Scottish Welfare Fund: Child Poverty Summary

Introduction

The Scottish Welfare Fund (SWF) comprises Community Care Grants (CCGs), which help people to live independently; and Crisis Grants, which provide a safety net in a disaster or emergency. The SWF is a budget limited scheme. Grants are intended to meet occasional or short-term needs and not to provide an alternative source of regular income. General statistics can be found in quarterly and annual SWF publications.

It is not specifically intended to target child poverty; other benefits and policies have been designed with that purpose in mind, such as the Scottish Child Payment. However, grants awarded to households with children are likely to have some impact on child poverty.

On this basis, and as part of the Scottish Government's focus on child poverty, a commitment was made in 2024 to publish a summary of relevant Scottish Welfare Fund data. This is the second report on how households with children are supported by the Scottish Welfare Fund with comparisons to other households.

Applicants are asked to provide information about the people in their household, including age and relationship to the main applicant. This information is used to define household type, with children defined as those under 16 years of age when the application was made. Data coverage and quality in this area is high, although there are likely to be some issues with data accuracy, on which the Scottish Government continues to work with local authorities. A variety of other relevant information is collected from applicants, with varying degrees of data quality, some of which is presented in this report.

Since April 2021, around 486,315 applications were received from households with children, representing 33% of total applications with around 955,000 children in those households. There were on average 1.7 children in those households: 51% single child; 32% two children; 13% three children; 4% four children; and 1% five or more children. Around a third of awards, totalling over £88 million, were made to households with children, with around 517,000 children in those households. It is not known which households were in poverty according to any standard definition, however, 99% reported being in receipt of benefits.

It should be noted that multiple applications from, or awards to, a household are counted, and people living in those households are counted more than once. Furthermore, people's ages and household types can change between applications, for example when a child is born or is no longer under 16 years of age.

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Applications by household type

Since April 2021, local authorities received almost 1.5 million Scottish Welfare Fund applications, a third of which came from households with children. The proportion of applications that came from households with children was roughly the same for Community Care Grants (35%) and Crisis Grants (33%) (**Chart 1**). While the total number of applications fell in 2023-24 and 2024-25 the proportion of applications from households with children was consistent over time (**Chart 2**).

Around 955,000 children were recorded on applications during this period. It should be noted that where multiple applications have come from the same household individuals will be counted more than once (**Chart 3**). In line with the fall in applications the total number of children on applications also fell in 2023-24 and 2024-25.

