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Child Winter Heating Assistance Evaluation Report



EQUALITY AND WELFARE



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Executive Summary

Background

The Social Security (Scotland) Act 2018 introduced a range of new benefits devolved to Scotland. Child Winter Heating Assistance (CWA) is a new benefit that has been implemented using these powers. It is also a unique benefit as it is only available in Scotland. CWA was first paid by Social Security Scotland for winter 2020-2021.

CWA targets families of the most severely disabled children and young people to help them heat their homes during the winter months. The most severely disabled children have the highest care needs, and can be most affected by cold temperatures for a long period of time. This means that their homes are most likely to need to be heated more and for longer periods of the day and night.

The current CWA payment is £214.10. CWA is not means tested and is therefore paid to anyone who is in receipt of the qualifying benefit during the qualifying week.

Current report

The aim of this report was to provide an evaluation of the CWA payment. As such, this report monitors CWA's progress towards meeting short and medium term policy goals and aims to contextualise its contribution within longer term policy goals. This approach is in line with the evaluation strategy¹ for the devolution of disability benefits.

The current evaluation was largely based on externally commissioned qualitative research which involved interviews with CWA recipients (family members, carers, guardians of children and/or young people who are severely disabled). Interviews were held in February 2022 and involved asking participants about their experiences of receiving CWA for winter 2020-21 and winter 2021-22, where the payments were £200 and £202 respectively.

The evaluation also draws on data from Social Security Scotland, some of which has been openly published as Official Statistics, and some of which was derived from secondary analysis conducted for this evaluation specifically. Furthermore, the evaluation draws on data from the Client Satisfaction Survey undertaken by Social Security Scotland. The survey was open to everyone who at that time had received either (a) a Social Security Scotland benefit, or (b) a successful decision on a benefit application from Social Security Scotland's inception.

¹ Scottish Government (2021) [Devolution of disability benefits: Evaluation strategy](#)

Key Findings: Impact of Child Winter Heating Assistance

Progress towards short-term goals

Official Statistics show that a total of 18,315 payments were made for winter 2020-2021 and 19,865 were made for winter 2021-2022. These statistics highlight that CWAHA helped **to increase household income over the winter months**. Further secondary analysis conducted by Social Security Scotland highlight the payments made across families varying by age, socio economic status, and rurality.

Findings from the Client Survey suggest that CWAHA had a positive impact on recipients, helping them to pay for what they need and to control their finances, likely **easing financial pressure**. These findings were echoed in the qualitative research where participants spoke about CWAHA helping to ease their financial stress and anxieties and, more practically, helping them to pay for their energy bills over the winter months.

Data derived from Official Statistics show that the majority of payments for winter 2020-21 and winter 2021-22 were made by the end of December, showing that the vast majority of recipients had an **increased ability to heat their homes during the coldest winter months**. In the commissioned qualitative research, participants stated that they were able to keep the heating on for longer, for example, during the night, in order to meet their child's needs.

However, participants also highlighted that the notification letter from Social Security Scotland arrived after they received the CWAHA payment. This late communication led to **uncertainty over eligibility** or whether they would **receive the payment**.

Participants of the commissioned qualitative research also said that CWAHA helped to **mitigate against additional heating costs over the winter**, where they used the payment to fund their energy accounts and keep their direct debits as low as possible over this period.

Progress towards medium-term goals

In the commissioned qualitative research, participants said that not receiving the payment would have meant more **stress and money worries** over the winter period. Some highlighted that an **additional stressor** would be having to choose between whether to not pay the heating or to cut back on food spend. They also emphasised that **the health of their child** was dependent on the heating being on for longer, and that CWAHA helped them to do this.

Participants tended to voice that they would rather the payment be **at the start of December** to allow them to pay towards their energy bills as soon as possible and budget their money over this period.

In the commissioned qualitative research, participants spoke about how they had used the CWAHA payment in different ways for winter 2020-21 and 2021-22, both of which helped mitigate them from experiencing financial difficulty or insecurity,

providing an insight into the **mitigation of financial difficulty/insecurity over time**.

Other outcomes

In the commissioned qualitative research, participants said that the payment itself made them feel that the **additional demands they were facing were being recognised**. They also praised the automated process and emphasised this made them feel entitled to the benefit.

However, participants also highlighted a **lack of communication from Social Security Scotland** prior to receiving CWA as a potential area of improvement. Specifically, participants would have liked to have been notified of their eligibility prior to receiving the payment. They would have also liked to have known that the payment is not a one-off, and that it can be used for other means that meet, or help towards meeting, their heating costs, other than energy bills.

Conclusions and policy considerations

This evaluation highlights that CWA has largely met its short-term goals, and made some progress towards its medium-term goals. In doing this, it is reasonable to assume that positive progress has been made towards its longer term goals of children and young people having access to a full range of opportunities, and children and young people having the best start in life. However, the evaluation highlights current operational issues regarding CWA. Therefore, in order to better address the policy goals outlined in this report, it would be beneficial to:

1. Ensure that the payment is made at a time which best meets the needs of families caring for a severely disabled child or young person. Therefore, it would be useful to consider the practicality of issuing CWA earlier, that is, in early December.
2. Improve Social Security Scotland communication so that recipients are (i) notified about their eligibility of receiving the payment prior to receiving it, (ii) know they can use the payment for other means that meet, or help towards meeting, their heating costs, and (iii) know that payment is an annual occurrence rather than a one-off.
3. Consider other methods of communication such as text messages or emails for sending information about the payment to CWA recipients.

