



f40 Executive Committee Meeting

Tuesday, December 7, 2021 – Conference call

1. Attendances, apologies, and changes to committee membership

Present: Cllr James McInnes (Chair, Dep Leader at Devon CC); 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); Julia Harnden (ASCL); Cllr Alex Dale (Derbyshire CC); Ed Francis (Worc SEND primary headteacher); Cllr Shellina Prendergast (Kent CC); Cllr Fiona Baker (West Northants Council); Deborah Myers (East Riding of Yorks Council); Annette Perrington (Swindon BC); Phil Haslett (Glos CC); Cllr Maria King (Cambs CC); Cllr Victoria Aitken (East Riding); Christine Atkinson (East Riding); Cllr Ben Weeks (East Riding).

Apologies: Emily Proffitt (Staffs primary headteacher and Dep Chair); Cllr Bob Standley (East Sussex CC); MP Layla Moran (Lib Dem Vice Chair); Cllr Laura Mayes (Wiltshire Council); Richard Soper (Worc Community Trust); Cllr Bryony Goodliffe (Cambs CC); Andrew Leadbetter (Devon CC); Cllr Rosie Baker (York Council); Cllr Scott Edwards (N Northants).

JMcl welcomed new members to the meeting.

2. Declarations of interest

KW declared an interest in agenda item number 16 – update on 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 20 Sept 2021

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

4. Letters sent to Prime Minister, Education Secretary, and Schools' Minister, and responses – noted

CT said Education Secretary Nadhim Zahawi, in his response, stated that the National Funding Formula (NFF) continued to distribute funding fairly. She said this was not the belief of f40 members and suggested that f40 respond to his letter explaining why members felt the NFF was not fair and how it could be altered to enable greater fairness.

JMcl said members would also make that point to the Department for Education officers when they met on December 15.

5. f40 response to DfE consultation on how LA school improvement function is funded – noted

AM updated members on f40's response to the DfE consultation on how local authorities' school improvement function was funded.

JMcl asked if other members had inferred from the consultation that the DfE was looking to make the move towards full academisation of schools, removing the local authority role from schools, and others agreed.

JH said ASCL supported f40's response.

Members agreed and said it was the wrong time to consult on the school improvement grant when a White Paper on the role of local authorities was imminent.

Members also said they were very concerned about the possibility of all schools being forced to become academies.

AP said in Swindon there were real worries that the funding for school improvement would be removed. She said funding to support maintained schools was already insufficient, and this would make matters worse. She said the expectation on local authorities was clear, but the funding was not.

She said local authorities were responsible for safeguarding children in both academies and maintained schools and that role should be protected and funded properly by the DfE. She suggested that a school safeguarding grant be established.

On the issue of academisation, DM said the East Riding of Yorkshire faced major challenges because it was a rural county with many small primary schools in villages that were still maintained by the local authority.

She said while some were very small, they were vital for their local communities and needed to be protected. She said there were concerns that if all schools were forced to become academies, some could close, meaning that very young children could face long journeys to and from school each day.

DM said a significant number of schools in the East Riding were still maintained by the local authority and a move towards academisation would destabilise education in the county. She said there was no appetite for academisation.

AD said the picture in Derbyshire was similar, with many schools still maintained by the local authority and the county having lots of small, rural schools that provided a vital service to their communities.

He said if the Government was going to change the funding around the local authorities' school improvement function, the statutory responsibility also needed to change. He questioned who was checking on academies and holding them to account with regards the safeguarding of pupils? He said the job was too great for Regional Schools Commissioners to undertake on their own.

AD said he felt nobody outside of education was fully aware of what was happening and that f40 should include the issue of school improvement and academisation in the meeting with the DfE in December, and in the briefing to MPs, planned for March.

AM agreed and said it was an important point. He said the role of the local authority was holding everybody to account – particularly around the protection and safeguarding of children.

He also said it was important for the DfE to recognise that the National Funding Formula did not play a part in the funding of schools within multi academy trusts. He said trusts were responsible for deciding how their budgets were distributed between each of their schools, meaning the variation between them could be great.

