

STATEMENT BY THE GSLP/LIBERAL OPPOSITION 81/2006
5 July 2006

The Opposition has been inundated with representations from concerned householders who have received a standard letter informing them that the electricity bills for February, March and April this year have still not been settled. They also refer to arrears prior to February 2006.

The letters concerned give the recipients 21 days to settle the bills in question and ensure that future bills are paid promptly when they become due. They inform consumers that the Electricity Authority has now adopted a disconnection policy in respect of current bills.

In many cases the information in the letters is incorrect. People have been told when they complained by telephone to destroy the letter. In other instances they have been told that they have arrears dating from more than six years ago where the consumers at the time who had not paid had since passed away, and the relatives, who are the current householders, are being told that they must pay the amount.

Although the letter comes from the Authority, this is the result of a policy decision adopted by the Government in 2005 who have since issued the necessary authorization for the implementation of the measure of electricity supply to consumers with three months arrears.

It will be recalled that in 2005, the Government was projecting a possible deficit for that financial year and that for the 05/06 financial year the projected surplus was about £3.7 million. Since then, as everyone knows, the Government has revised that figure upwards three times, first to £17 million, then to £ 20 million and then to £ 22 million in the space of a few days.

The introduction of the policy of declaring a blitz on the collection of arrears and the policy of electricity increases, as far as the Opposition is concerned, were decisions taken in the context of a financial picture presented at the time which was very different to that presented in this year's budget. While the Opposition accepts that it is right that people should be expected to pay their electricity bills, what it does not accept is that there can be a blanket policy introduced overnight which does not give any weight to the circumstances of individual consumers and this appears to be what is happening given the level of complaints that have been received.

ENDS