



North
Yorkshire County Council

North Yorkshire Local Assistance Fund



What is it?

The North Yorkshire Local Assistance Fund ("the Fund") provides support for vulnerable adults to move into or remain in the community, and for families under exceptional pressure to stay together.

Awards are made in the form of goods, not cash. Items requested must be essential and critical to your needs or those of your family. They include essential items of household furniture and equipment, beds and bedding, food vouchers, clothing vouchers, utility top-ups, utility reconnection charges and essential home repairs.

Can I apply?

You can apply if:

1. you are over 16 years old; **and**
2. you live in or are moving to North Yorkshire (including if you are leaving an institution and resettling in North Yorkshire); **and**
3. you are in receipt of specific means-tested benefits or you have a household income below the government's 'low income threshold' (for 2013/14 this is £15,910) and have less than £1,000 in capital; **and**
4. you have a need that cannot be met from other forms of support; **and**
5. you fall into one or more of the following categories:
 - Homeless
 - Learning / physical disabilities
 - Mental health problems

- Recently released from prison / supervised on Community Order
- Victim of domestic abuse
- Carer
- Drugs or alcohol dependent
- Couples and single parents with children and people caring for children, who are under exceptional pressure ('Exceptional pressure' may be the result of acute domestic difficulties. An award under this category would normally be to help members of a family to stay together).

If you have an urgent need for food or a utility top-up (that is, credit added to your gas or electricity account) but do not strictly fall within one of our categories above, then we may be able to provide a one-off food voucher and/or a utility top-up (see also "How do I apply for food and/or utility top-up?" below).

Each case will be looked at individually and awards depend on funds available. Support will be given to those most in need.



How can I apply?

You will need to contact North Yorkshire County Council's Customer Services Centre on **0845 8 72 73 74** to talk about your circumstances and what support you feel you need.

Lines are open Monday to Friday from 8am to 5:30pm.

If you have an urgent need for support, the County Council will put you in contact with an organisation in your local area who will want to discuss your needs with you a bit more and talk about the kind of support that they may be able to help you access. This may include the agency completing an online application for the Fund for you, if you are eligible for assistance.

Can I apply myself, without seeing another agency?

In exceptional circumstances, we can help individuals who need to make their own application, without the need for them to attend another agency in their area. For example, this might be because:

- the local agency is unable to urgently get access to the internet;
- there is an access issue and the individual simply can't get to the local agency; or
- there isn't an agency who has access to the online application form in that area.

This process can be slightly slower though, as individuals will need to make

sure they send all the documentary evidence required to support their application (see the criteria in "Can I apply?", above). Online applications through an agency are preferred, to make sure we get assistance urgently to people who need it.

If an individual application is needed, then please call NYCC Customer Services on **0845 8 72 73 74**.

How often can I apply?

You will only be able to apply for a maximum of three items in any rolling 12 month period, unless your circumstances change, and this can be demonstrated to the agency that is helping you to apply.

The exception to this rule is for people who have an urgent need purely for food or utility top-up and who are eligible for support from the Fund. If you need a food voucher or a utility top-up, you will be able to apply to the Fund for both of these, if needed, up to two occasions within 12 months. You will also be able to submit an additional application that year for other items from the Fund, such as household goods or clothing, up to a maximum of three items.

Additionally, if you meet all of our basic criteria around age, residency and income and have an urgent need for food or utility top-up but do not strictly fall within one of our categories at point 5 above, then you may still be able to apply for a one-off food voucher or a

one-off utility top-up (see “How do I apply for food?” below). This exception is only made for food vouchers and utility top-ups from the Fund.

How do I apply for food and/or utility top-up?

You will need to contact NYCC Customer Services (**0845 8 72 73 74**) to ask about any kind of support from the Fund, including food and utility top-up. You can call us between 8am and 5:30pm, Monday to Friday.

When you call for the first time to ask for either food or utility top-up, Customer Services will obtain your details and ask you some questions to identify whether you meet all of the key eligibility criteria for the Fund. If you do then we will put you through to the company who process our applications. If you cannot pay for the full call, we will take a number from you and ask the company to get in touch with you urgently. They will speak to you to ask you a few more questions about your circumstances, but you will not need to visit an agency in your area, nor will you be asked to send evidence of your circumstances. The application will be automatically approved and, depending on your application, either a food voucher will be sent out to you directly or a PayPoint voucher will be issued to you via email, text or post, for you to take to a PayPoint outlet to scan and credit your energy account. For more information about how this process works, please see “How does utility top-up work?”, below.

