

Report for: Cabinet Member Signing - Urgent Decision 19 October 2020

Item number: n/a

Title: Discretionary Scheme to support those self-isolating in Haringey during the Covid-19 pandemic

Report
Authorised by: Charlotte Pomery, Assistant Director Commissioning

Lead Officer: Florence Guppy, Strategic Lead Community Enablement

Ward(s) affected: All

Report for Key/
Non Key Decision: Key Decision

1. Describe the issue under consideration

- 1.1 The Department of Health and Social Care has recently published guidance to local authorities to deliver a Test and Trace Support Payment Scheme to cover the period 28th September to 31st January 2021. The Test and Trace Support Payment scheme is designed to support people on low incomes and who have been asked to self-isolate by NHS Test and Trace, if they will lose income as a result of self-isolating, and to encourage them to get tested if they have symptoms.
- 1.2 In this guidance, local authorities are permitted to develop a Discretionary Scheme setting out their approach to supporting people who are self-isolating during the Covid-19 pandemic but are not eligible for the Department of Health and Social Care's Test and Trace Support Payment as they are not in receipt of qualifying benefits or are not able to demonstrate their eligibility in the prescribed ways.
- 1.3 Both the national and local schemes are designed to support residents and other members of their household to self-isolate as restricting contact is an important measure to help stop the transmission of COVID-19 and avoid further economic and societal restrictions. This paper seeks approval of the Council's proposed Discretionary Policy, attached, in order for the discretionary scheme to become operational.
- 1.4 The Department of Health and Social Care's Test and Trace Support Payment Scheme (the Scheme) started on 28th September 2020 and local authorities are expected to have arrangements in place to administer the payments by 12th October 2020. The recommended decision is intended facilitate the discretionary payments arrangements under the Scheme. The decision and its implementation is therefore urgent and time critical.
- 1.5 As of 12th October, local residents are approaching the Council for support under the Scheme. Where residents find that they are not eligible for the Scheme, the Council still wishes to offer support within an agreed Policy framework to facilitate self-isolation and to slow the transmission of Covid-19. Given the rapidly growing incidence of Covid-19 in the community, with pressures now being felt on local

acute hospital settings, the Council wishes to facilitate residents who have been asked to self-isolate to do so and thereby to ensure that as few people as possible suffer financial hardship as a result of self-isolating. In the Council's view, it is desirable to set in place this measure urgently as one of several already being introduced to slow the spread of the virus and to reduce the risk of further community transmission.

2. Recommendations

2.1. It is recommended that Cabinet

2.1.1. Adopts the Self-Isolation Payment Discretionary Policy attached at Appendix 1.

2.1.2. Delegates authority to the Assistant Director Commissioning, in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Transformation and Public Realm Investment, to amend this policy to give effect to changes in legislation, statutory or non statutory guidance, or directives or instructions of a similar character issued by Government.

2.1.3. Agrees that this policy is subject to the availability of government funding and will terminate on 31st January 2021 unless terminated earlier or extended beyond this date by Cabinet / Cabinet Member decision.

3. Reasons for decision

3.1 The national Test and Trace Support Payment Scheme and the Discretionary Scheme is intended to minimise the risk of the spread of Covid-19 by ensuring that in requesting an individual to self-isolate, that individual does not suffer hardship as a consequence of not being able to work due to the need to self-isolate. The Government has issued 'The Test and Trace Support Payment Scheme: Implementation Guide for Local Authorities in England' (30th September 2020). The recommended Self-Isolation Payment Discretionary Policy is intended to give effect to the government's implementation guidance.

3.2 The Council recognises the conditions set out for the national scheme and welcomes the opportunity for local authorities to seek to supplement these conditions by establishing a discretionary scheme to meet local need. The Council also recognises that in making funding available to support such a Discretionary Policy, the Department of Health and Social Care has emphasised that the £90,000 available to Haringey will not be increased should demand exceed the funding available.

3.3 In adopting this Discretionary Policy, therefore, the Council wishes to ensure both that the pool of applicants is as wide as is possible, and that the dedicated resources made available by the government stretch as far as possible. For these reasons, the Council is proposing that the scheme enables a package of assistance including a cash payment to be granted as opposed to a single cash payment being the method by which to achieve that objective.

3.4 The Test and Trace Support Payment scheme started on 28th September 2020 and local authorities are expected to have arrangements in place to administer the

payments by 12th October 2020. Therefore, there is a need for an urgent decision to be taken on the recommendation under the Council's Special Urgency provisions in order to ensure that discretionary payments are made to eligible people who have been asked to self-isolate by the NHS Track and Trace system, and who will suffer financial hardship.

4 Alternative options considered

- 4.1 The first alternative option considered was not to develop a Discretionary Policy and merely to adopt the national scheme. This was discounted as it would have potentially left some Haringey residents, who are working and contributing to the local economy but are not in a position to claim qualifying benefits by dint of their immigration status for example, at the risk of financial hardship through self-isolating.
- 4.2 The second alternative option considered was to develop a Discretionary Policy which would mirror the national scheme in making a single cash payment to eligible applicants. This was discounted as central government has been clear that the funding available for this scheme is cash-limited, rather than demand led, and that therefore the local authority will need to manage demand from local residents for support to enable self-isolation. In order to maximise the number of residents who may be at risk of financial hardship who can be supported through this Scheme to self-isolate thereby reducing the risk of transmission of Covid-19, the Council believes that a more flexible scheme which stretches the resources to meet the potential demand is to be preferred.
- 4.3 The third alternative option considered was to develop a Discretionary Policy which would only support those able to evidence employment to the standards required in the national scheme. This has been discounted as the Council is aware of local residents working and contributing to the local economy who will suffer financial hardship as a result of self-isolating who are not able to evidence their employment to this standard.

