



**Reading**  
Borough Council  
Working better with you

## DECISION BOOK

**Issue: 613      Date: 19 OCTOBER 2020**

Decisions set out in the book have been made under delegated powers by the Chief Executive, Executive Directors or the Chief Finance Officer and Monitoring Officer, in consultation either with the relevant committee or Lead Councillor.

The Decision Book process has been altered to suspend the current Councillors' call-in arrangements within the 10-day period after its publication and replace it with the ability during that period for three Councillors to request a retrospective review of the decision in writing to the Head of Legal and Democratic Services.

The decision book can be accessed on the Council's website - <https://democracy.reading.gov.uk/mgListOfficerDecisions.aspx?bcr=1&BAM=0>

The officer reports accompanying the decisions are attached.

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## DECISION BOOK - ISSUE 613 - 19 OCTOBER 2020

### 1. TEST AND TRACE DISCRETIONARY ISOLATION SUPPORT PAYMENT SCHEME

<u>DECISION</u>	<u>LEAD COUNCILLOR(S)</u>	<u>WARDS AFFECTED</u>	<u>PAGE NO.</u>
1. TEST AND TRACE DISCRETIONARY ISOLATION SUPPORT PAYMENT SCHEME	COUNCILLOR BROCK	BOROUGHWIDE	1

This report sets out the decision to implement a Test and Trace Discretionary Isolation Support Payment Scheme.

It is the decision of the Chief Executive, in consultation with the Leader of the Council that a Test and Trace Discretionary Isolation Support Payment Scheme in respect of residents meeting the following criteria is introduced:

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; and

are employed or self-employed; and

are unable to work from home and will lose income as a result; and

are 18yrs or over and a resident in the borough; and

are on a low income (as defined below) and will face financial hardship as a result of not being able to work while they are in self-isolation; and

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 satisfy one of the following criteria:

No recourse to public funds; or

Have applied but not had an outcome from one of the benefits listed above; or

Have an outstanding appeal against a decision on one of the benefits listed above.

Low income is defined as 16 hrs at National Living Wage (£8.72) or below, this is equivalent to earnings of £139.52 per week or £604.59 per calendar month immediately prior to the self-isolation period.

Applications will only be accepted from those that have been told to self-isolate on or after 28 September 2020 and within 14 days of the date that their self-isolation period (as notified by NHS) ends.

Individuals in the same household can each make an application to receive a Test and Trace Discretionary Isolation Support Payment, if they each meet all the eligibility criteria in full.

An individual may make an application more than once but only:  
they meet the eligibility criteria for each individual application; and  
the periods of self-isolation do not overlap

READING BOROUGH COUNCIL

REPORT BY EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF RESOURCES

LEAD COUNCILLOR:	COUNCILLOR BROCK		
DATE:	19 OCTOBER 2020		
TITLE:	TEST AND TRACE DISCRETIONARY ISOLATION SUPPORT PAYMENT SCHEME		
SERVICE:	FINANCE	WARDS:	BOROUGHWIDE
AUTHOR:	SAMANTHA WILLS	TEL:	0118 937 2711
JOB TITLE:	REVENUES & BENEFITS MANAGER	E-MAIL:	<a href="mailto:samantha.wills@reading.gov.uk">samantha.wills@reading.gov.uk</a>

1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1.1 This report sets out the decision to implement a Test and Trace Discretionary Isolation Support Payment Scheme.
- 1.2 In response to the Coronavirus, COVID-19 pandemic, the Government announced from 28 September 2020 that individuals meeting certain criteria are entitled to a Test and Trace Support Payment or Discretionary Support Payment of £500. Both schemes are designed 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.
- 1.3 The Test and Trace Support Payment is reliant on the individual being in receipt of a qualifying benefit, whilst the discretionary scheme looks to support those that are not in receipt of benefits.
- 1.4 The payments are designed to help ensure people who have tested positive for COVID-19 and their close contacts self-isolate for the required period to stop the onward spread of the virus and encourage individuals to get tested if they have symptoms.
- 1.5 The scheme starts on 28 September 2020, and local authorities are expected to have arrangements in place to administer payments by 12 October 2020. Someone told to self-isolate on or after 28 September (but before the scheme is operational in their local authority) will need to be able to make a backdated claim for payment. The scheme will last until 31 January 2021.
- 1.6 The Government announced that it is providing local authorities with additional funding to provide a Discretionary Scheme to support those residents who meet all other eligibility criteria, but do not currently receive 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 will face financial hardship as a result of not being able to work from

