

# **Self-Isolation Support Grant**

## **Equality Impact Assessment**

**October 2022**

# Equality Impact Assessment - Self-Isolation Support Grant

## Name of Grant:

Self-Isolation Support Grant (SISG)

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## New policy / legislation

Creation of new policy, followed by several policy iterations to address the impacts of Covid-19. The establishment of a Covid-19 Grant, Self-Isolation Support Grant (SISG) followed by several grant eligibility iterations to address impacts of Covid-19 and associated inequalities. This review was prompted by the policy change from 1 May 2022 reducing the value of the grant from £500 to £225.

## Legislative Power

The SISG sits inside the Scottish Welfare Fund (“SWF”). The SWF is a national scheme, underpinned by law, the Welfare Funds (Scotland) Act 2015 (“the Act”)<sup>1 2</sup> and delivered on behalf of the Scottish Government by all 32 local authorities. The SWF is the legislative and delivery mechanism for SISG in the form of Crisis Grants. It aims to provide a safety net to people on low incomes by the provision of Crisis Grants and Community Care Grants.

The Act places a statutory responsibility on each local authority to maintain a Welfare Fund.<sup>3</sup> The Act also gives powers to Scottish Ministers to make regulations<sup>4</sup> and publish guidance,<sup>5</sup> setting out how these funds should be administered. The Welfare Funds (Scotland) Regulations 2016 (“the Regulations”) and this guidance were subject to public consultation (between 27 May 2015 and 21 August 2015). The guidance is reviewed annually and is issued by Scottish Ministers under Section 6 of the Act.

During the Covid-19 pandemic, it has been necessary to amend eligibility for the SISG on different occasions. Therefore, the SWF guidance<sup>6</sup> is maintained on an on-going basis and is updated and shared with local authorities as and when changes have been required.

## Grant Overview

The Scottish Government originally committed to providing a SISG of £500 to workers who earned less than the Real Living Wage or were in receipt of a low income benefit, and who would experience reduced earnings as a result of them, their child or the person they are caring for being required to self-isolate, or staying at home, to prevent the spread of Covid-19.

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<sup>1</sup> [Welfare Funds \(Scotland\) Act 2015 \(legislation.gov.uk\)](https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2015/12/section/1)

<sup>2</sup> [The Welfare Funds \(Scotland\) Regulations 2016 \(legislation.gov.uk\)](https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukreg/2016/12/section/1)

<sup>3</sup> [Welfare Funds \(Scotland\) Act 2015 \(legislation.gov.uk\)](https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2015/12/section/1)

<sup>4</sup> [Welfare Funds \(Scotland\) Act 2015 \(legislation.gov.uk\)](https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukreg/2016/12/section/1)

<sup>5</sup> [Welfare Funds \(Scotland\) Act 2015 \(legislation.gov.uk\)](https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukreg/2016/12/section/1)

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.gov.scot/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-scottish-welfare-fund-statutory-guidance/>

These grants help to support people who would otherwise struggle to be able to afford to comply with the requirement to self-isolate or follow advice to stay at home. It provides them with the financial support they need to meet their basic needs during the period in which they are unable to work (see section 10 for changes from 1 May 2022 when the grant changed to a one-off payment of £225 to cover the SG Health Policy advice to stay at home i.e. the requirement to self-isolate was removed and was replaced with advice to 'stay at home').

## Executive Summary

The Scottish Government has been clear since the beginning of the Covid-19 pandemic that self-isolation was, and continues to be, an essential tool in reducing the spread of Covid-19. With this in mind, the Scottish Government took the necessary steps to provide financial assistance for those groups of people who would otherwise find it difficult to self-isolate, or stay at home, when required or advised to do so.

In developing this fund, the Scottish Government is mindful of the three needs of the Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED) - eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation, advance equality of opportunity between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not, and foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not - and recognises where the measures may benefit people with protected characteristics.<sup>7</sup> Where any negative impacts have been identified, we have sought to mitigate/eliminate these.

We are also mindful that the equality duty is not just about negating or mitigating negative impacts, as we also have a positive duty to promote equality. We have sought to do this by designing the grant so the eligibility criteria of the grant allowed us to include as many groups as possible.

Delivery of the SISG needed to be achieved quickly, and be deployed and supported from within the existing public administration infrastructure. A simple claim process was established by adapting the existing SWF processes, which were already consistent with existing compliance standards.

The Scottish Government understands the impacts of Covid-19 have been, and will continue to be, experienced disproportionately by different groups, including women, those from minority ethnic communities, older people and disabled people which is why £4.4 billion was committed to providing financial support. This emergency funding has supported otherwise strong and viable businesses, protecting the business base, jobs and people's livelihoods - helping prepare for a stronger economic recovery.

In order to address the needs of many sectors adversely impacted by the pandemic, a range of business support and personal support funds were introduced quickly, over several months, to provide emergency funding to help secure jobs, safeguard businesses and to alleviate financial personal hardship. The SISG was one such fund.

SISG development has aligned with SG Health policy, who lead on the emerging developments of Covid Policy. SISG development was originally housed within the Fair Work Directorate, given the support lay with businesses and economic impact, but given the growing scale and impact of Covid-19 across the economy, a bespoke Directorate was established in February 2021– COBRAS (Covid Business Resilience and Support) – to develop resilient and targeted economic support. At the beginning of 2022, it was announced that SISG policy would be moved to the Directorate for Economic Development after COBRAS was dissolved in June 2022.

