



HM Government of Gibraltar

Ministry of Education, Heritage,
Environment, Energy and
Climate Change

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Budget Address - The Prof John Cortes MBE, MP

Part I – Environment, Heritage, Public Health and Utilities

Mr Speaker,

I rise for my eighth budget speech, conscious that, being the last one in the electoral cycle, it could conceivably be my last. While resisting the temptation to summarise the accomplishments of this latest part of my life's journey, I must however comment very briefly on how different Gibraltar is today.

In 2011 all you could recycle here was glass, there was virtually no climate change awareness, no possibility of a Parliament even debating, let alone passing, a motion on the climate emergency. There was heavy pollution from the old diesel power stations, with frequent power cuts due to insufficient generating capacity. There were hundreds fewer trees, the Barbary partridge was going extinct, and there was no Commonwealth Park.

Mr Speaker,

2018/19 was an extremely busy year in the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Climate Change.

It has been a challenging year. An immense amount of time and work have been devoted to environmental planning and contingency in the context of Brexit. As a result, two officers in the Department have been working almost exclusively on Brexit, with support from many others. This is quite apart from my own involvement in reviewing documents and drafts and chairing the joint working group of UK and Gibraltar Environment Officials, both here and in London, a process not yet concluded. This has affected progress in other areas but we have nevertheless been able to push through on key issues and embark on new initiatives. I am most grateful to my extended Brexit team, which includes people from other departments, agencies and beyond, for their efforts and determination.

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As a result, we are ready for Brexit, if it unfortunately happens, and will ensure, as I have stated before, that we continue to use EU environmental targets as our minimum standards and without any decrease in our quality of life.

Mr Speaker, among the work that has suffered as a consequence of Brexit, is our 25 year environment plan, but I am confident this will be finally launched in September.

As I stated during the Climate Emergency debate, we have a real chance in Gibraltar to achieve carbon neutrality and our intention is to achieve this. Despite the tiny impact this will have on a global scale, we can but do what we can, and we can certainly be an example to others. Much has been done already. Emissions from power generation has reduced by 21% since 2013, and LNG, which produces 25% less carbon than diesel, will continue to produce a further drop. Green procurement, solar panels for both hot water and energy generation, an unprecedented amount of environmental legislation, more trees planted than ever before, are other examples. Existing commitments by Government as announced by the Chief Minister last year, also include no vehicles fully fuelled by petrol to be registered by 2030, and only electric vehicles by 2035.

The Climate Emergency declaration of Parliament commits us to encourage other countries, and the region, to take climate action. This is how we can lead by example, offering solutions to other communities in how this can be achieved. As my late mother would say, “un grano no hace un granero, pero ayuda a su companero”.

In this and other contexts, Mr Speaker, Gibraltar continues to work hard with our colleagues in the Overseas Territories and will extend this work further.

In relation to the OTs, and thanks to intense lobbying for a number of years, HM Government of the UK finally agreed last year to allow Overseas Territories to form a part of the UK delegation to international environmental conferences of parties (COPs). This happened for the first time ever at the 24th Conference of the Parties (COP 24) of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), otherwise known as the Paris Agreement, held in Poland in December. The OT delegation was composed of Dr Kedrick Pickering, former Deputy Premier of the BVI, with our own Dr Liesl Mesilio as his technical support. The level of exposure and possibilities presented to the team through this high-level access was unprecedented and was achieved largely by Gibraltar’s insistence on the importance of OT representation.

Indeed, I continue to press the UK to ensure Gibraltar’s inclusion in international Agreements, including the Paris Agreement on Climate Change, the Bern Convention, the Barcelona Convention, and the extension of the Intercontinental Biosphere Reserve of the Mediterranean to include Gibraltar.

Environment within the Community

Mr Speaker, my scientific team continues to work in monitoring environmental variables and manages many aspects of our natural environment. They are involved in a huge range of activities, both internally, and in organising activities and initiatives such as World Environment Day and the forthcoming Island Games associated environmental conference.

The administration section of the Department among many other duties, manages the many



contracts that relate for example to planted areas.

Together with the now fully integrated Heritage and Upper Rock and Beaches Divisions and the Cleansing Section, they are a formidable force for the environment.

Mr Speaker,

We have continued to engage with a wide array of stakeholders, in the public and private sectors, including the Chamber of Commerce; the Gibraltar Federation of Small Businesses; the University of Gibraltar; and of course our active environmental NGOs, GONHS, ESG and Nautilus Project, Sustainable Gibraltar and the Gibraltar Heritage Trust.

This year has seen unprecedented public interest in the environment, in particular sustainability and Climate Change. New groups have been formed, and we have seen the extension to Gibraltar of the Schools Strikes for Climate, spearheaded by Iona Sacarello and other very committed students from Westside School, whom I have met on at least four separate occasions. I have nothing but admiration for the way that these young people, and indeed all those who are now worried about the sustainability of our way of life, from excessive use of polluting motor vehicles to consuming too much meat, for standing out and being counted.

I thank them, and all the NGOs for their invaluable contribution towards Gibraltar's environment and heritage.

And I have one message for our environmental NGOs, one which I think I am entitled to send, given the 35 years that I spent in that movement. I am very happy to see them coming forward with campaigns and petitions, to rally support for our common course.

But the battlefield has changed since I was an environmental activist (which some say I still am of course). The enemy is no longer the same; it is no longer an unsympathetic Government. The person you have to convince now is not the Minister for the Environment, nor indeed the Chief Minister, nor indeed the Cabinet. You are pushing against an open door. You are preaching to the converted, indeed, if they will allow me, in some cases they are preaching to someone who helped convert some of them.

The focus now has to be directed elsewhere, to us working together to gain support from the community. From individuals and corporations, public and private. To make those who make commercial decisions that can have wide effect, make the right ones and make them in a different way to how they would have done before.

My work with the various environmental and other committees continues, and I would like to thank all those many individuals who sit on committees, councils and boards that I name or Chair, for their significant, and voluntary, contribution to the running of Gibraltar.

Mr Speaker, this Government leads in environmental Governance, something which is recognised beyond our shores, and something of which we can be justly proud. Our bold legislative vision on the environment has resulted in letters from international bodies, congratulating us for our environmental foresight. As an example, our declaration of a climate emergency resulted in a matter of hours in nearly two thousand 'likes' on twitter.



Environmental Legislation

Mr Speaker, this Government's term in office has seen an unprecedented level of environmental legislation. We have so far published 173 pieces of legislation, which have all led to positive environmental change, in 2019 alone, adding Ivory, Balloons, Animal Welfare, Pet Sales, Circus Animals, Dolphinarium, Plastics, and Climate Change to the list.

This indeed should not come as a surprise, as Gibraltar's first significant environmental legislation came into effect during the GSLP's 1988 term. And we haven't finished yet.

Sustainability

Mr Speaker I have been working on formalising the responsibilities of the Commissioner for Sustainable Development and to ensure we undertake action in pursuit of the economic social, environmental and cultural well-being of Gibraltar.

The Commission for Sustainable Development and Future Generations will have a duty to promote, assist and advise on progress made by public departments and agencies towards a more sustainable future.

Over the last year, the Commissioner, Daniella Tilbury has been working to build capability in sustainable development across the community. She currently working with the Department of Education to build upon the excellent environmental work currently led by teachers.

