Standing up for London: 10 years of the London Assembly

LONDONASSEMBLY



Introduction

Over the last ten years London has won the right to host the 2012 Games, suffered appalling terrorist attacks and had to face a long recession, all at a time when a new unique form of city-wide government, the Greater London Authority (GLA), was establishing itself. This report highlights how the London Assembly, one branch of the GLA, has helped to deliver positive change to life in the capital.

Elected by nearly two and a half million Londoners, the 25 Members of the Assembly are a democratic check on, and balance to, the Mayor of London, holding Mayors accountable for their administrations and championing transparency at City Hall. The Assembly examines issues that have an impact on London and publishes reports recommending action by the Mayor, central government, local authorities and others

Assembly investigations are carried out by cross-party committees often looking at long-term issues facing London, from leading discussions on how the capital can emerge from the economic downturn to looking at ways to tackle alcohol misuse by young Londoners. The Assembly is also able to respond quickly to particular problems that have an impact on Londoners' lives, for example the transport chaos caused by snow in February 2009. Within a month of London's buses being withdrawn for the first time in living memory, the Assembly

recommended a range of actions to improve the response to extreme weather and these were implemented to good effect the next time snow fell.

In the decade since the GLA was created it has evolved and grown, increasing its influence and gaining new powers from central government. This short report is a summary of just ten of the areas where the Assembly has contributed to the development and operation of the GLA as a whole and its ability to deliver real changes for the better. It shows how the London Assembly has influenced and shaped policy at local, regional and national level to improve life in London, and how it has fought to ensure that, whoever is Mayor, their actions and those carried out in their name are transparent and accountable.

Metropolitan Police Commissioner
Sir Ian Blair, questioned by the Assembly on
November 2007 after the Met was found
guilty of health and safety breaches in
respect of the shooting of Jean Charles de
Menezes at Stockwell Tube station.
Photo Evening Standard



Holding the Mayor and his administration to account

Few would now dispute that transparency and accountability are essential to effective, open government. For ten years the Assembly has been publicly questioning the Mayor and senior figures in his administration to ensure that their actions, decisions and policies are clear for all to see. From the revelatory to the confrontational, these sessions have provided a public insight into where the Mayor is taking London and how his administration is using its power.

When things go wrong, the Assembly's role is to make sure that action is taken to ensure that mistakes are not repeated. When a senior adviser to the Mayor was found to have made fraudulent expense claims, the Assembly identified the key lessons to be learned and made a series of recommendations for action to improve the GLA's processes. Among these actions, the Assembly led the way on publishing each individual expense claim made by Assembly Members and pressed the Mayor, his advisers and senior GLA staff to follow suit.

Sometimes, the impact of the Assembly's work is less immediate. For example, as early as 2003 the Assembly was expressing concerns about the management of the London Development Agency (LDA), the Mayor's

regeneration body which spends hundreds of millions of pounds of public money each year. At the time, the Agency dismissed the Assembly's criticisms. But over the years that followed the weaknesses within the Agency became impossible to hide from wider public view.

In 2007, the Assembly's economic development committee carried out a detailed review of the LDA's support for a sample of projects. The review found that in some cases the LDA was unable to show what it expected to be delivered for its funding or how projects were monitored and their success or failure measured. There was also insufficient documentation to explain why the LDA had become involved in the projects in the first place.

These findings were shown to apply more generally across the LDA when, in 2008, the LDA showed itself to be unable to demonstrate proper processes in relation to projects supported by the Mayor's office.

In response to allegations of impropriety and failures of governance, the Assembly trawled through hundreds of documents and held three public meetings before issuing a Statement of Concerns calling for an overhaul of weak LDA management systems, tighter controls on registering the outside interests of LDA board members, staff and mayoral advisers and greater transparency about the role of mayoral advisers in operational

"We were able to provide evidence from our sector's point of view which was taken very seriously by the Assembly" - Scott Rosser, Director for London, Community Transport Association



decisions. The LDA's subsequent major review reached similar conclusions to the Assembly's, and a GLA groupwide review of governance incorporated the Assembly's recommendations for clearer rules for the conduct of mayoral advisors and registering outside interests of board members

The Mayor's budget

The Assembly publicly monitors and scrutinises the Mayor's budget throughout the year to help ensure that sound decisions are made and value for money is achieved. It looks at specific items of expenditure like those relating to the Mayor's programme of events, and at issues of wider concern such as spending on the preparations for the London 2012 Olympic and Paralympic Games.