Introduction

Since its inception, the Scottish Government has made a clear commitment to eradicating child poverty. A renewed commitment to tackling child poverty was made in the Child Poverty (Scotland) Act 2017.

This renewed commitment aims to utilise, where possible, the wider powers devolved to the Scottish Parliament following the 2014 independence referendum, the Smith Commission and, in particular, the range of social security powers devolved via the Scotland Act 2016.

The Social Security powers that have been devolved through the Scotland Act 2016 give the Scottish Parliament responsibility for £2.8 billion of social security expenditure (around 15% of total benefit expenditure in Scotland) which are enacted by the Social Security (Scotland) Act 2018.

Families with a disabled child are one of the six priority families in the Tackling Child Poverty Delivery Plan.² The 2016 SNP Manifesto set out a commitment to pay Winter Heating Assistance to families with a severely disabled child.

Child Winter Heating Assistance (CWhA) is a new benefit from the Scottish Government. It is a benefit that is only available in Scotland. CWhA was first paid by Social Security Scotland for winter 2020-2021.

The CWhA payment is intended to help the most severely disabled children and young people and their families with increased heating costs over winter. Paid once a year, from November onwards direct to families' bank accounts, the payment for winter 2022-2023 will be £214.10. For winter 2021-2022 the payment was £202, and for winter 2020-2021 it was £200. Parents/Guardians of these children do not usually have to apply for the benefit for entitled children and young people as it is paid automatically.³

CWhA is not means tested and is therefore paid to anyone who is in receipt of the qualifying benefit during the qualifying week. The payment also can be used for any means that meet, or help towards meeting, their winter heating costs.

The initial policy intent of the benefit was to meet the extra financial demands faced by families of disabled children and young people as a result of⁴:

² Scottish Government (2021) [Tackling child poverty: third year progress report 2020-2021 - gov.scot \(www.gov.scot\)](https://www.gov.scot/resources/consultations-policies/child-poverty/tackling-child-poverty-third-year-progress-report-2020-2021-gov-scot)

³ In limited circumstances clients could also apply for Child Winter Heating Assistance. This could apply for example when a child or young person no longer lives in Scotland, but has a genuine and sufficient 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.

⁴ [The Winter Heating Assistance for Children and Young People \(Scotland\) Regulations 2020 \(legislation.gov.uk\)](https://www.legislation.gov.uk)

- 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
- the need to heat their homes for longer periods through the winter because of the likelihood of most children or young people receiving the highest rate care component of DLA (Disability Living Allowance) being present in the family home for longer periods of time.

How is someone entitled to CWHA?

Children and young people in Scotland are entitled if they are under 19 years old and receive one of the following 'qualifying benefits':

- the highest rate of the care component of Child Disability Payment
- the highest rate of the care component of Disability Living Allowance for children
- the enhanced rate of the daily living component of Personal Independence Payment
- the enhanced rate of the daily living component of Adult Disability Payment

These latter two criteria have been subsequently added. Inclusion of those on the enhanced rate of the daily living component of PIP was introduced in November 2021, and inclusion of those on the enhanced rate of ADP was introduced in March 2022. This has resulted in a significant proportion of payments being backdated. Indeed, for winter 2020-21, 23% of payments were made after October 2021. For winter 2021-22, the proportion of those backdated has not been officially recorded yet.

Furthermore, to be entitled to the payment, children and young people must be receiving one of the 'qualifying benefits' listed above on at least one day in the third full week of September (the 'qualifying week').

These eligibility criteria were based on the understanding that children and young people who qualify will⁵:

- be most likely to have conditions that require a consistently warm temperature;
- be generally at risk more if they were to spend time in a cold environment; and,
- generally live in families that are more likely to be on a low income or in poverty.

⁵ [Child Disability Payment: position paper - gov.scot \(www.gov.scot\)](https://www.gov.scot/position-papers/child-disability-payment)

Evaluation Aims

The Scottish Government is creating a new social security system for Scotland, having taken over a number of benefits devolved in the Scotland Act 2016. The Act defined eight principles⁶ which underpin this new system, which aims to treat clients fairly and with dignity and respect. They include making an investment in people, reducing poverty, and bringing value for money. The Scottish Government is committed to evaluating the benefits administered by Social Security Scotland to ensure that they are being delivered in line with these principles.

The overall aims of CWAHA are to help improve the health and wellbeing of the most severely disabled children and young people as well as their families.

Within this, the short-and-medium term policy aims are that:

- The household income for those eligible is increased across the winter months.
- There is a reduction in the financial pressure associated with increased heating expenditure.
- Those who receive the payment have an increased ability to heat their home in winter.
- There is mitigation of additional heating costs over the winter months.
- The health and wellbeing of the most severely disabled children or young people and their families is improved.
- There is mitigation against financial difficulties/insecurities over time.
- People are supported with payment costs at a point in time when it is most needed.

This evaluation is concerned with CWAHA's progress towards these short- and medium-term policy goals as well as that towards longer term impacts⁷ such as, children and young people having access to a full range of opportunities, and children and young people have the best start in life.

This progress can partly be monitored through an analysis of quantitative data (e.g., Official Statistics and survey data), such as the number of benefit payments made and whether objective performance indicators were met. However, it is crucial to learn directly about client experience, to understand in more detail, how benefits are spent, and how the money supports individuals. This provides a key insight into the short- and medium-term impact of benefit payments, but also creates a better understanding of how this could contribute towards longer term impacts.