AP said local authorities wanted all of their children to be in good schools, whether they were academies or maintained schools. She said all children were the responsibility of the local authority and, therefore, councils should receive funding for safeguarding according to the number of children they were responsible for.

CT said it was important to recognise that all parental complaints to Ofsted about schools also went to the local authority – both for academies and maintained schools.

Action: It was agreed that the issues of the local authority school improvement function and academisation be raised with the DfE on December 15, and in the briefing to MPs.

6. Meeting planned between f40 and the DfE on December 15

KW updated members on the meeting planned between f40 and the DfE funding team on December 15.

She said it was agreed that EP would present the view from schools, JS would present the view relating to SEND, and AD would present on the local authority perspective.

KW said a new objectives and priorities briefing document was being drafted before the meeting to ensure focus was placed in the right areas. See item number 9.

Action: KW to work with EP, JS and AD to produce a PowerPoint presentation for the meeting with the DfE.

Action: KW will circulate notes from the meeting with the DfE at the earliest opportunity.

7. Webinar planned with DfE's Tom Goldman on Tuesday, January 25 at 2.30pm – noted

Action: A save-the-date email has already been sent to f40 members. KW to provide more details in due course about signing up for the webinar.

8. MPs' briefing proposed for Westminster on Tuesday, March 1, 2021 – COVID permitting – noted

Action: KW to provide more details in due course. A diary note has already been sent to members of the f40 Executive.

9. f40 campaign objectives

Members of the Executive finalised the key objectives and priorities briefing document for 2022, prior to the meeting with the DfE on December 15. This is the overview of f40's priorities and a more comprehensive document will be drafted before the MPs' briefing in March.

Action: KW to circulate the final draft of the briefing document.

See separate document attached.*

10. Update on f40 survey of members on SEND

AM said plans were in hand for a second survey on how local authorities were managing the demand on their SEND budgets and more detail would be circulated in the new year. He said there was a number of issues to focus on, so a series of surveys may follow – the first one looking at sufficiency.

Action: AM, MJ and KW to meet again to discuss the survey and circulate to members.

11. Expected White Paper on the role of local authorities

AM said Government was expected to release a White Paper on the future role of local authorities and f40 should consult with members and respond.

Action: Members agreed to monitor the situation and to meet to discuss it once it was published.

12. Financial update / Membership invoicing 2021

KW said all members had now paid their annual subscription for 2021/22 and f40 had a healthy bank balance.

13. Any other business

There was no other business.

14. Date of next committee meeting

JMcl said the next f40 Executive committee meeting was scheduled for March 1, 2022, and it was hoped that it could be held in person at the LGA office in Westminster – directly before the MPs' briefing in the House of Commons.

However, it was agreed that if the SEND review was published before then, or the White Paper on the role of local authorities was issued, an online meeting would be organised beforehand.

Action: KW to confirm with members in late January / early February that the meeting is being held in person, as planned.

15. Appointment of new Chair in March 2022

KW reminded members that JMcl was planning to stand down from his role as Chair at the March Executive meeting. She said while members very much wanted to see JMcl continue in his role, they appreciated that he felt unable to lead the group as he previously had, since relinquishing his position as Cabinet Member for Children and Schools at Devon County Council. He is now Cabinet Member for Adult Services.

KW invited members who were interested in becoming Chair to contact her in the coming weeks.

It was agreed that f40 should also have two Deputy Chairs, to help share the workload. Anyone interested in the additional role of Deputy Chair should also contact KW in the coming weeks.

16. Update on procurement of Secretariat role

KW declared a conflict of interest and left the meeting.

JMcl updated members on the re-tendering of the role of Secretariat and said Derbyshire County Council had kindly agreed to continue as the official administrator of the f40 group and its accounts.

As the Secretariat role is going out to tender, and in line with the drafting of new contracts, members agreed that f40 would accept full financial responsibilities and liabilities going forward.

Ends

* Indicates that a document is attached or accompanying