

f40 Executive Committee Meeting

Saturday 9 February 2008

Held at Amernton Farm, Stowe by Chartley, Staffs

Attendees

David Kidney, Chair
Doug Allan, f40 Secretariat
Lindsey Wharmby, Consultant
Eunice Finney, Staffs
Ivan Ould, Leics
Tony Norton, N Lincs
Helen Donovan, Worcs
Jon Pearsall, Worcs
Chris Chapman, Cheshire
Joe Jefferies, NASUWT
Gillian Hayward, Glous
John Peck (substitute for Mick Brookes, NAHT)
Chris Wales
Francis Loftus, N Yorks
Kevin Green, Beds
David Smith, Wigan
Geoff Venn, Beds
David Rowlands, Cheshire
Chris Levy, NAGS
David Harty, Cambs

Apologies

Liz Eyre, Worcs
Vanessa Eddy, Dorset
Barbara Westwood, Bury
Mick Brookes, NAHT

Minutes of previous meeting

The minutes of the meeting held on 10 November 2007 were approved as an accurate record of the proceedings.

Women's Institute Resolution

DA confirmed that the f40 resolution proposed by the WI in Tyneside had failed to be adopted for conference.

2008 Settlement - update

The chairman invited members to comment on issues arising following the settlement for 2008 -11, the first three-year funding period.

IO referred to the problems of budget and allocations – mismatch will cause problems.

DR said review of local government in Cheshire will mean a whole range of new problems for education and funding. Situation is similar in Bedfordshire. Both hope that f40 will support issues in these areas. There will now be two administrators in those areas - doubling the cost of these services.

TN said schools in North Lincs may be heading towards deficit budgets.

DR said demands for savings from Children's Services are difficult to achieve. For the future he suggests ring-fencing Children's Services, not just schools.

DSG Formula Review

The review is now underway and the following documents have been distributed to all stakeholders by DCSF:

- Minister's announcement in Parliament
- Minister's letter to consultees
- Agreed Terms of Reference
- Summary of comments received during consultation on Terms of Reference

These documents have also been circulated to all f40 Executive Committee members by the Secretariat, and they are now available on the group's website.

DA explained that a Review Group, consisting of major representative organisations has been established to undertake review work. Special Interest Groups, like f40, will be invited to submit papers and attend meetings of the Review Group to present their reports and evidence. DA had asked if the f40 Group might be considered for membership of the Review Group, but the response had been rejected.

DA referred to the priorities for study and the outline timetable that projected through to 2010.

- Feb 2008 Formula Review Group begins work
- Jan 08-Sept 09 Development phase
- Oct-Dec 09 Develop consultation proposals
- Jan-Mar 10 Consultation
- Apr-Jun 2010 Build up to decisions
- July 2010 Ministers announce broad decisions
- Oct 2010 School funding settlement for 2011-12 onwards.

Given the timescales for the transfer of 16-19 funding to local authorities, the Review Group will prioritise work on aligning 14-16 funding with 16-19 funding as the first stage of the review and to consult on this in autumn 2008.

Consultant's Report (Lindsey Wharmby)

Pockets of Deprivation – LW’s report was circulated to Executive Committee Members, f40 Directors and School Forum Chairs on 17 January 2008.

In this research LW had concentrated on what the grant tells us about measures of deprivation - by comparing rank order on the old measure and the new measure. This has thrown up some areas of interest. However it has also revealed an anomaly that affects two f40 members - Herefordshire and Nottinghamshire (and several other authorities). LW stated that she has contacted the DCSF about the anomaly and they agree with her analysis, but that they were unsure how to deal with it!

Individual authorities may wish, if they realise the anomaly applies to them, to put their point of view to the DCSF. The anomaly is important for those it affects - but much more interesting in the long-term is the application of the methodology in the formula review. LW is convinced that this is a fundamentally sound and good measure of social deprivation.

DK thanked LW for her deprivation research and report. He believes that the extra deprivation funding was provided in part as a consequence of f40’s campaigning.

LW indicated that she is now doing some more work on the implications of cross-border issues on deprivation. There’s a lot of data now available.

IO wondered if the money presented under deprivation is actually reaching the schools that need it. About 4,000 children cross borders from Leicester to Leicestershire and it’s unclear if the money is moving with them. LW to provide details of cross-border situation to IO.

HD referred to EAL issues in Worcs. Influx of Polish children. LW said that would be covered by a different funding regime.

