

Subject:	DISCRETIONARY TEST AND TRACE SUPPORT PAYMENT SCHEME
Date:	9 October 2020
Decision to be taken by:	Councillor Trevor Bartlett, Leader of the Council
Report of:	Mike Davis, Strategic Director (Corporate Resources)
Portfolio Holder:	Councillor Chris Vinson, Portfolio Holder for Finance, Governance and Digital
Decision Type:	Executive Non-Key Decision
Call-in to be Suspended:	Yes (<i>The Chairman of the Council has agreed to suspend call-in</i>)
Classification:	Unrestricted
Purpose of the report:	To seek approval for a discretionary Test and Trace Support Payment Scheme.
Recommendation:	<p>(1) That the discretionary Test and Trace Support Payment Scheme, as set out at Appendix A to this report, be approved.</p> <p>(2) That the Strategic Director (Corporate Resources) be authorised to make amendments to the scheme in the light of government advice/requirements or otherwise in the light of experience gained from operating the scheme.</p> <p>(3) That the Council enters into data-sharing agreements with Public Health England and such other parties as may be necessary in order to facilitate the implementation of the scheme, subject to the Council's Data Protection Officer being satisfied as to their terms.</p>

1. Summary

- 1.1 This report seeks approval for a discretionary payment scheme relating to the Test & Trace Support Payments Scheme.
- 1.2 The scheme will be delivered through the Councils' revenues and benefits service (administered by Civica). Civica also administer the benefits and revenues services for Canterbury City Council and Thanet District Council under shared services arrangements. It would therefore be beneficial for all three councils to agree the same scheme. Due to the urgency of the required implementation, there is necessarily a very short deadline required for this decision.

2. Introduction and Background

- 2.1 From 28 September 2020, individuals will be entitled to a Test and Trace Support Payment of £500 if they:

- 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**

- Are unable to work from home and will lose income as a result
- Are 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.

2.2 This payment is designed to support people on low incomes if they will lose income because of self-isolating, and to encourage them 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. The scheme will last until 31 January 2021.

2.3 In recognising that there may be circumstances where an individual meets the main qualifying criteria for the Test and Trace Support Payment (i.e. they are a low-income worker who is unable to work because they are self-isolating) but are not in receipt of qualifying benefits and could experience extreme and intolerable financial hardship as a result of not being able to work, the Council is implementing a Discretionary Scheme.

2.4 The purpose of the Test & Trace Support Payments Scheme is set out in section one of the Scheme at Appendix A. The scheme itself has been developed in line with guidance issued by the Department of Health and Social Care which is attached as Appendix B.

2.5 Essentially, this is a national scheme which local authorities are being funded to operate locally.

2.6 The funding for this scheme is as follows:

LA	Programme cost ('main' scheme funding)	No. of cases the funding will cover (at £500 per case)	No. of cases the funding will cover per week of the scheme*	Admin funding total	Discretionary scheme funding	No. of cases the funding will cover (at £500 per case)	No. of cases the funding will cover per week of the scheme*
CCC	£62,000	124	7	£29,225.60	£37,474.52	75	4
DDC	£52,500	105	6	£27,812.00	£31,573.10	63	3.5
TDC	£76,500	153	8.5	£31,383.20	£46,079.65	92	5

2.7 As can be seen, the available funding only allows for a very small number of discretionary awards to be made over the lifetime of the scheme, and therefore the budget will need to be closely monitored and awards made only on an exceptional basis, with the underlying criteria of an applicant being in extreme and intolerable financial hardship

3. Identification of Options

3.1 **Option 1:** Whilst introduction of the Scheme is at the discretion of the Council and the Council could decide not to implement a scheme, this would be to the detriment of residents that are required to self-isolate.

3.2 **Option 2:** The guidance for scheme development sets out a number of mandatory criteria for awards (i.e. legally required to self-isolate, low-income worker who is unable to work because they are self-isolating) but provides scope for each Council to implement supplementary criteria to determine awards. The criteria set out within section 2 of Appendix A reflect the priority of protecting those residents at risk of financial hardship.

3.3 **Option 3:** The Council could look to vary the local criteria set out under section 2 of Appendix A, however, funding for the scheme will be capped and any proposed change will need to carefully prioritise awards to those most in need.

