



Department
for Work &
Pensions

DWP Central Freedom of
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[DWP Website](https://www.dwp.gov.uk)

Our Ref: FOI2021/97780

17 December 2021

Dear J Roberts,

Thank you for your Freedom of Information (Fol) request received on 29 November. You wrote:

"Big Brother Watch's report of July 2021 entitled 'Poverty Panopticon: the hidden algorithms shaping Britain's welfare state' considers your use of risk based verification (RBV): <https://bigbrotherwatch.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/Poverty-Panopticon.pdf> 'In RBV policies across the country and in DWP guidance the human intervention element of the process is limited. Benefits officers who request the risk score are permitted in limited circumstances to upgrade a risk score, for example from low to medium, but are forbidden by the DWP from lowering anybody's score.' (page 37)

1. Can you confirm that benefits officers are forbidden from lowering anyone's score?
2. If you record centrally the number of times benefits officers upgrade risk scores, please provide the information for the financial year 2020/21.
3. Can you confirm that DWP staff who claim benefits are also subject to RBV?"

DWP Response

Risk Based Verification (RBV) guidance was offered to all local authorities (LAs) on a voluntary basis from April 2012. There is no requirement for LAs who have adopted RBV to notify DWP of adoption.

The classification of risk groups is a matter for LAs to decide. For example, guidance suggests that claims might be divided into 3 categories:

- **low risk claims:** only essential checks are made; such as proof of identity.
- **medium risk claims:** these are verified in the same way as all claims currently, with evidence of original documents required.
- **high risk claims:** enhanced stringency is applied to verification. Individual LAs apply a variety of checking methods depending on local circumstances.

I confirm that we hold some information to answer your requests.

1. Once the category is identified, individual claims cannot be downgraded by the benefit processor to a lower risk group. They can however, exceptionally, be upgraded if the processor has reasons to think this is appropriate.
2. This information is not held by DWP.
3. DWP staff who claim Housing Benefit from LAs who operate RBV are subject to the same rules as all other claimants.

If you have any queries about this letter, please contact us quoting the reference number above.

Yours sincerely,

DWP Central Freedom of Information Team
Department for Work and Pensions

Your right to complain under the Freedom of Information Act

If you are not happy with this response you may request an internal review by e-mailing freedom-of-information-request@dwp.gov.uk or by writing to: DWP Central Fol Team, Caxton House, 6-12 Tothill Street, London, SW1H 9NA.

Any review request should be submitted within two months of the date of this letter.

If you are not content with the outcome of the internal review you may apply directly to the Information Commissioner's Office for a decision. Generally, the Commissioner cannot make a decision unless you have exhausted our own complaints procedure. The Information Commissioner can be contacted at: The Information Commissioner's Office, Wycliffe House, Water Lane, Wilmslow, Cheshire SK9 5AF.

Website: [ICO Contact Information](#) or telephone 0303 123 1113.