It should be noted that, we have not evaluated CWAHA in terms of its impact on its long-term goals. These are, children and young people having access to a full range of opportunities, and children and young people having the best start in life

⁶ Scottish Government 2019: [Social Security Scotland: our charter](#).

⁷ Scottish Government 2019: [Evaluating the Policy Impact of Devolved Benefits](#).

specifically (or measurably). However, it is possible to look at trends associated with these elements and the likelihood that CWHA has contributed to them. This can be achieved by looking at the impact on household finances and the ability of families to meet any increased heating costs, for example.

The overall aim of this evaluation is to provide the Scottish Government with timely, robust research on the experience of CWHA recipients. Specifically the evaluation addressed the following research questions:

1. To what extent did CWHA achieve its short-term and medium-term goals?
2. To what extent did CWHA contribute to longer term policy goals?
3. Are there any other outcomes relevant to the implementation and impact of CWHA?

These questions have been predominantly addressed by gathering evidence through primary qualitative research with those who received the payment, had some control of the financial decision-making that arose, and can attest to the impact of the benefit. There has also been use of available statistics in the form of the Client Satisfaction Survey and Official Statistics (both provided by Social Security Scotland and explained in more detail below).

Methodology

This chapter provides an overview of the evaluation approach for CWHA. It describes short-term, medium-term, and long-term goals, outlines research questions driving the evaluation activities, and provides a summary of the different data sources used.

Overview of evaluation design

This evaluation will utilise relevant policy goals to estimate the impact of CWHA. The short-term goals are intended to be immediate and easy to measure as a direct impact of CWHA. Whereas the medium and especially the longer term goals are more distal and are also influenced by other factors.

Relevant short-term goals:

- Household income is increased across the winter months
- Reductions in financial pressure regarding increased heating costs
- Increased ability to heat the home during the winter months
- Mitigation of additional heating costs over the winter

Relevant medium-term goals:

- Improved health and wellbeing
- Mitigating against financial difficulties/insecurities over time

- Supporting people with payment costs at a point in time when it is most needed

Relevant long-term goals:

- Children and young people have the best start in life
- Children and young people have access to a full range of opportunities

It should be noted that the medium and long-term goals relate not only to CWHA but to the wider government goals for children, young people and their families, and are influenced by all social security benefits, as well as other interventions designed to support families with children across the Scottish Government. As such, CWHA will play an important, but not exclusive, role in contributing to these anticipated goals.

Summary of Data Sources

In accordance with the evaluation strategy⁸, the evidence used in this report was drawn from multiple data sources, described below:

Bespoke commissioned research

Axiom was commissioned by the Scottish Government to conduct qualitative research with participants who had received CWHA on their experience of this, the impact that receiving the payment had on them, and suggested improvements to the payment process. The evaluation aimed to map findings onto the short-term as well as the medium/ longer-term policy aims of CWHA. It also aimed to gain an insight into how to improve the client experience, including receiving the payment so that it better addresses the CWHA policy aims.

In-depth interviews, lasting around 45 minutes, were conducted with 19 CWHA recipients across Scotland. Note that in this research, by using the term “recipients” we refer to parents, carers or guardians who receive the CWHA payment on behalf of the child and/or young person who is entitled to it. All interviews took place over the telephone due to preference, and fieldwork was conducted in February 2022. The findings from the commissioned research will be included under the relevant sections in this evaluation report in order to highlight how CWHA is addressing its policy aims. The full bespoke research project from Axiom is available in Annex A.

Official statistics

Social Security Scotland publishes Official Statistics which include information on applications, payments, and clients. The following publications are used as sources of evidence in this report:

- [Child Winter Heating Assistance statistics: Winter 2021/2022](#)
- [Child Winter Heating Assistance: Winter 2020/2021](#)

⁸ Scottish Government 2019: [Evaluating the Policy Impact of Devolved Benefits](#).

Please note that the latest publication (Child Winter Heating Assistance statistics: Winter 2021/2022) has updated information for winter 2020/21 within it.

Please also note the following technical points about how Official Statistics are presented throughout this report:

- Figures are rounded for disclosure control and may not sum due to rounding
- Where stated, secondary analysis has been conducted on rounded figures from published Official Statistics.
- Most results are presented to zero decimal places. '0%' should therefore be interpreted to mean less than 0.5%. If no responses were given then this is denoted by '-'.

Social Security Scotland Client Survey

This report draws on data conducted by the Client Survey team in Social Security Scotland. The Social Security Client Survey was open to everyone who at that time had received either (a) a Social Security Scotland benefit, or (b) a successful decision on a benefit application from Social Security Scotland's inception. The Survey ran August/September 2020 (round 1) and May/June 2021 (round 2), however, only round 2 is significant to this report as CWHHA was not launched until after the first round of the survey.

The Client Survey collected equalities and socio-economic information from respondents. It also asked about their experience of Social Security Scotland and receiving benefits. In total, the second round of the survey received 7,322 responses (around 7.4% of the total number of invites sent), of whom:

1. 836 had received CWHHA and the qualifying benefit only, or were also in receipt of other benefits from Social Security Scotland.
2. 206 had received CWHHA and the qualifying benefit only.

