

Test & Trace Discretionary Support Payments

12 October 2020



BACKGROUND

As part of its response to COVID-19, the Government announced that from 28 September 2020 it will be a legal duty to self-isolate when advised to do so. It is acknowledged that some working people will be unable to work from home during self-isolation and may not receive full pay. This drop in income may result in self-isolation being very challenging and increase the risk that an individual goes in to the community and spreads COVID-19.

From 28 September 2020, individuals will be entitled to a Test and Trace Support Payment of £500 if they are eligible. 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. This is important to help stop the transmission of COVID-19 and avoid further economic and societal restrictions. The scheme run until January 2021.

Eligible payments made via the national scheme are reimbursed in full to the local authority. A separate fund has been allocated to Local Authorities for the local, discretionary scheme. Plymouth has been allocated £77,368.83, which would support 154 eligible applicants. At this stage, the Government has no plans to provide further funding once this fund is exhausted.

TEST & TRACE NATIONAL SCHEME

The Test and Trace Support scheme was designed that has two strands:

1. National Scheme

Eligibility Criteria:

- 1.1. 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
- 1.2. Are employed or self-employed
- 1.3. Are unable to work from home and will lose income as a result
- 1.4. 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.

TEST & TRACE DISCRETIONARY SCHEME

2. Discretionary Scheme

Eligibility Criteria:

- 2.1. 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
- 2.2. Are employed or self-employed
- 2.3. Are unable to work from home and will lose income as a result
- 2.4. Any local eligibility criteria

It is the final element (2.4) that each local authority can define. It is important to note that this scheme is designed to enable employed/self-employed individuals to self-isolate who otherwise would be unable to, due to financial hardship. There are many circumstances where this will be the case, so to attempt to build hard rules around eligibility may inadvertently take people out of eligibility and encourage risky behaviour. For this reason, the recommendation is that the PCC discretionary scheme will consider each application on its merits and will include Public Health input in the decision via the Duty Manager.

RECOMMENDATION

The Plymouth City Council Test & Trace Discretionary Payment Scheme will have the following eligibility criteria, the applicant

1. **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**
2. **is employed or self-employed**
3. **is unable to work from home and will lose income as a result**
4. **would, without the payment, be unable to self-isolate**
5. **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**
6. **is on low income and will face financial hardship as a result of not being able to work while they are self-isolating**

The above are all taken directly from the published government guidance.

It is recommended that the following additional local criteria are necessary in order to focus the discretionary fund on the customers most likely to need it in order to self-isolate;

7. **Applicants with less than £6k capital will be considered**
8. **University or higher education students may be considered under exceptional circumstances for instance underlying entitlement to a means tested benefit as they are responsible for children or have disabilities but not receiving benefits; students who rely on wages to pay accommodation costs or a mortgage**

In the event that Government Guidance changes and/or the implementation of the scheme progresses and operational issues arise, rapid changes may be needed to the discretionary scheme. For these reasons, the following recommendation is made:

9. **Any review and changes to the discretionary framework to be delegated to the Strategic Development Manager (Customer Services), in consultation with the Director of Public Health and Councillor Chris Penberthy as Portfolio Holder.**
10. **The Plymouth City Council discretionary scheme will end once the discretionary fund of £77,368.83 is exhausted, unless additional funds are provided by Government**