



## Social Security Scotland Statistics

# Funeral Support Payment: high level statistics to 31 October 2019

### Frequency of publications

The next publication, covering up to end January 2020 will be released in March 2020.

Under the Code of Practice for Official Statistics<sup>1</sup> we publish a timetable of statistical releases for the twelve months ahead<sup>2</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> The Code of Practice is found online at: <http://www.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/assessment/code-of-practice/index.html>

<sup>2</sup> The forthcoming publication timetable is available at: <http://www.gov.scot/Publications/2005/03/18798>

# Introduction

Social Security Scotland began taking applications for Funeral Support Payment on 16 September 2019. This publication provides information on applications and payments for Funeral Support Payment from this date to the 31 October 2019. It therefore includes figures for approximately six and a half weeks of applications. The [Background](#) section has further detail about the payments.

All tables and charts relating to this publication can be found at: [www2.gov.scot/Topics/Statistics/Browse/Social-Welfare/SocialSecurityforScotland](http://www2.gov.scot/Topics/Statistics/Browse/Social-Welfare/SocialSecurityforScotland)

These statistics are being published as experimental statistics. Experimental statistics are defined in the Code of Practice for Statistics as "*new official statistics undergoing evaluation. They are published in order to involve users and stakeholders in their development and as a means to build in quality at an early stage.*" These statistics have not yet been assessed by the UK Statistics Authority. They have not been designated as National Statistics<sup>3</sup>.

## Main findings

### Key figures

- From 16 September 2019 to 31 October 2019, 950 applications for Funeral Support Payment were received **[Table 1]**.
- Approximately 620 applications had been processed by 31 October 2019. Of these, the majority (495, 80%) were authorised, while smaller proportions were either denied (65, 11%) or withdrawn (55, 9%) **[Table 1]**.
- The total value of Funeral Support Payments issued up until the 31 October was £483,549, with an average payment value of £1,521 **[Table 5]**.

### Applications received and processed

- Approximately 950 applications were received up until 31 October. Of these, over two thirds (655, 69%) were received in October. Almost one third (290, 31%) of applications were received in September **[Table 1]**.

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<sup>3</sup> For more information on experimental statistics please see:

<http://www.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/news/assessment-and-designation-of-experimental-statistics.html>

- Approximately 620 applications were processed up until 31 October. Of these, four out of every five (495, 80%) were authorised, while approximately one out of five were denied (65, 11%) or withdrawn (55, 9%) **[Table 1]**.

## Application channel (method of application)

- Of the 950 applications received, almost two thirds (575, 60%) were made by telephone and just over one third (320, 34%) were made online. The remaining applications (55, 6%) were paper applications **[Table 2]**. The [About the data](#) section has further information about the application channel data.

## Local authority and non-Scottish postcodes

- Applications were received from clients in all local authorities, with the highest number of applications coming from Glasgow City (180, 19%), North Lanarkshire (100, 11%) and South Lanarkshire (75, 8%) **[Table 3]**.
- Approximately 10 (1%) applications were made by people living at non-Scottish postcodes **[Table 3]**.

## Processing times

- Approximately four out of every five applications awarded a decision between 16 September and 31 October 2019 (490, 81%) were processed within 10 working days. Approximately nine out of ten applications (555, 92%) were processed within 15 working days. A small proportion of applications (15, 2%) took 21 days or more to be processed **[Table 4]**. This processing time includes time spent waiting to receive copies of documents or evidence requested from clients, but does not include additional time to make payments.
- Median average<sup>4</sup> processing time for applications processed between 16 September and 31 October 2019 was 6 days **[Table 4]**.

## Payments

- The total value of Funeral Support Payments issued up to 31 October was £483,549, with a mean average value of £1,521 per payment issued **[Table 5]**.
- Of the 320 payments issued, almost all (315, 98%) were paid in instances when a person had died at the age of 18 or over. The mean average

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<sup>4</sup> The median average is the middle value of an ordered dataset, or the point at which half of the values are higher and half of the values are lower.

amount paid out in these cases was £1,526. A small proportion of payments (5, 2%) were issued when a person had died aged 17 years or younger. In these cases the mean average amount paid was £1,178 **[Table 5]**.

