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Annex A: Qualitative Research for the Child Winter Heating Assistance Evaluation Report



EQUALITY AND WELFARE



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Executive Summary

Introduction

This report presents the findings from qualitative research with recent recipients of Child Winter Heating Assistance (Winter 21/22).

Child Winter Heating Assistance (CWHHA) is an annual payment made to the most severely disabled children and young people up to, and including, the age of 18 who are in receipt of one of the qualifying benefits to help mitigate the additional heating costs that their households face in the winter months.

The in-depth interviews were carried out by Axiom Research & Consultancy on behalf of the Scottish Government, Social Security Directorate.

The research was carried out with CWHHA clients on the impact that CWHHA has on household finances and the wider health and wellbeing impacts for disabled children and young people and their families in receipt of the payment.

Key Findings

- The CWHHA payment was **appreciated and welcomed** by all research participants, with respondents expressing a wide range of positive sentiments towards the benefit.
- These included the **reduction of financial pressure** as the payment was used towards heating bills, **reduction in money worries** during the most expensive time of the year, **boosts in mental wellbeing** with the reassurance of being able to afford heating bills, and the **reassurance that they could provide** a warm bedroom and household more generally for their disabled child throughout the winter.
- The **lack of an application process** for most recipients was also widely praised for reducing the 'burden of applying' for families.
- The vast majority of respondents used **CWHHA to immediately pay** their energy provider in comparison to the year prior where they typically kept the money aside until their bill arrived. This provided the opportunity for respondents to proactively manage the household direct debit payments to their energy provider, which was seen as important to reduce monthly direct debit levels at the start of the winter.
- However, **only a minority of respondents** were aware that the payment could be used for other means that meet, or help towards meeting, their heating costs, other than energy bills.
- A **number of positive impacts** were noted. Respondents highlighted the necessity of CWHHA in **helping them manage** contextual crises such as the pandemic and increasing energy costs. Typically, CWHHA allowed respondents to **keep the heating on** for longer which helped to meet the needs of children with certain health conditions. There was also a recognition that a warmer

home **helped reduce the likelihood** of conditions worsening for other family members who had long-term health conditions themselves.

- Despite these positive findings, **areas for improvement** were also highlighted. Respondents typically received their notification letters after they had received their payment, resulting in key information in the letters including eligibility, purpose of the benefit and payment dates not being remembered.
- In line with this, **lack of information** from Social Security Scotland was also cited. Respondents were generally uncertain over eligibility, and those who had received CWHa the previous winter (20/21) were uncertain whether they would receive it again.
- Overall, **respondents were relying** on word of mouth and social media posts from friends to source information on the timing of the payments and from third sector organisations to raise awareness of CWHa.
- Respondents expressed **some hesitation about contacting Social Security Scotland** to check about eligibility and timing of CWHa. The most common reason for this was that contacting them was perceived to be too much of a hassle. However, prior negative experiences (including with the Department for Work and Pensions and, less commonly, with Social Security Scotland) were also noted.
- There was an **appetite for digital communications** to be introduced, where appropriate, using text and/or email to issue the notifications. There is a perception that this approach would improve the speed of notifications and help inform recipients before payments are made.
- There were also **mixed opinions** over when the best time was to receive the payment, with one point of view being to **receive the payment earlier**. Supposedly, this would be to help respondents proactively manage their bills. However, another opinion was to **receive the payment later** so that it could be used to cover heating bills at the most expensive times of the year.

Background and Methodology

Introduction

This report presents the findings from qualitative research with recipients of Child Winter Heating Assistance in Winter 2021. In-depth interviews were carried out in February 2022 by Axiom Research & Consultancy on behalf of the Scottish Government, Social Security Directorate.

Project Background

The Scottish Government is creating a new social security system for Scotland. These powers were devolved in the Scotland Act 2016. One of the aims underpinning the new system is to tackle poverty.

Child Winter Heating Assistance (hereafter referred to as CWHa) is an annual payment made to the most severely disabled children and young people up to, and

including, the age of 18. It delivers on the SNP 2016 manifesto to extend the eligibility for the Winter Fuel Payment to families with children in receipt of the highest care component of Disability Living Allowance. This has since been extended to clients on the highest rate of the care component of Child Disability Payment and to young people in receipt of the enhanced rate of the daily living component of Personal Independence Payment and, as of winter 2022/23, Adult Disability Payment.

To receive CWHHA the child or young person must be entitled to the qualifying benefit on any single day during the “qualifying week”. The “qualifying week” is the week running from the third Monday in September in any given year. In 2021 the qualifying week was Monday 20 September to Sunday 26 September 2021.

The payment was introduced in November 2020 and is not available elsewhere in the UK.

The payment is not means-tested and does not have to be used directly on heating costs. If the household has more than one eligible child or young person, they will each get the payment.

Most families do not need to apply for this benefit¹. Social Security Scotland makes the payments automatically to entitled children and young people. Recipients receive a letter telling them that they are entitled to the payment.

In 2020/21 the payment was £200. The amount payable for 2021/22 was £202 due to uprating. For 2022/23 CWHHA will be uprated by 6% to £214.10.

The policy intent for CWHHA is to mitigate increased heating costs incurred by families of severely disabled children and young people. These increased heating costs are incurred as a result of having to sustain a higher temperature at home during winter due to their disability or long-term condition and having to heat their home throughout the night due to night-time care needs. More specifically, disabled children, young people and their families are likely to incur increased heating costs as a result of:

- heating their homes to a higher temperature in winter, in line with World Health Organization (WHO) Guidance on room temperatures for vulnerable people;
- the need to heat their homes through the night, or for periods of the night, because another person is required to provide care and support to the child or young person during the night in respect of needs arising from the individual's disability or condition; and

¹ In limited circumstances clients may have to apply for CWHHA. For example, when a child or young person no longer lives in Scotland but has a link to Scotland. Note that is limited only to those who live in a member state of the EEA (not including the UK) and have rights protected by the EU withdrawal agreement. Clients also needed to apply for Child Winter Heating Assistance if they receive a backdated Disability Living Allowance award for the qualifying week.

