



North Yorkshire Local Assistance Fund Update bulletin for agencies November 2013



This bulletin provides a summary of key issues and information for authorised agencies and other partners in relation to the North Yorkshire Local Assistance Fund (NYLAF). It is divided into two sections; a general update for all partners and also some technical updates and other issues specifically for authorised agencies.

To go to a particular section within the bulletin, please click on the relevant heading below. Items underlined within the bulletin will also cross-reference to other sections so please hover over these and press Ctrl+click to follow the link.

If you have any queries or feedback about this bulletin or the NYLAF then please contact nylaf@northyorks.gov.uk

General Bulletin

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Utility top-ups introduced

As per the briefing note circulated to all partners on 4th November, we will be including provision for small amounts of utility top-up within the NYLAF for vulnerable customers who urgently need some credit added to their gas or electricity account. This provision will be introduced in two phases. Calls for **first-time utility top-up applicants** may be made to NYCC Customer Services **from Monday 18th November 2013**. We will also be able to process one-off provision of top-up for customers who – as per our current food provision – don't meet a target category but are more broadly vulnerable and who meet our other basic criteria for NYLAF.

Subsequently, **as of 4th December 2013**, changes to the NYLAF online form mean that authorised agencies **will also be able to apply online** then for utility top-up as part of a standard NYLAF application. This **will include applications for second-time applicants for utility top-up**. A flowchart has also been circulated highlighting how the processes for applying for food and utility top-up will work as they have been aligned to work. The briefing note explains in more detail how the utility top-up provision will work and what the entitlement will be. Both the briefing note and the flowchart can be downloaded from www.nypartnerships.org.uk/nylaf

Six-month stakeholder review – 30th September 2013

Thank you to all those agencies who attended one of our workshops as part of the six-month review of the NYLAF. The workshops were well attended by both authorised agencies and other partners who work with vulnerable people, and there was a lot of useful debate and constructive thinking about how the scheme could continue to best meet the needs of vulnerable people. Some general themes which came out of both sessions were:

- There were some early problems experienced by agencies in using or referring customer to the NYLAF but these seem to have been resolved in the main and processes are now working well.
- Agencies are finding the applications process to be much quicker and easier than previous applications to DWP, although a couple of agencies reported difficulties with resourcing the processing of NYLAF applications because of high demand.
- Some further work is needed to help improve communications with agencies and customers. This includes not only clarifying for some larger agencies what their log-in details are for the online form and ensuring that they cascade the information widely to officers, but also clarifying for all agencies what can be provided by the NYLAF and ensuring that regular bulletins continue to be circulated with updates.
- Feedback about the quality of goods supplied and delivery timeframes is generally very good. We need to ensure there is some flexibility in the system for agents/applicants to indicate where there are health needs linked to a requirement for a slightly different item or other requirements surrounding delivery arrangements which Charis or the supplier need to be aware of.

Detailed points arising from both workshop sessions have already been circulated via email to all key partners, along with a copy of the presentation from the day. If you would like to see a copy of any of these documents please email your request to nylaf@northyorks.gov.uk

Key points raised from both sessions were subsequently taken to the NYLAF governance group meeting on 15th October 2013 for further review. As a result, some changes and additions to the scheme have been agreed. They are outlined in brief below and further information is available elsewhere within this bulletin for some of the items by clicking on the relevant links below.

“You said, we did...” - changes and updates to the NYLAF

- We were asked to clarify for all partners the exact items that can be provided via the NYLAF. This list is now available to view at www.northyorks.gov.uk/nylaf . We have also improved the online form for authorised agencies so that a full list can be viewed when starting an application.
- We were asked to provide a contents list of the goods provided within a food parcel and also a baby pack. See “[Baby packs](#)” below, for further information.
- We have also made some changes to our food parcel provision – see “[Changes to emergency food provision](#)”, below.
- We have included **cots** and **pans** within our standard provision.
- Agencies asked for clarity around applications for items required for a whole household; in particular for food, clothing and beds/bedding. We can clarify that these items can be requested for a full household and will only constitute **one of the three items** that any eligible customer would be entitled to apply for.
- We have re-issued the secure password details to the online form for all NYCC Children’s Centres and are in the process of providing a similar reminder to assist the appropriate officers within NYCC Health and Adult Services.
- We were in the process of making some changes to the online form and have made a few more in response to feedback from the workshops. Authorised agencies are recommended to read “[Online form changes planned for December 2013](#)”
- We have made some changes to our NYLAF information leaflet. See [NYLAF leaflet updated](#), below
- Communications. Agencies commented that they would like to receive regular updates about the Fund – please see “[Communications about the NYLAF](#)”, below.

