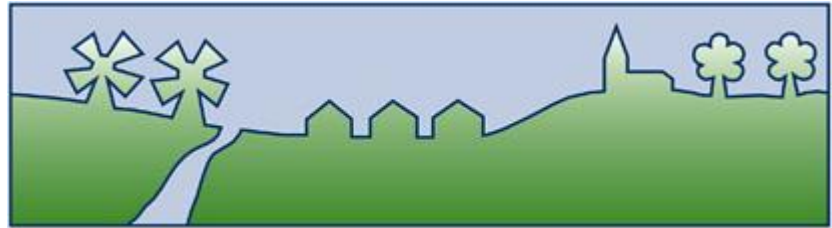




Department
of Health &
Social Care



MID SUSSEX
DISTRICT COUNCIL

Test and Trace Support Payments: Discretionary Scheme Guidelines for Mid Sussex DC

1. Purpose of this document

This guidance sets out the guidelines for Mid Sussex District Council on helping people in their area to claim the discretionary Test and Trace Support Payment.

2. Test and Trace Payments: an overview

From 28th September 2020, individuals may be entitled to a Test and Trace Support Payment of £500 if they meet all of the following criteria:

- 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
- Will face financial hardship as a direct result of self-isolating.

Test and Trace Discretionary Support Payments

Individuals that meet all the criteria for the test and trace payments with the exception of one of the qualifying benefits (e.g. who are not currently receiving Universal Credit, Working Tax Credit, income-related Employment and Support Allowance, income-based Jobseeker's Allowance, Income Support, Housing Benefit and/or Pension Credit) will be considered for a £500 discretionary payment if they are determined to be in 'financial hardship'.

Financial hardship is determined by factors such as the individual:-

- is likely to experience debt issues - for the purposes of core living expenses - as a result of requirement to self isolate;
- is unable to afford the essentials for living during the period of isolation; and
- has no access to savings or other financial help from relatives to assist during this period.

If this is determined, as a part of the process officers will also need to check to see if they are entitled to any qualifying benefits if they apply for a discretionary Test and Trace Support Payment. The individual applying would also need to agree to be referred by the Council to undertake free independent debt advice.

This discretionary payment is designed to support people on low incomes who are not in receipt of the listed benefits, who will lose income as a result of self-isolating, and to encourage them to get tested if they have symptoms. This is important to help stop the transmission of COVID19 and avoid further economic and societal restrictions. The scheme will last until 31st January 2021. No further applications will be accepted after 31st January 2021.

These discretionary payments will be made available from 28th September 2020, and Mid Sussex District Council has arrangements in place to administer them from the 12th October 2020. Someone told to self-isolate on or after 28th September 2020 (but before the scheme is operational in their local authority) will need to be able to make a backdated claim for payment.

To mirror the National scheme, each award must be for a flat rate of £500 per successful claim. Payments will be made until funding from the Government has been fully utilised or the Government has closed the scheme. The current closing date is 31st January 2021.

3. Eligibility for payments

Backdating

Eligibility for the Test and Trace Support Payment, will be for people who are told to self-isolate on or after 28th September 2020 and who meet the relevant eligibility criteria.

Mid Sussex District Council will not accept applications from people told to self-isolate before 28th September 2020, even if the period of self-isolation continues after 28th September 2020.

Applications from members of the same household

People in the same household can each make an individual application to receive the payment, if they each meet the eligibility criteria.

Multiple claims

Individuals can claim more than once (if they are told to self-isolate multiple times), as long as they meet the eligibility criteria for each individual claim and their periods of self-isolation do not overlap. Mid Sussex District Council will keep a record of individuals who make multiple claims to guard against potential fraud.

Applications made after someone's period of self-isolation has ended

Eligible individuals can make a claim up to 14 days after their period of self-isolation ended. Mid Sussex District Council is not allowed to accept applications after this point.

