



Department
of Health &
Social Care

**Test and Trace Support Payments:
Discretionary Policy guidelines for City of Lincoln Council and North
Kesteven District Council – Revenues and Benefits Shared Service**



Final Version 1

Document History

Version	Description	Date
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1. Purpose of this document

This guidance sets out the guidelines for City of Lincoln Council and North Kesteven 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, local authorities can make a £500 discretionary payment to individuals, 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; and
- Are unable to work from home and will lose income as a result.

In addition, a discretionary payment is for people:

- Who are not 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; and
- Who are on low incomes and will face financial hardship as a result of not being able to work while they are self-isolating.

Local authorities may also introduce local criteria for their discretionary scheme.

The Revenues and Benefits Shared Service for City of Lincoln Council and North Kesteven District Council – known as 'LiNK' – will, as part of this process, check to see if the applicant is entitled to any of the above qualifying benefits if they apply for a discretionary test and trace payment, - as they may then potentially be eligible for a mandatory Test and Trace Support Payment.

This discretionary payment is designed to support people on low incomes who are not in receipt of the listed benefits for mandatory Test and Trace Support Payments, if they 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 COVID-19 and avoid further economic and societal restrictions.

These discretionary payments are available from 28th September 2020, and LiNK has arrangements in place to administer these. The schemes – mandatory and discretionary – will last until 31st January 2021.

3. Eligibility for payments

Eligibility criteria

Test and Trace Support Payment discretionary payments, will be for individuals who are told to self-isolate on or after 28th September 2020 and who meet the relevant eligibility criteria, as follows:

- Who are not 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; and
- Who are on low incomes and will face financial hardship as a result of not being able to work while they are self-isolating; and
- Who has savings/capital of less than £1,000 (this final item is local criteria for City of Lincoln Council and North Kesteven District Council).

Backdating

LiNK cannot 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

Someone 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. LiNK will keep a record of all individuals who make claims to guard against potential fraud – for example, where multiple claims may be made.

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. LiNK will not 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, LiNK will reference any other local support that is available for people who have been instructed to self-isolate, such as food packages.

Applicants who are self-isolating who have not been told to self-isolate by NHS Test and Trace

LiNK cannot approve applications for anyone who does not have a valid notification from NHS Test and Trace. The legal duty to self-isolate that came 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.

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

The Discretionary payments allocations were announced on 2nd October 2020, as follows:

- City of Lincoln Council: £29,030.03
- North Kesteven District Council: £21,687.89

Department of Health and Social Care (DHSC) has advised, as follows:

The £15 million for discretionary payments is a fixed four-month envelope that will not be topped up or subject to a reconciliation process.

The whole pot has been distributed up front, and will not be rounded down to a multiple of £500 as it will not be subject to a reconciliation process (meaning that it will not be topped up or reclaimed if local authorities overspend or underspend their allocation from the pot).

Based on the allocations of £29,030.03 (Lincoln) and £21,687.89 (North Kesteven), the maximum number of discretionary payments to be made will be 58 and 43 per authority, respectively. Once these allocations have been exhausted, no further discretionary payments will be made.

4. Application process

LiNK has arrangements in place to process and verify applications, issue payments to successful applicants, as well as to prevent and detect fraud.

LiNK has an online application form for City of Lincoln Council (<https://www.lincoln.gov.uk/coronavirus-1/coronavirus-covid-19/12>) and North Kesteven District Council (<https://www.n-kesteven.gov.uk/coronavirus/coronavirus-isolation-payments/>), which is able to take applications for both the 'mandatory' and discretionary schemes. For those without access to online facilities, claims may be taken over the telephone through the LiNK Welfare Reform Support Team.

To apply, applicants will complete the online form (or a telephone/hard copy application if digitally excluded) and provide LiNK with:

- A notification from NHS Test and Trace asking them to self-isolate;
- Proof of savings/capital;
- A bank statement;
- 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;
- Where required, an income/expenditure statement – which will be included as part of the application process, and link in with requirements of LiNK's guidelines for Discretionary Housing Payments.

Once this evidence has been verified and eligibility for a discretionary payment is affirmed, LiNK will pay the applicant £500. This payment should be made within three working days of receiving an eligible application.

