



f40 Executive Committee Meeting
Saturday, 12 April 2014 at Amerton Farm, Staffordshire

1. Attendance and apologies

Present: Ivan Ould, Leics (Chair); Doug Allan, (Secretary); Joe Jefferies, NASUWT, Notts; Tony Norton, N Lincs; Chris Chapman, Cheshire; David Harty, Cambs; Margaret Judd, Dorset; Gillian Hayward, Gloucs; Stewart King, Gloucs; Steph Simcox, Worcs; Pauline Hibbert, Stockport; Christine Atkinson, ERYC.

Apologies: Robin Walker MP, Worcester (Vice Chair); Nic Dakin MP (Vice Chair); Bernadette Hunter, Staffs/NAHT; Gillian Allcroft, NGA; Eunice Finney, Staffs; Sam Ellis (Financial Consultant); Helen Donovan, Worcs; Jon Pearsall, Worcs; Edwina Grant, Central Beds; Francis Loftus, North Yorks. Liz Eyre, Worcs

2. Minutes of the meeting held 28 September 2014

The minutes of 28 September 2013 were approved as a correct record of the meeting.

3. Activities since the last meeting (note that the scheduled meetings for January and March were postponed)

- Meeting with Oliver Letwin MP, 14 October 2013 to discuss Conservative Policy on school funding and approach to the next national Election Manifesto. **Noted.**
- Meeting with Schools Minister, David Laws MP, 29 October 2013. **Noted.**
- Meeting of research team with DfE representatives, 6 November 2013. **Noted.**
- Meeting with Shadow Secretary of State for Education, Tristram Hunt MP, 21 January 2014. This meeting took place not long after Mr Hunt had been made Shadow Secretary. **Noted.**
- Letter to the Secretary of State and Schools Minister about NFF delay and Deprivation concerns, 27 January 2014. And response dated 14 February. **Noted.**
- Double-page feature on f40's campaign published in Academy Magazine, January 2014. **Noted.**
- National Conference staged 6 February 2014 at The Palace of Westminster, London. IO commented that he thought this event had been probably the most important annual conference we have staged so far. It was a great venue and we attracted considerable attention from the government and MPs. **Noted.**
- Letter to David Blunkett MP to contribute to the Labour Party's debate on the future role of local government in the delivery of education services. The Policy Review should be published soon. IO also pointed out that Edward Timpson MP had recently commenced an investigation into the way in which Birmingham Council delivers children's services, to include potential ways of delivering them via private companies/trusts etc. This is viewed as potentially dangerous for local government in general. **Noted.**

Notes and correspondence for most of the above matters can be viewed on f40's website.

4. School Funding Formula

4.1 School Funding – Minimum Funding Levels – Announcement

This important announcement was made by Schools Minister, David Laws, to Parliament on 13 March 2014. It indicates that total extra funding of £350million is to be made available for 2015-16 to a total of 62 local authorities identified by government as having the poorest funding levels. The amount includes £172millions for 23 f40 member authorities. The government emphasised that this

extra funding is not a first step towards a new national funding formula, which would not now be introduced before the elections in 2015. A list showing f40 'gainers' and those that will not gain, was tabled.

Immediately after the announcement, f40 issued a news release welcoming the extra funding and the fresh recognition of the case for fairer funding. Whilst still welcoming the injection of extra cash, f40 and individual member LAs have now been able to examine spreadsheets showing the methodology the DfE has used in calculation how the extra cash will be allocated. There is concern that not all f40 authorities, which by definition are among the worst funded, have gained, and that some have only gained small amounts. Two meetings (20 March and 9 April 2014) have been held with DfE representatives to discuss the underlying calculations and issues created. Notes of these two meetings had been circulated. They are available on the website.

MJ said that at the first meeting (20 March) with the DfE there appeared to be considerable surprise that f40 might have any reservations about the announcement. It was as a result of our concerns that the wrong datasets had been used to make the calculations and that many LAs have been unable to replicate the DfE figures, that the DfE agreed to circulate spreadsheets showing the detailed calculations for individual authorities. They only arrived at 5pm on Tuesday 8 April. They also agreed to a further meeting in advance of f40's Executive Committee.

