

Purse holders must watch their teeth

"IT'S A BIT daft, really, handing out council cash to local groups who are going to turn round and kick you in the teeth," a leading member of Camden Council's ruling Labour group, said to me a few months ago.

It was a half-jocular remark from a man who belongs to a Labour council with a massive majority committed to participation

in community and planning matters.

But some local groups feel there is a strong underlying truth in it, which is very disturbing, and which questions the sincerity of Camden Council's commitment to participation.

One of these is the Tolmers Village Association, which recently had their application for cash turned down and had to face the

prospects of closing their shop headquarters in Drummond Street.

It seems they had overstepped the mark by asking for money to employ their own planner who could take a grass roots look at the possibilities for the development area.

Nick Wates, the retiring co-ordinator for the TVA, told me last week: "We were prepared for the grants sub-committee to turn down the money for the planner, but what happened was that they turned down the whole thing, saying that they didn't have enough information, and the committee would consider another application in September."

The TVA then invited members of the grants sub-committee to come and see them for themselves, which four of them did — two Tories and two Labour members. The Tories made favourable noises, but the Labour members were a little more difficult.

Then the chairman of the grants committee, Councillor John Carrier, came down, and caused a little concern among TVA members, who asked for his guidance in framing an interim application which Carrier could approve under "chairman's action."

He said that he couldn't guide them. "He is in a position to hand out the money and decide on it, yet he apparently won't tell us the best way of getting it," Nick Wates told me.

So an association which represents the interests of one of the main run-down areas of the borough had no money to carry on its important community work. The only prospect of getting money was to guess without guidance what sort of a claim would be amenable to Councillor Carrier and his committee.

When I spoke to Councillor Carrier he told me that he agreed he was reluctant to hand out council cash to groups which bit the hand that fed them. "It's a very paternalistic system, which is a bit of an anomaly," he admitted.

Tight-fisted?

"But I'm not happy about council money going to groups who are anti-council, anti-bureaucracy, anti-town hall, and who then become bureaucratic, more town hall than the town hall, and tyrants in their own area."

"I'm not happy about it, because it is counter-pro-

ductive and doesn't help anybody."

Unfortunately, the tight-fisted image the committee give to some of the groups who want money is construed by those groups as a council attempt to inhibit them from ever opposing the council, which it is sometimes in the interests of the community to do.

It may be a reaction to this that some groups then go out of their way to oppose the council just to show that they are not going to be bullied.

Councillor Carrier made it clear that he was in no way "prejudiced" against the Tolmers Group, and that he



● John Carrier

knew much of the work they did was very valuable.

In fact, on the day I spoke to him he was due to receive an interim claim from the TVA to tide them over until September, and under chairman's action it was likely that they would get some money, anyway.

The attitude of the member I quoted at the start was to some extent echoed by Councillor Carrier, and it is causing grave concern among groups. As one group leader said: "They hold the purse strings, and it is they who would judge what is 'counter-productive' if it comes to us seriously opposing them, as we well might have to at some time."