

Flip Chart Notes of the Independent Members Forum. 11 March 2004.

Purposes:

- Influence on national agenda
- Periodic Meetings
- Telephone email/networks
- Training
- Interface with Standard Board
- Empowering/Confidence building
- Demystification
- Sharing experience/good practice
- 'Case Law'/Precedent – delivering consistency in local determination
- Developing role/understanding. Avoiding 'dumping ground' parameters
- Avoid creating divisions (query = value of forums)
- Compliment professional networks
- Overcoming isolation (esp. if Chairing)
- Counterweight to politics/groups
- Developing a concept/role of 'independence'
- Build public confidence
- To include all Standards Committees (inc. Police Authorities)
- Labour exchange

Membership Issues:

- Every Independent?
- Geographically: Split into sub-regions
- 6 existing forums
- Address at National Assembly
- County normal membership 15-20
- Include any co-optee should remain open to acquire guidance
- Bi-annual meeting of Groups
- Split Groups into two
- Hampshire, East Sussex, West Sussex, Surrey, Isle of Wight
- Berkshire, Wiltshire, Oxfordshire
- Clear Independents only
- One person from each forum at the other
- Costs of meetings
- Unproductive if too small, if above division too small amend after
- Revolving location
- Fringe meeting at National Assembly
- Contact information to be exchanged
- Half day to full day event
- Day allocation to include some form of training
- Visual and hearing aids to be provided

Agenda Items:

- Future items
 - Sanctions
 - Beyond the code
 - Further Delegations
- Training
 - Available to every member
 - To be repeated every 3 years?
 - Available also to Parish, Town and Principle Councillors?
 - Specific to Independent Members
- Updates, analysis discussion of Standards Board decisions
- Case studies
- Un-minuted support for local difficult issues, Charlton House Rules.

Formality:

- Need agenda?
- Short notes, bullet points (host provides)
- Terms of Reference, not constitution
- Membership criteria
- Membership list and contact details
- Time for informal discussions

Feedback:

- Allows show of strength to authorities
- Each individual to receive notes, develop from there
- Minutes/notes by the end of April
- To be made Standards Committee Agenda Items
- To be sent to the Individuals, not the authority.
- Notes, not minutes

Common areas:

- Code of conduct
 - Adopt without change?
 - Meetings for members before code is put into effect
- Members allowances
- Provide terms of reference or/and annual report
- Specific functions
- How to promote good conduct
- Annual reports
- Presentations to full council
- Training of Parish Clerks

A.O.B:

- Parish Councillors do not welcome Standards Committee – responsibility to educate them so.
- 54% of complaints against Parish Councillors – but they are numerically superior
- Payment matter
- Members should not be financially restricted

Table showing spread of Independent Members within Standards Committees.

Council	Independent Members	Elected Members	Parish and Town Members
Isle of Wight	7 C. V/c	2	1
Salisbury D.C.	2 C. V/c	2	1
Wiltshire D.C.	4 C. V/c	2	0
West Wilts	3 C. V/c	4	2
Spelthorne	2 C. V/c	5	0
New Forest	2 V/c	4 C.	2
Woking	2 V/c	5 C.	1
Surrey Police	2 (soon to be 3) C. V/c	3	0
Hart	2 V/c	4	1 C.
Portsmouth City	2 V/c	3 C.	1
Eastleigh	3	5 C. V/c	1
Fareham	3 C. V/c	4	0
Swindon	3 C.	3 V/c	1
Test Valley	2 C. V/c	3	2
Rother D.C.	2 C. V/c	3	2
Arun D.C.	2 (soon to be 4)	6 C.	1
Worthing	2 V/c	5 C.	0
Gosport	2 C. V/c	6	0
S. Oxfordshire	2 C. V/c	4	2
Crawley	4 V/c	5 C.	
Rushmore	2 C.	3 V/c	0
Horsham	2 C.	4 V/c	2
Southampton City	2	6 C.	

Key: C. = Chairman, V/c = Vice-Chairman

For further information on contacts etc. see summary of feedback forms.

