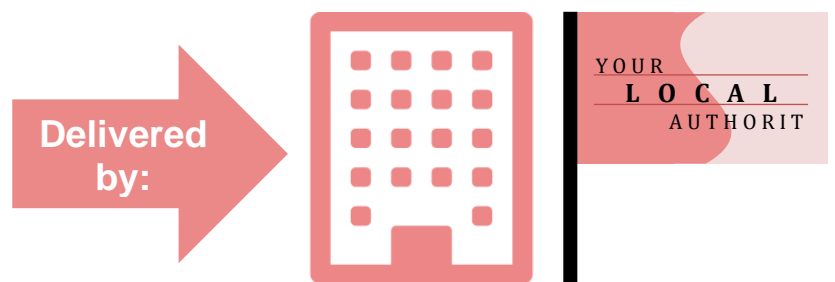


Experiences of the Scottish Welfare Fund

Background

The Scottish Welfare Fund is delivered by each local authority in Scotland. Each local authority has their own system for running Scottish Welfare Fund.



One part of the fund is to help people on low incomes who are facing a crisis.



Another part of the fund helps people who are vulnerable to continue to live in their community. For example, if they are at risk of being homeless.



About the research

This report gives the findings of research about people's experiences of the Scottish Welfare Fund.



It was sent to all Social Security Experience Panel members and was also open to anyone else who had experience of Scottish Welfare Fund. Stakeholder organisations were given the chance to send it to the people they help.

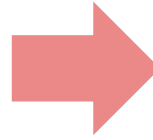




2,450+
invites

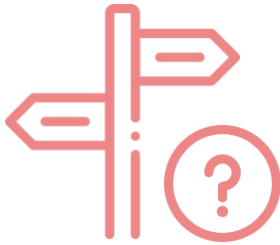


171
survey
responses



106
respondents had applied
for Scottish Welfare Fund

The research explored:



How people had heard
about the Scottish
Welfare fund



Their experiences of
applying for Scottish
Welfare Fund



Things that worked
well or could be
improved about the
Scottish Welfare
Fund

People took part in
30
out of
32
local authority areas



Finding out about the Scottish Welfare Fund

Most respondents who had applied for Scottish Welfare Fund said that they found out about the Scottish Welfare Fund through:



A support and advice service



Through friends or family



Online

A number of the people who had not applied for the Scottish Welfare Fund said that they weren't aware that it was available. Some thought it was not well enough advertised.



Some of these said that they would have found it helpful to know about the fund and believed that it could have helped them.

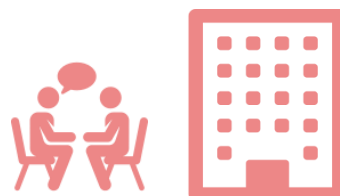
'I wasn't aware the Fund existed, my local Council has certainly never publicised it. I think making sure that knowledge of the Fund is disseminated to those who may need it or be entitled to apply to it is essential.'

'There should be a proactive structure to this facility. Possible users should be actively identified and encouraged to apply i.e. homeless people, those at risk of homelessness, where a family member dies, people registered with social work etc..'



Applying for Scottish Welfare Fund

Most respondents applied for the Scottish Welfare Fund either over the phone or online, some applied by post, and a small number applied in person at their council office.



More than **two in five** respondents said that the process of applying for Scottish Welfare Fund was “difficult or very difficult”.



More than **a quarter** said that it was “very easy or easy”

Many people who had an unsuccessful application, said that they didn't understand the reason given to them.



‘In plain English would have made a difference. If you have learning difficulties it makes it near impossible to understand’

Others felt that decisions or the criteria for the fund were unfair.

'There was no letter - I was told on the phone that the fund could not help because it did not cover heating bills like mine.'

'I felt that because I didn't know what I was doing, because I'm not on tons of benefits, that I was an easy fail. It didn't matter that I needed the money, I wasn't on their social lists or whatever so that was that.'

'Apparently as I wasn't just out of hospital or prison I was not eligible for the money.'



Positive experiences of applying for Scottish Welfare Fund

A number of respondents described positive experiences of applying for Scottish Welfare Fund. These included:



A simple and quick process



Helpful and supportive staff



Choice of how to apply

'The online form was easy to fill in. The whole process was easy.'

'I was lucky the person I dealt with was really good and helpful and took the time to explain everything to me.'

'My experience was very positive. It was dealt with professionally and quickly with respect.'



'It was not too complicated for me. It did not take very long before I got a response.'

What could be improved about the Scottish Welfare Fund

Others described less positive experiences and highlighted a number of areas where they felt that the process could be improved. This included:



Making decisions **more quickly**



Improving the **information available**



Fair decisions
no matter
where you live

'The information given was incomplete, incorrect and contradictory. It would have helped if this wasn't the case. Also the criteria [are] being interpreted differently by different council areas.'



More
**supportive
staff**



More
accessible for
disabled
people



Being flexible

‘The length of time it took to process was almost a month. Living with a child for 23 days without a fridge, cooker or any furniture was really difficult.’

‘Speaking to someone who had a little empathy would have been nicer. Every time I have applied, I have had to speak to someone who hasn't treated me with much care despite being in a difficult situation.’



‘The form could have included a list of exclusions to getting any help e.g. if you have an accessible kitchen they do NOT provide any suitable white goods to fit it so you are left without any cooker.’

What's next?

The findings from this survey are being used to inform the annual review of the Scottish Welfare Fund Guidance. The guidance is used

by decision makers who process applications. Issues raised in the survey have been included in this year's guidance. The findings will also be shared directly with Scottish Welfare Fund teams across Scotland to inform their work. Finally, they will be shared with the Scottish Public Services Ombudsman who carries out independent reviews of Scottish Welfare Fund decisions.

How to access background or source data

The data collected for this social research publication:

- are available in more detail through Scottish Neighbourhood Statistics
- are available via an alternative route <specify or delete this text>
- may be made available on request, subject to consideration of legal and ethical factors. Please contact SocialSecurityExperience@gov.scot for further information.
- cannot be made available by Scottish Government for further analysis as Scottish Government is not the data controller.



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The views expressed in this report are those of the researcher and do not necessarily represent those of the Scottish Government or Scottish Ministers.

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