

Delegated Decisions report



23 March 2021

TEST AND TRACE SCHEME 3

Name of Cabinet Member	Councillor Rob Middleton (Cabinet member for Resources)
	Councillor Hannah O'Neil (Cabinet member for Health and Wellbeing)
Report sponsor	Steve Richardson Director - Finance and Resources
	Vicky Head Director of Public Health
Report author	Robin Bates Head of Revenues and Benefits Tel: 01908 252082 Robin.Bates@milton-keynes.gov.uk

Exempt / confidential / not for publication	No
Council Plan reference	Not in Council Plan
Wards affected	All wards

Executive Summary

Nationally and locally there is evidence to show that the level of awards of the national Test and Trace scheme is relatively low when compared to the number of applications. The cause of this relates to the qualifying criteria for payments not being met. There are two elements to the national scheme, statutory awards for those on a qualifying benefit or those demonstrating financial hardship due to the loss of income for a two week period (the discretionary scheme).

As the pandemic unfolds we are continuing to track our local epidemiology and learn from the emerging evidence base to so that we can identify new ways to help control the spread of infection in MK. Elements of our pandemic response will, by definition, be reactive, and will move quickly where we feel there is scope to act locally to protect our residents.

In this situation, we are responding to the latest epidemiology in MK as well as the low number of support payment awards made and the national evidence on self-isolation. We want to act quickly to prevent infection.

In response to these low award rates and the ongoing concern e that people are failing to self-isolate when they test positive or when they are identified as a contact, which are among the most important actions people should take to prevent onward spread, a local scheme has been proposed.

This scheme would be aimed at supporting (but not limited to):

1. Those with terms that do not support receipt of at least their average pay for the period (calculated from their average earnings). Examples are:
 - Zero Hours contracts.
 - Agency staff.
 - Fully employed but only eligible for Statutory Sick Pay (SSP) or not receiving SSP.
 - Those who have lost overtime (see point 2).
 - Those prevented or delayed from seeking new employment.
2. Payments to Non-dependent adults living in a household will be based on their own circumstances and not that of the homeowner / tenant.
3. Top up payments of up to £250 will also be considered in specific circumstances for those eligible for an award under the national discretionary scheme.

In these cases, a one of payments of between £250 and £500.00 would be considered for confirmed positive cases or a payment not exceeding the level of lost earnings over the period.

Applications will be required within 7 days of self-isolation period commencing and evidence will be required of the start date of isolation (NHS reference).

In addition, and also covering the discretionary element of the national statutory scheme, the capital limit for cases will be increased from £1000 to £8000.

The total cost of the scheme will be in the region of £200k and will be a one off provision for payments in 2021-22.

1. Decisions to be Made

- 1.1 To agree the implementation of a third scheme aligned to Test and Trace Payments that supports those who do not qualify for the statutory award of £500 (those who meet the Government criteria) or do not demonstrate financial hardship in order to enable an award of the same amount within the discretionary scheme.
- 1.2 In addition, to agree that the service would also start to pay top up payments for hardship cases up to the level of lost earnings over a two-week period (to a maximum additional award of £250).

2. Why is the Decision Needed?

- 2.1 Milton Keynes has been badly hit by the second wave, with very significant impact on the local NHS. As we have emerged from the intensity of January and February, we have continued to see transmission within some occupational sectors, which tend to be those that are lower paid, less secure, with less income protection if people need to take time off. People in these jobs often live in shared houses and travel to work together, increasing transmission risks further.
- 2.2 At the same time, we are aware that few support payments have been made, therefore we undertook work to understand why. This highlighted that most people do not meet the eligibility criteria, despite potentially losing income while self-isolating. In order to tackle enduring transmission within some occupational sectors effectively, we have identified the potential value of providing additional financial support.
- 2.3 Rates of infection in Milton Keynes remain higher than we would like and, as schools open to more pupils, our position remains precarious. It is therefore pivotal that we take local action where we can to reduce barriers that can make it harder for our residents to self-isolate.
- 2.4 Widening the existing support available will help to address the ongoing challenge, locally, of those who still feel that they cannot self-isolate due to the loss of income that they will incur and to support the NHS and Department of Health in safeguarding the local community.
- 2.5 Data shows a high number of applications against the existing scheme but relatively low awards due to essential criteria not being met. A Third Scheme will look to increase the opportunity to assist those that are approaching the council for support with their loss in income due to self-isolation.
- 2.6 The current applications and awards data for the Council is provided below and covers the period from the start of the scheme in October 2020 to week ending 5 March 2021:

Accumulative

*some items will be pending awaiting further evidence and therefore the Awarded and Refused will not always **add up to the total received**.

	MKC
Test and Trace Total Claims Received	893
TT Total Claims Awarded	238(27%)
Test and Trace Total Claims Refused	649

	MKC
Discretionary Hardship Cases Total Claims Received	983
Discretionary Hardship Cases Total Claims Awarded	22(2%)
Discretionary Hardship Cases Total Claims Refused	887

3. Implications of the Decision

- 3.1 The new cost will be met from the Contain Outbreak Management Fund provided by central Government and in liaison with Public Health colleagues. Estimates will be based on the number of applications in 2021. The scheme will be time limited initially while demand is assessed, but a fund provision of £200k has been set aside to support payment between the launch date of early April 2021 and the end of the national scheme in June 2021. This is expected to cover the cost of awards and the administration costs of delivering the scheme.
- 3.2 Communication of the new scheme will be initiated in order to ensure awareness of the changes are known by the residents of MKC. This will be completed alongside the widening of the national scheme, which will also support those asked to self - isolate due to the closure of schools.
- 3.3 The Revenues and Benefits service already have in place an application, verification and payment process and decisions are audited to ensure they align to the purpose of the schemes and a panel also reviews the decisions being made.

Financial	Yes	Human rights, equalities, diversity	No
Legal	No	Policies or Council Plan	No
Communication	No	Procurement	No
Energy Efficiency	No	Workforce	No

(a) Financial Implications

The cost of the scheme in terms of payments and administration will be carefully managed during the initial proposed time limited period of the scheme, however the total number of applications received to date has been recorded and this will support initial assumptions around costs / the scheme application and awards will be assessed on a weekly basis for a period of four weeks initially.

(b) Legal Implications

None.

(c) Other Implications

None.

4. Alternatives

- 4.1 To continue to work closely with Department of Health on any ongoing developments of the existing schemes to capture limitations on successful award.

5. Timetable for Implementation

Draft report to CLT	9 March 2021
CLT approval for Delegated Decision	11 March 2021
Delegated Decision	23 March 2021
Communications	Preparation from 11 March 2021
Reporting	Preparation from 11 March 2021
Processes and procedures	Preparation from 11 March 2021
Implementation	Immediately after decision

List of Annexes

None.

List of Background Papers

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/test-and-trace-support-payment-scheme-claiming-financial-support/claiming-financial-support-under-the-test-and-trace-support-payment-scheme>

Recent media coverage of this issue:

End of January

<https://www.ft.com/content/22544fbf-a5dd-4b3c-99c7-1341cb2b0eb5>

Early February

https://www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/entry/test-and-trace-20000-people-not-self-isolating_uk_601a901cc5b6c2d891a4c990