



## **f40 Executive Committee Meeting**

**Thursday, 9 July 2020 – Conference Call**

### **1. Attendances, apologies, and changes to committee membership**

**Present:** Cllr James McInnes (Chair); Karen Westcott (Secretary); Margaret Judd (Dorset Council); Cllr Peter Downes (Cambs Schools Forum); Carole Thomson (Oxfordshire Schools Forum); Jackie Smith (CEO Brunel SEN MAT & Uplands Educational Trust); Andrew Minall (Hampshire CC); Julia Harnden (ASCL); Cllr Richard Long (Kent CC); Steven Edmonds (NGA); Phil Haslett (Glos CC); Christine Atkinson (East Riding of Yorkshire); Cllr Bob Standley (East Sussex CC); Rebecca Dew (DTW).

Richard Soper (Worcester Community Trust) tried to join the meeting but was unsuccessful.

**Apologies:** Emily Proffitt (Staffs Headteacher); Cllr Alex Dale (Derbyshire CC); Howard Emmett (North Yorks CC); Cllr Mary Evans (Suffolk CC); Deborah Myers (East Riding of Yorkshire).

### **2. Minutes of the meeting held on 21 May 2020**

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

### **3. Covid-19 and the impact on schools - update:**

#### **a. Budgets and costs**

AM said at the recent f40 FMRT meeting, members had all agreed that the loss of income for schools during Covid-19, and additional pandemic-related costs, were the major concerns for both schools and local authorities. He said there were real concerns around whether schools would be able to recover all of the costs from the DfE.

MJ said there were concerns around how tight the claims were going to be. And she said there had also been fears that any school with a surplus would be unable to recover any costs at all. However, she said the general consensus was that all schools would be able to recover costs brought about by the coronavirus, but that they could not make additional surplus from it.

PH agreed and said in Gloucestershire the messages from schools were that loss of income and loss of lettings was having a significant impact on school budgets. He also said not all schools were able to furlough staff, which had created additional financial strain.

PH said there was also concern around whether or not schools could claim extra expenses incurred by having teachers working through the Easter holidays. While some schools could operate a rota system and then give teachers who had worked their time back in lieu, many schools had not.

He said some teachers had lost out on holidays and it could prove significant financially.

He said the fact schools were not going to be open during the summer holidays had alleviated some of the fears. However, he said the DfE had indicated that additional staff costs would not be met, which had caused concerns.

JMcl said schools had to be open during the Easter holidays to take care of vulnerable children and the children of key workers. He questioned why the DfE would not cover their costs.

MJ said the DfE had asked schools to join together and set up a rota system. She said it was suggested that teachers who worked during Easter should be given time off later in the year to compensate. However, she said some schools, such as special schools, were unable to do that. MJ said it was an area, perhaps, that the DfE had not fully understood when setting the parameters of what schools could and could not claim back and that individual circumstances should be taken into account.

JMcl asked whether f40 should be doing something to highlight the issue.

AM said in Hampshire there had been some inconsistency between the online DfE claim form guidance and feedback from the Regional Schools Commissioner about claiming for staff costs. AM said the commissioner said they had spoken to the DfE and had been advised to put teaching costs during the holidays in the 'other' section on the claim form.

JS said she had been following the guidance carefully and would be submitting a claim for £75,000, which would primarily cover the cost of PPE. She said at her Trust of special schools they had been using hundreds of face masks every week.

JS said working a rota system was exhausting for staff. She said even if staff were not in school, they were still working from home, as well as looking after their own families.

She said she was not hopeful that all of her claims for extra expenses would be paid. She said the guidance on what could be claimed had changed half-way through the lockdown period.

CA agreed and said loss of income was a big concern for many schools. She questioned why nursery schools had been excluded from making claims for extra expenses. She said a nursery school in her area had tried to claim and had been refused.

AM said it was not clear whether nursery schools could or could not claim.

PH said teaching staff had also spent a lot of time developing new online systems to support children with remote learning. He said that had also taken up much of their holiday and own time. He said the idea of a rota system was not realistic. He said teachers had been under immense pressure, so allowing teachers to take time off as part of the rota system had been difficult.

PH said now teachers and schools were preparing for all children returning in September, taking time off before the summer break would also be difficult. He said appreciation from the DfE in the guidance would have been welcome.

MJ suggested f40 write to the DfE with its concerns around budgets and extra expenses. She said if the DfE were to bring out new guidance this summer on what schools could claim for, it would be useful for them to have some feedback from local authorities about what the issues were.

JH agreed and said ASCL would be writing a similar letter to the DfE too, particularly about loss of income. She said it was important to raise awareness around concerns and represent members. She said the loss of income was huge to so many schools.

