Winchester City Council

Test and Trace Support Payments Scheme

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Definitions

The following definitions are used within this document:

‘Applicant’; means the individual making an application for a payment under this scheme;

‘Contact Tracing and Advice Service (CTAS)’; means the web-based system used by Public Health England to contact and trace individuals who are required to self-isolate;

‘CTAS Account ID’; means the unique number provided by Public Heath England through the Contact Tracing and Advice Service (CTAS);

‘COVID-19’; means the infectious disease caused by the most recently discovered coronavirus;

‘Housing Benefit’; means the benefit administered by local authorities under either the Housing Benefit Regulations 2006 or the Housing Benefit (Persons who have attained the qualifying age for state pension credit) 2006;

‘income-related Employment and Support Allowance’; means the means-tested Employment and Support Allowance administered by the Department for Work and Pensions under the Welfare Reform Act 2007;

‘income-based Jobseeker’s Allowance’; means the means-tested Jobseekers Allowance administered by the Department for Work and Pensions under the Jobseekers Act 1995;

Income Support’; means the means-tested Income Support administered by the Department for Work and Pensions under the Income Support (General) Regulations 1987;

‘NHS Test and Trace’; means the service provided to the National Health Service in England, established in May 2020 to track and help prevent the spread of COVID-19;

‘Pension Credit’; means the means-tested Guarantee or Savings Credit administered by the Department for Work and Pensions under the State Pension Credit Regulations 2002;

‘Qualifying benefit’; means any of the following benefits: Housing Benefit, Income support, income-based Jobseeker’s Allowance, income-related Employment and Support Allowance, Working Tax Credit or Universal Credit;

‘Self-isolation, Self-isolate’; means the legal requirement for an individual to self-isolate when told to by NHS Test and Trace or the NHS COVID-19 app and the legal duty to self-isolate under the Health Protection (Coronavirus, Restrictions) (Self-Isolation) (England) Regulations 2020 which came into force on 28th September 2020;

‘Test and Trace Support Payment Scheme’ (‘Standard Scheme’); means the Standard Scheme introduced by Government on 28th September and administered by Local Authorities;

‘Test and Trace Discretionary Payments Scheme’ (**‘Discretionary Scheme’);** means the Test and Trace Discretionary Payments Scheme which has been agreed by the Council and which *may* be available for individuals who are unable to access the ‘Standard Scheme’.

‘Universal Credit’ means the means-tested Universal Credit administered by the Department for Work and Pensions under the Universal Credit Regulations 2013;

‘Working Tax Credit’; means the means-tested benefit administered by Her Majesty’s Revenues and Customs under the Working Tax Credit (Entitlement and Maximum Rate) Regulations 2002.

1. Background to Self-Isolation and Test and Trace Support Payment Scheme

1.1 From 28th September 2020, Government has changed the legislation so that certain people will have to self-isolate due to the current COVID-19 crisis.

1.2 A package of legislative measures has been introduced both to ensure that those who are required to self-isolate, do so and, that those on a low income, receive a payment to assist their finances and to encourage compliance with the legislation.

1.3 The Council, together with Government, recognises that self-isolation is one of the most powerful tools for controlling the transmission of the Covid-19 virus and this scheme document details who will be eligible and how the Test and Trace Support Payment will be made. It also outlines the approach the Council will take in determining whether a payment will be made or not.

1.4 This document, which covers the **Standard Scheme**, should be read alongside the Council's Test and Trace Discretionary Support scheme which *may* be available to individuals who do not qualify for a payment under this scheme.

2. An overview of the Test and Trace Payment scheme (the standard scheme).

2.1 From 28th September 2020, individuals will be entitled to a Test and Trace Support Payment of £500 from the Council if they meet the eligibility criteria listed below:

(a) Make an application to the Council in the prescribed form and provide all the evidence and verification required;

(b) Are a resident within the Council's area;

(c) 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; or

(d) (From 8th March 2021 only) Are the parent or guardian of a child or young person in the same household and need to take time off work to care for them while they self-isolate. (This is limited to one parent or guardian per household for the child or young person's self-isolation period). For the purpose of this element a child or young person who:
- is aged 15 or under (or 25 or under with an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHC)) and normally attends an education or childcare setting; and
- has been told to self-isolate by NHS Test and Trace or by their education or childcare setting

(e) Are employed or self-employed;

(f) Are unable to work from home and will lose income as a result; and

(g) Are currently receiving any of the following ‘qualifying benefit’s:
- Universal Credit;
- Working Tax Credit;
- income-related Employment and Support Allowance;
- income-based Jobseeker’s Allowance;
- Income Support;
- Housing Benefit; or
- Pension Credit.