I am committed to driving change for sustainability across the public service, business and local community and will with the Commissioner's assistance be developing policies to achieve this, such as for example, a sustainable catering policy.

The Commissioner has also attended various high level meetings including expert committees hosted by the United Nations Economic Council for Europe (UNECE). This representation enables Gibraltar's interests to be visible in international dialogues and fora.

Environmental education and awareness

Mr Speaker, I am delighted that there has never before been so much collaboration between environment and education, taking environmental education to another level.

The Environment Department is actively supporting schools in Project Based Learning (PBL) cycles as a platform for interdisciplinary teaching and learning which has effectively embedded key environmental issues into the very core of a 21st century curriculum.

A key element of PBL is the incorporation of outdoor experiences such as visits to local sites or businesses. This internationally recognised approach empowers students with the skills and knowledge they require, not only for the preservation, protection and improvement of Gibraltar's local environment, but in the pursuit of global environmental sustainability.

The framework of co-operation includes the Sustainable Schools Core Committee (which also includes the University), the Sustainable Schools Working Party (with representatives from all



schools), and the Sustainable School Group (which includes teachers, ancillary staff and pupils). Each school also has an eco committee, led by the pupils.

ClimACT, is an EU Interreg – Sudoe project which aims to support the transition to a low carbon economy in schools. The University of Gibraltar, in collaboration with the Departments of Education and Environment (in addition to the participating schools), spearheads this project.

Cleansing, Waste Management and Litter

Mr. Speaker, the tender for the provision of cleaning services, and upkeep of public areas was awarded last year to Britannia Management, keeping the Government's commitment to fully protecting the workers. The new contract is considerably more extensive in the number of areas to be cleaned as well as the frequencies of the cleaning of such sites. The cleanliness of our public areas has improved, and will improve further, as the proactive collaboration between the department and the contractor identifies areas where further improvements can be made.

The Department's Litter Wardens continue to work to stop fly tipping and littering throughout Gibraltar. There are approximately 600 litterbins around Gibraltar so is no excuse for littering. As part of our litter strategy, we will be rolling out further litter cameras this year and will be adding another warden to the section. We will also be providing recycling bins in the city centre, including Main Street.

The Litter Committee continues to meet and advise on litter management, with many achievements that don't always get to the public eye, but which are significant.

Moving on to waste management Mr Speaker, overall recycling figures have seen a slight decrease in the order of 2% from last year. Considering that the figure had been increasing year on year since 2012, it is not cause for concern. Part of the reason is the trend to reduce and reuse more, so that the third 'R' – recycle is expected to drop. Which is actually encouraging.

We will therefore be embarking on an extensive waste reduction and recycling awareness campaign this year, in addition to progressing the new waste facility at Europa Advance Road, to which we continue to be committed. This will ensure maximum separation of waste and will increase our recycling ability.

Sewage treatment

I am pleased that despite the complexities in the discussions and design referred to yesterday by the Chief Minister, we are progressing on the preparatory work on the new sewage treatment plant which we still expect to be completed in 2020.

Plastic

Mr Speaker,

It is now well known that plastic in the wrong place and at the wrong time is a scourge on the planet, particularly the oceans. Surrounded as we are by sea, we have to take action, and action on this will have a direct benefit on our waters and the life within them.



As the Chief Minister has already announced, Gibraltar will be taking steps in implementing an importation ban with regards to plastic bags and other single use plastic. Whilst certain exemptions will be created to ensure hygiene and safety standards are met, we will prohibit the importation of plastic bags with a thickness of 100gsm or less.

In addition, we are taking wider measures to regulate the importation of Single-Use Plastic. The Regulations will restrict and prohibit the importation of a wide range of single use plastic products into Gibraltar, to reduce litter on land and sea. Most PLA products, the wrongly-named 'biodegradable plastics' are currently produced as single use items and are therefore also captured.

Energy and climate change

Mr Speaker, I return to the subject of Climate Change. Climate Change is now affecting every country on every continent. It is disrupting economies and affecting lives, costing people and communities; and will do so even more in future. Weather patterns are changing, sea levels are rising, weather events are becoming more extreme and greenhouse gas emissions are now at their highest levels in history.

Climate change requires immediate and ambitious action to prevent the worst effects it can have on people and wildlife. This was reflected in this Parliament's unanimous declaration of a climate emergency, being the second Parliament in the world to do this, coming a week after a similar motion in the Mother of Parliaments.

The Climate Emergency Motion sets out ambitious targets, even more ambitious than those set in the Climate Change Bill soon to come before this House, that provides the legal framework and the binding obligation to this and future Governments to deal urgently with Climate Change. Together with our 25 year plan it formalises how Gibraltar will tackle its climate change responsibilities in years to come.

Declaring a Climate Emergency is only the first step. ACTION is required. We are working hard to ensure that this is so.

Both the Motion and the Bill require strict, accountable reporting. The Department of Environmental and Climate Change has already analysed in detail what challenges these represent, and what action needs to be taken. It will not be easy, but it is achievable. A detailed analysis and plan will be published in the coming months. I have seen the initial work done, and I am confident and excited. Based on these recommendations, we will identify the necessary budget, but Mr Speaker, I would like to remind this House that work on climate change is progressing in many different departments and authorities as part of their core work and so not separately identified by Head. And so work in the GEA, Aquagib, GSLA, and in relation to many Government projects, not least the schools and the sports facilities, are making provision for improvements that will positively impact on our climate change responsibilities. In addition, relevant projects such as solar installations are being funded by private investment on Power Purchase Agreements.

However, progress will not have to wait for all of that. The Government's own tender project for the phased roll out of rooftop PV systems across Government buildings, under a power purchase agreement, is now well underway, with successful tenderers informed last week. This project is envisaged to produce approximately 3.6 MW of solar power. This Mr Speaker, is in addition to



the 3MW solar plant, the first phase of which is already producing power, and the solar panels at the sports complexes which are expected to generate approximately 800 kW of solar power. The installed capacity of solar power at the end of 2019 will therefore be over 7MW. At average production, this is 30% of power consumption so I am confident therefore that our 2020 target of 20% overall is within reach.

The amendment to the Electricity Act approved by this House recently will encourage private consumers to micro-generate and get credit when feeding into the network.

Other projects include the deployment of onshore wind power at two different sites. A call for expressions of interest will be published for this project.

The Department is also working with the University of Highlands and Islands in Scotland, to explore the tidal resource in BGTW and to assist us in expanding our renewable energy portfolio
Mr Speaker, the LNG plant is close to being fully commissioned, setting us well on the path towards a lower-carbon economy, as diesel powered electricity generation becomes a thing of the past. Already much of our electricity comes from LNG, and Waterport power station is often silent. Work on decommissioning will be done this year at the same time as the former south district power stations and most of the temporary generators are dismantled.

A steering committee made up of management and staff, with Unite representation, is embarked on working together to ensure a smooth transition when GEA takes over the new plant a year after final commissioning.

I have to thank all at GEA, including its Board, for driving the project and adapting to the change that we are seeing.

Our continuing Greenhouse Gas Inventory programme, as part of our commitments under the Global Covenant of Mayors helps us monitor and govern our total manageable emissions more effectively. The latest results see Gibraltar's overall carbon emissions were 10% lower in 2017 than in 2015 and 8% lower than in 2016. Emissions from electricity generation is down 21% from 2013 and significantly, down 15% since 2016. Emissions from waste are down by 13% since 2015 and 10% since 2016. We now have to tackle other emissions with the same energy as we have tackled power generation.