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<sup>7</sup> Section 4 of the Equality Act 2010

Prior to 1 May 2022, when the eligibility changed as the impact of the restrictions changed, eligibility for the grant was restricted to those low income workers or parents/guardians who have been notified by Test and Protect or an incident management team or those who are not fully vaccinated.

Before the self-isolation period, or period when advised to stay at home, you also had to be:

- employed or self-employed
- unable to work from home, and will lose income as a result of self-isolation
- be assessed as having low income, either
- the household is currently receiving, or has been awarded, but not yet received, a payment of the following benefits; or whose income may entitle them to Universal Credit, should an application have been made prior to their isolation:
  - Universal Credit, Tax Credit, Income-based Employment and Support Allowance, Income-based Jobseeker's Allowance, Income Support, Housing Benefit, Pension Credit and/or Means-tested Council Tax Reduction.
- be an individual who earns less than the Real Living Wage threshold
- the household income is such that it falls within the agreed definition of 'low income' for this purpose; being 25% above the established UC rate for their household type in their local authority area. (NB eligibility for the scheme was changed on 6 October 2021 to ensure that the definition of low income as less than Universal Credit + 25% for their circumstances was calculated to continue to include the £20 per week temporary coronavirus increase in the Universal Credit Standard Allowance).

From the start of the scheme in October 2020, until March 2022, local authorities awarded around 120,000 grants totalling £60 million. The latest forecasts, as at September 2022, project a further 19,000 awards, totalling £7.7 million, by the end of October 2022.

### **Sources of data**

The Scottish Government drew on a wide range of sources to understand the impact of restrictions on those with protected characteristics. These sources include statistics published by both the Scottish Government Economist (OCEA) and the Office of National Statistics, as well as insights from the Annual Population Survey and Equality Evidence Finder – a Scottish Government and its Agencies source to collect, analyse and publish equality evidence across a wide range of policy areas and equality characteristics. We also have access to information that has been returned directly from LAs on SISGs covering to July 2022, and information that the SG collects related to the Scottish Welfare Fund covering to March 2022. As information on the Scottish Welfare Fund currently covers only to March 2022 we have used the information returned directly on SISG by LAs to get a picture on equalities data to July 2022.

Every effort is made to ensure that Equality Impact Assessments (EQIA) are published timeously. However, the speed at which it was necessary to ensure mechanisms were in place for supporting the impacts of Covid-19 restrictions, resulted in delays to completing EQIAs for a number of support funds, including SISG. We developed the monitoring tools to capture data, and memorialised policy changes and costs as each iteration was made to SISG.

The National Contact Centre (NCC) was established by NHS Scotland in response to the Covid-19 pandemic. The NCC was a new service hosted within NHS, National Services Scotland (NSS) which was designed to support the contact tracing function.

The use of data<sup>8</sup> for Contact Tracing, along with Testing, TTIs (Track, Trace, Isolate) were actions within the Test and Protect Strategy, which was a public health measure designed to break chains of transmission of Covid-19 in the community.

The Centre also gathered data on those who were required to self-isolate or advised to stay at home. Once the individual had granted consent, NCC then shared this information with Local Authorities. Local Authorities then used this information to identify people on their systems to provide them with support and/or help to access funding during periods of self-isolation. NCC provide us with data on who is booking a PCR test.

## **SISG Iterations**

SISG has undergone a number of iterations since it was launched on 12 October 2020.

### **1. 7 December 2020, the grant was extended to include:**

- Workers of families who are claiming Universal Credit (if they claimed it)
- Parents of children who are told to self-isolate
- Local authorities can use exceptional circumstances for late applications

### **2. 20 November 2020, the grant was extended to include:**

- Those who do not have Recourse to Public Funds (NRPF)
- This ensures the same rules apply to someone who is required to isolate but cannot access the funds via the Scottish Welfare Fund (SWF) due to their immigration status

### **3. 2 February 2021, the grant was extended to include:**

- Those on Council Tax Benefit
- Families not in receipt UC but within 25% of similar family
- Real Living Wage or lower
- Extending the application period to 28 days from the point of being told to self-isolate.

### **4. 2 May 2021**

- Due to an outbreak in Glasgow, eligibility was extended to secondary as well as primary contacts in certain postcodes.

### **5. From May 2021, the grant was extended to include**

- Seasonal workers from May 21.

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<sup>8</sup> <https://www.informationgovernance.scot.nhs.uk/use-of-your-data-for-track-trace-isolate-tti/>

- We explicitly created new guidance and the inclusion in the NRPF scheme.

**6. In October 2021, the grant was amended to:**

- To remove the need for fully vaccinated contacts to isolate as close contacts.

- The grant was changed to support the health policy and to ensure those who were not isolating were not eligible for the grant.

**7. From 30 November 2021 to 10 December 2021, the grant was amended to reflect**

– The health policy changed to support the increase in the Omicron variant.

- Omicron was added as a variant of concern for the purpose of the grant

- Eligibility was changed for vaccination and household status are irrelevant as all contacts are required to isolate.

**8. From 11 December 2021 to 5 January 2022, the grant amended to**

– Apply the household contact rules – vaccination status is irrelevant for household contacts, but relevant for non-household contacts.

**9. From 6 January 2022 to 30 April 2022**

– Apply the fully vaccinated rules – only positive cases and contacts over the age of 18 years and 4 months old who are not fully vaccinated are eligible.

**10. From 1 May 2022 onwards**

- Only positive index cases are eligible (no contacts, regardless of their vaccination status are eligible to apply as contact tracing ended on 1 May 2022).

