a **MENU** for CHANGE

CASH RIGHTS FOOD

The Scottish Welfare Fund: Strengthening the Safety Net

A Study of Best Practice

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Executive Summary

Background of the Study

A Menu for Change: Cash, Rights, Food is a three-year project funded by The National Lottery Community Fund and managed by Oxfam Scotland, Child Poverty Action Group (CPAG) in Scotland, Nourish Scotland and Poverty Alliance. The project aims to improve Scotland's response to food insecurity.

Launched in January 2017, the project's overarching aim is to support a reduction in the need for emergency food aid by encouraging national and local action to prevent food insecurity and enhance and evolve the response for those experiencing crisis. The project believes the best way to do this is to promote and improve the accessibility of high quality advice services and cash-based responses available to someone who has run out of money for food.

The Scottish Welfare Fund (SWF) is the major source of cash available to people in Scotland who find themselves without enough money for food. Funded by the Scottish Government and administered by local authorities, it provides non-repayable grants to people in crisis so they can choose how best to meet their own needs.[1]

The SWF is a unique source of support in the UK. The absence of similar local welfare assistance schemes outside Scotland is linked to increased pressure on food banks to help people in crisis.[2]

As part of its research into food insecurity and the cash-based responses available to people in income crisis, A Menu for Change set out to identify and promote examples of good practice in the administration of the Scottish Welfare Fund, specifically with regards to crisis grants.

Research Approach

Different methods were used to examine best practice in SWF delivery, including:

- Quantitative analysis of Scottish Government, Scottish Public Services Ombudsman (SPSO), and local authority data;
- Semi-structured interviews with SWF staff;
- Focus groups with SWF staff, welfare rights advisors, and people who have applied to the SWF;
- Analysis of qualitative data from the wider Menu for Change project.

Key Findings and Recommendations

In considering best practice in Scottish Welfare Fund delivery, this study has identified that all local authorities should:

1. When taking crisis grant applications by phone, have the same member of staff take the application and make the award decision;
2. Not use an "eligibility checker" for online applications;
3. Re-evaluate what evidence from applicants is deemed to be "essential" and reduce this, where appropriate;
4. Make active referrals to advice and support services rather than simply signpost people in crisis;
5. Pay all applicants in cash as opposed to vouchers;
6. Give all applicants their decision over the phone initially, followed by a written decision.

In order to maximise the capacity of local authorities to deliver the best practice identified in this study, the Scottish Government should:

1. Consult local authorities to determine the budget they need to administer the fund to a high standard, including implementing the above recommendations;
2. Increase the SWF administrative budget based on the findings of this consultation process;
3. Increase the overall SWF programme budget to meet increased demand;
4. Provide opportunities for sharing best practice between SWF frontline staff;
5. Review and revise statutory guidance on the SWF to reflect the recommendations in this report; and
6. Review the existing monitoring and evaluation of the SWF to ensure an approach based on best practice is being delivered across Scotland and provide additional support to local authorities where required.

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[1] https://www.gov.scot/policies/social-security/income-related-benefits/

[2] https://www.trusselltrust.org/2017/07/04/local-welfare-provision-local-jigsaw/

1. Introduction

A Menu for Change is a partnership project led by Oxfam Scotland, Child Poverty Action Group (CPAG) in Scotland, Nourish Scotland and Poverty Alliance and funded by The National Lottery Community Fund. It has been working since 2017 to reduce the need for emergency food aid in Scotland. To do this, the project encourages national and local action to prevent food insecurity and enhance and evolve the response for those experiencing income crises. The project believes the best way to do this is to promote and improve the accessibility of high quality advice services and cash-based responses available to someone who has run out of money for food.

The project partners recognise social security as a basic human right and an important source of protection against food insecurity. In order to ensure an adequate standard of living, the social security system needs to be responsive to people's needs and rising living costs. It should also provide mechanisms to protect people from destitution when they do fall through the safety net. Inadequacies in the current social security system have been widely reported as driving food insecurity and the growth in food bank use in Scotland and across the UK.[3] While key policy levers for strengthening the social security system are controlled by the UK Government, the Scottish Government holds powers capable of making a significant impact on food insecurity in Scotland.

The Scottish Government has stated its commitment to reducing poverty and inequality, including by taking a rights-based approach to social security. It has taken steps to mitigate the impacts of UK welfare reforms, including the development of the Scottish Welfare Fund. The Scottish Welfare Fund is a unique source of social security crisis support in the UK. The absence of similar local welfare assistance schemes outside Scotland is linked to increased pressure on food banks to help people in crisis.[4]

Despite some achievements, the Poverty and Inequality Commission has recently highlighted the importance of social security and called on the Scottish Government to adopt bolder steps and to increase investment to deliver on its social justice commitments.[5] Strengthening the Scottish Welfare Fund has the potential to help Scotland make better progress in reducing poverty and, with it, to reduce the number of people facing food insecurity.

In many ways, A Menu for Change builds on the work of the Independent Short Life Working Group on Food Poverty, which was set up by the Scottish Government in 2015. In its 2016 report, the Working Group set out a number of recommendations for addressing food insecurity in Scotland.[6] Two of those recommendations focused on the Scottish Welfare Fund:

- The Scottish Government, along with local authorities and all those responding to acute food insecurity, should ensure widespread use of the Scottish Welfare Fund as the first port of call for emergency support and ensure the fund is administered in a way that allows this.

- If demand for the Scottish Welfare Fund grows, the Scottish Government should increase investment in it accordingly.

The Scottish Welfare Fund (SWF) was established in 2013 after responsibility for the Department of Work and Pensions administered Discretionary Social Fund was transferred to the devolved governments. It provides two kinds of grants, crisis grants and community care grants, which act as a safety net to people on low incomes. Crisis grants are for helping someone get through a disaster or emergency situation, such as running out of money for food. Community care grants provide help to establish or maintain a settled home.

The SWF is funded by the Scottish Government but administered by individual local authorities.[7] While there are national regulations and statutory guidance, local authorities are given significant discretion over how they administer the fund so it can be tailored to local needs.

As part of its commitment to improving the accessibility of cash-based crisis response, A Menu for Change examined how the SWF is administered by local authorities. The research aimed to identify examples of good practice that indicated:

- Fast decision making;
- High quality decision making; and
- Easily accessible applications.

The research focused on crisis grants as those are most likely to be awarded to someone who might otherwise need to access emergency food aid.

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[3] Loopstra & Laydor (2017) Financial insecurity, food insecurity, and disability: The profile of people receiving emergency food assistance from The Trussell Trust Foodbank Network in Britain; Perry et al. (2014) Emergency Use Only Oxfam, Child Poverty Action Group, Church of England and the Trussell Trust.

[4] Trussell Trust (2017) Local Welfare Provision: Local Jigsaw.

[5] The Poverty and Inequality Commission's response to the Scottish Budget (2019)

[6] Dignity: Ending Hunger Together in Scotland, Report of the Independent Working Group on food poverty (2016).