Third-party applications

Applicants can apply on behalf of someone else. However, the £500 must be paid into a bank account in the name of the person for whom the application is being made (so, for example, if someone applied on behalf of a parent, the payment would be made into the parent's bank account).

Applicants with other support needs

As part of the information available on the online application form and in the design process, Mid Sussex District Council will reference applicants to any other local support that is available for people who have been instructed to self-isolate, such as food packages, welfare benefits and other financial assistance.

Applicants who are self-isolating who haven't been told to self-isolate by NHS Test and Trace

Mid Sussex District Council is not allowed to approve applications for anyone who does not have a valid notification from NHS Test and Trace. The legal duty to self-isolate that comes into force on 28th September 2020 applies only to people who have been told to

self-isolate by NHS Test and Trace. This means it is important that people who have tested positive share accurate information about their recent contacts with NHS Test and Trace.

The NHS Covid-19 App

Anyone who is notified through the NHS Covid-19 app that they should self-isolate is strongly encouraged to do so. However, there is no legal duty to do so because the privacy and anonymity protections on the app mean that it does not collect any personal details. This also means that eligibility for the Test and Trace Support Payment scheme cannot be confirmed via the App. To be eligible for the scheme a person **must** have been contacted by a human tester working for NHS Test and Trace, in addition to meeting the other criteria set out above.

Applicants who are quarantining after returning to the UK

The Test and Trace Support Payment scheme does not cover people who are self-isolating after returning to the UK from abroad, unless they have tested positive for coronavirus or have been instructed to self-isolate by NHS Test and Trace.

Funding Pot

As the funding pot for discretionary payments is very cash limited, when the funding has been exhausted no further discretionary Test and Trace Support Payment applications will be considered. Mid Sussex District Council will advise accordingly if this is the case.

4. Application process

Mid Sussex District Council will put arrangements in place to process and verify applications, issue payments to successful applicants and prevent and detect fraud.

Mid Sussex District Council has its own online application system. The online form for Mid Sussex District Council is at <https://midsussex.grantapproval.co.uk>.

To apply, applicants will complete an online form (a telephone application is available upon special request where the applicant has no access to the internet) and provide Mid Sussex District Council with:

- A notification from NHS Test and Trace asking them to self-isolate; and
- A bank statement; and
- Proof of employment or, if they are self-employed, evidence of self-assessment returns, trading income and proof that their business delivers services which cannot be undertaken without social contact; and
- Evidence that earned income will reduce; and

- A statement of the Financial Hardship they face.

Once this evidence has been verified, if the applicant meets all the criteria and the applicant qualifies, Mid Sussex District Council will pay the applicant £500. This payment should be made within three working days of verifying an eligible application.

Accessibility requirements

Mid Sussex District Council will ensure accessibility of forms for citizens across languages and disabilities.

How will people provide evidence?

As applicants will be self-isolating at home, Mid Sussex District Council has provided an online claim form that allows applicants to upload their evidence electronically wherever possible. It is the responsibility of Mid Sussex District Council to ensure data security and that evidence provided will be retained in line with our local policies.

As some applicants will not have access to scanning equipment while they self-isolate, Mid Sussex District Council will accept photographs of documents wherever possible.

5. Pre-payment checks

Mid Sussex District Council will carry out three main pre-payment checks. These are to verify that each applicant:

- Has been told to self-isolate by NHS Test and Trace and has engaged with the service to complete the full contact tracing journey; and
- Is employed or self-employed and will lose income because they cannot work from home; and
- Will face financial hardship as a direct result of having to self-isolate.

Checking that an applicant has been told to self-isolate by NHS Test and Trace

Only people who have been told to self-isolate by NHS Test and Trace can claim the Test and Trace Support Payment. To check this, Mid Sussex District Council will use data provided from the Contact Tracing and Advice Service (CTAS) system (see below).