home whilst self-isolating.

- 1.7 The UK Government are providing £50 million for Test and Trace Support and Discretionary Payments for the period to 31 January 2021. It includes:
  - £25 million for programme costs (costs of payments to applicants), excluding discretionary payments.
  - £10 million for administration costs.
  - £15 million for discretionary payments.
- 1.8 The £15 million for Discretionary Payments is a fixed four-month envelope that will not be topped up or subject to a reconciliation process. Reading's share of the £15 million is £43,467.95.
- 1.9 The Government have set some broad national criteria for the funds but are allowing local authorities to determine their own local award schemes.
- 1.10 This report sets out the national guidance and proposed offer to Reading residents, taking into consideration demand, economic need and consistency with our neighbouring authorities
- 1.11 An Equality Impact Assessment for these proposals has been carried out and is set out in Appendix One.

## 2. DECISION

2.1 It is the decision of the Chief Executive, in consultation with the Leader of the Council that a Test and Trace Discretionary Isolation Support Payment Scheme in respect of residents meeting the following criteria is introduced:

- 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; and
- are employed or self-employed; and
- are unable to work from home and will lose income as a result; and
- are 18yrs or over and a resident in the borough; and
- are on a low income (as defined below) and will face financial hardship as a result of not being able to work while they are in self-isolation; and
- 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 satisfy one of the following criteria:

- No recourse to public funds; or
- Have applied but not had an outcome from one of the benefits listed above; or
- Have an outstanding appeal against a decision on one of the benefits listed above.

Low income is defined as 16 hrs at National Living Wage (£8.72) or below, this is equivalent to earnings of £139.52 per week or £604.59 per calendar month immediately prior to the self-isolation period.

Applications will only be accepted from those that have been told to self-isolate on or after 28 September 2020 and within 14 days of the date that their self-isolation period (as notified by NHS) ends.

Individuals in the same household can each make an application to receive a Test and Trace Discretionary Isolation Support Payment, if they each meet all the eligibility criteria in full.

An individual may make an application more than once but only:

- if the individual is told to self-isolate multiple times; and
- they meet the eligibility criteria for each individual application; and
- the periods of self-isolation do not overlap

## Appendix 1 - Equality Impact Assessment

### 3. POLICY CONTEXT

#### NATIONAL GUIDANCE AND CRITERIA

- 3.1 The Government recognises that the Test & Trace Support Payment may exclude individuals that are on low incomes and will face financial hardship as a result of not being able to work while they are self-isolating, as they are not in receipt of a specified benefit. Funding has therefore been made available to local authorities to administer a Discretionary Scheme.
- 3.2 On 30 September guidance was issued to Local Authorities, and although discretion has been given to produce a local scheme, there are several qualifying criteria that must be met.
- 3.3 The Guidance indicates Local authorities can make a £500 discretionary payment to residents over the age of 18 who:
- 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;
  - are employed or self-employed;
  - and are unable to work from home and will lose income as a result.
- 3.4 The Guidance goes on to confirm that the discretionary payment is intended for people:
- who are 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
  - who are on low incomes and will face financial hardship as a result of not being able to work while they are self-isolating.

3.5 Local authorities can introduce additional criteria to determine eligibility for discretionary payments in their area, as long as these operate in addition to, rather than instead of, the criteria set out above.

