

F40 Executive Committee Meeting held at Amerton Farm, Staffordshire

7 June 2008

1. Attendance/apologies

Attendees

David Kidney; Doug Allan; Lindsey Wharmby; Mick Brookes, NAHT; Tony Norton, N Lincs; Vanessa Eddy, Dorset; Francis Loftus, N Yorks; David Harty, Cambs CC; Geoff Venn, Beds; Ivan Ould, Leics; Chris Chapman, Cheshire

Apologies

Kevin Green, Beds; Gillian Hayward, Glos; Joe Jefferies, NASUWT; Eunice Finney, Staffs; Barbara Westwood, Bury; Jon Pearsall, Worcs; David Rowlands, Cheshire; David Smith, Wigan.

2. Minutes of previous meeting

The minutes of the meeting held on 10 May 2008 were approved as an accurate record of the proceedings.

3. Annual conference, Bedfordshire, 10 May 2008

Everyone agreed it had been an excellent conference. Really focused member's minds on the issues that have to be tackled in the Funding Review.

4. E-newsletter

Following the conference the Group has issued its first e-newsletter. Again committee members thought this was excellent, providing the key information in a succinct fashion straight to people's PCs. Agreed that the e-news will be produced regularly in the future.

It was also agreed that all Executive members should be asked to consider forwarding the e-news widely within their authority, to include members, officers, school forum members and schools (heads and governors). DA to send the e-newsletter to all representatives of "poorly funded" authorities which are not in f40 Membership. DK also to circulate to MPs representing f40 authorities.

DA to emphasise in the next edition the importance of all members "sharing" the f40 newsletter with their colleagues.

5. DSG Formula Review

The process is building up and moving very rapidly forward. Pressure is on f40 to respond to evidence gathering and the submission of papers.

MB indicated that the backcloth to the review is extremely tough funding for all services. Funding pressures are being identified in all government areas. LAs have to find savings of 3% - not 1% from their limited central funds. But requirements for spending keep coming.

IO identified the pressures on schools, particularly for SEN, area great. We need to keep LAs at the heart of our campaign. He also raised concern about cost pressure associated to personalised learning and others.

LW said the situation across public expenditure will be tight. Change leading to greater equity will depend to a large extent on the transition. We may create a new breed of 'losers' who will then shout just as loudly as f40 authorities.

VE referred to 'schools in deficit' and 'schools in surplus' issues which need to be resolved. TN expressed concern about rising balances and said he couldn't understand why it was happening, particularly in some of our poorest schools. Why isn't the budget being spent? There has to be some underlying reason. VE pointed out that in Dorset there are real distortions. LW suggested the DCSF's guidance 'Managing School Balances' is worth checking out. MB said it is absolutely essential that there is good intelligence about this matter. He thought surpluses should normally be taken away from schools.

SFIG has now produced some excellent guidance for local authorities. FL said there has to be an answer to deficit funding in some areas, where redundancy might be the only way for schools to proceed. You can't close the school because it is often the only one available. AN said the formula is out of date and fails to reflect the needs of modern schooling. It throws up enormous discrepancies. The new national formula must look for a new approach – not a revamp of the existing system.

IO suggested the balancing issue is embarrassing and is undermining f40's approach. He also said the 14-19 Diploma is another issue, as is the potential end of LSC and start-up of a new agency. In addition, the issue of school workforce is raising its head – particularly in terms of non-compliance. The trade unions will be pushing this on their agenda. And we must all watch out for the pay claim from support staff as Jim Knight sets up their new pay review body this September.

VE pointed out that most deficits are in secondary schools, which are impacted upon by LSC funding. Some have lost hundreds of thousands of pounds of anticipated funding. LW said schools and forums should check the rules relating to balances and look at the way the formula works for them. GV thought there would be little room for government manoeuvring in this respect. f40 should concentrate on areas of change that it can have an impact on – prioritise.

MB said that if DSG money is getting tighter, the government should look at other areas where funding can be adjusted, e.g. academies, where people are doing jobs, but not in the classroom.

DK suggested that f40 could use e-news, press releases and seminars to get messages across, and also make better use of Parliamentary questions using f40's 200+ MPs. The latter is particularly important. Also look at contributing to regional educational conferences. Some standard f40 slides would be helpful for presentations.

F40's objective of achieving a fairer funding formula will be met by prioritising our activities and by seeking to influence key players. We need to consider how we can influence reps on groups such as SFIG.

DK also suggested a series of seminars for MPs, trade unions etc in Parliament and delegations to see Ministers.

6. Issue Paper

F40's issues paper submitted to DSG review Group on 31 March 2008.

7. ALF paper

F40's paper submitted to the DSG Review Group on 13 May 2008.

8. ACA

Paper is nearing completion. Comments received from various authorities and individuals. LW/DA to finalise and submit to DSG Review Group asap. Covering letter to make the points that the paper covers ACA and small schools, and DCSF has access to data at the level of "super output" areas which can be used to be more accurate in analysis.

LW suggested a question to Parliament about 'sparsity per hectare'. The government has the detail to provide this.

MB referred to the very high costs of SEN in f40 areas where there are small schools.

9. SEN paper

This is one of the most important areas for f40. Very unpredictable. The formula is based on low birthweight and deprivation, which is very random. The definition of low birthweight (below 5lb) is not that unusual nowadays. F40 to argue that very high cost youngsters should be funded regionally. This would remove these random and unpredictable costs from LEA/schools budgets and lead to a more equitable distribution overall.

TN's questions to Ministers (circulated Friday 6 June) may provide some useful detail. LW to undertake research and provide paper for consideration.

10. Small schools

DA referred to approach from the National Small Schools Association which has expressed an interest in the work of f40. There may be areas where we can work together to influence 'small schools' issues. Agreed we keep in touch and consider a joint seminar at some point in future. (Perhaps also in partnership with SPARSE?).

11. Any Other Business

IO reported that he is to attend an IDeA national networking meeting on 26 June at which several senior Ministers will be present. He will present the f40 messages as best he can.

12. Next Meeting

Saturday, 13 September 2008 at 11am at Amerton Farm, Stowe by Chartley, Staffs.