

PRESS RELEASE

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Budget Address 2021-2022 – The Hon Steven Linares MP

Mr Speaker,

This is my 21st Budget speech and my 9th as a Government Minister.

I will start my speech by giving a synopsis of what has been achieved over the last two years despite the Covid19 pandemic.

This has not only changed our lives but has changed many working practices and we have had to adapt to the situation to the best of our ability.

My current responsibilities are Housing, Employment, Youth and Sport.

I will therefore start with Housing

Mr Speaker,

Since I was given the honour of becoming Minister for Housing one of my main goals has been to review all Policies, Schemes and Agreements, including the whole of the Housing Act.

I am happy to say that we have made considerable progress on this front.

So much so that I intend to start publishing the new documents in the autumn.

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One of the main functions of the Housing Department is that of collection of rental payments.

For this there are numerous methods available and the Department are actively contacting customers to get them to subscribe to one of these methods.

These are:

- Deduction at source from wages/salaries or Occupational Pension
- Standing Order from the client bank account
- Online via the E-Gov Portal
- Telephone payments

We are also working on having a Direct Debit System in place soon and we will be calling all our clients to ask them to subscribe to this method of payments.

As from the 14th July 2020 the Housing Department has been providing scheduled appointments to tenants that could only make payments via cash.

Counters are opened twice a week for the said scheduled appointments.

This happens in keeping with the social distancing measures set out by Public Health Gibraltar.

Expanding the options available through which to make payments of rent gives tenants the flexibility to be able to choose a payment method.

The Department has ensured that the correct systems are in place to deal with the non-payment of rent.

Notifications are now issued automatically to alert the department of any tenant who commences to default on their rent.



This process enables the Department to contact the tenant far sooner than ever before in order to engage with them at an early stage before the debt begins to build up.

The Housing Department continues to assist tenants to arrange repayment plans or to adjust an existing repayment plan, to meet both, their needs and ours.

These meetings are very useful as they allow the Department to identify those tenants who have genuine hardship and are unable to pay their rent.

All such situations are looked at on a case by case basis.

Careful consideration is given to those who may have a real social and/or medical issue.

This helps the Department determine those who genuinely cannot pay and those who simply do not want to pay.

There are a total of 587 tenants with arrears agreements.

A total of nearly £ 2m has been secured via such agreements, representing 42% of the overall arrears figure.

The continuation of the concerted effort to have rent payments deducted at source continues to be a top priority.

As I have already stated, it is Government's policy that all Civil and Public Servants who are Housing Department tenants, should have their rent payments deducted from their salaries automatically.

This is more convenient for the tenant and at the same time it ensures that none of them default or fall behind in their payments.



I am pleased to say that 65% of rent is now collected via such secure methods like standing orders and deductions at source etc.

Despite having all these facilities available to them, there are still, regrettably, a minority of tenants who can pay and but who do not want to pay.

This category of tenants have no social or economic hardship.

They do not qualify for rent relief and yet they continue to default.

In such cases, the Housing Department has no other option but to commence legal action, or use any other legal means to recover the unpaid debt.

Honourable Members will understand that the Housing Department have taken a very proactive approach to the question of rent payment and rent arrears.

The problem is being tackled at its roots.

This is by ensuring that tenants do not fall behind in their payments in the first place.

Having said this, I must sincerely thank the vast majority of people who do pay their rent diligently on a monthly basis.

These make up over 90% of Housing tenants.

The message to them is to continue to pay on time and to rest assured that Government will tackle those who do not pay.

Mr Speaker, on the 1st July 2020 we announced the introduction of the New Enforcement and Compliance section in the Housing Department.



This section is tasked with the Departments litigation processes, Anti-Social Behaviour, In-House Complaints procedures, Claims, Ombudsman's queries and the Recovery of Arrears among other enforceable action required in accordance with the Housing Act.

Our review of the whole of the Housing Act will go a long way in dealing with all these complex issues.

Another important part of the Housing Department is the Allocation Unit.

A total of 387 housing allocations have been made since 1st April 2019, up to the end of June 2021.

The Housing Department works closely with ERS and others in order to recover the properties of those tenants who have either passed away, been admitted to the ERS, or have chosen to move to private accommodation.

Those flats are immediately identified for applicants on the waiting list.

