

We're following the leader, the leader, the leader. We're following the leader... even if he hasn't been formally elected?

Such seems to be the case at Fylde Council.

Red faces in true blue ranks all round. And a touch of defiance.

It seems a "procedural" item slipped into oblivion from an agenda back in May 2011. It was the item of business relating to the formal election of Coun David Eaves as leader. Pretty important, some might say.

Fylde's chief executive says the item was omitted following an "officer error" which "no one spotted."

He adds: "The leader has behaved and been recognised as the leader.

He was elected in 2010 for four years.

"We employ human beings. With Government cuts we have fewer and fewer officers taking on more and more work and these things can happen."

These things can happen?

We're not talking about some oversight leading to a bin not being emptied on the right collection day.

It's the formal election of the leader of a council – the very leader who elects the Cabinet, as councils rather grandly style policy makes and shapers since the old commit-

Jacqueline Morley



Look at it this way ...



tee system was given the order of the boot.

We now have portfolio holders rather than committee chairmen. It's all a bit pretentious but so long as the spirit of democracy – rather than bureaucracy – is honoured I shrug it off.

What concerns me more is the assumption that a leader has been elected.

An old news editor used to tell me "assume makes an ass of you and me". It matters not if Coun Eaves was born to lead and others to follow.

The elevation has to be formalised, ratified.

It begs other questions. If a leader's not really the leader is the cabinet he appointed a cabinet?

Could every decision made since May 2011 be held up for scrutiny?

The timing of the disclosure could not be worse for the Conservative clan at the heart of the council.

Right now they face a spir-

ited campaign by the Fylde Civic Awareness group for a referendum of local voters over whether they want the council to be run in some other way – such as revert to the committee system.

Coun Eaves maintains it's a democratic process.

But the process came under fire on a recent Sunday Politics show – with heavyweights such as Sir Gerald Kaufman contending the council's cabinet could not exist in a "cocoon".

Morecambe MP David Morris concedes the awareness group had a "point" – and had established the first test case of Localism.

It's all a bit too Life of Brian for me. So I'm happy to play Devil's Advocate – even if I haven't been formally elected.