

# Benefit cheat loses jail appeal

A BENEFIT fraudster who was jailed for claiming £20,000 of benefits has had her appeal against her sentence dismissed.

Matia Begum, aged 35, was sentenced to 20 weeks' imprisonment earlier this month after she pleaded guilty to benefit fraud, and admitted falsely claiming income support worth £19,600 and council tax relief worth almost £2,500.

The mother-of-four, of Barn Owl Close, East Hunsbury, claimed Government assistance over a two-year period, while maintain-

ing she was a single mother who had been abandoned by her husband.

At a hearing earlier this month, her solicitor alleged she 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 as to 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.

However, the prosecution by 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.

The court also heard 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.

Sitting with two magistrates at Northampton Crown Court yesterday, Judge Ian Alexander QC told Begum it had been "a hopeless" appeal.

He added: "If anything, it was a generous sentence from the magistrates' court."