

# LONDON ASSEMBLY

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**Krupesh Hirani AM**  
**Chair of the Health Committee**

Daniel Elkeles  
Chief Executive Officer, London Ambulance Service  
(Sent by email)

Dear Daniel,

20 February 2023

## **London Ambulance Service Strategy 2023-2028**

Thank you for inviting the Health Committee to the London Ambulance Service (LAS) Dockside Education Centre and Emergency Operations Centre (EOC) in Newham on 24 January 2023. The Committee appreciated the time that LAS staff took to show us around, and it helped bring to life the work that LAS does in taking calls from the public and training paramedics. We also appreciated being able to question LAS representatives on the new LAS strategy.<sup>1</sup>

The Health Committee welcomes the opportunity to contribute to the new LAS organisational strategy for 2023-28. The Committee hopes to meaningfully feed into the strategy through the recommendations included in this letter.

Through our discussion with LAS representatives and a call to patient groups and members of the public for written evidence, the Health Committee set out to understand how LAS is performing, where it is delivering successfully and how it could improve. We also looked at the emerging themes of the new LAS strategy, and explored whether these are the right priorities for LAS. The Committee was interested in what further objectives should be included in LAS'

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<sup>1</sup> The LAS panel for the strategy session included: Andy Trotter, Chair; Daniel Elkeles, Chief Executive; Dr John Martin, Deputy Chief Executive and Chief Paramedic and Quality Officer; Dr Fenella Wrigley, Deputy Chief Executive and Chief Medical Officer; Cathy-Anne Burchett, Assistant Director of Operations South East London; and Roger Davidson, Director of Strategy and Transformation.

strategy for 2023–28 in order to drive up performance for Londoners, and what action the Mayor can take to support LAS and improve performance.

### **Involving patient voice in LAS decision-making**

Evidence presented to the Committee through our call for evidence suggests that the LAS could do more to involve patient groups in policy development and decision-making processes. In particular, responses mentioned the desire for patient groups to have greater access to LAS performance data.<sup>2</sup> High levels of engagement and transparency should be the norm, in order to allow patients to constructively feed into decisions on how services are delivered.

Patient groups can provide insights into patient needs. Healthwatch Kingston carried out community engagement from November 2022 to January 2023 on the subject of LAS performance in the local area and where improvements could be made.<sup>3</sup> One of its findings was around how LAS could improve service provision for those who are neurodiverse or have a learning disability. This kind of insight is invaluable in supporting the organisation to adapt to the diverse needs of Londoners, and LAS must ensure that there are processes in place for patients, particularly those with specific needs or from disadvantaged backgrounds, to provide this kind of feedback.

One of the development principles of the LAS Strategy 2023–2028 is that it should be co-developed and co-produced with partners including patients and the public. The Health Committee believes that this should be an overarching principle for the LAS and should guide their operations throughout the lifespan of the strategy, not just in its development. By better involving the patient voice, in particular those experiencing health inequalities, the LAS can become a more responsive organisation better placed to serve London’s diverse communities. Roger Davidson, Director of Strategy and Transformation, told the Committee that LAS has “a patient and public council... in the organisation now and we also have ways of understanding what the experience of our patients is. However, we do recognise that we want to get better at this and in particular we want to understand well things like health inequality.” The Committee believes that the 2023–2028 strategy should set out how this will be achieved.

***Recommendation 1:*** *The LAS should include in its new strategy commitments to increase levels of patient engagement, in order to give patients a greater say in how services are delivered.*

### **Public Awareness and Education**

Londoners have a key role to play in supporting LAS to manage demand on ambulance services. This was evident during the most recent period of industrial action, when Londoners were urged to only use 999 for the most serious cases. The Committee heard that this was successful in reducing the number of 999 calls during the strike period. Healthwatch Kingston, as part of its community engagement work, found that there was an issue with the “public’s lack of understanding about when to use the service and when to use alternatives”, in particular whether someone should call 999, call 111, or contact their GP.<sup>4</sup> The Healthwatch Kingston consultation also found that “people wanted more education for the community on how to

