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# **PCS responds to Starmer speech**

General secretary Fran Heathcote says ministers should make the social security system less punitive and more supportive.

In prime minister Keir Starmer's speech to the first Labour party conference since winning the general election in July, he promised the "biggest levelling up of workers' rights in a generation" and talked about "rebuilding our public services."

To cover the cost of filling the "black hole in our public finances" left by the previous government, he promised that "we will get the welfare bill down. Because we will tackle long-term sickness and support people back to work."

He promised to "root out waste and go after tax avoiders.... There'll be no stone left unturned, no innovation ignored, no return to Tory austerity. We will rebuild our public service, protect working people...."

He said: "If we want to maintain support for the welfare state then we will legislate to stop benefit fraud, do everything we can to tackle worklessness."

## **Powers to support people**

Responding to his speech, PCS General Secretary Fran Heathcote says ministers should make the social security system less punitive and more supportive

She said: "Our members working in the DWP and in jobcentres want more powers to support people into work – to help people, not trip them up.

"The UK has some of the lowest levels of benefits in Europe. Those that do overclaim often do so in error, struggling to navigate a complex system, or because they can't make ends meet on our poverty-level benefits.

"The government should focus on making our social security system less punitive and more supportive."