



Making Usdaw Members' Voices Heard

National Executive
Council Statement
to 2026 ADM





Usdaw is involved in politics because it plays a crucial part in improving members' lives.

The Employment Rights Act, passed last year, shows how our longstanding and historic relationship with the Labour Party can deliver for our members. Usdaw was involved in developing Labour's New Deal for Working People right from the start – and now it is the law.

The Labour Party is the party of trade unions. We must continue to strengthen the link holding us together, making the voices of ordinary people heard in the political arena, and delivering for our members.

General Secretary's Foreword



Last year, the Labour Government delivered for working people by passing the Employment Rights Act.

I am proud our Union played such an important role in securing the Act, as well as the other changes promised in Labour's Plan to Make Work Pay. We were there from the first discussions through to the last moments when the Bill became law, and we will continue to work hard to make sure our new rights are implemented in full.

For our members, the Act means Statutory Sick Pay from day one of absence, a right to a contract that reflects hours that they work, a ban on fire and rehire and so much more.

None of this would have been possible without our affiliation to the Labour Party. It means that the voices of Usdaw members are in the room where decisions are made.

Whilst other parties will peddle simplistic answers, I know that the Labour Government is delivering despite the difficult inheritance left by the Conservatives. We will work with the Government as a constructive partner, but I will never be afraid to tell them when they get things wrong. As General Secretary, I am committed to continuing to use our political voice to campaign on our members' priorities.

A handwritten signature in red ink that reads "Joanne Thomas". The signature is stylized and written in a cursive script.

Joanne Thomas
General Secretary

Section One – A Past, Present and Future Link

A Shared History

In 1900, Usdaw’s predecessor union, the National Union of Shop Assistants, Warehousemen and Clerks, came together with over 40 other trade unions to form the Labour Representation Committee, which eventually became the Labour Party. As one of those founding members, our Union is not just affiliated to the Labour Party but, with our sister unions, an integral part of it.

We are proud that our members have historically played important roles in Labour Governments, including the first woman cabinet minister Margaret Bondfield, and Ellen Wilkinson, who served as Education Minister in the Attlee Government.

Our Link Today

Unions created the Labour Party so ordinary working people could have a political voice, and to stand up against anti-union employers and vested interests. This is still true today, and we know that decisions that impact our members at work are taken not just by employers, but by elected politicians and governments.

With over 14 years of Conservative rule, we saw this more clearly than ever with attacks on rights at work and living standards and the stripping back of our public services.



In 2024, the Labour Party returned to government on a manifesto that sought to change Britain for the better, including delivering a New Deal for Working People. Usdaw played a key part in developing and shaping the New Deal – without our affiliation, there would have been no voice in the room for Usdaw members.

But the damage done by the governments of David Cameron, Theresa May, Boris Johnson, Liz Truss and Rishi Sunak cannot be undone overnight. Nor can the impact of 40 years of roll back on workers' rights. That is why our Union must continue to organise to influence the political agenda.

We are proud to be a constructive partner with the Labour Government, but inevitably there have been times when we have not always agreed with their decisions. Where they get things wrong, we will never be afraid to say so: Usdaw was clear on its opposition to the decision to restrict the Winter Fuel Allowance and changes to the benefits system which would negatively impact our disabled members. But because of our affiliation and strong historic relationship with the Labour Party, the words of our members carried weight and contributed to the Government changing direction.

That is why Usdaw is committed to maintaining and growing its links to the Labour Party. We will work to increase Usdaw's voice at every level - locally, regionally, and nationally.

A Local Link

The Labour Party is organised through Constituency Labour Parties (CLPs), to which trade union branches can be directly affiliated. Where practical, every CLP should have at least one Usdaw branch affiliated. Similarly, every Usdaw branch should affiliate to at least one CLP, and it is strongly advised that branches should affiliate to, at a minimum, any CLP where they have ten members living in that constituency.

There are important benefits to branch affiliations, which include giving Usdaw a vital say in the selection and reselection of candidates, and it increases grassroots links between the Union and the broader Labour Party.

From the beginning, the Labour Party has been made up of many different parts: affiliated trade unions, members, and affiliated socialist societies. This unique alliance of interests gives Labour a direct link to ordinary working people, and its structures must reflect the diversity of experiences. That is why Usdaw continues to support delegate based organisational structures as the default for all CLPs, and all Usdaw members who are individual members of the Labour Party should be encouraged to become a delegate to their local party.

A National Voice

Usdaw is actively involved in Labour Party structures on a national basis, giving us a say on how the Party is run and how policy is developed. This includes the Labour Party Conference, the National Policy Forum, and the National Executive Committee. Usdaw believes that there should be no reduction in the collective voice of the affiliated trade unions within any Labour Party structures.

