

STATEMENT BY THE GSLP/LIBERAL OPPOSITION 92/2007

16 October 2007

It is disgraceful that only three days after a general election the Government have announced a major re-plumbing of the hospital building at Europort. The timing of the announcement, so soon after Gibraltar went to the polls, shows a level of contempt for the electorate which is without precedent in Gibraltar.

It will be recalled that the Opposition have long made the point that the hospital building in Europort was designed to be an office block and that the hospital should have been purpose built from scratch somewhere else. The problems which have been experienced with the water supply stem from the simple fact that persons were supposed to be working in the building and actually not living in there.

Indeed, many months ago there were complaints that the sewer was overflowing into some bathrooms. The Government rubbished and ignored these complaints at the time.

There have been many problems with the water supply in the Europort hospital ever since it opened. There were problems at one time with the pressure of the water. In July 2005, after the Opposition voiced its concerns about the taste of the drinking water, the Government confirmed that copper levels in the drinking water were found to be higher than normal in Buildings 3 and 4 of the hospital.

At the time, the Government accused the Opposition of making "alarmist and inaccurate comments" even though they then issued "no drinking order" on tap water in the affected buildings. This order was lifted on 16 September 2005. However, in some wards, there are still signs above hand basins which clearly state that the water is for hand-washing only.

It is absolutely incredible that the hospital building should require all plumbing to be replaced so soon after it opened. This reflects a very serious level of mismanagement on the part of the Government.

The Government constantly claims that the cost of running the health service - which is over £5m a week - reflects all the additional costs that have been incurred from the original mistaken decision to convert prime office space, which had been acquired by the government for £8m, into a hospital at almost double the cost of building a new purpose built facility. It is quite obvious that notwithstanding that the enormous costs of converting the hospital, there are still bills to come.

The continued spending required to fix problems such as this which should not be occurring - and which arise exclusively from mismanagement - drains resources from front line patient care.

These issues are clearly ones of which the previous GSD government were aware at the time of the last budget, or at least by the time that the election was called.

The main issue for regret is that this news has obviously been "buried" and was not confirmed to the electorate before the general election as it may have had a bearing on the result.

ENDS