Official Statistics in Development

Scottish Welfare Fund Statistics: Quarterly Update to 30 September 2024

January 2025

Scottish Government
Riaghaltas na h-Alba

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Key points

In the latest quarter, local authorities awarded households a total of **£11.1 million** in Scottish Welfare Fund grants. More than a third of awards were made to families with children, while more than half were made to single person households with no children.

During July to September 2024, local authorities received **19,820 applications for Community Care Grants**, a decrease of 14% compared to July to September 2023. At the same time, local authorities made **8,795 Community Care Grant awards, spending £6.9 million**, both decreases of 17% compared to July to September 2023. Local authorities received **59,675 Crisis Grant applications** in July to September 2024, a decrease of 9% compared to July to September 2023. At the same time, local authorities made **37,040 Crisis Grant awards,** an 11% decrease**, spending £4.2 million**, 13% less than in July to September 2023.

During July to September 2024, 10% of Community Care Grant awards were repeats, and 60% of Crisis Grant awards were repeats, three and four percentage points lower, respectively, than July to September 2023.

From July to September 2024, 92% of Community Care Grant applications and 95% of Crisis Grant applications were processed within **target times**.

Local authorities have been **allocated £35.5 million** for Scottish Welfare Fund awards in 2024-25. There was also an estimated underspend of £3.1 million carried forward from 2023-24. Of the estimated total £38.6 million available for awards, **£22.7 million (59%) had been spent in the first half of the year**.

We have previously highlighted **data quality issues** with the official statistics, discrepancies between the official statistics and management information, and quality issues for certain local authorities (described in the data quality section).

Introduction

An Official Statistics in Development Publication for Scotland

These statistics are official statistics in development. Official statistics in development may be new or existing statistics, and will be tested with users, in line with the standards of trustworthiness, quality, and value in the Code of Practice for Statistics.

Scottish Government statistics are regulated by the Office for Statistics Regulation (OSR). OSR sets the standards of trustworthiness, quality and value in the Code of Practice for Statistics that all producers of official statistics should adhere to.

More information about Scottish Government statistics is available on the Scottish Government website.

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 latest quarter, 1 April to 30 September 2024. While this edition concentrates on the period from 2019-20 onward, it also contains information on budgets and expenditure from 1 April 2013, when the scheme began.

A supplementary spreadsheet containing 44 tables and 14 charts has also been published. Electronic versions of this document and accompanying tables and charts are available at the Scottish Government SWF web page.

Geography

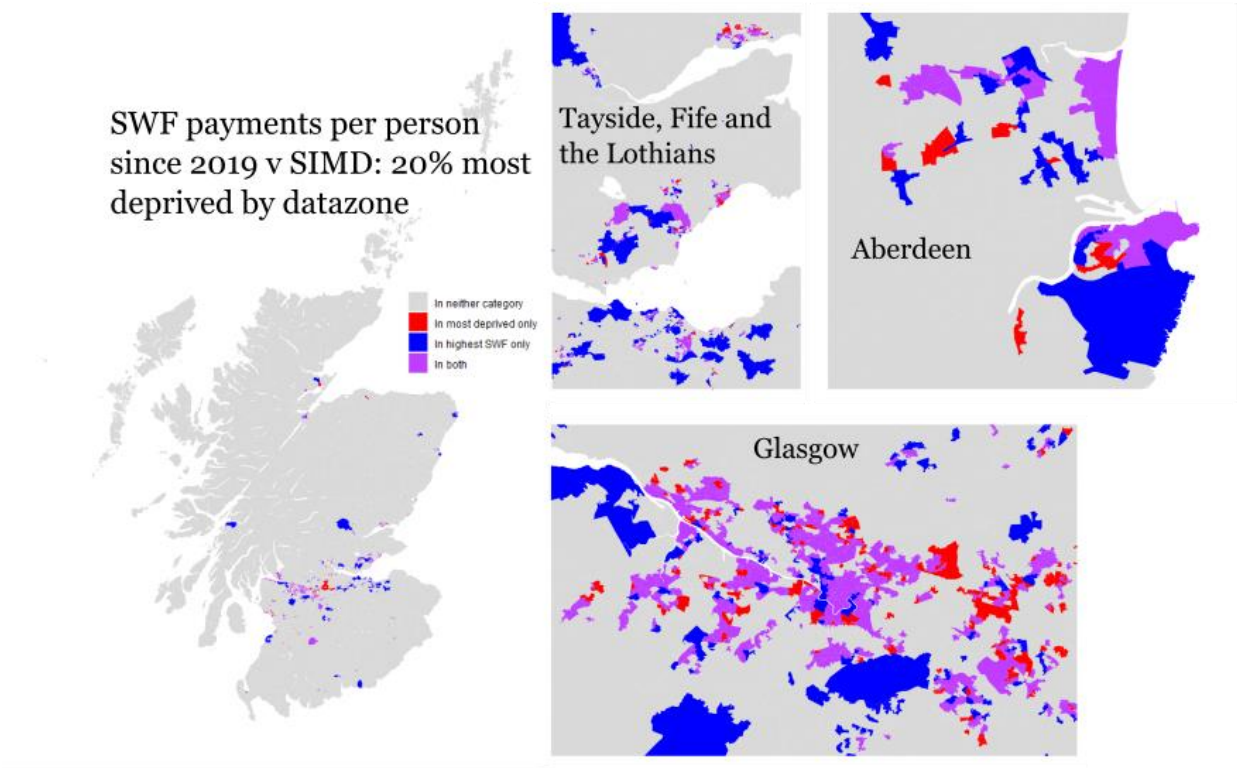
These maps highlight datazones in Scotland which are ranked in the top 20% of SWF expenditure per person since 2019. Comparison is made to the distribution of the 20% most deprived datazones as defined by the Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation 2020.

Given that SWF funds are targeted at people on low incomes, and/or people receiving benefits, then it would be expected for there to be a strong relationship between the two sets of datazones. The maps show that this is the case. Many datazones are coloured purple, indicating membership of both groups. Where greater interest may lie is those datazones which are only in one of the groups.

The blue datazones highlight relatively high levels of SWF support for areas which aren't in the 20% most deprived. Although many are close to areas of relative deprivation, some appear to be more isolated. This may indicate local issues and differences in local authority priorities, but also highlights that pockets of deprivation can exist in areas that are relatively prosperous overall.

Figure 1: Maps comparing top 20% of datazones receiving SWF payments per person since 2019 versus the top 20% most deprived datazones according to the SIMD

These maps cover Scotland as a whole, and also focus more closely on large urban areas to enhance local understanding. The highlighted areas are datazones which are ranked in the most deprived, and/or received the most SWF money per person.



