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*Cllr Johnstone*

Thank you for your letter of 12 October to Sajid Javid, about Midlothian Council's motion regarding the Trade Union Bill. I am replying as the Minister responsible.

The Trade Union Bill relates to employment rights, duties and industrial relations, all of which are clearly reserved matters. This is why the Government is confident that the Trade Union Bill is consistent with the devolution settlements.

As part of our proposals we have announced our intention to end the practice of state-run trade union subscription payments, removing a taxpayer-funded administrative burden on employers. This reform will give employees greater control over their subscriptions, allowing them to set up their own direct debit with their chosen trade union, as well as consumer protection under the Direct Debit Guarantee.

Regarding facility time, we will require public sector employers to publish information along similar lines required of Government departments by the Cabinet Office's Facility Time Framework for the Civil Service. These publication requirements are aimed at promoting transparency and public scrutiny of facility time, encouraging public sector employers to moderate the amount of money spent on facility time in light of that scrutiny.

Turning to agency workers, our changes to the regulations banning employers from hiring agency staff during strike action will help businesses to continue providing their customers with basic services during industrial action. This is not a matter of threatening the jobs of striking workers: hiring temporary agency workers would not have any impact on a worker's right to keep their job, and striking workers will retain all protections they already have.

Nothing we are proposing weakens the voice of workers in the workplace, nor reduces their right to decide whether or not to participate in a trade union. What the Trade Union Bill will do is to strike a fairer balance between the rights of unions and their responsibilities towards the rest of society.

I hope this is helpful in clarifying the Government's position.

W. K. S. M. M.

Nick Boles

**NICK BOLES MP**