The Labour Party Annual Conference is an important opportunity for us to pursue issues that matter to our members by submitting motions, voting on motions and engaging in debate. It is vital for union voices to remain heard at Labour Party Conference. We will continue to support maintaining our 50% share of the votes at conference, as well as ensuring that trade unions continue to make up the majority on the Conference Arrangements Committee (CAC), which acts as the standing orders committee for Labour Party Conference, so that our collective voice as unions is not reduced. We will also continue to call for this approach across structures in devolved nations and regions.

Working Together

Usdaw works together with our sister affiliated trade unions through the Trade Union and Labour Party Liaison Organisation (TULO), also known as Labour Unions. We are proud that last year our General Secretary, Joanne Thomas, was elected as its first woman Chair.

We are committed to working with TULO on a national and regional basis to promote our collective interests, and provide training, support and a voice for ordinary working people in the Labour Party.



Candidates for the Future

The selection of candidates is an important part of Labour Party business. Candidates are the public face of the Labour Party, and if elected to public office are responsible for delivering on manifesto pledges.

We know the impact that those with a trade union background – and specifically an Usdaw background – can make in parliaments and council chambers. That is why we continue to strive to make sure that Usdaw members can and do seek public office.

Training and development is important, however, process and procedure must give affiliated unions, including Usdaw, a meaningful say. For example, for elections to the House of Commons, devolved legislatures and directly elected mayors, we will continue to make the case that affiliates, like Usdaw, should be able to nominate candidates before the shortlisting process and that those nominations should be given appropriate weight when shortlisting takes place.

A Living Link

The link between Usdaw and the Labour Party is not just something on a piece of paper. It is brought to life, every day, by our members. The Labour Party is at its best when trade union voices are at the forefront, and Usdaw will continue to play its part.

A Co-operative Voice

Our Union began representing Co-op workers, and we are proud to still represent thousands of members working across the co-operative sector today.

Our Union is affiliated with the Co-operative Party, the political arm of the Co-operative Movement, committed to working with the Labour Party to further the interests of co-ops and mutuals.



Section Two – Usdaw Voices in the Room

Sometimes, it can seem like political decision-making is so far removed from the everyday lives of ordinary working people that it might as well be happening on another planet. From the outside, it can seem as if the politicians taking the decisions are just as alien to us.

Decisions and events that happen in Westminster, the Senedd, Holyrood or even our local town halls have a huge impact on us. That is why it is so important that the people taking these decisions understand what life is really like for working people.

In the past, the politicians we had grown used to seeing in the media were rarely representative of our local communities. Many were privately educated and had little real-world experience of modern working environments.

In recent years, this has changed. Since July 2024, with the election of the Labour Government, both our politics and the makeup of our politicians have changed massively. People who have experience of real working life, and the pressures facing people who have to work for a living, have pushed for changes in laws and policies that will help their constituents by addressing the key problems that they face.

Many Labour MPs, MSPs, MSs and Councillors have experience working in sectors like retail, distribution, education or the NHS. They also often have a trade union background, with every Labour candidate and politician expected to be a member of a trade union. This means that they bring these values to their role as elected representatives.

The Difference

It is important that the people we elect to represent us have the best interests of working people and their families at the heart of the decisions they are taking, and that we remember that not all politicians or political parties are the same.

We saw this where regions that elected Labour Councillors during the austerity years had representatives that fought for local people against the cuts that the Conservative-led national government brought down on us. We say Conservative-led, because austerity was only possible because of the support of the Liberal Democrats, who formed a coalition government with the Conservatives for their first term.

In practice, austerity politics meant cutting public funding, under the guise of cutting 'red tape' and bureaucracy. The reality of this meant cuts to our essential public services left local councils needing to reduce services to avoid going bankrupt. In recent months, there has been talk from both the Conservatives and Reform of returning to austerity. Reform in particular has begun to campaign on this subject, using the same language of 'cutting red tape' that was used previously to justify cutting essential services. In Reform-led councils, this has caused chaos already and is another example of Reform not delivering on their promises.

This Labour Government has set fairer funding for councils, which will mean more freedom to fund services in the way councillors believe benefits local residents. However, it is clear that Reform controlled councils are choosing to bring back cuts, not because the Government has forced them to, but because that is what they believe in.

Reform the Reality

Reform UK are in control of 12 local councils and there are over 900 Reform UK local councillors. They say that they are saving money and cutting waste, but they have not shown clear evidence of how these savings have been made. Let's have a look at what they have actually been doing, dressed up as cost-saving:

- Focusing on short-term cuts without considering the long-term impact - like scrapping the move to electric cars in Kent, which may save on upfront costs but is likely to lead to higher vehicle maintenance costs later on.
- Claiming credit for decisions made by previous administrations, like new IT contracts in Lancashire and Lincolnshire - where work on the contracts was already nearly completed before they took over.
- Cutting projects that they do not agree with politically - like cancelling electric vehicle charging and other green projects in Staffordshire.
- Harming essential services - at a time of crisis in the adult social care sector, they are closing five council run care homes and five day centres in Lancashire.

