



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

Martin Machray RN  
Executive Director of Performance  
NHS London  
(Sent by email)

Dear Martin,

6 April 2023

## **London Ambulance Service**

I am writing to you in my position as Chair of the London Assembly Health Committee regarding the London Ambulance Service (LAS). This follows a visit by the Committee to the London Ambulance Service Dockside Education Centre and Emergency Operations Centre (EOC) Newham on 24 January 2023. The Committee had the opportunity to question LAS representatives on the new LAS strategy for 2023-2028, and discuss wider issues facing healthcare provision in London.<sup>1</sup>

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 looked at the emerging themes of the new LAS strategy, and explored whether these are the right priorities for LAS.

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<sup>1</sup> The LAS panel for the strategy session was attended by: 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

The Committee also asked what action the Mayor and other stakeholders – including the NHS in London – can take to support LAS and improve performance for Londoners. This discussion resulted in a series of recommendations on how the NHS in London can support LAS, which are set out below. The Committee has written to LAS directly with a series of recommendations, and will also be writing to the Mayor of London and the Department for Transport to highlight recommendations specific to them.

## **LAS relationship with the Integrated Care Systems in London**

The Committee is aware that the NHS in London has undergone significant change since the development of the five integrated care systems (ICSs): North West London, North Central London, North East London, South East London, and South West London. The King’s Fund has stated that “ICSs...are part of a fundamental shift in the way the health and care system is organised.”<sup>2</sup> According to the King’s Fund, these are “intended to encourage closer collaboration not only between NHS services, but also between the NHS and local authorities, the voluntary sector and other organisations.”<sup>3</sup>

The Committee discussed with LAS representatives the challenges that come with dealing with each ICS as the only pan-London healthcare provider. Andy Trotter, Chair of LAS, commented on the “complexity” that exists for LAS in managing these multiple relationships.<sup>4</sup> Successful working relationships and collaboration between LAS and the ICSs are vital to ensuring the effective provision of healthcare in London. In 2021, the King’s Fund noted that collaboration across London’s health system “may require leadership and organisational development support to help embed new ways of working and overcome the remaining hurdles”.<sup>5</sup> The Committee has also made a recommendation to the Mayor of London to work with LAS, NHS London, and the ICSs to explore options for a more simplified London-wide governance structure for LAS.

*Recommendation 1: NHS London should consider providing additional resource and support to the healthcare system in London to help embed relationships between LAS and the five integrated care systems (ICSs).*

## **LAS support offer to primary care**

LAS representatives told the Committee that there is scope to develop closer links between LAS 999 and 111 services and primary care and GP practices, which could lead to improved outcomes for patients and the NHS. This could include linking LAS telephones to each primary care network and GP practice and answering calls on their behalf. The rationale presented by Daniel Elkeles, Chief Executive of LAS, was that it was easier for LAS “to recruit call handlers on that scale than it is for every GP practice in London to do that.” Daniel Elkeles also commented that this would free up “capacity for the GPs in practice to actually have more time to spend with the patients who really need them”. By exploring these options in London, there is potential learning for how ambulance services across the country can work better with primary care networks.

*Recommendation 2: NHS London should explore how best to utilise LAS capabilities in relation to 999 and 111 services in its offer to primary care networks and GP practices.*

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<sup>2</sup> The King’s Fund, [Integrated care systems in London](#)

<sup>3</sup> The King’s Fund, [Integrated care systems in London](#)

<sup>4</sup> Health Committee Meeting Transcript – London Ambulance Service Strategy 2023-2028, 24 January 2023

<sup>5</sup> The King’s Fund, [Integrated care systems in London](#)

## **North east London hospital bed stock**

Hospitals and ambulance trusts across the country have been dealing with significant delays in hospital handovers in recent months. In discussion with the Committee, LAS representatives identified north east London as being the area in the capital where this issue is greatest, with Daniel Elkeles, Chief Executive of LAS, arguing that this is because “the population of north east London has grown absolutely massively and the hospital bed stock has not”. According to the King’s Fund, ‘north east London has the fastest growing population anywhere in the UK’.<sup>6</sup>

Hospitals across London need to have sufficient bed stock to match the surrounding population in order to avoid handover delays and allow ambulances to reach people in need. The hospital bed stock in north east London in particular should be reviewed to ensure that it is keeping up with rapid population growth.

*Recommendation 3: NHS London should review hospital bed stock in London and ensure that plans for future hospital bed provision take into account and are able to respond to rapid population growth in parts of London.*

## **Ambulance vehicle procurement**

The Committee heard of the LAS’ difficulties in procuring vehicles to suit the specific needs of driving in London. Daniel Elkeles, Chief Executive of LAS, described the national specification ambulance made by Fiat as “totally unsuited to driving in London.” Daniel Elkeles told the Committee that ambulances in London needed to be automatic, low-weight and of a size that enables them to drive down small roads. However, the LAS experienced challenges when looking to procure different types of vehicles, as few manufacturers make vehicles to this specification. The Committee was told that LAS has been working with manufacturers such as Ford to overcome these barriers.

There is potential scope to bring down costs for ambulance trusts such as LAS if there is greater flexibility in national specifications, and greater collaboration between trusts to carry out joint procurement, recognising that similar challenges may also exist in other major cities across the country.

*Recommendation 4: NHS England should explore options for making ambulance specifications more flexible, as well as facilitating joint procurement between trusts.*

The Committee would welcome a response to this letter by 19 May 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)).

Yours sincerely,

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<sup>6</sup> The King’s Fund, [Integrated care systems in London](#)

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Krupesh Hirani', written in a cursive style.

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