2. Methodology

Different methods were used to examine best practice in SWF delivery, including:

• Analysis of quantitative data;

• Interviews with SWF staff;

• Focus groups with SWF staff, welfare rights advisors, and people who have applied to the SWF;

• Analysis of qualitative data from wider A Menu for Change research with people experiencing food insecurity

The Scottish Government publishes data quarterly on the delivery and use of the SWF.[8] This data covers a number of different factors and is broken down by local authority area. To support this study, the Scottish Government provided figures covering the 2017/18 financial year.

A Menu for Change selected six indicators for analysis during this phase of the research. These were:

• decision making times;

• award amounts;

• the level of repeat applications;

• the number of successful appeals;

• accessibility;

• the number of onward referrals.

A more detailed explanation of each indicator and the reason for selecting it is provided in Chapter 3. The overarching aim was to focus on indicators that pointed to fast, high quality decisions on easily accessible applications.

Local authorities were divided into three size categories: those with 500 or fewer applications; those with between 500 and 10,000 applications; and those with more than 10,000 applications over the 2017/18 financial year. This approach ensured there was adequate representation of rural and urban councils, and corrected for the positive bias smaller authorities would receive due to having fewer applications.

Each local authority was then ranked based on its performance on each indicator relative to others in their size category. The top two in the smallest category, the top five in the middle category, and the top three in the largest category each received one point for each indicator. For tie breaking purposes, a star was placed beside each point of

the local authority who was placed highest in that indicator in their category. These points were then tallied. In order to get a cross section of different sized local authorities, those scoring in the top two in the smallest category, the top six in the middle category, and the top three in the largest category were selected for further study. Six were chosen in the middle category due to a tie in the tie break. The results from this process are available in Appendix A.

This approach enabled the identification of the sample of local authorities to include in the qualitative phase of the research. Researchers contacted the eleven selected local authorities and asked if members of their SWF teams would be willing to take part in a short interview. Nine local authorities agreed to participate.

Senior managers, team leaders, and decision makers were interviewed to get an in-depth understanding of how each SWF was organised and administered. A full list of the questions asked can be found in Appendix B.

The interviews aimed to better understand how the SWF was administered in each area. For example, within which department the SWF sat within the council, how staff were trained, and how claimants were notified of their decision. The interviews were analysed and common themes of good practice identified. This analysis also drew on the findings of other qualitative research A Menu for Change is conducting with people with lived experience of food insecurity.

These findings were then taken to three focus groups: one of SWF practitioners from across Scotland, one of welfare rights advisers from across Scotland, and one of people who had experience of applying to the SWF in Dundee. They were each asked what they thought about the initial conclusions and then to identify any issues they thought may not be represented.

Finally, the themes identified and the feedback received were used to develop the recommendations contained within this report. Interviews with local authority staff were conducted on the basis that the information they provided could be used within this research, but the identity of the individuals would not be shared. This approach was adopted to maximise the comprehensiveness of the information gathered.

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[7] This research does not consider the merits of possible alternative delivery mechanisms.

[8] The most recent data is available on the Scottish Government website: https://www2.gov.scot/Topics/Statistics/Browse/Social-Welfare/swf

3. Quantitative Findings

The quantitative indicators were chosen for analysis as it was felt that, of the data available, they best pointed to fast, high quality decisions on easily accessible applications. Table 1 sets out the indicator examined, the relevant section of the SWF guidance, why it was felt it was an indicator of good practice, and the approach taken when using the data.

Table 1: Quantitative Indicators

Indicator	Guidance	Rationale	Approach
Decision making times	All local authorities are required to make a decision on a crisis grant decision immediately after the local authority has received all information allowing a decision to be made, and in any event, no later than the end of the next working day. (SWF Guidance – 7.32)	The speed with which someone receives their award is especially important when what they are seeking is money for food.	Local authorities were ranked based on the ratio of same day decisions to overall decisions.
Award Amounts	Local authorities should ensure that an award meets the applicant's needs. (SWF Guidance - 7.24)	Higher award amounts will be more likely to adequately meet the needs of the applicant.	Data on the specific details of the case or how many days the award is supposed to cover are not available, so local authorities were ranked based on the average award value.
Repeat Applications	When someone claims a crisis grant, they should receive enough money to last them until their next pay date. (SWF Guidance – 7.3)	If the volume of repeat applications in a local authority area is high, it can be inferred that the value of the grants being given is inadequate and links with advice and support services are not being utilised as well as they could.	Local authorities were ranked based on the number of cases of multiple applications by the same household over a two month period divided by the overall number of applications received in the same period.

Indicator	Guidance	Rationale	Approach
Successful Appeals	When someone is unhappy with the decision on their application, they can request a "first tier" review which is conducted by the local authority. If they are unhappy with the outcome of the first tier review, they can request an independent "second tier" review which is carried out by the SPSO. (SWF Guidance - 9.1 and 10.1)	It can be inferred that local authorities which have low levels of decisions overturned by the SPSO are making high quality decisions.	Local authorities were ranked by the number of successful appeals divided by overall decisions appealed.
Onward Referrals	Local authorities should ensure that they build and maintain relationships with a range of local partners including NHS, third sector, advice agencies and money advice agencies, including credit unions. This will ensure, where appropriate, people accessing the SWF can be signposted to other services which could address their wider needs. (SWF Guidance – 2.8, 2.11 - 2.12)	Local authorities who more regularly refer or signpost claimants to other support services have a better chance of ensuring applicants' wider needs are being met.	Local authorities were ranked by how many onward referrals they made divided by overall applications.
Accessibility	Local authorities must make provisions for applications to be made via three delivery channels, for example, online, on the phone and face-to-face… At a minimum, local authorities must provide a face-to-face option for more vulnerable individuals, and people who have support needs or impairments… (SWF Guidance – 4.13)	The more ways an applicant can apply, and the easier those routes are to access, the more accessible the fund is.	Local authorities were ranked according to the number of application methods they provided, with extra weight given to those who provide face-to-face access and those who provide free-phone numbers.

Results

Eleven councils were identified as examples of good practice as a result of the quantitative exercise.

In the small category (less than 500 applications), Orkney and East Renfrewshire were identified.

In the middle category (between 500 and 10,000 applications) Inverclyde, Falkirk, East Dunbartonshire, Clackmannanshire, North Ayrshire, and Moray were selected.

In the largest category (more than 10,000 application) Fife, Glasgow City, and Edinburgh City were identified.

A more detailed breakdown of the data can be found in Appendix A.

Limitations

It should be highlighted that it is accepted that these indicators are imperfect metrics of good practice. Some of the data available may be incomplete, and many of the tallied totals were very close. For example, the Scottish Government did not have referral data from several local authorities due to reporting issues, and just because the SPSO has overturned a few decisions does not mean the others have not been of high quality.

