



PRESS RELEASE

Date: 10th January 2022

EMBARGOED UNTIL 8:30PM ON MONDAY 10TH JANUARY 2022

CHIEF MINISTER'S NEW YEAR MESSAGE 2022

Good evening.

Tonight, as we all start the first full week of work after Christmas and New Year, I want to wish everyone in Gibraltar a healthy and happy 2022.

The start of a New Year is always a time of hope and expectation.

We have left behind us an awful year of pandemic deaths.

One hundred of our compatriots lost to COVID.

Ninety three in 2021.

I once again extend my most sincere condolences to all those who have lost a friend or a relative to COVID.

We can now look back on 2021 and see we have come through an astonishingly difficult year.

And we all jointly hope or pray that a better and brighter 2022 lies ahead of us.

But let us be clear:

It is up to us and our collective effort to make a success of 2022.

Let us be clear also that our fortunes are in our own hands as a people.

Subject to the challenges of medicine and nature, we will be the ones that will shape the year to come;



And the consequences of our choices in 2022 will endure to the benefit or detriment of generations of our children to come.

I know one thing for sure:

Gibraltarians do not give up when the going gets tough.

When the going gets tough, Gibraltarians unite and get going.

And that is what we need to do now.

From these many challenges, we can deliver many successes.

But only if we stick together.

Only if we put our collective interests above our personal self-interests.

Only, if we plan for a better future for our children and not for a short-term gain for ourselves.

And that is what we must do as responsible members of this community today.

Rest assured that from 6 Convent Place, I remain deeply optimistic and positive about the prospects for Gibraltar.

I know we have now been your government for ten years

And I know we have not got everything right.

I know we have not yet done many things you wish we could have done

But when it has come to the toughest ever issues, all of the government team has been strong and effective

And whether it has been popular or not, we have done the right thing.

That is what you have elected us to do.

You have elected us to look after our common interests as a people and seek our mutual benefit as citizens.

We have acted to favour the interests of our nation as a whole – whatever the personal and party political cost to us.

You would expect nothing less from the members of the government that I lead.

And you will get nothing less from us than total commitment to the best interests of Gibraltar.



Because we put Gibraltar first always.

THE UNIONS

Today, a demonstration on health care issues has been cancelled by Unite.

I welcome the responsible and sensible approach to delay that demonstration on public health advice.

Because as a democrat, I fully support and endorse the right of people to demonstrate.

Deciding to postpone the demonstration in question due to the prevalence of COVID has been a mature decision.

But I acknowledge the fact that there are issues to be dealt with in our health services.

I also acknowledge the call from union leaders across the board seeking to engage with the Government on public sector issues.

I look forward to that engagement.

It is an engagement that must be tempered by objective reality.

The objective reality of the deficit in our public finances.

Our estimate is that by the end of 2021 the COVID fund spending may have reached about £300m.

That amounts to almost half a year of our revenue having to be spent just on the pandemic.

That is more than we expected and is a fact we have to contend with, just like every other nation on the planet.

The objective reality we are facing also includes increasing inflation which is running at over 4%.

And the objective reality also includes our investment already in more civil and public servants in the past ten years and improving their conditions.

THE NUMBERS IN EDUCATION, PUBLIC SECTOR & HEALTH

I recognize, of course, that in life, perhaps we might all, always want more.

But we must realise how lucky we are already, given the prevailing economic circumstances in the world, to have the Gibraltar that we have.

In respect of the topical issues of health, education and the public sector generally, let me give you some very basic data, more of which I will share with union colleagues in the weeks to come.



THE PUBLIC SECTOR

The public sector as a whole has grown in size and cost in the last ten years since we have been in Government.

I want to renew again my sincere thanks to all public sector workers for the work they did during the pandemic.

They really responded when Gibraltar needed them.

Based on the authoritative data of the Employment Survey of October 2011 and October 2020 the public sector grew from 4,824 employees to 6,480 employees.

The cost of the public sector increased from just over £163m to just shy of £280m.

That is an increase of over £115m.

And salaries in the Civil Service are now well above parity with the United Kingdom, on average by around 40%.

HEALTH

In the Health sector let me reiterate that we must thank each and every one of the workers in our health sector for the work they did and are doing during this pandemic.

And let us be clear that we have invested huge additional amounts in our health services in the last ten years.

And we have employed many more people in the GHA in our time in office so far.

When we were elected the Health Budget was £78m.

This year, it was forecast to reach £140m.

In 2011 there were 808 Full Time posts and 123 Part Time posts in the GHA.

