

Self-Isolation Payment – Review 4 December 2020

Background

The objective of SIP is to encourage self-isolation by supporting workers instructed to self-isolate who will be financially worse off. For instance, zero hours contractors, self-employed who can't work from home, PAYE whose employers will not be paying their normal wage. Some may get sick pay but other won't if they are not Covid positive.

Main scheme funding (DWP benefits) allows for 98 awards and Discretionary funding allows for 59 awards. No top up from government for the Discretionary scheme.

Although LA's do have some discretion, there is still some prescribed 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, the 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.

Data for CCC to 4 December 2020 – received 88 applications;

- 9 pending information
- 1 awaiting officer allocation
- 18 paid from main award
- 60 refused

CCC Policy

We set our Discretionary policy to support those on Council Tax Reduction or where the applicant has No Recourse to Public Funds.

Council Tax Reduction is quick and easy to apply for and we believed that this would provide a good indication of those on low incomes who will face financial hardship as a result of not being able to work. Without this test, it was felt at the time that it would be difficult to assess low incomes without some form of income versus expenditure calculation. CTR also looks at capital held.

I have reviewed the 60 refused applications and found the following:

- 4 refused due to evidence not being supplied
- 2 refused due to no evidence and no qualifying benefits
- 4 refused because they are furloughed – no loss of income
- 8 refused because employer still paying the same – no loss of income
- 10 refused because no valid Test and Trace number
- 2 South Cambs
- 1 Hunts
- 1 withdrew (believe no drop in income)
- 2 students – not receiving any of the welfare benefits
- 26 others who are not receiving any of the welfare benefits

34 would still have been excluded from any discretionary award and some of the 26 above may also have been ruled out for other reasons; such as no drop in income or no track and trace number but we did not delve further as they had not passed the welfare benefits test.

Other LA's Approach

Peterborough - Their policy says you will face financial hardship as a result of not being able to work while you are self-isolating. Peterborough are petitioning County to shore up their Discretionary scheme as they appear to have paid almost all of it.

Huntingdonshire - broadly follow our scheme but do allow applications from people waiting to hear from DWP benefits too. I think the hope in this is that if they do receive one of them, then funding would move from Discretionary to Mandatory.

South Cambs - have the following:

- on low income and will suffer financial hardship
- that that bank account and savings should normally not exceed £1,500 there may be some discretion for exceptional cases

Their webpage does not say what constitutes low income.

No Recourse to Public Funds (NRPF)

A difficult area, as households where one or more adults are unable to claim benefits are reluctant to claim any welfare benefits. Where a claimant is able to claim, no 'allowance' is given for their NRPF partners, and this could still impact on their Home Office applications as their household, which they are a part of, are benefiting from a welfare benefit. This makes households wary of applying for anything.

Proposed Changes

To try to support more people, we could move towards a broader definition of 'low income' and 'suffering financial hardship' but it needs to be balanced against spending the budget too quickly.

Propose that low income is working more than 28 hours per week and earning less than £19,200* gross and suffering financial hardship including having less than £1,500 savings. This would remove part time workers and those who have high incomes who would therefore be deemed to not have a low income.

Part time workers with families or a member of the household with a disability are highly likely to be receiving one of the mentioned qualifying benefits and would qualify through that route.

In applying for SIP, payslip and bank statement as required so the above can be readily evidenced.

Keep the NRPF route in the discretionary scheme but in reality, many will not apply. Officers working with the group think it is better for County to use some of their Public Health funding to support this group via Cambridge Ethnic Community Forum.

Wraparound Support

Work ongoing with Community Hub to develop text for SIP applications processed (approved or refused) as some may still need support even if they have had a grant such as being unable to get food delivery slot and need someone to collect food, dog walking etc.

Work also ongoing with County to refer applicants who are refused because they are outside the scope of the scheme rules if it is felt they still need assistance. We would not refer where employer is making up wages or where evidence is not supplied.

If the change is successful, it is intended to review refusals and if still within the 14 days of the end of the self-isolation payment, to make an award. Although they may be back at work, paying an award may be seen as positive encouragement to others to self-isolate in the future.

Naomi Armstrong
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- <https://www.jrf.org.uk/report/minimum-income-standard-uk-2020>