Scottish Welfare Fund: Making Cash First Count



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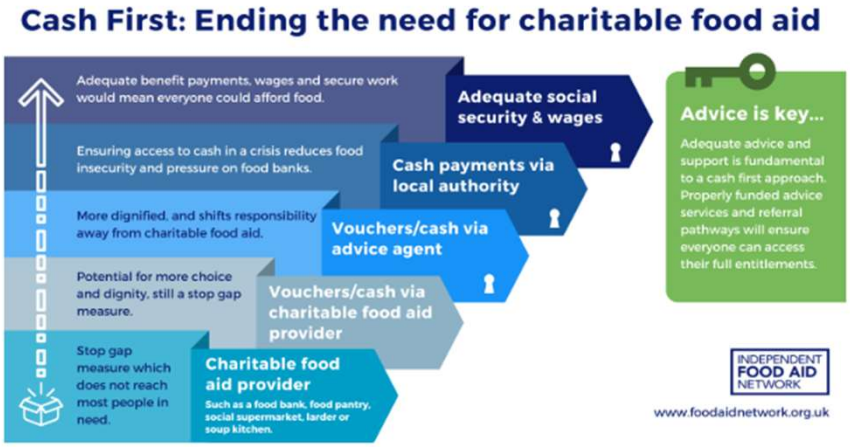
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Questions we will cover

- What is a cash first approach and why does it matter?
- How does the Scottish welfare fund (SWF) support a cash first approach?
- What do people say about the SWF?
- What can you do to make the most of the SWF for people who need crisis support?
- What can we do to improve local authority practices on the SWF?

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The 'cash first' approach



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The Scottish welfare fund

Crisis grant

For short-term living expenses in the event of an emergency, and

For short-term living expenses and items in the event of a disaster.*

Community care grant

To help individuals establish or maintain a settled home.

To avoid going in to care or prison, homelessness, or 'exceptional pressures'.*

**Some items or expenses are excluded – see SFW Guide 'Annex A'*

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The crisis grant

Crisis grant

For short-term living expenses in the event of an emergency, and

For short-term living expenses and items in the event of a disaster.

Who can get it?

You must be on a low income or unable to access your money,

You must be 16 or over and usually, resident (or about to be), or homeless, in the local authority.

You should get a decision immediately, by the next working day!

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Primarily a cash payment?

"Payment may be made in cash or cash equivalent, however the regulations do not require any crisis grant to be paid in cash."

"A cash equivalent … does not limit the recipient as to where they can spend an award, or what they can spend it on. [And] does not require the applicant to use the payment in a certain way… examples include Paypoint or … Allpay"

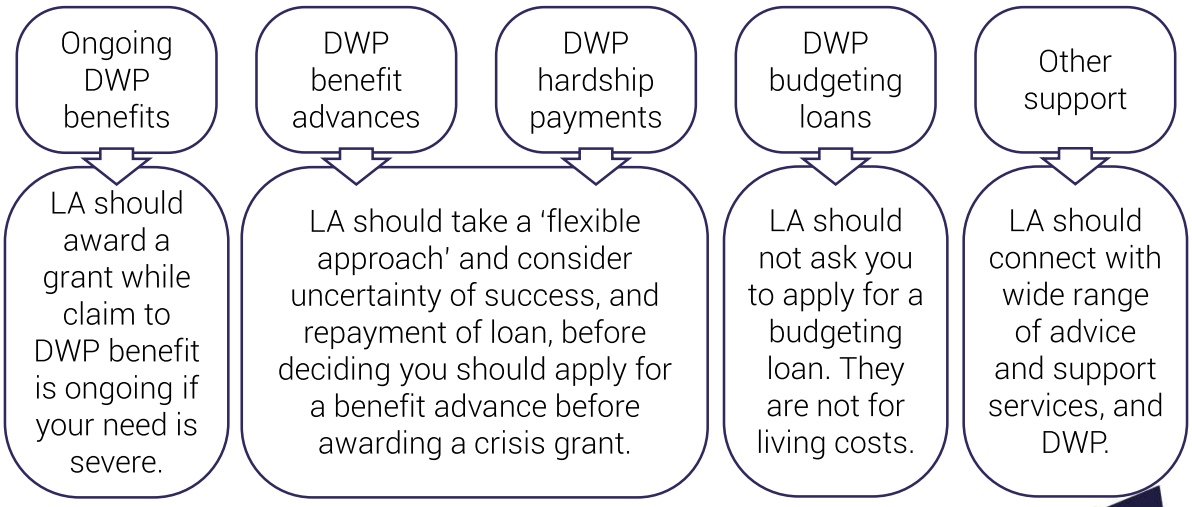
"When deciding to make a cash equivalent payment, local authorities should seek to understand any potential for stigma and take reasonable steps to minimise this"

Paras 4.45-47 SWF Guide

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Relationship with other financial support



See SWF Guide paras 2.22 to 2.31

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Relationship with food banks

"Local authorities should not use food bank referrals to fulfil a grant award. If an application has been unsuccessful, local authorities may consider signposting to local food banks to meet the applicant's immediate need as part of the wider holistic service. It may also be appropriate to refer or signpost, if it has not been done already, an applicant to income maximisation and other services to ensure they are receiving all the benefits they are entitled to."

