

Developing a Network of Political Activists



Executive Council Statement
to the 2019 ADM



Usdaw
*Union of Shop, Distributive
and Allied Workers*

Foreword by Paddy Lillis, Usdaw General Secretary



I think it is fair to say that politics has taken a bumpy road over the last couple of years. From the snap General Election to Brexit, from Universal Credit to austerity, uncertainty has been the dominating factor in politics.

One thing that we can be certain of is that this Tory Government is hurting our members and making a mess of governing the country. Working people need a Labour Government. A Government committed to delivering the real and meaningful change that our members need.

Usdaw needs a Labour Government that looks and sounds like our members; one that understands their interests and the issues they face in their daily lives and puts them first; one that promotes fairness, equality and prosperity for all, through its actions.

It is because of this that we need more of our members to be actively involved in politics, voicing their opinions on the world around them, joining Labour, influencing policy and standing for election.

Usdaw has stepped up its activity, saying loudly and clearly that 'It's Time For Better Pay', proposing concrete measures to 'Save Our Shops', lobbying to protect Sunday working and improve the law on assaults against retail workers.

Since becoming General Secretary last July, I have been determined to put in place the necessary resources to deliver a comprehensive strategy for political engagement, one that puts encouragement, training and support at its heart so that Usdaw members can get more involved directly in politics, campaigning, and standing as Labour candidates.

It is my firm belief that there is a huge amount of talent amongst our membership and that many members have the necessary skills to go far in politics, although many might not realise it yet. We need to do more as a Union to support and develop our members to become political activists.

I hope that the measures outlined in this statement demonstrate the commitment that the Union, and myself personally, have to encouraging our members to become politically engaged, training those who have the skills to do more, and supporting those who become Labour candidates.

Collectively we have the strength in numbers, the commitment and the talent to make sure that our voice is heard and that we are effective political campaigners. Working together, we can ensure Usdaw has a stronger voice in politics.

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

Paddy Lillis
General Secretary

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Why Politics Matters to Usdaw Members

As a trade union, Usdaw works every day to make the working lives of our members better as well as campaigning for broader improvements in areas that affect other aspects of our members' lives and those of their family, friends and other working people.

Sometimes this can be achieved through negotiations with employers but for other things, such as statutory workers' rights and the National Minimum Wage, it is necessary to lobby the Government.

Politics is not confined to the floor of the House of Commons, the debates in Holyrood, the workings of the Welsh Senedd, or activity in Stormont. Politics, and the political decisions that parties, politicians and organisations make, affect virtually every aspect of the daily lives of Usdaw members.

With so many aspects of our lives affected by politics, from rights at work to services provided by local councils, to pensions and other benefits, it would be wrong to ignore politics and give up our chance of influencing the decisions that are being taken.

In the workplace, political decisions have in the past benefited trade unions and Usdaw members. For example, whenever Usdaw achieves recognition with a company, or when an Area Organiser attends a disciplinary meeting in a workplace without Usdaw recognition, the Union is relying on crucial rights delivered by the last Labour Government. Rights that were won through political campaigning and that enable a trade union to better organise and represent members.

However, there have also been decisions taken that have hurt members too. For instance, the Conservative Government reducing protections against unfair dismissal and cutting in-work benefit payments was only possible because they were in Government in the first place and strong enough politically to take those decisions and force them through.

Similarly, outside of work Usdaw members are affected by political decisions every day. Funding for the NHS, budgets for local services like bin collections and road repairs, as well as priorities for the police are all governed by political decisions.

Whilst the sheer numbers of decisions being made and the scope of them could be a little intimidating, it is important to remember that Usdaw members are in a strong position. Collectively, through the Union and the resources provided by the Political Fund, members have a strong voice to influence politics.

Usdaw Campaigns

Usdaw has run many important campaigns over the years, most of which have included important political work.

► Time for Better Pay

In Autumn 2018, Usdaw launched the 'Time For Better Pay' Campaign. Whilst clearly aimed at improving the working lives of Usdaw members, in order to achieve and protect many of the big improvements that the campaign is calling for, we need a Government that is prepared to listen to Usdaw and the views of its members and enact the legislation that would guarantee £10 per hour and introduce a legal minimum number of hours in a contract.

► Supporting Parents and Carers

The 'Supporting Parents and Carers' Campaign, as well as providing valuable, practical advice on a range of issues to members, has a political dimension. Over the years, the campaign has called for increased Government funding for mental health services, a new legal right to paid carers leave, and better parental leave rights. All of these require action from politicians and are more likely to happen when Usdaw and its members are active politically.

