

Mr Boris Johnson
Mayor of London
City Hall
The Queens Walk
London
SE1 2AA

Date: October 2009

Dear Mayor Johnson,

In its response to the review of GLA powers,¹ the London Assembly argued that the Mayor should be required to produce an integrated water strategy for London, incorporating supply, demand, drainage and sewerage. This recognised the strategic role that the Mayor and the London Assembly have to play on this issue. The London Assembly has published six reports on water related issues since May 2004² plus responses to various water management strategies and Government bills. The Assembly's work has focused on mitigating the flood risk (Tidal and fluvial, surface water and sewer), reducing water leakages, encouraging water recycling, water metering and water pressure management.

The London Assembly Environment Committee therefore welcomes the opportunity to respond to the consultation on your Water Strategy. The Committee warmly welcomes many of the proposals contained in the strategy. Many of the proposals build on previous work where cross-party agreement has been established. This response suggests a number of further steps that could be taken to strengthen the ability of the strategy to deliver a safe, sustainable and value for money water management system.

1. Flood risk in London

The London Sustainable Development Commission's recent report London's Quality Of Life Indicators 2009³ states that London is vulnerable to flooding from four main sources (the tidal Thames, fluvial tributaries to the Thames and the non-tidal Thames, surface water flooding from heavy rainstorms, and overflowing sewers). **The Committee would welcome a statement in the Strategy setting out clearly who is responsible for managing all sources of flood risk.**

Tidal and Fluvial Flooding

The Environment Agency states that over 400,000 properties are at risk of tidal flooding in London: although this is a low probability with the Thames Barrier in place, if it did happen there would be

¹ 21 February 2006, http://www.london.gov.uk/assembly/review_powers.jsp

² Sewage Review – Health and Public Services Committee, September 2004,

Under Pressure – Health and Public Services Committee, March 2005

Down the Drain – Water Usage & Supply – Environment Committee, March 2005

London under threat – flooding risk in the Thames Gateway – Environment Committee, October 2005

Crazy Paving – Front Gardens – Environment Committee, September 2005

Drought in London – Health and Public Service Committee, July 2006

³ http://www.londonsdc.org/documents/qol_reports/QoL_indicators.pdf

severe consequences. Over 150,000 properties are at risk of fluvial flooding in London.⁴ In light of recent Met Office research for the Environment Agency Thames Estuary 2100 Project, a 40 per cent increase in peak fluvial flows on the Thames and its tributaries by 2080 has been forecast.⁵ The Environment Committee has investigated the issue of flood risk in the Thames Gateway and **concluded that fragmented responsibility for maintaining flood defences and lack of clarity over planning are putting London at risk.**⁶

Surface water flooding

The Environment Agency states that the main cause of flooding in England and Wales in 2007 was surface water flooding. London has seen recent examples of surface water flooding, which brought some parts of London to a standstill.⁷ The Environment Agency says more research is needed to understand how surface water flooding will affect England and Wales in the future.

The Environment Committee has investigated one of the causes of surface water flooding. The Committee found that two thirds of London's front gardens have been paved over – an area equivalent to 22 Hyde Parks. Following this work, changes have been made to national planning guidance, which came into force on 1st October 2008. The new planning laws respond to calls in our report for legislation to control the number of concrete-covered gardens in London.⁸

The Committee welcomes the Mayor's proposal to work with partners through the Drain London Forum to create a strategic surface water plan for London by 2012, which will be key to maintaining safety locally. It is important that London boroughs work together, where appropriate, across boundaries to meet the challenge of surface water flooding and the Mayor has key role in ensuring this. **The Committee would like to have clarification of what guidance the Mayor will provide for London on surface water flooding before 2012.**

Sewer Flooding

Tackling ageing infrastructure including draining and sewerage systems will be a long-term problem, but vital for London's effective water management. A key issue for London is the management of sewers during heavy rains. The Environment Agency informed the Committee that recently three quarters of a million tonnes of raw sewage and drainage was let into the Thames following heavy thunderstorms.⁹ The London Assembly has carried out investigations into management of sewer overflows in the past and would welcome concerted action to resolve this matter to avoid this damage to the environment. The Committee strongly welcomes the Mayor's proposal to support the construction of the Tideway tunnels, which would greatly reduce storm discharges. There are concerns however that progress to delivering the Tideway tunnel have stalled. **The revised strategy should set out a firm timetable for delivery of this vital piece of urban infrastructure.**