This report will discuss the Client Survey data concerning those who received CWHHA and the qualifying benefit only. Although this is a relatively small subsample of the client survey (n = 206), it is necessary because experiences of other types of benefit may vary. Therefore, reporting on the experiences of those who received CWHHA only will give the most robust insight into CWHHA experiences specifically.

Please also note the following technical points about how Client Survey findings are presented throughout this report:

- The number of respondents providing a valid answer to each individual question/statement varied slightly, within the ranges shown (e.g., 197-206 recipients of CWHHA).
- Most results to the closed questions are rounded to whole numbers. As such, results (e.g. those presented in tables) may not sum to 100% due to rounding.

- Most results are presented to zero decimal places. '0%' should therefore be interpreted to mean less than 0.5%. If no responses were given then this is denoted by '-'.

Limitations

This section discusses what can and cannot be determined from the data sources that are available for this evaluation. It will also highlight how this influences the extent to which robust conclusions can be drawn regarding the impacts CWHA has on its policy goals.

Commissioned qualitative research: This evaluation is largely dependent on findings from externally commissioned work. The work aimed to capture a variety of experiences based on rurality and socioeconomic status in order to provide context and narrative to the quantitative findings from the other data sources on CWHA. However, the work did have the following limitations:

- Though not the goal, the findings are not representative of all CWHA recipients because the overall sample was small, and participants were self-selecting, meaning that they actively chose to take part, as opposed to being randomly selected.
- The sample approached for recruitment also involved those who were members of the Client Panels, not the wider client base of CWHA recipients. This meant that the sample was skewed towards those who are more generally motivated to participate in research. These people may have some other shared characteristics that in turn may skew the results.
- Findings are based on participants' *perceptions* of impact, rather than objective measures of impact.

These are the main limitations from the commissioned qualitative work, but please see Annex A the full commissioned report for a more detailed discussion of the relevant limitations.

Social Security Scotland research: While the commissioned research was explicitly conducted for the current evaluation, Social Security Scotland research (the Client Survey and Official Statistics) was conducted to provide information relevant to operations and policy and does not therefore serve as a direct measurement of the policy goals concerning this evaluation.

On a similar note, the Client Survey was designed for all Social Security clients and not just those who were CWHA recipients. This means that the questions were worded in a general way to make them applicable to all benefits. Therefore, while it is a useful source of supplementary evidence, it is not explicitly designed to gather the views and experiences of CWHA recipients alone.

Furthermore, the Client Survey statistics discussed in this report were based on a small sample in the range of 197-206 recipients of CWHA, the number of which depended on the number of valid responses to the question being asked. Overall, these numbers represent a small proportion of the overall number of children or young people entitled to CWHA in winter 2020/21 (N = 18,315) and winter 2021/22

(N = 19,865). This sample was also self-selecting and no weighting had been conducted to control for potential response bias.⁹ It cannot therefore be assumed that the results represent the CWHA client base as a whole.

Medium and long term impacts: Understanding the true impact of CWHA would require a rounded evaluation of progress towards its medium-term goals, and also its longer-term contribution to the wider Scottish Government impact of children and young people having access to a full range of opportunities, and children and young people having the best start in life. Doing so requires suitable time to have passed, and for the latter in particular, it would involve isolating the influence of CWHA from other contributing factors, such as wider social security benefits. A step in this direction would be to gain access to data with appropriate outcome variables e.g., from population surveys, or further bespoke research. However, at the time of writing there are no concrete proposals on future evaluations of CWHA. More details on options for extended policy evaluation are provided in the evaluation strategy report.¹⁰

Findings

In this chapter of the report, the data sources outlined in the methodology section (bespoke commissioned research, Official Statistics, and the Social Security Scotland Client Survey) are used to evaluate CWHA's progress towards its short-term, and medium-term goals as well as its likely but less tangible progress towards longer term goals.

Progress towards short-term goals

The short-term policy goals of the payment are:

- Household income is increased across the winter months
- Reductions in financial pressure regarding increased heating costs
- Increased ability to heat the home during the winter months
- Mitigation of additional heating costs over the winter

Household income is increased across the winter months

One way to consider whether CWHA helped to increase household income for eligible families with severely disabled children and young people across the winter months is to examine the number of payments that were made. According Official Statistics¹¹, a total of 18,315 CWHA payments were made for winter 2020/2021, with a total value of £3.7 million. For winter 2021-22, a total of 19,865 payments were issued, with a value of £4.0 million.

⁹ For a more detailed discussion of the methodological limitations, see Social Security Scotland (2021) [Client Survey 2018-2021](#)

¹⁰ Scottish Government 2019: [Evaluating the Policy Impact of Devolved Benefits](#).

¹¹ Social Security Scotland (2022). [Child Winter Heating Assistance statistics: Winter 2021/2022](#)

It is also worth noting that the Scottish Government initially reported that 14,015 payments were made in winter 2020-2021, with a total value of £2.8 million.¹² However, following the eligibility expanding to include those young people on the enhanced rate of the daily living component of Personal Independence Payment (PIP), there was a policy commitment to backdate the CWHAs payment to enable as many homes as possible to benefit.

To get a better insight into how CWHAs increased household income, it is beneficial to also consider the diversity of people receiving CWHAs. Table 1 presents secondary analysis of Official Statistics data on the number of payments by age, socioeconomic status, and rurality.

