

LEADER

9 OCTOBER 2020

REPORT OF ASSISTANT DIRECTOR FINANCE AND IT

A.1 TRACK AND TRACE SUPPORT PAYMENT SCHEMES - STANDARD AND DISCRETIONARY POLICIES

(Report prepared by Richard Barrett)

PART 1 – KEY INFORMATION

PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

To set out the proposed Standard and Discretionary Track and Trace Support Payment Schemes.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- In response to Government guidance, the Council is required to have in place Track and Trace Support Payment Schemes by 12 October 2020.
- Although broadly based on the same core principles, two separate schemes have been developed to reflect the Standard Scheme prescribed by the Government and a Discretionary Scheme that reflects a very limited amount of local flexibility.
- The two proposed schemes are attached which are designed to support people who have been requested to self-isolate by the NHS Track and Trace Service where they are likely to face financial hardship.
- The schemes will operate until 31 January 2021.

RECOMMENDATION(S)

- a) That the Leader approves the two schemes as attached.
- b) That the Leader delegate's authority to the Section 151 Officer to take the necessary actions to implement and administer the schemes and to make technical changes to them to ensure they remain in line with any changes in Government guidance.

PART 2 – IMPLICATIONS OF THE DECISION

DELIVERING PRIORITIES

FINANCE, OTHER RESOURCES AND RISK

Finance and other resources

The Government has provided the Council with the following grant funding to support the implementation of both schemes:

To meet the cost of payments made under the Standard Support Scheme - £77k

To meet the cost of payments made under the Discretionary Support Scheme - £46k

In addition to the above, the Government have provided a further £31k to support the administrative costs of operating both schemes.

Payments under both the Standard and Discretionary Scheme are the same at £500 per applicant per period of self-isolation.

The Government have stated that the funding of £77k that supports the Standard Support Scheme will be subject to a reconciliation process with any unused amounts having to be returned to the Government and conversely topped up if greater than this initial allocation.

The same does not apply to the Discretionary Scheme, so the funding is finite and therefore the design of the scheme must reflect the underlying need to accommodate the overall costs within this initial allocation.

Risk

Risks in administering the scheme have been set out in the policy and include complaints / appeals and the risk of fraud error.

The Discretionary Scheme states that the Council reserves the right to revise the scheme at anytime, which may be necessary to address the financial risks highlighted above subject to the level of applications made.

LEGAL

The schemes reflect the guidance issued by the Government and will be implemented and administered as requested by the Department of Health and Social Care.

OTHER IMPLICATIONS

Consideration has been given to the implications of the proposed decision in respect of the following and any significant issues are set out below.

Crime and Disorder / Equality and Diversity / Health Inequalities / Area or Ward affected / Consultation/Public Engagement.

There are no direct implications with the design of the discretionary scheme providing the general opportunity to access financial support.

PART 3 – SUPPORTING INFORMATION

BACKGROUND TO THE DECISION

The Government recently made changes to legislation so that certain people will have to self-isolate due to the current COVID-19 crisis. A package of legislative measures has been introduced to ensure that those who are required to self-isolate, do so and that those on a low income receive a payment to assist their finances and to encourage compliance with the legislation.

Therefore, from 28 September 2020, eligible individuals are entitled to a Test and Trace Support Payment or discretionary support payment of £500. This is 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.

Local authorities must have arrangements in place to accept applications and administer payments by 12 October 2020.

Two policies have therefore been developed with one responding to the Standard Scheme requirements and the other to the Discretionary Scheme requirements which are set out separately below.

The Government have set an initial end date for both schemes of 31 January 2021.

PROPOSED TRACK AND TRACE SUPPORT PAYMENT SCHEME – THE STANDARD SCHEME

The proposed scheme attached fully reflects the various elements of the associated Government guidance.

It covers a number of key points with a summary of the eligibility criteria as follows:

To qualify for a £500 payment, an applicant must:

- Live in the district;
- 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;
- be unable to work from home and will lose income as a result; and
- be 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.

To successfully administer the scheme, the policy deals with other key points that reflect Government guidance as necessary and include:

- Backdating
- Application process and time limits
- Notification process
- The management of fraud
- Delegated powers

There is no local discretion applicable to this standard scheme in respect of the core eligibility principles and therefore it simply reflects Government guidance.

The Government have however enabled local authorities to reflect a limited level of local discretion in cases where people may be on low incomes but not be eligible for the standard scheme.

A separate scheme has therefore been developed that reflects this additional flexibility as set out in the next section of the report.

PROPOSED TRACK AND TRACE SUPPORT PAYMENT SCHEME – THE DISCRETIONARY SCHEME

As mentioned above the Government have enabled Local Authorities some degree of local discretion but in reality it is relatively limited and is additional to rather than replacing anything contained within the Standard Scheme.

The following core elements of the Standard Scheme must therefore be retained:

- Live in the district;
- 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.

In allowing some degree of flexibility, the Government recognises that people who are not necessarily in receipt of the qualifying benefits set out within the Standard Scheme above, may also be on low incomes and experience financial hardship if they are required to self-isolate.

Designing a scheme that defines low income and financial hardship but also containing the costs within the overall funding provided by the Government of £46k over a four month period until the scheme ends at the end of January 2021, is extremely difficult in practice. The scheme also needs to be relatively straightforward to administer and be easily understood by applicants.

Within the published guidance, the Government have suggested that people who may have applied for one of the qualifying benefits but are still waiting the outcome of their claim could be supported under the local discretionary scheme.

The proposed discretionary scheme therefore builds on this principle by basing any assessment of low income on similar criteria to that used by the Government when assessing any of the qualifying benefits under the Standard Scheme.

This approach will also ensure some degree of consistency between the Standard and Discretionary schemes.

The scheme also includes the right for the Council to revise the discretionary scheme at any time to enable a response to any issues that may emerge as it is applied in practice.

BACKGROUND PAPERS FOR THE DECISION

Associated scheme guidance issued by the Government

APPENDICES

Attachment 1 – Proposed Track and Trace Support Payment – **STANDARD SCHEME**

Attachment 2 – Proposed Track and Trace Support Payment – **DISCRETIONARY SCHEME**