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<sup>2</sup> Patients’ Forum for the London Ambulance Service, Evidence Regarding Performance of the London Ambulance Service – Submission to the London Assembly Health Committee, 11/1/23

<sup>3</sup> Healthwatch Kingston, Community Engagement – London Ambulance Service Strategy 2023–2028, Submission to the London Assembly Health Committee, 13/1/23. Local Healthwatch groups are independent organisations whose purpose is to make recommendations to healthcare providers on behalf of patients

<sup>4</sup> Ibid

support themselves before emergency intervention is required.”<sup>5</sup> LAS representatives at the meeting explained that public knowledge of how to make 999 calls and what to expect when making the call is highly valued by LAS staff.

LAS representatives told the Committee that they do take action in this area, highlighting a recent campaign advising people celebrating New Years’ Eve to drink sensibly and behave appropriately to ease demand on ambulance crews. These initiatives and campaigns are welcome. However, during the meeting, LAS representatives noted that there was a challenge in measuring the effectiveness of these public awareness campaigns. Specific and measurable targets should be included in the new strategy to make sure that LAS is making progress in this area, and that the public in London know how to most appropriately utilise ambulance services.

***Recommendation 2:*** *The LAS should include in its new strategy specific commitments and targets around public awareness and education initiatives. These should relate to issues such as when the public should call 999, how they should do so, and actions they can take to prevent emergency care being required in the first place.*

## **LAS Workforce Diversity**

Theme 5 of LAS’ new 2023-2028 strategy includes the commitment “to improving our diversity so we better represent the people of this city”.<sup>6</sup> According to LAS data, 20 per cent of the LAS workforce is from a BAME background.<sup>7</sup> Although this proportion is increasing, the level of BAME representation varies at different levels in the organisation with 40.9 per cent in the lowest 4 employment bands, compared to 15.9 per cent in the highest.<sup>8</sup> LAS conceded to the Committee that this was an area in which it wanted to improve. As you told the Committee at the strategy session on 24 January, LAS is “at only 20 per cent diverse workforce. In a city where 50 per cent of people are not white British, that feels totally wrong.”

One specific area of focus that LAS highlighted is creating different pathways into paramedicine beyond the traditional route through university. LAS representatives suggested to the Committee that by increasing take-up of different routes into paramedicine such as the entry-level ambulance practitioner programme, and by training and upskilling LAS call-handlers, the LAS workforce will become more ethnically representative of London.

The Committee welcomes LAS’ desire to better represent the population that it serves, and create pathways for people of diverse backgrounds to achieve fulfilling careers in the organisation. The 2023-2028 strategy should include a detailed action plan with specific targets for how it will improve diversity in paramedicine and in the organisation as a whole.

***Recommendation 3:*** *The LAS strategy should include targets and an action plan for how it will improve workforce diversity, in particular for paramedics.*

## **LAS outreach with schools and colleges**

The Committee heard the LAS has a recruitment team that carries out engagement work with schools and colleges, in order to encourage more people to pursue a career in the organisation. Given that it takes several years to train as a paramedic, this work is important in attracting

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid

<sup>6</sup> Information provided to the Health Committee by LAS

<sup>7</sup> Integrated Performance Report, May 2022, [London-Ambulance-Service-Integrated-Performance-Report-May-2022.pdf \(londonambulance.nhs.uk\)](https://www.londonambulance.nhs.uk/~/media/2022/05/Integrated-Performance-Report-May-2022.pdf)

<sup>8</sup> Ibid

people to the profession from a young age. It is also essential that young people are made aware of the various routes into the profession, including through apprenticeships. In relation to outreach work with schools and colleges, Roger Davidson noted that ‘we do not think we have cracked it in any way, shape or form, but it is going to be a focus in terms of ambition’.