► Freedom From Fear

The 'Freedom From Fear' Campaign is a long-running, key campaign for Usdaw and whilst it seeks to publicise the message that 'abuse is not part of the job', it also incorporates the aim of delivering improved legal protections for public facing workers who might be assaulted whilst simply going about their jobs.

Campaigning for legislation requires direct political involvement from the Union, lobbying politicians, presenting evidence and working on amendments to proposed legislation. If the Union can work with politicians to deliver this campaign goal, it will, through political action, deliver real benefits for Usdaw members.

► Sunday Trading

Right from the original 'Save Our Sundays' Campaigns, Sunday trading has always been an important issue for Usdaw members and one where the decision has always been a political one. Campaigning together, Usdaw members have successfully persuaded enough politicians to defeat proposals to relax Sunday Trading laws each time they have been proposed. Whether it was George Osborne and the Conservative Party in Westminster, or councillors in Northern Ireland, this Union needed to be directly involved in politics in order to win these campaigns.

Elections

Obviously, when it comes to politics, elections are crucial. They are the clearest point at which everybody, including Usdaw members, can directly influence political decisions by electing the people that make them.

In order to make the most of this opportunity, Usdaw members need to be involved directly in the elections. Simply taking the time to vote and doing so at each election means that politicians standing for election need to give serious consideration to the issues affecting Usdaw members. Going further, Usdaw members have the power to help make sure that candidates who are more likely to take action to actively improve their lives get elected. By volunteering their time and getting involved in election campaign activities, either through the Union or through their local Labour Parties, they can make a real difference to the outcome of election campaigns.

Register to Vote

It is important that Usdaw members make their voice heard at the ballot box. To do so, you need to be registered to vote.

You can check if you are registered by going to: www.gov.uk/register-to-vote

If your shifts or caring responsibilities mean that it is difficult to get to the polling station on the day of the election, you should sign up for a postal vote. Anyone can apply for a postal vote and you can do so by going to: www.gov.uk/government/publications/apply-for-a-postal-vote



The Importance of Engagement

With politics having an impact on the everyday lives of our members and our political structures acting as a foundation from which to build activity on, the key to our political success is engagement and activism.

Whether it is campaigning against this Government's damaging legislation such as the Civil Liabilities Bill, raising awareness of the issues our members face in the workplace or through 'Freedom From Fear' Campaign, or more directly supporting Labour at election time, we can only achieve our political aims by working together.

Meaningful engagement from our membership, on the ground, means our campaigns can have a real impact on the shopfloor, on the streets and in Parliament. Moreover, politics as a whole is stronger for our engagement. We need more people in politics with experience of working on the shopfloor, a distribution centre or a call centre; people who have experience of the difficulties that working people can face and understand the importance of political action to tackle social injustice.

Whilst not every member will agree with every campaign, the principal of collective campaigning and the ability of the Union to act as a loud and clear political voice on behalf of the members is crucial to achieving political change.

Members choosing to opt into the Political Fund, ensuring that we can be politically engaged as a Union, is an important part of this process. When recruiting members and encouraging colleagues to join it is vital that we talk about the positive impact of Usdaw campaigns and how they are relevant to the lives of our members. For instance, our 'Frequently Asked Questions' sheet and our leaflet on our campaigns and the way the Political Fund supports the work of the Union, provides the financial foundation that complements the work of engaged members and political activists.

Why We Need More Political Activists

To ensure high levels of engagement we need more political activists. Broad based political activity from our members is key to the work of our Union and only with the commitment of a large number of members volunteering will we achieve success for our political campaigning work. That means at all times we need to seek to provide encouragement and support to get more involved in politics.

Direct volunteering work from our members is the bedrock of our campaigns and is absolutely crucial to us to be able to win our campaign goals. Only by pulling in the same direction can we secure crucial advances for our members and show that our grassroots, people-powered campaigns matter more than the Tories' limitless cash.

Working together, every member, rep and official can do something to help deliver the Union's political engagement strategy. Reps and branch officials are often the first to hear that a member is interested in politics or in getting more involved in the Union, they are in a perfect position to provide that member with the initial encouragement and support they need.



Getting Involved

There are lots of different ways to get involved and become a Union activist. These include:

- ▶ Completing surveys.
- ▶ Providing a case study.
- ▶ Organising workplace visits.
- ▶ Taking part in campaign events.

Beyond this, there are many ways that members can get directly involved in the political work of the Union.

During elections, divisions organise campaign days for Usdaw members. These are a great way for members, regardless of their level of experience to get involved with the political work of the Union. Campaigning alongside other Usdaw members not only means that members get to meet each other and share their experiences, it also means that campaigning is relaxed and friendly and that support is available if people need it. Campaigning together like this also makes a real difference during elections.

