. This has not been easy and the exercise is not complete because, save for a few departments, statistics on this subject have never been collated and are now in the process of doing so. While we now have a better idea of the issue, it is not necessarily a completely accurate reflection and we are therefore looking at ways of collecting additional information in the future.

For the first time, a forum of all key Government departments and agencies in relation to domestic abuse have met to discuss working practices in order to improve coordination between relevant



departments. The forum will continue to meet at regular intervals and also invite relevant stakeholders to work with them.

The Government recognises the exemplary work undertaken by the staff at Women In Need in helping victims of domestic abuse. In the past they have had very little practical support other than premises and an annual grant. We have invested a lot of time working with them. They are actively supported by the Ministry for Equality who offer guidance, in addition to practical support. As well, Women In Need have developed a professional working relationship with Social Services. Consequently, there is now much better communication and co-operation between them and Social Services and, as a result, cases are being dealt with in an improved manner.

In November last year, together with the Director of Equality and the Team Leader of Children and Families at Social Services, we paid a familiarisation visit to the Welsh Assembly in Cardiff to see at first-hand how the Government in Wales was dealing with the issue of domestic abuse at a strategic level and in particular, their policies and strategies in this area. We also had the opportunity of visiting two shelters for victims of domestic abuse and discussing with staff their experiences in running shelters.

There is no place for domestic abuse in Gibraltar and my Ministry, together with all relevant departments and agencies, is working to eliminate it in Gibraltar.



HOUSING

Mr Speaker, in respect of my housing portfolio I would like to start by saying, that in our first term in office we have constructed almost 1000 affordable homes offered on a co-ownership basis, and just last week we have announced the construction of a further 1700 homes. More detail on this in a moment Mr Speaker but I just wanted to set the tone that this Government, under the helm of a GSLP/Liberal administration has done more for housing than the GSD did in 16 years. This, of course, is not the only thing that we have done for housing, but it is so fundamental that I needed to start on that note.

The progress that we are making on housing is literally visible on all fronts, whether in construction of new homes or the refurbishment of existing housing estates.

Low cost and affordable housing is one of our flagship manifesto commitments.

The new estates at Mons Calpe Mews and Beach View Terraces will be ready very shortly, indeed to the delight of the many. This will provide 331 and 568 flats respectively.

All the construction will of course have an effect on the housing waiting lists, but we are well aware of the demand for home ownership and we have not stopped at having just the development of 3 estates in our term of office which is why we have continued work on this front with the construction of a further 1700 homes at Hassan Centenary Terraces and Bob Peliza



Mews so that we do not have a repetition of the housing crisis that was allowed to develop by the GSD who, by their own admission, they had not made housing a priority.

In terms of co-ownership flats the GSD only ever built 804 flats during their long tenure at Waterport, Cumberland and Bayview Terraces and Nelson's Views. Unfortunately many of those who purchased flats are still suffering from construction defects that this government is in the process of rectifying. And the only rental stock they provided was the mid harbours estate

Construction of flats for the elderly

It is also important to mention that within the current construction projects, the purposely built accommodation for the elderly. In last year's budget speech, construction of Charles Bruzon House and Sea Master Lodge flats were announced. Only a year later you can see how advanced the works are and they are expected to be completed by the summer of 2016.

A total of 141 new flats for the elderly will result in this number of flats returning to the Housing rental stock, having yet another knock on effect to the Housing waiting list.

Much care has been taken, not to repeat the mistakes made by the GSD, we have consulted relevant professionals to make the flats user friendly and accessible and avoid the inherent costs of rectifying the design defects of Bishop Canilla House and Albert Risso House. And let's not even mention the fiasco of the propose built elderly flats at the old St Bernards Hospital that were so unfit for purpose that they were rejected by everyone they were offered to.



Mr Speaker, when we took office, there was a waiting list of 63 bath to shower conversions, this means that there were 63 elderly or disabled people who were struggling at home, and this Mr Speaker, was in the days when hardly anyone received domiciliary care.

This is the importance that the GSD gave to the safety and wellbeing of the elderly and disabled at home, because despite a waiting list, and the earliest conversion sought dating back to 2001, in 2011 they converted 7 bathrooms and in 2010, wait for it Mr Speaker, it was the grand total of 4 conversions, they fared better the year before Mr Speaker because they did 5.

