

WILTSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

SCHOOLS FORUM

01 December 2011

SECTION 251: COMPARISON OF LOCAL AUTHORITY SPENDING 2011/12

Introduction

1. This report informs the Schools Forum of the information published in September by the Department for Education (DfE), based on the section 251 returns for all Local Authorities (LA) and giving the planned expenditure comparison for 2011/12.

Background

2. Under Section 251 of the Apprenticeships, Skills, Children and Learning Act 2009, the Secretary of State is obliged to publish comparative details of every LA's expenditure on education and social care.

Section 251: Comparison of Budgeted Expenditure by LAs

3. Benchmarking data on LA expenditure was published by the DfE in September. This consisted of a number of tables, all of which are available on the DfE website or from the DfE Finance Team should members wish to study the detail. The DfE tables show both gross and net budgeted expenditure per pupil for each LA in respect of all lines included in the Section 251 Budget 2011/12 Return. The net (or gross) budgeted expenditure for education services is calculated by dividing the net planned expenditure by the total full time equivalent for all pupils aged 3 to 19 on roll, including those three and four year olds in private, voluntary and independent settings, whose places were funded by the LA. For non education services the population aged 0-17 is used.
4. A further table published by the DfE gives year on year comparisons for certain lines on the Section 251 return. A copy of the main items from this table comparing Wiltshire with its statistical neighbours for Children's Services is included at Appendix 2 to this report.
5. As in 2010/11 the data has been presented for schools forum showing the trend from 2007/08 (where available) to 2011/12 compared with the national average for all authorities and with the average for Wiltshire's Children's Services statistical neighbours. The data is shown both as data tables and graphically in Appendix 1. It is hoped that showing the data in this format will help to identify any trends as well as areas where Wiltshire is similar or different from other authorities.
6. For the purposes of this analysis Wiltshire's statistical neighbours are:
 - Shropshire
 - Worcestershire
 - Hampshire
 - West Berkshire
 - Oxfordshire
 - Cambridgeshire
 - Suffolk
 - Somerset
 - Dorset
 - Gloucestershire

7. For some tables within Appendix 1 data has only been captured on the return since 2008/09.

Analysis of the tables

Schools Budget

The main findings in relation to the Schools Budget are that :

8. Funding levels – Wiltshire has the lowest Guaranteed Unit of Funding of the 11 LAs in the group, this is the per pupil amount used in the DSG calculation and therefore the level of funding coming in to Wiltshire is lower than its comparator authorities. The range is £4,593 (Wiltshire) to £4,891 (West Berkshire). In comparison to this, the Individual Schools Budget (ISB) per pupil delegated to Wiltshire Schools is the 5th highest in the group indicating that more funding is delegated in Wiltshire than some comparator authorities.
9. In Wiltshire the increase in primary ISB (per pupil) from 2010/11 to 2011/12 is the highest in the comparator group and the increase in Secondary and Special ISB the second highest. This could reflect differences in approaches to delegating mainstream grants but is also likely to reflect the fact that a number of authorities applied the negative Minimum Funding Guarantee (MFG) to schools budgets in 2011/12 which did not happen in Wiltshire. The increase in SEN delegation will also have had an impact.
10. Wiltshire has 5% of primary schools and 5% of secondary schools receiving the MFG. The range within the comparator group is 4% to 60% for primary schools and 0 to 31% for secondary schools. No special schools in Wiltshire receive the MFG and the range across the group is 0 to 50%.
11. Wiltshire's central expenditure is 99% of the allowable limit. Wiltshire would appear to be only 1 of 3 authorities in the group who has not exceeded the Central Expenditure Limit.
12. In previous years Wiltshire has benchmarked high for centrally retained SEN funding within the Schools budget. Following the SEN review, the reduction in the Independent Special Schools budget and reinvestment of £1.4 million in to the delegated budget this position has changed and Wiltshire is now 6th out of 11 for centrally retained SEN funding and spending is in line with the national average.
13. The additional information table (Appendix 2) shows expenditure on independent special schools and PRUs per head of the relevant population. For independent special school placements the expenditure is divided by the number of pupils recorded on the Alternative Provision Census within non-maintained and independent special schools. Wiltshire's expenditure per pupil is the 4th highest when looking at gross expenditure and the 3rd highest when considering net expenditure. The difference between net and gross is potentially the result of the level of contributions from other budgets including social care and health. Given the reduction in numbers of placements it could be suggested that the relatively high cost of placements compared with some statistical neighbours is a result of only those young people with the most complex needs being placed out of county. This year Wiltshire has joined the CIPFA SEN Benchmarking Club which will give comparative data on placements in the independent sector and comparative data on maintained special schools – this data will be shared when it is available.
14. For expenditure on PRUs Wiltshire ranks 5th out of 11 authorities when expenditure is divided by pupils solely on the role of the YPSS – dual and subsidiary registrations are excluded. There is a considerable range in expenditure per pupil across the comparator authorities and this may reflect different practice in terms of whether pupils are recorded on the roll of the PRU as well as different delivery models. The unit cost for Wiltshire when using only pupils on the roll of YPSS is £47,108. This would be considerably lower when including pupils who are dually registered with the service.

15. Hourly spend on the free entitlement for 3 and 4 year olds in Wiltshire shows as the lowest across the statistical neighbour group at £2.72 per hour. This has been investigated and an error identified within the benchmarking information. The correct hourly rate for Wiltshire should record as £3.85 and the lower figure arises due to the double counting of the deprivation and rurality hours in the calculation. What isn't clear is whether this error has occurred across all authorities or whether it is in issue with how Wiltshire has completed the return.

LA Funded Services

16. Wiltshire still spends above the national average and the average for statistical neighbours on LA funded SEN services which include the Psychology Service, Speech and Language Therapy, Statutory SEN and administration and management, although the gap with the national average has narrowed considerably in 2011/12 and reflects savings achieved within central services in the 2011/12 business plan.
17. Expenditure on School Improvement has decreased across all authorities although the reduction in Wiltshire is less than the average for statistical neighbours or the national average. This may reflect differing approaches across LAs in responding to government reductions in funding and to the new academy regime. Wiltshire has prioritised investment in narrowing attainment gaps within its business plan for 2011/12 and 2012/13.

Proposal

18. Schools Forum is invited to note this report.

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Unpublished documents relied upon in the production of this Report: None

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