



# Politics Matters

National Executive  
Council Statement  
to 2022 ADM



# Usdaw is involved in politics because it provides a means by which to improve members' lives.

The real issues affecting workers' lives are at the core of our activities and the campaigns around which we organise.

Industrial organising provides the foundation upon which we negotiate with employers and represent our members' interests in the workplace; political organising provides the foundation upon which we campaign to change the country and represent our members' interests in society. These are two sides of the same coin used together to improve the lives of Usdaw members.

Usdaw is affiliated to the Labour Party because it is our Party and provides us with the means to secure a Government on the side of our members, working people, and the most vulnerable in society.

By using our collective strength we can campaign and win, delivering a Labour Government that will deliver for our members.

# General Secretary's Foreword



There is a very real chance that the next general election could be just a little over 12 months away.

This poses all of us in the Trade Union and Labour Movement with a real challenge, we must get ourselves ready to fight and win that election. If the Conservatives win then we face the prospect of them having been in power in Westminster for 18 years by the time we have another chance to remove them.

This matters.

Politics might not be something you think about every day or something you seek to be actively involved in, but maybe you should. Whether you want it to or not, politics affects your life at work and at home every day.

I hope that this National Executive Council Statement will demonstrate why I say this and why each of us needs to look at the world, understand what needs to change and work collectively to achieve that change.

The challenge ahead of us is large and real but it is one that we can rise to and overcome. It is made up of small tasks, leaflets to be delivered, voters to be persuaded and individual seats to be won. No single part of this challenge is beyond us and by making sure that we are prepared and succeeding at each step, we can deliver a Labour Government together at the next general election.

I am determined to make sure that Usdaw is ready to face this challenge, that everyone understands what is at stake and that we have teams of confident and well supported activists ready to hit the campaign trail running.

The election is coming; we need to be ready, so that together we can win.

A handwritten signature in red ink that reads "Paddy Lillis". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

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**Paddy Lillis**  
General Secretary

# Section One – Politics Affects Us All

The word 'politics' can sometimes feel stuffy and like it does not affect Usdaw members' everyday lives.

But politics affects almost everything that happens. All laws, the working environment and pay, and the services communities rely on from pensions to pot holes, it is all politics.

Udaw's recent Cost of Living Survey highlighted that a great number of members feel angry about the current economic situation in Britain and how this is affecting their everyday lives.

The cost of living is rising so fast that wages are not keeping pace. This means most Usdaw members, like most other people in the UK, are feeling some financial strain when it comes to paying bills, be it food, fuel or housing.

## **Retail workers have told Usdaw:**

*"I'm having to skip more and more meals to make ends meet. Last year I struggled to heat the house and now with less money and higher fuel prices it's going to be impossible. I might just have to invest in an extra blanket and hope I don't get ill."*

**Retail Worker, 25**

*"Gas and electricity prices have gone up but my wages have stayed the same. We as a family are having to eat more often at the Sikh temple where food is free of charge."*

**Retail Worker, 43**

*"Our monthly payments for gas and electricity are extremely high and it's just increased again recently. We've tried everything to save electricity but it's still not enough. I'm totally struggling with the costs of living. I work overtime every week doubled my contracted hours to make ends meet but still I'm struggling. I am dipping into my overdraft every month. Even if I worked overtime every week I would still be struggling. I'm just hoping for an increase in my salary."*

**Retail Worker, 53**

### Parents reported:

*"It's hard to get by. Food bills and petrol all going up yet National Minimum Wage is still low. It just doesn't cover the increase in costs. It's a very stressful time for us as a family, I just feel sorry for my kids that they have to have the bare minimum. Last month I had to choose between nappies for the baby or an extra meal."*

**Retail Worker and single mum, 32**

*"I've already been struggling to pay bills for gas and electricity to the point that during winter time I tried to avoid using the heating as much as possible. My concern is if I have already been struggling to pay what will happen if prices keep rising up? I'm not sure I'll be able to heat my house enough to keep my children warm this winter."*

**Retail Worker and father of three, 35**

### Older people said:

*"Rising food prices have pushed my household budget to breaking point. I am having to use a food bank."*

**69 year old pensioner, working one day per week in retail to supplement pension**

The cost of bills and the safety nets that are there to protect people financially are all political issues that matter to Usdaw members.