So whereas in 3 years the GSD undertook a total of 16 conversions I am proud to say Mr Speaker that since we took office, we have undertaken a total of 367 bath to shower conversions because, Mr Speaker, we actually care about people.

And Mr Speaker, after the swansong that we had to endure yesterday, lets remind ourselves who the Minister for Housing was during that time Oh yes, Mr Netto, the one who professes to be the saviour of the disabled. My my... Mr Speaker. Oops. Maybe he forgot about his failings in that respect too.

Refurbishment of Major Estates

Another important commitment is the refurbishment of the Government rental estates, and true to our word, in our first term in office, the transformation of the largest housing estates is evident for all to see. We have tackled these forgotten estates, which were so neglected by the GSD in favour of luxury developments.



We have now made considerable progress on the refurbishment projects to the three major Government Housing Estates namely Laguna Estate, Glacis Estate and Moorish Castle Estate. Once completed these refurbished estates will most definitely impact positively on the overall aesthetic appearance of the land entry point into Gibraltar; a far cry from the slum-like appearance that they were allowed to deteriorate to over 16 years of GSD neglect.

From an ecological standpoint, careful consideration has been given to the use of energy-efficient designs and materials in a concerted effort to leave the lightest possible footprint on the environment. This has resulted in a marked improvement to the thermal and acoustic properties of the buildings. As such, a sustainable green design has been applied both as a process and as a goal.

Mr Speaker, I will proceed to outline in detail all the works that are being undertaken because it is easy to forget all the work that is being done.

Laguna Estate

The refurbishment works at Laguna Estate are well advanced in Phases 1 and 2 and have now commenced in Phase 3. The electrical substation and accompanying civil engineering works to provide the electrical supply to the lifts and telecommunications infrastructure to phase 1 and 2 have now been completed and work has commenced in phase 3. This will pave the way for the laying of electrical cables, which will start shortly.



Under phase 1, Rodney House, is practically complete and only requires the commissioning of the lifts and the paving to the new stores area behind Rodney House which will provide one store per tenant.

Other work which forms part of phase 1 includes Smith Dorrien House, Mallard House, Forbes House, Landport House, Orillion House, Bayside House, Maidstone House, Blackwatch House, Causeway House and Nelson House. Here most of the external works including the mono-pitched roofs are practically complete and works on the lifts installation are at an advanced stage.

Works to Laguna House, Inundation House, Somerset Court, Liddell House, Kensington House, Jamaica House, Ballymena House, Madeira House and Boyd House, which are part of phase 2 have started and are progressing well.

Under phase 3 scaffolding has now been erected to Resolution House, Forrester House, Somerville House, Devon House and Kings House. Works to the external façade have commenced at Devon House, Somerville House, Kings House, Resolution House and Forrester House and the construction of the lift shafts has commenced at Sheffield House and Faulknor House.

All the above phases are scheduled to be completed next year.

Glacis Estate

Equally, progress at Glacis Estate is plainly evident. George Jaeger House is



complete and the installation of a new lift to its south elevation will be starting soon. The removal of the scaffold to Referendum House is now complete.

I can only think of one word to describe the look of the 'new' Tower Blocks, WOW !

Works to the external facade have started on all blocks in the estate. The mono-pitched roof to Constitution House is virtually complete and those to Brother O'Brien House, Portmore House, Gustavo Bacarisa House and Ironside House are well advanced.

The Refurbishment of the estate is scheduled for completion by December 2015.

Moorish Castle Estate

The refurbishment and infrastructure works to the estate are at a very advanced stage and consistent progress has been achieved in all blocks. Additionally, refurbishment works to Moorish Castle Married Quarters, which has historically suffered severe problems of water penetration, are programmed to start this summer.

The Moorish Castle Estate project is scheduled for completion by December 2015.

Alameda Estate

In addition to the foregoing intensive refurbishment programmes, this Government is also committed to continue the refurbishment works to Alameda Estate. In fact, during this past year refurbishment works have been completed to Kingsway House and Red Sands House and I can proudly announce that the refurbishment of Picton House will be undertaken during this financial



year and is scheduled to start this summer. The remaining two blocks, Victoria House and Alameda House will follow.