Chart 1: Scottish Welfare Fund applications by grant and household type

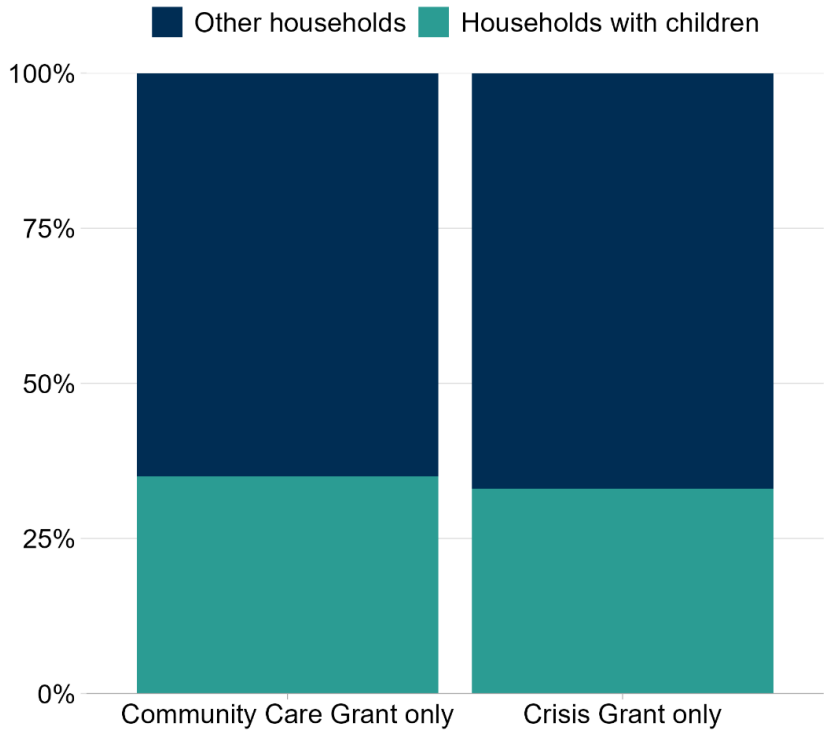


Chart 2: Scottish Welfare Fund applications by year and household type

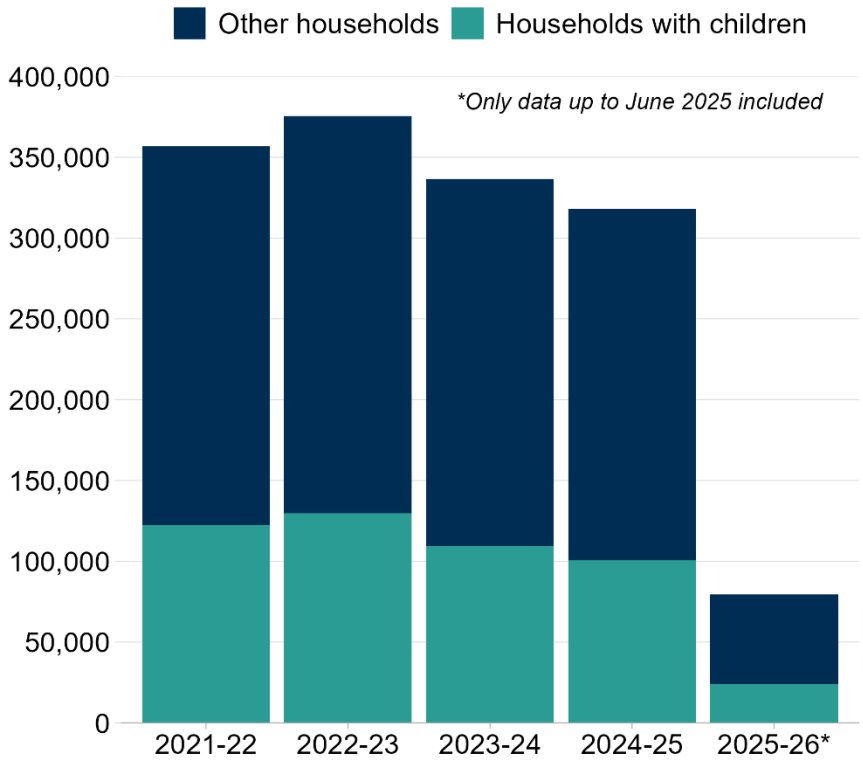
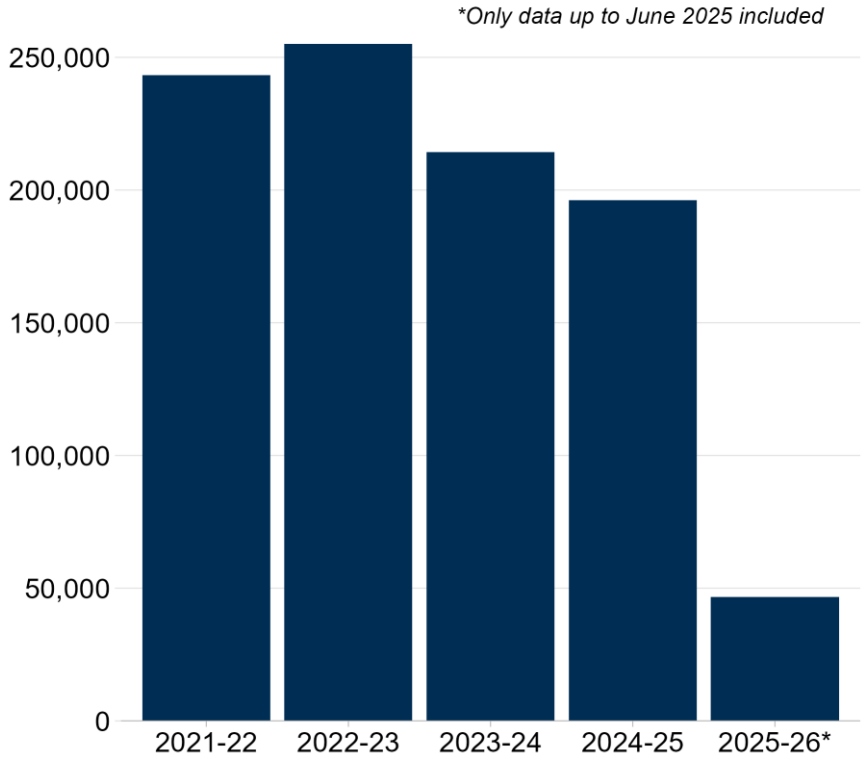


Chart 3: Children on Scottish Welfare Fund applications by year



Application reasons

The most common reason for Community Care Grant applications from households with children was ‘families facing exceptional pressure’ representing 46% of applications, compared to 31% of applications from other households (**Chart 4**); whereas the most common reason for applications from other households was ‘helping people stay in the community’ at 31% of applications compared to 24% of applications from households with children. Applications for ‘caring for a prisoner/ offender on temporary release’ were excluded from the chart due to small numbers.

Reasons for Crisis Grant applications show less variation by household type (**Chart 5**). Among households with children and other households the most likely reason was ‘Emergency – benefit/income spent’ at 44% and 43%, respectively. The only clear difference was that 20% of applications from households with children were for ‘Emergency – unexpected expense’, compared to 15% of other households.