Ushaw members need to have a voice on these issues to make sure decision makers in Government understand their lived experiences when making and changing the laws that govern them, and making decisions on spending the billions paid each year in tax and National Insurance.

Some of the things that affect members' costs of living, like the Coronavirus crisis, would happen no matter what party formed the Government but others, like the value of sick pay, increases to National Insurance Contributions or the reduction of benefits, are the direct result of political decisions from the Conservative Government.

Ushaw wants to make sure that members are engaged on these issues and campaigns for a Government that will bring change for the good.



## Who Are Our Politicians and What Do They Do?

Level of Government	Representative	Role
Unitary Authority/ County Council/ Borough Council	Councillors	<p>Councillors have decision making authority for most of the amenities in our everyday environment, such as roads, pavements, parks, schools and leisure facilities including leisure centres and libraries. They also control local services, such as child protection services and care for children and vulnerable adults.</p> <p>Councils historically provided many other local facilities, such as support for the elderly (meals on wheels), benefits advice and childcare. However, due to severe budget cuts from the Conservative Government in recent years, many councils are struggling to fund even the most basic services, such as parks and street maintenance.</p> <p>You may have noticed pavements in disrepair and potholes in your road. You may have been told the council can no longer provide support, such as home adjustments for the disabled and elderly. Perhaps your local library has closed. This is likely due to spending cuts from the Conservative Government.</p>
Devolved Governments: Scottish Parliament	MSPs (Members of Scottish Parliament)	In Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland some decisions about laws and spending are made by devolved governments of those countries.
Welsh Senedd	MSs (Members of the Senedd)	Everything from funding for university education, the costs of prescriptions and policies around housing can be made by politicians in the devolved governments.
Northern Ireland Assembly	MLAs (Member of the Legislative Assembly)	Recently the safety restrictions around the Coronavirus pandemic have been dealt with at this level.

Level of Government	Representative	Role
House of Commons	MPs (Members of Parliament)	<p>When we think of politicians we are often thinking about our MPs in Parliament.</p> <p>MPs create and amend a large number of the laws that govern us and make national decisions about spending for things like the NHS, pensions, the military, the environment and national transport infrastructure.</p> <p>Our employment laws are created and amended by MPs, so having the right people in government is vital to making sure we get a fair deal at work.</p>
House of Lords	Lords	<p>The House of Lords does not propose new laws but it scrutinises decisions made by the Government. They provide checks and balances to make sure decisions are made fairly.</p> <p>While the House of Lords is not usually able to prevent Bills passing into law, it can delay Bills and force the House of Commons to reconsider amendments to them.</p>

Would you be interested in becoming a Councillor, an MP or a member of a devolved parliament? It is important that people with real experience of the working world are involved at every level of Government. Contact Usdaw's Politics Office if you are interested.



# Section Two – Why Do Unions Support Labour?

It is important to understand why trade unions such as Usdaw support the Labour Party.

It is not just that Usdaw supports Labour, it is that Usdaw, other affiliated trade unions and the Labour Party are all part of one common movement, working together to improve the lives of working people and the whole of society.

From the very beginning, the Labour Party has always been crucial for the Trade Union and Labour Movement to achieve its political aims for its members.

The Labour Party itself was formed by trade unionists and allies in 1900. It was created by people just like Usdaw members, people who needed to see real and positive change in their lives, to be a party **of** the people, **by** the people, **for** the people.

The Labour Party has a history going back generations as the only political party to consistently implement policy that benefits working people and their families.

From the NHS, to the minimum wage, state pensions and education for all; Labour is the only party that has a record of delivering social and economic policy for the people rather than the privileged few.

This is because Labour and the unions have worked hand in hand, listening to the priorities for working people and achieving the structural changes necessary to support people where they need it most.



The Conservative Party actually voted against introducing a National Health Service 21 times before Labour got it through, and they voted against introducing a National Minimum Wage. They may like to say now that they value these things but they would not even exist if Labour had not overcome Conservative opposition to introduce them.

Labour will always be the best vehicle for positive change for Usdaw members and the country as a whole and that is why Usdaw supports Labour.

## **Labour Unions - How Unions and the Labour Party Work Together**

The relationship between trade unions like Usdaw and the Labour Party is not just historical, it is not just a 'friendship' and is not just for election times. Trade unions and the Labour Party work together in a structured way all year round and at every level.

