Rivero under fire

As international interest in the UK’s MPs expenses scandal subsides, the Canarian government has its own case to deal with.

Regional president Paulino Rivero is under fire for spending around 300,000 euros on refurbishments to the presidential residence in Las Palmas, which is used only occasionally. The money has been spent during the last two years and Rivero stayed in the plush Santa Catalina Hotel in the capital while the residence was out of action, costing the taxpayer a further 11,500 euros according to figures given in a recent Parliamentary debate on the controversy.

Opposition deputies have repeatedly called for a full explanation of the expense but until now the government has insisted the details should be kept secret for, “security reasons”. PSOE deputy Juan Carlos Alemán said recently that the secrecy surrounding the project was unnecessary. “It is not as if the President has to keep the nuclear button somewhere in the house, so there is no need to hold back the details of how much it all cost” he said.

RURAL LA PALMA

Hostels promise to island hotels

The authorities in La Palma have promised to ensure that the newly-created network of hostels for walkers will not be allowed to compete with existing hotel and rural tourism accommodation on the island.

Six new hostels are due to enter operation soon after a series of delays and the news has triggered concern among the hotel trade that they might lose custom. However, the Cabildo in La Palma insists there is no reason to worry. “The hostels are very basic and are located along the main walking trails. They are to be used as one-off place to sleep for tourists walking in the hills but are not designed to offer the level of comfort found in a hotel or cottage” said a spokesman. Opposition parties say the hostels were promised almost two years ago but only two were completed on schedule.

School meals

Limited places

Parents who have been signing up their children for next year’s school term and school meals provision in public schools across the Canaries may have noticed that there have been extra forms to fill in.

For the 2009/10 year, with an expected overlap between the number of children looking for school meals and the number of canteen places actually available, the regional department of education has said that working parents will be given priority. Pilar Teresa Díaz, spokesperson for the regional department, outlined how children/places would be prioritised, with weighting given to those whose parents (or parent in the case of single parent families) work during school meal times, families who have more than one child in the same school, or those with a parent working in the same educational centre. Because the economic situation of many families has changed since their tax declaration last year – the criteria on which school meal places’ costs are normally based – the department is allowing people to change that if needs be, thus much of the extra paper work.

The number of school meal places will increase by over five thousand in September, up to 68,150, with the creation of 14 new school canteens, eight in the province of Las Palmas, six in Santa Cruz de Tenerife, and all will operate via catering companies.