However, based on the data currently collected from local authorities and published by the Scottish Government, these provide, in A Menu for Change's view, a good indication of performance. That said, the tables should not be interpreted as a strict ranking of practice, but as a starting point to identify councils that appear to be doing something particularly well. For this reason, we are not naming any local authorities in our qualitative findings. It is hoped the model adopted could be reviewed and enhanced over time as a tool for the identification of best practice.

4. Qualitative Findings

The qualitative data provided important insights into SWF policy and practice. This chapter presents seven key themes identified through analysis of this data and outlines the related recommendations for policy and practice change.

Theme 1: When taking applications by phone, the same member of staff that takes the application makes the decision

Local authorities are required to offer at least three ways to apply for an SWF grant. (SWF Guidance 4.13). Most offer a telephone application service where the applicant can phone a dedicated number and speak to an officer who will talk them through an application.

When taking crisis grant applications over the phone, the local authorities contacted operated in two ways. Most had one member of staff take the information required for an application from applicants, with the same person making a decision on that application. Others had one member of staff take the application and then pass it to another member of staff to actually make the decision.

The benefits of having the same member of staff do both tasks are many. It allows the decision maker to request further information they know they will need while the applicant is on the line, instead of having to try and contact them afterwards. Similarly, it allows for requesting further evidence by a deadline (e.g. 3pm on the same day). For straightforward cases, this approach also allows for decisions to be made while the applicant is on the line.

SWF staff explained that applicants are often difficult to get a hold of. People facing an income crisis will be facing many challenges, may be reluctant to answer calls from unknown numbers (many councils block their numbers on outgoing calls), or may not have the means to be near a phone or return a missed call. Therefore, anything that reduces the necessity of remaking contact with the applicant is positive.

Having one member of staff complete both tasks also reduces the overall application time. This is because it reduces the potential for needing to re-contact the applicant discussed above, but also because it does not require a different member of staff to look at the application "cold"; if they had taken the application, they would already know its contents.

The feedback from the SWF focus group was largely positive. They explained it leads to consistency, allows for trust to be built up with the applicant, and agreed with the points discussed above.

However, larger authorities were clear that splitting the tasks created cost savings. This is because staff simply transcribing applications are typically on a different pay grade than those who need to understand the intricacies of SWF decision making. Another point was that taking and making an application at once does not allow for the prioritisation of applications, so it potentially becomes simply a first-come first-served situation. This could be problematic, especially if staff are taking applications for both crisis grants and community care grants.

The welfare rights workers focus group also largely agreed that having the same person taking and making the decision on the application was good practice. They explained it gives decision makers the opportunity to better understand an applicant's needs as opposed to simply looking at a piece of paper. They suggested it is also better for applicants because many do not want to talk to multiple people about their situation, especially during a stressful income crisis.

The focus group of people who have applied for SWF grants also thought this was good practice. One member explained, *"Nothing's as wearing or demeaning as having to tell your story again and again."* The group discussed the fact that applications can get lost if they pass through too many hands and that some people might not be good at explaining themselves, so follow up questions can be really helpful.

An A Menu for Change research participant explained how simple they found the process:

"I phoned, I gave them my details, I explained a bit about how I had no money and what I needed the money for, and then they said they'd make a decision and it'd be like a couple of hours, an hour to two hours, and they would phone me back – and they did. Okay. And they were really quite helpful, aye."

Based on the findings and positive feedback received, it is recommended that all local authorities should:

> **Recommendation 1: When taking crisis grant applications by phone, have the same member of staff take the application and make the award decision.**

Theme 2: Eligibility checkers

The Scottish Government's SWF guidance states that: "Screening questions or eligibility checkers should not be used to deter applicants from making an application for SWF grants. Even if it seems unlikely that the application will be successful, the applicant should not be prevented from applying." (SWF Guidance - 5.1).

Most of the local authorities interviewed do not use an eligibility checker for pre-screening online applications. Eligibility checkers ask questions designed to determine whether the applicant will be eligible for an award or not. Types of eligibility checkers vary, but some do not allow an applicant to continue with their application if they answer some questions a certain way. This can deter applicants who might have otherwise been eligible. While most of the local authorities we interviewed do not use an eligibility checker for pre-screening online applications, there was some evidence of such tools being used.

For example, one local authority checker asks, "Have you already had 3 Crisis Grants made to you in the last 12 months?" If you answer "yes" it will not let you continue with the application. This could deter a potentially successful application because, in exceptional circumstances, a fourth or subsequent award can be made, even if an applicant has received three crisis grants in the last 12 months. Therefore, these sorts of checkers are clearly problematic. (SWF Guidance – 7.23).

The main argument for the use of eligibility checkers is that they save staff from having to process applications that will not be successful. Unfortunately, these checkers almost certainly deter potentially successful applicants either by misstating the guidance, as in the example above or by wrongly assuming applicants understand certain terminology. For example, another checker asks if you've had a "relevant change of circumstances". If you answer "no", it will not allow you to continue your application. Without having a clear understanding of what "relevant change of circumstances" means, applications which could have been successful may have gone unmade.

The experience of an A Menu for Change research participant illustrated how confusing the eligibility requirements could be:

"When I got the money for my tax credits being delayed, you know, I was really getting it quite pernickety from them [SWF], they were saying to me, "Look, if this happens again, you'll not be able to get another one." And I thought it was supposed to be three in a year."

Based on findings and the deterrence inherent in online eligibility checkers, it is recommended that all local authorities:

> **Recommendation 2: Do not use an "eligibility checker" for online applications.**

Theme 3: Re-evaluate what evidence from applicants is "essential"

The SWF statutory guidance requires councils to apply a "balance of probabilities" threshold when accepting evidence regarding an applicant's circumstances. (SWF Guidance - 4.20). The guidance also states, "The evidence requested should be proportionate to the circumstances of the case. It should only be asked for if essential." (SWF Guidance – 4.24).

Several local authorities participating in this study explained they had purposely reduced the kinds of evidence that should be considered essential. For example, one council used to require bank statements from all applicants, but many applicants did not have an account, or it was difficult to get a statement printed off and bring it to a council office. They now only ask for bank statements if the award is to cover more than a week's expenses, and even then, it is not a blanket requirement.

Another council used to phone the police to confirm that people who claimed a crisis grant for lost or stolen funds had reported the loss or theft. They now give more weight to what the individual says and only request evidence when it's necessary to determine if there is a crisis.

SWF staff interviewed explained that reducing the amount of evidence required makes applications less onerous for the applicant. For example, they do not need to take the time to go to collect the evidence or pay for travel for applicants to bring it to a council office. It also speeds up decision making times and reduces the burden on decision makers to search for further information from sources other than the applicant, meaning they can process more applications. Finally, several local authorities said that, in reality, securing further evidence rarely changed decisions made.

Local authorities explained that asking for less evidence does require staff to be more trusting of applicants, and this can require a cultural shift. This was especially true of staff who came from anti-fraud or benefit administration backgrounds.

