

EQUALITY, POVERTY AND SOCIAL SECURITY

Scottish Welfare Fund Statistics: Annual Update: 2020/21

Introduction

The Scottish Welfare Fund comprises Community Care Grants – which help people to live independently – and Crisis Grants, which provide a safety net in a disaster or emergency.

This publication provides information on the Scottish Welfare Fund for the financial year of 2020/21. It also contains information from previous financial years dating back to 1 April 2013, when the scheme began.

The publication also includes monthly management information on the Scottish Welfare Fund and the Self-isolation Support Grant, broken down by local authority level. Scottish Welfare Fund management information covers from January 2020 to May 2021 and Self-isolation Support Grant management information covers from October 2020, when the scheme began, to May 2021. Management information is included for comparison with the Scottish Welfare Fund Official Statistics and to provide more recent figures that show the impacts of COVID-19 on the Scottish Welfare Fund and the Self-isolation Support Grant.

A supplementary spreadsheet containing 74 tables and 15 charts has also been published. Electronic versions of this document and accompanying tables and charts are available at: <https://www.gov.scot/collections/sg-social-security-scotland-stats-publications/#scottishwelfarefundstatistics>

These statistics are being published as experimental statistics. Experimental statistics are defined in the Code of Practice for Official Statistics as "*new official statistics undergoing evaluation. They are published in order to involve users and stakeholders in their development and as a means to build in quality at an early stage.*" These statistics have not yet been assessed by the UK Statistics Authority. They have not been designated as National Statistics¹.

¹ For more information on experimental statistics please see:

<https://osr.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/publication/experimental-statistics-official-statistics-in-development/>

Summary of main points

From when the Scottish Welfare Fund scheme began on 1 April 2013 until 31 March 2021, **428,260 individual households** have received awards totalling **£287.3 million**. A third of households receiving an award were families with children, while just over half were single person households with no children.

In 2020/21, local authorities received **84,325 applications for Community Care Grants** (15% more than 2019/20) and made **48,095 awards** (14% more than 2019/20) – an acceptance rate of 57% (three percentage points higher than 2019/20). **Expenditure on Community Care Grant awards totalled £29.5 million**, which is 20% more than 2019/20. The average award was £613.

At the same time, local authorities received **271,295 applications for Crisis Grants** (22% more than 2019/20) and made **188,120 awards** (34% more than the 2019/20 - an acceptance rate of 69% (six percentage points higher than 2019/20). **Expenditure on Crisis Grant awards totalled £20.0 million**, 54% more than 2019/20. The average award was £106.

In 2020/21, 28% of Community Care Grant applications were **repeat applications**, two percentage points higher than 2019/20, and 71% of Crisis Grant application were repeats, four percentage points higher than 2019/20. This is the highest proportion of Crisis grant repeat applications in any year since the start of the Scottish Welfare Fund.

In 2020/21, 84% of Community Care Grant applications and 94% of Crisis Grant applications were processed within the target time limits.

Local authorities were **allocated £57.5 million** for Scottish Welfare Fund awards in 2020/21, which included a **£22.0 million COVID-19 allocation**. There was also an estimated underspend of £2.0 million carried forward from 2019/20. Of the estimated total £59.5 million available for awards this year, **£49.5 million (83%) was spent by 31 March 2021**. At this time last year less had been spent (£37.6 million), however a larger proportion of the budget had been spent (108%) because the available budget was lower (£34.9 million). In October 2020, a **further £20 million** was allocated to a flexible fund that can be used for Scottish Welfare Fund, Discretionary Housing Payments or other means of support for people through the pandemic.

Since April 2013, there have been 25,860 Tier 1 reviews for Community Care Grants, and 28,440 for Crisis Grants. Just under half of decisions have been revised at this stage for both Community Care Grants (47%) and Crisis Grants (45%).

In our previous publications, we highlighted **data quality issues** with the official statistics, and discrepancies between the official statistics and management information. While there are still data quality issues in the official statistics for certain local authorities (described in the [data quality section](#)), the discrepancies

between the official statistics and management information have reduced in the last year at Scotland level. Overall, the monthly management information and quarterly data extracts have similar figures for Community Care Grant applications (-3% in quarterly extract) and expenditure (+2%) but there is a slightly larger discrepancy in awards (-5% in the quarterly extract). At Scotland level, the monthly management information and quarterly data extracts have similar figures for Crisis Grant awards (-2%) and expenditure (-1%) but there is a slightly larger discrepancy in applications (-5% in the quarterly extract). Management information to February 2021 has been provided in **Tables 72 and 73** for comparison to the official statistics. However, the official statistics provide much more detailed information and breakdowns that are not available from the monthly management information and remain the recommended primary source for analysis and commentary.

We have provided monthly management information of **Self-Isolation Support Grant** applications, awards and expenditure broken down by local authority in **Table 74**. However, comparisons should not be made between the numbers of applications received by local authorities, particularly due to variations in the administrative systems used to apply for the grant.

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Applications

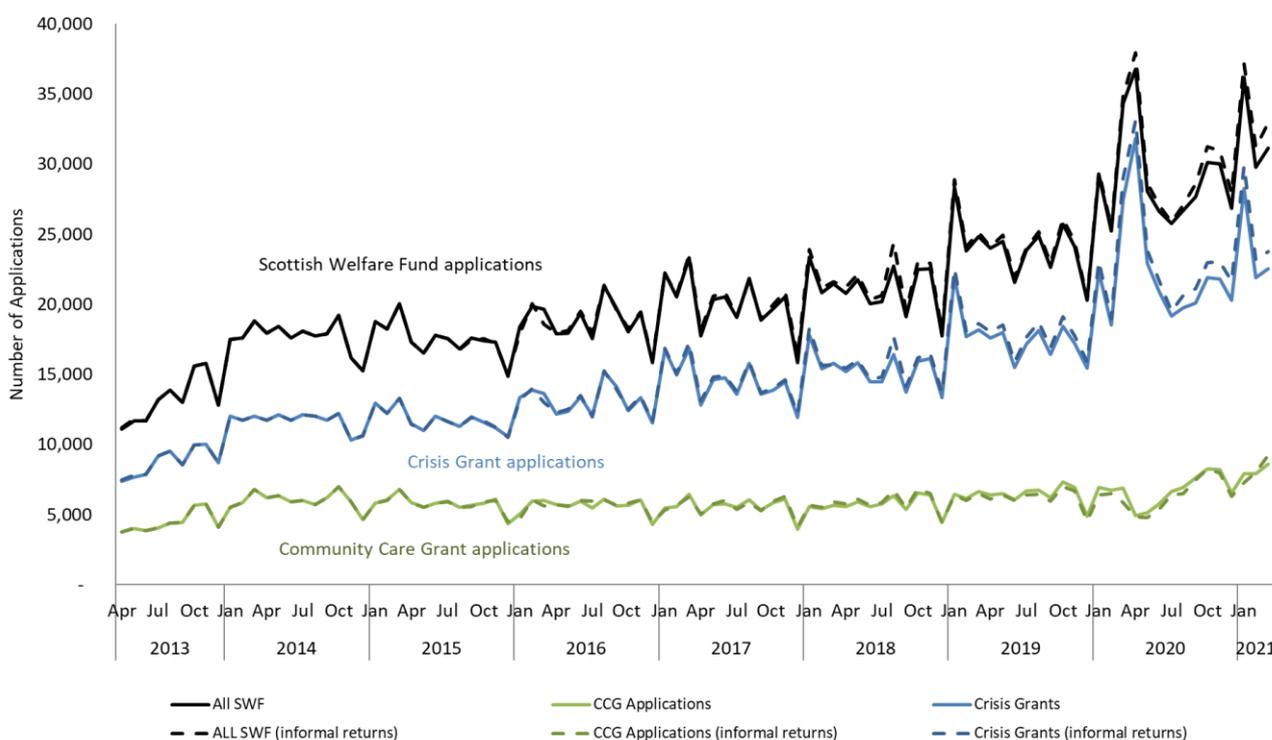
A total of 355,615 applications to the Scottish Welfare Fund were received in 2020/21, an increase of 18% compared to 2019/20 (**Table 2**), the majority were for Crisis Grants (271,295, **Table 6**), and a smaller proportion were for Community Care Grants (84,325, **Table 4**).

Compared to 2019/20, the number of Community Care Grant applications increased by 8% (6,210) (**Table 4, Chart 1**), continuing an upward trend since 2018/19. At local authority level this varied from a 19% decrease in Shetland to a 60% increase in Edinburgh (**Table 4**).

The number of Crisis Grant applications increased by 22% (49,235) (**Table 6, Chart 1**), continuing an upward trend since 2015/16. At local authority level, this varied from a 56% decrease in Shetland to a 108% increase in Edinburgh (**Table 6**).

Applications to the Scottish Welfare Fund peaked in April 2020 and January 2021. In April 2020 there were 53% more Scottish Welfare Fund applications than April 2019, and in January 2021 there were 24% more Scottish Welfare Fund applications than in January 2020, according to the Official Statistics (**Chart 1**). The April 2020 peak was due to an increase in Crisis Grant applications (+81%) that was likely due to the impacts of COVID-19. The January 2021 peak was due to increases in both Crisis Grants (+27%) and Community Care Grants (+14%); while increased Scottish Welfare Fund applications in January are consistent with previous years it is likely that this was also due to impacts of COVID-19.

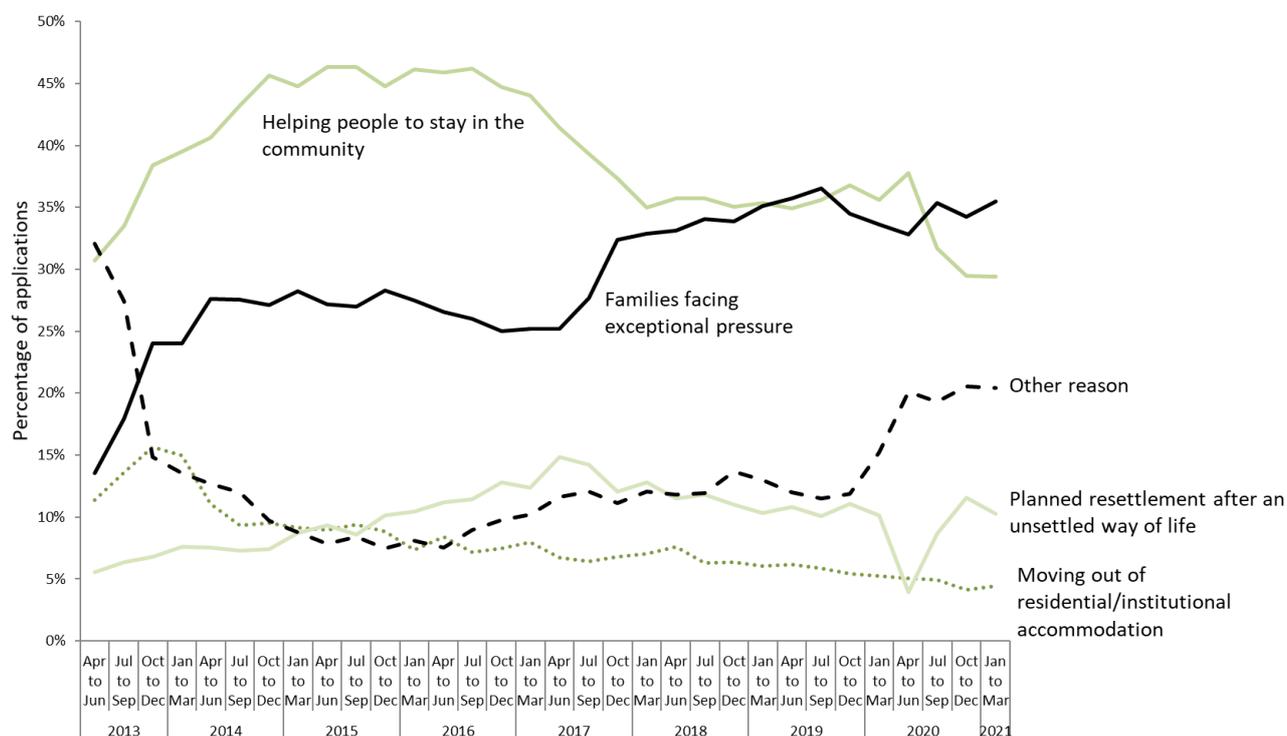
Chart 1: Applications to the Scottish Welfare Fund – Scotland – Monthly



In the most recent year, there were relatively large changes in reasons for Community Care applications, which may relate to COVID-19.

