**Hartlepool Borough Council**

**Test and Trace Discretionary Payments Scheme**

**Updated August 2021**

1. **Background**
	1. The Government announced that, from 28 September 2020, in England there is a new legal duty on anyone who tests positive for COVID-19, or are identified by NHS Test and Trace as a close contact, to self-isolate.
	2. The Government has provided funding for a new Test and Trace Support Payment Scheme for people on low incomes who are unable to work while they are self-isolating because they cannot work from home.
	3. The eligibility of the Standard Test and Trace Support Payment is defined by Government. This includes that an individual be currently receiving, or living with a partner who is receiving, Universal Credit, Working Tax Credit, Income-based Employment and Support Allowance, Income-based Jobseeker’s Allowance, Income Support, Housing Benefit and/or pension Credit.
	4. Where an applicant does not receive any of these qualifying benefits, but does meet all of the other criteria, they may be considered for a discretionary payment provided they can demonstrate financial hardship as a result of not being able to work whilst self-isolating.
	5. The scheme will run until 30 September 2021, subject to any further Government guidance to the contrary.
2. **Scheme Expansion – Parent and Guardian**
	1. The Government introduced a new Parent and Guardian scheme from the 8 March 2021. Subject to meeting the criteria for caring responsibilities as defined by that scheme, the Council’s discretionary scheme will be expanded to allow for a discretionary payment provided the applicant can demonstrate financial hardship as a result of not being able to work whilst caring for a child or young person self- isolating. A discretionary payment will be considered where the benefit criteria of the main parent and guardian scheme is not met.
3. **Criteria**
	1. As of 16th August 2021, fully vaccinated adults are no longer required to self-isolate is identified as a contact by NHS Test and Trace. This means that they are no longer eligible for the support payment.
	2. Children and young people under the age of 18 are no longer required to isolate if they have been identified as a contact.

* 1. To be eligible for a £500 discretionary support payment through the main scheme, you must be resident within the Hartlepool Borough Council area and fulfil the following criteria at the time of the notification:
* You have been told to self-isolate by NHS Test and Trace or via the NHS COVID-19 app, because you've tested positive for COVID-19; or
* You have been told to self-isolate by NHS Test and Trace or the NHS COVID-19 app because you have been identified as a close contact of someone who has tested positive, and are not fully vaccinated; and
* You have responded to messages received from NHS Test and Trace in which you have provided all relevant information including contact details;
* You are employed or self-employed;
* You are unable to work from home and will lose income as a result;
* You have savings of less than £10,000 and are facing financial hardship (this shall be self-certified);
	1. Applicants via the Parent and Guardian route will have to meet the criteria as set out in that scheme, namely:
* Be 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;
* Be employed or self-employed;
* Be unable to work from home while undertaking caring responsibilities and will lose income as a result; and
* You have savings of less than £10,000 and are facing financial hardship (this shall be self-certified);
* Be the parent or guardian of a child or young person who has tested positive for COVID-19 and 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;
* Be the parent or guardian of a child or young person who has been identified as a close contact of someone with COVID-19 (by NHS Test and Trace or by their education or childcare setting or the NHS COVID-19 app), is aged 18-25, is not fully vaccinated and has an EHC Plan.

3.3 People who have no recourse to public funds will be eligible for this scheme subject to all other eligibility (listed above) being met.

3.4 Full time University students and those in higher education are excluded from this scheme, unless significant hardship can be demonstrated.

3.5 The Council reserves the right to change the eligibility criteria during the life of the scheme in the light of the funding position.

1. **Application**
	1. Applications for the Discretionary Scheme payment will be identified from the main or Parent and Guardian Test and Trace Support Payment application. A separate application is not required.
	2. Applications will be accepted from a third party in respect of any individual who meets the eligibility criteria for payment. The third party will be required to provide evidence of their identity and to confirm the reason why they are applying on behalf of another person. Payment will only be made to the person who is self-isolating or is caring for a child or young person who is self-isolating. No payment will be made to a third party applicant.
	3. Applications should be made via the link on the main webpage.
	4. A telephone process is available for those unable to access digital services. Applicants should call 01429 284188 if this service is required, or support is required to complete the online application form. Translation support is available if required.
	5. The Council may request any information or evidence it reasonably requires to support the decision making process.
	6. Eligible individuals can apply for a discretionary payment up to 42 days after their period of self-isolation begins. No applications will be accepted after this point.
	7. For the main scheme, individuals in the same household can each make an application to receive a discretionary payment, if they each individually meet the eligibility criteria in full.
	8. For the parent and guardian scheme, only one application per household can be made per child or your person isolation period. No overlap of claims can be made. For example, should a second child be required to isolate during the first child’s isolation period, no additional payment will be made. However, should a second child, or indeed the first child be required to isolate at a future date, a second application is allowed.
2. **Assessment Process**

5.1 The Council will undertake all necessary checks to verify the application in order to be satisfied that applicants meet the criteria in full. This may include contact with the Department of Work and Pensions, the applicant’s employer for verification purposes, HMRC for tax purposes and NHS Test and Trace to confirm isolation status. For the parent and guardian scheme this will include contact with the child’s education or care setting.

5.2 Applicants will be informed of the outcome of the application process.

5.3 There is no statutory appeal process for the discretionary scheme. The Council will operate an independent internal review process where an applicant is dissatisfied with the decision.

5.4 Any such requests should be lodged in writing with the Council within 3 days of the original decision, clearly stating the reasons for their disagreement, and providing any additional information to support the application where relevant. Applications should be lodged via the following e-mail address:

benefitstestandtracesupport@hartlepool.gov.uk

5.5 The application will be reconsidered as soon as practicable, and the applicant informed of the outcome of the review.

1. **Payment**
	1. Where the applicant meets all of the eligibility criteria for a discretionary payment, the £500 will be payable as one lump sum within 3 working days of an approved application.
	2. The Government has stated the payment will be subject to income tax. The payment will not be subject to National Insurance contributions and will not be taken into account for Benefit purposes.
	3. The Council accepts no responsibility in relation to applicant’s tax liabilities. Applicants should make their own enquiries to establish their tax position as appropriate.
2. **Fraud and failure to self-isolate**
	1. Any applicant falsifying information to gain payments may face prosecution and any payment issued will be recovered from them. This may also include recovery costs.

* 1. Similarly is it is established that payment has been made incorrectly due to misrepresentation or incorrect information provided to the Council, the Council will look to recover the amount in full.
	2. The Council has a duty, if it becomes aware that an individual in receipt of this payment has failed to self-isolate, to refer the case to the police. This may result in recovery action against payments made.
1. **Data Protection**

8.1 All information and data provided by the applicant, or their representative will be kept secure and dealt with in accordance with the Council’s Data Protection Policy and Test and Trace Privacy Notice.