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Dr Sally Witcher  
Disability and Carers Benefits Expert Advisory Group

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Thank you for your letter of 8 June about the development of the social security charter.

I am pleased to agree your proposals on how the Advisory Group can best support our work to develop the charter. In particular, it is clear from my discussions with officials that the Group's advice has already added considerable value to our proposed approach and I am keen to see that productive relationship continue. Your offer to help us to access seldom heard groups is also most welcome.

I note that your letter raises a number of concerns relating to the timeframe identified for completion of this work. However I believe it is important that we continue to maintain the momentum established by the passage of the Act and that the rights and responsibilities to be conferred by the charter are in place as soon as possible for the early users of the new system.

It must also be remembered that we begin this work from a position of strength. Through the public consultation that first identified support for the principles and charter; the evidence submitted through the Bill process and extensive engagement with Experience Panels and stakeholder organisations, we already know a great about how people think the new system should operate. The process we have developed, with your guidance, is designed to build on that good work to ask people the relatively simple question of what the legislative principles should mean in everyday practice. I am therefore confident that there is ample time for the development of a quality product and especially given the depth and rigour of the process envisaged.

The other point I make in this regard is that the Parliament's approval of the first charter in many ways marks the beginning and not the end of this work. The statutory accountability procedures relating to the charter, including Parliamentary approval, are of such strength that the charter will be integral to the new system. It is therefore right that it should be refined and improved as the system matures and grows and we learn from the feedback of early users.

Since our last meeting, I can also advise that officials have made progress on several of the other matters the Group has expressed interest in; including the recruitment of the core group, the extent to which it is representative and processes for capturing stakeholder feedback. To allow for more focussed discussion I have not set out the detail of that here and have instead asked officials to meet with you as a matter of priority.

I hope that you find this reply helpful and I again thank the Group for supporting this important work. I look forward to a productive discussion on 30 August.

Kind regards



JEANE FREEMAN