



f40 Executive Committee Meeting

Thursday, 21 May 2020 – Conference Call

1. Attendances, apologies, and changes to committee membership

Present: Cllr James McInnes (Chair); Cllr Michael Appleyard (Bucks CC); Emily Proffitt (Staffs Headteacher); Karen Westcott (Secretary); Margaret Judd, (Dorset Council); Carole Thomson, (Oxfordshire Schools Forum); Jackie Smith (CEO Brunel SEN MAT & Uplands Educational Trust); Andrew Minall (Hampshire CC); Cllr Mary Evans (Suffolk CC); Julia Harnden (ASCL); Cllr Richard Long (Kent CC); Steven Edmonds (NGA).

Cllr Peter Downes (Cambs Schools Forum) tried to join the meeting on several occasions but was unsuccessful.

Apologies: Phil Haslett (Glos CC); Cllr Alex Dale (Derbyshire CC); Howard Emmett (North Yorks CC).

2. Minutes of the meeting held on 27 January 2020

The minutes were **APPROVED** as a correct record of the meeting.

3. Confirmation of Deputy Chair

MA said he was standing down as deputy chair of f40 and would be leaving the group as he no longer had a role within Buckinghamshire County Council. He will be stepping down as a councillor in May 2021. MA thanked the group and said he had enjoyed working with members over the years.

JMcl thanked MA for his support and efforts to improve the fairness of education funding.

After a show of hands, members welcomed EP as the new deputy chair of the f40 group.

4. Matters to be noted:

- Matt Western MP confirmed as new Labour Vice Chair (MP for Warwick and Leamington)

5. Covid-19 and the impact on schools:

a. Budgets and costs

EP said the pandemic had had a huge financial impact on schools. She said her school had lost about £20,000 so far from income streams that were currently unavailable, such as wraparound care. She said she was also concerned as she believed any school with a surplus would not be able to claim additional costs back from Government. She said she believed schools would have greater deficit budgets because of Covid-19.

AM said in Hampshire the information coming from schools was that income-generating areas were causing particular issues. He said they were looking at other options to counterbalance this, and he believed budgets would be more of an issue further down the line.

He said the original list issued by the Department for Education, outlining where schools could claim back for extra expenditure, was limited.

However, AM said he believed those with surplus budgets would still be able to claim additional costs back from Government, but that they could not use the pandemic to add to their surplus budget.

MJ said she had also interpreted Government guidelines in that way, so local authorities and schools could reclaim additional expenses, but not make a profit from Covid-19. She agreed the list from the DfE was limited.

ME said her concern was that in the beginning, when the country first went into lockdown and schools closed to the majority of pupils, local authorities were told to spend whatever it took to put the necessary measures in place. However, she said since then Government seemed to have pulled back that advice.

ME said Suffolk CC had been frank with Government about their expenditure on SEND during the pandemic.

CT said one of the main issues was the extra cleaning costs as schools needed to be repeatedly deep cleaned. She also said, as up to 30% of staff were unable to go into work because they were isolating, schools were struggling to find supply teachers and then pay for them (not deemed an additional cost by DfE).

JH agreed that she believed schools could reclaim the extra costs and were not expected to use their current surplus budgets to pay for additional expenditure during the pandemic.

JH said ASCL found the greatest issue was the loss of private income within schools and colleges, and that the list put out by the DfE did not cover the full range of additional costs.

She said ASCL was asking very specific questions of the DfE and asking that the list of costs be extended to cover other areas and be extended past July.

JH said ASCL was told the list was just a starting point, so they are taking a full list of actual extra costs back to the DfE. She also said there were some schools that would be more disadvantaged than others as they couldn't access the additional funding.

JMcl encouraged all schools, colleges and local authorities to keep a record of the extra costs incurred. He said it was imperative that evidence was collected so it could be shared with the DfE later.

JH said ASCL had produced a calculator application for schools and colleges to use, which she was happy to share with f40 members. JH to send it to KW for wider circulation.

EP said with regards to free school meals, her school was significantly out of pocket because they couldn't get the Government's voucher system to work and they did not want pupils to go without meals. They provided vouchers from the school budget and were continuing to do so.

EP said there was little guidance for schools around FSM and what they were supposed to be doing going forward, but she hoped the DfE would recompense schools.

She also said her school had been unable to furlough all of the staff it wished to because some had second contracts, meaning the school had been forced to continue picking up salary costs.

ME said Suffolk CC had decided to link each additional cost to the guidance issued by Government, so they could directly attribute each cost to specific advice.

MJ said in Dorset they had asked their schools to complete forms about additional spending and had asked some to return them to the council now, so they could begin to understand the extra costs incurred.

AM said in Hampshire schools had also been instructed to keep a list of extra costs, but the council had also asked schools to recognise where savings could be made.

