

Note of SO58 urgent decision teleconference with the Chief Executive - Resources Portfolio - Wednesday 4 November 2020

Purpose: David Williams, Chief Executive asked that a telephone conference facility be used for him to consult on the urgent decision required on the following **recommendation:**

Approve the Council's Test and Trace Support Payment Discretionary Scheme

Reason for Urgency

The Standard and Discretionary Schemes are open for a limited period from 28 September 2020 to 31 January 2021. The Government expectations is for local authorities to process applications with immediate effect and commence making payments to eligible applicants as soon as possible from 12 October 2020.

Consultation

The Chief Executive consulted the following members:

The Leader
The Leader of the Opposition
The Portfolio holder
Group spokespersons

Teleconference attendance

Councillors: Gerald Vernon-Jackson (Leader), Chris Attwell (Cabinet Member for Resources), Donna Jones (Leader of the Opposition), Tom Coles (Labour opposition spokesperson), Benedict Swann (Conservative opposition spokesperson).

Officers: David Williams (Chief Executive), Peter Baulf (City Solicitor), Natasha Edmunds (Director of Corporate Resources), Chris Ward (Director of Finance & Resources) and Anna Martyn (Local Democracy Officer).

Apologies for absence were received from Cllr Jeanette Smith (Progressive Portsmouth People Group opposition spokesperson). Cllr Smith's comments had been received and noted.

The SO58 referral and report had been circulated to all the required consultees.

Reporting Back

As stated above Standing Order 58 requires all such decisions to be reported to the relevant decision making body at its next meeting, in this case Council. In the meantime the Members' Information Service will be used to relay this decision to members and to make it public.

Members' Questions and Comments

Cllr Jones requested a short briefing on the background to the SO58 decision. Natasha Edmunds said that the council has an element of discretion on how it disburses payment to people who would suffer financial hardship if they had to self-isolate and were unable to work. She explained how the council would apply the criteria for discretionary payments. For example, the council would consider an applicant's

financial and medical situation, their income and reasonable expenditure and that of their household, their savings and those of a partner. Other special circumstances may be taken into account such as child maintenance payments or extra heating costs where a member of the household is at home a lot of the time. There may also be cases, for example, where people have no recourse to public funds or are full-time students. Applicants will be assessed on merit and will be asked to demonstrate how they would suffer financial hardship without the payment, as with other locally applied benefits. The applicant also has to meet the criteria fixed by the government for the standard scheme: they have to have been told to self-isolate by the Test and Trace scheme, have a unique ID number, live in the council's area, be employed or self-employed, cannot work from home. The difference with the discretionary scheme is that applicants are not in receipt of a qualifying benefit.

Chris Ward pointed out that whereas the council can be reimbursed by the government for payments made under the standard scheme, the government have allocated a fixed amount for the discretionary scheme. The government will not extend the £66,100 it has already provided to fund discretionary payments.

Those members present approved the Council's Test and Trace Support Payment Discretionary Scheme. Cllr Smith had commented that although she agreed with the proposal she thought some of the hurdles may put people off claiming; however, a lockdown from 5 November may alter the situation. Cllr Jones thought in practice only a very small number of people, probably casual workers, would be eligible for discretionary payments. David Williams said the decision would be reported to the Cabinet on 1 December.

DECISION

The Chief Executive agreed to approve the Council's Test and Trace Support Payment Discretionary Scheme.

Meeting duration: 2 pm to 2.07 pm.