



f40 Executive Committee Meeting

Tuesday, January 16, 2024 – in-person and online meeting

1. Attendances, apologies, and changes to committee membership

Present: Cllr Alex Dale (f40 Chair and Derbyshire CC); Phil Haslett (Dep Chair and Glos CC); Karen Westcott (f40 Secretary); Andrew Minall (Hampshire CC); Jackie Fieldwick (Brunel MAT & Uplands Enterprise Trust); Cllr Victoria Aitken (East Riding of Yorks Council); Jonathan Rallings (County Councils Network); Cllr Bob Standley (East Sussex CC); Cllr Samantha Gethen (Solihull Council); Carole Thomson (Oxfordshire Schools Forum); Ed Francis (Worc SEND primary headteacher); Cllr Jonathan Price (Staffordshire CC); Julia Harnden (ASCL).

Apologies: Emma Hardy MP (Labour Vice Chair); Emily Proffitt (Dep Chair and Staffs primary headteacher); Margaret Judd (Dorset Council); Cllr Andrew Leadbetter (Devon CC); Cllr Bryony Goodliffe (Cambs CC); Cllr Fiona Baker (West Northants Council).

AD welcomed everyone to the meeting, especially Cllr Jonathan Price, from Staffordshire County Council, who was attending for the first time.

2. f40 Vice Chairs – update on latest position

KW said after the group agreed its campaign activity for the year ahead, it was important that the f40 Vice Chairs were engaged and included.

She said Liberal Democrat Vice Chair Layla Moran MP was no longer responsible for education. She suggested f40 contact other Lib Dem MPs and invite them to join the group.

Action: KW to contact Conservative Vice Chair Sir Gary Streeter MP and Labour Vice Chair Emma Hardy MP, along with possible Labour incumbent Rachael Maskell MP, to suggest meetings to discuss campaign activity this year.

Action: KW also to enlist the support of a new Liberal Democrat MP to join the f40 group as Vice Chair.

3. Re-tendering and appointment of Secretariat

KW left the meeting during this discussion due to a conflict of interest.

AD updated members on the re-tendering process for the role of f40 Secretary. He said the process was now coming to an end and the appointment would be agreed and formalised in the coming weeks.

Action: KW or AD to update members in due course.

4. Minutes of the meeting held on 17 October 2023

The minutes were **APPROVED** as a correct record of the meeting. There were no matters arising.

5. Matters to be noted:

- Letter to Chancellor on SEND and press release – noted
- Interview with BBC Countryfile on SEND and fairness of funding – noted

AD updated Executive members on activity from the last few months and said it had been a very busy period.

He said a letter from Vice Chair Sir Gary Streeter and other MPs to the Chancellor requesting £4.6bn extra funding for SEND had been sent in October. However, he said it did not lead to any additional funding in the Autumn Statement.

AD said f40 had gained some media coverage about the letter to the Chancellor. He said he had also appeared on BBC's Countryfile TV programme in November 2023 during a feature they were running on SEND and the unfairness of funding and the exceptional challenges in rural areas.

VA said she wished to commend f40 for producing the briefing documents, graphs, and other materials during recent months to help explain clearly the challenges with education and SEND funding and provision.

VA said during the debate in the House of Commons, a number of MPs had referenced the briefing paper and graph to highlight the issues in their areas.

- Meeting with Children and Families Minister David Johnston MP – noted
- Meeting with Shadow Education spokeswoman Bridget Phillipson – noted

AD said f40 met with Children and Families Minister David Johnston MP and Shadow Education spokeswoman Bridget Phillipson in October. He said they were useful meetings in which f40 got across its concerns, but neither the Minister or Shadow Minister really offered suggestions for the crisis in SEND. He said it was more a listening opportunity for them.

PH said following the meetings, he did not feel either the Conservative or Labour parties had a plan for the SEND crisis or any answers. PH said he believed there wasn't a pot of money to properly fund the current SEND requirements, so policy change would be the only answer.

JP said Staffordshire County Council had received a letter from Education Secretary Gillian Keegan and he was not confident that more money would be coming for SEND either.

JP said he had been engaging with local MPs, but the general response was that councils had to make the best of what funding they had.

VA said the extra money needed to support the current SEND demand was so big, policy change was needed, along with better management of expectation.

CT questioned the success of the Delivering Better Value (DBV) and Safety Valve (SV) programmes. She said there were serious challenges around both schemes and the DfE should be making reports public on their impact so far, as they were funded with public money.

CT said DBV had offered some good advice to enable local authorities to make some small savings, but councils were already doing everything suggested and their deficits continued to grow.

She said the SV scheme required local authorities to make huge savings in their SEND budgets, which many found extremely difficult to achieve without reducing the already-stretched support they offered.

