

Unhappy with this decision?

The Inspector's decision is usually the end of the review process. However people who are unhappy with the Inspector's decision can write to the office manager. He may direct a different Inspector to look at the case again.

An applicant can expect a response within 12 working days.

The Inspector's decision will be changed if it contained an error of fact or law.

External Focus

We are conscious that the Inspectors see approximately one per cent of the total number of applications to the Social Fund. One objective of the External Focus Team is to raise awareness of the OSFC and to forge links with all those who have an interest in the review process.

The External Focus Team runs information and technical workshops; holds meetings with key stakeholders and issues quarterly statistical reports that provide details on performance. Our sister organisation in Birmingham, the Independent Review Service, produces a journal, which highlights quality issues.

For further information about statistics, workshops, or if you wish to be added to the journal distribution list, please contact the office support staff as detailed below.

Further Information

In this booklet it has only been possible to give a summary of what the OSFC does. If you would like more information about any of the subjects covered then please let us know.

You can write to us at:

FREEPOST
Office of the Social Fund Commissioner
24-26 Arthur Street
Belfast
BT1 4GF

Alternatively you can contact us:

By FREEPHONE on 0808 1270417, or
By FREEPHONE MINICOM on
0808 1270418, or
By fax 028 9023 0921,
By Email – sfc@osfci.org.uk
Or visit our web site at:
www.osfci.org.uk

Social Fund Inspector's Reviews

A guide to the service



OSFC is able to provide literature in alternative formats. The formats include Large Print and alternative languages.



INVESTOR IN PEOPLE

Introduction

The Office of the Social Fund Commissioner (OSFC) is based in Belfast. We are a statutory body that carries out independent reviews for people who are dissatisfied with the outcome of their application to the discretionary part of the Social Fund. The Social Fund Inspectors change approximately:

- half of Community Care Grants
- a third of Crisis Loans
- a tenth of Budgeting Loans

The Social Fund Commissioner is appointed by the Department for Social Development (DSD) in N.Ireland. The Commissioner appoints Social Fund Inspectors to review:

- Community care grants which do not have to be repaid
- Budgeting loans and crisis loans which must be repaid
- Overpayments from the Social Fund

People have a right to an independent review if:

- they have had a decision from the Social Security Agency about their Social Fund application; and
- this decision has already been reviewed by the Social Security Agency.

How to ask for a review by a Social Fund Inspector

People who wish to apply for an independent review should complete the application in leaflet OSFC1. This is issued with Social Security Agency's (SSA) review decision. Alternatively, they should write a letter explaining why they want an independent Inspector's review. The request should be sent to the OSFC to the address overleaf. The OSFC will obtain the original application and the SSA's decision.

The Review Process

The Inspector's review is a paper hearing, which means that cases do not have to be presented at a tribunal. This allows us to carry out reviews quickly, usually within 12 working days. Because crisis loans for living expenses are urgent, we aim to review them within 24 hours.

Usually, we will ask people to comment on their circumstances and the information used by the SSA before we make our decision.

An Inspector looks at the SSA's decision to see if it was reached correctly. This means considering whether it was legal and reasonable and checking there were no procedural errors.

If the decision passes these tests, the Inspector considers if the decision was the right one in all the circumstances of the case. If the SSA's decision doesn't pass the initial tests, the Inspector makes a new decision.

An Inspector can:

- Change the decision. If it is wrong in some way, the Inspector makes the decision that should have been reached in the first place.
- Agree with the original decision if the Social Security Agency's decision was right.
- Return the papers to the Social Security Agency asking it to obtain more information and make a new decision.

When the decision has been made, the Inspector issues a letter to the applicant or his representative explaining the outcome. A copy of this letter is sent to the SSA, together with the original documents. The SSA issues any payments.