



## **f40 Executive Committee Meeting**

**Tuesday, October 15, 2024 – both in-person and online**

### **1. Attendances, apologies, and changes to committee membership**

**Present:** Cllr Alex Dale (f40 Chair and Derbyshire CC); 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 Reid (Suffolk CC); Rachael Adler (Hertfordshire CC); Michael Freeston (EYA); Charlotte Harding (NGA); Cllr Barbara Ellenbroek (Cornwall); Sarah Burns (Cheshire East headteacher); Jonathan Rallings (County Councils Network); Samantha Gethen (Solihull Council).

**Apologies:** Phil Haslett (Dep Chair and Gloucestershire CC); Emily Jones (NAHT); Cllr Fiona Baker (West Northamptonshire Council); Cllr Bob Standley (East Sussex CC); Cllr Julia Harnden (ASCL); Amelia Walker (Somerset CC); Cllr Andrew Leadbetter (Devon CC); Cllr John Howson (Oxfordshire CC); Cllr Elaine Lynch (Cumberland Council); Emma Balchin (NGA); Cllr Laura Mayes (Wiltshire); Annette Perrington (Swindon Council); Julia Grainger (Suffolk County Council); Clive Harris (LGA).

AD welcomed everyone to the meeting, especially those who were attending for the first time.

### **2. Appointment of new f40 Vice Chairs**

AD informed the Executive of f40's recent Vice Chair appointments and said they had already been active in helping to sponsor the Parliamentary Briefing planned for later that day. The new Vice Chairs are as follows:

- Rt Hon Sir David Davis, MP for Goole and Pocklington, East Riding (Cons)
- Sarah Dyke, MP for Glastonbury and Somerton, Somerset (Lib Dem)
- Jayne Kirkham, MP for Truro and Falmouth, Cornwall (Labour)

### **3. Membership**

KW updated the committee on membership and said f40 now had 43 members.

AD said the contract for the Secretariat support was now being provided to DTW following their appointment at the conclusion of the tendering process.

AD said Derbyshire County Council, which is the administrative authority for f40, wished to have back-to-back agreements in place with all 43 members. He said he would arrange a meeting with some members of the committee and the legal team at Derbyshire CC to discuss it in more detail.

RA asked if f40 wished to have more member local authorities in the group.

KW said she had invited the lowest funded local authorities to join f40 during the past year, and she would reach out to them again.

RA said she believed local authorities needed to understand the commonality in f40 and how all LAs campaigning together could benefit everyone. She said the SEND issue was a challenge for all, and many were impacted by the unfairness.

Members agreed that we should extend the invitation to join f40 again.

JR said a lot of the large rural areas, as well as the least deprived areas, often had the biggest SEND expenditure, so there was commonality among many authorities.

AM said f40 needed to get the messaging right. He said f40 was increasingly talking about SEND, which led members to also talk about Early Years more too.

**Action:** KW to invite the lowest funded authorities to join f40 again.

#### **4. Minutes of last Executive committee meeting held on July 15, 2024**

MF asked that a comment he made in the 'chat' section of the online meeting be included in the minutes. The following comment has been added:

*MF said Early Years provision in schools was going to be a lead issue for the new Government and he believed it must be driven by the best interests of the child's experience, rather than a way of keeping schools open to combat falling pupil numbers.*

The Minutes were otherwise approved.

#### **5. Matters to be noted**

- Letter from Education Secretary Bridget Phillipson – **noted**

AD said Education Secretary Bridget Phillipson had responded to f40's letter inviting her to meet with the group. He said in the letter she had stated that she would like to meet with the group, if her diary allowed.

KW said she had also contacted Minister for School Standards Catherine McKinnell MP to request a meeting but had not yet had a response.

Members suggested f40 also write to Helen Hayes MP, Chair of the Education Select Committee, as well as Minister for Early Education Stephen Morgan MP, to invite them to meet.

AD suggested the group liaise with f40 Vice Chairs to see if they could help facilitate any of the meetings with Ministers.

It was also suggested f40 approach Children's Commissioner Rachel de Souza again to invite her to meet with the group.

RA suggested we speak with their special advisors to request meetings.

**Action:** KW to write to Helen Hayes MP, Minister Stephen Morgan MP, and the Children's Commissioner.

**Action:** KW to liaise with the f40 Vice Chairs about the possibility of helping to arrange meetings with key spokespeople.

- Isos Partnership research on SEND crisis, commissioned by LGA and CCN, launched – **noted**

- New f40 website now live – **noted**

KW said the new f40 website was now live. She invited the committee to provide feedback if they felt something should be added or changed.