The Usdaw Voice

To keep affecting change, we need members to stand for political office. The best decisions are made when there are trade unionists at the table, and when there are Usdaw voices in the room.

Being a local councillor or MP is a lot like being a rep. Taking the time to listen to the people you are representing, to really hear what they are saying and to understand their perspective. We know that our Usdaw Reps and members have the skills needed to stand for office. But if members are unsure, the Usdaw Politics team is on hand to help, with guidance, training and development. There is lots of support available for members to put themselves forward.

The Next Steps

Keeping the link between the Labour Party and trade unions alive means that we in the Labour Movement need to make sure that there are trade unionists taking up positions in the Labour Party. This could be at a very local level, by attending meetings or being an active local campaigner. This means getting to understand the reasons behind decisions taken locally, and getting to spend time with the people that make those decisions.

Attending Labour Party Branch and CLP meetings, and taking up roles within the CLP, can give Usdaw members a way to affect the decisions being taken in their communities. There is more information on ways to get involved at the back of this statement.

For more information about standing for elected office, Usdaw members can attend the TULO Political School, which is a supportive environment for trade unionists to learn about the practical steps they can take to get more involved.



Section Three – Usdaw Voices at Every Level

We often say that the industrial and political work of the Union are two sides of the same coin. We need strong political representation at all levels of government, at Westminster, in Scotland, in Wales and in local councils, so that we can bring into effect the lasting political changes that Usdaw members need in their working and home lives.

We have a strong record of campaigning in areas that will make improvements for people at work, and to underpin this we also need to be able to address the issues members tell us affect them in their home lives and local communities. The way that we do this depends on the type of issue and which kind of representative we need to engage with.

Local Councillors

Council services are mostly funded through our national government in Westminster. Depending on the area, there may be councils that work at different levels of local responsibility. Wherever the region, the council is responsible for many of the day-to-day services that we rely on, including our local parks, schools, and libraries, and they have oversight of local planning and licensing.

Usdaw engages with local councils around issues like Sunday trading, supporting local high streets and passing council motions supporting our 'Freedom From Fear' Campaign, including Greenwich, Plymouth, Oxford, and Worcester. Where there are Usdaw members who have been elected as local representatives, we offer support and resources for campaigning, including helping Usdaw's political activists to participate in local events and campaigns. One of our next steps will be creating an Usdaw Councillor Network, so that members who are Councillors can share their experiences and support each other.



Westminster

MPs use information and examples from Usdaw members to raise issues in Parliament. These could be through raising a formal question to a minister, highlighting a topic during a select committee hearing, or putting forward a change in law themselves. Like any group of colleagues, MPs have good working relationships with each other and may work together on shared concerns to drive change.

Select Committees

A select committee is a group of MPs or Peers that look at specific areas of the work of our Government in detail, scrutinising the decisions and making recommendations based on evidence that they receive. Usdaw and other trade unions engage with select committees by giving written evidence or through sending representatives and taking questions in person.

Ushaw has given evidence to select committees on varied issues, for example on the Employment Rights Bill, to the Home Affairs Committee on the scale and seriousness of violence against shopworkers, to the Treasury Select Committee on the acceptances of cash, which members tell us helps with budgeting and managing finances. In each case, the Union is raising issues that are important to Usdaw members and getting a national spotlight to focus on them.

Usdaw Group of MPs

Currently, Usdaw has over 60 members in our Parliamentary Group, which is made up of Labour Members of Parliament from the House of Commons and Peers from the House of Lords. Usdaw gives information and updates on our campaigns to our Group, to enable them to make decisions that take into account the reality of life for Usdaw members, both at work and at home. Usdaw members have been invited to speak to the Group in person, to share their experiences first hand. Equally, Usdaw MPs can be invited to attend branch meetings in their constituency to listen to our members. This means that MPs and Lords can see the direct impact of their decisions on the people they represent.

Devolved Parliaments

Having devolved parliaments in Scotland and Wales means that elected representatives can take decisions on matters that directly affect the people of those nations. Some can still only be decided on by MPs in Westminster, but matters like local government, education, and health and social services are all decided on by the members of the devolved parliaments.

In a similar way to Westminster, there are Usdaw Labour members of the Scottish Parliament (MSPs) and members of the Senedd Cymru (Welsh Parliament) (MSs). As members of Usdaw, they share the same values and concerns and are committed trade unionists.

In Scotland, crime and policing is also devolved, and through our campaigns with our Usdaw MSPs to address violence against shopworkers, we were able to support the creation of the Protection of Workers Act, which has been in force in Scotland since 2021. This has served as a basis for a similar provision in the national Crime and Policing Bill, making it an offence to assault a shop worker in England and Wales.

