



PRESS RELEASE

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Budget Address 2021-2022 – The Hon Samantha Sacramento MP

Mr Speaker,

It is indeed a privilege to address Parliament this year, as we were unable to do so in the normal manner last year.

And what a year it has been, Mr Speaker, Little did I expect, when I was appointed Minister with responsibility for Civil Contingencies in the Autumn of 2019, what this would entail a few months later.

The Office of Civil Contingencies has been at the very centre of the Government's response to the Covid 19 Pandemic.

This crisis response operation saw the early activation of the Government's command structures and the establishment of a COVID-19 Strategic Coordinating Group (SCG) which I Chair and which was responsible for continually assessing the risks and vulnerabilities, implementing the Government's strategy and coordinating the tactical activities across all Government departments, responding agencies, the military and of course, the army of volunteers who stood up to help in every possible way.

The challenges posed by this deadly virus have been both manifold and manifest and Government has left no stone unturned to protect the lives of those in our community and manage the impact

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on our livelihoods and our way of life.

2020 was not only dominated by the COVID-19 Pandemic. Indeed, last year we saw the United Kingdom and Gibraltar leaving the European Union. As negotiations towards a Brexit deal continued, Government also increased the tempo in its contingency planning and preparations to mitigate the impact of a potential no-deal Brexit. This work, led of course by the Chief Minister and the Deputy Chief Minister and supported by the Office of Civil Contingencies run in parallel to the COVID-19 Pandemic and peaked at the time when Gibraltar was hit hardest by December's killer second wave. The hive of activity generated by these two once-in-a-generation events occurring simultaneously was both intense and unrelenting.

Response to COVID-19

Mr Speaker, as soon as news of a SARS-type lung infection in Wuhan broke in January 2020, Government immediately convened a meeting to assess the potential impact of this disease reaching our borders. By 27th January 2020, Government formally established the Civil Contingencies Coordinating Group responsible for monitoring developments and ramping up planning and preparation. In early March 2020, Government activated its COVID-19 response structures as follows:

The GHA was faced with a potential scenario of hundreds of deaths and people requiring hospitalisation, St Bernard's Hospital and Elderly Residential Services have been at the sharp end of the pandemic. Increasing bed capacity, resources, equipment and PPE to deal with this was a critical requirement and the Government's main effort. COVID-19 also brought the requirement to establish unique capabilities that were outside the normal functions of a conventional hospital. Such requirements included the need to establish the following bespoke capabilities specifically for the Pandemic:

The GHA 111 Service. This call centre has been a crucial service. We needed to provide people requiring medical assistance a way to get the support they needed quickly and without physically turning up to the hospital. Effective infection control would be a key weapon against the spread of the virus and for this reason, every effort possible was made to minimise non-emergency visits to the hospital. GHA 111 became the focal point for all medical matters and since the start of the

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Pandemic, the operators have dealt with well over 35,000 consultations over the phone.

The COVID-19 Swabbing Station. Mr Speaker, because testing and screening was key. Government's ability to effectively contain the virus would rely heavily on knowing who was carrying it. For obvious reasons, the COVID-19 swabbing station had to be established outside of the hospital, again reduce the risk of transmissibility. A facility that was set up from scratch, the COVID-19 Swabbing Station has collected and processed over a quarter of a million swabs.

The COVID-19 Laboratory. Mr Speaker, this has been our eyes and ears, and without which events would have unfolded very differently, allowing us to have a firm hold on the developing epidemiological situation thereby driving the decision-making process. Their efforts and achievements have been tremendous. Mr Speaker our scientists and laboratory support staff have worked tirelessly throughout, often working endless hours and it is incredible that in little Gibraltar we are now also undertaking genomic testing to identify the strain of the virus in positive cases in under 72 hours.

Mr Speaker, the Contact Tracing Bureau has effectively dealt with over 4,000 positive cases. This has required a thorough risk assessment of every case as well as the identification and management of close contacts and the spread of the virus has been significantly slowed down ultimately resulting in many lives being saved.

ERS, Mr Speaker, as the organization responsible for the largest vulnerable group, it bore the brunt of the COVID-19 response. Infection control was their top priority and efforts were made to control the spread of the virus and provide health care to all their residents.

The Nightingale Hospital, Mr Speaker was a facility created at the Europa Point Sports Complex to provide additional bed capacity to St Bernard's Hospital for lower dependent patients and also prepared to take higher dependency patients if St Bernard's became overwhelmed.

The Isolation Facility at the Europa Retreat Centre. This facility was created to isolate those mostly non-residents and sea farers arriving from high-risk countries. The facility also accommodated positive cases who were either unable to self-isolate at a place of residence or were discharged from hospital.

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Mr Speaker, the Care Agency was tasked with looking after Vulnerable Groups and the Vulnerable Groups team was established to provide that support.

Mr Speaker, we also had Response Teams and a dedicated response team worked under the direction of the Care Agency to support the more vulnerable households. Support included the provision of free food packs and other essentials during lockdown.

Mr Speaker we also had a Community Support Group which was established to coordinate the support from the hundreds of volunteers organizations and individuals.

Importantly Mr Speaker, the Mental Health and Wellbeing Support team was established because Mr Speaker Mental Health and Post Traumatic Stress Disorder in particular has been a central area of concern throughout the response operations. A bespoke Mental Health and Wellbeing Team was established to deliver Frontline Resilience Management training to all responding organisations as well as support to the more vulnerable members of the community through the setting up of a Befriending Service.

Mr Speaker we set up a Public Information Call Centre. The 200 41818 Public Information Call Centre became the one-stop focal point to deal with all non-medical issues in the community. Telephone operators were quickly able to deliver support to members of the community and well over 45,000 calls have been received since it was established.

It was the Business Support Group, Mr Speaker. As lockdown measures and other restrictions were imposed, many businesses were either forced to cease operations or operate differently. The creation of CELAC allowed Government to work closely with the private sector.

The Logistical Support Group. Mr Speaker, the ability to procure and manage critical equipment such as PPE was severely tested during the earlier part of the pandemic as demand far outweighed supply. As countries scrambled to get as much PPE as they could, efforts had to be made to source these from wherever possible. It was important that these were centrally managed to ensure that frontline departments were issued with the equipment that they needed.

The Command Support. Mr Speaker, The gathering of timely information and shared situation awareness across all Government departments is a crucial function. The Office of Civil Contingencies has published daily Situation Reports Mr Speaker, (SITREPs) since the very start of the pandemic. These have been prepared by the Civil Contingencies Coordinator Mr Ivor Lopez who I can assure Mr Speaker has worked 365 days on this as he provides the SITREP, without fail, every single morning. The timely and accurate reporting of critical information has been the key factor in the Government's decision-making process.

Our Legislation Support Mr Speaker. Since the start of the Pandemic, the legal team from the Government Law Offices have published over 300 regulations under the Civil Contingencies Act. These have set a legal basis for the introduction of various public health measures which again has been key in controlling the spread of the virus.

Media, Mr Speaker. Another indispensable tool in the response has been the Government's ability to communicate with the public. Daily press conferences, regular press releases as well as constant engagement with the local and international media has allowed the public to be kept regularly informed.

Mr Speaker, it's taken a Pandemic for the general public to understand the existence and the role of the Office of Civil Contingencies and also the importance of the essential role that our Health Care and Social Services professionals play. I am very happy that the reports, that the efforts of the collective were recognised by his Worship, the Mayor in granting them a special Mayor's Award and more recently Mr Speaker that Ivor Lopez and Sandie Gracia were recognised in her Majesty's birthday honours list.

