

<h1>BRIEFING</h1>	<b>To</b>	Leader & Strategic Directorate of Finance and Customer Services
	<b>DATE:</b>	08/10/2020
	<b>LEAD OFFICER:</b>	Rob Mahon Head of Corporate Finance
	<b>TITLE:</b>	Self-Isolation Support Payments & discretionary payments

## 1. Background

**1.1** On 20 September Government announced that from 28 September there will be a legal duty on all those who test positive for COVID-19 or are identified by NHS Test and Trace as a close contact, requiring them to self-isolate. Failure to comply will be an offence carrying a fine of at least £1,000 and up to £10,000 for multiple breaches.

Government are:

- asking local authorities to focus on the principle of encouraging, educating and supporting compliance.
- placing a new legal obligation on employers that they must not knowingly enable or encourage their employees to break the law on self-isolation.
- asking local authorities to administer the new Test and Trace Support payments
- providing discretionary funding for local authorities to help those who require corresponding financial support to the Test and Trace Support Payment to self-isolate, but do not meet all of the eligibility criteria.

**1.2** From 28 September 2020, individuals will be entitled to a Test and Trace Support Payment of £500 if they:

- Have been told to stay at home and self-isolate by NHS Test and Trace, either because they have tested positive for coronavirus or have recently been in close contact with someone who has tested positive. **They should have a unique ID number that they will need for the application process.**
- Are employed or self-employed
- Are unable to work from home and will lose income as a result
- Are currently receiving Universal Credit, Working Tax Credit, income-based Employment and Support Allowance, income-based Jobseeker's Allowance, Income Support, Housing Benefit and/or Pension Credit.

This payment is designed to support people on low incomes, if they will lose income as a result of self-isolating, and to encourage them to get tested if they have symptoms.

	<p>This is seen as important to help stop the transmission of COVID-19 and avoid further economic and societal restrictions. The scheme will last until 31 January 2021.</p> <p><b>These payments will be made available from 28 September 2020, and local authorities should have arrangements in place to administer them by no later than 12 October 2020.</b> Someone told to self-isolate on or after 28 September (but before the scheme is operational in their local authority) will need to be able to make a backdated claim for payment.</p> <p>Local authorities will also be able to make a discretionary £500 lump sum payment in exceptional circumstances to an individual who meets the main qualifying criteria for the Test and Trace Support Payment (i.e. they are a low-income worker who is unable to work because they are self-isolating) but is not in receipt of qualifying benefits and could suffer financial hardship as a result of not being able to work.</p>
<h2>2. Key Issues</h2>	
<p><b>2.1</b></p>	<p>In order to administer the scheme the Council has developed an online application form and a process method for efficiently reviewing an application against the qualifying criteria, to allow payment to be made quickly. Government's draft guidance indicates that payment should be made within <b>3 working days</b> of the application being made.</p> <p>The Council's website has an introduction to the scheme with a clear outline of what the eligibility criteria and exclusions are. A press release has been issued and the Council will continue to promote via social media and the Councils website the existence of this support payment.</p>
<p><b>2.2</b></p>	<p>The planned outline process is as follows;</p> <p>In order to apply the applicant must have available:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• a notification from NHS Test and Trace asking them to self-isolate (this will include a Unique ID number);</li> <li>• a bank statement or online banking evidence in their name; and</li> <li>• proof of employment, or, if they are self-employed, evidence of self-assessment returns, trading income and proof that their business delivers services which cannot be undertaken without social contact.</li> </ul> <p>The process steps are:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Application submitted with the Council verifying first the NHS Track and Trace unique ID number provided.</li> <li>2. The Council then review the eligibility against the benefits and employment related criteria.</li> <li>3. The Council then carry out the banking check</li> <li>4. Providing all eligibility criteria have been checked and passed, payment can be issued.</li> </ol> <p>At each stage, the applicant will receive an automatic email letting them know their claim has progressed. Clearly, there will be cases that are more complex or require more judgement than others, or where the applicant hasn't provided all the required information, as such some claims may take longer than the 3 days.</p>
<p><b>2.3</b></p>	<p>The following exclusions apply and have been communicated on the Councils web page that should be noted.</p> <p>You will not be eligible for the scheme if you:</p>

- are quarantining after travelling abroad (unless you test positive during the 14-day quarantine period and are advised to self-isolate by NHS Test and Trace)
- continue to receive full wages while you self-isolate
- can work from home during a period of self-isolation
- are no longer required to self-isolate i.e. your period of self-isolation ended before the Self-Isolation Payment Scheme launched (28 September 2020)
- have not received a notification from NHS Test and Trace telling you to self-isolate
- have to stay at home to look after a child who has to self-isolate

It should also be noted that eligible individuals can make a claim up to 14 days after their period of self-isolation ended. **Local authorities should not accept applications after this point.**

**2.4** The following points must also be taken into consideration when administering the scheme.

### **Applications from members of the same household**

People in the same household can each make an individual application to receive the payment, if they each meet the eligibility criteria.