- Of the 320 payments issued, over three quarters (250, 78%) were paid to funeral directors, at the request of clients, while less than one quarter (70, 22%) were paid to clients **[Table 6]**.
- At local authority level, the highest total value of payments was made to people in Glasgow City (£97,898), North Lanarkshire (£69,796) and South Lanarkshire (£46,305) **[Table 7]**.

## **Redeterminations and appeals**

- Management information collected manually by the Client Experience team at Social Security Scotland indicates that approximately 10 redeterminations were requested by 31 October 2019. This represents 1.9% of the total number of applications processed during this period **[Table 8]**.
- By 31 October 2019, approximately 5 redetermination requests had been decided **[Table 8]**.
- The median average<sup>5</sup> response time for redeterminations that were closed up to 31 October 2019 was 16 working days **[Table 8]**.
- No appeals were received between 16 September and 31 October 2019.

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<sup>5</sup> The median average is the middle value of an ordered dataset, or the point at which half of the values are higher and half of the values are lower.

# Background to Funeral Support Payment

The Scotland Act 2016<sup>6</sup> gives Scottish Parliament powers over a number of social security benefits which had been administered to Scottish claimants by the Department for Work and Pensions.

Social Security Scotland – the executive agency of Scottish Government responsible for delivering social security benefits for Scotland – began taking applications for Funeral Support Payment on Monday 16<sup>th</sup> of September 2019. This replaced the Funeral Expense Payment, which the Department for Work and Pensions ceased to deliver in Scotland on the same day.

Further details about the Funeral Support Payment can be found at <https://www.mygov.scot/funeral-support-payment/>.

## Funeral Support Payment

The Funeral Support Payment is a cash payment to help towards the costs of a funeral. The payment will be made to an individual responsible for arranging the funeral, or directly to a funeral director if the client requests this. The payment usually will not cover the full cost of the funeral but it will help pay some costs. For example, burial or cremation costs, applicant's travel costs, transport costs to move the person who died, document costs and medical costs, and a set amount for 'other funeral costs' such as funeral director fees or a coffin.

## Eligibility

To be eligible to qualify for Funeral Support Payment the applicant must meet all of the eight eligibility statements below. If any one of the following statements is not met then the client will not be eligible:

1. I live in Scotland.
2. I have not already had help with funeral costs from the government for this funeral.
3. I (or my partner) are getting at least one qualifying benefit. These are:
  - Income Support
  - Income Based Jobseekers Allowance
  - Income related Employment and Support Allowance
  - Pension Credit
  - Child Tax Credit
  - Disability or severe disability element of Working Tax Credit
  - Universal Credit
  - Housing Benefit
4. I am applying after the person died, but less than six months after their funeral.

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<sup>6</sup> The Scotland Act 2016 webpage at <http://services.parliament.uk/bills/2015-16/scotland.html>

5. The funeral is for someone who lived in the UK.
6. I (or my partner) had the nearest relationship to the person who has died.
7. I (or my partner) are responsible for paying for the funeral (i.e. named on the funeral bill).
8. The funeral is being held either in the UK, a country in the European Union, or Iceland, Liechtenstein, Norway or Switzerland.

The Funeral Support Payment can help towards funeral costs of an adult (aged 18 or older) or a young person (aged 17 or under) including a child, a baby, or a still born baby. If a baby died before 24 weeks of pregnancy, Funeral Support Payment cannot help towards these costs.

Further details about eligibility for Funeral Support Payment can be found at <https://www.mygov.scot/funeral-support-payment/who-can-apply-and-when/>.

## **Payment Amount**

The expected average total payment is £1,300 although the actual amount paid will depend on a number of factors, as outlined below.

## **Deceased person's assets**

The amount paid will depend on the amount of money left behind by the person that died. This can come in the form of any assets in the deceased's estate such as money, savings, property, other funds, insurance policies, funeral plans or money due from pensions or burial clubs. Any such money from the person that died will need to be used to pay for the funeral expenses. As a result, Social Security Scotland will calculate the Funeral Support Payment amount to be paid, less any deductions from assets held in the deceased's estate. This only applies if the person who died is aged 18 year old or over. No deductions will be made if the person who died is aged 17 years old or under.

