



Caroline Pidgeon MBE AM
Chair of the GLA Oversight Committee

(Sent by email)

25 March 2022

Dear Sadiq

I am writing to you on behalf of the GLA Oversight Committee following our Question and Answer sessions with your Mayoral Advisors. The Committee met with David Bellamy, Chief of Staff and Richard Watts, Deputy Chief of Staff on 22 July 2021. We then met Felicity Appleby, Mayoral Director for Political and Public Affairs, and Sarah Brown, Mayoral Director for Communications, on Tuesday 7 December 2021. Finally, the Committee met Ali Picton, Mayoral Director for Operations, on Tuesday 1 February 2022.

Firstly, we were pleased to find that the Deputy Chief of Staff and all the Mayoral Directors were receptive to our suggestions and agreed to upload their job descriptions to the GLA website. We were also pleased that the Chief of Staff agreed to share the Deputy Mayors' job descriptions with the Committee. **However, it appears that the job descriptions for Richard Watts and Ali Picton have yet to be published and we have not received the Deputy Mayors' job descriptions. The Committee would like to see these requests actioned as soon as possible.** This transparency is extremely important for Londoners and the Committee believes this approach should be the default.

When meeting with the Chief of Staff and the Deputy Chief of Staff, we were disappointed neither were able to tell the Committee their objectives for the Mayoral Term, rather stating that their objectives were to serve you, the Mayor, and deliver your priorities. Whilst the Committee accepts that their role is to deliver your priorities, we would expect both Mayoral Advisors to disclose their objectives to the Committee to enable proper scrutiny in the interest of Londoners. To ensure that Mayoral Advisors are delivering value for money, we need to be able to measure their success, and assessing the delivery of objectives would enable us to do this. **The Committee would like the Chief of Staff and Deputy Chief of Staff to disclose their objectives for the Mayoral Term to this Committee.**

The Committee heard from the Chief of Staff, who, when asked how he would describe the relationship between the London Assembly and the Mayor, said that he would like to see more strategic working, and for the London Assembly to be more 'upstream' in its scrutiny work. **The Committee would therefore like to receive an update regarding our request to explore publishing a forward plan of Mayoral decisions, to support the Assembly in conducting pre-decision scrutiny of the Mayor.** Nevertheless, the Committee would like to reiterate its position that post-decision scrutiny, as well as pre-decision scrutiny, will always be a vital part of what the London Assembly does.

The Committee heard from each of the Mayoral Directors about their roles and responsibilities and was interested to understand more about their respective objectives for this Mayoral Term. Whilst each of the Mayoral Directors and their teams have met with some Assembly Members and their offices, it is clear that this is not consistent across the Assembly. Where there has been communication or collaboration with the Mayoral Teams, Committee Members reflected that it was not always clear where officers sat within the wider Mayor's Office and GLA nor was it clear the responsibilities and roles of the relevant teams.

The Committee was pleased to hear that all of the Mayoral Directors are keen to improve relationships with the London Assembly during this Mayoral Term through more regular and informal communication. The Committee supports this, and we would like to see more liaison between the Mayoral Teams and the Assembly to foster a greater understanding of the Mayoral Teams' functions and work. **The Committee requests that a meeting is arranged between the Chief of Staff, Group Leaders and Senior Officers to discuss an improved system for more regular, timely communication and improved information sharing.**

However, we were extremely disappointed that not a single one of the three Mayoral Directors were able to disclose to the Committee the budget for their respective teams, advising that the Chief of Staff was the budget holder. We do not think this is an acceptable response; given the level of responsibility that the Mayoral Directors hold and their generous remuneration. We would expect, at the very least, that they would be able to give us an approximate cost of the teams for which they are responsible. Our role is to hold you and your advisors to account on behalf of Londoners. It is impossible for this Committee to examine whether the Mayoral Directors and their teams represent value for money without the relevant cost figures. **The Committee recommends that the Mayoral Directors are made aware of the budget implications for their respective teams, to ensure that the London Assembly can adequately scrutinise their work and ensure that they are delivering value for money for Londoners. We ask that the budgets for each area of your office are provided to this Committee.**

An area of focus for the Committee during our meeting with the Mayoral Director for Operations was the backlog of Mayor's Questions (MQTs) that we are experiencing. Whilst we appreciate the time it takes to produce comprehensive and thorough responses to often complex areas, we heard from Committee Members experiencing unacceptable delays. Ali Picton told the Committee that the standard window for answering a letter was 20 days, however, Committee Members said that in some cases they were waiting seven weeks for a response. This severely impacts our ability to adequately scrutinise your work on behalf of Londoners.

The Committee heard that there are now systems in place to track mayoral correspondence, with the aim to ensure more correspondence is responded to within this 20-day standard window. **The Committee would like to see the impact of this system in terms of quicker responses to our correspondence and to our constituents' correspondence** – often constituents will contact Assembly Members when they have not received a response from your office and this is an unnecessary duplication of work. We are also interested in the monitoring of this system and would like to be kept updated on how many requests are responded to within the expected timeframe, the average length of time it takes for a response to be received and the longest time someone is waiting for a response. Ali Picton agreed to share this information with the Committee and we look forward to receiving this in due course. **Going forward, the Committee would like to see regular performance statistics reported to this Committee on a quarterly basis.**

We are grateful to the Mayoral Advisors for giving up some of their time to meet with the GLA Oversight Committee and we look forward to greater collaboration with them and their teams going forward into the next Committee year.

Yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Caroline Pidgeon', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Caroline Pidgeon MBE AM
Chair of the GLA Oversight Committee