Chart 4: Reasons for Community Care Grant applications by household type

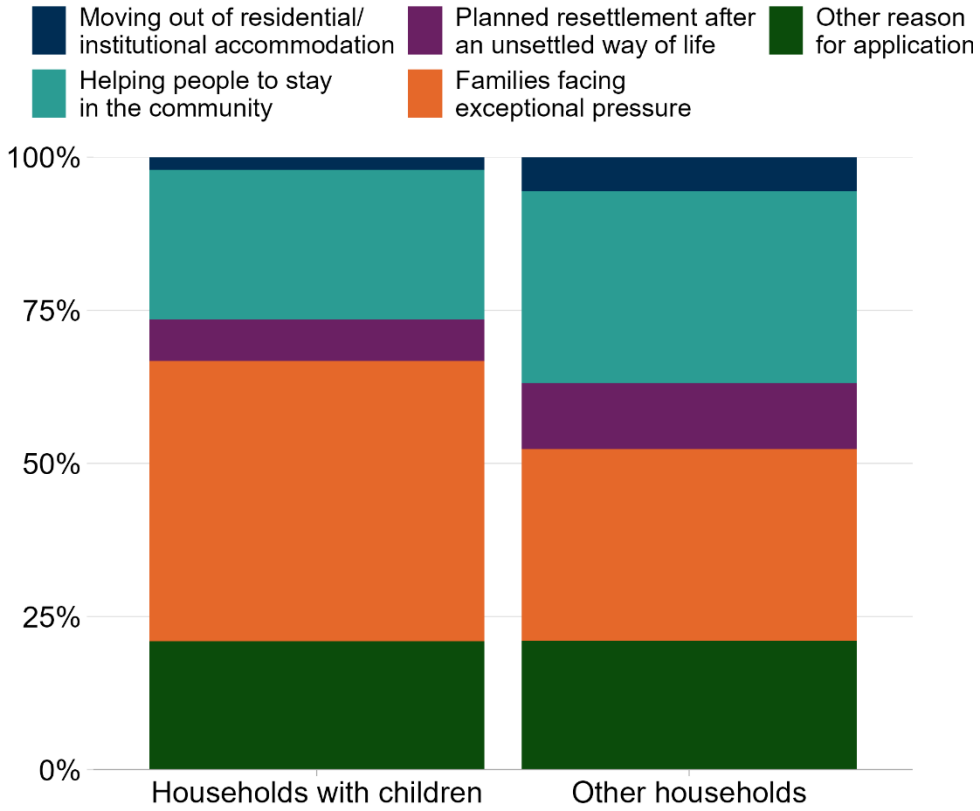
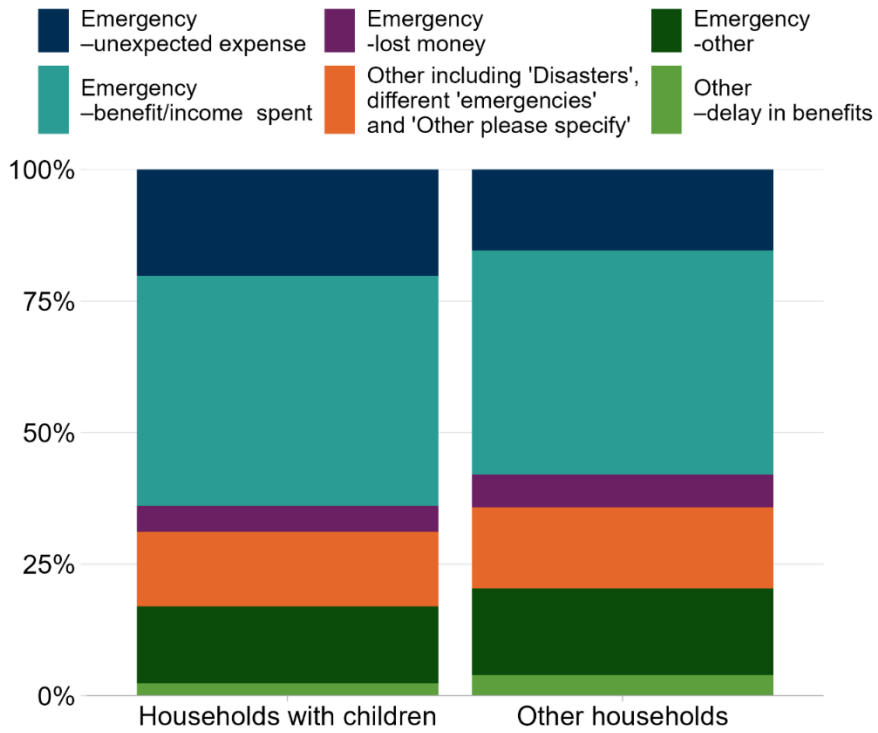
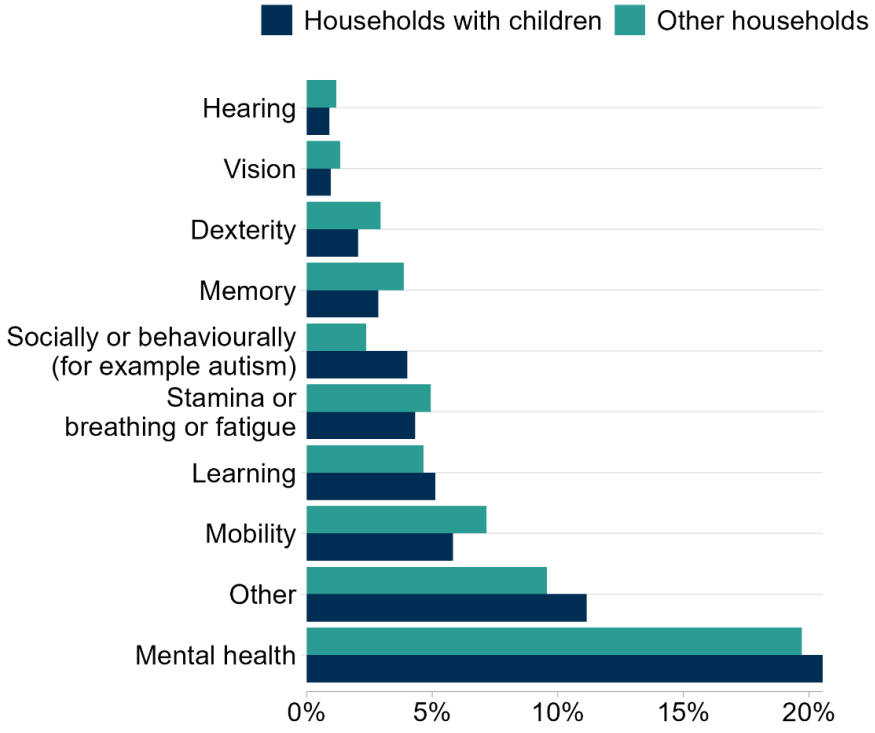