Applications

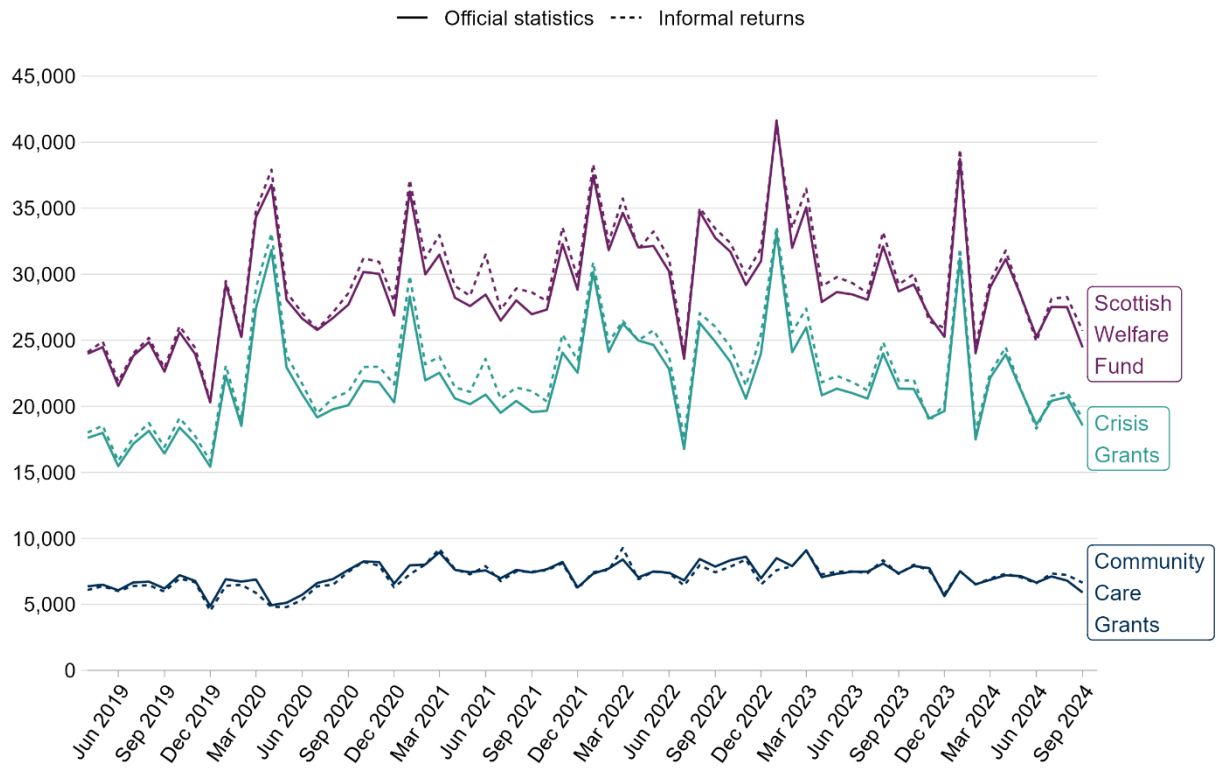
From July to September 2024, 79,495 applications to the Scottish Welfare Fund were received (**Table 1**). The majority were for Crisis Grants (59,675, **Table 3**), and a smaller number were for Community Care Grants (19,820, **Table 2**).

There were 3,115 fewer Community Care Grant applications (-14%) than in the same quarter in 2023 (**Table 2, Chart 1**). At local authority level the percentage change in applications varied from 50% increase in Na-h Eileanan Siar (from 20 to 30 applications) to a 42% decrease in Moray (from 220 to 125 applications). Application numbers increased in 8 local authorities and decreased in 24 local authorities.

Compared to the same quarter in 2023, there were 6,250 fewer Crisis Grant applications (-9%) (**Table 3, Chart 1**). At local authority level the percentage change in applications varied from a 139% increase in Na-h Eileanan Siar (from 35 to 80) to a 38% decrease in East Lothian (from 1,385 to 865 applications). Crisis Grant applications increased in 8 local authorities and decreased in 24 local authorities.

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

This chart shows time series of the numbers of applications to the Scottish Welfare Fund per quarter since April 2019, separated into the two schemes.

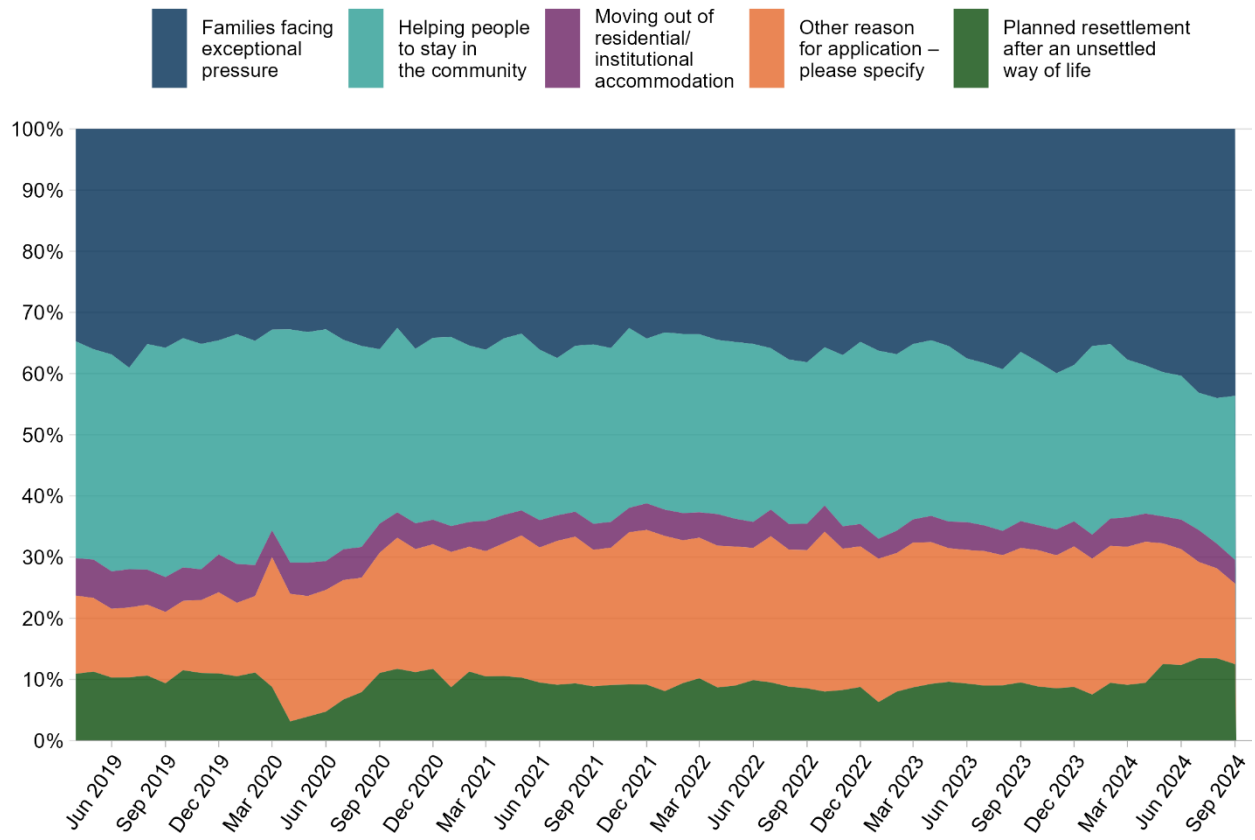


The most common reason for Community Care Grant applications was ‘Families facing exceptional pressure’ (43% of applications) (**Table 4, Chart 2**). This is the

highest value recorded under that category, mainly caused by a sharp drop in ‘Other’ reasons.

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

This chart shows time series of the proportions of different reasons for applications to the Scottish Welfare Fund per quarter since April 2019.