Air Quality

Mr. Speaker,

I am of course aware of criticism as to our air quality that we see in social media in particular. But the Chief Minister yesterday revealed very good news on this subject.

We have to recognise that we live in a concentrated urban area with more traffic than we would like to have, and that we have a great deal of shipping calling at Gibraltar, and even more passing through the Strait and impacting on our air, even though it has no connection to Gibraltar other than the geographical. We also have some industrial activity, which includes Gibdock. And so there are still, clearly, improvements on which we have to work, and on which, including Gibdock,



we are working hard.

But Mr Speaker, we have a duty to acknowledge real progress, and Mr Speaker, there is good news. I can report that last year, 2018, , not only were recorded Nitrogen dioxide levels EU compliant for the first time ever in all our monitoring stations, but that also for the first time since air monitoring started in Gibraltar 14 years ago, levels of ALL pollutants, including all gases and particles monitored, were within EU required levels. This is hugely significant. It shows that our efforts are working, and gives me great confidence as to our being able to tackle the remaining problems too.

Air quality is of course due to improve further when we change fully to LNG and as solar power increases.

In relation to traffic, Mr Speaker, the STTPP is already making inroads, and my Department will this year be working more closely than ever with that of my colleague Paul Balban to analyse the impact of traffic on air quality and assist and support in taking further steps to reduce this. This will include rolling out electric car charging points to encourage their use, in addition to the w measures measures in private developments announced yesterday by the Chief Minister.

Mr Speaker, we have a draft law on idling, but are holding it back in the face of recent research that suggests that stop/starting in fact causes more emissions. We are assessing the evidence on this.

Mr Speaker

Awareness of air quality issues in the community is at its highest. The Environmental Agency's air quality website continues to provide up-to-date hourly measurements of pollutants. These are reported to the general public in a user-friendly website which increases transparency and demonstrates the work and progress that is being made to improve air quality.

As promised, last year we introduced three new air quality monitors, one at Europort, another at Gibdock and another which was used to measure occupational exposure at the frontier and is now measuring air quality in Catalan Bay in response to a request from the Village. The data will be made publicly available. I am happy to say that levels detected are all within EU acceptable ranges. But most important, the results are helping us understand the issues better so that we will be better able to improve the quality of the air that we breathe, that is so important for our health.

Given the success in improving air quality in the south, the time has now come to move the air monitoring station to the north, and we are currently considering the best location.

I must stress my full support for the work that has been done by my colleague the Minister for Traffic and Transport in implementing the Sustainable Traffic, Transport and Parking Plan (SSTTPP) and congratulate him on it and on the courage that he has shown in improving traffic and the environment. The plan implements policies that reduce traffic and speed as well as encouraging the use of alternative methods of transport.

Mr Speaker, I announced last week during World Environment Day that I will be creating an Air Quality Commission. This Commission will bring together key stakeholders, in a common



endeavour to understand the facts about air quality Gibraltar. It will create a forum for sharing concerns and for proposing solutions. By operating transparently, it will help build public trust in the evidence, and the collective actions taken as a result.

I will be announcing further details in the coming weeks.

Energy

Mr Speaker, it surely ironic that the largest contributor to improving air quality and reducing our carbon footprint has been and is the Gibraltar Electricity Authority.

The last twelve months have again seen a huge effort going into the commissioning of the new power station project, the associated new high voltage distribution centres, infrastructure, the new high voltage cabling network and the adjacent LNG storage facility.

As the commissioning phase nears completion, to date about 14 million units (Kwh) consumed in Gibraltar have come from the North Mole Power Station.

The total installed generating capacity at the end of the year continues to be 76.98 MWe, well in excess of our maximum demand, and so we are very well provided.

As mentioned earlier, CO₂ emissions this year saw a decrease of nearly 6% from 152,287 tonnes in 2017 to 147,992 tonnes in 2018, a figure that should see a further significant drop over the next 12 months.

The Authority continues to upgrade and expand the Network and SCADA system (Supervisory Control and Data Acquisition) used to monitor generation and distribution, thus providing a better and faster response when dealing with (now extremely rare) power outage scenarios.

Improvements to the public lighting network continue by replacing existing street lights with LED and other low energy lanterns thus further reducing overall consumption.

The GEA is also working with the Port Authority to encourage on-shore power being made available to ships at berth.

Moving to water, Mr Speaker, during the past year AquaGib Ltd has maintained and improved on its levels of service and performance indicators in respect of the provision of potable and seawater supply, and sewerage services. In order to achieve this level of service AquaGib has undertaken an expenditure of £12,474,000.

AquaGib has continued to invest on capital projects as part of its asset replacement plan aimed at maintaining and improving the water infrastructure assets in Gibraltar. The current approved investment plan is set at £3.2m over the 5-year period to 31 March 2020. During this period, a total of £645,733 was spent on capital projects, which included:



- The replacement of potable and seawater mains.

- Replacement of customer's water meters, meter cupboards and meter manifolds.

In addition to the above AquaGib has provided support to Government on the delivery of new infrastructure for numerous projects, including the commencement of delivery of a new Sewage Pumping Station (SPS) at Varyl Begg estate, new mains for the comprehensive schools/Notre Dame sites, new mains to facilitate the building of the Lathbury & Europa Point Sports Facilities, new mains along Dockyard Road and new SPS's at Wellington Front and No.4 Dock.

During the period AquaGib has continued with a long-term project to further increase the PW/SW delivery from the Waterworks reservoirs to the Westside area. This project is expected be completed within the next financial year.

Importantly, replacement of old equipment at its RO plants will significantly reduce the energy consumed in water production.

Beaches

Mr Speaker

From water, to beaches. We have this year improved the training and supervision of our lifeguards to make our beaches safer. Lifeguard induction now includes first aid, dealing with the public, obligations under the Seashore Rules and the Seaside Pleasure Boat Rules, beach litter, marine pollution and wildlife strandings and most importantly training in disability.

This year considerable planning and logistical support has been added in order to improve the lifeguarding standards and this includes round the clock supervision of the Beach Service in order to ensure the safety and wellbeing of all beach users.

As is now expected Mr Speaker, the winter/spring storms again caused considerable damage at our beaches. We have had continuous storm damage of varying severity for the past twelve years. As a result, we work with the Technical Services Department on an extensive works programme to resolve this in time for the summer.

A complete overhaul of the Camp Bay public toilet and shower facilities will be carried out this year. Solar panels will be installed to provide hot water at the facilities, and we will mirror this at the other beaches.

We have also, of course to celebrate the opening up of Nuffield Pool to the community with the splendid new seafront promenade.

Marine surveillance and fishing

Mr. Speaker, marine surveillance and research have become one of the Department's key areas of research with both the technical section and the EPRU actively engaging in research, management and surveillance, and now include certified marine mammal medics.



The Department's scientific dive team has trained up four further officers. The dive team continues to be instrumental in the Department's marine monitoring programme. They also carry out the regular servicing and maintenance to the underwater camera system, increasingly popular here and abroad, giving its worldwide viewers an insight into the high biodiversity within BGTW and our 'No Take' Marine Conservation Zone (MCZ).

