



North Yorkshire Local Assistance Fund Annual Report 2015/16



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Overview

The North Yorkshire Local Assistance Fund (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. 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 and utility reconnection charges.

Applicants are eligible 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 (only one white good) may also be awarded within the same twelve month period.

Applications to the fund are made through authorised agencies (e.g. selected North Yorkshire County Council (NYCC) front line services, registered social landlords, and voluntary organisations). 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.

Autumn 2014 and the run up to the 2015/16 financial year had been one of uncertainty for Local Welfare Provision right across England. The Government had proposed that ring-fenced funding for Local Welfare Provision be incorporated into the existing mainstream government grant each local authority receives. In December 2014 the Government confirmed that this would be the case. With no additional specified funding for the Local Assistance Fund, the decision about whether to fund the NYLAF from savings in other services went to NYCC's Executive in February 2015.

The Executive decided to continue with NYLAF provision but to reduce the NYLAF budget bringing it into line with the notional amount identified by the government. This decision was given careful deliberation by the Executive and balanced between the recognised need for and value of the NYLAF

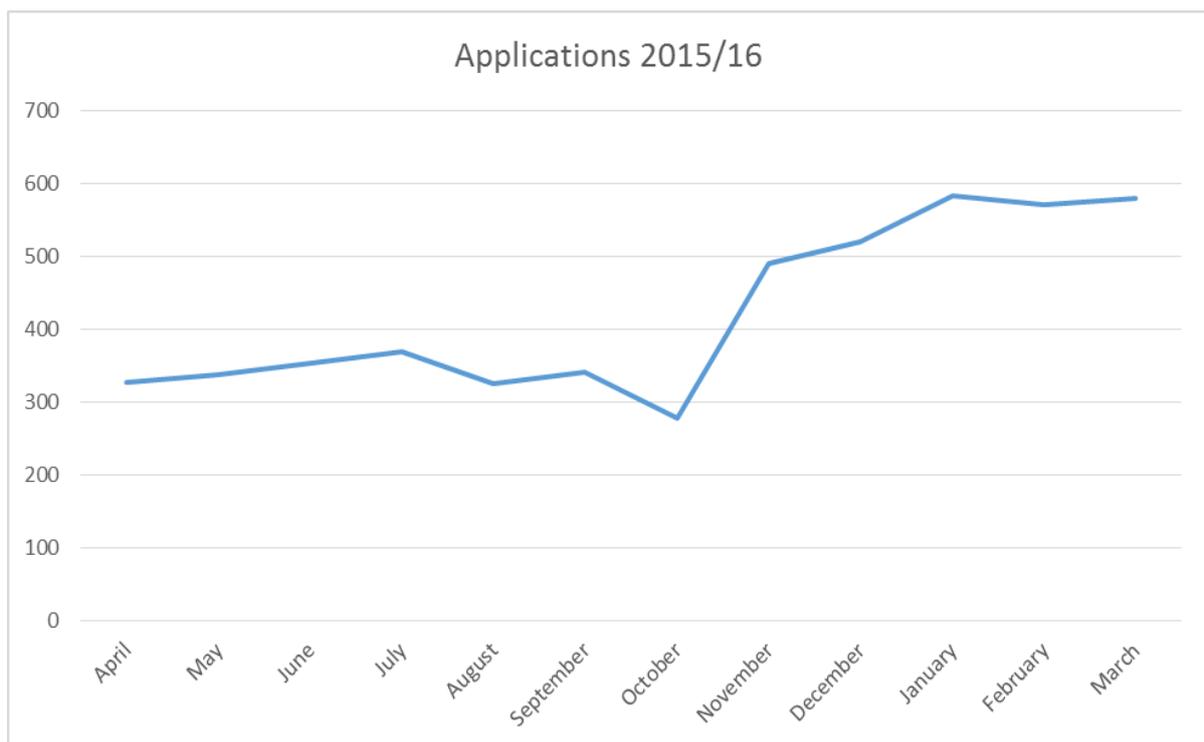
in the county but also recognising that NYCC has been given no funding to be able to continue the operation of the scheme at a time when very significant cuts are being made across NYCC to key services.

