Dear Colleague

NATIONAL ASYLUM SUPPORT FORUM

As you may know, Home Office Ministers wish to set up a new national forum on asylum support for consultation with interested parties.

I enclose a short consultation paper outlining our proposals and seeking comments on the proposed membership and terms of reference of the group. The deadline for comments on these proposals is 27 March. Ministers will make a final decision on the forum once the results of the consultation have been reviewed.

I look forward to receiving your comments.

Yours sincerely

Peter Durbin
Deputy Director Secretariat and Policy
NASS NATIONAL FORUM: CONSULTATION DOCUMENT

Issue
Consultation on membership and terms of reference of a new national discussion forum on asylum support issues.

Responses are requested by Wednesday 27 March 2002, to Ruth Stradling, National Asylum Support Service, 3rd floor, Voyager House, 30 Wellesley Rd, Croydon CR0 2AD.

Introduction

It is proposed to establish a new national forum for interested parties to discuss issues around the operation of the asylum support system. This consultation paper sets out proposals for the structure, membership and remit of this forum, and seeks the views of those with an interest.

Background

2. A consultative forum, the Asylum Support Stakeholder Group, operated prior to April 2000, to allow consultation on issues around the establishment of the National Asylum Support Service (NASS). This has fallen into abeyance since NASS became operational.

3. The Local Authority Regional Consortia established in support of the national asylum support arrangements hold regular meetings with interested parties at which local issues relating to asylum support can be discussed but there is currently no forum where stakeholders can raise issues at a national level. It is therefore proposed that the new body will focus on national issues, considering local issues only where they have clear national implications.

4. The proposed terms of reference of the forum are "to discuss national issues arising from the operation of NASS".

5. In order to cover the widest possible range of interests whilst keeping the group to a manageable size, the proposal is for a relatively small group, limited to between 15-20 members drawn primarily from umbrella bodies representing wider groups of organisations. We want to ensure that the group includes representatives of the relevant statutory bodies, the Regional Consortia, relevant voluntary sector organisations and external pressure groups, organisations providing services for asylum seekers, and representatives of asylum seekers themselves.

6. We propose to circulate papers for the forum to a wider group of bodies, and, where the agenda includes specialist issues, to invite appropriate specialist bodies to that meeting.

7. We envisage the forum meeting between two and four times each year.
Issues on which comments are requested

- Are the proposed terms of reference appropriate?
- Which groups should be invited to send a representative to the group?
- Should papers for forum meetings be copied wider than the forum membership?
- How often should the forum meet?