

EQUALITY, POVERTY AND SOCIAL SECURITY

Scottish Welfare Fund Statistics: Update to 31 December 2020

Introduction

The Scottish Welfare Fund comprises of **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 October to 31 December 2020. It also contains information from previous financial years dating back to 1 April 2013, when the scheme started. The next update of this publication, to be released in July 2021, will include applications received in January to March 2021. Disclosure control has been applied to the figures reported here, with all values rounded to the nearest five observations.

The publication includes monthly management information (informal returns) from January 2020 to February 2021, broken down by local authority for comparison with the Official Statistics and to provide more recent figures that show the impacts of COVID-19 on the Scottish Welfare Fund. Monthly Self-Isolation Support Grant management information broken down by local authority is also included.

A supplementary spreadsheet containing 46 tables and 13 charts has been published. Electronic versions of this document and supplementary 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://www.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/2010/12/images-assessmentanddesignationofexperimentalstatistic_tcm97-44327-1.pdf

Summary of main points

From when the Scottish Welfare Fund scheme began on 1 April 2013 until 31 December 2020, **414,930 individual households** have received awards totalling **£269.4 million**. A third of households receiving an award were families with children, while just over half were single person households with no children.

From October to December 2020, local authorities received **21,880 applications for Community Care Grants** (15% more than the same quarter of 2019). Decisions were made on 21,175 applications, with **12,220 awards made** (14% more than the previous year) – an acceptance rate of 58% (three percentage points higher than the same quarter of 2019). **Expenditure on Community Care Grant awards totalled £8.0 million**, which is 24% more than the previous year. The average award was £592.

From October to December 2020, Local Authorities received **63,890 applications for Crisis Grants** (25% more than the same quarter of 2019). Decisions were made on 63,875 applications, with **43,405 awards made** (32% more than the same quarter of 2019 - an acceptance rate was 68% (four percentage points higher than the same quarter of 2019)). **Expenditure on Crisis Grant awards totalled £4.8 million**, 56% more than the previous year. The average award was £111.

From October to December 2020, 28% of Community Care Grant applications were **repeat applications**, three percentage points higher than in the same quarter of 2019. 72% of Crisis Grant application were repeats, five percentage points higher than the same quarter of 2019. This is the highest proportion of Crisis grant repeat applications in any quarter since the start of the Scottish Welfare Fund.

From October to December 2020, 88% of Community Care Grant applications and 95% of Crisis Grant applications were processed within **target times**.

Local authorities have been **allocated £57.5 million** for Scottish Welfare Fund awards in 2020/21 so far, which includes 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, **£31.6 million (53%) has been spent in the first nine months of the financial year**. At this time last year less had been spent (£28.5 million), however a larger proportion of the budget had been spent (86%) because the available budget was lower (£34.9 million). A **further £20 million** was allocated in October 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 25,165 **Tier 1 reviews** for Community Care Grants and 26,645 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 publication, 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 few quarters at Scotland level. Overall, the monthly management information and quarterly data extracts have similar figures for Community Care Grant applications (-3% difference), awards (-2% in the quarterly extract) and expenditure (-1% in quarterly extract). At Scotland level, there is a larger discrepancy in Crisis Grant applications (-6% in quarterly extract), but awards (-2% in quarterly data) and expenditure (-2% in quarterly data) are relatively similar. Management information to February 2021 has been provided in **Tables 44 and 45** for comparison to the official statistics. However, the official statistics provide much more detailed information as well as 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 46**. 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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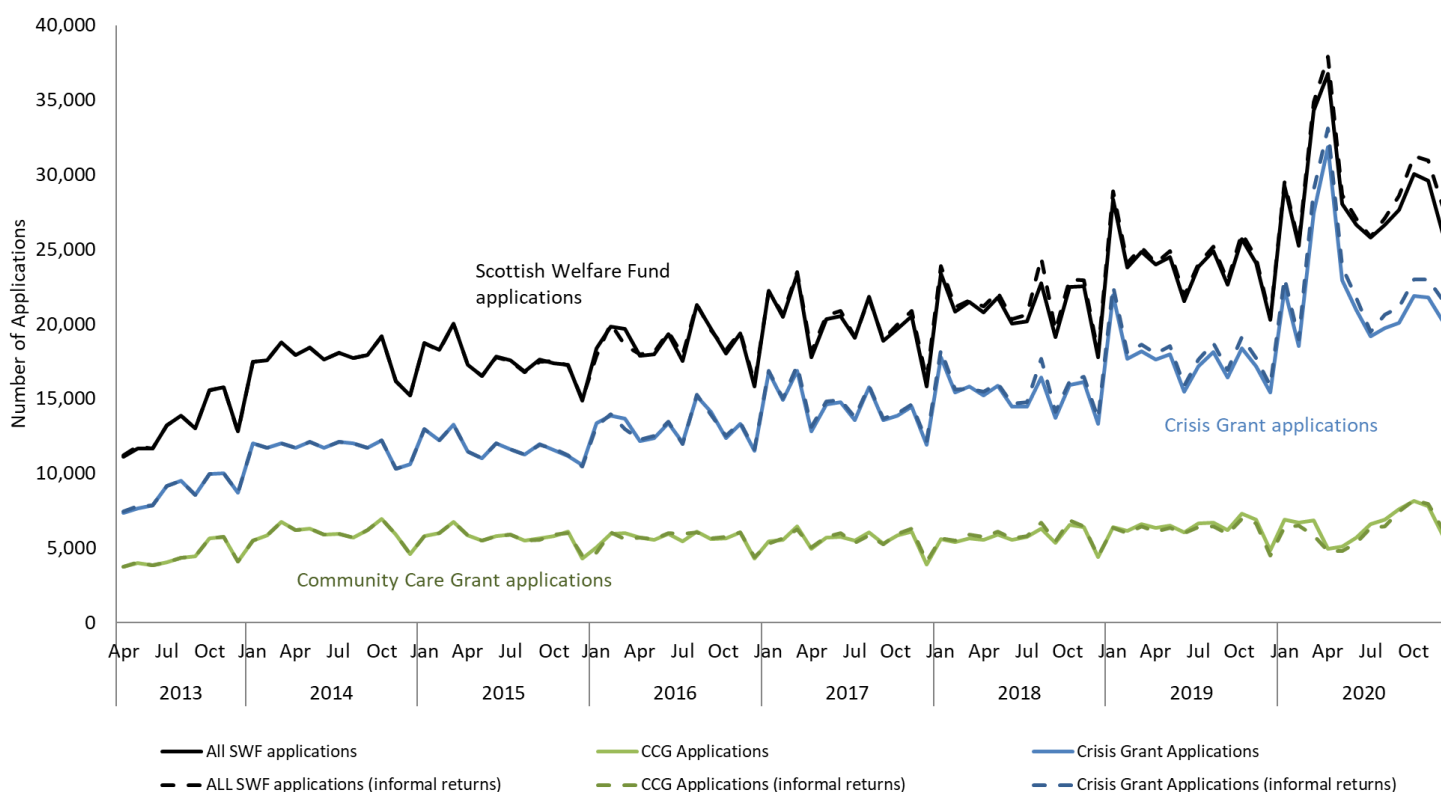
Applications

From October to December 2020, 85,770 applications to the Scottish Welfare Fund were received (**Table 1**). The majority were for Crisis Grants (63,890, **Table 3**), and a smaller proportion were for Community Care Grants (21,880, **Table 2**).