Paras 4.59 SWF Guide

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What do people say about the SWF?

- Never heard of it
- Too long to get a decision
- Can only get 3 grants in a year
- I've been knocked back before
- They ask too many questions
- The award was too small
- Risk of refusal damages adviser relationships
- We never hear the outcome

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Emergencies and disasters

Emergency

A circumstance of pressing need which requires immediate action.

How the emergency came about is not relevant.

Disaster

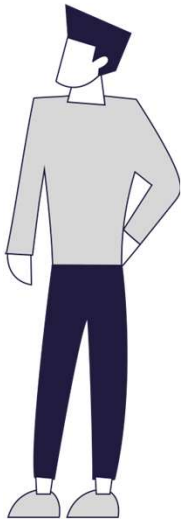
Events of great or sudden misfortune.

Normally unforeseen, resulting in significant damage, destruction or loss of, possessions or property.

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Emergency, disaster or neither?

Magnus went out for a long walk yesterday morning after a row with his flat mates about whose turn it was to clean the bathroom. When he got home an hour later, he discovered he had lost his wallet. It contained his UC, which was supposed to last him another week.

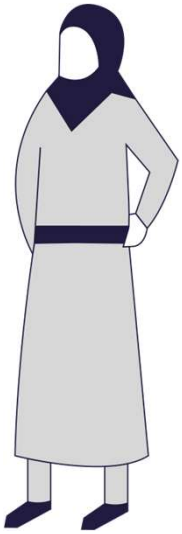


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Emergency, disaster or neither?

Last night, Ifshan fell asleep whilst she was making chips, and the cooker caught fire. The cooker, the kitchen curtains and the cupboards above the cooker are ruined, and the living room furniture needs to be replaced because of smoke damage.

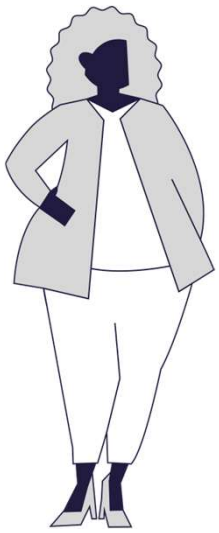


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Emergency, disaster or neither?

Celia has been on UC for a while, working on a zero hours contract. Her income fluctuates from month to month. This month, she has run out of money before her next payment of UC- it just didn't stretch far enough.



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You must be on a low income or unable to access your money

- Local authorities must take account of SWF guidance when deciding if your income or capital is too high to be eligible for a crisis grant.
- If you are applying for, or already getting, universal credit or pension credit, then it is accepted that you have a low income.
- Otherwise, your income is assessed against earnings thresholds, published annually, to decide if you are on a low income.
- Additional factors like disability, homelessness, domestic abuse, and the income of a partner or family member are taken into account.

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Who meets the low income condition?

- Elspeth is a lone parent with three children. She works and gets universal credit.
- Kelsey has come to stay with her mum in Shapinsay. She has just left her partner in Fife due to domestic abuse. Her ex controlled their finances, and she has no bank cards. She gets no benefit at present.
- Parveen has multiple sclerosis and can't work. She gets adult disability payment. She lives with her partner Jamaal in temporary accommodation. They get housing benefit. They used to get universal credit, but this stopped when Jamaal found full time work.

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Examples – earning threshold

Single	
no children and no housing costs	£773 per month
one child and no housing costs	£1,732 per month
one child and housing costs in North Ayrshire	£2,593 per month
Couple	
one child and housing costs in North Ayrshire	£3,033 per month
one child and housing costs in Edinburgh City	£3,931 per month

See full tables at www.gov.scot/publications/scottish-welfare-fund-statutory-guidance-2/documents/ (additional needs considered).

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Amount of crisis grant for living expenses

Householder	Non-householder
The 'food and non-alcoholic drinks + electricity and gas' rates of the UC Essentials Guarantee should be used.	The 'food and non-alcoholic drinks' rate of the UC Essentials Guarantee should be used.
Single £66pw | Couple £109pw*	Single £42pw | Couple £74pw*

Dependent child - UC child element (pre-2017) – eg £351.88pcm*

The rates should be **pro-rated for the respective number of days that the crisis grant is awarded for. (Amounts are indicative).*

See SWF Guide paras 7.23 to 7.24

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Duration of a crisis grant for living expenses

"[For] a gap in income of an unknown duration, … an award should usually be made for two weeks of living expenses at a time."

Para 7.7 SWF Guide

"Decision makers [DMs] should ensure that the award made meets the period of crisis to avoid repeat applications in sequence"

Para 7.7 SWF Guide

"If an applicant on Universal Credit applies for living costs [and] their next payment date is more than two weeks away, a DM can make an award to cover a period longer in duration, [e.g.], four weeks."

