



## **f40 Executive Committee Meeting** **Saturday, 6 February 2010 at Amerton Farm, Staffordshire**

### **1. Attendance and apologies**

#### Present

Ivan Ould, Leics; Doug Allan, Secretariat; Mick Brookes, NAHT; Lindsey Wharmby, f40 Consultant; Joe Jefferies, NASUWT; Gillian Hayward, Gloucs; Peter Doyle, Devon; Tony Norton, N Lincs; Helen Donovan, Worcs; Jon Pearsall, Worcs; David Smith, Wigan; Mike Sladen, Cambs; Eunice Finney, Staffs; Chris Chapman, Cheshire East

#### Apologies

Francis Loftus, N Yorks; Geoff Venn, Beds; Vanessa Eddey, Dorset; David Harty, Cambs and David Kidney MP

### **2. Minutes of the previous meeting**

The minutes of the meeting held on 3 November 2009 were approved as an accurate record of the procedures.

### **3. Conference – 3 November 2009**

The conference staged at Church House was considered to have been an outstanding success. The notes of the conference, circulated post-conference, were approved as an accurate record of the event. A copy of these notes and various speaker's contributions, are available on the f40 website.

### **4. DSG Formula Review**

Regretfully, and despite an encouraging statement made by the PM's office on 20 January in response to Devon CC's petition, there has not been a Government announcement about the results of the DSG Formula Review. The view within the committee is that the Government will not be able to undertake a consultation in advance of the general election and will therefore delay any announcement. This is not only extremely disappointing for f40, but also means that the Group's tactics will need to change to ensure that fair funding remains high on the political agenda over the next few months.

LW emphasised the importance of a consultation proceeding either immediately or straight after the election, based on all the research and available information stemming from the Review. DS stated that grants now paid separately by DCSF have often originated as a response to an individual issue and are, therefore, merely "sticking plasters". He suggested he and the LGA are in favour of seeing fewer of these ring-fenced grants. MS suggested that f40 needs to be clear and consistent about its approach. The DSG Review may eventually offer some help, but may also take away important funding streams.

IO (and others) raised a range of key issues that are increasingly important in the funding debate, but which don't seem to have been included in the funding debate, including:

- **Free school meals** – the eligibility threshold has increased with no information on how it will be funded.

- **School transport** – potential statutory duty implications stemming from fact that the participation age has been raised.
- **Sure Start** – budget reports indicate that there will be inflationary increases but there is no detail available to date.
- **Children’s Centres** – the consultation on children’s centres suggested a move away from specific grants and a move to DSG which would have significant distribution issues in particular for rural authorities with pockets of deprivation. This point also relates to School Development and School Standard grants.
- **Harnessing Technology** – there are rumours that this grant will cease in 2011, which means that the funding of servicing and network maintenance of broadband will not be funded. The importance and cost of broadband in rural communities is a particular issue.
- **Nursery Education** – provision for 2 year olds is currently being piloted and if ‘mainstreamed’ would have major financial implications.
- **Post-16 provision** – the costs associated with maintaining this sector in a shrinking economic climate and increased participation.
- **Building Schools for the Future (BSF)** – this is an extremely important issue for f40 authorities, but is not being adequately addressed.
- **Classroom Assistants** – additional costs.
- **Procurement** – severe problems are being experienced in many areas at a time of increased costs and/or poor service.

**ACTION:** It was agreed that individual f40 authorities may well wish to add to this list. Any thoughts should be communicated to Doug Allan asap. These points will be highlighted in future communications and media releases.

MB referred to a meeting he had attended recently at which Ministers highlighted the threat of reduced funding in 2011. Under the title “More for Less” speakers had talked about squeezing more value from lower funding, but MB had made it clear that in his opinion “less” means “loss”.