The MCZ, located at seven sisters, is proving to be a success with notable fish species such as grouper and pointed nose groupers being spotted by users of the underwater camera.

Indeed as the UK Government increasingly indicates its support for marine conservation, its Blue Belt, with declaration of marine conservation zones, and looks at the management therein, I will remind them of our own marine protection laws - all the fruit of GSLP or GSLP/Liberal governments, and of the need to support our laws and the protection of the rich biodiversity of BGTW.

The Department continues to liaise closely with local NGO's, Clubs, associations and marine users through the Neptunian Network, which was set up in 2017, organising marine awareness campaigns and coastal and subtidal clean ups, with further outreaches planned.

Mr Speaker, the Environmental Protection and Research Unit is going from strength to strength. Over the past year, they have engaged with 241 fishing vessels, carried out 113 land patrols, 56 dedicated dog patrols, 38 wildlife rescues, 3 cetacean surveys, 15 callouts and 5 oil spill checks.

Environmental Health

With the uncertainty of Brexit, the Environmental Agency have been working closely with the Department on issues such as contingency planning on food imports and exports of waste in the event of a no deal scenario.

The Agency monitors the quality of our bathing waters. Last year we saw a further improvement to the water quality classification of our beaches. Four of Gibraltar's beaches are now classed as 'Excellent', with one classed as 'Good'. These are the best classifications that our beaches have EVER achieved.

When assessing Western Beach using the four year average as stipulated in the Directive it is still classed as 'Poor' however, based on 2018 results Western Beach is classed as 'Sufficient'. Water quality there is therefore better, but clearly there are still issues that our neighbours need to address and also shows how essential the bathing water monitoring programme is.

The Agency has also contributed significantly to the Government's anti-dog fouling campaign. Since the inception of the DNA testing scheme 230 samples have been submitted with 22 Fixed Penalty Notices issued to offenders and 7 Fixed Penalty Notice issued to a dog owner for not being licensed. As the programme continues and awareness increases, irresponsible dog owners find new places to take their dogs. We continue to persevere with the aim of further reducing this problem.

I take this opportunity to assure responsible dog owners of my support, of our efforts to restore their good name, that we are looking to tackling the problem of dog urine, and to confirm that we will be creating a dog park near the Nuffield Pool.



The Agency is the competent authority for COMAH and has had a major input throughout the design and construction phase in ensuring (along with UK based HSE) that the LNG storage plant and new power station meet the strictest safety standards, which far exceed those normally required by the industry. They will continue to discharge their work as the competent authority once the plant is fully commissioned.

The Agency is also working with the Port Department in tightening the laws on emissions from ships, especially black smoke.

Mr Speaker, recently, as Minister for Public Health, I have been working closely with the Agency in assessing living conditions in a number of areas, especially the Upper Town, and, together with representatives from Housing, Town Planning and Land Property Services, we are working towards being able to improve these conditions.

Public Health
Mr Speaker,

The Public Health team, under the leadership of the new Director Dr Sohail Bhatti, though small, continues to be extremely active in public campaigns and engagement across the public service and beyond. They are always there, with initiatives and campaigns, making a real difference. The Multi-disciplinary CHAMP initiative on obesity last year and on mental health this year are testament to this.

Among their other work, they are particularly engaged with schools, working towards healthy eating and healthy living, which include healthy tuck shops and plans to prohibit smoking directly outside schools.

Cemetery

Mr Speaker, the management of the Cemetery continues to progress well. The appointed contractor for the planted areas within the grounds has been very well received and is providing the much-needed ongoing maintenance. Over one hundred trees have been planted on the site. The long overdue legal overhaul to the Cemeteries Act, Regulations and various appointments of statutory posts have all been completed this past year.

Preparatory works have already started for an extension to the Muslim plot within the North Front Cemetery as the present area is nearly at full capacity.

Green and Planted areas, urban wildlife

Mr. Speaker, planting trees and creating green areas is a priority for this Government. As we know, urban trees can help to mitigate some of the negative impacts and social consequences of urbanisation. Trees are a critical factor in human health and wellbeing, and in the overall quality of life in communities. In 2019, we have already planted 549 trees in areas like Red Sands Estate, Glacis Estate, Europort Avenue and Camp Bay. And there are more to come.

The exciting new park to the north of the leisure centre, will add to the green spaces developed by



us for the clear enjoyment of all. With 80 trees and an organic children's playing area, its success is guaranteed, as the extraordinary success of Commonwealth Park, this Government's green gem has shown.

Another initiative we are embarked upon is to identify walls and buildings that can be converted to green by the planting of climbing plants. This will be done in several sites this year and retrospectively green up existing large concrete structures to reduce temperature, absorb carbon, and create a healthier environment overall.

Since the launch of our Planning for Biodiversity; an urban wildlife conservation and planning guide, in December 2017, a significant number of bird and bat boxes have been successfully installed in different developments across Gibraltar.

These are being monitored by the Department and are ensuring that the populations of these species is maintained.

Botanic Gardens

The Gibraltar Botanic Gardens continue to develop, with new works carried out on planting beds throughout the Alameda, in an effort to marry aesthetics with showcasing the gardens' plant collections. The effects of root action and erosion on the Alameda's paths continue to be a problem and so I am very pleased to announce the start of a phased programme of resurfacing of the Alameda's paths.

The Gibraltar Botanic Gardens continue to raise their profile as a global centre of excellence for the study and cultivation of cacti, and is developing a particular focus on the much neglected cactus flora of the Caribbean, work which is producing exciting results.

One of the Gibraltar Botanic Gardens' early successes was to rescue the endemic Gibraltar Campion from almost certain extinction (if I say so myself). The gardens keep conservation collections of Gibraltar's special plant species, but new material will be collected from the wild this year, in order to enhance the genetic diversity of these important collections.

The children's education programme is one of the botanic gardens' flagship programmes and work is well underway to develop an exciting new education area in the heart of the gardens, for outdoor learning about horticulture and the environment. The botanic gardens hope to deliver the project by the end of the year, all as a result of a crowd funding initiative and sponsorship and without calling on public funds.

Gibraltar Nature Reserve

Mr Speaker, this past financial year, the Gibraltar Nature Reserve, collected £5.5M total revenue, as compared to the previous year's revenue of £4.1M, an increase of £1.4M. This has been possible thanks to the vision, sheer hard work and enthusiasm of my team. We are expecting that there will be further increase in revenue this year.

The Gibraltar Nature Reserve has increased in size this year, with the addition of the fascinating



Devil's Tooth Green Corridor, resulting in the Reserve having increased in area by about 39% since 2013.

Habitat management continues to improve areas for wildlife, and the success of the Barbary partridge programme that the Department is running with GONHS is evident to all.

The Gibraltar Nature Reserve provides vibrant and beautiful habitat for our flora and fauna and, managed carefully. The Upper Rock is at its best ever, and we will continue and enhance this relationship between the tour guide sector and the conservation and heritage side of the Gibraltar Nature Reserve. I am proud to say that this Government is proving, time and time again, that it is both possible and desirable to care for, respect and improve our environment as well as make it financially viable and provide an income to those working in the tourism sector.

Mr Speaker, we shall continue to do all this, while making environmentally sound, prudent and commercially worthwhile choices. I can confidently say that, as part of the improvements we have planned in the short and medium term, we have and will continue to increase the revenue from the Gibraltar Nature Reserve. There are exciting times ahead for the Gibraltar Nature Reserve.

