



Building a Social Security System Together: Co-designing the Social Security Charter

Tuesday 2 October 2018

Introduction

SAMH is the Scottish Association for Mental Health. Around since 1923, SAMH operates over 60 services in communities across Scotland providing mental health social care support, primary care, addictions and employment services, among others. These services together with our national programme work in See Me, respectme, suicide prevention, sport and physical activity inform our public affairs work to influence positive social change.

SAMH wants to see:

- **The inclusive and constructive approach to co-production of the charter including the Experience Panel continued**
- **An explicit commitment within the charter to promote wellbeing**
- **Opportunities for stakeholders such as advisory and campaigning organisations to have meaningful input to the Charter's development**
- **Every aspect of the Social Security Agency's work to be checked against the Charter, to ensure that every aspect of the Agency embodies the expectations within the Charter**
- **The Scottish Government should consider extending the reach of the Charter to cover other devolved areas of welfare, such as the Scottish Welfare Fund**

The Scottish Social Security Charter

The approach taken to the development of the Social Security Act and subsequently on the Charter has been constructive and inclusive. SAMH is pleased to serve on the Disability and Carers Benefits Expert Advisory Group and has also participated in several stakeholder events. We have promoted the opportunity to take part in the Experience Panels to our supporters. We are encouraged by these opportunities for participation and by the positive approach to policy development so far, and we hope to see this continue.

Promoting Wellbeing

We applaud the Scottish Government's intention to create a far more positive and just social security system. We would like to see an explicit commitment to promoting wellbeing as part of the Charter, to help make that intention a reality.

SAMH service users have told us that the assessments, culture and sanctions used in the UK welfare system all have an effect on their mental health. A commitment to promoting wellbeing would demonstrate real commitment to creating an entirely new culture in which people using the system could be confident that their health would not suffer as a result of applying for assistance to which they may be entitled.

Proportionate consultation

SAMH supported Amendment 145 to the Act, requiring that the sample of people consulting during the preparation of the Charter is representative by primary health condition. We were pleased that this was passed.

We know that PIP is not working for people with mental health problems. We must ensure that evidence and experience of the particular factors specific to mental health and benefits, such as the impact of fluctuating conditions, inform the development of the Charter.

The current proportion of people in receipt of PIP who have a mental or behavioural problem is 37.98%.¹ It is therefore essential that the views of people with mental health problems are heard during the development of the Charter and the new Scottish benefits.

We know that 39% of Experience Panel members have a mental health problem: broadly proportionate to the percentage of PIP recipients with mental health problems.² This is encouraging, and we'd like to see that level of involvement continue.

We welcome the emphasis that has been placed on directly involving people with lived experience of social security. We would suggest that stakeholders such as advisory and campaigning organisations also have important expertise to offer. The development process should create space for these stakeholders to have meaningful input.

Making the Charter a Living Document

It's vital that the Charter is given life. It must have meaning to the journey that a citizen embarks on when they apply for social security. We suggest that the new Social Security Agency gives thought to how it can truly embed the Charter within its working processes. We believe that every process, document and environment should be checked against the Charter, to ensure that every aspect of the Agency embodies the expectations within the Charter. The 6 month timescale outlined in the Social Security (Scotland) Act for the publication of the first Charter is challenging. We welcome the statutory requirement for a review of the Charter within 5 years and believe the review must be rigorous to ensure the Charter stands the test of time.

Consistency with other policy areas

As it stands, the Charter will apply only to newly devolved areas of social security. Once it is complete, we suggest the Scottish Government should consider extending the reach of the Charter to cover other

¹ [Stat-Xplore](#) [accessed December 2017]

² Scottish Government [Social Security Experience Panels: About Your Benefits and You – Quantitative Research Findings](#) 2017

devolved areas of welfare, such as the Scottish Welfare Fund. This would help to create a consistent experience for people who have contact with the social security system.

Further information

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