

EQUALITY, POVERTY AND SOCIAL SECURITY**Social Security Experience Panels:
Low Income Winter Heating Assistance****Background**

The Scottish Government is becoming responsible for some of the benefits currently delivered by the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP). As part of work to prepare for this change, the Scottish Government set up the Social Security Experience Panels.

**Department
for Work and
Pensions****Scottish
Government**

Over 2,400 people from across Scotland joined the Experience Panels when they started in 2017. They all have recent experience of the benefits that are coming to Scotland.



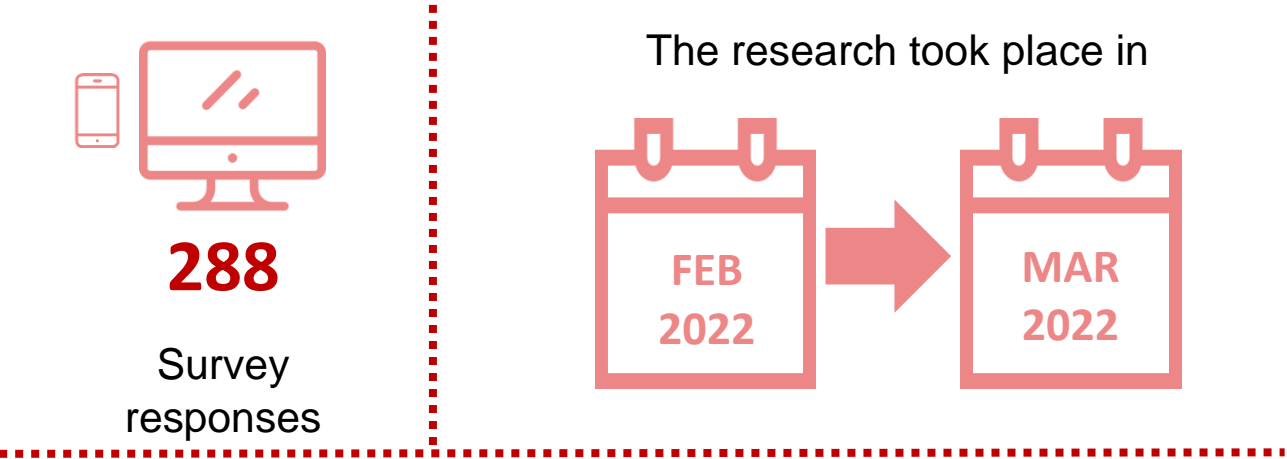
The Scottish Government is working with Experience Panel members to create Scotland's new social security system.

**2,400+
Experience Panel
members**

About the research

This report gives the findings of research with Experience Panel members about Low Income Winter Heating Assistance, a new benefit in Scotland which will replace Cold Weather Payment in 2022.

Cold Weather Payments are triggered when a ‘cold spell’ of 7 consecutive days of zero degrees Celsius (or below) occurs. The new benefit aims to remove the dependency on cold weather altogether by making a one-off annual payment to eligible people.



The research asked views about:

Should Cold Weather Payments be replaced in Scotland with a new benefit.

If the new benefit would be a good way to help people on low incomes with heating costs.

We also asked more specific questions about:



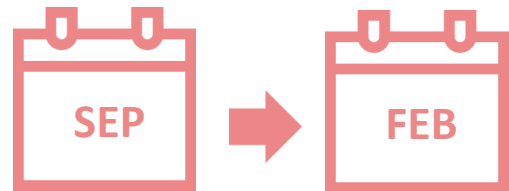
Should the new benefit be called Low Income Winter Heating Assistance?



Should the new benefit replace a temperature dependant payment with an annual one-off payment of £50?

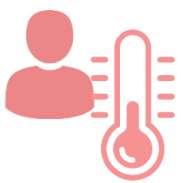


If the qualifying system, which is the same as for Cold Weather Payment, was a good way of deciding who should receive the benefit.



If there should be a 'qualifying week' in September, and if the payment should be made in February.

About the respondents



As this research was about a new cold weather benefit, we identified members of the Experience Panels who had told us they had previously had experience of the DWP's Cold Weather Payment, and asked them to take part.



We also asked members, who had told us they had experience of other benefits which were part of the eligibility criteria for Cold Weather Payment, to take part.



Of the 667 Panel members asked, 288 people responded.

Initial questions about a new Scotland benefit

We asked Panel members if there should be a new benefit in Scotland that would replace Cold Weather Payment.

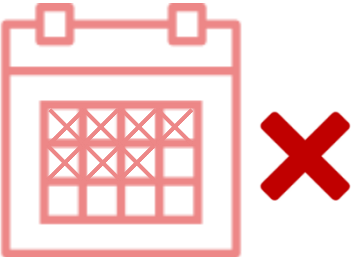


More than four in five (82 per cent) respondents agreed there should be a new benefit.

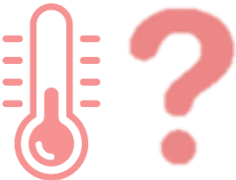


87 per cent agreed a new benefit would be a good way of helping people on low incomes with heating costs.

It is proposed that the new benefit in Scotland **removes the dependence on 'cold spells' altogether.**



The majority of respondents (90 per cent) agreed that the need for a 7-day 'cold spell' be removed from the eligibility criteria.



Panel members have said that the requirement for 7 days below freezing was too strict, and that it made it difficult to plan ahead.



The benefit as a one-off annual payment



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Just over half of respondents (55 per cent) agreed that the new benefit should be a **one-off payment each winter**.

“Simplifies the system.”