Varyl Begg Estate

The general embellishment, road resurfacing and parking rationalisation works to Varyl Begg Estate, including the upgrade of the surface water drainage system and the replacement of existing access ramps with new disability ramps, has started and is progressing well. Phases 1 and 2 have now been completed, works to phase 3 have already started and the remaining phases 4 and 5 will be completed by August 2015.

Edinburgh Estate

As part of a continuous maintenance programme to Edinburgh Estate consisting of minor external repairs, waterproofing and roof tile repointing, we have managed to complete Thomson House, Donald Delf House and Joseph Lagares House and we are currently working on Alfred Duarte House, William Gomes House, Joseph Noguera House and Manolo Mascarenhas House with Jacobo Azagury House programmed to start in August 2015.

Other Refurbishments

Apart from the Government manifesto commitments, other extensive refurbishment programmes to Government Housing stock have been undertaken, namely the external refurbishment of Sandpits House and Anderson House. These refurbishment works included the external insulation of the facade and waterproofing, the replacement of the existing windows and the construction of



new mono-pitched roofs in order to eliminate the long-standing problem of water penetration. I am pleased to inform Parliament that these works have now been completed.

Importantly Mr Speaker, we are now moving on to other estates and I am pleased to announce that the refurbishment to New Police Barracks will commence very shortly indeed. The tender for this will be announced next week and the refurbishment will include, external refurbishment, construction of a new mono-pitched roof and the installation of a lift.

HOUSING GENERALLY

Mr Speaker, there have been many changes at housing generally, and not just with the minister a few months ago! At this juncture I need to credit the work undertaken up until the cabinet reshuffle by my colleague Minister Balban and the tremendous progress made under his leadership and of course before him our good friend Charles Bruzon whose tenure was sadly called short.

The Housing Department has seen major changes in the last year, The Technical and Design Division of the Housing Department transferred to the Housing Works Agency with effect from April 2014 to consolidate the efficiency of how we maintain and repair our Housing stock.

A collective grievance created and subsequently unresolved by the previous administration that created an unsustainable fissure in communications between HWA and critical Housing Department Technical and Design subsections, has finally been overcome with this amalgamation.



Brand new and modern office accommodation was designed and built by the HWA to house the former Technical & Design Division and everyone is now under one roof within HWA premises and at last, Mr Speaker, the interlaced activities and procedures of two previously contending Government Organisations merge to provide excellent association, interaction and dependability.

The merger has enlarged and enhanced the scope of HWA activities significantly. Whereas being initially commissioned only with internal flat repairs, since the recent transfer of the Housing Technical and Design Division, the Agency is responsible for all maintenance, upgrades and repairs (internal and external) to Government Housing stock and also manage the major refurbishment of the housing estates.

To compensate for the unsustainable exodus of operatives retiring under the Early Exit Scheme negotiated by the previous administration, this Government has engaged the services of Gibraltar General Construction Company Ltd (GGCCL) who contract-out repairs to approved, small construction companies.

The fusion of all Housing resources has created the synergy to bridge historic operational rifts to enhance the quality of services extended to Government tenants this has translated into faster repairs and therefore a quicker turnover of allocations.

Allocation stats:

This is evident if we consider the statistics



In 2012, just after we took office, and following our initiative to refurbish empty and abandoned flats, we refurbished 63 flats. The year before that the GSD had refurbished just over half that number, 38 and in 2010 only 12, 2009, 15. The GSD would rather that flats lay empty and dilapidating than allocate them to families in need. Between 2012 and 2014 we have repaired a total of 138 empty flats the GSD repaired only 65 in the equivalent period 2009 to 2011.

Self-Repair Scheme

The current Self Repair Scheme represents a vast improvement over the scheme in operation under the previous administration which was unrestrained and prone to abuse.

Tenants who are allocated a new flat can opt to undertake their own refurbishments using materials provided and delivered on-site by the HWA, strict accountability policies have been introduced. This has been instrumental to a marked reduction in waiting time for the delivery of flats to new tenants and significant savings in labour costs for Government.

The new scheme was introduced in September 2012 and has since extended this service to nearly 400 tenants, who frequently express their satisfaction with the level and quality of service afforded via this Government endeavour.