Beyond the Pandemic Mr Speaker, the office of Civil Contingencies is driven by a formal identification of threats and risks to Gibraltar, emergency plans are developed to ultimately save lives, ensure an efficient response and under the umbrella of the Gibraltar Contingency Council, below are some of the plans which the Office of Civil Contingencies continues to work closely with other organisations and agencies.

- a. Marauding Terrorist Attack.
- b. Chemical Biological Radiological and Nuclear (explosives) Response Framework.

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- c. Cyber Security.
- d. Mass Casualty Plan.

Mr Speaker, I must thank everyone from the Civil Contingencies team so ably lead by Mr Ivor Lopez MBE, for leading the Pandemic arrangements with such military precision.

Mr Speaker, in August last year, a Cabinet of 10 Ministers became 9 when my good friend Gilbert Licudi stepped down from the Government benches and I was given the privilege to receive, in the middle of a Pandemic, the additional portfolios of Health, Elderly Care and Social Services and the Care Agency, the departments at the heart of the Covid-19 response.

ELDERLY RESIDENTIAL SERVICES

Let me start by referring to the work of the Elderly Residential Services as they have been the most precious department during the last year.

Mr Speaker in 2019, the number of doctors at ERS was increased. During the Pandemic, the medical team was further increased in order to be able to cope with the implementation of a medicalised model of care, the aim of which was to prevent admission to St Bernard's Hospital as much as possible and the introduction of a matron for ERS in 2019 was widely welcomed by health users and professionals.

Mr Speaker, since the early days of this Pandemic, the dedicated teams at ERS have worked tirelessly to put in place infection control, prevention measures to curtail the spread of the virus. This has included daily PCR and lateral flow testing and use of PPE for all staff, not to mention the cautious enhanced cleaning and disinfecting that continues to take place.

Mr Speaker acquiring and refurbishment of the onsite cottage and converting it to a new four bed isolation unit for Mount Alvernia, bringing the total of isolation bed capacity to 16 beds.

Mr Speaker in addition to isolation rooms which were created and equipped with all necessary equipment and staff bubbles created in all the departments to safeguard any further exposure, all staff were upskilled and trained to deliver acute care.

Mr Speaker, the safety and well-being of the residents in ERS has remained a top priority and they

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continue to use all the resources available to them to keep them safe.

Mr Speaker there was a daily increase of physiotherapy to all residents which helped with mobility and increased medical support was delivered to ensure the health and safety of all residents.

As well as protecting the physical health of ERS residents, helping to protect their mental wellbeing and prevent loneliness was also an important step. This included daily video calls for all residents and their families and increased activities programmes for those able to take part.

Mr Speaker I have nothing but the highest praise for the management and all staff at the ERS for their absolute dedication to the service and its residents, always going over and above to keep them safe. I cannot thank everyone at ERS enough for the work that have done, and continue to do. Mr Speaker this was under the extraordinary leadership of Susan Vallejo in particular.

Mr Speaker, throughout the Pandemic ERS was also extremely mindful of residents and people in the community living with dementia and special provisions were put in place both in terms of outreach support and within the facilities, to be able to support people who have dementia Mr Speaker in line with our Dementia National Strategy and National Plan. Mr Speaker a lot of the outreach support was done through the Bella Vista Day Centre which unfortunately was suspended during the pandemic. This building was adapted to cater for a 26 bedded residential care facility, as part of the Covid response and support then to those users was provided through the outreach team .The aim of this team was to continue with therapeutic services and assistance with medical and social care, as well as the provision of the meals on wheels service.

Mr Speaker, I regret to inform the public that I have been informed by GHA and ERS Management today that a decision has been taken following public health advice, to cease the service at the Bella Vista day centre commencing from Monday. The service will continue for the next few days only for those who have not been able to make alternative arrangements, but Mr Speaker it is with great regret that this decision has been taken but it has been taken in the interest of all service users to contain the spread .

GIBRALTAR HEALTH AUTHORITY

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Mr Speaker, turning now to the GHA.

I would like to start with some background to the two previous financial years and the unexpected but very significant pressures placed on the GHA.

The start of the GHA's financial year coincided with a Major Incident posture as declared by the Chief Minister on 27 March 2020; by this point the GHA was already fully in action with Covid preparations. With this formalisation of command structures and processes, routine and non-urgent clinical services were reduced or stopped, teams reorganised, dedicated COVID and non-COVID wards and clinical areas were set up and staffed, and patient consultations moved primarily to telephone based.

Mr Speaker that time the Ophthalmology department moved to the University, the Chemotherapy Suite moved to the Cancer Relief Centre, and routine blood taking in the PCC moved to the old PCC site. All measures put in place to minimise patients coming in to the hospital and being placed at risk of infection.

Mr Speaker the GHA introduced a 'Readiness' or 'Threat Assessment' system, graded from Green, to Yellow, to Amber to Red; dictated by the number of COVID cases in the community and therefore how ready the GHA needed to be for a possible surge in cases, while at the same time allowing key personnel some well-deserved annual leave and rest.

Mr Speaker on 21 December 2020, a sharp rise in COVID cases led very quickly to another lockdown and the declaration of a second major incident on 22 December 2020. January 2021 was an extremely difficult month with a total of 66 COVID deaths, of which 39 were in the Elderly Residential Services. The GHA went in to Black alert status on 11th January 2021 and routine clinical services were once again stopped and staff were recalled from annual leave.

Due to the rapid lockdown and escalation of the readiness status, the rise in cases was thankfully short-lived, and on 29th January the GHA reduced the alert status to Red, and then to Amber on 22nd February and Yellow on 19th April. The Europa Nightingale Field Hospital was decommissioned on 5 March 2021 and routine clinical services gradually resumed once again.

Mr Speaker a staff COVID-19 swabbing service was introduced on 13th July 2020, originally offering monthly swabs to all GHA staff. Since then the service has expanded in reaction to the rise in cases and the need to protect patients, staff and visitors to GHA sites. Now vaccinated staff are swabbed weekly and non-vaccinated staff twice a week.

On the 10th January 2021, the COVID-19 Pfizer-BioNTech vaccination programme which we called “Operation Freedom” started with 3 main efforts; staff vaccinations at the St Bernard’s vaccination centre, individuals over 70 years old and those in vulnerable groups at the old PCC at the ICC vaccination centre, and the residents of the Elderly Residential Services on site. Dedicated and trained teams from across all clinical and administrative specialities formed the vaccinations teams and delivered a seamless service to all those vaccinated.

Mr Speaker applications for the vaccination programme closed on the 1st June; in total the programme delivered 39,320 first doses, 39,061 second doses, we are still continuing with second doses Mr Speaker and a total of 78,381 vaccines have been administered and importantly Mr Speaker not one single dose wasted.

Mr Speaker, I now move to outline the key projects in the GHA that have been ongoing throughout the pandemic, albeit sometimes postponed due to having to focus resources solely on COVID-19 and management of the Pandemic.

First and foremost Mr Speaker is the ambitious “Reset, restart and recover programme” for the GHA. This will mean a review of all key areas of the GHA to see how they can be improved so as to provide a better service to the public.

Mr Speaker, we have learnt a lot from the Pandemic and most notably, the pandemic has made us all work differently and more efficiently. One of the key cornerstones of reset, restart and recover is to keep the working practices that work best as we recast the provision of health care in a way that better meets the needs and demands of our community. This will be done in consultation with stakeholders and the Unions.

