

Agenda Item IMD15

INDIVIDUAL EXECUTIVE MEMBER DECISION

REFERENCE IMD: 2020/15

TITLE	Discretionary Test & Trace Support Payments Scheme
DECISION TO BE MADE BY	Executive Member for Finance and Housing - John Kaiser
DATE, MEETING ROOM and TIME	20 October 2020 Virtually at 9:30am
WARD	None specific
DIRECTOR / KEY OFFICER	Deputy Chief Executive - Graham Ebers

PURPOSE OF REPORT (Inc Strategic Outcomes)

Wokingham Borough Council (the Council) have been provided funds by Department of Health and Social Care to adopt a Discretionary Test & Trace Support Payments scheme for the finite period of 28th September 2020 to 31st January 2021, which compliments the Governments national Test & Trace Support Payments scheme.

These payments are designed to ensure people who have tested positive for COVID-19 and their close contacts, will self-isolate for the required period even though they may lose wages. They are also designed to encourage individuals who are eligible for this payment to get tested if they have symptoms. This is important to help stop the transmission of COVID-19 and avoid further economic and societal restrictions.

This scheme will be known as the Discretionary Test & Trace Support Payments scheme and will apply from the date of adoption, until changed.

RECOMMENDATION

That the Executive Member for Housing and Finance approve the policy as contained within Annex A to the report. This policy may need to be changed and a further "Urgent Item" may be required at a later date. Currently this scheme will operate from 28th September 2020 to 31st January 2021

SUMMARY OF REPORT

The Council will consider making a Discretionary Test & Support Payment to applicants who meet the qualifying criteria, as specified in this policy, providing sufficient funding for this purpose is available at the time of the Council's decision. All applications will be considered on their individual merits.

The features of the Council's Discretionary Test & Trace Support Payments scheme are that an applicant:

- has 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; and
- is employed or self-employed; and
- is unable to work from home and will lose income as a result; and
- **is 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
- is on a low income and will face financial hardship as a result of not being able to work while they are self-isolating.
- must not hold capital in excess £5,000. If money is held in a joint account, a percentage of the value will be assumed to belong to each party.
- be able to satisfy that they will face hardship if they have to self-isolate because they cannot work

The purpose of this policy is to detail the Council's high level objectives in respect of Discretionary Test & Support Payments and detail how the Council will operate the scheme, including the factors that will be taken into account when considering if an award can be made. Each case will be treated strictly on its merits and all applicants will be treated equally and fairly when the scheme is administered.

to the policy will seek to:

- ease severe financial pressure on individuals in certain situations;
- give financial help to those in genuine need;
- help those without the necessary means.
- To encourage residents to self-isolate where appropriate and get tested without financial risk
- sign-posting to the best organisation to assist with needs

Background

On 20th September, the Government announced that it would provide Local Authorities with additional funding to administer the Test & Trace Support Payment (T&TSP) scheme to support people on low incomes who are unable to work from home if they are told to self-isolate by NHS Test and Trace and will lose income as a result.

The first guidance from Department of Health & Social Care was received 28th September 2020 (dated 25th September) and has had several updates since. In the guidance received 1st October 2020 (dated 30th September) details of discretion scheme started to emerge and funding for this was confirmed on 2nd October 2020 (received 5th October). Due to these delays the statutory 28 days' notice for an IEMD has not been able to be met, therefore we are requesting this as an urgent item.

From 28 September 2020, individuals who qualify are entitled to a Test and Trace Support Payment or Discretionary Test and Trace Support Payment of £500.

These payments are designed to help ensure people who have tested positive for COVID-19 and their close contacts to self-isolate for the required period to stop the onward spread of the virus. They are also designed to encourage individuals who are eligible for this payment to get tested if they have symptoms. This is important to help stop the transmission of COVID-19 and avoid further economic and societal restrictions.

The scheme started on 28 September 2020, and local authorities were required to have arrangements in place to administer payments by 12 October 2020. The scheme will last until 31 January 2021.

There are two schemes: the main scheme and the discretionary scheme. This policy concentrates on the discretionary scheme

These payments are aimed at individuals who meet **all** of the following criteria as set by Government and must apply to **all** applications, with the **exception** of qualifying benefits for the discretionary scheme:

- Have been told to stay at homes 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
- 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 (*not required for discretionary scheme*)

The Government guidance sets out what local authorities in England need to do to enable people in their area to claim the Test and Trace Support Payment, including discretionary payments.

The Discretionary Test & Trace Support Payments are intended to support residents that have received a Test & Trace COVID-19 CTAS number who meet all of the criteria in the policy with the exception of a qualifying benefit (Universal Credit, Working Tax Credit, income-based Employment and Support Allowance, income-based Jobseeker's Allowance, Income Support, Housing Benefit and/or Pension Credit)

The delivery of the discretionary payment is purely at the Council's discretion. The value of the payment to be made to a successful applicant will be £500 whether main or discretionary. The decision as to whether a Discretionary Test & Trace Support Payments will be made will be administered by the Assessments Team.

The Discretionary Test & Trace Support Payment scheme will be advertised directly on our website and the applicant can apply on-line or via.

To be considered for a Discretionary Test and Trace Support Payment the applicant must:

- 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;
- be employed or self-employed; and
- be unable to work from home and will lose income as a result.
- **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
- be on low incomes and will face financial hardship as a result of not being able to work while they are self-isolating.
- Must not hold capital in excess £5,000. If money is held in a joint account, a percentage of the value will be assumed to belong to each party.
- Be able to satisfy that they will face hardship if they have to self-isolate because they cannot work

Discretionary Test & Trace Support Payments are not subject to any formal statutory appeals process and therefore there are no appeal rights.

This policy has been designed with consideration of The Human Rights Act 1998 and The Equality Act 2010

Business Case (including Analysis of Issues)

The Test & Trace Support Payment schemes (main & discretionary) are a Government initiative to assist with controlling COVID-19 infection rates. These payments are designed to encourage individuals who are eligible for this payment to get tested if they have symptoms. This is important to help stop the transmission of COVID-19 and avoid further economic and societal restrictions.

Each authority has been given an allocation to spend on the discretionary scheme and they must decide the criteria for themselves. No further funds will be added from the local authority.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS OF THE RECOMMENDATION

The Council faces severe funding pressures, particularly in the face of the COVID-19 crisis. It is therefore imperative that Council resources are focused on the vulnerable and on its highest priorities.

	How much will it Cost/ (Save)	Is there sufficient funding – if not quantify the Shortfall	Revenue or Capital?
Current Financial Year (Year 1)	The council has been provided funds by DHSC to run its scheme of £27,579.30 for the period 28 th September 2020 to 31 st January 2021	Yes. No further awards will be made if funding is exhausted in year	
Next Financial Year (Year 2)	Not applicable		
Following Financial Year (Year 3)	Not applicable		

Other financial information relevant to the Recommendation/Decision
None

Cross-Council Implications
N/A

Public Sector Equality Duty
An equalities assessment has been considered but due to timings will be finalised within the next week.

SUMMARY OF CONSULTATION RESPONSES	
Director – Corporate Services	Director and Assistant Director have reviewed policy and had the opportunity to comment on.
Monitoring Officer	Notified and nothing specific to add
Leader of the Council	Notified and nothing specific to add

Reasons for considering the report in Part 2
N/A

List of Background Papers
Discretionary Test & Trace Support Payments Policy

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