

# COVID-19 UPDATE FROM CITIZENS ADVICE BRENT – 18 AUGUST 2021

## Immigration update

### Resettlement scheme for Afghan nationals

The government has released a fact sheet on [UK support to resettle Afghan nationals](#). You may get queries - possibly from relatives in the UK - about the scheme and how it will continue to operate. One change to the system after recent events is that people can apply from outside Afghanistan. There has also been an [announcement](#) that a further 20,000 refugees will be resettled over 5 years. No details of the plan have yet been announced other than that it will prioritise those most in need - in particular women and girls and minority groups.

Information on how to apply is expected soon.

## Family update

### Move to digital only divorces

HM Courts and Tribunals Service (HMCTS) has said that from Monday 13 September [all legal representatives in divorce cases must make divorce applications online](#), instead of using a paper form. At present, unrepresented parties can [apply for a divorce online on GOV.UK](#) or via the D8 paper court form method. The change will mean that if the applicant is legally represented, the divorce will always be started online. HMCTS have previously published a guide on [how unrepresented respondents can reply to an online divorce](#).

These changes will only apply to divorce applications. Applications for dissolution of a civil partnership, judicial separation or nullity should still be made on a paper form.

You should advise a client who wants to apply for a divorce to do so online as, particularly at the present time, this will be a quicker method.

## Benefits update

### Post Office card account users

The Post Office card account contract comes to an end in November 2021. Current users who are unable to provide a bank, building society or credit union account will be moved to the voucher-based Payment Exception Service from the end of August 2021. This provides access to payments via the PayPoint network. From the end of August 2021, these payments can also be accessed via the Post Office. The [DWP has written to claimants](#) with card accounts to request alternative account details.

### Council tax collections - best practice guidance for local authorities

On 16 August, the Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government (MHCLG) published [best practice guidance for collecting council tax](#).

The guidance shares good ideas but is largely not prescriptive. There are some recommendations. Local authorities (LAs) should:

- work with debt advisers at any point in the process and have a single contact point
- design communications to be engaging and tailored
- consider waiving or reducing liability order fees in some cases
- consider other debts before applying for an attachment of earnings order
- use enforcement agents considerately and only when other methods are not available
- recognise enforcement agents act for the LA and that the LA is responsible for their conduct

The guidance gives many useful examples of good practice with an emphasis on cross-agency working and Brent Council addresses these in their Ethical Debt Recovery Policy.