Mr Speaker, as Chair of the GHA Board, I am changing the way that the Board operates and will reinvigorate its way of working. I will ask the Board to consider the strategic direction of the GHA

on the services that we need to provide and develop a workforce strategy that will make us more self-sufficient as well as to oversee the strategic repatriation of services where possible. The new Board will have a greater involvement in the GHA as it holds its management to account in the delivery of strategic priorities. All in all Mr Speaker, we will be focusing on efficiency, looking at better value for money and how we can eliminate waste from the system and looking to improve the patient experience to ensure that they get the best outcomes. The patient will be first and foremost in our plans and the money will be diverted to patient care and not lost in bureaucracy. In parallel, we will also be looking at improving the health of our community as prevention is better than cure.

This work has already commenced and reviews on the management of surgical waiting lists, pharmacy and mental health are already underway.

Background work has gained pace in some of the infrastructure projects in the GHA such as the upgrade of the Theatre Sterile Supply Unit which supplies all sterile equipment for the health authority, and a new ENT department which will be relocated to provide more clinical space and a dedicated sound proofed hearing and testing area.

Mr Speaker, following a series of very positive meetings with the Prostate Cancer Support Group, I am pleased to be able to report that an agreement has been reached for the formalising of a Memorandum of Understanding between the charity and the GHA which will enhance the services offered by the GHA. Prostate cancer is the second most common cancer, and the leading cancer among men. While the incidence of prostate cancer has increased, fortunately, so has the survival rate. The advancements in early detection and treatment is therefore of paramount importance. The forthcoming MoU will add physical resources and specialised training donated by Prostate Cancer Support Group to the GHA's Urology Department. This is Mr Speaker, the perfect example of collaboration between the Government and the voluntary sector in terms of support and enhancement of services to benefit our community.

Mr Speaker, In November 2020, the GHA Domestic Abuse Working Group was constituted to formalise a process in the GHA to ensure that victims of abuse were identified, assessed and offered appropriate support, including referral pathways, in line with Gibraltar's wider National strategy.

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Finally, on health Mr Speaker, I turn to Mental Health. I made it a key priority in the review of the GHA since I became the Minister less than a year ago to build on the unprecedented improvements already delivered by my predecessor Ministers for Health in our Government. Notwithstanding and in parallel to having to deal with the Pandemic, at the end of last year I commissioned a review of the service and the preparation of a national strategic plan by an external adviser.

Additionally, in the last couple of months, a parallel programme of preparatory work and plans supported by other external experts in the development and delivery of the Mental Health Services to ensure that the service is ready to respond to the changes required to deliver the strategy.

This has also included the provision of further training for our in-patient staff in the application of the Mental Health Act Mr Speaker, and this has already taken place and work is underway to finalise the development of the Code of Practice.

I am very keen to report on the progress that has been made since embarking on the commissioning of a national mental health strategy for Gibraltar which is now in its final stages and we aim to complete and publish in the coming weeks.

However, Mr Speaker, in the meantime, the mental health services have not been sitting still and as the part of the strategy we will see the launch of a 'listen and learning' initiative that gives us the opportunity to better use the stories of patients and their relatives to help improve the services provided.

Also Mr Speaker, the development of a new Crisis Pathway to improve access to services, provide immediate access where necessary together with follow up support and Mr Speaker;

An inter-agency initiative between the GHA, the Department of Education and the Care Agency to provide more coordinated support to children and younger adults with mental health needs.

Mr Speaker, there will be a lot more details of our plans in the Mental Health Strategy once it is finalised and published. Throughout, we are committed to listening to the experience of people who use our services and help shape our plans as we implement them. Again, Mr Speaker the patient is at the heart of our services.

I am pleased that in November 2020, we published the Mental Health Situational Analysis report

which was commissioned from Public Health England. The report highlighted excellent progress to date with improvements to the physical environment, the mental health act reforms and front-line response of our mental health services in Gibraltar as well as suggesting areas for further improvement all of which the GHA has been actively progressing.

The Mental Health Board plays a crucial role and have been actively supporting the development of our services by providing an independent 'critical eye' through their visits and discussions with patients in Ocean Views and I am immensely grateful for their work. They clearly and quite rightly identified a need for an improved range of activities and rehabilitation activities for patients during their stay in hospital. In response, we are launching a programme whereby there will be ward based staff with additional training and responsibilities to run ward based activities. This will be further enhanced through a refocussed and more structured approach to the delivery of Occupational Therapy Treatments and a programme of Ward based daily living activities for patients in our rehabilitation ward.

Finally, I intend to launch ongoing audits and a formal review process in respect of significant events and untoward incidents in Mental Health in order that we can ensure that we have learned and continue to learn lessons and incorporate these into our service transformation programme.

Mr Speaker, our Mental Health Services demonstrated great resilience and have coped with the challenges of the COVID 19 Pandemic, and our staff should be congratulated for their efforts.

CARE AGENCY

Mr Speaker, as I now turn to my responsibilities in relation to the Care Agency, I would like to say that Health and Social Care is the cornerstone of our community and will always be a priority. However, before I begin would like to take a moment to pay tribute to the late Glynis Pearson, a much loved and valued member of our Disability Service who sadly passed away in August 2019. Her devotion and dedication to the Service she managed was exemplary to all, and she is greatly missed by staff, and especially the service users who adored her and who she adored.

Mr Speaker, Mr Carlos Banderas was appointed Chief Executive of the Care Agency in August 2020, Mr Angelo Cerisola was appointed Services Safety and Standards Director and Ms Jennifer

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Poole was appointed Head of Adult Services in November 2020.

Ms Sharon Ratcliffe was appointed COVID-19 Coordinator for the Care Agency at the start of the Pandemic. Mr Speaker, my congratulations to all of them.

Mr Speaker, turning to the Care Agency Disability Services. The advance of Covid-19 has certainly changed the way that Disability Services has supported adults with learning disabilities. Service users who would have attended St Bernadette's Centre, were like most others, staying home. The lock-down restrictions and lack of social contact was especially hard on people with learning disabilities so they were supported to manage the challenges associated with the social lockdown by the dedicated and caring team of professionals.

The Care Agency's very skilled and experienced Specialist Occupational Therapist and Strategy Coordinator adapted service provision by the use of technology for long-distance health care, this meant wider outreach. The outreach was carried out with invaluable input from the Behaviour Support Officer, who was essential in supporting families. Instrumental telehealth provision was also implemented by the Learning Disability Social Worker who was in constant contact with service users and their families.

In general, Mr Speaker, I am delighted to report that service users, families and staff have reported that the support offered has been useful and beneficial during these unprecedented times and feedback has been overwhelmingly positive.

Service users' 'Wishes and Feelings' meetings continue to take place on a regular basis with all units at St Bernadette's Resource Centre, however the Covid-19 measures have limited and restricted options available for now.

Turning to the Care Agency's Adult Services it continues to provide assessment, support and advice to all vulnerable people over the age of 18.

During the 2019/2020 Financial Year, Adult Services received 1,229 referrals for social work assessments and support, 31% of which were generated in the hospital. 124 of these were in relation to Safeguarding Alerts, and 20 in relation to domestic abuse. These referrals are received

not only from other professionals, but also from the general public, either self-referrals, or from relatives or neighbours who wish to raise concern about a possible vulnerable person. This represented an increase of 79 which is 6% on this previous year.

Then referrals received during the 2020 / 2021 Financial Year, was 1,642. This represented an increase of 395 referrals from the previous year which is 34%. 448 referrals were generated in hospital, an increase of 16% and 67 referrals were made in relation to safeguarding matters (a decrease of 46% on the previous year), and 25 referrals were made with regards to domestic abuse

The influx was received through the COVID helpline. During this period, Adult Services also lead in contacting all over 70s, conducting telephone surveys for each and every individual and they carried out over 500 home visits for people who were not contactable over the telephone. Adult Services ensured that all vulnerable adults were supported during this difficult period with shopping, collection of prescriptions, meals on wheels as well as providing practical support, advice and information on a daily basis.