Chart 5: Reasons for Crisis Grant applications by household type



Applicants are asked whether ‘any member of the household has a physical or mental health condition or illness lasting or expecting to last 12 months or more’, and for types of disabilities. Fifty-two percent of SWF applicants reported disabilities in their households. This proportion and the prevalences of types of disabilities were consistent across household types (**Chart 6**).

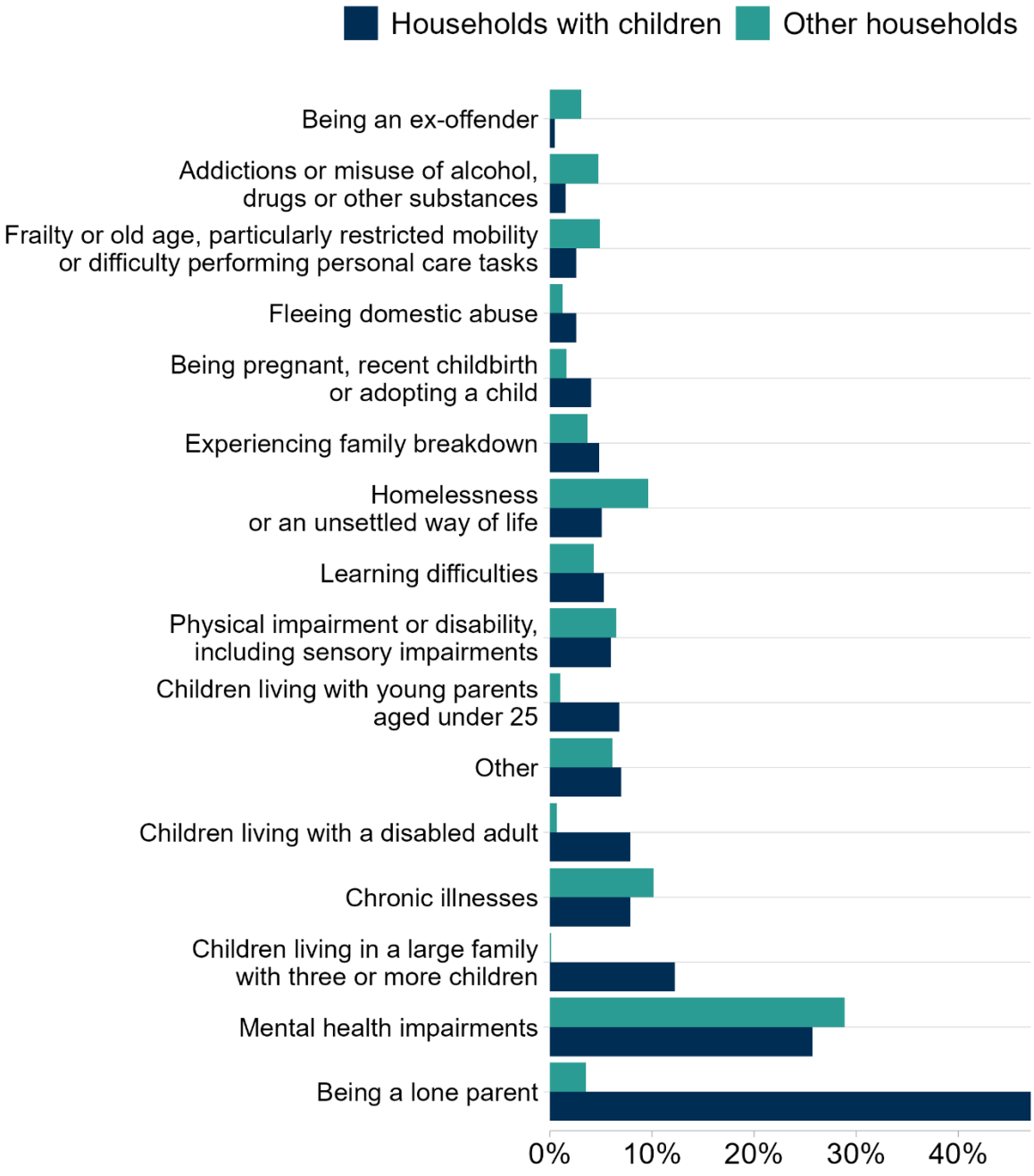
Chart 6: Prevalence of disabilities by household type



