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To: Education Cabinet Committee – 19 March 2013

Subject: Kent Test Proposals

Classification: Unrestricted

Summary:	This paper sets out a proposed approach to future 11+ assessment arrangements in Kent in the light of a recent review and survey of Headteacher opinion on the Kent test.
Recommendations:	Education Cabinet Committee is invited to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>(i) Note the summary of views from the survey (see Appendix 1)</li> <li>(ii) Note the proposed procurement specification set out in Appendix 2.</li> </ul>

## 1. Introduction

1.1 The last review of the Kent process for selecting pupils for grammar school places (the Procedure for Entrance to Secondary Education, or PESE) was in 2007. Arrangements for assessing pupils have remained substantially the same since the year 2000. The current contract for test materials and services is expiring and a procurement exercise is due for tests to be taken for admission to grammar school from September 2015 onwards.

1.2 The Cabinet Member requested a review in 2012, led by headteachers, of the assessment process. This gave rise to a wider survey of Headteacher views (reported at Appendix 1). The review was prompted by concerns relating to a strong coaching culture, which was felt undermines the effectiveness of Kent's grammar school selection process. A review group of Headteachers and KCC officers set out to establish some consensus on the best way of approaching selection for grammar provision in future.

1.3 The views of the review group and those of the Headteachers who responded to the survey are taken account of in a summary of the proposed specification which is attached as Appendix 2.

## 2. Financial Implications

2.1 In accordance with best procurement practice and the Council's standing orders, Kent County Council will seek to choose a contractor by competitive tender, taking account of best value considerations. Delivery of a streamlined process has the scope to offer savings, though until the tendering process is complete it would be inappropriate to attempt to quantify this.

2.2 A reduction in the number of papers used (as proposed in the accompanying document) should bring down design and printing costs and also reduce waste by cutting the volume of materials destroyed after testing.

2.3 The Council's specialist PESE Database is designed around the current process for recording test score information from Optical Mark Reader machines. Any change in the number of tests, the marking software or the calculation of a test threshold will have implications for the development of

new IT solutions so that delivery of the process can continue smoothly through any transition.

### **3. Bold Steps for Education in Kent**

3.1 If the expectations of schools involved in the review are realised, any changes in the selection process could have an impact on the pattern of admissions to Year 7. This could in turn have an impact on the number of children obtaining a place at their first preference school on National Offer Day. It is not possible at this stage to predict what that effect might be.

3.2 A reduction in administration time in Primary schools could support the improvement of core skills at Key Stage 2, as could a change in focus in the test content.

3.3 Reduced focus on coaching for selection may help raise attainment levels in line with KCC targets.

### **4. Current Position**

4.1 The review group met in the course of 2012. There was wide-ranging discussion and some polarisation of views about parts of the process, but key themes regarding improvement in the test arrangements were identified. These were that the new test should, as far as possible:

- \* be as uncoachable as possible
- \* include a stronger literacy element
- \* be flexible in application (so results can be used in different ways)
- \* avoid commercial exploitation (marketing of practice materials to parents)

4.2 The group recommended seeking wider views on key points, to ensure that any proposed changes would be widely accepted by schools, as Kent County Council is no longer the Admission Authority for the majority of Kent's grammar schools.

### **5. Headteacher survey**

5.1 The questions in the survey of Headteachers arose from the discussions of the review group. The outcome is attached in table form as Appendix 1.

5.2 There were 135 respondents in total, 25 from the Secondary sector and 108 from the Primary sector. In several cases the majority view on a given question is so narrow as not to give a firm steer, and it is apparent from comments made that there are often strong views on both sides.

### **6. Testing**

#### *Practice tests*

6.1 Schools were divided on the merit of practice tests, but a majority of respondents felt they should not be dropped completely but reduced. The attached proposal accommodates the provision of practice materials, but in a simpler, short format which would not require schools and test centres to administer a practice test session. The main tests would (as now) include worked examples where appropriate to show method.

### *Reducing the burden of testing*

6.2 A small majority favoured a change to testing on a single day, those who did so, however, had different views about the best way to achieve this. At present Kent LA operates different testing arrangements for internal and external candidates. Due to the high number of external candidates and the restrictions placed on the timetable, by the need to provide results before 31 October (a national deadline), children attending test centres must be tested on one day, where those in Kent primary schools are currently tested over two days. This is inequitable and so open to challenge.

6.3 The attached proposal is for two tests, which combine elements presently covered by three tests and a writing exercise. Overall time spent on the tests would be reduced and this would enable the completion of testing in one day for all candidates.

### *Location of testing*

6.4 The question as to whether Kent pupils should be tested in secondary schools rather than primary schools was included in the survey at the request of the Chair of the Kent Primary Forum. Respondents (the majority of whom were from primary settings) were equally divided, giving no firm remit for change.

6.5 It is therefore proposed that testing for Kent pupils should continue to take place in primary schools, which are reassuringly familiar environments for children and do not require parents to transport them to a different school on the day. About 11,500 children are registered for testing, so there would also be significant practical difficulties in accommodating tests in secondary schools.

### *Standardisation*

6.6 Standardisation is a statistical process which puts children's test results in context, taking account of their age and the average performance of children in a given test. In order to take account of the whole ability range the LA has traditionally used a national standardisation. Over time, a disproportionate number of children taking part in the assessment have scored at the top of the range by comparison with the national sample. This suggests that the testing arrangement has become less fit for purpose in selecting the highest achieving pupils (25%) for grammar provision, in line with KCC policy.

6.7 A small majority of respondents who expressed a strong view favoured a national standardisation, but there was also support for the use of a local standardisation – ie: one based on the performance of those tested.

6.8 The attached proposal invites tenderers to identify how they would deliver an appropriate standardisation for Kent.

### *Headteacher Assessment Panels*

6.9 There was strong support for the Headteacher Assessment Panels. It is proposed they will continue to have an important role in the process regardless of any other changes.

## **7. Public Sector Equality Duty**

7.1 The Equality Act 2010 permits selective admission based on ability or aptitude. Due regard must be taken in relation to ensuring that information given and processes are accessible to all. Care must be taken to ensure that the criteria do not directly or indirectly discriminate on the basis of candidates' protected characteristics. In relation to the disability characteristic, it is not unlawful to apply the same selection criteria to disabled children who apply for admission- however reasonable adjustments must be made (e.g. making assessment available in an alternative format).

7.2 An Equality Impact Assessment will be undertaken in order to ensure due regard is given to future arrangements and to inform the procurement process.

## **8. Conclusions**

8.1 It is proposed that tenders are invited from potential suppliers of test materials and related services for the September 2014 tests, which will help determine who is admitted to all Kent's grammar schools in September 2015.

8.2 It is proposed the new test should take account of points made during the review meetings and in the survey of Headteachers' views. These should also inform the procurement exercise.

## **9. Recommendations**

Education Cabinet Committee is invited to:

- (i) Note the summary of views from the survey (see Appendix 1)
- (ii) Note the proposed procurement specification set out in Appendix 2.

## **10. Background Documents**

Headteacher Survey

<https://kentcc.firmstep.com/default.aspx/RenderForm/?F.Name=H1rp7182V6V&HideAll=1>

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