New official figures published last week by the Office for National Statistics (ONS) show that workers in North East are still £44 a month worse off than they were before the financial crash; that’s the equivalent of a weekly food shop, a tank of petrol or money towards paying the bills.

The ONS figures show that in 2016 real wages in the North East are still 2.2% below their 2008 level.

Many families in our region still haven’t recovered from the financial crash. With household debt increasing, the last thing they need is another hit to their pay packets. But with inflation set to outstrip wages next year, we are on the cusp of another living standards crisis.

Pay growth remains weak by historical standards, and inflation is getting higher. Working people must not be left to pay the price of Brexit through lower wages and higher inflation. The Chancellor must use the Autumn Statement to protect growth and create well-paid work by investing in the construction of roads, railways and homes.

And he must protect the living standards of the lowest paid workers by increasing the minimum wage. Theresa May says she wants an economy that works for everyone – that means a genuine effort to drive up pay.

We need investment now to create more decent, well-paid jobs, alongside an end to the public sector pay cap. The government should stick by its promise to give the lowest paid a pay rise, with increases in the national living wage to include under 25s too.

With the autumn statement comes a real opportunity for the Chancellor to create an economy where people feel like they can live, not just exist.

Beth Farhat

Regional Secretary Northern TUC