The Mayor must consult the Assembly about the multibillion pound budget that funds everything the Greater London Authority and its functional bodies deliver. Over the past ten years the difference between the Mayor's original budget proposal and the final budget after his consultation with the Assembly is a total reduction of almost £180 million. That's a saving of more than £80 on a Band D council tax bill

Speaking up for Londoners

Assembly Members are a voice for Londoners in City Hall. The Assembly looks at issues from the point of view of those who are affected by them. We do this in order to find practical solutions to the problems people face in their daily lives and open up London's opportunities to all.

Instigating the London Living Wage

In July 2002, the Assembly commissioned a report on the cost of living in London in comparison with the rest of the UK and recommended that a London premium should be applied to the living wage. The then Mayor accepted the Assembly's recommendations and applied the London Living Wage within the GLA. The current Mayor has also accepted and promoted the principle of the London Living Wage, and increasing numbers of businesses and organisations outside the GLA group have adopted it.

Making London accessible to all

Our report on the poor take-up of Oyster cards among low-income groups in the capital prompted the Mayor and Transport for London to offer free cards to 100,000 people, giving them access to cheaper fares on public transport.

The Assembly's Transport Committee has pressured Transport for London's Dial-a-Ride service to make changes in response to the concerns of users, resulting "...while acknowledging the courage of hundreds of individuals, the report underlines widespread systemic and planning failures – not in order to apportion blame, but to ensure that London is better prepared for the future" - The Times



in improvements that will benefit older and disabled Londoners. For those with their own transport, in 2002 we highlighted problems relating to the different policies adopted by central London boroughs for blue badge holders, which led to an agreement between boroughs to standardise their procedures, making it simpler for badge holders to use them.

Increasing access to public toilets

In 2006, the Assembly found the number of public toilets in London had decreased dramatically - by 40 per cent over 7 years. We recommended schemes to encourage public access to toilets on commercial premises such as shops, cafes, and bars. The Mayor took up this recommendation and in April 2009 the Open London scheme was launched. The scheme encourages businesses to open their toilets to members of the public. Participating stores include Asda, Sainsbury's, Tesco, Marks and Spencer and John Lewis.

The emergency response to the 7 July attacks

In the absence of a public inquiry the Assembly remains the only organisation to have given survivors of the 7 July bombings the opportunity to have their voices heard in an official setting. Our investigation applauded the efforts of the emergency and transport services, and highlighted ways they could be better equipped to respond in future. Some 48 of our 53 recommendations have been implemented, resulting in improved communications within and between the responding services and better plans for support for survivors and bereaved people.

Strengthening London's flood defences

Over the coming years, London's flood defences and water management infrastructure will have to be updated to cope with a growing population and changing city environment.

An investigation by the Environment Committee found that fragmented responsibility for maintaining flood defences and lack of clarity over planning are putting London at greater risk. The Committee's findings on these issues were recognised and addressed in legislation in 2009.

Following work undertaken in the early years of the GLA, the Assembly became a key voice in calling for the construction of an interceptor tunnel to prevent sewage overflowing into the Thames in periods of heavy rain. The plan to build the 30 kilometre tunnel was finally given the go-ahead by the Government in 2007.

"We endorse the London Assembly's recommendation that the Mayor should extend his policies to improve public toilet provision" - House of Commons Select Committee on Communities and Local Government



In 2005, the Assembly identified for the first time the scale of loss of green space in London due to paving over front gardens – an area equivalent to 22 times the size of Hyde Park. These hard surfaces add to the pressure on the city's drainage systems, increasing the risk of local flooding. We called for planning policies to be changed to discourage people from paving over front gardens. Pressure mounted and, in October 2008, the law was changed to require planning permission for paving over front gardens with impermeable materials.