## **Burial or cremation costs**

The amount paid will depend on the cost of burial or cremation in the local council area, where the person who died, had lived immediately prior to their death. The exact burial or cremation costs are known for different local council areas. More information on burial and cremation costs can be found at: <https://www.mygov.scot/burial-cremation-costs-scotland/>. As it usually does not cost anything to bury or cremate a baby, child or young person aged 17 or under in Scotland, payments might be lower in these instances.

## **Funeral Costs**

A payment amount of £700 will be paid towards other funeral costs, such as the funeral car or funeral service. If the person who died had a funeral plan or funeral insurance, this amount will be reduced to £120.

## **Travel costs**

The Funeral Support Payment can help towards cost of one return journey to the place where you are arranging the funeral (such as a funeral director's premises), or to and from the location of where the funeral is being held. This includes travel by bus or train or even towards travel by taxi, boat and plane. It can include travel in your own car but does not include travel in a funeral car.

## **Transport costs to move the person who has died**

The Funeral Support Payment can help with transport costs if the person who died needs to be moved more than 50 miles. Social Security Scotland can only help pay for the travel over 50 miles, including return travel. This amount is calculated from the funeral director or taken from the funeral bill.

## **Document costs**

The Funeral Support Payment can contribute towards the cost of death certificates for the purpose of releasing money belonging to the person who died; and medical certificates needed to bury or cremate the person that died such as a Medical Certificate of Cause of Death (only needed for deaths outside Scotland).

## **Medical costs**

The Funeral Support Payment can contribute towards the cost of certain medical procedures needed before the funeral can go ahead. For example, the removal of a pacemaker from the person who died before they can be cremated.

## **Recovering payments**

Social Security Scotland can recover any Funeral Support Payment award made either in part or in full if money becomes available from the deceased person's estate.

## **An example of an amount paid out**

The person who died was over 18 and lived in the Glasgow City Council area. They had £250 in personal savings, but no funeral plan or insurance.

The person who is responsible for the funeral lives in Aberdeenshire and needed to travel from Aberdeenshire to Glasgow for the funeral. They would be able to get a total payment of £1,198:

Cremation cost in Glasgow City = £670; Funeral costs = £700; Travel costs from Aberdeenshire to Glasgow = £58; Transport cost to move deceased person = £0, Document costs = £0, Medical costs to remove pacemaker = £20; Deduct deceased persons assets= -£250; Total = £1,198.

## **Application and decision making process**

Applications can be made online, by phone, and by paper form ('application channel').

Social Security Scotland processes each application received and makes a decision whether to approve or deny the application. An application will be denied if the client is not eligible or provides insufficient evidence to demonstrate their eligibility to receive a Funeral Support Payment. An application will be authorised if the applicant is eligible and can provide the appropriate evidence to receive a Funeral Support Payment. Applicants may also withdraw their application before a decision is made.

Social Security Scotland aims to process completed applications within ten working days of receiving all supporting evidence for an application, and they will make payment as soon as possible thereafter. Applications may take longer to process if copies of documents need to be requested and received from clients. This is less likely when applicants choose to work with a funeral director and provide Social Security Scotland with consent to contact that funeral director. This is because the funeral director often has all required information available and the payment can be made direct to the funeral director, if eligible.

In this publication, the application processing time is calculated as the number of working days from the application being received by Social Security Scotland to the date that a decision was made or the application was withdrawn. We do not include time to make payments within processing time.

## **Redeterminations and appeals**

Applicants can ask Social Security Scotland to look again at what they have decided if their application is denied, or if they think the amount they are going to be paid is wrong. This is known as a redetermination. A request for a redetermination should be made within 31 calendar days of being notified of the determination. This is extended to up to 1 year if there is a good reason. Social Security Scotland then has 16 working days to make the new determination. Applicants also have the right to appeal to a Tribunal if they do not agree with Social Security Scotland's redetermination, or if Social Security Scotland is not able to make a redetermination within 16 working days.

## **About the data**

### **How the data is collected**

The data in this publication is sourced from Social Security Scotland's case management system. The system holds information on all applications received, decisions and payments. Data about the applicant, their partner, and the person who has died is collected through the online application form, or is entered by



client advisors during telephone applications, or the processing of paper applications. Information about the application outcome and payments is created in the case management system as an application is processed.

