

The Opposition notes the pleas of innocence of the Minister for Social Services as regards the manner in which she deals with relatives of users of the service.

Whether her approach is inhumane and compassionless or not is a matter of individual and personal judgment. The Opposition is not in the least surprised that the Minister and the Government do not agree with this judgment since it is the hallmark of this Government that they can do no wrong.

What is far more worrying is that the Minister should consider that the case in question is an isolated incident in the whole of the agency that employs 175 persons and provides a service to hundreds of users, all of whom this Government seems to think are very happy with the state of the service and where no-one claims there is a state of crisis.

The state of crisis has been going on for years and the Minister has swept complaints from users under the carpet and gagged concerned employees to ensure that the truth does not come out.

The Government statement says that to state there is a crisis in the Agency shows the irresponsible and scare-mongering tactics of the Opposition to discredit the Government.

The Minister is either deliberately not telling the truth or incredibly ignorant of the problems in the Agency of which she is both the Chairperson and the Minister responsible.

One area in crisis is that of residential children in care, in respect of which an emergency meeting was held in the Agency on September 14th. At this meeting it was decided that in order to address the crisis in this area of the service, in the short term, a contingency team should be set up to carry out a needs assessment to manage the crisis.

The contingency team set up consisted of the Acting Children's Team Leader, the Adult Team Leader and two Social Workers. The latter two employees to be paid additional remuneration for being involved in this project.

The practice of the Agency to have a fire-fighting crisis management approach is the best the staff can do given the failure to address continuous complaints of staff shortages and excessive use of casual supply workers with consequential high turnover negatively affecting service users.

Of course, if the Minister claims there is nothing wrong in the Agency, that the complaints are isolated incidents and that it is all a question of a small minority of malcontents, then the Opposition will continue to provide the public with details of what has been going on according to those closely involved with the Agency and who constantly claim that the Minister is and has been fully aware of these concerns and has chosen to turn a blind eye to them.

ENDS