⁴ Information from EA Officers, Environment Committee meeting July 2009

⁵ <http://www.metoffice.gov.uk/corporate/pressoffice/2008/pr20080923.html>

⁶ London under threat? Flooding risk in the Thames Gateway, Environment Committee, October 2005

http://www.london.gov.uk/assembly/reports/environment/flood_thamesg.rtf

⁷ Information from EA Officers, Environment Committee meeting July 2009

⁸ Crazy Paving: The environmental importance of London's front gardens, Environment Committee September 2005

<http://www.london.gov.uk/assembly/reports/environment.jsp>

⁹ Information from EA Officers, Environment Committee meeting July 2009

2. Supply and demand imbalance in London

Londoners face an increasing risk of water shortages. London's demand for water will exceed the amount that can be supplied from current sources.¹⁰ Thames Water states that London has a supply–demand deficit that could affect levels of service, including the ability to avoid water use restrictions in dry years. The Committee suggests that the following measures are made a priority:

Reducing water leakage rates to below the economic level

The Committee's investigation into this subject in 2005 found that London's water loss was one of the highest in the country: nearly 1,000 million litres lost per day.¹¹ Thames Water has had the highest level of leakage of any water company in England and Wales for several years. However, a renewed focus on mains replacement is showing results. The Committee supports the Mayor's proposal to further reduce leakage to 80 litres/property/day by 2035, which is the UK standard. **As the leakage figure currently stands at 217 l/p/d, this signifies a large reduction and the Committee believes a mid way target should be set, by 2020 for example.**

Encouraging water recycling

The Committee welcomes the draft Strategy's aim to encourage more sustainable forms of drainage in new developments by encouraging green roofs, rainwater harvesting, grey water recycling and sustainable drainage and believes this should happen for all new developments. Previous work by the Committee has found that water companies should invest in rainwater collection schemes on new developments, in the public realm, and should support their customers to install systems in their homes and businesses, in order to reduce the need for piped water and reduce surface water flooding.

The Committee would welcome inclusion in the water strategy of best practice guidance on untreated and recycled grey water and harvesting rainwater. These are innovative and sustainable means of increasing water supply and reduce risk of flooding from heavy rainfall and are suitable for water usage that doesn't need purification, such as toilet flushing.

Water metering

The Committee has long supported the use of water metering to manage resources effectively, with the use of social tariffs to take into account the social impact of metering.

The Committee's report, *Down the Drain*, recommended that 'the Mayor should work with the water companies, the industry regulator and local authorities to secure a target of 50 per cent of London homes fitted with a water meter by 2015. Thames Water forecast this will be achieved, rising to 77 per cent by 2020.¹² The Mayor's target is more ambitious, looking to have meters installed in all houses in London by 2015 and block of flats by 2020. The strategy is unclear as to whether this is purely aspirational or a commitment backed up by an action plan agreed with Thames Water.

The Assembly has previously expressed concern that meter tariffs need to be set in a way that protects low-income families who might need extra water.¹³ Concerns that water metering could have a disproportionate impact on people who are on low incomes and who have certain medical conditions,

¹⁰ Down the drain, London's water usage and supply, London Assembly Environment Committee, March 2005

¹¹ Down the drain, London's water usage and supply, London Assembly Environment Committee, March 2005

¹² <http://www.london.gov.uk/assembly/envmtgs/2008/envsep2/minutes/appendixc.pdf>

¹³ Drought in London – Health and Public Service Committee, July 2006

or large households, and therefore need extra water should be central when structuring these tariffs. Thames Water expects that by 2014/15, 74,000 lower-income customers will be claiming discounts of 25 per cent or 50 per cent.¹⁴

The Committee welcomes the Mayor's commitment to protect vulnerable and low-income households.

3. Climate Change impacts

The Committee welcomes the Strategy's link between water management and climate change. Many of the Committee's findings during its investigations into water highlighted the positive impact more efficient water management can have on the environment.

The Committee welcomes the Mayor's proposal (proposal 12) to identify how sewage can provide renewable energy and reduce greenhouse gas emissions. During the Committee's investigation into Waste to Renewable Energy technologies, the merits of using Anaerobic Digestion at sewage plants, which produces methane as a fuel and sludge as a fertiliser. A project between United Utilities and the National Grid in Manchester is looking at the potential to pump the methane gas into the grid. They estimate gas from the UK's sewage could supply 400,000 homes in the UK.¹⁵

The Committee looks forward to working with the Mayor on this issue of vital importance to Londoners quality of life.

Yours sincerely,



Murad Qureshi AM

Chair of the Environment Committee

¹⁴ Information provided by Thames Water to Environment Committee,
<http://www.london.gov.uk/assembly/envmtgs/2008/envoct15/item04a.pdf>

¹⁵ Costing the Earth <http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b00k3x25>