2.2 This particular scheme is designed for those individuals (applicants) who:
- meet the standard conditions 2.1 (a) to (e) above;
- are in receipt of one of the qualifying benefits listed in 2.1(f); and
- comply with the self-isolation requirements laid down by Government;

2.3 Where individuals meet all the requirements but are **not in receipt of a qualifying benefit (2.1 (f))**, no payment can be made; however, they may be able to apply for a discretionary payment under the Council’s Test and Trace Discretionary Payments Scheme which is available on the Council’s website www.winchester.gov.uk/benefits/are-you-eligible-for-a-test-and-trace-support-payment

2.4 Individuals will **not** be entitled to apply for both a payment under the Standard Scheme and under the Council’s Discretionary Scheme.

2.5 The Health Protection (Coronavirus, Restrictions) (Self-Isolation) (England) (Amendment) Regulations 2021 provide that, from 16 August 2021, the following individuals **will no longer** be legally required to self-isolate if they are identified by NHS Test and Trace as a close contact of a positive COVID-19 case:
- Those aged 18 or under; or
- Those who have been: (a) double vaccinated; and (b) who had their second COVID-19 vaccination at least two weeks prior to coming into close contact with the positive case.

3. Commencement of the scheme and scheme closure

Commencement

3.1 This scheme is available to all individuals who meet the eligibility criteria and who are told to self-isolate **on or after** 28th September 2020.

3.2 Individuals who are required to self-isolate **before** 28th September 2020 will not be eligible for a payment.

Scheme closure

3.3 At the present time, Government has stated that this Standard Scheme will be available until 31st March 2022.

4. Applying for a Test and Trace Support Payment (the Standard Scheme).

4.1 Individuals who are resident within the Council's area will be entitled to make an application for a Test and Trace Support Payment under this scheme. In all cases, the 'applicant' will be required to answer **all** of the questions asked and provide the information required by the Council in the specified timescale.

4.2 In order to receive a payment, all applicants must meet the full eligibility criteria, details of which are shown within Section 7 of this scheme. The applicant will be required to self-verify certain criteria and also confirm that they will comply with the self-isolation requirements set by Government.

4.3 Where the applicant fails to meet the eligibility criteria, they will not receive a payment and will be informed of this by the Council, either at the point of application or as soon as practicable thereafter.

4.4 Where the applicant is successful, the Council will notify them accordingly and make payment in line with the timings and methods shown in Section 8.

4.5 Applications can **only** be accepted from individuals who are resident in the Council's area.

4.6 Applications will be accepted from a third party in respect of any individual who meets the eligibility criteria for a payment. However, the following should be noted:

- The person making the application will need to provide evidence of their identity and also the reason why they are applying on behalf of another person; and
- That any payment **must** only be made by the Council to the person who is self-isolating. No payment will be made to a third party under any circumstance.

4.7 All applications shall be made online using the Council's dedicated webpage www.winchester.gov.uk/benefits/are-you-eligible-for-a-test-and-trace-support-payment
There are no paper or other types of application processes; however, should individuals experience difficulties in making any application, they should contact the Council on 01962 848539.

5. Time limits for making an application for a payment

5.1 No application for a payment can be made before the 28th September 2020 or for any individual who has been required to self-isolate before 28th September 2020.

5.2 Eligible individuals can apply for a Test and Trace Discretionary Payment at any time up to 42 days after their period of self-isolation (or that of their child or young person) has commenced. The Council will **not** accept any applications after this point.

6. Multiple claims within the household and from the same applicant

6.1 Individuals in the same household can each make an application to receive a Test and Trace Support Payment, if they each meet the eligibility criteria in full.

6.2 An individual may make an application more than once but only:

- If the individual is told to self-isolate multiple times; **and**
- they meet the eligibility criteria for each individual application; **and**
- the periods of self-isolation do not overlap.

6.3 The Council is mindful that this can be confusing for applicants and it will be essential, where multiple applications are made by an individual, to ensure correct eligibility. Therefore, a new application will need to be made for each distinct period of self-isolation.

7. The eligibility criteria and evidence required for the Test and Trace Support Payment (the Standard Scheme).

7.1 For payment to be made under this scheme, all of the criteria **must** be met. As with the application form itself, all evidence will need to be provided electronically. The Council provides facilities for all applicants to upload documents, evidence and photographs.