Applicants may try to provide a notification from the NHS Isolation Note service rather than NHS Test and Trace. If this happens, Mid Sussex District Council will not reject their application, but give them an opportunity to provide a valid NHS Test and Trace notification if they have one.

In order to be eligible for the payment, since 27 November 2020 local authorities have received an additional instruction from central government that all applicants must have engaged with the NHS Test and Trace Service before any payment can be made. Mid Sussex District Council will be able to verify that this criterion has been met via the web-based PowerBI based Eligibility Checker. This means that all applicants must ensure that they have completed all steps of the NHS Test and Trace contact tracing 'journey' before they can be considered eligible.

Checking that an applicant is employed or self-employed and will lose income because they cannot work from home

The application process will ask applicants about the nature of their work, whether they are employed or self-employed, and whether they can do this work from home. These questions will be asked before applicants are asked to confirm whether they will lose income while self-isolating.

For applicants who are self-employed, Mid Sussex District Council will confirm they are satisfied with the evidence of self-assessment returns and trading income provided by the applicant, before considering loss of income. If more income is required, it will be requested from the applicant.

Checking that an applicant will lose income because they cannot work from home

The application form will ask applicants to confirm both that they cannot work from home while they are self-isolating and that they will have a reduction in earned income because they are self-isolating.

As long as someone meets the other eligibility criteria and is losing income because they have been told to self-isolate and cannot work from home, they are eligible. So, for example:

- Someone with a single job whose employer continued to pay them a full wage while they self-isolated would not be eligible.
- Someone whose employer paid them a reduced wage while they self-isolated would be eligible (they have lost income).
- Someone 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.

Requesting further evidence

If Mid Sussex District Council has not received all the required evidence in order to carry out the relevant pre-payment checks, they will offer the applicant the opportunity to provide

further information, but only where there is a possibility that the applicant may be able to show that the criteria have been met. Mid Sussex District Council will not be required to do this where it is clear from the initial application that one or more of the criteria has not been met.

6. Obtaining a CTAS number

The NHS Test and Trace service uses a web-based tool called 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 a 8-character identifier unique to each record on the web tool (e.g. 4a2c204a).

Most citizens 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 web tool to undertake the contact tracing journey. The invitation message (sent either via a text message or email) contains the 8-character Account ID.

All cases and contacts who complete 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.

Mid Sussex District Council will use the web-based PowerBI based Eligibility Checker to check whether an applicant for a £500 Test and Trace Support Payment has a CTAS number.

7. Making payments

Mid Sussex District Council will pay eligible individuals within three working days of verifying their received application. Payments will be made up front, as a single payment, to the bank account matching the bank statement they have provided, via BACS.

Applicants who are overdrawn

Applicants may be able to exercise their first right of appropriation on the £500 Test and Trace Support Payment, so that their bank does not use it to pay their overdraft if they are overdrawn. More information about this can be found by visiting the web address below.

[Money Advice Hub - Right of Set-off & First Right of Appropriation](#)

Appeals

Mid Sussex District Council will not provide a right of appeal against any decision not to award a discretionary Test and Trace Support Payment. This is the same as applications made under the National scheme. People who are turned down will not be eligible because they do not meet the criteria.

However, where possible, the Government have requested that local authorities should work with applicants to make sure they have provided the necessary evidence to support a successful application. For instance, someone who is self-employed may have forgotten to provide their self-assessment return in the first instance. This person should not be rejected but given the opportunity to provide further evidence if they have it.

8. Records to be kept by local authorities

As a minimum, in accordance with the requirements laid out by the Government, Mid Sussex District Council will need to keep a record for the purposes of monitoring:

- The number of applications for discretionary payments under the scheme
- The number of approved applications for discretionary payments under the scheme
- The number of approved discretionary payment applications for which post-payment checks indicate the applicant was not eligible.

9. Taxation

These payments will be subject to income tax. Payments under the standard eligibility criteria will not be subject to National Insurance contributions.

