

**STATEMENT BY THE GSLP/LIBERAL OPPOSITION
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The case of a 14 year old girl who has had to spend two nights in Prison because there was nowhere for her to go has drawn attention to the lack of facilities and resources available in Gibraltar to deal with this kind of situation. It is also a very poor reflection of the spending priorities of the present GSD Government that clearly prefers to pour public funds into projects which they consider to be glitzy like the Theatre Royal, the air terminal and now the Mid-Town development instead of on the basic needs of ordinary people.

The Opposition will not comment on the details of this case as there are obviously issues which are sub-judice. However, we must be free to comment on its political implications and on what it says about the policy of the Government in this regard.

The Government has just presented to Parliament last week a budget where they praised the state of the economy and of public finances in general. In this context it is deplorable that a young girl has had to spend even one night in Prison because social services claimed that it did not have the resources to deal with the case. There is no excuse of this kind of situation and the Government have a lot to answer for.

The Opposition has pressed the Government on the need to provide a safety net for vulnerable persons who find themselves in this kind of situation in the past. Shadow Minister for Social Services Neil Costa drew attention to a similar case last year where a woman with Gibraltar connections who was a criminal defendant could not be granted bail by the Magistrates' Court because she had no alternative accommodation. Mr Costa said at the time that this case brought into sharp focus the serious deficiencies which existed in the system.

Commenting on the matter, Shadow Minister for Social Services Neil Costa said:

“It was shocking then and it is shocking now that the liberty of an individual, let alone a 14 year old minor, should be restricted in this way. I have said before that it should not be for those who fall through the cracks of the system to have to seek out assistance, it should be the people entrusted with their care who should do whatever is in their power to provide them with the basic needs of any human being and ensure their dignity. The Government must understand that there are people out there who have no support at all and who rely on the state as the final safety net. The GSD must show more compassion and humanity in these kind of cases and it is pathetic that the Minister responsible Jaime Netto should blame the lack of resources. It is not enough for the Government to wash their hands of the problem in such a cold and uncaring manner while they spend millions of pounds of taxpayers’ money on other projects of questionable value to the community.”