***Recommendation 4:*** *The LAS strategy should include commitments and targets in its strategy to increase its outreach work in schools and colleges, in order to encourage more people into the profession.*

## **LAS and Public Health in London**

LAS has a significant public health function and a role as an anchor institution to improve the health of Londoners. One of the new strategy’s themes, ‘Contribution to life in capital’ includes a focus on public education, where LAS says that it has “dedicated public education teams” and that it runs “public health campaigns that are aimed at improving public health, tackling inequities and contributing to developing thriving local community”.<sup>9</sup>

The Committee heard that LAS is carrying out hundreds of thousands of blood glucose and blood pressure checks across London when treating patients at the scene. Through these health checks, LAS is gathering information that could provide valuable insights into the health of particular communities across London. However, Roger Davidson, Director of Strategy and Transformation told the Committee that “there is not necessarily a natural flow of information about what we are seeing”.

It is essential that LAS develops these links into the wider public health system to facilitate information sharing, and collaboration on public health initiatives. The Committee found that there had been minimal contact between LAS and the new GLA Group Public Health Unit (PHU). The PHU was established in April 2022 to provide independent public health advice and support across the GLA Group.<sup>10</sup> LAS should set out how it will work together with bodies such as the GLA Group PHU and others to create a collaborative environment of information-sharing and joint working to improve the health of Londoners.

***Recommendation 5:*** *The LAS should include in its strategy plans for how it will work collaboratively with London’s wider public health system, including the new GLA Group Public Health Unit.*

## **LAS and Sustainability**

LAS has identified climate change as “one of the most significant public health emergencies” and has committed to working towards targets for all NHS organisations to be net zero for directly controlled emissions by 2040, and net zero for wider emissions that they influence by 2045.<sup>11</sup> The Committee welcomes this focus. A response to our call for evidence from NHS South East London Integrated Care Board (ICB) said that it was “essential” that the new strategy linked in with the LAS Estates Strategy and its sustainability plans, arguing that these plans “cannot work in isolation”.<sup>12</sup> The Committee heard that LAS has made good progress

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<sup>9</sup> Information provided to the Health Committee by LAS

<sup>10</sup> Mayor of London, [MD2940 Establishment of a GLA Group Public Health Function](#)

<sup>11</sup> LAS Carbon Neutral Plan April 2022 – March 2025 - [London Ambulance Service Carbon Neutral Plan April 2022 – March 2025 - London Ambulance Service NHS Trust](#)

<sup>12</sup> NHS South East London ICB, Call for Evidence: London Ambulance Service strategy 2023-28, Submitted to London Assembly Health Committee, 11/1/23

towards making its fleet more sustainable, but there remains the significant challenge of 'greening' the service's estate. According to LAS' Carbon Neutral Plan, making the existing estate more energy efficient, and replacing gas boilers with renewable sources of heating by 2032, is required for LAS to achieve its net zero targets.

LAS told the Committee that financing is the biggest obstacle to the organisation achieving this. The LAS Carbon Neutral Plan sets out how this "scale of transformation will require multi-year financial commitment to prioritise sustainability improvements across the next decade" and that external funding will be required as "internally generated capital funding will not be sufficient"<sup>13</sup>. At the meeting, LAS representatives noted that the Mayor of London could potentially offer support in securing this funding, and that this should be explored further.

***Recommendation 6:*** *The LAS should include in its strategy how it will explore working with the Mayor to release funding for greening the LAS' estate.*

The Committee would welcome a response to this letter by Friday 31 March 2023. Please send your response by email to the Committee's Clerk, Diane Richards ([diane.richards@london.gov.uk](mailto:diane.richards@london.gov.uk)).

We would also welcome an update from LAS in 12 months on actions taken in response these recommendations and progress in implementing the new strategy.

Yours sincerely,



**Krupesh Hirani AM**  
**Chair of the Health Committee**

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<sup>13</sup> LAS Carbon Neutral Plan April 2022 – March 2025 - [London Ambulance Service Carbon Neutral Plan April 2022 – March 2025 - London Ambulance Service NHS Trust](#)