### **Third-party applications**

Applicants can apply on behalf of someone else. However, the £500 must be paid into a bank account in the name of the person for whom the application is being made (so, for example, if someone applied on behalf of a parent, the payment would be made into the parent's bank account). This could cause an issue in households where only one parent has a bank account.

### **Checking that an applicant is receiving one of the qualifying benefits**

Local authorities should use the DWP's Searchlight system to check that each applicant is receiving one of the qualifying benefits.

### **Applicants who have applied for benefits but are not yet receiving them, or have an outstanding appeal against a decision not to award them a benefit**

If the applicant meets all the other eligibility criteria but is not yet in receipt of one of the qualifying benefits, local authorities could choose to make a discretionary payment.

### **Checking that an applicant has been told to self-isolate by NHS Test and Trace**

Only people who have been told to self-isolate by NHS Test and Trace can claim the Test and Trace Support Payment. To check this, local authorities should use data provided from the Contact Tracing and Advice Service (CTAS) system.

### **Check employment status and loss of income**

The application process must draw out the individual's employment status and evidence of that as well as confirmation of loss of earnings. If the individual must self-isolate but

is being paid for that period, they are not eligible. If their employer pays them a reduced wage whilst isolating, they qualify.

**Payment is subject to income tax**

The £500 payment will be subject to income tax and the Council will be required to make HMRC aware of all payments made under the scheme.

**2.5**

**Discretionary Payments:**

The revised guidance indicates the criteria that must apply in order for the Council to make a discretionary award. Effectively, the applicant must meet all the main scheme criteria apart from being in receipt of a qualifying benefit.

Local authorities can make a £500 discretionary payment to individuals who:

- have been told to stay at home and self-isolate by NHS Test and Trace, either because they have tested positive for coronavirus or have recently been in close contact with someone who has tested positive;
- are employed or self-employed; and
- are unable to work from home and will lose income as a result.

In addition, the discretionary payment is for people:

- who are not currently receiving Universal Credit, Working Tax Credit, income-based Employment and Support Allowance, income-based Jobseeker's Allowance, Income Support, Housing Benefit and/or Pension Credit; and
- who are on low incomes and will face financial hardship as a result of not being able to work while they are self-isolating.

The Council can introduce other criteria but only on top of / in addition to the above criteria.

The Councils online form will allow an applicant who meets standard criteria, except for being in receipt of the qualifying benefits, to continue with their application. At this point the applicant will be informed that they do not meet the criteria for the Test and Trace Support Payment but they may continue with their application as they may be considered for a discretionary payment. The applicant will be asked to provide as much detail as possible about the financial difficulties the period of self-isolation will cause them.

To allow applicants to provide as much details as they feel is relevant to their case, they will be provided with a free text section. The form will ask them to include a number of helpful pointers that will assist the review of the application, such as;

- total household income
- number of dependants
- whether or not the applicant is the main earner in the household
- details about the impact that the self-isolation period will have on them

On receipt of an application of this nature Council officers who specialise in the review of benefits claims and financial hardship claims for areas such as Discretionary Hardship Payments will assess the information provided. Officers will then use that information to make an informed decision as to the level of financial hardship that the applicant will experience, with the result being either a discretionary payment of £500 or a rejection of

	<p>their application. The officers dealing with these cases will be kept to a small team to aid consistency of approach.</p> <p>Any rejected discretionary applications will have the right to appeal, the appeal will be reviewed by a manager within the Councils Revenues and Benefits section, to ensure a specialist in this kind of assessment carries out the review of the Councils treatment of the case.</p>						
<b>2.6</b>	<p>Government will provide local authorities with funding support to cover the costs of;</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Test and trace support payments</li> <li>2. Administration costs of the scheme</li> <li>3. Discretionary awards</li> </ol> <p>It has been indicated that a payment based on estimated requirement will be made to local authorities soon.</p> <p>The amounts confirmed for Rotherham MBC are as follows, it is expected that the amount for the Test and Trace Support Payments is an initial allocation as this scheme is demand led.</p> <table> <tr> <td>Test and Trace Support Payments</td> <td style="text-align: right;">£136,500.00</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Administration</td> <td style="text-align: right;">£40,311.20</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Discretionary Payments</td> <td style="text-align: right;">£82,081.80</td> </tr> </table>	Test and Trace Support Payments	£136,500.00	Administration	£40,311.20	Discretionary Payments	£82,081.80
Test and Trace Support Payments	£136,500.00						
Administration	£40,311.20						
Discretionary Payments	£82,081.80						
<b>3. Key Actions and Timelines</b>							
<b>3.1</b>	<p>The scheme will go live on the Councils website by 12<sup>th</sup> October in line with governments requirement. Progress with the scheme will be monitored and reported to senior officers within the Council on a regular basis and to government through their online tool Delta.</p>						
<b>4. Recommendations</b>							
<b>4.1</b>	<p>To note:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The outline of the scheme and key criteria.</li> <li>• The Councils implementation of the scheme.</li> <li>• The proposed approach for discretionary payments</li> </ul>						