With funding secure, NYCC underwent a competitive tender process to re-procure the administration of the NYLAF. The result of this process saw Connect Assist – a Social Enterprise based in South Wales – take over the administration of the NYLAF from Charis Grants LTD in October 2015. Charis Grants LTD had provided an effective and professional service; and were instrumental in ensuring the NYLAF was a success, particularly during the Fund’s inception and have created a good foundation from which the Fund can build.

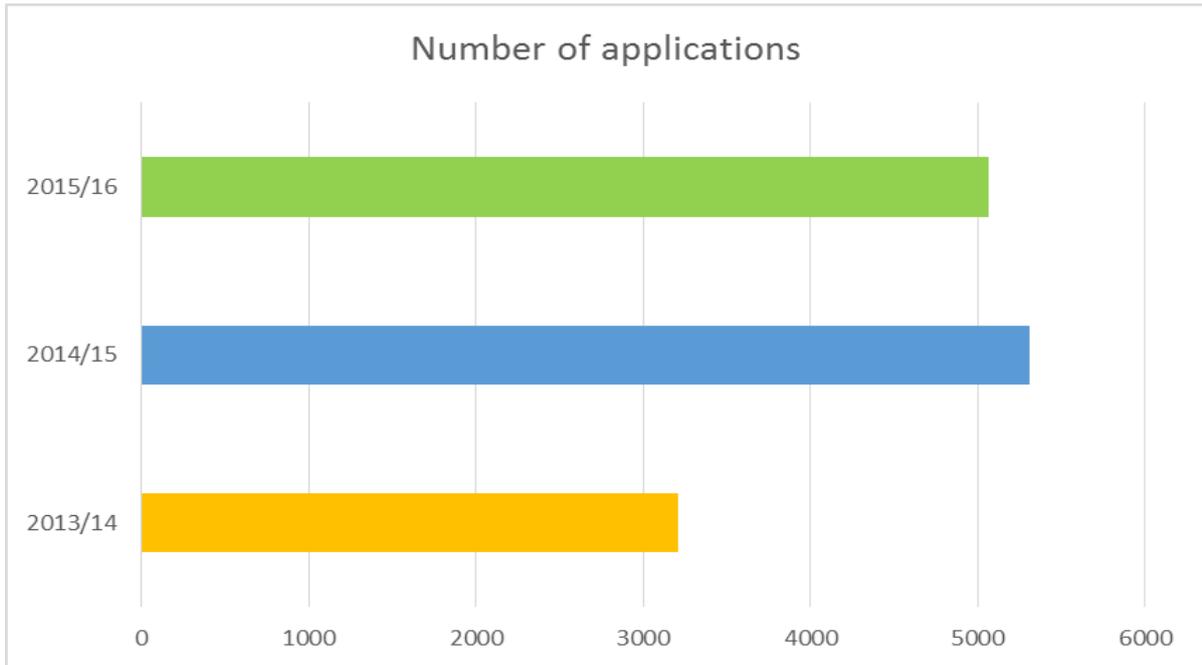
Feedback about Connect Assist has been very positive, particularly commenting on the timeliness of turnaround times for applications and the improved online form with search functionality.