Nearly one-third (29 per cent) disagreed with the new benefit being a one-off payment.

“What if a cold spell lasts for months?”



Many respondents said that a one-off payment would **help with planning** finances.



Some were worried that it would not be enough if there were a number of **extremely cold periods**.



Some suggested **alternative ways** the benefit could be paid. For example, possible top-ups when there are cold snaps, or making two or three payments over the winter period.

The benefit as a £50 payment

Part of the proposed plan for the new benefit is that the one-off payment should be **£50**.



Currently this would be **equal to two Cold Weather Payments of £25**, when temperatures are zero degrees, or below, for 7 days in a row.



Just under a quarter of respondents (**23 per cent**) said a one-off payment of £50 would be suitable.



Three in five respondents (**59 per cent**) said a one-off payment of £50 would not be suitable.



Some positive responses were that it is **more predictable than the Cold Weather Payment**, and that some people would be 'lucky' to receive two Cold Weather Payments in a year.



Some negative comments were that £50 doesn't cover many hours of heating, especially with the **rising prices of fuel**.



It was mentioned that the payment doesn't take into consideration the **size of a property**, but may be generous because of **warmer winters**.

The name of the new benefit

When the Scottish Government introduces the new Scottish benefit that replaces Cold Weather Payment, it is planned to be called **Low Income Winter Heating Assistance**.



57 per cent
agreed



24 per cent
disagreed



19 per cent
were **unsure**

What people liked about the name:



“Clearly indicates who this payment is aimed at.”



“I believe this is an appropriate name and sounds more of a help.”

What people didn't like about the name:

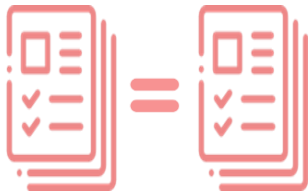
“I find the name condescending... It's just a reminder that I'm on low income and I'm on benefits.”



“It stigmatises people... The name, I would suggest, is a backwards move and not progressive.”



Eligibility



People on certain qualifying benefits and conditions may be eligible for Low Income Winter Heating Assistance. These are **the same benefits and conditions** used for determining **Cold Weather Payment eligibility**.



Four in five respondents (81 per cent) said that the **eligibility criteria** for the new benefit is **clear**.



57 per cent agreed that using these criteria is **a good way of deciding who is eligible** for the new benefit.

30 per cent **disagreed**.

Just over half of the respondents (54 per cent) agreed with the plan to **keep the qualifying conditions** for the new benefit **the same as for Cold Weather Payment**.

Thinking about how eligibility could be different, people said:



“You seem to be missing out certain benefits such as Personal Independence Payment and Industrial Injuries Disablement Benefit where those recipients will be on low incomes as well.”



“The use of these ‘qualifying benefits’ excludes so many disabled people... who need it more than some of those who will qualify using the current system.”

The 'qualifying week'

Low Income Winter Heating Assistance will be based on a 'qualifying week' rather than a period of cold weather. This method is also used to calculate **Winter Fuel Payments** and **Child Winter Heating Assistance**.

The plan is to have this 'qualifying week' in **September**.



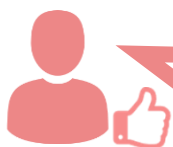
55 per cent
agreed



26 per cent
disagreed



19 per cent
were **unsure**



"I think it makes sense for Social Security Scotland to plan ahead for budgeting purposes and this will also assist claimants with their personal budgets."



"It gives an ample time period to inform the people who qualify for it. Also gives people who think they should qualify time to appeal."

"Making the qualifying week in September excludes those [who] may start claiming benefits from October onwards."



"If you're giving the payment based on who's receiving certain benefits, that should simply be a constant rolling list."



The timing of the benefit payment

Because **February tends to be one of the coldest months** in Scotland, it is intended that the payment should be made during this month.



42 per cent of respondents said the benefit **should be paid in February**.



36 per cent of respondents said the benefit should **not** be paid in February.



Because the largest winter bills often come in February, some people said this was a **good time** to pay the benefit.



Some said it would help people using pay-as-you-go meters.



But some people said the benefit **should be paid earlier**, because this might help people reliant on solid fuels who often live in colder areas.

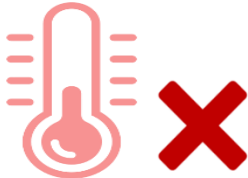


Some people felt the payment should be paid over several months instead of one payment.

Final thoughts: a summary of comments

We asked Panel members to think about all the proposed changes to the new benefit in Scotland which will replace Cold Weather Payment, and tell us their views.

These are some of the recurring themes:



A one-off payment is better than a 'cold spell' dependent criteria.



While £50 is a good start, the payment should be higher because of rising costs.



People living in colder rural areas might be worse off under the new scheme.



“I think it’s a good idea. The current system is too strict and is also something of a postcode lottery as it depends how close someone lives to a weather monitoring station – it might be below freezing in the person’s area, but not at the monitoring station.”

“It is not enough. In a cold winter it could be freezing for 8 weeks, which [under the current system] would be £200 towards survival in a semi-detached home. It’s just not enough for the fuel challenges we are facing and those in colder rural areas will be penalised by this change.”



Next steps



In December 2021 the Scottish Government published a consultation paper seeking views on Low Income Winter Heating Assistance.



This consultation shared the aims, key eligibility criteria and format of the new benefit.



It outlined how the Scottish Government intends to deliver the new benefit through Social Security Scotland to help towards winter heating costs.



The range of views identified in the consultation and in this report provide a useful steer for any further development of Low Income Winter Heating Assistance.





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