Table 1. Proportions of CWHAs payments by age, socioeconomic status, and rurality¹³

	Winter 2020-2021	Winter 2021-2022
	(n = 18,315)	(n = 19,865)
Child age-group		
0-5	13%	12%
6-10	29%	28%
11-15	32%	33%
16-18	27%	27%
Recipient¹⁴ age-group		
18-24	1%	1%
24-34	21%	20%
35-44	41%	42%
45-54	25%	25%
55+	6%	6%
Unknown¹⁵	5	5%

¹² Social Security Scotland (2021) [Child Winter Heating Assistance statistics: Winter 2020/2021](#)

¹³ Proportions may not sum due to rounding. 2020-21 figures include payments issued since the Social Security Scotland (2021) [Child Winter Heating Assistance statistics: Winter 2020/2021](#) report has been published as well as backdated payments

¹⁴ Generally the parent, carer, guardian who receive CWHAs on the child's and/or young person's behalf

¹⁵ In a small number of cases age band is 'unknown'. This is either due to missing date of birth information or an error in date of birth (e.g. recipient date of birth recorded in place of child date of birth).

SIMD Quintile¹⁶		
1 (most deprived)	32%	32%
2	23%	24%
3	18%	18%
4	16%	16%
5 (least deprived)	11%	11%
Unknown – Other	-	-
Unknown - Scottish	-	-
6-fold Urban Rural Classification		
Large urban area	32%	33%
Other urban area	40%	40%
Accessible small town	8%	8%
Remote small town¹⁷	3%	3%
Accessible rural area	12%	12%
Remote rural area¹⁸	4%	4%
Unknown – Other	-	-
Unknown - Scottish	-	-

The commissioned qualitative research gives insight into the positive impact that CWAHA had on recipients' income and budget over the winter months. Participants highlighted that the additional household income was welcomed and appreciated, and that it helped them to be able to cope with the demands over the winter months.

“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

¹⁶ SIMD Deciles and Urban Rural Classifications are based on the child or young person's postcode. Some postcodes could not be matched to the look-up file, but were identified as being in Scotland. These may be new-builds, which have new postcodes. Some postcodes were identified as being in other parts of the UK, outside of Scotland. This may be where a child has a genuine and sufficient link to Scotland, or where they have moved away.

¹⁷ This row combines remote and very remote small towns.

¹⁸ This row combines remote and very remote rural areas.

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”

(CWAH recipient)

“I had a wee cry to myself when I saw that the CWAH 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”

(CWAH recipient)

Reductions in financial pressure regarding increased heating costs

The Client Survey collected information on the overall impact of receiving CWAH.¹⁹ Respondents were asked to rate, on a scale of 0-10 (‘not at all’ to ‘a lot’), how much their benefit payment (a) helped them to pay for what they needed, (b) helped to make a difference to their life, and (c) helped them to control their finances. The average scores for respondents who had received the CWAH benefit on behalf of the child or young person (n = 206) were:

- 8.1 out of 10 for “help you to pay for what you needed”
- 8.0 out of 10 for “help make a difference to your life”
- 7.2 out of 10 for “help you to control your finances”

Although not a direct measure of financial pressure, these three factors can serve as proximal measurements as they give insight into financial impact of the payment which likely impacts on individuals’ experience of financial pressure. Of these three measures, respondents were relatively less sure that it had helped them control their finances compared to being able to pay for what they need and make a difference to their life.

In the commissioned qualitative research report, participants also confirmed that receiving CWAH helped to reduce experience of financial pressure. From a practical sense, recipients were acutely aware that December, January, and February were the months in which heating bills are most expensive. They reported that the extra money facilitated them being able to meet those extra heating costs while not having to save by cutting down spend for food and other essentials. This highlights the financial impact of the payment which likely impacts on individuals’ experience of financial pressure. Furthermore, recipients spoke about financial pressure in relation to their wellbeing, noting that CWAH had helped to reduce their

¹⁹ Note that this refers to the sample who received CWAH as well as the qualifying benefit, however, the survey asked about benefits in relation to Social Security Scotland alone. As the qualifying benefits either pertain to those provided by the Department of Work and Pensions (DLA and PIP) or benefits not yet asked about (ADP), it is likely recipients’ responses refer to their experience of CWAH alone.

money worries and anxieties regarding increased heating costs over the winter months.

“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”

(CWAHA recipient)

Increased ability to heat the home during the winter months

The Official Statistics provide data on when CWAHA payments were made, which can help give an insight into recipients’ ability to heat their homes during the winter months. For the winter 2020-2021 payments, 73% of payments were made by the 31st of December 2020²⁰, in line with policy commitments. Note that this calculation also takes into account those payments which were backdated (23%) due to the eligibility criteria expanding to include those on the enhanced rate of the daily living component of Personal Independence Payment (PIP) in November 2021. For winter 2021-2022, 93%²¹ of payments were made before the 31st of December.²² However, it should be noted that this is based on payments issued by 31st March 2022, and this percentage may change in future if any backdated payments have been made since then.

Findings from the commissioned qualitative research highlighted that CWAHA allowed families of severely disabled children and young people to turn their heating on for longer periods, especially in the child or young person’s bedroom.

“...their bedroom is their safe haven...”

(CWAHA recipient)

This was particularly important for families with children and young people with irregular sleeping patterns; CWAHA allowed them to heat the home throughout the night. CWAHA also allowed parents/families to put the heating on a little earlier so that their child was returning from school into a warm home, whereas in previous winters the heating would go on when they got in. Furthermore, a number of

²⁰ It should be noted that the deadline of December 31st for determinations being made on CWAHA entitlement has been subsequently removed for operational flexibility as well as to ensure clients are being paid at a time most suitable to them.

