



North Yorkshire Local Assistance Fund
Annual Workshop Notes
November 2015



North Yorkshire County Council would like to thank all those who attended the Local Assistance Fund Annual Workshop on 22 October. A range of authorised and supporting agencies were represented as well as the Deputy Chief Executive and Operations Director from Connect Assist, the new Fund administrators. The workshop once again presented an excellent opportunity for NYCC and Connect Assist to receive feedback on the Fund as well as suggestions for going forward, and it is hoped that all those who attended found the workshop useful.

Attendees received two presentations, one detailing some of the key points and changes of the NYLAF over the previous 12 months, and another introducing Connect Assist and their background. This was then followed by small group discussions on a range of questions circulated prior to the workshop.

NYCC will now review the feedback provided and liaise with Connect Assist where there are aspects of the Fund that can be added to or changed.

The notes on these questions can be found below:

Have there been any issues since Connect Assist took over the NYLAF on October 1st? What has improved and what is working well?

- No immediate feedback was provided to agencies following an application. An email bounce back to say if an application was successfully received or unsuccessful was requested as sometimes agencies didn't have time to check on the form.
- It was a positive that previous applications and their current status could now be seen.
- On the whole a quick turnaround of decisions was praised with sometimes emergency awards being received within an hour of submitting an application. However, this wasn't always the case and it was acknowledged that during the transition between providers there were delays for emergency awards.
- Some agencies had struggled to get through to Connect Assist on the authorised agency phone number.

- It was noted that a fully made up bed was better for applicants as some didn't have the tools needed to put together a bed. The problem noted was practically getting the bed into the room.
- There were a number of minor I.T. issues raised with the online form – support requested had to be written twice, 1st 2nd and 3rd choice items requested wasn't the most user friendly interface, sometimes random unrelated names appeared on the form, and on the standard application form Q3 was duplicated further on.

Have there been any issues for your agency in dealing with new referrals (authorised agencies) or with clients who need to be signposted on (for supporting agencies) – particularly in terms of available resources and prioritisation of work?

- Ryedale seems to be under represented with regards to authorised agencies. Stonham currently only run one drop-in in Ryedale once a week.
- Potential for Housing Options staff in District and Borough Councils to become agents. Harrogate has an in-house debt management scheme.
- A refresh on referral routes is needed.
- Harrogate Borough Council do get customers who expect the provision of cash payments.
- Are operational Health and Adult Services staff in Hambleton using the Fund?

To what extent do you feel that support is getting to the people who need it? Are there any groups of customers you are working with who are not getting support from the Fund but you feel should be? How many of the clients signposted to the Fund are repeat customers?

- Most people are now aware of the Local Assistance Fund. There are often a higher number of repeat customers for emergency applications.
- Housing is a massive issue around the County as people struggle to find places to live. This situation will only get worse in the foreseeable future.
- Older people aren't a major client group for most agencies and this group may be under represented by the Fund.
- A minority of customers know when their 12 months since receiving an award are up.

To what extent have you been able to offer longer term (i.e. on-going) support to customers who have been referred to you for support from the Fund? What kind of support have you been able to provide?

- Depends on the organisation and the service, for some clients the NYLAF is a way into the service for people who weren't on the radar. For others it is often a good way to complement on-going support they are receiving.

- Things sometimes develop outside of the immediate problem and agencies may need to refer elsewhere.
- It is sometimes tricky to work out where an individual is receiving support from and if any of them are also authorised agencies.

Which goods and services should we prioritise as part of the NYLAF offer? Are there any items that are not offered that you feel are needed? Are there any items that you feel could be removed from the NYLAF offer?

- Items suggested for inclusion were: carpets, curtains, car seats for young children, house/garden clearance (labour), skips, infestation and deep clean of properties, emergency travel, water arrears and debt payments as part of utilities, small weekend utility amounts available on a Friday night.
- Home starter kits containing items such as a toaster, kettle, cutlery, microwave etc would be a valued addition for some applicants.
- It was asked if there was scope for a white good pack such as a microwave and fridge freezer as often applicants would request a cooker and then have nowhere to adequately store food and vice versa.
- One agency noted that washers and cookers were in highest demand; another noted that beds were often required.
- It was noted that housing associations often rip up the carpets during a change in tenancy and do not replace them which causes massive issues.
- House clearing was in demand, as a common problem was tenants would sometimes throw old furniture and household items onto the verge as there was nowhere to put it and then the Council(s) would often charge them to remove the items.
- It was noted that Section 17 payments went with the Education Social Work Team as part of the reorganisation of Children and Young People's Services into the 0-19 Prevention Service. Now the Local Assistance Fund was the only way for many hard off families to acquire school uniforms. On a related point it was raised that as more schools become academies and use their own academy uniform this may become a problem for families.
- It was emphasised that authorised agencies should be aware of other sources of support in their locality that applicants could use.
- Could more than two emergency vouchers be awarded, even if it were on a case by case basis?
- Is there scope in the future for increasing the number of white good items from one to two?

Is there anything that you think we could do to improve the process for you and your customers going forward?

- It was raised if it was time to review the food and furniture elements of the NYLAF – using food banks and furniture schemes more, the savings could then be used to fund other things.
- An authorised agency noted that they had sometimes had issues previously where gas cookers would not be fitted as it was claimed that the gas connection and cap had not been dealt with to a high enough standard.
- It was too early to give appropriate feedback on Connect Assist after only three weeks. It was recommended to send a survey out after six months to get feedback. Not just to authorised agencies but to the applicants who receive goods from the Fund.

Is there anything else you wanted to raise; any other issues or comments about either the future of the NYLAF or past experience?

- Are people who apply for utility being linked to existing energy saving organisations and schemes?
- Are people who use oil being referred to local oil clubs?
- Look into Aldi and Lidl vouchers, not just for cost but also because they can be the most accessible supermarket, i.e. Pickering.
- Future of the NYLAF, future strain with tax credits as well as greater roll out of universal credit.
- A District Council noted that sometimes tenants have to move into a property quickly (within 48hrs) and if the furniture requested doesn't arrive by the time they've moved in the District Council has to pay for the items.

Following the group discussion Neil Irving (Assistant Director, Policy and Partnerships) gave a presentation on NYLAF food provision. He noted that food provision had undergone a number of changes since the Fund's inception in April 2013 from food parcels to current PayPoint provision.

It was pointed out that food award options sat on a spectrum with control at one end and speed at the other. Food parcels were costly and often produced a lot of waste food, nor does the Council have the resources to be policing food awards through escorting individuals to supermarkets or requesting shopping receipts. Food vouchers offer a higher level of control in that they can only be used in the supermarket they are valid for but it could still be used to purchase anything in the supermarket, it is not restricted. Nor can food vouchers be guaranteed to arrive the following day unless extra postage is paid for. The advantages of PayPoint then is that it is quick and can be done same day through a multitude of channels and is not

restricted by the geography of certain supermarkets. However, the PayPoint award is converted into cash which could be used in any store and not necessarily for food.

It was emphasised that an element of responsibility does lie with authorised agents in how well they know and how much an applicant can be trusted to spend a PayPoint award appropriately. It may be more appropriate for the food award to come directly to the agent who can then request to see a receipt, accompany the applicant or give it to the applicant with stringent advice.

We would welcome your thoughts and ideas around the future of food provision.

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Public information: www.northyorks.gov.uk/nylaf

Partner updates: www.nypartnerships.org.uk/nylaf