

Rother District Council

Report to: Cabinet
Date: 9 October 2020
Title: Test and Trace Support Payments Discretionary Scheme
Report of: Chris Watchman – Revenues and Benefits Manager
Cabinet Member: Councillor Dixon

Ward(s): All

Purpose of Report: To advise Members of 1) the introduction by Government of a new scheme to be administered by local government of payments to low income households of £500 where they are required by the NHS to self-isolate and their normal source of income is adversely affected, and 2) approve the locally determined discretionary scheme required to support the scheme where the applicant does not meet the national criteria.

Decision Type: Non-Key

Officer

Recommendation(s): It be **RESOLVED:** That

- 1) the test and trace support payment discretionary scheme outlined in Appendix A be approved; and
- 2) the Assistant Director Resources (Chief Finance Officer) be granted delegated authority to make minor amendments to the agreed scheme, in consultation with the Cabinet Portfolio Holder for Finance and Performance.

Reasons for

Recommendations: To allow the Council to receive and process applications for the test and trace support payments where the applicant does not meet the national criteria.

The Chairman of Council has already agreed that, subject to the approval of Cabinet, this decision can be taken as an urgent decision to allow the Council to implement the scheme in accordance with the Government's timescale.

Introduction

1. The Government have introduced a payment of £500 for those households on low incomes if they have been instructed to self-isolate by the NHS and to do so would adversely affect their income. The Government have tasked local government to administer this scheme which needs to be up and running by the 12 October 2020. Households are eligible from the 28 September and the scheme will operate until the 31 January 2021.

Scheme Eligibility

2. To be eligible for the test and trace support payment, the resident must:

- have been asked to 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;
 - be employed or self-employed;
 - be unable to work from home and will lose income as a result;
 - be currently receiving one of the following benefits: Universal Credit, Working Tax Credit, income-related Employment and Support Allowance, income-based Jobseeker's Allowance, Income Support, Housing Benefit, Pension Credit
3. Residents will not be eligible for the payment if:
- only self-isolating for the purposes of quarantining after a trip abroad.
 - if their income is lower than normal because they are furloughed. The payment is for people facing a reduction in income because they cannot work while self-isolating.
4. Residents can make a claim up to 14 days after their period of self-isolation ends.
5. Funding for the main scheme has been confirmed at £39,000 for Rother which would support 78 households. Hopefully, if the number of claims exceeds this amount, then further funding will be made available.

Discretionary Scheme

6. The Government have also enabled Councils to have a discretionary scheme. Funding of £23,545 will be provided but this will limit the number of people the Council can help to 47. No further funding is likely at this stage and therefore will be on a first come first served basis. The discretionary scheme will deal with the scenario where a resident meets the qualifying criteria except that they are not in receipt of any of the benefits detailed in paragraph 2 above. A draft discretionary scheme is outlined at Appendix A, from Section 7, and is based on the following criteria:
- All residents can claim except for full-time students (student loans / grants etc.) and those who are not normally resident in the UK;
 - Capital limit £3,000;
 - Income – eligibility is determined through an income band as follows:
 - i) Lower threshold - must have (normally) gross wage of £80 per week or more and this has reduced due to self-isolation and they cannot work from home
 - ii) Upper threshold £290 (gross)
7. The lower threshold is the minimum income level for all benefits. The upper threshold is based on £15,000 per year or £290 gross earnings per week which is based on the Government's assessment of low pay (60% of median income).

Scheme administration

8. Applications will be accepted via an on-line form which by the time of this meeting will be live on the Council's website. In addition, the scheme requires the Council to provide a telephone-based service for those residents not able to access the internet. The initial contact will be managed by the Council's contact centre who will pass details to the Revenues and Benefits team. The Council will also provide information regarding the other support residents can access around the district. This will be available on the Council's website and can be provided as part of the telephone service.
9. The Government expect payments to be made within 3 working days of receipt of application. This may be challenging for officers, depending on the volume of applications and will be kept under review.
10. The scheme is being promoted on the Council website and through social media. In addition, local organisations such as Citizens Advice and Hastings Advice and Representation Centre (HARC) will be informed how residents can access the scheme.
11. It is proposed that delegation is given to the Assistant Director Resources (Chief Finance Officer) in consultation with the Cabinet Portfolio Holder for Finance and Performance to make minor amendments to the scheme, in light of experience?

Conclusion

12. Whilst a small amount of money, it is hoped that the support payments will help those households in Rother who are on low incomes and are being adversely affected due to having to self-isolate. Members will be kept informed of how the scheme is progressing through the regular COVID-19 updates.

Other Implications	Applies?	Other Implications	Applies?
Human Rights	No	Equalities and Diversity	No
Crime and Disorder	No	Consultation	No
Environmental	No	Access to Information	No
Sustainability	No	Exempt from publication	No
Risk Management	No		

Chief Executive:	Malcolm Johnston
Report Contact Officer:	Chris Watchman
e-mail address:	chris.watchman@rother.gov.uk
Appendices:	Appendix A - Discretionary test and trace support payments scheme
Relevant Previous Minutes:	None
Background Papers:	Test and trace support payments – implementation guide for local authorities
Reference Documents:	None