7.2 Where documentation is only held in 'hard copy' or paper form, the Council will accept digital images or photographs provided they show all the relevant information.

7.3 The Council will keep all information supplied by applicants, secure and in accordance with Data Protection legislation.

An individual must make a valid application to the Council in the prescribed form and provide all evidence and verification required

7.4 As mentioned in Section 4, a valid application must be made via the Council's website:
www.winchester.gov.uk/benefits/are-you-eligible-for-a-test-and-trace-support-payment
All applicants will be required to provide details sufficient to identify themselves, their address and to allow the Council to contact them including:

- Full name;
- Address;

- National Insurance Number;
- Telephone number; and
- Email address.

7.5 In addition to the above, all applicants will be required to submit a copy of their current bank statement(s) in order to:
- Verify that their income has reduced due to having to self-isolate (see later); and
- Provide details of the bank account number and sort code of the account into which a payment would be made.
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That they are a resident within the Council's area

7.6 The applicant will be required to verify that they have their sole or main residence in the Council's area. The Council will check other records held (and make other enquiries where appropriate) to determine this.

7.7 Where necessary, the Council will ask the applicant to provide additional evidence of residence.

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

7.8 A key requirement of the scheme is that the applicant has been instructed by the NHS Test and Trace to stay at home and self- isolate either because:
- they have tested positive for COVID-19 (coronavirus); or
- have recently been in close contact with someone who has tested positive.

7.9 All applicants will be required to provide the 8-digit unique ID number which has been provided to them by NHS Test and Trace.

7.10 For information, the NHS Test and Trace service uses the Contact Tracing and Advice Service (CTAS) to record information about people who have tested positive for COVID-19 and their contacts. The CTAS Account ID is an 8-digit identifier unique to each case (e.g. 3b1a3015c). Most individuals who test positive for COVID-19 or are a contact of someone who has had a positive test, will receive a digital invitation from the CTAS system to undertake the contact tracing journey.

7.11 All cases and contacts who have completed the contact tracing journey (including those who were ineligible for the digital invitation such as children or individuals with a landline number only) will receive a citizen advice message upon completion of the NHS Test and Trace questionnaire. The citizen message (sent either via a text message/email or postal service for people with no access to mobile phone or email) contains the 8-character Account ID.

7.12 The Council will check that the applicant has a valid Account ID produced by the Contact Tracing and Advice Service. Only this number will allow an application to be processed.

7.13 The Council will not make payment to anyone who does not have a valid notification (Account ID) from NHS Test and Trace (or in the case of a parents or guardians, details from the education / care setting). It should be noted that there is a legal duty to self-isolate which only applies to people who have been told to self-isolate by NHS Test and Trace.

7.14 The Council will not accept a notification from the NHS Isolation Note service. Where the applicant has provided this only, they will be given an opportunity to provide a valid NHS Test and Trace notification if they have one.

7.15 This scheme does not cover people who are self-isolating after returning to the UK from abroad, unless they have tested positive for COVID-19 (coronavirus) or have been instructed to self-isolate by NHS Test and Trace.

All applicants must be currently employed or self-employed

7.16 Only those applicants who are currently employed or currently self-employed will be entitled to claim a Test and Trace Support Payment. For the sake of clarity, this scheme requires all applicants to provide sufficient evidence of their current employment or self-employment status. In the case of employed applicants, full details of their employer must be given on the application form including contact numbers.

7.17 The Council will also require applicants to provide proof such as listed below:

Employed

- Current wages or salary slips;
- Employment contract; or
- Letter from the employer confirming current employment.

Self Employed

- Self-assessment form;
- Details of HMRC registration as self-employed;
- Current accounts; or
- Current accounts and trading statements

7.18 The above list is not exhaustive.

7.19 As this is an essential requirement in order for a Test and Trace Support Payment to be made, the applicant must satisfy the Council that they meet this criterion.

Are unable to work from home and will lose income as a result

7.20 All applicants will have to certify on the application form that they are:

- Unable to work from home; and
- Will lose income as a result.

7.21 The Council will need to be satisfied that any applicants meet these conditions in full.

Unable to work from home

7.22 The Council will require applicants to give details about the nature of their work and whether they can undertake this work from home.