One local authority did suggest that some applicants were taking advantage of the lowered threshold, but explained it was the minority and SWF staff quickly learned to modify evidentiary requests accordingly. Others indicated that where multiple applications were coming from the same individual, they would start to increase the evidentiary threshold.

When evidence is required, councils interviewed tried to make it as easy as possible for claimants to provide it. One council explained that they would accept verification of evidence from any council staff member. For example, an applicant could bring their documents to a local library, and the librarian could contact the SWF team to say they'd seen it, instead of requiring the applicant to bring it to the SWF staff directly. This greatly reduced the burden on the applicant. Another council got access to other council databases so they could get evidence of things like rent or benefits without requiring the applicant to provide anything further.

The welfare rights workers focus group agreed this was good practice. They pointed out that sometimes local authorities give too much weight to some forms of evidence (such as that provided by the DWP) when the applicant's own information was equally, if not more, reliable and should be treated as such. They also pointed out that even when there were gaps in an applicant's story, there could be underlying issues the applicant might not feel comfortable divulging to the council.

A research participant for A Menu for Change explained how difficult providing evidence could be:

"The experience I had was bad because, over the phone, I explained the situation, this was on a Friday, I was running back and forward from town to make sure I could get all the paperwork from my bank so I'd show proof of my bank statements, I had to show proof… she [SWF decision maker] wouldn't budge from her quest of "I need receipts for your rent". And I said, "Well, the system that we have is that I don't do it through my bank. It's picked up every month… cash in hand." And she wouldn't, she wouldn't move from the point, she just kept on asking for, "We need receipts though, we need receipts." I said, "Well, you don't understand, what I've just explained to you is that I will not have heating or electric. I'll be in a dark flat; I'll have no phone to charge or contact anyone with. And I'll have no food."… So after that experience, I've just not phoned them back again 'cause I have no proof of receipts, and I have no money coming in now. So it's literally just relying on the drop-in centres."

Based on the findings and positive feedback received, it is recommended that all local authorities should:

> **Recommendation 3: Re-evaluate what evidence from applicants is "essential" and reduce this, where appropriate.**

Theme 4: Active referrals to advice and support services rather than signposting

Local authorities found that where they were able to actually contact an advice service and request an appointment for an applicant (an active referral), as opposed to simply telling applicants where they could access further support (signposting), there was a much higher chance the applicant would engage with the additional support.

All but one of the local authorities spoken to had an active referral policy and procedure to a limited number of advice agencies, although signposting was also used depending on the situation. SWF staff reported that when they received feedback on the referrals they have made to advice agencies, the outcomes for those applicants were typically positive. For example, one local authority explained 80% of sanctions were overturned on appeal for claimants who were actively referred to the Welfare Rights department.

Feedback from advice agencies to SWF staff was seen as key to maintaining an active referral policy. This approach helped SWF staff to see the benefit of taking the time to make an active referral. In general, it was noted that good communication between advice agencies and SWF staff as to the outcomes of referrals helped to improve relationships between services while encouraging more referrals to be made.

Participants in the SWF focus group agreed that an active referral approach was good practice. One local authority explained they had invested heavily in an online referral portal that made it easy for SWF staff to make an active referral. Another has merged its SWF department with its advice services so, an active referral was as simple as passing details across a desk. Both report lower than average numbers of repeat applications.

Where such processes were not in place, local authorities cited resource implications as the main barrier. They also worried about the capacity of local advice and support agencies to cope with the possible increase in demand. Finally, they explained that not receiving feedback from advice agencies made it difficult to know whether it was worth the investment or not.

When asked about the potential implications of receiving referrals from the SWF, the welfare rights workers spoken to suggested they would be perfectly capable of coping with the demand. They explained that many of the applicants would be likely to come to their service anyway but possibly further down the line when things might be more difficult to correct. They agreed that providing information about outcomes of the referral was important and suggested providing anonymised stats to referring agencies could be a way of feeding back information where services are concerned about data protection issues. Finally, they stressed the importance of claimant choice in a referral policy (i.e. applicants should not feel pressured into accepting a referral).

The advisory group members agreed. They felt active referrals were more efficient and highlighted that when people are in crisis, things need to be done quickly. They explained people in these situations tend not to be in a good place to be making appointments and having to speak to new people. They said it might also leave people feeling that they are not getting the support they need and are left to do everything on their own.

An A Menu for Change research participant explained her positive experience of support she received from the SWF to access other services:

"Awfy nice woman, and she was telling me to apply to PIP, dae this, dae that, dae the next thing, and you had to go to the Blind Academy."

Based on the findings and positive feedback received, it is recommended that all local authorities should:

> **Recommendation 4: Make active referrals to advice and support services rather than simply signpost.**

Theme 5: All applicants paid in cash as opposed to vouchers

All of the local authorities interviewed awarded applicants cash for crisis grants. They typically provided this via PayPoint, a service that enables the council to send the applicant a code which can be taken to local shops to be redeemed for cash. In more rural areas, applicants could collect cash from a local authority office. Direct bank transfer (BACS) was also offered in some circumstances; however, local authorities highlighted issues with this method. For example, it can take several days for the payment to arrive in the applicant's bank account, and some applicants may have an overdrawn account so will not be able to access the entire award.

One local authority explained that if they were giving a large award, they would pay part by PayPoint and part by BACS. This is because PayPoint has a limit on how much cash can be collected at one time. This approach ensured applicants were able to get an initial sum immediately to tide them over until the BACS payment went through.

The main reason local authorities choose to use cash as opposed to vouchers is it allows the applicant to use the award for whatever they need. Vouchers are, by their nature, restricting and implicitly suggest the applicant might choose to spend their award on things they "shouldn't" if they were paid in cash.

PayPoint was viewed as the most accessible way to distribute awards as applicants can typically go somewhere near to where they live to cash it.

The SWF practitioners focus group agreed this was good practice, and most councils indicated this was the way they did things. The only concerns raised were in relation to PayPoint (not cash itself). For example, it was pointed out that people may feel embarrassed having to ask to use PayPoint in a shop, or that in small or rural authorities, PayPoint may not be available.

The welfare rights focus group agreed that cash is the most desirable payment method but also pointed out some shortcomings of PayPoint. They explained that for applicants without mobile phone access, PayPoint was not viable, and therefore, councils must have alternative ways of paying available to them and ensure applicants understand what these are. They also suggested that when sending texts with PayPoint codes, local authorities should make sure they clearly state this is their SWF award. They have noticed some notification details are sparse and that some applicants have thought they could have been involved with a scam text.

The advisory group also felt paying in cash is good practice. They explained there was a stigma attached to using vouchers in stores and PayPoint was available in most shops. They also pointed out you could just buy what you need in the shop you picked up your cash in via PayPoint, so it could save on travel costs.