Information on vulnerabilities experienced by households is recorded, with multiple possible on each application. Although there are known data quality issues, it provides an insight to the experiences of households applying to the Scottish Welfare Fund. Households with children were less likely (40%) to have no vulnerabilities recorded than other households (56%).

Prevalences of individual vulnerabilities varied quite a bit by household type (**Chart 7**). The most prevalent amongst households with children were: Being a lone parent (47%); 'Mental health impairment' (26%); and 'Children living in a large family with three or more children' (12%). Local authorities referred around 30% of SWF applicants to other sources of support.

Chart 7: Prevalence of vulnerabilities by household type



Awards by household type

Since April 2021, local authorities made 903,000 Scottish Welfare Fund awards with 299,000 (33%) going to households with children. The proportion going to households with children was the same for Community Care Grants and Crisis Grants (**Chart 8**) and was consistent over time (**Chart 9**).

Chart 8: Awards by grant and household type

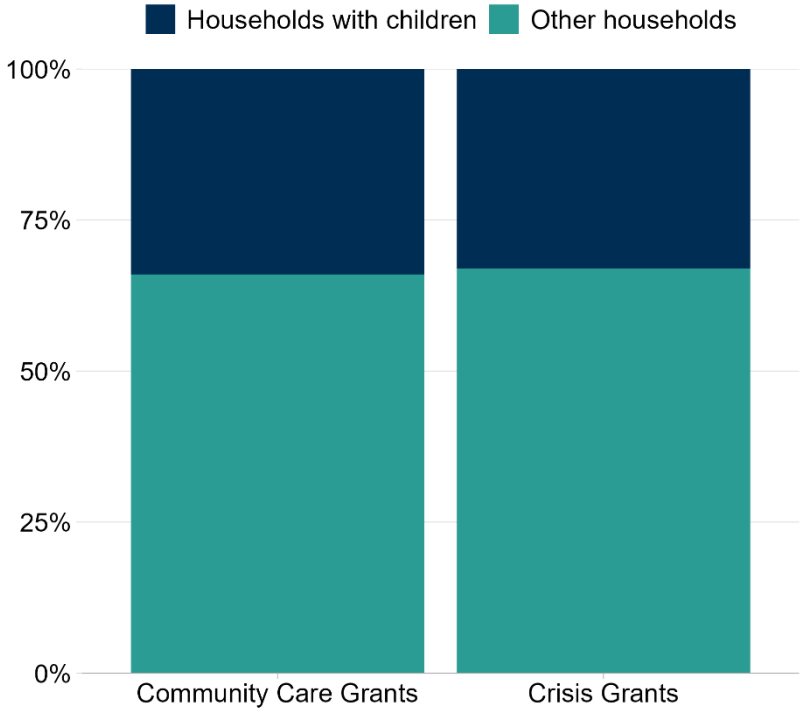
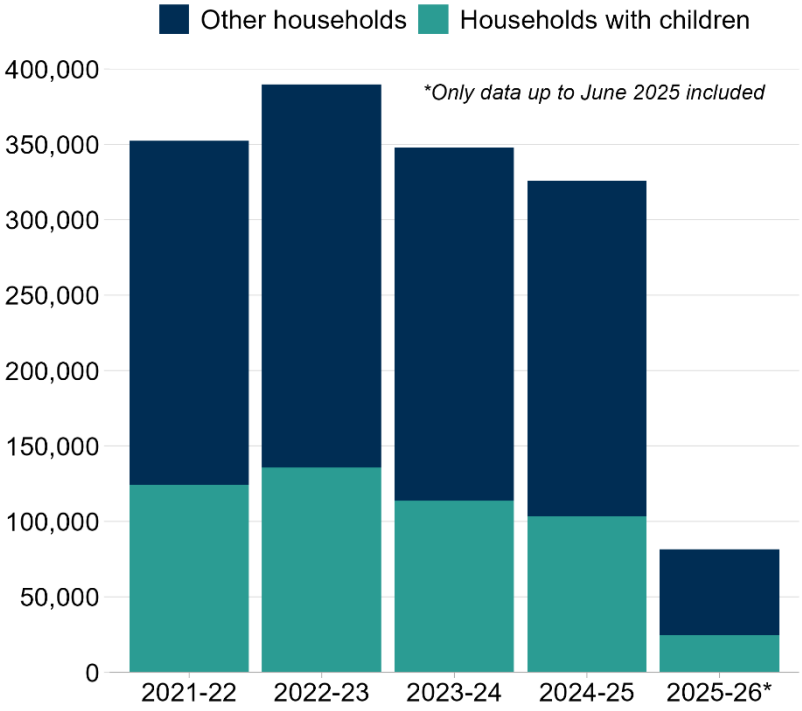
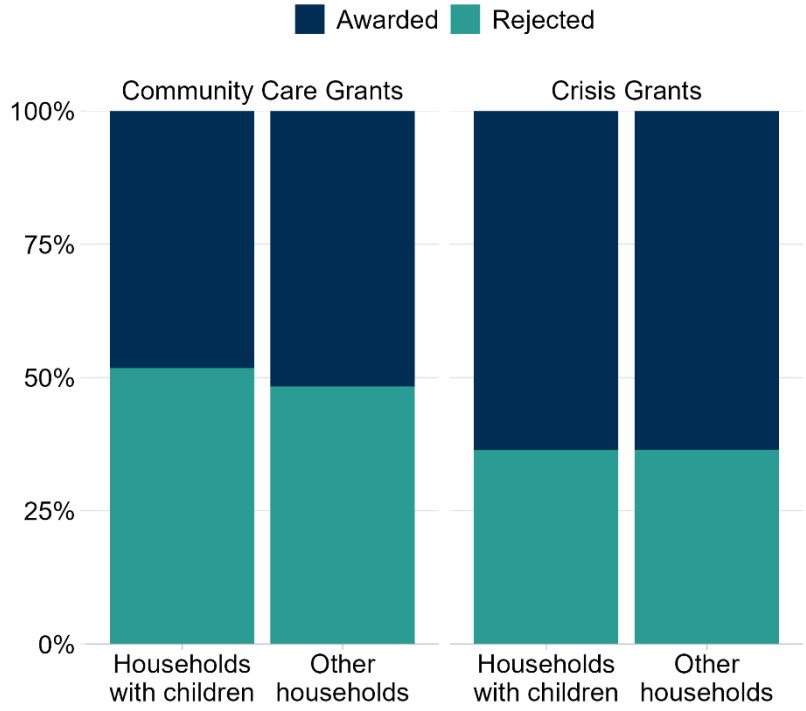


Chart 9: Awards by year and household type



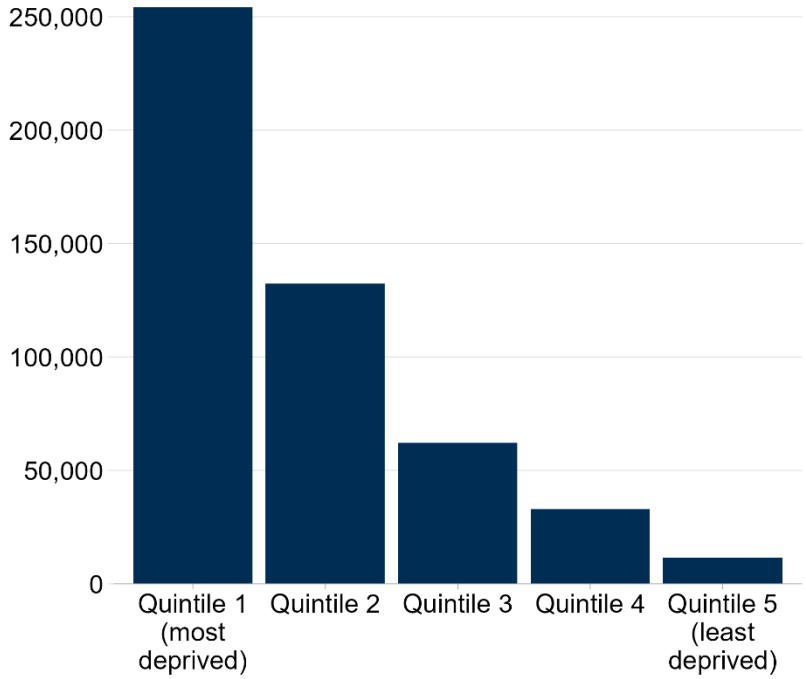
The acceptance rates of Community Care Grants and Crisis Grants did not vary significantly by household type (**Chart 10**).