- the need to heat their homes for longer periods through the winter because of the likelihood of most children or young people being present in the family home for longer periods of time.

The recent economic effects of the COVID-19 pandemic have exacerbated financial pressures for many financially vulnerable families in Scotland, potentially adding to the challenges of keeping their house warm during the winter.

In addition, the UK energy market has recently been seriously disrupted, with a number of UK energy firms having gone into administration during autumn/winter 2021. During the programme of research, the energy regulator Ofgem confirmed it was increasing the domestic energy tariff cap by 54% from 1 April 2022.

Due to the current disruption to the UK energy market many households are faced with additional concerns, ranging from continuity of supply, price increases, to losing any energy credits they may have accrued over the summer with the previous supplier.

The Scottish Government is committed to listening to those who have had direct experience of receiving CWHAs, with the aim of identifying any challenges within the current system and to identify potential ways in which the payment and the payment process can be improved longer term. The qualitative research detailed in this report explores the experiences and impact of receiving CWHAs. A wider policy evaluation to assess the extent to which CWHAs has met its policy goals will draw on this qualitative research with recipients of CWHAs alongside evidence from management information and Social Security Scotland research activity.

Research Objectives

The principal aim of the research was to provide timely insights on the experiences of CWHAs recipients, exploring the impact of CWHAs on:

- the financial wellbeing of households
- the physical health and wellbeing of severely disabled children, young people and their families
- increasing the recognition around the extra financial demands required during winter to keep houses warm for longer periods while caring for severely disabled children and young people.

Specifically, the research was conducted to provide a better understanding on:

- The types of goods and services purchased with the payment
- The extent to which CWHAs impacted on any financial pressure associated with increased heating expenditure
- The extent to which CWHAs impacted on the ability of households to heat their home in winter.

Research Method

To meet the objectives of this research, in-depth interviews were completed with 19 individuals who received CWHa on behalf of their child in winter 2021.

The recruitment of CWHa recipients was undertaken via Social Security Scotland's Client Panels². The Panels are made up of individuals who have opted in to be contacted for further research after completing Social Security Scotland's Client Survey. At the time of recruitment, the number of Client Panel members who had received the winter 21/22 CWHa payment was approximately 260. The research was promoted to these 260 panel members, with Social Security Scotland contacting them directly by letter/email and asking them to contact Axiom if they wanted to take part in the research. The research was also promoted on the myGov.scot website.

Potential respondents were offered an incentive of a £30 Love2Shop voucher to thank them for their participation in the research.

Following promotion of the research by Social Security Scotland, 26 potential respondents initially contacted Axiom to opt into the research (representing a response rate of 10% from the 260 potential respondents on the Social Security Client Panel).

A reminder email was subsequently issued by Social Security Scotland with the aim of increasing the participation rate. However, the reminder did not generate any additional interest

Each potential respondent was subsequently recontacted by the Axiom research team to check that they had received the CWHa 21/22 payment and to set up a suitable appointment time to conduct the interview.

Of the 26 potential respondents that Axiom contacted:

- 1 did not respond to our request to provide additional contact details to enable pre-screening
- 4 stated that they had not yet received their CWHa payment
- 1 had a phone number which had been disconnected
- 1 withdrew interest due to health reasons

All respondents interviewed had one child who was eligible for the CWHa payment in the household.

² [Client Panels - mygov.scot](https://mygov.scot)

Of the 19 respondents interviewed, 13 lived in urban locations, with the remaining 6 living in rural locations.

The Socio-Economic Grouping (SEG) classifications are widely used by the Office for National Statistics and is used in the national Census to profile the income and economic activity across households. A definition of the six SEG classifications is provided in Appendix 3. In terms of socio-economic classifications, respondents had the following profile, where SEG A is the most affluent and SEG E is the least affluent.

A	0
B	0
C1	2 respondents
C2	0
D	2 respondents
E	15 respondents

When using the Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation, research participants had the following characteristics using the SIMD20 Quintile classification, where SIMD 1 is the most deprived and SIMD 5 is the least deprived.³

SIMD 1	3 respondents
SIMD 2	6 respondents
SIMD 3	2 respondents
SIMD 4	4 respondents
SIMD 5	4 respondents

All respondents were offered the choice of being interviewed by telephone or by video call. All interviewees preferred to be interviewed by phone. Interviews took place between the 2nd of February 2022 and the 28th February 2022. The majority of respondents had received their CWHa payment in late December, therefore the discussion focused on usage over a six- or seven-week period from mid to late December 2021 through to mid to late February 2022. Respondents reflected on how CWHa had helped them since they had received the payment.

³ [Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation 2020 - gov.scot \(www.gov.scot\)](https://www.gov.scot/publications/scottish-index-multiple-deprivation-2020/pages/10-introduction-to-the-simd20-quintiles.aspx)

A topic guide was designed to fully meet the information needs and requirements of the project, which was agreed with Scottish Government prior to the recruitment of research participants. A copy of the topic guide is provided in Appendix 1.

Analysis

The report provides an analysis of the research findings. The research was qualitative in nature, asking open-ended questions to allow interviewees to tell their story in relation to their experience as well as the impact of receiving CWHa.