#### 4. NATIONAL PAYMENT AWARDS

4.1 Payments under the Test and Trace Discretionary Isolation Support Payment Scheme should remain at £500 to ensure consistency in approach across all Local Authorities.

#### 5. NATIONAL GUIDANCE PROCESS

5.1 The Government recognise that there will be a need to run an application process.

5.2 The application process will enable proportionate pre-payment checks to be undertaken to confirm eligibility for the scheme and application of discretion in relation to establishing those on a low income but not in receipt of a specified benefit.

5.3 Local authorities must use their discretion in identifying the right person to receive the payment, based on the application process.

5.4 Authorities are required to send each recipient a letter or email to confirm that they have been paid.

#### 6. TEST AND TRACE DISCRETIONARY ISOLATION SUPPORT PAYMENT SCHEME PROPOSED BY READING

6.1 The £15 million for discretionary payments has been allocated according to the COVID-19 Relative Need Formula (RNF) The whole pot has been distributed up front, and it will not be subject to a reconciliation process (meaning that it will not be topped up or reclaimed if local authorities overspend or underspend their allocation from the pot). The additional funding for Reading is £43,467.95, spend will need to be managed to ensure enough funds are available for the duration of the 4-month scheme.

6.2 The funding provided will allow for 86 eligible applications throughout the duration of the scheme. Should funding be exhausted, the scheme will close earlier than 31 January 2021.

6.3 The Council will make payments to those who meet the eligibility criteria at 3.3 and in addition to those:

- who are on a low income and will face financial hardship as a result of not being able to work while they are self-isolating; and
- who are 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 satisfy one of the following criteria

- Have no recourse to public funds; or
- Have applied but not had an outcome from one of the benefits listed, or

- Have an outstanding appeal against a decision on one of the benefits listed
- 6.4 Low income is defined as 16 hrs at National Living Wage (£8.72) or below, this is equivalent to earnings of £139.52 per week or £604.59 per calendar month immediately prior to the self-isolation period.
- 6.5 The Council will only accept applications from those who have been told to self-isolate on or after 28 September 2020 and will only accept applications from customers within 14 days of the date that their self-isolation period (as notified by NHS) ends.
- 6.6 Individuals in the same household can each make an application to receive a Test and Trace Discretionary Isolation Support Payment, if they each meet all the eligibility criteria in full.
- 6.7 An individual may make an application more than once but only:
- If the individual is told to self-isolate multiple times; and
  - they meet the eligibility criteria for each individual application; and
  - the periods of self-isolation do not overlap.
- 6.8 Where multiple applications are made by an individual, to ensure correct eligibility, a new application will need to be made for each distinct period of self-isolation.

## 7. READING'S PROPOSED PROCESS

- 7.1 There will be an online application form published on the Council's website with telephone support offered to those that are digitally excluded.
- 7.2 The window for applications will be open for 4 months with a cut-off date of 31 January 2021, however should funding be exhausted before this deadline, the scheme will close earlier.
- 7.3 Applications will be considered by officers within the Benefits Team overseen by the Revenues & Benefits Manager.
- 7.4 It is anticipated BACS payments to successful applicants will be made within 3 days of application.
- 7.5 No payments will be awarded without an application being made.
- 7.6 Any unsuccessful applicants will be advised by e-mail where possible, or via letter, as soon as is reasonably practicable after date of application.
- 7.7 All eligible applicants will be informed by email where possible, or via letter to confirm that they have been paid.

## 8. APPEALS

- 8.1 Discretionary Support Payments are not subject to any formal statutory appeals process and therefore there are no appeal rights.