Accessibility requirements

LiNK has arrangements in place to ensure accessibility of forms for citizens across languages and disabilities.

How will people provide evidence?

LiNK has arrangements in place to allow applicants to upload their evidence electronically, wherever possible. As some applicants will not have access to scanning equipment while they self-isolate, this will include accepting photographs of documents wherever possible. Data security and evidence provided will be retained in line with appropriate LiNK policies.

5. Pre-payment checks

LiNK will carry out the following main pre-payment checks. These are to verify that each applicant:

- Has been told to self-isolate by NHS Test and Trace;
- Is employed or self-employed and will lose income because they cannot work from home;
- Is facing financial hardship as a result of not being able to work while they are self-isolating;
- That the applicant has savings/capital of less than £1,000.

Applicants who have applied for benefits but are not yet receiving them, or have an outstanding appeal against a decision not to award them a benefit

If the applicant meets all the other eligibility criteria for a mandatory Test and Trace Payment but is not yet in receipt of one of the qualifying benefits, LiNK will consider making a discretionary payment, rather than wait for the applicant to receive the qualifying benefit to be eligible for a mandatory payment.

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 a discretionary Test and Trace Support Payment. To check this, LiNK will use data provided from the Contact Tracing and Advice Service (CTAS) system through the 'Eligibility Checker' process in place.

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

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

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

For applicants who are self-employed, LiNK will confirm they are satisfied with the evidence of self-assessment returns and trading income provided by the applicant.

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

The application form asks 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 may be eligible for a discretionary payment. 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.

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 an 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 completed 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.

LiNK can, through specified officers, use the web-based PowerBI based Eligibility Checker to check whether an applicant has a CTAS number.

7. Making payments

LiNK will aim to pay all eligible individuals within three working days of receiving their application. Payments should be made up front, as a single payment, to the bank account matching the bank statement they have provided, via the most appropriate payment mechanism.

LiNK will send each recipient a letter or email to confirm that they have been paid.

Applicants who are overdrawn

LiNK will advise such applicants how to exercise their first right of appropriation on the £500 payment, so their bank does not use it to pay their overdraft if they are overdrawn.

Appeals

LiNK is not required to provide a right of appeal against any decision not to award a discretionary payment, (neither for the main Test and Trace Support Payment). People who are turned down will not be eligible because they do not meet the criteria.

However, where possible, LiNK will work with applicants to make sure they 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.

If an individual is rejected because they do not meet the mandatory eligibility criteria, LiNK will consider if the individual meets the criteria for a discretionary payment.

As good practice, LiNK has a mechanism in place to review cases turned down where the application appeals. The Head of Shared Revenues & Benefits and/or Benefits Manager will review these cases within 5 working days of the appeal being made, and notify the decision within a further 3 working days.

8. Records to be kept by local authorities

As a minimum, LiNK will keep a record for these purposes of:

- 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;
- Any other requirements as notified by DHSC;
- Any other requirements in relation to applications and decisions, as considered proportionate and in line with LiNK data retention policies.

9. Taxation

These payments will be subject to income tax, but they will not be subject to National Insurance Contributions (NICs). (This is the case both for Test and Trace Support Payments and discretionary payments made under the scheme).

10. Eligibility for other benefits

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

11. Evidence of failure to self-isolate

If LiNK becomes aware, either through post-payment verification checks or through other means, that someone has not self-isolated, they will need to refer the case to the police. Recovery of the discretionary payments made to the individual will be carried out in line with government guidance.

12. Fraud

LiNK is responsible for fraud-prevention measures, following where appropriate, best practices to bolster counter-fraud measures provided in government guidance. This includes information on post-payment verification checks.

LiNK has the right to recover costs from people who claim the payment fraudulently and can keep any money recovered to put towards LiNK costs of running the scheme. LiNK is not liable for any unrecoverable costs due to fraud.

13. Review of this Policy

This Policy will be reviewed;

- When updated government guidance is made available;
- When a change may be required due to under or over subscription of discretionary payments;
- For any other reason in the best interests of proactive and positive administration of this Policy.

Any changes to the original Policy will be delegated to respective Chief Executives of City of Lincoln Council and North Kesteven District Council to consider/approve.