

Test and Trace Support Payment Policy

Introduction

In response to Covid-19 and effective from 28 September 2020 the government have made it a legal requirement to self-isolate if an individual has been contacted by NHS Test and Trace and instructed to self-isolate.

To support those required to self-isolate the Department of Health and Social Care (DHSC) have setup a payment support scheme for those on a low income who cannot work from home. There are two elements to this scheme: (1) The main scheme; and (2) The discretionary scheme. Both these elements are payable at £500.

This scheme is due to run until 31 January 2021 and Barnet have been allocated £160,000 for the main scheme and £96,051 for the discretionary scheme.

DHSC have provided eligibility criteria for both the main and discretionary elements of the scheme. 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.

Eligibility Criteria

Test and Trace Main Scheme Support Payment

Eligibility for a £500 Test and Trace Support Payment is restricted to people 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;
- are unable to work from home and will lose income as a result; and
- 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.

Test and Trace Discretionary Support Payment

Eligibility for the £500 discretionary support payment is restricted to people who:

DHSC mandatory eligibility criteria

- 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.

- 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.

LBB additional eligibility criteria

- were earning no more than £250 per week prior to being instructed to self-isolate; or
- are in receipt of Council Tax Support; or
- at the discretion of the Assistant Director of Finance or Director of Resources where they deem an application outside of LBB's additional eligibility criteria would cause unnecessary financial hardship.

Backdating

Eligibility for the NHS Test and Trace Support Payment, including discretionary payments, is for people who are told to self-isolate on or after 28 September 2020 and who meet the relevant eligibility criteria.

Applications will not be accepted from people told to self-isolate before 28 September 2020, even if the period of self-isolation continues after 28 September.

Applications from members of the same household

People in the same household can each make an individual application to receive the payment, if they each meet the eligibility criteria.

Multiple claims

Some individuals could be asked to self-isolate by NHS Test and Trace more than once.

Someone can claim more than once (if they are told to self-isolate multiple times), as long as they meet the eligibility criteria for each individual claim and their periods of self-isolation do not overlap.

For example, if someone claims for a period of self-isolation lasting from 1 October to 14 October and then claims again for a second period of self-isolation beginning on 10 October, they would only be allowed to claim once, because the two periods overlap. However, they would be allowed to claim for a second period of self-isolation that began after the first period had ended on 14 October.

Applications made after someone's period of self-isolation has ended

Eligible individuals can make a claim up to 14 days after their period of self-isolation ended, applications will not be accepted after this point: for example, if someone was told to self-isolate until 10 October, they would have until 24 October to make a claim.

Third-party applications

Applicants can apply on behalf of someone else; however, the £500 must be paid into a bank account in the name of the person for whom the application is being made. For example, if someone applied on behalf of a parent, the payment would be made into the parent's bank account.

Applicants who are self-isolating who haven't been told to self-isolate by NHS Test and Trace

Local authorities should only consider applications from individuals who have a valid notification from NHS Test and Trace telling them to stay at home and self-isolate.

Applicants who are quarantining after returning to the UK

The Test and Trace Support Payment scheme does not cover people who are self-isolating after returning to the UK from abroad, unless they have tested positive for coronavirus or have been told to stay at home and self-isolate by NHS Test and Trace.

Application Process

Applications must be made online via the council's website and will include agreement that the applicant consents to all stipulated declarations. All applications must be supported by enough evidence to confirm that they meet the relevant criteria.

Applicants will have to provide:

- their name, address, date of birth and national insurance number and contact details;
- a notification from NHS Test and Trace asking them to self-isolate;
- proof of receipt of one of the qualifying benefits;
- a bank statement (as a basic up-front fraud check); and
- proof of employment or, if they are self-employed, evidence of self-assessment returns, trading income and proof that their business delivers services which cannot be undertaken without social contact.

Applicants will be required to make a declaration that they cannot work from home and have seen a reduction in income because of self-isolation.

Payments will only be paid when all eligibility criteria have been suitably evidenced.

Determination of applications

Applications will be considered by a dedicated review team, overseen by The Exchequer Team.

Appeals

There will be no right of appeal against a decision not to award a payment, either for the main scheme or the discretionary scheme. Applicants who are turned down will not be eligible because they do not meet the criteria.

Barnet will work with applicants to make sure they provide the necessary evidence to support a successful application. For instance, someone who is self-employed may have forgotten to provide their self-assessment return in the first instance will be given a single opportunity to provide the missing evidence.

Policy review

To ensure that the Discretionary Support Payment reaches those individuals most in need, this policy may be reviewed by the Director of Resources, following which the council reserves the right to modify eligibility criteria.

Combatting fraud

In order to ensure that Test and Trace Support Payments are not subject to potential abuse, all submitted applications will require a statutory declaration of truth, a statement regarding data processing and a recovery of funds statement. This declaration allows for the council, through the Corporate Anti-Fraud Team, to carry out post-payment checks in order to give greater assurance that the funds were claimed correctly. Furthermore, the declaration carries warnings which further allow the Council to consider taking criminal action against persons who have been found to have deliberately made false applications for the funding. It also allows for the recovery of funds which have been paid which should not have been.

The Award

It is intended that all applications will be processed within two working days of receipt of all required evidence and payments will be made via BACS only. Successful applications should expect to receive the funds in their accounts within 5 working days of the fully completed application.

As funding is limited, any discretionary award will be on a first-come-first-served basis. The council cannot commit to funding further discretionary applications once all available government funding has been allocated.

Taxation

These payments will be subject to income tax, but they will not be subject to National Insurance Contributions.