- Parents/guardians of children under the age of 16 and carers of adults over the age of 16 remain eligible to apply for the grant if the child or adult they care for has tested positive for Coronavirus.

- The grant is one payment of £225 for the whole isolation period.

- Applicants can only receive the grant three times in any 12-month period. Any awards made prior to 1 May 2022 are not to be taken into account.

- All other eligibility requirements stayed the same for the grant including financial eligibility and the need for a positive PCR test.

**Age: Children and Young People**

Children and young people can be affected by staying at home, and therefore the provisions of this grant, in two ways. Firstly, the children and young people may themselves require to stay at home if they test positive (children and young people under the age of 18 were exempted from the requirement to self-

isolate, where they had been identified as a close contact of someone who has tested positive and had returned a negative PCR test).

Children and young people may be affected by others in their household having to stay at home, parents or carers in particular. If those others staying at home lose income as a result, that could impact on the children and young people's wellbeing and welfare, particularly in low income households.

In lower income households in particular, financial losses could dis-incentivise compliance with advice to stay at home. Many working parents do not have the backup of contractual employment arrangements that allow them to be paid while looking after isolating children. The children and young people, or those in their households, may be under pressure to continue working despite being advised to stay at home, which risks the further spread of the virus and impacting on the health of those in the household, potentially magnifying the losses.

In the third report of Public Health Scotland's Covid-19 Early Years Resilience and Impact Survey, it was found that, in 3 out of 10 households, the status of the main household earner had changed as a result of economic changes post-lockdown, and 4 out of 10 households had seen their income reduce. This highlights the wider socio-economic impact that children face, as a result of the impact of staying at home on their parents and wider concerns on the fall-out of weaker economic activity.

The wider impacts of this can be significant on children and young people, either on their own employment if they are older teens or through the impact on their parents. For the former group, it can lead to significant reduced income and impact precarious employment when they are starting out in the workplace. For the latter group, it can have significant impacts on the household – either through dis-incentivising compliance and the attendant health consequences or through wider impacts of a drop of income on the wellbeing of parents, carers or children. For this reason, ensuring that the SISG could continue for lower income parenting groups has always been a priority.

In developing this fund, the Scottish Government is mindful of the three needs of the Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED). The Scottish Government has sought to address the impacts above – SISG is tailored financial support for anyone advised to stay at home who earns the equivalent of the real living wage or less. Please see the PSED section later on in this document. By ensuring this support remains towards those on low incomes, this policy has supported children and young people in low income households (or on low incomes) who may be impacted.

In 2017-20, 28% of adults aged 16-24 were in relative poverty after housing costs (140,000 adults each year), compared to 15% of adults aged 65 and older (150,000 adults). The age groups in between all had similar poverty rates between 17% and 19%.

From figures provided by local authorities, from March 2021 to August 2022, 31% of SISG applicants were aged 16-24. The percentage of applications in the 16 to 24 category peaked when the infection rate was higher. Data does not indicate any change in the proportion of applicants in that age category since implementation of the May 2022 change.

From March 2021 to August 2022, a total of 12,318 awards (15.4%) were made to parents of children asked to self-isolate out of a total of 80,114 awards for which this information was available.

In the last 15 years, the youngest adults (16-24 year olds) have been consistently more likely to be in relative poverty compared to older adults<sup>9</sup>.

### **Impact of changes brought in from 1 May 2022**

When we were considering changes to the grant to come into force from 1 May 2022, for the reasons set out above, ensuring that the current SISG could continue for lower income parenting groups remained a priority. As a result of the assessment of the impact of the policy change on the protected groups, eligibility for parents/guardians of children remained unchanged. Although the amount payable was reduced, in acknowledgement that Statutory Sick Pay (SSP) is not paid to really low income workers, it was crucial that we were able to provide some financial support for those following Scottish Government health guidance to stay at home.

### **Older People**

Older people who are in work in low-income jobs face losses if advised to stay at home, but no more so than any other age group. We additionally have a requirement for carers of older people who are unable to stay at home unassisted. With the prevalence of the virus higher in older people, those who are working are at a disadvantage with a higher risk of requiring to self-isolate. The SISG was designed to reflect the needs of these groups and mitigate financial loss.

In most years, the poverty rate after housing costs for single female pensioners had been higher than that for single male pensioners, with this gap only recently widening and closing again.

Some of the difference in pensioner poverty between sexes may be due to different age profiles. For example, in 2017-20, 40% of female single pensioners were aged 80 or older compared with 30% of male single pensioners. Older pensioners may have different sources of income which may result in them having lower incomes.

<sup>10</sup>Among single pensioners, a slightly higher proportion of women than men were in poverty in 2016-19 (18% vs 15%). This may partly be due to their different age profiles.

<sup>11</sup>In 2017-20, 20% of single female pensioners (50,000 women each year) and 17% of single male pensioners were in relative poverty after housing costs. Note that there were too few single male pensioners in poverty in the sample to produce a robust estimate of their population.

### **Impact of changes brought in from 1 May 2022**

When the SISG was established, it was designed to reflect the needs of older people and to help mitigate any financial loss as a result of having to self-isolate. We made no changes to financial eligibility for the grant, therefore older people retained the ability to apply for the grant. There is currently no data available to suggest older people have been negatively impacted by the changes brought in from 1 May 2022.