I remind the House that the review of all tenancies continues to be undertaken and all records are being updated in order to provide a more efficient service.

Mr Speaker, the Housing Allocation Committee continues to provide valuable advice to the Housing Authority.

This comprises two independent members, a registered Medical Practitioner, an Occupational Therapist and a social worker.

The Housing Manager continues to meet with them on a monthly basis.

Mr Speaker, on many occasions there are housing issues which cut across the work of other departments and authorities.



A considerable effort has been made to improve coordination and working practices.

All departments now have a designated contact person.

This has smoothed out the communications channels and has minimised the time taken to undertake tasks.

The Senior Management of the Housing Department are full members of the multi-agency forum.

This multi-agency forum was created precisely in order to deal with issues of the Elderly Care, Mental Health, Child Protection, Social Care and others.

The forum reflects the commitment to work together and provides a framework in which this can happen.

The main Departments that Housing has worked with are the Department of Equality, DSS, CSRO, RGP, Social Services, GHA, Prison Service, ETB, Drugs Rehabilitation Services, the Fire and Rescue Service, the Central Arrears Unit and Car Parks Ltd.

Mr Speaker, the Housing Department also works closely with the Town Planning and Building Control Department.

Housing is linked to them via the applications received through the e-planning project programme.



Mr Speaker, it is important to note that once the review of all Policies, Schemes, Agreements etc has concluded many practices will be changed in order to safeguard our tenants.

One of these will cover the strict implementation of alterations made to flats.

Although we have had a system in place, many tenants over the years have made alterations to their homes without permission.

This sometimes has had a negative impact on other tenants.

Appropriate paperwork such as plans/drawings/photos and specifications will now have to be submitted to and then approved by the Land Works Panel.

If approved by the Land Works Panel, tenants are also required to obtain planning permission from DPC prior to undertaking works.

Mr Speaker, the Covid19 pandemic has led to the digitalisation of all Housing application forms.

This has enabled our tenants and applicants generally to complete, attach documents and send these to the Housing Department electronically, thereby avoiding foot traffic at our counter.

This has been achieved by working closely with the digitalisation team in order to have all application forms available online.

The Housing Department will continue to pursue this and enhance its facilities further with the introduction of its own website in order to be able to offer current up to date information and services.



Mr Speaker, as the Minister for Housing I like to remain in close contact with our tenants.

I have been able to do via the relevant Tenants Associations.

I have already met up with most if not all of the constituted associations.

I have also taken time to walk about the estates with members of the Tenants Associations who have highlighted the issues that concern them.

The message to them is that we will work in partnership and cooperation in order to resolve any issues that they may have.

Matters like Maintenance, Anti-social Behaviour, Parking and General concerns have already been discussed.

The feedback received from the Tenants Associations is generally positive.

In this context I would encourage those Tenants residing in Housing Estates to establish a Committee which aims to benefit and enhance the living environment of the Estate in collaboration with Housing Departments officials.

This will provide them with a collective forum to discuss matters relating to their estates.

The rapport that the Department as well as the HWA have now established with tenants via their association is a positive two-way process which benefits everyone.

The Government remains committed to tackle anti-social behaviour.



The Housing Department have signed an MOU with the RGP which will allow us to work together to stamp it out.

We will not allow a few troublemakers to make a misery of the lives of the majority of law-abiding citizens.

I am therefore pleased that the RGP has initiated Neighbourhood Policing in close consultation with the Housing Authorities.

I am also happy to say that I have met with the NGO Action for Housing seven times since Oct 2019 despite the pandemic and that my officials have met them seventeen times in the same period.

This makes a total of 24 meetings in the space of 19 months.

In relation to the review of the Housing Act, we have had both written representations and meetings with representatives of tenants and landlords.

Their views are been taken into consideration in our review of the Act.

Mr Speaker, the Housing Works Agency is a key component in all this.

HWA personnel provided assistance at the pensioner blocks during the lockdown and the height of the pandemic, as follows:

- o Staff were stationed by the entrance to the pensioner blocks to facilitate the delivery of food, medicines, etc; to the tenants;
- o Staff implemented all procedures as instructed by the Civil Contingency Department;
- o Staff delivered the Gibraltar Chronicle and Panorama on a daily basis;
- o Staff disposed of household rubbish on a daily basis;



o Staff assisted in distributing and collecting all medical forms as required and liaising with the GPS as necessary.