The information is held across multiple tables within the system. 100% extracts of administrative data are taken from this system every day for internal reporting purposes. Data cuts combine information from the different tables in the system into one daily extract which includes details of all Funeral Support Payment applications made since 16 September 2019.

To take into account backdating and delays between applications being authorised and payments being made, the data cut from 18 November has been used to produce statistics on applications received and decisions made up to 11.59 pm on 31 October 2019. Later data cuts may include additional retrospective changes to application details, including corrections to details in the case management system, and changes that have resulted from redeterminations and appeals.

Where a redetermination or appeal has been requested but not decided, decision date, outcome, payment date and payment value will be updated to reflect information about the redetermination or appeal, rather than the original application. If a redetermination or appeal has been decided, the data in this publication will show the decision date, outcome, payment date and payment value according to the new decision.

More detailed redeterminations and appeals management information is collected manually by the Client Experience team at Social Security Scotland. It is currently not possible to link this management information to data extracted from the case management system. However, in future updates to these statistics, information on redeterminations and appeals will be available for each application directly from the case management system.

## **Quality assurance**

The data used to produce the official statistics are the same as the data extracted from the case management system on a daily basis that is used for internal reporting within Social Security Scotland. As such, the data is checked daily for consistency with previous extracts (i.e. do applications, decisions and payments figures increase as expected over time, and are they in proportion to each other) and compared to other sources of information such as the number of payment instructions reported by the finance team.

Additional quality assurance and cleaning has been carried out on the variables used in the official statistics:

- Check for duplicate and missing application references

- Check that application dates, processing times and payment times are within the expected ranges
- Check that payment date is present where a payment value is present
- Check any postcodes that do not match to local authorities – see [Geography](#) section

Once the data is aggregated and copied into the publication and supporting Excel tables, the final statistics are quality assured by a different member of the statistics team. The final documents are checked by the lead statistician.

## **Data Quality**

### *Rounding and disclosure control*

Application and outcome figures have been rounded to the nearest five for disclosure control. Data has been suppressed where it would disclose fewer than five applications or payments. Due to the short time period covered in the publication, some breakdowns of data have had high amounts of suppression applied due to small numbers. As future publications will be based on a larger number of applications, there will likely be less small cohorts requiring suppression.

### *Missing and duplicate applications*

The data comes from 100% data cut of the case management system.

The data cut was checked for applications where the fields relating to application date and the outcome and payment of the application were blank. These applications would represent temporary ‘prospect cases’, which are created when clients contact Social Security Scotland without a National Insurance number, and are later replaced once a National Insurance number is received from the applicant. Any such applications are therefore duplicates and would be excluded from the statistics.

Clients may make repeated applications to Funeral Support Payment in certain circumstances. For instance, if their initial application is withdrawn or denied. This means that there can be several applications from the same client in the data cut. For this publication we have retained all of these applications.

### *Unverified information from application form*

Information about the client and the person that died is taken from the application form completed by the client or by a client advisor over the telephone. This information may contain errors because it has not been verified by comparison to other sources of information such as records held by the Department for Work and Pensions. This means, for example, that it is possible to have authorised

applications where the original application form did not include complete details of the deceased but was later amended as the application was processed.

### *Delay between application authorised and payment*

In this publication, the date that applications were processed by client advisors is the date used to produce statistics of processed applications by month. After applications are authorised for payment by client advisors, the decision is approved by a manager, and then a payment is issued. In some cases, payments will be issued on the same day that payments are authorised by client advisors, however in other cases there can be a delay before payments are issued. Clients should receive money in their nominated account within four working days after payment is issued.

In this publication, we report on the value of payments that have been issued by the end of each month and not the payments successfully received by the applicants.

### *Application channel*

Application channel is automatically entered into the case management system for online applications, and manually entered for applications taken by phone or paper. If ever an application channel has been manually entered incorrectly, the application channel will be classed as 'unknown'.

### *Geography*

Applications are assigned to local authority by postcode using a Scottish Government lookup file. For some applications, the postcode will not match to the lookup file. This can be because the postcode is not in a Scottish local authority, or because the postcode has been introduced too recently to appear on the lookup file, for example if a property is in a new development. For postcodes that could not be matched to a Scottish local authority, the postcode area was used to check whether the postcode was in Scotland or elsewhere. Non-matching postcodes from Scottish border postcode areas (postcodes starting 'DG' and 'TD') were also checked individually and assigned to Scottish local authorities or as 'non-Scottish postcodes' manually.