Summary of Activity 2015/16

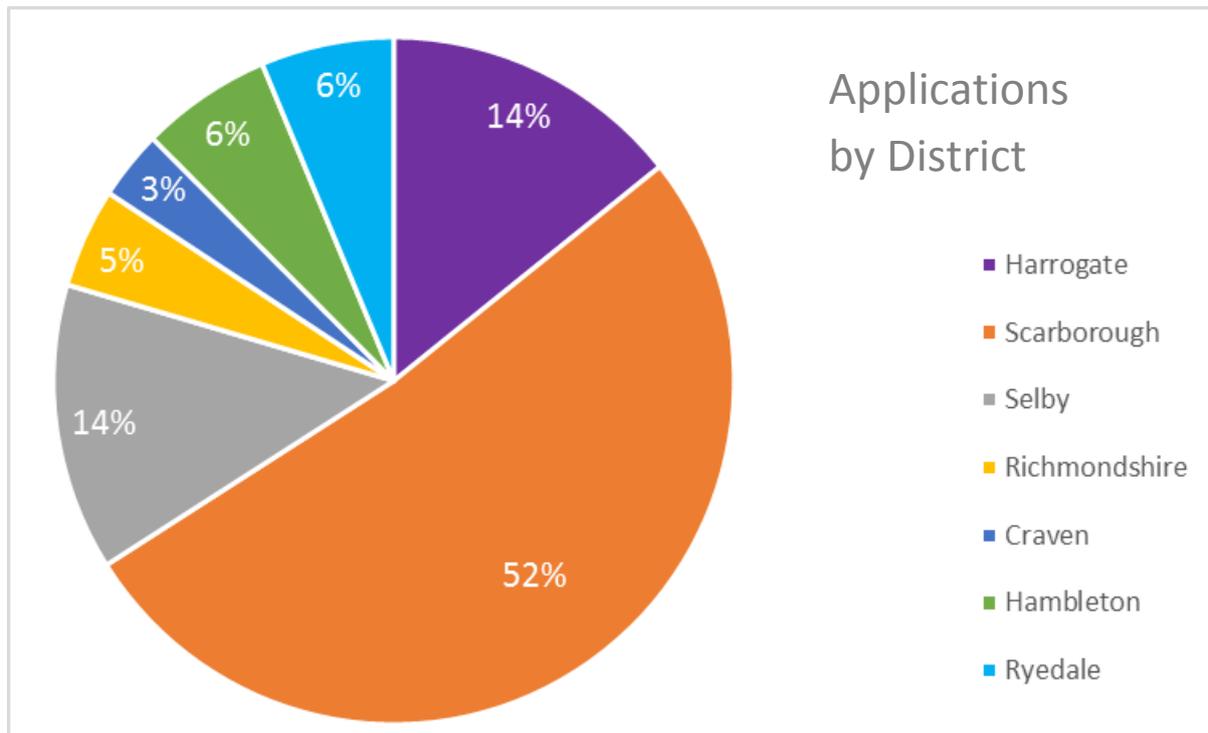
Now at the end of its third year a considerable amount of data is available on the fund, offering greater insight to NYCC and Connect Assist on trends over time. The seven months from April to October saw a period of steady demand, declining slightly after a brief period of higher demand at the end of 2014/15. The final five months of the year from November to March saw consistent high levels of demand for the Fund.



The significant increase was primarily for emergency applications of food and utility top-ups. While an increase in the number of emergency applications over the winter period is expected, one of the most common reasons applicants apply to the NYLAF is when there is a delay in processing a benefits claim, or, in exceptional circumstances when a household is struggling for essentials after a benefits sanction or during an appeal. There has been a number of welfare reforms in recent years and this may be impacting on the number of applications to the NYLAF and might also contribute to the rise.

