

STATEMENT BY THE GSLP/LIBERAL OPPOSITION

48/2010

20 April 2010

The Opposition has received representations from members of the public who have complained that the frequency of sessions offered with speech therapists have been reduced.

In one of these cases, a mother of two young children enrolled them about two years ago to take speech therapy lessons as a result of developmental delay. These children made use of the speech therapy service provided by the GHA once a week after school for one hour. The children also attended during the summer months, albeit with a different and reduced timetable. The Opposition has further been informed that the speech therapy classes were given by two qualified speech therapists funded by the GHA.

In December of this year, the mother was advised that due to an increase in the number of children requiring speech therapy, her children would only be able to avail themselves of speech therapy sessions on alternate terms, instead of during the full year.

This means, for instance, that the children will see the speech therapists during the start of the school year up to Christmas, then they would not see a therapist during the second term of the academic year and they would be able to see a therapist again in the final term of the school year and so on. In practice it means that a child having contact with a speech therapist in December, would not see the therapist again until April. This is totally unacceptable.

Commenting on the matter, Shadow Health Minister Neil Costa said:

“A number of parents are understandably extremely upset by this reduction and cannot understand why the GHA cannot devote more resources to tackle the increased demand instead of responding to the problem by reducing the service available to the children. Given that the GHA costs the taxpayer over £ 1 million a week it is incredible that the funds cannot be found to maintain the service that previously existed, particularly at a time when millions of pounds have been thrown away on other less important matters. It is regrettably typical of this and past GSD administrations that decisions at the top on how to spend our money are taken without any consideration of the impact on the lives of Gibraltarians who require such services.”