Getting Involved in Your Division

If you are interested in becoming more active in the campaign work of your division, contact your Divisional Political Co-ordinator (contact details are in the appendix) and ask to be kept up-to-date with campaigning in your area.

The Labour Party

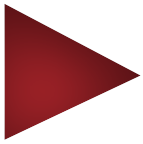
If Usdaw members want to get more involved in the political work of the Union, it is very important to join the Labour Party. Not only does this mean that they will be able to represent the Union at their local Labour Party meetings and national conferences, it also means that they will have a greater, direct say in the activities of the Labour Party.

Labour Party membership allows Usdaw members to:

- ▶ Put across their point of view at meetings and policy forums that help decide Labour's policies.
- ▶ Attend Labour Party Conferences.
- ▶ Vote in the selection of Labour candidates or stand as a Labour candidate.
- ▶ Help Usdaw campaign for policies our members need such as a higher minimum wage, better rates for young workers and promote Usdaw's 'Freedom From Fear' and 'Parents and Carers' Campaigns.
- ▶ Join in debates, social events and help at elections.
- ▶ Become a delegate from an Usdaw branch to your local Labour Party's General Committee which decides the party's priorities in your local area.

Join the Labour Party

By joining you do not need to commit to going to meetings or doing anything that you do not want to. But if there is something you do want to change, it gives you the chance to do it. You can join online join.labour.org.uk – make sure you choose the reduced affiliate member rate.



Engagement and Activism

Local Affiliations

The most common link between Usdaw and the Labour Party is an affiliation between an Usdaw branch and a Constituency Labour Party.

Affiliating means that Usdaw branches can make our members' views known to the local party, including Labour councillors, MSPs, AMs, MPs and MEPs and discuss important issues with the wider Labour Party membership. Branches should also receive details of what a local CLP is doing which means that local Usdaw members can get involved with local campaigns, events and activities.

An Usdaw branch can affiliate to any constituency where members of that branch live. It is good to get your Usdaw branch to affiliate to CLPs wherever your branch has members. The Branch Secretary completes an affiliation form (CO Form AY) and returns it to the Politics Section at Central Office. It costs £6 per year, which is paid by Central Office out of the Branch Political Fund. Annual renewals will be done automatically by Central Office until notice is given by the branch.

Affiliated branches can also:

- ▶ Appoint delegates to attend the Labour Party meetings.
- ▶ Take part in the trigger ballot process which decides whether a Labour politician should stand for Parliament again.
- ▶ Take part in the process for nominating new parliamentary candidates.
- ▶ Participate in local political campaigns.
- ▶ Encourage local parties and politicians to support Usdaw campaigns.

The Divisional Political Activist Programme

Usdaw's approach to providing support to activists is evolving to become more structured through a Divisional Political Activist Programme. The aims of this programme are to deliver campaign activity on the ground in Usdaw Key Seats and to encourage the widest possible political engagement amongst the membership.

The programme will focus on organising campaign activity in Usdaw-supported target seats over a sustained period of time, providing the encouragement, training and support to turn Usdaw activists into confident and active political campaigners. As part of the programme, Usdaw will be organising intensive events incorporating training on campaign planning and techniques, engaging with local politicians and candidates, and practical campaigning.

The programme will mean that when the next election comes, Usdaw members will be in a position to make the difference in the key battleground seats across the country with teams of well-trained political activists, who are familiar with the area and the local issues, ready to hit the ground running during the election campaign.

It also means that more Usdaw members will be in a strong position, when combined with the work undertaken by the National Candidate Programme outlined in the next section, to stand for election themselves, taking their life experience and understanding of the issues that people like Usdaw members face, into the council chambers and parliaments of this country.



Working with Usdaw Members Standing as Candidates

There is absolutely no question that Usdaw has amongst its members people who would make excellent councillors and members of parliament. Skills learnt as an Usdaw activist and rep such as listening, representation and campaigning, as well as personal qualities such as compassion and solidarity, an ability to understand other people's points of view, and a desire to help improve people's lives are exactly the same skills that make a good elected representative. The problem is that too many people do not realise the skills they already have and how valuable they are.

We need more politicians that understand working people, ones who have shared the same experiences as them. What Usdaw members need is Usdaw members representing them in council chambers and the parliaments of the United Kingdom.

That is why Usdaw is putting encouragement, training and support at the heart of its political engagement strategy. Sometimes it will simply be the case that those with the skills have not thought about themselves as potential candidates or they might have doubts about their abilities. Sometimes they might need opportunities to learn new skills that will make them better candidates, other times they will need support to level the playing field or overcome particular barriers.

