



f40 Executive Committee Meeting

Monday, September 20, 2021 – Conference call

1. Attendances, apologies, and changes to committee membership

Present: Cllr James McInnes (Chair, Dep Leader at Devon CC); Emily Proffitt (Staffs primary headteacher and Dep Chair); Karen Westcott (Secretary); Margaret Judd (Dorset Council); Andrew Minall (Hampshire CC); Jackie Smith (CEO Brunel SEN MAT & Uplands Educational Trust); Carole Thomson (Oxfordshire Schools Forum); Richard Soper (Worc Community Trust); Julia Harnden (ASCL); Cllr Bryony Goodliffe (Cambs CC); Cllr Alex Dale (Derbyshire CC); Ed Francis (Worc SEND primary headteacher); Dominic Muns (Wiltshire Council); Cllr Shellina Prendergast (Kent CC); Cllr Fiona Baker (West Northants Council); Jon Fisher (East Riding of Yorks Council).

Apologies: Cllr Bob Standley (East Sussex CC); Deborah Myers (East Riding of Yorks Council); Annette Perrington (Swindon BC); MP Layla Moran (Lib Dem Vice Chair); Laura Mayes (Wiltshire Council).

JMcl welcomed new members to the meeting.

2. Declarations of interest.

KW declared an interest in agenda item number 15 – The Re-tendering of the Secretariat Role – and said she would be leaving the meeting before the issue was discussed.

3. Minutes of the meeting held on 14 June 2021

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

4. Notes of the meeting with the DfE in June 2021 - noted

5. Annual report issued to the LGA - noted

KW updated members on the new guidelines for Special Interest Groups within the LGA and 7qhow SIGS, such as f40, were now only permitted to be established for five years. Should they wish to continue after that they will be asked to make their case to the Leadership Board for continuation when they submit their annual report. For all existing SIGs, the five-year period will end in summer 2024.

It was agreed that members should discuss the issue at a later date.

6. f40 response to the DfE consultation on the National Funding Formula – presentation by Andrew Minall

AM presented f40's draft response on the DfE consultation on the National Funding Formula, as drafted following a meeting with the Finance Managers' Research Team. He said the questionnaire had been difficult to answer in some respects because some questions did not allow for comments and only allowed for 'yes', 'no' or 'unsure' answers as to whether or not you agreed with the DfE statement or suggestion.

He said where f40 had not wholly agreed with the DfE suggestion, it was proposed the response should be 'no'. AM said f40 preferred to use a 'yes' or 'no' answer so that there could be no mistaking on the views of the group.

He said there was an opportunity to comment at the end, which could be used to explain f40's concerns and suggestions.

However, CT said she had discussed the consultation with the Oxfordshire Schools Forum and it had agreed to use the 'unsure' option for some questions where there were caveats around the response.

CT also said on Question 14 that Oxfordshire Schools Forum agreed with the DfE that teachers pay was a 'significant' element of the education budget for mainstream primary and secondary schools, and that its significance could not be questioned, as f40 had suggested in their draft response.

AM agreed it was a significant element of the budget but said there were other significant areas of spend, too, with around less than half of overall education budgets going on teacher salaries. He said he would amend the wording in the f40 response to agree that teachers' pay was **one** of the significant elements, alongside some others.

Members agreed to pass the draft response, with the slight amendment made to question 14.

Action: KW to circulate the amended submission to members of the Executive for their comments.

Action: KW to submit the final submission to the DfE consultation on the National Funding Formula, and then to circulate it to all members of f40.

7. f40 survey of members on use of SEND budgets

AM informed members about a meeting held that morning between members of the f40 Finance Managers' Research Team (FMRT). He said members of the FMRT had agreed that a survey should be circulated to members, looking at:

- Sufficiency of places
- Early intervention / triage of SEND
- Post 16 provision
- Core provision – ages, unit costs etc

AM said the purpose of the survey would be to enable members to share best practice, expertise and experience around how their SEND budgets are spent and how different local authorities provide support, looking at provision of special school placements and inclusivity of mainstream schools.

JS said she would be happy to get involved in the survey and provide support.

JS said the number of special school places was growing all the time, but it was vital for mainstream schools to be more inclusive, as well. She said the population in Swindon was increasing, therefore, the number of children with SEND was rising, and more special school places were required.

She said where children could not be included in mainstream schools, or where it was detrimental to include them, special school places needed to be provided. She said the issues with SEND were around:

- Dwindling budgets
- Increasing complexity of need
- Growth in numbers of children with SEND

JS said it required intricate place planning.

WF agreed with JS and said the needs of children were becoming much more complex. He said he believed more children were being born with SEND and he believed more and more children with additional needs were being taken out of mainstream schools, due to Covid and the fact that parents now had a choice.

MJ said she believed there needed to be full understanding of when new special schools were required and when children with SEND should be included at mainstream schools.

EP said, from a mainstream perspective, 15% of pupils had special needs. She said it was difficult to provide the right level of support to all pupils because the support was targeted towards the highest needs.

She said where schools were unable to provide the right level of provision or support, special school places should be provided. She said decisions on SEND support should be made for the right reasons.