Yellow-legged Gulls

As a result of continuing control of yellow-legged gulls, the long-term trend in the breeding population of gulls in Gibraltar continues to be one of decline. This often difficult and dangerous work, which includes removing nests from tall rooftops, is one of the most valued services that is performed for the public by the Avian Control Unit, and their efforts and dedication deserve to be recognised. Due to immigration from other nesting sites around the western Mediterranean, culling has to be sustained on an annual basis and, without this team's valuable work, the gull population in Gibraltar would quickly increase to the very high numbers that peaked during the 1990s.

Raptors

The GONHS Bird of Prey Unit continues its excellent work in rescue and rehabilitation with extraordinary success. A number of release and re-introduction programmes are planned, the first being the setting up of a colony of Lesser Kestrels which sadly have recently disappeared from the Rock as a breeding species due largely to loss of feeding habitat in nearby Spain.

Macaques

Mr Speaker, surgical laparoscopic contraception now provides the cornerstone for birth control in the Barbary macaques, although contraceptive implants of up to three years duration are still used in selective cases. For the first time in many years we have had zero growth of the monkey population without mass culling, as a result of the benign measures that have been taken by this Government.

Incursions into town are evidently much less frequent, for a number of reasons. These include our provision of ponds and a varied diet to supplement their natural feeding.

These animals are of course wild and free ranging and therefore it would be impossible to prevent all incursions into urban areas. But they are part of our heritage and are once again being



considered more as welcome residents of the Rock and less as an inconvenience. That is just as it should be.

Blockchain and the Environment

Mr Speaker,

Gibraltar is already a well-known and leading jurisdiction on DLT legislation. It is also true, that we lead on the Environment. It therefore makes sense to bring these two together.

Ways in which Blockchain can help us tackle climate change include:
Supply Chain management, Recycling, Energy, Environmental Treaties and Carbon Tax.

We are therefore working to create a regulatory environment for persons to establish exchanges where environmental assets can be traded using distributed ledger technology in Gibraltar. The regulatory environment will consist of the co-existence of the existing DLT Regulations and draft Token Regulations, together with Regulations to be enacted under the forthcoming Climate Change Act, which will govern the standards that must be met by the projects whose environmental assets are listed on the exchanges. In the longer term, and in particular once the Paris Rulebook has been completed we will adapt the regulatory framework as necessary to accommodate the trading of internationally traded mitigation outcomes.

In achieving this goal, we are consulting stakeholders and industry actors at an international level, with a view to holding a public summit in Gibraltar to encourage and provide incentive for green activities within Gibraltar as well as create environmental assets here that could be traded on the exchanges.

HERITAGE

Mr Speaker, the Heritage Division, with the assistance of Technical Services, has carried out works on heritage properties over the past year, the main ones being the Almond Tower at Moorish Castle, Parson's Lodge Battery and Moorish Castle Gate. Work on other heritage assets, including the Tower of Homage, are planned.

Some will also have noticed the disappearance of the structure that had been erected at Nun's Well. This crenelated carbuncle had no historic significance. We are currently landscaping to create a new, open recreational area, and will be looking at opening out the well in a second phase. A myriad of other smaller projects have been carried out, ranging from the refurbishment of cannon to replacing of plaques, and much more.

Something that never ceases to amaze me is the wealth of archaeological remains that continues to be unearthed whenever developments take place. This was the case in the Lathbury sports complex area, where buried military structures were re-discovered and documented.

At the Europa sports complex site, pottery of Moorish origin and remains of a Moorish Wall have been found.



At the other side of Gibraltar, and in the airport tunnel, human remains and various items of pottery, including parts of amphora have been found in the sand at a considerable depth, and at Four Corners, we have unearthed the remains of the Torre del Molino.

The team from the Gibraltar Museum and the Ministry, including the Government Archaeologist, and of course, the Gibraltar Heritage Trust, are working together like never before, to the great benefit of our Heritage.

Gorham's Cave

At our World Heritage site, and given the discovery of a Neanderthal child's tooth as reported in last year's speech, the Gibraltar National Museum, a recognised world leader in research, has dedicated a team to continue work in Vanguard Cave all winter for the first time.

A recent paper published in collaboration with the Max Planck Institute in Leipzig has put the sediment at the top of this cave at around 45-50 thousand years which means the sediments that are making up this section, are going to be older.

I can also report that following contacts made during the successful Calpe Conference last September, samples of sediment have been sent to assess their potential for extraction of DNA. It is remarkable that today's technology means we can pick up signals of humans, and other animals, without even retrieving the fossils.

In this vein I was pleased to preside over a press conference showing that ancient DNA had been extracted from Neolithic and Bronze Age human remains from the Rock. These are indeed exciting times and are rewarding all of us for putting our faith and support in this project.

Excavations this summer will run for three, instead of the usual two, months thanks to a new collaboration with the prestigious University of Leiden in the Netherlands, that country's oldest university where, incidentally, George Eliott studied!

Heritage Trust

The close working relationship with the Gibraltar Heritage Trust continues and is indeed going from strength to strength. The Ministry and the Trust meet regularly in order to work with developers in the formulation of works plans, whilst at the same time protecting Gibraltar's Heritage.

All those who participate in Trust matters need to be praised as they are vital within our community and I salute and urge them to continue to support us in our efforts. Their work at Witham's Cemetery of course merits particular mention.

Heritage and Antiquities Act

Mr Speaker, following on from the introduction of the Heritage and Antiquities Act, the past year has seen the consolidation of the advisory group provided for in the Act, the Heritage and Antiquities Advisory Council (HAAC). This has been an invaluable aid in providing expert advice on all aspects of our heritage and is working extremely well. One of the priorities of the Council is the assessment and consideration of other properties that have heritage value, to be included in the Act's list of scheduled monuments, and it is actively working on this.



The Heritage and Antiquities Act itself has proved a success and its content has been embraced by developers who now understand that heritage matters need to be considered at the embryonic stage of projects. There is constant liaison, together with many site visits and advice is provided. As a consequence of this, we now find that when developments come before the DPC they do not have heritage concerns and therefore are expedited quickly.

Urban Renewal

Mr Speaker, Urban Renewal is being tackled on different fronts and with close liaison between Ministries, Departments and Agencies, partly through the Urban Renewal Committee.

The work involves Planning, Housing and Technical Services Departments, Cultural Services and LPS.

One of the initiatives that has sprung from the Urban Renewal Committee is the Street Art initiative which is already brightening up urban areas – with more to come.

This year will also see the much needed refurbishment of Governor's Parade.

While it is not an area for which I have political responsibility, and while it was dealt with at length by the Chief Minister during his address, I feel that as the longest serving member of the DPC, I have to comment on development.

I agree that there is more development than many would like. But let us analyse this more carefully:
1) some of the main sites are schools and health facilities - direly needed and having to be built almost all-at-once due to the neglect of the last administration.

2) no natural areas have been compromised.

3) building now has to be energy efficient and have environmental considerations as standard. Therefore developments today have much less environmental impact, square metre for square metre than at any time in the past.

