



f40 Executive Committee Meeting

Monday, July 15, 2024 – online meeting

1. Attendances, apologies, and changes to committee membership

Present: Cllr Alex Dale (f40 Chair and Derbyshire CC); Phil Haslett (Dep Chair and Gloucestershire CC); Emily Proffitt (Dep Chair and Staffordshire 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 Yorkshire Council); Carole Thomson (Oxfordshire Schools Forum); Ed Francis (Worcestershire SEND primary headteacher); Cllr Lois Samuel (Devon CC); Cllr Bryony Goodliffe (Cambridgeshire CC); Jon Millin (Primary Heads Association); Cllr Andrew Leadbetter (Devon CC); Cllr John Howson (Oxfordshire CC); Cllr Les Hall (Cornwall Council); Cllr Andrew Reid (Suffolk CC); Rachael Adler (Hertfordshire CC); Claire Merchant-Jones (Somerset CC); Julia Grainger (Suffolk CC); Cllr Elaine Lynch (Cumberland Council); Michael Freeston (EYA); Emma Balchin (NGA).

Apologies: Cllr Fiona Baker (West Northamptonshire Council); Jonathan Rallings (County Councils Network); Cllr Bob Standley (East Sussex CC); Cllr Samantha Gethen (Solihull Council); Julia Harnden (ASCL); Amelia Walker (Somerset CC).

AD welcomed everyone to the meeting, especially those who were attending an f40 Executive Committee meeting for the first time. Everyone was invited to introduce themselves.

KW updated the committee on membership of f40. She said the group now had 43 local authority members. She said Hertfordshire County Council and Cumberland Council had joined the group. North Northamptonshire Council was no longer a member.

2. Minutes of last Executive meeting held on April 23, 2024 – Matters Arising

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

3. Matters to be noted

- Letters to political parties before the General Election
- Letters to all prospective parliamentary candidates in f40 areas prior to General Election
- Letter to Education Secretary Bridget Phillipson
- Letter to all f40 MPs after the General Election
- f40 annual report issued to the Local Government Association
- Explanation for MPs and media about the unfairness of education funding

KW updated committee members on recent activity leading up to the General Election, as well as activity following. She said before the election f40 had written to each of the main political parties urging them to make education a key priority in their manifestos and had written to all prospective parliamentary candidates in f40 areas to explain the group's concerns and invite them to pledge their support to the group.

Following the election, f40 had written to Secretary of State for Education Bridget Phillipson to invite her to meet with the group.

f40 has also written to all MPs in f40 areas inviting them to work with the group, explaining our concerns and giving notice of an MPs' briefing later in 2024 in Westminster.

KW said a one-page document explaining the unfairness of education funding had also been created and shared with f40 members, which could be used to help explain the disparity in funding and why it should be levelled up.

4. Appointment of f40 Vice Chairs

AD updated the committee on the three Vice Chair roles with f40. He said Sir Gary Streeter, f40's Conservative Vice Chair, had stood down as an MP in the General Election, and changes with regards Shadow responsibilities for f40's Labour and Lib Dem Vice Chairs meant that f40 was now looking to appoint three new Vice Chairs to represent the main parties.

AD said f40 had begun the process of identifying suitable Vice Chair candidates and invited members of the Executive to contact KW if they had suggestions for suitable candidates.

KW said it was hoped the Vice Chairs could be in place soon. f40 hoped to host a briefing for MPs in Westminster in the autumn and the Vice Chairs would play an important role in encouraging attendance and speaking on the key education issues.

Action: KW and AD to continue meeting with prospective Vice Chair candidates and to update f40 members in due course.

5. Update on LGA and CCN ISOS Partnership research on SEND

AD outlined to members the research project that the Local Government Association (LGA) and County Councils Network (CCN) had commissioned on the crisis in SEND, carried out by the ISOS Partnership. He said f40 was given a presentation on the findings in the spring.

KW said she believed the findings would be made public during the next few weeks, now the General Election had been held.

AD said it was very encouraging that the LGA and CCN were focusing on the SEND crisis. He said it would be useful for f40 to work with them to engage Government and MPs in finding a solution for the crisis. He suggested they work together at the next MPs' briefing, hosted by f40.

JF said in previous briefings hosted by f40, MPs often asked why there was an increase in the number of children with SEND, and why the complexity of need was increasing.