Para 7.8 SWF Guide

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Example – Kiera

Kiera has two children, aged 6 and 10. She rents her flat.

Her next payment of UC is due in 21 days.

Q: How much should her crisis grant be?

Single householder £66pw ÷ 7 x 21 = £198

Each dependent child £351.88pcm x 12 ÷ 365 x 21 = £242.94

£198 + £242.94 + £242.94= **£683.88**

Tip: Use the 'UC essentials' figures and guidance on award lengths!

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Crisis grants – how many awards?

You (and your partner) can get up to three crisis grants (each) in a 12 month-period, unless **exceptional circumstances** apply.

Reg 9 WF (S) Regs 2016

The council need not consider an application if you applied for a SWF grant the same items or services in the last 28 days, unless your circumstances have changed.

Para 6.1 SWF Guide

However, an application for living expenses for a different period e.g. the week following the period covered by your previous application, is not an application for the same items or services.

Para 6.4 SWF Guide

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Exceptional circumstances

To get more than 3 grants in a 12-month period, your application must usually:

- Be different from previous applications in the last 12 months,
- be unforeseen, and the applicant could not have avoided it,
- and not be due to common situations that may face those on a low income (eg, budgeting challenges and benefit deductions).

The guidance states that "exceptional circumstances are not easily defined and the decision maker should use their own judgement and discretion when applying this criteria".

Para 7.28 SWF Guide

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Migrants and the SWF

- You cannot get a SWF grant if you have 'no recourse to public funds' (NRPF), or if you are an asylum seeker.
- However, if you do not have NRPF, for example, if you have status under the EU settlement scheme, or refugee status, then you are not excluded from getting a SWF grant.
- If you are excluded, you might get support for NRPF families with children, or vulnerable adults, from social work, instead.
- The council should refer you to welfare rights, the Home Office or specialist immigration advice for support.

Para 6.9 – 6.15 SWF Guide

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Priority levels

Priority level v case specifics	High most compelling	High	Medium	Low
Need	Immediate and extremely severe	Immediate severe	Less immediate Less severe	Not time critical
Vulnerability	Highly vulnerable, and at immediate risk	Highly	Moderately	Some resilience
Consequences of no grant to health/wellbeing	Significant and immediate adverse consequences to wellbeing if not awarded	Significantly adverse	Moderately adverse	No identifiable effect
Effect of grant	Will have a substantial and immediate effect on the applicant	Immediate Substantial	Noticeable	Minor

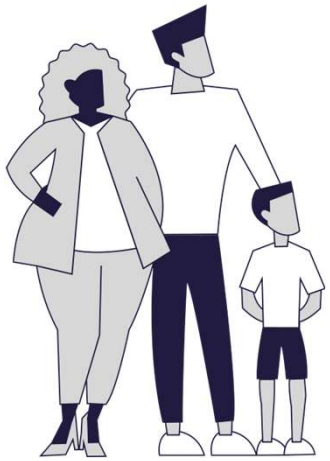
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- Emergency kinship care for nephew
- Next UC payment next week

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- Emergency kinship care for nephew
- Special dietary needs
- Will become very ill if given the wrong food
- Next UC payment next week



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Reviews and complaints

You can ask to be notified about the outcome of an application you made on someone else's behalf (SWFG 4.17)

Disagree with a Scottish welfare fund decision?

- Ask the local authority to review it.
- Ask within 20 working days of the decision (late requests may be accepted).

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Reviews and complaints

Not happy with the review decision?

- Ask the SPSO to review it.
- (Can also ask for internal review of the SPSO decision if still not satisfied)

Not happy with the way your application was handled?

- Complain to the local authority.

Still not happy? Complain to the SPSO

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What can you do to improve local authority practices on the SWF?



- Reviews
- SPSO
- Early Warning System

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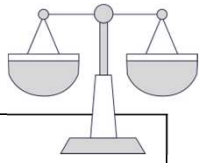
Early Warning System

- Share your anonymous case studies with us
- https://cpag.org.uk/welfare-rights/support-advisers/tell-us-about-your-case

- For more information, contact
- kmckechnie@cpagscotland.org.uk

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References and resources



Child Poverty Action Group	Scottish Welfare Fund webpage Scottish Welfare Fund eLearning module
Scottish government guidance	Scottish Welfare Fund: Statutory Guidance (April 2026)
Legislation	Welfare Funds (Scotland) Act 2015 Welfare Funds (Scotland) Regulations 2016
Scottish Public Service Ombudsman	SWF Independent Review Service Summary of SPSO cases and outcome

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Help for advisers

CPAG WELFARE RIGHTS

Advice by telephone:
0141 552 0552

Monday to Thursday, 10am - 4pm,
Friday 10am – 12 noon.

Advice by email:
advice@cpagscotland.org.uk

Free, independent, expert, up-to-date advice and information to frontline advisers and support staff on all aspects of the benefits system. More info here.

More resources for advisers can be found at cpag.org.uk/welfare-rights

Sign up to our email newsletter: what's new for advisers – CPAG welfare rights

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