Mr Speaker,

The Leader of the Opposition yesterday, in his sojourn into alternative reality, had the audacity to complain about development in Gibraltar, when so many of the developments about which he complained were commenced or approved by the GSD when in government and so have been inherited. They did their planning by decree and in secret, often the first thing the public knew about a development being the holes in the ground. This is what led me to walk out of one of those secret DPC meetings when I represented an NGO, and then refused to attend a number of meetings subsequently. Public engagement now is as never before, with many developments, even government projects, being either pushed back or significantly amended as a result - and all perfectly transparent and in public.

Specifically for Victoria Keys, I am confident that the Environmental Impact Assessment that we have required will show that the loss of the impoverished and much punished seabed will not have significant detrimental effects. In fact it will provide habitat for our now famous limpets! I will



ensure that any material from the east side will be screened for contaminants before being used and that the process does not negatively impact surrounding areas.

I have met with the lead developers and will be personally working closely with them to ensure that Victoria Keys are an example to the world in a sustainable green development, aiming for carbon neutrality as a minimum.

Gibraltar Garrison Library

Mr Speaker, very near to that, the Garrison Library has worked on a number of conservation projects concerned with the fabric of the building. Focus has been on the restoration of the Military Room which has now become a fully equipped reading room; and of the Gibraltar Room, where much of the Gibraltar collection is kept. These changes have transformed the level of service available to general public and researchers, and have served to restore these rooms in keeping with the building's Georgian heritage.

The top floor of the former Gibraltar Chronicle building which had formerly been used by the Garrison Library secretary and accounts office has now been restored, uncovering, through the removal of chipboard partitions and a false ceiling, of two beautiful Georgian rooms. Work on the balustrade, has been extremely difficult due to its delicate nature and the difficulty of sourcing suitable material, but is now progressing.

The Garrison Library has also been working on strategies to increase footfall through cultural events and outreach programmes with schools in Gibraltar, including Gibraltar Literary Festival and the annual International Symposium on self-determination organised in conjunction with the office of the Deputy Chief Minister.

Mr Speaker, I am very excited to continue to develop my relationship with the Library team with a view to ensuring we protect it, promote and develop it, as the rich historical and cultural treasure for future generations.

To end on Environment Mr Speaker,

I feel that I must challenge the political parties opposite to be honest.

In doing so, I have to express my disappointment at the GSD and, more surprisingly at Together Gibraltar and their approach to the Environment.

When the NGOs are all appealing to the politicians to depoliticise Environment as they call for a consensus and a joint approach, the actions of both parties opposite show that they are not interested in us working together.

With the sole exception of the Hon Mr Feetham who is gracious in his recognition of the progress we have made in areas such as animal welfare and the Upper Rock, the remainder of the Opposition, most recently the party represented by the honourable lady, for whom, and she knows this, I have the highest regard, fail to accept and recognise the progress being made in Environment, and instead embark on negative statements that denigrate the work of those - including public servants and NGOs, who are achieving so much. I would ask them to reconsider their approach, even as an election approaches, and for the sake of the Environment, be constructive for a change.



Conclusions on Environment

And finally on Environment, Mr Speaker, I must acknowledge with pleasure the lesson in environmental policy provided by Sir Joe Bossano in his contribution yesterday. Joe is absolutely correct in his analysis, including his pointing out my unfair generalisation in which I blamed the whole of our species for the sins, grievous that they are, of just a part of it. I particularly support and am hugely encouraged - but not surprised - that Sir Joe will incorporate environmental principles in his new economic analysis and plan. This is something that I have always advocated, and is essential if we are to avoid the disaster that awaits our descendants should we fail. I offer my full support and assistance to Sir Joe in his work redefining the economy of the future. I firmly believe that the outcome of this work could itself be an example for other countries to follow. I will comment further on my work with Sir Joe later in my speech.

Part II - Education

Mr Speaker,

In Education, the future is here.

From September we will have fully inclusive mixed gender schools, devoted to awakening the learning process in our children. This is a well overdue update to our education system, now fully accepted in the community is a vital step in education and in achieving full gender equality.

Mr Speaker,

I am privileged to work with women as the heads of two of my departments - Environment and Education, but saddened that the top posts for example in the water and energy sectors are still all held by men.

I am excited to think that co-education, and the equalisation of opportunities within and between the two new Comprehensive schools, as well as the introduction of vocational courses, will go a long way towards redressing the balance, encouraging more women to take on careers in science, technology and engineering.

From September too, mental health support will be in place, which, together with our outdoor learning opportunities and developing creativity and resilience in our children will assist their development as confident individuals.

Our young people will be able to achieve whatever goals they set for themselves, contributing towards tomorrow's society at all levels. We are devoted to developing reflective youngsters who can think for themselves, question others and find solutions to problems outside the restraints of conventionality.

Mr Speaker,

Realignment is now a reality. With each key stage contained within each sector of education this affords us the perfect opportunity for realistic and meaningful tracking of pupil progress that can be accurately reported to parents and carers. Parents and carers are an integral part of their children's education and play a vital role alongside the schools in shaping our future generations.



Mr Speaker,

As we know, this year we opened the first of many (a total of NINE) new schools following on from St Bernard's a couple of years ago.

Notre Dame School is a great addition, which has been hugely enjoyed by teachers and pupils already for almost a whole academic year.

It is an amazing school in every way, and the lasting vigour that could be seen around opening time was contagious. The teachers were absolutely amazing in their dedication and in making the transition smooth and the move a success. Thank you Priscilla Cruz and all your teaching and support staff.

St Anne's, Bayside and Westside will open in their new sites in September. Their facilities will be second to none, and they will be among the best designed and equipped and designed schools anywhere, a real asset to our future generations. These will in the comprehensives include 13 labs each, a mechanical workshop in Westside, a hairdressing salon in Bayside, a large sports hall each, and two astro-turf playing fields each.

St Anne's will have a new sports hall too, with large play areas at both podium and roof levels, and of course, the Adventure playground coming back to the community of the area.

Work is progressing well at the new St Martin's School, and Governor's Meadow, Bishop Fitzgerald and the College will follow soon, as will St Mary's which will also be constructed new.

We are continuing to work hard to create brand new, strategically designed and purpose-built schools.

My Ministry team and the Advisory Service have worked very closely with the Senior Leadership Teams of each school to ensure that these learning environments are stimulating, exciting and welcoming places for our young learners. There has been an unprecedented level of consultation, with many staff members involved in all stages of each school project, from initial design, to furnishing the layouts, and the procurement of equipment.

It has been extremely hard work, but the schools will speak for themselves.

All staff, teachers, LSAs, admin staff technicians, attendants, cleaners, have been and are working extremely hard to ensure that the schools are ready for opening. I'd like to thank the School Migration Committee led by Joey Britto, with Tony Segovia, Melba Noguera and Ian Torrilla, and for their diligence in taking the lead on this. The biggest task is the move of the Comprehensives for which I also need to thank the heads, Michelle Barabich and Michael Tavares for their leadership.

All our primary schools have now embarked on our teaching and learning initiative with digital technologies. Professional development has been delivered to members of the senior leadership team, teachers and members of our core groups in every one of our Primary schools.



This initiative enters the next phase of its implementation this year with the secondary schools receiving their initial training and subsequent professional development.

Our primary schools will continue to be provided with access to the professional development opportunities provided by this initiative over the course of this financial year, with a large investment in additional hardware being deployed to support the strategies our teachers are developing. This House will have the opportunity to vote these funds in the Appropriation Bill, except that the GSD members of the Opposition will not.