The most common reason for Community Care Grant applications was ‘Families facing exceptional pressure’ (35% of applications) (**Table 8**). This reason increased by six percent, compared to 2019/20, and overtook ‘Helping people to stay in the community’ (32% of applications), which was the most common reason in previous years, and decreased by five percent, compared to 2019/20. The number of applications due to ‘Other’ reasons increased by 71%, compared to 2019/20. This category is likely to include applications that local authorities have recorded the reason as ‘COVID-19’ or similar on their own software systems, or could indicate a decrease in data quality due to additional pressures related to COVID-19.

Chart 2: Reasons for Application – Community Care Grants - Quarterly

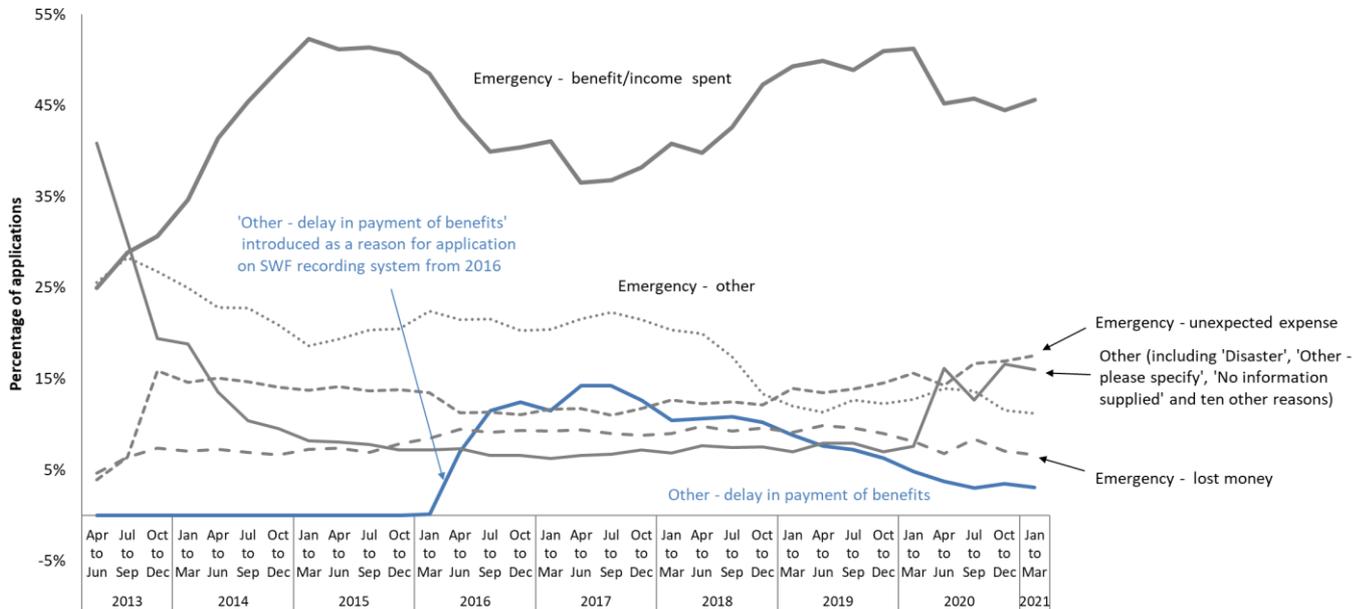


The most common reasons for Crisis Grant applications are different types of emergency (85% applications in 2020/21), whereas disasters such as fires and floods are less common (fewer than 1% of applications) (**Table 11, Chart 3**).

The most common reason remained ‘Emergency - benefit/income spent’ (45% of applications) which increased by 10% (11,090 applications), compared to 2019/20 (**Table 11**). The second most common reason was ‘Emergency – unexpected expense’ which increased by 38% (12,095 applications), compared to 2019/20. There were also increases in applications due to ‘Other’ reasons (+317%, 23,080 additional applications) and in applications due to ‘Emergency – other’ reasons (+25%, 6,790 additional applications), compared with 2019/20. Again applications recorded as under other reasons may relate directly to COVID-19, or to a decrease in data quality.

The number of applications due to delays in payment of benefits gradually increased after this reason was introduced in 2016, peaked in July to September 2017 (6,100 applications) and since then decreased to 2,230 applications in the most recent quarter, which was 3% of all Crisis Grant applications, and a decrease of 32% compared to the same quarter in 2020 (Table 10, Chart 3).

Chart 3: Reasons for Application – Crisis Grants – Quarterly



Processing Times

84% of Community Care Grant applications were processed within the target time of 15 working days in 2020/21. This is an increase of two percentage points compared to 2019/20 (**Table 14, Chart 4**). In the latest quarter, processing times varied by local authority, from 51% in Aberdeen City and Glasgow City to 100% in six local authorities: Argyll and Bute, Clackmannanshire, East Ayrshire, East Renfrewshire, Inverclyde and Orkney (**Table 15**). The proportion processed within target has been low for Glasgow City in previous quarters in 2020/21, and the council have indicated this has been due to high demand (**Table 1**).

94% of Crisis Grant applications were processed within the target time of the next working day in 2020/21, one percentage point less than 2019/20 (**Table 17, Chart 5**). In the latest quarter, processing times varied from 70% in Shetland and 76% in Glasgow City to 100% in six local authorities: Argyll and Bute, East Ayrshire, East Renfrewshire, Falkirk, Inverclyde and Orkney (**Table 18**).

A chart showing the variation in processing times for Community Care Grant applications within each local authority is included in the separate tables file that accompanies this publication (**Chart 4b**). This chart illustrates that as well as there being a variation in the proportion of applications processed on time between local authorities (**Tables 15**), there can be considerable variation within local authorities. For example, **Chart 4b** shows that for Community Care Grants since April 2013, the median processing time (or the middle value of processing times if all applications were ranked from highest to lowest) was lower than the target of 15 working days. However, 95% of applications took up to around 26 days to process, with 5% of applications taking longer than this.

There is much lower variation in processing times for Crisis Grants. Since April 2013, the median processing time (or the middle value of processing times if all applications were ranked from highest to lowest) for all local authorities has been either the same or next working day.

It is possible that cases are currently missing from the dataset used to produce this publication due to delays in processing, or due to cases being awarded in principle or 'pending' on local authority systems. It is therefore possible that estimates of the proportion of cases processed within target times could change for the latest quarter once these cases are received.

Chart 4: Initial Processing Times for Community Care Grants – Quarterly

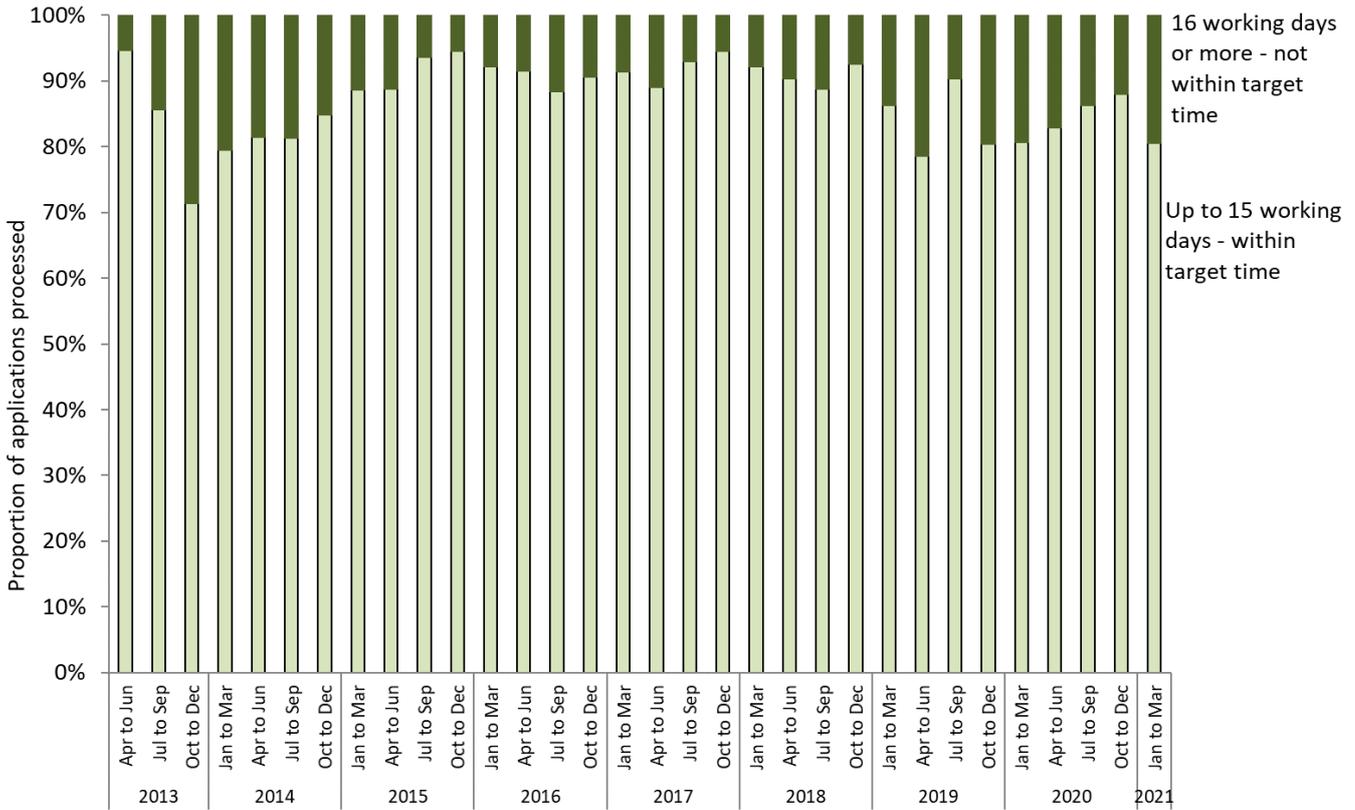
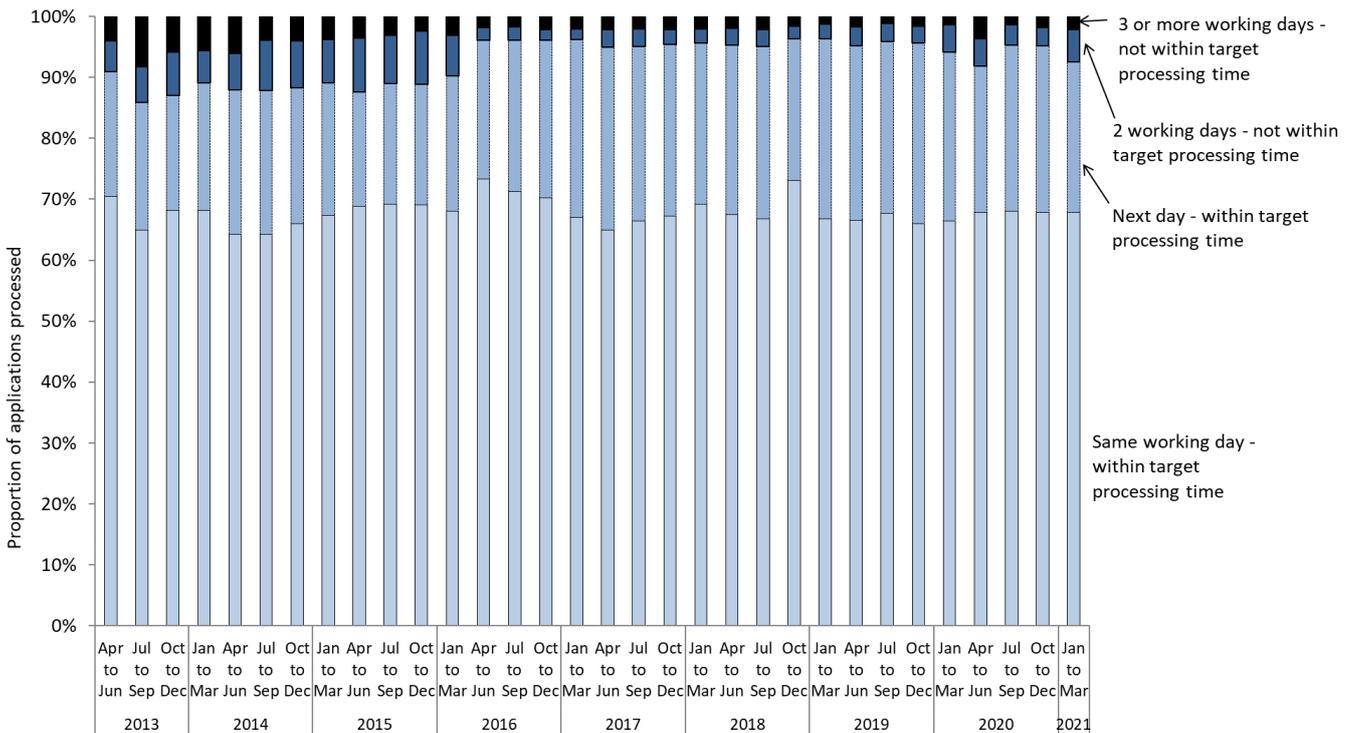


