

Jail for mum in £20K fraud

A BENEFIT fraudster wept in court as she was jailed for stealing more than £20,000 of public money over a period of two years.

Matia Begum, aged 35, of Barn Owl Close, East Hunsbury, admitted falsely claiming income support amounting to £19,600 and council tax worth almost £2,500.

At Northampton Magistrates Court yesterday, her solicitors said the mother-of-four had been forced to claim the benefits to care for her young children after her husband left the marital home.

John Weaver, defending, said Begum had suffered "religious and cultural difficulties" and her husband, who she met through an arranged marriage, had given no indication of whether or not he would return home when he first left in 2005.

He added: "She has never been in trouble before, but clearly she is in a substantial amount of trouble now."

He appealed for magistrates to consider the fact that Begum cared for four children between the ages of two and 14.

But Russell Eaton, prosecuting on behalf of the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP), said the case was aggravated by the fact the deception had begun in late 2005 and only ended in October 2007.

He added Begum's husband, whom she claimed had moved back to Bangladesh, was actually working as a Hackney carriage driver in Northampton and had been spotted parking his car outside her home on more than 20 occasions during that period.

He was also present in the town to register the birth of their youngest son in 2006.

Presiding magistrate Brian Gentry sentenced Begum to 20 weeks in jail, adding: "The reason we feel we have no option is because of the seriousness of the offence."