

MAYOR OF LONDON

Andrew Boff AM

Chair of the London Assembly

C/o davena.toyinbo@london.gov.uk

Our ref: MGLA060721-7678

Date: 11 November 2021

Dear Andrew,

London Assembly (Plenary) Meeting 1 July 2021 – Motions

Thank you for your letter of 6 July about the motions agreed at the London Assembly (Plenary) meeting on 1 July. My reply to motions 1 and 2 is set out below and I am sorry for the delay in responding.

Motion 1 – Building Safety Crisis

Despite Government funding commitments to tackle the building safety crisis, many leaseholders remain ineligible for funding and face the uncertainty of the safety of their buildings, and the potential for bankruptcy that may come with remediating them.

I have repeatedly called for a long-term funding solution that protects all leaseholders from the cost of remediating unsafe buildings of any height or type of safety defect. I will continue to advocate for all leaseholders until the Government proposes funding solutions that protect them from remediation costs.

Proposal 1 – that the Mayor implements a clear policy of not working with or funding developers or housing associations that have not taken action to support leaseholders in existing stock they own or have built.

The building safety crisis has arisen due to collective systemic failings across the development sector, rooted in a flawed regulatory framework put in place by the Government. Much of the housing and development sector is unfortunately implicated in the crisis in some way, and the evidence emerging from the Grenfell Inquiry about the conduct of a number of companies and organisations is highly concerning. However, refusing to work with specific organisations would put us at risk of a legal challenge about whether Greater London Authority (GLA) procurement practices are fair and compliant with legislation. Due to the systemic nature of the crisis, it would also significantly diminish our ability to build new affordable homes, further deepen the shortage of housing in London, and consign more Londoners to remain on housing waiting lists for longer.

MAYOR OF LONDON

As I have said before, the focus must now be on reforming the industry, implementing a new more robust regulatory framework, and creating a culture of accountability to ensure that new homes are built to the highest safety standards and existing homes are made safe at no cost to leaseholders.

I am determined to continue to lead by example in this area. I have introduced new requirements that homes built through my new Affordable Homes Programme 2021-26 meet the highest standards of safety. These standards mirror the approach taken to procurement through my London Development Plan framework (LDP2) for homes built on GLA land.

I will continue to use my convening powers to promote cultural change and improve the sharing of best practice. My Homes for Londoners Board recently approved the creation of an External Wall System (EWS1) Task and Finish Working Group, through which social landlords will discuss how to better support residents affected by the challenges associated with the EWS1 process, which is leaving too many people unable to remortgage or sell their homes and move on with their lives.

Proposal 2 – that the Mayor establish a fire safety victims support hub, which would provide both mental health and practical advice to leaseholders affected by the cladding and fire safety crisis in London.

I am deeply concerned about the impact that the cladding scandal is having on Londoners' mental health and wellbeing, including the daily stress and worry faced by leaseholders and residents. This is a national crisis, and support must be made available to residents in affected buildings, to help them cope with the physical and mental health toll of living in potentially dangerous buildings. The GLA is, however, not the right organisation to provide the specialist advice or mental health support leaseholders need.

I am aware that there are various organisations offering support to leaseholders, including the government-funded independent advice service LEASE. However, I know that many leaseholders feel the current service offered by LEASE falls far short of what is needed. This is why I have called for the Government to review the role and remit of LEASE as a resource for leaseholders affected by the building safety scandal. Leaseholders must have access to the necessary support and legal advice they need at this distressing time. I would expect the review to draw out the exact form that LEASE should take in order to deliver this, in particular identifying other specialist mental health organisations that LEASE could signpost to.

Proposal 3 – that the Mayor trial a public fire safety risk assessment register in London for residential properties, like those used for Energy Performance Certificates, so that prospective buyers or renters can see the fire safety rating of any potential home.

I agree that it is vital that both current and prospective residents have access to the fire safety information for buildings they are currently living in, or intend to live in. Residents remain very much in the dark when it comes to the safety of their buildings, and I agree that Fire Risk Assessments (FRAs) are valuable tools that could address this.

As I have outlined previously, while I see the value in having a register, there are serious safety risks we must guard against. There is a risk that individuals wishing to cause harm, for example through arson, could use this information to compromise public safety. This is why, in March, I recommended instead that the Government legislate a duty on building owners to disclose FRAs to residents and prospective buyers and renters. I was pleased to see that the Building Safety Bill proposes an amendment to the Fire Safety Order, which would introduce a duty for Responsible Persons to provide specific fire safety information to residents, including any risks identified by the FRA.

MAYOR OF LONDON

It is, however, unclear whether this duty for Responsible Persons to share fire safety information extends to prospective residents, and residents who are not leaseholders but tenants in a building. Through the bill's legislative scrutiny process, I intend to continue to engage with the Government and make the case for strengthening this clause so that the Responsible Person's duty to proactively share fire safety information encompasses both prospective and current residents, and both leaseholders and tenants.

Proposal 4 – that the Mayor take every step to ensure applicants to both the Building Safety Fund and the Waking Watch Relief Fund hear back from the GLA regarding their applications as soon as practicable.