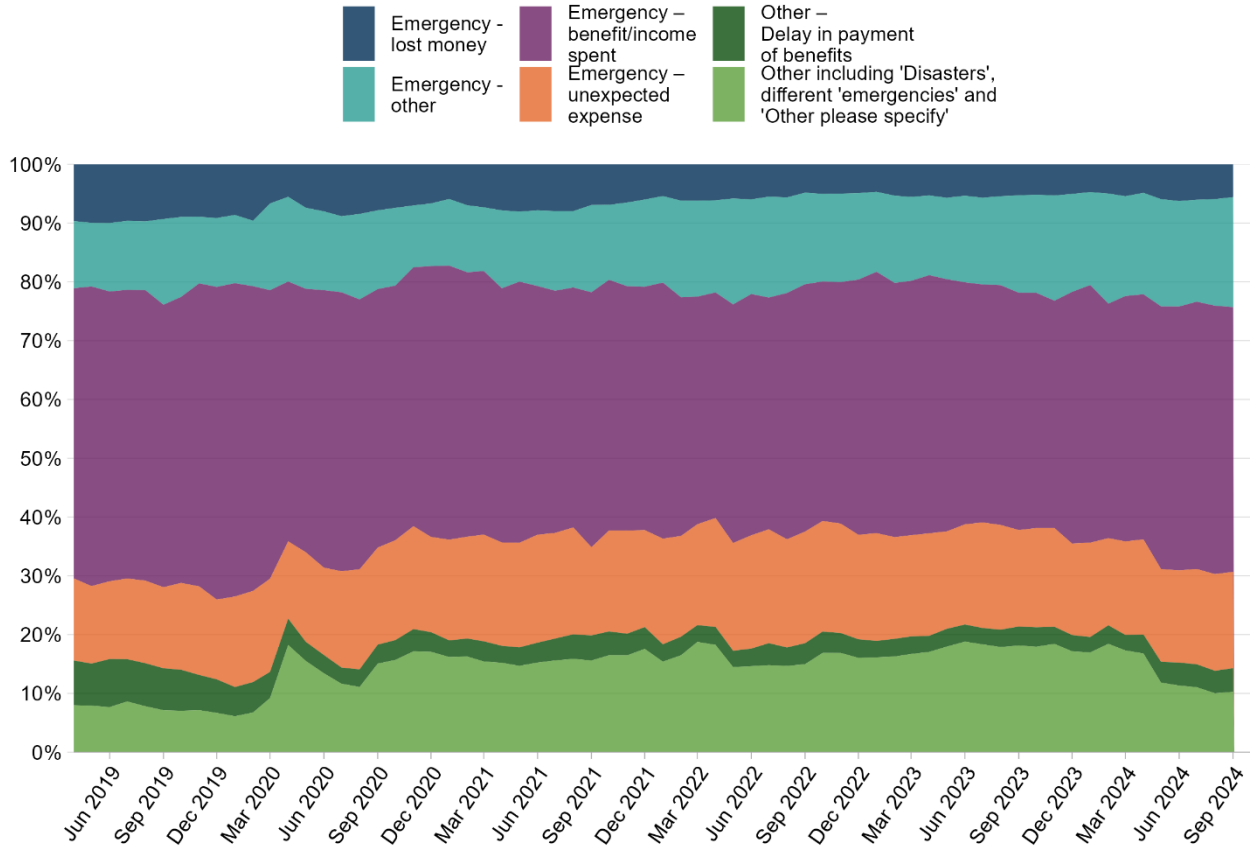


During July to September 2024, the most common reasons for Crisis Grant applications were different types of emergencies (53,030, 89% of applications), followed by ‘Other’ reasons (6,125, 10% of applications) (**Table 6, Chart 3**). The ‘Other’ category increased greatly at the advent of the COVID-19 pandemic and has persisted at a higher level since, at least partly due to unresolved changes in application processes. Recent changes however have at least partially dealt with these issues.

Within the ‘Emergency’ category, the most common reason was ‘benefit/income spent’ (27,090, 45% of applications). Within the ‘Other’ category, the most common reason was ‘Other – please specify’ (3,795, 6% of all applications).

Chart 3: Reasons for Application – Crisis Grants – Quarterly

This chart shows time series of the proportions of different reasons for applications to the Scottish Welfare Fund per quarter since April 2019.



Processing Times

During July to September 2024, local authorities processed 92% of Community Care Grant applications within the target time of 15 working days (**Table 8, Chart 4**), and processed 95% of Crisis Grant applications within the target time of the end of the next working day (**Table 10, Chart 5**).

Two local authorities processed fewer than 80% of Community Care Grant applications on time: Falkirk (40%) and Aberdeen (73%) (**Table 9**), and five processed fewer than 90% of Crisis Grant applications on time: Falkirk (74%), Shetland (75%), North Lanarkshire (84%), Renfrewshire (87%) and Stirling (88%) (**Table 11**).

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

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

This chart shows time series of the proportion of CCG applications within the processing time target per quarter since April 2019.

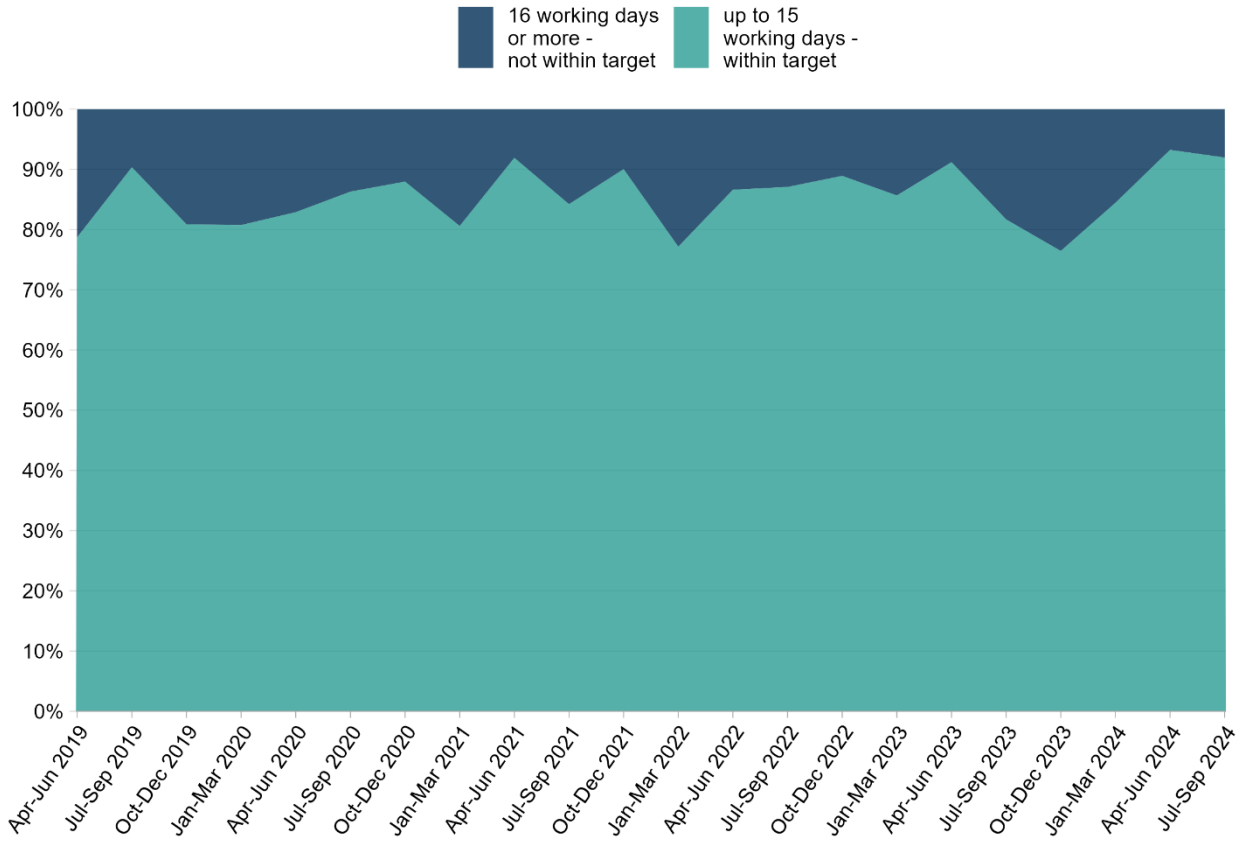
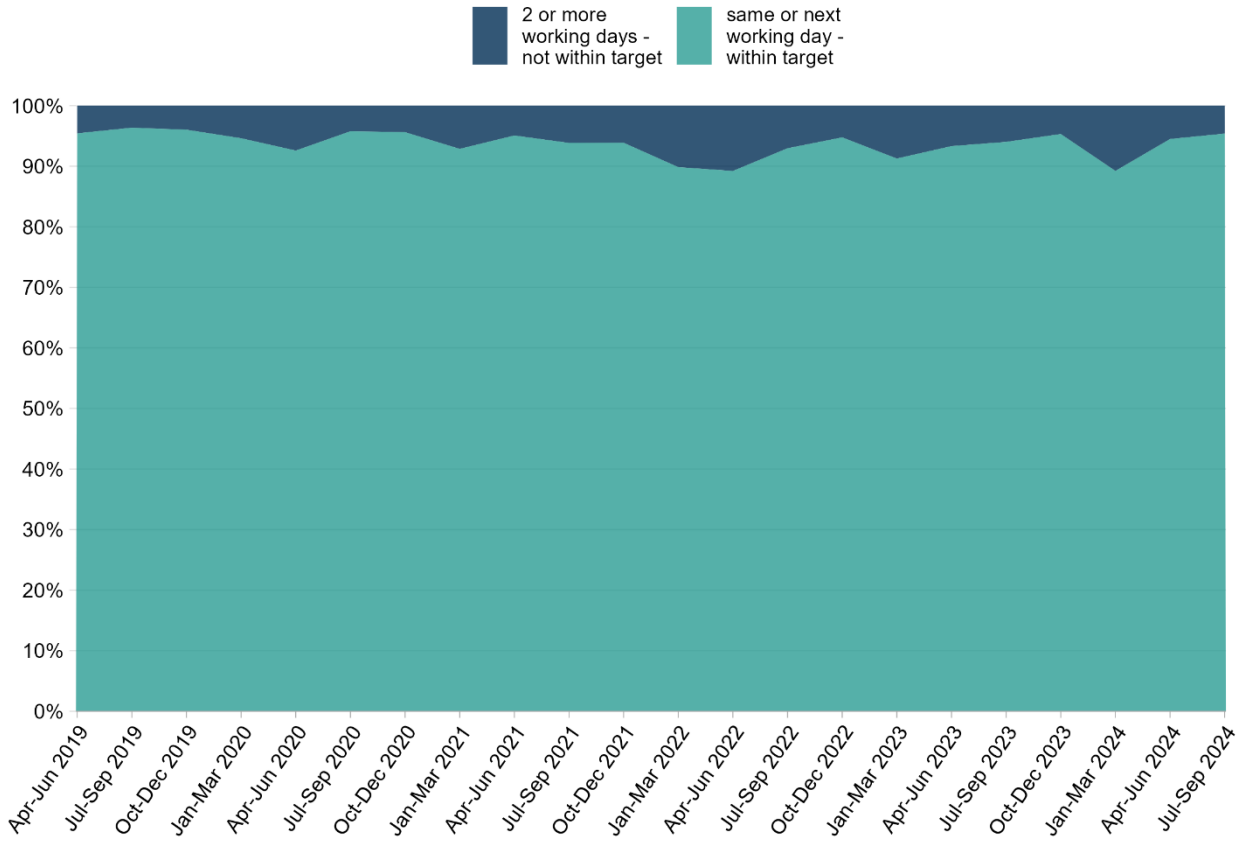