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<sup>9</sup> [Poverty and Income Inequality in Scotland 2017-20 \(data.gov.scot\)](https://data.gov.scot)

<sup>10</sup> [Poverty and Income Inequality in Scotland 2016-19 - gov.scot \(www.gov.scot\)](https://www.gov.scot)

<sup>11</sup> [Poverty and Income Inequality in Scotland 2017-20 \(data.gov.scot\)](https://data.gov.scot)



## **Sex: Men**

There is no evidence to suggest men are impacted any differently as a result of their sex. No differential impacts are identified. The poverty rate for single men without children was 34% (90,000 men). Estimates for single fathers are not available due to small sample sizes.<sup>12</sup>

### **Impact of changes brought in from 1 May 2022**

When we were considering the changes, we looked at the potential impact on men. This meant that if there was going to be anything negative, we could take mitigating action. There is no data available to suggest that men have been negatively impacted by the changes brought in from 1 May 2022.

## **Women**

Available evidence illustrates that women have been disproportionately affected by the social and economic impacts of Covid-19, with these negative impacts being particularly acute among young women, women in low-income households, disabled women, BME women, lone mothers and those with caring responsibilities.

Women were almost twice as likely as men to say that the support they received from their employer to take care of their wellbeing (for example sick pay, reduced workload, online social activities with colleagues) had decreased since the first lockdown (17% of women compared to 9% of men)<sup>13</sup>.

Women who are unpaid carers are more likely to be in less secure, lower paid work or to be unemployed. Under Section 58 of the 2008 Public Health Act, carers who suffer loss as a result of the person they care for being asked to stay at home (such as parents) would ordinarily be entitled to compensation. The Coronavirus (Discretionary Compensation for Self-Isolation) (Scotland) Act 2022 suspends the duty on health boards to provide compensation in these circumstances, meaning that payment of compensation is at the discretion of health boards instead. The Act is due to expire on 31 October 2022.

From figures provided by local authorities, covering from March 2021 to August 2022, 58% of SISG applicants were women. During this timeframe the proportion of applications that were from women increased. In March 2021, 50% of applicants were women, and by April 2022 this had increased to 62% of applicants. The proportion who were women then increased further to 70% of applicants by August 2022.

Although the available data does not indicate a change in the overall upward trend, the proportion of applicants who were women appears to have increased more rapidly since 1 May 2022 when changes to the grant were brought in. Those recent increases in the proportion of applicants who were women could potentially be explained by the ongoing routine testing of the health and care professions, which are more likely to employ women in low incomes roles.

## **Race**

Minority Ethnic people are more likely to work in low income professions and therefore more likely to be impacted by the advice to stay at home.

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<sup>12</sup> [Poverty and Income Inequality in Scotland 2017-20 \(data.gov.scot\)](https://data.gov.scot/publications/poverty-income-inequality-scotland-2017-20/)

<sup>13</sup> <https://www.engender.org.uk/content/publications/Close-the-Gap-and-Engender-Joint-briefing-on-the-impact-of-COVID-19-on-womens-wellbeing-mental-health-and-financial-security.pdf>

This is compounded by the modification to the Public Health etc. (Scotland) Act 2008 remaining in place. There are significant socio-economic inequalities that are faced by people from ethnic minority backgrounds. 39% of people from an Asian or Asian British background face relative poverty after housing costs are removed in Scotland, with 38% of people from a mixed, black or black British or other related background in the same situation. By contrast, for people identifying as “White-Other” that figure is 25% and for those identifying as “White-British” that figure falls further, to 18%.<sup>14</sup>

In addition, in BME communities Bangladeshis and Pakistanis have much higher rates of heart disease compared to their white British counterparts, and black African and African Caribbean people have higher rates of hypertension compared to other ethnic groups. Further, BME groups overall are six times more likely to develop diabetes compared to white British people. There is substantial evidence to show that BME communities experience high rates of child poverty and ill health<sup>15</sup>.

In terms of the job market, a higher proportion of minority ethnic people work in the hospitality industry (31.7% vs 18.6% of the white population, 2019 data). According to the last census, Asian men and women were particularly likely to be working in wholesale and retail and accommodation and food services, and African women were by far the most likely to be working in either caring, leisure and other service occupations or sales and customer service occupations, where homeworking may be much less feasible.<sup>16</sup>

There is also an intersectional challenge with the inequalities issues faced by minority ethnic women and young people. The minority ethnic employment gap was much higher for women than men. For women the gap was 22 percentage points and for men it was 9.5 percentage points. The gap in the employment rate for the minority ethnic population was largest for ages 16 to 24 (26.1 percentage points); followed by ages 25 to 34 (25.3 percentage points), ages 35 to 49 (15.0 percentage points), and ages 50 to 64 (3.1 percentage points). There was some evidence of possible negative differential impact, mitigated by SISG. The data also supports that there is a higher percentage of multi-generational households in concentrated ethnic minority areas across Scotland. This results in increases to secondary contact transmission rates. In May 2021, eligibility for the grant had to be extended to secondary as well as primary contacts for certain postcodes with the Govanhill area of Glasgow due to a health requirement to deal with the large number of cases within those densely populated areas.

Ethnic minorities are more likely to live in ‘overcrowded’ housing as well as multigenerational households; 30% of Bangladeshi households and 15% of black African households are overcrowded (where there are more people than bedrooms), compared to 2% of white British households<sup>17</sup>.

SISG support for staying at home from 1 May 2022 remained available to anyone earning the equivalent of the real living wage or less to get through a period of staying at home, this helped to mitigate the economic impact for BAME people in low-paid or insecure work.

