

MAYOR OF LONDON

Hina Bokhari OBE AM

Chair of the London Assembly Economy,
Culture and Skills Committee
C/o Tim.Gallagher@london.gov.uk

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Dear Hina,

Thank you for the London Assembly Economy, Culture and Skills Committee's report – *At a crossroads: London's high streets*, which will make an important contribution to the development of my next London Plan, alongside the delivery of projects and programmes that I am funding to improve London's high streets and town centres.

I am committed to securing stable, long-term economic growth that delivers for Londoners. Through several of my programmes, such as the Good Growth Fund, the High Streets for All Challenge and the Civic Partnership Programme, I have promoted a strategic partnership and investment approach to boost local areas and help Londoners and their high streets adapt to diverse challenges, like changes in consumer habits and working patterns.

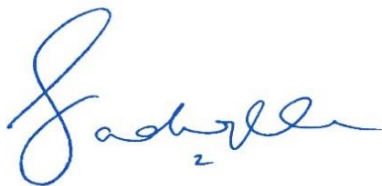
The London Growth Plan, which I have developed in partnership with London Councils, asserts London's high streets and local economies as a key priority. Londoners experience the economy in their everyday lives through their high streets and town centres. This is why I am investing £21m this year through the High Streets and Places Fund to support businesses and town centre regeneration in boroughs across the capital.

I am already working with the Government to take a strategic approach to the future of licensing, which will boost hospitality, culture and nightlife in London's local economies, creating conditions for businesses to thrive, despite the challenging cost-of-living and energy price pressures.

A robust and clear spatial policy framework will be instrumental to the success of London's high streets and town centres, and my next London Plan will reflect this.

My response to the recommendations in the report is set out in the Annex below.

Yours sincerely,



Sir Sadiq Khan
Mayor of London

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Annex

Mayor of London's response to the recommendations of the London Assembly Economy, Culture and Skills Committee's At a crossroads: London's high streets report

Recommendation 1

The Mayor should ensure that the Grow London Local platform provides support to small businesses on the high street to improve digital literacy and adapt to changes in shopping habits. Following on from the announcement that 250,000 businesses have benefitted from its services, he should publish details about how many high street businesses have benefitted from its support on digital literacy training to date, and what form of support this has taken.

Since the launch of the programme in June 2023, the Mayor's Grow London Local programme has made 5,426 referrals to business support provision designed to help with digital needs via its in-person service. Of these referrals, 4,563 (84 per cent) are external support or advice that is of no cost to the business. London & Partners (which delivers Grow London Local on behalf of the Greater London Authority (GLA)) recently began collecting information from businesses it has helped access the support and will be able to share data in due course.

Recommendation 2

To help develop the unique character and heritage of each high street, the Mayor should develop an Art on the High Street programme that commissions public art installations, murals and interactive artworks on high streets in London. The GLA should work with local schools and artists in commissioning this work.

The Mayor has long recognised that arts and culture are a key component of successful and inclusive high streets that celebrate diversity. Art in the public realm has the power to enrich communities by reflecting the city's diversity, revitalising public spaces, fostering civic pride and engagement, and driving tourism and economic growth.

The Mayor has supported an expansion of public art in local areas through initiatives like the London Borough of Culture, which has commissioned numerous permanent and temporary artworks across the city. Highlights include Croydon's Music Heritage Trail, Brent's pandemic-era Biennial, and upcoming installations in Wandsworth and Haringey. The 2024 London Mural Festival involved over 300 artists and significantly boosted local engagement and perceptions.

There are numerous public art initiatives already in place across London, including the Fourth Plinth, Frieze Sculpture Park, Stratford Waterfront, The Line, and Sculpture in the City. City Hall has helped to bring these together to create London Sculpture Week, drawing attention to the wealth of free, accessible artwork in London. In addition, GLA officers have worked with ART UK to map all existing public art and memorials in London and this data is available for Londoners to access.

The Mayor has led and collaborated on initiatives to reflect London's diversity, for example through the Untold Stories programme, which has supported over 70 community-led projects. Major new memorials are also underway, including tributes to victims of air pollution, the HIV/AIDS epidemic, and the transatlantic slave trade.