Chart 5: Initial Processing Times for Crisis Grants – Quarterly

This chart shows time series of the proportion of CCG applications within the processing time target per quarter since April 2019.

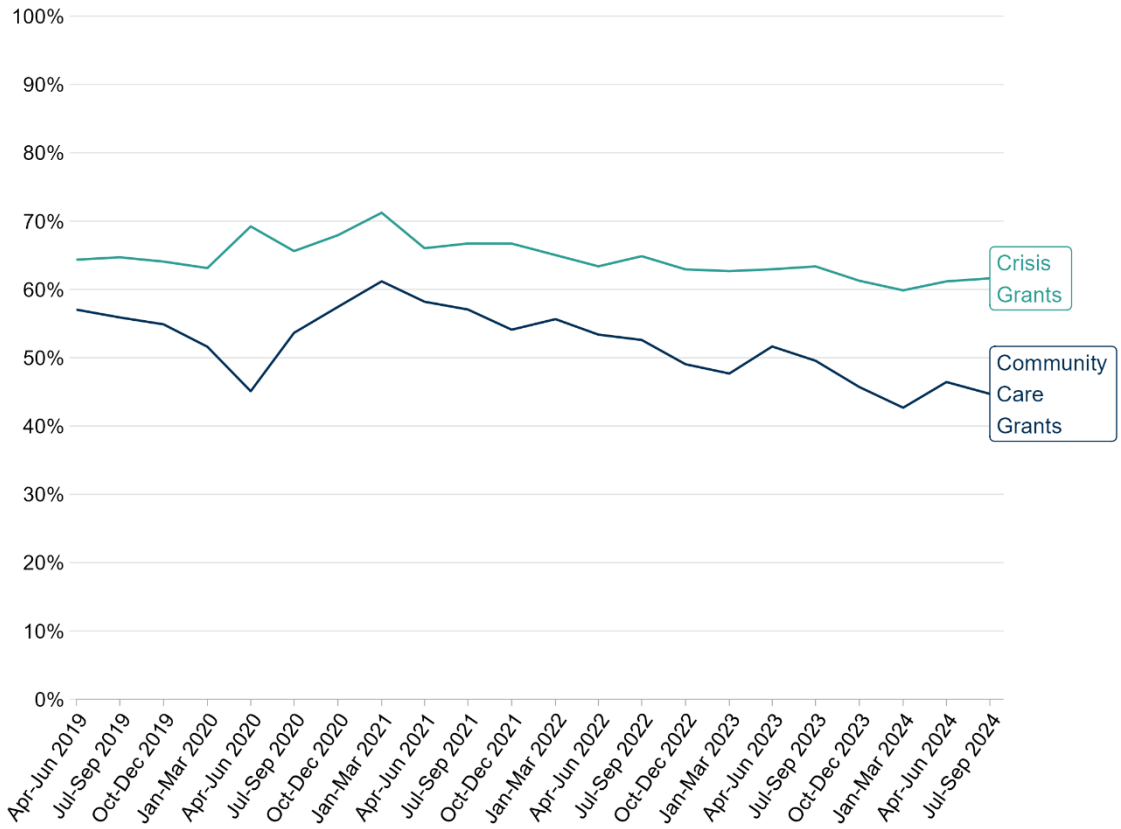


Decisions and Awards

During July to September 2024, decisions were made on 19,665 Community Care Grant applications with an acceptance rate of 45% (**Tables 12 and 14, and Chart 6**) and decisions were made on 60,115 Crisis Grant applications with an acceptance rate of 62% (**Tables 15 and 17, and Chart 7**).

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

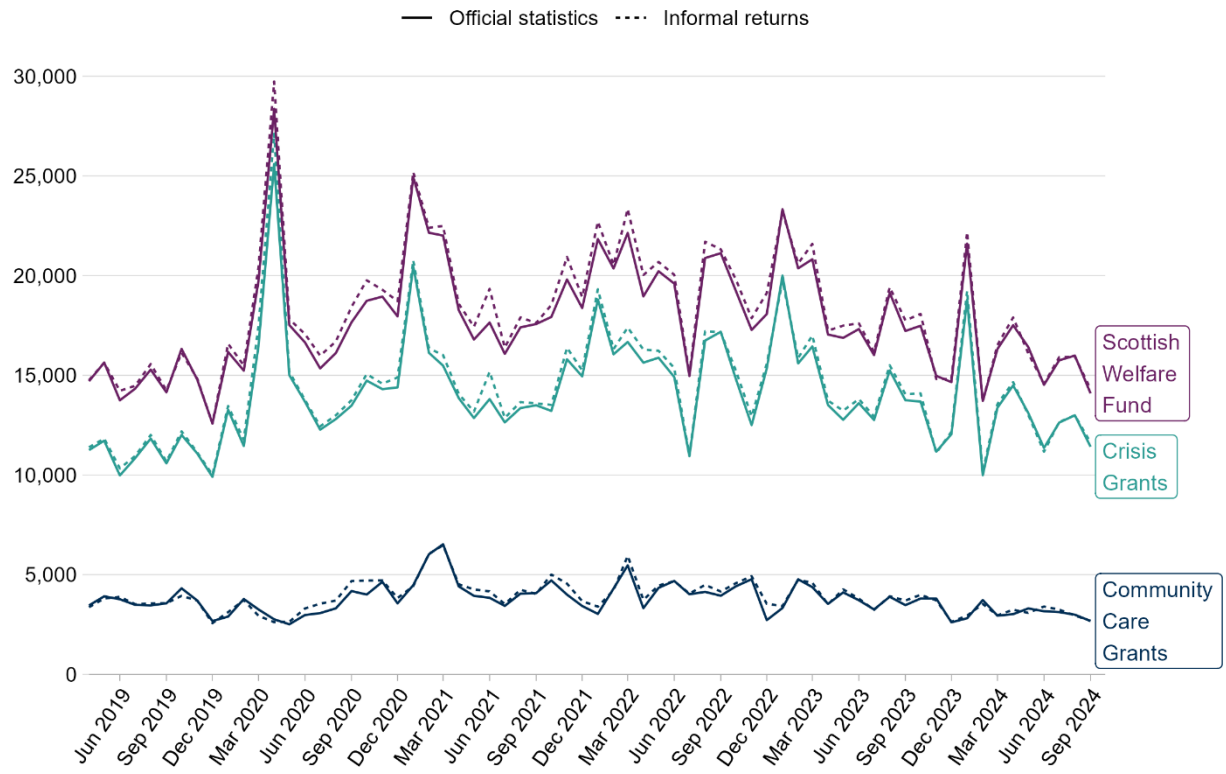
This chart shows the time series of the rate of CCG and Crisis awards per quarter since April 2019.



