

October 2020

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National Whistleblowing Standards go-live date

The Independent National Whistleblowing Officer (INWO) service for the NHS in Scotland will start in full on 1 April 2021. This means that the National Whistleblowing Standards will take effect from that date and become a requirement for NHS organisations to follow.

We shared (draft) National Whistleblowing Standards in January 2020, originally intending for go-live to be July 2020, but the impact of COVID-19 on health services, and us, meant that the original date had to be postponed. The newly confirmed date of 1 April 2021 takes into account the pressures of the winter season on the NHS in Scotland as well as the significant risk of a second wave of COVID-19 infections (nationally or locally).

By the go-live date, any organisation providing an NHS service should have procedures in place that enable their staff, students, volunteers and others delivering health services, to access the National Whistleblowing Standards. The INWO will then be able to investigate complaints about concerns that have been through the local whistleblowing process.

To support implementation, and to ensure those wanting to find out more about the Standards and raising concerns, the INWO will operate an advice phone line from the 1 November 2020. This service will be open to all NHS providers, staff and members of the public via Freephone 0800 008 6112.

The INWO team will be available to offer the following advice:

- information on transitional arrangements, including where whistleblowers need to go to raise concerns before 1 April 2021
- support and advice on implementation of the Standards
- general enquiries from members of the public.

The INWO has written to each health board and issued an e-bulletin which is available [here](#). If you are interested in hearing more about our work, please [sign up to the INWO mailing list](#) to receive future e-bulletins.

Self-Isolation Support Grants

From Monday 12 October 2020, we became independent reviewer for a new type of grant called the Self-Isolation Support Grant.

The grant was introduced by the Scottish Government to provide £500 financial support to those working but on a low income, who have been asked to self-isolate by Test and Protect. Specifically, the grant is intended to support those who cannot work from home and who will experience a reduction in earnings as a result of having to self-isolate. For more information on the grant, see the [Scottish Government website](#).

Applicants who are unhappy with the council's decision, and who have been through the council's first tier review process, can ask our Scottish Welfare Fund team to independently review the decision. Those looking to request a review can call us on 0800 014 2799 or [apply online](#).

Our findings

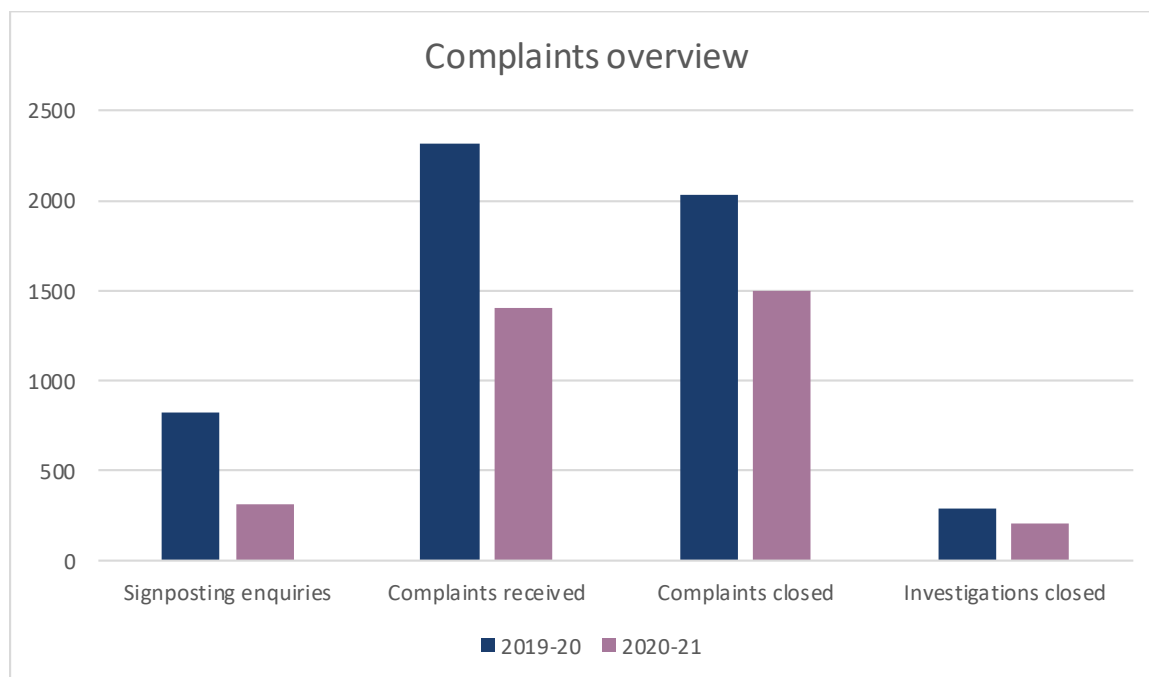
Complaints

This month we:

- published 34 decision reports available [here](#)
- upheld 18 complaints in full or part
- made 51 recommendations for learning and improvement.

Annual six months comparison

With the unprecedented start to 2020-21, we are taking a look at how our figures under lockdown compare to the same period last year (1 April – 30 September).



Noticeably, there has been a drop of **39%** in the total number of complaints received.

The reduction in complaints applies to all sectors except university complaints for which we have seen a **22%** increase compared to this time last year.

Scottish Welfare Fund reviews

Statistics

During September, we:

- responded to 84 enquiries
- made 65 decisions
 - 12 community care grants
 - 53 crisis grants
- upheld six (50%) of the community care grant decisions determined and 11 (21%) of the crisis grant decisions
- signposted an additional 76 applicants to other sources of assistance. In most cases this was to their local council as they were contacting us in error or because they were unable to reach their local council.