Domiciliary Care continues to be provided to assist the vulnerable, elderly or infirm at home.

Mr Speaker, from April 2019 to March 2020, a total of 558 individuals received domiciliary care. This rose by 15% for the following year to a total of 643 individuals.

Mr Speaker, unfortunately Waterport Terraces Day Centre had to be closed in March 2020 in order to ensure safety of all the elderly clients.

Throughout the COVID period however, day centre staff were unable to attend physically but they provided outreach support, calling to enquire as to clients general wellbeing on a regular basis and carrying out home visits to provide activity packs to keep them engaged and stimulated at home.

Mr Speaker, I cannot emphasise enough the magnificent work that has been undertaken by the Care Agency to support the needs of our vulnerable community.

Mr Speaker, looking at Safeguarding Adults at risk. As we continue to enhance practice, legislation is being drafted to establish the Safeguarding Adult Board as a statutory body in order to ensure

the safeguarding of adults at risk is made a priority for stakeholder organisations. Training on safeguarding adults is being delivered today as I speak, well maybe not now Mr Speaker, as it's a bit late in the day, but it commenced this morning.

Mr Speaker, turning to Children's Services. The Family and Community Centre (FCC) has been instrumental in ensuring that children and young people, parents and carers, can access support. The Care Agency has worked hard at creating meaningful ties with the community and combating any residual stigma associated with social services. Families are now more amenable to receiving support from the social work team and this service has been instrumental in bridging the gap between Child Protection and Children in Need and crucial in providing children and families with increased opportunities to succeed and achieve the best possible outcomes.

The Care Agency has worked hard to reduce the number of children who have had to be placed in residential care. A significant improvement, increasingly supporting families to care for children and young people, with the support of their own Fostering and Adoption Social Worker with supports and guidelines around them, around issues of contact, finances and support in their family placements.

In Children's Residential Services Mr Speaker, The Care Agency has care plans in place for every child and these are prepared in conjunction with therapists and Social Workers and understood by the care teams and helps to provide clarity to everyone in the service about the standards expected in the care that they provide to our most vulnerable children.

The Care Agency is working together with the Royal Gibraltar Police in achieving a joint protocol to work with young people in care who may also be known to the criminal justice system. Additionally Mr Speaker, the Care Agency Chairs a Multi-Agency working group on youth offending to develop strategies on how to best offer support.

Mr Speaker, a Parent and Child Assessment Unit has been created. The aim of this service has been to provide residential parent and child assessments for those who are suffering, or are at risk of suffering significant harm and on Child Protection Plans. Residential support encourages parents to reflect on their parenting and impact that this may have on their children and at the same time ensuring that the child's needs are being met in a safe and healthy environment. The programme helps parents build on their parenting skills and adopt positive strategies in their day to day parenting responsibilities.

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The centre has workers engaged in providing significant number of supervised contacts that are currently being requested by the Courts.

Also Mr Speaker, the Freedom Programme for victims and perpetrators of domestic abuse is running from the Family Centre as a group session which is a significant step forward for the service in supporting men and women who have suffered domestic abuse.

Looking at our leaving care service Mr Speaker, the Children's Service continues to have a Personal Advisor service for young children leaving care; support is offered up to the age of 25 to those who are either in residential care, in supported accommodation or living independently in the community and the role of the Personal Advisor has been crucial in supporting young people transition into independent living and to have someone that they can rely on when necessary.

Mr Speaker, children with disabilities are among the most vulnerable within any society. This year's main focus has been on increasing and developing respite services, so that support can be provided in the shortest time possible.

Encouragingly, 2020-2021 has seen the provision of care, afforded to children with disabilities and their families, increased. Part of a range of services which support children in need and their families have included the provision of day, evenings and weekend activities for children.

Mr Speaker finally on children, the Child Protection Committee has continued to ensure safeguarding is embedded in practices and procedures across services for children in Gibraltar. During the Financial Year 2019/2020, 216 individuals have been trained in Safeguarding Tier 1, 30 in Tier 2 and Safeguarding Training Tier 3 was also successfully delivered by the GHA and supported by Care Agency practitioners.

Additionally, all new RGP recruits received safeguarding training as part of their induction programme.

Mr Speaker, turning to the Care Agency's Therapeutic Services. These services have supported staff and service users with individual and/ or group counselling during the Pandemic. This included

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those returning to work after having contracted the virus, and, if requested, as part of post-traumatic stress healing given the stresses arising from the nature of their work. Services were extended to the GHA and ERS as well as Care Agency members of staff.

The Therapeutic Team continues to offer Care Agency clients, Care Agency colleagues and other colleagues with Multi-Agency teams such as the Royal Gibraltar Police, the Gibraltar Health Authority, Department of Education, Youth Services, Her Majesty's Prison Service and Gibraltar Sports and Leisure Authority a range of specific, therapeutic, professional expertise and support.

The Care Agency's Therapeutic Team also provides support and supervision to Bruce's Farm, both in respect of residents undergoing drug and alcohol treatment, and the staff members who care for them.

There has also been Inter-Agency Consult Mr Speaker. Between April 2020 and March 2021, the Therapeutic Team Services, have through their MAPPA duties been involved in monthly meetings with the RGP and multi-agency teams. A total of 108 clinical hours has been attributed to MAPPA.

ROYAL GIBRALTAR POLICE

On that note, Mr Speaker I turn to my Justice portfolio, commencing with the Royal Gibraltar Police.

Mr Speaker following the 2019 Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire and Rescue Services (HMICFRS) inspection on the Royal Gibraltar Police [RGP] and the report submitted in 2020, the RGP continues to work hard at a strategic level to achieve the recommendations set out. Chaired monthly by the Commissioner of Police Richard Ullger and attended by the Command Team, together with members of the Gibraltar Police Authority [GPA] and HMICFRS they strategically discuss progress and implementation. As a result of this, there has been a lot of work to establish a Domestic Abuse Unit and a Victims of Crime Unit, to better coordinate the Public Protection delivery of the service. The Service has provided much training to the entire force and its new approach has provided the public with greater confidence to report matters of Domestic Abuse.

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Mr Speaker, the Code of Ethics has also been well established with good processes in place to support the principles and improve standards of behaviour, with policies adopted and implemented to target those who may engage in any corrupt practice. More training is envisaged and improved systems will be implemented at a cost to improve governance and accountability.

Mr Speaker, National Security continues to be a priority for the RGP and this is evidenced by the commitments aligned to the Annual Policing Plan. The recent 2019 Terrorism Act provides the RGP with broad and intrusive powers to stop, search and hold individuals at entry points into Gibraltar providing the RGP with the ability to investigate potential plots of acts of terrorism and support other states in such investigations.

The enforcement of this act has already commenced with Project Servator, a policing tactic carried out by Specially Trained Officers who deter and detect criminal and terrorist activity, as well as to reassure the public.

Through these methods Mr Speaker, the RGP have already been successful in detaining drug suppliers, wanted persons and illegal immigrants.

Simultaneously, the RGP has also invested in its firearms command structure, and now has the capacity and capability to command a firearms incident, at a strategic, tactical and operational level.

There are notable cases of interest Mr Speaker as the RGP officers are constantly at the forefront of fighting crime that occurs both nationally and internationally, and there have been many success stories over the past year.

