



## **f40 Executive Committee Meeting**

**Wednesday, December 9, 2020 – Conference call**

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

**Present:** Cllr James McInnes (Chair); Karen Westcott (Secretary); Emily Proffitt (Staffs headteacher and Dep Chair); Margaret Judd (Dorset Council); Peter Downes (Cambs Schools Forum); Jackie Smith (CEO Brunel SEN MAT & Uplands Educational Trust); Cllr Richard Long (Kent CC); Christine Atkinson (East Riding of Yorkshire); Cllr Mary Evans (Suffolk CC); Dawn Sexstone (Swindon Council); Carole Thomson (Oxfordshire Schools Forum); Richard Soper (Worc Community Trust); Phil Haslett (Glos CC).

**Apologies:** Andrew Minall (Hampshire CC); Matt Western MP (Lab Vice Chair); Layla Moran MP (Lib Dem Vice Chair); Deborah Taylor (Leic); Julia Harnden (ASCL); Cllr Bob Standley (East Sussex CC); Alex Dale (Derbyshire); Deborah Myers (East Riding of Yorkshire);

### **2. Minutes of the meeting held on 16 Sept 2020**

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

### **3. Second letter sent to the DfE re Covid-19 and the impact on education – noted**

### **4. Meeting with the DfE in November re Covid costs – summary of meeting – noted**

MJ updated members on the meeting held with the DfE in November.

She said it was a good meeting, which focused largely on the impact of Covid on schools. She said f40 explained where it believed the priorities should be – relating to supply teacher costs, loss of income, and additional costs in heating, utilities and resources, and the fact that one size did not fit all.

She said the DfE team said it would be beneficial for them to have more evidence and case study information relating to both extra costs for schools, as well as savings, and f40 had agreed to help where it could.

PH said it seemed like a good meeting, but he had hoped the issue of additional IT costs for schools would be discussed. He said many schools had been forced to invest heavily in new and improved IT in order to facilitate remote learning.

PH said Gloucestershire County Council had asked schools to capture their additional expenditure from September onwards and information provided could be passed on to the DfE. He said other local authorities were possibly doing the same. PH suggested that would be a workable way to provide additional information to the DfE.

And he said knowing that the information was being passed to the DfE would encourage schools to be more forthcoming with their costs and savings.

PH said it would be good to include details around IT costs when examples were provided to Government and asked if other areas had seen similar additional expenditure.

EP said she believed it was very much down to individual schools. Some secondary schools may have been able to invest heavily in new IT equipment and systems if they had the funding when the need first arose during lockdown in March. But she said many primary schools may not have had the budget to spend on new IT systems.

She said her school had only received one new laptop from the DfE. She believed the variation in spend and investment across the country would be diverse. EP said even in her primary school, there was variation between parents, children and staff in their ability, willingness and understanding of online learning.

She said online learning was alien to most schools before March this year, so they were not prepared or in a position to switch immediately when the country went into lockdown. She said it had created huge voids in education, but it very much depended on a school's circumstances.

CT agreed and said in Oxfordshire it very much varied from school to school. She said there were also huge issues for some schools and students who struggled with broadband access – particularly in rural communities.

CT said she was concerned about cash flow in schools in the future and the effect on three-year budget plans that utilised balances. She said current balances in budgets were being eroded quickly – especially when schools had to pay for a high level of supply teachers.

She believed there was a lack of understanding in the DfE about future concerns around cash flow and budgets. She said whilst schools may have reserves now, the extra costs, particularly around supply teachers, and the lack of income meant they could face difficulties in the future.

CT said her concern was that Covid will still be having a huge impact on school budgets in two years' time, but by then the DfE will have moved on and any avenue for schools to reclaim costs will have closed. She said the DfE needed to appreciate the long-term impact for schools.

PD said schools in Cambridgeshire only received 25% of the laptops they had been promised for remote learning.

MJ said Dorset also did not receive the number of laptops it had expected. She said the local authority and schools had been able to repurpose some laptops, but they were still short of what was needed.

She said it was almost getting too late for laptops to be provided – nine months into the pandemic and when the vaccine was being rolled out.

JS said she believed every local authority and school lost out on laptops.

ME said in Suffolk, schools had been promised laptops by the DfE, so when charitable organisations offered them, they politely declined. However, she said many laptops did not materialise from the DfE, and the charities who had offered them had then moved on and were no longer in a position to help. As a result, many schools lost out, she said.

PH said with regards eroding school balances, many people felt uncomfortable with the DfE's proposal that schools could only apply for funding to help with extra supply teacher costs once their reserves had been used up.