Chart 5: Initial Processing Times for Crisis Grants – Quarterly



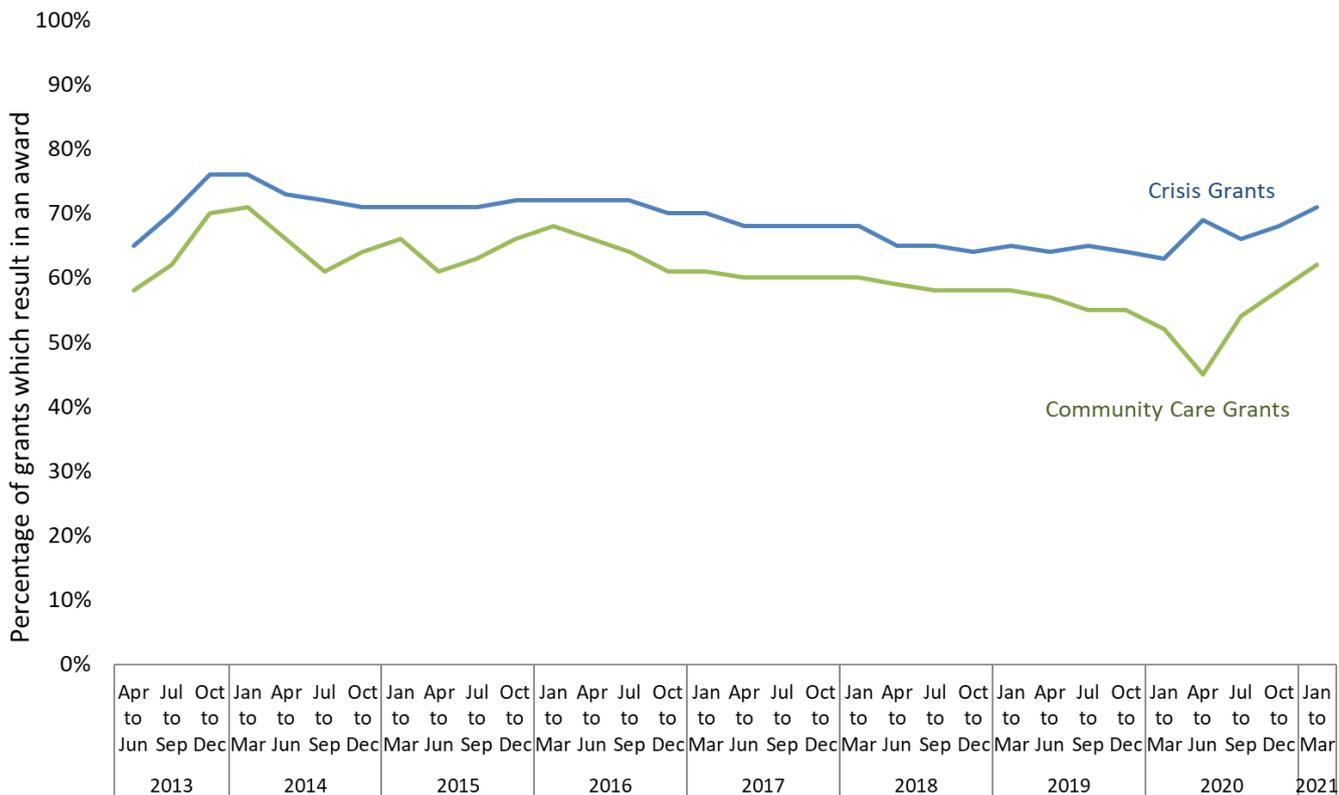
Decisions and awards

Decisions were made on 84,325 Community Care Grant applications in 2020/21 and 48,095 awards were made, representing an acceptance rate of 57% (**Table 19**), three percentage points higher than 2019/20 (**Table 23**). At the same time, decisions were made on 271,295 Crisis Grant applications in 2020/21 and 188,120 awards were made with an acceptance rate of 69% (**Table 24**), six percentage points higher than 2019/20. (**Table 28**).

The highest Community Care Grant acceptance rate was in Inverclyde (80%), and the lowest was in Fife (33%). Compared to 2019/20, acceptance rates increased in 22 local authorities and decreased in 10 local authorities (**Table 23**). The highest Crisis Grant acceptance rate was in Inverclyde (84%) and the lowest was in Shetland (45%); compared to 2019/20, acceptance rates increased in 29 local authorities and decreased in three local authorities (**Table 28**).

There were variations in Community Care Grant and Crisis Grant acceptance rates during the year, which may have been due to COVID-19 (**Table 22, Table 27, Chart 6**). In April to June 2020 the acceptance rate for Community Care Grants decreased to 45%, 12 percentage points lower than the same quarter of 2019, whereas in contrast, the acceptance rate for Crisis Grants increased to 69%, five percentage points higher than the same quarter of 2019. Toward the end of 2020/21 acceptance rates increased for both Community Care Grants and Crisis Grants with 62% of Community Care Grants and 71% of Crisis Grants approved in January to March 2021, ten percentage points and eight percentage points higher than the same quarter of 2020, respectively.

Chart 6: Community Care Grant and Crisis Grant acceptance rates – Quarterly

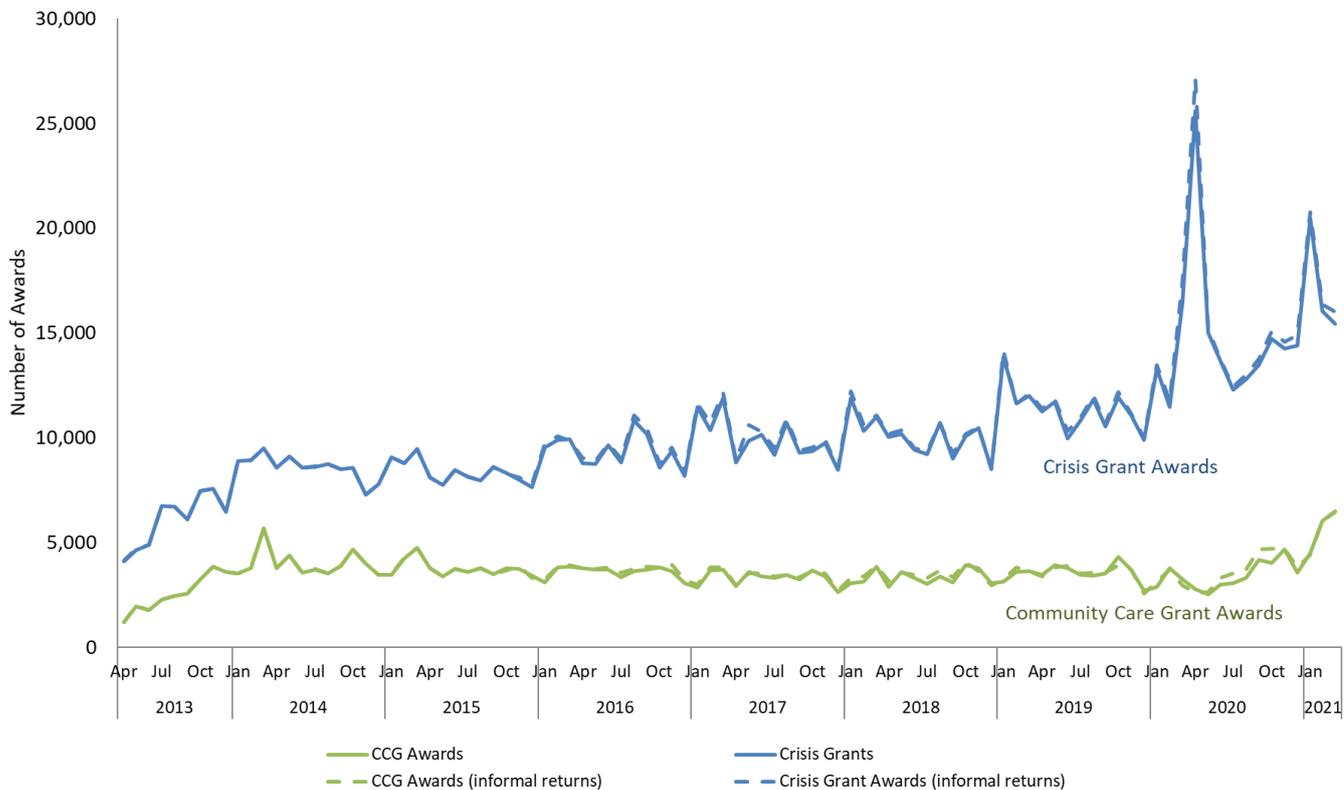


The number of Community Care Grants awarded in 2020/21 (48,095 awards) was 14% higher (5,850 awards) than in 2019/20, and the number of Crisis Grants awarded in 2021 (188,120 awards) was 34% higher (47,910 awards) than in 2019/20 (**Table 21, Table 26**).

During the year, there were sharp increases in Crisis Grant awards in April 2020 and January 2021 (**Chart 7**). In April 2020, there 25,600 awards, 128% more than April 2019, and in January 2021 there were 20,465 awards, 54% more than January 2020 - these peaks in Crisis Grant awards were likely due to the impacts of COVID-19.

In contrast to the increased Crisis Grant awards in April 2020, the number of Community Care Grant awards fell in May 2020 (2,515 awards), a decrease of 36% compared to May 2019. This decrease may also have been due to the impacts of COVID-19 as lockdown restrictions may have prevented local authorities from completing some Community Care Grants (for example those requiring delivery or installation of goods). From December 2020 until the end of the financial year (2020/21) Community Care Grants awards increased. In March 2021, there were 6,485 awards, an increase of 99% compared to March 2020 (**Chart 7**). It is possible that this increase was due to the release of lockdown restrictions allowing local authorities to complete more Community Care Grants. It may also be due to local authorities adjusting their priority levels as they approached the end of the financial year with budget remaining.

