



North Yorkshire Local Assistance Fund Annual Report 2014/15



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Background

The North Yorkshire Local Assistance Fund (NYLAF) was launched on 1 April 2013 by North Yorkshire County Council (NYCC) to replace the discretionary Social Fund scheme managed by the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP). The Welfare Reform Act 2012 abolished the Social Fund and meant that new locally based provision would now be delivered by local authorities instead of the DWP.

The Social Fund previously provided crisis loans, crisis loan alignment payments and community care grants – cash for general living expenses and to see people through during times when there were issues with their benefits.

The NYLAF provides emergency support for vulnerable adults to move into or remain in the community, and to help families under exceptional pressure to stay together. The NYLAF does not replicate what was previously provided by DWP. No cash payments, crisis loans or community care grants are available. Awards are made in kind, for example by supplying vital household goods and basic necessities. Available items include essential items of household furniture and equipment, beds and bedding, food vouchers, clothing vouchers, utility top-up vouchers, utility reconnection charges and essential home repairs.

A customer may apply for up to two awards of emergency food and/or utility top-ups in any twelve month period. For other items provided under the fund, a maximum entitlement of three items

(including a maximum of one white good) may also be awarded within the same twelve month period.

Charis Grants Ltd is responsible for the day to day management of the fund, under contract to NYCC. This includes managing the application process, making the decision on awards within the criteria specified by NYCC, and ensuring the supply and delivery of all items that are awarded. Charis were appointed following procurement in 2012/13 and have provided a good service to date.

Applications to the fund are made through authorised agencies (e.g. selected NYCC front line services, registered social landlords, and voluntary organisations). These agencies include the Rainbow Centre Food Bank in Scarborough, Foundation, Horton Housing, NYCC Care and support etc. It is the role of authorised agencies to assess the applicant and identify them as eligible and vulnerable. It is expected that the authorised agencies will see an application to the NYLAF as part of a package of support. The application takes the form of an online form which was designed by Charis specifically for the NYLAF. The agent is responsible for filling out the details of the form with the applicant present.

However, if there is an urgent need for food/utility top-up but the applicant does not strictly fall into one of the vulnerability categories then the NYLAF may be able to issue a one-off food/utility top-up voucher without going through an authorised agency. Instead customers can call the Customer Service Centre who will then forward the call direct to Charis. Any second request must go through an authorised agency and meet the full requirements.

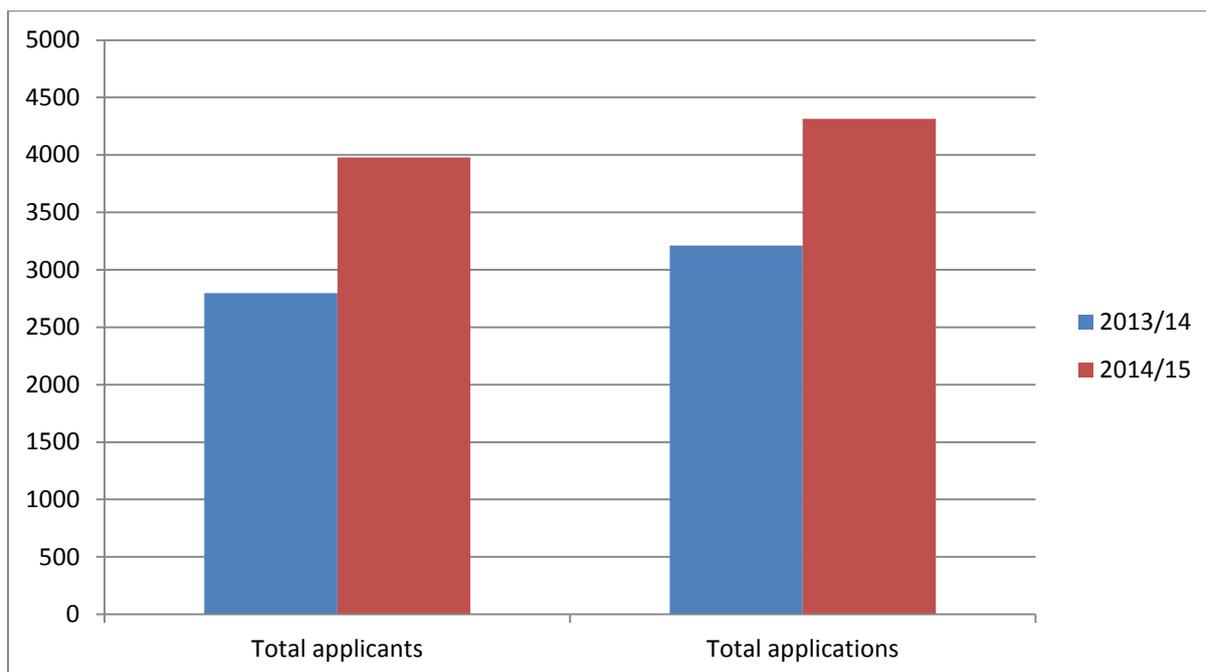
Awards are delivered direct to the customer unless specified otherwise (some customers may choose to have their goods delivered to the agency). Charis Grants are responsible for communicating with the customer when the goods will be delivered. Food vouchers and utility top-up vouchers can be delivered within 24 hours.