HWA staff tailor-made a significant number of bed dividers for the Nightingale wing.

They also assisted in laying flooring and performed other ancillary works.

I wish to place on record my gratitude and that of the Government for all this.

The staff of the HWA undertook their duties with a sense of responsibility and an awareness of the situation that deserves praise.

Many thanks to them all.

In addition to the above, HWA staff have been instrumental in coordinating and/or actioning over 15,000 Works Orders.

This included 221 Occupational Therapy Works carried out at a cost of £321,000.

There were 107 flat refurbishments at cost of £1.45M.

And 1772 emergency works at a cost of £236,000, together with many other reactive works.

Mr Speaker, the general public and more specifically certain housing tenants need to understand that what is on offer is Government Housing and not Social Housing

The vast majority of tenants are not social cases.

In fact, there are some tenants who can easily afford to buy a flat in one of our affordable housing projects.

There are some tenants who can afford to drive luxury, flashy cars and go on an annual cruise.



Yet they can be, at the same time, the most demanding of tenants.

This narrow category of tenant wants everything done for them and complain about everything all the time, including about the small 3% rent increase.

They make up some of the cases with rent-arrears.

Even though they are people who can afford to pay.

That is why the Housing Act is being reviewed.

We intend to take legal action to get them to pay.

There are obviously others who are suffering genuine hardship.

The genuine cases will continue to be helped as much as possible.

Mr Speaker, the House knows that Government rents are, and have always been, well below market price.

Government rental accommodation is therefore heavily subsidised by the tax-payer.

Let me illustrate the point.

In monetary terms, the provision of rental Housing costs in the region of £17m and the amount we collect from rent (even if we include arrears) is approx. £5m.

Therefore, the deficit is £12m per annum.



This does not include the £114m that has been spent on upgrading, beautifying and refurbishing numerous housing estates all over Gibraltar.

This programme has clearly shown our commitment towards our tenants and our people.

The taxpayer has the right to ask certain people that they pay their rents.

The taxpayer also has the right to ask tenants for help in looking after the area that they live in.

Mr Speaker, I move on now from Housing to Employment.

Despite the fact that I have only been Minister for Employment for a few months, I have been able to appreciate the work that has been carried out during very challenging times.

The Department of Employment have not only had to adapt to Covid19 but also to Brexit which has added enormous pressure on them.

It is therefore a credit to all the officers of this Ministry together with those at the Ministry for Digital & Financial Services to have developed the new fully digitised interactive Government e-services for its Business users.

They have been able to change practices and to respond to the demands of Brexit negotiations and related contingency preparations, in the area of employment and more specifically workers' rights.

Simultaneously the Department has been maintaining its full offering to the general public and business alike, by adapting ways of engagement where necessary and running multiple systems in parallel with the testing of new digital systems.



I am very pleased to say that currently all these new systems are already being rolled out publicly to local employers.

During the pandemic the Employment Department has been a fundamental entity in ensuring that the BEAT support measures were administered correctly and thereby a deliverable reality as well as a total success.

The Employment Department has been instrumental in managing the thousands of applications and direct enquiries in our Government's monumental effort to support local businesses and their workforce during these unprecedented and difficult times.

The Department of Employment, has waived fees as a way of providing additional support to local employers who have been impacted by the COVID19 pandemic.

The Government's BEAT measures have shown to have reduced the number of possible redundancies, maintained static the levels of unemployment and thereby protected much of our economy that could have otherwise suffered directly as a result of the pandemic.

Now, as we hopefully continue to move through the unlocking and to the other side of the pandemic we see, even in these most difficult times, that unemployment although unavoidably affected, has remained stable and Gibraltar continues to boast low unemployment levels.

Mr Speaker, I will now go over the data.

As at October 2020, the total number of employee jobs in Gibraltar has decreased, by 1,087 a small 3.6%, drop from 30,603 in 2019 to 29,516 in 2020.

Average gross earnings is £32,625.26, another record high, with an increase of 2.7%.



The Private sector has recorded a decrease in jobs of 1,214, from 24,001 to 22,787 in October 2020.

The public sector and the MOD have seen an increase of 1.9% and 2.1% respectively to 6,232 and 497 when compared to October 2019.