He said some schools had experienced problems when trying to recoup costs of cancelled trips. He said many schools were caught in the middle between parents asking for their money back and operators being slow to refund or refusing to refund. He said the authority was taking legal advice.

JH said where bus companies and tour operators had been difficult with schools and colleges about cancelled trips, ASCL had passed their names onto the DfE.

JS said one of the biggest additional costs for her in the SEND sector had been the cost of buying necessary PPE. She said children with SEND often bit and licked staff, so PPE was paramount for her staff. However, she said she had to purchase it herself – having no choice but to buy in bulk. As a result, she had to buy 25,000 aprons.

JS said the pandemic had resulted in many additional costs with regards staffing and equipment needs. They had had to invest in portable toilets to aid social distancing and had bought several thermometers as all children were having their temperature taken on arrival at school. She said the list of extra costs was extensive.

RL said it was in the hands of the DfE to help schools meet these extra costs.

b. Free School Meals (FSM)

JS said her school had also gone outside of the Government's FSM scheme. She said her MAT had to organise FSM very early and could not wait for the DfE to put something in place.

JH said the lockdown had highlighted many issues already recognised in schools around disadvantaged children and the need for a long-term plan around FSM. She said Government provided food vouchers for children during the Easter holidays, but nothing had been arranged for the May half-term. She said a voucher system was needed throughout the year – not just during term time.

ME said in Suffolk, they also had difficulty with the DfE scheme. She said in rural areas there was not the same extensive choice of supermarkets and the vouchers did not always cover available stores, such as Co-op. She said she had heard stories about parents having to take £30 taxi rides in order to cash in a £15 food voucher.

ME said there had also been a huge increase in applications for Universal Credit. She said the number of children receiving FSM would rise, leading to extra costs for the DfE, schools and authorities.

She said she believed some children would not be back in school until Christmas and there was concern about the well-being of those who were disadvantaged. Even in middle class areas, she said, families were now on Universal Credit and the local authority would have to pick up the cost.

JS agreed that a year-round FSM system was needed, and everyone should work together to encourage the DfE to introduce changes.

She said the DfE should work with local authorities and schools more to find possible solutions to challenges, before introducing new initiatives. She said on the FSM scheme, the DfE clearly did not speak to different regions and schools, because it didn't work in many areas.

c. Schools opening to extra pupils

EP said at her school plans were in place to start accepting additional year groups on June 1.

She said they were originally expected to receive around 50% of children from the additional year groups from June 1, but only 25% were likely to return. She said some parents had indicated they did not wish for their children to return.

She said parents who were doctors and nurses (key workers) had kept their children away from school during recent weeks, rather than taking up the opportunity of sending their youngsters into school.

EP also believed local authorities had been slow to circulate Government guidance to schools. She said the frequency of new guidance from the DfE had been unsettling. She said headteachers were applying one set of guidelines, only to be told that new guidelines had been issued.

She said one of the biggest concerns among headteachers was accountability, and whether all responsibility would land with the headteacher.

She also cited social distancing of the youngest year groups as a major concern – saying it was virtually impossible.

EP said at her school there would be a minimal return to school on June 1 because parents did not have faith in it.

JS said there was a lot of anxiety in all schools about it.

She said the constantly changing guidance, and the fact that the guidance was open to interpretation, were big concerns.

JS also asked how schools were to deliver a meaningful curriculum if it was only available to some children.

JS said the schools in her MAT had never closed and a significant number of children with SEND had continued to attend. However, she said 20% of her staff had been shielding from the pandemic. She said schools were in an impossible situation.

SE said there was a level of concern over responsibility and accountability for both headteachers and governors. He said governing bodies were giving advice to headteachers based on Government guidelines and were urging them to view them positively, rather than with fear.

ME said in Suffolk they had a lot of rural schools, where the leadership team was just one or two people. She said they had worked tirelessly since February and there was concern about physical and mental pressure.

She said people wanted to do the right thing, but parents were really nervous about sending their children back to school. She said parents working in the medical fields were the most nervous.

MJ said in Dorset schools had been grouped in clusters and meetings were held twice a week with cluster heads to discuss ongoing issues and challenges. She said the clusters supported each other, so heads of small schools would not be isolated and left to cope alone.

MJ said the Local Government Association was looking at the issue of accountability and had a legal team looking at it.

RL said most Kent schools had remained open to some children throughout and he believed the majority would expand their provision to more children on or after June 1.

He said it was the local authority's job to help schools understand and implement the guidance.

JMcl said in Devon the local authority had been proactive and was helping schools. He said the partnership-working had been tremendous throughout the pandemic and he hoped it would continue going forward. He said the imaginary walls had been knocked down.

He said schools expanding their intake from June 1 should not feel frightened by the experience. He said schools and local authorities should be thinking about what they can do, rather than what they can't, and they should be looking at all of the issues.

He said there should be lots of conversations locally between headteachers and the authority. However, for some schools, he said taking in more pupils from June 1 would not be realistic.

