

## **URGENT REPORT TO THE LEADER**

**11 MAY 2021**

### **REVISED ARRANGEMENTS FOR THE MEDWAY TEST 2021**

Portfolio Holder: Councillor Mrs Josie Iles, Portfolio Holder for Children's Services  
(Lead Member)

Councillor Martin Potter, Portfolio Holder for Education and Schools

Report from: Dr Lee-Anne Farach, Director of People, Children and Adults Services

Author: Paul Clarke, Acting Head of School Services

#### **Summary**

This report requests approval to amend the review process for the Medway Test, which will result in a fairer process.

#### **1. Budget and policy framework**

1.1. The decision required is the approval of additional subjects to be included within the Medway Test review arrangements as set out in section 2 of this report. As Cabinet approved the Medway test process as part of the admissions arrangements it falls to the Cabinet, or delegated powers of the Leader to determine due to the urgency of the matter.

1.2. The need for an urgent decision is to enable the revised review process to be published so that:

- We can reassure parents that responsible measures are going to be put in place for the Medway Test when we publish our digital information guide for 2022 admissions 19 May 2021.
- Schools and parents are aware of the changes before Medway Test registration opens on 1 June 2021.
- Schools can start to build their evidence bases around the revision.

1.3. The Chairman of the Children and Young People Overview and Scrutiny Committee has agreed that the taking of these decisions are urgent and cannot be reasonably deferred until the next Cabinet meeting on 8 June March 2021, in accordance with Section 11 (Cases of special urgency) of the Local Authorities (Executive Arrangements) (Meetings and Access to

Information)(England) Regulations 2012 and Rule 17 (Special Urgency) of the Access to Information Rules (Part 2 of Chapter 4 in the Constitution). This is because the Medway Test arrangements are due to be published on 19 May 2021.

- 1.4. Additionally, and in line with rule 15.11 of Chapter 4, Part 5 of the Constitution, call-in can be waived where any delay likely to be caused by the call-in process would seriously prejudice the Council's or the Public's interests. The Chairman of the Children and Young People Overview and Scrutiny Committee has agreed that the decisions proposed are reasonable in all the circumstances and to them being treated as a matter of urgency and to waive call-in.

## 2. Background

- 2.1. As a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, pupils have received less time in face-to-face education and will have learnt at differing levels and pace. Therefore, officers have strived to take measures to make the test as fair to all pupils as possible.
- 2.2. One area that requires approval to amend is the subject matter used as evidence in the review process. The topics of work scrutinised during the academic review process may be seen as restrictive and therefore, in consultation with Headteachers, it is recommended that additional subjects are included as evidence.
- 2.3. It is proposed to include humanities/topic work and reading in the review process.
- 2.4. This will provide the panel with a broader overview of a pupil's ability and provide a fairer, more open and comprehensive process.

## 3. Options

- 3.1. The options are:

- 1) Leave as is with original subjects and academic review arrangements:

- The review process could be deemed unfair and come under further scrutiny at admission appeal.
- By limiting the breadth of evidence utilised, pupils may be disadvantaged, dependent upon their ability and capacity to learn from home.

- 2) Add the additional subjects to increase the scope of work being scrutinised at review to include humanities/topic work and reading:

- The work scrutinised at review will cover a wider scope which would make it fairer to account for some disadvantage over the last year.

Option 2 is the preference as it is the fairest solution available for academic review under recent covid restrictions.

#### 4. Decision required

- 4.1. The decision required is the approval of the additional subjects to be included within the Medway Test review arrangements, as set out in section 1 of this report. As Cabinet approved the Medway Test process as part of the admissions arrangements it falls to the Cabinet, or delegated powers of the Leader, to determine due to the urgency of the matter.

| <b>Decision type</b>           | <b>Risk rating</b> | <b>Can decision be taken under officers' delegated authority?</b> | <b>If not (or if decision is both executive/non-executive), an urgent decision is required</b> |
|--------------------------------|--------------------|---|--|
| <b>Executive functions</b>     | H                  | N   | Leader – please refer to urgency provisions  |
| <b>Non-executive functions</b> | NA                 | NA  | NA   |

#### 5. Risk management

| <b>Risk</b>  | <b>Description</b>  | <b>Action to avoid or mitigate risk</b> | <b>Risk rating</b> |
|--|---|---|--------------------|
| Not approving the proposed revision to the Medway Test review process, could result in disadvantage to some pupils | Where learning at home is not effective or sufficient which could mean that some pupils who would otherwise have been deemed as being of grammar ability may not be | Approve proposed amendments             | B2                 |

#### 6. Consultation

- 6.1. Officers have consulted with headteachers and education professionals who fully support the proposed changes.

#### 7. Financial implications

- 7.1. There are no financial implications resulting from this change.

#### 8. Legal implications

- 8.1. As Cabinet were the decision makers for the School Admissions Arrangements 2022, within which the Medway Test arrangements are determined, it means that this is a matter for Cabinet or the delegated urgency powers of the Leader to determine any changes to the published arrangements.

## 9. Recommendations

- 9.1. The Leader is asked to agree, using urgency powers, to the addition of the subjects of humanities/topic work and reading to the Medway Test academic review process for one year only, as set out in option 2 at section 3.1 of the report.
- 9.2. The Leader is asked to agree that recommendation 9.1 is considered urgent and therefore should not be subject to call in.

## 10. Suggested reasons for decision

- 10.1. Given the ongoing disruption to education since March 2020 due to the Covid-19 pandemic it is reasonable to make changes to the Medway Test review process.

### Lead officer contact

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### Appendices

None.

### Background Papers

None.

.....(signed) ..... May 2021 (date)

Councillor Alan Jarrett, Leader of the Council