

The Tynwald Effect

Written by Jeff

Thursday, 26 November 2009 13:30

Individuals or groups serving the public must balance two priorities: meeting their own needs as providers; and meeting needs of service users.

But this balance may tip. Providers can slide into being driven mainly by their needs rather than those of users. In literature on health and social services this is called the Niskanen Effect (after a leading researcher).

For example, a study carried of a city's soup kitchen provision found that premises for volunteers to prepare and hand out meals were in middle-class suburbs where the volunteers lived and felt safe. Users bussed in from downtown were looked after, and then bussed back to where they belonged.

And a survey of the administration of a charity set up to assist blind men with retraining and resources to lead an independent life found many users reported providers were in practice less positive about encouraging independence than might have been expected. A major factor was the charity's need to hang on to funding by holding on to its clients.

In national politics there is a cousin to the Niskanen Effect. For now, let's call it the Tynwald Effect. Our political providers have needs to be considered before they turn to the needs of users (otherwise known as the electorate.)

Firstly, as opening prayers acknowledge, Tynwald is dedicated (at least in theory) to ensuring that 'God's will is done in this land' (we're no longer a Christian society, but so what?)

Then, to balance the supernatural, the demands of Mammon must be given due attention with legislation to keep business and financial services sweet.

Also, the political providers, like professionals the world over, have to consider their own dignity, incentives and perks. And in their case there is another and over-riding factor - the necessity of getting re-elected.

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So where do we, the users, come into the equation and what should PAG be doing on behalf of the electorate to get the balance right? Over to you ...