At the second meeting (9 April), there was discussion about ways in which the allocation calculations could have been modelled to produce a fairer solution. One alternative was based on stripping High Needs out of the Schools Block and a second would involve uplifting MFL s by an agreed percentage to take account of Early Years and High Needs, and then comparing the uplifted MFL with the 2012-13 GUfs. The DfE agreed to look at these, though they made it clear that only relatively small variations to the announced figures will be tolerated. They also agreed to publish a set of FAQs as soon as possible to assist LAs. They are also considering providing a spreadsheet with all LA calculations so that individual LAs can undertake comparisons.

MJ presented several slides that explained how the DfE calculations had been made and why the allocations are unlike what f40 might have anticipated. During a discussion, the following points were made:

- There was concern that the calculations being used for allocation of the "extra" funding looks like the beginning of a formula that might become the foundation of a new national funding formula, in which case the basics would be wrong from the start. That would be disastrous for f40 LAs.
- There was concern that LAs would be asked to make final budget decisions before they have access to all the appropriate data from the DfE. This would create significant financial planning issues, especially if pupil numbers drop, or in connection with prior attainment.
- There was concern that f40 would accept the existing calculations so as not to offend the "generous offer" from the government, even though it is clear the basis of the allocations can be shown to be wrong. The group should stand by its declared principles and continue to campaign for the fairest possible allocation now and a new funding formula as soon as possible.
- A minority view was expressed that the extra funding is a sop to f40 aimed at keeping member LAs quiet in the absence of the promised new funding formula.
- Several committee members commended the work undertaken by those who had visited the DfE to discuss the allocation calculations and suggest variations. It was hoped these discussions and subsequent trial modelling might persuade the DfE to adjust the calculations in such a way that more f40 poorly funded LAs might benefit.
- The view was expressed that this whole episode had proven the need for a fairer approach to High Needs, as well as Schools Block.

- In response to a question about the long-term implications re the £350million funding, MJ suggested that she was concerned that the extra funding would be in place at least for two years, maybe more if the introduction of the new formula was delayed further, say because of a change of government.
- IO said that despite the concerns, the group had to be positive. Many f40 LAs will achieve a relative gain, but the whole process is creating some embarrassment between member authorities. He also spoke of the massive ‘unfunded’ pressures that local authorities are facing this year and next.
- One member suggested it was unfortunate that the DfE hadn’t tested the calculations with f40 in advance of the announcement. After all, we are supposed to be working with the department! If we had had an advance opportunity to comment we could may have been able to iron out a few issues and reach a fairer distribution.
- GH suggested that when preparing responses to the MLF Consultation all member LAs that have gained should point out how they plan to distribute the extra funding.

AGREED:

- That DA should ask the DfE for the MFL Values for all LAs so that some modelling can be undertaken.
- That f40’s response to the consultation makes it clear that f40 has concerns about the methodology and hopes that a better information can be applied to the allocation process.
- That we continue to discuss our concerns about the allocation of the £350million with the DfE and, in the longer term, about how the new funding formula is developed.

4.2 Chair’s letter to f40 Lead Politicians and Directors of Children’s Services

On 1 April, the Chair wrote to all lead politicians and Director of Children’s Services in member LAs to welcome the extra funding as a first step, but also to confirm that f40 would ensure that its campaign promotes fair funding for all of the poorest funded LAs, schools and pupils. He reminded members that unity has always been a particular strength and it should be maintained despite the MFL creating winners and losers within f40’s ranks. IO promised that the group will always fight for the best outcome for all member LAs and that, after dealing with the current MLF consultation, f40 will continue to lobby to ensure that the government keeps its promise to consult on a new national funding formula for schools.

4.3 Feedback on announcement from MPs – paper prepared by Vice Chair, Robin Walker MP

RW’s paper listed the MPs (24 in total) who had spoken positively on the announcement in Parliament. The paper also mentioned that several MPs (Staffordshire, Solihull, East Riding and Warrington, which are f40 members) had been in touch to express concern and disappointment that their LA had received relatively small, or no allocation at all.

He indicated that he had received very positive feedback from Members representing Shropshire, Cambridgeshire, Warwickshire, Swindon, Cheshire, Gloucestershire and Dorset. He mentioned that in his own authority, Worcestershire, the news of uplift had been generally welcomed, though some schools and governors have raised concerns about relatively small proportional uplift compared to other areas.

4.4 Fair Schools Funding in 2015-16: Consultation Response

SK had kindly prepared a draft response on behalf of f40 for consideration by the Executive Committee. He was warmly thanked for his work. The draft was discussed paragraph by paragraph

and changes agreed in various sections. **AGREED** that SK/DA to finalise the submission, which will then be shared with all f40 member LAs, with a final version being submitted to the DfE by the consultation deadline – 30 April 2014.