AD said the website looked better and was more user-friendly. He thanked KW and DTW for their work in helping to create it.

## **6. Parliamentary briefing (taking place later the same day)**

AD outlined the Parliamentary Briefing that was due to take place in Portcullis House in Westminster later that day. He said the three f40 Vice Chairs had been very supportive and a number of MPs had responded positively to say they hoped to attend.

**NB: Post meeting note:** Around 80 MPs were either present at the briefing or represented, with the Q&A session after the presentation lasting 90 minutes. The list of attendees and presentation slides have been added to the f40 website and circulated to all members.

## **7. f40 response to emerging policy changes**

PH had requested this item be added to the agenda but was unable to attend the meeting. It will therefore be added to the next f40 Executive Committee meeting agenda.

CT asked members what their views were on the Minimum Per Pupil Funding Level (MPPFL) system for distributing funding to schools? She said it had huge implications on the levels of funding that schools received and wondered if it was something that f40 should again be looking at in more detail when talking to the DfE.

CT said the MPPFL only added to the unfairness in education funding. She said as MPPFL was paid per child, it left small schools with fewer pupils with insufficient funding, and those with declining numbers also struggled. She said they often did not have enough funding to run their schools.

AM agreed and said f40 had for some time spoken out about the impact of the MPPFL on some schools and looking at it again was worth exploring. He said declining numbers was an issue for some schools. The crisis in SEND was also an issue as some schools had high numbers of children with SEND, while others had relatively few, meaning pupil numbers fluctuated.

JR said the big challenge was that Government had to grapple with a lot of different demands with regards funding.

He said the Isos Research into the challenges with SEND, which highlighted the unfair distribution of children with SEND across mainstream schools and the need for greater support for mainstream schools to be inclusive, had been universally accepted by everyone.

BG said she believed school admissions should be handed back to the local authority, so the mainstream system was based on 'local schools for local children'. She said that would ensure a more even spread of children, including those with SEND. She said transferring admissions back to local authorities would be a 'quick win' to help solve some of the issues in the SEND system.

BG said it would also reduce issues and costs around school transport, which were largely down to the increasing number of SEND children being transported out of their local areas to specialist schools.

BG said bringing school admissions back under LA control would be the best way to resolve the issues and aid inclusion in mainstream schools, who would have to learn (if they haven't

already) to support all their local children, whatever their need. This would help to support parental confidence in mainstream schools too.

JR said Government could not delay resolving the SEND crisis any longer. He said failing to do so would lead to the collapse of local authorities.

EF said he had attended five tribunals this term alone where parents had taken action against their local authorities because they wanted to send their children to his special school. In some of the cases, he said the families did not live in his school's local authority area.

JF said we could not change SEND policy without changing practice, and without financial investment.

EF said culture change was also required.

JR said parents had no confidence in the mainstream system and that needed to change if the SEND crisis was to be resolved. He said the local authority SEND deficits would continue to rise if parents felt their local mainstream school could not meet the needs of their children, and so fought to send their children to specialist provision.

MF said there needed to be a culture and policy change across education, not just SEND. He said if Government continued to focus on exams and grades to judge the success of a school, then inclusion would never happen. He said if we removed the need for schools to concentrate so heavily on their exam results, they would naturally become more inclusive of those pupils with extra needs.

SG said parents often put children into special schools because they offered a different style of education. She said EHCPs were becoming increasingly difficult to secure, and a lot of parents felt the only way they could get extra support for their child was by sending them to independent schools, including specialist provision.

SG said she was concerned that when VAT is added to the cost of independent schools next year, many parents will not be able to afford the higher fees and will send their children back to LA schools. However, she said they may also look to secure EHCPs for their children to compensate. She said it would ultimately mean more costs for the local authority.

AD agreed and said the VAT will make independent schools unaffordable for some parents, so there would be a knock-on effect for mainstream schools and local authorities.

JR agreed that some parents wanted a different option for their children.

BG said it was the outcomes that mattered. She said sometimes people looked at the school surroundings and facilities, but did not look at the outcomes for children. She questioned whether local authorities received value for money when it came to how much they were spending on placing children in independent provision.

JF said the whole SEND system was broken. She said she ran a special academy trust, as well as an independent school because opening an independent school was the only way she could expand and open another facility. However, she said her independent school was actually in a local authority building. She said there were insufficient special school places and little room in the system for expansion.

JF said it was not just children in schools who were in need of extra support. She said everyone in society was more fragile and it was not an easy issue to solve.

