

Disability and Carers Benefits Expert Advisory Group

To: Jeane Freeman, Minister for Social Security
By e-mail

8 June 2018

Dear Jeane

Social Security Charter

I would like to thank you and your officials for the constructive discussions and input we have had so far in relation to development of the charter.

When we last met you as a group on 8th March, we agreed that we would write to you setting out the proposed form of our involvement in the charter development, once we had seen the plans for this. Receipt of the summary charter development plan has allowed us to determine how our involvement may be most helpful.

The group's proposed involvement in charter development

Members are naturally keen for the group to add value to the proposed process. Prior to having sight of the development plan, we anticipated that the formation of a workstream on this issue might be appropriate, operating in a similar way to the scrutiny workstream we formed towards the end of last year.

However, on seeing the detail of the proposals to engage people with lived experience, with the creation of a core group, and numerous workshops and interviews, it is the group's view that we should not risk adding a further layer of complexity that a separate workstream could bring to the planned structures and processes.

We therefore propose an ad hoc basis of group or individual contributions, to respond in a flexible manner where we can add value, particularly given the tight timeframes (see also observations below). We propose that our input would have two main formats:

- Our established role as a source of expert advice to Ministers on aspects of the project, including, for example, timings, achievement of co-production, support of people with lived experience, and whether the resulting charter will fulfill its intended aims and purpose. In addition to providing advice directly to

Ministers, we propose to work iteratively with officials, responding to requests for input and proactively putting forward proposals, as and when helpful.

- Certain individual group members are particularly well placed to identify and facilitate access to seldom-heard groups. Given the group's independent nature, we may on occasion be well-placed to bring together stakeholders to assist in the development process. We would be happy to work with officials to support stakeholder engagement in this way.

I have agreed to act as the group's lead or coordinating representative on all matters relating to the charter. In addition, a number of individual group members have already identified themselves as having skills, interest and access to specific groups which match actions set out in the development plan. We also propose to bring charter issues to the whole group via a regular agenda item. We will maintain close contact with officials to co-ordinate our input, as appropriate.

The group's initial observations on charter plans

I would like to share with you the group's initial thoughts on the charter, arising from discussion at our last group meeting and the meeting attended by yourself, after receipt of the summary development plan:

- The group welcome the intention to produce a robust, accessible charter that delineates Social Security principles, is explicit in the proposed application and delivery of these principles, and that will be co-designed with people with lived experience.
- As you know, timing is a key concern. The timetable set out is very tight with no allowance for slippage. Well conducted co-production needs time, particularly with the degree of capacity-building that may well be required for this project. In the existing timetable there is a very small window for stakeholder feedback between final write up and final sign off. This may present significant challenges and we fear this may prove unrealistic.
- There is a specific timing concern that the charter will not be ready for Carer's Allowance Supplement going live. We will be writing to you soon separately on CAS and will address this more fully then.
- We are aware that you have ruled out an 'interim charter'. However, should unavoidable practical difficulties render the proposed timetable infeasible, group members recommend consideration be given to a contingency arrangement - if not specifically an interim charter as such, some other form of clear statement being in place to ensure claimants of the earliest benefit(s) to go live can know what to expect from the system, and have clarity about pathways to proper redress.

- The group will have a keen interest in how people with experience will be supported, and how capacity-building will be achieved. We will be happy to work with officials to help get this right.
- Due to the current lack of in-depth knowledge on the protected characteristics and other key information about the Experience Panel members, recruitment for the core group will also need to reach out to people / organisations working with seldom-heard groups to ensure they are represented there. Group members also recommend over-recruitment to counteract the high potential for attrition.
- The charter clearly needs to work for staff as well as clients in order to set out their rights and responsibilities around the deliverability of benefits. This raises questions about staff training, and about their own input into the charter development process.
- There will need to be a mechanism or some form of hierarchy for decision-making / reaching consensus, given the input of multiple stakeholders who may hold differing views.

We would welcome your thoughts on these points, and we look forward to working with you, officials and other stakeholders in developing a strong, accessible and useful co-designed charter.

With best wishes,

Sally Witcher

Sally Witcher

Deputy Chair and group lead on the charter