It was agreed that it is critically important to be proactive now, regardless of the Government’s inaction. We can’t sit around waiting for a consultation that may not now come. Suggestions for urgent action were discussed and generally supported. To include:

- An immediate email to all member authorities drawing attention to the Executive Committee’s current view about the status of the review.
- In order to ensure member authorities are fully engaged, all future f40 circulations of information aimed at Directors of Children’s Services, also to be copied to Executive/Cabinet Members responsible for children’s services and to Chairs of School Forums.
- Preparation of an open letter (to be agreed by all Executive Members) to the Secretary of State, Ministers, Shadow Ministers, PPCs, LGA, relevant groups and agencies, which would also be sent to national and regional media representatives, expressing disappointment and concern at the Government’s dithering and highlighting the potential issues for the poorest funded authorities if nothing changes.
- Production of an information pack (quick & dirty guide to fair funding, slides for public meetings, examples of inequity, funding league positions and potential damage if the Funding Review fails to deliver etc) to be made available to all PPCs and member authorities.
- Plea to member authorities to recognise the dangers of Government inaction and to mobilise action to raise the issues locally, regionally and nationally. It is essential that “grassroots” action is taken at this point. Encouragement for local publicity to inform parents, governors, head teachers, teachers, school support staff and trade union members about the Government’s failure to address f40’s central concerns.
- Summit of all f40 member authority Lead Members for Children’s Services to galvanise action and provide a platform for media attention.

- A further National Conference will be staged at Church House, London on 8 (preferred) or 15 June 2010. It was agreed that a pre-election conference was impractical and June was the earliest that a conference could be organised after the general election. The intention would be to target the new Government and MPs in the early days of a new administration and to highlight fact that this is not the time to be cutting back on education – but to make a fairer distribution. F40 authorities will be invited to send politicians, Directors and Chairs of School Forums. Other invitees might include CRC, LGA, trade Unions etc. Also media representatives.
- Take further action with f40 member authorities to encourage them to promote the petition on the PM's Downing Street site.
- Attract national and regional media attention for the fairer funding cause.

**AGREED:** that DA should develop and circulate an Action Plan for comment, and to attract additional ideas. That DA should commence organisation of those elements that can/must be started without delay.

### **5. Rural Services All-Party Parliamentary Group – Funding Inquiry**

It was reported that f40 has been invited to contribute to this Inquiry, which will convene in the House of Commons on Tuesday 23 February 2010. It was agreed that Lindsey Wharmby and Francis Loftus should attend and present f40's position.

Peter Doyle reported that Devon CC has also been invited to give evidence.

### **6. Membership and Finance**

DA reported that the current membership is 32 local authorities. New members accepted into the Group are Oxfordshire and Trafford.

**AGREED:** That at the end of March, DA should invoice all member authorities for annual subscriptions for 2010-11. The subscription will remain at the same level, £2,000, which means the level has not increased for 8 years.

IO reported that he has spoken to his political counterpart at Staffordshire CC about the council taking a more active role in f40 activities. EF also stated that she too was in touch with the council about this.

### **7. CIPR Award – DTW entry with f40**

DA reported that he had submitted an entry for the Chartered Institute of Public Relations annual Pride Awards 2009 which was successful in winning the Silver Award for Public Affairs. The committee congratulated DA on winning this award and attracting additional publicity to the Group's cause.

### **8. AOB**

DA reported on an approach received from Total Politics, a company working closely with Devon CC on reorganisation issues. The company suggests it can assist in getting messages across to PPCs, MPs, Government Ministers and Civil Servants. It was agreed that the information would be kept on file and the company's services considered again, if necessary.

MS provided a copy of Cambridgeshire CC's paper "Integrated Planning Strategy 2010-2015 and Allocation of Schedule 2 of DSG" which may be of interest to other authorities. MS will supply an electronic copy to DA so that he can circulate it to member authorities.

### **9. Next Meeting**

The next Executive Committee meeting will be held at Amerton Farm, Staffs at 11am on Saturday, 8 May 2010.