

MINUTES OF MEETING Urgent Decisions HELD ON Monday, 19th October, 2020, 10am

PRESENT:

Councillor Seema Chandwani – Cabinet Member for Transformation and Public Realm Investment

ALSO ATTENDING: Charlotte Pomery and Ayshe Simsek

55. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

There were no apologies for absence.

56. DECLARATION OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

57. APPROVAL OF DISCRETIONARY PAYMENT POLICY FOR THOSE SELF-ISOLATING DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

The Assistant Director for Commissioning outlined that The Department of Health and Social Care had 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 was 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.

In this guidance, local authorities were 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.

The Cabinet Member noted that both the national and local schemes were designed to support residents and other members of their household to self-isolate as restricting contact was an important measure to help stop the transmission of COVID-19 and avoid further economic and societal restrictions.

The resolutions were seeking approval of the Council's proposed Discretionary Policy, attached, in order for the discretionary scheme to become operational.

The Department of Health and Social Care's Test and Trace Support Payment Scheme (the Scheme) started on 28th September 2020 and local authorities were

expected to have arrangements in place to administer the payments by 12th October 2020. The recommended decision was intended facilitate the discretionary payments arrangements under the Scheme. The decision and its implementation was therefore urgent and time critical.

The Cabinet Member noted that, as of 12th October, local residents are approaching the Council for support under the Scheme. There had been 8 applicants put forward on Friday 16th of October and completion of their applications delayed until today.

The Cabinet Member noted that where residents find that they are not eligible for the Scheme, the Council still wished 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 wished 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 was 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.

The Cabinet Member considered the report and recommendations and noted that there had been no queries from her councillors colleagues on the proposed urgent decision. The Cabinet Member,

RESOLVED

- 1 To adopt the Self-Isolation Payment Discretionary Policy attached at Appendix 1.
- 2 To delegate 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.
- 3 To agree 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.

Reasons for decision

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.

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.

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.

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.

Alternative options considered

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.

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.

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.

The Chair of Overview and Scrutiny has agreed that the decision is both reasonable in all the circumstances and that it should be treated as a matter of urgency. The decision is deemed urgent in that any delay in implementation caused by the call-in procedure would seriously prejudice the Council's response to the COVID-19 pandemic and the wider public interest. The decisions will ultimately ensure that residents on low incomes can access funding to self-isolate and slow the transmission of the virus. The call-in procedure rules do not apply when the decision being taken is urgent or time critical as set out above. This is in accordance with Part 4, Section H Call-In Procedure Rules Paragraph 18 (a) and (b) of the Council Constitution.

CHAIR:

Signed by Chair

Date