Trade union branch members are encouraged to affiliate their local branches to their local Labour party so that unions and the Labour Party are working together at a community level.

There is also a Trade Union Liaison Officer in every constituency Labour Party. These officers are tasked with maintaining strong links with local trade union members who are also members of the Labour Party and can feed back to the local Labour MP if there is one.

Local Labour Councillors and Labour MPs must all be trade union members.

Structurally, trade unions are embedded in the decision making processes of the Labour Party from top to bottom.

Collectively affiliated trade unions come together as Labour Unions, also known as TULO, and there are regional and national TULO committees. These are made up of trade union officials who work together to organise and liaise with the Labour Party and make sure it is meeting the needs of union members.

It is not that unions tell Labour what to do, and Labour is not soft on unions as the Conservative Party might say, it is that we are all part of one movement together, working for a better future for working people and their families.

Unions and the Labour Party have always and will always work as one for the people of Britain and that is why we ask union members to support the Labour Party in our communities and at elections.

# Section Three – Getting Involved in Politics as an Usdaw Member

Usdaw's strength and ability to deliver on its aims as an organisation is based on its members. It is the commitment of Usdaw members that allows the Union to deliver campaign activity and support wider goals, such as the delivery of a Labour Government. Inside and outside of the workplace, when it comes to how we organise, how we represent our members and how we campaign, we can only do this effectively with the active involvement of members.

In terms of the political activity of the Union, this direct activism from members is critically important. An active and engaged membership leads to better debate, stronger campaigns and a louder voice in politics.

Being active can mean many different things, all of which are important. Usdaw members work hard and sometimes being active in politics can seem like a step too far, or something that takes too much time or is for other people, but every member has their own valuable experiences to contribute and a voice that deserves to be heard.

## How can Usdaw Members get Involved in Politics?

There are many ways Usdaw members can get involved in politics. The most important thing is not how members get involved but that they are involved in some way.

### Engaging with Politics

The easiest thing members can do is simply to take an interest in politics, what is happening in their communities and the wider country, and how politicians' decisions are affecting them, their families and friends.

Understanding how decisions are taken and what those decisions mean allows members to form opinions and take an active part in debates on issues that interest or affect them. This understanding forms the foundation upon which campaigns can be built collectively and the first step to affecting decisions and improving society can be taken.



### **Campaigning with Usdaw**

Whilst going out campaigning for the first time can be daunting, it normally turns out to be a positive experience, especially when done alongside other Usdaw members. Whether it is a campaign day organised in support of one of Usdaw's campaigns or one in support of the Labour Party during an election, its success will depend on the active engagement of members.

Usdaw members campaigning together allows the Union to ensure that its support and presence is recognised and valued by the campaigns being helped and that the efforts of Usdaw members are co-ordinated in the best way possible to make a real difference.

Campaigning together also allows members to benefit from the experience, skills and solidarity of other members, improving the size and skills of the Union's activist base overall.

Attending Usdaw campaign events is a really easy and positive way for members to get that bit more active in the work of the Union.

### **Joining the Labour Party and Getting Involved**

As well as supporting the Labour Party and campaigning together, Usdaw members can join the Labour Party as individual members. They can get involved directly alongside other trade unionists and people from across society who believe that the Labour Party and Labour Councils and Governments are the best way to secure the change that working people need in our country.

Joining the Labour Party is a really good way for Usdaw members to help ensure that Usdaw's key campaign messages and the issues that affect members are raised effectively within the Labour Party. It also allows them to take part in more of Labour's activities and elections. It is a crucial first step if members are looking to get more formally involved in the Labour Party, for example by holding positions within Labour or standing for election.

## Usdaw's Political Activists Programme

In order to provide Usdaw members with the support they need to become confident and experienced political activists and candidates, Usdaw has launched a Political Activists Programme. The pandemic and lockdown severely impacted on the initial activities of the programme. However, steps were taken to deliver support for activists campaigning online during elections as well as holding online political engagement events and linking members in with available online training.

As the Union prepares for the next general election, activity, support and training through the Political Activists Programme will take a central role in ensuring that Usdaw is ready to play a full role in that election campaign.