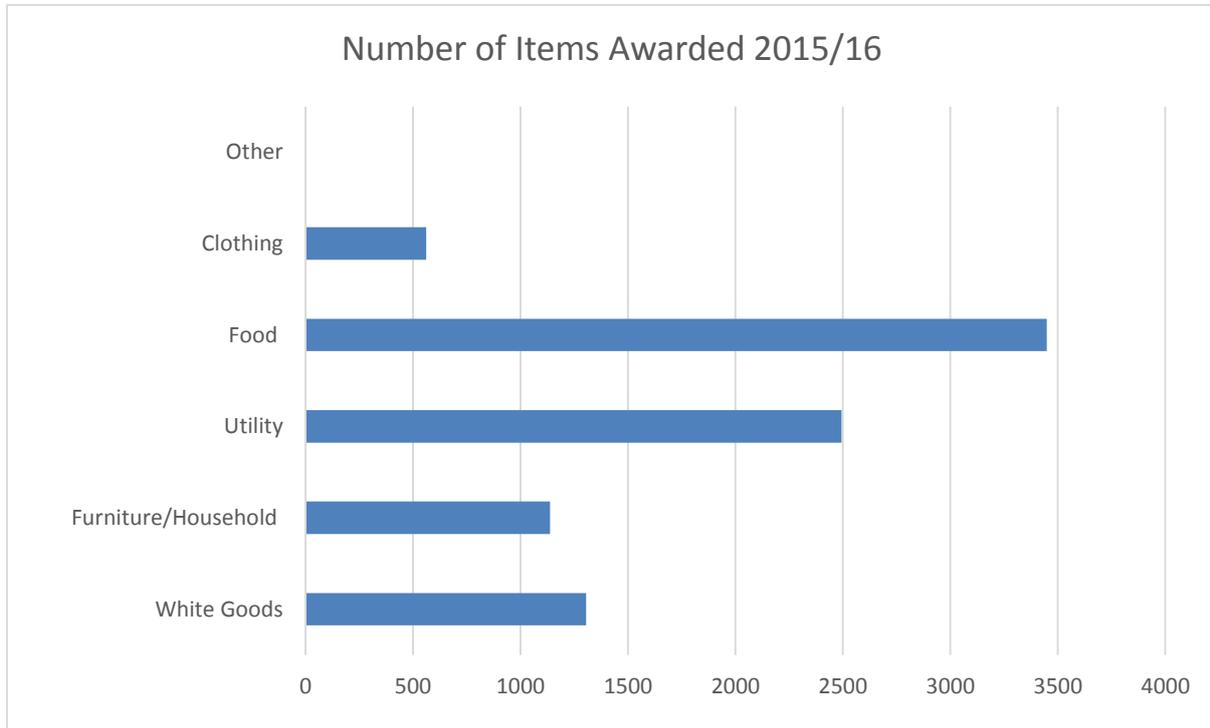


There were 5,067 applications between 1 April 2015 and 31 March 2016. 224 applications were rejected, primarily because the applicant had already had exceeded their entitlement for the year; a weak case had been made in the application, or the application had failed an audit.



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.



Emergency awards of food and then utility top-ups were the two most awarded items from the Fund in 2015/16. There are a number of reasons why this is the case. An increase in requests for these items during the winter months and the possible repercussions of welfare reform has been mentioned previously; applicants who are eligible are entitled to two awards of food and/or utility in any 12 month period whereas an applicant may only apply for three of any other item. And finally emergency applications, where an applicant is eligible, are automatically approved. They are not subject to audit like other items.

Examples of 'Other' items awarded by the Fund in 2015/16 are essential home repairs in exceptional circumstances and specially adapted items awarded for medical reasons.

Partnership Agreement

NYCC are currently designing a short partnership agreement between authorised agents and the Council that will set out what each organisation can expect of the other while working to support vulnerable individuals and families on the NYLAF.

Audited Applications

The NYLAF audits a random sample of non-emergency applications for quality control and fraud prevention purposes. Where an application has been selected for audit the authorised agent will need to submit proof that the applicant meets the eligibility criteria before the application can proceed. Please ensure that these documents are to hand when completing an application in case the application you are completing is pulled up for audit.

If there are going to be any issues with submitting the necessary documentation then please let Connect Assist know as soon as possible at NYCC@connectassist.co.uk.

Enquiries: nylaf@northyorks.gov.uk

Connect Assist: NYCC@connectassist.co.uk

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

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