

Test and Trace Support Payment Scheme

1. Background

With effect from 28 September 2020 there have been new legal obligations for individuals who test positive for coronavirus (COVID-19) or who have been identified as a contact by NHS Test and Trace to self-isolate.

In order to support those on a low income who are affected a new Test and Trace Support Payment (TTSP) is being introduced. This is a £500 payment that is made to the individual who has to self-isolate or provide care to a child who is usually in an educational or childcare setting or young person with an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP) who is usually in an educational setting but has to self-isolate. It can be claimed multiple times where there is more than one period of self-isolation.

Where multiple household members make an application at the same address, each application will be considered separately. Only one carer can claim in respect of caring for a child or young person who is self-isolating.

2. Commencement and Review Date for this Policy

The West of England unitary authorities (Bath & North East Somerset Council, Bristol City Council, South Gloucestershire Council) and North Somerset Council have developed a regional policy to provide some consistency in the additional support that will be available to individuals under these prevailing conditions across the wider region.

The policy came into force with effect from 28 September 2020, was updated to include provision for caring responsibilities with effect from 8th March 2021 and will end on 30th June 2021. This is when the national funding is due to come to an end.

3. Eligibility

The individual must:-

- 3.1 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 therefore unable to work, or

3.2 Be unable to work due to caring for a child who is usually in an educational or childcare setting but has to self-isolate, or

3.3 Be unable to work due to caring for a young person with an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP) who is usually in an educational setting but has to self-isolate ('qualifying young person').

And meet the following eligibility conditions:-

3.4 Be employed or self-employed

3.5 Be complying with the requirement to self-isolate

3.6 Be unable to work from home and will lose income as a result

3.7 Must also be in receipt of at least one of the following benefits or tax credits

- Universal Credit
- Working Tax Credit
- Income Related Employment and Support Allowance
- Income Based Jobseeker's Allowance
- Income Support
- Housing Benefit
- Pension Credit

4. Discretionary Awards

Provision is made for a discretionary award for individuals who satisfy the eligibility criterion 3.1-3.6 above (excluding being in receipt of a qualifying benefit or tax credits) who also satisfy one of the following conditions:

4.1 On a low income; which is defined as combined household earnings of £350 per week or your income is low enough to potentially qualify for other benefits.

4.2 Suffering financial hardship as a result of being instructed to self-isolate or having to care for a child or qualifying young person who is self-isolating. Hardship will be determined by comparing the household's income prior to self-isolation and will be for the period of self-isolation. The loss of the household income must be sufficient to cause financial hardship.

If the declared low income is at a level that would result in possible benefit entitlement, but a claim hasn't been made or has been refused due to immigration status, we will advise individuals to claim for an appropriate qualifying benefit.

In some cases, it may be more appropriate to direct applicants to other assistance funds. Where this is the case we will direct those where necessary, e.g. university and college funds.

Applications for a discretionary award will be made using the same application process and a decision made by considering eligibility for both a standard TTSP and discretionary award.

5. Applications and Evidence

Individuals should apply to their own local authority using the online application form (which will include the ability to upload documents at point of application). If an individual cannot apply online, a telephone application can be made by contacting the local authority's published number.

The following evidence requirements are examples of support for an individual's application for a TTSP:-

Current Employment

- Most recent payslip if the individual is employed, or;
- Contract of employment and bank account showing payment of wages, or;
- Most recent trading accounts or tax return if the applicant is self-employed.

Loss of Income from Employment

- Payslip(s) showing reduction in income as a result of self-isolation or caring responsibilities, or;
- A letter/email from employer to confirm that income will be reduced as a result of self-isolating, or;
- Trading accounts for period of self-isolation if self-employed; or
- In absence of any of the above a self-declaration.

The council will be unable to make a payment until loss of income as a result of self-isolating or caring responsibilities is confirmed. This can be provided to the council separately to the initial application to the TTSP scheme.

Self-isolation

- Notification from NHS Test and Trace asking the individual to self-isolate, either for the applicant or the child or qualifying young person that the applicant is caring for (including eight digit NHS Test and Trace Unique Identification Number)
- Letter, email or other reasonable confirmation from an educational or childcare setting advising the child or qualifying young person that they need to self-isolate.

Payment

- Bank statement for the account which the Test and Trace Support Payment will be paid into (this account must be in the name of the person applying for the Test and Trace Support Payment).

Providing Evidence

Supporting evidence is to be provided electronically via the council's website or sent to the local authority's published e-mail address. We will consider alternative ways of submitting evidence on a case by case basis and in a way that does not result in affecting the self-isolation of the individual.

An application can be made on behalf of somebody else. In this case, the payment must still be paid into a bank account in the name of the applicant receiving the payment. Checks will be undertaken to ensure that the individual who is receiving the payment is eligible and that payment is made directly to them.

6. Decisions

Decisions on eligibility will be made by the benefits service or other local authority representative with delegated authority and will be based on the information provided in the application form, evidence provided by the applicant and data made available to the council by the following government departments:-

- Department for Work and Pensions (DWP)
- Her Majesty's Revenues and Customs (HMRC)
- NHS Test and Trace

It is not expected that information and evidence in addition to the above will be required. However, wherever further information is needed contact will be made with the applicant via e-mail or telephone.

7. Delayed Applications

Eligible individuals can apply for a TTSP up to 42 days after the self-isolation period begins. We cannot accept applications delayed after that period. We will consider applications that are delayed as a result of any delays in the council implementing the scheme or where there is a delay between the application being submitted and relevant evidence being provided.

8. Method of Payment

Payment will be made as a £500 lump sum to the bank account nominated by the individual applying for the TTSP. This should be paid within three days of an eligible application and supporting evidence being received. We will consider how payments are made to individuals who do not have a bank account on a case by case basis.

9. Notification of Decisions

The applicant will be notified of whether their application has been successful or not. This will be via 'send secure' e-mail wherever possible. If a decision cannot be notified electronically a letter will be sent to the individual's address.

10. Appeals

There is no formal appeal process for the TTSP scheme. The local authority decision will be final and no separate dispute resolution is in place with this scheme. The dispute resolution process under the constitution of the relevant council will apply.

11. Overpayments

In the event that a payment is made to an individual who is not eligible, the council may take action to recover the payment.

12. Fraud

The council has the right to recover costs from individuals who claim the payment fraudulently and may take further action against individuals as required.

13. Review and future policy

The policy may be reviewed at a date earlier than schemes current end date of the 30 June 2021. If there is a change in the government's funding or policy approach this policy will be automatically amended to reflect these changes. In addition we reserve the right to dis-apply the policy once central government funding has been exhausted.