



# North Yorkshire Local Assistance Fund Annual Report 2016/17



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## Overview

The North Yorkshire Local Assistance Fund (NYLAF) is a service funded and managed by North Yorkshire County Council (NYCC) to provide emergency support for vulnerable adults to move into or remain in the community, and to help families under exceptional pressure to stay together. 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, and utility top-up vouchers.

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 two 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 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, rather than an isolated intervention.

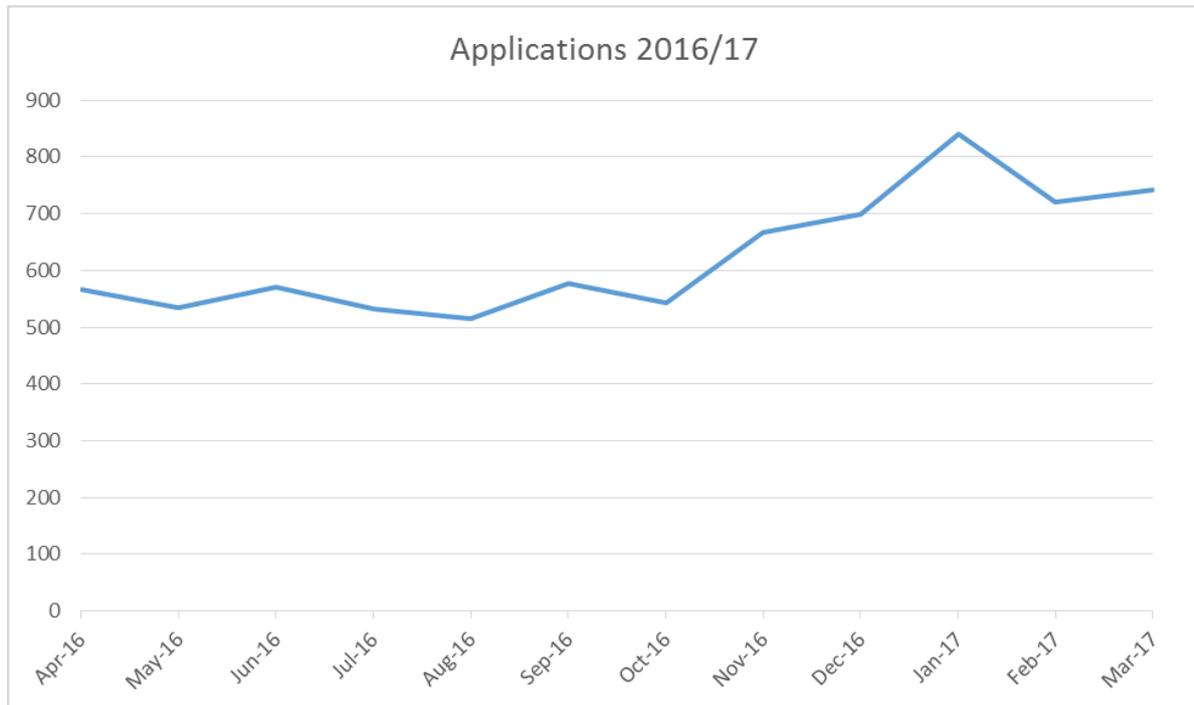
## Summary of Activity 2016/17

2016/17 saw a large rise in the number of applications made to the NYLAF. Comparable trends have been reported by similar funds and by food banks throughout the country, often linked to benefit changes, the rollout of Universal Credit and increases in the cost of living.

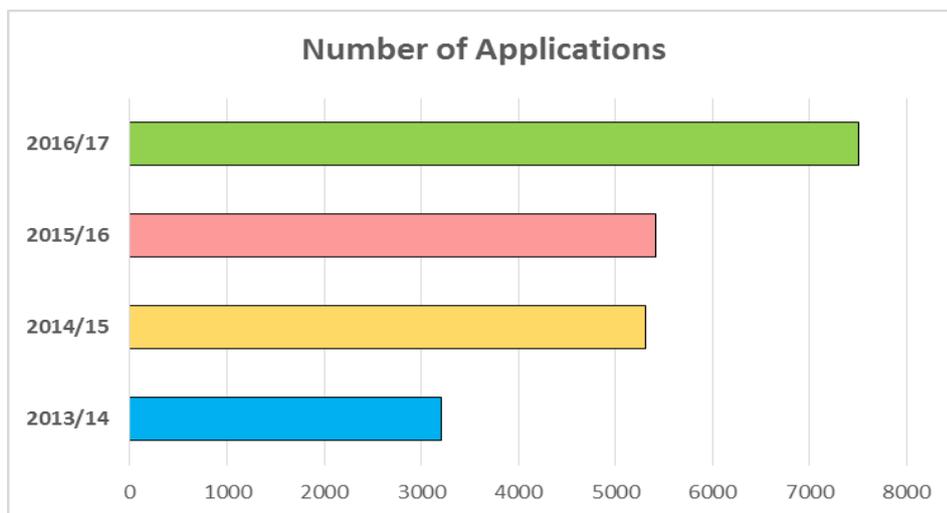
NYCC continues to proactively monitor and adapt the NYLAF to ensure that it can support as many people as possible within fixed budget. Working with Connect Assist Ltd, the administrator of the Fund, operating costs have been significantly reduced and best value sought through managing and changing suppliers. This meant that more money was available to spend on grant awards. The change to the entitlement for non-emergency items (explained in more detail later) from three to two has also enabled more households to be supported within the budget.