Compared to the same quarter in 2019, there were 2,795 more Community Care Grant applications (+15%) (**Table 2, Chart 1**). At local authority level the percentage change in applications varied from a 169% increase in Orkney (from 15 to 35 applications) to a 33% decrease in Fife (from 1,400 to 940 applications). Application numbers increased in 24 local authorities and decreased in eight local authorities.

Compared to the same quarter in 2019, there were 12,885 more Crisis Grant applications (+25%) (**Table 3, Chart 1**). At local authority level the percentage change in applications varied from a 94% increase in East Dunbartonshire (from 460 to 890) to a 62% decrease in Shetland (from 55 to 20 applications). Crisis Grant applications increased in 25 local authorities and decreased in seven local authorities.

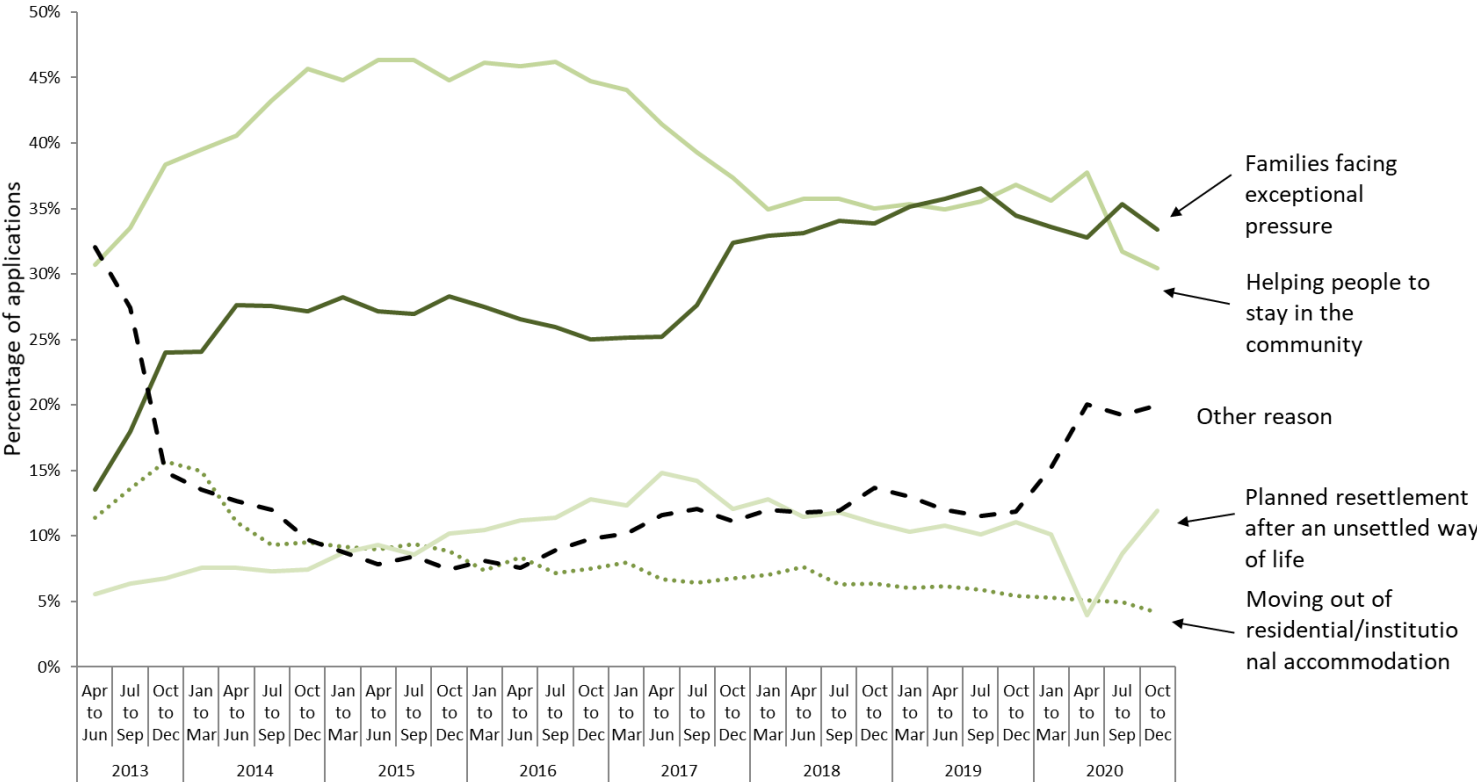
Chart 1: Applications to the Scottish Welfare Fund – Scotland – Monthly



During October to December 2020, 'Families facing exceptional pressure' was the most common reason for Community Care Grant applications (7,310, 33%), followed by 'Helping people to stay in the community' (6,660, 30%) and 'Other reason' (4,370, 20% of applications) (Table 4, Chart 2).

The overall increase of 2,795 Community Care Grant applications, compared to the same quarter of 2019, was largely accounted for by 2,105 more applications for 'Other reason' (increase of 93%). The increase in applications for 'Other reason', is consistent with the previous two quarters and may be due to COVID-19 related applications being recorded in that way.

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



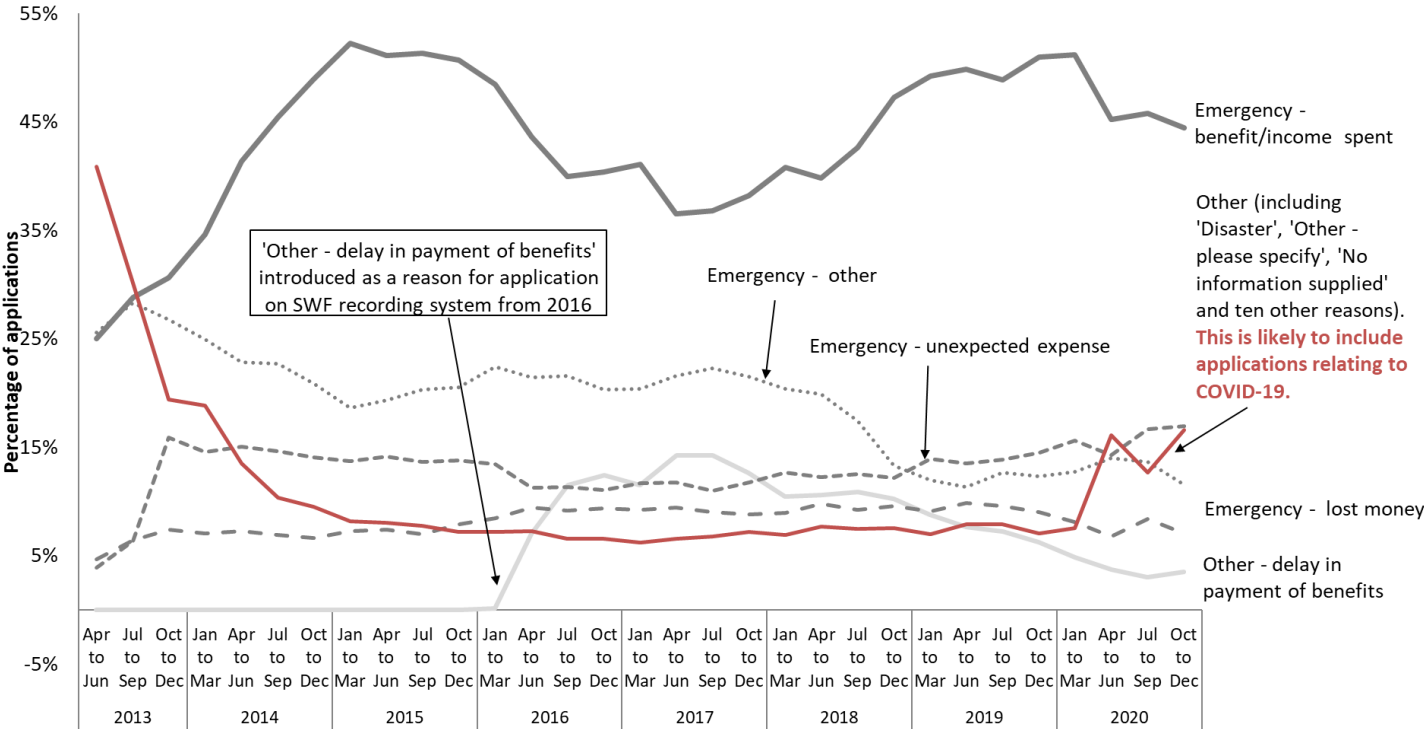
Note: "Caring for a prisoner/offender on temporary release" and "No information" are not shown – in the most recently quarter these accounted for 0% applications.