Local authorities awarded 8,795 Community Care Grants, 1,825 (17%) fewer than July to September 2023 (**Table 13, Chart 7**) and 37,040 Crisis Grants, 4,715 (11%) fewer than July to September 2023 (**Table 16, Chart 7)**.

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

This chart shows the time series of the number of CCG and Crisis awards per quarter since April 2019.



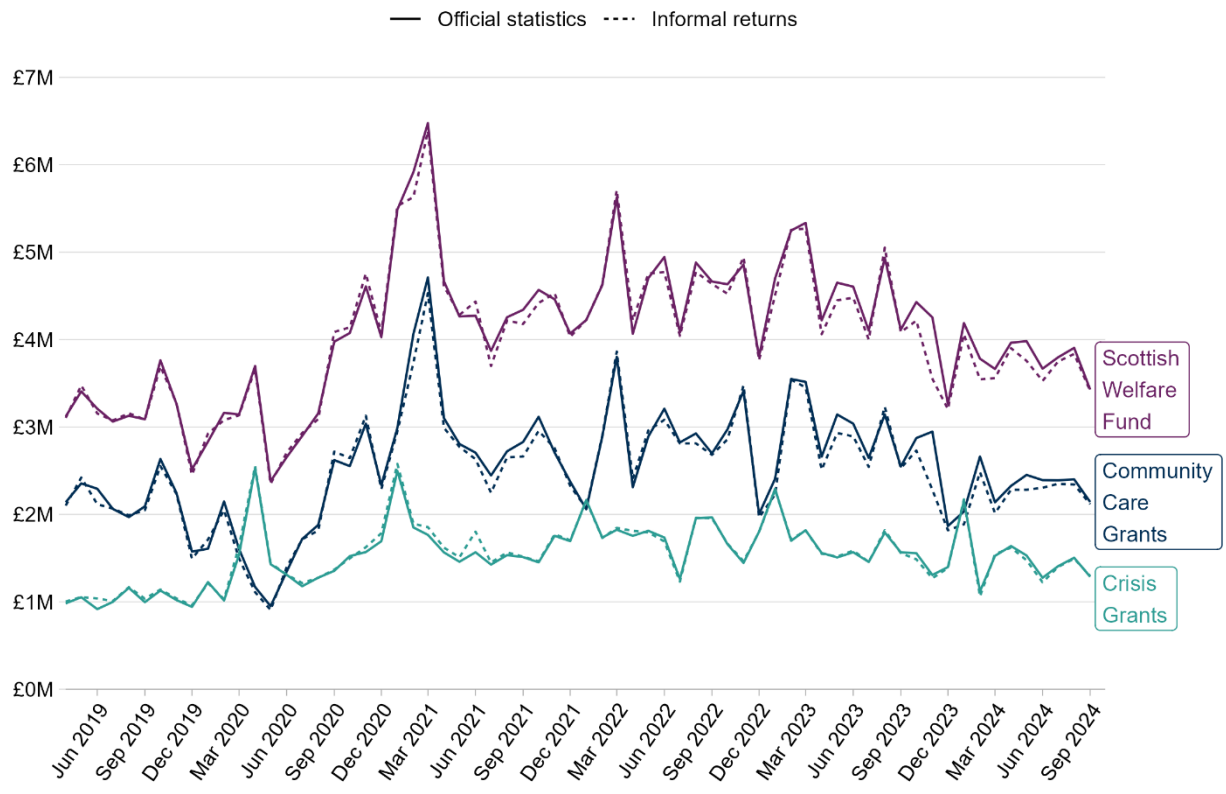
Expenditure and Budgets

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.

During July to September 2024, £11.1 million was spent through the Scottish Welfare Fund, 15% less (£2.0 million) than the same quarter in 2023 (**Table 23, Chart 8**). More was spent on Community Care Grants (£6.9 million) than on Crisis Grants (£4.2 million). Compared to the same quarter of 2023, Community Care Grant expenditure increased in nine local authorities, while Crisis Grant expenditure increased in 10 local authorities (**Table 23**).

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

This chart shows the time series of the expenditure on CCG and Crisis Grants per quarter since April 2019.



Local authorities have been allocated £35.5 million for Scottish Welfare Fund awards in 2024-25. There was also an estimated underspend of £3.1 million carried forward (see the Data Quality section for issues relating to estimation of underspend). Local authorities had spent £22.7 million by the end of September 2024, representing 59% of the estimated available budget. At this point in the year, if spending were consistent in each quarter we would expect local authorities to have spent 50% of their available budgets. In comparison, by the end of September 2023, local authorities had spent £26.6 million, representing 69% of the available budget (**Table 24, Table 26, Chart 9 and Chart 10**).

The lowest percentage of budget spent (including estimated previous underspend) was in Na-h Eileanan Siar (9%). The highest were Fife (106%), Perth & Kinross (105%), and East Renfrewshire (81%). Twenty-four local authorities had spent at least 50% of their estimated available budgets and therefore may be on track to spend all of their available budget for 2024-25 at current rates of expenditure (**Table 26, Chart 9**).

Chart 9: Proportion of 2024-25 budget spent as at 30 September 2024

This chart shows the proportion of budget spent during 2024-25 by local authority.