MJ said even if the DfE could look at repaying costs this time next year, it would be helpful as the full costs may only become apparent then.

JMcl suggested f40 write to the DfE with its key concerns. He said he believed that local authorities would receive 75% of lost income, so perhaps the DfE could consider the same approach with schools.

AM said writing a letter about additional costs would also prove beneficial to the DfE as it would help them and the Treasury to identify where extra expenditure had arisen.

**Action:** MJ, AM and KW to draft a letter to the DfE from f40 outlining what the financial concerns are. The draft will be circulated to members of the executive before submission.

BS said the latest guidance for local authorities was that they would have to cover the first 5% of extra costs themselves. They would then be able to claim 75% of the rest.

SE said the concerns raised resonated with what school governing bodies had reported to the NGA.

He said he believed it would be beneficial for all of the different school, headteacher and local authority organisations to contact the DfE independently with their concerns. He also wondered if the LGA would like to be involved in communicating with the DfE.

JMcl agreed and said each organisation should submit their own communication to the DfE, and f40 should focus on lack of funding, and the fairness of funding.

PH said he believed timing of the letter was important and he believed the biggest impact on school budgets was yet to come. He said he believed there would be a spike in exclusions in the autumn, along with an increase in EHCP applications, which would lead to additional costs.

JS said there would be additional staffing costs too. She said she had already informed the DfE that the schools in her Trust would not be able to reopen to all children at the beginning of September because of their special needs. She said they were planning a phased return, with all children back in school by the third or fourth week of September. She said she could not over-estimate how difficult it was going to be.

JS said she was disappointed that the DfE had stipulated that all children should return in September, and discretion was not permitted. She said strategic decisions were being taken without the full understanding of the operational delivery constraints.

RL agreed that the biggest impact on schools was yet to come.

#### **b. Return of Years 1 and 6**

Members agreed that not all children who could have returned to school have done so. While many had seen a 60% to 70% return rate, other schools had been able to broaden their offer to other year groups.

### **c. September return**

JMcl said the guidance around all children returning in September had just been released and was still being digested.

PH said in Gloucestershire they were prepared for the September return, but he said the key issues for schools was the public health guidance. He said children would be in bubbles when in school, but out of school they would not. He also said transport for secondary school children would be very difficult to organise in bubbles, or with any kind of social distancing. He said every school was different, so schools would need to apply the guidelines according to their own situation.

PD said he believed schools and local authorities needed to be honest with parents. He said it would be impossible for schools to implement all of the rules. He said Government requirements were not realistic, but parents should be assured that schools and local authorities would be doing their best.

JH said she believed one of the issues was marrying the different guidance from all of the different Government departments, for example around social distancing for the vulnerable. She agreed there would likely be extra staff costs. She also said there would be issues around how schools managed exam results day.

JMcl said he believed it would be difficult to carry out everything asked by the Government when schools returned, and he agreed that councils and schools should be honest, but he stressed that parents needed to be reassured that action was being taken to reduce the risks. He said parents should not be made to feel more anxious than they already are.

JS said she had already communicated to her parents about the gradual return within her Trust. She said some parents did not want their children to return to class straight away, and schools should respect that. JS said digital learning programmes would be available for those children.

JMcl said everyone needed clarity. He said everyone wanted children back in school but threatening parents with prosecution if they failed to send them was not the way to go about it.

### **d. School transport**

JMcl said school transport was going to be difficult. He said children would not be in a social bubble on the bus, but once they arrived at school, they would be.

He said in Devon, 25% of children travelled on public service buses, where social distancing was required. As a result, he said more public service buses would be required for school runs.

PH said in Gloucestershire they did not have the capacity to put on extra buses. He said the cost of school transport was likely to rise significantly as they would be unable to put multiple children on buses.

BS said even if the local authority wanted to allow children to travel in their bubbles, they did not have the resources to enable it to happen. He said unless the social distancing measures were removed, school transport would not work.

#### **e. Other Covid-19 issues/challenges**

AM said f40 should pay attention to the Covid catch-up grant because nobody knew how it was going to be distributed. He said special schools may lose out. He said in Hampshire they were asking the DfE for more information about it.

JMcl said the catch-up grant was something that should be included in the f40 letter to the DfE.

PH said Covid-19 had put a sharp lens on those issues that were already there. In many ways, it had exacerbated existing issues around funding and fairness of funding. This was particularly the case with High Needs funding.

He said because there was not a needs-based funding formula for High Needs, it left schools vulnerable.