Ultimately, Usdaw wants to see change that benefits our members. The more elected representatives there are that share common aims, the more chance we have of making a positive difference. There is more to be done, but so far this Labour Government has abolished the two child benefit cap, introduced the Employment Rights Act, the Renter's Rights Act, and free breakfast clubs as a direct result of Usdaw member voices.



The Scottish Parliament Building at Holyrood in central Edinburgh.



The Senedd Cymru (Welsh Parliament) in Cardiff

Section Four – Getting Involved

We need voices of Usdaw members within politics to ensure decisions reflect the needs and lives of working people. This is important at all levels, from within Government to on the ground campaigning and at home voting.

When members' voices are heard, positive changes can be made. We can see this with the implementation of the Employment Rights Act, which is a direct result of the work and campaigning of Usdaw members, and is key to enhancing workers' rights with its provisions.

Resource Sheets



The Usdaw Politics Team have put together a series of resource sheets about Usdaw and politics. Members can visit: www.usdaw.org.uk/LabourSupporter to find out more about taking up a CLP Officer role, standing for public office, and how to invite an MP to visit a store or branch.

Political Activist

Becoming a political activist enables you to become more politically involved on your own terms. In joining the programme, you do not need to attend every event, you can choose which activities you wish to participate in. Whether that is campaigning in local elections through door knocking and leafleting to help Labour win or retain Key Seats, or even standing as a Labour candidate. You will get the opportunity to attend training and workshops to help you on your political journey.



You can find more information and stay updated on the latest activities near you by signing up to 'Join the Team' here: www.usdaw.org.uk/JoinTheTeam.

Joining the Labour Party

You can become a member of the Labour Party, to help ensure there is always a voice in the room who understands the needs of working people, from their own experiences.

Being a member of the Labour Party allows you to become an Usdaw delegate (known as a General Committee or GC Delegate) to your Constituency Labour Party (CLP), where you can attend meetings and participate in discussions with your local Labour MP, or Labour candidate. This is crucial, as it allows MPs and candidates to hear how policies can affect working people. They also allow you, as a delegate, to influence policy through submitting and voting on motions.

As an Usdaw member, you are eligible for a reduced rate of membership. To join, visit: <https://join2.labour.org.uk/join>.

Voting

Voting in elections is one of the easiest ways to get your voice heard and make change.

You cannot vote unless you are on the electoral roll. To ensure you are exercising your right, make sure you have registered to vote here: www.gov.uk/register-to-vote.

We know it can be difficult to find the time to vote on polling day. Between work, family and other commitments, it can be tricky to get to the polling station in person. To make things easier, you can vote at home, by post. Register for a postal vote here: www.gov.uk/apply-postal-vote.



Section Five – Usdaw’s Parliamentary Group

House of Commons

Chair: Michael Wheeler MP
Vice Chair: Connor Rand MP
Secretary: Helena Dollimore MP
Douglas Alexander MP
Sadik Al-Hassan MP
Jess Asato MP
Sarah Champion MP
Andrew Cooper MP
Stella Creasy MP
Judith Cummins MP
Kate Dearden MP
Anneliese Dodds MP
Stephen Doughty MP
Sarah Edwards MP
Chris Elmore MP
Kirith Entwistle MP
Bill Esterson MP
Emma Foody MP
Daniel Francis MP
Tracy Gilbert MP
Becky Gittins MP
Ben Goldsborough MP
John Grady MP
Nia Griffith MP
Sarah Hall MP
Carolyn Harris MP
Claire Hazelgrove MP
Mark Hendrick MP
Gerald Jones MP
Gen Kitchen MP
Alice Macdonald MP
Siobhain McDonagh MP
Jim McMahon MP
Anna McMorrin MP
Frank McNally MP
Ed Miliband MP
Navendu Mishra MP
Ian Murray MP
Alex Norris MP
Tristan Osborne MP
Michael Payne MP

Yasmin Qureshi MP
Jonathan Reynolds MP
Tim Roca MP
Matt Rodda MP
Sarah Russell MP
Oliver Ryan MP
Josh Simons MP
Jeff Smith MP
Gareth Snell MP
Jo Stevens MP
Fred Thomas MP
Gareth Thomas MP
Matt Turmaine MP
Liz Twist MP
Valerie Vaz MP
Chris Vince MP
Christian Wakeford MP
Andrew Western MP
Katie White MP
Rosie Wrighting MP

House of Lords

Baroness Anderson of Stoke-on-Trent
Lord Bassam of Brighton
Lord Cashman
Baroness Chapman of Darlington
Lord Coaker
Lord Hannett of Everton
Lord Hanson of Flint
Baroness Smith of Basildon

Scottish Parliament

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Claire Baker MSP
Neil Bibby MSP
Mark Griffin MSP
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