

Report of	Meeting	Date
Director (Customer and Digital) (Introduced by the Executive Members (Resources))	Executive Member Decision	21 October 2020

## COVID 19 TEST AND TRACE SUPPORT PAYMENT SCHEME

### PURPOSE OF REPORT

- To seek approval for the payment of Test and Trace Support Payments (TTSP) in line with Government guidance and the council's own procedure.

### RECOMMENDATION(S)

- The Executive Member for Resources approves:
  - payment of the mandatory Test and Trace Support Payments in line with current government guidance.
  - payment of the discretionary scheme as outlined at Appendix 1.
  - the process for administering the discretionary payment scheme in line with the government guidance and the council's own procedure as outlined in the Councils Test & Trace Support Payment Process.
  - A budget of £93,498.88 is approved to make payments and manage the scheme. This will be funded through Government funding detailed in the operational guidance.
  - That delegated authority is given to the Director of Customer & Digital, S151 Officer and Chief Executive to amend the process subject to any further announcements from Government. This will allow the council to respond to any changes as quickly as possible whilst ensuring compliance with Government and Council regulations.

### EXECUTIVE SUMMARY OF REPORT

- The Government have introduced financial support for individuals and their close contacts on low incomes and unable to work from home who have tested positive to enable them to self-isolate to stop the spread of the virus.
- The funding is provided by the Government and the administration of the scheme is to be carried out by local authorities. A process and a user guide have been drawn up in line with government guidance and the council's current processes.
- From 28 September 2020 individuals who have been contacted by NHS Test and Trace and advised to self-isolate and meet the eligibility criteria will be entitled to a payment of £500.

<b>Confidential report</b> Please bold as appropriate	Yes	No
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<b>Key Decision?</b> Please bold as appropriate	Yes	No
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## REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATION(S)

6. The Council are obliged to implement the mandatory scheme as directed by central government. The proposed criteria for the discretionary scheme, best provides financial support to those who may be ineligible for support from other sources and need it the most.
7. The Government has provided five versions of updated guidance within two weeks and so this report requests delegated authority to senior officers to make any necessary changes to the current process if required.

## ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED AND REJECTED

8. Alternative payment options were considered and discounted.
9. Applicants for the payments will not necessarily be registered in the Academy system which meant that not all payments could be made from Academy. There is also no direct correlation of the scheme with council tax. Advice was received from Capita not to use Academy to process the payments
10. The issue of prepaid cards was considered but this is open to misuse by payment recipients and does not provide the added anti-fraud check of receiving valid bank details from an applicant.

## CORPORATE PRIORITIES

11. This report relates to the following Strategic Objectives:

Involving residents in improving their local area and equality of access for all		A strong local economy	<b>X</b>
Clean, safe and healthy homes and communities		An ambitious council that does more to meet the needs of residents and the local area	<b>X</b>

## BACKGROUND

12. On 28 September 2020, the Government introduced the Test and Trace Support Payment Scheme (TTSP).
13. Individuals may be entitled to a TTSP or a discretionary payment of £500. This is to support people on low incomes who are unable to work from home if they are told to self-isolate by NHS Test and Trace and will lose income as a result.
14. The council is administering and managing the scheme on behalf of government and is responsible for the administration and making payments.
15. Government funding is being provided for the TTSP Scheme, administration costs and a discretionary fund which is a fixed amount.

## ELIGIBILITY

16. From 28 September 2020 eligible individuals are entitled to a TTSP or a discretionary payment of £500.
17. The scheme closes on 31 January 2021.

18. Individuals must satisfy each criterion.
19. There will be no right of appeal against the council's decision.

### **TTSP Mandatory Scheme**

20. The government have set out mandatory eligibility criteria for the TTSP Scheme. Individuals who:
  - a) 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
  - b) are employed or self-employed
  - c) are unable to work from home and will lose income as a result; and
  - d) 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.

