Briefing Note

Elected Member Briefing – Crisis Grants

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About this Briefing Note
Briefing by: Paul Fraser, Interim Director of People and Resources
Date: 04/11/2026
Subject: Crisis Grants

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if exempt or confidential explain risks and consequences.

Purpose

This briefing responds to questions raised at the Policy and Resources Committee about the operation of the Scottish Welfare Fund. It provides further information on the application process, the support available to applicants, work undertaken to promote awareness of the Fund and the performance information previously reported to Committee.

Background

The Scottish Welfare Fund provides non-repayable support to people and families on low incomes who are experiencing hardship or unexpected circumstances. It comprises Crisis Grants, which provide assistance in an emergency or following a disaster, and Community Care Grants, which help people to establish or maintain an independent life in the community. Awards are discretionary and take account of individual circumstances and the funding available.

Applications can be made online, by post or in person at 8 North Ness Business Park. Crisis Grant applications can also be made by telephone. Assistance is available for people who need support to complete an application.

Supporting applicants

The Council's Revenues and Benefits Service administers the Fund and supports applicants through the application process wherever possible. When additional information is required, officers explain what is needed, discuss how it might be

obtained and provide advice and guidance. Where other assistance may be appropriate, applicants are signposted or referred to relevant services.

Crisis Grant applications must be determined no later than the end of the next working day. Where information considered relevant remains outstanding, a decision is nevertheless made within that timescale on the information available. Community Care Grant decisions are normally made within 15 working days once all necessary information has been received.

Awareness and partnership working

The Fund is promoted through Council services and organisations which regularly support people experiencing financial hardship. This includes Housing and Social Work, NHS Mental Health Services, Hjaltland Housing Association, Shetland Citizens Advice Bureau, the local Department for Work and Pensions office, Shetland Foodbank and staff at 8 North Ness. Information is also available through Council information, leaflets and online resources.

Information about the Fund has also been added to Hjaltland Housing Association's tenant information, providing another route through which households can find out about the support available.

The Revenues and Benefits Service has engaged with the Council's Trauma Informed Lens Team and staff have undertaken trauma-informed training. The service has also participated in NHS Shetland's Money Worries training and supported promotion of the "Worrying About Money?" guide, which brings together financial advice and sources of local assistance.

Taken together, this supports a "no wrong door" approach, with the intention that somebody experiencing financial hardship who contacts the Council or one of its partners is directed towards the Scottish Welfare Fund or another appropriate source of help.

Applications and awards

For 2025/26, the position was:

- Crisis Grants: 126 applications were received, 53 were awarded and the value of awards was £10,419.01.
- Community Care Grants: 93 applications were received, 51 were awarded and the value of awards was £54,788.66.

For Crisis Grants, 74 applications were recorded as refused or otherwise closed. This figure should not be read as meaning that 74 applicants who satisfied the requirements of the Fund were refused assistance. The category covers a range of outcomes, including applications where required information was not provided, applications for items which the Fund cannot support, occasions where another form of provision was more appropriate and cases which did not meet the conditions for an award.

Similarly, 42 Community Care Grant applications were refused or otherwise closed during the year. The underlying records again show a range of reasons, with incomplete applications or evidence not being provided accounting for a number of cases.

These figures demonstrate both the demand for the Fund and the level of direct financial assistance being provided, with £65,207.67 awarded through Crisis and Community Care Grants during 2025/26.

Performance information

The Scottish Welfare Fund performance figures previously reported to the Policy and Resources Committee were subsequently found to be inaccurate. An internal review identified that the date on which all necessary information had been received was not always recorded correctly. Where that date was absent, the system used the original application date, which could make the reported processing period appear considerably longer than it had actually been.

The issue was raised with the Scottish Government and revised data was supplied. The correspondence confirms that the Scottish Government was able to accept replacement extracts containing the corrected information. Updated comparative figures can therefore be provided to Members following publication of the revised national statistics.

Importantly, this was an issue with the recording and reporting of management information. It did not affect decisions on individual applications or the assistance provided to applicants. Procedures have been clarified with staff so that the relevant date is recorded consistently in future.

Conclusion

The questions raised by Members have provided a useful opportunity to review the operation and promotion of the Scottish Welfare Fund. The review has confirmed that applicants can access the Fund in a number of ways, that support is available to people who need assistance with the application process and that the Service has established links with a wide range of partners working with people experiencing financial hardship.

It has also identified and allowed the Council to correct an issue affecting the reporting of processing times. Revised information has been supplied to the Scottish Government and arrangements have been clarified to improve the accuracy of future reporting.

The Council will continue to promote the Fund and work with partners to ensure that people experiencing financial hardship are directed to the most appropriate form of support.

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