Chart 7: Number of Scottish Welfare Fund Awards – Scotland – Monthly



At local authority level, the greatest increase in Community Care Grant awards compared to 2019/20 was in Aberdeen City (52% increase), reflecting a 17 percentage point increase in the acceptance rate (**Table 21, Table 23**). The greatest decrease was in Shetland (17% decrease), although this was a decrease of only 12 awards. The greatest increase in Crisis Grant awards was in Edinburgh (141% increase), reflecting a 108% increase in applications (**Table 26, Table 6**). The greatest decrease was in Shetland (66% decrease), although this was a decrease of only 88 awards.

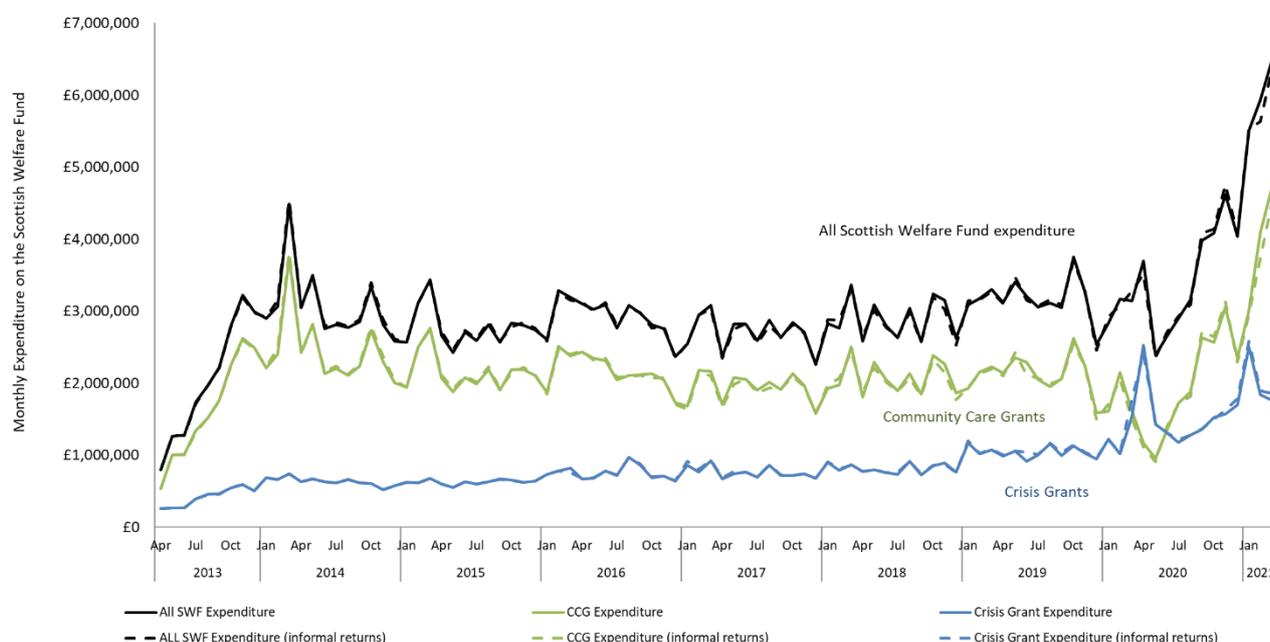
In January to March 2021, the most common reason for Community Care Grant application rejections remained ‘Reasons for application do not meet the conditions for an award’ (58%), and the most common reason for Crisis Grant application rejections remained ‘Excluded as a result of previous application history’ (31%) (**Table 29, Table 31**).

Expenditure and budgets

Unless otherwise stated, all expenditure information in this publication is based on the date of decision. As such it should be regarded as committed spend, rather than actual spend. Where a case has been reviewed, expenditure is assigned to the quarter of the initial decision rather than the review date. Further discussion of expenditure data quality is included in the [Data Quality](#) section of the publication.

Local authorities submit monthly management information returns to the Scottish Government. These returns also contain expenditure information on Community Care Grants and Crisis Grants. **Chart 8** shows that expenditure recorded in the quarterly monitoring matches closely with the information in the monthly returns at Scotland level until March 2021.

Chart 8: Expenditure on the Scottish Welfare Fund – Comparison of official statistics and monthly management information – Scotland – Monthly



Between 1 January and 31 March 2021:

£17.9 million was spent through the Scottish Welfare Fund, 96% more than in January to March 2020 when £9.1 million was spent (**Table 39, Chart 8**). Expenditure on Community Care Grants increased by 121% (£11.8 million compared to £5.4 million) and expenditure on Crisis Grants increased by 61% (£6.1 million compared to £3.8 million).

The Official Statistics indicate that in March 2021, Scottish Welfare Fund expenditure was 107% higher than in March 2020, with Community Care Grant expenditure 195% higher and Crisis Grant expenditure 14% higher (**Chart 8**).

During 2020/21:

The available budget for awards in 2020/21 was £59.5 million, which included £57.5 million allocated by Scottish Government, and £2.0 million of underspend carried forward from 2019/20 (**Table 40**). A total of £49.5 million was spent on Scottish Welfare Fund awards during 2019/20 (**Table 38**), including £29.5 million on Community Care Grants (**Table 34**) and £20.0 million on Crisis Grants (**Table 36**). This is an overall increase in expenditure of 31%, with Community Care Grant expenditure increasing by 20% and Crisis Grant expenditure increasing by 54% compared to 2019/20.

Expenditure on Community Care Grants increased in 26 local authorities, the greatest relative increase being in Aberdeen City (94% increase, **Table 34**). Expenditure decreased in six local authorities, the greatest relative decrease occurring in Shetland (12% decrease). Expenditure on Crisis Grants increased in 29 local authorities, the greatest relative increase being in Edinburgh (235%, **Table 36**). Expenditure decreased in three local authorities, with the greatest relative decrease in Shetland (51% decrease).

Average award value for Community Care Grants increased from £584 in 2019/20 to £613 in 2020/21. The average award value for Crisis Grants increased from £93 in 2019/20 to £106 in 2020/21.

Expenditure compared to budget:

As a whole, local authorities spent 83% of the available budget (the amount allocated by Scottish Government plus underspend from previous years) (**Table 42, Chart 9**). In comparison, at the end of 2019/20 108% of the available budget had been spent, although the budget available for the Scottish Welfare Fund in 2020/21 was £24.5 million higher than in 2019/20 (**Table 40, Table 42**).

Expenditure varied considerably between the local authorities. Twenty-one local authorities spent less than 90% of their budgets in 2020/21; amongst those local authorities, eight had also spent less than 90% of their available budget at the end of 2019/20. The local authorities that had spent the smallest proportions of their budgets were Eilean Siar (22%), Highland (42%) and Falkirk (43%). Collective underspend for the year was £11.5 million, which is £9.5 million more than at the end of 2019/20, although the budget available in 2020/21 was £24.5 million higher (**Table 40**).

Six local authorities spend more than their budget (**Table 42, Chart 9**): Edinburgh City (121%), West Lothian (113%), South Lanarkshire (110%), Perth and Kinross (103%), Aberdeen City (102%) and Dumfries and Galloway (101%). Of the six local authorities that overspent their budgets this year, five also overspent last year. In total local authorities overspent their available budgets for 2020/21 by around £1.5 million, about a third of the overspend for 2019/20 (£4.7 million, **Table 40**).

Chart 9: Proportion of 2020/21 budget spent as at 31 March 2021

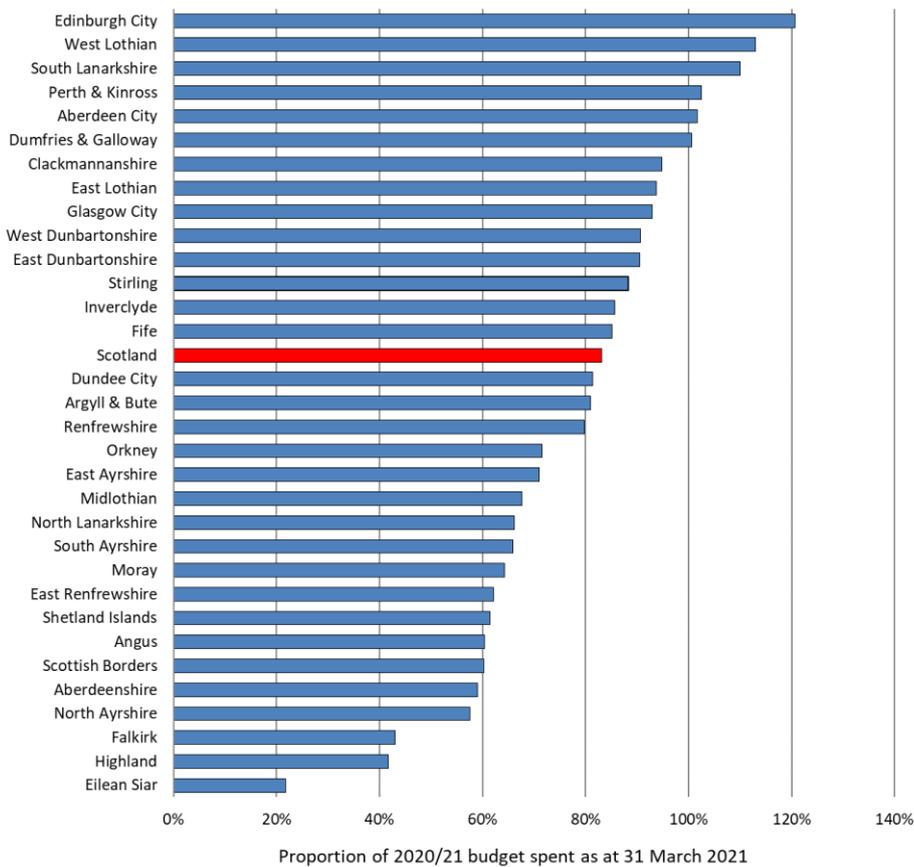
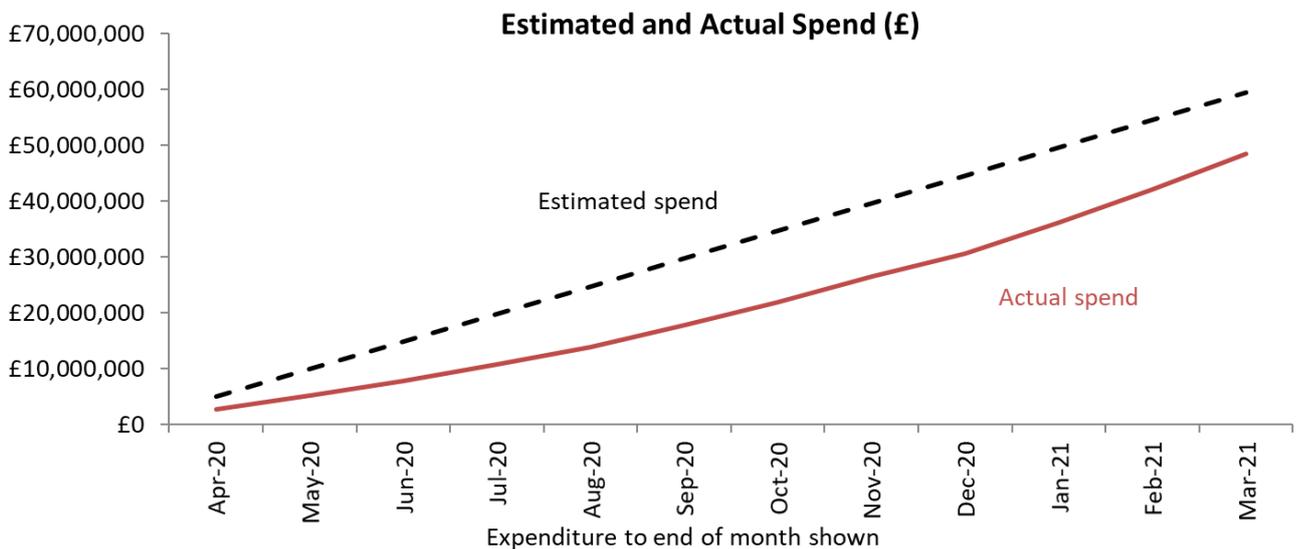


Chart 10 indicates that the overspend increased until the end of December 2020 and then decreased until the end of March 2021 (compared to the estimated flat expenditure profile).