Planning for London's future

Contributing to the Mayor's London Plan

The Mayor's London Plan is the blueprint that shapes the capital physically, environmentally and economically. The policies within it directly impact on Londoners' quality of life and the look and feel of the capital, from where tall buildings are constructed to the character of our high streets and the amount of green space we enjoy. The Assembly has contributed to the proposals in this crucial strategic document, resulting in numerous changes to London Plan policies on issues such as Crossrail, more support for outer London and encouraging more sites for sustainable food growing.

Transparency in the Mayor's planning decisions

The Mayor has significant powers over planning decisions in the capital. The Assembly's work has resulted in these powers being exercised more transparently so that Londoners can see what decisions the Mayor is taking on their behalf and why. In 2002 the Assembly highlighted the Mayor's failure to open up his planning decisionmaking to public scrutiny. Excluding the public and the Assembly from meetings where planning decisions were made - which on numerous occasions were held immediately after meetings with selected developers behind closed doors - risked exposing the Mayor to allegations of improper influence.

When the Government proposed giving more planning powers to the Mayor in 2006, including the ability to take over and determine planning applications of strategic importance, the Assembly pressed hard for mechanisms to ensure openness and transparency in the decision-making process. The Mayor now holds, in public, representation hearings on planning applications he has taken over and must give the opportunity for objectors to be heard.

Influencing the development of the Mayor's housing strategy

In June 2006 the Assembly called for more family homes in London after revealing developers were meeting their "affordable housing units" targets by providing excess

"We share your concerns about protecting London from the risk of flooding...We also broadly agree with many of the conclusions and recommendations discussed in this report" - Environment Agency



numbers of one-bedroom properties. The Assembly found there was a shortfall of around 28,000 two, three and four bedroom dwellings for the affordable sector and pressed the Mayor to use his planning powers to encourage the building of homes with more bedrooms. The Mayor's Housing Strategy now includes targets for larger sized social rented homes and a larger proportion of family-sized intermediate homes.

Protecting London's war memorials

As well as looking forward to the future, the Assembly has successfully called for the preservation of London's past. For example, in 2009 the Assembly revealed that London's war memorials are threatened not only by vandalism, but also by neglect and a lack of protection by the planning system. We called for more protection for the capital's 6,000 war memorials, urging London boroughs to tighten planning policies specifically to cover the preservation of memorials. Our recommended changes to planning policies have been included in the London Plan, and the Mayor's Cultural Advisor and the Museum of London have agreed to promote the preservation of war memorials.

London Underground and the PPP

The Assembly has been at the centre of the debate about Tube upgrade works as the controversial London Underground PPP has played out. Key players including the Mayor, London Underground, contractors and the PPP Arbiter - who was called in to determine a fair price for the works when a dispute over costs erupted between London Underground and its contractor Tube Lines - all appeared before the Assembly to account publicly for the delays and cost overruns that have dogged the improvement works.

Our focus has been on keeping the costs and arrangements transparent and minimising disruption to passengers. To this end we continue to push London Underground to consider using block closures to upgrade lines, rather than seemingly endless weekends, as this is what passengers told us they would prefer. We also recently prompted London Underground and its then contractor, Tube Lines, to publish the dates they plan to close the Northern Line early, so passengers have the maximum time possible to prepare for the impact.

"Board member Patrick O'Keefe reported that he watched the Committee's meeting about the PPP agreements the day before. In his view, the Committee's meeting had revealed the arrogance of Tube Lines in relation to its approach to upgrading the Tube and how it was adversely affecting Londoners"- TfL Board Meeting



Safety on public transport

The Assembly has promoted measures to increase the safety and security of Londoners on public transport. In 2006, we highlighted safety issues at suburban railway stations, which led the Mayor to announce funding for an additional 89 British Transport police officers.

At the start of 2008, after investigating crime and disorder on the bus network, the Assembly recommended that Transport for London (TfL) conduct a feasibility study of live CCTV streaming on buses to improve safety for passengers. By October that year, TfL had implemented a trial of live CCTV in direct response to the Committee's suggestion.