Unsuccessful applicants can ask for the decision to be reviewed. Initially this is undertaken by Charis Grants Ltd, but any subsequent review would be undertaken by NYCC.

Summary of activity 2014/15

Now at the end of its second year the NYLAF has built on the experience of the first year. Spend, which in the last six months of 2013/14 was averaging 105.7% of the allocated budget, was brought within budget through changes to award entitlement. During 2014/15 the number of applicants and applications to the Fund rose significantly from the previous year. Those changes ensured that the rise in the number of applications did not impact on the financial sustainability of the Fund, and ensured that there was funding available to award all successful applications the items requested.

Total applicants:	3,978
Total applications:	4,316
Total unsuccessful applications:	121

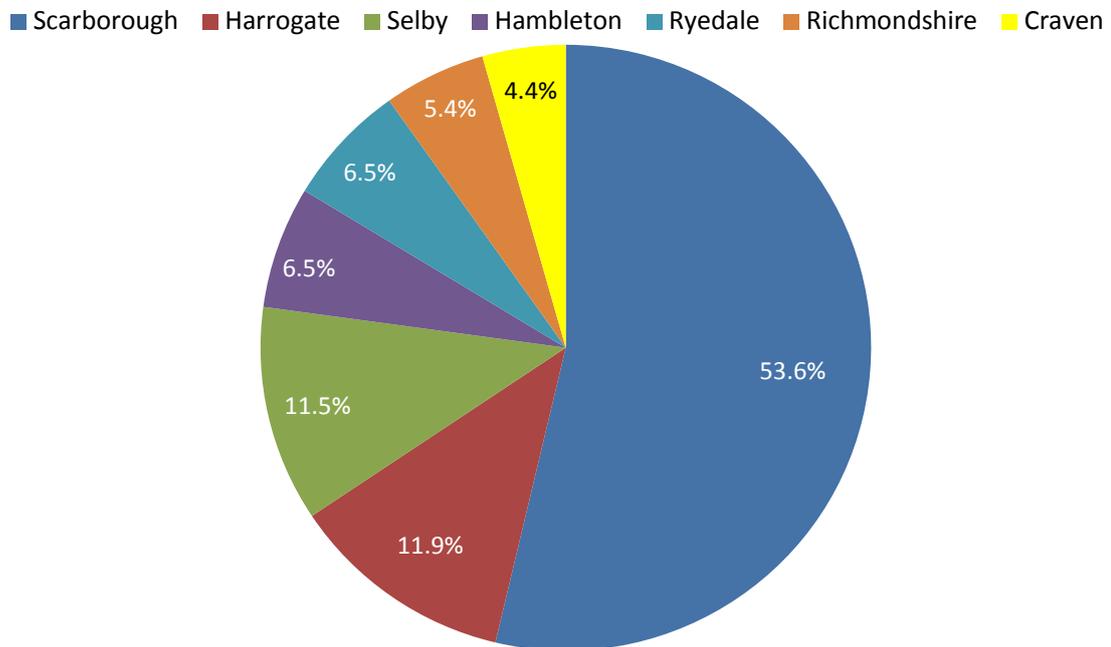


The total number of applications is different to the number of total applicants as applicants can submit applications on multiple occasions (up to the maximum entitlement). The unsuccessful applications were due to applications being withdrawn or timed out, ineligible or a weak case, or because an applicant has maximised an item entitlement or applied again too soon after reaching maximum entitlement, or because an item requested is an excluded item.

