

Cabinet Member Decision Note
Covid-19 Response – Urgent Decision
Test & Trace Support Payments

To: Cabinet Member for Adults & Health & Deputy Leader of the Council and Cabinet Member for Commercialisation, Education and Skills

Date: 5th October 2020

Author:	Director of Public Health & Head of Revenues & Benefits
Wards:	All
Parishes Affected:	All

1. Purpose and Reasons

- 1.1 This report seeks authorisation for the Council's approach to make Test and Trace Support payments to support those on low incomes who are unable to work and will lose income as a result and have been told to stay at home and isolate by NHS test and Trace.
- 1.2 In response to the Coronavirus pandemic, COVID-19, Central Government announced there would be payments made to individuals on low incomes and unable to work due to having to isolate. This will help ensure these individuals isolate and help reduce the spread of Coronavirus.
- 1.3 In accordance with Paragraph 16(h) of Rules of Procedure and Terms of Reference Overview and Scrutiny Committees (Part 4 of the Constitution) Call-in Procedure, His Worship the Mayor Councillor Perkins has agreed that this issue be treated as urgent as any delay likely to be caused by the call-in process would seriously prejudice the Council's or the public interests.

2. Recommended Action to be authorised by a Cabinet Member under Delegated Powers

Recommended that:

- 2.1 The Director of Public Health & the Head of Revenues & Benefits be authorised to:
 - 2.1.1 Adopt and publicise a Swindon Scheme to enable test and trace payments be made to low income individuals who have to isolate.
 - 2.1.2 To assess applications against the eligibility criteria as set out by the Government guidance and to produce eligibility criteria for a Swindon Discretionary Fund as soon as practicable.

Further information on the subject of this report can be obtained from Andy Stevens on telephone 01793 464607 or via email Astevens3@swindon.gov.uk

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2.2 The Corporate Director of Finance and Assets be authorised to make the payments as assessed using the funding provided by Central Government.

3. Detail

3.1 On the 25th September 2020 the Department of Health and Social Care issued guidance regarding the eligibility criteria for making Test and Trace Support payments. This guidance asked that Local Authorities put in place systems that will enable local residents to make applications and for payments of £500 to be made to those that are eligible by 12th October. The Department of Health and Social Care has stated Local Authorities will be reimbursed for making these payments. Given the deadline by which these payments have to be made, His Worship the Mayor has been approached to seek his permission that this decision be exempt from call-in.

3.2 To be eligible for the £500 payments individuals must meet all the following criteria:

3.2.1 Be instructed to self-isolate by NHS Test and Trace on or after 28 September 2020.

3.2.2 Applications must be made within no more than 14 calendar days after the date their period of self-isolation ended.

3.2.3 The individual has to be employed or self-employed and due to the nature of their work is unable to work from home.

3.2.4 They have to confirm that they will lose income as a result of having to isolate.

3.2.5 Be in receipt of one of the following benefits Universal Credit, Working Tax Credit, income-based Employment and Support Allowance, income-based Jobseeker's Allowance, Income Support, Housing Benefit and/or Pension Credit.

3.3 The guidance also asks that Local authorities also produce their own discretionary schemes to help low income residents who are not in receipt of one of the benefits mentioned in 3.2.5, but may be in the process of applying. Further guidance on this is to follow and the Director of Public Health and the Head of

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Revenues and Benefits will take this into consideration and produce a Swindon Discretionary Scheme. The Discretionary Scheme will ensure payments will only be made, which will be reimbursed by Central Government.

- 3.4 An online system is being implemented to ensure applicants provide all the required information and so that payments are made promptly. Customer Services staff will assist those that have difficulties making online applications.
- 3.5 Initially the scheme is set to run from 28th September 2020 until 31st January 2021, but will continue longer if funding is provided by Central Government.
- 3.6 The payments will be subject to Income Tax
- 3.7 Local authorities will not be required to provide a right of appeal against any decision not to award a payment, either for the main Test and Trace Support Payment or for applications to receive a discretionary payment. People who are turned down will not be eligible because they do not meet the criteria.

4. Alternative Options

- 4.1 The Council does not have to implement any of these changes, although it is expected to implement them in order to help low income households and help prevent the transmission of the coronavirus.

5. Consultation

- 5.1 The following Opposition and Minority Group Spokespersons / Ward Members have been consulted on the recommendations of the report and their responses are also summarised below:

Councillor Ray Ballman – I fully support the scheme and hope it will commence as soon as possible.