We have noted an increase in applications since the 9th December 2011, but this is mainly due to those interested in purchasing in the low-cost co-ownership schemes



The Housing Allocation Committee meets on a monthly basis in order to discuss applicants who may have a need to be housed before others due to medical or social issues, the Committee provides valued advice to the Housing Authority. However, it is not for the Housing Allocation Committee to allocate dwellings.

Much mischief has been caused by the opposition in relation to an answer that i provided in Parliament last week in respect of housing allocations, where they have tried to twist what i thought was a very clear answer into something that is not. Much political mischief and scaremongering Mr Speaker and very telling that the press release issued by the GSD was not by an elected member, for this I actually credit my elected shadow because he, as any other opposition member who has been a minister for housing will understand what i mean and therefore realises that this is a non point. The fact is Mr Speaker, that it was the GSD that made the changes to the way that allocations are made and under the Housing Act 2007, which THEY introduced, housing allocations that were previously undertaken by HAC now have to be undertaken by law by the Housing Authority, ie the Minister.

REFER TO HANSARD 20017 "SIR PETER - "the allocation was done by the Government no the Housing Allocation Committee" and that was for 490 flats at the Mid Harbour estate, just before the 2007 election.

Meetings with Tenants' Association, Action for Housing and others

In keeping with our established policy of holding regular meetings with Tenants Associations, senior officers in my Ministry continue to liaise closely to identify areas of collective concern and agree apposite restoration measures.



All key players; Housing Ministry, Housing Works Agency, Gibraltar General Construction Company Ltd (GGCCL) and the Royal Gibraltar Police afford representation at empowered executive levels so that complex problems can be identified, discussed and tackled swiftly.

The relationships born from these regular engagements go a long way to reveal the communal issues that truly concern the tenants of each estate and foster a constructive spirit of partnership between Housing officials and tenants' representatives.

The Housing Department and HWA staff continue to support the Tenants' Associations on the day-to-day.

Regular meetings are also held with Action for Housing where individual and general issues of concern are discussed.

One final change at housing Mr Speaker, and that is that the Housing Department are now based at New Harbours to enable Government to fulfil another manifesto commitment and put the City Hall to better use. The offices have been purpose built and are now more accommodating to the public, are accessible to people with disabilities, and has also provided a better working environment for the staff as now offices are better suited to needs. There is more privacy for clients and is a more secure location for staff. In the case of the rent collection, we have also maintained a presence in the heart of town, we have a counter available for rental payments at the Post Office.



As this department also moves with the times and joins e-government, tenants are able to pay rent online. Efforts are made to encourage this method of payment and staff have engaged with the Citizens' Advice Bureau to promote this at their Senior Citizens Computer Fun Day which has proved popular.

Such is the improvement made in the Ministry for Housing, whether the Housing Department or the Housing Works Agency, that this has even been recognised by the Ombudsman who, in this year's annual report has noted the marked reduction in housing complaints.

TOURISM

Finally Mr Speaker, I turn to my tourism responsibilities.

Over these past three years, and indeed since I took over the portfolio as Minister for Tourism in December 2014, this Government has demonstrated a firm commitment to tourism, an area of the economy we immediately recognised as crucial for our sustainable prosperity, development and economic growth as an advanced, forward looking community. Since we were elected, the sense of dynamism and energy that we have managed to instil into every aspect of our involvement, whether in promoting the Gibraltar tourist product abroad, in our endeavours to open up new markets and fresh business opportunities or in our dealings with stakeholders in the private sector who have formed a successful and solid partnership with us in our common aims, has been unprecedented. At this juncture I wish to credit the sterling work undertaken by my colleague Minister Costa who held this portfolio



until the reshuffle and during his tenure as Minister for Tourism raised the standard of the organisation making it focused and dynamic and laying the foundations for excellent results we are now yielding

In the past 12 months we have continued to pursue our objectives with the same clear focus, sparing no effort, and investing the necessary financial, material and human resources to upgrade our unique product, refurbishing some of the tourist sites and attractions in order to ensure that we do justice to our growing reputation as a leading travel destination in the Mediterranean and one of the most exciting and interesting short break opportunities that are available in the holiday market.

