

Uncaring attitude to care providers

PARTY SCENE

DAVID CLARK

The decision to exclude Presbyterian Support Otago (PSO) from the future provision of home support services is another case of ideological madness by the National-led Government.

PSO currently provides more homecare than any other Otago provider. It has a long history of delivering support, and a record of cost-effective, innovative and professional service.

In a decision announced under the shadow of the Christmas tree, three alternative providers have won Government contracts for home support in Otago. One of these is Australian-based. A PSO board member with 10 years' experience says the process followed was not price-based but service delivery-based. It is not clear what that means. He contests the decision is cynical, contrived, economically flawed and commercially naive.

The public of Dunedin seem to agree. A petition launched this month already has 8500 signatures. Hundreds have marched in the street.

PSO's 370 staff and thousand-plus clients are also making their voices heard.

If PSO is told the decision is not about price and not about quality of care, and if the DHB denies it is part of a bid to reduce provider numbers nationwide, then what is going on?

The easiest conclusion to reach is that this Government is so ideologically wedded to profit-driven organisations, a community looking after itself doesn't get a look in. Local board members appear to have rubber stamped a decision made in Wellington.

Certainly, the most disturbing aspect of this tender round is lack of transparency.

Presbyterian Support has been denied access to documents showing how the DHB reached its decisions. This hints at a flawed process.

Historically surpluses generated by PSO have been plunged into local community services. That's unlikely with overseas providers.

Fortunately this is not yet an open and shut case. PSO is working towards inclusion as a fourth provider. I wish them luck.

► David Clark is the Labour MP for Dunedin North.