

MAYOR OF LONDON

Navin Shah AM

Chair of the London Assembly

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Our ref: MGLA040920-3186

Date: 21 October 2020

Dear Navin,

London Assembly (Plenary) Meeting 3 September 2020 – Motions

Thank you for your letter of 3 September about the motions agreed at the London Assembly (Plenary) meeting on 3 September. My reply to each motion is set out below.

Motion 2 – Housing Overcrowding

I welcome the Assembly's recognition of the problem of overcrowding. Due to a decades-long under-supply of housing, particularly social housing, London suffers from far higher rates of overcrowding than the rest of the country, with families, low-income households and BAME communities particularly affected. Tackling overcrowding is a key objective of my London Housing Strategy and new London Plan.

Motion 2 includes three specific requests, which I will respond to in turn.

1. Giving proper weight and consideration to the dwelling size mix set out in Table A1 of the amended 2017 Strategic Housing Market Assessment when assessing and determining referable planning applications to ensure there is sufficient provision of family sized homes.

Policy H10 of my London Plan already sets out that schemes should generally consist of a range of unit sizes, and that when determining unit sizes, applicants and decision-makers should have regard to robust local evidence of need where available, or, where this is not available, the range of housing need and demand identified by the London SHMA.

2. Commissioning a specific London Housing Survey, to collect more comprehensive data on the conditions of London's households than is currently available through the English Housing Survey, which will give a more solid evidence base for future housing and planning policies.

As previously discussed, a new London-wide survey with a large enough sample to produce accurate results at neighbourhood level would be very expensive, and may not be an appropriate use of scarce resources – not least because the results of the 2021 Census could well be available before any such research is completed.

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3. Ensuring each borough has an up-to-date housing needs assessment which takes local overcrowding levels into account.

My London Plan asks boroughs to set out the size mix of social housing they want to see in their area, based on evidence of local need from sources such as local housing registers. Boroughs can draw on the London-wide SHMA to understand housing mix requirements or to inform local assessments. When assessing Local Plans, my team would expect boroughs that have not used the London SHMA to have robust evidence of local needs.

While my housing and planning policies aim to tackle overcrowding as effectively as possible given available resources, it is clear that the best way to deliver the family-sized affordable homes required is for Government to provide much more funding for my Affordable Homes Programme. As your motion notes, Government funding allocations should also take account of the higher cost of delivering larger homes in their calculations. But instead of the £4.9bn a year required to fund the affordable homes that London needs, the Government has allocated London just £4bn over five years. This is simply not nearly enough.

Motion 3 - Support for Retired Police Officers

I support the Assembly's recognition of the invaluable job our police officers perform. They come to work every day to protect the public, minimise harm, prevent crime and bring offenders to justice. They work tirelessly to keep us safe and we should do everything we can to support them.

I am aware that there is ongoing research into assessing the mental health and wellbeing of emergency responders and I look forward to the considered views of the College of Policing (CoP) and National Police Chiefs Council (NPCC) on this important subject. In the meantime, my Deputy Mayor for Policing and Crime will continue to engage the Commissioner and also seek views from the National Association of Retired Police Officers (NARPO) as to how best to support retired police officers.

Motion 4 – Travel for Under-18s

I welcome this motion and share the Assembly's concern about the serious impacts of suspending free travel for under-18s, which was a requirement of Government included in Transport for London's (TfL) funding deal.

It is abundantly clear that losing free travel would hit the poorest Londoners hardest at a time when family finances are stretched more than ever. Fifty-seven per cent of the under 18 population in London are BAME and as more families face financial stress from COVID-19, I am concerned that suspending free school travel would add additional burdens to low-income Londoners. We also know children and young people in some of the most deprived areas in London are exposed to the highest road danger risk.

I have voiced my strong opposition to these plans several times, including in writing to the Transport Secretary, Rt Hon Grant Shapps MP. There is not yet clarity on when exactly the changes proposed by the Government would be implemented. But no matter when implemented, the impact will be the same. I know the Government's proposals are causing uncertainty for children, families, and schools, and I would, of course, wish to be able to provide more clarity.

I have not given up hope that we might still dissuade Government from their misguided demands. I will continue making the case to Government to drop these plans and I am grateful for the Assembly's support as discussions with Government continue.

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Motion 5 – Police Funding

I welcome the feedback from the Assembly regarding the engagement with the Home Secretary in relation to COVID reimbursements for lost income from council tax and business rates and a joint letter will be sent in relation to this. At present, the cost impact on the Metropolitan Police Service (MPS) from COVID-19 has been £26m to date and this will be compounded if there is lost income from council tax and business rate income. Our current round of budgeting assumes an income reduction of £109.3m for MOPAC and Londoners do not deserve to risk losing further police officers as a result of this.

Motion 6 - Unconscious Bias Training

I welcome the Assembly's support for unconscious bias training of police officers. I agree that this is an integral part of preparing officers generally and is particularly important in a diverse global city like London.

I will continue to challenge the MPS to both deliver and continuously improve the inclusion and equality training it provides and this will be a feature of my Action Plan on trust and confidence in policing.

Inclusion and equality should not be constrained to stand-alone training but, wherever possible, an integrated element within wider officer development, reinforced as officers are promoted or change roles. As such, I also welcome the ongoing collaboration between the MPS, Middlesex University and Stuart Lawrence to produce an inclusive cultural awareness toolkit for officers and look forward to the benefits of this partnership.

Thank you again for writing to me.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Sadiq Khan', with a small number '2' written below the name.

Sadiq Khan
Mayor of London