

Test and Trace Support Payments.

Introduction.

From the 28 September 2020, individuals will be able to claim a payment of £500 if they are required to self isolate, by the NHS Test and Trace process, claim an in-work benefit, cannot work from home and will lose money as a result.

The scheme has 2 elements

- **Main Scheme** – with the qualifying criteria being prescribed by Government
- **Discretionary Scheme** – whereby the Council can extend the payments to people who satisfy most of the main criteria but are not in receipt of a qualifying benefit.

Main Scheme Qualifying Criteria.

Individuals may be entitled to a Test & Trace Support Payment of £500 if they:

- Have been told to stay at home and self-isolate by NHS Test and Trace, either because you have tested positive for coronavirus or have recently been in close contact with someone who has tested positive.
- Are employed or self- employed
- Cannot work from home and will lose money
- Are currently receiving Universal Credit, Working Tax Credit, income-based Employment and Support Allowance, income based Jobseekers' Allowance, Income Support, Housing Benefit and/or Pension Credit.

The payment is fixed amount of £500 for each separate period of isolation.

People may qualify several times for several periods of isolation provided the isolations are entirely separate and do not overlap.

Members of the same household (including partners) may each qualify for a £500 payment simultaneously provided each meets the qualifying criteria.

Employees who are 'Furloughed' are not eligible.

Discretionary Scheme Qualifying Criteria.

The Council manages a Discretionary Scheme to cover people who satisfy most of the criteria of the Main Scheme, but do not receive a qualifying benefit. A £500 payment can be made if they would suffer financial hardship as a result of the self isolation,

Individuals may be entitled to a Discretionary Test & Trace Support Payment of £500 if they:

- Have been told to stay at home and self isolate by the 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; and
- are unable to work from home and will lose income as a result.
- are not currently in receipt of 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
- are a low income worker; (see below) and
- have accessible capital of less than £6000; and
- are suffering financial hardship due to a loss of income. The applicant will need to demonstrate that hardship.

Definition of a low income earner:

An individual will be classed as a low income worker if their average normal gross weekly income is below £322.64. This reflects 37 hours at the National Minimum Wage of £8.72.

Definition of financial hardship

Financial hardship will be classed as an inability to meet essential living costs such as rent/mortgage, food, utilities, medical needs, which cannot be resolved by personal budgeting.

Application Process.

The applicant will need to provide the following information via the on-line Test & Trace Support Payment Application Form

- A notification from NHS Test and Trace requiring self-isolation.
- Proof of receipt of a qualifying benefit (standard scheme)

- The most recent bank statement for the account the support payment will be paid into.
- Recent proof of employment or self employment, evidence of self-assessment returns, trading income and proof that the business delivers services which cannot be undertaken without social contact.

A declaration is needed that the applicant cannot work from home due to the nature of the work and will lose income as a result of self-isolation.

Individuals wishing to make a claim for **Discretionary Payments** will need to complete the supplementary questions within the online form and demonstrate that they will suffer hardship.

Individuals who are not able to claim on-line will be given appropriate telephone support.

Claims will only be accepted up to 14 days after their self isolation ends.

The Council may request such supporting evidence as it feels appropriate to substantiate that the applicant meets the qualifying criteria.

Assessment and Appeals Process

Applications for the payments are managed within the Revenues and Benefits Service. Whilst no formal appeals process exists, an applicant who is aggrieved by a decision to refuse a payment may ask for it to be reviewed by a more senior officer.

- Assessments are made by Benefit Officers and Senior Benefits Officers.
- Payments are approved by Senior and Principal Benefit Officers
- Reviews are undertaken by Principal Officers, the Benefits and Compliance Manager or Local Taxation and Benefits Manager.

Payment Process

Payments will be made by bank transfer into a verified bank account.

If you are overdrawn at the bank, you can exercise your **first right of appropriation** to ensure that the bank does not use the payment to pay the overdraft. You should speak to your bank in the first instance, they may ask you to make your request in writing.

Fraud and Abuse of the Scheme.

The Council is committed to the fight against fraud in all its forms. Appropriate checks will be made both before and after payments are made.

Any person who falsely declares their circumstances or provides a false statement or evidence in support of their application, may have committed a criminal offence.

Where the Council suspects that such a fraud may have occurred, or a payment has been paid that is not due, the matter will be investigated and this may lead to the council re-claiming the payment and criminal proceedings being instigated, as appropriate.