



HARTLEPOOL BOROUGH COUNCIL

MANAGING DIRECTOR'S DECISION RECORD

Date of Decision: 25/06/21

Department: Resources and Development

Division: Finance

Officer Making Decision: Managing Director, in consultation with the Leader (or in his absence the Deputy Leader), Chair of the relevant Committee (or in his absence Vice Chair) and Monitoring Officer.

Subject / Description & Reason for Decision: The original decision approving the Council's Test and Trace discretionary scheme was approved 12.10.20. After meeting the standard scheme requirement, with the exception of being in receipt of benefit, the key local determinants of this scheme were:

- Have capital of less than £3,000;
- Have low income (in effect either receive no pay or sick pay during the isolation period); and
- Be able to prove financial hardship.

The discretionary scheme was amended from 1 January 2021 to:

- Have capital of less than £3,000;
- Have a loss of income (in effect either receive no pay, sick pay or demonstrable loss of income during the period)

The proposal removed the need to prove financial hardship. Financial hardship is, in effect, accepted if applicants have a low level of savings and loss of income.

The government provided an additional £170,000 for the discretionary scheme in March 2021. This funding coincided with a significant drop off in applications as overall Covid caseload fell.

The government has now extended Test and Trace financial support to September 2021. As part of communications they have advised that:

“if your council has made no changes to its discretionary scheme since funding was increased and less than 60% of your allocated funding has been spent, you should assess whether your eligibility criteria can be amended to support more people on low incomes in your area”

For context, the Councils current discretionary position is:

Grant to date: £248,000

Awards made: £83,500 (167 awards) – 34%

Remaining: £164,500 (equivalent of 329 awards)

The only scope the Council has to relax its rules is with regard to the capital/savings threshold. Whilst initially our threshold was high, a number of Authorities have now increased their threshold.

Advice from DHSC is that there needs to be some form of criteria that represents financial hardship, but that this can be achieved by increasing the savings threshold.

It is therefore proposed to increase this threshold to £10,000. Savings above this level will still be considered where a clear financial hardship can be demonstrated. This threshold will become entirely self-certified.

In practice this may only have a small impact on the number of discretionary claims paid, but by increasing this threshold it may:

- Increase the number of eligible claimants and so encourage greater compliance with isolation rules;
- Reduce admin time of having to review bank statements. It will purely become self-certified; and
- Reduce the number of applicants who “give up” on the process as they are reluctant to have the LA examine their financial position.

It is not possible to re-evaluate the claims that have been rejected since the launch of the scheme since the outcome of these cases has been logged with the DHSC.

The amended criteria will come into force from the date of this decision record.

Type of Decision:	In accordance with Article 12 – 12.3 - the decision is not defined as a Key decision for the following reason:- The Expenditure is inevitable as a result of the Government providing a Section 31 grant ('New Burden' Funding) to help fund the impact of specific legislative commitments where there is no in year cost, or future commitment for the General Fund. Details of any Section 31 grants and the commitments which need to be funded will be reported to the Finance and Policy Committee and the relevant Policy Committee as soon as is reasonably practicable thereafter.	
Nature of Delegation Being Exercised:	Constitution Reference – CE15 – urgent decisions normally reserved to a Committee. The Managing Director (or in his/her absence the Director of Resources and Development) may take a decision normally reserved to Full Council or a Committee where: (a) Failure to take the decision quickly would, or would be likely to, harm the interests of the Council and the public. (b) The decision is so urgent that it cannot wait until the next meeting of the Committee at which the decision would normally be taken	
Alternative Options Considered & Rejected:	Withdrawing the savings threshold completely. However advice from DHSC was that this should be raised rather than withdrawn.	
Any Declared Register of Interest	No If Yes, specify:	(delete as appropriate)

Signatures for retained copy only

Managing Director – Denise McGuckin

Decision made in consultation with:

Leader of the Council - Cllr Shane Moore

Chief Solicitor and Monitoring Officer – Hayley Martin