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**HERTSMERE BOROUGH COUNCIL**

**Covid 19 – Local Authority Discretionary Test and Trace Support Payment Policy**

**Background**

From 28th September 2020, the government announced that individuals would be entitled to a Test and Trace payment of £500. This is to support people on low incomes who are unable to work from home if they are told to self-isolate by NHS Test and Trace and will lose income as a result.

These payments are designed to help ensure people who have tested positive for COVID-19 and their close contacts self-isolate for the required period to stop the onward spread of the virus. They are also designed to encourage individuals who are eligible for this payment to get tested if they have symptoms. This is important to help stop the transmission of COVID-19 and avoid further economic and societal restrictions.

The scheme will last until 31st January 2021

**Eligibility**

The government have set the criteria for who is eligible for the scheme. However, because this may not reach all those who suffer financial hardship because they are forced to self-isolate, there is additional funding to make discretionary payments to those not eligible for the Test and Trace payments.

The £500 Test and Trace Support Payment is restricted to people who:

* 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;
* are employed or self-employed;
* are unable to work from home and will lose income as a result;
* are currently 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.

The Discretionary payments will be for those who:

* 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;
* are employed or self-employed;
* are unable to work from home and will lose income as a result; and
* **Are not** 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
* Have **net** earnings of £500 or less. In this instance, net earning means gross pay less NI, Tax and any pension contribution
* Savings of less than £16,000

The discretionary scheme is aimed at people on low incomes and for each claim, the council will need to be satisfied that there has been financial hardship due to the loss of the income. This **may** include those:

* without recourse to public funds
* awaiting a benefit decision or the outcome of a benefit appeal
* that cannot claim a qualifying benefit because their partner is working
* with a disability related benefit not listed above
* in receipt of Council Tax Support

If all other criteria are met, the key factor in determining applications will be whether financial hardship has been suffered. Applicants will be requested to evidence financial hardship and may be required to provide details such as household income, bank statements and employment status.

Due to the funding for the discretionary scheme being limited the Council will assess the level of financial hardship for each application and will make awards in the most deserving cases and not all applications will be successful.

**Level of Discretionary Award**

If you are successful in your application you will be awarded £500

**Funding**

The council has received government funding of £37,500 and has secured a further £160,000 via the Public Health Board (Hertsmere’s allocation from a Hertfordshire wide bid of £2 million) so the council is hopeful to reach all applicants who meet the criteria. The council will not make any awards after this has been spent and once these funds have been depleted no further awards can be made. The council will monitor the amount of discretionary awards made for the duration of the scheme.

**Decisions**

This policy was approved by Sajida Bijle, Managing Director under emergency powers on 29 January 2021 and will be implemented by officers under the delegated authority of this policy.

The decisions will be final and there is no further appeal mechanism.

**How to Claim**

The online form can be found [here](https://www.hertsmere.gov.uk/Health--Wellbeing/Financial-support-when-self-isolating.aspx)