

STATEMENT BY THE GSLP/LIBERAL OPPOSITION 96/2006
10 August 2006

The Opposition is deeply saddened by the response of the Government to the comments that we made in support of the Disability Society. We stand by our view that the approach of the Government and the tone of their reply to the Disability Society lacks in compassion and humanity.

The GSD are the last people to talk about u-turns and double standards, since it is well known that they are experts in the field. They have to understand that they have been in Government for over ten years and as such they have to answer for their failures to the Opposition in the House of Assembly and to the electorate as a whole.

What is obvious from this debate is that the Government cannot take criticism. Their reaction to the slightest questioning of their policies is either to lash out at whoever is making the criticism or to deny that the problem even exists. They also have a tendency to draw on historical red herrings which have no relevance whatsoever to the position as it stands today.

If they have identified there is a need now for 700 hours of respite care, for example, then it is their duty to ensure that the service is available. It is totally irrelevant whether or not this level of respite existed or was identified as a need in previous years either before 1996 or after.

The Government have on many occasions described the provision of Social Services as being demand-led. It is obvious that the demand that exists now is greater than that which existed previously because both the service users and the relatives who look after them are now ten years older and as they get older they need more help. The Government have to ensure that services are there as and when people need them.

It will be recalled that it was the Society itself, in their letter to Mr Caruana of 26 May, and in other public statements, who have been highlighting the problems that they are experiencing with the

provision of Social Services. The Government may very well think that we have the best Social Services in the world, but when users of the system have been pointing out deficiencies for many years, since the days of Milbury, then it is their duty to listen to those complaints and to correct them.

The problem is that whatever action the Government has taken subsequently, instead of improving the services available, has actually made matters worse.

The Opposition has been informed that serious allegations have been made which relate to the conduct towards the clients of the service and the shortage of human resources and its effect on the care provided. These complaints have allegedly been brought to the attention of the Minister and she has done nothing to address them.

The Government keep on boasting about the healthy state of the economy and of public finances. In this context, and given that the Government has had no hesitation in spending millions of pounds in other areas, it is completely indefensible that the Minister did not allow the Agency to retain the £120,000 they had under-spent in the last financial year because they had failed to provide the service budgeted for.

Indeed, such is the level of incompetence of Mrs del Agua that she has the unique distinction of having brought to the House of Assembly an amendment to the Social Services Ordinance to stop herself from authorizing employment in the Agency without first obtaining the approval of the Chief Secretary of the Government. This suggests that she herself recognizes that she cannot be trusted to take the correct decisions.

The Disability Society can rest assured of the support of the Opposition now and when we form the next Government.

ENDS