He said a school that had saved or managed its budget particularly well, so had reserves, would feel they were being penalised as they would not qualify for help with supply teacher costs, while a school that had not managed its budget so well, may get help. He said the DfE's Covid Workforce Fund did not take account of schools that had been saving for particular projects, and those reserves would be wiped out on supply teacher costs.

He appreciated that schools without a cash reserve may have managed their budgets as well as they possibly could – but said all schools should be treated fairly.

## **5. Additional information requested by the DfE**

MJ reported that the DfE team said it would be beneficial for them to have more evidence and case study information when discussing the needs of schools with the Treasury. The information required related to:

- a. PPE and other costs to SEND schools
- b. Impact of teacher absences on schools' ability to cope with Covid
- c. Supply teacher costs to schools
- d. Savings to schools

It was agreed that the f40 group would try to supply the DfE with additional information.

CT said in its correspondence with the DfE, f40 must not lose track of the fact that the National Funding Formula was not yet working as efficiently as it should be and still required improvements. She said many proxy add-ons and the lump sum being included in the Minimum Per Pupil Funding meant that schools did not receive the level of funding they should. She said f40 should continue to campaign for further improvements to the system. Members agreed.

**Action:** KW to write to f40 Directors of Children's Services, Executive Members, Finance Managers, and School Forums to ask if they can provide evidence from schools in any of the areas listed above.

## **6. Collaboration Group**

KW informed members that f40 had joined the Collaboration Group for remote meetings in October and November. She said it had been agreed that the group would focus on urging Government to repay schools the additional expenses they had incurred from Covid.

MJ said it was felt that many MPs were not aware that a large percentage of the last increase to schools was being spent on teachers' pay, and now the extra Covid costs. There was evidence that some MPs believed schools were relatively well off after the last promise of extra funding from Government.

In fact, figures produced by ASCL showed that the real annual increase per pupil was only £58 per pupil, but schools had spent an average of £75 per pupil implementing Covid safety measures prior to opening in September. In real terms, they were worse off.

It was, therefore, agreed that the Collaboration Group would hold an MPs' briefing to inform Members of Parliament about the lack of funding, and that funding was not as plentiful as

some believed. The briefing would also focus on the extra expenditure created by Covid and why schools should be reimbursed.

MJ said the group had also agreed that it should continue to focus on the £12.6b it calculated education needed up to 2023. Taking into consideration the £7.1b extra funding education received last year, the Collaboration would continue to campaign for the extra £5.5b (which may now be more than this) that education still required.

KW said the Collaboration Group had agreed that f40, NEU and ASCL should compile a one-page briefing note for MPs on the current situation. It is currently in draft and will be completed in the next few weeks, after the release of new evidence.

The briefing is to be held with MPs early next year.

## **7. f40 SEND stats and national survey**

MJ shared a powerpoint presentation with members showing the findings from the recent national survey f40 conducted about SEND funding and budgets across local authorities in England.

She said 77 local authorities had taken part, amounting to 52%, which she was pleased with.

MJ said it seemed that the largest authorities had the greatest deficit budgets in SEND in cash terms, but also in per pupil terms. She said greater understanding of why this was the case was needed.

She said it may be that more figures were needed before conclusions could be drawn and before it could be shared with others and the DfE

PD said it seemed that the local authorities with the greatest deficits were among the least deprived areas in the country. He questioned whether 'pushy parents' were a contributory factor – requesting additional support for their children. He said he was fascinated by the figures in the survey.

JMcl said Devon was among those areas with the biggest deficits and said he believed it was due to the fact that these large areas had been historically poorly funded in education. He said they simply did not have the budgets to meet demand.

JMcl said there was also poverty in rural areas that was not so easy to see or identify as it was in towns and cities.

RL said in Kent they had been historically underfunded. He said because the county was not considered deprived, it received less funding, so was less able to afford the High Need costs.

He said there had been heavy investment in new SEND schools in Kent, and there was some evidence to suggest that the new schools were more attractive to SEND parents. As a result, demand had increased in its special schools. He said Kent had a large number of EHCPs, which was growing. He said the proportion of EHCPs was higher than other areas.

ME said Suffolk had some areas that were considered affluent, but others that were deprived, and it received a lower funding level. She said it was very difficult for the authority to deal with the rise in demand for SEND.

ME also said that she felt that because of the number of EHCPs and the fixed timescales for completion, some EHCPs may have been turned around without the amount of detail required, which did not help.

CT said in Oxfordshire it was a similar situation. She said it had historically received less funding yet had recorded a great increase in EHCPs.

She said parents had greater awareness over their rights, so did ask for more. She said there had been a deficit previously, but now it was snowballing out of control.

She said the deficit in Oxfordshire was largely down to out-of-county placements because there were insufficient places within the county. She said schools were being forced by financial pressures to be less inclusive, so there was more reliance on special schools. And she said parents did not see a stigma attached to EHCPs, which they had with Statements, so they were keen to have them for their children.