District breakdown

Like 2013/14, the district of Scarborough continues to submit the highest number of applications, followed by the districts of Harrogate and Selby. These three towns represent the largest population settlements in the County and the trend in demand broadly reflects the level of demand seen under the DWP's Social Fund. In terms of the particularly high volumes stemming from Scarborough district, there is a strong link between issues such as levels of deprivation, unemployment and benefits take-up in this part of the county and the high demand for emergency NYLAF support.

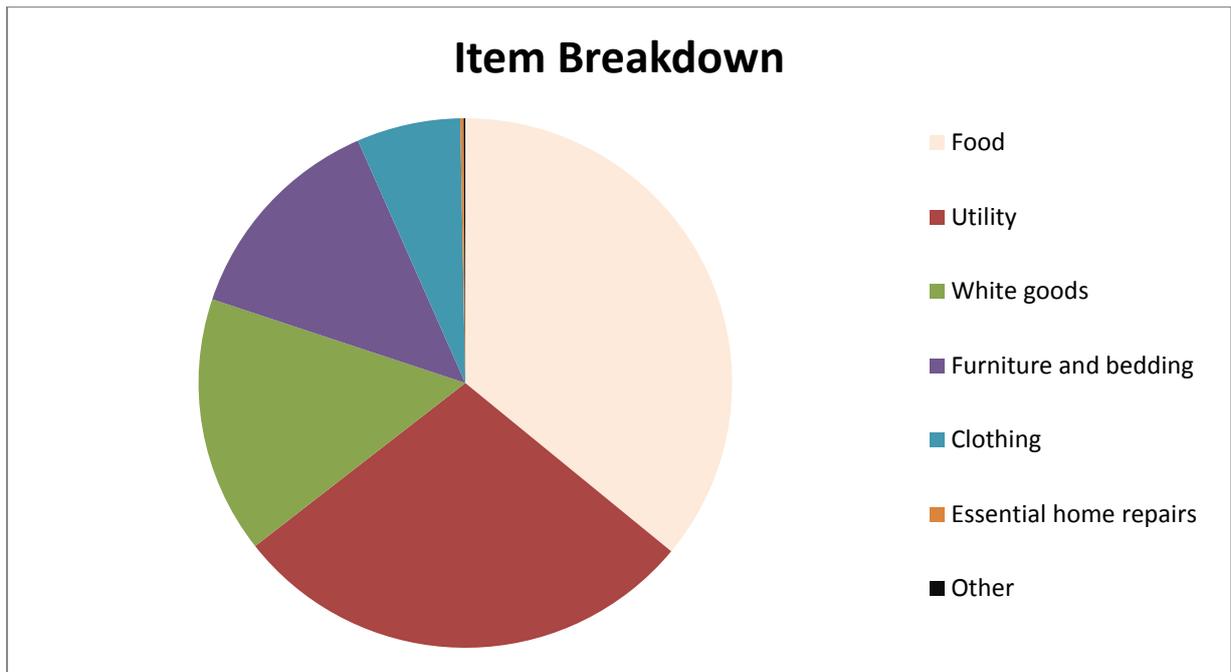
District Breakdown of Awards 2014/15



Item breakdown

The highest requested items throughout 2014/15 were food and utility (electric or gas) top-up, or the emergency short term items as these can be requested on multiple occasions. The restriction of one white good awarded meant there was a reduction in the overall number of white good awards in comparison to last year.

Food (including food awards issued by the Rainbow Centre):	36.0%
Utility:	28.5%
White goods:	15.7%
Furniture and bedding:	13.3%
Clothing:	6.3%
Essential home repairs:	<1%
Other:	<1%



Future funding for the NYLAF 2015/16

From 2015/16, the government had proposed that funding for local welfare provision be incorporated into the existing mainstream government grant that each local authority receives. Essentially, this move away from providing additional specified funding means local authorities are each left with the decision about whether to continue funding their local welfare schemes and, if so, to what degree. This is particularly difficult for local authorities given the current climate of significant budget reductions that need to be made across a range of services.

During December 2014, the government confirmed that there would be no additional specified funding for local welfare assistance but instead there was a notional allocation for spend on this included within the existing local government settlement. For North Yorkshire this came to around £713,000, to include funding for both awards spend and grant administration. Previously, NYCC has been given around £960,000 per year from the government to use in awards spend and for grant administration.

