

MAYOR OF LONDON

Andrew Boff AM

Chair of the London Assembly

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Date: 26 October 2023

By Email

Dear Andrew,

I write in reply to your letter to David Bellamy of 15 September regarding the motion passed by the London Assembly on 14 September. This letter has been passed to me as Shirley Rodrigues' line manager.

Any allegation of a Deputy Mayor acting inappropriately is taken very seriously by the Mayor, as well as David Bellamy and myself. We would agree with the Assembly that scientific and academic studies should be free of political pressure and interference, and we are grateful to those experts who carry out work for the benefit of Londoners.

The Assembly motion (attached as Appendix 1) does not provide a term of reference for any investigation, nor does it cite the specific examples of poor behaviour that it refers to. However, from the questions asked of the Mayor at the September MQT session and other comments made by Assembly members, I have surmised the incidents in question are the email exchanges reported in articles in the Daily Telegraph on 19 and 22 August 2023.

Emails between Shirley Rodrigues and Prof Frank Kelly, February 2023

The first story related to an FOI of email correspondence between Shirley and Professor Frank Kelly of Imperial College in February 2023. I have reviewed the correspondence in question and spoken with both Shirley and Professor Kelly in order to assess whether there has been a failure to uphold the high standards of behaviour the Mayor expects of his administration.

The email exchange on 13 and 14 February consisted of the Deputy Mayor asking a prominent expert in the field to provide a media quote in support of the Mayor's policies. This is a wholly normal part of the job of a Deputy Mayor and there is nothing improper about it. At no stage in these emails did the Deputy Mayor ask Professor Kelly to express a view other than his own, as a leading air quality expert in this area. The wording changes she suggested be made to Professor Kelly's initial draft of a quote were in direct response

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to a request from Professor Kelly for Shirley to make further suggestions on the media quote he had drafted. Nothing in this is unusual or improper. It is a core part of the job role of a Deputy Mayor to liaise with key stakeholders and to seek support in explaining Mayoral policies, and any fair-minded reading of the exchange shows this to be its purpose.

The Assembly motion does not cite any examples of what it considers to be undue interference, which makes considering this matter difficult. However, it is important this allegation is addressed. 'Undue interference' is defined as: 'interference that goes beyond that which is appropriate or warranted in all the circumstances.'¹ So, the accusation relates to whether the exchanges made were appropriate or warranted.

I have already stated that it is wholly appropriate for a Deputy Mayor to be liaising with noted experts in their area and seeking support for Mayoral policies. There strikes me as nothing inappropriate or unwarranted in the tone of the email exchange either. The emails made no request at all to alter scientific findings and furthermore do not relate to any particular scientific study - and so there can be no suggestion that these emails interfered in the scientific process.

Professor Kelly confirmed to me that at no stage did he feel under undue pressure from Shirley and that he did not feel there was anything inappropriate or unwarranted in the exchanges at all.

Following this review, I am confident that this email exchange is not improper and therefore not a matter for further investigation.

Emails between a GLA officer and Prof Chris Griffiths, November 2018

The second Daily Telegraph story on 22 August this year related to emails sent in November 2018. These were between a GLA officer and Professor Chris Griffiths of Queen Mary College, University of London. These emails were passing on comments from Shirley Rodrigues made on a press release related to a study on the impact of the London Low Emission Zone (the LEZ, as distinct from the ULEZ – the Ultra Low Emission Zone). It was these emails that were quoted by Assembly Member Fortune in his exchanges with the Mayor at the September MQT.

It is worth noting that LEZ is a policy supported by previous Labour and Conservative Mayors and the emails do not relate to research regarding the ULEZ. It would be disingenuous to link them to the current debate about ULEZ expansion.

The context for the emails is that Professor Griffiths, also an internationally renowned air quality expert, shared the press release regarding a paper published in The Lancet on the impact of LEZ extension with the GLA as a courtesy given LEZ was GLA and TfL policy. GLA officers and the Deputy Mayor, via GLA officers, requested a small number of changes to the press release that they felt would more accurately reflect the impact of the LEZ. In the

¹ Taken from Law Insider: [Undue Interference Definition | Law Insider](#)

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event none of these changes were actually made, both because the press release had already been issued and because Professor Griffiths did not accept some of the suggestions.