Councillor Kevin Small – I am happy to support the proposals, but would also like to see included urgent action for the setting up of a discretionary scheme so people do not lose out. Hopefully the Government will not end a claimant's Job Seekers Allowance if they cannot work, but if this happens can the Discretionary scheme support them please.

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Councillor Stan Pajak – Very supportive of the decision note on making test and trace payments to low income residents. This is essential if we are to succeed in the battle against coronavirus and its terrible consequences for the residents of Swindon.

Councillor Oliver Donachie – I have no objection to the proposal as laid out in the covering documents.

6. Implications, Diversity Impact Assessment and Risk Management

Financial and Procurement Implications

- 6.1 The Government will provide funding to meet the full estimated costs of delivering the Test and Trace Support Payment and the discretionary fund. This includes set-up, programme and administration costs.

Legal and Human Rights Implications

- 6.1 The council has power to make the payments in accordance with the Localism Act 2000. The Guidance provides mandatory criteria but also states that Local Authorities should also devise a discretionary scheme. Further guidance from the Department of Health and Social care will be provided in due course, although it is believed much of the criteria in the mandatory scheme will continue in the discretionary scheme. Any exercise of the powers and the discretion within the scheme will be exercised reasonably and with regard to the purpose of the guidance, which is for government, utilising local authority local knowledge to determine which low income residents asked to isolate will be supported, within the total value of funding provided by government. The guidance requires that the council operate processes to prevent fraudulent claims and verification of claims will be undertaken.

Climate Change Impact

- 6.2 The proposals would not bring a change in the service delivery and Officers believe that there is no expected effect on the Council's carbon footprint.

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All Other Implications (including Staff, Sustainability, Health, Rural, Crime and Disorder)

- 6.3 This will help low income households through a very difficult time and help reduce the transmission of Coronavirus. No adverse impacts have been identified.

Diversity Impact Assessment

- 6.4 No adverse Diversity impacts have been identified by the implementation of these payments and a Diversity Impact Assessment has been undertaken. Certain ethnic groups, vulnerable people and low income households may be more adversely affected by Coronavirus and so these payments may help with inclusion. For individuals with difficulties using the online system or language difficulties the Council's Customer Services team will provide telephone assistance in making applications.

Risk Management

- 6.5 Resources will be deployed to check that the applications are genuine and to verify that the person has been asked to isolate and that payment if made is to the right recipient. The Department of Health and Social Care have stated that Local Authorities will not be expected to repay any monies paid to fraudulent claimants where the required verification has been undertaken. The Council's Internal Audit team will also be involved with designing the system and help ensure appropriate checks are undertaken.
- 6.6 If the Council granted payments in excess of the amounts that Central Government will recompense there would be an additional burden on Council Taxpayers, but the verification of applications will ensure that only those that will be reimbursed will be paid.

7. Consultees

- 7.1 The Corporate Director of Finance and Assets (s151 officer) and Chief Legal Officer (Monitoring Officer) are consulted in respect of all reports.
- 7.2 His Worship the Mayor, Councillor Garry Perkins

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8. Background Papers

8.1 None

9. Appendices

9.1 Department of Health and Social Care - Test and Trace Support Payments Implementation Guide for Local Authorities

10. Declarations of Interest

Opposition and Minority Group Spokespersons / Ward Members

10.1 Opposition spokespersons / Ward Members are reminded to consider whether they have any known interests in any of the matters referred to in this Decision Note. If such an interest exists this should be declared to the Monitoring Officer (or Senior Committee Clerk), and they should take no part in the consideration of the Briefing Note and should refer the Briefing Note to their Group Leader.

Cabinet Member(s)

10.2 Cabinet Members are reminded to consider whether they have any known interests in any of the matters referred to in this Decision Note. If such an interest exists this should be declared to the Monitoring Officer (or Senior Committee Clerk), and they should take no part in the consideration of the Decision Note and should refer the Decision Note to the Leader of the Council instead for consideration.

11. Sign-off

11.1 The Cabinet Members are requested to respond with 5 days of the date of this report (by 10th October 2020).

11.2 The Cabinet Members are requested to indicate one of the following responses to the Recommendations set out in Section 2 of this report.

[to be signed electronically and redacted for publication]

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