



Note of meeting with DfE held Wednesday, 9 April 2019

DfE:

- Tony Foot, Director, Funding and Analysis Directorate, Early Years and Schools Group
- Tom Goldman, Deputy Director, Funding Policy Unit
- Helen Alderton, Funding Policy Unit
- Eva Sharma, Funding Policy Unit
- Russell Ewans, High Needs team

F40:

- Cllr James McInnes, Chair of f40 and Cabinet Member for Childrens and Schools, Devon County Council
- Cllr Michael Appleyard, Cabinet Member for Education and Skills, Buckinghamshire County Council
- Margaret Judd, f40 Executive Committee Member/Chair f40's Finance Managers Research Team (FMRT) and Sufficiency & Funding Team Manager, Dorset Council
- Andrew Minall, Head of Education Financial Services, Hampshire County Council
- Doug Allan, Secretary of f40

1. Introductions

2. Discussion

JMcl thanked the DfE team for the opportunity to continue the discussion about school funding and the NFF. Maintaining a good working relationship continues to be very important.

TF acknowledged that f40 statements/documents tend to welcome NFF but he encouraged f40 to present this strongly enough. JMcl suggested that f40 aims for a balance and does welcome the NFF but also believes it needs further work. MJ stated that the group didn't want to sound critical but raising issues around the edges and trying to alleviate tensions in the system is critical to the group's campaign.

F40 had circulated its **campaign strategy statement**. This is prominent on the group's website and will be used at campaign events in the coming months. It makes use of figures on School Funding and High Needs shortfalls stemming from f40 modelling. TG asked how the High Needs figure had been arrived at and MJ acknowledged that it was a figure agreed with NEU, which closely mirrored the figure in the Isos Tipping Point report.

MA and JMcl took the opportunity to reference the very real issues relating to High Needs in their LAs. TF said that the department is very aware of the problems and is looking at High Needs overspends across the country and stated they are set against DSG rather than council tax/ central spend.

MA said that special needs in his LA is in real crisis and it is proving very difficult to manage. Creating special units is an expensive activity and transporting pupils to them is problematic and costly. The LA is quite definitely "trailing the need" and it is a pressure on central resources. SEN is 75% of education spend centrally. Can't get the right level of professional staff and employing fewer in SEN. The knock-on effect is horrendous.

JMcl said that High Needs is in crisis and LAs are approaching breaking point. There is a need for more special schools, but LAs appear to be 'locked out' of access to necessary resources and answers, meaning that outstanding or good maintained special schools are not able to support the new provision as it is only open to academy trusts to set up and there

may not be enough academy special schools to support all the potential new schools. Using private sector facilities is very expensive.

MA asked if the DfE is monitoring increased reporting of autism. TF said yes.

RE asked if the legislation is at fault or the way it is interpreted by individual LAs. Various f40 representatives suggested the legislation had had an impact by enabling more children to be in the mix – which in itself was not a fault – but expectations had been increased but resources to deal with the extra demand were not available.

Briefing paper: f40 had previously provided a copy of the group's latest Briefing Paper (April 2019) and updated Narrative in support of the f40 modelling. MJ refreshed memories about the intellectual basis of the modelling and explained f40's approach to various elements:

TG wondered about the £3.4 billion figure for 2019/20 shortfall and MJ explained how it had been reached. He also asked several other questions and MJ agreed that some adjustments would be made to reflect the points raised.

ES referred to MFL and NFF being a top-down approach. She asked if f40 had a view on the routes to get additional resources to the poorest funded schools/LAs. MJ and AM suggested that the minimum figure should be the basic entitlement: if there's a lot of cash in the system then you don't need MFL, but when there is a shortage, you may. ES suggested that f40's approach is unclear about whether MFL is delivering. TG suggested that the MFL was positive for f40 areas and f40's response was that it was at best a sticking plaster that meant that there were a group of schools just above the thresholds that were relatively disadvantaged by it and it was at best a temporary measure whilst the basic entitlement increased as this should ultimately be sufficient and would negate the need for the MFL.

Modelling and Narrative: The DfE team indicated that they had examined the revised modelling and could see where it had been updated and adjusted since the last meeting. It is clear and easily understood, and is a valid, intellectual approach. F40 reps said it is the only bottom-up calculation available and it provides a useful basis for real school costs

TG raised two particular issues that need checking – whether Key stage 5 values are embedded within secondary class sizes; and whether the approach to non-staff costs is right given the pensions increase. MJ agreed to look at this.

TF said that the modelling provides much valuable information that informs the ongoing debate within the department. MJ suggested that the year on year cost changes information must be useful and TF agreed that it is.

Next Steps: JMcl asked if there was anything else specifically that the DfE would like f40's help on and TG said not in terms of the modelling, but perhaps in terms of High Needs pressures on schools.

RE explained that the DfE was about to issue a Call for Evidence in relation to the High Needs situation in schools and LAs. TF suggested that it would be very useful if f40 could undertake some research among its members to try and identify a list of suggestions that LAs and schools might put forward – not just on funding levels, but positive suggestions about the legislation, its application and practical ideas that could help to reduce pressures.

DA handed over a document containing evidence of pressures experienced by headteachers in a range of schools in a range of f40 LAs.

JMcl indicated that the **CSR** would be the group's main focus for the next six months. TF suggested that the Chancellor had indicated a three-year CSR with discussion starting in the summer and concluding in the autumn. The Chancellor also caveated this on the assumption that there was an orderly Brexit.

There will be an Executive Committee and MPs' Briefing in Parliament on 14 May and f40 would be collaborating with other school funding organisations throughout the summer, including a "Together for Education" event in Westminster Central Hall on 22 June.

TF said that again he had found the meeting very useful and constructive. He thanked f40's representatives for taking the time to meet and discuss school funding and looked forward to a further meeting, probably in the summer.

End
DA/9 April 2019