



## **Notes of meeting with f40 Conservative Vice Chair Sir Gary Streeter MP, held on Tuesday, March 9, 2021**

### **Attendance:**

- Sir Gary Streeter Conservative MP and Vice Chair of f40
- Cllr James McInnes, f40 Chair / Cabinet Member for Children and Schools, Devon CC
- Margaret Judd, Funding Manager, Dorset Council
- Andrew Minall, Head of Education Financial Services, Hampshire CC
- Karen Westcott, Secretary of f40

### **1. Welcome**

JMcl thanked GS for his time and for supporting the f40 group.

GS said he was very happy to continue as a Vice Chair of f40 and would do all he could to assist with the campaign around education funding.

### **2. SEND**

JMcl said the situation around SEND funding was serious, and if it was not for Covid, SEND would be the biggest issue in education right now.

He said the Government review into SEND was paused last year when Covid struck, and he was keen to ensure it was completed and reported back to Government as soon as possible. He asked if GS could ask a Parliamentary Question, asking when the SEND review would be finished, and the recommendations acted upon.

GS said he would be happy to table a question.

GS said everything had been swept away by Covid and Brexit, but he said SEND was an issue close to his heart and he would be happy to ask the question.

MJ said from the SEND survey that f40 undertook, it showed that of the 149 authorities responsible for education in England, 77 responded, giving a 52% response rate. She said those 77 local authorities had a combined deficit SEND budget in 2020/21 of £977m. A third of them have a £10m deficit in 2020/21.

JMcl said there needed to be changes to the system, with fewer applications for EHCPs and mainstream schools being more inclusive of pupils with SEND.

GS said it looked as though the deficit SEND budgets would cost £1b or more to deal with.

JMcl agreed and said the deficit would continue to grow unless the system was overhauled and more money was invested in SEND.

He said while the changes to the SEND system in 2014 were laudable, they were too expensive and not sustainable.

**Action:** KW to contact GS in connection with tabling questions to Parliament.

### **3. Early Years**

MJ said Covid had proven very difficult for the Early Years sector because of the lack of children attending nurseries.

She said the business model relied upon nurseries having private income to supplement their funding from the DfE. However, she said the pandemic had led to a fall in numbers and, therefore, a fall in income.

MJ said some parents were working from home or on furlough, so did not need to send their children to nursery, while some parents had chosen not to send their youngsters for fear of Covid infection. In some cases, nurseries simply could not accommodate the usual number of children due to social distancing. MJ said there were many reasons why the number of children attending nursery had fallen, and some people feared the numbers would not go back up again for some time.

MJ said Government had asked local authorities to pay for those children who had places in the Early Years entitlement provision, whether they attended or not. However, she said some children were not yet registered because parents were still at home, so they were not going to be included in the funding stream.

GS asked if there had been an over-supply of nursery provision, even before Covid.

MJ said she was not aware of a large over-supply, and both JMcl and AM said in their experience the Early Years market tended to balance itself out with supply and demand.

GS said he had been speaking to a primary school in Devon and the headteacher had mentioned there were not enough three-year-olds coming through. He asked if that was a national trend.

MJ said in her area there had been a drop in the birth rate that was forecast to continue for a number of years. AM said he had seen a similar trend in Hampshire.

#### **4. Covid**

JMcl said schools had done extremely well throughout the pandemic and had returned to school in March without any issues. He said attendance among pupils appeared to be very high.

JMcl said he was interested to know what form of catch-up would be implemented during the summer. He said he had spoken to teachers who were concerned about children being overloaded with schoolwork through the holidays, which could have a reverse effect on their learning.

He said everyone wanted children to make up for lost time, but he did not believe it was a quick fix. He said it would take a few years for children to 'catch up'.

GS said he agreed. He realised that teachers were exhausted. He said he had a meeting with Nick Gibb, Minister for School Standards, coming up and he would discuss it with him.

GS suggested that if children were taking part in social activities during the summer holidays it might help to prepare them for academic learning from September, and may help to provide some of the social interaction they missed out on during lockdown.

MJ said people should also remember that students had been working online this year, so they would be ready for a break in the summer. As a result of the online learning, she said not all pupils may be behind.

GS said he guessed that some children could also be ahead.

#### **5. Government consultations**

##### High Needs funding

AM said f40 was preparing submissions for the Government's consultations on high needs funding.

He said f40 would be highlighting that the historic factor in funding did not reflect the current need of SEND. He said f40 believed the DfE should continue with the approach it had been taking, by allowing the historic factor to fade out, making way for increased responsive funding, based on need.

AM said f40 also wanted to see more equitable high needs funding, so that children had the same access to services, regardless of where they lived. At the moment, he said some local authorities received much more than others.

GS asked if f40 was suggesting a new funding formula for high needs.

AM said 'no', f40 wanted the DfE to continue in the same direction of travel that it had been taking, allowing the historic funding element to gradually decrease over time. He said f40 would like more responsive funding. He said in recent years, Government had invested more in SEND and that needed to continue, as need was increasing year on year.

MJ also said f40 was keen for High Needs Block and Schools Block funding to be interlinked as it was important that they worked together in tandem.

GS said this was something else he could bring up in the Parliamentary Questions.

### Sparsity

AM said f40 would also be submitting a response to the Government's consultation on sparsity. He said a lot of small schools in rural areas did not meet the criteria for sparsity funding. As a result, they were struggling to remain sustainable. AM said small rural schools could only generate so much income to supplement their Schools Block funding and could only find so many efficiencies – as a result, they had nowhere else to go.

AM said one of the funding changes in recent years had been to increase the minimum per pupil funding level (MPPFL). However, he said it moved many schools out of the responsive funding approach and to a fixed level of funding. He said some schools had so few pupils, that mathematically they would always be above the MPPFL.

He said f40 wanted to support small rural schools – those necessary schools that provided a much-needed service to local children.

GS said he would be happy to also ask some Parliamentary Questions about sparsity, too. KW to liaise with the office of GS about it.

**Action:** KW to contact the office of GS about Parliamentary Questions.

### National Funding Formula

AM said f40 would also be responding to the Government's consultation on the National Funding Formula, once it was released.

He said Government appeared to be removing the responsive element of funding, instead increasing the fixed funding through MPPFL. He said it was a crude way to calculate funding and left some schools very hard up, especially those with high numbers of SEND pupils.

GS asked if the issue was that they got the set amount through MPPFL, but then had some other funding taken away, meaning that it had a negative impact?

AM said 'yes'.

JMcl said multi-academy trusts could move money to different schools within the trust family, depending on need. However, he said local authorities were not permitted to do that. He said Government needed to make sure that funding systems were equitable across the board.

## **6. MPs' briefing**

JMcl said f40 hoped to host an MPs' briefing in Westminster later in the year and asked if GS would sponsor the event and arrange for f40 to use one of the committee rooms in the House of Commons.

It was agreed that a Tuesday late afternoon/early evening, during the beginning to middle of November, would be an ideal time.

GS said he would be happy to sponsor the briefing once f40 had agreed on a date.

**Action:** KW to liaise with the office of GS over the date of the briefing.

Ends