GH illustrated position in Gloucestershire which got an extra £1 million. School Forum agreed a distribution process and it was spread quite thinly across pockets of deprivation that weren’t previously recognised.

GV referred to benefits felt in Bedfordshire.

Next Steps for Consultant

Like for like schools **AGREED**

The group is interested in whether similar schools, in similar areas, get similar funding. LW has started working on secondary schools information. It is difficult to make sense of information that searches produce. There’s no easy to follow pattern. Interestingly, the way in which LAs put funding into individual schools budgets has a significant effect (the amount of delegation). LW will continue her work in this area.

Area Costs **AGREED**

LW is not convinced that salary costs are accurately represented in some/all areas. This is an area in which more work can be undertaken relatively quickly.

Primary Schools – especially small schools **AGREED**

In relation to small primary schools, it's not the cost of small schools in rural areas that is the real issue -it's the sparsity of children in those areas.

GH wondered about central and devolved budgets. Need to take care in the way you interpret this information.

DR suggested that Cheshire is sparse – but not too much; and Cheshire is deprived – not too much so. It falls into the sparsity and deprivation trap.

TN asked about the complexities of funding for smaller schools and the impact across the authority in which they are located.

KG said it is policy to keep small schools open – that's a conundrum?

LW said she would be working alongside George Phipson at the NAHT on the small primary schools issue. Even if you amalgamate you rack up higher transport costs and it is not considered good practice to bus young children huge distances to go to school.

CC pointed out that Cheshire has about 100 rural schools. The government's definition of 'rural' is not very sensible. It doesn't always make sense 'on the ground'.

JV said the cost of transport is about to go up – even though the government is wanting costs to be cut. So we should argue to cut travel. That means keeping rural schools, no matter what their size.

DS (a large urban authority) suggested the current definitions for sparsity has been in place for years. What the government want to do is get rid of surplus places – not close schools. Urban authorities are moving SEN children across their areas in taxis!

On area costs, DS suggested that London Boroughs argue that it is general costs – not just salaries, that put up costs.

IO said he is involved in the 'Social Partnership', which is interested in 'extended services'. Rural schools often don't help themselves. They could become part of their community in more ways.

FL said there's a big issue about choice. And, what is a small school – 20, 50, 100 or 200? That needs sorting out.

J Peck said that the NAHT is totally committed to retaining small schools. A 200 level would include many urban schools. These small schools are a vital part of communities. They may be more expensive to run than other schools within their authority. The idea of "federation" is catching on and may be more prevalent in the future. Could save costs – but doesn't always do so. Extended services are working effectively in most authorities. The perceived demand is not always there in reality. The fact is that the community by law has to pay for use of school facilities. In addition, small school heads are increasingly involved in teaching and cannot

Deprivation **AGREED**

LW to continue her work into the funding of deprivation.

Transport costs

It was agreed that no specific work should be undertaken on this issue.

Annual Conference 2008

Bedfordshire CC has kindly agreed to host the conference.

DA outlined the work that had been undertaken since November, including a visit to a range of potential venues in Bedfordshire.

Jim Knight has now indicated that he will not be able to attend, but Dugald Sandeman and Stephen Kingdom will attend. Cllr Stay, Deputy Leader of Beds CC and Director, Malcolm Newsome to speak. Lindsey Wharmby to present consultancy position.

Date agreed as 10 May 2008 (11am start and 1.30pm finish)

DA confirmed venue as Wyboston Lakes (adjacent to A1 motorway)

DA to prepare draft programme for initial consideration by Chair, Vice Chair and Kevin Green (Beds). Once agreed to seek approval from Dugald and Stephen.

Marketing to begin asap.

Membership and Finances

Membership has remained steady at 25 paid up authorities in 2007-08. Suffolk CC has regrettably ignored requests to pay their annual subscription, despite many approaches. IO will contact Leader to discuss.

Agreed that DA should start the process of invoicing authorities for the 2008-09 subscription. Fees to remain unchanged at £2,000 per authority.

AOB

- HD referred to research she has undertaken that proves that with the three year settlement, 40 authorities move further away from national average year on year. It's an inevitable consequence of spend plus.
- IO has written to Ed Balls, Secretary of State, re Children in Care court costs.
- Impact of common Early Years formula (add to next meeting agenda).

Next meeting

Saturday 26th April 2008 starting 11am at Amerton Farm.