



The Rev Paul Flowers

ROCHDALE council chiefs yesterday rallied round one of the leading figures in the 'satanic abuse' row after learning he has a conviction for gross indecency.

The Reverend Paul Flowers, a Methodist minister and Labour vice-chairman of the social services committee, was fined £75 after committing the offence in a public toilet.

Yesterday he said: 'I believe that I have performed my duties as vice chairman well and in the best interests of the citizens of Rochdale.'

The offence took place

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nine years ago when Mr Flowers, 40, lived at Hedge End, near Southampton. He moved to Rochdale four years ago where he runs a Methodist mission.

Council officials argued that the conviction was now expended under the terms of the Rehabil-

itation of Offenders Act. Leader Richard Farnell said: 'There is no question of him being asked to resign. The Labour group and senior officers of the council have always been aware that he is gay. It was not a secret and it makes not the slightest difference. He is a compassionate and dedicated councillor.'

But Tory group leader Pam Hawton called on him to consider his position. 'That committee has particularly sensitive duties in relation to child protection and everyone on it should have the complete confidence of the public,' she said.