Congestion charging

In the controversial early days of the congestion charging scheme, the Assembly persistently questioned the contractual arrangements between TfL and Capita, who administered the charge. The Assembly used its powers to force TfL to release the details of the contract into the public domain. In a series of public meetings and reports the Assembly highlighted serious problems relating to poor performance, customer service failings and questionable value for money, repeatedly asking the Mayor to account for them. Just six months into the

charging scheme the contract between TfL and Capita was renegotiated.

In 2002, the Assembly pressed for exemptions from the proposed congestion charge for cleaner vehicles, having recognised the impact the charge could have on vehicle emissions in central London. These exemptions became part of the scheme and the resulting environmental benefits have become an important factor in assessing the congestion charge's success. The Assembly also suggested that the idea of a low emission zone should be explored, a policy subsequently adopted by the previous and current Mayor.

The 2012 Games

The Assembly's calls for a lasting legacy for east London and a focus on sustainability helped to shape London's bid for the 2012 Games. Having secured those commitments, the Assembly's continuing concern has been to ensure that the promises made in the bid are delivered.

An extensive body of work has been built around regular public sessions with the agencies responsible: the London Development Agency, Olympic Delivery Authority, and the London Organising Committee of the Olympic Games and Paralympic Games. These sessions create opportunities for Londoners to get a sense of exactly what they can expect

"The London Assembly's sport and culture committee has put some pertinent questions to the organisers – how many people will be ahead of the average London family in the queue for low-cost tickets and how many tickets are going to be kept for the International Olympic Committee and their friends?" – Evening Standard



from the Games, and how the millions of pounds they are contributing are being spent.

2012 tickets

In 2010, the Assembly has led calls for transparency about who will receive the 9 million tickets available for the 2012 Games and how much tickets will cost. Questions from Londoners were included in a submission to the Games organisers, LOCOG, which set out key issues such as affordability, availability, ease of purchase and accessibility for priority groups like London school children and local residents. The organisers will present their ticketing plans at a future Assembly meeting so Assembly Members can assess how far their questions and concerns have been addressed.

Business opportunities arising from the Games

In February 2006 the Assembly highlighted potential opportunities for small and medium sized enterprises arising from the 2012 Games, and called for a website providing information on procurement opportunities to ensure they did not miss out. Since the LDA launched the CompeteFor website over 18,500 companies have signed up and the service is expected to produce £6 billion in work for London businesses.

Looking to the future

During the decade of its existence the Greater London Authority's powers and responsibilities have grown and expanded, challenging both the Assembly and the Mayor to find new ways of tackling the problems that inevitably face a leading world city. Over those ten years the Assembly has evolved to establish itself as a champion for transparency and accountability at City Hall and an advocate for many Londoners whose voices may otherwise go unheard. Those will remain the Assembly's primary objectives as the GLA approaches its teenage years and a fresh set of changes and challenges in the government of London.

A brief guide to the GLA and the London Assembly

What is the GLA?

The Greater London Authority is a unique and complex organisation made up of several different public bodies, including the London Assembly, each governed by their own distinct set of rules and regulations.

The GLA sets transport, planning, housing, economic development, skills, health and environmental strategies for the capital. It also plays a key role in championing London, and is currently helping to deliver the London 2012 Olympic and Paralympic Games.

The GLA group includes the Metropolitan Police Authority (MPA), Transport for London (TfL), the London Fire and Emergency Planning Authority (LFEPA) and the London Development Agency (LDA), all of which provide important services for Londoners. But the heart of the organisation is at City Hall, home of the London Assembly and the Mayor of London.

The Mayor's job is to set the priorities, policies and budgets for the GLA group and, of course, to deliver on the promises he made at election time. The Mayor sets a proportion of London council tax bills - known as the GLA precept - which helps pay for the services the GLA group delivers. The current GLA precept is £310 for an average Band D property.

The London Assembly is tasked with keeping a constant eye on how the Mayor and his administration exercise their powers, questioning the efficiency and effectiveness of the Mayor's policies and looking at ways to improve life in London. The Mayor is required to appear before the Assembly to answer questions, and must consult the Assembly about the detail of his policies and respond to its recommendations for changes to his approach. The Assembly holds confirmation hearings to judge the suitability of senior mayoral appointments and can amend the bottom line of the Mayor's £14bn budget if two thirds of Assembly Members vote to do so.