Having carefully reviewed the emails cited in the article I believe they are a legitimate exchange of views in which the Deputy Mayor asked, via a GLA officer, for wording changes to a press release relating to a study into the effectiveness of the LEZ. These changes were suggested in response to what was believed to be an invitation to comment on a draft press release. There is therefore nothing unwarranted or inappropriate about the exchange in and of itself.

So, the question moves onto whether the content and tone of the emails is appropriate. Debate and discussion between experts are normal and I cannot see anything that, read in good faith, could be described as inappropriate or unwarranted in the content. Indeed, the very fact that Professor Griffiths declined the request to change the wording of the press release without further comment shows that this was an exchange conforming to the norms of appropriate conduct in dealing with external experts. These emails demonstrate that these world-leading scientists who work with the GLA are free to disagree on how information is presented, as they should as independent experts.

The question was raised about whether the Deputy Mayor is an expert in environmental policy, qualified to make these comments and join in a serious debate. Shirley Rodrigues is, without doubt, an expert in environmental policy and its implementation. Before her appointment as a Deputy Mayor Shirley oversaw the global climate change grants portfolio (\$200m budget and c10 staff) at the Children's Investment Fund Foundation (CIFF) including developing their urban investment strategy and designing programmes on air quality and low carbon urban transport. From 2005 to 2009 Shirley worked at the GLA under Labour and Conservative Mayors, first as Head of Environment and Climate Change, and as Executive Director, Development & Environment. As part of these roles, she developed landmark environment strategies on climate change mitigation, adaptation, waste, water and air quality.

She has also held senior roles where she has devised and delivered a range of environmental policies and programmes in London, nationally and internationally; including serving as Director of Policy & Research at the Sustainable Development Commission, the UK Government's independent advisory body on sustainable development, as well as performing a number of relevant climate change, energy and transport policy roles across different local organisations in London, including London Councils' Transport Committee for London, Association of London Government and various local councils. She was appointed as a Deputy Mayor in 2016 precisely because of her subject specialism and expertise and has continued to provide expert commentary in her role. It is therefore clear that she is well qualified to engage in academic and policy debate with fellow experts.

After all, robust challenge and debate is central to the scientific process so valued by the Assembly. It was wholly correct that Professor Griffiths refused to change the wording of his press release as he didn't feel the suggested alternative was accurate. However, there is nothing inherently wrong with this request. Again, it should be noted this whole exchange was about a press release and not a scientific paper.

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Conclusion

In neither case did the Deputy Mayor ask the relevant professor to alter their “academic work”, as the motion suggests, let alone any conclusions in it. Nothing in the emails refers to proposed amendments to a “scientific study”. The motion passed by the Assembly is an inaccurate characterisation of the situation. Further, no good faith reading of the exchanges could lead a reader to the conclusion that independence of scientists was being undermined or subjected to undue influence. Therefore, there can be no reasonable question regarding whether the exchanges damage public confidence in Mayoral policies, that is unless their contents are misrepresented.

Having thoroughly looked into the matter, I can only conclude that there is no case for suggesting the Deputy Mayor has behaved improperly or unduly interfered with academic independence and for that reason there is no need to investigate further.

Nevertheless, if having considered this letter the Assembly wishes to discuss this matter further Shirley and I would be happy to attend a meeting of the Oversight Committee to discuss the matter in person. I will ask our Executive Support team will be in touch with the Committee Services team to arrange a date as soon as possible.

Yours sincerely,



Richard Watts

Deputy Chief of Staff
Office of the Mayor of London

CC David Bellamy
 Shirley Rodrigues

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Appendix one

This report has been written in reply to a motion passed by the London Assembly on 14 September 2023. The Motion reads:

“That the Assembly notes the answers to the questions asked.

This Assembly notes in particular the answers to the questions regarding emails sent by the Deputy Mayor for Environment urging scientists to alter conclusions in their academic work relating to ULEZ and LEZ.

This Assembly believes that in a democracy, scientific and academic studies should always be free of political pressure and interference. The Assembly recognises the value of scientific method, evidence and analysis in informing policy and supports the independence of scientists to work freely and without undue influence.

This Assembly believes that such interference risks damaging public confidence in those individuals holding public office, and risks undermining any public support both for this policy and future Mayoral policies.

This Assembly is concerned by these allegations of undue interference and calls for an urgent investigation by the Mayor’s Office and GLA into these allegations with a report to the Assembly within the next six weeks.”