The report is therefore largely narrative and should be viewed as offering insights that provide a better understanding of the feelings, attitudes, and experiences of recent CWHa recipients.

Report Structure

The report details the main research findings, addressing the Scottish Government's key research aims. The main findings are presented as follows:

- Experience of receiving CWHa
 - Initial impressions of CWHa
 - Communication from, and contact with Social Security Scotland
 - The payment process
 - Goods and services purchased
 - Changes in use of the payment between Winter 20/21 and Winter 21/22
- Impacts of receiving CWHa payment
 - Impact on financial wellbeing of households
 - Impact on the health & wellbeing of the family
 - Recognition of the extra financial demands while caring for disabled children or young people
- Suggested Improvements to CWHa

Findings

Experience of receiving CWHa

Initial impressions of CWHa

The majority of respondents received the CWHa 21/22 payment on behalf of their child just prior to Christmas 2021. A minority had received the payment in January 2022.

All respondents welcomed the payment, were hugely appreciative, and expressed a range of positive experiences regarding receipt of CWHa, which included becoming

emotional with relief when they saw the payment had been received in their account.

“I have to say I welled up – I had tears in my eyes when I saw the payment had come in. I can’t tell you what a difference that made to our household budget over Christmas. We knew we could do something nice for my child for Christmas because we had the extra money in our account. We were not expecting it – so it was a huge surprise and a huge relief”

“I had tears of joy when I saw the payment had come in. We have to budget so carefully for every penny and that extra money just took the pressure off at Christmas”

“I had a wee cry to myself when I saw that the CWHa money was in – I wasn’t expecting it and when I saw it I knew we would be able to keep the house warm. December and January are dark and cold, and we have an old house that is hard to keep warm. The payment meant that it wouldn’t be a cold, hard winter”

The majority of respondents had also received the CWHa payment the previous winter (winter 20/21). However, most interviewees commented that they had not expected the payment again this winter (winter 21/22).

Only one respondent had assumed the payment would be repeated on an annual basis due to the complex health care needs of their child.

The interviews explored why the respondents had not been expecting the payment. The most commonly cited reason was the lack of any notification from Social Security Scotland prior to the payment being received.

The majority of respondents praised the CWHa payment process (as the payment is an automated process and not one that most recipients have to apply for). The combination of not having to track application dates, and the lack of prior notice before the payment was received both contributed to the initial positive impact CWHa payment had on all interviewees.

As one respondent explained:

“When you have a severely disabled child it takes over your life, you are constantly trying to juggle everything – it seems like a never-ending process of applying for every benefit that helps and checking dates and details. It was just such a relief to receive the CWHa payment without having to jump through any hoops there was just no faff with the CWHa payment”

When the payment was initially received the vast majority of respondents commented that they believed the payment should be used exclusively to support the payment of the household heating bill over the winter period.

This assumption was partly down to the name – ‘Child Winter Heating Assistance’, and that for the majority of respondents the supporting letter from Social Security Scotland arrived after the payment was paid into the recipient’s account. Most were not aware it could be used for other means that meet, or help towards meeting, their heating costs, other than energy bills.

Only one respondent stated that they felt that the payment could be used for other goods and services. They commented:

“Not sure if it was in the letter or I saw it in a Facebook group – but I saw that Scottish Government wouldn’t be checking how the payment was used. So I spent some of it on Christmas for the kids”

When asked about eligibility, most interviewees believed that it was linked to the health condition of their disabled child.

However, there was a lack of understanding on the need to be entitled to highest or enhanced rate of the care component or daily living component of the qualifying benefit for at least one day of the qualifying week, in order to be entitled to CWHa.

These issues left interviewees unclear about whether they would receive the payment on a regular annual basis, which in turn made receipt of the payment feel more like a “welcome bonus” when it arrived.

Communication from and contact with Social Security Scotland

All respondents stated that they had received a letter from Social Security Scotland regarding the CWHa payment for winter 2021/22.

However, most respondents indicated that the letter had been received after the payment had been made to their nominated bank account. In some cases, the time lag was only a few days, in others it was a delay of up to 3 weeks.

When the interview explored reaction to the letter, many respondents rated it highly in terms of being easy to understand, helpful, and clear.

Respondents indicated that the letter set out the likely payment dates for receipt of CWHa for winter 21/22 and the eligibility criteria that were applied to establish entitlement to the payment.

However, the communications impact of the letter was diminished due to its late delivery. As the majority of research participants received their letter after the payment had been paid in, most respondents had very low levels of recollection when asked about the specific content of the letter.

One respondent summed it up when she said:

“yeah I thought the letter was useful – but to be honest I didn’t really read it, because by the time I had received the letter the money had been paid in already”

Some of the respondents were aware through social media conversations with friends/support groups that the CWHHA payment was due to be issued in winter 21/22. The interview subsequently explored whether they had proactively contacted Social Security Scotland to check whether they were going to receive a payment.

Typically, respondents indicated that they felt that contacting Social Security Scotland would be “too much hassle”.

When this was explored further, respondents commented that they had historically experienced a number of challenges contacting both the Department for Work and Pensions and Social Security Scotland when trying to check details on their benefits. As a result, they held deeply engrained perceptions around the challenges of contacting these organisations, which included:

- General frustration at the time in regard to phoning in to raise a query.
- Issues involving long wait times to get through to a client advisor.
- Having to go over again the reason for the enquiry if you needed to call back to follow up (as the call was assigned to another advisor).
- Poor / slow response times to email enquiries.

