



f40 Executive Committee Meeting

Tuesday, April 23, 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); Emily Proffitt (Dep Chair and Staffs primary headteacher); Karen Westcott (f40 Secretary); Andrew Minall (Hampshire CC); Margaret Judd (Dorset Council); 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); Julia Harnden (ASCL); Cllr Lois Samuel (Devon CC); Michael Freeston (EYA); Cllr Bryony Goodliffe (Cambridgeshire CC); Emma Balchin (NGA); Jon Millin (Heads Association); Ben Bryant (ISOS Partnership); Cerys Samuel (university student – work experience placement).

Apologies: Cllr Andrew Leadbetter (Devon CC); Cllr Fiona Baker (West Northants Council); Cllr John Howson (Oxfordshire).

PH chaired the first section of the meeting as AD was a little late due to a train delay.

PH welcomed everyone to the meeting, especially Cllr Jon Millin, Emma Balchin, Cllr Lois Samuel, and her daughter Cerys Samuel, who were attending the f40 Executive Committee for the first time.

KW updated on apologies before introductions from those attending.

KW gave an update on the appointment of a Liberal Democrat MP Vice Chair and said she hoped to be able to confirm details in due course.

2. Minutes of last Executive meeting held on January 16, 2024

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

3. Matters to be noted

- New briefing paper and summary of activity throughout 2023 – Noted

PH made reference to the new f40 briefing papers, which had been circulated in hard copy to all members at the meeting. Digital versions had also been circulated to all f40 members.

He said f40 had updated its key asks to include suggestions for reform as the issues in education, both relating to schools and SEND, went beyond the need for more funding. He said a lot of work had gone into refining what f40 was asking for.

PH said fairer and increased funding were still big issues for f40, however, he said reform was also needed to tackle some of the major challenges, including ensuring that mainstream schools received more funding, training, and resources to enable them to be more inclusive of SEND pupils. He said to get the SEND system right, Government needed to invest more in mainstream schools and early intervention.

PH said the cost of sending pupils to independent specialist SEND schools was a major challenge for local authorities, so ensuring local authorities had sufficient State SEND provision was also key. He said f40 was urging Government to invest more capital funding in SEND, distributing it fairly across all LAs so they can each expand their provision in a way that best suits their needs.

He said the current bidding system for capital funding was slow and meant that some LAs were unsuccessful in securing more funding.

JH said she agreed with everything in the briefing documents, and asked if there was any insight as to how long it would take for the capital funding to materialise that had already been promised to local authorities.

PH said the money was gradually coming through to local authorities, but it could often be delayed and caught up in red tape and protracted Government processes.

He said f40 was asking for substantial additional capital funding to help reduce the reliance on costly independent provision. He said if Government was to provide more capital funding, it would save in the long-term.

AM said schools were seeing falling numbers of pupils. He suggested that where school buildings became vacant, they be repurposed for SEND provision.

PH said f40 had calculated that a State specialist place saved around £30k per pupil a year compared to an independent place. He said a new school for 200 pupils would cost around £19.5m to provide and would ultimately save around £6m per year, compared to the cost of independent provision for those pupils.

VA said in East Riding of Yorkshire they had calculated their own costings when comparing State SEND provision to independent. She said independent placements were well over £30k per pupil more expensive than State places.

JF said the lack of capacity in the specialist SEND system was a huge issue because even if LAs wanted to use State provision, they were unable to, and she said the quality of independent provision could vary, but local authorities had no choice but to use them anyway.

PH said one of the challenges was the length of time children had to wait for a specialist place.

JR said Government was not sufficiently funding SEND and had failed to adequately fund the changes it made in the sector in the Code of Practice 2014, which had resulted in conflict between local authorities and parents. He said the Code of Practice may have been well intentioned, but Government should properly fund what it offered to children.

JH said the situation had reached a point where the noise was not about where the SEND system was broken and what needed to be done to improve it, but more about the adversarial environment it was creating.

PH said some children with SEND were being sent to fee-paying independent schools because they were cheaper for local authorities to fund than independent special schools.

JF said she believed the whole SEND sector needed a reset and rebalance.

EP said the unfairness of funding was a real issue for schools, too. She said if her school was located just a few miles further down the road, she would be in a different local authority and would receive around £800,000 a year more in funding.

She said she had been involved in tribunals four times in the past two years because her school was at capacity and was unable to support some SEND pupils. She said in each case the child had been placed in expensive independent provision, instead of State provision.

EP agreed that LAs needed to be able to invest in their mainstream schools, enabling them to support SEND more, as it would save them money in the long-term.

JF offered to share a paper she had written with members of the f40 Executive, which showed the unfairness in funding. She said level 1 SEND funding in Swindon was £12,000, but in Wiltshire it was £22,000. She said the unfairness in funding was a big issue for the lower funded schools.

JF thanked KW and members of the Executive for their work in producing the new f40 briefing papers.

- Meeting with the DfE funding and SEND Reform teams – Noted

PH updated members on the meeting with the Department for Education in February. He said the DfE appeared very interested in listening to f40 members talk about the challenges in both SEND and the unfairness of funding but said they did not appear to have all of the necessary answers to put it right.