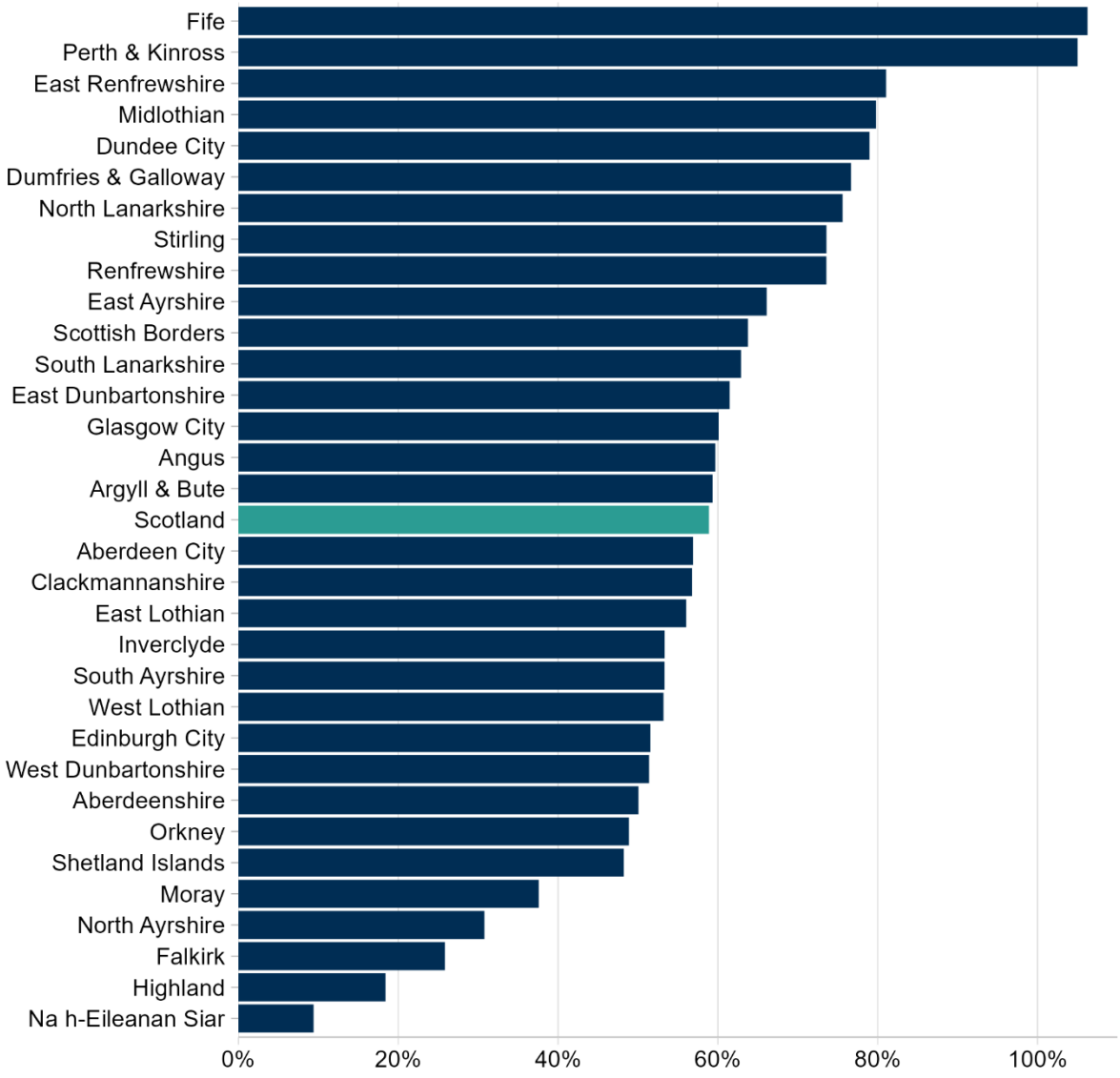
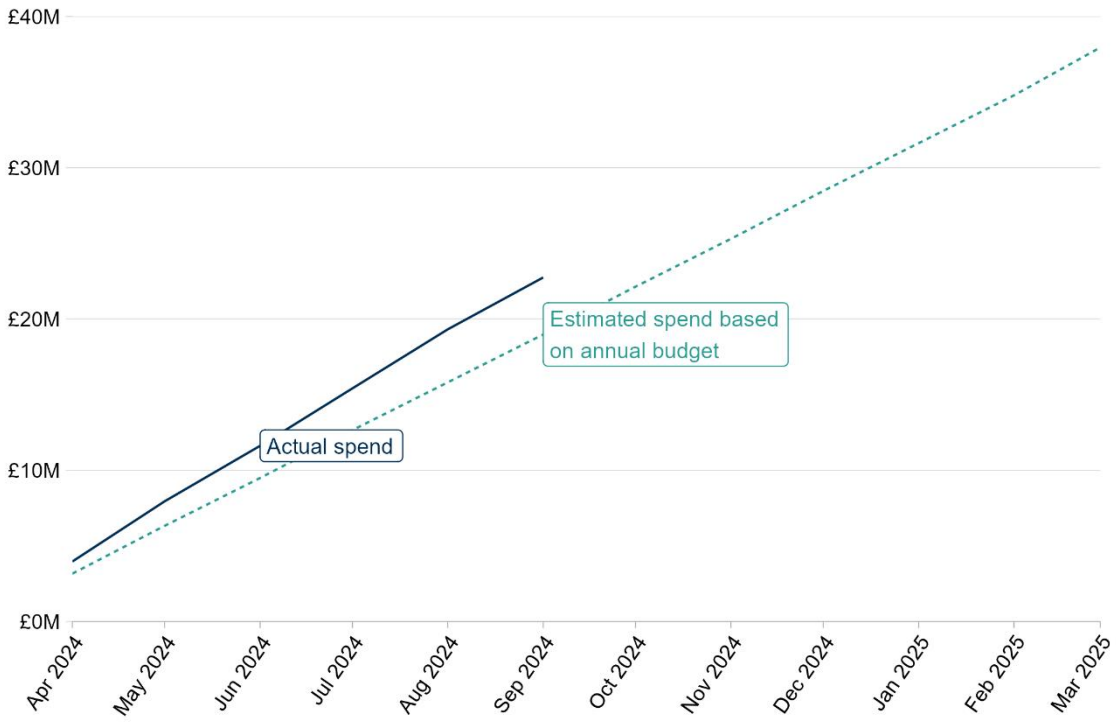


Chart 10 shows that the shared overspend from the start of the year, which if continued would result in £6.8 million overspend by the end of the year.

Chart 10: Cumulative expenditure on the Scottish Welfare Fund – Monthly – 2024-25

This chart shows the time series of the expenditure throughout 2024-25 in comparison to a theoretical steady budget-only spend.



Repeat Applications and Awards

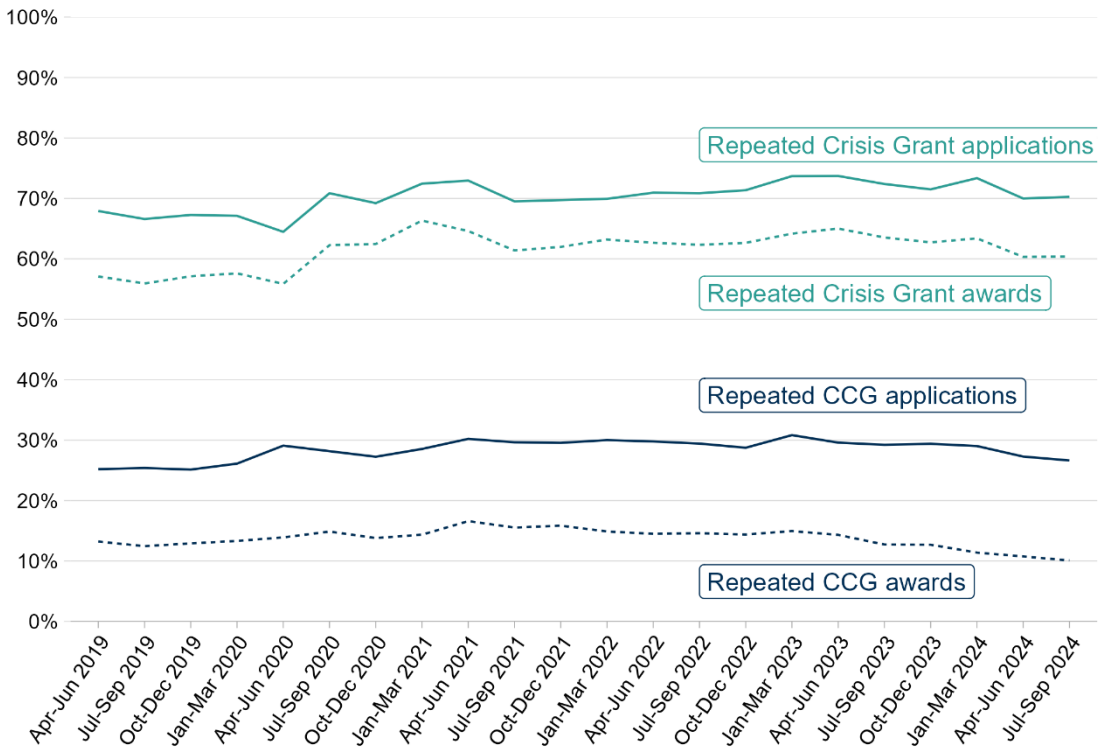
During July to September 2024, a larger proportion of Crisis Grants applications and awards were repeats (70% and 60%, respectively), compared to Community Care Grants (27% and 10%, respectively) (**Tables 41**-**44**, **Chart 11**).