Whilst these were general frustrations that acted as potential barriers to pro-actively contacting the organisation, two respondents expressed specific concerns about their recent experiences of contacting Social Security Scotland. These included staff being ‘dismissive’ on the phone and not following through on agreed action points.

Many respondents were uncertain whether they were going to receive the CWHHA winter 21/22 payment, and therefore they were not expecting or relying on the benefit.

However, they were aware that the payments were due to be paid through chatting to friends or support groups on social media.

As one respondent stated:

“I knew the payments were coming around again this winter because I had seen some posts on the Facebook pages of some friends who are in the same boat with a disabled child – but I wasn’t sure if I would be receiving the payment or not, so I wasn’t counting on it”

In addition, another respondent commented:

“When you’re a full-time carer it can be really hard not to feel isolated - and the pandemic didn’t help. So we tend to use social media groups to talk with other parents facing the same challenges. It’s our link to what’s going on. As soon as someone heard about CWHHA payment – the jungle drums went into full swing and there were posts everywhere on Facebook”

However, it was interesting to note that the term 'one-off payment' had led to some confusion as to whether the CWHa payment would be paid every year.

As one respondent commented.

"I'm in a support group for parents with disabled children with the same condition as my son. The organisation is really good at passing on information to help the parents access benefits and support. I had seen on the forum that the CWHa payments were coming up – but I didn't realise that it was an annual thing. To be honest I thought it was a one-off payment last winter – so I wasn't expecting to receive anything this winter"

The payment process

The late arrival of the supporting letter meant that most respondents first became aware they had received CWHa when they checked their bank statement.

The information on the bank statement description was clear, and as most respondents had received the payment the previous winter, they were in no doubt what the payment was for when they read it in their bank statement.

Most respondents indicated that there had been no problems receiving the payment and that the payment had been for the amount detailed in the supporting correspondence. As noted earlier, their main concern was the timing of the letters arriving after the payment had been made.

Only one respondent indicated that they had experienced a problem regarding payment. The respondent had sent in bank account information for her daughter's nominated account in advance of her 16th birthday, with the aim of her daughter being paid CWHa directly.

However, the CWHa payment was made directly to the daughter's nominated account prior to her 16th birthday.

Whilst this did not create any problems for the family, the respondent suggested that it may have the potential to create problems in other households and was keen to highlight the potential friction that it could have created.

She further explained:

"My daughter was expecting money from her grandparents to spend on something special for her birthday. When the CWHa payment was made to her account she could have easily spent it on her birthday presents not realising what the money was for. Luckily when I realised that the money had been paid into my daughters account, I explained that the payment was actually for the heating, and she was happy to let me transfer the money back to my bank account. Luckily, I have a really good relationship with my daughter – but you can see the potential situation where a child may not want to give it back to her parent or that they spend it online before the parent realises it was paid to them"

Whilst she acknowledged that the payment was made to the nominated account that she had just sent through to Social Security Scotland, she commented that the money should not have been paid to anyone under 16, and that a basic age check should have been done before the payment was processed.

Goods and services purchased in Winter 2021/22

The majority of CWHHA recipients interviewed had used the payment to proactively manage their monthly payments to their energy provider.

Respondents typically used the amount to pay off any outstanding balance they may have had or used the entire amount and paid it as a one-off payment to their account. The motivation was the same for both, to reduce their monthly energy direct debit to as low as possible at the start of the winter.

As one respondent commented:

“In my experience it’s a constant battle with my energy provider – they are always trying to charge you more than you actually use so that your account doesn’t fall into arrears – We always provide regular monthly meter readings to try to make sure we are paying as little as we need to - before they can get a chance to recalculate the monthly direct debit – which is always in their favour”

There were however three exceptions. One household that lived in a rural community had used the entire amount of £202 to purchase wood burning logs. The interviewee explained as follows:

“We live a rural village which is prone to power cuts every time the weather turns bad. We have a wood burner in the main living space which we use when it gets really cold – but it’s really our back up for when the grid goes down. So when the CWHHA payment came through I used it to buy wood burning logs. The amount lets us order about two months’ worth of logs which we buy from a local company”

Another respondent indicated that they had used around half the money to buy warmer bedding for her daughter.

“My daughter is in a wheelchair, so she is really affected by the cold because she doesn’t really get a chance to move around much. It’s really important I try and keep her warm all the time. I bought her a warmer duvet for the winter and a throw that she can put over her while she is sitting. I used about half the amount on that and the rest I used to clear off about one months’ worth of heating bill which was in arrears”

The third respondent explained that the money had arrived in December, and she decided to use it to cover Christmas expenses.

She explained as follows:

“My daughter will be 18 in the summer - so I don't think we'll get another CWHa payment. We've had such a rubbish year with the Covid. We've been shielding nearly the whole entire period – so I wanted to make this Christmas as special as possible. So I'll be honest, I spent it all on Christmas food and presents for my daughter”

One respondent had to change energy provider as her previous provider had fallen into administration due to the disruption in the energy markets.

At the time her energy company went into administration she was very anxious that she would be put on a higher tariff with the new provider, and that she would lose the small amount of credit that was on her account with the previous energy provider.

She was assigned a new provider through Ofgem's process known as supplier of last resort.

However, she used the CWHa payment to make an advance pre-payment on her account and managed to retain her energy credit from her previous energy provider, resulting in a direct debit that was lower than she was previously paying. She recognised that this was likely to be a temporary offer but was impressed that the transition was a relatively smooth one and not as stressful as she had first imagined.

Changes in how CWHa clients used the money since Winter 2020/21

As the majority of respondents had also received the CWHa payment in Winter 20/21 when it was first introduced, they were asked what difference the payment had made the previous winter and whether they had used the money differently this winter (Winter 21/22).

