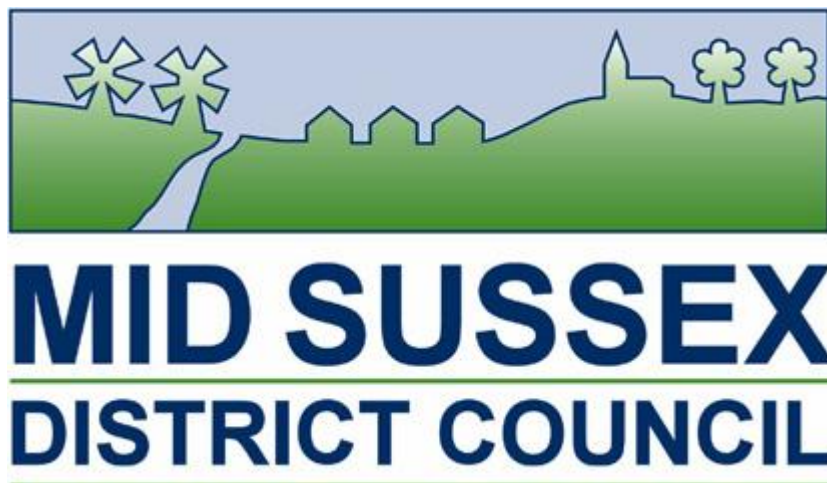




Department  
of Health &  
Social Care



## **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 28<sup>th</sup> 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.
- Been given an account number by Contact Tracing and Advice Service (CTAS) when informed to self-isolate by NHS Test and Trace to quote on your application.

- Have responded to messages received from NHS Test and Trace (which will have been received via a combination of email, text, letter or phone call) in which they provided their contact details and where they have tested positive, the details of their contacts.
- 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

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

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

Core living expenses are considered to be priority expenses which would put the individual in a vulnerable position if left unpaid. Examples of these include rent, mortgage, council tax and court fines. Failure to keep up with these payments can put an individual at risk of court action or at risk of losing their home, which is why they are considered priority debts.

Priority debts are those that carry the most serious consequences if you do not pay them. They are not necessarily the largest debts, or debts with the most expensive interest rates, but non-payment can lead to serious problems.

Mid Sussex District Council will therefore only consider applications made under the Discretionary scheme where one of the following applies:

- The individual has a rental liability based on a commercial tenancy. This means that the individual holds a valid tenancy agreement in which they pay rent in exchange for occupancy of a property for a period of time, and where the penalty of non-payment of their rental liability will result in their eviction from the property. This does not include informal, casual or familial arrangements; **or**

- The individual has a mortgage, or other such similar loan taken out against their home;  
**or**
- The individual has a current Individual Voluntary Arrangement (IVA).

Any applications that do not meet at least one of these criteria will be turned down.

Please note that in each of the above cases the individual who wishes to make an application must personally have the liability against their name; these criteria do not apply where the individual is the partner or relative of the individual who holds the liability.

In view of the limited pot and the recent surge of applications we will also apply the following criteria to any discretionary Test and Trace Support Payment:-

- A capital/savings limit of £4,000; and
- The income lost must exceed £100 in total

Please note that any loss of income or risk of financial hardship will be considered directly in relation to the period in which the individual has been instructed to self-isolate by NHS Test and Trace. Any loss of income or financial hardships resulting due to external or pre-existing factors, or due to the wider effects of Covid-19 (for example a reduction in business during the past year), will not be taken into account. The aim of the scheme is to provide financial support, where required, to those who may otherwise choose not to self-isolate due to the financial repercussions of not being able to attend work.

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

## **Scheme Outline**

This discretionary payment is designed to support people on low incomes who are not in receipt of the relevant benefits under the National Scheme, 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.

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

When the scheme was first introduced the original closing date was 31<sup>st</sup> January 2021. The government have since extended the scheme so that it will now end on 31<sup>st</sup> March 2021. No further applications will be accepted after 31<sup>st</sup> March 2021.