AM said Hampshire County Council was one of the first authorities to go through the DBV programme and whilst it provided some useful challenge and assurance, actions were already being taken on all the key areas of activity. He said it had, however, resulted in the opportunity to explore other smaller areas through supporting pilots. He noted that whilst the

DfE was continuing to challenge the LA to find further savings, there was limited further scope and any areas identified were likely to achieve diminishing returns.

AD suggested f40 write to the DfE to request reports on the success of the DBV and SV programmes. He also suggested that f40 MPs ask written questions in Parliament to get the information brought into the public domain.

PH said reports into both programmes have been promised on completion, but now might be a good time to ask for interim reports. He said the SV was not receiving good feedback from councils. PH said it was a big worry that both schemes were continuing to be rolled out when they did not appear to be making any difference to the deficits.

JR said it was very difficult to get a united opinion on the programmes from local authorities.

He said the County Councils Network (CCN) originally said it wanted the deficit SEND budgets to be written off by Government, but some authorities had already gone down the Safety Valve route and had gone through the pain of trying to reduce their spend and deficits.

He said they would feel it was grossly unfair if other authorities simply had their deficits written off now, without going through that same pain. He said local authorities were in different stages of the programmes.

JR said CCN and the Local Government Association (LGA) were working together on a report on SEND, which would be ready in the Spring, and he hoped they would make a bold statement at that point on the DBV and SV programmes.

JH said ASCL felt the same about the DBV and SV programmes, and believed it was difficult to unify people. She suggested all of the different organisations involved in education and SEND funding work together on agreeing the language to be used around the programmes and raising their profile.

She said more than half of local authorities were involved in the interventions, but they were not going to be the answer to the challenges.

VA said f40 needed to highlight the impact on the wider society if Government failed to invest sufficiently in early intervention and SEND. For example, she said a high percentage of people in the prison system were believed to have SEND.

Members of the Executive agreed it would be good to meet with:

- Minister for Levelling UP, Housing and Communities
- A junior minister in the Treasury
- Ministry of Justice

VA said f40 needed to show the impact of the pressure on SEND budgets across local authorities and society as a whole. She said if Government did not get early intervention right, it would create a bigger problem later on.

JP said more MPs needed to lobby on f40's behalf. He said his experience was that MPs were not engaged enough in the challenges with SEND and some even believed there was already enough money in the system. He said some MPs did not understand the scale of the issues.

AD agreed and said MPs tended to be very parochial and were often only focused on one local authority. He said they may not think SEND was a national issue. AD said many MPs would not be linking the letters they received from parents to the national crisis.

SG said often it would be parents complaining to MPs about the SEND support their child was or was not receiving. She said f40 should be encouraging MPs to speak to their constituency office managers about the kind of issues that were coming through.

AD said MPs should also be talking to each other to learn about SEND challenges and common threads across the constituencies.

JF said she believed the independent SEND sector would significantly expand within five years due to the increase in demand.

JR believed politicians had stuck their heads in the sand for years over SEND and it would not be dealt with before the General Election, and probably wouldn't be dealt with for a long time after the General Election either.

He said when parents complained to their local authorities about SEND provision, they should also be advised to speak to their MPs – so Members of Parliament were fully across the issues.

JR said MPs should be pushing for more funding. At present, he said councils were caught between a rock and a hard place and it suited Government that parents were laying the blame at the door of the local authority.

Action: KW to write to the DfE to request copies of reports on the DBV and SV.

Action: KW to invite Ministers in the Treasury, DLUHC and Justice to meet with f40 to discuss SEND.

Action: KW to encourage MPs to speak to their constituency office managers about the SEND issues that were coming through, and to speak with each other about the national picture.

Action: KW to encourage MPs to ask Parliamentary Questions requesting that the report on the impact of the DBV and SV programmes be made public.

- Meeting with SEND Community Alliance – noted

AD said some members of the Executive had met with the SEND Community Alliance and it had been a useful meeting. He said although the two groups did not agree on everything, there was consensus around many things, including that SEND required more funding and that early intervention was crucial.

He said the SEND Community Alliance had invited JF to write a feature on SEND and early intervention for the Special Needs Jungle website. JF said she was liaising directly with them about it.

AD said f40 and the SEND Community Alliance had agreed to meet again in due course.

6. Debate in the House of Commons on SEND on January 11, 2024 – update

KW updated members about the debate on SEND in the House of Commons, which had been secured by David Davis MP, supported by f40. She said 27 MPs had spoken, followed by a response from Children and Families Minister David Johnston MP, who is responsible for SEND.

KW said the debate had attracted a lot of interest from Members of Parliament on both sides of the House and from right across the country.

KW said she was contacting all of those MPs who spoke to enlist their support going forward and to update them on f40 activity.

AD said he had listened to the debate and was heartened to hear so many different MPs talking about the same challenges with SEND and referencing f40's calculation that £4.6bn more funding was required.