The model of success in stabilising the number of persons unemployed year on year reflects the excellent work undertaken by the Service.

This has been developed and established by long-term close working relationships with our local employers and business community, understanding their needs as well as understanding the specific individual needs of those persons registered who are either unemployed or looking for alternative employment.

With this, the Employment Service despite ongoing pressures continues to see our dedicated Employment teams working tirelessly to provide the best possible support and advice to service users.

Mr Speaker, under this Government despite external events, and due to all our efforts, we continue to see record low unemployment.

In 2020, with Brexit looming over us and a year of pandemic the yearly average was a record low of 21.

So, our current unemployment level is 0.07%.

This is a 95% reduction in unemployment since 2011.



In the last quarter of 2020 as we battled to support the return to normal business operations, we again achieved a low figure.

The last quarter average of unemployment at 23, is the lowest level ever recorded in unemployment history since records began.

In 2021, we have continued to maintain low unemployment levels with the 2021 second quarter average of unemployment again at 23.

Mr Speaker,

This, now more than ever is proof, that this Government's system works, and it continues to work well, even under the testing times that we are living in.

The Labour Inspectorate's strategy and programme of inspections across the various industries, although delayed during the worst impact of the pandemic, now continues to operate diligently and effectively.

This Government reiterates its commitment to the eradication of illegal labour by ensuring that all businesses are compliant within the Employment Regulations.

The Labour Inspectorate remains, as always, available to provide information, guidance and advice to both employers and employees.

In the same way the Health and Safety Inspectorate continues to provide excellent levels of service.



They continue to deal with all matters especially issues related to contractors and developers.

The Health & Safety Inspectorate also remains available to anyone that requires best practice guidance and advice in respect of Health and Safety issues at work.

Gibraltar is pleased not to have seen a fatality at work for over 10 years now.

Mr Speaker, finally, the Department of Employment despite all these challenges, continues to advance towards meeting the Government's commitment on e-services and being the first department to be fully interactive digitally.

Mr Speaker, I move on now to the Youth Service.

As Minister for Youth I am happy to say that the Youth Service opened its doors as soon as the civil contingency rules allowed.

It has created and developed programmes that have reached more young people than ever before.

In these difficult times where many young people have suffered lockdown and have been confined to their homes the Youth Service within the limits of the Covid19 protocols has become a vital part for relieving the stress and anxieties created by the pandemic.

The Youth Service deal with young people from the ages of 12 to 25.

The programmes that they develop have concentrated on increasing their social networks through activities such as baking, going to local restaurants, team building games and group discussions that develop their understanding on different types of friendships/relationships and boundaries.



They have further been able to develop their life skills in areas such as social etiquette, managing money, arranging their own outings as well as attending GYS sessions and events.

Obviously, some of these programmes have been interrupted by the pandemic but as soon as it has been possible they have restarted.

The Youth Service was able to run some programmes during July and August 2019 when schools were closed.

They have also put together a choir called Joyful Riots and they have been invited to perform for local charities which have included the Happiness Foundation at The Convent and for Gibsams at the Sunborn.

This same group have created an Urban Garden using recyclable materials in the youth centre patio, showing their commitment to the environment.

The Youth Production Team, in March of 2020, were able to go to a residential in Seville in order to work at exploring cultural differences through photography.

The Youth Service were involved with the Island Games event by having a youth café open every evening welcoming visitors from across the Islands.

Mr Speaker, other programmes have concentrated on highlighting career paths that may be available to them.

This has been achieved by reaching out to government departments and local businesses in order to facilitate insight experiences for young people on what it might be like to work in these different areas.



A total of six insight visits to various establishments have taken place including the Royal Gibraltar Police, Classic Cuts, the Fire Brigade, and Nursing.

All these programmes have been delivered at the Laguna, Dolphin, and Plater Youth Clubs.

Each Club have offered programmes that have involved travelling to different places.

The Dolphin Youth Club have been able to travel to Krakow Poland where they visited Birkenau and Auschwitz concentration camps and the famous salt mines; as well as other historical sites.

Young people from the Laguna Youth Club enjoyed day trips to Costa Jump, Aventura Amazonia high ropes course, Wakana Lakes outdoors education centre, a trip to Puerto Santa Maria, a visit to the World War II Command Centre and a visit to the cinema.