²¹ This percentage is reflective of the total number of payments made up to March 2022. The date was not recorded for 35 payments so these were excluded from this proportion but may have been issued before the 31st of December 2021.

²² For winter 2020-21, 76% were made prior to January 31st 2021 (with 3% between December 31st and January 31st), 1% were made between February 1st and May 31st 2021, and 23% were made after October 2021. The majority comprising this latter proportion was likely due to back payments issued as a result of the eligibility increasing to include those on the enhanced rate of the daily living component of Personal Independence Payment (PIP) in October 2021. For winter 2021-22, 99% of payments were made prior to January 31st 2022 (with 6% between December 31st and January 31st), and 1% were made between February 1st and March 31st 2022.

participants noted that they were able to have a good supply of hot water which was seen as an important part of the care routine for their disabled child or young person.

Mitigation of additional heating costs over the winter

The commissioned qualitative research highlighted that CWHA helped to alleviate the additional heating costs over the winter period. Indeed, the vast majority of participants said that they used their CWHA to immediately pay their energy provider, either to pay off outstanding balance they may have had or to pay the entire amount as a one-off payment. This helped them to reduce their monthly energy bill direct debit to as low as possible at the start of winter, and mitigate additional heating costs. Other motivations to do this were Covid-19 and the cost of living crisis. Participants explained how these situations had further exacerbated the additional heating costs that they were already facing in order to care for their severely disabled child. That CWHA gave them the opportunity to pay into their energy accounts was therefore seen as a particular benefit.

Progress towards medium-term goals

Increased Health and Wellbeing

Respondents to the Client Survey who had received CWHA only (n = 206) rated that the payment helped make a difference to their life on an average of 8.0 out of 10 (where 0 = “not at all” and 10 = “a lot”), suggesting an indirect positive impact on health and wellbeing.

In addition to participants’ expressing the aforementioned decreases in financial pressure as a result of receiving CWHA, participants of the commissioned qualitative research were also asked about the ramifications if they were to not have received CWHA. Participants commonly noted that, if they had not received CWHA, they would have experienced more stress with regards to worrying about being able to meet increased heating costs over the winter. Specifically, the stress would be caused by the knowledge that non-payment of heating bills would lead to increases in subsequent heating bills, making their financial situation worse. Participants also talked around the recent significant increases of heating bills and noted that this would also exacerbate the problem, making it even more difficult to “catch-up” with bills.

If they had not received CWHA, participants said that another stressor for them would be the difficulty of having to choose between whether to pay the heating bill or buy good food for their family. Others also expressed this difficult decision in relation to paying their heating bill or cutting back on what they spend on food more generally. This highlights the cumulative impact that no CWHA payment would have on other household budgets. Specifically, participants stated that they would have to cut back on food spend, would be unable to buy fresh food, have to rely on low-cost supermarket nearing sell-by date offers, and that they would have to plan every meal in order to work within a restricted budget.

“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”

(CWAHA recipient)

Participants also spoke about the direct positive impacts of CWAHA, where they were able to proactively manage the direct debit payments to their energy provider. This was seen as important to reduce monthly payments at the start of the winter. Being able to proactively manage payments could potentially lead participants feeling more in control of their finances.

However participants were uncertain over whether they were going to receive CWAHA. Indeed, the letters that notified participants of their eligibility tended to be paid after they had received CWAHA. Participants said that this resulted in them not being able to plan as efficiently as they could if they were aware, which could potentially inhibit feeling in control over finances.

Supporting people with payment costs at a point in time when it is most needed

January and February tend to be the coldest winter months, and therefore arguably when the heating bills will be at their highest. Given that 73% of payments for winter 2020-21 and 93% for winter 2021-22 were paid prior to December 31st, this suggests that the vast majority of payments were made before the heating bills were at the highest, potentially when they were needed most.

Respondents to the Client Survey who had received the CWAHA payment only (n = 206) also rated that the payment helped them to pay for what they needed on an average of 8.1 out of 10 (where 0 = “not at all” and 10 = “a lot”). Helping recipients pay for what they needed was in fact the highest rated positive impact of the three that were asked about in the survey, the other two being helping to make a difference to recipients’ lives and helping recipients to control their finances.

For winter 2020-21, participants of the qualitative commissioned work also clarified that they kept the CWAHA payment aside to cover the January heating bill, suggesting that receiving CWAHA before this heating bill would be optimal to meet recipients’ needs.

“January is usually the biggest heating bill every year. We received the CWAHA 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”

(CWAHA recipient)

In contrast, recipients used the Winter 21/22 CWAHA payment to either clear off any outstanding balance they had, or to make a one-off payment to ensure their energy providers account balance was in credit. This suggests that timing was less important this year. The main reason provided for the differences between the two years was the cost of living crisis, which encouraged recipients to keep on top of

their bills more. Given that the cost of living crisis will likely continue into this year, it seems that CWA payment will help to meet needs with regards to heating bills irrespective of the time in winter that it is paid.

Indeed, participants in the qualitative commissioned research voiced that they would prefer that CWA was paid before Christmas, with desire for the payment being made in early December. One point of view was that the payment be made in November to allow for budget planning over the Christmas period, where the majority of participants wanted to minimise their direct debit payments by setting their monthly bill to as low as possible at the start of the winter period. Nonetheless, another point of view was that earlier payment may result in the payment not being used for what it is intended.

