

## **INDEPENDENT MEMBERS' FORUM**

**3 October 2006**  
**at**  
**Basildon District Council**

<b>Present:</b>	Lorraine Browne	Solicitor and Deputy Monitoring Officer	Basildon
	Malcolm Fielding	Independent Member	Basildon
	Julie Batt	Meetings Manager	Basildon
	Tony French	Independent Member	Braintree
	Jason Bishop	Independent Member	Castle Point
	Ian Clift	Independent Member	Castle Point
	Derek Connelly	Independent Member	Castle Point
	Myrna Liles	Independent Member	Maldon
	Tony Comber	Independent Member	Rochford
	David Cottis	Independent Member	Rochford
Bernard Flynn	Independent Member	Rochford	
<b>Apologies:</b>	Amanda Darke	Independent Member	Castle Point
	Bob Smale	Independent Member	Castle Point

### 14. Introduction

Lorraine Browne welcomed everyone to Basildon District Council and the third Independent Members' Forum. All present introduced themselves.

### 15. Minutes of IMF Meeting on 30 May 2006

The Minutes were agreed, subject to a small correction to Minute No. 7 which stated that Basildon had three Independent Members, when in fact there were only two.

There were no matters arising that were not covered on the agenda for this meeting.

### 16. Lessons Learnt from the Mock Hearing on 13 July 2006

The Mock Hearing held on 13 July 2006 was discussed. It was agreed that the event had been successful and gave an idea to Independent Members of what it would be like to take part in an actual hearing. The Mock Hearing brought the principles and procedures for hearings into context and proved useful both to those taking part and those observing. Appreciation was expressed of Castle Point's lead in arranging the event.

It was felt that it might be worth repeating the event after two years or so.

17. Formation of the Association of Independent Members of Standards Committees in England (AIMSce)

The formation of AIMSce was discussed. It was noted that it had first been raised at last year's Standards Board for England Conference and notice of how to obtain membership application forms had been included in the papers for this year's Conference. However, concern was expressed that no background information seemed to be available at this time, such as aims and objectives, constitution and whether this was a Standards Board or an independent initiative.

It was agreed that Bernard Flynn would report on the AIMSce at the next IMF, which would be after the Conference had taken place.

18. 5<sup>th</sup> Annual Assembly of Standards Committees – 16-17 October 2006

It was noted that Derek Connelly, Malcolm Fielding, Bernard Flynn and Tony French would attend the Annual Assembly on 16-17 October 2006. It was considered that it was worth attending this Conference at least once as an Independent Member as there was an opportunity for networking and cross-reference of ideas. It was also an opportunity to receive up-to-date information on proposals relating to standards issues, although it was unfortunate that this year the expected White Paper on standards was not going to be released until after the Annual Assembly had taken place.

There was a general discussion on the responsibilities of Independent Members and Standards Committees at the various Councils connected with the IMF and it was apparent that these responsibilities varied noticeably. Also, the Councils' approach and attitude to Independent Members differed. It was felt that it would be useful at each IMF to review briefly the structure of each of the Councils' Standards Committees and to discuss any difficulties encountered by individual members.

19. Response to Cornerstone Paper – "A Question of Standards. Prescott's Town Hall Madness"

The Independent Members noted the contents of the Cornerstone Paper and the Standards Board's response. It was considered that the Cornerstone Paper was overtly political and failed to demonstrate credible examples of its assertions. However, the response from the Standards Board should have addressed the apparent need for training for some Monitoring Officers.

It was felt that it was important for Independent Members to be seen to be ethical, independent and reasonable.

20. Future of the Independent Members' Forum

The future of the Independent Members' Forum was discussed and it was agreed that, in addition to any other business that arose, the following matters should be included in future agendas:

- Feedback from Standards Board Annual Assembly
- Feedback on AIMSce
- White Paper on standards
- Summary of Councils' Standards Committee functions
- Review of any hearings held

In addition, the IMF provided an opportunity for Independent Members to exchange ideas and experiences.

21. Standards Training

Lorraine Browne indicated that she would be arranging a training session on standards in the new year and would invite Councillors, Independent Members and Parish Councillors from surrounding Councils when the date had been confirmed.

22. Next Meeting

Ian Clift advised that Castle Point would host the next IMF meeting and details of the arrangements would be circulated in due course.