In addition, the economic and social challenges faced by these groups – a higher likelihood of falling into poverty, an increased chance of being in a job that may bring workers into contact with Covid-19, the SISG can mitigate the cost to workers from these backgrounds, who may be on lower incomes and below the real living wage, by providing targeted support to get them through a period of isolation. In addition, the

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<sup>14</sup> [Inequalities by ethnicity in the context of COVID-19 \(slide-pack\) - gov.scot \(www.gov.scot\)](#)

<sup>15</sup> [Poverty, Inequality and COVID-19 \(improvementservice.org.uk\)](#)

<sup>16</sup> [Inequalities by ethnicity in the context of COVID-19 \(slide-pack\) - gov.scot \(www.gov.scot\)](#)

<sup>17</sup> [Poverty, Inequality and COVID-19 \(improvementservice.org.uk\)](#)

assistance provided by the Local Self-Isolation Assistance Service enabled the provision of vital support such as food and essential medicine delivery.

In 2015-20, people from non-white minority ethnic groups were more likely to be in relative poverty after housing costs compared to those from the 'White-British' and 'White-Other' groups<sup>18</sup>.

The poverty rate was 41% for the 'Asian or Asian British' ethnic groups (50,000 people each year), and 43% for 'Mixed, Black or Black British and Other' ethnic groups (no population estimate available due to the small sample).

The poverty rate amongst the 'White-Other' group was 24% (80,000 people) and that of the 'White-British' group was 18% (860,000 people).

### **Impact of changes brought in from 1 May 2022**

The amendments brought in from 1 May 2022 were in response to the changing Health Policy advising people to stay at home as opposed to having to self-isolate. We did not make any changes to actual eligibility for the grant, so it remained open to all groups who meet the eligibility criteria to apply. There is no data currently available to suggest that the protected characteristic of race has been negatively impacted by the changes brought in from 1 May 2022.

### **Disability**

The Scottish Health Survey,<sup>19</sup> estimates that in 2018, 33% of adults (and 12% of children) in Scotland were disabled, defined as having a limiting long-standing condition.

The survey provides an accurate estimate of the number of disabled working age people in Scotland. For young people aged 16-24, 24% of young people have a limiting longstanding illness. This number raises to 30% for individuals aged between 25-34, 32% between 35-44, 46% between 45-54 and, finally, 60% between 55-64.

The proportion of adults providing unpaid care for a family member, friend or someone else remained at 15% among those aged 16 and over and 4% for children aged 4-15.

This same survey indicates that disabled adults are likely to fall into the lowest household incomes - in 2018, 51% of adults with household incomes in the bottom quintile (less than £14,300) were disabled, compared with 23% adults with household incomes in the top quintile (£49,400 and above).

Disabled people represent a third of all Scottish adults, and half of all adults with household incomes are amongst those on the lowest incomes in Scotland. Without support in place, the impact of the modification would be to exacerbate already existing income inequalities faced by this group.

The current support for staying at home, the SISG, provides some mitigation for this. This grant has always been targeted at those workers on low incomes who cannot work from home, and is currently available to people who stay at home, lose income, and earn the equivalent of the real living wage or less.

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<sup>18</sup> [Poverty and Income Inequality in Scotland 2017-20 \(data.gov.scot\)](https://data.gov.scot)

<sup>19</sup> [The Scottish Health Survey 2018 edition; amended in February 2020 : volume 1 : main report \(www.gov.scot\)](https://www.gov.scot)

In terms of practical support, the Local Self-Isolation Assistance Service provided direct assistance, which could support the needs of disabled people, alongside the wider population.

Above, the ONS figures highlight that almost a quarter of disabled people surveyed – more than double the non-disabled population, have required support with groceries, food and essential medicine delivery and the provision of essentials. This is the very service that the Local Self-Isolation Assistance Service provides, alongside social support or signposting to mental health support.

In 2017-20, the poverty rate after housing costs for people in households with a disabled person was 23% (500,000 people each year). This compares with 17% (540,000 people) in a household without disabled household members.

Again, in 2017-20, as in previous years, the poverty rate was higher for individuals in households with a disabled person, when disability-related benefits are not included in the household income. After housing costs, the poverty rate was 29% (640,000 people each year) for people living with a disabled household member, and 16% (500,000 people) for those without.

With regards to information available covering from March 2021 to July 2022, a total of 2,930 awards (3.7%) were made to carers out of 80,114 awards, for which this information was available. Our information on acceptance rate is incomplete and no additional information is currently available<sup>20</sup>.

### **Impact of changes brought in from 1 May 2022**

As stated previously, in relation to other protected characteristics, there is no data currently available to suggest that the protected characteristic of disability has been negatively impacted by the changes brought in from 1 May 2022.

### **Religion and Belief**

There is no evidence to suggest people from a faith (as opposed to a minority) background are adversely affected by the SISG.

However, religion and belief became a consideration when we looked at the double vaccinated iteration. Our decision was to leave it at actually having the vaccination, not being offered it because for some, it is a religious decision not to be vaccinated. It would be discriminatory to ask someone their reason/s for exemption and why they had not been vaccinated.

### **Impact of changes brought in from 1 May 2022**

As stated previously, in relation to other protected characteristics, there is no data currently available to suggest that the protected characteristic of religion and belief has been negatively impacted by the changes brought in from 1 May 2022.

### **Sexual Orientation**

There is no evidence to suggest that people are adversely affected by the SISG as a result of their sexual orientation.