Assembly Members questioning the Mayor, Boris Johnson, in the Chamber at City Hall



What is the London Assembly?

The Assembly is made up of 25 members elected by Londoners for a four year term at the same time as the Mayor. Eleven represent the whole of the capital and fourteen are elected by constituencies made up of two or three London boroughs.

Individual Assembly Members respond to thousands of letters and emails from their constituents each year, taking up issues on their behalf and pushing for positive change in the capital.

In addition to their City Hall duties Assembly Members represent Londoners on three key organisations – the Metropolitan Police Authority, the London Fire and Emergency Planning Authority and the London Development Agency.

On 1 May 2008 nearly two and a half million Londoners cast their vote to elect the third London Assembly since the GLA was created. The current Assembly is made up of eleven Conservative, eight Labour, three Liberal Democrat, two Green Party and one British National Party Assembly Members.

What does the London Assembly do?

Holding the powerful accountable

Ten times a year the Mayor is required to appear before Assembly Members for a two and a half hour session of Mayor's Question Time, giving them and Londoners the opportunity to hear from the horse's mouth what the administration is doing. In addition to this public meeting Assembly Members also put thousands of written questions to the Mayor, many dealing directly with concerns raised with them by Londoners. All the Mayor's answers to these questions are published on the GLA website.

While the Mayor is ultimately in charge of policy, he is not the only one making decisions that affect the quality of life in London. He has a battery of advisers, appointees and officials at City Hall and in other parts of the GLA group who are responsible for implementing his policies and delivering their aims and objectives. These advisers and officials are regularly called before the Assembly and its committees to explain what they are up to, how much it is costing, and what results they can show for their actions. Regular meetings of the full Assembly are held with the Chairs, Commissioners and Chief Executives of London's transport, police and fire services, the London Development Agency, the Olympic Delivery Authority and

Users of Dial-a-Ride question Transport for London representatives during a Transport Committee meeting in March 2010.



the London Organising Committee of the Olympic and Paralympic Games.

The Mayor is required to present his multi-billion pound budget for the GLA group to the Assembly for approval. Assembly Members can amend the budget if two-thirds of them agree to do so.

Transparent investigations

Through their committees - that cover key areas like transport, housing, health, the environment and economic development - Assembly Members investigate and publish reports on the Mayor's decisions and actions, and anything else the Assembly considers to be of importance to Greater London. To help conduct investigations the Assembly has the power to summons documents and relevant people before the Assembly and its committees.

The Assembly asks Londoners for their views on the subjects it investigates, and these contributions help to form recommendations for improvements to life in London, Thousands of Londoners have contributed their views to our investigations on topics such as Olympic ticketing, door-to-door transport, air quality, cycle parking and alcohol misuse among young people. Over 700 people responded to our survey on the passenger experience of the London Underground, which formed part of a report calling for a new approach to managing overcrowding and upgrade works.

We also ask a wide range of local and voluntary groups and representative organisations to provide us with written information or to speak at our meetings. Their views are added to contributions from academics, other public sector organisations and the private sector, all playing an important part in our consideration of the issue at hand.

The committees meet regularly and publish their findings and recommendations, putting proposals to the Mayor, local authorities and other government organisations about ways to make improvements in the capital. The vast majority of these recommendations are agreed unanimously by the cross-party committees.

Open government

All Assembly meetings are open to the public so Londoners can see what is being done on their behalf. Over the years thousands of people have attended, watching Assembly Members question the Mayor or one of our many expert quests. The Assembly also hosts sessions explaining its role and how its meetings work for groups that visit City Hall, including international delegations and college and university students.

Sometimes members of the public get the opportunity to question quests directly during meetings. Most recently users of Dial-a-Ride, a door-to-door transport service for people with mobility impairments, questioned Transport

The GLA's annual Service of Remembrance at City Hall, 6 November 2009



for London representatives about problems they had experienced with the service.

As well as being open to the public, all Assembly meetings are broadcast live on its website,

www.london.gov.uk/assembly, and recordings are available to view afterwards.