Chart 10: Acceptance rates by grant and household type



Since April 2021, around 517,000 children were in households with an award, and 254,000 (49%) lived in the most deprived 20% areas in Scotland (**Chart 11**).

Chart 11: Children in households receiving an award by Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation quintile

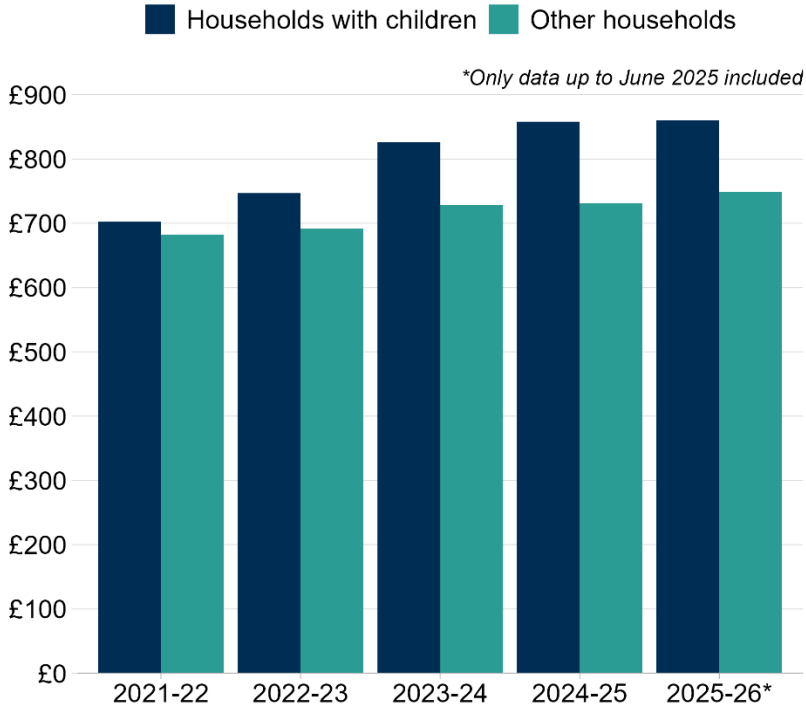


Expenditure by household type

Households with children were awarded grants totalling around £88 million (40% of total expenditure). The average value of awards for both grant types differed significantly by household type, with larger awards going to households with children.

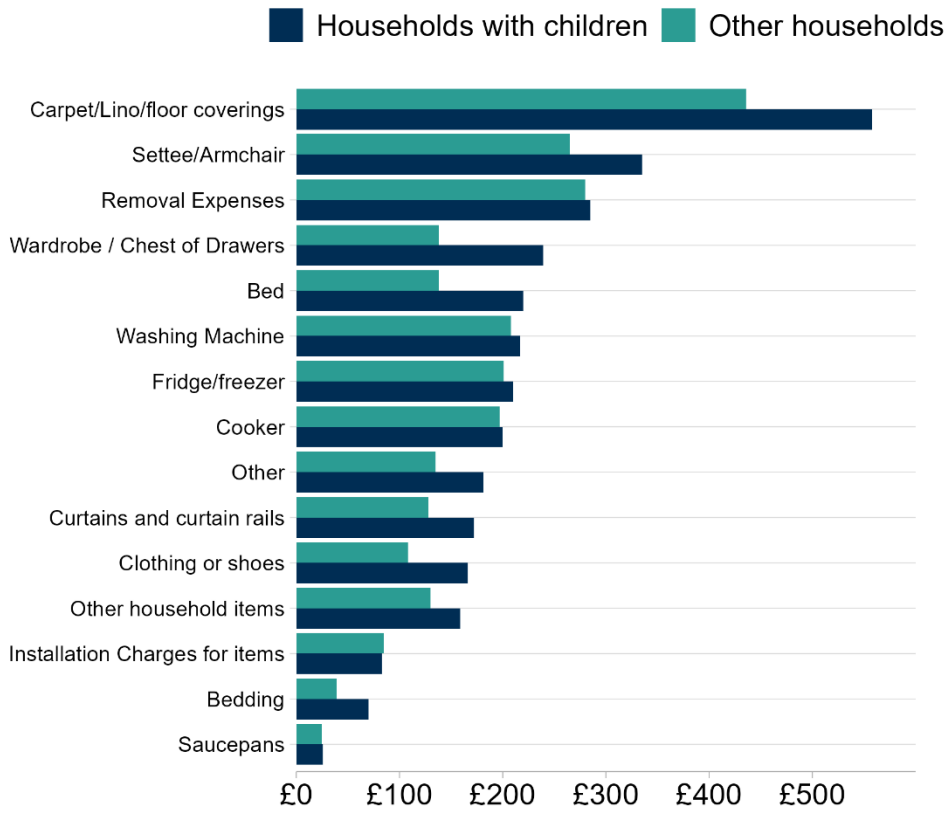
The average Community Care Grant award since April 2021 was £779 for households with children and £709 for other households. The difference between household types has increased over that period with the average award for households with children reaching £860 in the first quarter of 2025-26, compared to £749 for other households (**Chart 12**).

