

Record of Decision taken by S151 Officer

Decision title: Discretionary Test and Trace Support Payments (TTSP)

Officer making the decision: Paul Fitzgerald

Author Contact Details: Simon Doyle
01823 219467
s.doyle@somersetwestandtaunton.gov.uk

Date of Decision: 24 November 2020

Details of decision:

The Chief Executive approved the adoption of a Discretionary Test and Trace Support Payment Scheme for Somerset West & Taunton. The scheme is detailed in Appendix 1.

This decision amends the discretionary scheme so that the following additional eligibility criteria will apply to applications received on or after 30 November 2020:

An applicant must not possess capital of £1,000 or more;

An applicant must pay rent to a landlord who is not a close relative, or pay a mortgage (and not be on a 'mortgage holiday');

Only one Test and Trace Support Payment will be made per household

This amendment is taken in accordance with para 19.2 of the Test and Trace Discretionary Support Payment scheme which states that '*Officers of the Council will administer the scheme and the Section 151 Officer is authorised to make technical scheme amendments to ensure it continues to meet the criteria set by the Council and, in line with Central Government guidance*'.

The changes have been recommended by the Benefits Specialist, after reviewing all successful discretionary applications and considering whether the successful applicants were suffering hardship as a result of having to self-isolate.

Cllr Ross Henley, Portfolio Holder, was consulted on 19 November 2020 about the changes.

Background:

From 28 September 2020, central Government introduced legislation requiring certain people to self-isolate to reduce the spread of coronavirus which included a package of measures to ensure those who need to self-isolate and are on a low-income can get help towards their finances to encourage compliance with the new rules.

From 28 September 2020, certain individuals will be entitled to a Test and Trace Support Payment (TTSP) of £500 if they meet prescribed criteria. The scheme will be administered by local councils such as Somerset West and Taunton and, at the present time, will run until 31 January 2021.

Government has also provided SWT with £36k with which to make £500 payments to people who are required to self-isolate but do not meet the criteria within the Government's standard scheme. This funding will allow us to make a maximum of 73 £500 Local Discretionary Test and Trace Support payments.

As at 24 November 2020, we had paid £32,500 to 65 successful applicants. At this rate, we will run out of funds to pay discretionary payments in December 2020 and will have to close the scheme earlier than the anticipated end date of 31 January 2021.

Details of the revisions made to the discretionary scheme are set out in Appendix 2.

Reasons for proposed decision:

The scheme changes provides our approach to awarding the discretionary Test and Trace Support Payments in order to:

- Provide financial support for those on low incomes in order to practically support their ability to self-isolate, and thereby control the spread of Coronavirus;
- Ensure the total monies awarded remain within the limited funding made available;
- Include reasonable safeguards to avoid fraudulent claims;
- Ensure the scheme is manageable from an administrative perspective;
- Meet the expectations around purpose and timescale set by Government.

Alternative options considered and rejected:

We considered closing the scheme once we had exhausted the original funds from central Government but believe these changes best targets the remaining funding available to meet the objective of supporting those on low incomes to self-isolate, in a transparent, equitable and administratively efficient way.

The below has been completed:	Name(s)	Date
Relevant Portfolio Holder(s) consulted	Cllr Henley	19/11/2020
Relevant ward councillor(s) consulted	This potentially affects all wards & there is insufficient time to consult all Members	
The following are if appropriate / applicable: Yes/No. If yes the implications should be attached to this decision notice.		
Finance implications	£20k of the projected underspend of the £1.382m provided by central Government for Covid-19 additional Council Tax hardship relief to be used to top up the £36,886 provided by central government for discretionary payments.	
Legal implications	These payments support compliance of self-isolation rules for those on low incomes 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, and who cannot work from home.	

