

REGULATORY AND OTHER COMMITTEE REPORT

NAME OF COMMITTEE:	Schools' Forum
DATE OF MEETING:	10 October 2012
SUBJECT:	2012/13 Section 251 benchmarking information
REPORT BY:	Tony Warnock (Head of Finance – Children's & Specialist Services)
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IS REPORT CONFIDENTIAL?	No
IS REPORT EXEMPT?	No

SUMMARY

The purpose of this report is to share with the Schools' Forum the latest s.251 benchmarking data published by the DfE in September 2012.

DISCUSSION

All Local Authorities (LA) are required to publish, prior to the start of the financial year, a statement showing their planned expenditure on Children's services. Since 2003/04, the DfE has used that information to publish benchmarking tables of planned expenditure. The latest benchmarking information is published at:

<http://www.education.gov.uk/rsgateway/DB/STR/d001085/index.shtml>

Although this information is very useful, it must be recognised that differences can arise because of LAs varying approaches to: delegation; the interpretation of the DfE' s251 guidance, and; the methodology used for apportioning corporate overheads, etc. It is also important to note that the 'per capita' figures shown in the report are calculated using the planned spending and often, the total school population (including academies where relevant) or pupils in maintained schools only (the notes on the spreadsheet attached indicate which has been used). The data does not always take account of specific cohorts, such as the actual number of early years children placed in independent settings, or the number of children actually transported to and from school, etc.

A copy of the benchmarking data from Table 1 of s.251 is attached at Appendix 1. The most notable comparators are set out below:

Col	Description / Comment	Lincs £ per capita	Upper Tier median £ per capita	Ranking out of 27 LAs	English mean £ per capita
1	Individual Schools Budget <i>This essentially reflects the funds available directly to schools.</i>	4,182	4,245	19 th	4,594
12	Fees for independent special schools <i>The LA's lower than average cost is, in part, due to the building of four EBD schools a decade ago and other strategies introduced to help meet children's needs within LA provision. This is a major budget pressure for many LAs now.</i>	57	77	23 rd	93
39	Total Schools Budget¹ <i>The LA's figure is again very close to the Upper Tier median, but well below the English average.</i>	4,362	4,368	15 th	4,722
47	Home to School transport – SEN <i>The LA's cost per pupil is lower than in previous years, due to pro-active steps taken to reduce SEN costs and secure more localised provision.</i>	71	69	=12 th	71
48	Home to School Transport – Other <i>Spending remains very high. The per capita differential equates to c.£9m. Rurality is a key factor.</i>	191	98	2 nd	56
50	School Improvement <i>Spending is close to the Upper Tier median.</i>	43	40	=9 th	36
54	Statutory and Regulatory duties	36	26	=7 th	47

Further comparisons can be made by referring to Appendix 1.

Lincolnshire's overall position has not changed significantly in recent years. That is not surprising given that the funding (through the 'per pupil' Dedicated Schools Grant) will remain 'cash flat' for the four year Comprehensive Spending Review (CSR) period that started in 2011/12. There is therefore

¹ The budget lines up to this point reflect expenditure financed by the DSG. The remaining lines are financed directly by LCC budgets and together demonstrate total planned spending on Children's Services.

little room for growth or re-alignment of budgets. With regard to non-DSG budgets, LAs will have responded differently to the c.25% reduction to formula grant in this four year CSR period and that may take some time to be reflected clearly in LAs' s.251 budget statements and the benchmarking data.

Lincolnshire's per pupil DSG funding remains in the bottom quartile of all LAs and, as indicated in the table above, the 'per pupil' spending on the Schools Budget is £360 less than the England average. This adverse situation continues to be compounded by the fact that Lincolnshire also spends c.£135 per pupil more on school transport than the England average. The Schools Forum will recall that the government recently decided to defer a review of the funding formula for LAs / schools until the next spending period. There is therefore no prospect of any material improvement in the LA's DSG funding in the short to medium term.

The government's school funding reforms for 2013/14 will require LAs to delegate more services to schools. That should improve the comparability of s251 data in future years.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Schools Forum is asked to note the content of the report.

APPENDICES - these are listed below and attached at the back of the report.
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Appendix A - 2012/13 Section 251 benchmarking data for Upper Tier Authorities (Table 1 - net)
