



North Yorkshire Local Assistance Fund
Update Bulletin for Agencies
December 2015



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Feedback from the Stakeholder Workshop – 22/10/15

North Yorkshire County Council would like to thank all those who attended the Stakeholder Workshop in October and provided a broad range of feedback on the questions circulated before the event. This update bulletin is an opportunity to keep partners informed of the action that NYCC and Connect Assist already have, or will be taking based on that feedback.

If you would like to see all the feedback that was collated please follow this link:
[Workshop Feedback Update](#)

Please note that the comments below are the actions that have been, or will be, taken. We reviewed all the comments, for some of the feedback provided no action could be taken which is why it might not appear below.

Q1. *Have there been any issues since Connect Assist took over the NYLAF on October 1st? What has improved and what is working well?*

- An email bounce back to confirm that an application has been received was requested and has now been implemented. Connect Assist also try to contact the applicant or agent on the same day where possible.

- Connect Assist have been training more staff and have more people who are able to respond to enquiries either by the phone or email.
- Unfortunately there are a number of suppliers of beds for the Fund, and we are dependent on what the suppliers stock. Having numerous suppliers also makes a standard approach across the County difficult to achieve as someone in Whitby might not be able to receive the same sort of bed that an applicant in Skipton received.
- There were a few I.T. issues that were raised. Support requested had to be selected and then also written out creating duplication, this has now been changed and it only has to be selected. The text has now been shifted in the same question so that agents filling in the application form know before they start to request support that the items should be in order of priority as it was commented that this only became known after completing the question which meant lengthy changes.

Q2. *Have there been any issues for your agency in dealing with new referrals (authorised agencies) or with clients who need to be signposted on (supporting agencies) – particularly in terms of available resources and prioritisation of work?*

- It was noted that Ryedale seemed to be under represented with regards to authorised agencies. NYCC do have a number of teams from Health and Adult Services and Children and Young People's Services working in the District however, it is acknowledged that there is a lack of voluntary or charity organisations, or other teams such as District Council Housing. The Fund is always open to new organisations.

Q3. *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?*

- Elderly people were highlighted as a vulnerable group who may not be well represented by the Fund. NYCC recently established the Living Well Team, focussed on prevention and offering support to individuals and households at an early stage to prevent them needing social care. While anyone aged over 18 can receive support from Living Well it is expected that the majority demographic will be older people. We invited a representative from the Living Well Team to the Workshop and we hope that the Living Well Team will be utilising the Fund in the New Year.

Q4. *To what extent have you been able to offer longer term support to customers who have been referred to you for support from the Fund? What kind of support have you been able to provide?*

- If you are ever unsure if an individual is receiving support from another authorised agency you can ring the Customer Service Centre or email the Local Assistance Fund email and we can let you know.

Q5. *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?*

- A number of valid and reasonable items for inclusion were suggested and each one was discussed at length by the NYLAF Governance Group and the outcome for each item can be found below:
 - While the Group thought there was considerable merit for including **carpets** it was noted that carpet fitting, especially for a number of rooms or a whole house is particularly expensive. Nor could a carpet be taken with an applicant if they moved house. It was appreciated that the quality of landlords varied but it was felt that, especially with issues of safety in a property, the Fund should not be subsidising the responsibilities of the landlord. **Rugs** were considered as a suitable alternative to carpets in that they are comparatively inexpensive and can be transported. Working with Connect Assist, standard and large size rugs are now available from the Fund.
 - It was agreed that **curtains** fell into the same category as carpets and that similar arguments for and against applied. The Group decided not to incorporate curtains on this occasion.
 - The Group agreed that if a family had a need for a **child car seat** they should seek support from their local NYCC Children's Centre who may be able to help.
 - The Governance Group felt that there was a case for **house clearances and deep cleans** yet unfortunately it was unclear how the criteria for who would qualify for these awards would be determined. It was also noted that the cost and demand for this service would push the NYLAF over its monthly budget which would mean the ability of the Fund to help those in need consistently over 12 months would be affected. Again, like carpets, while we acknowledge the quality of landlords will vary we wouldn't want to be subsidising the responsibilities of the landlord who have a duty to ensure that the home is suitable and safe for living.
 - **Emergency travel** was again felt to be too difficult to determine an appropriate criteria as often the definition of what is an emergency is subjective and varied from person to person. Logistically, unfortunately the geography of North Yorkshire means that a large number of taxi companies would need business agreements, unlike a city authority area where one taxi company could be used.
 - After the Workshop further research was done into **water arrears and debt repayments**. There are some national schemes as well as schemes local to specific water companies to help customers to pay off their water arrears. Apart from exceptional circumstances these schemes rarely offer one time lump payments to settle water debts, instead most focus on longer term (12-18 months) repayments to help customers with budgeting and finance. One off payments from the Local Assistance Fund would undermine the ideas behind those schemes and may not resolve a longer term issue a customer may have with budgeting and finance. However, we have since updated our "other forms of support"