10. Eligibility for other benefits

These discretionary payments will be disregarded when calculating eligibility for other benefits. This includes calculating entitlement to Universal Credit.

11. Evidence of failure to self-isolate

Applicants should note that if Mid Sussex District Council becomes aware, either through post-payment verification checks or through other means, that someone has not self-isolated, they will refer the case to the police.

12. Fraud

Mid Sussex District Council will be responsible for fraud-prevention measures and has a duty to protect the public purse.

Mid Sussex District Council will have the right to recover costs from people who claim the discretionary £500 payment fraudulently. Any such money recovered will be put towards the costs of running the scheme.

APPENDIX 1: Wider policy on self-isolation

Why does self-isolation matter?

Ensuring infected individuals and their close contacts isolate is one of our most powerful tools for controlling transmission.

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.

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

The changes announced by the government on 20th September 2020 will:

- introduce a new duty on individuals to self-isolate if someone tests positive or is identified as a contact by NHS Test and Trace.
- introduce a new Test and Trace Support Payment of a £500 lump sum payment for those on low incomes to support them if they cannot work during their self-isolation period.
- 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.
- place a new legal obligation on employers that they must not knowingly enable or encourage their employees to break the law on self-isolation.
- provide discretionary funding for local authorities to help those who require corresponding financial support to the Test and Trace Support Payment to self-isolate, but do not meet all the eligibility criteria.

What difference does it make if self-isolation has a legal basis?

This change is intended to make clear the importance of people self-isolating when they have COVID-19 or they have been in recent and close contact with someone who has tested positive for COVID-19. A new legal obligation, implemented rapidly nationwide, will help stop the virus continuing to spread.

What is the aim of the Test and Trace Support Payment?

The Test and Trace Support Payment has been introduced in response to feedback from local authorities and directors of public health that some of their residents were struggling to self-isolate as directed due to financial constraints. It is to help ensure that people on low incomes self-isolate when they test positive or are identified as a contact, and to encourage more people to get tested. This will help to reduce the transmission of COVID-19 and avoid further societal and economic restrictions, including local lockdowns.

How will the duty to self-isolate be imposed?

The proposed legal duties will apply in England only. Anyone notified of a positive test result and any of their notified contacts will have a legal duty to self-isolate. Guidance will make clear that people who have symptoms should, as now, self-isolate while they get a test.

Those testing positive for COVID-19 will be legally obliged to self-isolate for a period ending 10 days after the onset of symptoms or, for people who did not have symptoms when they were tested, 10 days after the date of the test. Other members of their household will be legally obliged to self-isolate for a period ending 14 days after the onset of the infected person's symptoms (or, if they were asymptomatic, after the date of the test). Non-household contacts will be obliged to self-isolate for the period notified to them by NHS Test and Trace (the period ending 14 days after their most recent exposure to the person who has tested positive).

What is the role of local authorities in supporting the requirement to self-isolate?

NHS Test and Trace and local authorities will continue to work together to help ensure that people understand their obligations on self-isolation and why it is so important to self-isolate – and help them access any support they need in order to do so.

Local authorities will focus on the principle of encouraging, educating and supporting self-compliance – they will not be expected to enforce the legal requirements. Local authorities will pass on the details of anyone they suspect of breaking the rules to the police. Where there is clear evidence that someone is not following the rules, the police will determine what follow-up action to take and, where necessary, issue fixed penalty notices.

Do local authorities need to launch a communications campaigns to advertise the Test and Trace Support Payment?

The government is running a central communications campaign to publicise the new legal duty to self-isolate and the Test and Trace Support Payment. We will support local authorities in arranging additional local communications, publicity and engagement.

Do local authorities need to check that Test and Trace Support Payment recipients are self-isolating?

Local authorities should focus on encouraging, educating and supporting self-isolation compliance. They should pass on the details of anyone they suspect of breaking the rules to the police.