The work our teachers are doing in this particular area is groundbreaking, innovative and truly transformative.

Curriculum

Work is continuing on the implementation of the 14-19 year old vocational pathways with initial courses in Hairdressing and Computer Science scheduled to launch in September 2019 with many others to follow.

Mr Speaker,

This year will see consolidation of the work being done in Education in the digital technologies. We will ensure that, working with the industry, we lead in providing opportunities for our young people to train and develop their skills so that they are able to take up the opportunities that the private sector in this area is providing and will continue to provide.

The realignment of the curriculum at Secondary schools is at an advanced stage at KS3 with a planned rollout of changes at KS4 beginning in September 2019.

Next academic year, the existing curriculum provision at primary level will be reviewed involving all key stakeholders. This review will engage teachers, parents and members of the wider community to ensure that our primary curriculum supports the development of learners who are knowledgeable, caring, creative and resilient. Key to this is the extending of mixed ability to all subjects in primary schools, with corresponding support being provided for teachers to ensure maximum benefit to the children.

PGCE

The Department of Education has worked in close collaboration with our friends in the University of Gibraltar to develop a bespoke Post Graduate Certificate in Education aligned to the vision for education in Gibraltar. This local-context programme is aligned to the teaching standards in the UK and aims to develop teachers equipped with a robust understanding of the teaching and learning processes required to support students through their educational journey.

This exciting new programme will take on its first cohort of students mentored and supported by the excellent practitioners in our schools.



Scholarships

Mr Speaker, With regard to higher education, I am pleased to report that we currently have live:
759 Mandatory Undergraduate Scholarships,
149 Postgraduate Scholarships
56 Discretionary Scholarships

The total expended during FY 18/19 in respect of undergraduate and postgraduate degrees/courses amounted to £16,500,000.

The increase in allowances announced by the Chief Minister is greatly welcome by all.

If I may briefly digress, Mr Speaker, the Chief Minister was kind enough to consider yesterday that there was added value in the fact that Sir Joe and I had worked together in achieving LNG as a source of power. It is of course not the first time that we have come together in this positive way. Sir Joe will recall how we worked together in the late 1980s when he was Chief Minister in many aspects of Environment and Health. Coincidentally Mr Speaker, going through some papers at home, I came across a petition that I had organised back in 1986 as chair of the Gibraltar Union of Students, that read: "We, the undersigned, believe that no student should be prevented from undergoing a course of further education for which he/she has been accepted by an educational institution, for lack of Government financial support."

A few years later, the GSLP came into Government under Sir Joe and ensured that this happened. And today I sit in the same Government, celebrating the thousands of Gibraltarians who have benefitted from the scholarship system with a further increase in student allowances.

Mr Speaker, I will continue.

The very successful Washington Internship, now entering its seventh year has to date benefitted 120 young people.

And training has been provided throughout the public service, as well as the Student Experience Programme (SEP) in our schools, in-service CPD for teaching staff – including the iPad Teaching and Learning, Mindfulness, SEN and Mental Health training and the Finland Educational Workshop.

This year we will be investing over £600,000 in the new Teaching and Learning of Digital Technologies Apple initiative to bring this new way of teaching into all our schools – including the secondaries.

Works

The Minor Works programme for 2018/19 mainly targeted the remaining schools that were not earmarked for replacing.

Work done last year included:



Electrical upgrade, sewer diversion and partitioning at Mary's School to improve teaching space.

Gutter replacement, toilet refurbishment, waterproofing, sound insulation and new playground seating at St Joseph's Schools.

St Paul's School has undergone and is undergoing major refurbishment, including to the staff area and classrooms.

Works have also been done to Bishop Fitzgerald, the Hebrew School and to Bleak House -

Plans for the current FY remain chiefly centred on the continued refurbishment of both St Joseph's and St Pauls' schools. This will include the creation of outdoor forest learning zones, converting concrete patios into gardens with trees and other plants and the opportunity for the children to grow vegetables and fruit. It is in these outdoor learning through play opportunities for our children that we can promote creativity, self-esteem and resilience.

SEN

Mr Speaker,

Importantly, all the new schools will have enhanced provision/resourcing to support pupils with Special Educational Needs (SEN).

Two more Learning Support Facilities (LSF) are being created, in Governor's Meadow and St. Anne's, to support more children who require more specialist input.

St. Martin's will have enhanced facilities, which will cater for a greater variety of needs. There will be a hydro-therapy pool, rebound therapy room, enhanced therapy areas, some specialist classrooms, as well as general classrooms and much more space, both inside and outside, for the children to work and play in.

The Early Birds Nursery provision within St. Martin's will double.

In a hugely significant development which I know will be welcome by parents and by many NGOs, as well as by teaching staff, I am delighted to announce that as from September 2019 all our SENCOs (Special Needs Co-ordinators) will have a full time post and not have to double up with other teaching duties, with their focus on all matters connected to SEN. This will be a huge boost to the service, and particularly to those children in all our schools with special educational needs.

Consistent with this, the Special Needs Learning Support Assistant complement has been increased by 21. This goes some way to support the increasing numbers of SEN pupils who are being identified.

Nursery/Lower Primary

As part of our commitment to provide nursery places to all those entitled who so wish, morning places have now been offered to all nursery age pupils whose families have applied. This year, for the first time, there has been an emphasis on providing placements on a catchment area basis, which will be helpful to families.



More support will be given to lower primary in the afternoons, whereby the nursery LSAs will support the main body of the school in the afternoon.

Training

In keeping with the philosophy of improving our education strategies, we hosted a visit from Leena Heinila, a Finnish educationalist who conducted a series of workshops with teachers on the world celebrated and successful Finnish skills-based educational model. In this context, teachers across the lower primary sector attended a very informative conference in Finland which exposed them to different teaching and learning philosophies. The visit concentrated on kindergarten and lower primary age groups with the aim of understanding 21st century teaching models some of which we will be introducing in our schools.

The Union, policies and procedures

Mr Speaker,

The relationship between myself, the Department and the Teachers' Union is excellent. We have developed the ability to talk openly, frankly, respectfully and always constructively and are making huge progress across the education sector. Teachers know well the regard in which I hold them and their profession, and the deep personal commitment that I have to them, with I repeat today, to their work and their aspirations. My regular visits to their schools are out of a genuine interest, and probably what I enjoy most in my work.

The relationship is reflected in the now very successful Social Partnership with NASUWT Gibraltar which has meant that jointly with the Teachers' Union, we have begun to look at Teaching and Learning Responsibility Allowance with the aim of restructuring how we remunerate additional responsibilities to a teacher's working role. We have created steering committees and engaged the expertise of PWC to ensure the distribution of these allowances is fair and equitable.

We have settled long standing union claims such as the equalisation of pay between upper primary and lower primary sectors posts. In addition, we have settled anomalies between secondary school allowances and introduced pro rata maternity leave allowances for teachers on supply contracts exceeding one year.

We have advanced in the creation of policies in schools and in the review of departmental umbrella policies.

The relationship between the Department and the Union has never been closer, as evidenced by the progress made and by the fact that meetings are held on a more than weekly basis.

We have built a close interdepartmental relationship too with Human Resources. And I would like to stress the close working with Welfare Officer Sean Keating in supporting staff members overcome personal and health related trauma. Support for staff has become one of the Department of Education's prime objectives as we believe that a happy staff goes a long way to creating happy, motivated and dedicated students.