Last year my predecessor declared that notwithstanding the spectacular progress achieved since December 2011 in this area, Her Majesty's Government of Gibraltar would strive to continue transforming the tremendous potential for growth of the local tourist industry, into concrete proposals for the benefit of our entire community. In the course of my Budget speech I will be providing a detailed account of what we have achieved in the past 12 months.

AVIATION

Gibraltar is well connected by sea, land and air, with regular flights to the main cities in Britain and now to Morocco. The steady growth of the Gibraltar International Airport is



critical to the success of our tourism strategy. The Gibraltar Tourist Board in partnership with Gibraltar International Airport and the Ministry for Tourism have worked relentlessly in this sector. As part of the policy of expanding air connectivity to consolidate the Rock's position as the leading short break destination in the Mediterranean, the Ministry has secured two new air routes in 2015, that makes a total of three new routes introduced in our first term in office.

Indeed, the expansion of aviation services in Gibraltar has been noteworthy and this summer we have added Bristol, Tangier and Casablanca to our list of destinations, bringing the total to eight; – London Gatwick, Heathrow, Luton, Manchester, and Birmingham, being the others. The additional five-weekly flights will increase the number of weekly departures from the Gibraltar International Airport to 37.

The new twice-weekly service to Tangier operated by Morocco's national airline, Royal Air Maroc, officially commenced on Sunday March 29th. The flight is estimated the shortest intercontinental flight in the world, and will start and end in Casablanca, Morocco's main city and economic hub. From there, connections are available to Agadir and Marrakech, plus other destinations in Europe, the Middle East, Africa and North America. This initiative forms part of a wider approach by Government to promote Gibraltar as a tourism destination as well as offer opportunities in financial services and commerce to Morocco.



Gibraltar also welcomed a new UK destination on Sunday April 19th, with EasyJet offering a three times a week service to Bristol in the South West of England and this has been heralded by EasyJet as the most popular of all its new routes.

We are greatly encouraged by the steady increase in air passenger departures in UK scheduled flights since 2011, when just over 193,500 were registered, a figure which has gone up to 209,100 in 2014. In respect of air passenger arrivals on scheduled flights from the UK, these have risen from 189,500 in 2011, to 204,600 in 2014, both figures represent an increase of almost 8% since we took office. Total passenger numbers at Gibraltar International Airport exceeded 400,000 for the first time ever in 2014. We are confident that the new routes to Bristol and Tangier/Casablanca will have an impact on our air traffic and open up fresh opportunities for the tourist industry both in Morocco and in south west of the UK.

Another crucial aspect of our work in respect of the very tough and competitive aviation sector is the policy of continuing to engage with existing and new airlines in actively carrying out joint marketing campaigns to promote Gibraltar as a unique leisure and business destination, the latest being with EasyJet in the Bristol region and with Royal Air Maroc. These are often silent, understated tasks, steadily conducted behind the scenes which later produce the positive results that we aim for.



But, we are not a complacent administration, or one to rest on our laurels and the public can rest assured that we will leave no stone unturned in our efforts to achieve even greater results, in our relentless efforts to attract more and more visitors to our shores, to ensure sustained growth on all fronts. Her Majesty's Government of Gibraltar is always mindful of seeking increases in passenger capacity on existing services, in addition to exploring the possibilities of opening up new links to regional destinations in the UK, as well as to other destinations in Europe.

We are also working on route development out of Gibraltar International Airport with parties outside Gibraltar who have shown an interest in partnering with us in the expansion of operations. This could have the consequent effect of boosting passenger numbers through the terminal in the long term.

We want to continue building on our successes of the past three years, to put Gibraltar on the map as a major international destination for leisure and cultural tourism, to significantly increase overnight visitors in our hotels, promoting our air services, cruise industry, shopping experience and our port as a cluster for professional shipping and maritime activity. That is an iron cast commitment.

HOTELS

Gibraltar's hotel sector is going through exciting times, times of change and new opportunities.



Total arrivals at hotels are up by 8.5% at 58,744 – the highest figure since 2008.

‘Other’ arrivals grew most as a reflection of continuing growth in business sector arrivals and it is encouraging to see arrivals climb for sporting and cultural visits.