The Political Activists Programme will work to deliver support and training tailored to Usdaw members that will enable members to be confident participants in campaigns, play a full role in political activities, and become election candidates themselves if they want to. Having politically active members will enable Usdaw to exert influence in politics, win campaigns and deliver through political means for members.

Usdaw members interested in getting more involved in politics, at any level and in any way, should sign up for the Political Activists Programme in order to receive information about activities, training and support on an ongoing basis.



## Standing for Election

It is in everybody's interests to have a diverse range of politicians with a range of experience taking decisions that affect our lives. There should be politicians serving as councillors, members of the devolved parliaments and as MPs who understand the real life experiences of Usdaw members, ideally having been Usdaw members themselves.

Usdaw members, especially those who have experience of organising and representing members as shop stewards or branch officials, quite often already possess the skills needed by elected politicians.

### Getting Involved in Politics - What You Can Do

- **Join the Labour Party** – Become a Labour Party member in order to take part in Labour Party meetings and activities, to be eligible to be an Usdaw delegate to Labour Party Conference, and to stand for election. For more information go to [join.labour.org.uk](http://join.labour.org.uk)
- **Become an Usdaw delegate from your branch to your local Constituency Labour Party** – If you are a Labour Party member, put yourself forward to represent your branch as a delegate to your local Labour Party by contacting your Area Organiser or the Politics Office.
- **Sign up for Usdaw's Political Activists Programme** – Get more involved in politics and develop your campaign skills by signing up for Usdaw's Political Activist Programme. For more information go to [www.usdaw.org.uk/jointheteam](http://www.usdaw.org.uk/jointheteam)
- **Think about standing for election** – Stand up for your community and represent them as an elected representative. Many Usdaw members already have the skills to listen to and take action on behalf of their neighbours and wider community. If this is something you would be interested in contact the Politics Office.

# Section Four – Delivering a Labour Government

## Why We Need a Labour Government

Usdaw members need and deserve a Government that is on their side, a Government that listens to and understands the issues facing them in their daily lives. Ultimately this means that members need a Labour Government.

With a Labour Government, Usdaw is able to use its formal links with the Labour Party to secure meaningful progress for members, working with Labour to make the country better and fairer for all of us.

## What Labour Delivered for Working People When in Government

As an affiliated trade union, Usdaw played a key part in the achievements of Labour in Government, which is something everyone involved should be proud of.

The Conservatives have been in power since 2010, which means that it can sometimes be difficult to remember all the progress made for working people under the last Labour Government. It is worth taking the time to remember just some of what was achieved:

- **Strengthened Workers' Rights** including introducing the very first National Minimum Wage, a minimum of four weeks' paid holiday, a right to parental leave, extended maternity leave, a new right to request flexible working and the same protection for part-time workers as full-time workers.
- **Rebuilt the NHS** delivering the shortest waiting times since NHS records began, three million more operations carried out each year by 2010 compared with 1997, over 44,000 more doctors, over 89,000 more nurses, over three quarters of GP practices offering extended opening hours for at least one evening or weekend session a week, all prescriptions free for people being treated for cancer or the effects of cancer and teenage girls are offered a vaccination against cervical cancer and a guarantee that whatever the condition, people would not have to wait more than 18 weeks from GP referral to the start of hospital treatment.
- **Took measures to support pensioners** increasing winter fuel payments, giving the over 75's free TV licences and lifting 900,000 out of poverty.
- **Provided every child with the best possible start in life** through the establishment of over three million Child Trust Funds and the opening of nearly 3,000 Sure Start Children's Centres, which provided support for two million children and their families and a free nursery place for every three and four year old. By 2010, over two million children had been lifted out of absolute poverty.

- **Massively invested in education** with over 42,400 more teachers and 123,000 more teaching assistants by 2010 than in 1997, more than doubled the number of apprenticeships, approximately 3,700 rebuilt and significantly refurbished schools, significantly improved GCSE achievement by pupils and more young people attending university than ever before.
- **Increased the quality and supply of housing** including setting a 'decent homes standard' and investing over £20 billion to bring 1.4 million homes up to the standard. They also launched the £1.5 billion Housing Pledge to speed up the delivery of new affordable housing and embarked on the biggest program of council house building for 20 years.
- **Made our communities safer** with 16,000 more police officers and 16,000 new police community support officers in 2010 compared with 1997. Overall crime dropped by 36% with violent crime reduced by 41%. Every community was given its own dedicated police team.
- **Made our country fairer by:**
  - Tackling homelessness so that by 2010 it was at its lowest level since the early 1980's.
  - Equalised the age of consent, repealed Section 28, and introduced civil partnerships giving same sex couples the same inheritance, pension and next-of-kin rights as heterosexual couples.
  - Moved decision making closer to the people affected by those decisions with devolution in Scotland, Wales, Northern Ireland and London.
- **Took early action to tackle climate change** by significantly reducing greenhouse gas emissions and boosting the supply of renewable energy.