At the Plater Youth Club, a unique opportunity to visit London was planned and delivered during this period involving several of Plater's older members who have shown commitment and positive participation over a long period of time.

At Plater, the focus has been in catering for the young people's personal and social development.

All the Clubs have enjoyed organising and having Summer BBQ and Xmas Parties and other outings.

These events have been a great form of release for our young people in troubled times.

The Gibraltar Youth Service continues to form part and contribute to various multi-agency fora.

These include the Child Protection committee, sub-training committee, Drugs Advisory Council, Youth Advisory Council and the CHAMPS (Children Healthy and Active Multi-Agency ProgrammeS) initiative.



Mr Speaker, I want to thank the Youth and Community Workers for their continuing positive engagement with young people at a time when the world is encountering very challenging issues.

I have also been able to meet up regularly with the Voice of Young People.

This is a group of youngsters who bring to my attention any issues that concern them. I am pleased to say that we have managed to discuss and resolve many of those issues.

Some of the time they simply want to be directed to the right person or place.

One of the highlights of the Youth Service is Youth Day.

This is done in conjunction with GCS.

This year a youth day committee was formed comprising of young people representing various youth organisations.

The committee had the opportunity to debate and decide on all matters concerning Youth Day (their responsibilities for delivering Youth Day ranged from choosing date and venue, email administration, promotion of event as well as manning the event).

I will now turn to my responsibility as Minister for Leisure.

The Kings Bastion Leisure Centre has never looked back since our government implemented a series of reforms after we won the 2011 general election.

From an expenditure of £2.6m per annum and revenue of a mere £50,000 it now has an expenditure of £1.6m and a revenue of nearly £800,000 in 2018.

Unfortunately, since 2019 due to the pandemic, revenue has obviously decreased



Last year, due to the Covid19 pandemic, the Leisure Centre had to close down from the 15th March to the 30th June 2020 and from the 23rd December 2020 to the end of January 2021.

Even when the facilities resumed operation after the initial lockdown, attendance was considerably down due to the various restrictions that were in place to control the spread of infection and obviously people were also very reluctant to go there.

It was during the March 2020 closure that the issues with the Ice-Skating Rink come to light.

One of the determining issues was that the cooling system was running on an old gas system that was out of date.

We had to decide whether it was worth procuring a new system.

This would have cost the centre approximately £500,000.

The fact was that Ice Rink cost only on electricity nearly £10,000 per month.

There were only about 20 members of GISA using the rink and only a few from the general public.

And to boot there were constant leaks since the Ice Rink should never have been built on a second floor.

The leaking water was also damaging the brand-new Bowling Alley below that we had bought for the Island Games.

So, although it was a hard decision, we decided in September 2020 to decommission the Ice Rink.



So, during lockdown LMS started to work on their next big project, which was the conversion of the Ice Rink into a Boulder Park.

I am pleased to say that the Boulder Park is now up and running.

We are already saving £10,000 on the electricity, saved ourselves the cost of £500,000 on the new cooling system and we no longer have any more problems with the leaking ceiling.

The materials for the construction of the Boulder Park cost about £120,000, which was paid for using part of the Capital Expenditure Allowance that LMS had left over from previous year's savings.

We expect that this new first-class facility will prove very popular with the local community and will encourage adventure sport seekers to take up this challenging activity.

The rest of the Capital Expenditure Allowance was used to purchase two new pinball machines for the Amusement Arcade.

In addition to the facilities that LMS operate, i.e. King's Bowl, the Fitness Gym and the Amusement Arcade, in 2020 they added The Cannonball Store.

This was due to open in April but was delayed and it eventually opened on the 1st July 2020.

The net income for the first six months was over £10,000 but they expect this to be much higher in 2021, as they have extended the range of stock and their customer base keeps on growing.

All in all, I am convinced that KBLC will continue to improve.

Despite the fact that revenue has decreased during the pandemic, it is still a far cry from what we inherited in 2011.



On a final note, I would like to mention that during the lockdown, members of LMS staff assisted at the Nightingale Hospital, at the Call Centre and helped with the distribution of groceries to the homes of the elderly.

All staff costs associated with this were paid by LMS who also covered the full salary costs of all its staff members during the closure via the set annual service fee.

