



Phil Woolas MP  
Minister of State  
Direct Communications Unit  
2 Marsham Street  
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20 January 2009

Dear Phil,

Thank you for attending the Asylum and Refugee Taskgroup last Thursday. Your attendance was very much appreciated by the members and I feel that it was a very constructive discussion. I hope you also found the meeting informative. A number of key issues were raised and I thought it might be useful to follow-up your visit with a brief summary of the main points:

#### UASC Reform Programme

- Clarity is urgently needed regarding the timescales, funding, service specifications, age-assessment issues and post-18 funding to encourage local authorities to re-engage with the Reform Programme.
- Critically, there needs to be a resolution to the post-18 Leaving Care funding issue to progress the programme. If UKBA cannot remove UASCs that have been given a negative decision on their asylum claim prior to their 18<sup>th</sup> birthday (as is often the case with UASCs from countries such as Iran, Iraq and Afghanistan for example), local authorities need to be assured that the costs of providing Leaving Care support will be fully met by central government.
- Developing service models/specifications for those local authorities interested in becoming a 'specialist authority' within the UASC Reform Programme is a resource intensive exercise. The Taskgroup therefore request that UKBA provide funding for local authorities to undertake this work..

#### UASC funding

- The Taskgroup welcomes the recent resolution to, and payment of, outstanding leaving care and special circumstances funding owed to local authorities to March 2008. However, an agreement needs to be urgently reached for the leaving care and special circumstances grants for this financial year (2008/09) in order to avoid replicating the same funding 'bottlenecks' we have recently managed to resolve and the associated risk of de-railing the recent impetus given to the UASC Reform Programme.

### Regional Strategic Migration Partnerships (RSMPs) - Enabling Grant Agreements

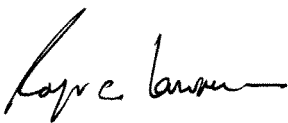
- UKBA have indicated that they will be reviewing the Enabling Grant Agreements in the first quarter of 2009 and that a report will be produced at the end of March. Given the tight deadline, the Taskgroup would like confirmation of the timescales, terms of reference and planned stakeholder engagement so that members can ensure their RSMPs feed into the review and that RSMP meetings over the next few months take account of and assist this process.
- Local government structures are undergoing a period of considerable change. UKBA therefore need to ensure that the RSMP review takes account of these changes. The LGA will be happy to provide any information that might facilitate this.
- UKBA should consider a one-year extension to the Enabling Grant Agreement if there is a delay in the review (a review was originally scheduled to take place in early 2008) to enable forward planning.

### Casework Resolution Programme

- The Taskgroup urge UKBA to continue working closely with local authorities to ensure that future tranches of the casework resolution programme are successfully implemented.
- It is vital that UKBA work with individual local authorities to share information and develop joint plans that take account of local issues, the capacity of local services and the availability of 'move-on' housing.
- Planning and implementation needs to be flexible enough to respond to changing circumstances e.g. if community cohesion issues arise or there is a lack of available housing in certain areas, it may be necessary to temporarily slow or stop the implementation of reviews. This need not jeopardise the overall progress of the programme however.

The LGA Taskgroup has worked very closely with previous Ministers to help deliver the Government's Asylum and Immigration policies over the last eight years and we look forward to continuing and developing that relationship with you. I hope you and your staff find the points outlined above constructive and that they will be taken into account when developing future UKBA policy and practice.

Yours Sincerely,



Cllr Roger Lawrence  
Chair of the LGA Asylum and Refugee Taskgroup