**EXTRACT FROM PAY DEBATE AT WESTMINSTER**

**HANSARD 4TH DECEMBER 2017**

* It is an honour to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Stringer. I declare an interest as a Unison member. [Hon. Members: “Hear, hear!”] Thank you.

I am glad to take part in the debate because of the huge number of people who have contacted me —constituents, many of whom are members of Unison, or are in the RCN, who feel strongly, and rightly, that they have been badly done by. It is high time that public sector workers had a decent pay rise. For too long—more than seven years—they have borne the brunt of austerity. Many of them have seen colleagues made redundant as the revenue support grant for councils, police, fire and rescue and other local services has been cut, and they ​have picked up the pieces—and, often, new responsibilities —to keep services going. At the same time, their wages have reduced in real terms, while their living costs, like ours, go up year by year.

It is no wonder there are recruitment and retention problems in the NHS and elsewhere in the public sector. In the NHS, demand has gone up, but staff continue to work to make sure patients are looked after. They respond magnificently in times of crisis; and we have had too many crises in the past year. That is not just first responders, nurses and doctors. It is all staff, from those who drive the ambulances to the porters, cleaners and technical staff who make sure our hospital buildings are safe, healthcare assistants and nurses, and the many other professions allied to healthcare such as radiographers, physios and lab technicians. I have been visiting a lot of hospitals recently, and I see how hard they all work, yet the Government want them to pay for their own pay rise by looking at their terms and conditions. That is outrageous. In local government, I see the staff who work hard keeping our streets clean, looking after those who need help and support, and keeping our vital services going. It is about time they had a decent pay rise, and that that pay rise was fully funded.

**I will refer to one particular issue today, and ask the Minister to address it in his response. I take the opportunity to draw attention to a serious issue affecting NHS workers in Northern Ireland; I thank Unison for bringing it to my attention. While health staff in England, Scotland and Wales have received 1%—paltry as it is—in Northern Ireland they are still waiting for the 1% that the pay review body recommended back in April. It was revealed last week that £26 million has been found to fund the pay rise, but the Government say it cannot be allocated without ministerial approval, which is impossible, given the current deadlock in Northern Ireland. The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland has implemented rates bills and a budget, yet he says he cannot give NHS workers in Northern Ireland even the 1% they are already owed.**

The Government should amend the Northern Ireland budget to give NHS workers that 1% and, may I say, more than that. I ask the Minister to make that commitment today. All our public sector workers in all sectors, right across the UK, deserve a real pay rise and one that is fully funded. It is high time that the folk who carry out our essential services were properly recognised and not taken for granted.

[The Exchequer Secretary to the Treasury (Andrew Jones)](http://hansard.parliament.uk/search/MemberContributions?house=Commons&memberId=3996)

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It is always a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Stringer.

I thank all Members who have contributed to the debate today. We have had 37 Back-Bench contributions or interventions. I have to say that there was remarkable knowledge from the hon. Member for Glasgow South West (Chris Stephens) about the 1823 Act—194 years ago; I am not even sure the Conservative party existed then.

**Lots of points have been raised. Let me answer the one by the hon. Member for Blaydon (Liz Twist) about Northern Ireland. The decision and implementation is actually with the Northern Ireland civil service. I do not think that there are any decisions outstanding with Ministers, but of course the key thing is to get that Administration back up and running and hope the parties in Northern Ireland can find the common ground to achieve that.**

Housing and housing challenges have been raised, which is entirely fair. It has been very tough for people all over the country to deal with housing costs, whether those relate to getting on the housing ladder or not. I have to say that I do not think that is an entirely private sector or entirely public sector issue. It applies equally to everybody right across the country and that is why housing was the centrepiece of the Budget