An A Menu for Change research participant explained how fast and simple PayPoint was:

"They had called us back within about six hours and told us that we'd get that payment and you'd get a code through to your phone number; I think for like 10am the next morning. So, all in all, it only took them maybe, one day to process it all and for us to have the payment. So, it was fab…"

Based on the findings and positive feedback received, it is recommended that all local authorities should:

> **Recommendation 5: Pay all applicants in cash as opposed to vouchers.**

Theme 6: All applicants given their decision over the phone

All of the local authorities interviewed contacted applicants by phone to give them their decision. They explained it was the fastest way to tell people about the outcome of their application. It also allows the decision maker to give detailed reasons for their decision, answer any questions the applicant may have, and ensure the applicant really understands their reasoning. It also means the decision maker can offer further advice or make referrals when appropriate.

When staff were unable to contact applicants via phone, text messages were sent. Letters outlining the decision were always sent in addition, regardless of whether they were able to contact the applicant by other means.

The SWF focus group agreed that communicating decisions by phone was good practice, and many explained that they did this. There was some variation, with one local authority explaining they only call applicants if they are unsuccessful or received less than they had requested. They pointed out that in addition to the positives discussed above, it also meant the decision maker who made the decision could explain their reasoning to an applicant as opposed to having to explain someone else's reasoning if the applicant phoned later and spoke to a different decision maker. It also allowed decision makers to carefully explain the appeals process to people who were unhappy with their decision.

SWF staff also highlighted some shortcomings with this approach. For example, calling applicants and explaining decisions does put a demand on staff time. It also means staff must directly engage with applicants who may be unhappy with their decision. One interviewee within a council also pointed out that it sometimes led to people immediately requesting a review in the heat of the moment.

The welfare rights focus group also agreed that phoning applicants to explain decisions was good practice. Some explained that in their experience, applicants were only called if the applicant was awarded the grant and received a letter if they were unsuccessful. They pointed out that applicants may have language or literacy issues so a phone call would often be more effective at ensuring the applicant understood the reason for their decision and what other options might be available to them. Finally, they explained the importance of also sharing the decision with the person who supported them to make the application where appropriate, as they can continue to offer them support in other areas, if necessary.

The advisory group agreed to get a phone call was best. They felt that whoever was ringing would have all the information about next steps and could talk you through whatever you had to do next. They explained if this didn't happen, they would likely feel rejected and not know where else to go.

Based on our findings, it is recommended that all local authorities should:

Recommendation 6: Give all applicants their decision over the phone initially, followed by a written decision.

Theme 7: Funding

The major barrier to local authorities implementing the good practice identified in this research is funding. There are two SWF budgets, one for the administration of the fund called the "administration budget", and one for actually paying successful applicants, "the programme budget".

Underfunding of the administration budget was consistently raised by SWF staff focus group participants when discussing the research findings. It was also clear that even for local authorities already demonstrating the good practice identified in this research, there was more that they could do with a larger administration budget.

For example, none of the local authorities we spoke to actively advertise the SWF to the public. Most suggested they had conducted a campaign when the fund first started in 2013, but now the most that is done is making presentations to advice and support agencies. One local authority interviewee joked, "Don't tell anyone we're out there!" This was a sentiment expressed by many SWF staff members who took part in the research.

Based on interviews with those delivering the SWF, there is evidence that local authorities choose not to advertise the fund, not because they do not want people to receive their entitlements, but because they don't feel they have the resources necessary to cope with the demand which advertising would create.

Similarly, most of the local authorities spoken to did not offer face-to-face applications for vulnerable applicants, even though this is specifically prescribed in the guidance. (SWF Guidance – 4.13). Again, local authorities explained they did not have the resources, in terms of both staffing and physical space, to provide such a service.

Local authorities have been highlighting since the inception of the SWF that the administration budget has been insufficient.[9] That view remains unchanged and many local authorities spoken to explained they had to use significant funds from their own general fund to ensure the SWF was adequately administered.[10]

If local authorities across Scotland are to be able to deliver best practice, they must be given the proper resources to do so. The overall SWF budget (£37,873,210), including both the administration budget (£4,877,970) and programme budget (£32,995,240), has remained unchanged since 2013/14 when it was first introduced[11]. This represents a real-terms cut, given that the budget has not risen to meet inflation.

There have been variations to how much of that total each local authority receives. The calculation was initially based on how many crisis loans were administered in the area

under the old DWP regime, but has since been changed to be based on the Income Domain of the Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation. While this reallocation is welcome, it does not address fundamental under-resourcing.

To address this, the Scottish Government should consult with every local authority to determine the funding each requires to implement practice that would ensure everyone who needs support through the SWF knows about its existence and is able to easily access a fast, high quality decision.

Increasing local authorities' ability to advertise and administer the fund will undoubtedly impact how much money is available to give to applicants. In her letter answering the recommendation made by the Scottish Parliament's Social Security Committee[12] that programme funding should be increased (i.e. the pot each local authority receives to pay out), the Cabinet Secretary for Social Security and Older People, Shirley-Anne Somerville, pointed out that there was an overall underspend to the programme budget in 2017/18. This could be interpreted as suggesting there is not a compelling reason to increase the programme budget.[13]

However, there are several possible reasons for the underspend. For example, the underspend could be explained by the persistent under resourcing of the

administration budget. If councils feel it necessary to take from their own general funds to keep the fund running at current levels, it is understandable that they would not look to widen access to the fund in order to try to keep staff workload manageable. As outlined above, several local authorities also suggested they would not be able to cope with demand if they were to advertise the fund.

It should also be pointed out that 68% of the programme budget underspend in 2017/18 is attributed to only six councils. In fact, nine councils overspent, and two councils significantly overspent in the same time frame – one council overspent by £100,000 and another by over £300,000.[14] This suggests the underspend is not clearly attributable to a lack of need, and can be explained by differences in local authority practices and demographics.

If the Scottish Government is going to make the Scottish Welfare Fund work to its full potential, ensuring people facing acute income crisis receive adequate cash-based support, it must be prepared to properly fund the administration budget so local authorities can administer the fund to the highest standard. However, this must be accompanied by an increase in the programme budget to meet the increased demand which a rise in awareness of the fund, and enhanced practice in the delivery of it, is highly likely to create.

[9] Scottish Parliament Finance Committee, Report on Welfare Funds (Scotland) Bill (2014), Par. 6-18.
[10] See e.g. Highland Council's Evidence to the Social Security Committee's Enquiry into the SWF (2018). Par. 3.
[11] Scottish Government Scottish Welfare Fund budget allocations
[12] Letter from Convener of the Social Security Committee to the Secretary for Social Security and Older People on Scottish Welfare Fund budget allocation - 01 November 2018
[13] Letter from Cabinet Secretary for Social Security and Older People on Scottish Welfare Fund budget allocation - 13 December 2018
[14] T24 of https://www2.gov.scot/Topics/Statistics/Browse/Social-Welfare/swf/SWF30Jun2018

5. Conclusion

If Scotland is going to reduce the need for emergency food aid, it needs to utilise every tool it has to its full potential. The Scottish Welfare Fund is arguably one of its most potent.

This research aimed to examine the policies and practices local authorities are currently implementing to make sure the SWF is administered so that applicants receive fast, high quality decisions on applications that were easy to make.

