



## **Information on MECOPP**

MECOPP was established in January 2000 as an independent Charity. The organisation assists Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) carers and carers with other protected characteristics access the supports and services necessary to undertake or sustain a caring role. MECOPP currently supports in excess of 750 carers including carers within the Gypsy/Traveller community.

MECOPP, as one of the National Carer Organisations (NCO's) has contributed to, and fully endorses, the joint NCO submission. Our individual submission will therefore concentrate on issues which impact on BME carers specifically and carers with protected characteristics<sup>1</sup> more generally.

### **Tell us what you think about these principles**

MECOPP is in agreement with the principles but would strongly argue that principles by their very nature are subjective and open to interpretation. We believe that their impact would be considerably strengthened by the inclusion of a set of standards sitting underneath each principle. Standards must be measurable and provide the means of accountability both for the individual and any regulatory body.

We also have one additional concern on the 'determinants of enough money to live on'. Our question centres on who decides how much is enough and on what basis? We would draw your attention that the cost of living is higher for some groups than others, such as disabled people who face an increase in their cost of living due to expenditure necessitated by their disability or longterm condition.

### **Tell us about other principles you would like in the new law**

MECOPP would argue for the inclusion of one additional principle: the law must ensure equity of access to the new social security system. We believe this is necessary as both research and direct experience of working with BME communities highlights the additional difficulties they encounter in the current system. Barriers include lack of accessible information, lower levels of take up of certain benefits and higher levels of scrutiny.

We welcome the commitment to ensuring that people can access the system in a number of ways and that technology will be tempered with direct face to face contact. Many of the individuals MECOPP assist report significant difficulties with the current system where more and more benefits must now be applied for online. For people who have both limited English language and IT skills, this is proving to be an almost insurmountable barrier and one which prevents people from applying. We would also ask that the new staff in the Social Security Agency reflect the diversity of Scotland's population. Participants at a focus group

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commented specifically on the value of having an agency that can provide them with unbiased information and that can support them in their preferred language.

### **Social Security Charter & Annual Report**

MECOPP broadly welcomes the Charter but would again argue that it does not go far enough. We would advocate that the annual report be supported by the publication of an action plan to address the findings of the report. We believe that this would create a climate of transparency and also provide a more robust system for accountability. Both full and summary versions of the annual report and proposed action plan should be widely available.

MECOPP would like to see timescales set out in the Charter for the processing of applicant claims, reviews and appeals.

### **Current benefits**

MECOPP would highlight the following points with regard to the benefits to be delivered by the new agency. The current process for applying for funeral payments is time consuming, demeaning and can cause great distress at a very difficult time. We believe that the process for establishing eligibility and getting a decision should be speeded up so that the bereaved family/individual can make arrangements as quickly as possible.

MECOPP would also raise the possibility of waiving the age limit on the winter fuel payment for people with disabilities and chronic longterm conditions.

### **Carers Allowance**

MECOPP welcomes the increase to the Carers' Allowance but would again argue that even at the new rate, it does not adequately recognise in financial terms the significant contribution that carers make to the life and economy of Scotland. This is disappointing given that it is an 'earnings replacement benefit' which even at the new rate would only recompense carers at the rate of £2.00 per hour based on a 35 hour caring week.