

Local Outbreak Engagement Board

2 March 2020

Isolation Payments

1. Purpose

To update the board on the Test & Trace Support Payment scheme – commonly known as isolation payments. In particular to set out the:

- Qualification criteria
- Application process
- Number of applications / payments

2. Recommendations

2.1 That, subject to any comments that Board Members may wish to make, the report be noted

3. Report detail

Qualification Criteria

In addition to the legal duty of self-isolation introduced by the Government from 28 September 2020, they also introduced a Test & Trace Support Payment scheme to assist those on low incomes and unable to work while self-isolating.

The scheme allows for a one-off payment of £500 to those that meet the following criteria:

- Have been asked to self-isolate by NHS Test & Trace
- Employed or self-employed
- Unable to work from home and will lose income as a result
- Currently receiving one of the following benefits
 - Universal Credit
 - Working Tax Credit
 - Employment Support Allowance (income based)
 - Jobseeker's Allowance (income based)
 - Income Support
 - Pension Credit
 - Housing Benefit

If more than one person in a household is instructed to self-isolate, and they all meet the other criteria, then each will receive the support payment. If a resident is instructed to self-isolate again at a later time, then provided they still meet the other criteria, they will be entitled to a further support payment.

In addition to the national scheme each local authority was given a set amount of money to develop its own discretionary scheme. The fund was cash limited with no additional funds being made available to local authorities.

The guidance allows the LA to determine its own discretionary scheme for cases that meet the first 3 of the criteria listed above, but are not in receipt of one of the listed benefits. At the start of the scheme, Walsall had the following additional criteria for its discretionary scheme:

- Household has not received a payment from main scheme for the same isolation period
- Limit to 1 Discretionary payment per household per isolation period
- Annual projected combined earnings of below £18,400 per year for claimant and partner
- Household savings/capital under £1,000.

The £18,400 was used as the income threshold is the amount considered by government to be the low-income threshold (60% of median) and was the amount used by all our neighbouring authorities. Subsequently, due to the low level of discretionary awards being granted, this limit was amended to £21,000 for individuals and £25,000 for couples. The increase in the earnings limit was in response to the low level of awards granted and has now been mirrored across most authorities.

The amendment to the earnings level was implemented following an internal review of the level of discretionary awards and the amount of funding left available to spent. The change in policy came in on 12 February 2021 and will only affect new claims going forward (it is not going to be backdated).

Application Process

To receive applications for both the national and discretionary schemes, Walsall used the same portal as was used for Business Grants and residents were directed there from the Walsall Council's website. For those residents who are unable to apply on-line, Walsall Council has a dedicated phone line for applications to be made over the phone.

The application process collected the following information and documents:

Information

- Personal details – name, address, Ni number, contact details
- 8 digit NHS test & trace
- Isolation start & end date

- Name & address of employer
- Job title & type of employer
- A statement as to why the person would lose income from having to self-isolate

Documents

- Proof of employment
- Proof of benefits / evidence of low income
- Proof of bank account
- Copy of test & trace notification
- Proof of address & identity

Applications / Payments

Like all local authorities Walsall have received a large number of applications from residents that do not meet the criteria. The main reason for this appears to be around the communication between the NHS and customers when they receive a positive test result (resulting in large numbers of applications that do not meet the criteria being made).

The numbers are as follows:

Total Applications	2934
Unsuccessful applications	1725
Awards under national scheme	566
Awards under discretionary scheme	101
In progress	542

The main bulk of those in progress are waiting for residents to supply additional information.

The guidance issued by central government included a requirement for a 3 day turn around on applications. Currently, where all the required information is provided, we are meeting that 3 day target. There was a period of time, due to the pressure of increasing work demands across the whole service, that Walsall was not meeting that target. This was resolved by increasing resources on the process and paying for some staff to work over-time.

At the introduction of the scheme Walsall Council received £42,840.80 in funding from central government for the administration of the scheme. The staff costs of those working on the scheme have already exceeded the £42,840.

4. Conclusion

There is a scheme for £500 payments to people who have officially been asked to self isolate by NHS, are employed / self employed, are unable to work from home and would lose income as a result and are either receiving

one of the listed benefits or on low income as determined by the local authority.

The number of applications is significant, however, a large number of applicants are unsuccessful as they do not match the relevant award criteria. The high proportion of claims turned down in Walsall is reflective of the national picture.

Background papers

None

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