

Spotlight shines on democracy's future

By REBECCA DRAPER

PEOPLE from as far as Dorset attended a seminar and debate on how local democracy could be changed to include more people in the decision-making process.

The Localism and Democracy seminar, organised by the Fylde Civic Awareness Group, was attended by around 70 people on Friday, keen to hear about the benefits of changing Fylde Council from a leader and cabinet system to a committee system.

The group wishes to force Fylde Council into a referendum by collecting 4,000 signatures calling for the committee system, where all 51 Fylde councillors would have a vote on local issues.

Currently the council is led by a single councillor, Coun David Eaves, elected by his peers and six cabinet members.

The awareness group feels the leader and cabinet system doesn't provide a fair democracy, as local councillors, elected to represent the people, don't have a say in the most important issues.

All the way from Dorset was Alistair Chisholm, who said his local area had the same concerns as the awareness group.

He added: "I think what the awareness group has done, and is doing, is really splendid. I hope Fylde Council itself does decide to review its governance, so it doesn't have to go to a referendum."

The seminar heard from Hannah Roberts from the Parliamentary Outreach Service,



DECISION, DECISIONS: Jon Harrison (left) chairman of Fylde Civic Awareness Group and (right) Coun Paul Hayhurst at the seminar reviewing the way Fylde Council organises its committee system

based in Parliament in London.

Her talk, Engaging with Parliament, covered the work of Parliament and how individuals and groups could engage with policy at a national level.

She was followed by John Bainbridge, the former secretary of the steering group which petitioned for St Annes to have its own town council.

The final speaker of the day, before a debate over the issue, was by Paul Hayhurst – a Lancashire County councillor and Fylde Councillor for Elswick.

Coun Heyhurst was the leader of Fylde Council when it moved over from a committee system to its current system several years ago.

He said: "There is around 150 square miles in the borough. There is not a hope that seven members can make decisions.

"There is no local representation at the executive level, how can people be represented by people who don't have a clue what's happening in the rest of the borough?"

Coun Heyhurst said with the committee system, various committees would meet over the space of a couple of weeks.

Their decisions were reported in the media, sparking a response from residents which could then be relayed by councillors at a full council meeting weeks later.

Each councillor could put forward change to the deci-

sions made, which would be voted on by each councillor at the meeting.

Jeanette Draper, from the Victoria Hotel Community Association, said it didn't matter what the structure of the council was, as long as it benefited the community.

She said: "It's about the effectiveness of the system, rather than the system itself. There needs to be a way of councillors making the decisions consulting with people in the street and finding out what they want. Instead of making decisions for them, the council should be making decisions with them."

But Coun Ed Nash, who represents St Annes on Fylde Council and is a town councillor for the area, said if there

was a referendum on the issue, it would increase council tax bills to pay for it, sparking another referendum.

He added: "It would go on forever."

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