



f40 Executive Committee Meeting

Tuesday, October 21, 2025 – online

1. Attendances, apologies, and changes to committee membership

Present: Cllr Alex Dale (f40 Chair and Derbyshire); Karen Westcott (f40 Secretary); Phil Haslett (Dep Chair and Gloucestershire); Andrew Minall (Hampshire); Margaret Judd; Jackie Fieldwick (Brunel MAT & Uplands Enterprise Trust); Cllr Victoria Aitken (East Riding of Yorkshire); Carole Thomson (Oxfordshire Schools Forum); Michael Freeston (EYA); Bruce Parvin (Northumberland); Cllr Heather Delaney (Solihull); Rachael Adler (Hertfordshire); Ellen Eager (Dorset); Jon Rallings (CCN); Michael Barton (NGA); Cllr Andrew Leadbetter (Devon); Cllr Andrew Reid (Suffolk); Cllr Hilary Frank (Cornwall); Sal Thirlway (Cheshire West and Chester); Ben Pearson (West Northants).

Apologies: Ed Francis (Worc SEND Head); Cllr Jonny Edge (Cambridgeshire); Cllr Bob Standley (East Sussex); Emma Balchin (NGA); Charlotte Harding (NGA); Sam Henson (NGA); Cllr Elaine Lynch (Cumberland); Cllr Karen Grinsell (Solihull); Jon Millin (Glos Heads Assoc).

AD welcomed everyone to the meeting, especially those who were attending for the first time. He also said since the last meeting, Essex County Council had joined the f40 group.

AD also informed members that unfortunately Emily Jones, one of f40's Deputy Chairs and a headteacher from Staffordshire, had made the difficult decision to withdraw from f40 at this time as she was taking on a new job role and wanted to dedicate more time to it. She hopes to return in the future. AD thanked Emily for her time and commitment to the group and said he hoped she would be able to work with f40 again.

2. Minutes of last Executive meeting held on July 1, 2025 – approved.

3. Matters to be noted:

- Meeting between f40 and LGA Children and Young People's Board – noted

AD said the meeting did not go ahead as planned, so KW to work with the LGA to see when it can be rescheduled.

Action: KW to contact the LGA to reschedule the meeting.

- f40 presentation at NGA local authority online event – noted
- Meeting with Schools Minister Catherine McKinnell on July 15, 2025 – noted

Ad said the meeting with then Minister Catherine McKinnell MP had gone well. He said she had listened, and she seemed to understand the issues f40 raised. However, soon after, the Minister was replaced in the role as Schools Minister by Georgia Gould MP.

PH said Minister McKinnell had stated in July that they were still listening to stakeholders around the SEND reforms, when he had hoped they would have been almost locked down by then.

MF said it was frustrating that the reforms were still not published as everyone was under the impression that they were almost ready to be rolled out in the Spring.

AM said he sensed that the reforms were to be a journey, spanning a number of years. He said he was concerned the SEND crisis would be kicked further down the road.

RA asked if f40 had written to the Treasury about education funding and suggested that might be the best way to raise issues around the need for more funding. She said the SEND crisis could require between £8-10billion to put right, and having buy-in and understanding from the Treasury was crucial.

She said with the local government reorganisation due to come into force in 2028, as it currently stood, many new local authorities could start off bankrupt.

AD said when f40 had written to the Chancellor in the past, the letters had typically been passed onto the DfE or an Education Minister. The group had never received a response from the Treasury.

PH said when f40 had spoken with the DfE in the past, they were aware of the deficits, but they were allowed to continue to grow. He said Government had extended the statutory override to 2028, and they were about to roll out the reforms, whilst the Curriculum Review and Fair Funding Review are also going on in the background. He said he was hoping by the end of the year there would be an indication of how Government was going to deal with the SEND crisis.

AD said f40 really need to meet with an MP in the Treasury to state the case that additional funding was required for both mainstream and SEND.

BP suggested f40 make contact with the Society of County Treasurers (SCT). He said joining up with the Society may prove more fruitful.

JR said the Association of Local Authority Treasurers Society and Society of County Treasurers had been working together and were about to unveil a report on their findings.

Action: BP to make contact with Northumberland Council's representative on the SCT to find out who f40 should contact to fix up a meeting.