JF said she was planning to look at both of these issues this year to identify the factors driving the increases and how we should be doing things differently to ensure we meet this rising need as early as possible. JF said she believed early intervention and collaboration between schools and SEND specialists would provide children with much greater support when they first need it, and in the right environment.

JF said she would share her findings with the f40 group.

AD thanked JF and said at present no one seemed to have any answers as to why SEND and the complexity of need were on the rise.

MF said the National Audit Office was also looking into the rise in SEND, which would be very helpful in understanding the factors behind it. [Support for children and young people with special educational needs - NAO work in progress](#)

Action: KW to contact LGA and CCN to arrange a meeting to discuss possibility of working together on education and the SEND crisis.

6. f40 campaign plan ideas

- MPs' briefing in Westminster – October/November 2024
- Webinar for f40 members
- Letter for members/schools to share with local MPs about education reform/investment
- Invitation to meet with f40 to key education ministers / opposition spokespeople / DfE / Select Committee
- Speak with APPG on SEND about future meetings/speaking opportunities
- Campaigning at events
- Media – opinion pieces on what action we would like to see on education / SEND

AD said some possible ideas for campaign activity for the next year had been identified, listed above, and he encouraged Executive members to suggest other ways that f40 could engage Government and decision-makers about the need for educational reform and a resolution to the SEND crisis.

AD touched on each of the different approaches listed above.

Deficit SEND budgets

AM suggested that f40 also engage with the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government, headed up by Minister Angela Rayner, to share concerns about the growing local authority SEND deficit budgets, which are currently being held off their books by the statutory override. He said many local authorities feared bankruptcy if the statutory override was removed.

PH said Gloucestershire County Council had been working to identify the steps they would have to take to balance their SEND budget once the override was removed, including cuts. He said they were talking to the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government to explain the situation and ask for guidance.

PH said he believed it would become much more of an issue for the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government as in the past it had mostly been dealt with by the Department for Education (DfE).

PH said he believed the Safety Valve and Delivering Better Value intervention programmes would not be enough to stem the flow of increasing deficit budgets. He said, whilst he recognised that it might have to be, he was not in favour of the statutory override being extended further as it would simply delay a resolution. He said demand would continue to outstrip funding and resources unless the problem was tackled head on.

CT said Oxfordshire was part of the Delivering Better Value programme and it was clear that it was not going to help the local authority to balance its books.

CT also said the DfE had promised to publish reports outlining the findings of both programmes, but nothing had been published so far.

She said f40 should be pushing for updates on the findings and raising them with Ministers.

JH said the SEND crisis, and the deficit budgets, had gone beyond simply being an education problem and was now an issue for the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government. He said a high number of local authorities were running the risk of bankruptcy within the next ten years.

He said the fact there was a cumulative local authority deficit across England of more than £3bn illustrated the seriousness of the issue and that it would not solve itself. He said strong action was required from Government.

AD said while SEND was a major concern for members, f40 would also continue to push for fairer education funding. He said f40 members continued to receive less funding than other local authorities, which exacerbated their funding challenges.

JF said she felt the SEND crisis was coming to a head and f40 needed to work with Government on how provision could be delivered differently.

PH said working in partnership with other organisations always reaped the greatest results. He suggested f40 work collaboratively with other organisations again, such as ASCL, NEU, LGA, NGA and CCN.

AM said raising issues through the media was also useful, and he suggested f40 pick up talks with BBC's Branwen Jeffreys to raise issues around SEND.

VA also suggested some key education correspondents, including in the regional media.

NGA survey

AD asked EB to explain the findings from a recent survey carried out by the National Governance Association (NGA) of its members.

EB said the survey had shown that school governing bodies were most concerned about balancing their budgets this year, with many schools struggling to meet all of their costs. She said the financial picture was worsening for schools.

EB said there was also lots of concern about the rising demand for SEND support and how SEND was funded. She said the fact SEND budgets were calculated based on historical need was not working for schools.

She said the findings also showed that maintained schools were finding it harder to balance their books than academy trusts, and she said primary schools were struggling more than secondary schools due to the falling number of pupils impacting on the amount of funding they received.