VA said it was a good debate. She said 27 MPs had spoken but she understood there were a number of other MPs who wanted to speak but were unable to due to time limitations.

Action: KW to contact all MPs who spoke in the debate.

Action: KW to ask the office of David Davis MP for the number of people who requested to speak but were unable to.

Action: KW to speak with the office of David Davis MP about follow-up activity to the debate.

7. f40 at All-Party Parliamentary Group session on SEND on January 9, 2024 – update

PH updated members around f40's involvement in the recent All-Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) session on SEND in Westminster, which focused on early intervention. He said the different groups involved in SEND, such as parents, specialists, and headteachers, were represented at the session and all agreed that early intervention was key.

He said f40 got across that while there had been investment in Early Years, it had been in extending provision, rather than improving the quality of Early Years provision.

PH said the core message of the session was that Early Years investment was good, but it needed to be targeted at the right families, and he said f40 had talked about the real terms cuts to mainstream education.

He said if Government wanted schools to be more inclusive of SEND and to offer improved support, more funding and early intervention was required.

PH said in Gloucestershire, it was the primary schools that were really struggling to meet demand for SEND support and early intervention on their current budgets.

PH said f40's message to the APPG was that Government needed a clear strategy that focused on early intervention, followed by the funding and policy to enable it to happen. He said Government needed to make sure any extra money was getting through to where it was most needed.

PH said there was currently no joined up strategy. He questioned why the Change Programme, which is being trialled following the publication of Government's SEND and Alternative Provision Improvement Plan, was running separately and detached from the DVB and SV programmes?

PH said it was useful for f40 to present at the APPG, and MPs on all sides agreed on the need for greater early intervention, but there was no tangible outcome.

AD said he had contacted the NAHT, which acts as Secretary to the APPG, to thank them for the invitation and to say f40 would be happy to be involved in similar things in the future.

8. Pre-election campaigning/focus and asks

KW said it was an important year ahead with the General Election planned, so it was important that f40 agreed its campaign activity in the next few weeks.

Everyone agreed that f40 needed to continue to build on the message around the need for an additional £4.6bn funding for SEND throughout the campaign activity in 2024.

VA said f40 needed to get SEND on all manifestos.

PH said f40 also needed to push for reform of the SEND sector and the need to implement a strategy around early intervention, backed by policy and funding.

VA said the debate on SEND in the House of Commons highlighted the increasing conflict between local authorities and parents around SEND support. She said the f40 campaign this year needed to include that conflict, along with the bigger picture on current policy.

BS agreed that f40 should be pushing for policy change, as well as the £4.6bn for SEND. He said it was easy for Government to push back on the funding, but policy change less so.

AM said f40 should perhaps be speaking with the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC) around the unfairness of SEND and education funding, and the rise in transport costs, especially for large, rural authorities.

Action: KW to set up a workshop for Executive members to discuss the campaign plan for the year.

Action: KW to work with the team to update the f40 briefing papers.

Post meeting note: The workshop has been arranged for February 5.

9. Re-working of the f40 School and SEND funding briefing papers

AM said f40 was still planning to carry out some research work about SEND funding and distribution later in the year.

CT said she would like f40 to recalculate how much it costs to run a school, as the figures previously produced were very useful but were now out of date. She said the calculations should take into account the need for mainstream schools to become more inclusive of SEND and how much additional funding they would need to provide quality SEND support.

AM said f40 would request information from the DfE to assist with the research.

AM to update members on the research at a later date.

Action: AM and MJ to research SEND funding and distribution and how much it costs to run a school.

10. f40 website

KW asked members if they were able to access the f40 website without any issues. She said some local authorities and Government departments had reported problems accessing the website during the last year.

It was agreed that the content on the website be audited and that members discuss the website again at the workshop.

Action: KW to audit the content on the website.

11. Financial update, membership, and subscription fees for 24/25

KW said the invoices for annual subscriptions were due to be issued in April, and the Executive needed to agree the subscription fee for the year ahead. She outlined the costs associated with f40 and shared some options around subscription fees.

AD proposed that the subscription fee remain at last year's level of £1,400. He said there was much campaigning work to be done again this year as we approached a General Election.

VA agreed and said f40 had done a huge amount of work during the past year and more was required if we were to raise the profile of education and SEND on manifestos. She also said it would be helpful to get more schools and parent forums involved in the conversation around funding.

Members unanimously agreed that the subscription fee for 2024/25 remain at £1,400.

Action: KW to issue annual subscription invoices to members, along with the new briefing papers, and a summary of planned activity and the activity that has taken place during the past year.

12. Date of next committee meeting – in-person and online meeting

It was agreed that the next f40 Executive meeting should take place in April.

Members said they would like to host another MPs' briefing in April in Westminster, and it would make sense to arrange both events on the same day.

Action: KW to look at dates and availability and update members.

13. Any other business

There was no other business.