



WOKINGHAM BOROUGH COUNCIL

DISCRETIONARY TEST & TRACE SUPPORT PAYMENTS POLICY 28th Sept 2020 – 31st Jan 2021 COVID 19

Version Control

Version	Date	Author	Comments
1	01.10.20	Nicky Thomas	First draft
2	06.10.20	Nicky Thomas	First amendments with Clare Fell
3	08.10.20	Nicky Thomas	Agreement and any amendments with Simon Price & John Kaiser
4	12.10.20	Nicky Thomas	Process started on Mod Gov
5	20.10.20	Nicky Thomas	IEMD Urgent Item – Sign-off

1.0 Introduction

National Picture

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.

From 28 September 2020, qualifying individuals 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 which is to be designed by each Local Authority but still meets the aims of the main 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 decision as to whether a Discretionary Test & Trace Support Payments will be payable will be made by the Assessments Team.

Local Picture

Wokingham Borough Council will run a scheme during the period required by law from 28th September 2020 to 31st January 2021

The purpose of this policy is to detail the Council's high level objectives in respect of the Discretionary Test & Trace Support Payments programme 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 whether the claimant meets the necessary criteria as set in the main scheme and this discretionary scheme. All applicants will be treated equally and fairly when the scheme is administered.

2.0 Statement of Objectives

Supporting financially vulnerable residents of Wokingham Borough forms part of the duties and responsibilities of various council (and partner) teams. It recognises that in addition to the wide spectrum of support that is available to its residents, the Council needs to be flexible in its approach in order to mitigate unforeseen circumstances that place additional pressures on residents that could result in financial hardship.

The Discretionary Test and Trace Support Payment will be a one-off payment of £500 to provide additional funds to those having to self-isolate, have seen a reduction in income which will leave them financially vulnerable and they do not qualify for the main scheme. We 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

3.0 Policy

3.1 Test & Trace Support Payments - 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 Council has reviewed the guidance and has developed the criteria below based on this guidance.

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 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 scheme set out in the following paper shall be known as The Discretionary Test & Trace Support Payments and will apply from 28th September 2020 until changed 31st January 2021.

The value of the payment to be made to a successful applicant will be £500 whether main or discretionary.

All applications for the discretionary scheme will be considered on their individual merits.

3.2 Applying for a Discretionary Test & Trace Support Payment

The discretionary payment will be advertised directly on our website and the applicant can apply on-line or via telephone for those who are unable to apply on-line. They will be asked to provide their supporting evidence as this will be required to assist the decision making process. This evidence can be uploaded on-line when making the application or can be emailed in to a dedicated in-box

All outcomes will be notified in writing.

3.3 Eligibility Criteria

Only applicants who are told to self-isolate from 28th September 2020 will be eligible to claim. The scheme operates until 31st January 2021

It is a one-off payment but applicants can make more than one request if they are told to self-isolate more than once.

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 of £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

3.4 Awarding a Discretionary Test & Trace Support Payment

In deciding whether to make a Discretionary Test & Trace Support Payment we will have regard to the applicants circumstances. In order to do this each applicant must supply supporting evidence to support their request for the payment. This will include, but is not limited to:

- Bank/Building Society statements for the last 2 months for all accounts held by the applicant in sole or joint name
- Proof of any other capital held for example bonds, ISA's, stocks and shares, savings accounts
- Proof they have an earned income and expect to face a reduction in income due to self-isolating

The Council has funding from the government to support 55 applications for Discretionary Test and Trace Support Payment, this is a finite budget.

Once this funding has been exhausted no further payments will be made.

3.5 Payment of a Discretionary Test & Trace Support Payment

Local authorities should pay eligible individuals within three working days of receiving their application. Payments should be made up front, as a single payment, to the bank account matching the bank statement they have provided, via the most appropriate payment mechanism.

3.7 Notification

The Council will notify the applicant of the outcome in writing no later than three days after the application is received.

Notification will be sent if awarded or if not awarded

3.8 Right to Appeal

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

4.9 Overpayments

If the Council becomes aware that the information contained in an application for a Discretionary Test & Trace Support Payments was incorrect or that relevant information was not declared, either intentionally or otherwise, the Council will seek to recover the payment made as a result.

4.10 Fraud

The Council is committed to the fight against fraud in all its forms. Any applicant who tries to fraudulently claim a Discretionary Test & Trace Support payment might have committed an offence under the Fraud Act 2006.

If the Council suspects that fraud may have occurred, the matter will be investigated as appropriate and this could lead to criminal proceedings.

3.11 Publicity

In addition to details being contained on the Council's website, the scheme will be advertised via social media and support from the Communities Hubs.

4. Monitoring

The Assessments Team and the Senior Finance Specialist will monitor the amount and types of award made. This monitoring information will be made available for management and Members at any time. In addition it will be used to make the necessary government returns to the Department of Health and Social Care and the NHS, with whom data can be shared within appropriate legislation and guidance.

5. Financial Implications

The Council will be given the following grant based on its share of the funding made available by Government:

Total Government funding:

- **£25 million** for programme costs (costs of payments to applicants), excluding discretionary payments.
- **£10 million** for administration costs.
- **£15 million** for discretionary payments.

The Council's allocation:

- **£45,500.00** programme costs which equates to initially 91 payments
- **£26,770.40** administration costs
- **£27, 579.30** discretionary payments which equates to 55 discretionary payments

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