

# The Detention Forum



## Re-defining our purpose as a network

March 2022

### Introduction

As a network, we last reviewed our theory of change in March 2021; our new co-ordination group has encouraged us now to review our purpose as a network to help us to drive forward strategically with the change that we want to see. This paper sets out how we might want to re-define our purpose for discussion by our members in March.

### Our Mission

We want to end the use of immigration detention in the UK because we think that it is unjust and inhumane.

### Who we are

We are a network of 50 independent organisations, which have signed up as members of the Forum; in so doing we have expressed our support for the current objectives and strategy set out in our theory of change. We have also all agreed to support the work of the Detention Forum, work collaboratively and amicably with others and respect different strengths that each of us bring to the Detention Forum.

### Key principles

Detention Forum has always sought to add value to the activities of our members. We hence never seek to compete or to duplicate what our members are doing, rather we seek to amplify to reach wider audiences, and only, if necessary, fill in any gaps in the context of our members' activities.

We want to create a safe space to think, advocate, challenge and reflect. We can then develop a menu of policies and messages – into which our members can dip to enhance their capacity and confidence to communicate and campaign.

We see ourselves as part of a growing movement for change, and we know that we are not the movement.

We know that we are not an organisation (and we have no desire to be).

As a network of organisations, we are committed to exploring how we can have more impact on challenging the use of immigration detention by working together.

*We place a particular value on working with people who have lived experience of immigration detention. We want our policy and communications to be shaped and energised by this experience. And we are most interested in listening to people with lived experience to gain a better understanding of what we can do to support their work for change.*

We are focussed on immigration detention, but we are also concerned at any deprivation of liberty because of immigration status. So, we also have an interest in proposals around off-shore detention and the use of accommodation centres or quasi-detention.

**Our purpose is to build knowledge, capacity and confidence amongst our members so that they take action both individually and collectively.**

## **How change happens**

We know that change happens in a number of different ways and that the change process is never straight forward and linear. We are always open as to the best way to bring about change. As a forum, we cherish different ways to promote change. We create a safe space, with mutual respect, where colleagues with different approaches can come together and share learning for maximum external impact. We actively want to support action at a variety of different levels across our society to build pressure for change, and as a forum we want to be the place where these different initiatives come together, learning is shared, and a common strategy for change is forged.

## **Our ways of working**

- Bringing our members together to share information and discuss strategy
- Developing policy positions for change
- Developing our strategy through our working groups
- Using our communications channels

- Recruiting more members

### **Our internal actions**

- Our quarterly members' meetings
- Our working groups
- Our webinars on key issues
- Developing our policy positions
- Developing our communications messages
- Using Slack for interaction between meetings
- Sharing information to our network via email

### **Our external actions**

- Our website
- Our twitter feed
- Our YouTube channel
- Our Parliamentary engagement
- Our external engagement for new members/ friends
- Our policy papers
- Our campaigning resources

### **Our support for people with lived experience of detention**

- Policy briefings
- Parliamentary updates
- Campaign training
- Communications training
- Meeting space
- Access to advice

### **Our working groups**

#### 1. Parliamentary

We have a large group of our members committed to working together for greater impact in Parliament. Over the last few years, we have been active on various Bills. We have also had different approaches: on the Immigration Bill, we were more directive with our members on taking action and got a great result from our members; on the current Borders Bill, we have been more facilitative, and while our members have been very involved, we have not been so as the Forum.

We need to be more assertive as a working group on our strategy in Parliament and not just reactively but also proactively raising new issues such as alternatives to detention. We also need to develop far closer links with the grassroots campaigning working group to ensure more synergy between these different levels of engagement.

## 2. Strategic communications

We have a committed group of members which met frequently last year. They played a major role in our thinking on our mission statement, and helped to frame our messages on asylum. This groups needs to continue to develop our messages to support our other policy papers.

## 3. Grassroots campaigning

This group of our members has real potential but has yet to get really going, but it is vital for us because we believe that change does not only happen in Westminster. We need to listen more to grassroots groups and develop a plan for how we can better inspire and support grassroots campaigning.

## 4. Building new allies

This group has been enthusiastic in the past, and has worked up a proposal for 'friends of Detention Forum'. These new friends would be groups not working on detention but sharing our values and our appetite for change. We see our friends as being a critical way in which we can amplify our message and get more people taking action at critical moments.

## **Our policy papers**

Over the last year we have developed policy positions on the following issues: time limit; supportive environment (alternatives to detention); gatekeepers/case progression panels; time served prisoners; asylum policy; and short-term holding facilities. We need to get these policy papers up on our soon to be refreshed website, and we need our communications working group to develop the key messages from each of the policy papers.

The next stage will be to encourage all of our other working groups to discuss these policy papers and in particular Parliamentary and grassroots to discuss how they might be used further, together with our communications group to discuss potential for external communication through our members all by ourselves

## **Our communications role**

In the past the Forum has had an aspiration to develop more of an external commentator role on key issues pertaining to immigration detention. With our expanded membership now, it feels more appropriate for the Forum to be supporting our members to develop external communications messages on our policy issues, but in the absence of action from members, it would then be for the Forum to play a more direct role itself in external communication.

## **The role of our members**

One of the most encouraging things about our Forum is the high level of engagement and interest from our members. Despite the global pandemic, membership attendance at our meetings has remained remarkably high.

Yet our engagement with our membership to date has been somewhat one way with all communication going through the project director. We need to develop other platforms whereby the creativity and interaction that we witness at quarterly meetings can be replicated on a more regular basis, and we need to ensure that our members can initiate contact with other members without having to go through a central point within our Forum. For example: we are keen to explore whether a Slack channel will help us to achieve this goal of more interaction between our members.

We have a vibrant membership full of energy and ideas, and we need to do more to encourage sharing of those ideas in between meetings for our mutual motivation.

## **What do you think?**