By using quantitative and qualitative data on SWF delivery, and insights of people with expertise of the fund, it was possible to identify some practical examples which local authorities could use to ensure their fund is supporting people in need as well as possible.

The findings highlight that small systems changes can have major impacts. For example, not requiring rent receipts could be the difference between someone getting the cash they need or having to turn to emergency food aid. Giving someone a phone call to talk them through what other support is available could mean someone doesn't have to live without electricity until their next pay date.

Many local authorities may have already implemented some of these recommendations in some form, but a full mapping of practice is beyond the scope of this research. For those authorities that are not yet employing these practices, this report should start a broader conversation about what might work in their locality to make sure their fund is accessible to all, with high quality decisions made quickly, and with the correct support always on offer to all applicants.

This evidence points to a clear shortfall in administrative funding provided to local authorities by the Scottish Government. Without additional funding, local authorities will be unable to administer their funds appropriately or offer a high-quality service to some of the most vulnerable people in Scotland.

Finally, if local authorities are going to advertise and remove all existing barriers to people applying for crisis support, the programme budget will undoubtedly require further investment due to the anticipated increased demand. Such investment in strengthening the Scottish Welfare Fund would be an important step in helping achieve the ambition of reducing the need for emergency food aid in Scotland.

Key Findings and Recommendations

In considering best practice in Scottish Welfare Fund delivery, this study has identified that all local authorities should:

1. When taking crisis grant applications by phone, have the same member of staff take the application and make the award decision;
2. Not use an "eligibility checker" for online applications;
3. Re-evaluate what evidence from applicants is deemed to be "essential" and reduce this, where appropriate.
4. Make active referrals to advice and support services rather than simply signposting people facing acute income crises;
5. Pay all applicants in cash as opposed to vouchers;
6. Give all applicants their decision over the phone initially, followed by a written decision.

To maximise the capacity of local authorities to deliver the best practice identified in this study, the Scottish Government should:

1. Consult local authorities to determine the funding necessary to administer the fund to a high standard, including implementing the above recommendations.
2. Increase the SWF administrative budget based on the findings of this consultation process;
3. Increase the overall SWF programme budget to meet increased demand.
4. Provide opportunities for sharing best practice between SWF frontline staff.
5. Review and revise statutory guidance on the SWF to reflect the recommendations in this report; and
6. Review the existing monitoring and evaluation of the SWF to ensure an approach based on best practice is being delivered across Scotland and provide additional support to local authorities where required.

Notes:

This is the number of working days between the date all information was received and the Crisis Grant Initial Decision.

Working days counts the number of Monday to Fridays between the date all information was received and the decision date. No allowance is made for public holidays.

If the date all information was received is missing or after the initial decision date, then the application date is used instead.

Disclosure Control has been applied to this table. All cells have been rounded to the nearest five observations.

In all charts, local authorities with 500 or fewer crisis grant applications in 17/18 are highlighted in orange; those with between 500 and 10,000 applications are highlighted in blue; and those with more than 10,000 applications are highlighted in green.

Appendix A[15]

Initial processing times (working ways) for crisis grants by local authority FY 17/18

	Same working day	All crisis grant cases with an initial decision in this year	Percentage made on same day	Ranking
Scotland	**116,845**	**174,315**	**67%**	
Eilean Siar	175	180	97%	1
Orkney	65	70	93%	2
East Renfrewshire	305	490	62%	3
Shetland	135	225	60%	4
Falkirk	4,950	4,980	99%	1
Argyll & Bute	1475	1,495	99%	2
Perth & Kinross	3480	3,530	99%	3
North Ayrshire	5,930	6,055	98%	4
Inverclyde	3060	3,130	98%	5
Aberdeenshire	4,360	4,585	95%	6
East Dunbartonshire	1640	1,735	95%	7
East Ayrshire	5,235	5,630	93%	8
Scottish Borders	1850	2,000	93%	9
Angus	2150	2,375	91%	10
Midlothian	3225	3,700	87%	11
Dumfries & Galloway	3,995	4,695	85%	12
Highland	3640	4,330	84%	13
West Dunbartonshire	4,860	5,875	83%	14
South Lanarkshire	4,035	5,350	75%	15
East Lothian	2350	3,280	72%	16
Moray	1825	2,565	71%	17
Renfrewshire	6,040	8,725	69%	18
West Lothian	4,285	6,310	68%	19
Clackmannanshire	920	1,495	62%	20
Stirling	1735	3,190	54%	21
South Ayrshire	1210	2,455	49%	22
Dundee City	2135	5,935	36%	23
North Lanarkshire	15,475	17,825	87%	1
Fife	10,915	13,040	84%	2
Edinburgh	7,435	11,080	67%	3
Aberdeen City	7,000	10,665	66%	4
Glasgow City	960	27,335	4%	5

[15] It should be highlighted that it is accepted that these indicators are imperfect metrics of good practice, some of the data available may be incomplete, and many of the tallied totals were very close.

Average award for Crisis Grants by local authority FY 17/18

Local authority	17/18 total	Number of awards	Average award	Ranking
Scotland	**£9,125,149**	**118,750**	**£76.84**	
Shetland	£14,248	145	£98.26	1
Orkney	£6,611	70	£94.44	2
East Renfrewshire	£30,135	390	£77.27	3
Eilean Siar	£11,362	160	£71.01	4
Clackmannanshire	£113,668	895	£127.00	1
Inverclyde	£261,143	2,675	£97.62	2
East Dunbartonshire	£124,847	1,330	£93.87	3
East Lothian	£144,945	1,605	£90.31	4
South Ayrshire	£139,463	1,545	£90.27	5
Stirling	£185,860	2,255	£82.42	6
Falkirk	£220,671	2,695	£81.88	7
Dundee City	£285,503	3,690	£77.37	8
Highland	£228,357	3,000	£76.12	9
South Lanarkshire	£248,657	3,270	£76.04	10
Moray	£117,775	1,555	£75.74	11
Midlothian	£173,458	2,310	£75.09	12
Aberdeenshire	£229,441	3,080	£74.49	13
Perth & Kinross	£160,592	2,165	£74.18	14
Dumfries & Galloway	£232,841	3,235	£71.98	15
Angus	£113,444	1,605	£70.68	16
North Ayrshire	£282,765	4,065	£69.56	17
West Lothian	£253,707	3,650	£69.51	18
Argyll & Bute	£69,025	1,015	£68.00	19
Renfrewshire	£450,237	6,760	£66.60	20
West Dunbartonshire	£280,466	4,805	£58.37	21
East Ayrshire	£210,391	3,630	£57.96	22
Scottish Borders	£41,638	860	£48.42	23
Glasgow City	£1,764,429	19,425	£90.83	1
Fife	£897,956	10,685	£84.04	2
Edinburgh	£675,121	8,580	£78.69	3
North Lanarkshire	£808,715	11,690	£69.18	4
Aberdeen City	£347,684	5,905	£58.88	5