Mr Speaker,

I will now continue with my next area of responsibility as Minister for Sport.

Whilst it has become a distant memory we must not forget that because of the extended nature of the extraordinary financial year that was 2019-2021 we cannot reflect on all that was done from a sporting perspective without starting with Gibraltar's biggest sporting event ever.

The 2019 Island Games were an unbridled success that saw 23 member Islands descending on Gibraltar.

The week of the 6th to the 12th July, 2019 lay witness to a fantastic sporting festival which had 1624 athletes and 944 officials participating.

In addition, 151 media representatives most of whom travelled from the participating Islands gave the Games and Gibraltar fantastic international exposure.

We cannot forget the team of 574 volunteers, without them the Games would have simply not happened.

The Games were held within budget and also registered direct revenues of £712,000.

However, the wider economic impact of the Games was very noticeable as our restaurants, bars, shops and tourist sites were enjoyed by all those who attended as well as their families.



This gave rise to an increase in economic activity during the week of the competition and beyond.

The Sunshine Games of 1995 were always revered by member islands as one of the best.

The 2019 Organising Committee, led by Linda Alvarez who I must once again thank publicly, rose to the challenge and put together another wonderful sporting experience.

The Island Games have developed both in size and in the quality of competition, venues etc.

These improvements bring challenges, particularly in smaller members like ourselves, but the smooth and seamless running of the events are a testament to the months and years of hard work and planning.

This work provided a week that will live long in the memory of those who were involved, participated or simply enjoyed the sporting action as spectators.

Finally, Mr Speaker legacy is a term banded about all too often without substance but the Games have left a tangible and lasting legacy in terms of infrastructure.

We will soon have a full 52m pool for our local swimmers and water-polo players, a full 400m running track, and an Astro-turf football pitch in Lathbury.

The Games have left us a World Class shooting range at the North Mole and the target shooting range at Europa Advance Road.

A Special Olympics Complex is also in place for use by our Special Olympians and others in our community.



At Europa Point, we can already see the benefits of the Rugby Pitch, the use of the First-Class Squash Courts and soon the use of the Cricket Pitch.

The pitch was also used for one of the biggest ever Multi-music and cultural festival.

The GMF, Monkey Rocks and the Bocelli Concert all took place at this new venue.

The Multi-Purpose Hall, already its short time in existence, has been used by Badminton in the Island Games and as our last GMF's Second Stage.

It was also a venue for the World Junior Darts competition.

It became the Nightingale Hospital during the lockdown.

And it was the scene for the World title fight between Dillon Whyte and Povetkin.

Last but not least, it was the venue for the elevation of Mark Miles as Papal Nuncio and Archbishop.

Mr Speaker, nobody can argue that this is not a Multi-Purpose Hall!

Furthermore, the Games have also left a legacy in sporting equipment and in sporting development.

Even though halted temporarily because of the pandemic, we will soon start reaping the rewards.

The Islands Games was however not the only event hosted during the past financial year.

Covid19 ensured that, for obvious reasons, the period post March 2020 was very quiet or practically stagnant in terms of International hosting.

However, prior to this Gibraltar continued to host world-class events.



These included but are not limited to:

International Gibraltar Chess Open

Junior Chess Open

European Backgammon Championships

International Squash Open

Gibraltar Darts Trophy

World Pool Masters

World Snooker Masters

Euro Hockey Nations Championships (Men's) III

Junior Darts Co-operation World Championships

Rock Masters Ten Pin Bowling

Several UEFA Champions League and Europa League qualifiers

All the above were held under the banner of Event Led Tourism and brought many visitors to Gibraltar.

Our International reputation has grown and we are now considered an extremely popular choice for International federations.

The importance of this cannot be under estimated more so in the current climate.

Local associations also continued to participate in International competitions representing Gibraltar proudly and admirably.

Sports Development projects, including coach training and mentoring, also took place with the Gibraltar Sports Advisory Council considering applications from all of the local registered governing bodies of sport.

In summary the levels of financial support for Sports Grant has been a total of £610,113.43



Locally, competitions and development programmes were held as usual with one main difference being the addition of new sporting venues including the fantastic sporting facilities at both secondary schools.

The use of these went a long way to addressing many of the shortages in terms of indoor facilities and will no doubt prove crucial in a post Covid19 environment by providing the sporting fraternity with the tools to continue developing.

