

Mayor's Office

Jennette Arnold OBE AM

City Hall
The Queen's Walk
More London
London SE1 2AA

City Hall
The Queen's Walk
More London
London SE1 2AA
Switchboard: 020 7983 4000
Minicom: 020 7983 4458
Web: www.london.gov.uk

Our ref: MGLA270313-2944

Date:

17 APR 2013

Dear Jennette

Thank you for your letter of 20 March in which you invited my comments on four motions agreed by the London Assembly (Plenary) Meeting on 13 March.

I do not oppose welfare reform. Alongside all political parties, I recognise that welfare reform is needed to curb the spiralling welfare bill and better to incentivise work. I have worked closely with the boroughs and the Government on measures to mitigate the unforeseen consequences of welfare reform and to ensure that London remains a mixed and balanced community. These include:

- more time for existing claimants to adapt to the changes;
- more funding for boroughs to mitigate impacts, including £25 million for London boroughs in 2012/13, and an expected £115 million over the next two years;
- Incentives for landlords to reduce their rents.

The Department for Work and Pensions is committed to assessing and monitoring the impacts of welfare reform as it progresses. This includes an independent assessment of the impacts of Local Housing Allowance (LHA) reform for which an interim report will be published in May. Therefore, I do not believe it necessary or efficient for the Greater London Authority to duplicate this work.

I believe your call to support people to live in London is best met through planning and investment to provide the mixed and balanced communities London needs. My London Plan and Housing Strategy include policies to ensure that new housing developments have a mix of market, intermediate and social rented homes. To this end, I will deliver 100,000 affordable homes over my two terms.

In response to the three further motions:

Motion 1

I would like to thank the Assembly for bringing to my attention the Academy of Medical College's excellent report on obesity, 'Measuring Up, The Medical Profession's Prescription for The Nation's Obesity Crisis.' I welcome this report and the views of the doctors it represents.

I am committed to helping London tackle obesity. I was disappointed when Government decided against giving the London Health Improvement Board statutory status, and I personally wrote to the Secretary of State to express this. Despite this setback I am maintaining the momentum initiated by the London Health Improvement Board by launching Healthy Schools London on 25 April 2013. This programme will encourage schools in the Capital to share best practice and put in place measures to improve the health and wellbeing of pupils and reduce the risk of obesity.

I recognise the need to limit unhealthy fast food outlets near schools. In 2012, we produced 'Fast Food Fix', a toolkit to help London boroughs work with takeaway businesses to make food healthier, with schools to reduce the amount of unhealthy food children consume from such businesses and to use regulatory and planning measures to address the proliferation of hot food takeaway outlets.

Last year, with the Chartered Institute of Environmental Health, we also launched a Healthier Catering Commitment for London. Healthier Catering Commitment (HCC) is a voluntary scheme for food outlets in London to encourage them to improve their food offering. In order to be eligible to use the HCC logo, a business must meet criteria which cover areas such as healthier frying, reducing salt and sugar, increasing carbohydrates, health promotion and access to fruit or vegetables.

I agree that the GLA is in an excellent position to influence partners, such as Transport for London, to improve the built environment to encourage physical activity. The GLA and TfL have appointed a Public Health Specialist to lead on this area of work, recognising the important part this plays in tackling obesity.

The London Healthy Workplace Charter, coordinated by the GLA, provides a framework to support employers to develop good practice by promoting health in their organisation in a practical way. Many of the accredited organisations have specified plans to encourage employees to improve their diet and physical activity.

Finally, we are exploring opportunities to work with GPs to promote walking and cycling in local communities.

There are a number of recommendations in the AoRMC report over which I have no direct jurisdiction but, as chair of the London Health Board, I will continue to press for progress in this area and challenge the NHS, London boroughs, and other partners to create an environment that helps Londoners to sustain healthy eating and activity habits.

Motion 2

With regards to overseas investment, the GLA does not hold information on the number of homes owned by overseas investors across London. There is also no evidence at present of overseas investors keeping large numbers of homes empty or unused. What data there is on properties owned by companies incorporated overseas is collected by the Land Registry, and data on the ownership of empty homes is collected by London boroughs.

Motion 3

I do not expect Universal Credit to "exacerbate London's Housing Crisis" as you clearly fear. I welcome the fact that the Government is piloting the direct payment of Housing Benefit, and phasing the roll out of Universal Credit in order to ensure the right framework of support is put in place locally to minimise arrears. The National Housing Federation has already undertaken a review of impacts on housing associations, and intends to continue this work. Therefore, it would be costly and unnecessary duplication of the GLA to undertake this.

Thank you again for writing.

Yours ever,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'Boris Johnson', written in a cursive style.

Boris Johnson
Mayor of London