EP and JS said they had been very disappointed at the negative media coverage aimed at the teaching profession in recent weeks. They said teachers wanted to do the right thing and wanted to teach, but equally did not want to put anyone at risk.

SE said schools were not "re-opening" as they had been open throughout, they were merely going to accept more pupils. He said he was also disappointed by the media coverage and said the country could not have continued to operate without the support and efforts of teachers.

He said he believed Government now recognised the challenges within schools and that local conditions would determine what could and could not be achieved by June 1. He said new scientific advice would be available on May 28.

JS said the term 'reopening' schools should be banned as it was misleading. She said schools had been open throughout – without any protective measures. She said it should not

have been her responsibility to source PPE. She had no PPE in her SEND schools for three weeks.

JH said the negative media coverage had undermined the sector and she agreed that teachers needed support, not criticism.

d. Widening achievement gap

JMcl said there was no doubt there would be a widening gap in achievement, as a result of the pandemic and lockdown.

EP agreed that it was inevitable but her message to parents was to trust teachers to do their jobs when schools returned properly. She said teachers would do all they could to help children catch up.

e. School transport

ME said in Suffolk the county council had received the Government guidance on school transport, showing how many children were able to travel on vehicles at any one time.

For example, she said, 18 children would be permitted on a 72-seater bus. She said allocating the right school transport would be extremely difficult. She said children got on school transport from various places and organising the right transport for the right number of pupils would be near impossible. Making sure children sat 2m apart would also be extremely hard, she said.

ME said the local authority believed more parents would choose to drive their children to school, which would create parking issues outside schools. She said the whole school transport issue was unpredictable and challenging.

JS said the issues were similar at her SEND MAT. She said most parents were bringing their children to school themselves, and where pupils were arriving on other transport, they were coming on minibuses, with one child to a bus.

JS said when pupils arrived at school, they had their temperature taken, which slowed the process of getting children into class. As a result, they have had to stagger arrival times. She said school transport had a vital role to play. If children have not socially distanced on school transport on the way into school, trying to keep them apart in class was pointless as there had already been cross contamination.

JMcl said until social distancing went to 1m, he didn't think school transport would be practical or workable.

f. Other issues/challenges

JMcl said he hoped local authorities and schools had earmarked someone to record all the innovations that were currently being used to deal with the pandemic. He said some changes were for the better and should be continued once life returned to normal.

6. SEND review

KW said she had spoken to Tony McArdle, Chairman of the SEND Leadership Board and an independent adviser to the Government review on SEND, to find out the latest position on the review.

Tony said the review team was due to discuss progress this month and he would update f40 accordingly.

7. f40 SEND stats

KW said 38 of f40's 42 local authority members had submitted their stats on EHCP applications.

KW was using the DSG figures to include the number of pupils for each local authority in the stats, so that they had context.

Once complete, the results will be used by f40 to support reform in the HNB and they will be submitted to the Government review on SEND and the DfE to illustrate pinch points in the EHCP system, and when SEND issues are typically raised at school.

The results will be shared with members of f40.

8. Meeting with the DfE

MJ explained that a provisional meeting between the DfE and members of the Collaboration Group had been cancelled after the country went into lockdown. The meeting had been set up with a member of the NEU and MJ to discuss the Collaboration Group's calculation that education needed an additional £12.6bn during the next three years.

The f40 group to monitor the situation and look to meet with the DfE funding team at a suitable, later date.

9. FMRT meeting proposed

MJ said it would be useful for members of f40's Financial Manager's Research Team (FMRT) to meet in the next few weeks to discuss education funding.

KW to set up a date.

MJ said the FMRT last met in November 2019, but it made sense to meet again to ensure f40's budget modelling and formula were updated, and to ensure education funding remained high on the national agenda.

CT asked if there was any update on teacher pay rises and whether they had been incorporated into the Government's funding model.

AM said he believed the timescales and funding model were unchanged and the consultation on the proposed pay rises would start around the school holidays. The pay rises will take effect from September. He said the consultation and any changes to local pay frameworks would be challenging.

10. Collaboration Group

It was agreed that f40 should suggest a meeting with the Collaboration Group much later in the year, after the current issues have settled down.

JMcl said f40 should stay focused on fair funding in those local authority areas that have been traditionally underfunded.

11. f40 conference

KW updated members on the new provisional date for the f40 conference, November 26, but said things remained uncertain at present. All agreed that f40 would need to follow Government guidance nearer the time.

12. Membership and Financial update

KW said f40 continued to have 42 local authority members and a healthy bank balance. She said f40 would normally invoice local authority members for the £500 membership fee in April, but the decision had been taken to defer invoicing this year until further notice. Members to review the situation in September.

13. Date of future committee meetings

Members agreed the meeting had been useful and another conference call meeting should be arranged for w/c July 6. KW to send a doodle poll to members and arrange a suitable time.