Repeat applications for Crisis Grants within two months of initial application by local authority FY 17/18

Local authority	Total repeats	Total applications	Percent repeats	Ranking
Scotland	50,780	174315	29%	
Orkney	5	70	7%	1
East Renfrewshire	80	490	16%	2
Eilean Siar	30	180	17%	3
Shetland	80	225	36%	4
South Lanarkshire	1,105	5,350	21%	1
Inverclyde	665	3,130	21%	2
Dundee City	1,505	5,935	25%	3
Clackmannanshire	395	1,495	26%	4
South Ayrshire	665	2,455	27%	5
Highland	1,180	4,330	27%	6
Angus	650	2,375	27%	7
Scottish Borders	560	2,000	28%	8
Argyll & Bute	420	1,495	28%	9
Renfrewshire	2,455	8,725	28%	10
Aberdeenshire	1,370	4,585	30%	11
Falkirk	1,530	4,980	31%	12
Stirling	995	3,190	31%	13
Moray	820	2,565	32%	14
North Ayrshire	1,965	6,055	32%	15
West Dunbartonshire	1,960	5,875	33%	16
East Dunbartonshire	590	1,735	34%	17
Perth & Kinross	1,205	3,530	34%	18
Dumfries & Galloway	1,610	4,695	34%	19
East Lothian	1,125	3,280	34%	20
East Ayrshire	1,970	5,630	35%	21
West Lothian	2,230	6,310	35%	22
Midlothian	1,520	3,700	41%	23
Glasgow City	6,180	27,335	23%	1
Edinburgh	2,585	11,080	23%	2
Fife	3,425	13,040	26%	3
Aberdeen City	3,665	10,665	34%	4
North Lanarkshire	6,235	17,825	35%	5

Notes:

Figures for repeat applications by household
A window of 60 days was used to calculate repeat applications (SG usually use 365 in the publication)

Scottish Public Services Ombudsman reviews received by authority and application type FY 2017-18

Local authority	Number of review requests	Upheld against council	Percent upheld	Total applications	Ranking
Scotland	288	102	35%	174160	
Orkney	0	0	0%	75	1
Eilean Siar	0	0	0%	185	1
Shetland	0	0	0%	220	1
East Renfrewshire	0	0	0%	490	1
Clackmannanshire	1	0	0%	1,460	1
Argyll & Bute	2	0	0%	1,495	1
Moray	0	0	0%	2,560	1
Stirling	0	0	0%	3,185	1
East Lothian	1	0	0%	3,285	1
Midlothian	2	0	0%	3,700	1
Falkirk	0	0	0%	4,940	1
West Dunbartonshire	1	0	0%	5,850	1
Perth & Kinross	5	1	20%	3,525	2
Angus	4	1	25%	2,370	3
Highland	11	3	27%	4,335	4
East Dunbartonshire	3	1	33%	1,730	5
East Ayrshire	3	1	33%	5,635	5
Renfrewshire	11	4	36%	8,710	6
Aberdeenshire	12	5	42%	4,570	7
South Ayrshire	9	4	44%	2,445	8
South Lanarkshire	8	4	50%	5,360	9
Dundee City	8	4	50%	5,915	9
Dumfries & Galloway	8	5	63%	4,695	10
West Lothian	3	2	67%	6,310	10
Scottish Borders	1	1	100%	2,005	11
Inverclyde	1	1	100%	3,140	11
North Ayrshire	1	1	100%	6,060	11
Aberdeen City	3	0	0%	10,640	1
Fife	3	0	0%	13,025	1
Glasgow City	126	36	29%	27,355	2
North Lanarkshire	29	11	38%	17,810	3
Edinburgh	32	17	53%	11,075	4

Data retrieved from: https://www.spso.org.uk/scottishwelfarefund/2017-18-statistics#overlay-context=statistics

Available methods of applying to SWF

Local authority	Crisis Grant	CGs: No. of application methods	Free Phone	Face to Face	Points	Ranking
Shetland Islands Council	Online; Paper; Phone (local)	3	N	N	3	1
East Renfrewshire Council	Phone (local number); Paper	2	N	N	2	2
Orkney Islands Council	Phone (local); Paper/Email	2	N	N	2	3
Comhairle nan Eilean Siar (Western isles)	Paper	1	N	N	1	4
Moray Council	Online Phone Paper Face to face	4	N	Y	5	1
Angus Council	Phone (0345 number); Online; Face to face	3	N	Y	4	2
East Dunbartonshire Council	Phone; Paper/Email; Face to face	3	N	Y	4	2
Falkirk Council	Phone (local); Online; Paper; Face-to-face	3	N	Y	4	2
Inverclyde Council	Phone (local); Paper; Face to face	3	N	Y	4	2
West Lothian Council	Online; Phone (local); Face to face	3	N	Y	4	2
Aberdeenshire Council	Phone (local number); Online; Paper	3	N	N	3	3
Dumfries and Galloway	Online; Request callback; Paper	3	N	N	3	3
East Ayrshire Council	Phone (local number); Paper; Online	3	N	N	3	3
Highland Council	Online; Phone (0800)	2	Y	N	3	3
Perth and Kinross Council	Online; Phone (local); Paper	3	N	N	3	3
Scottish Borders Council	Online; Phone (0300) Request callback; Paper	3	N	N	3	3
South Ayrshire Council	Online; Paper; Phone (0300)	3	N	N	3	3
Stirling Council	Online; Paper; Phone (local)	3	N	N	3	3
Argyll and Bute	Online; Paper	2	N	N	2	4
Dundee City Council	Phone (local number); Online	2	N	N	2	4
Midlothian Council	Phone (local); Paper	2	N	N	2	4
North Ayrshire Council	Phone (local); Online	2	N	N	2	4
Renfrewshire Council	Phone (0300); Paper	2	N	N	2	4
South Lanarkshire Council	Online; Paper	2	N	N	2	4
West Dunbartonshire Council	Online; Phone (local)	2	N	N	2	4
Clackmannanshire	Online	1	N	N	1	5
East Lothian Council	Online	1	N	N	1	5
Aberdeen City Council	Phone (0800 number); Online; Face to face	3	Y	Y	5	1
Glasgow City Council	Phone (local); Paper; Online	3	N	N	3	1
Edinburgh City Council	Phone (local); Online	2	N	N	2	2
Fife Council	Online; Phone (0300)	2	N	N	2	3
North Lanarkshire Council	Phone (0300)	1	N	N	1	4

Based on services advertised on council websites. Retrieved Sep 2018.