Tourist arrivals in 2014 were affected by the closure of the Queen’s Hotel and the refurbishment of the Rock Hotel.

It is encouraging to see that room nights offered are up, again to the highest point since 2008.

Room nights sold grew to an all-time high.

The average length of stay for tourist arrivals has increased from 3.46 in 2013 to 3.94 in 2014, the highest since 1994. This is encouraging as it reflects our efforts to increase overnight tourism.

Room occupancy and sleeper occupancy may have fallen marginally but this is linked to growth and it is fair to point out that supply has grown faster than demand, though we are confident that this will catch up.

Guest nights offered are the highest since 1992.



Guest nights sold are the highest since 2008, again with tourist arrivals growing faster than other arrivals, linked once again to an increase in the average length of stay.

The average length of stay overall has remained consistent but it is wonderful to note once again that in the case of tourist arrivals this has increased.

The impact of the Sunborn Hotel, the first locally established luxury floating five-star hotel, plus the much welcomed major refurbishment projects across some hotels such as the Rock Hotel and the Caleta Hotel have given new impetus to the trade, and we have seen these results translate into the statistics I have just reviewed.

Gibraltar now boasts a much-admired new five star hotel, the Sunborn, which has become an integral part of the Rock's social and leisure scene. The quality and sophistication on offer across a broad range of services, is unprecedented for Gibraltar, and its presence in one of Gibraltar's primary nightlife locations, Ocean Village, has given renewed vibrancy to the area.

Importantly, we have now developed an interesting and much needed variety in our local hotel bed stock, to satisfy customers, whether they are seeking budget holiday type accommodation, to the intermediate and the luxury styled product.



There are also proposals in the pipeline for new hotels like the Marriott, Holiday Inn Express, a major extension of the Caleta Hotel as well as a new boutique hotel in the Upper Town which will increase the availability of quality hotel accommodation on the Rock.

CRUISE INDUSTRY

Our pro-active marketing strategy over the past year has been successful in selling the Rock as the ideal short term holiday destination on a global scale, and the improved tourist product has also had an effect on growing number of cruise ship visitors to the Rock. Whereas in 2013, the total number reached 284,870, the figure for 2014 has risen to 298,512 and it is expected to exceed the 300,000 mark in 2015 with a total of 212 ships scheduled to call at Gibraltar, this being up by 32 calls over 2014.

This is an area where, it has to be said, the Gibraltar Tourist Board's partnership with the private sector, with the dedicated local agents, whether it be shipping or shore excursions, which form such a vital part of the industry, has produced the desired results. We have spared no effort to consistently promote Gibraltar as a leading cruise destination during our participation at the main international cruise industry gatherings and through our membership of the very proactive and influential Medcruise Association. I'm very pleased to confirm that Gibraltar will be hosting the MedCruise General Assembly in the spring of 2017, and this will be the second time that this important event has been held on the Rock.



This year we have continued the successful policy introduced by my predecessor, of securing one-to-one meetings with senior cruise industry executives in UK, Miami and at the meetings of Medcruise and building up strong personal relationships with the top decision makers.

Among the highlights on this front, has been the agreement with Royal Caribbean International, for the visit to the Gibraltar port of its newest megaship 'Anthem of the Seas' the largest cruise ship ever to call on us,, no less than seven times over 2015, bringing in excess of 30,000 passengers to the Rock, and representing a significant boost to our tourism sector.

This demonstrates the confidence by the industry in our role as a leading cruise port in the Mediterranean and sends a strong signal that Gibraltar is a serious and committed player in the industry, able to efficiently handle some of the largest vessels in the world. Furthermore Government is actively considering a number of options to increase the berthing capabilities of the port to handle more large ships simultaneously.

Our energetic policy to support the cruise industry, and give the port a further competitive edge, was further enhanced by the introduction of amendments to the Port Rules. This initiative will incentivise Royal Caribbean vessels from continuing to call beyond 2015 and seek to attract more calls by other cruise companies.



It is also worth noting is how Carnival UK, a part of P&O Cruises and Cunard, has declared that Gibraltar is the third most visited port of call for them in 2015, after its home base of Southampton and Lisbon such is the success of our strategy.