The RGP's efforts in combatting drug trafficking, in line with the Commissioner's commitment when taking office to do so, has been notable this year. Drug suppliers have been arrested and convicted, with forfeitures made of monies suspected to have been collected in the commission of the offence. Large seizures of drugs have been made, with the largest happening in January of this year, with a total of 1.3 tonnes of cannabis resin recovered, having a street value of approximately £6.5M. This was equally matched on the same night in a joint operation with Spanish Law Enforcement agencies, and the seizure of 1.8 tonnes of cannabis resin. In February 2021, £2M worth of cocaine was seized.

Equally Mr Speaker, offenders escaping our local jurisdiction have been arrested through the European Arrest Warrant Framework and some excellent cooperation has resulted, particularly

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with the National Police Forces of the Kingdom of Spain to bring these people to justice. Under the current Framework policing cooperation continues.

Mr Speaker, The Economic Crime Unit which was recently resourced with more officers, has increasingly been investigating complex crimes, arresting offenders for false accounting, fraud, money laundering and frauds by false accounting.

In March this year, the RGP created a Traffic Enforcement Unit that dealt with exceptionally bad driving linked to anti-social behaviour. By having a coordinated response, the RGP has proactively enforced the laws on the roads with a zero tolerance towards offences that put other road users in danger.

In September 2020, the RGP was recognised by GibSams for its hard work to improve Mental Health Wellbeing in the service. This has had a positive impact on staff and officers.

Importantly also, a Diversity, Equality and Inclusion Strategy was adopted by the RGP in February 2021. This is being adopted from Recruitment into Retention, ensuring that the service is a diverse one. Only recently Mr Speaker, the RGP made history by promoting its first woman inspector.

GIBRALTAR FINANCIAL INTELLIGENCE UNIT (GFIU)

Mr Speaker, I turn now to The Gibraltar Financial Intelligence Unit (GFIU) which also plays a critical role in the fight against economic crime and also uses financial intelligence to tackle other criminal conduct. As it marks 25 years since its establishment, the GFIU has undergone a restructure, and as a result of the recommendations made by the Council of Europe Committee of Experts on the Evaluation of AntiMoney Laundering Measures and the Financing of Terrorism (MONEYVAL) Mr Speaker.

Mr Edgar Lopez, a former senior police officer, was appointed as its Director by the Attorney General in March 2020, and oversees a permanent core of Financial Intelligence Officers, and other staff, together with specialist officers on secondment from the Royal Gibraltar Police, HM Customs and the Gambling Division.

To coordinate the intelligence available to the GFIU, it established a Joint Financial Intelligence Task

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Group to discuss financial intelligence and disclosures received by the GFIU where complex cases might be investigated. The group meets weekly and has proved to be a very efficient mechanism bringing all stakeholders together to make better informed decisions.

Last Year Mr Speaker, the GFIU launched an e-learning platform that it designed and provides service users with the latest information through e-learning workshops. Mr Speaker, the numerous achievements over the last year demonstrates the efforts made to professionalise the unit.

In January 2019, the GFIU launched an online reporting system for the secure submission of Suspicious Activity Reports (SARs). The system called THEMIS consists of two separate parts – an online ‘portal’ for use by MLROs and a system visible only to the GFIU. It has also integrated all Mutual Legal Assistance (MLA) requests into the system which allows officers to cross check with existing data. This allows the GFIU to harvest the data and link any potential local money laundering investigations.

Mr Speaker, officers continue to undertake regular online training to be able to improve the conduct in their roles. Mr Speaker, the e-learning workshops have increased over the last year with over 300 users having access to it. Feedback on both the initiatives and workshop content offered by the GFIU, has been very encouraging. More workshops are being designed which will include Terrorist Financing, Online Child Sexual Abuse and Exploitation and Human Trafficking. The GFIU has engaged with industry professionals, international institutions and academics to ensure that the content and design of these workshops are optimized to provide the most up-to-date information. International Efforts the GFIU has been very actively involved in international forums.

GIBRALTAR LAW COURTS

Now Mr Speaker I turn to our Law Courts. The Law Courts have not escaped the impact of that the Covid-19 pandemic but the Gibraltar Courts Service have worked extraordinarily hard to keep the courts open and operating throughout both lockdown periods; the use of the video-link facility with HM Prison increased and remote hearings for civil matters at the Supreme Court were introduced and the Court of Appeal sessions have been conducted remotely.

Mr Speaker, there are currently 5 appointed members of the Court of Appeal with the recruitment

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of a further member imminent in order to maintain the complement at 6.

Last year, on advice from the Judicial Service Commission, 8 new Justices of the Peace were recruited, appointed and sworn-in. Again, this is to maintain the complement of Justices following a number of retirements.

Mr Speaker, In 2019, acting on advice from the Judicial Service Commission, Mr Justice Yeats and Mr Justice Restano were appointed Puisne Judges of the Supreme Court.

The Law Courts Mr Speaker are in a strong position. The current complement of judges, coupled with the fact that when hit with the pandemic there was no backlog in either the Magistrates' or Supreme Courts, has enabled it to deal effectively with the current substantial workload brought about as a result of the scaling down of operations during both lockdown periods.

Mr Speaker, as Minister for Justice, I have worked closely with the Chief Executive of the Gibraltar Courts Service to ensure that the Courts' back office administration is properly resourced, and to make certain that the level of support to the Judiciary, Court Users and the legal profession is maintained so as to continue delivering a timely and efficient justice system that is open to all.

Mr Speaker turning to the Government's Law Offices, a team who have continued to play a crucial part in shaping legislation, providing legal representation and delivering legal advice to Government and departments.

During the course of 2020 to date, the GLO have published the following legislation

40 Bills

26 Acts

830 legal notices

In January 2020, the Government published the legislation that provided the framework of Gibraltar's exit from the European Union.

Since the enactment of the European Union (Withdrawal) Act 2019, a significant number of regulations have been published using the powers conferred by that Act, which have been aimed

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at correcting deficiencies that have arisen as a result of Brexit. Others have been made pursuant to the obligations entered into in the Withdrawal Agreement.

Another aspect of Brexit relates to trade, where we, on the 1st January 2021 published 27 sets of regulations to give effect to the roll-over.

Mr Speaker, the Competition Bill was also published in December 2020. Following its enactment, a further 8 sets of regulations and orders have been published, which taken as a whole, provide for a competition regime for Gibraltar that is based on the post-Brexit regime applicable to the UK.

In addition to dealing with the legislative impact of Brexit, there has been as we know a significant amount of Covid-related legislation enacted, principally under the Civil Contingencies Act. Since we first legislated for Covid by declaring it to be an infectious disease on the 31st January 2020 Mr Speaker there have been, as I said earlier, over 300 Covid regulations.

Other than Brexit and Covid Mr Speaker, the following legislative projects have also come to fruition during this period:

The Marriage (Amendment) Act: which deleted section 6B of the Marriage Act which provided for registrars to opt out of conducting a same-sex marriage in the exercise of their freedom of conscience.

Mr Speaker, importantly the Surrogacy Act 2021, which came into force on 9th February 2021 and provides for the regulation of surrogacy arrangements, the legal status of those participating in assisted reproduction arrangements. One of the many regulations resulting from the passing of that Act amended the Births and Deaths Registration Rules to allow for the recording of information in a birth entry relating to a woman who is a parent in accordance with section 9 of the Surrogacy Act, making it possible for two women to be named on a birth certificate.

The department has also been engaged in the area of International Conventions including Brexit of course and the MONEYVAL assessment on Gibraltar.

And finally on that note Mr Speaker, it leaves me to mention the work done on the anti-corruption authority. Yes, Mr Speaker this was of course a manifesto commitment but that commitment has

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not been possible in the time frame stated in the manifesto for obvious reasons.