If you'd like to apply for food or utility top-up a second time within twelve months, you will need to contact NYCC Customer Services again, but this time we will ask you to make contact with another agency in your area as you may have a need for longer term support. This will involve you providing some documentary evidence of your circumstances to the agency that helps you to apply.

Food vouchers are credited with enough money to enable you to purchase enough food to last for at least five days. The value of the voucher is enough to buy a healthy diet and it is hoped this will be spent on a mixture of fresh and preserved foods. We guarantee that a voucher will be delivered to you within 24 hours, if your call is received before 11:30am, Monday to Friday. We cannot guarantee to get a food voucher to you within a shorter period of time so if your need is urgent then you may need to get support from another agency. NYCC Customer Services may be able to help with information about other places which provide food in your area.

How does utility top-up work?

Once your application for utility top-up has been approved (either by phone, for the first application, or via an online application through an agent for the second application), you will be sent a pre-credited voucher or code with a set amount to help top up your energy supply. You will be able to receive the voucher by post or email. You will be

able to specify how you would like to receive your voucher or code when you apply. Vouchers will need to be taken to any PayPoint outlet, such as a local newsagent, along with your gas prepayment card or electricity key. Outlets offering the PayPoint service can be identified with the PayPoint logo in the window. Once the voucher barcode has been scanned against your card or key, this will automatically credit your account with one of the amounts below.

- Individual - £28
- Family (more than one adult in the household) - £45

You will not be required to provide identification to the PayPoint merchant and as such it is important that you make sure that we know what is the best way of sending the voucher on to you. Repeat vouchers cannot be provided in the event that you mislay your voucher. Each voucher will only work once and, once redeemed, cannot be used again.

In circumstances where a customer only has access to a coin meter or requires other fuel such as coal, it may be possible to provide utility top-up in the form of a voucher which can be redeemed for cash at a PayPoint outlet. Customers requiring a voucher for a coin meter or other fuel must indicate this to NYCC Customer Services or to the referring agent when requesting support.

Please note that where a standard voucher is issued by us for direct top up of gas or electricity accounts, these cannot be exchanged for cash and the PayPoint merchant will be unable to provide you with a cash alternative.

If you desire a utility top-up voucher to be sent to you in the post we guarantee a next day delivery providing your call is received before 1:45pm, Monday to Friday. If you desire a utility top-up voucher to be issued by email we can guarantee the voucher will be issued within 24 hours providing your call is received before 3:45pm, Monday to Friday. Unfortunately we cannot guarantee to help you within a shorter period of time.

Please note that utility top-up vouchers will expire after a month of the date they were issued.

Can I still get some support if I don't meet all of the criteria?

If you do not strictly fall within one of our categories (see "Can I apply" on page 1) but meet our other criteria and have an urgent need for food or utility top-up which cannot be met through other forms of support, then we may be able to issue a food voucher and/or utility top-up to you on a one-off basis. To apply for this, you will need to contact NYCC Customer Services in the usual way to discuss your circumstances. These applications will be processed in the same way as other first-time applications for food or utility top-up from the Fund.

I don't have money to pay for a call to NYCC Customer Services - how do I get in touch?

You can go to any NYCC Library and Information Centre in North Yorkshire and ask them to put you through to NYCC Customer Services. Alternatively, if you call the Customer Services Centre and give a phone number that we can contact you on then we will call you back directly so that you are not charged for the full call.

What if I apply to the Fund for assistance and I am not happy with the decision?

You can ask for the decision to be looked at again. Details about how to get the decision reviewed will be provided in the response to your application.



Where can I get urgent help if my application is not successful or if I am not eligible?

Information will be available for those who are not eligible for the Fund or not successful with their application to get other forms of support elsewhere in the county.

Where can I get help with other costs that aren't included within the Fund?

The Department for Work and Pensions are responsible for providing a number of payments and advances for those who meet the eligibility criteria. These include:

- Funeral Payments
- Sure Start Maternity Grants
- Winter Fuel and Cold Weather Payments
- Short-term Benefit Advances
- Budgeting Advances

For further information please speak to your local JobCentre Plus office.

Contact us

North Yorkshire County Council, County Hall, Northallerton, North Yorkshire, DL7 8AD

Our Customer Service Centre is open Monday to Friday 8.00am - 5.30pm (closed weekends and bank holidays).

Tel: **0845 8727374** email: **customer.services@northyorks.gov.uk**

Or visit our website at: **www.northyorks.gov.uk**

If you would like this information in another language or format such as Braille, large print or audio, please ask us.

Tel: 01609 532917 Email: communications@northyorks.gov.uk