The graph below shows the level of demand for the Fund throughout 2016/17 (number of applications per month). The main increase has been in the number of emergency applications for food or utility awards; demand for non-emergency items (e.g. household items and white goods) has remained at roughly the same level for the past three years. Typically there is an increase in the

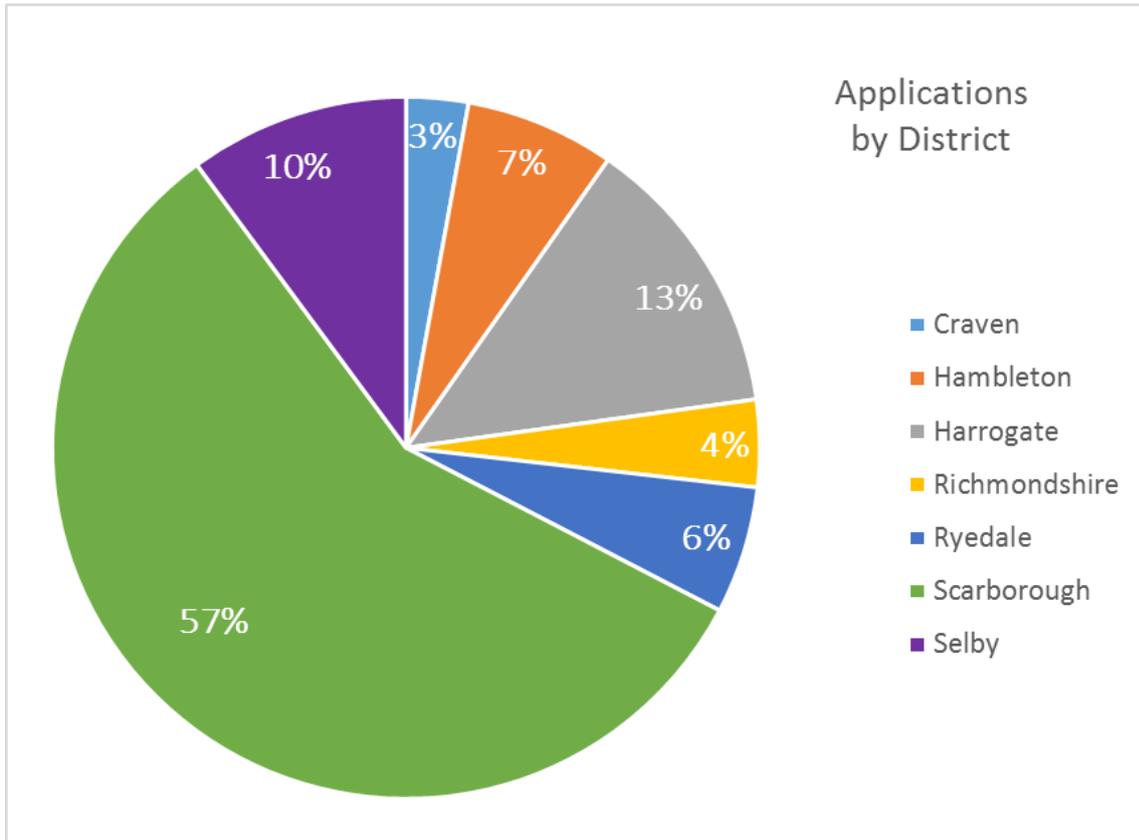
number of requests for food and utility during the winter months and particularly during the holiday time when a number of statutory and voluntary support services are closed for an extended period.



One of the most common reasons applicants apply to the NYLAF for emergency food and/or utility top-ups 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.