Mr Speaker, what has been happening in Gibraltar for the last year and a half and indeed the whole of the world, has meant that some things have taken precedence over others but I can assure Mr Speaker, the Hon Mr Clinton given that he raised this issue only a moment ago, that I have been working on this matter in addition to my commitments to Covid and everything else. I have been working on this matter directly with the Chief Minister and also with Minister Isola and a draft bill is at a very advanced stage. Indeed, I received the latest draft about a week ago and Mr Speaker, the bill will be before this house this calendar year, Covid permitting.

Mr Speaker, I turn now to The Office of Criminal Prosecution and Litigation. This too Mr Speaker, was heavily involved in the initial and ongoing Moneyval evaluation, forming part of the Gibraltar delegation at the various Strasbourg/Gibraltar meetings. Arising from this, OCPL has also been involved in the process leading to the amendments that have recently been made to Proceeds of Crimes Act.

Mr Speaker, during the height of the Covid Pandemic, the OCPL staff were seconded to deal with matters related to BEAT payments. Notwithstanding this and most of the department needing to isolate due to a number of positive tests, the OCPL, never the less, covered all court appearances and urgent matters throughout the lockdown period.

Mr Speaker, the OCPL has noted a marked increase in the number of sexual offences matters that are being investigated and prosecuted. This would seem to suggest that there is a marked and increased confidence in the judicial process as a whole in dealing with this type of case, whether they are historic or recent allegations.

HER MAJESTY'S PRISON

Mr Speaker, I now turn to Her Majesty's Prison. The average daily population for the last two financial years stood at 48, which is a slight drop from the average.

On the 18th September 2019, Mr Gareth Coom was promoted to Prison Superintendent. Having worked with Gareth for a number of years and more closely in the last year and a half Mr Speaker, I want to thank him for his dedication to the service that he leads and for all his help, especially

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during these recent unprecedented times.

Unfortunately, Mr Speaker 2020 began not only with the threat of the oncoming pandemic but sadly, with the passing of two members of staff; Officers Zac Valance and Diana Senior.

Mr Speaker, the prison services continues to be well used by those in custody as the year progressed, with all of these seeing a higher percentage of users. Mr Speaker, they attended educational classes, made use of the gymnasium and attended vocational classes. In terms of spiritual support, ministers of the various religious denominations visited the prison weekly and offered guidance in addition to a kind ear, in fact Mr Speaker, religious attendances were up to 35% of the population.

Mr Speaker, the Senior Management team and staff devised a series of fluid protocols to safeguard HMP during the pandemic, initiatives and regimes that would serve them well throughout the year. In retrospect, the ability to effortlessly adapt to changes in advice marked the difference between success and failure in these confined circumstances and in the end saw the service traverse this very difficult period with only a single Covid case.

Mr Speaker at present, the Prison Service continues to follow their road map to normality, re-establishing services and renewing initiatives and improvements to current ones, including an increase to the provision of general and substance abuse counselling and rehabilitation. Improving these services will better place offenders on the road to rehabilitation and successful re-integration into society and thus reduce the rate of reoffending.

Mr Speaker this is something that I am working very closely with the superintendent of prison on because experience tells us that the most effective drug strategy combines both elements of counselling and rehabilitation programmes, which are provided together with the enforcement and deterrence. To this end, and in order to enhance the enforcement and deterrence element, the prison service is extremely proud to report at present a 55% participation in their Voluntary Drug Testing Scheme.

Other areas that have received attention over the last two years include improvements to infrastructure and equipment. The prison gymnasiums was completely refurbished. An investment has also been made in the Main Yard, with the repair to the ground and the purchase of equipment.

Mr Speaker, upcoming specialist training in the United Kingdom will include Control and Restraint and Multi-Disciplinary Team training for instructors.

The Prison management and the treatment of prisoners continue to be seen by the Statutory Prison Board, members of which undertake their responsibilities with passion and determination.

PROBATION SERVICES

Mr Speaker, the Probation Services have continued to provide frontline services during the pandemic to both the Courts by way of Pre-Sentence Reports and to the Parole Board for consideration for Parole and community supervision orders.

Probation Officers have received further training in MAPPA sex offender risk assessment, management and supervision. Additionally, one of the Probation Officers undertook training in the Freedom Programme for victims who have been physically or emotionally abused by their partners. Whilst the programme focuses working with the victims of domestic abuse the programme will enable Probation Officers to work with perpetrators of domestic abuse as part of Probation supervision. The programme challenges the rationalising and justification that perpetrators employ for their abuse. It is designed to make perpetrators accept responsibility and teach them appropriate behaviours with their partners. Probation Officers will be undertaking further training to facilitate the incorporation of domestic abuse into public protection risk management.

Mr Speaker, I turn to the last of the uniformed bodies that I have responsibility for and that is the fire service.

GIBRALTAR FIRE AND RESCUE SERVICE & AIRPORT FIRE AND RESCUE SERVICE

Starting with the Gibraltar Fire and Rescue Service, this has also for them been a year of continued progress and adaptation to new challenges.

The GFRS have continued during Covid with its primary objective of providing the best possible level of emergency response to the community whilst negotiating the challenges brought about by Covid-19.

Mr Speaker, notably one of the members of staff at GFRS was seconded to the Covid-19 Mental

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Health and Wellbeing Team and since his return to GFRS continues to carry out invaluable work under their welfare support system and is currently working on a project to introduce an internal support network and increase Mental Health First Aid and increased awareness amongst the workforce.

Mr Speaker, GFRS has seen multi-agency major incident exercises, on both real-time practical events as well as TTX's with significant involvement from the GFRS at all levels of the command and control structure. Following the lead from the Gibraltar Contingency Council, this is an ongoing process of development and definitely one that will vastly improve interoperability and the overall efficiency of Gibraltar's emergency response capability.

Mr Speaker, the gym facilities were refurbished last year by the firefighters themselves. As a result of this voluntary work, expenditure has been significantly reduced and they now have a facility that contributes towards maintenance of an acceptable level of physical fitness amongst our crews, something that is of obvious value to their operations.

Mr Speaker, the GFRS Senior Management is in the process of preparing proposals for an introduction of a dedicated Training Department and Mr Speaker, I now turn also to the Airport Fire and Rescue Service, which despite the constraints of the pandemic, have maintained a particularly busy period of activity. With an unusually quiet airfield, the focus was to consolidate all elements of practical training and reviewing operational procedures. This was undertaken observing the relevant protective measures for the safety of all staff members, ensuring preparedness for response could be maintained, whilst remaining conscious of a potential need to support other agencies if the circumstances so required.

Mr Speaker, continual training ensures that firefighters maintain the necessary skills and competences, which are critical to safely and effectively fulfil their roles. This at a time ensures that as an organisation, the AFRS functions properly and can react whenever it is called for. Consequently, it is mandatory for the entire AFRS complement to be re-certified every 4 years and will now happen in October 2021.

Mr Speaker, the UK Civil Aviation Authority undertook an organisational preparedness audit in June 2020. This was undertaken virtually and resulted in a clean bill of health, with only relatively minor

observations having been highlighted. This now provides an assurance that the AFRS is fully prepared to respond to any operational demands that may be placed upon it, not only at the airfield but elsewhere in Gibraltar in support of the Gibraltar Fire and Rescue Service or any other emergency service.

Mr Speaker, the GFRS and AFRS continue to work closely fostering a great professional working relationship. This demonstrates a mutual commitment to promote interoperability in respect of both training and operational responses to support each other during any incident. This collaborative approach serves to identify performance improvement, cost effectiveness and other synergies, which satisfy common gains in all aspects of firefighting and training, with the benefits ultimately resulting in a safer Gibraltar.