Consideration of the role arts and culture can play in local place-making has also been a theme of the Mayor's regeneration funding programmes, through which he has invested in permanent

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cultural space on high streets, as well as public art that has been developed by artists collaborating with local communities, including schools. However, public art is not always the answer to the system issues faced in some of our town centres; a strategic and place-based approach should be taken to support local character and heritage in ways that work with local assets, the economy and stakeholders most effectively.

Recommendation 3

The Mayor should build on lessons from the Community Improvement Districts pilot to create an online engagement platform for local communities to have a say in high street regeneration projects in London. This should include formal processes such as regular consultations and community forums, as well as introducing voting rights for communities in relation to certain projects. This structure should be built into the GLA's new High Streets Fund.

The Mayor was proud to support a national pilot programme to explore Community Improvement Districts in practice as part of his High Streets for All Mission. The key learning from across the country was that there is no 'one-size-fits-all' approach to getting this right, and the same goes for undertaking meaningful community engagement in regeneration more broadly. This work is best done at a local level, to local objectives defined with local stakeholders. Whilst a pan-London engagement platform for this purpose would be unhelpful (with a danger that it would replace meaningful and tailored local engagement), the Mayor wants to see current investments like the Civic Partnership Programme and future bids for regeneration funding developed alongside community stakeholders. The Good Growth by Design 'Process Note': Commissioning Co-Design and on-going involvement of the Mayor's Design Advocates aim to support Local Authorities and others to get this right.

Recommendation 4

When providing funding for future programmes on London's high streets, the Mayor should prioritise funding for areas with high vacancies, based on vacancy data from the High Streets Data Service.

High vacancy rates are one metric GLA officers use to take decisions, and they will be using this to inform the allocation of funding through the Mayor's High Street Place Labs initiative, which supports boroughs to develop local strategies that can attract investment to improve the area and boost economic activity. However, other priorities – including equalities and climate – must also be considered in decisions on future funding for high streets to ensure that investment meets the needs of London's diverse communities. A place may well have low vacancy rates but other significant challenges, which might be more around business mix and opportunities or night-time safety, for instance. Through ongoing engagement with boroughs, GLA officers also know that in some instances an increase in vacancies can occur where a significant site is prepared for redevelopment that will benefit an area in the long term.

Recommendation 5

As part of his new High Streets Fund, the Mayor should support local community groups to take advantage of the new powers introduced by High Street Rental Auctions (HSRAs) to take over the leases of vacant units. This should include providing financial support to community groups to develop viable projects, to enable them to access vacant units as part of HSRAs.

The Mayor was supportive of the previous Government's HSRA proposals and pleased to see this Government continue with the plans. On 11 March, through the High Street Network, he convened Local Authorities to join MHCLG colleagues to learn about the policy and Government support offer. GLA officers have established a working group, which includes representatives from

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eleven London boroughs, to explore how HSRAs can be delivered effectively in London to address vacancies and bring new uses to the high street. This working group is considering every stage of the process to allow officers to understand where and how the GLA can best contribute.

One early outcome of convening partners to better understand and respond to their needs is that the Mayor's High Streets Data Service can help local authorities identify and track potential properties to create an evidence base to support a future auction (a necessary Stage One process). Officers continuously engage with stakeholders to provide the best possible High Street Data Service offer to subscribers. New data has been procured, and analysis tools are being developed to make the analysis and interpretation easier for specific use cases, of which HSRA is now one. Officers have already made modifications to the service to filter data quickly to meet HSRA criteria, and thus subscribers can quickly apply that to their local area.

Recommendation 6

To address gaps in capacity and encourage effective partnership working among local authorities, the High Street Network should offer training on stakeholder engagement and accessing funding opportunities. As part of this work, the GLA should facilitate peer-to-peer mentoring from boroughs with successful high street initiatives.

The Mayor is growing the High Street Network for exactly this purpose, that is, as a peer-to-peer learning and support network to share successful approaches and mainstream solutions that work. Participants have access to the latest best practice, including case study visits of successful initiatives hosted by local authorities and their delivery partners, with the opportunity to meet and engage with representatives from boroughs, communities, the private sector and organisations across London.

Officers have identified effective community engagement as a theme for activity before the end of 2025 and will continue to develop the programme based on the needs communicated by network members.

Recommendation 7

When delivering his new High Streets Fund, the Mayor should consider the feedback received by the Committee about the onerous nature of competitive bidding processes for high street projects. Where possible, he should work in collaboration with all London boroughs to identify the areas of greatest need when distributing funding.