“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”

(CWA recipient)

Mitigating against financial difficulties/insecurities over time

Unfortunately, the available data does not give any direct insight into the proportion of families who are currently experiencing financial difficulties and insecurities, and therefore it cannot give a direct insight into how CWA has impacted on these families to mitigate current financial difficulties or insecurities. Equally, it is difficult to measure the impact of CWA against financial difficulties or insecurities over time as this would require longitudinal data that is simply not yet available given the age of the benefit.

However, when considering those who might currently be in financial difficulty or currently facing financial insecurities, Scottish Household Survey statistics do highlight that higher proportions of those living with limiting disabilities are living in more deprived areas than those with limiting disabilities living in less deprived areas²³. This does indeed follow the trend of CWA payments by SIMD quintile highlighted in Table 1, where higher proportions of payments were made to those in more deprived areas. Although it should be noted that the figures from the Scottish Household Survey also likely include those who are not eligible for CWA (those who are not receiving the highest rate of the care component of DLA or CDP nor the enhanced rate of the daily living component of PIP and ADP). It should also be noted that SIMD is not a direct measure of financial difficulty or insecurity and therefore it cannot be assumed that those living in the most deprived areas, for example, are currently experiencing financial difficulties or insecurities.

The commissioned qualitative work does provide some insights into the hardships that people are already facing. Although it should again be noted that this does not necessarily mean that they are currently experiencing financial difficulty or insecurity. Nonetheless, participants spoke about difficult choices they face such as

²³ Scottish Government (2019). [Scottish Health Survey Data](#)

heating the house or buying fresh food for their family, and highlighted that CWHA helped prevent them from facing these choices.

“We do everything we can to make sure we give our daughter as 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.”

(CWHA recipient)

“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”

(CWHA recipient)

With regards to mitigating against any experience of financial difficulty or insecurity, respondents to the Client Survey who had received the CWHA payment only (n = 206) also rated that the payment helped them to control their finances on an average of 7.2 out of 10 (where 0 = “not at all” and 10 = “a lot”). Though this rating was markedly lower than the other two positive impacts asked about in the survey (helping recipients to pay for what they needed and helping to make a difference to recipients’ life), it was still positively weighted towards helping recipients a lot compared to not helping them at all.

Furthermore, the commissioned qualitative work asked about recipients experiences of the payment for both winter 2020-21 and winter 2021-22, which helps to give an initial insight into the positive benefits of CWHA over a two year winter period. Recipients highlighted that CWHA has helped them feel more in control of their finances as well as help them to be able to keep up with their energy bills over the winter months. Participants also spoke about CWHA helping them to pay off outstanding balances they may have had with their energy provider straight away in winter 2021-22. While for winter 2020-21, they kept the money aside for their January bill. This highlights how recipients have used their payments differently over both winter periods, but both in ways that have helped them to mitigate against the experience of financial difficulty or insecurity.

Indeed, when asked about what would have happened had they not received CWHA, participants spoke about the high risk of falling behind on their energy bill payments over the winter months, and the difficulty in recovering this over the summer months due to the recent energy cost rises.

Other outcomes

Families feel difficulties meeting increased heating needs have been recognised

In the qualitative commissioned work, without being prompted, participants stated how grateful they were for the CWHA payment and were hugely appreciative that Scottish Government had recognised the financial pressures they were facing.

“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”

(CWHA recipient)

Participants also highlighted that a particular advantage of CWHA was that it was an automated payment that did not require an application process. Indeed, the automated nature of the payment seemed to help families feel that they were entitled to the benefit.

“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 hard it can be to look after a disabled child and they are doing their bit to help us”

(CWHA recipient)

Issues with communication

However, the qualitative commissioned research did also highlight the need for better communication from Social Security Scotland, where participants noted that they were unaware that they were eligible to receive CWHA, whether they were going to receive the payment, that the payment could be used for needs other than energy bills, or that the payment was to be made on an annual basis. One reason given for the first two points was because the letter that notified participants of their eligibility, of the purposes of the benefit, and of the payment dates, arrived *after* they had received the payment.

Participants commonly suggested digital communication as a potential alternative to posting notification letters. Although it should be noted that the level of information that is required by law to be provided with a notice of award cannot feasibly be given by text. Nonetheless, improving the timing of the notification letter as well as offering different methods of sharing information about CWHA could therefore help improve understanding of the purpose of the payment, perhaps further increasing the feeling that recipients’ needs have been recognised.

Progress towards longer term goals

As set out in the tackling child poverty delivery plan²⁴, the Scottish Government has been delivering support for families and children across a range of policy areas, including social security. These actions are intended to contribute to a range of long-term government goals, the following of which are relevant to CWHAs:

- Children and young people have access to a full range of opportunities
- Children and young people have the best start in life

CWHA will play a small but important role to working towards achieving these goals. However, these goals are highly complex and multifaceted. Indeed, CWHAs are one of a number of ways in which the Scottish Government is trying to tackle these issues. A package of policies has been proposed by the Scottish Government in which these policies are expected to have cumulative impact.²⁵ However, it should be noted that the impact of disability benefits, including CWHAs, on the longer term goals is particularly difficult to estimate given that these benefits are significantly underreported.