AM said he believed the issue was around trying to work out where the true need was. Based on projecting the current level of growth, by 2043, Hampshire would reach a point where children may not need mainstream schools because all children would need to be in a special school. Clearly that is not the case and while there are some objective reasons for growth in the SEND population, we need to get to a new point of stability.

JH said the high needs formula needed to be reviewed as a matter of urgency. She said the Government review on SEND needed to be published.

JS said population growth and increasing complexity were creating a changing situation. She said the percentage of children with SEND was increasing – as was the number of people with SEND now being identified.

She said as the population grew, we built more mainstream schools. However, she said more special schools also needed to be built.

CT suggested f40 write to the new Secretary of State for Education, Nadhim Zahawi, about the SEND review.

EP said she agreed and said f40 needed to take firm action. She said we have had Covid but it was time f40 put its points forward in a positive way.

CT said she was concerned about the Comprehensive Spending Review at the end of October, so f40 needed to speak up now and make the point that education could not take a financial hit.

JMcl agreed. He said f40 had written to the new Education Minister, as well as Schools Minister Robin Walker, who was a former Vice Chair of f40, to congratulate them on their new posts and to invite them to meet with the group and discuss issues further. He said f40 would write a second letter, setting out some of the key issues.

Action: KW to write to both the Education Minister and Schools Minister to set out f40's key issues with education funding and urging that the SEND review be published as soon as possible.

Action: KW to write a summary of the FMRT meeting and to arrange a second meeting with JS and members of the FMRT so the detail of the survey could be agreed and responsibilities shared out.

8. Covid impact on education

EP said the current issue was that the Recovery Premium Grant announced in July was only based on those pupils who qualified for Pupil Premium. She said those schools with few children in receipt of Pupil Premium would receive very little. She also said there was lots of conflicting messages around, so parents were under the impression additional funding had been allocated for one thing, but schools may need to spend it in a different way. She said she would like more clarity on how it could be used.

SP said the Covid Recovery Grant had not made any allowances for Early Years, which was a serious issue. She said Early Years was where educators had the greatest leverage in the impact they could have on children, and f40 should perhaps also be focusing on this issue in its letter to the Minister.

JH agreed that the Covid Recovery Grant conditions were very strict.

Action: KW to produce a short letter/briefing note for the new ministers on f40 priorities.

9. Update on f40 conference

KW said due to rising Covid cases, it would not be possible to organise an in-person f40 conference this year, as hoped.

She said f40 would be organising a series of Q&A webinars instead and more details would be released in due course. The first speaker had already been lined up, but dates were still to be confirmed.

Action: KW to plan first webinar with members of the Executive and to circulate details to members.

10. F40 workshop on priorities

JMcl suggested an online workshop be held for members of the Executive Committee to enable them to discuss campaign priorities and for new members to get to know the group.

It was agreed that the workshop should be held in October.

Action: KW to circulate a doodle poll and arrange.

[Post meeting note: The workshop will be held on Monday, October 18, from noon until 2pm]

11. Update on MP's briefing in Westminster

KW said it was still hoped that the MPs' briefing could go ahead on November 9 in Westminster. However, KW said she was awaiting the latest Covid guidance on numbers permitted to attend.

KW said Conservative Vice Chair Gary Streeter had agreed to sponsor the event and his office had secured a room.

[Post meeting note: KW has since been informed that under the current Covid guidelines nobody from f40 would be permitted to attend the briefing in the House of Commons as it would not be considered 'essential business'. The rules may change in mid-October, but the event could not be confirmed until after that time. The decision has, therefore, been taken to postpone the briefing until early in 2022]

Action: KW to inform f40 members of the latest position and to make necessary arrangements.

12. Financial Update / Membership invoicing 2021

KW updated members on the invoicing of annual subscriptions. She said the majority of local authorities had now paid their subscriptions for 2021, with the remaining in hand. She said f40 had a healthy bank balance.

13. Annual subscriptions

JMcl said in April 2022, subscriptions may need to increase as they had been at the lower rate of £500 per year for the past four years. He suggested fees increase to £750 per year.

MJ said originally fees had been £2,000 per year, and then £1,000 per year, before being lowered to £500 on a temporary basis in 2017. However, during 2020, they had been further discounted to £250 to assist local authorities through the turbulent months of the pandemic.

However, she said if f40 wanted to hold a conference it would not be sustainable at the £500 rate.

JS said she would not object to a rise to £750.

JMcl proposed that annual subscriptions rise to £750 a year in April 2022, which was seconded by MJ. The motion was passed.

14. Any other business

There was no other business.

15. Date of next meeting.

KW said the next meeting was due to be held in December. Due to rising cases of Covid, it was agreed that the next meeting would be held remotely again, hopefully, with some meetings being held in person during 2022.

Action: KW to circulate a doodle poll to agree the next meeting date in December.

[Post meeting note: The next Executive Committee meeting will be held on Tuesday, December 7 from 10am until 11.30am]

16. Retendering of Secretariat role

Draft contract documentation from Derbyshire regarding the requirements of the secretariat role was discussed to seek views from the Executive. It was agreed that the draft requirements reflected the need. Some further discussion was held regarding next steps of the procurement process. JMcl agreed to keep Executive Committee updated regarding the progress.