During October to December 2020, the most common reasons for Crisis Grant applications were different types of emergency (53,470, 84% of applications), followed by 'Other' reasons (9,975, 16% of applications) (**Table 6, Chart 3**).

Within the 'Emergency' category, the most common reason was 'benefit/income spent' (28,415, 44% of all applications). Within the 'Other' category, the most common reason was 'Other – please specify' (6,490, 12% of all applications).

The overall increase of 12,886 Crisis Grant applications, compared to the same quarter of 2019, was largely accounted for by 7,180 more applications for 'Emergency' reasons (increase of 16%) and 5,535 more applications for 'Other' reasons (increase of 125%). The increase in applications for 'Other – please specify', is consistent with the previous two quarters and may be due to COVID-19 related applications being recorded in that way.

Chart 3: Reasons for Application – Crisis Grants – Quarterly



Processing Times

During October to December 2020, local authorities processed 88% 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**). At the local authority level, four local authorities processed less than 80% of Community Care Grant Applications on time (Aberdeen City 56%, Dumfries and Galloway 72%, Fife 79% and Glasgow City 72%) and only two processed less than 90% of Crisis Grant applications on time (Glasgow City 86%, Shetland 45%) (**Table 9, Table 11**).

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

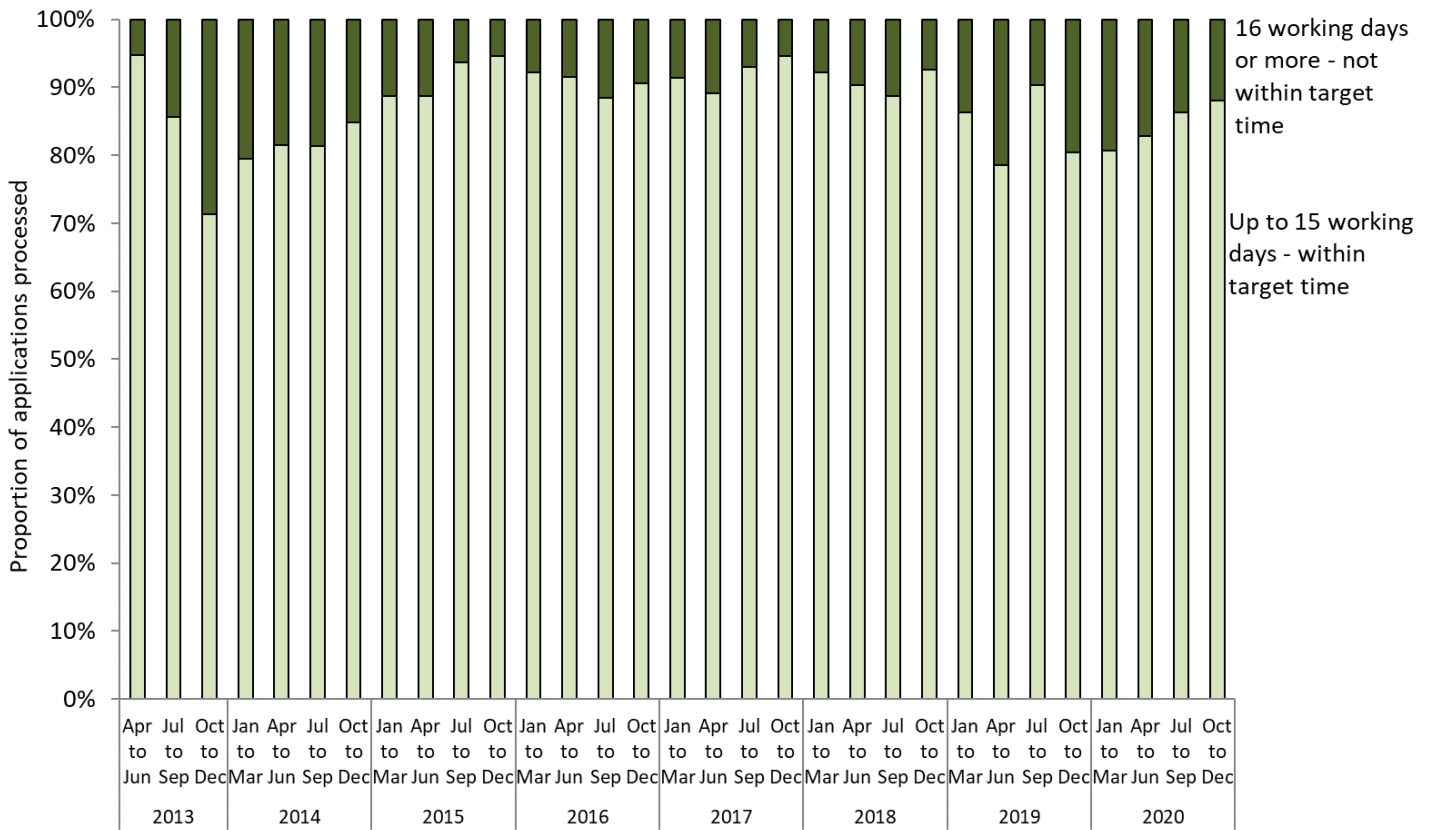
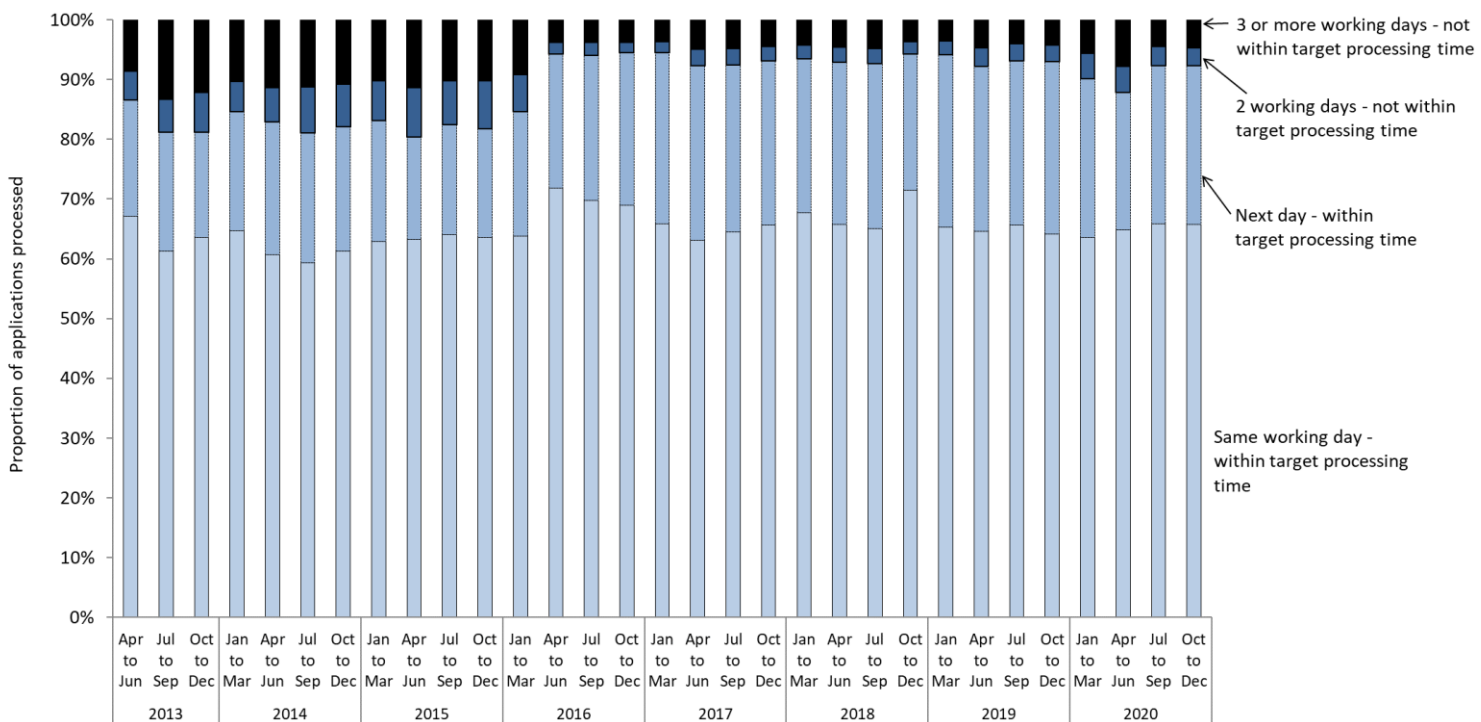