4. Evaluation of Options

4.1 Option 2 is the preferred option. It is considered that the proposed criteria achieve the right balance between supporting those most in need and the significant financial constraints of the scheme.

5. Resource Implications

5.1 The Councils will issue grants to cover the 'main scheme, the discretionary scheme, and to cover administrative costs, as follows

LA	Programme cost ('main' scheme funding)	No. of cases the funding will cover (at £500 per case)	Admin funding total	Discretionary scheme funding	No. of cases the funding will cover (at £500 per case)
CCC	£62,000	124	£29,225.60	£37,474.52	75
DDC	£52,500	105	£27,812.00	£31,573.10	63
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The Council will then allocate this grant to eligible individuals. There will be no additional funding provided by the Council.

The administrative funding is provided to cover the scheme in its entirety ('main' scheme, and discretionary scheme).

The allocation for Non-Discretionary Test and Trace payments ('main' scheme) may increase dependent upon the demands for the scheme and this will be funded by further Government Grants.

6. Climate Change and Environmental Implications

7. No impact.

8. Equalities

8.1 The scheme is intended to support working individuals who have suffered a loss of income as a result of a requirement to self-isolate due to Coronavirus. The

mandatory scheme has been set out by Government and cannot be amended by the Council.

- 8.2 The Council has chosen to provide a discretionary scheme alongside the mandatory scheme however, which will take into account those who are awaiting a decision on benefits entitlement, those who have no recourse to public funds (due to immigration status), and those where exceptional financial hardship can be proved. Due to the urgency of the decision, it has not been possible to produce a full Equalities Impact Assessment, however national data regarding coronavirus shows that men, the elderly and BAME groups have a higher risk of contracting Coronavirus, and of the virus being more serious in these groups when contracted
- 8.3 Assessments for exceptional financial hardship will be made using a pre-existing methodology and process to ensure fairness. A criterion to include those with no recourse to public funds has been included in the scheme, which will help to alleviate any disadvantage experienced as a result of ethnicity.
- 8.4 The Council will continuously monitor the number of applications, awards and refusals made through the discretionary scheme with a view to ensuring, where possible, that no adverse discrimination occurs as a result of the policy. It is not considered proportionate at this time to collect enhanced equalities monitoring information in relation to the scheme, but this may be included at a later date if a need is identified. Future changes to the discretionary scheme may be made to ensure the Council meets the Public Sector Equalities Duties.

9. **Data Protection**

- 9.1 Both parts of the scheme are designed to support working individuals who have lost income as a result of self-isolation due to Coronavirus. As such it is likely that their personal information will already be held by the Council for the administration of Council Tax or Benefits. The information will be held securely by the service in accordance with all the Councils' Data Protection Policies and privacy notices.
- 9.2 Where new data or additional data is collected about the individual (not already held by the Council) it will be collected only for the purpose of administering the Test and Trace Support Payments and will be processed in line with delivery of this service.
- 9.3 In order to implement the scheme it will be necessary for the Council to enter into a data sharing agreement with Public Health England.

10 **Corporate Implications**

- 10.1 Comment from the Section 151 Officer: This is the report of the Strategic Director (Corporate Resources) who is also the section 151 officer. As the Strategic Director was personally involved in the development of this report and in view of the urgency of this decision, no further comments have been invited from the Finance Team.
- 10.2 Comment from the Solicitor to the Council: The Powers to implement such a scheme are contained in Section 1 of the Localism Act 2011. The Policy has been developed in line with guidance issued by the Department of Health and Social Care.
- 7.1.1 Comment from the Equalities Officer: Given the urgent need to adopt and implement a scheme and also that the equalities implications of the proposal have been considered by Civica whose assessment is incorporated at paragraph 8 of this report, the equalities officer has not been consulted.
- 7.4 Other Officers (as appropriate):

8 Appendices

Appendix A - Discretionary Test and Trace Support Payment scheme document

Appendix B - Department of Health and Social Care Implementation Guidance

9 Background Papers

Report to Section 151 Officers/Deputy Chief Executives prepared by Civica and dated 6 October 2020

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