The role of the GLA in relation to the Building Safety Fund (BSF) and the Waking Watch Relief Fund (WWRF) is to administer the funding programmes on behalf of the Government. All decisions regarding the scope and design of these funds, including approvals of applications, are carried out by the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG).

The delays on decisions on both funds are largely related to programme delays, which are unfortunately outside the GLA's scope of influence. On the BSF, registration delays and appeals have both caused delays on final application decisions. Several applicants registered with the fund have experienced these issues meaning that applicants have not heard from MHCLG on their eligibility status, and therefore cannot get onto the GLA's or Homes England's portals to progress their applications. In various instances, eligibility decisions have led to appeals, and applicants are still waiting to hear back from MHCLG on these decisions.

On the WWRF, the short timelines on the creation of the fund meant that programme mobilisation, including appointing and training staff, had implications for how quickly the team was able to process funding applications. Further, the team has supported applicants so that their applications are as complete as possible to mitigate the risk of further delay once applications reach MHCLG. This has meant sending back corrections or clarifications to applicants, with requests to address gaps and issues. While applicants have benefited from this involved approach from officers in my team, this process has had an impact on progress of the fund delivery.

I would like to thank you again for your work advocating on behalf of Londoners affected by the building safety crisis, and for raising the issues in your motion. I will continue using all my powers, and engaging with the Government as required, to expedite a resolution to the crisis.

Motion 2 – Black Londoners

I am appalled by every death on the streets of London. My heart goes out to the families and communities who have been affected by violence and I promise we are doing everything to prevent further victims, whatever their ethnicity. However, I am gravely concerned about the number of homicides this year, especially the number of young black men who have lost their lives. I would like to reassure the Assembly that I am already working with the Home Office on the issue of homicide reviews in London and my Deputy Mayor for Policing and Crime has been attending meetings with the Minister for Policing regarding homicide since the start of the year.

When I established the Violence Reduction Unit (VRU) in September 2018, one of the initial work programmes was to undertake London's first Strategic Needs Assessment and also to undertake a more in-depth analysis of existing statutory reviews of homicides in London. Both of these reports were published on our website in January 2020. The former identified that there were a significant

MAYOR OF LONDON

number of homicides where there was no statutory requirement to undertake a review. As a result, I wrote to the Home Secretary on 3 March last year.

The Government has listened to my concerns, which have been the genesis for legislation for statutory reviews of certain homicides. The Government intends to introduce statutory reviews for homicides with a victim aged 18 or over, that have involved the use of offensive weapons (Offensive Weapons Homicide Reviews). This would be for homicides not covered by existing statutory reviews.

A provision of the legislation is to initially co-design and pilot Offensive Weapons Homicide Reviews with a small group of areas across England and Wales – London will be one of those areas. The VRU is already working with the Home Office and London partners on implementing the pilot in London. Within the published Strategic Needs Assessment, was a recommendation to undertake an in-depth review into causational factors for homicides in London. The VRU has commissioned the Behavioural Insights Team, who have begun this review with significant support from the Metropolitan Police Service.

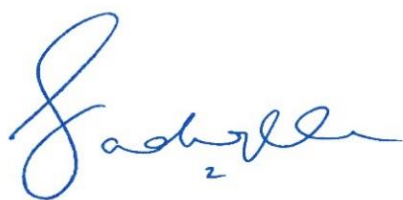
The VRU has commissioned a comprehensive range of programmes being funded to help and support our young black men that include the following:

- The VRU's MyEnds Programme has taken a place based approach by concentrating investment specifically to areas most affected by violence. The £6m programme is funding community-led responses to violence in eight neighbourhoods across London, which supports local people and local communities to help bring about change and provide better opportunities for young people.
- Borough Capacity Building programme – This provides £1.5m of funding to the 24 boroughs not included within the MyEnds Programme, to adopt a similar place based approach within a distinct area of their borough affected by violence.
- Programmes that support parents and the whole family approach, and which actively encourage parents and carers from black communities to engage and work with the VRU to shape the programmes of support.
- Black Men For Change Programme – a two year programme that operates in four boroughs, specifically led by black men working with young black men around identity, training and opportunity.
- East London Business Alliance (ELBA) Everyone's Business Programme is an innovative community-led programme that operates in four boroughs and focuses on supporting young people from disadvantaged or marginalised communities who have been or are at risk of becoming affected by violence with a specific focus on providing training opportunities for young black men.
- The recently launched after-school Stronger Futures Programme focuses on how we can help young people furthest away from opportunities to improve educational outcomes, employability prospects and mental health for young people aged 10-18. We are asking for bids from community-led groups to support those young Londoners most in need, targeting schemes that evidence how they will improve educational outcomes, employment opportunities and welfare/support.

MAYOR OF LONDON

- We know that black pupils are twice as likely to be excluded from school so we are working with schools and Pupil Referral Units across London to make sure we are providing the best possible support alongside raising key concerns with the Government about the high rates of exclusions and how they disproportionately affect black children in our schools. The VRU has provided dedicated funding to every London borough.
- The VRU is delighted to be funding Power the Fight's Therapeutic Intervention for Peace research report, which focuses on developing culturally competent therapeutic services and community led mental health services for families and peers affected by traumatic loss through youth violence.

Yours sincerely,

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

Sadiq Khan
Mayor of London