



HOUSE OF COMMONS

LONDON SW1A 0AA

25th January 2023

Dear Constance,

RE: STRIKE ACTION AND MINIMUM SERVICE LEVELS

Thank you for your recent correspondence in respect of your concerns surrounding strike action and proposed minimum service levels (MSLs). I have read your comments with interest.

As I am sure you are aware, trade union laws are designed to support an effective and collaborative approach to resolving industrial disputes. While the Government and I continue to support the right to strike, this should always be a last resort. As you may be aware, the Government is not responsible for decisions on pay. The well-established independent pay review process is the right way to set public sector pay – it provides independent, expert advice, and is a neutral process in which all parties play a role.

That said, the Government recognises the particular economic challenges the country faces this year. A balance must be struck between giving workers a fair and reasonable settlement and taking steps to continue to bring down inflation and protect households' budgets. In this time of economic difficulties, inflation-matching pay awards that many of the unions are demanding will make the fight against inflation more challenging, risking interest rates, mortgage payments and bills rising for people as a result. This would erode the value of any pay increase for public sector workers and hurt households across the country.

Nevertheless, the Government hugely respects and values the work of our public sector workers, and it is committed to avoiding prolonged industrial action. We must resolve the strikes and deliver on the promise of halving inflation and reducing debt. Therefore, the Government is inviting the trade unions to meet for honest, constructive conversations about what is fair and affordable in public sector pay settlements for 2023-24, and Secretaries of State are inviting unions to sit down and discuss the evidence that the Government will be submitting to the pay review bodies.

The rights of some workers to strike must be balanced against the rights of the wider public to get on with their daily lives. Strikes can, and do, cause significant disruption. That is particularly the case when they take place in important public services, such as transport or education. It cannot be right that trade unions can, as we saw in the case of the recent rail strikes, seek to hold the country to ransom if their demands are not met.

The Government also has a duty to the public to ensure their safety, protect their access to vital public services, and help them go about their daily lives. Therefore, the Government has introduced the *Strikes (Minimum Service Levels) Bill* for vital public services, including health, education, fire and rescue, transport, nuclear decommissioning, and border security, to maintain critical, and in many cases life-saving, services.

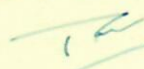


We will consult first on MSLs for ambulances, fire, and rail. While the Bill contains provisions for other parts of the NHS, education, nuclear decommissioning, and border security, we hope that voluntary agreements will continue to be sufficient.

This new legislation will allow the Government, the NHS, the public, and other services, to plan properly for the running of services in times of strike action – and ensure that striking workers are not inadvertently putting the public at risk. This package of measures will see the UK align with many countries across the world, such as France and Spain, that already have minimum service agreements in place, to prevent large swathes of their economies being ground to a halt by industrial action.

Ultimately, I do of course recognise the pressure the current cost of living situation puts on UK households and that is why the Government has put in place the comprehensive package of support to help households through this period. But while taxpayers continue to foot the bill, ministerial colleagues cannot support union demands for huge Government-funded pay increases - however, the formal independent pay review process is now underway across many public services and it is right that it is given the time and space required to conduct its work, so that Ministers can then consider their informed recommendations in the usual way.

Once again, thank you for having taken the time to contact me and if I can ever be of any further assistance to you then please do not hesitate to contact me again.

With best wishes.


TOM PURSGLOVE MP
MEMBER OF PARLIAMENT
CORBY & EAST NORTHAMPTONSHIRE