

CCAC was afraid of losing staff

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agencies was that most of the increase would go to the front-line workers, which would have attracted and kept them in this area and not lose them to hospitals and institutions."

All services are contracted after requests for proposals, a process which was mandated by the Province several years ago. There are three companies providing homemaking, three for nursing and five for rehabilitation services.

Ms Harvey said two of the service providers approached the CCAC early last year asking for an increase to their rates. The board heard the request, deliberated, and asked CCAC staff to meet with the service providers and look at an appropriate rate.

"The agencies were expressing concern about retaining and maintaining their staff," she said.

"We were being hit by service provider shortages and not able to provide client services because there weren't enough nurses and homemakers out there."

Last year, the CCAC had a \$336,000 deficit, which was absorbed into this year's operations, said Ms Harvey.

Mr. Jackson suggested the request for the Halton CCAC for a large increase this year was rejected because it would have involved breaking an existing home care contract with a private provider.

The original CCAC budget in 1997 was \$21.2 million and it has increased by about 60 per cent since that first year. Said Mr. Jackson, "the CCAC board has to know that it's making decisions to reduce service in order to give more money to these private companies.

"The money should be going to front-line services. It shouldn't necessarily be going to increasing compensation for contracts," he said.

"What's the sense of writing a contract if you're going to open it six months after you've signed it?"

Ms Harvey acknowledged that the CCAC could have held firm, but said the board was more concerned about the possibility of not being able to provide services to clients for lack of staff.

"We did do a market survey and found we were one of the lowest-paying CCACs in our surrounding area for our service providers, particularly for homemaking," she said.

"Other CCACs had increased the rates, and it did put pressure

on us to look at trying to come up with some kind of change in our compensation package. But yes, we could have said no."

Halton MPP Ted Chudleigh was also critical of the local CCAC, calling for an audit of its books. "They seem to have an unquenchable demand for free services," said Mr. Chudleigh.

The Tory MPP said the 20 per cent increase was requested to cover projected growth, but Halton's senior population isn't increasing by 20 per cent. He believes the agency's funding is adequate and said it can't handle its budget as well as some other CCACs seem to.

The provincial government now has the authority to audit its funding partners and Mr. Chudleigh said he would encourage Tony Clement, minister of health and long term care, to audit the Halton CCAC.

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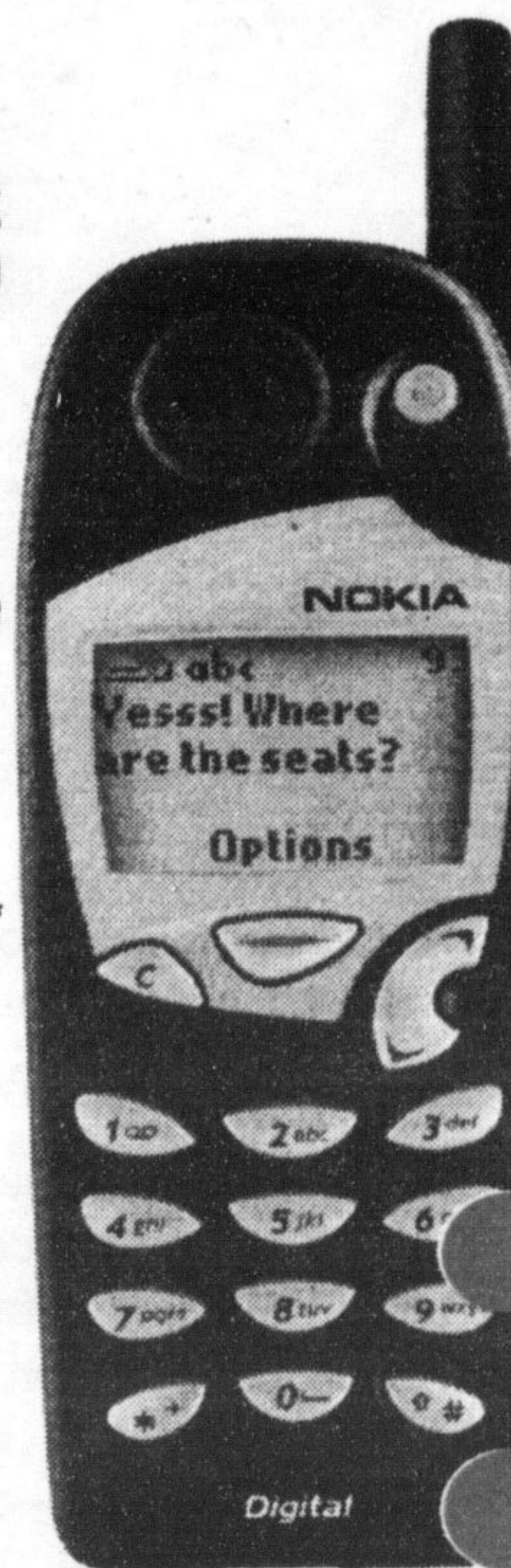
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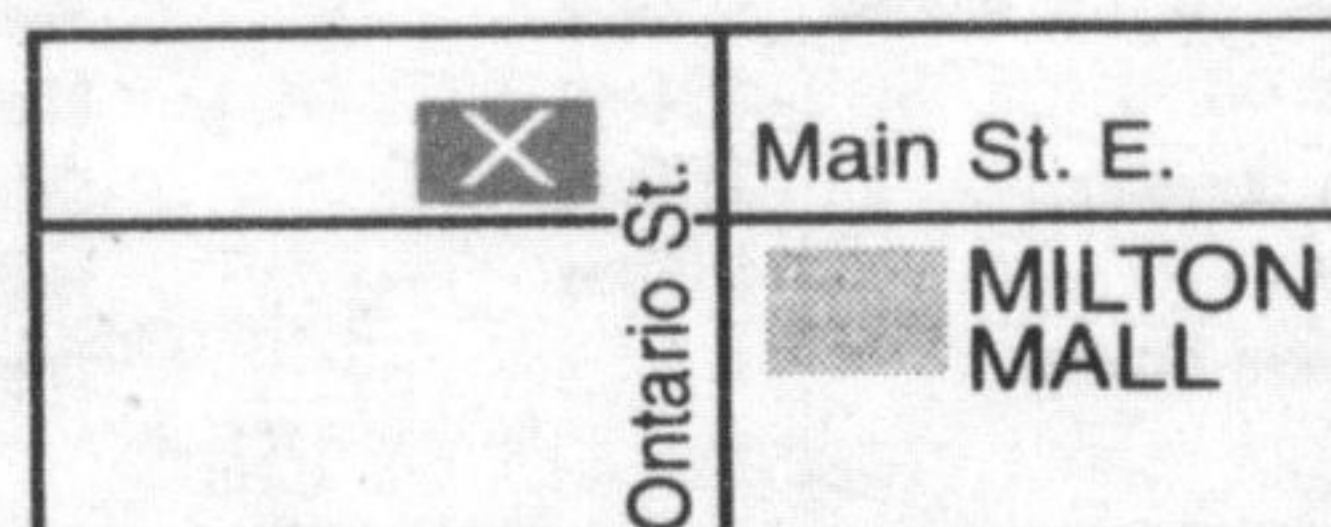
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