

Schools Forum			
REPORT TITLE	Section 251 Local Authority Benchmarking		
KEY DECISION	No	Item No.	10
WARD	N/A		
CLASS	Part 1	Date	15 March 2018

1 Purpose of the Report

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to inform members of the Schools Forum how the Local Authority's spend on education services compares with its statistical neighbours.

2 Recommendation

- 2.1 The Schools Forum is recommended to:

- 2.1.1 Note the position for Lewisham Schools as reported in the benchmarking analysis.

3 Background

- 3.1 Local Authorities are required to submit a budget statement to the DfE in April of each year. This is known as the Section 251 statement and it sets out the Local Authority's expenditure plans for the next financial year.
- 3.2 Each local authority's statement is summarised on the DfE website. This provides benchmarking data that can be compared against other local authorities, nationally, locally or with any chosen group of authorities.
- 3.3 The most useful comparison is considered to be with an authority's statistical neighbours. An authority's statistical neighbours are determined by a range of indicators set by the National Audit Office.
- 3.4 For Lewisham, its statistical neighbours are the London Boroughs of:
- Brent
 - Croydon
 - Enfield
 - Greenwich
 - Hackney
 - Haringey
 - Islington
 - Lambeth
 - Southwark
 - Waltham Forest

4 Benchmarking Results 2017 / 2018

- 4.1 Attached at Appendix 1 to this report is a comparison which is mostly on a per pupil basis, but in part on the basis of population of all the budget headings within the Dedicated Schools Grant and General Fund for Lewisham's statistical neighbours.
- 4.2 In total, there are 11 local authorities in Lewisham's statistical neighbour group. The ranking compares Lewisham's position in the table, and therefore the higher the ranking, the higher the expenditure. It stands then that if the ranking is 1, it reflects the highest spending local authority.
- 4.3 Such statistics are always difficult to interpret as not all local authorities categorise their expenditure in exactly the same way or they organise services and expenditure differently. Therefore, a degree of caution is always advised when reviewing these comparisons. It is not necessarily either good or bad to be either at the lowest or highest end of the spending spectrum. It is more important that the statistics provide a challenge to the current policies being adopted and their costs. It could well be that the level of spend is appropriate.

5 High Needs

- 5.1 Lewisham has the second highest spend of our statistical neighbours and England on the High Needs block. It is approximately 39% higher than the average spend, mainly due to the highest top-up funding for maintained schools in England, which in the high needs block of £51m is circa £19.8m. The High Needs Group will continue to review all the expenditure in this area to see if the costs can be reduced.
- 5.2 Statutory/ Regulatory duties (education) - This covers expenditure on the management and planning of the CYP directorate. The average across our statistical neighbours is £23 per pupil, while for Lewisham it is £11 per pupil.
- 5.3 Education Services Grant - As previously announced, the ESG for retained duties was been transferred into the DSG for 2017/18 and is now included within the schools block unit of funding for each local authority.

6 Next Steps

- 6.1 This dataset provides useful information and allows the local authority to challenge itself on whether it is providing value for money. However, there are complexities with using this data as local authorities interpret the regulations very differently as the spending should be included in each heading. In order to get a better understanding, Lewisham is a member of two CIPFA benchmarking clubs. CIPFA have run these benchmarking clubs for several years and the council has belonged to the Children Social Care benchmarking club for a number of years which has helped to develop and drive some of the strategic thinking and improve the value for money in this area. The Special Education Needs club is still a relatively new club. The latest SEN benchmarking report will need to be discussed at the High Needs Sub group.

7 Further Information

7.1 Should you require any additional information regarding the items contained in this report please contact:

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Appendix 1 – s251 Benchmarking Schedule for 2017/18