## 9. FRAUD



- 9.1 The Council will not accept deliberate manipulation and fraud - and any resident caught falsifying their records to gain a support payment will face prosecution and any payment issued will be subject to claw back, as will any payments paid in error.
  - 9.2 Local authorities will be responsible for fraud-prevention measures. Discussions are currently underway to bolster counter-fraud measures and guidance from central government will be issued in due course. This includes information on post-payment verification checks.
  - 9.3 Local authorities will have the right to recover costs from people who claim the payment fraudulently and can keep any money recovered to put towards costs of running the scheme. Local authorities will not be liable for any unrecoverable costs due to fraud.
10. CONTRIBUTION TO STRATEGIC AIMS
- 10.1 Payments are designed to support people whilst self-isolating to stop the onward spread of the virus. This is important to help stop the transmission of COVID-19 and avoid further economic and societal restrictions.
11. ENVIRONMENTAL AND CLIMATE IMPLICATIONS
- 11.1 None to note.
12. COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AND INFORMATION
- 12.1 In addition to details being contained on the Council's website, the scheme will be advertised via social media and press release, there will also be national campaigns.
13. EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT
- 13.1 A Full Equality Impact Assessment is set out at Appendix 1.
14. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS
- 14.1 None to note
15. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS
- 15.1 The cost of these payments will be met by Central Government, a lump sum payment will be provided up front. It will not be subject to a reconciliation process and as a result will not be topped up or reclaimed if over or underspent.
  - 15.2 Once funds are exhausted, as there is no top up available, the scheme will end, this may be earlier than 31 January 2021 depending on demand.
  - 15.3 The Government are committed to meeting the delivery costs to local authorities for this scheme and will meet associated New Burdens costs.
16. BACKGROUND PAPERS
- 16.1 There are none



Provide basic details

Name of proposal/activity/policy to be assessed

1. TEST AND TRACE DISCRETIONARY SUPPORT PAYMENT SCHEME

Directorate: Corporate Resources

Service: Finance

Name and job title of person doing the assessment:

Samantha Wills

Job Title: Revenues & Benefits Manager

Date of initial assessment: 09 October 2020

Scope your proposal

What is the aim of your policy or new service?

The scheme provides support to 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

Who will benefit from this proposal and how?

These payments are designed to help ensure people who have tested positive for COVID-19 and their close contacts self-isolate for the required period to stop the onward spread of the virus and provide financial support during that time.

What outcomes will the change achieve and for whom?

They are also designed to encourage individuals who are eligible for this payment 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.

Who are the main stakeholders and what do they want?

Reading residents

**Consultation**

Relevant groups/experts	How were/will the views of these groups be obtained	Date when contacted
Members / Senior Officers	Email Exchange	tbc
Berkshire Authorities Revenues & Benefits Group	Series of regular meetings	Every Friday since Covid lockdown

**Collect and Assess your Data**

Describe how this proposal could impact on Racial groups

Data regarding ethnicity is not available

Is there a negative impact? No

Describe how this proposal could impact on Gender/transgender (cover pregnancy and maternity, marriage)

Specific data is not available on those protected characteristics

Is there a negative impact? No

Describe how this proposal could impact on Disability

Specific data is not available on those protected characteristics

Is there a negative impact? No

Describe how this proposal could impact on Sexual orientation (cover civil partnership)

Specific data is not available on those protected characteristics

Is there a negative impact? No

Describe how this proposal could impact on Age

Specific data is not available on those protected characteristics

Is there a negative impact? No

Describe how this proposal could impact on Religious belief?

Specific data is not available on those protected characteristics

Is there a negative impact? No

#### Make a Decision

If the impact is negative then you must consider whether you can legally justify it. If not you must set out how you will reduce or eliminate the impact. If you are not sure what the impact will be you MUST assume that there could be a negative impact. You may have to do further consultation or test out your proposal and monitor the impact before full implementation.

Tick which applies

1. No negative impact identified      Go to sign off
2. Negative impact identified but there is a justifiable reason

How will you monitor for adverse impact in the future?

Listen to business feedback, comments, appeals and complaints.

Signed (completing officer) Samantha Wills  
(reviewed)

Date 09 October 2020

Signed (Lead Officer) Jackie Yates

Date