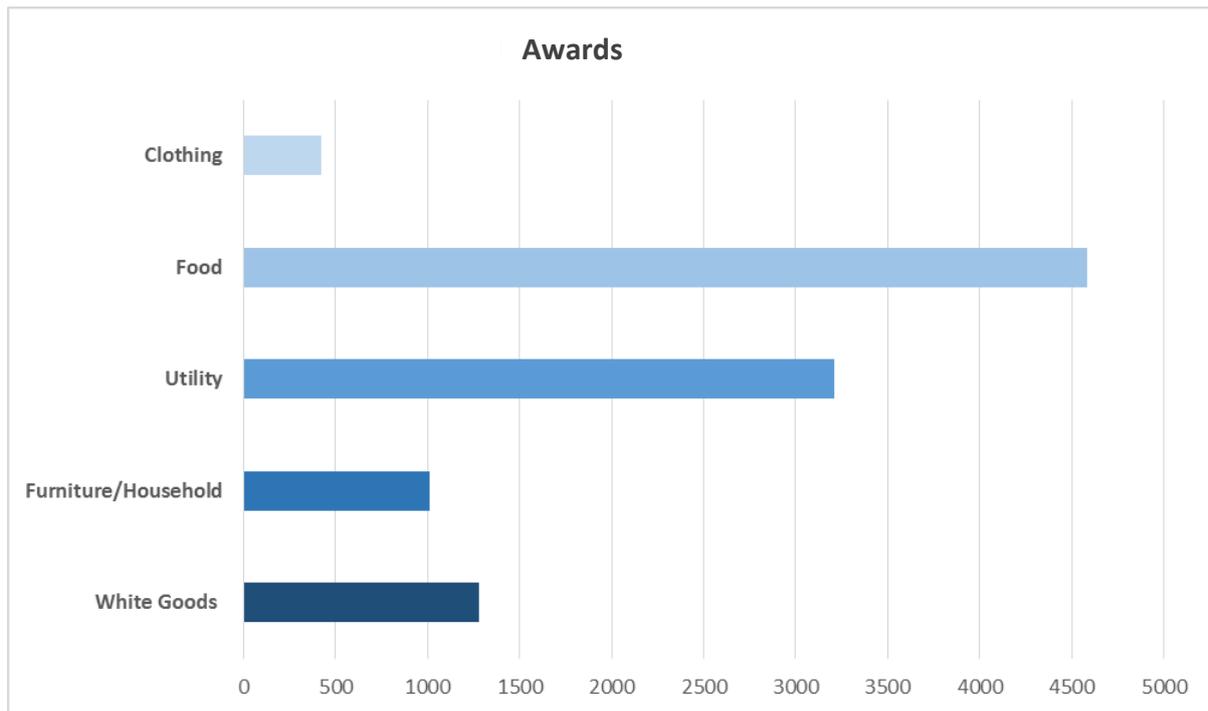
Overall there were 7,508 applications between 1 April 2016 and 31 March 2017. 501 applications were rejected, primarily because the applicant had already had exceeded their entitlement for the year; a weak case had been made in the application, the applicant couldn't be contacted, or the application 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 former DWP 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.

The Fund also has a partnership with a local support centre and food bank (the Rainbow Centre) in Scarborough Town who have strong local links in the town and are able to reach a greater number of people. They deliver the first award of emergency food provision in the town. The Fund is always happy to explore similar ways of working with food banks across the county.

Emergency awards of food and then utility top-ups were the two most awarded items from the Fund in 2016/17. There are a number of reasons why this is the case some of which such as national welfare reforms and an increase of requests in winter have already been mentioned. Eligible households are entitled to two awards of food and/or utility in any 12 month period whereas a household may only apply for two of any other item. Additionally emergency applications, where an applicant is eligible, are automatically approved. They are not subject to audit like other items.



The Fund will consider requests for items of need not available from the standard list of awards. These requests are considered on a case by case basis, have a higher refusal rate and are typically low in number. This year these requests included particular beds for medical needs and removal costs.

The average cost per award was as follows:

- White Good – £215.40
- Furniture, household items – £134.77
- Utility – £36.35
- Food – £31.90
- Clothing – £76.71

### Other Developments in 2016/17

From 1 July 2016 eligible households could only apply for two non-emergency awards (one of which could be a white good) in a 12 month period. This was down from three items previously. Earlier in 2016 a sustained period of increased demand had meant that the Fund was spending over budget. A range of options of ways to reduce spend were presented to Authorised Agents in a consultation. The overwhelming preference of Agents was to lower the number of awards from three to two.

Since this change we have seen spend stabilise while being able to support more applications. Additionally, feedback indicates that this change has not been too detrimental for applicants. Items are prioritised based on the need of the household at the time. Typically, although not always, this has meant that white good items and essential household items such as beds continue to be prioritised while lower cost and more accessible items for households on lower incomes have been deselected. These items can often be purchased from supermarkets or charity shops instead.

At the same time the vulnerability criteria were reviewed to ensure that the thresholds remained accurate and up to date. While no vulnerability groups were added or removed a number were changed.

For the first time the relationship between NYCC and Authorised Agents was set out in a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU). The MoU is a short partnership agreement signed by both parties setting out what each organisation can expect of the other while working to support vulnerable individuals and families through the NYLAF.

This year the Fund also implemented a new process for prospective organisations to apply to become an Authorised Agent. This new process provides greater clarity and more information about what is required. To date we have received a number of new requests from some excellent organisations, services and Council teams who have gone on to become Authorised Agents.

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County Council