



North Yorkshire Local Assistance Fund
Update bulletin for agencies
November 2014



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).

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

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Stakeholder review - 1st October 2014

We would like to thank everyone for attending the stakeholder workshop in October. It was a very informative session for us in getting your feedback on the NYLAF and your initial views about how the NYLAF could evolve in 2015/16 if significant funding reductions have to be made as a result of government cuts to funding for local welfare provision. The slides used at the session and a full note of the issues raised have now been circulated to all stakeholders. If you haven't received these and would like a copy then please email nylaf@northyorks.gov.uk.

One issue raised was around whether or not the NYLAF would be able to provide Co-op vouchers as it was felt that the current provision gives a rather limited choice for those in rural areas. We are currently exploring this through Charis Grants and will update on any progress in due course.

With the gap left by North Yorkshire Credit Union, we are looking for information about credit unions operating within North Yorkshire, so that we can potentially help those people who may be in need of long term financial advice and support. If you know of any credit unions who may be operating within North Yorkshire then please do email us.

Handling referrals to the NYLAF / signposting to authorised agencies

Another particular issue that arose at the workshop was that there was still some confusion surrounding NYLAF referrals and how these should be managed. This confusion has, at times, led to inappropriate inter-agency referrals being made, particularly where a signposting agency has made an assumption about who the local authorised agencies may be and has directed the customer straight to another agency. The point to stress here is about **how vital it is that any new customers and referrals go through North Yorkshire County Council's Customer Service Centre**, so that this is the first point of contact for all referrals. This is really important because our customer service advisors who deal with the NYLAF are trained to identify when an individual may be eligible for the Fund.

Each customer who calls has a detailed conversation with an advisor who not only ascertains whether the individual meets the NYLAF's basic criteria but also whether there is an underlying issue or need which aligns them to one of our vulnerability categories. There is a threshold or definition for each of these categories and it's important that both the vulnerability and basic criteria are fulfilled. If NYCC Customer Services are satisfied from their conversation that this is the case, then the individual is provided with details of relevant authorised agencies in their area that may be able to offer broader support, including an application to the NYLAF. In some cases, the customer will have a choice of authorised agencies in their area and we leave it with the customer to determine whether to follow up on this support and which agency they will attend.

We have been asked on a number of occasions if we could publish a list of authorised agencies for the NYLAF. We have not done this to avoid any inappropriate referrals being made in case, for example, the full criteria are not checked before the individual is signposted on. Also, a few of the authorised agencies working with us are very small and have scant resources so part of the reason for requesting that all contact is directed through NYCC Customer Services is to help our agencies to manage their capacity, as well as ensuring that customers with a critical need receive an effective service. If any customers cannot pay for the full call, then Customer Services will happily take some contact details and call back when convenient. An additional benefit of directing customers through Customer Services is that if we identify that there is actually an urgent need for food and/or utility top-up and it is the customer's first application, then we can pass details straight through to Charis to process directly for the customer.

All customers should call NYCC Customer Services in the first instance on **0845 8 72 73 74**. Lines are open Monday to Friday, 8am to 5:30pm. The NYLAF customer leaflet contains further details about cut-off times for requesting food and utility top-ups, to ensure they reach the customer as soon as possible. See www.northyorks.gov.uk/nylaf

Please note that **this guidance only relates to customers who are new to the NYLAF**. If an authorised agency is already working with a client that they feel would be eligible for support from the NYLAF then they **do not need to go via Customer Services**, as long as they are satisfied that they have checked against all key criteria and seen documentation to evidence the basic criteria. All criteria are detailed in the customer leaflet, as above.

Making contact with the NYLAF team and Charis Grants

As all partners will be aware, NYCC has a dedicated NYLAF email account – nylaf@northyorks.gov.uk – to be used by agencies who have queries about the Fund, for example concerning system or policy issues. There have been a number of recent incidents whereby customers appear to have been provided with the NYLAF email address and are using this to request support directly from us. Often these communications also come with little or no detail about the customer or their contact details. This has resulted in delays in picking up the request effectively and routing the customer through the appropriate channels. Whilst this email account is checked fairly regularly, it is not designed to be used by customers seeking support and we would like to reiterate that all new customers should contact NYCC Customer Services on **0845 8 72 73 74**. If email contact is preferred then customers seeking further information about the NYLAF may use the Customer Services email account at customer.services@northyorks.gov.uk.