The Mayor's approach to investment programmes is continuously evolving and informed by the insights from previous schemes. The Good Growth Fund interim evaluation showed that boroughs and delivery partners value his long-term approach to partnership working. It also confirmed their appetite for alternatives to competitive application processes for City Hall funding. This is why the High Streets for All Challenge projects were selected in collaboration with London boroughs via a simplified call for ideas.

The Civic Partnership Programme built on the value of this effective cross-London coordination, targeting places of greatest need where local regeneration aspirations align with mayoral and wider London government priorities and where there is capacity for collaboration. In the design of this programme, officers used data analysis, engagement and co-design with London boroughs and local partnerships, supported by GLA strategy funding, to develop and test initial proposals, thereby eliminating onerous open bidding processes to make our funding decisions.

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This year, the High Streets and Places Fund directly allocates £20.1m of UK Shared Prosperity Fund (UKSPF) capital to every borough to invest in local high streets and places. In addition, £600,000 in High Street Place Labs funding to develop local high street strategies that can attract future investment will be allocated via a simple call out to boroughs to put forward their priorities. Officers will draw on data insights, including deprivation, climate risk, changes in high street spending and vacancies, to help identify the projects that will be awarded this funding.

Recommendation 8

When providing funding for projects as part of the new High Streets Fund, the Mayor should work with both inner and outer London boroughs to ensure that these projects are supported and enabled by local licensing regimes.

Before the Government made the announcement on the pilot for new licensing powers for London, which seeks to boost hospitality, culture and nightlife, the Mayor had already announced a new £300,000 Summer Streets Fund to boost al fresco dining and extend opening hours for pubs, restaurants and venues this summer. This will help to grow the capital's nighttime economy and support restaurants, cafes, small nightlife venues, pubs, late openings and businesses, including live music and LGBTQ+ venues.

GLA officers are working closely with the boroughs and Government to shape the future of licensing in London, with a full consultation planned later this year. Future investment in high streets would consider any opportunities arising from the changes to licensing.

Recommendation 9

The Mayor, working with ReLondon, should provide further funding to increase the number of circular economy and waste management initiatives on the high street, ensuring businesses and councils have the resources to implement sustainable solutions and drive long-term high street transformation. This should form part of ReLondon's next business plan, which is due to be renewed at the end of 2025.

The Mayor does not have the resources or powers to ensure that all businesses and councils implement sustainable solutions on waste and circular economy. His role is strategic and in line with the policies set out in the London Environment Strategy; he works within his powers to support and encourage waste authorities and councils to implement sustainable and circular business solutions. Alongside ReLondon, the Mayor has promoted the uptake of circular business models and support for circular businesses to scale. In 2023, ReLondon secured £1.4m in funding from the UKSPF to implement their High Streets Beyond Waste Programme. ReLondon recently applied to the UKSPF to extend the programme and were successful in securing an additional £525k. The funding will provide grants to businesses to support London's high streets to become more circular.

As chair of ReLondon, the Deputy Mayor for Environment and Energy, Mete Coban, will ensure the next business plan considers this recommendation and reviews opportunities to further support the circular transition and high street businesses.

Recommendation 10

As part of his new High Streets Fund, in cases where the funding impacts local transport and accessibility, the Mayor should ensure that both inner and outer London boroughs have actively gathered and taken into account the views of residents and businesses on parking and transport accessibility. This should include consulting with local Disabled people and their representatives.

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The London Plan and the Mayor's Transport Strategy promote the prioritisation of active travel (walking and cycling) to access high streets and town centres. This is about ensuring safe routes to encourage people to choose active travel in the first place, but also about ensuring we have the infrastructure to make this as accessible as possible, for instance, high-quality public realm and space to park bicycles, including adapted cycles. There will clearly be a need to ensure sufficient parking in town centres for Blue Badge holders, but it is for London boroughs to determine in most cases.

The boroughs are responsible for engagement with relevant stakeholders on schemes they are delivering, including inclusion and accessibility groups. However, the GLA provides support on good design, including the need for accessibility to be properly considered. Where investment is related to a Transport for London (TfL) initiative on TfL roads (for instance, a Healthy Streets scheme), it conducts an Equalities Impact Assessment for each proposed scheme. TfL provides funding to London's boroughs to deliver infrastructure improvements, such as for new pedestrian crossings, new cycling links and cycle parking. This sum totalled £87m for 2025-26.