Chart 5: Initial Processing Times for Crisis Grants – Quarterly



Note: The target processing time for Crisis Grants changed from two working days to the end of the next working day in April 2016.

Decisions and awards

During October to December 2020, decisions were made on 21,175 Community Care Grant applications with an acceptance rate of 58% (Table 12 and Chart 7) and decisions were made on 63,875 Crisis Grant applications with an acceptance rate of 68% (Table 15 and Chart 7).

During October to December 2020, local authorities awarded 12,220 Community Care Grants, 1,475 (14%) more than the same quarter of 2019 and 1,625 (15%) more than July to September 2020 (Table 13, Chart 6). At the same time, local authorities awarded 43,405 Crisis Grants, 10,490 (32%) more than October to December 2019 and 4,835 (13%) more than July to September 2020 (Table 16, Chart 6).

Chart 6: Number of Scottish Welfare Fund Awards – Scotland – Monthly

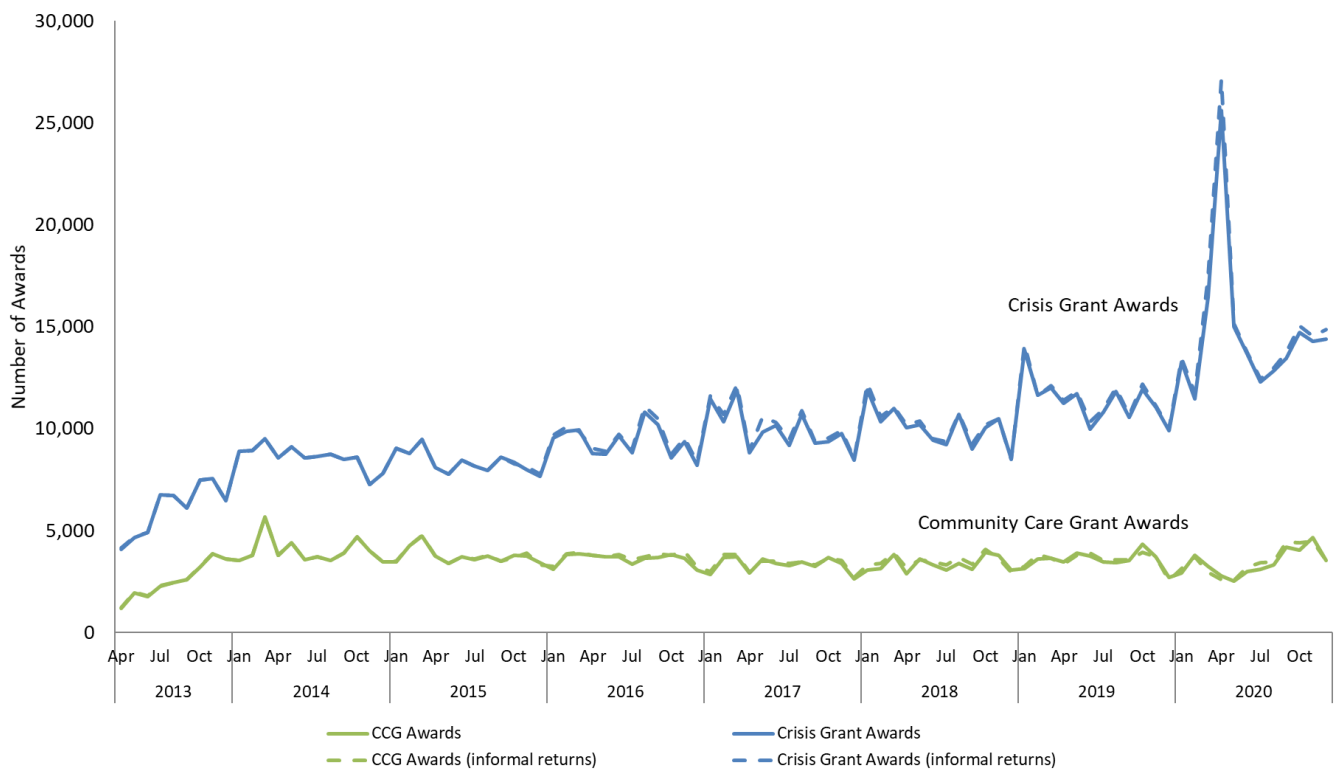
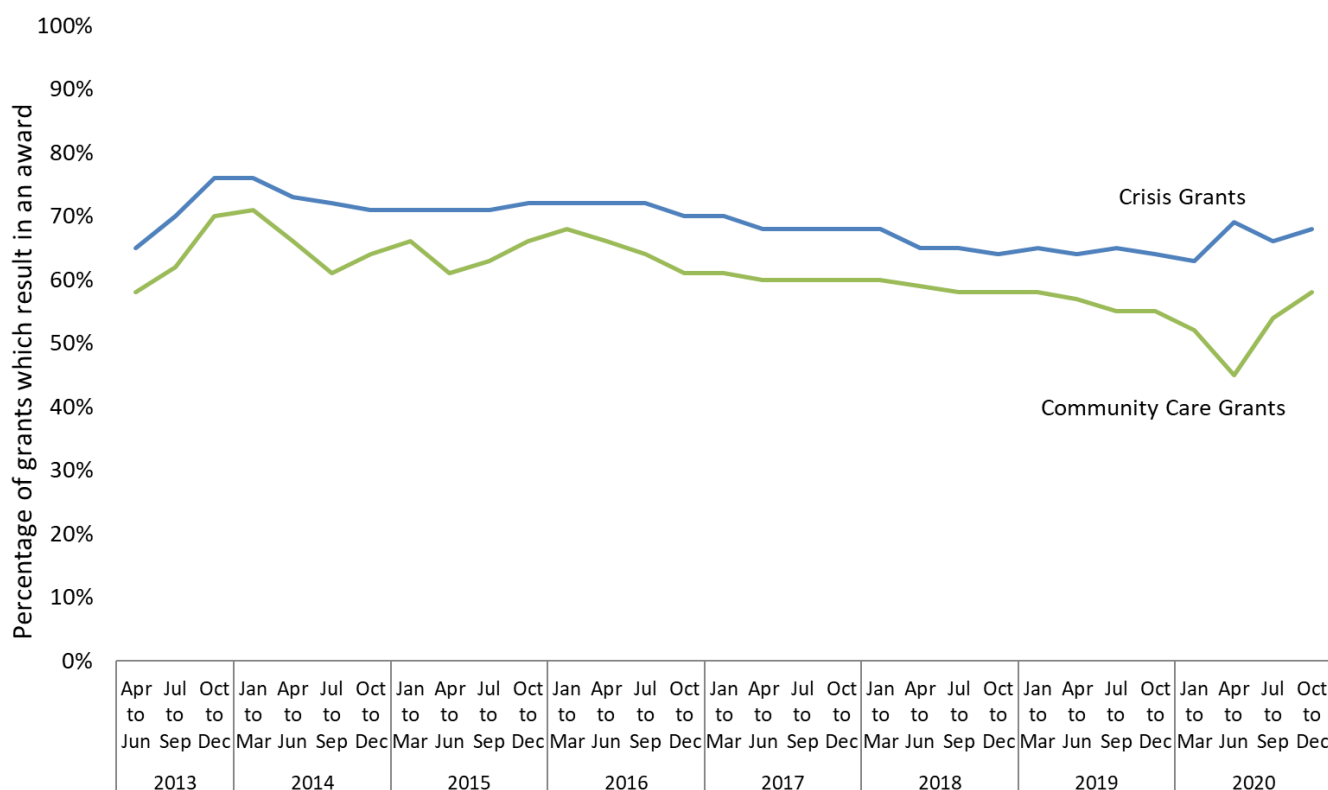