The GSLA will continue to administer the use of these and provide a community use programme to all registered governing bodies who required use of those facilities.

As if summer 2019 had not been busy enough the GSLA also run its now established Summer Sports and Stay and Play programmes.

The Summer Sports programme celebrated its 20th anniversary and a celebratory evening was held to mark the occasion.

It was great to see past leaders and many who have contributed to the success of the programme reminiscing about what has been a great 20 years from very humble beginnings.

The Summer Sports Programme once again reported an extremely high attendance rate with 318 children registering on the programme.

This figure only accounts for those attending activities at the Bayside Sports Centre and organised directly by the GSLA, 846 other children attended the numerous sessions and satellite activities held around Gibraltar but still an integral part of the programme.

Unfortunately, as with many activities the sports programme fell foul to Covid19 and was not held in 2020.



It was however felt that the Stay and Play programme had to continue given its importance to the service users.

The 2019 Stay and Play programme for children with disabilities was also a great success and catered for 31 children who enjoyed a summer full of both fun and educational activities.

2020 did however prove to be a pivotal time for the Stay and Play programme.

Covid19, whilst tragic in many respects, has made many reinvent themselves in relation to how services are delivered with the restrictions and challenges that we faced.

The team at the GSLA Sports Development Unit restructured the programme creating bubbles and working in different sites in order to be able to address Covid19 concerns.

What they found was that those who attended (26 children) found the programme even more welcoming and the creation of smaller groups allowed for more meaningful interaction between leaders and children.

Such was the success of the new set up that it will now become the modus operandi moving forward.

Mr Speaker, Sports unfortunately were not immune from the impact of Covid19 and sporting venues were one of the first to shut down and close their doors in March, 2019.

Whilst, the negative effects of inactivity are well documented they become magnified in a community like ours which has the highest participation rates per capita that I have ever seen.

In fact, I challenge anyone to provide evidence that there is a more active country than Gibraltar.



The enforced hiatus affected many sports but I must congratulate and thank all our local entities who worked very closely with the GSLA to ensure that the return of sports was done in a safe and logical manner as part of the Unlock the Rock Roadmap.

This happened the first time around and then after the second lockdown at the turn of the year.

Many had to re-invent themselves and look at alternative ways in which they could continue to provide their members and in particular the junior elements of the associations with activities within the restrictions.

Many have thankfully been able to complete their domestic seasons with some of them preparing for upcoming international events.

It is once again fantastic to feel the buzz return to all our sporting facilities.

Mr Speaker, I would like to end my contribution on sports by thanking to all the staff at the Gibraltar Sports and Leisure Authority.

As one of the first departments to feel the full impact of the Covid19 closures staff from the GSLA were immediately deployed to assist the community's wider efforts.

Some were stationed at the Primary Care Clinic others at the Contact Tracing and the 111 call centres respectively.

The role of the GSLA also included the manning of the Golden Hour venues as well as delivering food and other essential items to the vulnerable in our community including those living in HMGOG elderly residences.

Those few left behind faced the daunting task of having to assist with the setting up of the temporary morgue inside the newly converted Multi Use Games Area.



The covering of the area which has effectively become another sports hall cost £528,116.64 but no one could have imagined that its first use would be to house refrigerated trailers and a second CT scanner for digital autopsies.

Notwithstanding all that they were asked to do, the staff at the GSLA undertook their new duties with a responsibility and an awareness of the situation that deserves praise.

The really humbling thing to consider is that, when they were asked to do it all again in early 2020, their approach was just as positive.

As with many others in the community Gibraltar owes them a debt of gratitude.

Mr Speaker,

During the past 10 years in Government I have been responsible for 15 different portfolios.

I can safely say that I would not have been able to do any of them without the support and professionalism of those in my Ministry who have followed me wherever I have been assigned to, past and present.

For this I am eternally grateful.

They steer me on the day to day running of all my responsibilities.

They have helped by getting involved in all of the portfolios I have been given.

Without them I would not have been able to implement all the positive policies and manifesto commitments which I am involved in.

They are definitely my right hand who have and are steer me and help me to deliver.

Mr Speaker,

Last but not least I would like thanks to you and your staff at Parliament.

Thank you all.