And finally Mr Speaker, one final note, on the basis of the stark under-representation of women in the Fire Services.

Mr Speaker, I recently met with the Chiefs from GFRS and AFRS and I have set up a working group to promote equal opportunities, both in recruitment and hopefully in retention of a diversity of firefighters in Gibraltar.

EQUALITY

Finally Mr Speaker, I turn to my portfolio as Minister for Equality.

During our decade in office, it has been my privilege to have held a wide range of portfolios.

Of all those portfolios, there has been one that I have held from the very first day, and that is Equality. I was extremely honoured to be chosen as Gibraltar's first Minister for Equality in 2011 and it is a responsibility that I continue to be very proud of.

Mr Speaker, this Ministry which I lead is dedicated to upholding equality principles and to eliminating all forms of discrimination. It has been and continues to be greatly rewarding to form and lead a new Ministry which has been ground breaking in its vision, ideas, policies and most significantly, legislation.

I will start with LGBTQ+ Rights Mr Speaker and I am grateful for the Chief Minister's comments on gay rights in his intervention yesterday and the importance that he has given this issue and the recognition of the work of the Ministry for Equality. Because Mr Speaker, in the space of just under ten years, a great deal has been achieved by our administration in order to ensure that gay rights are properly protected by legislation. In fact it is incredible now to think that the first time the word 'gay' was mentioned in Parliament was not that long ago and it was in my very first budget speech in 2012. Mr Speaker, this Government stands for fairness and equality and I am very proud that since 2011, we began to address the issue of gay rights; an issue which had never been directly mentioned let alone addressed in this House before and we have done so promptly and with conviction.

Mr Speaker, this had marked a fundamental change in values and has ensured that all members of our community enjoy the same rights.

There are many ways to protect the rights of our citizens – clearly, passing legislation is one of the most important steps that we can take. Nevertheless, it is also vitally important to continue to raise awareness of LGBTQ+ matters to ensure that any kind of discrimination is not allowed to take root in our community.

Mr Speaker, it was very important for this Government to again mark Pride Month this June because representation and visibility matter and sometimes much more than we can ever imagine. This year we have marked Pride in a number of bright and illuminating ways. Pride flags have been flown from key buildings and points in Gibraltar. Pedestrian crossing signals at a number of crossings have been changed in order to reflect the diversity in our community. Unfortunately, some of the comments on social media in response to our initiatives this year have shown a blatant disregard for our fellow citizens. There is no place in Gibraltar for homophobia and hate and I would urge everyone to remember that we are all equal and that we all deserve and are entitled to full respect at all times.

While visibility is key, Mr Speaker, an equally critical component of this journey is to listen to the voices and concerns of the LGBTQ+ community. For this very reason, we launched the first survey in Gibraltar. The survey will be live for until 30th September and I would urge everyone from the LGBTQ+ community to participate. Hearing directly from stake-holders is vital in a democratic

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society which upholds the key values of equality, diversity and inclusion.

Mr Speaker, our Government's commitment to equality is embedded in everything that we do. Gender equality is another important strand of my equality portfolio.

Mr Speaker I believe most resolutely that gender equality is a vital component of a modern and mature society and it is a key factor in our quest for social justice.

In 2020, Mr Speaker, we marked International Women's Day with a Women in Stem panel discussion event, days before we went into our first lockdown. The event aimed to raise the profile of women working in STEM locally and as a means of providing young people, particularly girls and young women, with positive role models.

Looking back now Mr Speaker, the event almost seems prophetic given the pivotal role and central role that was to be played by scientists and healthcare professionals during the Pandemic.

In 2021, we marked International Women's Day by recognising and celebrating the extraordinary efforts and crucial role of women in Health and Care during the Covid crisis with an extensive social media campaign. This was in-keeping with the United Nations theme, 'Women in Leadership: Achieving an Equal Future in a Covid-19 World' and it was particularly fitting that we celebrated International Women's Day 2021 in this way given that in Gibraltar women comprise over 70% of the health and care workforce.

As Minister for Health and as Minister with responsibility for Civil Contingencies I have repeatedly witnessed first-hand the truly incredible efforts of women at the forefront in fighting the coronavirus pandemic. I have nothing but admiration, respect and a huge sense of gratitude for all their endeavours in eradicating the virus from our community.

Another intrinsic part of our gender equality strategy is challenging gender stereotypes because these are often deeply embedded in societies to the point that they are not recognised as such but are regrettably considered to be 'natural' and form part of expected behaviours. There can often be a backlash against any initiatives that are perceived to challenge this status quo.

Mr Speaker, because backlashes do not deter me from working to eradicate stereotypes that I know

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prove damaging and in most extreme cases, can even be fatal. That is why we must challenge the insistent and persistent use of hyper-feminine and hyper-masculine stereotypes – they do not reflect the full spectrum of human experience and they serve to strictly police the behaviours of men and women and of people who do not identify as such.

To this effect, Mr Speaker, we launched a Modern Fairy Tales short story competition in November 2019, a resounding success. Not only was the Fireside Chat event, to discuss gender stereotypes in traditional fairy-tales, delivered to a packed audience, but the actual competition itself was phenomenally supported by 140 participants and 151 entries.

Clearly, there is an appetite in Gibraltar for changing limited gender stereotypes and I know that the competition has served to generate a conversation around the issue.

Another strand of the gender equality strategy is the economic empowerment of women. One of the key initiatives to do this is our Women's Mentorship Programme, of which we have already run two cycles and

we would have launched the third cycle in 2020 but obviously the pandemic did not allow for this.

Nevertheless, I look forward to announcing the launch of the third cycle imminently and would like to urge anyone interested in participating in the Women's Mentorship Programme, either as a mentor or a mentee, to contact the Ministry of Equality and to register.

Mr Speaker, another key issue which is at the forefront of my equality agenda is domestic abuse.

Mr Speaker, domestic abuse is one of the highest priorities for our Government and you would have seen Mr Speaker from my address that it is now a common theme running through the majority of the departments for which I am responsible.

As Minister for Justice and Equality I am extremely aware that making legislation for changes is a powerful way forward in eradicating domestic abuse and it is also important to pave the way for new laws with training so that it is put into effect properly.

While domestic abuse affects everyone, statistics show that it affects women predominantly.

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Mr Speaker, therefore I published a Command Paper for a Bill specifically dedicated to offences relating to domestic abuse. This landmark, standalone and consolidated piece of legislation seeks to enshrine in law the protection of victims of domestic abuse.

The two most fundamental changes that this piece of legislation will introduce will be that of a definition of domestic abuse in statute and the introduction of domestic abuse protection notices and orders. These notices and orders will provide new tools for the RGP and the Courts; they prohibit abuse and may prohibit contact or stop the person going within a certain distance of a victim's home.

Additionally, Mr Speaker, the Government is widening the definition of domestic abuse to include non-physical, economic abuse and controlling and coercive behaviour as part of developing the National Strategy.

All these additional legislative measures will serve to enhance the protection of victims of domestic abuse and they will also serve to send a very powerful message to the perpetrators and the wider community that this Government is committed to eradicating this grave social issue.

The Government was acutely aware of the likelihood of an increased risk of domestic abuse during the Covid period and as such, the National Strategy was brought into sharper focus. During the lockdown period, a specific Covid-19 Domestic Abuse working group made up of professionals from all stakeholder departments, and which also included a representative from Women in Need, was appointed.

Enhancing the knowledge and skills of our first responders is also a top priority for the Government and I have been working closely with the Commissioner of Police to ensure that the RGP's skills and knowledge in this highly sensitive area are enhanced.