Chart 10: Cumulative expenditure on the Scottish Welfare Fund – Monthly – 2020/21



Housing costs within Universal Credit:

From 1 April 2017, the UK Government introduced a change to the entitlement for housing costs within Universal Credit (UC), resulting in people aged 18-21 years no longer being eligible, unless the individual is covered by an exemption². The policy applies to new claimants, claiming UC on or after 1 April 2017, in an area using the full, digital service. To mitigate against this, the Scottish Government extended the Scottish Welfare Fund on an interim basis to provide Community Care Grants to 18-21 year olds affected by this change³. Based on management information supplied to Scottish Government by local authorities, these grants amounted to around £14,000 from 1 April 2017 to 31 December 2018. Applications, awards, expenditure and review data relating to these grants have been excluded from the rest of this publication. On 5 November 2018 the UK Government laid regulations coming into force on 31 December 2018 revoking the removal of assistance with housing costs for those aged 18-21. We have not received any further management information on these grants since December 2018.

Family Reunion Crisis Grants:

Delivery of Family Reunion Crisis Grants commenced on 14 May 2018. The grants support refugee families arriving in Scotland under family reunion rules to settle with their family member already resident in the local authority area. Applicants can apply for both Crisis Grants and Community Care Grants through this scheme. Based on management information supplied to Scottish Government by local authorities, these grants have amounted to around £212,268 from 14 May 2018 to 31 March 2021.

² <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/housing-costs-for-18-to-21-year-olds>

³ <https://www.gov.scot/policies/social-security/support-with-housing-costs/>

Items and Payments

In 2020/21 the most common Community Care Grant expenditure remained on floor coverings, beds and bedding, and kitchen appliances such as washing machines, cookers, fridges and freezers (**Table 44**).

In general, the most commonly awarded items and their proportions of the total number of items awarded have remained similar quarter to quarter (**Table 43**). The quantity of most items awarded increased in line with the overall increase in Community Care Grant awards in 2020/21 (**Table 21**). There was a relatively large increase in grants awarded for redecoration of which there were 21 times as many in 2020/21 as in 2019/20 (440 awards compared to 20 awards).

As in previous years, the most common Crisis Grant awards were for food, essential heating expenses and other living expenses (**Table 48**). The amount spent on food increased by 66% reaching £12.6 million in 2020/21, remaining the leading Crisis Grant expenditure, and the amount spent on other living expenses increased by 68% overtaking essential heating costs as the second item of Crisis Grant expenditure (**Table 50**).

The most common payment method for Community Care Grants remained provision of new goods (54% of payments, **Table 52**). Cash remained the most common payment method for Crisis Grants (45% payments). The number of awards paid into bank accounts increased by 106%, compared to 2019/20, and overtook cash alternative as the second most common Crisis Grant payment method (19% of payments compared to 17% of payments (**Table 54**). The increased number of awards paid into bank accounts may be due to COVID-19 preventing payments by other methods.

In 2020/21, 61% of Community Care Grant payments were made within one week, ten percentage points higher than 2019/20, whereas smaller numbers of payments were made within 2 to 6 weeks (**Chart 11**). These changes may reflect the increased number of awards paid into bank accounts. Sixty-five percent of Crisis Grants were paid on the same day as all information being received which is the same as 2019/20 (**Chart 12**).

Chart 11: Distribution of time to make Community Care Grant payments (comparing 2019/20 with 2020/21)

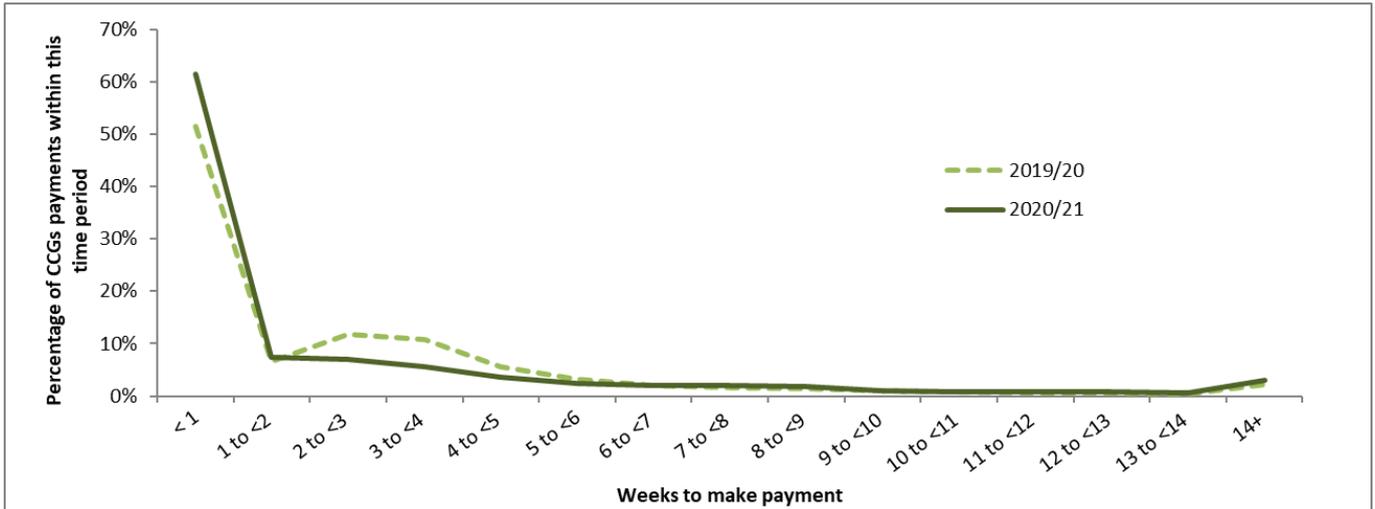
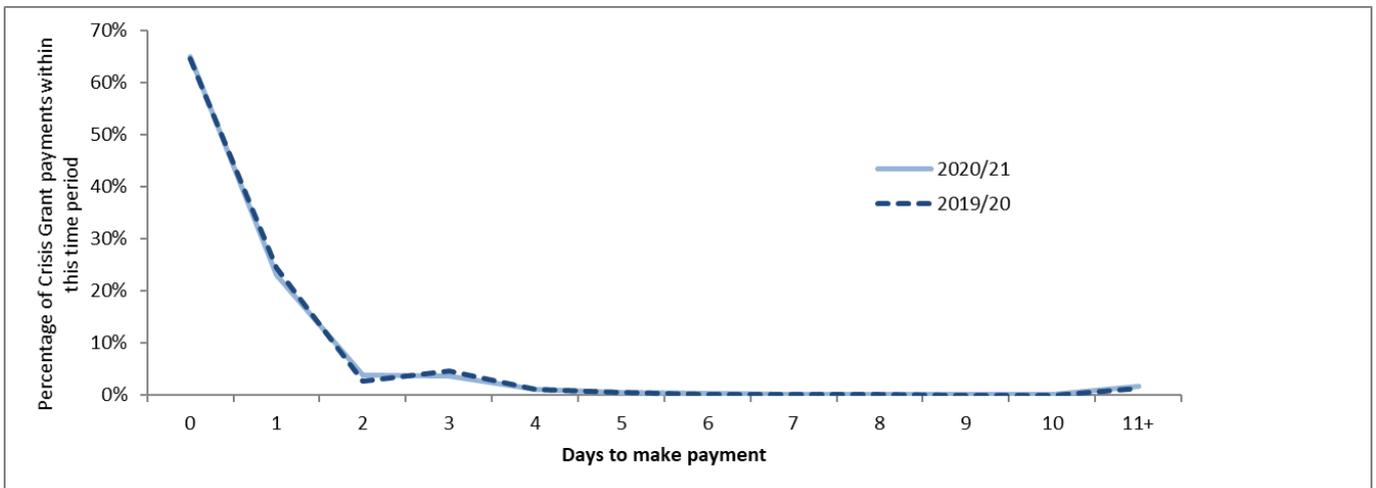


Chart 12: Distribution of time to make Crisis Grant payments (comparing 2019/20 with 2020/21)

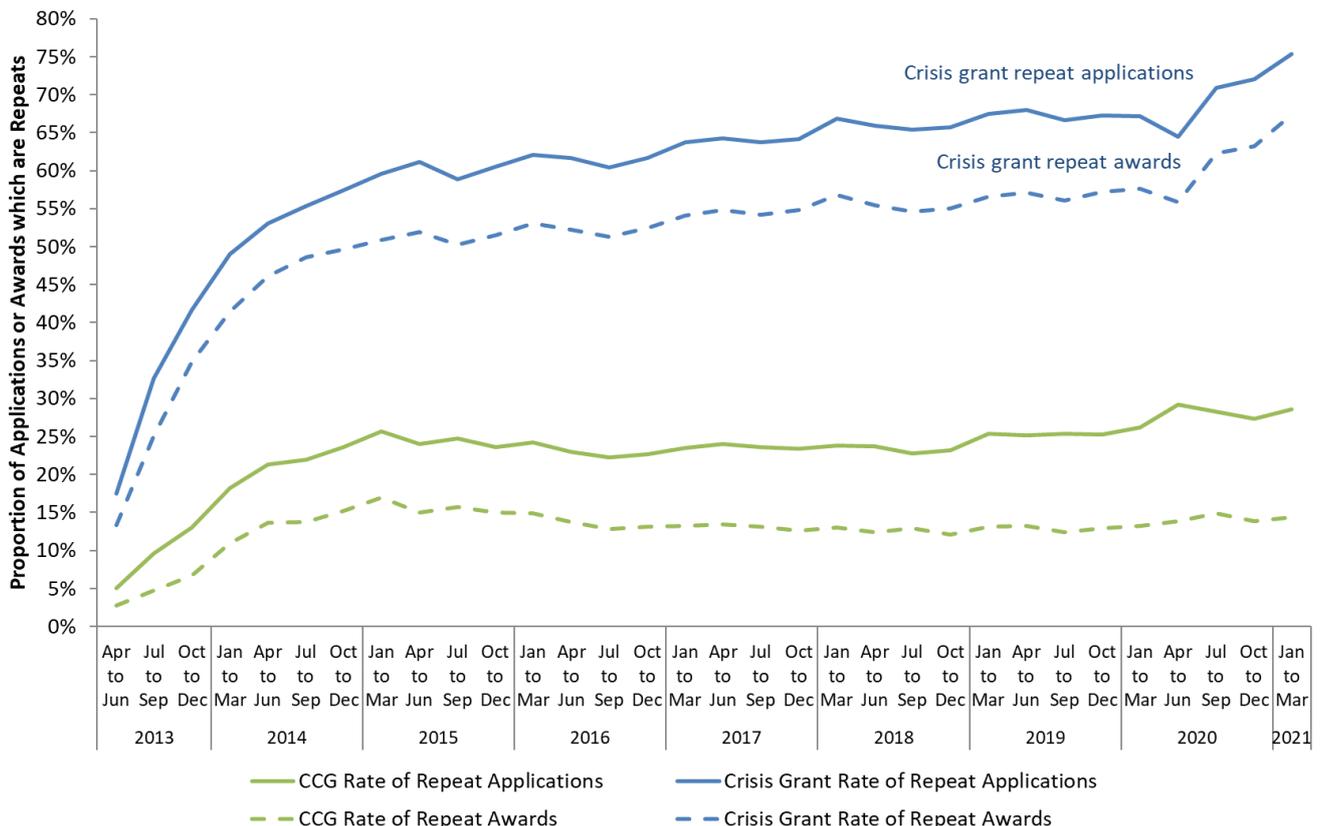


Repeat Applications and Awards

The percentage of applications and awards that were repeats were higher for Crisis Grants compared to Community Care Grants (**Chart 13**). The number of Community Care Grant applications and awards that were repeats increased by 20% and 26%, respectively, between 2019/20 and 2020/21 (**Table 65 and 67**). At the same time, the number of Crisis Grant applications and awards that were repeats increased by 28% and 46%, respectively (**Table 69, Table 71**). The proportion of applications that were repeats increased for Community Care Grants (from 26% in 2019/20 to 28% in 2020/21) and Crisis Grants (from 67% in 2019/20 to 71% in 2020/21).