One of the aims that we have continued to pursue is the issue of cruise turnarounds which would provide a huge boost to our tourist trade in every sense. We are working hard for this to materialise and we continue to encourage several cruise companies to consider this activity, as this would provide incredible economic opportunity for Gibraltar.

IMPROVEMENTS TO VISITOR ATTRACTIONS

In the past three years, the Gibraltar Tourist Board has made a capital investment of £3m in the Rock's major tourist attractions; at St Michael's Cave, the 'jewel in the crown' of the local product has been extensively refurbished and modernised creating a more contemporary look inside significantly, the entrance was completely redesigned, with the installation of a wheelchair lift to improve access; the steps have also been fitted with lights, while a new spectacular 30 minute 'son et lumiere' show, that runs all day, enhances the dramatic geological features and striking views of the caverns' interior.



The 100 Ton Gun site has also been refurbished and there has been beautification of external area and now also has an accessibility ramp which extends the view of the gun to people with disability. In the past they only had access to the exhibition.

New mannequins in historical costume have been located at all the gun embrasures of The Great Siege Tunnels – also known as the Galleries – adding a realistic feel to the site. The figures complement the information panels and props that were also put in place.

The World War Two Tunnels have also benefitted from the refurbishment programme and the construction of new accessible toilets for persons with disabilities. Improved facilities for staff have also been provided. The viewing platform at Jew's Gate has also been resurfaced.

In addition, there are also significant improvements to the nature reserve which are being spearheaded by the Ministry of the Environment that will greatly enhance the Upper Rock as a tourist product, not least the spectacular suspension bridge at the newly refurbished Royal Anglian Way.

I have detailed the improvements as an investment in our tourist product because they I am delighted to report that they have had a noticeable, positive impact in the number of tourists visiting the Upper Rock. Whereas in 2013 just over 732,000 were recorded, in



2014, the number of visitors rose to just over 791,000. 2015 has seen a consistent increase in the number of visitors to the Upper Rock. At the end of April 2015 visitor numbers were up by 9.2% over last year. Our unprecedented investment in the tourist product will ensure that we continue to have first class tourist attractions that people can enjoy whether residents or visitors. We want tourists to receive a good impression of what we have to offer and enjoy our product to the full. This Government has shown it is fully committed to tourism, like never before.

As with all improvements and refurbishments that we have carried out at the beaches and tourist attractions, foremost in our minds has been the need to ensure that accessibility features were included at the design stage, to ensure that people with disabilities or reduced mobility could enjoy the facilities. This has been a trademark of my ministerial responsibility.

WEDDINGS AND CIVIL PARTNERSHIPS

The Rock has long been an ideal location for weddings, as part of our new marketing strategies the weddings market in Gibraltar has been reinvigorated. Two legislative initiatives last year the amendment to the Marriages Act, which now allows marriage ceremonies to be conducted aboard locally registered passenger ships under special licence and the introduction of the Civil Partnership Act which permits same sex civil partnerships, has seen more couples tying the knot here. The changes create new business opportunities, closely linked to Gibraltar's tourist, hospitality industry and shipping registration.



Since the introduction of the civil partnership legislation in Gibraltar it is now possible to develop new ideas and products aimed specifically at the LGBT market and we have noted that a number of tourists have already taken up this opportunity in the last year.

The initiative has opened up new business opportunities with what is widely considered a very profitable segment of the tourist market. We are keen to broaden our horizons in this respect, by participating in new business opportunities, and this year the Gibraltar Tourist Board has attended two well-known international events and trade fairs aimed at the LGBT tourist market.

The GTB has also carried out a promotion campaign with leading LGBT publication advertising the fact that same sex couples can come to Gibraltar enter a civil partnership as part of a tailor made tourist package.

EVENT-LED TOURISM

Event-led tourism has been an innovative concept expanded by Government to repackage everything that Gibraltar has to offer in new and novel ways that are proving both extremely popular with the public whether resident or visitors, and at the same time, affording the tourist industry a magnificent business platform to showcase the many attractions, leisure products and facilities of our unique destination.



The dual rationale behind it is simple: organise a first class cultural event with an international dimension, that will appeal to the general public across the board, and by so doing be assured that you will be attracting visitors to Gibraltar as well, on the strength of those events; we have found that many visitors who will find the experience engaging enough to want to start booking a return to the Rock as soon as they arrive back home.