Compared to the same quarter in 2023, the rates of repeat Community Care Grant applications and awards were two and three percentage points lower, respectively. The rate of Crisis Grants repeat applications and awards decreased by two and four percentage points, respectively.

The rates of repeat Crisis Grant applications and awards declined slightly after the highs seen during the COVID-19 pandemic, but in 2023 have been even higher. Increased rates of repeat applications and awards may be due to individuals continuing to experience financial hardship, at least partly due to the increased cost of living.

Chart 11: Repeat applications and awards for Community Care Grants and Crisis Grants – Quarterly

This chart shows time series of the numbers of repeat applications and awards to the Scottish Welfare Fund per quarter since April 2019, separated into the two schemes.



Reviews

In the most recent quarter, there were 925 Community Care Grant Tier 1 reviews, resulting in 385 revised decisions (42% of reviews; **tables 33 and 34**). At the same time there were 1,950 Crisis Grant Tier 1 reviews resulting in 750 revised decisions (38% of reviews; **tables 33 and 34**).

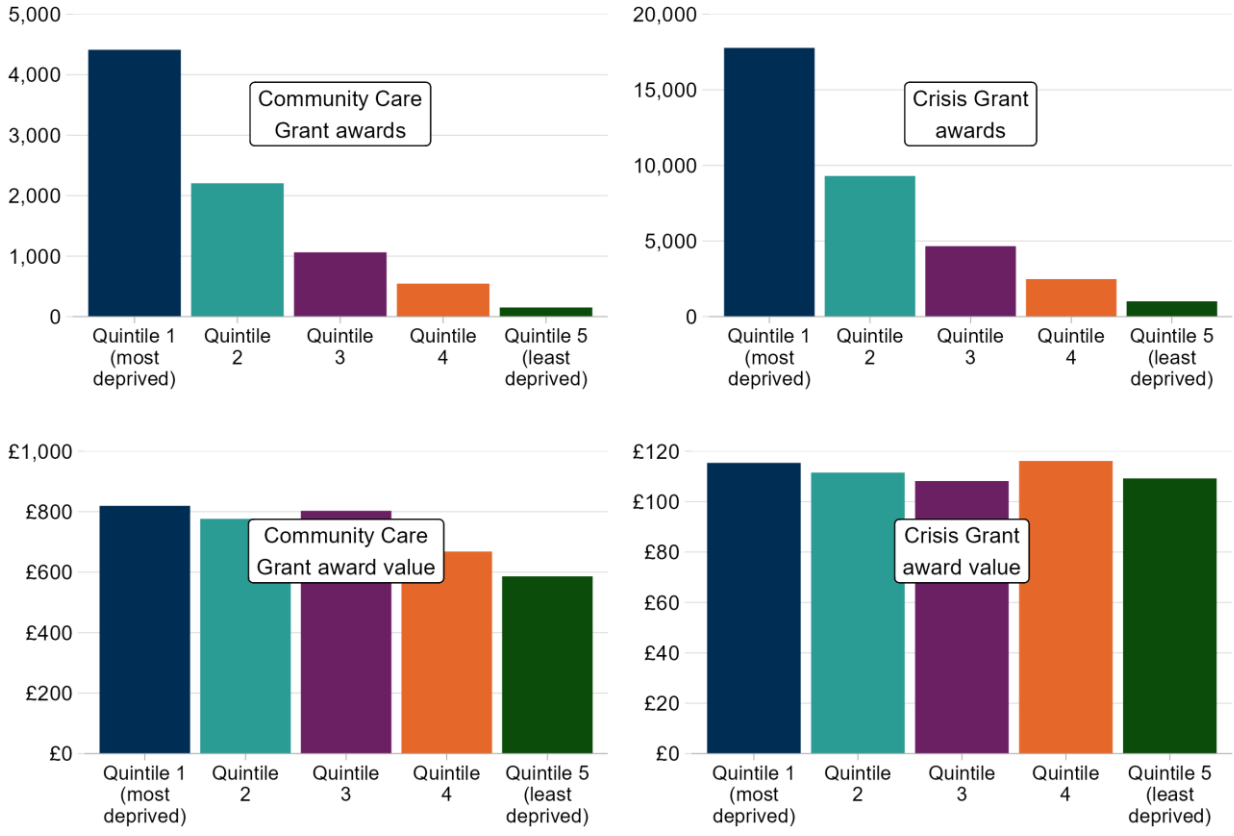
Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation

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). In the latest quarter, around half of Community Care Grants and Crisis Grants (50% and 48% respectively) were awarded to applicants living in these areas. In comparison, 2% of Community Care Grants and 3% of Crisis Grants were awarded to applicants from the 20% least deprived areas (**Table 35**, **Table 36**, **Chart 12**).

The average value of awards was similar across all quintiles, with a slight bias towards more deprived areas for Community Care Grants. (**Table 37**, **Chart 12**).

Chart 12: Distribution of awards and average award value by SIMD Quintile rankings of applicant's postcode – July to September 2024

This is a montage of four charts showing how monies have been disbursed between different areas during 2024-25 based on their level of multiple deprivation.

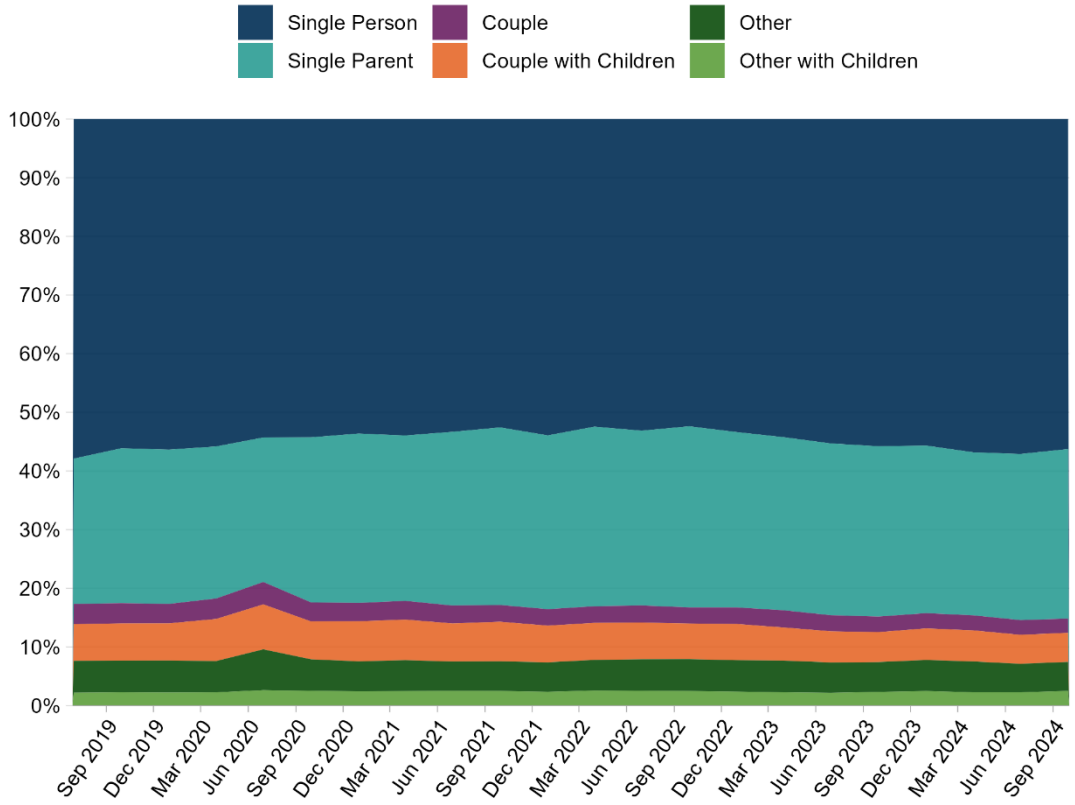


Characteristics of Households in Receipt of Awards

More than a third of awards have been made to households with children, and this has been the case in almost every quarter. In the most recent quarter, 36% of awards went to households with children (**Tables 37 to 39, Chart 13**).