## **8. f40 conference – March 11, 2005**

KW outlined the plans for the f40 conference on March 11, 2025. She said she had provisionally booked the conference room at the LGA for the day and had drafted an initial itinerary.

She said initial ideas for speakers included:

- Ministerial representative from the Department for Education
- Representatives from the DfE
- A secondary headteacher
- A primary headteacher
- A local authority representative
- Each of the three f40 Vice Chairs
- A representative of Early Years

KW said an early suggestion for the theme for the conference was: 'The future of Education: The Path to Reform, Investment and Success', but asked others to suggest ideas and speakers for the day's event.

BG asked if someone from the Department of Health could attend? She said she believed health leaders needed to be more involved in the conversations, particularly when children with mental health challenges were having to wait so long for appointments.

It was suggested that perhaps the DfE could invite someone from the Department of Health to attend the conference and speak.

Members agreed that the speakers should be a mix of policymakers and practitioners on the ground.

AD suggested that someone from the DfE and Health be on a panel together to discuss SEND and how we could improve inclusion at mainstream school.

JR suggested someone from the Integrated Care Board (ICB) sit on the panel, or someone from the NHS Confederation.

BG also suggested a young person be asked to speak or give their input. It was agreed that perhaps f40 capture some thoughts and insight from young people via a short film that could be played to the audience.

Other suggestions for speakers included parent/carer forums, The Council for Disabled Children, the National Governance Association, and the Early Years Alliance.

BG said she could help to identify and liaise with young people for the film.

RA said she may have video content that f40 could use for the conference.

BE also said there was a Youth Council in Cornwall that may be happy to get involved.

VA said a secondary headteacher in East Riding had just won a national inclusion award. VA agreed to put KW in touch with him.

AM suggested a 'Save The Date' diary invitation be circulated to all f40 members inviting them to attend the conference. He said if a great number of people wished to attend, f40 could consider a different, bigger venue.

KW said she could look at the possibility of making some aspects of the conference available online.

**Action:** VA to introduce the headteacher to KW.

**Action:** KW to reach out to various people to invite them to be speakers at the conference.

**Action:** KW to send a 'Save The Date' invitation to all f40 members.

**Action:** KW to explore the possibility of making some aspects of the conference available online.

**Action:** KW to arrange an online meeting for a conference sub-committee to meet and agree actions and progress.

## **9. Campaign plan**

### **- Webinar for f40 members**

KW said it had been agreed at an earlier f40 Executive Committee meeting that an online webinar be held for all local authority members, based around the content of the parliamentary briefing in October.

KW said she hoped to arrange it for late in 2024, depending on availability.

The committee was in agreement and said it would be useful for members to hear the presentation on the Isos Partnership research on SEND.

**Action:** KW to speak to members of the f40 Executive, County Councils Network, Local Government Association, and Ben Bryant at Isos Partnership to arrange a date.

**Action:** Once a date is agreed, KW to circulate the details to f40 members.

**Action:** Once a date is arranged, KW to arrange a meeting for some members of the Executive to progress the webinar.

**NB: Post meeting note:** The webinar is planned for Thursday, December 12.

### **- Letter for members/Governors/schools to share with local MPs**

KW asked members how they would feel about f40 circulating a letter to LA members, school governors and headteachers about the need for reform and investment in education and SEND, which they could share with their local MPs to raise awareness of the need for action.

CH said the National Governance Association would support such a letter and would help in drafting and distributing it.

AR said he believed f40 should engage MPs more.

AD said if we could get the letter to governors, they could, in-turn, write to their local MP, who would hopefully write to Ministers and the Chancellor.

**Action:** KW to draft a letter with AD and then share it with CH for her input from the NGA.

**Action:** When signed off, the letter will be circulated to all members of f40, and representatives of the NGA, CCN, LGA, EYA, and ASCL for sharing.

### **- Invitation to key Ministers / Opposition spokespeople / DfE / Select Committee / Children's Commissioner**

KW said she had written to various people in recent weeks inviting them to meet with f40 and would continue to do so in the coming weeks and months.

She said she would update people when meetings were offered.

**Action:** KW to extend invitations to key decision makers inviting them to meet with f40.

### **10. Financial Update**

KW said all but one LA member had paid their annual subscription, and f40 had a healthy bank balance.

**NB: Post meeting note** – All 43 members have now paid their subscriptions.

### **11. Date of next committee meeting**

**NB: Post meeting note** – The next f40 Executive Committee meeting will take place online only on Thursday, January 9, from 9am to 11am.

### **11. Any Other Business**

There was no other business.