7.23 Only those applicants that cannot work from home whilst self-isolating will meet the criteria and therefore, each applicant will not only be required to verify the fact, but also provide details of the reasons why this is the case, together with details of the type of work that they would normally undertake.

7.24 This criterion applies whether an applicant is either employed or self-employed and Government has provided a number of examples as follows:

- An applicant with a single job whose employer continued to pay them a full wage while they self-isolated would not meet the criteria;
- An applicant whose employer paid them a reduced wage while they self-isolated would meet the criteria (as they have lost income); and
- An applicant with two part-time jobs who continued to be paid a full wage by one employer, but whose other employer did not pay them while self-isolating, would be eligible.

Are currently receiving any of the qualifying benefits.

7.25 The final criterion is that the applicant **must be in receipt** of one of the following qualifying benefits:

- Universal Credit;
- Working Tax Credit;
- income-related Employment and Support Allowance;
- income-based Jobseeker’s Allowance;
- Income Support;
- Housing Benefit; or
- Pension Credit.

7.26 Applicants must be **actually** in receipt of the listed benefits. Each applicant will be required to verify that they are in receipt of one of the benefits and provide evidence of that to the Council. Evidence will need to be provided electronically but typically could be copies of bank statements showing the payments, confirmation of benefit entitlement or award /payment summaries (as in the case of Universal Credit). The Council will accept 'screenshots' of any online benefit account.

7.27 Where an applicant has yet to apply for a qualifying benefit; is awaiting a decision on a benefit; is currently appealing a negative decision; or is unable to apply for a qualifying benefit, they will not be entitled to a payment under the Standard Scheme and will be directed to apply for a payment under the Council's Test and Trace Discretionary Payment Scheme.

7.28 The Council will verify the current receipt of a qualifying benefit with the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) and Her Majesty's Revenues and Customs (HMRC) as appropriate.

8. How much grant will be paid, methods of payment and timings.

8.1 Where an applicant meets all of the eligibility criteria, a single payment of £500 shall be paid for each period of self-isolation. Payments will be made direct to the applicant's bank account within 3 working days, starting with the date of application.

8.2 Where further information or evidence is required from the applicant, the Council will look to make payment within 3 working days starting with the date when all of the required information is received.

8.3 Full details of the applicant's bank account must be supplied on the application form and this will be cross checked with the copies of the bank statements provided as part of the verification process.

8.4 As required by Government, payments can only be made to the applicant's bank account. No payments can be made to third parties whatsoever.

8.5 The Council is aware that in some cases, applicants may be overdrawn and may not be able to gain access to the payment. In these cases, the applicant may apply for protection. This protection is called a 'first right of appropriation of funds order'. More details of this can be obtained from the Councils website www.winchester.gov.uk/benefits/are-you-eligible-for-a-test-and-trace-support-payment or from Citizens Advice.

8.6 To validate the applicant's bank account details, the Council will need to share relevant information given to them with TransUnion. This will be used to ensure the support payment is paid to the correct bank account and to help prevent fraudulent use of support payments. **This is not a credit check and won't impact on the applicant's credit rating.**

For more information on how TransUnion may use the applicant’s data, please visit https://www.transunion.co.uk/legal-information/privacy-centre.
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9. Notification of Decisions

9.1 Applications will be considered by officers of the Council and all decisions made by the Council shall be notified to the applicant either in writing or by email.

10. Implications for other benefits and reductions

10.1 The Council has been advised by the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) that the Test and Trace Support Payment will be disregarded for the purposes of all means-tested benefits.

10.2 The Council has decided that any payment made under this scheme shall not affect entitlement to Council Tax Reduction.

11. Review of Decisions

11.1 There is no right of appeal or statutory appeals process. However, if an applicant is not satisfied with the initial decision, they may request a review of that decision by a senior officer

11.2 All such requests must be made in writing to the Council, within 3 days of the Council’s decision, and should state the reasons why the applicant is aggrieved with the decision of the Council. New information may be submitted at this stage to support the applicant’s request for a review. The request will be reconsidered as soon as practicable, and the applicant informed in writing or by email of the decision.

12. Complaints

12.1 The Council’s ‘Complaints Procedure’ (available on the Councils website) will be applied in the event of any complaint received about this scheme.

13. The Discretionary Test and Trace Payment Scheme and its relationship with the Standard Scheme

Standard Scheme

13.1 This 'Standard' Scheme has been determined by criteria set down by Government and is primarily aimed at all applicants who are working or self-employed; are unable to work from home and will therefore have a reduction in income and are in receipt of certain qualifying benefits (Universal Credit; Working Tax Credit; Income-related Employment and Support Allowance; income-based Jobseeker's Allowance; Income Support; Housing Benefit; or Pension Credit).