We have increased that by three hundred full timers to 1,103 and by 35 part timers to 158.

We have recruited 17 additional consultants, 12 more doctors, doubled the number of speech therapists and added 31 staff nurses, 20 more enrolled nurses and 33 more nursing assistants.

And that is just an overview of the increases we have delivered.

I fully understand that there are issues still to resolve in our Health Service.

But there is no lack of investment in our health services and there is no lack of recruitment.



And I can also understand that morale may be low in the health service.

Because we are in the midst of a pandemic that is causing huge stress to all our health professionals.

A pandemic that has reduced the services we can offer and increased waiting lists.
Not just in Gibraltar, but around the world.

But it cannot be said as a fact that we are failing to employ more nurses, doctors or consultants.

This year we will continue to provide the funding necessary for our health services to continue to deal with the pandemic.

Now it is time to see the health service be run totally independently as we restart and recover the GHA from the ravages of the COVID pandemic.

As from today, the Gibraltar Health Authority is run by a new Director General.

The Minister for Health and the Ministry for Health are now based outside of St Bernard's Hospital, setting policy but with no executive involvement in the day to day.

All industrial relations aspects will be dealt with by the GHA management led by the Director General.

I sincerely believe that this will enable us to resolve many of the outstanding issues and will make resolution of the industrial relations aspects of the health services, smoother and easier.

EDUCATION

In education, I also want to highlight that there were 297 full time teachers in 2011 when we were elected.

There are 370 this financial year.

That means that we have hugely increased the teaching professionals employed in the past ten years.

We have added 73 new teachers already.

Those are the facts.

I thank all our teachers for how they kept education going these past two years.

Faced with innumerable difficulties arising from COVID, they have kept going.

The Education budget has more than doubled under the Government I lead.

The Budget was £22m in 2011 when we were elected.



It has trebled to almost £60m in this financial year.

Those are the facts.

Increased spending to be proud of.

Spending on scholarships and new teachers and much better pay and terms and conditions for teachers already.

And with three more new schools already in the pipeline.

So I look forward to having an in-depth discussion with union leaders.

Always looking to work together in the best interests of the whole of our community and the private sector and citizens that we are, respectively, elected and employed to serve.

BREXIT - TREATY

In providing that service, dealing with the challenge of COVID has taken literally thousands of hours and hundreds of meetings.

The same is true of Brexit.

This year we hope we will bid goodbye to both these issues.

You, the public, know that neither Brexit nor COVID are convenient political excuses for anything.

They are cutting political realities we did not bring upon ourselves.

But they are cutting political realities that we have had to deal with, to the obvious detriment of other policy areas.

These are the inescapable realities of the situation we have found ourselves in since the 24th June 2016.

And it is fundamental that we get our future relationship with the EU right.

That is why this process is absorbing so much of our time.

Let me be categorical on the Treaty negotiations.

We are and always will be British and we left the EU with the UK.

But we are also on the edge of Europe and a part of the European continent.

Our current commercial reality, our tourist industry, as well as our jurisdictional offering is based on a fluid frontier with the EU.



But always offering a British marketplace, a British experience and an exclusively British jurisdiction.

Our current business model and our interaction with Europe depend on a fluid frontier that is administratively easy to traverse.

In a way that delivers greater opportunities for our children in both Britain and Europe, not less.

In a way that reflects the reality of our geographic, economic and political circumstances.

And certainly not in a way that is a hostage to the rose tinted myths of nostalgia.

Instead we must reflect the reality of life in the third decade of the twenty first century.

Because our modern identity is already steered in the key determination that no one has a right to decide our future other than the Gibraltarians.

Nothing will ever change that.

So I have been as clear in public statements as I am in private negotiations throughout.

My Government sees Gibraltar's future in one way and in one way only.

As British, British, British.

And under the Government I lead, we are closer to Britain than we have been for generations.

So don't for one moment believe we would do anything to change that.

In fact, it was almost exactly a year ago that we received the greatest dividend in our relationship with Britain.

We received the first of many deliveries of precious Pfizer vaccine via the Royal Air Force.

For now, just the fact that the negotiations between the UK and the EU continue is already a very positive sign of the prospects for our reaching an agreement.

We are working together with UK colleagues to reach an agreement that respects our red lines on our exclusively British sovereignty, jurisdiction and control.

The deal, if we make one, will not compromise our sovereignty, or we will not do it.

It will be a deal on movement and fluidity of goods and people.

And a deal that can be the foundation of a new and improved level of prosperity for every family in Gibraltar.