To mirror the National scheme, each award will 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 31<sup>st</sup> March 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 28<sup>th</sup> September 2020 and who meet the relevant eligibility criteria, as detailed above.

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

For example, if someone claims for a period of self-isolation lasting from 1<sup>st</sup> October 2020 to 14<sup>th</sup> October 2020 and then claims again for a second period of self-isolation beginning on 10<sup>th</sup> October 2020, they would only be allowed to claim once, because the two periods overlap. However, they would be allowed to claim for a second period of self-isolation that began after the first period had ended on 14<sup>th</sup> October 2020.

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 28 days from the start of their period of self-isolation or whilst they are in their self-isolation period, as advised by NHS Test and Trace. 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**

Where appropriate, 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 instructing them to self-isolate. The legal duty to self-isolate that comes into force on 28<sup>th</sup> September 2020 applies only to people who have been told to self-isolate by NHS Test and Trace and have received a CTAS account number and have completed the 'contact tracing journey'. 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**

Up until 10<sup>th</sup> December 2020, to be eligible for the scheme a person must have been contacted by a human tester working for NHS Test and Trace, either because they had tested positive or they had been in close contact with someone who had, and that contact had provided their details directly to NHS Test and Trace. This meant that anyone advised to self-isolate by the NHS Covid-19 App would not meet the requirements for the Test and Trace Support Payment.

From 10 December 2020, the NHS Test and Trace Support Payment will be extended to include NHS COVID-19 App users who live in England and have been notified only via the app that they have been in close contact with a positive case of coronavirus. An App user will need to follow some steps to request a CTAS 8-digit NHS Test and Trace Account ID, and because app users are anonymous, they will need to leave the App to do this. They will need to register with NHS Test and Trace by following a link in the App.

The user must do this while they are in their self-isolation period. They will be unable to request an Account ID after they've finished self-isolating.

To start the process on the App, the user will need to select '**Financial support**'. This button appears on the home screen when an individual has been told to self-isolate via the App because they have been in close contact with someone who has Covid-19. They will be taken to a website which will ask for some information to check whether they could be eligible. None of the information provided will be passed back to the NHS COVID-19 app.

The App is designed to protect the user's privacy and does not know who or where the user is located.

If answers show that a user may be eligible for the NHS Test and Trace Support Payment, there are four steps to apply for the Test and Trace Support Payment:

**Step 1 - Confirm who you are with NHS login.**

**Step 2 - Enter personal details.**

**Step 3 - Register with NHS Test and Trace.**

**Step 4 - Apply to your local authority.**

### **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 quoting their CTAS 8-digit Account ID; and
- Two months' recent bank statements; 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
- Evidence of rent, mortgage or IVA; and

- A statement of the Financial Hardship they face; and
- Confirmation that they believe to the best of their knowledge that they meet the criteria.

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 (see above for the full criteria)

### **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 have a notification from the NHS Isolation Note service rather than NHS Test and Trace. If this is the case, Mid Sussex District Council will give the opportunity for the applicant to provide a valid NHS Test and Trace notification if they have one. If the applicant only has an NHS Isolation Note but cannot provide a notification from NHS Test and Trace containing their Account ID, they will not be eligible for this payment.

In order to be eligible for the payment, since the 27<sup>th</sup> November 2020 local authorities have received an additional instruction from the 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 account 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 individuals 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.

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.

In some cases, individuals will have received an 8-digit code from NHS Test and Trace in a message asking them to complete the contact tracing journey. This code is not the same as an Account ID or CTAS Number. An Account ID will only be obtained in conjunction with an instruction from NHS Test and Trace to self-isolate, once all contact tracing has been completed.

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. If Mid Sussex District Council is unable to locate an applicant on the Eligibility Checker, it will not be possible to issue a Test and Trace Support Payment to the individual.

## 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 and Council Tax Support.

## **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 20<sup>th</sup> 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.