PH said the survey had provided good figures and an excellent overall picture with regards SEND. But he said it would be better if the survey showed what position local authority SEND budgets would have been in if they had **NOT** moved money from their Schools Block to High Needs Block.

PH said in some ways, being able to move money from one Block to another masked the issue in High Needs.

He asked if it would be possible to ask local authorities who had moved money from one Block to another to provide the additional figure of what their SEND budget would have been if they had not done so.

Peter Downes said in Cambridgeshire they had had very difficult conversations in School Forum about the issue of moving money from Schools Block to High Needs. He said School Forum was against it because they felt it masked the problem and the DfE should be aware of the scale of the problem.

MJ said the same issues had arisen in Dorset, with School Forum being against moving money from one budget to cover another.

PD said the crux of the issue was that the number of EHCPs was going up and the money allocated was inadequate.

He said f40 should continue to campaign for more money in SEND. Everyone agreed.

PH said his personal opinion was that moving money from School Block to High Needs was masking the issue and was not helpful in the long-term. He said a lot of local authorities might be in worse positions with their SEND deficit budgets if they had not moved money around, and the DfE should be made aware of that.

PH said it would also be helpful if the survey explained what the SEND deficits were as a proportion of the whole local authority SEND budgets.

MJ said the aim was to present the SEND survey findings to the DfE, but only when it was fully complete.

Everyone agreed that the Government review into SEND needed to be completed and actioned as soon as possible.

PD said the National Funding Formula was a step in the right direction, but it needed to be looked at again. He said there were still too many discrepancies in the way funding was distributed. And he said more money was needed in education as a whole, as well as in SEND.

JS said she would be eager to know if local authorities had recovery plans in place for their deficit SEND budgets.

JS said some special schools had deficit budgets, which had been made worse by the extra costs of Covid. She asked how schools were to make ends meet, let alone start to pay off deficit budgets.

PD said in Cambridgeshire it was difficult to find a recovery plan, and other members agreed it was the same in their areas.

He agreed it would be worth doing some more work on the survey so that it provided a full and clear picture of the SEND situation. He said SEND was the key issue that needed to be dealt with in the country.

CT said it was fundamental that SEND funding was overhauled. She said, at the moment, it was more about top-up measures than a sufficient lump sum. She said local authorities were having to spend more than they were getting, which was not right.

And CT said schools were not always receiving the full allocation of money they should be for pupils with SEND. She said one headteacher at an average-sized secondary school had reported that they were under-funded by £40,000 a year for children with EHCPs, because they did not qualify for proxy SEND funding as the area was not considered deprived and Oxfordshire's top-ups were insufficient.

**Action:** It was agreed that MJ and KW go back to those local authorities who said they had moved money from Schools Block to High Needs to give details on what their financial position would have been if they had not done so. MJ to also include in the survey figures showing what proportion of overall budget the deficits were.

## **8. FMRT meeting**

KW informed members that f40's next Finance Managers Research Team would be meeting at the end of January 2020. She said she would update members with a copy of the minutes afterwards.

## **9. Membership invoicing**

KW informed members that invoicing was now taking place for the reduced subscription fee of £250 for 2020. Normal invoicing will resume in April 2021.

## **10. Financial update**

KW updated the Executive Committee and said f40 had a healthy bank balance.

## **11. Any Other Business**

RS asked what other authorities and schools were doing about end of term planning? He said Government had sent a letter that day asking that schools ensure track and trace continued for six days after pupils finished school for Christmas. This meant senior

leadership teams had to be on standby to contact parents as late as Christmas Eve if they needed to advise that children should isolate because of Covid.

He said it had been suggested that schools could organise a professional development day on Friday, December 18, so pupils were not in school, which would mean that teachers did not have to be on standby on Christmas Eve.

He asked if schools were closing earlier in other areas so that teachers did not have to be involved in track and trace so close to Christmas, perhaps opting for remote learning, instead.

JS said remote learning in special schools was not feasible.

PH said the track and trace system in schools was a real challenge for senior leadership teams. He said in Gloucestershire, the advice to schools was to keep social bubbles particularly small in the last two weeks before school finished, and to ensure they did not mix. That way, he said if there were positive cases of Covid, the number of people who needed to isolate would be minimised.

He said the track and trace system for schools was difficult and senior leadership teams had been understandably upset at having to be on standby, given the amount of work that had been undertaken by leaders all year and that they had not had the normal holidays or down time.

## **12. Date of next committee meeting in March 2020**

KW suggested the next meeting be held in March 2020.

**Action:** KW to circulate a doodle poll to gauge when is best and then schedule a meeting.