The NYCC Executive reviewed NYLAF at its meeting on 3rd February 2015 and decided to continue with NYLAF provision but to reduce the NYLAF budget bringing it into line with the notional amount allocated by the government. This decision was given careful deliberation by the Executive and balanced between the recognised need for and value of the NYLAF in the county but also recognising that NYCC has been given no funding to be able to continue the operation of the scheme at a time when very significant cuts are being made across NYCC to key services.

A copy of the report and the draft minutes of the meeting can be downloaded from the NYCC website at <http://democracy.northyorks.gov.uk/committees.aspx?commid=18&meetid=2118>.

The NYLAF will need to continue to be managed carefully to ensure that expenditure does not exceed budget. Steps taken during 2014/15 included removing rent deposits and rent in advance from its provision and restricting white goods to one award per application. As a result, and taking into account a change in VAT treatment, it is hoped that no further significant changes will be required.

NYCC and Charis Grants Ltd have systems in place to minimise the risk of fraud including any misuse of vouchers. Authorised agencies assess applicants and check that they are both eligible and vulnerable. A random sample of applications made by authorised agencies is audited. All applicants have to sign an online declaration to agree that they will not use any of the goods received for other purposes, including selling items on elsewhere. Other measures are in place to minimise the risk that items awarded are sold on. An internal audit report by Veritau, published in January 2015, concluded that the mitigating systems in place for the NYLAF provided “substantial assurance”.

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Public information: www.northyorks.gov.uk/nylaf
Partner updates: www.nypartnerships.org.uk/nylaf

Case studies

1. Clients have been supported through the NYLAF to purchase essential living items when they have been in financial hardship due to no fault of their own. Clients have also been supported through the NYLAF with starting and building on a tenancy with items such as washing machines.
2. The fund was a great help for a customer (Single mother with 11-month-old child). It helped her to have an electric cooker, which enabled her to cook at home for herself and her child, through which they could eat healthy food and keep them within the living budget. Without the support from NYLAF they would really struggle to have healthy food, especially the child.
3. NYLAF helped a young single mother caring for a young baby with Cystic Fibrosis, by providing a washing machine. The client was awaiting benefits for her child coming through and was unable to ask family members for financial support. The client was under a lot of stress dealing with her mental health issues, and she was struggling to cope financially having a child with a serious medical condition including having to pay out substantial travel costs for hospital appointments. A new washing machine was essential for the client and her son due to his medical condition and to maintain hygiene. The support provided by NYLAF was greatly appreciated on both a practical and emotional level.
4. I started working with an elderly client, aged 76 and living in poverty, some months ago. During my first visit I could see that he did not have a working cooker. He told me the very old cooker he had in his kitchen had not worked for 2 years and could not be fixed. This client has health needs and had no means of getting hot meals. I applied for a cooker

through NYLAF. The following week, when I arrived for a visit, he had a new cooker installed and had cooked a roast chicken.

5. Young female moved out of our accommodation quickly to a YCH house. She was only given a few days' notice and did not have a fridge freezer. NYLAF provided her with one promptly. If this had not have been the case the child could have been referred to children's social care. She was able to store food and milk at the accurate temperatures.
6. I have a client who until recently was living in a tent. We managed to find a room in a shared house. This room was just that. No bed; no cooking facilities, no cupboards; nothing. NYLAF awarded a bed so that he has somewhere to sleep, a table top cooker, so that he can sustain himself and kitchen utensils for something to eat with. Without the award he would be living in an 'indoor tent'; in a sleeping bag on the floor, with no means of providing food for himself.
7. I am supporting a vulnerable client at the moment who suffers from mental health issues. When his mental health has been particularly bad, he has gone weeks on end without any money. He has gone without food or electric. This is before I started supporting him. He recently had a situation not so long back where he had no food or electric. I applied to NYLAF on his behalf and he was able to receive a food parcel and an electricity voucher. This enabled him to be able to eat and have hot water and heating; also to prevent him going into crisis.
8. A customer who fled domestic violence with only minimal belongings was assisted through NYLAF to receive furniture and white goods for a property they were allocated.
9. I supported a person with learning disabilities to move from residential care in another county to their own home back in their own county. This person had no money and was unable to purchase any furniture. The fund provided a bed, fridge and washing machine. Without this, this person would be unlikely to have saved and bought these things in time and would have found the transition from residential care to their own home much more stressful.