

DANIEL KAWCZYNSKI MP



HOUSE OF COMMONS  
LONDON SW1A 0AA

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Dear Constituent

### **Strike laws in the UK**

Thank you for contacting me about the strikes. Trade union laws are designed to support an effective and collaborative approach to resolving industrial disputes. While the Government continue to support the right to strike, this should always be a last resort. The Government is not responsible for decisions on pay. A 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 avoid prolonged industrial action. We must resolve the strikes and deliver on the promise of halving inflation and reducing debt. Therefore, the Government is inviting 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, it 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.

Consultations are currently being held on Minimum Service Levels (MSLs) for ambulances, fire, and rail. While the Bill contains provisions for other parts of the NHS, education, nuclear decommissioning, and border security, it is hoped that voluntary agreements will continue to be sufficient.

This new legislation will allow the Government, NHS, the public and other services to plan properly for the running of services in times of strike – 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.

Previously, agency staff were not allowed to be hired to provide temporary work cover during strikes. However, I understand your frustrations with the ongoing strikes; therefore the law has now been changed to allow businesses most affected by industrial action to fill vital roles with temporary, skilled workers.

By allowing trained, temporary workers to carry out crucial roles, affected businesses will have the freedom to tap into the services of employment businesses to temporarily cover essential roles during strikes. This will keep crucial sectors moving and minimise the negative and unfair impact of strikes on the British public by ensuring that businesses and services can continue operating.

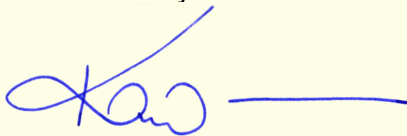
I recognise the pressure the current cost-of-living situation puts on UK households. But while taxpayers continue to foot the bill, ministerial colleagues cannot support union demands for huge government-funded pay increases for workers. I welcome that members of the RMT union have voted overwhelmingly to accept a pay offer from Network Rail which will end ongoing industrial action. As I

understand it, this deal amounts to an uplift on salaries of between 14.4 per cent for the lowest paid grades to 9.2 per cent for the highest paid.

As a result of talks between the Government, NHS employers and the unions, an offer has been made for NHS staff (including nurses) to receive an additional pay rise of 2 per cent for 2022-23, on top of the 4 per cent increase recommended through the Independent Pay Review Body process. A "Backlog Bonus" of at least £1,250 will also be paid in recognition of the dedication and efforts of NHS staff during the pandemic and their role in cutting waiting lists.

Further, in 2023-24, the Government is offering NHS staff a 5 per cent consolidated increase in pay, worth at least £1,065. I firmly believe that this agreement represents a fair and reasonable offer for NHS staff, as well as being a fair deal for taxpayers. To that end, I am pleased that the RCN is supportive and urge union members to support this offer which can end the industrial dispute and the disruption that patients have faced in recent months.

Yours sincerely



Daniel Kawczynski MP  
Member of Parliament for Shrewsbury & Atcham