5 Background

- 5.1 The Discretionary Policy attached at Appendix 1 sets out the details of the scheme to be applied in Haringey which will cover the period 28th September 2020 through to 31st January 2021 in line with the national scheme.
 - 5.1.1 The scheme will cover individuals who are employed, or self-employed but who are not in receipt of the qualifying benefits in the Test and Trace Support Scheme. These may include but are not limited to Residents with No Recourse to Public Funds (NRPF), Self-employed residents who have yet to submit a year's self-assessment and Residents who have a pending claim or current appeal to qualifying benefits. The scheme will also cover individuals who are unemployed and are not able to evidence receipt of qualifying benefits but for whom self-isolation poses significant financial hardship and/or who, without such support, would be unable to self-isolate.
 - 5.1.2 The scheme will award a package of direct support to a value of £400 with additional information, advice, guidance and support to ensure residents are supported holistically and household resilience is developed. The Council will

reserve the right to increase the support to a value of up to £500 in extraordinary circumstances where applicants meet the criteria of the Discretionary Scheme.

- 5.1.3 As set out in more detail in the Policy, the Council recognises the barriers faced by some residents in evidencing their employment status and accessing support for example and will be flexible in how information is brought forward, whilst recognising the need for such evidence to exist in order to qualify for the scheme.
- 5.1.4 As with the national scheme, the Council will pay eligible individuals within three working days of receiving their application. This will be a single payment, to the bank account matching the bank statement they have provided and in the name of the claimant.

6 Contribution to strategic outcomes

- 6.1 This Discretionary Policy helps meet the priorities and outcomes of Haringey's Borough Plan 2019-2023 and supports efforts to contain the spread of Covid-19 in the local community.

7 Statutory Officer Comments

7.1 Finance

- 7.1.1 This report is seeking to approve the adoption of a discretionary policy to make payments to individuals following the guidance issued for the government Test and Trace Support Payment Scheme.
- 7.1.2 The Department of Health and Social Care has made £260k of grant available to Haringey Council. The grant is made up three parts: £150,000 for programme costs for payments made to individuals who qualify under the government scheme; £20,000 towards administration of the scheme; and £90,090.56 for council discretionary payments for those asked to self isolate and would suffer financially but not fall within the government categories.
- 7.1.3 The grant for this scheme is cash limited and is sufficient to fund payments of £500 to 300 applicants who qualify under the government scheme and an estimated 225 payments of up to £400 under the discretionary policy.
- 7.1.4 The discretionary payment of up to £400 for the two weeks of self isolation is comprised of up to £300 housing support, £80 food support and £20 utilities support. It is noted that in exceptional circumstances payments of up to £500 may be made, and the full housing support may not be payable on other cases of shared accommodation.
- 7.1.5 There is a risk that demand for payments exceeds the grant funding available for both the main programme costs and those applying for discretionary payments.

7.2 Legal

- 7.2.1 The Department of Health and Social Care on 30th September issued the operational guidance titled 'The Test and Trace Support Payment Scheme: Implementation

Guide for Local Authorities in England' for the implementation of the Test and Trace Support Payments scheme. The guidance permits local authorities to make a £500 discretionary payments to eligible individuals. Authorities are also able to 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 in the guidance. The recommended decision is intended to facilitate the discretionary payment arrangement and is within the ambit of the government guidance. The Test and Trace Support Payment scheme started from 28 September 2020 and the Council is expected to have arrangements in place to administer payments by 12 October 2020. The decision and its implementation is urgent and time critical.

7.3 Procurement

7.3.1 There are no procurement implications arising from this report.

7.4 Equalities

7.4.1 The Council has a Public Sector Equality Duty under the Equality Act (2010) to have due regard to the need to:

- Eliminate discrimination, harassment and victimisation and any other conduct prohibited under the Act
- Advance equality of opportunity between people who share those protected characteristics and people who do not
- Foster good relations between people who share those characteristics and people who do not.

7.4.2 The three parts of the duty applies to the following protected characteristics: age, disability, gender reassignment, pregnancy/maternity, race, religion/faith, sex and sexual orientation. Marriage and civil partnership status applies to the first part of the duty.

7.4.3 The proposed decision is to adopt the Self-Isolation Payment Discretionary Policy which will terminate on 31st January 2021, unless terminated earlier or otherwise extended. The objective of this decision is to mitigate the financial, health and societal, impact of Covid-19 on Haringey residents who have been asked to self-isolate by NHS Test and Trace, and will lose income as a result of self-isolating, through provision of a discretionary payment to low-income residents in Haringey.

7.4.4 The decision will affect individuals and households on low income among whom older people, families with young children, BAME communities, and people with long-term health conditions are overrepresented. It is expected that the decision will lead to improved health outcomes for those self isolating, and for the wider community as this will help stop the transmission of COVID-19 and avoid further economic and societal restrictions. The decision will help to address the disproportionate health and financial impacts of COVID-19 on disadvantaged groups and groups protected under the Equality Act 2010.

7.4.5 As this policy requires applicants to submit evidence electronically, it is recognised that this requirement could disadvantage residents who do not speak English or residents who do not have access to scanning equipment. To mitigate this, the Council

is willing to accept other forms of evidence as appropriate this includes accepting photographs of documents wherever possible. The proposed decision therefore represents a proportionate means of achieving a legitimate aim.

- 7.4.6 The proposed decision therefore represents a measure to meet the needs of people with protected characteristics and therefore mitigate any new inequalities arising as a result of the impact of Covid-19.

8 Use of appendices

Appendix 1: Self-Isolation Grant Discretion Policy

9 Local Government (Access to Information) Act 1985