Apologies received from:

- 1) Group Captain Robert Brownlow, Kennet District Council
Dr. D Michael Humphreys, Surrey Heath Borough Council.
- 2) Cynthia Endacott, Royal Borough of Windsor.
- 3) Dr Barbara Spender, Winchester City and Hampshire County Council.
- 4) Mrs Jillian Paul, Reigate and Banstead Borough Council.
- 5) Michael Field, Slough Borough Council.
- 6) Santosh Bhabra, Adur District Council.
- 7) Reverend Paul Lipscombe, Buckinghamshire County Council.
- 8) Mr J Chester, Hampshire County Council.
- 9) David Watson, Isle of Wight County Council.
- 10) Margaret Lewis, Salisbury District Council.
- 11) Sam Sample, Kennet District Council.
- 12) Peter McGuigan, Wiltshire County Council.
- 13) Richard L. Tickell, Wiltshire County Council.
- 14) Patricia Horner, Hart District Council.
- 15) Mr Haines Chairman of Thanet District Council.
- 16) Mr John Johnson, Fareham Borough Council.
- 17) Ron Flux, Deputy clerk Wiltshire Police Authority.
- 18) William Reed, Democratic Services Manager, Oxford City Council.
- 19) Brian Hooper, Southampton City Council.
- 20) Ken Giles, Cherwell District Council.
- 21) David Boorman, Woking Borough Council.
- 22) Professor R Johns, Winchester City Council.
- 23) Peter Williams, Chairman, Guildford B.C.

Summary of feedback forms.

1. What did you find most useful about this forum?

The majority of attendees felt that the most useful inclusions in this meeting were (in no particular order):

- The presentation of the Standards Board for England by Anne Rehill.
- The opportunity to open discussion with others present and begin to network.
- Meeting like-minded people with the opportunity to exchange views.
- Discussion of the range of roles performed by the LA's.
- Clarification of the purpose of the network.
- Discussion of the way Independent members are treated by their LA.
- Knowledge of achievements and problems others have encountered.

2. What did you find least useful about this meeting?

- Many commented upon housekeeping matters, such as the room was too small, or layout was poor etc.
- Too many people.
- Need to be better equipped to deal with people's special requirements, i.e. Diabetes etc.
- No supply of food available.
- Not enough time to deal with all aspects.
- Too much detail in the early stages.

3. What geographical area should any non-national/non-regional Independents' forum cover?

- As discussed in the meeting, most agreed upon the discussed division, i.e. 1. Hampshire, East and West Sussex, Surrey and the Isle of Wight and 2. Berkshire Wiltshire and Oxfordshire.
- It was also suggested that the size of these committees could be addressed independently once they have met.

4. How often do you feel a meeting would be beneficial?

- Again, most members agreed with the decision taken in the meeting that meetings should be twice a year.

- There should also be a meeting at the Annual Conference.
5. Are there any activities referred to by representatives from other Standards Committees, that you would wish to adopt in your Standards Committee? If so, please specify.
- Scrutiny as to Members' allowances and expenses.
 - Reports to the District Auditor advising on probity and ethics.
 - Sharing experiences with other conduct committees.
 - Complaints procedure and Ombudsman investigations.
 - Ethical Audits.
 - Chairmanship by Independent members for local resolution complaints hearings.
 - Methods of monitoring standards.
 - Attendance at Council/Planning meetings.
 - Publication of Annual Report.
 - Extending code to Strategic Partnerships.
6. Are there any topics that you would like to feature at future meetings of the Independent Members Forum?
- Effective communication with Parishes.
 - Procedure in Conduct Hearings.
 - Case studies.
 - Any changes imposed by the Standards Board or Government.
 - Training
 - Activities 'beyond the Code'
 - Terms of reference/expansion of role.
 - Policies and strategies developed by other committees.
 - Standards Board Bulletin report.
 - The question of payments to Independent Members.
 - Future challenges
7. Is there a contact in your authority for communicating with other Independent Members in your Standards Committee?
- All contact details that were given are provided in the separate 'contacts document' provided.
10. Any other comments you would like to make?
- Still Sceptical about separation of Independent Members. I would prefer a Local Standards Forum for all Standards Committee Members.
 - Always consider the cost of the possible venues, ie: the Isle of Wight is expensive!
 - Would like to be sent copies of the Isle of Wight and Wiltshire Annual report.

- Would be interested to see copies of Terms of Reference adopted by other Local Authorities.
- Does the independent nature of members ensure that with developing skill and expertise that they cannot remain in office for long?
 - I believe that officers should be able to attend at the request of members.
 - Regular meeting date should be set at each meeting.
 - Sub-regions are still too large.
 - Minutes should be kept as an audit trail for members expenses and to help justify usefulness.
 - Forum should be exclusively for Independents.
 - How do the Standards Committee Monitor the operation of the Code?
 - Development of criteria for hearings and guidelines on seriousness and 'sentence' to avoid different outcomes.
 - Forums should not be used as a means of undermining the role of elected councillors.
 - Period visits/support from the Standards Board.
 - Modest financial support from standards board toward running costs.
 - Outside speakers for the benefit of training.