

Ref: **TG/KHC/220722**

22 July 2022

Alex Rowley MSP  
Room M1.04  
Scottish Parliament  
Edinburgh  
EH99 1SP

**BY EMAIL**

Dear Alex,

**Consultation – Domestic Building Environmental Standards (Scotland) Bill**

Usdaw welcomes the chance to share our views on the proposed Domestic Building Environmental Standards (Scotland) Bill, which would introduce a requirement for all new-build housing to meet the Passivhaus standard, or a Scottish equivalent.

We are the UK's fifth largest Trade Union with around 360,000 members, including 40,000 members in Scotland. Our members work solely in the private sector with the majority employed in retail and the retail supply chain. Usdaw also has significant membership in road transport, warehousing, food manufacturing, pharmaceuticals, call centres, and home shopping.

The Union is deeply concerned by the impact rising energy bills, and the wider cost of living crisis, is having on working people. Soaring inflation, which is primarily being driven by energy price rises, is posing a significant threat to workers' standards of living. Key workers, who kept the country going throughout the pandemic, are now struggling to make ends meet.

The results of Usdaw's recent cost of living survey of over 7,000 workers clearly demonstrate that urgent action is needed to reduce working peoples' bills. Shockingly, close to a quarter of respondents are missing meals every month in order to pay their bills, compared to 5% last year. The surging cost of living is having a devastating effect on workers' living standards, with nearly three-quarters of respondents reporting their mental health is being impacted as a result of financial worries. Workers are facing unsustainable pressure and are being pushed to the limit.

The Union is therefore supportive of measures that can be shown to reduce workers' energy bills. The Passivhaus building standard offers a cost effective and environmentally friendly means to drive down the cost of heating workers' homes. Passivhaus building techniques deliver lower bills via substantial increases to energy efficiency. Over time, the increase to construction costs associated with building to Passivhaus standards will be outweighed by savings in energy costs. As a result, the Union supports the proposed requirement for new housing to be built to the Passivhaus standard, as a long term measure to reduce workers' energy costs, without jeopardizing the building of more affordable housing.

However, immediate action is needed as we head towards a historically difficult winter for workers. Current predictions show that the energy price cap is likely to increase by a further 65% to £3,240 in October 2022. In addition to the recently introduced windfall tax on energy firms, the Union is calling for the Westminster Government to urgently introduce a set of measures to mitigate the impact of the energy price crisis. This should include a reduction of VAT to 17.5%, an immediate increase to all social security payments by at least the level of inflation, and an urgent and fundamental overhaul of Universal Credit.

In conjunction with these measures, the Government at Westminster must also bring forward an Employment Bill that delivers a new deal for workers. Usdaw is calling for a minimum wage of at least £12 for all workers, as a step towards £15 per hour. Alongside this, workers need a right to a minimum contract of 16 hours per week that reflects their normal hours worked, and a ban on zero-hour contracts. A comprehensive set of measures are needed immediately to tackle the rising levels of in-work poverty caused by increases to energy prices and the cost of living.

Yours sincerely