Changes to emergency food provision

We have extended the provision within each of our food parcels to now last each customer for at least five days and have included as standard a tin opener in each parcel. This was in response to feedback about customers who do not have access to this item when they receive their parcel and also older people who may struggle with ring-pull tins. A number of comments were also received from partners about catering for special diets. We have

introduced some flexibility into our parcel provision for those who are diabetic or require a vegetarian pack. Customers with these needs should identify this when applying to the NYLAF for food. A list of contents of the standard adult food pack will be made available at www.nypartnerships.org.uk/nylaf from 4th December, to align with the changes to our online form.

Baby packs

We have been asked to communicate again about the provision of baby packs as part of our broader emergency food provision, as some partners advised that they had been unaware that these were available. We are able to provide a pack for babies from 0 to 12 months, to include disposable nappies, powdered milk (0-12 months) and pureed jars of food (4 months+). Agents/applicants will need to advise the age of the baby when they apply to ensure the most appropriate pack is sent out. Baby packs can be applied for as part of an application for emergency food for a whole household, if required. As described in "You said, we did..." - changes and updates to the NYLAF above, provision for a household will constitute one item from the NYLAF.

Pressures on NYLAF spend for the remainder of 2013/14

As described at the recent stakeholder workshops, after a slow start early on, the NYLAF is now consistently hitting its monthly spend limit. In fact, for the month of October 2013, the NYLAF spent well over its monthly budget limit. We were only able to do this to support a high number of applications from vulnerable customers as there was some surplus funding available as a result of the slightly slow start to the scheme at the beginning of the financial year. However, this surplus will not be available each month and there will be increased pressures on the NYLAF over the winter months with the introduction of utility credit and other changes/additions to our provision, as have been detailed above, along with external pressures such as the introduction of Universal Credit. Charis Grants will therefore need to manage the NYLAF very rigorously to ensure that the most critical cases continue to receive the support they need each month. This will mean that there are likely to be more incidences of applications rejected where there is a slightly weaker case made. It's important for all partners to be aware of this over the course of the next few months. It is also important that the NYLAF continues to focus in this period on providing from a core of items which are absolutely essential to an applicant's needs. Whilst we can provide items from outside of our standard list if there is a very strong case for doing so, this will only be done in exceptional cases. A full list of our standard provision, if helpful, can be downloaded from www.northyorks.gov.uk/nylaf.

Communications about the NYLAF

We will continue to provide regular (roughly quarterly) update bulletins about the NYLAF for all partners and will post the most recent editions of these on to the North Yorkshire Partnerships website at www.nypartnerships.org.uk/nylaf This page is currently used by

authorised agents to access the secure online form and it was felt that this would be a suitable place for posting some wider partner communications. We will continue to retain the NYCC web page ([ww.northyorks.gov.uk/nylaf](http://www.northyorks.gov.uk/nylaf)) as a key place for customer-facing information, such as our leaflet (see also [NYLAF leaflet updated](#)).

Partners advised at the 6-month review that it was helpful to receive some top-level information about applications, awards and spend on the Fund at that event. We will therefore continue to circulate some basic information on a quarterly basis, which will be emailed out to all partners.

We hope these updates will help in meeting partners' communications needs. If there is a need for additional information outside of these quarterly updates then these requests should be made by emailing nylaf@northyorks.gov.uk detailing the information required.

NYLAF leaflet updated

The NYLAF leaflet has been updated to reflect changes in provision (such as utility credit) and is available to download from the NYCC web site at www.northyorks.gov.uk/nylaf . It has also been modified to take on board some of the feedback from the recent stakeholder workshops around making the language around our target categories a bit more 'customer-friendly'. Please do continue to check the web page to download and print any copies of the leaflet in the future as we will continue to amend it as and when changes occur.