In April to June 2020, the proportion of Crisis Grant applications and awards that were repeats decreased slightly to 64% and 56%, respectively, compared to April to June 2019 when the proportions were 68% and 57%, respectively (**Table 68, Table 70**). This likely reflects the increased numbers of Crisis Grant applications received and awards made in April 2020 as a result of COVID-19 (**Chart 1, Chart 7**), including a larger proportion of new applicants. In subsequent quarters, the proportion of Crisis Grant applications and awards that were repeats steadily increased. In the most recent quarter (January to March 2021) 75% of Crisis Grant applications and 67% of Crisis Grant awards were repeats, compared to 67% and 58%, respectively, in January to March 2020. These increases in repeat Crisis Grant applications and awards could be in part due to claimants experiencing ongoing financial difficulties due to the impacts of COVID-19.

Chart 13: Repeat applications and awards for Community Care Grants and Crisis Grants - Quarterly



Reviews

Since April 2013, there have been 25,860 Tier 1 reviews for Community Care Grants, and 28,440 for Crisis Grants (**Table 55**)⁴. Just under half of decisions have been revised at this stage for both Community Care Grants (47%) and Crisis Grants (45%) (**Table 56**).

Since April 2013, around 74% of Tier 1 reviews for Community Care Grants have been made within the 15 working day target, while around 89% of Tier 1 reviews for Crisis Grants have been made within the two working day target (**Table 57**). East Ayrshire have not been able to supply information on review processing times, which accounts for a further 2% Community Care Grants and less than 1% Crisis Grants where it is unknown if reviews were made within target times.

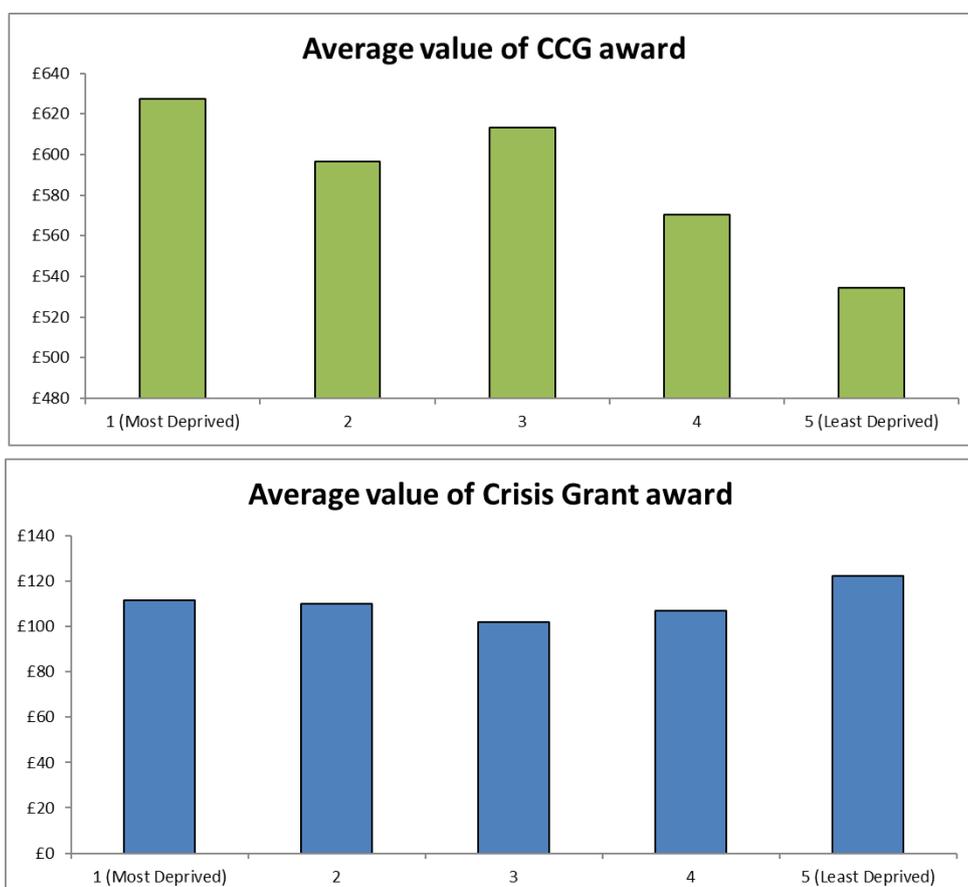
⁴ These figures do not include Tier 1 reviews for East Ayrshire for 2013.

Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation

Scottish Welfare Fund awards tend to go to applicants living in more deprived areas of Scotland. Around one in five people in Scotland live in the 20% most deprived areas in Scotland, as defined by the Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation (SIMD). However, in 2020/21 around half of Community Care Grants (51%) and Crisis Grants (48%) were awarded to applicants living in these areas. In comparison, around 2% of Community Care Grants and 3% of Crisis Grants were awarded to applicants from the 20% least deprived areas (**Table 59 and Table 61**). In January to March 2021, the distribution of Community Care Grant and Crisis Grant awards between the SIMD deciles remained similar to January to March 2020.

Community Care Grant applicants in more deprived areas also tend to receive a higher average award value than applicants in less deprived areas in 2020/21 (**Chart 14**). Applicants in the 10% most deprived data zones received an average award that was around £99 higher than applicants in the 10% least deprived data zones (£645 compared to £546, **Table 59**). For Crisis Grants, average awards were similar across the different SIMD rankings (**Table 61**).

Chart 14: Distribution of average award value by SIMD⁵ Quintile rankings of applicant's postcode – 2020/21



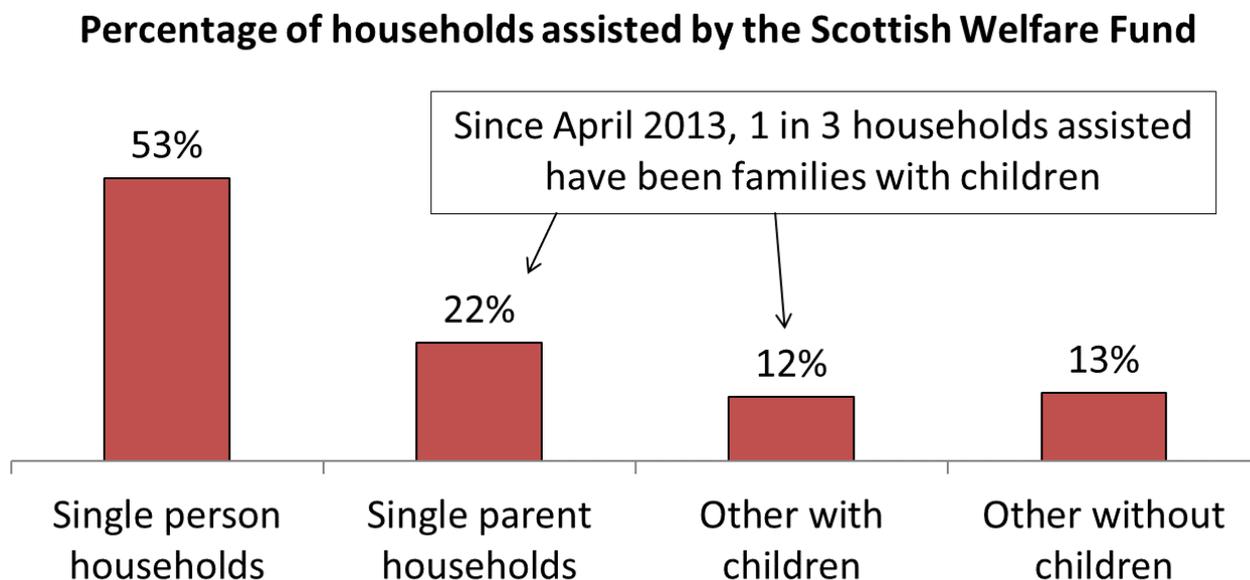
⁵ To ensure the correct SIMD rankings are applied this time series uses SIMD 2012 for the period April 2013 to September 2016, SIMD 2016 for the period October 2016 to December 2019, and SIMD 2020 from January 2020 onwards.

Characteristics of Households in Receipt of Awards

Since the scheme began in April 2013, 428,260 unique households received at least one award from the Scottish Welfare Fund. More households have received a Crisis Grant (316,105, 74% of households who have received a grant) than a Community Care Grant (233,760, 55% of households who have received a grant) (**Table 62a**).

Since the scheme began in April 2013, over half of all awards have gone to single person households (53%), and over a fifth to single parent households (22%) (**Table 62b, Chart 15**). In comparison, the latest household estimates for Scotland indicate that only 37% of households are single people, and 6% of households are single parent families⁶. A quarter of Scottish Welfare Fund awards have gone to couples, couples with children or other types of household (25%), whereas over half of households in Scotland are estimated to fall into these categories (58%). In total around a third (34%) awards have gone to households containing children.

Chart 15: Household types of unique households receiving funds from the Scottish Welfare Fund 1 April 2013 to 31 March 2021



⁶ National Records of Scotland 'Estimates of Households and Dwellings in Scotland, 2019', <https://www.nrscotland.gov.uk/statistics-and-data/statistics/statistics-by-theme/households/household-estimates/2018>

Background

On 1 April 2013, the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) abolished two elements of the Social Fund - Community Care Grants and Crisis Loans - and transferred funds previously spent on them to Scottish Ministers. In its place, the Scottish Government established the Scottish Welfare Fund. The Scottish Welfare Fund is a national grant scheme run by local authorities, based on [guidance](#) from Scottish Ministers. The guidance has been developed in partnership with COSLA⁷, local authorities and other stakeholders.

The objectives of the scheme are to:

- provide a safety net in a disaster or emergency, when there is an immediate threat to health or safety.
- enable people to live independently or continue to live independently, preventing the need for institutional care.

There are two types of grants in the Scottish Welfare Fund – Crisis Grants, and Community Care Grants.

A Crisis Grant aims to help people on a low income who are in crisis because of a disaster or an emergency. A disaster is something like a fire or a flood. An emergency might be when money has been stolen.

A Community Care Grant aims to:

- help people establish themselves in the community following a period of care, where circumstances indicate that there is a risk of the person not being able to live independently without this help.
- help people remain in the community rather than going into care where circumstances indicate that there is a risk of the person not being able to live independently without this help.
- help people set up home in the community, as part of a planned resettlement programme, following an unsettled way of life.
- help families facing exceptional pressures, with one-off items, like a cooker or a washing machine.
- help people to care for a prisoner or young offender on release on temporary licence.