### **TTSP Discretionary Scheme**

21. The Government have also set out mandatory eligibility criteria for the discretionary payments. Individuals who:
  - a) 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
  - b) are employed or self-employed; and
  - c) are unable to work from home and will lose income as a result.
  - d) 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
  - e) who are on low incomes and will face financial hardship as a result of not being able to work while they are self-isolating.
22. Local authorities can introduce additional criteria as long as they are in addition to the above.
23. In line with the government's intended principles it is proposed that the council's discretionary scheme is aimed at individuals:
  - a) Awaiting a decision on a Universal Credit award and/or the decision of a benefit appeal and or
  - b) Self-employed or employed
  - c) With property-related costs of rent or mortgage or outstanding liability for council tax for the property they occupy
  - d) With no recourse to public funds
24. Low income will be income in line with the benefit cap. This would be £20k for a family or couple and £13.4k for a single person. Joint income will be considered.

## **FUNDING**

25. Funding for the TTSP Scheme has been provided by the Government and distributed according to the MHCLG's COVID-19 Relative Need Formula. Chorley's proportion of the fund is £42k and will topped up or need to be repaid according to final spend.
26. The Government has provided £26,249.60 to enable the council to resource the administration of the funding scheme.
27. Funding for the discretionary scheme has also been provided by the Government and is cash limited. The fund is £25,000. This fund will not be topped up or reclaimed.
28. It is proposed that the awarding of discretionary payments is capped at the level of government funding. The Council will not approve or pay any awards after the point that funding has been fully allocated.

## **FRAUD, RISK AND ERROR**

29. Additional fraud and error guidance is to be issued along with post-payment verification checks.
30. Any individual caught falsifying records to gain a payment will be required to pay the funds back.
31. Any money recovered in this way can be kept by the local authority and put towards the cost of running the scheme.
32. A clear declaration has been added to the online form to gain agreement to this condition.
33. To combat fraudulent and duplicate applications the process includes a check of the unique NHS Test and Trace Account ID.
34. Applications will be processed by experienced housing benefit claim assessors.
35. Existing DWP systems will be checked to ensure applicants are in receipt of a qualifying benefit.
36. The NHS Contact Tracing and Advice Service (CTAS) software will be available for staff to check applicants have been contacted.
37. The payment process will follow the established creditor procedure.
38. The policy for the support payments is attached at Appendix 1. The operational user guide is attached at Appendix 2.

## **39. IMPLICATIONS OF REPORT**

40. This report has implications in the following areas and the relevant Directors' comments are included:

Finance	√	Customer Services	
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Human Resources		Equality and Diversity	
Legal	√	Integrated Impact Assessment required?	
No significant implications in this area		Policy and Communications	

## COMMENTS OF THE STATUTORY FINANCE OFFICER

41. All relevant services have created a process based on the latest government guidance that has been signed off by the Director of Customer & Digital, S151 and Chief Executive. This process has been checked by the council's internal audit service.
42. The Department of Health and Social Care on 30th September issued operational guidance for the implementation of the Test and Trace Support Payments. Within that guidance the distribution methodology for the allocation of the funding to local government was set out. The total funding allocated to Chorley Council is £93,498.88 that is broken down as follows:
- Test and Trace Payment £42,000 = 84 claims
  - Admin costs of both schemes £26,249.60
  - Test and Trace Discretionary Payment £25,249.28 = up to 50 claims

## COMMENTS OF THE MONITORING OFFICER

43. The proposed schemes (mandatory and discretionary) are in accordance with the requirements of the legislation. The mandatory scheme is directive and the council have no discretion in its implementation. The discretionary scheme fulfils objectives of supporting those in need.

ASIM KHAN  
DIRECTOR OF CUSTOMER AND DIGITAL

There are no background papers to this report.

Report Author	Ext	Date	Doc ID
Asim Khan	5448	21 October 2020	***

Following careful consideration and assessment of the contents of this report, I approve the recommendation(s) contained in Paragraph 3 of the report in accordance with my delegated power to make executive decisions.



Dated 19.10.20

**Councillor Peter Wilson**  
**Executive Member Resources**