



f40 Executive Committee Meeting

Thursday, April 6, 2023 – online meeting

1. Attendances, apologies, and changes to committee membership

Present: Phil Haslett (Dep Chair and Glos CC); Emily Proffitt (Dep Chair and Staffs primary headteacher); Karen Westcott (Secretary); Margaret Judd (Dorset Council); Andrew Minall (Hampshire CC); Julia Harnden (ASCL); Carole Thomson (Oxfordshire Schools Forum); Cllr Victoria Aitken (East Riding of Yorks Council); Cllr Bryony Goodliffe (Cambs CC); Cllr Fiona Baker (West Northants Council); Cllr Andrew Leadbetter (Devon CC); Morag Malvern (Wokingham Council); Bob Standley (East Sussex Council); Helen Watson (Wokingham Council); Steve Edmonds (NGA); Gareth Rees (Cornwall Council); Jonathan Rallings (County Councils Network).

Apologies: Cllr Alex Dale (f40 Chair and Derbyshire CC); Emma Hardy MP (Vice Chair); Annette Perrington (Swindon Council); Scott Edwards (North Northants Council); Cllr Prue Bray (Wokingham BC); Laura Mayes (Wiltshire CC); Jackie Smith (Brunel MAT & Uplands Educational Trust); Ed Francis (Worc SEND primary headteacher); Cllr Richard Holt (Solihull).

KW welcomed everyone to the meeting, particularly those who were attending for the first time.

KW gave apologies for Chair Cllr Alex Dale and said Deputy Chair Phil Haslett had agreed to chair the meeting in his absence.

2. Minutes of the meeting held on 24 January 2023

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

3. Members update

KW said f40 had 43 members. She said she would be writing to the 15 lowest funded local authorities for education who were not members of f40 again this year, inviting them to join the group.

KW invited members of the Executive to talk to their counterparts in neighbouring authorities to invite them to join f40.

Action: KW to share with the Executive a list of the lowest funded local authorities, which are not members of f40.

4. Matters to be noted

- Letter from Education Secretary Gillian Keegan – noted

AL said it was disappointing that the Education Secretary had not agreed to meet with f40 and asked if we were going to write to her again, inviting her to meet with the group to discuss the crisis in SEND. He said we should invite her to meet again.

MJ said instead of meeting with f40, she had passed our invitation along to Minister Nick Gibb's office, but he had not responded. CT said Nick Gibb had no responsibility for SEND, so we should approach the Education Secretary again. Members agreed.

AM said we should also be approaching the policy advisors within each political party to share our concerns around education funding with them, crucially around SEND. He said it was

important that we started talking to them now about the need for education to be a priority in their election campaigns.

Action: KW to write to Education Secretary Gillian Keegan again requesting a meeting on SEND.

Action: KW to invite the three f40 Vice Chairs to meet with members of the Executive to involve them in campaigning in the lead up to the General Election.

Action: KW to contact key education spokespeople and policy advisors in each political party to invite them to meet with the group.

- Minutes from the f40 meeting with the senior SEND policy team at the DfE – noted

PH said the meeting with the DfE SEND team had been useful, although they had not revealed anything that was not already in the public domain with regards the SEND and Alternative Provision Improvement Plan.

PH and AM said they both felt that the DfE was surprised that the Improvement Plan had been met with some scepticism and questions since its publication in March.

AM said from the Delivering Better Value sessions Hampshire Council had been involved in, they were reassured that they were providing the right SEND support in the right way, yet their deficit budget continued to increase. He said there were no answers as to how deficit budgets were to be reduced.

PH said if local authorities were doing all the right things around SEND provision, it demonstrated there was a problem with the system, and it needed to be re-thought.

AM said after the meeting with the DfE SEND team, he felt the issue of SEND was not being considered and addressed with enough urgency. He said there were some good recommendations in the Improvement Plan, but nothing that will materialise for at least two years. He said the deficit budgets will have increased by then.

JH said ASCL had been involved in similar conversations. She said SEND needed a costed delivery plan. She said ASCL shared f40's concerns.

MJ said, from the meeting, she felt the DfE were pleased with the Improvement Plan and that they were not worried that the improvements would only start to take shape in 2+ years.

PH said delivering national standards and introducing a national funding strategy were not easy things to deliver and would take a significant amount of time and investment.

EP said schools saw the plan as a 'hopes and dreams plan' and not an improvement plan.