Chart 13: Household types of households receiving funds from the Scottish Welfare Fund to June 2024

This is a chart showing a time series of the distribution of SWF funds split by household type since April 2019.



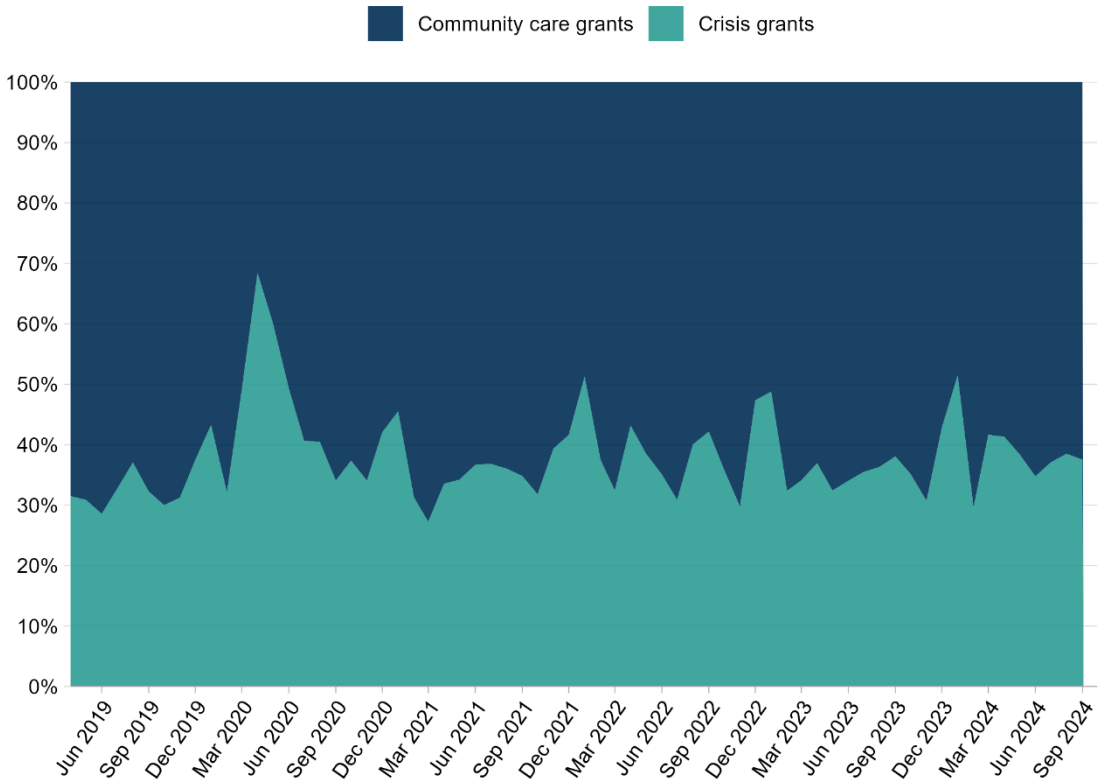
Destination of SWF Awards

Since the scheme began in April 2013, most funds have been directed to Community Care Grants in almost every quarter, although, even before the advent of the Covid pandemic, there was a general increase in the proportion of money being advanced via Crisis Grants (**Chart 14**).

As well as the regular peaks in or around January each year, it has been seen that Crisis Grant awards increased during periods of high Covid infections, most notably in the early part of the pandemic where more than two-thirds of SWF expenditure was to Crisis Grants. Latterly, this may be related to periods of self-isolation for people who didn't qualify for Self-isolation Support Grants, but may more widely be related to support required for people whose earnings had fallen.

Chart 14: Proportion of SWF spend by scheme – Quarterly

This chart shows the time series of the proportion of expenditure going to each SWF scheme since April 2019.



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 COSLA, 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.
- 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 was 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 allocated in response to COVID-19 in March 2020. A further £2.5 million was allocated to the fund in early 2023, and funding remained at £35.5 million for 2023-24 and 2024-25.

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 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 two separate applications. 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 2023-24.

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, have been processed by Local Authorities using the same IT systems as other Scottish Welfare Fund awards. We therefore received 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 were reimbursed separately for these awards. Local Authorities sent 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

excluded these applications from the analysis when producing this publication and accompanying publication tables.

Self-Isolation Support Grants

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

In a small number of cases, applications that are flagged don't appear to fit the criteria to be Self-Isolation Support Grants (i.e. amount paid was not equal to £500 (or later £225 or £250), or the application date was before this scheme started), and some applications may be part of joint applications, meaning that accounting for them is more complex. Now that the scheme has closed, any outstanding SISGs still recorded as Crisis Grants are removed if and when they are identified.

Data and Methodology

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 is available here.

Guidance to help Local Authority officers to record information is available here.

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. were 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 ProcXed website. Once the data has been validated by our software, the data is passed over to the Scottish Government's Communities Analysis Division.

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 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 or 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 limited to three in a rolling 12 month period, barring exceptional circumstances.

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 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.

As of the annual publication 2023-24 (published July 2024), a new software system was used to produce the outputs for this release. This has led to a small number of changes in the data compared to previous releases; this is most likely due to differences in how some items are handled by the new software. Where any differences occur, they are minor and do not significantly affect the trends seen or

general messages gleaned from the data.

Because the number of people in households changes over time, it is possible that the number of people in a household that has made more than one application was different on the occasions when those applications were made. This means that the count of the total number of people in unique households in receipt of funds (**Table 40**) may not be completely accurate.

Known data issues:

City of Edinburgh experienced a software issue in March 2020 that 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. Records indicate that around 1,335 crisis awards and £141,000 associated expenditure made in March 2020 was 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 are also 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 Community Care Grant applications in the quarterly data extract supplied to Scottish Government. In March 2020, around 1,000 applications, 400 awards and £60,000 associated expenditure was been recorded as Community Care Grants 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 Community Care Grants appears to have been resolved.

Scotland level figures are affected by specific issues described for Edinburgh and Glasgow and there may be additional issues with data quality related to COVID-19. Comparison of management information 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 Community Care Grants and/or Crisis Grants than the monthly figures. This could be due to delays in applications being processed, applications being withdrawn, or awards being kept as 'pending' or 'in principle' on local authority systems until they can be delivered/installed etc. Overall at Scotland level, compared to the monthly management information the quarterly data extracts contained 4% fewer CCG applications and awards but 3% more CCG expenditure; while there were 3% fewer Crisis Grant applications and 2% fewer Crisis Grant awards, and 1% more Crisis Grant expenditure. 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 and review decisions. We continue to work 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.

Unusual issues have occurred in some local authorities when relatively high volumes of applications have led to slower than usual processing times. This occurred during the Covid pandemic and has continued at times since.

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 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 2022-23 but a review decision is made in 2023-24, all of the expenditure for the case is counted in 2022-23.

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 differ from monies actually spent if reconciliations are not applied.

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 earlier publications, we included funds provided by Local Authorities in the available budget. However, this funding was 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 review these differences 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 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, but based on the types of item that have been requested, the Local Authority may 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.

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, however numbers are small.

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. This accounts for a small proportion of grants where it is unknown if reviews were made within target times. From July 2018 onwards, East Ayrshire have supplied full review information via ProcXed.

Improvements:

We continue to work 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 to differences in IT systems.

Coverage:

Charts are truncated to start from April 2019. This is to enhance readability and to focus on the most relevant trends of recent years. Data back to the start of the scheme can be found in earlier releases.

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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 here.

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.

Tell us what you think

We are always interested to hear from our users about how our statistics are used, and how they can be improved.

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