Usdaw's Politics Section has always sought to help members looking to become candidates and has assisted a number of members over the years to do just that. The section is working on adapting the existing help to provide tailored support to members where it is needed and in ways that will be the most effective. This means a revised package of support for potential candidates as outlined later in this statement. In addition, a key part of this support, building on the work done in the Divisional Political Activist Programme, will be a new National Candidate Programme to provide advance training for members considering standing for parliament.

The National Candidate Programme

To provide advanced training for those members who show an interest in standing as Labour candidates, including at a parliamentary level, and who have been active participants in their Divisional Political Activist Programme, Usdaw is developing a National Candidate Programme.

This will be launched once the Divisional Political Activists Programme is underway and delivering results. It will seek to provide the intensive individual support that will allow members to succeed as Labour candidates whilst also identifying members who are ready to take the next steps as candidates.

Support for Candidates

Usdaw currently provides financial support from the Central Political Fund for any Usdaw member who stands as a candidate in local elections. Branches are also encouraged to support local members in those elections.

As more Usdaw members are encouraged, trained and supported to put themselves forward as candidates, it is important that this support is expanded upon and better targeted. As a result, in future the Union will offer the following support to members putting themselves forward for selection and election as Labour candidates:

Council Candidates

Before and during the selection process the Politics Section will provide advice to members interested in putting themselves forward for selection as a local election candidate. This will include information about the process, advice regarding panel interviews and hustings, and examples of what a good selection campaign looks like.

After selection as a Labour candidate for local elections, the Union will provide advice and support from the Politics Section on how to run a local election campaign.

Finally, during the election the Union will provide support in two further ways:

- ▶ A financial donation from Central Funds – £50 for candidates seeking election to a parish council and £100 for candidates seeking election to borough, county or unitary councils.
- ▶ Support to contact local branches to encourage members to support the campaign. In addition, local branches can make a donation of up to £200 towards their campaign.

Parliamentary Candidates

Before any selection process the Politics Section will work to identify potential candidates and then discuss with them target seats and a general strategy to put them in as good a position as possible ahead of formal selection procedures.

Immediately ahead of formal selection procedures commencing, the section will advise the member how the process will be run and agree a campaign plan.

During the selection process, the section will work with the member to deliver the campaign plan, liaising with other parts of the Union where necessary.

Upon selection, the section will meet with the member to discuss support available in the run up to the next parliamentary election with the aim of agreeing a tailored support plan covering advice, finances and logistical support.

Once a parliamentary election is called, the support plan will be reviewed to ensure that it is still fit for purpose, reflects the current political environment, the priority of the constituency in question, and support available from other sources locally and nationally.



Political Activists

As illustrated previously in this statement, the success of Usdaw's political work is dependent on the commitment of a large number of members who volunteer to get involved.

When we run campaigns, whether in workplaces, on high streets, or directly in support of Labour during elections, it is the efforts of the Union's political activists that makes the difference. These efforts are all the more important when you look at the resources and power that we are often up against. Whether we are up against the power, influence and money of the Conservative Party, or the lobbying efforts of special interest groups, for our campaigns to achieve anything we must work together and use the strengths that we have as a collective, member-based organisation. We must use the skills, experiences, time and commitment of our members to deliver on our campaign aims.

Whilst this broad base of activism is the foundation that the political work of the Union is built upon, the Union does have a set of formal political structures within it which are outlined in this section.

Divisional Political Committees

Each division has a divisional political committee. The committees are appointed by the divisional councils and serve for a three year term. Members of the Union are free to put themselves forward to be on the committee subject to the following criteria:

- ▶ They need to be individual members of the Labour Party.
- ▶ In order to ensure effective links with a wide range of workplaces, all committee members need to be in work except for the representative of retired members.
- ▶ All members of the divisional political committee must be an Usdaw GC Delegate to their Constituency Labour Party.

The committees are made up of the following:

- ▶ Divisional Officer.
- ▶ Divisional Political Co-ordinator(s).
- ▶ One Executive Councillor.
- ▶ One Divisional Councillor.
- ▶ One Equalities Forum Rep.
- ▶ One Retired Members' Consultative Committee Rep.
- ▶ One Young Workers' Committee Rep.
- ▶ Four Usdaw GC Delegates to be appointed with the view of maintaining a balance of gender, ethnicity, trade or industry, and geography.