Because the concept of 'shared prosperity' passes through the litmus test of maintained and enhanced prosperity for our businesses and our people as a sine qua non.

And our objective is to achieve a continually more prosperous Gibraltar.

Freely trading and interacting with its neighbours.

Enjoying historically high standards of living, education and healthcare for our people in an indisputably British Gibraltar.

That is what we seek to achieve.

But make no mistake about it:

It will be a legally complex deal.

It will be equally politically complex and based on the reality of the multilateral relationships that our politics depends on.

HOUSING, SCHOOLS & OTHER PROJECTS

This year we will also, finally, start the demolition works that will permit us to start construction of Chatham Views and Bob Peliza Mews.

Work on the second phase of Hassan Centenary Terraces is also commencing with the removal of rubble from the relevant part of the Eastside reclamation and the creation of Victoria Keys.

The economic activity we expect from the development of the Eastside Project will also be significant.

It will be hugely important in GDP terms for our whole business community.

In that way, the Eastside Project and the Bayside Project being undertaken by the TNG group will have a hugely positive effect on most parts of our economy as a whole.

Nothing could make me happier than to see these projects all develop at pace.

No one could have moved them faster, with the joint Brexit and COVID challenges in play.

At the same time, we are seeing three new schools already being built.

That is excellent news for the pupils of St Mary's, Bishop Fitzgerald and Governor's Meadow schools.

I hope we will soon also be able to see progress on a new College of Further Education.



At the same time, we are going to see the launch of an exciting new charity, Possabilities, that will provide services for the disabled with our support.

They will be established at the old St Martin's school and will add greatly to the services we provide some of the most vulnerable in our community.

I warmly welcome this.

And we will continue to work towards the aim of full extension to Gibraltar of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

This is work we have been undertaking since we were elected.

We will not rest until it is finalized.

Additionally, we can also look forward to the improved traffic flow we expect in the North district once the ridiculously extended works on the runway tunnel are FINALLY completed.

This could be early this year if the contractor finally delivers on its well overdue obligations.

That will come at the same time as we take steps to better regulate traffic generally, not least when it comes to electric scooters, improve cycling infrastructure further and resurfacing more of our roads.

And whilst we look at these very local projects, we must not forget that the Earth itself is under serious threat from the effects of Climate Change.

As a Government we recently published Gibraltar's Climate Change Strategy, with ambitious but achievable aims which we must all as a community work together to achieve.

It will both improve our quality of life and fulfil our own responsibilities as a nation for our emissions.

On other environmental fronts we will work on progressing our Green Gibraltar aspirations which will include more renewable energy and greenery.

And we are still actively pursuing options for the treatment of all our waste, including sewage.

Brexit weighs as heavily on these issues as it does on most others, including the issue of the equalization of pensionable ages, to which we remain entirely committed.

Although COVID at least had a more positive effect on our digitization programme.

This year, we will see more of that programme finally delivered in a way that will make it easier for you to access the services you want from Government in a seamless, digital manner.



CONCLUSION

My dear fellow Gibraltarians.

We are a community that sticks together through adversity.

The last five years have seen us face successive waves of adversity.

But we have and we will overcome all of those challenges.

Now is not a time to lose our nerve.

But is also not a time to turn on one another.

We are forged from greater steel than the self interest we are seeing from a few, seeking to instill division amongst the many.

We cannot let the few dilute the interests of the many.

Because if we stand together, I have no doubt that this year we can once again emerge successful after twelve months of hard work and determination

There is no external challenge we cannot overcome.

I know you will never give up when it comes to Gibraltar and our future generations.

United we will make a great success of this year to come.

Buckle up though.

Because it is not going to be easy.

Fasten your seat belts.

Because navigating these waters is going to be tough but worth it.

Because what is at stake is the safety and security of the future of our children.

I have to say this is probably one of the most difficult messages I have had to deliver to you.

But I will always tell you the truth - even when the truth is hard and it may not be what you want to hear.

You pay me to tell you the truth.

You pay me to do the right thing for the many not the few.



And you pay me to defend our position as a people in a way that protects our inviolable British sovereignty.

And so, after the Christmas break with my family, I am energised and ready for every challenge that 2022 will present.

And this year, like last year and every year, the protection of our homeland is what will guide every step we take and every decision I make.

So, on behalf of Justine, Sebastian, Oliver and Valentina, I wish you and your families a HEALTHY, HAPPY AND PROSPEROUS 2022.

Thank you for all your work and effort last year.

Thank you for all the work and effort in this year to come.

Thank you very much for listening.

Goodnight.

ENDS