In a similar vein we do occasionally copy direct dial contact numbers or email addresses for Charis Grants to our authorised agencies where there has been a difficult issue to resolve. However, **we would like to request that authorised agencies do not pass these details on**

to potential NYLAF customers to use to seek support. We have had a few incidents recently where new customers have used these details to try to apply rather than first speaking to NYCC Customer Services. Charis Grants are not sufficiently resourced to take NYLAF calls directly from the public and are not contracted to do this, except in cases where an urgent food or utility provision needs to be made.

Thank you in advance for your co-operation in these matters.

Future funding for the NYLAF - update

Partners will be aware that from 2015/16, the government has proposed that funding for local welfare provision be incorporated into the mainstream government that each local authority receives. Essentially, this move away from providing 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. The government has been challenged on this decision through a process of judicial review, based on issues such as a lack of engagement with stakeholders and absence of an equality impact assessment around the impact that such a funding decision would make. The government has been ordered to review their decision by the High Court. This does not mean that they are forced to change their decision but to undertake the process again with the proper measures in place.

As such, there have been a few pieces of work underway from central government recently, to help inform future decision-making. The Department for Work and Pensions has been engaging with local authorities about their existing schemes, to understand how they have developed and how much of the funding has been spent. The results of this review were published recently and can be found at <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/local-welfare-provision-review>. Additionally, a central government consultation has been underway to seek views from local authorities about options for funding for 2015/16. More information is available at <https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/local-welfare-provision-in-2015-to-2016>. NYCC has drafted a response to this, which we will circulate shortly to NYLAF partners for your information. The outcome of the government's review into funding for local welfare schemes should be announced in December 2014, around the same time as the local government settlement.

Meanwhile, on a local level, NYCC has to initiate its own decision-making process about future funding. We have already started to engage with NYLAF stakeholders to get your views on this, via our stakeholder workshop and the recent electronic survey (see also NYLAF case studies, below). We have submitted reports about the NYLAF and potential funding options to two of the NYCC Scrutiny Committees during October 2014 (Care and Independence and Young People). These met with a very positive response and the views expressed will be put forward as part of a final report to the NYCC Executive on 3rd February

2015, where a decision will need to be made about the continuation of the NYLAF next year and the degree to which it could be funded by NYCC. We will of course keep partners updated as things develop.

NYLAF case studies

Many thanks to those partners who responded to the recent NYLAF survey about options for the development of the Fund in 2015/16. We had a really good response to this and will ensure that a summary of the views expressed is included in the report to the NYCC Executive in February 2015. Of particular use to us are case studies of how the NYLAF has helped customers in a critical situation to move on. If any partners would like to contribute these then please send (anonymised) details of the case to nylaf@northyorks.gov.uk

A reminder about the information-sharing protocol

We would just like to take this opportunity to remind you about the information-sharing protocol set up earlier on this year. The information-sharing protocol enables 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 is hoped to be particularly useful in instances where a client is receiving support from various agencies. Please be aware this is an optional procedure and is not to be used for every client; only for those who you think may have already applied to the NYLAF.

If you would like to sign up to benefit from this information sharing protocol please email nylaf@northyorks.gov.uk. We will provide you with a copy of the protocol for you to review. If you are happy to sign up then we would be grateful to receive your agency name (and a named agency contact if applicable) and a contact telephone number. This number will be the only one used by Charis Grants in contacting you to reply to your request for client information. As such, a designated mobile or direct dial number is preferable to an agency-wide/reception number. Please note that **any agency seeking information about a potential prior application to the NYLAF must have first signed up to our information-sharing protocol.**

Changes to the NYLAF team

The NYLAF team has recently been joined by Mark Taylor, Corporate Project Officer, who will be taking over much of the NYLAF work from Diane Parsons in the New Year. Mark can be contacted via nylaf@northyorks.gov.uk or by calling 01609 533914. Additionally, Helen Gray will be moving on from NYCC Customer Services in the New Year to take up another role, so it's important that any policy issues or NYLAF queries continue to be emailed to the NYLAF email account as above, to ensure that another member of the team picks up the issue quickly.

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