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<sup>20</sup> [Poverty and Income Inequality in Scotland 2017-20 \(data.gov.scot\)](https://data.gov.scot)

## **Impact of changes brought in from 1 May 2022**

As stated previously, in relation to other protected characteristics, there is no data currently available to suggest that the protected characteristic of sexual orientation has been negatively impacted by the changes brought in from 1 May 2022.

## **Pregnancy and maternity**

Pregnancy is recognised as being a key trigger that increases the risk of women living in poverty. The experience of being pregnant and living on a low income can often place pressures on women during their pregnancy, including increased stress due to worry about additional costs.

When the SISG was created, we had no evidence to suggest that people could be adversely affected by the Self-Isolation Support Grant as a result of Pregnancy and maternity. Also, at that point in time, no Covid-19 vaccines were available. We now understand that vaccines play a vital part in protecting against severe disease and reducing pressure across the NHS.

The risk to pregnant women and newborn babies following Covid-19 infection is generally low. However, some women may become seriously unwell and need hospital treatment, particularly in the third trimester. Pregnant women with coronavirus have a higher risk of being admitted to intensive than women of the same age who are not pregnant. Recent data in the UK shows that almost all pregnant women admitted to hospital with coronavirus with symptoms were unvaccinated<sup>2122</sup>.

The SISG does not adversely affect those who are pregnant or on maternity leave. Everyone who meets the eligibility criteria can apply for the SISG regardless of whether you are pregnant or on maternity leave or not.

## **Impact of changes brought in from 1 May 2022**

As stated previously, in relation to other protected characteristics, there is no data currently available to suggest that the protected characteristic of pregnancy and maternity has been negatively impacted by the changes brought in from 1 May 2022.

## **Gender reassignment**

There is no evidence to suggest that people are adversely affected by the SISG as a result of their gender reassignment.

## **Impact of changes brought in from 1 May 2022**

As stated previously, in relation to other protected characteristics, there is no data currently available to suggest that the protected characteristic of gender reassignment has been negatively impacted by the changes brought in from 1 May 2022.

## **Marriage or Civil Partnership (employment only)**

There is no evidence to suggest that people are adversely affected by the SISG as a result of marriage or civil partnership.

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<sup>21</sup> [Failing-Babies-Poverty-maternity-and-healthcare-in-the-twentieth-century\\_fin..pdf \(povertyalliance.org\)](#)

<sup>22</sup> [Pregnancy, breastfeeding and the coronavirus vaccine | The coronavirus \(COVID-19\) vaccine \(nhsinform.scot\)](#)

## Impact of changes brought in from 1 May 2022

As stated previously, in relation to other protected characteristics, there is no data currently available to suggest that the protected characteristic of marriage or civil partnership has been negatively impacted by the changes brought in from 1 May 2022.

## Socio-economic disadvantage: any people experiencing poverty

As outlined in the background to this document, people on lower incomes or insecure work, without the protections provided by contractual or statutory sick pay, stand to be impacted the most from a requirement to stay at home. As outlined in individual assessments above, this may also read across into intersectional considerations, such as the increased risk BAME or disabled people face with regard to being on lower incomes.

ScotCen Social Research were commissioned by the Scottish Government to carry out a mixed mode study of adults asked to self-isolate by Test and Protect either because they tested positive for COVID-19, were in contact with someone that tested positive for COVID-19 or recently arrived into Scotland from outside the UK.<sup>23</sup>

When analysed by levels of area deprivation, those living in the two most deprived SIMD quintiles were more likely to indicate that they had/were struggling financially (21%) compared with those living in the other three deprivation quintiles (8%).

Respondents who were index or contact cases living in the two most deprived SIMD quintiles were more than twice as likely to have applied for a SISG compared with those living in the other three quintiles (13% and 5% respectively).

The distribution of lateral flow/LFD tests being reported varies substantially by both age and deprivation status, with many fewer tests reported in younger adults across all deciles of deprivation, and for children in more deprived deciles.<sup>24</sup>

Those with household incomes of less than or equal to £16,900 (17% across all three waves) and £16,901 to £30,700 (13% across all waves) were more likely than those with higher household incomes to have applied for a self-isolation support grant.

The weekly national summary of Scottish local authority support data covering 14 to 20 February 2022 highlights that the majority of contact was to provide individuals with financial support. Namely, 1,933 referrals to the SISG, 369 referrals to other financial support, 236 people required assistance with food for financial reasons and 120 required assistance with food for access reasons<sup>25</sup>.

Information received from local authorities covering to July 2022 indicates that more than double the number of SISG applicants were living in the most deprived 20% of areas in Scotland (SIMD quintile 1: 27% of applicants) than were living in the least deprived 20% of areas in Scotland (SIMD quintile 5: 12% of applicants).

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<sup>23</sup> [COVID-19 support study: experiences of and compliance with self-isolation - gov.scot \(www.gov.scot\)](https://www.gov.scot/publications/covid-19-support-study-experiences-of-and-compliance-with-self-isolation-2022/pages/10-12.aspx)

<sup>24</sup> [Coronavirus \(Covid-19\): modelling the epidemic in Scotland \(Issue No. 91\) \(www.gov.scot\)](https://www.gov.scot/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-modelling-the-epidemic-in-scotland-2022/pages/10-12.aspx)

<sup>25</sup> [Coronavirus \(Covid-19\): modelling the epidemic in Scotland \(Issue No. 91\) \(www.gov.scot\)](https://www.gov.scot/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-modelling-the-epidemic-in-scotland-2022/pages/10-12.aspx)

## **Stakeholder Engagement**

There are many organisations representing people who are disproportionately affected and defined as having protected characteristics. The SISG EQIA is looking at the details of eligibility for the grant itself. When the SISG was being established, there was limited opportunity to engage individually with these groups due to the urgency of the situation. Scottish Government officials had rapid and focused engagement with experienced Welfare Fund practitioners in late 2020 and are aware that the principles of holistic service provision and inclusive communication underpin the SWF.