Chart 12: Average Community Care Grant award by household type and year



The difference in average award by household type is reflected in the average award for individual items (**Chart 13**). Across most items the average award value is greater for households with children, which is to be expected since households with children are likely to be larger and therefore require more furniture. The exceptions to this pattern were white goods, installation charges and removals, which, in most cases, will be single items irrespective of household size.

Chart 13: Average Community Care Grant award by household type and item



The average Crisis Grant award for households with children (£177) was around double the average award for other households (£89). That difference has been consistent over time. In 2025-26 the average award for all households increased due to local authorities implementing us the Universal Credit Essentials Guarantee from April 2025 onwards. Here, the difference can also be seen in the average value of items awarded which again can be explained by households with children generally being larger than other households (**Chart 15**).

Chart 14: Average Crisis Grant award by household type and year

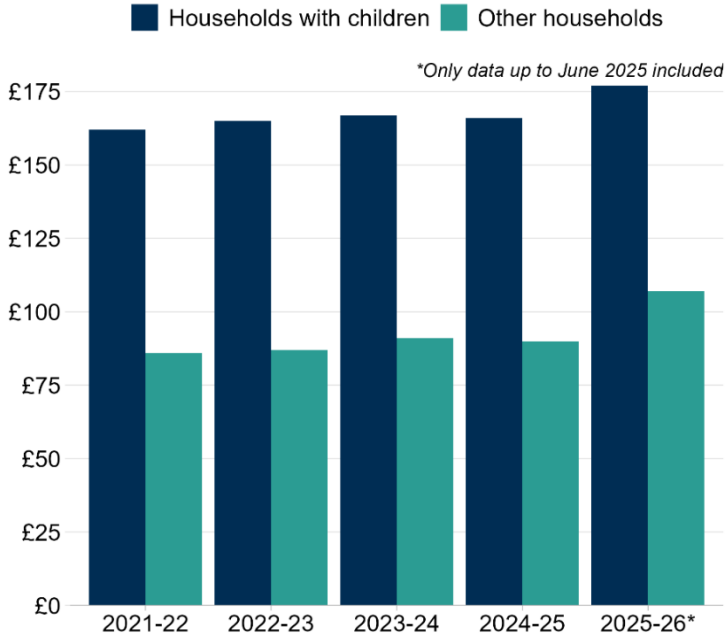
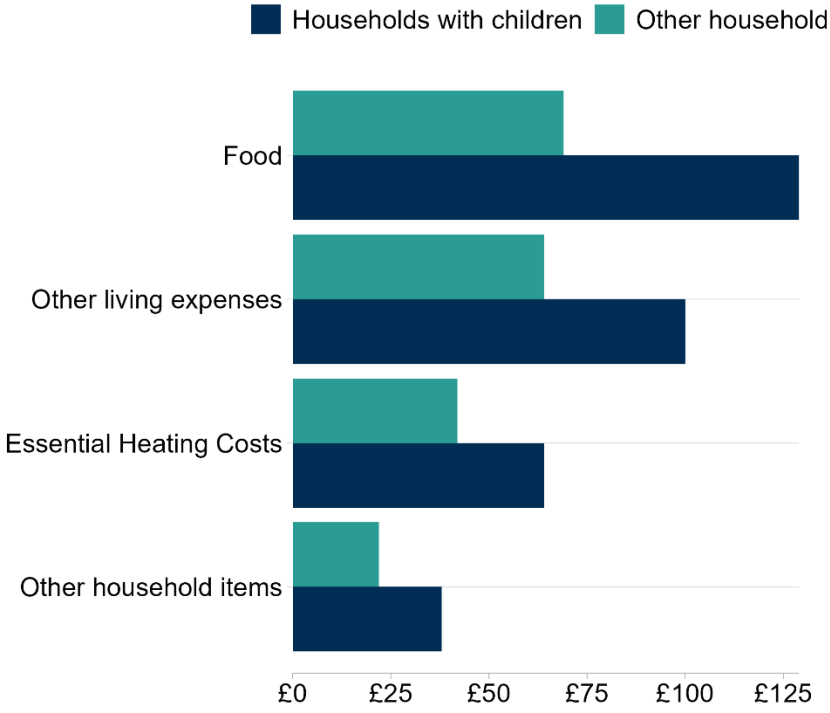


Chart 15: Average Crisis Grant award by household type and item



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.

Information on Scottish Government policy work relating to child poverty can be found here. This page highlights the actions being taken to eradicate child poverty, and the legislative background which underpins the policy.

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 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.

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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