

Selby District Council

Leader Urgent Decision
Paper



To: Leader of the Council
Date: 11 February 2021
Ward(s) Affected: All
Authors: Tammy Fox, Revenues & Benefits Manager,
Councillor Cliff Lunn, Lead Councillor for Finance
and Resources
Lead Executive Member:
Lead Officer: Karen Iveson, Chief Finance Officer

Title – Test & Trace Support Payment Discretionary Scheme Funding

1. Summary

- 1.1 This report provides an update on the Test & Trace Support Payment Scheme and proposes the diversion of £50k from surplus fund from local council tax support to extend the Council's discretionary funds. From the 28 September 2020 the government has put into place a legal duty for people to self-isolate if they test positive for Covid-19 or are contacted by NHS Test and Trace, with fines for those who break the rules. To support those on low incomes who are unable to work while self-isolating they also introduced a £500 Test and Trace Support Payment.
- 1.2 Central Government set criteria for the £500 payments but also asked authorities to have a discretionary scheme in place for payments to those who do not fulfil the conditions of the Standard scheme. Funding for the Discretionary scheme would be limited and any spend beyond the allocation would not be met. In early November 2020, applications up to the funding limit were granted. In mid-January further funding was allocated to the authority and the scheme was reopened.
- 1.3 The Department for Health and Social Care (DHSC) also announced that the support payment scheme would be extended from the original end date of 31 January to 31 March 2021. The further funding we have been given will shortly be exhausted again and the authority is proposing to use other funding from central government to keep the scheme open.

2. Recommendations

- 2.1 That as the matter is urgent, due to putting in place arrangements for Covid-19, the Leader agrees that:
 - i. An additional £50,000 of funding from the COVID 19 Council Tax Support Hardship fund is moved to continue the Discretionary Test & Trace Support Payment Scheme for a further period.

3. Background

- 3.1 It is recognised that self-isolation is one of the most powerful tools for controlling the transmission of COVID-19. The Test & Trace Support Payment is to ensure those low incomes are able to self-isolate without worry about their finances.
- 3.2 The Standard scheme is for those in receipt of working age benefits who fulfil the criteria to receive a payment and is fully funded by DHSC. The Discretionary Scheme is for all other applicants who fulfil the main scheme criteria but are not in receipt of working age benefits and who are facing financial hardship, each authority is given an allocated limited amount for this scheme.

4. The Report

4.1 Update on current position

4.1.1 At the start of the schemes we received enough funding to pay 35 applications for the discretionary amount, this ran out in early November and unfortunately we had to close the scheme. The DHSC has recently recognised that funding for the Discretionary scheme was too low and has given further funding to local authorities, we received enough to pay a further 23 applicants in the middle of January.

4.1.2 To date we have received 410 applications for both schemes, we have paid 126 applicants the Standard scheme and 57 applicants the Discretionary Scheme. The Discretionary scheme has nearly been exhausted once again. The District has seen high COVID case numbers in recent weeks leading to a high volume of applications.

4.2 Proposal for additional funding

4.2.1 At the beginning of the 2020/21 financial year local authorities received funding to provide a COVID hardship scheme to assist working age Council Tax Support claimants with a £150.00 grant towards the costs of their Council Tax. All existing claimants were awarded the £150.00 and new claimants throughout the year.

4.2.2 The authority received £523,000 for this and to date we have used £348,000 of this funding for hardship payments. We estimate a further £30,000 would be required to cover any new claims to the end of the financial year, this leaves approx. £145,000 in funding remaining. The guidance on this funding was for general welfare assistance and hardship due to COVID-19.

4.2.3 We therefore propose to allocate an amount of £50,000 from this fund to continue Discretionary payments for the Test and Trace support scheme. The need is vital to encourage applicants to self-isolate which will assist the District in the nationwide effort to drive down COVID-19 case numbers.

5. Risks

5.1 Legal

5.1.1 The COVID-19 Council Tax Hardship fund advised at a minimum the authority should provide a £150.00 grant to all working age CTS claimants and the authority has maintained this. Any remaining funding is for the authority to decide on spend based on its own priorities.

5.2 Financial

5.2.1 There is no financial risk to the authority as the funding for the hardship scheme has already been received. It is not proposed to use the full surplus for the Test and Trace Discretionary Support scheme so the flexibility remains to use the fund for other potential needs.

6. Conclusion

6.1 The Leader of the Council is requested to approve the action in this report to agree continues use of available funding for the Discretionary Test and Trace Scheme.

Contact Officer:

Tammy Fox – Revenues & Benefits Manager

tfox@selby.gov.uk

Decision Maker

Leader	Yes
Officer Delegated Decision	Yes for individual payment