Initially, a great deal of our stakeholder engagement came via insight into the grant from the volumes of correspondence we received from members of the public directly or via their MP or MSP. From this wealth of information, we could identify particular issues that were occurring and needed to be addressed. For example, when the grant was first launched, we received large amounts of correspondence from parents/guardians who had to self-isolate, but were then ineligible for the grant, if the child they cared for had to be off school due to an outbreak in their class. As the grant developed, we had ongoing communication with local authority representatives and received invaluable feedback from them and via comments made on the mygov web pages.

### **Three needs of the Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED)**

As set out in the Executive Summary, in developing this fund the Scottish Government is mindful of the three needs of the Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED) - eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation, advance equality of opportunity between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not, and foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not.

The SISG fund supports measures that help limit the spread of coronavirus and may particularly positively affect those with underlying health conditions (including people who are more likely to experience severe ill health from contracting Covid-19 than the general population), protecting their health and helping to advance equality of opportunity.

The fund should help to mitigate any negative impacts of following advice to stay at home, and advance equality of opportunity, providing support for people who may be at risk and do not have community support available, as well as those who cannot get online. It may also have a positive effect in fostering good relations between people, as those administering the fund may have the opportunity to understand more about the difficulties faced by (disabled people, minority ethnic people etc.) people.

Actions and decisions have been made on an on-going basis to address any adverse impacts of self-isolation identified on groups with protected characteristics (Age, Sex, Race, Disability, Religion and belief, Sexual orientation, Pregnancy and maternity, Gender reassignment, Marriage or Civil partnership (employment only)).

After the grant was launched in October 2020, it quickly became apparent that there was an issue with parents/guardians of children being asked to self-isolate due to an outbreak at their school, not being eligible to apply for the SISG. This affected the protected characteristic of Age (children and young people) and Sex (Women) as women are more likely to work part-time and therefore to take time off to care for their children.

This ineligibility to apply for the fund posed a risk of already low-income families being financially penalised due to their children having to self-isolate and their parent/guardian being unable to go to work. Due to

the information we were receiving from our correspondence, we understood a change needed to be made to the grant to include an extension to pay parents of self-isolating children. This involved accessing local authorities' education data to help us fully understand the numbers in question and to justify the extension.

As a result of this work and the action we took, eligibility for the scheme was expanded on 7 December 2020 to include: 1) parents or primary carers of children required to isolate; and 2) applicants who would ordinarily have an underlying eligibility for Universal Credit (based on earnings prior to the self-isolation request period), who experience a reduction in earnings as a result of being asked to self-isolate.

There was scope, on a discretionary basis, for retrospective revisions of decisions involving those parents or primary carers of children required to isolate who had applied prior to 7 December 2020 and were refused solely on that ground and indeed LAs did receive a number of these applications.

We also brought in discretion because early on PCR tests were not easy to get, particularly for children so one of the discretionary provisions was specifically to address outbreaks in schools.

To ensure the protected characteristic of race was considered, in November 2020, the grant was also extended to help those who have no Recourse to Public Funds (NRPF). This change ensured the same rules apply to someone who is required to isolate but cannot access the funds via the Scottish Welfare Fund (SWF) due to their immigration status. The grant was extended further in May 2021 to include seasonal workers brought in via the Agricultural Seasonal Workers Programme which brings workers from around the world to the UK. At that point, we explicitly created new guidance and included it in the NRPF scheme.

In order to address on-going issues affecting the protected characteristics of age, sex, marriage and civil partnership and disability, eligibility for the scheme was expanded further on 16 February 2021 to include: 1) applicants who are in receipt of means-tested Council Tax Reduction; 2) applicants who earn the Real Living Wage or less or whose household income is less than Universal Credit + 25% for their circumstances; 3) carers of adults required to isolate; and 4) a widening of the application period to 28 calendar days from being told to self-isolate. Someone who had been told to self-isolate on or after 2 February 2021 (but before the extension is operational in their local authority area) would have been able to make a backdated claim for payment.

This further expansion of the eligibility criteria allowed for more claims to be made and to allow more individuals and families to access the financial support they needed to help them self-isolate without being financially penalised for doing the right thing to help protect themselves and others.

Eligibility for the scheme was then changed on 6 October 2021 to ensure that the definition of low income as less than Universal Credit + 25% for their circumstances was calculated to continue to include the £20 per week temporary coronavirus increase in the Universal Credit Standard Allowance.

When the Omicron variant became dominant late in 2021, eligibility for the scheme was changed further on 30 November 2021 to enable contacts of someone who has tested positive or has been asked to isolate as part of an exercise within the public health response to a variant of concern to be eligible if they had to isolate for the required 10-day period. Eligibility for the scheme was changed further on 11 December 2021 to enable identified household contacts of someone who has tested positive to be eligible regardless of their vaccination status if they have to isolate for the required 10-day period. These steps were taken to extend eligibility to ensure that those who were required to self-isolate had some financial support to allow them to do so.



