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## INDEPENDENT MEMBERS FORUM

### 1 SUMMARY

- 1.1 This report invites Members to receive a note of the most recent South East Essex Independent Members Forum held at Basildon District Council on 3 October 2006 and also provides some background information on the forum.

### 2 INTRODUCTION

- 2.1 Since 2002, all District Councils are legally obliged to have a Standards Committee that must comprise at least one-third Independent Members.
- 2.2 The role of the Independent Member as portrayed by the Standards Board for England is as follows:
- (a) Independent members bring a fresh perspective to the workings of their standards committees and, by extension, to their authority. Appointing independent members to standards committees is a way of involving citizens with a commitment to public service in the promotion of high standards of conduct among elected representatives.
- (b) Independent members play an important role in safeguarding and emphasising the independence and integrity of standards committees. Independent members bring a non-partisan perspective to their standards committee's work, and can assure other members, officers and the public of the committee's impartiality when discussing conduct at the authority. Independent members have a mandate to be community orientated, public spirited and focussed on serving the public interest in an ethical manner. Independent members should:
- develop and apply knowledge of the Code of Conduct in relation to matters brought before their standards committee, including determining cases referred by an ethical standards officer;
  - develop a clear understanding of the way in which their authority works and how their standards committee enhance corporate governance;
  - read reports, briefings and background information in advance of standards committee meetings
  - be inquisitive, open-minded and non-judgemental;
  - be committed to a defined term of office; perhaps between two- and four-years long.

### 3 SOUTH EAST ESSEX INDEPENDENT MEMBERS FORUM

- 3.1 In 2003/4, Independent Member Fora began to emerge in different areas across the country. These early groups found that there was considerable benefit for Independents in meeting to share experience and ideas and to provide support for those in some authorities who felt isolated and marginalised.
- 3.2 At the Fourth Annual Conference in 2005, about half the Independent Members present attended a “lively” fringe event where the value of such fora was discussed and most expressed an interest in setting up similar groups in their own areas.
- 3.3 At its meeting on 8 November 2005 this Committee received a report back from the conference and endorsed a proposal to set up a local forum for Independent Members in South East Essex. This was intended to help those Members develop their role as describe in paragraph 2.2 and provide a venue “at which information, experience and views could be exchanged”.
- 3.4 The Corporate Director (Internal Services) contacted neighbouring authorities and on 21 February this year the first meeting of the South East Essex Forum was held at Castle Point Borough Council. There has since been three meetings and membership has extended.
- 3.5 At this year’s Annual Conference there is a proposal to take matters a step further and set up a National Independent Members Association.

### 4 RECOMMENDATION

- 4.1 It is proposed that the Committee **RESOLVES**

to receive the note of the South East Essex Independent Members Forum held at Basildon District Council on 3 October 2006 and endorse the work of the Rochford Independent Members within the Forum

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**Background Papers:-** None

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