AM said f40 did explain how the National Funding Formula was not working and needed to be improved, and how it fed into the unfairness of both School and SEND funding.

AD said the issue at the moment was timing, with the General Election approaching. He said we were in a position where nothing new was likely to happen for the next few months, and there would also likely be a period of uncertainty after the election, too.

JR said he did not think all MPs were aware of how serious the local authority SEND deficits were. He said that issue needed to be pressed at every opportunity.

PH said he was concerned that local authorities would have to start talking about cuts to provision if the growing SEND deficits were not dealt with.

EP said school budgets were increasingly being stretched – and there was no room to make further reductions to spending.

JF agreed and said schools were having to make sacrifices all the time. She said there was insufficient funding and resources in mental health and support services, which impacted on schools and their pupils.

VA said f40 needed to illustrate the issues with graphics for MPs, showing clearly how the adversarial environment had developed and why there was a crisis in SEND.

MF agreed and said the graphic should show that everyone – parents, schools, local authorities – were starting from a rational position, but that the lack of provision and funding created conflict.

Action: KW to explore the production of a graphic to illustrate how the SEND crisis had developed.

- Letter to the Chancellor re SEND funding from Conservative MPs – Noted
- [Guardian coverage](#) – Noted

4. Re-tendering and appointment of Secretariat role

AD took over the role of chairing the meeting from this point.

AD updated members on the re-tendering of the Secretariat role and said DTW had been re-appointed following a comprehensive procurement process with the administering authority Derbyshire County Council.

He said DTW had been informed of the intention to award the contract to them in due course, once final legal arrangements had been completed.

5. MPs' briefing in Westminster – following the Executive meeting on April 23, 2024

AD outlined the plans for the MPs' briefing in Westminster later that afternoon. He said MPs would be presented with an information pack, and a presentation had been prepared to explain the issues and where f40 believed reform and additional investment were required.

Post meeting note: Around 22 MPs or their representatives attended the briefing. Comments from the [Q&A session](#) are on the f40 website.

AD suggested f40 organise a campaign before the General Election, urging all parliamentary candidates to pledge their support to education and increased funding and reform. He suggested f40 also host a webinar for election candidates to find out more about the issues in school funding and SEND.

Action: KW to explore the possibility of an online webinar for parliamentary candidates before the election, urging them to pledge their support to education.

KW said members may also want to explore hosting a full-day's conference in London early next year, after the General Election had been held.

Members agreed that it would be a good way to engage MPs and invite them to be involved in the f40 campaign, focusing attention on education and SEND and the unfairness of funding, once the General Election had taken place.

Action: KW to begin looking at the logistics of hosting an f40 conference in January or February 2025.

6. Hosting of webinar for f40 members

The Executive agreed that after the council elections in May 2024, f40 should organise a webinar for f40 members to find out more about the campaign plan, and where f40 was lobbying for reform and increased and fairer funding.

Action: KW to explore holding the members' webinar in June or July 2024.

7. Requesting meetings with key decision-makers and ministries, including:

- Policy teams for each political party
- Key Education Ministers and Shadow spokespeople
- Department for Levelling UP, Housing and Communities
- HM Treasury
- Ministry of Justice

The Executive agreed that we should invite the policy teams from each of the different political parties to meet with f40 on the run up to the General Election to stress the importance of education in manifestos and debates, along with some other key ministries.

Action: KW to contact the various departments and policy teams to request meetings.

8. f40 website

KW explained that the f40 website was old and needed to be replaced. She said it was becoming increasingly difficult to update, and some local authorities and public sector organisations were unable to access it due to their strict firewalls.

Members agreed that f40 needed a modern website, particularly as we approached the General Election, and investment should be made in a new site.

Action: KW to work with the f40 team to replace the website.

9. Involving parents, carers, and schools in f40 campaigns

Members discussed the potential to meet with some national parent groups to discuss the issues around education funding and SEND, and where f40 could align with them and work together.

Members said it would be good to reach out to the National Parent Forum.

EB also suggested f40 meet with Parentkind, Nasen, and Independent Provider of Special Education Advice.

CT also suggested sharing the materials with the governing board of schools, and EP agreed that f40 should share its messaging with parents and schools.

Action: KW to make contact with the groups to invite them to meet with f40.

10. Financial update, membership, and invoicing

KW reminded members that at the January meeting the Executive had agreed to hold the annual membership subscription at £1,400 this year. She said the annual invoices were being issued.

11. Date of next Executive Committee meeting – online meeting, suggested during w/c July 8, 2024

It was agreed that the next meeting should be held in mid-July, online only.

Action: KW to circulate a diary poll to agree the best date for a meeting.

Post meeting note: The next f40 Executive Committee meeting is scheduled for Monday, July 8, from 2.45pm – 4.15pm.

12. Any other business

There was no other business.

13. Presentation by Ben Bryant, from ISOS Partnership, re its SEND research on behalf of the County Councils Network and Local Government Association

BB presented the initial findings of the research, looking at the challenges in the SEND system and some of the causes, along with some possible suggested reforms. The research is expected to be released publicly this summer.

Members of f40 thanked BB for the presentation.