Chart 7: Community Care Grant and Crisis Grant acceptance rates – Quarterly

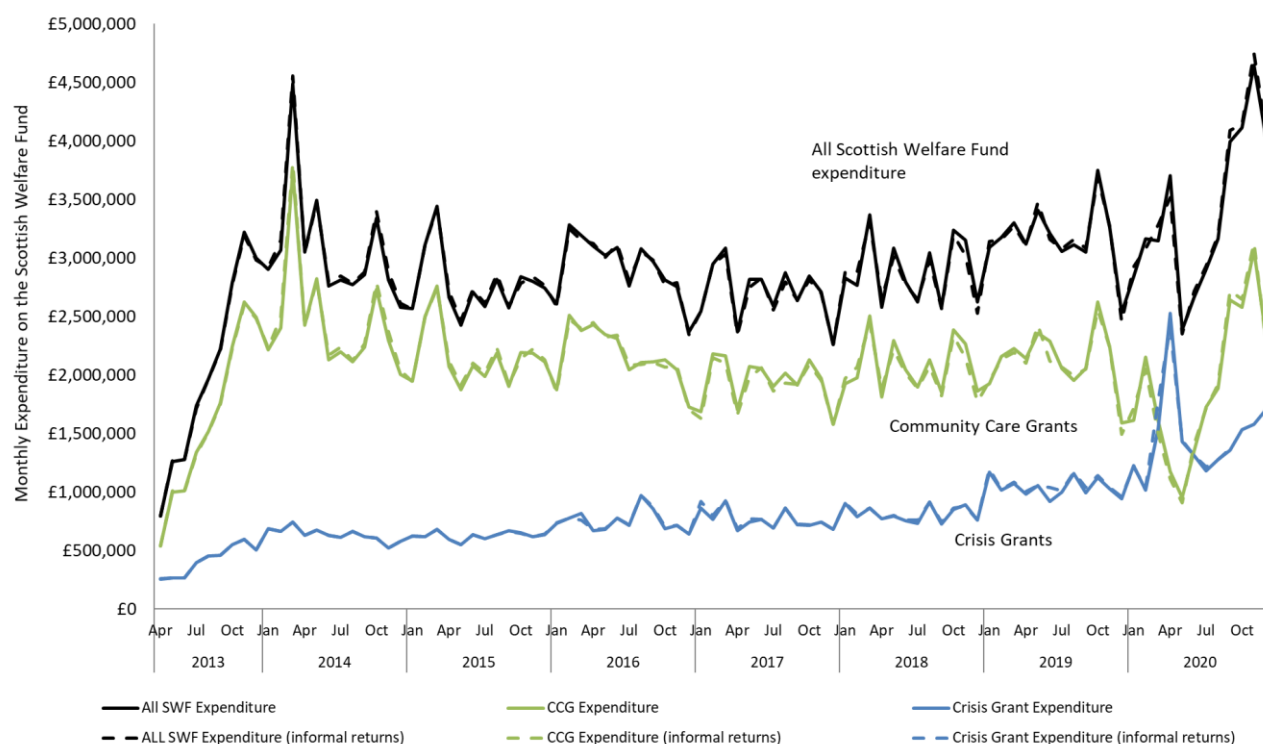


Expenditure and budgets

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 to the Scottish Government. These returns 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 management information at Scotland level. For most local authorities there is agreement between the monthly and quarterly returns, and agreement is closer for expenditure data than for applications or awards figures in the latest quarter.