Action: KW To liaise with BP over contact details at the SCT and then invite them to meet with f40.

N.B. Since the f40 Executive committee, meeting, it has been announced that the Schools White Paper and associated SEND reforms will be delayed until early 2026 as the Secretary of State wishes to gain more insight.

f40 has written to the Secretary of State to express our disappointment at the delay and has circulated a copy of the letter to our members, encouraging them to write their own letters to the Secretary of State.

- Written to new Schools Minister Georgia Gould MP – noted
- Drop-in event and briefing for MPs in Westminster in July 2025 – noted
- Interview and coverage in The Telegraph on SEND – noted

4. f40 campaign week

AD informed members that f40 was planning a campaign week in the first part of 2026 to campaign around the SEND crisis and the need for a review of the National Funding Formula to ensure funding was distributed more fairly. It is hoped the SEND reforms will be published by then.

AD said Vice Chair Sarah Dyke had suggested the week of campaigning at the last MP's drop-in event at Portcullis House in July, and the idea had been developed since then. However, he said it was hoped all three Vice Chairs would play integral roles in the week of campaigning.

Initial ideas for the campaign week include:

- Drop-in lunch/afternoon event for MPs and Cabinet Members at Portcullis House
- Selfie station to encourage MPs to have pictures taken at the event with f40 banners that they can promote
- Suggested Parliamentary Questions circulated to MPs
- Press release template shared with all LAs – encouraging local media coverage with schools/MPs
- Letter template for schools to send to their local MPs/Education Secretary
- Draft statements for both local authorities and School Forums to agree to
- Template social media posts sent to all LAs, schools and MPs
- f40 pin badges for MPs and Cabinet Members

KW said the idea was to arrange the campaign to sit alongside Education Questions in the House of Commons in January or early February, but dates for that had not yet been finalised. She said she would keep everyone informed once a date had been agreed.

VA said local authorities were typically setting budgets at the end of January and beginning of February, so that may need to be taken into account, as it may mean some Cabinet Members are unable to attend events.

KW said she would circulate the dates as soon as possible.

NB: Since the meeting, it has been revealed that the SEND reforms will be delayed. This may impact on the timing of the campaign week, but KW to speak with the Chair and Vice Chairs on timings and update as soon as possible.

Action: KW to circulate the date of the campaign week as soon as possible.

5. Creation of new School and High Needs funding formulae

AM said work was still ongoing to create a new suggested funding formula for both Schools and High Needs. He said the Finance Manager's Research Team (FMRT) had met to discuss how the suggested formula should be developed, and Executive Committee member Margaret Judd was busy working on it. He said as soon as it was ready, it would be shared with the FMRT and then brought back to the Executive for their input.

6. Survey on High Needs funding, provision and budgets

AM said the FMRT had devised a survey for all f40 member authorities to complete around their High Needs budgets and how they paid for provision.

KW said 27 local authorities had completed the survey so far.

It was agreed that those local authorities that had not yet completed the survey be contacted and encouraged to take part.

CT said she appreciated all the work that was being done and thanked MJ and AM for their efforts. She said if the suggested funding formula could be ready for the campaign week, it would be ideal.

AM said he hoped the funding formula would be ready for the campaign week.

CT said she had watched a DfE webinar recently, where the DfE had acknowledged that funding levels were having an impact on schools. She offered to share the webinar link with members.

N.B. The link for the webinar is <https://youtu.be/D5rJaGKeZv8?t=1223>

PH said he was concerned that the SEND reforms would result in more work and responsibility for schools, whilst their funding remained the same. He said schools were already having to make cuts to provision in order to balance their books.

He said at Gloucestershire County Council, a survey was being circulated through Schools Forum to ask schools to give examples of where they had made cuts to provision to retain a balance. He said a better picture of what adjustments schools were making was required. He said often it was to pastoral care and support because there was nowhere else to make cuts.

CT asked if PH could share the survey with f40, so other local authorities could consider developing their own, similar surveys.

PH agreed. The link to the survey is [School Funding Consultation – Fill in form](#)

PH said if schools were not going to receive enough funding to enable them to carry out the reforms, they will fail. He said it was clear that greater mainstream inclusion was on the Government's agenda, but they will be very difficult to implement without sufficient funding and resources.