The divisional political committees work closely with their Divisional Officers and Divisional Political Co-ordinators to:

- ▶ Organise, take part in, and encourage other members in their division to take part in campaigning.
- ▶ Encourage and offer support to Usdaw members in getting better engaged with the Labour Party, eg as activists, members or GC Delegates.
- ▶ Liaise with members of the Usdaw Parliamentary Group in their division in support of the campaign and engagement work of the committee.
- ▶ Support Usdaw Key Seats at General Elections and Usdaw candidates in local elections.
- ▶ Liaise with the Divisional Council, Divisional Equalities Forums, Young Workers' Committee and Retired Members' Committee, engaging in joint working and campaigns when possible.

Each committee elects a Chair and Vice Chair and reports to the National Political Committee.

In practice, this means that the committees are directly responsible for the delivery of the Union's political engagement work in their divisions both amongst the members and as part of outward looking campaign work.

Before and during elections, each committee organises campaign days for Usdaw members to promote the Labour Party locally. These are a great way for members, regardless of their level of experience, to get involved with the political work of the Union. Campaigning alongside other Usdaw members means that members get to share their experiences, campaigning in a relaxed and friendly environment and really make a difference.

Getting Involved in your Division

If you are interested in becoming more active in the campaign work of your division, contact your Divisional Political Co-ordinator (contact details are in the appendix) and ask to be kept up-to-date with campaigning in your area.

National Political Committee

Usdaw's National Political Committee works with the Politics Section to link together the work taking place in the divisions with the national political work and campaigns undertaken by the Union. The National Political Committee consists of:

- ▶ The President (who shall be the Chair).
- ▶ The General Secretary.
- ▶ The Deputy General Secretary.
- ▶ Two Executive Council members (one of whom shall be the Vice Chair).
- ▶ The Political Officer.
- ▶ Seven Divisional Political Committee Chairs (or their Vice Chairs).

In addition, one member of the Usdaw Parliamentary Group is invited to give the Parliamentary Report at each meeting.

Usdaw's Parliamentary Group

Members of Usdaw who have been elected to the House of Commons, the Scottish Parliament or the Welsh Assembly together form Usdaw's Parliamentary Group. The Parliamentary Group works to give the issues that affect Usdaw members' lives the importance they deserve in political debates.

The Group members support the Union's campaigns and work with the Union to raise issues, defeat damaging proposals, and improve legislation passing through our parliaments.

The Group's Chair is David Hanson MP. David is a third generation Usdaw member and worked for the Co-op before entering Parliament.

The Group's Secretary is Ruth George MP. Ruth was Usdaw's Political Officer before being elected in the 2017 snap General Election.



Appendix – Useful Contacts

Central Office

Usdaw Politics Section

Michael Wheeler, Political Officer
Emily Rowles, Research Assistant (Maternity Leave)
Connor Rand, Research Assistant

email: politics@usdaw.org.uk
Tel: 0161 249 2452

Divisions

South Wales and Western Division

Nick Ireland, Divisional Officer

email: cardiff@usdaw.org.uk
Tel: 029 2073 1131

Jason Stevens, Divisional Political Co-ordinator

email: cardiff@usdaw.org.uk
Tel: 01752 765930

Eastern Division

Nigel Scully, Divisional Officer

email: walthamx@usdaw.org.uk
Tel: 01992 709280

Andy Hearn, Divisional Political Co-ordinator

email: walthamx@usdaw.org.uk
Tel: 01992 709280

Midlands Division

Gavin Dadley, Divisional Officer

email: redditch@usdaw.org.uk
Tel: 01527 406290

Darren Matthews, Divisional Political Co-ordinator

email: redditch@usdaw.org.uk
Tel: 01527 406290

North Eastern Division

Joanne Thomas, Divisional Officer

email: leeds@usdaw.org.uk
Tel: 0113 232 1320

Aidan McCarthy, Divisional Political Co-ordinator

email: leeds@usdaw.org.uk
Tel: 0113 232 1320

Scottish Division

Stewart Forrest, Divisional Officer

email: glasgow@usdaw.org.uk
Tel: 0141 427 6561

Rob Donnelly, Divisional Political Co-ordinator

email: glasgow@usdaw.org.uk
Tel: 0141 427 6561

Southern Division

Sue Merrell, Divisional Officer

email: morden@usdaw.org.uk
Tel: 020 8687 5950

Rafael Rey, Divisional Political Co-ordinator

email: morden@usdaw.org.uk
Tel: 020 8687 5950

North West Division

Mike Aylward, Divisional Officer

email: warrington@usdaw.org.uk
Tel: 01925 578050

Tony Clare, Divisional Political Co-ordinator

email: warrington@usdaw.org.uk
Tel: 01925 578050



Improving workers' lives – Winning for members