## What We Want to See From a Future Labour Government

Whilst it is important to recognise how previous Labour Governments have changed the country for the better, the reason why Usdaw members need a Labour Government now is for all the changes we need to see in the future.

A lot of those achievements have been undone or eroded by the Conservative Government and the world is constantly changing and presenting new challenges. We have seen that the Conservatives' approach does not put working people first. Usdaw wants to see a Labour Government elected so that it can deliver on the aims of Usdaw's campaigns. Amongst the things Usdaw could make progress on with a Labour Government are:

- **Freedom From Fear** – The key political aim of the 'Freedom From Fear' Campaign for many years has been to secure stronger legal protections for retail workers to tackle the problem of abuse, threats and violence that Usdaw members face when simply going about their jobs.

Whilst the campaign finally secured these protections in Scotland last year through a private member's bill from Daniel Johnson, Labour MSP for Edinburgh Southern, for years this has been resisted in Westminster by the Conservatives.

The campaign is making progress against this Conservative resistance but with a Labour Government the campaign could finally see these protections introduced.

- **Industrial Strategy for Retail** – The retail sector has been neglected by the Conservative Government for too long. In the face of closures and redundancies that, in any other sector would have seen direct intervention, the Government has not intervened and has left the sector, and the people employed by it, to fend for itself.



During this same time, Usdaw has worked to develop an industrial strategy for retail and has had significant involvement and support from the Labour Party. With a Labour Government, Usdaw will be able to follow through on this work and work with the Government to provide real and meaningful support for the sector, and more importantly, the people employed in it.

- **Universal Credit** – The Conservative Government's Universal Credit system does not work. It fails to support those in need and struggles to cope with the realities of work, such as four weekly pay.

Time and again the Government has refused to listen and has failed to change the system in order to better support those Usdaw members and other working people who rely on the support provided by Universal Credit.

Usdaw and Labour have both called for the system to be replaced with one that works for working people and provides enough support for people who need it. With a Labour Government, this could be achieved.

- **Childcare** – Many Usdaw members rely on informal childcare arrangements, often because formal childcare either cannot cope with their working patterns or it is too expensive.

When last in Government, Labour introduced free childcare to support working parents and committed to expand it at the last election. With a Labour Government, this important pledge could finally be delivered to provide real support for working parents.

## How We Get a Labour Government

Winning a general election is not easy, especially when it is a battle between Labour and the Conservatives, with the Conservatives having a significant financial advantage.

What Labour has is people, thousands of committed activists in the heart of communities up and down the country. This is where the members of Usdaw and other trade unions play a key role.

The answer to how we deliver a Labour Government is by all of us playing an active role in the campaign and working together. Members need to understand what is on offer at the election, and what is at stake, that the election will offer a real opportunity for change.

It is then crucial that everyone uses their voice and their influence to make the case for that change. By simply talking with family, friends, colleagues and neighbours about the need to vote, and to vote Labour, members can make a real difference.

Finally, campaigns are won by people going out and campaigning together. Putting in the effort that is needed to communicate the election message and counteract the Conservatives' money.

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## Useful Links

### Join the Labour Party

[join.labour.org.uk](http://join.labour.org.uk)

(make sure you select the 'reduced' rate as a member of Usdaw)

### Join the Political Activist Programme

[www.usdaw.org.uk/jointheteam](http://www.usdaw.org.uk/jointheteam)

### Register to vote

[www.gov.uk/register-to-vote](http://www.gov.uk/register-to-vote)

### Sign up for a postal vote

[www.electoralcommission.org.uk/i-am-a/voter/apply-vote-post](http://www.electoralcommission.org.uk/i-am-a/voter/apply-vote-post)



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