13.2 The receipt of one of those benefits is essential in order for a payment to be made.

Discretionary Scheme

13.3 The Council's Test and Trace Discretionary Payments Scheme is for any individual who meets all the required criteria **except** that they are not currently in receipt of a qualifying benefit. The reason for this could be, for example, that a claim for a benefit has not yet been made or that the individual, whilst normally resident in the UK, is unable to gain access to public funds.

13.4 Details of the Council's Test and Trace Discretionary Payment Scheme can be found at www.winchester.gov.uk/benefits/are-you-eligible-for-a-test-and-trace-support-payment

Claiming from the schemes

13.5 Individuals who are entitled to a payment from the Standard Scheme are unable to make a claim from the Council's discretionary scheme.

13.6 However, an applicant who is refused a 'Standard Scheme' payment on the basis that they meet all the criteria **except** that they are not in receipt of a qualifying benefit, will be directed to make an application for a discretionary payment.

14. Funding of the scheme

14.1 Government has confirmed that it will reimburse the Council for all payments correctly made under this scheme.

15. Taxation and provision of information to HMRC

15.1 The Council has been informed by Government that all payments under this scheme are taxable. However, the payments will not be subject to National Insurance contributions.

15.2 The Council does not accept any responsibility in relation to an applicant's tax liabilities and all applicants should make their own enquiries to establish any tax position.

15.3 All applicants should note that the Council is required to inform Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs (HMRC) of all payments made to individuals.

16. Managing the risk of fraud

16.1 Neither the Council, nor Government will accept deliberate manipulation of the scheme and fraud. Any applicant caught falsifying information to gain payments will face prosecution and any payment issued will be recovered from them and this may also include other recovery costs.

16.2 Applicants should note that, where a Test and Trace Support Payment is paid by the Council, details of each individual applicant will be passed to Government. Applicants should also note that the Council utilises a number of databases and Government systems to verify information in connection with any applications submitted.

17. Recovery of amounts incorrectly paid

17.1 If it is established that any Test and Trace Support Payment has been made incorrectly due to incorrect information provided to the Council by an applicant or their representative(s), the Council will look to recover the amount in full.

18. The Council's duties in relation to self-isolation

18.1 The duty to self-isolate is an important one. Ensuring infected individuals and their close contacts isolate is one of our most powerful tools for controlling transmission.

18.2 We know that someone with the virus can remain infectious to other people for up to 10 days after developing symptoms. It can take up to 14 days for individuals to develop coronavirus symptoms after they catch the virus, and in this time, they can unknowingly pass it on to others, even if they don't have symptoms.

18.3 Self-isolating helps prevent family, friends and the community from contracting coronavirus, as well as helping to protect the health and care system.

18.4 The changes announced by Government on 20th September 2020 and brought into force on 28th September 2020 (as well as providing for the Test and Trace Support payments scheme):

- introduce a new legal duty on individuals to self-isolate if someone tests positive or is identified as a contact by NHS Test and Trace;
- introduce penalties for those breaking the rules, including fines of at least £1,000 and up to a maximum of £10,000 for repeated or very serious offences; and

- place a new legal obligation on employers that they must not knowingly enable or encourage their employees to break the law on self-isolation.

18.5 As part of this, the Council has a duty if it becomes aware, either through post-payment verification checks or through other means, that someone has not self-isolated, to refer the case to the police.

18.6 The Council has been informed by Government that, in order to ensure compliance with the new legislation NHS Test and Trace call handlers will be increasing contact with those self-isolating. Police resources will be used to check compliance in highest incidence areas and in high-risk groups, based on local intelligence including acting on instances where third parties have identified others who have tested positive, but are not self-isolating.

18.7 The Council will continue to focus on the principle of encouraging, educating and supporting self-compliance.

19. Delegated Powers

19.1 The Council has implemented this scheme in line with Government requirements and guidance.

19.2 Officers of the Council will administer the scheme and the Section 151 Officer is authorised to make technical scheme amendments to ensure it continues to meet the criteria set by the Council and, in line with Central Government guidance.

20. Data Protection and use of data

20.1 All information and data provided by businesses shall be dealt with in accordance with the Council's Data Protection policy and Privacy Notices which are available on the Council's website.