leaflet (available on the NYCC website) with more information about these national schemes and where to go for advice.

- The Group acknowledged the concern of agencies that one white good item can be restrictive. Working with Connect Assist applicants will soon be able to apply for a **microwave and fridge/freezer pack** as one white good item, however, this item is only available for applicants who have neither a fridge nor a cooker and we ask agents to be vigilant in this to ensure the Fund can help as many people as possible.
- The Group decided against the idea of more than two emergency vouchers, especially on a case by case basis as deciding eligibility for more than two awards would be overly problematic. Similarly, the idea of the Fund is to link those in need to longer term sources of support, and not creating a culture of dependency on short term quick fixes. Increasing the number of emergency vouchers runs counter to that ideal.
- More than one white good item was rejected as this was previously provided in 2013 but monthly spend far exceeded budget and it was dropped to one white good to help control spend. If this were permitted again the same outcome would be likely. However, it is hoped that creating a microwave and fridge/freezer combo would help to go some way in alleviating this issue.

Q6. *Is there anything that you think we could do to improve the process for you and your customers going forward?*

- We will send out a survey to both agencies and applicants after six months in order to gather appropriate feedback about the time period since Connect Assist began administering the Fund.

Q7. *Is there anything else you wanted to raise; any other issues or comments about either the future of the NYLAF or past experience?*

- Both Aldi and Lidl were approached about vouchers, however, disappointingly neither store run a voucher scheme.

Applicant eligibility

We would like to remind authorised agencies that applicants are only eligible for 2 awards of food and/or utility and 3 other items (only one of which can be a white good item) in any rolling 12 month period.

There is now search functionality within the online application form that can clarify this for you. Please do not submit any further applications where you can see an applicant has already received their entitlement and is no longer eligible. Any further applications submitted will be rejected.

If you are ever unsure if an applicant has entitlement remaining then please contact Connect Assist via email at: NYCC@connectassist.co.uk or phone on: **020 3192 0498**.

Christmas opening hours NYLAF – NYCC and Connect Assist

Please see the table below for the opening times of North Yorkshire County Council's Customer Service Centre and Connect Assist over the holiday period in which NYLAF applications and enquires can be received and dealt with.

Awards will be processed as normal and while we don't expect any significant issues it is important to note that during this busy holiday period there may be delays in the time it takes for items to reach applicants.

There should be no problems with emergency awards for food/utility as these awards can be emailed or texted where necessary, often within the same day.

24 th Dec	25 th Dec	26/27 th Dec	28 th Dec	29 th Dec	30 th Dec	31 st Dec	1 st Jan	2 nd /3 rd Jan	4 th Jan
8am-5:30pm	Closed	Closed	Closed	8am-5:30pm	8am-5:30pm	8am-5:30pm	Closed	Closed	8am-5:30pm

Agency passwords for the online application form

We have had a number of enquiries from authorised agents that they do not know their account password to access the online form, or that they have been locked out of their account.

Staff at North Yorkshire County Council and Connect Assist can only reset accounts, requiring reactivation. Obviously this is not an ideal situation especially where other users are using the account. Resetting the password may then only resolve the situation temporarily until another user using the old password tries to log in and the same problem arises.

We suggest that when setting an account password you inform all other members of your team and users of the account what you have changed the password to. We recommend that you then email that password and the account it is linked to, to nylaf@northyorks.gov.uk so that we can keep the passwords centrally. That way if someone is locked out of an account or has forgotten the password we can help you without resetting your account.

Connect Assist phone number

Please note that Connect Assist's telephone number for agencies has changed. The number you should now ring if you have a query or problem is **020 3192 0498**.

Connect Assist will not accept direct applications over the phone.

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