Measuring the impact of CWHAs would also require (a) suitable time to have passed since the payment was introduced, and (b) access to more robust and suitable quantitative data than is currently available. It should also be noted, however, that isolating the specific role of CWHAs would be challenging even with additional data.

Nonetheless, it can be reasonably expected that success against CWHAs' short and medium-term goals could help to contribute to the Scottish Government achieving its long-term goals. For example, meeting the heating needs of families with severely disabled children or young people likely makes some progress towards positively impacting on these children and young people having a better start in life.

Conclusion and policy considerations

The overall aim of this evaluation is to provide the Scottish Government with timely, robust research on the experience of CWHAs recipients. Specifically the purpose was to:

1. Evaluate the extent to which CWHAs has met its short-term and medium-term policy goals.
2. Assess the likely contribution of CWHAs to wider long-term government goals for severely disabled children and their families.

²⁴ Scottish Government (2018) [Every child, every chance: tackling child poverty delivery plan 2018-2022](#); Scottish Government (2022) [Best start, bright futures: tackling child poverty delivery plan 2022-2026](#).

²⁵ Scottish Government (2022) [Supporting documents - Tackling child poverty delivery plan 2022-2026 - annex 4: cumulative impact assessment](#)

3. Identify any other outcomes relevant to the implementation and impact of CWHHA.

The evaluation has shown that CWHHA has made significant progress in addressing its short-term policy goals. The evaluation has highlighted that for families with a severely disabled child or young person, CWHHA helped to: increase household income across the winter months; reduce financial pressure regarding increased heating costs; increase the ability to heat homes; and mitigate additional heating costs.

This evaluation has also illustrated that CWHHA has made some progress towards meeting its medium-term goals. CWHHA recipients said they experienced less stress and anxiety around whether they would be able to heat their homes, positively impacting on wellbeing. They also explained that heating their home had a direct positive impact on the health of their child. Furthermore, CWHHA recipients spoke about an increased ability to manage their finances by using the payment to meet different needs in winter 2020-21 and winter 2021-22. They also highlighted that CWHHA gave them an increased opportunity to provide for their families, for example, being able to also provide fresh food and not having to cut back on food spend.

As described above, it is not possible to provide a direct insight into CWHHA's independent contribution to longer term impacts such as children and young people having access to a full range of opportunities, and children and young people having the best start in life. Indeed, CWHHA is only intended to be one of a number of initiatives that has been put in place to tackle these issues.²⁶ However, given that CWHHA has made positive progress towards its short-term and medium-term goals, it is reasonable to assume that CWHHA is making a small but important positive contribution to its longer term goals.

Furthermore, the evaluation identified that another positive outcome of CWHHA was that families felt that the additional difficulties they faced with regards to increased heating costs were being recognised by the Scottish Government.

Despite this positive progress towards short, medium, and long-term goals, the evaluation has also found some limitations with the current operationalisation of CWHHA, highlighting the need for some areas for improvement. Therefore, in order for CWHHA to better address policy goals, the following should be considered:

1. Ensure that the payment is made at a time which best meets the needs of families caring for a severely disabled child or young person. Therefore, it would be useful to consider the practicality of issuing CWHHA earlier, that is, in early December.

Participants of the commissioned qualitative research commonly expressed a desire for CWHHA to be paid at the beginning of December. Though this research was not representative, it does show that this year, with the current cost of living

²⁶ Scottish Government (2022) [Supporting documents - Tackling child poverty delivery plan 2022-2026 - annex 4: cumulative impact assessment](#)

crisis, recipients preferred to use the payment immediately to keep their direct debits low over the winter months. Though it should be noted that last year recipients held onto their payment in order to pay off their January energy bill. These findings suggest that the payments will likely be used differently to meet different needs depending on recipients' financial situation at the time. Nonetheless, an earlier payment may allow for more flexibility to utilise the money in line with needs.

2. Improve Social Security Scotland communication so that recipients are notified about their eligibility of receiving the payment prior to receiving it, know they can use the payment for other means that meet, or help towards meeting, their heating costs, and know that payment is an annual occurrence rather than a one-off.

There is a need to improve the timing of CWHHA notification letters in order to keep recipients informed. Participants of the commissioned qualitative research said that receiving these letters subsequent to receiving the CWHHA payment itself caused confusion around eligibility as well as around whether CWHHA would be paid out. Addressing this in the future will help to ensure CWHHA recipients feel that their needs are being met by Social Security Scotland. Furthermore, the vast majority of recipients of the qualitative commissioned research were not aware that the payment could be made for necessities other than heating bills. Recipients should be made aware that they have the autonomy to use the payment for any means that meet, or help towards meeting, their heating costs.

3. Considering other methods of communication such as text messages or emails for notifying CWHHA recipients.

The commissioned qualitative research highlighted an appetite for other forms of communication. Specifically, participants stated that text messages and emails to provide information about CWHHA would be beneficial, reduce costs, and a quicker way to communicate. It should be noted that the level of information that is required by law to be provided with a notice of award cannot feasibly be given by text. However, using text messages to send supplementary information could be an option to better improve communication from Social Security Scotland going forward. Giving CWHHA recipients the option of what form of communication they prefer, whether that be email or post, will also help to ensure that they feel their needs are being met by Social Security Scotland.

How to access background or source data

The data collected for this social research publication:

may be made available on request, subject to consideration of legal and ethical factors. Please contact <Social_Research@gov.scot> for further information.



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