We have worked closely with the Ministry for Culture on joint initiatives to encourage event-led tourism to Gibraltar, and the idea has worked exceedingly well. Gibraltar has seen a glittering constellation of recording artists and chart topping performers descend upon our community, to the appreciation of sell-out jubilant crowds at the new annual Gibraltar Music Festival; celebrations of local cuisine on Calentita night; an international chess competition the Tradewise Open Chess Tournament; the international Jazz Festival and of course, the Gibunco Gibraltar International Literary Festival, whose third edition we are already organising for November 2015 and which I am pleased to say, is going from strength to strength.

All these tremendously successful events have served to promote Gibraltar as an attractive tourist destination. I have no doubt that the literary festival will continue to develop on its success for many years to come.

THE UKGTA



The United Kingdom Gibraltar Tourism Association and Gibraltar House in London continue to perform sterling work to coordinate all our tourism partners and stakeholders in the primary task of selling and promoting Gibraltar as a tourist destination. I am delighted to report that Scottish tour operator Osprey Holidays, has this year become the newest addition to the expanding pool of UK tour operators to feature Gibraltar. The company specialise in quality tailor-made short breaks to over 50 exciting locations around Europe, including Paris, Rome, Madrid, Prague, Florence, Berlin and now Gibraltar.

We are excited that Osprey Holidays have decided to team up with the Gibraltar Tourist Board and work together to promote the Rock as a tourist destination. The Board actively encourages the expansion of the overnight leisure market from our core markets in the UK and it is particularly encouraging to see expansion in the Scottish market. Once again this Government has shown its drive and dedication to delivering more visitors to the Rock. The tourist industry is a key part of our economy and we keep working hard to expand our product in new markets.

Our concerted approach to joint marketing campaigns and the GTB's direct marketing activities in the UK and in other markets, has been yielding results in our overnight tourism sector. This approach has already yielded results, as has been seen in the hotel statistics for last year. It is precisely this sector where more growth is encouraged as overnight visitors contribute greatly to the economy and deliver an always welcome revenue stream to all these industries.



Mr Speaker,

My main priority as Minister for Tourism will be to ensure that Gibraltar continues to build on its deserved reputation as a unique tourist destination which offers first class services, value for money, and a whole series of exciting tourist attractions and beautiful sites. It is also important that we keep on working to ensure growth in our cruise industry, in expanding air connectivity still further to other European destinations, in strengthening links with local tourist industry stakeholders and partners both in Gibraltar and UK for the benefit of all.

Our economic structures reflect the proven resilience acquired over many years and countless challenges, and tourism is a vital component of the economy and our long-term, sustainable prosperity. My aim is to increase the numbers of tourists who decide to spend their time with us, whether from UK or other European countries, or Morocco that we continue to invest wisely, as we have done in the past three years, to improve and repackage our tourist product in a manner that allows Gibraltar to remain ahead of the curve and to economically benefit from all our tourist assets.

We will strengthen all our efforts through strategic planning and marketing to achieve effective return on investments where possible.



The brilliant figures show the strength of the tourism industry right now, the great news Mr Speaker is that the year ahead is expected to be even better, with growth continuing.

Our new tourism strategy is working and has brought record number of visitors to our Rock.

Conclusion

Mr Speaker, while we continue to attract investment, and develop tourism as an essential driver of our economy, our duty is to spend the revenue that we generate responsibly and prioritise on delivering to those who need it the most, whether it is through housing, social services or any department that helps the public. The Chief Minister's address on Monday is evidence of exactly this.

I have spent 3 ½ years working with a team of Ministers who are great friends, hard working, dynamic, and moreover all work first and foremost with Gibraltar and its people at the heart of everything that we do, in a way that Gibraltar had stopped to experience. In the years prior to change



We a strong prosperous nation, our spending priorities are focused on those who most need and true to our socialist values we have delivered for our people.

In conclusion Mr Speaker, a year of great progress, and a term which has achieved important developments to achieve a fair and just society.

As this first parliament draws to a close at the end of the year I am very satisfied and immensely proud of all that has been achieved.

I would like to credit and thank all those who I have worked with me during this term.