

Report of	Record of	Date
Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member (Health and Wellbeing)	Executive Member Decision	14.09.21

Is this report confidential?	No
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Is this decision key?	No
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Savings or expenditure amounting to greater than £100,000	No
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Discretionary Test and Trace Support Payment

Purpose of the Report

1. To seek approval for an amendment to the discretionary element of the Test and Trace Support Payment Scheme (TTSP).

Recommendations

2. The discretionary element of the TTSP scheme is amended in line with Option 1 (point 16). This provides an increase to the low-income threshold in line with the 2021/2022 Universal Credit calculation rates with an additional percentage uplift, and an increased allowance for the level of savings in the discretionary eligibility criteria. The proposed changes are not retrospective.

Reasons for recommendations

3. The scheme remains in line with government requirements to administer grants to individuals who are affected by COVID19 and are unable to work during the self-isolation period.
4. The proposed change to the criteria for the discretionary element of the scheme best provides financial support to those who need it the most and may not be eligible for other forms of support.
5. The proposed change also meets the Department of Health & Social Care (DHSC) requirement to review our discretionary criteria, whilst still minimising the risk of spending the discretionary budget before the end of the scheme, therefore minimising the risk of being unable to assist some applicants who are still eligible.

Other options considered and rejected

6. Option 2: To remove the requirement for the applicant to have property related costs. These applicants are mainly adult children living at home with parents. Without means testing it cannot be established whether financial hardship would be experienced. However, the absence of property costs makes it unlikely that such a short-term reduction in income would lead to financial hardship. This option would also require further ICT development to change the application process and required evidence.
7. Option 3: To introduce a more detailed means testing verification process to prove financial hardship. This would prove more administratively burdensome and would also further delay any payments being made.

Corporate priorities

8. The report relates to the following corporate priorities: (Please bold all those applicable)

An exemplary council	Thriving communities
A fair local economy that works for everyone	Good homes, green spaces, healthy places

Background to the report

9. In response to COVID19 the Government announced there would be support for residents who are struggling to self-isolate as directed due to financial constraints. The support payment is to help ensure that people on low incomes self-isolate when they test positive or are identified as a contact, and to encourage more people to get tested.
10. The Department of Health and Social Care (DHSC) on the 30th September 2020 issued operational guidance for the implementation of the Test and Trace Support Payments. Within that guidance, the distribution methodology for the allocation of funding to local government was set out.
11. The cost of the scheme is funded by way of a grant payment from government to cover the cost of providing support payments to eligible individuals and costs for running the scheme will be recoverable. The amount of grant remaining is £80,000.
12. The Government have provided numerous information updates and guidance on the scheme and have now provided further guidance and eligibility criteria.
13. The council is administering and managing the schemes essentially on behalf of government and is responsible for the administration and payment of the grant monies. The additional costs involved in the administration of this scheme will be reimbursed by the government using new burdens funding.

Proposal

14. Individuals who are required to self-isolate and who don't meet the benefits-linked eligibility criteria could be eligible for a discretionary payment. The process has not changed and involves residents making an online application (or a telephone application if they are digitally excluded) and submitting as supporting evidence:

- a notification from NHS Test and Trace asking them to self-isolate (this will include a Unique ID number);
- a bank statement; and
- proof of employment, or, if they are self-employed, evidence of self-assessment returns, trading income and proof that their business delivers services which cannot be undertaken without social contact.

(Discretionary payments only)

- in the absence of being in receipt of one of the benefits prescribed by DHSC, information about the household composition, including any other incomes and/or savings as well as property related costs, to help confirm the applicant's eligibility due low income and potential financial hardship.

15. In order to allow more discretionary applications to be approved, therefore assisting a greater number of applicants and to attempt to avoid an underspend in the discretionary budget, the discretionary eligibility criteria is recommended to be amended as per Option 1 below.
16. Option 1:

The current discretionary scheme was based on the Universal Credit personal allowances for 2020/2021. This revised option is to be based on the Universal Credit personal allowances for 2021/2022 with a percentage uplift and rounding to the enhanced rates shown below.

Standard Allowance	UC standard rate	SRBC revised enhanced rate
Single	94.96	150.00
Couple	137.67	200.00
Child element	65.19	100.00

Bedroom allowance calculation

1 bedroom	90.90
2 bedrooms	115.07
3 bedrooms	132.33
4 bedrooms	182.96

17. In addition, it is recommended to increase the currently allowed capital limit from £6,000 to £10,000. The current earnings taper which is based on the Universal Credit calculation at 63% is recommended to be reduced to 60%.

Climate change and air quality

18. The work noted in this report does not impact the climate change and sustainability targets of the Councils Green Agenda and all environmental considerations are in place.

Equality and diversity

19. Not applicable. The approach is to support those individuals that are impacted by COVID-19 and to ensure that anyone who applies for the discretionary payment and meets the criteria is considered on a fair and equitable basis.

Risk

20. Failure to operate the payment programme promptly and effectively would present a reputational challenge for the Council. However, it is important that operational arrangements put in place are effective and have regard Government guidance and the levels of funding available.
21. The main and discretionary process has previously been developed and has been reviewed by Audit at every stage so that sufficient measures are in place to ensure fraudulent activity is minimised.

Comments of the Statutory Finance Officer

22. The grant for the discretionary element of the Test and Trace Support Payment Scheme (TTSP) has already been received. As outlined in the report, approval is required to spend this grant under the revised discretionary programme.

Comments of the Monitoring Officer

23. The changes proposed are relatively minor and do not cause any concerns from a legal perspective.

There are no background papers to this report

Report Author:	Email:	Telephone:	Date:
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Following careful consideration and assessment of the contents of this report, I approve the recommendation(s) contained within this report in accordance with my delegated power to make executive decisions.

Signed:	<i>Ellie M Titherington</i>
	<i>Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member (Health and Wellbeing)</i>
Date:	17.9.2021
Publication Date (DSO use only):	17.9.2021

This decision will come into force and may be implemented five working days after its publication date, subject to being called in in accordance with the Council's Constitution.