With the exception of three respondents, all respondents had used the money the same way following both payments, with respondents indicating that the money had been used exclusively to help with meeting the cost of heating bills.

However, compared to the previous winter, the timing of using the money in Winter 21/22 was different. In Winter 20/21 more respondents had kept the money aside to use it pay off the January 21 heating bill.

As one respondent commented:

“January is usually the biggest heating bill every year. We received the CWHa payment of £200 last year, so I knew that if I held on to the money that would allow me to pay off the full months' worth of heating when the bill came in”

In contrast, respondents had used this years' CWHa payment immediately. Respondents used the Winter 21/22 CWHa payment to either clear off any

outstanding balance they had, or they made a one-off payment to make sure their energy providers account balance was in credit.

When the reasons for this were explored further, respondents indicated that they constantly monitored their heating usage monthly and continually tried to keep their direct debits to the lowest amount possible.

By paying off any outstanding balance or paying in a one-off payment, they were pro-actively trying to minimise their monthly payments with their energy company.

The main reason for this was an increasing level of anxiety surrounding the 'cost-of-living crisis' and 'energy crisis' that were high-profile news headlines in the media. Against this backdrop, the majority of respondents wanted to minimise their direct debit payments and try and set their monthly bill to as low as possible at the start of the winter period.

Impacts of receiving CWHHA

Impact on financial pressure

When asked about how CWHHA had helped the family, two main responses were most commonly cited.

Firstly, respondents commented on the practical aspect of having the extra money to pay for their heating bill. Respondents were acutely aware that the December/January/February heating bills were the most expensive every year. This added significantly to the pressure on household budgets at an expensive time of year around the Christmas period.

Secondly, due to the level of anxiety around meeting the rising cost of energy and facing the three most expensive months of the year in terms of energy bills, many respondents also commented, about the positive emotional impact of receiving the CWHHA payment.

Many respondents openly discussed how the CWHHA payment had positively impacted on their state of mind and helped to reduce money worries they had going into the winter period.

One respondent summed it up when she said:

"If you're stuck at home all the time, you end up watching the news to pass the day and all you hear about is the increasing costs of heating bills. I was so worried that I wasn't going to be able to afford my heating this winter. It was such a relief when the money came through. It really took the pressure off"

Others echoed the same sentiment, expressing how relieved they were to have additional money to meet the cost of their heating over the winter.

Other comments included:

“I was so relieved when the money came in – now I know I don’t have to stress about my next bill. The payment will help me clear my balance and pay for January. It’s a huge boost knowing you don’t have to worry about making that payment”

“The payment really helped lift my mood. This year has been so difficult with the pandemic. We have been at home nearly all year and the heating has been on more than usual. I was dreading the winter bills, so the CWHHA payment has really helped”

Respondents were subsequently asked what would have happened in the absence of CWHHA this winter.

Three key themes emerged:

- An increased level of stress associated with worrying about how they would meet the increasing cost of heating over the winter.
- The health impacts on not just their disabled child, but everyone else in the household.
- The stress of having to choose between having to pay the heating bill or being able to buy good food to feed the family.

Many of the respondents initially commented that they would not be able to keep their home warm over the December / January period. The impact would have been reducing the amount of time the heating was on for and having the heating off during daylight hours.

Respondents went on to comment about the additional stress this would have caused as they would have been increasingly anxious about their January heating bill and whether / or how they would manage to pay it, without falling into arrears. Their stress was created as they knew non-payment would increase their subsequent energy bill payments, making their financial situation worse.

Some commented that in previous years they knew they could reduce their balance over the summer months. However, recent disruption to the energy supply market had exacerbated their level of anxiety around ever-increasing heating costs. (It should be noted that Ofgem released the notification that the energy cap was going up by 54% during the early stages of the fieldwork period, which was subsequently at the forefront of respondent’s minds at the time of interviewing).

Many respondents also highlighted the negative health impacts of living in a cold house, including the negative impacts on respiratory and circulatory health conditions in other family members. As one respondent said:

“if we weren’t able to keep our home warm that would really affect everyone in the house, my other child has asthma and my partner has a heart condition – the

extra money means everyone has a warm home. I don't want to even think how bad it would be for us as family if we hadn't received the CWHa payment"

A number of other respondents commented that not receiving the CWHa payment would really put pressure on other areas of their household budget.

One respondent summed it up when she said:

"I know this sounds dramatic, but it would really mean that we would have to cut back on what we could spend on food. For us it would be a choice of paying the heating bill or going hungry"

Other respondents echoed the same view, expressing how their food budget would be under increasing pressure.

In most cases the area where respondents felt they had some degree of control over costs was in their food budget. The impact of not receiving CWHa would have included:

- Not buying fresh food, as it goes off quickly and can be wasted.
- Planning every meal to work within a restricted budget.
- Relying on low-cost supermarket nearing sell by date offers.

As one respondent commented:

"We do everything we can to make sure we give a daughter a normal a life as possible, but if we hadn't received the money, the first thing we would have had to cut would be the quality of fresh food. That would break my heart because she would probably notice us cutting back on things."

Impact on ability to heat the home

Most respondents had received the payment in late December, therefore usage of the 21/22 CWHa payment was focused on a six- or seven-week period from mid to late December 2021 through to mid to late February 2022.

Respondents described some of the challenges they were facing regarding reducing their energy costs. Typical actions to reduce energy costs included:

- Households prioritising certain areas of their home to heat.
- Priority being given to the child's bedroom to ensure they felt they had a safe, warm environment.