He said he believed there would be an increase in EHCP applications. But he said he did not believe that the short-term impact of the pandemic should lead to more children needing EHCPs. PH said he believed that if a child did not need an EHCP previously, they should not need one now. He said other measures should be in place to enable children to catch up both emotionally and academically.

PH said the High Needs funding formula was not effective. He said it should be needs-led and Covid-19 had highlighted that.

JS said in Swindon there had always been funding made available from the High Needs Block to assist those children who were going through the EHCP application process. She said the early intervention had been crucial and had enabled many children to access extra help. However, she said she feared that funding was being removed.

JS asked if f40 could submit a suggestion to Government's review on SEND that early intervention funding be available.

MJ said in Dorset they were in the process of moving to an early help model to help children from Early Years onwards. She said it was designed to try to prevent issues from getting worse and reduce the need for EHCPs.

JMcl suggested that f40 submit the suggestion for additional early intervention funding to the Government SEND review.

**Action:** MJ, AM and KW to stress the importance of extra funding being available for early intervention in the letter to the DfE.

#### **4. Early Years**

MJ said for too long Early Years funding had been scraping along and Covid-19 meant it had lost all flexibility. As a result, she said many providers may close and the country could have big problems with a lack of facilities and places.

PH said the same applied in Gloucestershire and those that relied on private incomes had really suffered, and many may not survive.

AM said Early Years funding had not increased by very much for years.

Members said there were not many maintained nursery schools in their local authority areas because they were difficult to support financially. Instead, most Early Years providers were from the private sector.

## **5. 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.

He had informed her that the review had been halted during the pandemic, but that it would continue in due course.

**Action:** KW to stay in touch with Tony McArdle to find out when the review will resume.

## **6. f40 SEND stats**

MJ said f40 was going to request more information from members around SEND budget deficits. The information supplied would then be used to help f40 in the future as it drafted a funding model relating to High Needs Funding. The research would also be submitted to the Government's SEND review.

**Action:** MJ, AM and KW to discuss the information required in the new survey and to circulate to members.

## **7. FMRT meeting held on June 19, 2020**

JMCI informed members that AM was now chair of the f40 Financial Managers Research Team, and invited AM to summarise the last meeting.

AM said it was a good meeting, with many of the same issues and concerns raised around school funding and Covid-19 as had been discussed in this meeting.

He said it was agreed that f40 would continue to work with the funding model it currently had – which had already been shared with the DfE. He said it was agreed that f40 would only start work on a new funding model when the impact of Covid-19 and the first step to the £30k minimum rate for teacher salaries was known.

AM said f40 would continue to focus on fairness of funding, and quantum, and would still like to work towards a funding system where Minimum Per Pupil Funding Levels (MPPFL) were not required. He raised the difficulty in explaining the adverse impacts of the MPPFL, rather than a single factor to meet basic pupil entitlement.

MJ said it was also agreed that f40 would continue to keep up the pressure on the £12.6b that the Collaboration Group had requested from Government for education in July 2019.

PH said he agreed that the MPPFL was unfair as it left many schools without sufficient funding levels. He said it meant that two schools with the same number of pupils would receive the same funding, even if one of them had a high number of children with SEND and one of them had very few children with SEND. He said the level of need was not taken into account with MPPFL.

**Action:** PH to share his summary of explaining the impact of the MPPFL.

## **8. Meeting with the DfE**

JMcl said f40 would be requesting a meeting with the DfE in the autumn.

## **9. f40 conference**

JMcl said a decision about the f40 conference would be taken in September when the LGA had reviewed whether to hold events and hire out rooms again following lockdown. The provisional date for the conference is November 26.

Members will be updated at the next meeting in September.

## **10. Membership invoicing**

KW updated everyone on membership. She said f40 had 42 local authority members. She said due to Covid-19, membership fees this year had been reduced to £250, and a decision had been taken earlier in the year not to invoice in April, as usual, but to delay it until September 2020.

Annual invoicing of members will return to normal in April next year.

**Action:** KW to invoice member local authorities in September for a membership fee of £250 for 2020/21.

**Action:** KW to send a written update to members on f40's campaign objectives for 2020/21.

## **11. Additional support from MJ**

JMcl said as MJ was changing her role within Dorset Council and going part-time it would be more difficult for her to continue focusing so much time on f40 issues. JMcl said MJ's expertise, professionalism and knowledge was crucial to f40, particularly in drafting the f40 funding models that are shared with the DfE. He said MJ would continue to be a member of the Executive Committee and FMRT as part of her role at Dorset Council, but suggested, when necessary, that she be employed by f40 to draft funding models etc.

The suggestion was agreed by members.

## **12. Date of next Executive Committee meeting**

The next meeting will be held via conference call on Wednesday, 16 Sept at 2pm.