PH said he feared the longer the Government took to announce the reforms, the more he feared brave decisions would not be taken and the responsibility for dealing with the SEND crisis would continue to rest with schools and local authorities.

AM said expecting schools to make savings year on year was a false economy. He said schools could not deliver early intervention support if they did not have the funding.

BP said in Northumberland, school balances had dropped by 25%. He said expecting schools to deliver greater inclusion without extra funding would just be setting schools up to fail.

BP said the messaging from Government still talked about per pupil funding, yet pupil numbers were falling, so therefore funding was falling. He said f40 and partner organisations should challenge that.

PH said falling rolls was down to falling birth rates, as well as less inclusion at mainstream.

JF said everyone was agreed that schools and providers were having to do more with less funding. She said there were no more efficiencies to be made.

JF said multi academy trusts were not allowed to present deficits in their budgets, but she said it wouldn't be long before that happened. She said the lack of funding had been impacting on quality of provision for the past five years. She said without significant extra funding, a generation of children would be failed.

JR said the media was starting to push back on the idea that local authorities were to blame for the SEND crisis. He said the tone was changing. He said an additional £30bn had been spent on SEND since the Code of Practice was introduced in 2014, yet standards had fallen.

JR said the education system needed to change, and local authorities need to raise awareness around the issues and the need for change and additional funding whenever they spoke to their MPs.

RA said she believed getting a handle on the number of children going into independent SEND provision would help enormously. She said it would take years to work through, but the SEND system needed a reset and an acceptance that it would take up to seven years for any changes to be really felt.

She said there simply wasn't the funding to pay for so many children to receive independent provision, yet local authorities were blamed when they refused to fund it. She said the money being spent on independent SEND provision could be used elsewhere.

PH said the SEND reforms needed to shift the culture to make schools more inclusive of all children and not just focused on testing and exams. He said there had been no major increase in the number of children with complex needs; the rise in cases had been around social, emotional and language difficulties.

VA said the narrative needed to change so we started talking about autism as a superpower, and not a disability.

JF said she was frustrated there was still no movement on the Free School programme. She said the programme had been frozen, even when funding for new schools was in place, so it meant creating additional special school places was difficult.

AD agreed. He said in Derbyshire they were approaching the deadline for when a free school needed to be built and could not progress while the Free School Programme was frozen.

HD said it was important to remember that the narrative painted in the press did not always apply to all children and parents. She said most parents just wanted their children to have a decent education, and most parents wanted their children to go to their local school. However, she said schools could not always meet needs.

HD said she would like to see SEND support made statutory, then parents would not need to push for an EHCP for their children. She said when parents felt their child's needs were not being met, they felt the only way was through an EHCP.

HD said Government needed to put money into schools. She said schools were doing their best, but they couldn't meet the needs of all children. She said, as a result, parental confidence in the system had dropped.

AD agreed and said mainstream schools needed to be provided with additional funding, resources, training and guidance to enable them to be more inclusive. And he said OFSTED needed to shift its focus.

PH also agreed. He said 80% of children could have their education provided in mainstream, but the schools were unable to meet their needs.

JF said if Government wanted inclusion, it needed to fund it. She said high trust and high accountability were required.

RA said improving links with health and social care were also vital as schools could not be left to carry most of the responsibility.

7. LinkedIn activity and campaign

KW said f40 had launched a LinkedIn profile and urged members to engage with it and to share posts. She asked if members were happy to put some budget into helping to grow f40's LinkedIn following – to the value of £300.

Members agreed.

Action: KW to set up a LinkedIn campaign to help grow its following.

8. Financial update

KW said f40 had a healthy bank balance and all members had now paid their annual subscriptions.

9. Date of next committee meeting

KW suggested the next Executive Committee meeting be during the campaign week in January or February. More details to follow when the campaign plan is agreed.

Action: KW to update members on the date once the campaign plans materialise.

10. Any other business

There was no other business.

Ends

Disclaimer

These minutes reflect open and honest discussion among education leaders about the need for urgent reform and investment in the SEND system. All contributions reflect a shared commitment to improving outcomes for children and young people, particularly those with the highest needs. Where reform is discussed, it is in the context of creating a system that is better funded, more inclusive, and more effective for children and families.