

**SCOTTISH
PUBLIC
SERVICES
OMBUDSMAN**



People Centred | Improvement Focused

Scottish Welfare Fund independent review

Have you asked the council for a Crisis Grant or a Community Care Grant and are unhappy with its decision?

If you are still unhappy after the council's first tier review, you can ask us for an independent review. We are not part of the council. We are a free service.

We can decide:

- to change part or all of the council's decision
- to tell the council to make a new decision, or
- not to change the council's decision in any way.

We won't reduce or take away any award the council has given you.

How to ask for an independent review

You can ask us for an independent review in writing or by phone.

We can send you a form in the post, or you can find it on our website at www.spsso.org.uk/scottishwelfarefund

If you prefer, you can speak to us on **0800 014 7299** (calls to this number are free, even from mobiles).

We'll need to know you have received the council's first tier review decision. The council will usually send you a letter with its decision.

You should ask us for an independent review within one month of receiving the council's first tier review decision. In some circumstances you can ask for a review after this – contact us if you would like to discuss this.

Getting help to ask for an independent review

You can get help from someone you trust. You may like to ask your local Citizens Advice Bureau, an advocate or your support worker. Your Member of the Scottish Parliament (MSP), councillor, Member of Parliament (MP), or a friend or relative may also be able to help.

If someone is asking for an independent review on your behalf, you will need to tell us you are happy for this to happen.

If you are helping someone to ask for an independent review, we'll need their consent – unless there's a good reason they can't give it. If you have consented to someone else applying on your behalf, we may share information with them.

We want to make sure you can access our services easily. Please let us know how we can help.

What we will do

We'll consider whether the council should have made a different decision. We have legal powers that allow us to do this. We can check a number of things, including whether the decision was fair and reasonable. We may look at whether the council:

- followed Scottish Government guidance, regulations and any relevant council policies
- considered information that was accurate, relevant and complete
- made appropriate enquiries to get the evidence it needed
- made its decision fairly, based on relevant evidence and your own individual circumstances
- treated you with dignity and respect in making its decision.

How we will do this

We'll ask the council for all its paperwork about your application. We'll want to see that the council has reviewed its decision. We'll ask it to send us everything so we know what information was available and how it made its decision.

If we need information from anyone except the council, we'll try to discuss this with you first.

Sometimes we'll need to check information with you. We'll usually do this by phone or in writing but we may also ask to meet you if necessary. We may sometimes need to have an oral hearing. This will be with you and the council. You can ask us for more information about this.

Once we have all the information we need, we'll make our decision.

What we can decide

We can decide to change part or all of the council's decision, tell the council to make a new decision, or not change the council's decision in any way. We may also make suggestions to the council about how it can improve.

We won't reduce or take away any award the council has given you.

If we decide that the council should give you an award, the council will contact you to arrange this.

How long will we take to reach our decision?

After you have asked for an independent review, we'll start work straight away. We'll ask you and the council for the information we need. Getting this information can take time. This means we may need several days to give you our decision on a review of a Crisis Grant and several weeks to give you our decision on a review of a Community Care Grant. We'll aim to give you our decision within the following time limits:

- For Crisis Grants, one working day from when we get all the information we need to make a decision.
- For Community Care Grants, 21 working days from when we get all the information we need to make a decision.

If we cannot keep to these times, we'll let you know why.

If you are unhappy with our decision

If you are unhappy with our decision, you can ask us to reconsider it. We'll ask you to tell us why you disagree with it. We won't reconsider our decision simply because you are disappointed with it.

We have a leaflet about this process. You can find it on our website or ask us for a copy.

Our customer service standards

We are committed to offering a high standard of service to everyone who uses our service.

We have customer service standards so that our customers know what service they can expect to receive and how we'll provide it. You have the right to complain if you feel we are not meeting our customer service standards. You can get more information about how to do this from our website or by contacting us.

Making our decisions public

We may publish information about our reviews. This is to show people what we have found, and what we have asked councils to do. We'll remove any information that could be used to identify you or anyone else.



Your information

We are committed to protecting your privacy. We use information given to us about you and your application for its intended purpose and in line with the Data Protection Act 2018, the SPSO Act 2002 and the Welfare Funds (Scotland) Act 2015. We may need to collect and share information with a number of sources to carry out our investigation and we may do this orally, in hard copy or by email. We may report on the outcome of the investigation. When we do so we do not name individuals. We may also use information we collect to compile statistics and undertake research and analysis. There may be public interest benefits in reusing information for these purposes. Information is completely anonymised.

Your views are valuable to us, and we may contact you again to invite you to take part in our surveys for research purposes.

To find out more about how we handle your information and your rights, see our website. If you have any concerns about what we do, please let us know straight away.

How to contact the SPSO



Freepost SPSO

(this is all you need to write on the envelope, and you don't need to use a stamp)



SPSO

Bridgeside House
99 McDonald Road
Edinburgh EH7 4NS

Opening hours:

Monday, Wednesday, Thursday, Friday 9am–5pm, Tuesday 10am–5pm



Freephone: **0800 014 7299**



Website **www.spsso.org.uk/scottishwelfarefund**



Fax **0800 377 7331**



Please contact us if you would like this leaflet in another language or format (such as large print, audio, BSL or Braille).