Links to corporate aims	Homes & Communities - tackle economic, social and health inequalities within the groups and communities that need extra support.	
Community Safety implications	The payments are to encourage compliance with self-isolation rules and thereby prevent the spread of Coronavirus within our communities.	
Environmental implications	No	
Equalities Impact Safeguarding Implications	A specific EIA has not been undertaken due to time constraints for implementing this scheme. No disproportionate impacts are anticipated to affect any of the protected groups. There are NO safeguarding implications	
Risk management	The proposed scheme contains appropriate measures to help prevent fraud and to keep expenditure within budget	
Partnership implications	The discretionary scheme has been co-created in collaboration with Sedgemoor District Council.	

Any conflicts of interest declared by Leader or Portfolio Holders consulted on the proposed decision. If Yes provide confirmation from Chief Executive to grant dispensation for the Leader's / Portfolio Holder's views to be considered.

The Portfolio Holder, Cllr Henley, has been consulted regarding this change and has declared no conflict of interests.

Financial Implication Summary

The original funding of £36,886 for this scheme, provided by Central Government, will be exhausted well before the end of the scheme. In addition to topping up the funds using some of the projected underspend from our £1.382m Council Tax relief hardship fund, we will apply additional eligibility criteria from 30 November 2020 that will prevent us from spending more than the allocated funding.

Decision Maker

I am aware of the details of this decision(s), considered the reasons, options, representations and consultation responses and give my approval / agreement to its implementation.

Signed: Paul Fitzgerald – confirmed by email

Name: Paul Fitzgerald

Date: 24/11/2020

Note – This decision record is for decisions taken by Chief Executive/Director. The decision(s) can be implemented in accordance with the approved delegations.

Note: A copy should also be sent to the Governance Team – governance@somersetwestandtaunton.gov.uk

Appendix 1 – Test and Trace Support Payments Discretionary Payments Scheme



Somerset West &
Taunton Test & Trace

Appendix 2 – Test and Trace Support Payments Discretionary Payments Scheme

At the bottom of page 1 insert the following:

Document control Revision history

Version	Date	Summary of changes
V1.0	10/10/2020	Original scheme approved
V2.0	24/11/2020	Revisions approved by s151 officer following review and additional eligibility criteria to apply from 30/11/2020

Change the last sentence in para 7.28 to “The additional criteria are shown in 7.29 and 7.30 below”.

Return para 7.29 to what it was, i.e.

7.29 The additional criteria are as follows:

- (a) **An applicant's loss of gross earnings is greater than £100 per week due to self-isolating.** This figure is before any deductions for tax, national insurance, pension or other non-statutory items. This is a comparison of what the applicant would normally earn prior to self-isolation compared with earnings during self-isolation. Where an applicant loses earnings less than this level, then they would not normally be eligible unless there was an exceptional circumstance;
- (b) **An applicant's is employed or is self-employed for at least 16 hours per week;**
- (c) **An applicant must not possess capital of £3,000 or more.** Any applicant with capital above that level would not be eligible. For the sake of clarity, capital will be calculated in accordance with the rules for Housing Benefit;
- (d) **Individuals who have applied for a qualifying benefit but have not yet received a decision or have appealed** against a decision not to award a qualifying benefit and are awaiting the outcome of the appeal will be eligible to claim provided they meet **all** other criteria within this section;
- (e) **Applicants who are excluded from qualifying benefits by the “Persons from Abroad” provisions within the welfare benefit schemes** will be eligible to claim provided they meet **all** other criteria within this section; and
- (f) Where further information or evidence is required to support the claim, this is provided within 14 days of the Council's request.

... and insert new para 7.30:

7.30 The following addition criteria applies to applications made on or after 30 November 2020:

- (a) An applicant must not possess capital of £1,000 or more. Any application with capital above that level would not be eligible. For the sake of clarity, capital will be calculated in accordance with the rules for Housing Benefit;
- (b) An applicant must pay rent to a landlord who is not a close relative, or pay a mortgage (and not currently be on a 'mortgage holiday');
- (c) Only one Test and Trace Support payment will be made per household