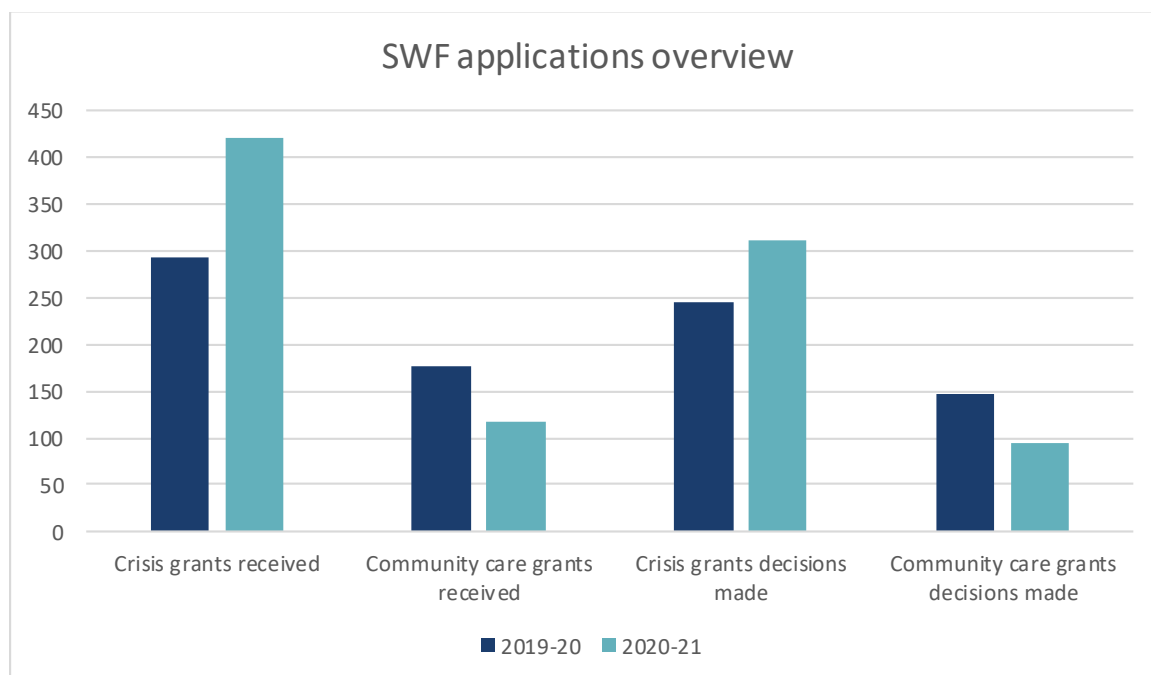
Case studies

We have continued to observe a decline in the number of community care grants received at independent review in recent months. However, of the small number of community care grant reviews received in September, we determined a number of cases where the council failed to take into account an applicant's specific circumstances when assessing the priority of items requested.

Examples of such cases can be found in the searchable directory [on our website](#) under the subject *Priority assessments not taking into account circumstances*.

Annual six months comparison

As with complaints above, this chart compares figures under lockdown to the same period last year (1 April - 30 September).



The number of crisis grant applications received has gone up **43%** when compared to last year. Despite this increase, our SWF team have determined **100%** of all crisis grant applications within one working day.

Signposting enquiries have also gone up **36%** compared to last year.

COVID-19 information

We continue to monitor and follow the latest Scottish Government and NHS Inform guidelines. As such, our office remains closed to visitors.

We are offering a limited phone service on 0800 377 7330 and are receiving emails, post and are taking new complaints as normal. We will provide the best service we can, but ask you to be patient with us during this challenging time.

Our Scottish Welfare Fund (SWF) team is available by phone as normal on Freephone 0800 014 7299.

Please read our [website for more service information](#).

We also have detailed [information for public service organisations](#) looking for advice on complaints handling during the COVID-19 pandemic. If you are experiencing particular difficulties or issues please contact us directly on CSA@sps.gov.scot.

SPSO e-learning modules

In December 2020, we will be removing our Model Complaints Handling Procedure (MCHP) [e-learning modules](#) from our website. Unfortunately these are hosted on Adobe Flash Player which is no longer being supported by Microsoft as of January 2021, and do not cover the recent changes as part of the revised MCHP. Organisations who have incorporated the modules into their own learning management systems will need to update any content themselves going forward.

Please note that this does not apply to the NHS e-learning which is available on the [NHS Education for Scotland site](#).

Remember, we have a variety of complaint handling guidance and resources available on our website. We are also in the process of developing further training resources in relation to the revised MCHP which we will make available in due course.

If you have any questions or would like to discuss future training possibilities, please email training@sps.gov.scot.

The Infected Blood Inquiry

The Infected Blood Inquiry was set up to examine:

- why men, women and children in the UK were given infected blood and/or infected blood products
- the impact on their families
- how the authorities (including government) responded
- the nature of any support provided following infection
- questions of consent
- whether there was a cover-up.

The Inquiry has been in contact with SPSO and we have agreed to share some information relevant to their work. The Inquiry is keen to hear from anyone who may hold evidence or have experience relevant to their work.

More details can be found on their website: www.infectedbloodinquiry.org.uk

Tel: 0808 169 1377

Email: contact@infectedbloodinquiry.org.uk

For further information contact:

Communications team

Tel: 0131 240 2990

Email: communications@spsso.gov.scot

SPSO Assessment and Guidance team

Tel: 0800 377 7330

Email: www.spsso.org.uk/contact-us

Website: www.spsso.org.uk