



PRESS RELEASE

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Statement by the Chief Minister on the Second Anniversary of this GSLP/Liberal Administration

Milestone Achievements for Government as Parliamentary Term Reaches Mid-Way Point

It is exactly two years since this GSLP/Liberal Government embarked on the first day of its second term of office and began to implement its 'Strongest Foundations' manifesto for government. Despite the immense challenges that have arisen since November 2015, much has been achieved by a Ministerial team that I am lucky and proud to work with. Nevertheless, there is still a lot of work to be done over the next two years, during which a number of hugely ambitious and revolutionary projects will come to fruition.

Naturally, much of my Government's attention over the last two years has been focused on preparations for Gibraltar's unexpected exit from the EU. The Deputy Chief Minister and I have had countless meetings with Ministers and officials from the Department for Exiting the EU and with other stakeholders in Brussels and London. These meetings will pave the way for Gibraltar's successful future outside the European Union.

However, this planning for the future has not prevented our administration from marking milestone events in Gibraltar's history. Driven largely by the Deputy Chief Minister, both the Evacuation during WW2 and the Referendum of 1967 were appropriately marked by first-of-a-kind concerts, exhibitions and other civic events.

Understandably, the Government has spent a large proportion of its time and energy on safeguarding our economic security in order to ensure that the record growth we have worked hard to achieve over the past six years continues well into the future. This growth has averaged a staggering 9% per year. I have been able to announce record-breaking Budget surpluses providing ample evidence that the Government's prudent management of the public finances works in the long-term interests of all taxpayers. The private sector has also responded positively and the huge success of the World Trade Centre is just one of the many examples of private sector projects, both big and small, that together represent hundreds of millions of pounds of inward investment in Gibraltar's economy and a huge show of confidence that the private sector holds in our future.

The current programme for government is providing opportunity for those who work hard to contribute to society and to take care of those who need a little extra help. This can be no more evident than in the Government's employment policy, the successful implementation of which has



led to consistently low levels of unemployment over the past two years. Indeed, on Gibraltar Day in London, I was proud to announce to a stunned audience that unemployment in Gibraltar stands at just 85 individuals! Your GSLP/Liberal Government is one that values people, not statistics, and one that continues to provide support to unemployed individuals to help them to find meaningful employment.

At the same time, it is any government's duty to make sure that whilst those who need extra support are cared for, those who could contribute and pay their fair way but choose not to are not allowed to get away with it. In this respect, the Government's rental arrears collection strategy has reversed the trend of debt owed to the taxpayer. Indeed, over £1 million of rent arrears has already been repaid, and a long-standing problem of the past is now firmly under control. This has enabled spending in other crucial areas, including the long-awaited refurbishment of Government housing estates. The installation of lifts and other internal renovation works continue and have improved the standards of living for many families. Additionally, the beautification of the external facades ensures that Gibraltar looks like the modern, cosmopolitan hub that it is, whilst maintaining the highest standards in health and safety and fireproofing.

This Government has a proven commitment to providing the best possible opportunities and support for all of Gibraltar's citizens. In this respect, my Government was proud to open the much-needed Dementia Residential Facility at Hillside and the Bella Vista Dementia Day Care Facility. The successful fruition of these breakthrough projects has revolutionised the way that Gibraltar cares for and treats Dementia patients and also offers support to their families and friends. The opening of these facilities has also had a significant and direct impact on bed availability at St Bernard's Hospital. Coupled with the extremely effective Day Surgery unit, these cutting-edge, modern and forward-looking facilities ensure that nobody is in hospital for longer than they need to be and simultaneously allows for the reallocation of resources, doctors and nurses to those who do require hospital treatment.

Alongside these physical changes to Gibraltar's landscape, significant legislative changes have also been implemented. The Civil Marriage Amendment Act 2016 ensures that the right to marry, which is afforded to all Gibraltar citizens in Section 15 of the Gibraltar Constitution, is properly enshrined in and protected by the law. Passed unanimously by Parliament, the Act was a landmark day for this community, and guarantees that sexual orientation will never again be a barrier to exercising the right to a civil marriage. This Government's record on Equality is proven, and the important work towards a fair and inclusive society will continue throughout the second half of this term of office. The Government looks forward to building upon its work with non-governmental organisations and civil society in order to achieve this. Already, a number of programmes including free inclusivity courses for businesses, Autism awareness seminars and sensory cinema screenings have had a remarkable impact on the inclusivity and accessibility of public life.

Fairness, inclusivity, care, opportunity, transparency, investment in people: these are the principles the Government has adhered to over the past two years, and which will inform the next two years of the term of this administration. Indeed, there is a great deal of work still to be done: a number of ambitious projects that have recently been announced will have changed Gibraltar for the better by the end of this Parliament. Not in the least, the new affordable housing estates will offer many Gibraltarian families a home for life, whilst a revolution in our schools will give our children the very best possible start in life. In a similar vein, the creative and holistic approach that the Government



is taking towards the Island Games will leave a lasting legacy of state-of-the-art sporting facilities that will generate opportunities for our athletes for decades. Of course, all this development requires modern infrastructure to support it, and this is why the Government is proud that both the runway tunnel and LNG power station are soon to be completed. Both will have a significant positive impact on daily life and public health in Gibraltar.

Our most important asset is our young people. That is why it is right we should also invest in the building of eight new schools. This is long overdue and exceeds the commitment contained in our manifesto of two years ago. We realised we could do more, and in this important area, we must.

In respect of our work for our young and not so young, I will also now be able to take on responsibility for the control of drugs, as I said I would during the last election campaign. The difficulties which Brexit presented prevented me from doing so until now and I had to indicate that I would not immediately be able to do that work. I want to thank Samantha Sacramento for having continued her committed and sterling work in respect of this portfolio until now.

The whole of the Ministerial team is delighted to be delivering these bold visions for the future which will be brought to fruition within the next two years. Over the past two years Gibraltar has met its challenges with an outstanding economic performance, which has generated the resilience that in turn has allowed the implementation of ambitious policies that have changed both our physical landscape and our community for the better. That is what you elected us to do. That is what we will deliver.