Onward Referrals FY 17/18

	Debt advice	Money management or financial capability support	Welfare rights/ benefits maximisation	Social work	Housing	Employability
Eilean Siar	-	180	180	-	-	-
East Renfrewshire	-	-	825	-	-	-
Orkney	-	-	-	-	-	-
Shetland	-	-	-	-	-	-
North Ayrshire	-	8,905	760	2,020	870	-
East Dunbartonshire	1,320	3,295	4,310	2,105	825	-
Inverclyde	-	515	580	65	3,060	-
Angus	3,055	-	2,005	-	1,640	435
Dumfries & Galloway	-	4,105	9,310	-	30	-
South Lanarkshire	1,295	970	1,465	670	3,315	3,035
Clackmannanshire	985	1,970	-	-	920	-
South Ayrshire	-	1,095	735	215	80	-
Scottish Borders	-	115	935	-	370	-
Dundee City	-	-	1,550	-	-	-
Renfrewshire	790	850	1,195	-	-	-
East Lothian	200	225	350	-	-	-
West Lothian	10	40	15	65	15	-
Moray	-	55	80	15	10	-
Stirling	110	145	175	-	-	-
East Ayrshire	-	-	-	-	-	-
Midlothian	suppressed					
Aberdeenshire	-	-	-	-	-	-
Argyll & Bute	-	-	-	-	-	-
Falkirk	-	-	-	-	-	-
Highland	-	-	-	-	-	-
Perth & Kinross	-	-	-	-	-	-
West Dunbartonshire	-	-	-	-	-	-
Fife	6,400	13,340	5,755	7,340	45	-
Aberdeen City	1,510	1,675	2,365	-	-	-
Glasgow City	1,300	1,515	2,625	-	-	-
North Lanarkshire	20	170	255	15	10	-
Edinburgh	suppressed					

Notes:

There is no differentiation between active referrals and signposting in the current collected data.
Each application may have been referred to more than one service.

Advocacy services	Resilience support e.g. befriending	Other	Not referred to any service	Total Referred	Total applications	% Referred	Rank
-	-	-	-	360	360	100%	1
5	-	670	10	1,495	1,505	99%	2
-	-	-	70	-	70	0%	3
-	-	-	225	-	225	0%	4
21,615	-	13,470	315	47,640	47,955	99%	1
-	-	1,185	90	13,040	13,130	99%	2
-	-	-	60	4,220	4,280	99%	3
-	-	2,945	185	10,085	10,270	98%	4
-	-	19,940	940	33,380	34,320	97%	5
-	-	4,065	690	14,820	15,510	96%	6
-	-	4,670	460	8,545	9,005	95%	7
-	-	1,290	520	3,420	3,940	87%	8
15	-	165	1,870	1,605	3,475	46%	9
-	-	1,550	4,370	3,100	7,470	41%	10
-	-	-	7,285	2,840	10,125	28%	11
-	-	-	2,820	780	3,600	22%	12
5	-	1,055	5,285	1,210	6,495	19%	13
-	-	230	2,240	390	2,630	15%	14
-	-	-	2,955	430	3,385	13%	15
-	-	60	5,585	65	5,650	1%	16
			3,690	10	3,700	0%	17
-	-	-	4,575	-	4,575	0%	17
-	-	-	1,495	-	1,495	0%	17
-	-	-	4,940	-	4,940	0%	17
-	-	-	4,335	-	4,335	0%	17
-	-	-	3,530	-	3,530	0%	17
-	-	-	5,855	-	5,855	0%	17
-	2,920	2,370	1,115	38,175	39,290	97%	1
-	-	-	7,980	5,550	13,530	41%	2
-	-	-	24,165	5,440	29,605	18%	3
75	1,625	-	15,775	2,170	17,945	12%	4
			11,010	70	11,080	1%	5

Yellow highlighted local authorities have all or nearly all applicants recorded as not being referred - probably a recording issue, not a real lack of referrals.

Final Scores

Scotland	Decision Making Times	Average Award Amount	Repeat Applications	Successful SPSO Appeals**	Accessibility	Onward Referrals	Total	Selected
Orkney	1	1	1	1			4	X
East Renfrewshire			1	1	1	1	4	X
Eilean Siar	1			1		1	3	
Shetland		1		1	1		3	
Inverclyde	1	1	1		1	1	5	X
Falkirk	1*			1	1		2	X
East Dunbartonshire		1			1	1	3	X
Clackmannanshire		1*	1	1			3	X
Argyll & Bute	1			1			2	
North Ayrshire	1					1	2	X
Angus					1	1	2	
East Lothian		1	1	1			2	
Moray				1	1*		2	X
South Ayrshire		1	1				2	
Perth & Kinross	1						1	
Midlothian				1			1	
Dumfries & Galloway						1	1	
West Dunbartonshire				1			1	
South Lanarkshire			1*				1	
Stirling				1			1	
Dundee City			1				1	
West Lothian					1		1	
Aberdeenshire							0	
East Ayrshire							0	
Scottish Borders							0	
Highland							0	
Renfrewshire							0	
Fife	1	1	1	1		1	5	X
Glasgow City		1	1	1	1	1	5	X
Edinburgh	1	1	1		1		4	X
Aberdeen City				1	1	1	3	
North Lanarkshire	1						1	

**More than 10 received points due to numerous instances of the same score
*Highest score in category (for tie breaks)

Appendix B

SWF Research - Interview Questions for SWF Staff

1. Can you tell me a bit about your job role in the SWF?

2. How is the SWF organised in the council? (e.g. what department does it sit in?)

3. Can you tell me about the people who use your service?
   - e.g. Are they mainly people who are experiencing benefit problems? People with illnesses or disabilities? Etc.

4. How do you ensure crisis grant decisions are made within the timeframes set out in the SWF guidance?
   - (immediately; but not more than end of the next working day)

5. What, if any, strategies have been implemented to reduce decision making times for crisis grant applications?
   - How effective were these?
   - What challenges were there in implementing them?

6. How do decision makers decide if someone is entitled to an award after receiving an application?

7. How are staff trained?

8. Do you conduct quality control of decisions?
   - If yes, how is this done?
   - If no, why not?

9. How do you decide how much to award an applicant?

10. Do you pay crisis grants in cash or in-kind?
    - why?
    - how are payments made?

11. What timeframe are awards meant to last?
    - How do you decide this?

12. What do you do when people apply multiple times in a short amount of time? (e.g. twice in one month)

13. How are people notified of their crisis grant decision?
    - What is included in this notification?

14. What is your process if someone is unhappy with their crisis grant decision?

15. In what circumstances would you refer clients on to other services?

16. What would that referral process look like?

17. Where do you usually refer people?

18. Do you have a written referral policy/procedure?

19. How effective do you think onward referrals are?

20. How does someone apply for a crisis grant?

21. Do you offer a face-to-face application service?

22. How do people find out about the SWF in your area?

23. Have you gotten feedback from members of the public about your application process?
    - If so, has this resulted in any changes?
    - If no, how have you determined it is accessible to claimants?

24. Are claimants ever told they shouldn't apply?
    - E.g. because they've had 3 in a 12 month rolling period, or it's been less than 28 days since their last award and there has been no change of circumstance

25. You scored particularly high in X category, why do you think that is?

26. Is there anything you think your SWF team does that many other teams do not?

27. What do you think your SWF team does particularly well overall?

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