Reminder! Deadline for ordering emergency food parcels

If a customer (or agent) rings NYCC Customer Services **before 4pm, Monday to Friday** to request a food parcel then this can be processed and delivered within 24 hours. If a call is received after 4pm then NYCC will still put the call through to Charis to process but Charis cannot guarantee that the parcel will be delivered within the 24-hour timeframe.

New officer on the NYLAF team

The NYCC NYLAF team has recently been joined by Andrew Rhodes, Corporate Project Officer, who will be taking over much of the NYLAF work from Diane Parsons, who is moving on to work on other projects within NYCC. This handover will be complete before the end of this year. Any queries or issues for Andrew should be directed via nylaf@northyorks.gov.uk or by calling 01609 532326.

Issues and information for authorised agencies

Online form changes planned for December 2013

Prior to the stakeholder workshop in September, NYCC were in the process of developing and agreeing some changes with Charis to the online form to respond to feedback and issues arising in the first six months. Most of the issues raised about the online form by authorised agencies at their workshop session were already due to be translated into changes but a few others were also taken on board and have been incorporated into this round of changes. Below are further details about some of the key changes to be made. These will be 'live' on the system by around the 4th December 2013.

- Following feedback at the workshops, agents will now also be able to specify contact details for a nominated carer in Section 2 (authorised agent details), where this person needs to be involved in arranging a delivery, rather than the applying agent.
- Section 4 (vulnerability of the applicant) - there have been a few important changes made to some of the thresholds to be used by agents in identifying vulnerability of a client and eligibility for NYLAF. These include broadening out the category for "recently released from prison" to also include those supervised on Community Order and who are supervised by the Probation Trust or Foundation on one of their programmes.
- Section 7 (items requested) will see a large number of changes, not least to the drop-down field requests for items because we have now added some new things in to the provision, such as utility credit. There will also be a dedicated space for each item request to indicate where there may be linked health issues or other requirements which may mean that a slightly different specification of item is required. In addition, there will be new guidance for agents and applicants about applying for larger household goods, including things to check to ensure that a successful delivery is achieved.
- Section 8 (supporting statement) – there will be more space available for supporting text.
- There will be better links between the NYLAF and Charis's "shared programme of giving". This means that on completing the NYLAF form, agents will also have the opportunity to indicate if their client has utility debt issues and may require further support from one of the charitable trusts that Charis works with.

Information-sharing protocol

We are currently working on developing an information-sharing protocol to enable authorised agencies to contact Charis Grants to find out whether a client who is eligible for support from the NYLAF has made an application within the last 12 months and as such whether there is any entitlement remaining. This will be particularly valuable once clients are potentially also applying for food and/or utility top-up and then subsequently require other items from the NYLAF. This should also help in a multi-agency context for clients

receiving support from various authorised agencies. A draft of the protocol will be circulated to all authorised agencies in December for comments and/or consent. Once consent is in place, the protocol will be active by the New Year.

Printing and saving on the online form

A few issues and queries have been raised by authorised agencies about saving and printing out a copy of the completed online NYLAF form; in particular around losing information from the supporting statement section if the 'back' button has mistakenly been used during typing, for example.

The online form auto-saves once each section is completed. If you exit the form mid-way through completing section 8 (supporting statement), the form will automatically take you to the last completed section, in this case section 7. **It is therefore strongly recommended that agents draft and save their statement in another format (such as Word) and then copy and paste the text** into the boxes on section 8 to ensure that the information is not lost if any error occurs.

If an application needs to be left part way through completion (for example to go to a meeting), then the agent can log off from the system and, when logging in again, can go to the link for "finish an incomplete application" and select the form that had been started and continue the process. Again, this will take the agent to the last completed section.

To print a copy of the form for your records once completed, you will need to click on "print application" on the right-hand side of the form and this will ensure a printable version.

Making a case for your client

Recent feedback from our supplier, Charis, suggests that there have been some applications made recently whereby very little information was provided within the supporting statement (section 8) or to indicate other support that the client may have explored before applying to the NYLAF (section 4). It will be even more important in the coming months for each support worker to ensure that a clear and supported case is documented for their client when submitting an application to the NYLAF. As described previously, increased pressure on the Fund in the remainder of this financial year means that there is more potential for slightly weaker cases being rejected than has been necessary previously, so it's important to make sure that you have provided all relevant information about your client's circumstances, needs and other forms of support that you can when applying.

Enquiries: nylaf@northyorks.gov.uk

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

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