Child protection and safeguarding

The Department of Education works together with other departments including the Ministry for Equality, and agencies in a wide range of training including safeguarding training which continued to be rolled out with 245 teachers now up to date with Safeguarding training.

A number of important relevant policies are in the process of being finalised including an Attendance policy and guidelines.

The Department is also dealing with the problems of drugs, alcohol and social gaming, aiming to establish common attitudes and practices related to physical and mental well-being including prevalence and patterns of substance misuse amongst our pupils aged 12-18.

There is further inter-departmental work, and collaboration with Gibraltar Voice of The Young People to develop anti-bullying strategies and rolling out of departmental Bullying Policy and Guidelines.

Mental Health

Mr Speaker,

We have made huge inroads over the past two years in improving awareness and support for mental health in our school population.

Following an extensive and ongoing review of positive mental health, social and emotional wellbeing in both primary and secondary education, a series of evidence based recommendations to enhance awareness, provide early detection and prevention measures supported by specialist training, has been developed.

As a result, much has already been implemented, including the formation of Strategic Steering Groups to coordinate and manage organisational change and dedicated work streams. Phase three, with a view to better supporting students through the 'transition' into higher education is well underway.

The Ministry and Department of Education through Wayne Barton and Jackie Linares, have organised extensive training sessions which have emphasised early detection, prevention and the holistic development of the child/adolescent, so as to avoid an escalation into mental health disorders, which unfortunately may then come to require medical input.

I took the opportunity at a recent mental health training session to announce the recruitment of four counsellors to be based at the schools. These will make a tremendous difference to the children, and also to the teachers and the educational psychologists who will now have this dedicated support.

Evidence shows that a counselling service which provides support within an overall school strategy can be highly effective in promoting young people's welfare, supporting their learning achievement as well as alleviating and preventing the escalation of mental health problems. School-based



Counselling can help pupils to develop skills, which make personal transitions more manageable. This may not be as spectacular as a new school building, but it is just as important.

I'd like to thank my own team of course including Sarah Payas, the Educational Psychologists, the SENCOs, the 'BEST' Education Services Team as well as the Care Agency, GHA and others, for working together in developing the requirements for this services. Recruitment is progressing and the Counsellors will be in post in time for the start of term in September.

Additional areas

The Union, policies and procedures

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The Chief Minister yesterday spoke about those areas for which he has direct responsibility. Teachers know well the regard in which We hold them and their profession, and the deep personal commitment that We have to them, with I repeat today, to their work and their aspirations. My regular visits to their schools are out of a genuine interest, and probably what I enjoy most in my work.

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motivated and dedicated students.

Mr Speaker,

I wish now to dedicate thought to the teachers, support staff, parents, carers, families, and students in this year of educational transition.

Change is not easy, and often stressful. A revolution can be more than that.

Mr Speaker, A time of change is never comfortable. It can be exciting, even fun, but it can and does cause anxiety and worry. I have myself experienced all those emotions at different times through this year.

I have been working with an amazing team, both in my Ministry and the Department, in the schools, with project managers advisors, and many more. I meet with them several times a week, and they start very early in the morning and end late at night, usually with no financial remuneration for this additional effort.

The journey is by no means over, but it is clear that it will be a hugely successful one. I thank each and every one of those involved in the Education Revolution. Those who have agreed and those who have had doubts. You are all a part of it, and this is for you.

And students and their families can be assured that what we can see on the horizon will become a reality of excellent facilities and first class learning opportunities, where all are equal yet different, and all will achieve to their maximum potential regardless of what that potential is.

To those I've met in my office, including those working groups seeing me after hours, led by Jenique Berllaque and Natalie Shoemith, to all those I've chatted with in the schools, including teachers and pupils, thank you for being a part of this journey.

Mr Speaker,

In ending I would like to thank all those who I work with, which includes the areas for which in have political responsibility, but also many others with whom I have regular contact during the course of my work.

I thank Liesl Mesilio, Stephen Warr, Gerry Lane and Marcello Sanguinetti and their teams in the Department of Heritage, Environment and Climate Change; Jackie Mason, Keri Scott and the advisors, Stuart Borastero and Chris Gomila in addition to the others who I have already mentioned in my speech, their teams in Education including Dympna Holmes and her administrative team, all the head teachers and their own teams in the schools and the College. I thank Glen Banda and the Environmental Agency for all that they do - and in particular I want to thank Glen, and his colleague Louis Poggio, who will be retiring this year, for many decades of excellent work between them in the interests of our environment. In particular in the past few years, their diligence in ensuring the



absolute safety of the LNG plant is something for which Gibraltar will always be grateful.

I'd also like to thank Michael Caetano and his team in the GEA, and Paul Singleton and all at Aquagib, for taking on new challenges while ensuring that we have power and water in our homes and places of work.

And all the many contractors with whom I work, including the Gibraltar Veterinary Clinic, the Botanic Gardens, the National Museum and many others.

Also those in Customs, the RGP, Human Resources, Culture, Planning, the Press Office and the MOD with whom I regularly work.

In my own Ministry, my PA and Personal Secretary in Environment and Education, Caryna, Gianna, Stephanie and Jessica, for their unstinting loyalty and friendship; Derek Alman for his inimitable work on the new schools.

And of course the Chief Secretary, the Financial Secretary and the Chief Technical Officer and their own teams who are always there for me when I need them in the exercise of my duties and beyond.

To those at No 6 in the Chief Minister's and Deputy's offices.

To the Gibraltar Law Offices for their patience and support in moving through important legislation and providing advice on tap when needed.

To the Unions for working with me, always in order to resolve problems and fulfil opportunities in the interests of working people.

Finally to the Chief Minister, Deputy Chief Minister and my Cabinet colleagues for their support and, their conversion - those few who needed converting - to the environmental cause. Their positive engagement and support is truly appreciated and not taken for granted.

And of course, thank you and the staff of this House for their sterling work throughout the year.

Conclusion

Mr Speaker,

Last week I was fortunate enough to be invited by the excellent team at The Nautilus Project to the presentation of environmental awards at the John Mackintosh Hall.

The Charles Hunt Room was full to capacity. There were many awards to young people and to businesses.

My mind went back to the exact same venue, over 30 years ago, when I organised talks and gave them to an audience of less than 20. A crowded room was a near impossibility and businesses who must now lead, simply not engaged.



How times have changed. How much we have progressed in awareness and in commitment. How satisfied I am to think that perhaps I had a little to do with that.

But in all that satisfaction, a word of warning. As Sir Joe Bossano stressed yesterday in his environmental reality-check, the environmental battle is by no means won. There is a great deal still to do, in our everyday lives and in recalibrating our economic principles. And it has to be done drastically but responsibly, with changes to the way we do things, but imaginatively without risking our success as a community and an economy. This is something that not everyone can do. There has to be a balance that risks neither the environment nor our economic wellbeing. But not everyone can pull that off.

It takes a Government in which responsible Environmental governance, commercial ambition and economic vision are equally strongly represented. It is this Government, and only this Government that can offer that.

Let that be a sobering thought to all those who might be misguided enough to think that there is a credible alternative to the GSLP Liberals in Government.

Mr Speaker, for our community and our future, there is simply no other option.