When first asked what difference the CWHa payment had made, most respondents explained that it had allowed them to turn the heating on for longer periods. This was particularly important for families with children and young people with irregular sleeping patterns; CWHa allowed them to heat the home throughout the night.

All respondents reported that they typically pre-set the thermostat to ensure a reasonably warm ambient temperature (around a range of 18 – 19 degrees Celsius). All respondents commented that they were constantly monitoring the heating to ensure the bills did not rise unexpectedly.

Key usage patterns revolved around the child's activities. Where the child was attending full-time education, the heating would be set for breakfast. The key difference was in relation to when they returned from school. The CWHa payment allowed the parent to put the heating on a little earlier so that their child was returning into a warm home, whereas in previous winters the heating would go on when they got in.

It was clear that the interviewees were putting the child's needs before their own. Many respondents stated how important it was for their child to have a safe warm bedroom to come home to. In many cases respondents used the phrase – *"their bedroom is their safe haven"*. Consequently, the child's bedroom was considered a priority to keep warm.

In addition, most interviewees commented that they would ensure public areas like the kitchen and living space would also be kept warm.

In contrast however, whilst respondents would prioritise these areas, they would consciously reduce the temperature (or in a minority of cases turn off the heating) in their own bedroom.

Whilst the discussion centred around heating, a number of parents also commented upon the importance of having a good supply of hot water for their child. In specific cases, CWHa had supported the care they provided. For example, for some families where their child had autism, CWHa reduced the impact of high heating bills resulting from the provision of baths, considered as an important therapeutic part of their routine.

Impact on quality of life

When asked whether CWHa had made any difference to their child's standard of living, respondent comments centred around two key themes:

- Positive impact on living conditions for their child
- Wider quality of life benefits to all family members

Respondents discussed the importance of providing a warm, safe living environment to raise their family. A number of respondents subsequently highlighted the need for CWHa support, as heating costs were affected by the severity of the health condition their child was facing.

Some respondents highlighted the issues that arose from certain conditions, and the challenges this led to in terms of heating their home. One respondent explained:

"When you have a child with ADHD you can't keep the doors closed to keep the heat in, he is always on the move going between his bedroom and other rooms."

Even at night he'll be up and about while we're in bed as a result we need to keep the place warm all the time when he's in."

Other respondents explained that their child was either a wheelchair user or bed-bound. In both circumstances, their child was affected by the cold and needed to be kept warm to help with their condition. Priority was given to ensuring their child's bedroom was the warmest part of the home, and where radiators had separate thermostatic controls, these would be set to the highest levels in the child's bedroom.

Consequently, the CWA payment was seen as essential support to help meet the increased heating costs of looking after their child.

Respondents also commented on the positive impacts a warm living environment had for other family members in the household.

For example, one respondent commented:

"one of my children is eligible for CWA and the other one isn't. The one that isn't eligible has asthma – so having a warm home is good for him as well, as his episodes can be triggered by damp and/or cold."

There was a general recognition that having a warm home reduced the likelihood of other health conditions worsening or developing. It was also clear from the interviews that for several respondents their eligible child was not the only person in the household with a long-term health condition.

Recognition of the extra financial demands while caring for disabled children and young people

All respondents commented on the positive impact on living conditions that the CWA winter 21/22 payment has made, with many respondents also commenting that the payment was critical for meeting the extra financial pressures facing households who are bringing up severely disabled children.

The recent Covid-19 pandemic has exacerbated these financial pressures. For example, respondents who had severely disabled children indicated that they had been staying at home more than before the pandemic. This added financial pressures on heating their home during the daytime.

For some, local school lockdowns have meant that their child has been at home more often during the day. The impact of this is that the respondent would turn the heating on during the daytime, to ensure their home was warm. In contrast, when their child was not at home, the respondent would typically turn off the heating, wearing warmer clothing during school hours instead.

For some respondents whose child receives home care visits, there has been an extra emphasis on ensuring that childcare related equipment is washed and sanitised daily.

The need to reduce transmission of the Covid-19 virus, has meant some respondents have faced higher than normal levels of usage in relation to washing and drying both bedding and care related equipment to ensure they are routinely sanitised. This has created extra energy usage costs as follows:

- Increased usage of the washing machine.
- Keeping the heating on all the time to dry off washing (hanging over radiators to speed up the drying time).

Some respondents also commented that their child's health condition meant that they found it difficult to regulate their body temperature, consequently they would constantly ensure their home environment was maintained at a steady temperature at all times. This increases the cost of their heating, as the heating needed to be on constantly.

As one respondent commented:

"People will think – oh really they are getting more benefits. But I don't think they would know that having a disabled child means that our heating is on constantly. We need to keep our daughter warm all the time – so our heating is on 24/7. If she gets cold, she'll get sick – so really, we have no choice but to keep it on all the time"

Many respondents, on an unprompted basis, stated how grateful they were for the CWHa payment and were hugely appreciative that Scottish Government had recognised the financial pressures they were facing. They also highlighted that the automated nature of the payment was an extra bonus, and contrasted this with previous, more negative, experiences of applying for benefits through both the DWP and other Scottish Government support which involved an application process.

As one respondent stated:

"I moved here from England a few years ago and let me tell you – you have to fight for every penny in benefits there. I couldn't believe it when we found out we had qualified for the CWHa payment. It's not available down there and I think that shows that the system is much more caring here"

In addition, one respondent commented:

"I think it shows that the Scottish Government really cares and understands how hard it can be being a full-time carer – sometimes the choices are stark – putting good food on the table for your child or paying the bills. It's a constant struggle. The extra money at Christmas really does feel like a Christmas present"

The automated nature of CWHa seemed to help families feel they were entitled to the benefit. In addition, receiving the payment automatically was associated with a perception that the Scottish Government cares for and recognises the challenges families like theirs face.