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

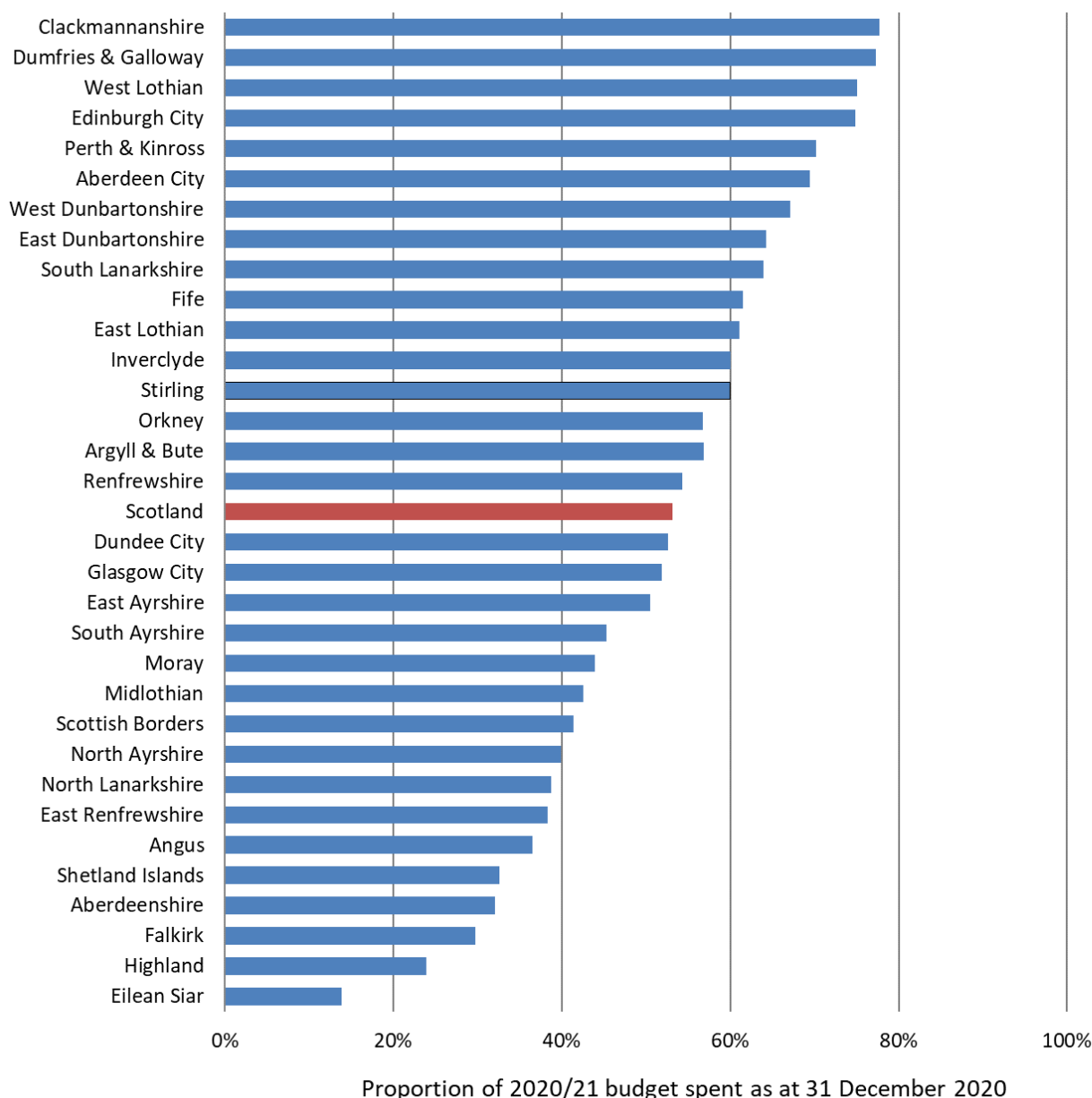


During October to December 2020, £12.8 million was spent through the Scottish Welfare Fund, 34% more than the same quarter in 2019 (£9.5 million). Higher overall expenditure was driven by higher expenditure on both Community Care Grants and Crisis Grants, (**Table 23, Chart 8**). Community Care Grant awards accounted for the majority of Scottish Welfare Fund expenditure at £8.0 million, while Crisis Grant awards accounted for £4.8 million (24% and 56% higher than the same quarter of 2019, respectively).

At local authority level, Community Care Grant expenditure was higher than the same quarter of 2019 in 27 out of 32 local authorities. Expenditure almost trebled in Moray (175% increase from £42,589 to £117,014) and Orkney (186% increase from £11,004 to £31,437) and Aberdeen City (184% £79,398 to £225,365), while the largest relative decrease was 37% (from £258,901 to £162,490) in Fife (**Table 23**).

Most Local Authorities (29 of 32) spent more on Crisis Grants, than in the same quarter of 2019, with the largest increases in East Dunbartonshire (175% increase from £28,854 to £79,304), West Lothian (219% increase from £81,399 to £259,889) and Edinburgh (223% increase from £193,052 to £623,132). The largest decrease was 81% in Shetland (from £2,345 to £434) (**Table 23**).

Chart 9: Proportion of annual budget spent as at 31 December 2020

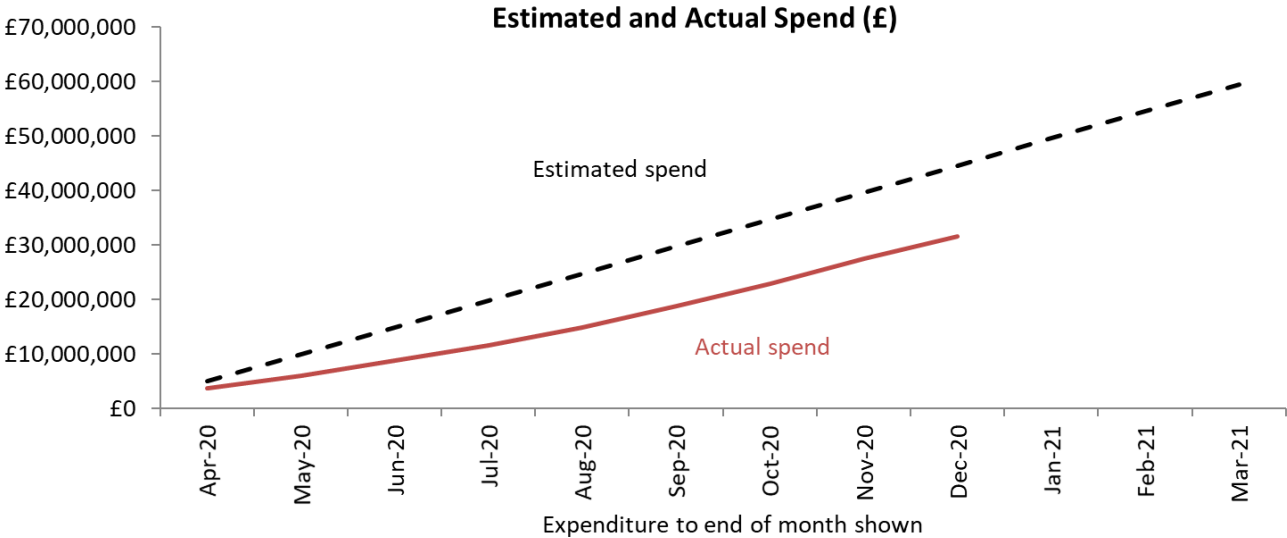


Local authorities have been allocated £57.5 million for Scottish Welfare Fund awards in 2020/21 so far, which includes a £22.0 million COVID-19 allocation. There was also an estimated underspend of £2.0 million carried forward from 2019/20 (see the [Data Quality](#) section for issues relating to estimation of underspend). Of the estimated total £59.5 million available for awards this year, £31.6 million (53%) has been spent in the first nine months of the financial year. At this time last year less had been spent (£28.5 million), however a larger proportion of the budget had been spent (86%) because the available budget was lower (£34.9 million). (**Table 24, Table 26, Chart 9 and Chart 10**).

The lowest percentage of budget spent (including estimated previous underspend) was 14% in Eilean Siar and the highest was 78% in Clackmannanshire. (**Table 26, Chart 9**). Edinburgh, West Lothian (both 75%

spent), Dumfries and Galloway (77% spent) and Clackmannanshire (78% spent) may be on track to spend all of their allocated funds during 2020/21 at current rates of expenditure. For data quality issues that affect expenditure during this financial year, see the [data quality section](#).

Chart 10: Cumulative Expenditure on the Scottish Welfare Fund – Monthly



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 £195,000 from 14 May 2018 to 31 December 2020.

Self-Isolation Support Grants:

Delivery of Self-Isolation Support Grants commenced on 12 October 2020. The grant is a £500 payment available for low-income workers who are asked to self-isolate because of coronavirus (COVID-19) and would lose income as a result. Self-Isolation Support Grants are made either as Crisis Grants or as discretionary grants for individuals with No Recourse to Public Funds (NRPF). The grants are administered by local authorities, who supply management information to Scottish Government for applications received and the number and value of awards made. From when the scheme began on 12 October until 28 February 2021, local authorities awarded 6,567 Self-Isolation Support Grants, totalling £3.3 million (**Table 46**). 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 (see [Background notes](#)).