Over the years we have hosted a series of seminars and conferences to enable experts, interested parties and the public to come together to discuss key issues. Topics have included developing eco-friendly manufacturing in London's East End, solutions to traffic congestion, London's response to the economic crisis, and the future of the capital's bus services. In October 2009, we hosted London's first climate hearing with Oxfam, which brought together people from across London with policy makers to discuss the impact of climate change.

The Assembly also hosts civic events for Londoners, often to recognise groups who contribute to the fabric of society – for example carers, Metropolitan Police Volunteers, social enterprise organisations and Girl Guides. Since 2005 we have jointly hosted, with the Mayor, an annual Service of Remembrance and a ceremony to mark Holocaust Memorial Day.

Further information

For more information about the London Assembly, visit our website at www.london.gov.uk/assembly

If you would like to keep up to date with the work of the Assembly, you can subscribe to our email newsletter, London Assembly Update, at

www.london.gov.uk/assembly-ezine

Useful links

London Development Agency: www.lda.gov.uk

London Fire & Emergency Planning Authority: www.london-fire.gov.uk

Metropolitan Police Authority: www.mpa.gov.uk

Transport for London: www.tfl.gov.uk

You can view a copy of this report on the publications section of our website: www.london.gov.uk/assembly

Other formats and languages

For a large print, Braille, disc, sign language video or audio-tape version of this document, please contact us at the address below or email **assembly.translations@london.gov.uk.**

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Arabic

الحصرول على لمخص لهذا المستند ببلغتك، فعرجاء الانتصال بعرقم الهائف أو الانتصال على العنوان العبريدي العادي أو عنوان العبريد الإلكنتروني أطباء.

Chinese

如您需要这份文件的简介的翻译本, 请电话联系我们或按上面所提供的邮寄地址或 Email 与我们联系。

Gujarati

જો તમારે આ દસ્તાવેજનો સાર તમારી ભાષામાં જોઈતો હોય તો ઉપર આપેલ નંભર પર ફોન કરો અથવા ઉપર આપેલ ૮પાલ અથવા ઈ-મેઈલ સરનામા પર અમારો સંપર્ક કરો.

Punjabi

ਜੇ ਤੁਸੀਂ ਇਸ ਦਸਤਾਵੇਜ਼ ਦਾ ਸੰਖੇਪ ਆਪਣੀ ਭਾਸ਼ਾ ਵਿਚ ਲੈਣਾ ਚਾਹੋ, ਤਾਂ ਕਿਰਪਾ ਕਰਕੇ ਇਸ ਨੰਬਰ 'ਤੇ ਫ਼ੋਨ ਕਰੋ ਜਾਂ ਉਪਰ ਦਿੱਤੇ ਡਾਕ ਜਾਂ ਈਮੇਲ ਪਤੇ 'ਤੇ ਸਾਨੂੰ ਸੰਪਰਕ ਕਰੋ।

Urdu

اگر آپ کو اس دستاویز کا خلاصہ اپنی زبان میں در کار ہو تو، بر اہ کرم نمبر پر فون کریں یا مذکورہ بالا ڈاک کے پتے یا ای میل پتے پر ہم سے رابطہ کریں۔

Bengali

আপনি যদি এই দলিলের একটা সারাংশ নিজের ভাষায় পেতে চান, তাহলে দয়া করে ফো করবেন অথবা উল্লেখিত ডাক ঠিকানায় বা ই-মেইল ঠিকানায় আমাদের সাথে যোগাযোগ করবেন।

Greek

Εάν επιθυμείτε περίληψη αυτού του κειμένου στην γλώσσα σας, παρακαλώ καλέστε τον αριθμό ή επικοινωνήστε μαζί μας στην ανωτέρω ταχυδρομική ή την ηλεκτρονική διεύθυνση.

Hindi

यदि आपको इस दस्तावेज का सारांश अपनी भाषा में चाहिए तो उपर दिये हुए नंबर पर फोन करें या उपर दिये गये डाक पते या ई मेल पते पर हम से संपर्क करें।

Turkish

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Vietnamese

Nếu ông (bà) muốn nội dung văn bản này được dịch sang tiếng Việt, xin vui lòng liên hệ với chúng tôi bằng điện thoại, thư hoặc thư điện tử theo địa chỉ ở trên.

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