I am delighted to report that in spite the challenges of the recent months, in 2020 all 250 officers of the Royal Gibraltar Police were trained by the UK charity SafeLives to deal with domestic abuse. The aims of the training were to enhance policing response to the victims of domestic abuse, the identification of perpetrators of domestic abuse and prevention measures and to ensure that the police was were properly prepared ahead of the forthcoming legislation.

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Mr Speaker, in addition to the RGP officers, professionals from other relevant departments such as the Probation Service, the Care Agency and the GHA were also able to benefit from the training and were able to gain the necessary skills and knowledge to assist in future training courses.

Mr Speaker, the Ministry for Equality also commissioned training on the Freedom Programme which is a very successful therapeutic programme for victims of domestic abuse in order that they may be provided with a supportive, safe and friendly environment.

Training on the Freedom Programme was delivered to the heads of all key stakeholder departments that form part of the national domestic abuse strategy and which deliver therapeutic and support services to victims of domestic abuse. This was done with a view to establishing a consistent and holistic policy in the delivery of such therapies throughout Gibraltar.

The Freedom Programme has been very successfully used by the Care Agency since 2014 and it was important to expand it throughout the public sector so that it could have a wider reach.

I am also very happy to report, Mr Speaker, that apart from the training there are frequent multi-agency meetings between the Care Agency, the GHA and the RGP to address issues relating to domestic abuse.

Our preventative strategy continues to work well through our collaborative relationships with the Department of Education too. The 'Respect and Healthy Relationships' continues to be delivered across schools in Gibraltar in age-appropriate and sensitive ways.

Mr. Speaker, the Ministry for Equality's work on disabilities has always been the lion's share of the work that we do and we have advanced greatly in the last ten years.

Mr Speaker, this last year has been difficult for all of us and it has been particularly sad for me to see that a lot of the good work and awareness raised by the Ministry of Equality has had to be put on hold due to lockdown measures. This is particularly true of the training and awareness programmes that they deliver and a lot of time and effort had been invested in preparing for them.

But, Mr Speaker, even throughout the lockdown, the Ministry of Equality were an important

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element of this Government's policy making decision on matters of disability.

Since my last Budget speech, the Ministry of Equality has also attended training and attended two Annual Conferences on the Rights of People with Disabilities organised by the Academy of European Law. The aim of this is that through learning we can continue to enhance the services that the Government provides.

Mr Speaker, the Disability Language and Etiquette Customer Care training that already forms part of the training prospectus for Civil Servants has also been included as part of the ongoing training for the Royal Gibraltar Police. Indeed, a number of training sessions for the RGP were already delivered before they had to be postponed due to COVID and we are hoping they can be reinstated soon.

Mr. Speaker, we launched Disability Information Cards, the purpose of which is to establish a discreet way for a person with a disability to communicate with others what their particular accessibility needs may be. This scheme is purely voluntary.

We now have close to 100 card holders and I am happy to say that these cards were especially useful during lockdown on occasions where people with particular disabilities were allowed to enjoy certain necessities due to their condition. For example, Mr. Speaker, children with particular requirements due to their disability could use this card successfully in order to gain access to the park at Europa Point during lockdown.

You may remember, Mr Speaker, that on occasions during spring 2020, time spent on the beach was limited to half an hour. This time limit was extended for people who, because of their disability, needed some extra time and the Disability Information Card proved to be a very simple and effective way to prove this to the authorities.

Mr. Speaker, the importance of being able to access an accessible toilet cannot and should not be underestimated. For some people, lack of such access means restrictive participation in social and cultural activities.

This is why we launched the RADAR Key Pilot Scheme in October 2019, and Mr. Speaker installed

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our first RADAR lock. For those people who are unaware, a RADAR key opens any door that has a RADAR lock and these are usually installed in public accessible toilets and will allow a RADAR key holder access to the toilets at all times.

These are the types of initiatives, Mr. Speaker, that create a more accessible social environment and therefore, makes a real difference to people with disabilities. Applications for a RADAR key should be made to the Ministry for Equality.

Mr. Speaker, I would also like to point out another example of how this Government is taking the concepts of equality and inclusion, adapting it into our policies. The award winning B-tween Bench designed by Gamma Architects to include a space, off centre, in order to allow wheelchair users to sit amongst friends or families, that Mr. Speaker, both HM Government of Gibraltar and private entities have made use of this inclusive design as part of the development of outside public areas.

Finally, on disability Mr Speaker, while we have achieved and progressed a lot Mr Speaker in terms of legislation and policies, training and awareness, we have more and big exciting plans ahead. Consultation with stakeholders is of course essential so that we be kept abreast of all live issues and the Ministry for Equality in the coming weeks will launch an in-depth consultation to see how we can further improve our services.

Mr Speaker, now that I have been given the responsibilities for Health and Social Services, it makes it so much easier to be able to discharge and integrate the general equality principles in relation to disability in a more seamless way and I have regular meetings with all my heads of departments together so that we can in consultation, the Medical Director, the Department of Equality and the Chief Executive of the Care Agency can work together in a more meaningful and a more collective way.

COMMONWEALTH PARLIAMENTARY ASSOCIATION

To conclude Mr Speaker, I will mention my responsibilities in the context of CPA. Having been a founder member of the British Islands Mediterranean Region's steering committee of the Commonwealth Women Parliamentarians, I was elected chair in the middle of the pandemic, that has brought with it additional responsibilities. I am grateful for the travel ban this year and having

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adapted to virtual meetings has been very effective otherwise I would have had to invest a lot of time travelling.

Mr Speaker, as yourself and Mr Clerk know full well, our participation in CPA can sometimes send us to far flung corners of the earth.

Mr Speaker, this being Mr Martinez's last budget session, please may I thank him, but may I thank him in particular for his support of our CPA work, which involves travel, or should I more accurately say sometimes adventures, because when one travels very far away, things are not always simple and most notably I might take this opportunity to remind him of that strange hotel in Istanbul or the event when the Honourable Mr Reyes was mugged in Cameroon and all sorts of strange things that have happened to us Mr Speaker. But I would like to sincerely thank Mr Martinez before his retirement as of course Mr Speaker, I would like to thank yourself and all the staff here in Parliament.

Mr Speaker that leaves me to thank everyone else who has worked with me and supported me in the last eighteen months especially as they have been particularly hard. Everyone who has worked with me directly has literally worked round the clock. The hours put in by the teams have been tremendous and looking back now I don't know where we got the energy from to keep going. But quite apart from the importance of what we were doing Mr Speaker, it was clearly the camaraderie that kept us going, from us as Ministers with the leadership of the Chief Minister, the Deputy Chief Minister and my friend and colleague the Minister of Public Health to all our teams especially those in the Civil Contingencies office.

Mr Speaker I am so happy that the efforts of those who work in the field of health and care have been recognised and on that note Mr Speaker it leaves me to apologise because before I wrap up, I must apologise for some of the policy work that has been the victim of Covid. Because there were policy work that we embarked on before the pandemic struck and which we have not yet been able to complete. The reason for this is simply because all our resources and all our attention were diverted to the pandemic and there were simply not any more hours left in the day, some days.

But Mr Speaker, there is nothing that I would like more than to complete these as soon as time permits.

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Finally, Mr Speaker, as we see the rise in cases attributed to the delta variant, as a community it is important that we keep safe. We must follow all the public health rules and the public health advice to keep ourselves safe and also it is important that we don't overburden the hospital and residential facilities. Mr Speaker, our vulnerable people come first and it is for them that we need to make these sacrifices.

Thank you Mr Speaker.

ENDS