As of 6 January 2022, eligibility for the scheme was changed further to require that individuals identified as contacts by Test and Protect (or equivalent service across the UK) who have been fully vaccinated become eligible only when they themselves test positive following public health policy's return to the isolation requirements prior to 30 November 2021. This includes children and young people under the age of 18 years and 4 months who are treated as fully vaccinated from this date.

This mitigation reduced eligibility but was based on the scientific evidence available at that time, which showed that due to the success of the vaccination booster programme, which had been made available to a much wider section of the population, and as we learned more about the Omicron variant, we understood that the mitigations put in place in November 2021 were no longer necessary. The reduction in eligibility meant the grant fund available would be best spent on those identified as needing to self-isolate to stop the spread of Covid-19.

Although fully vaccinated (non-index cases) no longer had to self-isolate, prior to reducing eligibility, we checked to ensure those who are unvaccinated would not be unfairly discriminated against and this group remained eligible to apply for the grant.

### **Next steps**

Before the COVID-19 pandemic, health boards were required to compensate people who they asked to self-isolate due to an infectious disease. This was required by [the Public Health etc. \(Scotland\) Act 2008](#).

[The Coronavirus Act 2020](#) changed this. The 2020 Act let health boards decide whether people who are self-isolating because of COVID-19 would receive compensation under the 2008 Act. The relevant provision of the 2020 Act expired on 22 March 2022.

The Coronavirus (Discretionary Compensation for Self-Isolation) (Scotland) Act 2022<sup>26</sup> provides that after the expiry of the 2020 Act on 23 March 2022, the modification to the 2008 Act will stay in place until 31 October 2022,<sup>27</sup> or such other time as the Scottish Ministers may provide.<sup>28</sup>

### **Update as of October 2022**

The success of the vaccination programme and new treatments have helped reduce the severity of the impact of Covid-19. Whilst the virus did remain a threat, health guidance was changed on 1 May 2022 to reflect the new phase of the epidemic as outlined in section 10. We are hopeful that this threat will continue to reduce as we head into autumn/winter 2022.

Although what may happen in the future is uncertain and therefore there are a number of possible Covid-19 futures that could occur.

As set out on page 13 above, in developing this fund the Scottish Government has been mindful of the three needs of the Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED) - eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation, advance equality of opportunity between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not, and foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not.

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<sup>26</sup> [Coronavirus \(Discretionary Compensation for Self-isolation\) \(Scotland\) Act 2022 \(legislation.gov.uk\)](#)

<sup>27</sup> [Coronavirus \(Discretionary Compensation for Self-isolation\) \(Scotland\) Act 2022 \(legislation.gov.uk\)](#)

<sup>28</sup> [Coronavirus \(Discretionary Compensation for Self-isolation\) \(Scotland\) Act 2022 \(legislation.gov.uk\)](#)

When reviewing the grant and deciding how we could continue to provide support to those who would need it, we were always conscious of the fact that as Statutory Sick Pay (SSP) would only be available from the fourth day of sickness, we had to ensure financial help could be provided during those first three days of unpaid absence. It also needed to be acknowledged that SSP is not paid to really low income workers.

Our decision to reduce the grant from £500 to £225 was based on a RLW calculation designed to meet the needs of socio-economic disadvantage groups as a result of the impact assessment of the policy change on the protected groups.

We know the impacts of Covid-19 have not been felt evenly throughout society. By ensuring this support remains towards those on low incomes, we are helping to provide vital support to those who require it. The value of the grant has been reduced, but this is to better reflect the health guidance to 'stay at home' for a shorter period of time and not to have to officially self-isolate. The reduced period of time is five days for adults and three days for children.

The three-cap application limit in a 12-month rolling period was introduced as the budget for the SISG had been reviewed. However, if applicants meet their application limit, they remain eligible to apply for a Crisis Grant (via the SWF) if they find themselves in financial difficulties due to following Covid-19 health guidance.

The decision to end contact tracing as of 1 May 2022 removed any eligibility for contacts. This will have an impact on those contacts who would previously have been eligible pre-1 May 2022. However, as unvaccinated and fully vaccinated contacts are now treated the same as each other, there is less disadvantage to either group. If a contact, or someone they care for, then goes on to have a positive PCR test result, they can apply for the grant independently.

### **Further review**

In order to demonstrate our ongoing consideration of the three needs of the PSED, effectively continuing to monitor the impact of the grant, we will revisit the EQIA as part of the ongoing review process. It is our intention to do so within six-months or earlier if the grant is to end before that point in time.

## Authorisation of EQIA

Please confirm that:

This Equality Impact Assessment has informed the development of this policy and subsequent iterations:

Yes  No

- Opportunities to promote equality in respect of age, disability, gender reassignment, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex and sexual orientation have been considered, i.e.:
  - Eliminating unlawful discrimination, harassment, victimisation;
  - Removing or minimising any barriers and/or disadvantages;
  - Taking steps which assist with promoting equality and meeting people's different needs;
  - Encouraging participation
  - Fostering good relations, tackling prejudice and promoting understanding.

Yes  No

- If the Marriage and Civil Partnership protected characteristic applies to this policy, the Equality Impact Assessment has also assessed against the duty to eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation in respect of this protected characteristic:

Yes No Not applicable

## Declaration and Publication

I have read the Equality Impact Assessment and I am satisfied that it represents a fair and reasonable view of the expected equality impact of the measures implemented.

I give my authorisation for the results of this assessment to be published on the Scottish Government's website.

**Name: John Paul Liddle**

**Position: Deputy Director**

**Authorisation date: 05 October 2022**



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