

The Rt Hon. Matt Hancock MP  
Secretary of State for Health and  
Social Care  
Department of Health and Social  
Care  
39 Victoria Street  
London  
SW1H 0EU



**Councillor Chris Penberthy**  
Cabinet Member for Housing and  
Co-operative Development

Plymouth City Council  
Council House  
Plymouth PL1 2AA

T 01752 668000  
E [chris.penberthy@plymouth.gov.uk](mailto:chris.penberthy@plymouth.gov.uk)  
[www.plymouth.gov.uk](http://www.plymouth.gov.uk)

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Dear Secretary of State

I am writing to you to update you on our progress with the discretionary element of the Test and Trace Support programme.

We have been part of the national working group to implement both the national and discretionary schemes. Concerns were expressed by many Local Authorities during those calls about the level of discretionary funding allocated. We were advised that there would be no additional funding forthcoming, and that the estimates had been based on the scheme running until 31 January 2021.

In the first two full weeks of the scheme, we received 22 discretionary applications which were valid pending final verification. In the first three days of week three the volume of applications rose sharply as infections in the city increased; 43 applications were received in those three days which were eligible pending final verification.

Our funding allocation provides for 154 working people in Plymouth to receive support if they are instructed to self-isolate and lose income as a result. That equates to an average rate of 8.5 valid applications per week for the duration of the scheme. In the first two weeks, the average application rate was 11 per week so if all things remain equal our discretionary funding is exhausted by the end of December, a month before the scheme is due to end. If you include the first three days of week three, the average weekly rate of eligible applications increases to approximately 26 per week, which would result in the discretionary scheme ending due to lack of funds in mid-November.

Plymouth is in a Medium risk area with one of the lowest number of COVID19 infections in the country. Our cases are rising sharply and our testing capacity has recently increased with the introduction of two new local testing sites which means it is extremely likely that the rate of valid applications for the discretionary scheme will also rise and we will exhaust our funding even sooner.

The funding arrangements for the national scheme are such that if the initial allocation is insufficient, additional funds will be made available so that all eligible applicants will be supported for the duration of the scheme. This discrepancy between national and discretionary funding methods will result in otherwise eligible, working, low income residents being refused financial support whilst they are trying to comply with the legislation, protect their community and self-isolate. It also unfairly places apparent blame on Local Authorities as we will be seen as 'refusing' applications rather than the Government funding being insufficient to support the scheme.

I am certain that Local Authorities in areas of higher infection rates will exhaust their funding even sooner than Plymouth, which will create a postcode lottery across the country at a time where working residents need consistent support. Ultimately this scheme is a public health incentive and in your letter to Local Authorities on 20 September 2020, you stated that the government '*is providing funding for a new Test and Trace Support Payment scheme for people on low incomes who are unable to work while they are self-isolating because they cannot work from home*'. This is not actually the case as the Government are not providing funding for all eligible applications, should no further discretionary funding be made available.

We ask that you reconsider the funding approach for discretionary payments to bring them in line with the national scheme. Aligning the funding approach will support all low income working people who will experience a drop in income as a result of the legal requirement to self-isolate when instructed to do so by the Test and Trace system, and not solely those already in receipt of a means tested benefit.

Kind regards

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Chris Penberthy', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Councillor Chris Penberthy  
Cabinet Member for Housing and Co-operative Development

cc.  
Luke Pollard, MP for Plymouth Sutton and Devonport  
Sir Gary Streeter, MP for South West Devon  
Johnny Mercer, MP for Plymouth Moor View