⁷ <https://www.cosla.gov.uk/about-cosla>

The Scottish Welfare Fund is a discretionary, budget-limited grant scheme that prioritises applications according to need. It provides grants that do not have to be repaid. It does not provide loans.

The DWP transferred the funding spent in Scotland on its Community Care Grants and Crisis Loans for Living Expenses to the Scottish Government. For 2013/14 and 2014/15 this amounted to £23.8 million. The Scottish Government topped this amount up by a further £9.2 million, giving the Scottish Welfare Fund a total budget of £33 million for both these years. This level has been maintained at £33 million from 2015/16 to 2019/20 by the Scottish Government. Local authorities have been able to top this up with their own funds, together with any underspends carried forward from previous years. There is no statutory limit on the amount of money which can be spent on the Scottish Welfare Fund.

In 2020/21 the programme budget for the Scottish Welfare Fund was increased to £35.5 million. In addition, £22 million was added in response to COVID-19, with a further £23 million held in reserve, to be targeted where it is needed later in the year. This publication covers applications made to the Scottish Welfare Fund until 31st March 2021. The Scottish Welfare Fund was introduced on an interim basis for the first three years, prior to setting the Fund out in law. The [Welfare Funds \(Scotland\) Act 2015](#) received Royal Assent on 8 April 2015 and placed the Scottish Welfare Fund into law from 1 April 2016. The Act is supported by the [Welfare Funds \(Scotland\) Regulations 2016](#), and statutory guidance.

Local Authority Delivery

Local authorities have the discretion to provide support in different ways. Not all grants will be cash payments. They may provide vouchers, a fuel card, or goods if they think that is the best way to meet the need.

Local authorities also have discretion on where in their organisation they process applications and how they link the scheme to existing services.

A local authority may provide assistance out of its SWF only to a person who is resident in the local authority area, is about to become resident in the local authority area, or a person who is homeless. Applicants should apply to the appropriate local authority. The application process will depend on the local authority's approach to wider service delivery and the infrastructure it has in place. Local authorities must make provision for applications to be taken via three delivery channels, for example, online, on the phone and face-to-face.

Details of applications, how they were processed, and the outcomes and expenditure associated with applications are stored on Local Authorities' IT systems. Four IT companies provide IT systems which underpin the provision of the Scottish Welfare Fund.

Application process

Applications are processed by decision makers within local authorities. Scottish Government produces statutory guidance to provide a framework for decision makers to promote consistency in decision making. In making decisions, local authorities need to balance the needs of the applicant against the remaining budget. Joint applications for a Crisis Grant and Community Care Grant are treated as individual. In these statistics they are also counted as two separate applications. It is for the local authority to determine whether a grant should be made as a Crisis or a Community Care Grant. If an applicant applies for one, the local authority may decide to award the other if it is more appropriate to the applicant's circumstances.

Applicants can make repeated applications for the Scottish Welfare Fund. A local authority does not need to consider an application if a person has applied for a Community Care Grant or a Crisis Grant for the same items or services within the last 28 days, where a decision has already been made and there has not been a relevant change of circumstances. Additionally, the number of Crisis Grant awards should normally be limited to three per person in any rolling 12 month period across all local authorities, although there can be exceptions.

An initial decision will be made on the application, either to make an award for all or some of the requested items, or to not make any award. In these statistics we refer to these outcomes as 'accepted' and 'rejected' respectively. Crisis Grants are typically made in cash or cash equivalent. Community Care Grants can be fulfilled in cash, cash-equivalent or in kind, for example by providing white goods or furnishings.

The target time for processing applications is 15 working days after receiving all the information allowing a decision to be made for Community Care Grants and by the end of the next working day for Crisis Grants.

Review process

If an applicant disagrees with the outcome of their application, there are two possible review stages. Firstly, a Tier 1 review will be carried out by the local authority. The target time for processing Tier 1 reviews is the end of the second working day for crisis reviews, and 15 working days for Community Care Grant reviews. At this point the original decision will either be 'revised' or 'not revised'.

Following this, an independent Tier 2 review may be carried out by the Scottish Public Services Ombudsman (SPSO). Tier 2 reviews have been carried out by the SPSO since 1 April 2016 (previously this was done by Local Authorities). Information on tier 2 reviews carried out by SPSO can be found in the [SPSO's Annual Reports](#) and [Annual Statistics 2020-21](#).

Family Reunion Crisis Grants and Community Care Grants for 18-21 year olds

Family Reunion Crisis Grants, and Community Care Grants for 18-21 year olds affected by the change to the entitlement for housing costs within Universal Credit, are processed by local authorities using the same IT systems as other Scottish Welfare Fund awards. We therefore receive data for these Community Care Grant applications in monthly and quarterly data returns. However, these specific types of grants are not funded through the main Scottish Government allocation for awards. Local authorities are reimbursed separately for these awards. Local authorities send separate quarterly returns detailing the application reference numbers of applications for Family Reunion Crisis Grants, and 18-21 year olds affected by the change to the entitlement for housing costs. We have then excluded these applications from the analysis when producing this publication and accompanying publication tables.

Self-Isolation Support Grants

Self-Isolation Support Grants are made either as Crisis Grants or as discretionary grants for individuals with No Recourse to Public Funds (NRPF). These grants are not funded through the main Scottish Government allocation for awards, so local authorities provide Scottish Government with monthly summary figures for applications received and the number and value of awards made. Self-Isolation Support Grants are processed by some local authorities using separate administrative systems, however other local authorities use the same IT system as their Scottish Welfare Fund awards. For those who use the same IT system, we also receive monthly returns detailing the application reference numbers and the date of the application. We use this information to flag the Self-Isolation Support Grant applications and exclude them from the analysis when producing this publication and accompanying publication tables.

Local authority level application figures should not be compared with each other due to several factors that are known to influence the number applications:

- i) in the early stages of the scheme, and after expanding eligibility criteria, it is expected there are larger numbers of speculative applications that are not eligible.
- ii) local authorities are currently taking different approaches to receiving/processing applications. In local authorities where online applications are used a higher number of non-eligible applications may be included in the data. As a result, the award rate in these councils may be lower than in those where applications are only possible via phone, email or outbound calling.
- iii) figures may include applications that have been received but are still being processed.
- iv) the extent and impacts of the pandemic have varied widely across and within local authorities.

About the Data

How the data is collected

One month after the end of each quarter, local authorities are asked to submit an XML file containing the information as set out in the data specification.

The data specification for the Scottish Welfare Fund and guidance to help local authority officers to record information are available at:

<https://www.gov.scot/publications/scottish-welfare-fund---data-specification-and-guidance/>

The data sent to Scottish Government each quarter should include all applications where an initial decision, Tier 1 review or Tier 2 review have been completed, plus any updates to previous cases (e.g. where information within a case has been revised, or a case has reached a different stage). To take account of delays between applications being received and decisions made, and retrospective changes in award values, the data cuts that are sent to Scottish Government each quarter should be sent at least a month after the end of the quarter that will be reported on.

This data is then uploaded to the Scottish Government's ProcXed⁸ website. Once the data has been validated by our software, the data is passed over to the Scottish Government's Communities Analysis Division.

Scottish Government also collects informal, monthly management information through a separate process as described in our recent management information publications available here: <https://www.gov.scot/publications/swf-monthly-management-information/>

Revisions

Each updated publication of statistics will include revisions to figures for previous quarters, with more recent quarters being subject to a greater degree of revision than more distant ones. There are several reasons for this:

(i) the cuts of data received by Scottish Government each quarter will include retrospective changes to past applications. For example, where the actual amount spent on an item was different to the amount initially awarded, this expenditure will be updated in the new data cut.

(ii) the cuts of data received by Scottish Government only include information about applications that have at least reached the stage of having an initial decision made. Some applications may therefore be received by the local authority in one quarter and decided in the next quarter. Scottish Government would only receive details about these applications in the next quarter's data cut, at which point the

⁸ [ProcXed.NET](#) is Scottish Government's on-line validation software that supports local authorities in collecting and validating data.

application will be added into the previous quarter's application statistics retrospectively.

(iii) Tier 1 and Tier 2 reviews can lead to changes in final outcome and final award amount. Where a case has been reviewed, expenditure is assigned to the quarter of the initial decision rather than the review date.

Processing times

Initial Processing Time is the number of working days between the date all information was received and the initial decision. Our count of working days counts the number of Mondays to Fridays between these two dates. No allowance is made for local holidays and bank holidays. If the date all information was provided is missing, the application date is used instead.

Households

We collect information on all people within each application. To group people into household units we filter the people table to contain only the main applicant and their partner. We ensure that there is no more than two people for each application. We generate a unique household reference based on the hashed National Insurance Number, gender and date of birth of the main applicant, and if applicable, their partner.

Repeat applications and awards

An application is defined as a repeat application if the household made another Community Care Grant/Crisis Grant application within the 12 months of the current application. Similarly a repeat award occurs if an award was made within 12 months of the current award. While there is no limit on the number of Community Care Grants an individual can receive in any one year, Crisis Grants are normally limited to three in a rolling 12-month period.

Payment times

The time taken to receive a payment was calculated as the date all information was received to the date of the last payment. If the 'all information date' is missing, the date the application is received is used instead. Last payment date includes payments made as part of reviews.

Data Quality

To ensure the data we receive is of the highest quality, we have asked all IT providers to implement the data specification as fully as possible. The data specification includes a number of validations. These validations are provided through an XSD schema and have also been implemented into the ProcXed system. Once local authorities submit data to the ProcXed system, a number of validations are triggered and warning messages appear. Local authorities may re-submit data to fix these errors or they can comment them to explain why they believe the data to be valid. On submission of the data to the Scottish Government,

each local authority is sent a detailed automatic report showing the contents of the data and any remaining errors.

To ensure sufficient data has been submitted, we cross check all submitted data with the monthly management information returns submitted to the Scottish Government (**Chart 7, Chart 8**). The automatic reports sent to local authorities contain charts which allow them to easily see if there is a discrepancy between these two data sources.

Known data issues to March 2021:

- City of Edinburgh experienced a software issue in March 2020 that has caused some crisis grant awards and expenditure from March 2020 to be recorded in April 2020 in the quarterly data extract supplied to Scottish Government. Comparison of the quarterly data to monthly management information (**Table 74**) indicates that around 1,335 crisis awards and £141,000 associated expenditure made in March 2020 has been shifted into April 2020 in the quarterly data extract used to produce this publication. This means that in Edinburgh in Jan-Mar 2020 around 33% crisis awards and 38% expenditure are missing, and in Apr-Jun 2020 around 17% of crisis awards and expenditure should have been recorded in the previous quarter. Scotland totals will also be affected. It is not currently possible to amend case details so that they appear against the correct month/quarter/financial year.
- In March 2020, some COVID-19 related Crisis Grant applications received by Glasgow City were recorded as CCG applications in the quarterly data extract supplied to Scottish Government. Comparison to the monthly management information (**Table 73, Table 74**) supplied separately by the local authority indicates that in March 2020, around 1,000 applications, 400 awards and £60,000 associated expenditure has been recorded as CCGs rather than Crisis Grants. However, this is difficult to quantify exactly due to ongoing and pre-existing discrepancies between the monthly management information and quarterly extract. These issues will also affect Scotland totals. From April 2020 onwards the issue of COVID related crisis grants being recorded as CCGs appears to have been resolved.
- Scotland level figures are affected by specific issues described for Edinburgh and Glasgow. There may be additional issues with data quality related to COVID-19. For example, comparison of management information (**Table 73, Table 74**) and figures derived from quarterly data extracts indicates discrepancies in numbers of applications, awards and expenditure for several local authorities. In many cases, the quarterly extract included fewer CCG and/or crisis grants than the monthly figures. This could be due to delays in applications being processed, or awards being kept as 'pending' or 'in principle' on local authority systems until they can be delivered/installed etc. However, overall at Scotland level, the monthly management information and quarterly data extracts have similar figures for CCG applications (-3% in the quarterly extract compared to the monthly management information) and expenditure (-1%) but there is a slightly larger discrepancy in CCG awards (-5%). At Scotland

level, the monthly management information and quarterly data extracts have similar figures for Crisis Grant awards (-2% in the quarterly extract compared to the monthly management information) and expenditure (-1%) but there is a slightly larger discrepancy in crisis grant applications (-5%). Any issues caused by processing or delivery/installation delays should be resolved in future updates to the publication as more data extracts are received. *Missing information/delays in receiving information*

An application is included in the quarterly data extract to the Scottish Government only when an application has been decided and when a payment has been made. For Crisis Grants, applications are less complex and payments are made quickly, resulting in almost no lag between cases being decided and being included in the data extract. However, for Community Care Grants, a large number of items may need to be ordered and payment may not occur until up to one month later, when invoices arrive. This results in a lag time between applications beginning in the local authority and applications being included in the extract to the Scottish Government. To rectify this problem, we are asking local authorities to submit data one to two months after the end of the quarter. This will ensure that, as far as possible, all relevant cases are included in the data extract.