As one respondent said:

“when you have a severely disabled child it can be absolutely exhausting trying to chase down the benefits and do what’s right for your child. The fact that there is no application process is a real bonus. It’s so tiring filling out application forms all the time and most of them ask the same questions”

Another respondent stated:

“I think the Scottish Government are doing a great job with this – no application process is a real godsend – it also says that they recognise just how hard it can be to look after a disabled child and they are doing their bit to help us”

Suggested improvements

Given that the payment process is automated and there is no formal application process for most recipients, respondents were asked whether the payment process could be done differently, and what changes they would like to see.

As mentioned earlier, most respondents praised the fact that there was no application involved. A few respondents stated that one of the positive aspects to the payment process for CWHAs was that they had no need to interact with Social Security Scotland directly. One respondent summed up the issues when she said:

“it’s a real bonus that you don’t have to chase up anything with Social Security Scotland – it can be so difficult to make an enquiry on anything – while most of the staff are helpful when you finally get through to speak to someone, getting through is so frustrating”

There were mixed views on the best timing for receiving CWHAs. Most respondents felt that the payment should be made before Christmas and expressed a desire for the money to be paid in early December.

Indeed, some respondents indicated that they would prefer the payment being made in November to help financial planning around the Christmas period. This included ensuring the energy bill monthly payments would be as low as possible going into the festive period which would free up available finances and provide more flexibility on Christmas related expenditure.

A minority of respondents stated that the payment should be made in late January. Their reasoning for this was clear.

“You get the biggest bill of the year at the end of January – so the payment can be used to clear that off when it comes in”

These respondents indicated that if the money was paid in after Christmas, it would ensure that most eligible households would use the CWHAs payment for the purpose it was intended for. As one respondent stated:

“I can see some families using the money to cover Christmas costs. If the money is in, then it’s going to be really tempting to use it for Christmas – it depends on how disciplined people are with their budget”

As a final stage to the interview, respondents were asked whether they had any thoughts on how the payment process could be improved. Suggested improvements were primarily centred around three key themes:

- Uncertainty whether their child would be entitled to CWHAs again or on annual basis
- The timing of the notification letter, outlining that they are due to receive their CWHAs payment
- Cost of issuing the letter using postal services and a potential desire for digital notifications

Even though most respondents had received CWHAs in winter 20/21, there was still a high level of uncertainty as to whether they could count on receiving this winter’s payment.

Therefore, there was a desire to receive information about whether their child would be entitled to CWHAs as soon as possible. It was felt that advance notice regarding the payment would reduce anxiety regarding financial pressures facing households in the run-up to winter and Christmas.

A number of respondents suggested that a digital approach should be taken to notifying individuals who were going to receive the CWHAs payment. As one respondent commented:

“Not every household will have a computer, so I can see why they still send out letters, but it would be quicker and less expensive to send notifications by text. The majority of people will have mobiles and if all the text says is to expect the payment it probably wouldn’t be seen as a scam or anything”

Several other respondents echoed this view commenting that it would be quicker to send out the notifications by text or email, that eligible households would know earlier whether they would be receiving the payment, and that they were more likely to receive the notification before the payment was in their bank account.

While there was an appetite for digital communications to be used to notify households entitled to CWHAs, not every respondent had access to digital communication channels, and as a result a minority of respondents were still dependent on postal information being issued.

Appendices

Appendix 1: Discussion Guide

Introduction (5 minutes)

- Interviewer Introduction
- Explain purpose of Interview
 - Axiom Market Research and Consultancy are working with the Scottish Government to conduct research on the CHILD WINTER HEATING ASSISTANCE payment. The research will help Scottish Government better understand your experience of receiving the payment and find out more about how the payment has been used. The research will help Scottish Government understand how the CWHHA payment helps people across Scotland and how the service can be improved.
- All comments made are strictly confidential and no one from Social Security Scotland, or the Scottish Government will ever see your individual views. Taking part will not affect any outstanding applications or benefits you're receiving.
- There are no right or wrong answers, only personal opinions
- Interview will be recorded for internal analysis purposes only – no one but the researcher will have access to the recording
- Interview will typically last 45 minutes and no longer than an hour
- If Parent or Carer
 - If you need to pause the interview at any time to care for your child/children just let me know and we'll call you back to complete the interview.

Discussion topics (45 minutes)

- **Experience of CWHHA**
- Can I just check when you received the CWHHA payment?
 - Winter 21/22
 - Winter 20/21
 - Received both payments
- Did you receive payment for more than one member of your family? (this winter? / last winter? / both times?)
- When you received the payment, what did you think the payment was for?
- Why do you think you were eligible for the payment?
- How clear would you say you were about what the payment could be used for?

- **Pre-payment Communication**

- Did you receive any information from Social Security Scotland to let you know that you were going to receive the payment this winter?
- What information did you receive?
 - If yes -What were your initial impressions of the information you received?
- Was there any personal contact with Social Security Scotland staff
 - If yes -What was your impression of the contact (positive / negative)
 - Why do you say that?
- Were you expecting to receive the CWHHA payment - before you received the information from Social Security Scotland?
 - If yes ... Were you counting on that money coming in this winter?
 - If yes ... How has this helped you plan the household finances this winter?
- Did the information you received help you understand why you were eligible for your payment/your child's payment?

