

January 2010

An update on the recently launched section 4 payment cards, otherwise known as the Azure Card

Contact Marie-Anne Fishwick by phone or email if you would like to discuss Azure Cards further:

[Marie-Anne@asaproject.org](mailto:Marie-Anne@asaproject.org)

Contact ASAP

[office@asaproject.org.uk](mailto:office@asaproject.org.uk)

[advice@asaproject.org.uk](mailto:advice@asaproject.org.uk)

**18 Barclay Road**

**Croydon**

**CR0 1JN**

**Tel: 020 8686 1888**

**Fax: 020 8686 1899**

**Advice Line: 0845 603 3884**

[www.asaproject.org](http://www.asaproject.org)

## Azure Cards Update

After a delay of many weeks, the UKBA has launched the Section 4 payment cards, otherwise known as the Azure Card. Their roll out is progressive and started in Glasgow on 30<sup>th</sup> November 09.

Further roll out dates are:

- 7<sup>th</sup> December 2009 for London, the South East and South West of England, and Wales
- 4<sup>th</sup> January 2010 for the North West of England
- 18<sup>th</sup> January 2010 for the North East, Yorkshire and Humberside
- 1<sup>st</sup> February 2010 for West and East Midlands and the East of England.

The UKBA organised a series of meetings with local stakeholders in each of the regions. ASAP attended the London-based one on 23<sup>rd</sup> November 2009 which was a good opportunity to ask questions and raise concerns.

### What is the Azure Card, how does it work?

The Azure Card replaces the supermarket vouchers previously given to people on Section 4 support. There is only one card per family, which will be distributed by the accommodation providers and will bear the name of the main applicant for support. The card is administered by Sodexo but runs on the Visa "closed looped system". This means that it can only be used in participating retailers, namely Asda, Boots, Morrisons, Peacocks, Sainsbury's and Tesco.

The card can be used for payment in these shops, a little like a debit card with no pin. When the person gets to the till they will have to hand it over for it to be swiped. The retailers' staff will have been notified that this new card exists, but not that it is for providing support to asylum seekers. The person can ask for a receipt, like with any other transaction, but this can't display the remaining balance. This should be checked by calling a freefone number which is on the back of the card.

In certain parts of the country where these retailers do not stock Halal meat, local suppliers have been sought out. At present the card can't be used to buy travel tickets. At a later date the UKBA hopes to add more retailers to the scheme, but they have explained that they want as little regional variation as possible between services accessible by the card.

### **How does the UKBA keep the cards topped up?**

At the beginning of every week, the first time that it is swiped, the card will be automatically credited with the person's support entitlement. Single people will only be able to carry over £5 every week, but couples and adults can carry over all their balance. Single people's unspent balance will be reduced to £5 at midnight on Sunday.

The £5 carry-over limit was introduced because whilst they accept that couples and families might be able to save a little from their allowance, they do not believe that this should be possible for single people. £35 a week is considered to be the bare minimum necessary in order to survive.

The UKBA have expressed a belief that the card will enable them to prevent fraud and that they intend to carefully monitor spending. They have confirmed that it will not be possible to get details of the payments made on the card, but they will be carefully monitoring spending levels. If "excessive amounts of credit", a sum which has not yet been defined, is built up, the person then risks losing their support.

### **What if there are problems with the card?**

The UKBA explained in their London meeting that they did not envisage any problems occurring with the card. However, the freephone number on the back of the card can also be used to report any technical problems (although it should be noted that there are no interpreting facilities on that number).

If the card is lost or stolen this should be immediately reported to the accommodation provider. They have been told by the UKBA to keep a stock of supermarket vouchers available for such an eventuality. When a report is made, the individual will receive two weeks worth of supermarket vouchers and the accommodation provider will notify the Home Office. Within this two weeks the UKBA will send a replacement card to the accommodation provider who will pass it on to the supported person.

ASAP expressed concerns about the Azure Cards in our June and October newsletters. But since its launch, we have received reports of problems using the cards. The common complaint seems to be that payment does not appear to go through when the card is swiped at the till, so the individual leaves without their shopping. However, it is later discovered that the money has been taken off the card.

ASAP believes that it is important that systematic problems are reported to the UKBA as well as going through the freephone facility. We would encourage organisations to keep records of any reported problems in order to submit this as evidence. We understand that the One Stop Services (OSS) are also collecting reports of problems so OSS clients should also report problems there.

---