EP said parents were looking at the 130-page document and believing that all of the recommendations should be acted upon now. She said they did not appreciate the recommendations would require funding, resources, and time.

FB said West Northants Council had been severely criticised by parents over its SEND provision, with a number of cases taken to judicial review. She said SEND was in crisis across the country due to a lack of funding and she urged MPs to lobby on behalf of local authorities.

FB said she felt sure MPs would want to help. She said local authorities simply did not have the funding to deliver everything that parents expected. She said local authorities were having to pay huge legal bills when cases were taken to tribunal or judicial review, and they frequently lost so had to pay for costly independent provision, too.

PH said he did not believe there was a joined-up approach.

VA said changes needed to be made to the SEND system now, she felt they were too little and too far away. She said she was disheartened because f40 and many others had pushed hard on the SEND Green Paper, but she said there was no mention of the funding and resources to deliver the recommendations.

PH agreed and asked how the national standards would work without legislation to back them up.

5. Debate in the House of Commons on SEND – update

KW said David Davis MP was still very interested in tabling a motion that a debate be held on SEND in the House. She said now f40's meeting with the DfE senior SEND team had been held, she was drafting a briefing paper outlining the group's position on SEND and its thoughts on the Improvement Plan.

A first draft had been circulated and once finalised, it would be circulated to the wider Executive team for their feedback.

Members said they were very keen to ensure the issue was debated in the House, with f40 MPs contributing to the discussion.

JR said funding was simply not available to provide the kind of SEND support that was being requested, which was putting councils in jeopardy. He said that should be the focus of the debate and MPs should be encouraged to join the debate on the lack of funding.

PH agreed that funding was key. JR said the main issue was that local authorities did not have the funding to deliver what was being promised in the Improvement Plan. He said the threat to councils should be the focus of the argument, and the £2.5b current deficit SEND budget, which was increasing year on year.

EP agreed that funding was the main concern but said the issue in schools was much wider than that. She said teachers were struggling due to stress and schools were losing staff all the time, and vacancies were difficult to fill. She said it was a recruitment and retention issue, too.

MJ said David Davis MP had agreed to request a debate in the House around SEND, and f40 would need to speak with him to understand his concerns around SEND and what he wished to focus on.

VA said she had spoken to David Davis MP about the debate, and said fellow MP in the East Riding of Yorkshire, Emma Hardy, who is a Vice Chair of f40, had offered to support him in his attempt to secure a debate on SEND in the House.

VA said all f40 members should be lobbying their MPs about the need for action on SEND, and increased funding. She said MPs should understand the impact the SEND crisis is having in their own constituencies and feel emotionally vested in the issue.

Action: KW to prepare some words that f40 members can share with their MPs, encouraging them to join the debate on SEND and to call for extra funding and support.

6. f40 campaign priorities for 2023/24

KW said it was an important campaigning year ahead as we approached a General Election, and asked members to think about what kind of campaigning they would like to focus on this year.

She said ideas included, but were not limited to:

- An f40 Annual Conference in 2024
- MPs' briefings in Westminster and online
- General Election campaigning – party conferences / manifestos / meetings
- National Children and Adult Services Conference workshop, Bournemouth, November 2023

- LGA conference workshop – Bournemouth, July 2023
- The Association of Directors of Children's Services Annual Conference – Manchester, July 2023

CT said she felt the f40 conference was useful, but it would be better to hold it after the next General Election, when we knew which party was in Administration and who the key people involved in education were.

CT said she believed f40 should be focusing on getting education into manifestos this year.

Members asked how much it would cost to host an f40 conference. KW said she had been quoted around £5,500 for a conference in London with around 100 attendees next year.

MJ said it would be worth carrying out a survey of Executive members, giving options for campaign activity and asking for suggestions and where the priorities should be.

CT said it would be a good idea, and suggested it also include costs.

VA suggested the f40 conference be held online, instead, to reduce costs.

JR said the f40 conference would be more about f40 members networking. If the group wanted to present its case to others, it may be better to focus on other events.

Action: KW to gather prices for different events throughout the year

Action: KW to organise a poll to gauge thoughts and suggestions from members of the Executive.

7. f40 annual subscription fee and financial update

AM said it was time for f40 to invoice members for the annual subscription fee and members needed to discuss and agree the fee for this coming year.

He said additional funding would be required this year to enable f40 to do more campaigning on the run up to the next General Election.

