

# Anger at 'closed meeting' system



Councillors are complaining about behind closed doors briefings at Fylde Town Hall.

Pictured clockwise from the top are Coun David Eaves, Coun Elaine Silverwood, Coun Liz Oades and Coun Peter Collins



**FYLDE** councillors say they have been disenfranchised by a series of meetings held behind closed doors at the authority.

Independent councillors in the borough are angered by the system, with one councillor who said he was "appalled" and another who said they "abhor" the process after portfolio members' suspected behind-closed-doors decision-making.

Before any council meeting, the cabinet is allowed a briefing by council officers on the agenda and it is here that some councillors feel their input is being bypassed, alleging decisions are being made without their input.

Speaking at a council meeting, about attending a call-in meeting regarding the high street innovation fund, where a decision was to be made on the use of £100,000 in Fylde, Deputy Mayor Coun Peter Collins, of Treales and Newton, said: "I went in with a clear mind, I didn't have any prior bias or anything. I just wanted to look at how the decision was made.

"Not what the decision

By Gareth Vickers

gareth.vickers@lisaexpress.co.uk

was, but how the decision was made. Quite frankly, I was appalled.

"It was obvious to anyone in that meeting that the decision had been made beforehand at an informal Cabinet meeting."

Coun Liz Oades said: "I and all my (opposition) colleagues abhor the secrecy of the Cabinet system.

"We believe that we are all elected equally and should have the chance to debate matters equally.

"I requested that other members of the council could attend the Cabinet meetings but the request wasn't acceded to."

Coun Elaine Silverwood added: "I once attended a council meeting that lasted just 12 minutes. From sitting down to getting up it was 12 minutes long. The cabinet calls these meetings beforehand briefings, but if we want a proper, democratic, open debate, how can a meeting be so short?"

"Seven individuals on the Cabinet are making decisions which impact everyone in the borough."

Fylde council leader,

Coun David Eaves, moved to counter any suggestion of impropriety and said that the council has been complying with new "openness and transparency" requirements for some time.

Coun Eaves added: "For some years now we have been making key and non-key decisions in public.

"Fylde Council's arrangements for involving back-bench councillors are the same as those applying in councils across the country.

"The important thing is that decisions are not made in private. The briefings, which have been available for elected members with special responsibilities since the Council was formed in 1974, can be in private but the decision has to be made in public.

"Briefings are held between members that have special responsibilities and officers, the purpose to provide the members with advice and guidance on their areas of special responsibility.

"Briefings are available to councillors that do not have special responsibilities upon request."