EB said the NGA would be pushing these issues when they had meetings with the DfE and policy advisors. She said the NGA would be asking the DfE to allow schools to keep the same funding, even when their pupil numbers fell. She said schools had the same running costs, regardless of how many pupils they had.

The results of the NGA survey:

<https://www.nga.org.uk/news-views/directory/nga-survey-reveals-many-schools-struggle-to-balance-budgets/>

Unfair funding

MJ said f40 needed to continue to campaign on the unfairness of funding for schools to ensure Government understood that some schools received far less than others and therefore had greater financial struggles. She said when the issues of SEND were so big, it would be easy to forget about the unfairness, but f40 needed to continue its campaigning.

MJ said f40 also needed to keep abreast of what Government planned for education, including SEND. She said f40 needed to make sure that funding did not drop when pupil numbers dropped.

Falling pupil numbers

JH said he believed falling pupil numbers would be the next big issue for both schools and local authorities after the SEND crisis. He said he was aware of some schools that only had a third of their maximum allocation of pupils.

JH said the funding system, with the Minimum Per Pupil Funding Level (MPPFL), was designed for large secondary schools, as they received funding based on the number of pupils they had enrolled. He said the funding system adversely impacted small or rural schools as they were not provided with sufficient funding due to having fewer pupils. He said the falling number of pupils would become an even bigger issue for them and Government as they required a certain level of funding just to operate.

JF agreed and said her academy SEND trust was speaking with a number of other trusts about how best to use their space, created by falling pupil numbers, to improve the SEND support they provide to pupils.

She said SEND experts working collaboratively with schools was the way forward and she hoped the practice would be rolled out nationally. She said it would enable schools to be creative with how they used their space and would be an opportunity to do things differently.

AM said f40 needed to make sure the falling pupil numbers was on the DfE's radar. He said the national funding formula was not responsive enough to system changes in a school's circumstances.

AM said the funding formula needed to be adapted to ensure it provided the right level of funding to all schools, even when their pupil numbers fell. He said there were ways it could be achieved, but it required a different way of thinking.

JH said in Oxfordshire, they were looking to enable all primary schools to start admitting children from the age of three, in Early Years, to compensate for falling pupil numbers.

VA said these issues were being discussed by Directors of Children's Services, who were due to meet with the new Secretary of State.

Flexibility of funding

PH said if local authorities had more control of school funding, and greater flexibility in how funding was used, they may be able to address specific local issues, such as those raised in the meeting.

PH said some of the SEND issues could also be solved if local authorities were given more flexibility in how funding was used.

PH agreed that school budgets should not be reduced when pupil numbers fell, and funding should also not be transferred to other areas of education if schools saw a reduction in their pupils. He said schools were struggling to manage on their current levels of funding and could not meet their costs if funding was taken away.

Action: KW to invite Education ministers, the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government, and Shadow spokespeople to meet with f40.

Action: KW to request a meeting with the DfE to discuss SEND, fairness of funding, falling pupil numbers, and reports on the Safety Valve and Delivering Better Value.

Action: KW to organise an MPs' briefing for MPs in mid-October or November in Westminster.

Action: KW to organise a webinar for members in the autumn.

Action: KW to invite members of the Collaboration Group to meet again.

Action: KW to speak with key education media to raise issues around both fairness of funding and SEND.

7. Financial update and invoicing

KW said f40 had a healthy bank balance. She said members had been invoiced for their annual subscriptions, as agreed at the last meeting.

8. Date of next committee meeting

KW suggested the next meeting be held in person at the LGA, to coincide with the MPs' briefing in Westminster in the autumn.

Action: KW to update members when a date is confirmed.

9. Any other business

CT asked if f40 was still planning to host a conference for members?

PH said timing of a conference would be key – it would need to be when local authorities and schools had more visibility of Government spending and what education funding looked like.

AD suggested the conference be held in January, February or March next year. He asked where conferences had traditionally been held in the past.

MJ said f40 had hosted conferences in different parts of the country during the past 20 years.

KW said they had latterly been held in London as it was found to be easier for most people to get to and was easier for speakers to commit to.

AD said the most important thing was that members were keen to attend, and that the right mix of speakers were secured.

AD said there was also the option of holding a series of webinars online, with speakers, rather than one in-person conference, if people preferred.

Action: KW to look at the possibility of organising an f40 conference in the first quarter of 2025 and to provide options to the Executive.

Ends