Following these checks on postcodes, in this publication a small proportion (10, 1%) of applications did not include address information and therefore could not be matched to a local authority or country **[Table 3]**.

### *Effect of redeterminations*

Application decision dates, outcomes and payment amounts are updated to reflect information about redeterminations and appeals as described in the [How the data is collected](#) section. Information in tables about decisions, outcomes and payments should therefore be viewed as the final decision, outcome and

payment value, after a redetermination request or appeal has been received and/or decided. This excludes the processing times table, where applications with redeterminations and appeals have been removed from the processing times calculations.

### *Processing time*

Processing time is the number of days from the application being received to a decision being made or the application being withdrawn. It includes time spent waiting to receive copies of documents from clients or funeral directors, but does not include additional time to make payments. It is calculated in working days. Weekends and public holidays are excluded, even if applications were processed by staff working overtime on these days. The time of day that an application was received or processed is not taken into account.

Processing times calculated do not include any applications that are flagged as having had a redetermination request because the decision date for these applications will represent the redetermination decision date, which can be some time after the original decision date. The number of applications in the processing times table is therefore lower than the number of applications shown as processed or decided in other tables. Redeterminations are a small proportion of the total applications processed, and the initial average processing times for applications that go on to redetermination or appeal compared to other applications should not differ from all other applications. Therefore, removal of these should not impact the average processing times shown in the table.

Processing time is only calculated for applications that were decided within the period being reported on. Data is presented by the month of decision rather than month the application was received.

### **Future developments**

Processing time currently includes the time spent waiting for requested evidence to be provided. We will be looking to produce a measure of processing times that separates the information into applications being received, evidence being requested, and this requested evidence being received.

More detailed information on redeterminations and appeals will be available for each application directly from the case management system in future updates to the statistics when this becomes available.

We will be seeking users' views on the content of this publication to ensure it best meets their requirements. If you have any comments or suggestions that you would like to provide us please email [MI@socialsecurity.gov.scot](mailto:MI@socialsecurity.gov.scot).

## **Information on Department for Work and Pensions Funeral Expense Payment statistics**

Department for Work and Pensions publish information about Funeral Expense Payment in the Social Fund annual report 2017 to 2018 at Great Britain level only: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/social-fund-annual-report-2017-to-2018>. Department for Work and Pensions also publishes annual expenditure for Funeral Expense Payments at Great Britain level in their Benefit expenditure and caseload tables: <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/benefit-expenditure-tables>.

Information about for Funeral Expense Payments in Scotland in 2017/18 was also published as part of correspondence between Department for Work and Pensions and Scottish Fiscal Commission: <http://www.fiscalcommission.scot/about-us/correspondence/correspondence-response-from-dwp-on-social-fund-figures-for-scotland-4-september-2018/>

## **Related Social Security Scotland publications**

Future research and statistics publications will be available through the Social Security Scotland 'Reporting' webpage at: <https://www.socialsecurity.gov.scot/what-we-do/reporting>.

Statistics on Funeral Support Payment feedback (complaints, compliments and suggestions) will be included in future iterations of the Social Security Scotland feedback statistics published at: <https://www2.gov.scot/Topics/Statistics/Browse/Social-Welfare/SocialSecurityforScotland>.

## **An Official Statistics publication for Scotland**

Official and National Statistics are produced to high professional standards set out in the Code of Practice for Official Statistics. Both undergo regular quality assurance reviews to ensure that they meet customer needs and are produced free from any political interference.

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### **How to access background or source data**

The data collected for this statistical bulletin:

are available in more detail through [statistics.gov.scot](http://statistics.gov.scot)

are available via an alternative route. Summary tables are available at:

[//www2.gov.scot/Topics/Statistics/Browse/Social-Welfare/SocialSecurityforScotland](http://www2.gov.scot/Topics/Statistics/Browse/Social-Welfare/SocialSecurityforScotland)

may be made available on request, subject to consideration of legal and ethical factors. Please contact [SocialSecurityStats@gov.scot](mailto:SocialSecurityStats@gov.scot) for further information.

cannot be made available by Scottish Government for further analysis as Scottish Government is not the data controller.

### **Complaints and suggestions**

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