AM said, for context, the annual fees were originally £2,000 but as the membership grew, the fees were held at £1,000 for a long time. However, since 2017 they were reduced to £500 as the group's reserves had grown. In 2020, to assist local authorities in Covid, they were reduced to £250.

However, AM said the reserves had now diminished, and subscription fees needed to be increased to enable f40 to lobby on behalf of local authorities.

MJ proposed the annual subscription fee this year be £1,400. She said this year would be unusually busy, and subsequent years the fee could be lowered again, depending on what was required.

VA agreed. She said f40 should be campaigning as much as possible and should be ensuring the subscription fee covered more than the administration and costs of the group.

AM said if the funds were not all spent this year, the subscription could be lowered next year.

AL said there needed to be sufficient funds to campaign.

PH asked if anyone would object to this year's fee being set at £1,400.

Members agreed that this year's subscription fee should be £1,400.

Action: KW to issue invoices to members for £1,400, along with the summary of activity that f40 had carried out during the past year, and the campaign plan for the year ahead.

8. Draft Campaign Briefing Paper and Summary of Activity

KW said she had circulated the draft campaign briefing paper and the summary of activity from 2022. She asked if anyone had any comments or suggested amendments for either document.

Members agreed with both papers.

Action: KW to finalise and circulate both papers to members.

9. The re-working of the f40 School Funding Briefing Paper

AM updated members on the work that was being done to update the f40 school funding briefing paper, which would identify how much funding was now required to run a school and provide quality education and support to children.

He said he and MJ had met to discuss the paper and were preparing figures in preparation for a meeting of f40's Finance Managers Research Team (FMRT) in June. AM said FMRT members would be asked to give input to the paper.

Both AM and MJ will then update members of the f40 Executive Committee on the school funding briefing paper at the next meeting in July.

10. Request meeting with DfE funding team

KW said it was over a year since f40 met with the school funding team at the DfE and she would contact them to invite them to meet with the group again.

PH said unfairness of funding was something that was still of major concern to him, including of SEND funding. He said it seemed to him like everything hinged on the SEND and Alternative Provision Improvement Plan, but quantum and fairness of funding was still a major issue.

Action: KW to contact the DfE school funding team to invite them to meet with f40.

11. School survey

KW said at the last meeting in January, it was agreed that f40 would carry out two surveys: one of local authorities, followed by a second one of schools, to ascertain the issues they were facing with school and SEND funding. She said the surveys would be discussed at the FMRT meeting and again at the Executive meeting in July in order to take them forward.

12. Re-tendering of Secretariat role

MJ said the re-tendering of the Secretariat role was progressing and would be happening in due course.

13. Date of next committee meeting – in-person meeting at the LGA on Tuesday, July 11, 2023

PH asked how members felt about having in-person meetings in London. He said online meetings seemed to be better attended.

VA said it was good to meet in-person, but it involved a lot of travel time and expense for some members. She said if meetings were being held in-person they should be combined with other events, such as an MPs briefing or in-person meetings with key stakeholders and influencers.

It was agreed that f40 should explore holding an MPs' briefing in Westminster on July 11, if possible.

Action: KW to investigate arranging an MPs' briefing.

14. Any other business

It was agreed that members would look out previous correspondence about SEND deficit budgets to help provide David Davis MP with background material before he tables a motion to have SEND debated in the House.

AM also asked if f40 should be strengthening their ties with other organisations involved in education funding. He said f40 had met with the County Councils Network and Local Government Association in recent months, and there may be others that would be useful to partner with.

PH asked if we should be meeting with the Association of Directors of Children's Services and any organisations involved in SEND.

KW said a meeting was planned with the Early Years Alliance for later in May. She said she would look to make contact with SEND organisations.

Action: KW to speak to members to ascertain the most relevant SEND groups to approach, such as the SEND Alliance, National Association for Special Educational Needs, and The Special Educational Needs and Disabilities Information Organisations Group (SENDIOG).

JH asked f40 members if the Safety Valve and Delivering Better Value programmes were making a difference to local authorities and their ability to reduce SEND deficit budgets? She asked if the programmes were focused on purely reducing deficits or were also about investment and improving the SEND system. She asked if the programmes were leading to progress.

AL said he believed they were all different as each local authority was negotiating individually and agreeing long-term plans for reducing their deficits with the DfE.

PH said each authority had to set out a plan, but whether they were realistic, and deliverable, was yet to be seen. He said it was too early to see evidence.

Ends