- **Impact of receiving CWHHA**

- What were your initial thoughts when you first heard you were receiving the payment?
- How did you initially think the CWHHA payment would help your family?
- Did you have any problems receiving the payment, after you received the information that you qualified for the payment?
- Was it easy to see from your bank statement what the payment was for?
- Have you kept the money aside - so you know that you have money aside to put towards your heating bill?
 - If No - Have you used the money in the way you first thought?

- **Specific Impacts**

- Has the CWHHA payment you received helped your family in any way?
 - Why do you say that?
 - If YES In what way has receiving the CWHHA payment helped you?
 - Probe with / (and keep asking until respondent can't think of any additional answers)
 - Any other ways you would say?
 - When respondent can't think of any additional answers, probe for:

- The extent to which it has impacted on their ability to heat their home in winter
 - The extent to which the payment has impacted on any financial pressure associated with increased heating expenditure
 - The types of goods and services purchased
- And has the CWHHA payment helped your family in the way you first thought it would?
 - Why do you say that?

- **ASK ALL**

- What would have happened if you hadn't received the CWHHA payment this winter?
- Did you have any worries about meeting your heating bills this winter?
 - If Yes..... What type of worries did you have?
- Has receiving the CWHHA payment helped with this?
 - If Yes ... In what way has it helped?

- **If recipient received payment last year as well – ask**

- Did the CWHHA payment you received make a difference last winter?
 - If Yes How did it make a difference?
 - If No ... Why do you say that?
- Have you used the payment differently this year?
 - If Yes – Why is that?
 - If Yes – how have you used it differently this winter?

- **Health & Wellbeing Benefits**

- Has the CWHHA payment made any difference to the type of health and care support you can provide to your child/children this winter?
- What difference has the CWHHA payment made?
- Has the CWHHA payment changed your child's standard of living in any way?
 - In what way?

- **Improvements**

- If the payment process could be done differently, what changes would you like to see?

- What month during the winter period do you think would be the best time to make the CWHHA payment?
- Would you consider overall experience of receiving CWHHA to be positive or negative?
 - Why do you say that?
- Overall do you feel you have been treated fairly?
- Do you have any other thoughts on how CWHHA could be improved?
 - Probe for suggested improvements across the customer experience:
 - Pre-payment communication
 - Explanation of eligibility
 - Accuracy of receiving payment
 - Being treated with dignity, fairness and respect

Winding up (5 minutes)

- Summarise key views expressed during interview.
- Thank interviewees for their views and close

Appendix 2: Technical Report: Qualitative Research

Client: Scottish Government - Social Security Directorate

Project Name: Child Winter Heating Assistance Evaluation Report

Research Objectives: to explore the impact of CWHHA on:

- the financial wellbeing of households
- the physical and health and wellbeing of disabled children, young people and their families
- increasing the recognition around the extra financial demands required during winter to keep houses for warm for longer periods while caring for disabled children

Target group: Recipients who had received the Child Winter Heating Assistance payment for Winter 21/22 on their child's behalf

Achieved Number of interviews: 19

Date of Fieldwork: 2nd February 2022 - 28th February 2022

Sampling Method: The research was promoted to members of the Social Security Scotland Client Panel who were asked to express interest in participating in the research. The survey was promoted by Social Security Scotland to panel members and on the MyGov.scot page. A reminder was circulated in mid-February to boost participation rates.

Respondent Validation: All interested participants were contacted by Axiom to pre-screen potential respondents to ensure they were eligible to participate in the research and to set up appointment times to conduct the interview.

Interview Method: All respondents that opted in to take part in the research were offered the choice of being interviewed by phone or by video call. All respondents stated a preference to be interviewed by phone.

Incentives Offered: All participating respondents were offered and received a £30 Love2Shop Voucher.

Appendix 3: Socio-Economic Grouping (SEG) Classifications

Occupation Group – A

- These are professional people, very senior managers in business or commerce or top-level civil servants.
- Retired people, previously grade A job.
- People whose late spouse or civil partner worked in a grade A job.

Occupation Group – B

- Middle Management executives in large organisations, with appropriate qualifications.
- Principal officers in local government and civil service.
- Top management or owners of small business concerns, educational and service establishments.
- Retired people, previously grade B job.
- Retired people whose late spouse or civil partner worked in a grade B job.

Occupation Group – C1

- Junior Management, owners of small establishments, and all others in non-manual positions.
- Jobs in this group have very varied responsibilities and educational requirements.
- Retired people, who worked in a grade C1 job.
- Retired people whose late spouse or civil partner worked in a grade C1 job.

Occupation Group – C2

- Junior Management, owners of small establishments, and all others in non-manual positions.
- Jobs in this group have very varied responsibilities and educational requirements.
- Retired people, who worked in a grade C1 job.
- Retired people whose late spouse or civil partner worked in a grade C1 job.

Occupation Group – D

- All semi-skilled and unskilled manual workers, apprentices and trainees to skilled workers.
- Retired people, who worked in a grade D job and who now receive an occupational pension.
- Retired people whose late spouse or civil partner worked in a grade D job and who now themselves receive a pension based on that job.

Occupation Group – E

- Long term recipients of state benefits.
- Unemployed for more than six months.
- Off sick for six months or more.
- Casual workers and those without a regular income.
- Intermittent workers in receipt of income support.



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This document is also available from our website at www.gov.scot.
ISBN: 978-1-80435-868-9

The Scottish Government
St Andrew's House
Edinburgh
EH1 3DG

Produced for
the Scottish Government
by APS Group Scotland
PPDAS1146482 (08/22)
Published by
the Scottish Government,
August 2022

Social Research series
ISSN 2045-6964
ISBN 978-1-80435-868-9

Web Publication
www.gov.scot/socialresearch

PPDAS1146482 (08/22)