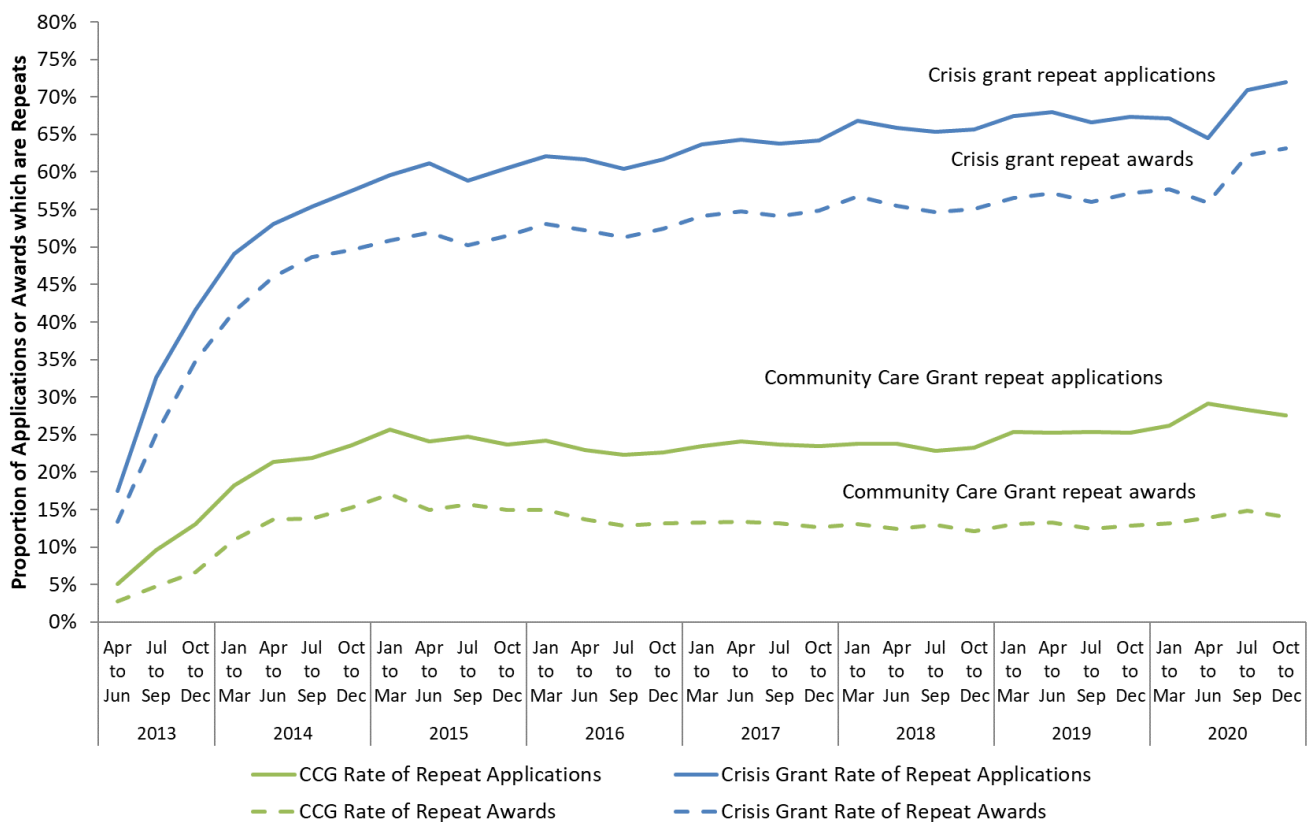
Repeat Applications and Awards

During October to December 2020, there were higher rates of both repeat applications and awards for Crisis Grants (72% and 63%, respectively), compared to Community Care Grants (28% and 14%, respectively) (**Table 40, Table 41, Table 42, Table 43, Chart 11**).

In the latest quarter, compared to October to December 2019, there were higher rates of repeat Community Care Grant applications and awards (+3 percentage points and +1 percentage point, respectively) and higher rates of repeat Crisis Grant applications and awards (+5 and +6 percentage points, respectively). The rates of repeat Crisis Grant applications and awards are the highest in any quarter since the start of the Scottish Welfare Fund, whereas the rates of repeat Community Care Grant applications and awards are slightly lower than the previous two quarters, but the third highest since the start of the Scottish Welfare Fund (**Chart 11**).

Increased rates of repeat Community Care and Crisis Grant applications and awards are likely to be due to the impacts of COVID-19 as many individuals continue to experience financial hardship because of the pandemic.

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



Reviews

Since April 2013, there have been 25,165 Tier 1 reviews for Community Care Grants and 26,645 for Crisis Grants (**Table 33**)². Overall, less than half of decisions have been revised at this stage for both Community Care Grants (47%) and Crisis Grants (45%) (**Table 34**).

Since April 2013, 74% of Tier 1 reviews for Community Care Grants have been made within the 15 working day target, while 88% of Tier 1 reviews for Crisis Grants have been made within the two working day target (**Table 35**).

² These figures do not include Tier 1 reviews for East Ayrshire for 2013.

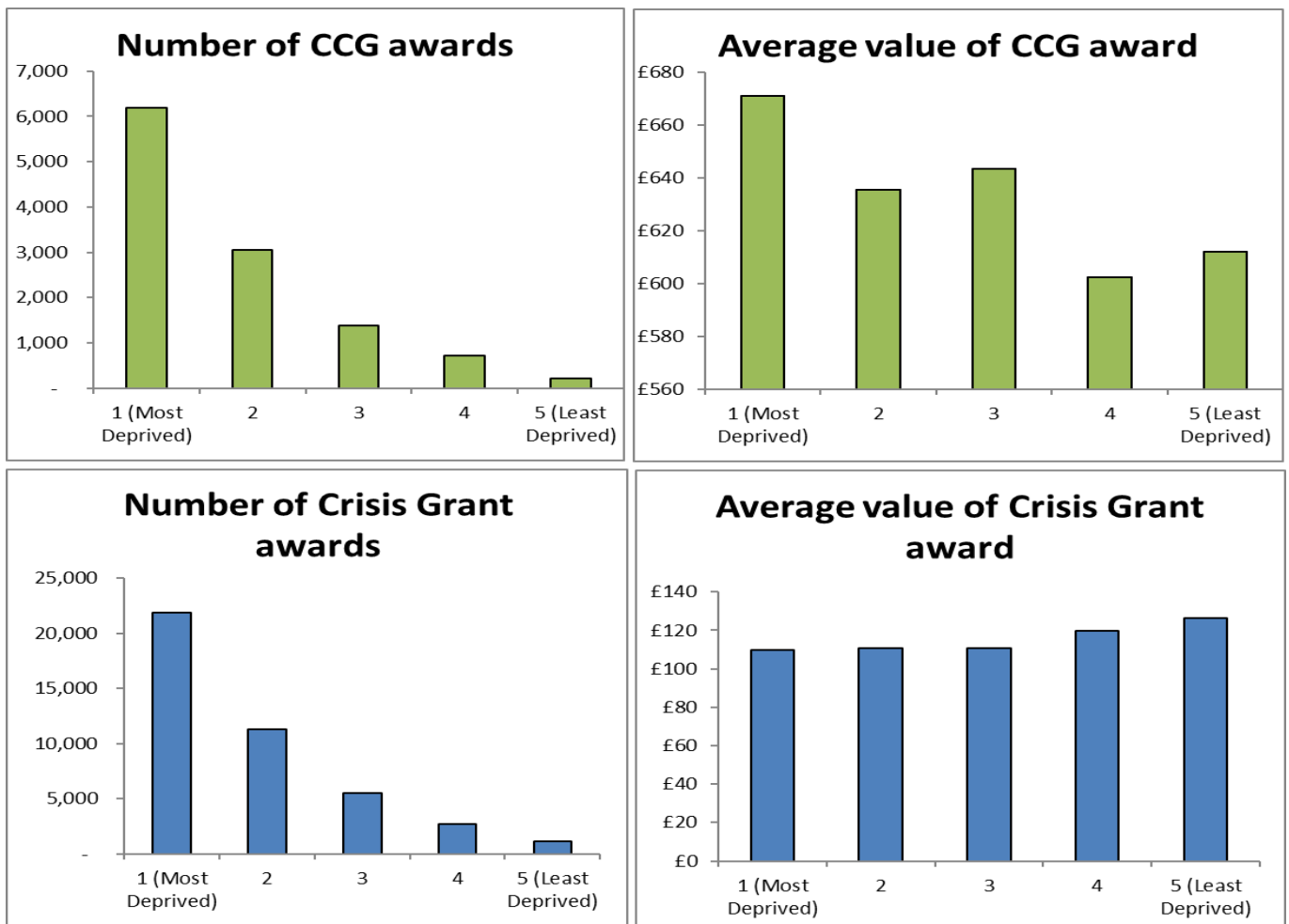
Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation

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 the latest quarter around half of Community Care Grants (51%) and Crisis Grants (50%) 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 36, Table 37, Chart 12).

In the previous quarter (July to September 2020), awards to those in the 20% most deprived areas had a lower average value than awards to those in quintiles two and three. Returning to the usual pattern during October to December 2020, Community Care Grants awarded to those in the most deprived areas had a higher average value than in less deprived areas (Table 36, Chart 12).

As in previous quarters, the average value of Crisis Grant awards varied less by the SIMD deciles than did Community Care Grants (Table 37, Chart 12).

Chart 12: Distribution of awards and average award value by SIMD 2020 Quintile rankings of applicant's postcode – latest quarter



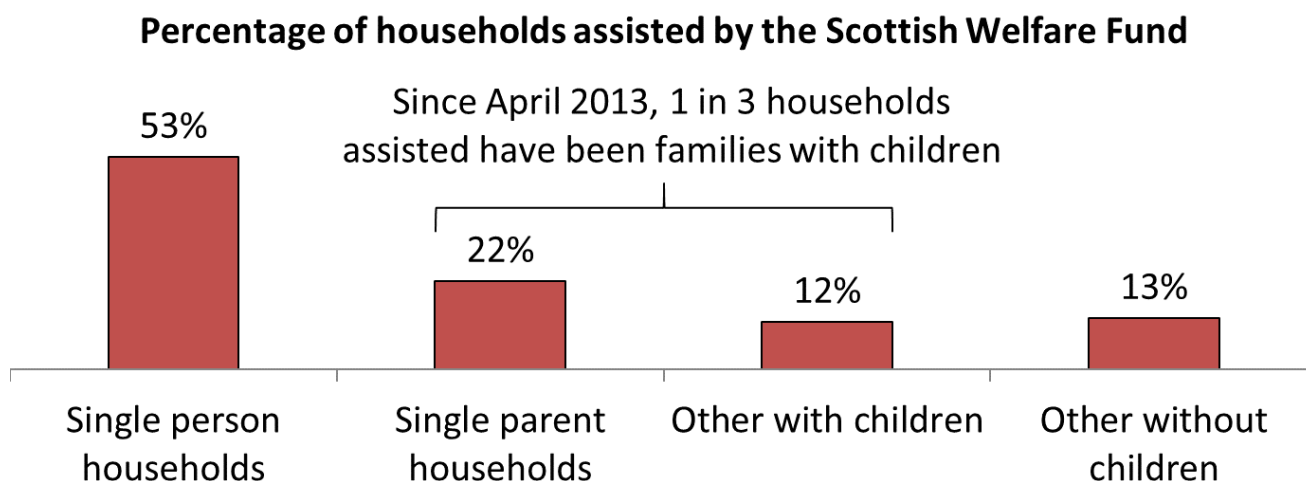
Characteristics of Households in Receipt of Awards

Since the scheme began in April 2013, 414,931 unique households received at least one award from the Scottish Welfare Fund. Based on the most recent award received by these households, more have received a Crisis Grant (306,229) than a Community Care Grant (224,679) (**Table 38a**).

Since the scheme began in April 2013, of the 414,931 unique households that have received at least one award, just over half were single person households (53%), and over a fifth were single parent households (22%) (**Table 38b, Chart 13**). In comparison, the latest household estimates for Scotland indicate that only 37% households are single people, and 6% households are single parent families³. Around a quarter (25%) of households receiving awards were couples, couples with children or other types of household, whereas over half of households in Scotland are estimated to fall into these categories (58%).

In total, since the scheme began a third (34%) of households receiving awards have contained children (**Table 38b**). Of the total £256.6 million that has been awarded, £115.4 million has been awarded to households containing children.

Chart 13: Household types of unique households receiving funds from the Scottish Welfare Fund – all time



³ 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/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 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 allocated in response to COVID-19 in March 2020.

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 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 2019- 20](#).

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 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 is available at:

<http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Topics/Statistics/15257/1529/swf-dataspec>

Guidance to help Local Authority officers to record information is available at:

<http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Topics/Statistics/15257/1529/swf-data-guidance>

and guidance for Family Reunion Crisis Grants at:

<https://www.gov.scot/publications/scottish-welfare-fund-family-reunion-crisis-grant-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 ProcXed⁴ 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

⁴ 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 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 normally limited to three in a rolling 12 month period.

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 6, 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 March to September 2020:

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 45**) 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 Community Care Grant applications in the quarterly data extract supplied to Scottish Government. Comparison to the monthly management information (**Tables 44 and 45**) 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 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.

In our previous publications we reported discrepancies between North Lanarkshire's management information and their quarterly data extract. This issue has now 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 (**Tables 44 and 45**) 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. However, overall at Scotland level, the monthly management information and quarterly data extracts have similar figures for Community Care Grant applications (-3% difference), awards (-2% in the quarterly extract) and expenditure (-1% in quarterly extract). At Scotland level, there is a slightly larger discrepancy in Crisis Grant applications (-6% in quarterly extract), but awards (-2% in quarterly data) and expenditure (-2% in quarterly data) are relatively similar. 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 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.

In our tables presenting the 2020/21 funding allocations and total budgets including underspend, the amount allocated in 2020/21 to date includes the initial SWF allocation for the year (£35.5 million) and an additional COVID-19 allocation (£22.0 million). The COVID-19 allocation was actually distributed in March 2020, prior to the start of the 2020/21 financial year. It is possible that some local authorities began spending this allocation prior to 2020/21, however, information on this is currently unavailable and in our tables we have assumed that COVID-19 funding has only been spent during 2020/21.

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, 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.

Payment Methods:

An error in data processing was 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, 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 further 2% Community Care Grants and less than 1% Crisis 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.

SIMD:

An error in data processing was discovered in regards to value of awards by SIMD area. This error has now been fixed and the time series has been revised to reflect this update.

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.

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.

An Official Statistics publication for Scotland

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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.

Complaints and suggestions

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