Some local authorities may not have been able to enter all of their data in time to include in this publication. Late entry of data may mean that this data appears in subsequent quarters, rather than in the quarter when the case was actually dealt with. As dates are automatically system generated, late entry of data has a knock on effect on any calculation which involves processing times or payment times.

Some question responses may default to "Other" in some IT systems. This particularly applies for reasons for applications, rejections, reviews, review decisions and payment methods. We are currently working with IT providers and local authorities to ensure that the full range of questions and responses are available in all local authority IT systems. Some questions may not be completed at all. This includes the vulnerability and referrals questions for some Local Authorities.

Expenditure

Unless otherwise stated, all expenditure information in this publication is based on the date of decision. As such it should be regarded as committed spend, rather than actual spend. For example, a local authority may commit to purchasing floor coverings for a household and set aside money for this (on the decision date). In practice, it may be some time later before the local authority is invoiced and pays the money to the supplier (on the payment date). Overall, there is very little difference between analysing expenditure information using payment dates as opposed to decision dates. Where a case has been reviewed, expenditure is assigned to the quarter of the initial decision rather than the review date. This means that if the initial decision took place in 2016/17 but a review decision is made in 2017/18, all of the expenditure for the case is counted in 2016/17.

It is possible for the value of an award to increase or decrease between the decision and payment date. For example, local authorities may estimate the cost of carpets and the final invoice for these may be less than originally thought. This results in money being paid back into their systems. Where we receive updated information about this change in expenditure in quarterly data returns, the statistics for previous quarters are updated to reflect this. We also receive separate reconciliations information from some local authorities. Over time, the expenditure data in the quarterly monitoring may exceed monies actually spent if reconciliations are not applied. Most recently, reconciliations have been applied to South Lanarkshire data from January to March 2018.

West Lothian have indicated that the expenditure for 2013/14 is an underestimate. This appears to have been due to issues in setting up the IT system for this data collection at the start of the scheme in 2013. Information about expenditure was collected manually rather than through ProcXed and cannot now be updated. West Lothian have indicated that this has led to an ongoing underspend being calculated for the local authority. Additionally, other local authorities have indicated that the figures published for annual over- and underspend do not always match local authorities' own accounts.

Where Scottish Government receive updated information about expenditure from local authorities, the statistics for previous quarters are updated to reflect this. However, local authorities have a cut off point after the end of a financial year at which point they have to produce accounts. At this point, expenditure for the year is calculated, and over- or underspend is calculated. At this point the council meets the overspend, or rolls forward the underspend to the next financial year's budget. If there is a change in the value of an award after this date, this will not be reflected in local authority calculation of the available budget for the next financial year. Additionally, some local authorities may choose to top up the budget for the fund at the start of a financial year with additional funds.

In previous publications, we have included funds provided by local authorities in the available budget, however for this version of the publication this funding has been removed from calculations. Available budget therefore only represents the amounts allocated by Scottish Government plus any underspend from previous years, and it is assumed that local authorities meet any overspend each year.

Each year the discrepancies between these annual expenditure figures and local authorities' accounts are compounded. We are reviewing these differences and to realign our calculation of local authorities' over- or underspend.

Joint Community Care Grant and Crisis Grant applications

Households can apply for both Community Care Grants and Crisis Grants in the same application. In versions of the publication covering the period up to December 2017, total applications reported were the total number of applications recorded on local authority IT systems. In some local authorities, these applications in some cases will include both a Community Care Grant and a Crisis Grant element.

However, some local authorities now have a facility to split a single application into the Community Care Grant and Crisis Grant elements, and treat these as two separate applications. Where local authorities have used this facility on their IT system, Scottish Government would receive this as two separate applications, with no information about whether they had originally been made together as one application. Because of this, we have changed the methodology for how total applications to Scottish Welfare Fund are reported, from the 2017/18 publication onwards. For all local authorities, we now report the number of Community Care Grants and number of Crisis Grant applications added together. Therefore, joint applications for Community Care Grants and Crisis Grants will now be counted in the figures as two applications. This makes the figures for total Scottish Welfare Fund applications consistent across all the local authorities.

In addition to the issue described above, local authorities have informed us that on some occasions, applicants may tick boxes on their application forms to apply for both a Community Care Grant and a Crisis Grant, however, based on the types of item, which have been requested the local authority, will process this application as only a Community Care Grant (e.g. if only flooring requested) or only a Crisis Grant (e.g. if only food requested). In these cases, the statistics in this publication reflect the way in which an application has been processed by the local authority, rather than the original tick boxes selected by an applicant.

Payment Methods

An error in data processing has been discovered in regard to the Payment Method categories of 'Cash alternative' and 'Payment into bank'. This error has now been fixed and the time series has been revised to reflect this update.

Reviews

Orkney are unable to supply Tier 1 review information via the ProcXed system. Orkney have supplied full details about all reviews carried out separately and these numbers are included in the tables, however as numbers are small these values have been suppressed for disclosure control.

East Ayrshire were unable to submit data on Tier 1 reviews via the ProcXed system until July 2018, but were able to supply summary information about numbers of review applications and decisions separately for 2014 onwards, which is included in the publication tables. From July 2018 onwards East Ayrshire have supplied full review information via ProcXed.

Improvements

We are working with local authorities to make the data more consistent across data fields and Local Authorities. We are reviewing how local authorities interpret the guidance and record information and also identifying issues that are due differences in IT systems.

Management information

Potential data quality issues in the monthly management information are described in our recent publications available here: <https://www.gov.scot/publications/swf-monthly-management-information/>

Comparisons with other UK Statistics

Annual reports by the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions on the Social Fund for the period prior to 1 April 2013 are available from the Department for Work and Pensions. The most recently available report can be found at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/annual-report-by-the-secretary-of-state-for-work-and-pensions-on-the-social-fund-2012-to-2013>

On 1 April 2013, the Department for Work and Pensions devolved the responsibility for Community Care Grants and Crisis Loans to the Scottish Government, the Welsh Government and directly to English local authorities.

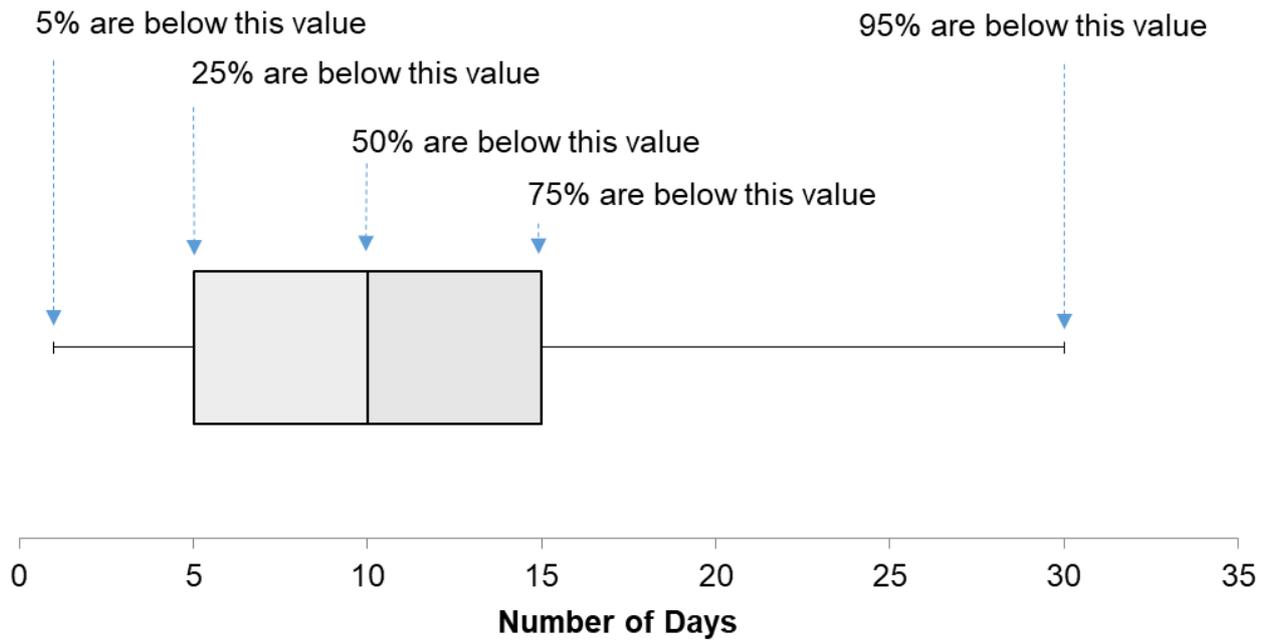
As a single national scheme covering the UK is no longer in operation, comparable statistics for other parts of the UK are not available.

Boxplots

Boxplots have been included to show the variation in processing times for applications within each local authority (**Chart 4b**). For each application received to the Scottish Welfare Fund, processing time has been calculated based on the number of working days between the date all information was received and the date the initial decision was made. A processing time of zero days indicates the application was processed on the same day that all information was received. The boxplots show (i) the average value (this is the median, or middle ranked value) of processing times across all applications within a particular local authority, and (ii) the variation in processing times among the applications within a local authority.

The variation among processing times is shown using a 'box' and lines extending out from the box (illustrated in the example below). The box shows the range of values around the median within which half of the processing times from a particular local authority fell. The lines extend out from the box to show the range of values within which 90% of the processing times from a particular local authority fell. The larger the box, and the longer the lines, the more variation there is among the processing times within the local authority.

Example of a boxplot showing processing times within a local authority



In the example above:

- The median value for processing times was ten days. When all the applications' processing times were ranked in order, the middle value was ten days. Half of the processing times fell below this and half above this.
- The width of the box was relatively small, indicating that half of the applications were processed in five to 15 days.
- However, some applications took much longer to process. The end of the line to the right of the chart indicates that 95% of applications took up to 30 days to process.

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Correspondence and enquiries

For enquiries about this publication please contact:

Aidan Cassidy

Social Security Statistics

e-mail: SocialSecurityStats@gov.scot

For general enquiries about Scottish Government statistics please contact:

Office of the Chief Statistician, Telephone: 0131 244 0442,

e-mail: statistics.enquiries@scotland.gsi.gov.uk

How to access background or source data

The data collected for this statistical bulletin:

are available in more detail through statistics.gov.scot

are available via an alternative route. Summary tables are available at: <https://www.gov.scot/collections/sg-social-security-scotland-stats-publications/#scottishwelfarefundstatistics>

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

cannot be made available by Scottish Government for further analysis as Scottish Government is not the data controller.

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