In order to try and ensure that f40 and individual LA responses follow a similar line, it was **AGREED** that a letter will be sent to all member LAs asking that, as far as possible, they try to match the answers in their responses.

4.5 Westminster Hall Debate – 9.30am, Tuesday 29 April 2014

Robin Walker MP, Vice Chair of f40, has been successful in securing a 90-minute debate in Westminster Hall. The title of the debate will be: "Fairer Schools Funding and the f40 campaign"

Robin has support from the following lead members, some of whom wish to raise concerns but others who wish to celebrate the progress that has been achieved so far: Sir Nick Harvey (LD), Julian Huppert (LD), Jeremy Lefroy (Con),

Other identified supporters include, David Davis, Andrew Percy, Michael Fabricant, David Mowat, Richard Graham, Sir Peter Luff, Andrew Jones, Dan Byles, Daniel Kawczynski, Ann McIntosh, Daniel Kawczynski, Neil Carmichael, Chris Pincher, Mark Pritchard, Ann Marie Morris, Richard Drax (all Con); Martin Horwood (LD) and Dennis Skinner (Lab). Nic Dakin (Lab) would also have supported but as a whip is not allowed to sign backbench motions).

Robin also suggested that it would be a good opportunity for f40 MPs to speak up about local concerns, welcome the progress that has been made and press the case for further reform. He recommended that f40 produces a short briefing paper to support MPs who wish to speak in the debate and encourage local authorities whose MPs are not engaged in the campaign already to lobby them to take part. **AGREED** that a short guide to fair funding will be produced and made available to all MPs representing f40 local authorities.

RW was congratulated on securing this important debate in the closing days prior to the conclusion of the current consultation. It was also **AGREED** that f40 will encourage all f40 member authorities to write to their MPs to encourage them to attend and join in this debate.

DA to ascertain whether f40 (and the public) can be represented at the debate. **AGREED**

4.6 Leicestershire Motion to Council

IO confirmed that his LA had agreed unanimously a Motion of Council about school funding. The Motion had then been drawn to the attention of all Leicestershire MPs and calling on them to support the council. Several MPs have responded positively. **AGREED** that the Leicestershire Motion and letter to MPs should be circulated to all f40 LAs with an invitation for them to do something similar and maintain pressure on the government.

5. National Funding Formula and Future Campaign Strategy

There are many actions listed above under various headings which constitute the key actions that must be taken forward in the immediate future. Dealing with the extra funding allocation and current consultation must be the priority. Then we must develop our approach to achieving the new national funding formula, which is now a post-election policy.

In addition to above actions, it was **AGREED**:

- That f40 must step up its public relations activities to ensure that the extra funding is definitely just “a first step” towards a new national funding formula and that all political parties fully understand the issues relating to fair funding of schools.
- That f40 must find a way of approaching Parliamentary Candidates in f40 LAs in the general election to establish their views on fair funding. Schools and parents should also be encouraged to ask similar questions.
- That member LAs should encourage parents to write to the Secretary of State, Schools Minister and local MPs to demand a move to a new and fair schools funding formula as quickly as possible.

6. LA Finance Managers Research Team

This team of volunteers from the ranks of LA Finance Managers was set up to develop proposals for a new national funding formula. It initially looked at a range of propositions and modelling, resulting in f40's paper “Towards a National Funding Formula for Schools – the F40 Perspective”. Notes of the various meetings are on the website.

SK has agreed to continue to chair the research group if the executive Committee wishes it to continue.

AGREED that the group has undertaken some very important work and should continue to meet as necessary to develop ideas and undertake modelling. Subjects for the team will include Sparsity, High Needs and detailed examination of approaches to a new national funding formula.

7. Membership and Finances

DA reported that at 30 March 2014 the group had 34 member LAs. Two authorities – Torbay Northumberland – had joined in the latter stages of 2013-14.

DA sought formal approval of the subscription fee for 2014-15 at £1,000 per member authority. He confirmed that invoices have been issued for these fees.

It was confirmed that the group's finances are in good shape and there are sufficient funds for current and future campaigning.

8. Dates of future meetings

DA reported that future meetings are scheduled for 7 June, 6 September and 6 December 2014. Members are asked to make a note of these dates in their diaries.