

LONDON ASSEMBLY

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Krupesh Hirani AM
Chair of the Health Committee

Sadiq Khan
Mayor of London
(Sent by email)

Dear Sadiq,

6 April 2023

GLA Group Public Health Unit

I am writing to you in my position as Chair of the London Assembly Health Committee regarding the Committee's investigation into the GLA Group Public Health Unit (PHU). This follows a meeting held by the Committee on 24 November 2022, which was attended by the following guests:

- **Vicky Hobart**, GLA Group Director of Public Health and Deputy Statutory Health Adviser
- **Dr Tom Coffey**, Mayoral Health Adviser
- **Jazz Bhogal**, Assistant Director for Health, Education and Youth
- **Farrah Hart**, Consultant in Public Health, GLA Group Public Health Unit
- **Will Balakrishnan**, Director of Commissioning and Partnership, Mayor's Office for Policing and Crime (MOPAC)

Our investigation aimed to understand the rationale behind creating the new GLA Group PHU and how it intends to add value across the GLA Group. The Committee explored the progress and impact of the GLA Group PHU since it was established in April 2022. It also looked at its role in implementing the Mayor's Health Inequalities Strategy and the Mayor's health and care policies, and what further action the GLA Group PHU could take to contribute to London's

public health system and the health of Londoners. Guests presented on the structure of the new Unit, and how it will work together with the Health and Wellbeing Team to combat health inequalities, and implement a 'health in all policies' approach across the GLA Group.

The Value of the Public Health Unit

The Committee heard that the PHU was established to add value across multiple organisations in the GLA Group, including the London Fire Commissioner (LFC), the Old Oak and Park Royal Development Corporation (OPDC) and Transport for London (TfL), and the London Legacy Development Corporation (LLDC). At the Committee's meeting, we received evidence on how MOPAC has been working with the new PHU. Will Balakrishnan, Director of Commissioning and Partnerships at MOPAC, told the Committee that the PHU had influenced some of MOPAC's key strategies, and highlighted future plans for collaboration and implementing a 'health in all policies' approach to policing and crime issues. It would be beneficial for the Committee to receive updates on how the PHU is working with each of these bodies and the impact this work is having.

Recommendation 1: The Mayor should provide the Committee with an update on how the Public Health Unit is adding value to the organisations in the GLA Group beyond MOPAC, including the London Fire Commissioner (LFC), the Old Oak and Park Royal Development Corporation (OPDC) and Transport for London (TfL), and the London Legacy Development Corporation (LLDC) and where changes in those organisations' work or priorities have occurred as a result.

London Vaccination Rates

Tom Coffey, Mayoral Health Advisor, told the Committee that "London often is behind the rest of the country in other vaccination campaigns, not just influenza, but also childhood vaccination campaigns." He also suggested that public health experience would be important to informing how this problem can be addressed. The Childhood Vaccination Coverage Statistics in England for 2021-22 show that London had the lowest coverage in the country for several vaccines (for example, London's coverage was 86.5 per cent for DTaP/IPV/Hib/HepB at 12 months, 9.1 percentage points lower than the North East which had the highest coverage at 95.6 per cent).¹ This is a significant public health challenge facing London, and the PHU has a role to play in supporting London's health system to address this challenge.

Recommendation 2: The Mayor should convene public health officials through the Public Health Unit to develop a strategy to improve London's vaccination rates for childhood specific campaigns and influenza.

London Climate and Health Network

The Committee received an update on the work of the London Climate and Health Network, which was established in February 2022. In a subsequent letter to the Committee, Vicky Hobart explained that "the group convenes every two months, and is starting to bring together partners from across the health and care system to co-ordinate, exchange knowledge, and build capacity for climate and health at the local and regional level... Building on the foundational work of this year (for example, a review of the available data, workshops on a range of topics), the Network is currently discussing priorities for 2023".²

¹ NHS Digital [Coverage Statistics 2021-22](#)

² Letter from Vicky Hobart to the Health Committee, 16 December 2022

Recommendation 3: The Mayor should ensure that the Public Health Unit reports back to the Committee on the London Climate and Health Network's priorities for 2023.

Damp and Mould in London's homes

The case of Awaab Ishak, the 2-year-old child who died from breathing mould in a cold, damp flat, was discussed at the Committee meeting in the context of the health impacts of inadequate housing. On 16 November 2022, the coroner's Report to Prevent Future Deaths was published, and confirmed that "Awaab Ishak died as a result of a severe respiratory condition due to prolonged exposure to mould in his environment."³ On 9 February 2023, the Housing Secretary tabled an amendment called 'Awaab's Law' to the Social Housing (Regulation) Bill that requires "social landlords to fix hazards, such as damp and mould, in their homes within strict time limits."⁴

Vicky Hobart told the Committee that the PHU would work as part of London's public health network to consider the coroner's Report to Prevent Future Deaths, including the areas of concern highlighted and in particular any implications for the GLA Group in terms of housing and children's health. The Committee would like to be updated with the detail of any action taken, and how the GLA Group will work to prevent cases like Awaab Ishak's in London.

Recommendation 4: The Mayor should ensure that the Committee is updated on how the Public Health Unit is supporting the GLA Group to respond to the case of Awaab Ishak, and prevent deaths from mould exposure in London.

The Public Health Unit's work on Asthma

At the Committee meeting, there was a discussion about asthma and its link to various issues such as mould and air pollution. Tom Coffey, Mayoral Health Advisor, suggested that the PHU could work across the GLA and beyond to help combat this issue. Tom Coffey told the Committee that "the evidence... is very clear, that asthma has multiple triggers and, therefore, to improve the outcomes for asthma in London we have to look at all the triggers. I would want to work, not just with the Deputy Mayor for Environment on air quality, but the Deputy Mayor for Housing on the quality of housing, the Deputy Mayor for Transport and how we make sure we have healthy active travel, and so on. Therefore, I would want to make sure that the Public Health Unit worked across all the various areas to make sure we do not focus solely on one single trigger, but all the triggers. I would hope that is what it will do over the next few years".

Recommendation 5: The Mayor should convene representatives from the GLA Group organisations through the Public Health Unit to develop a strategy to combat the multiple factors influencing asthma rates in London.

Drug Harms

Will Balakrishnan told the Committee about the range of work being done in the area of drug harm reduction, including the Mayor's London Drugs Forum, "a multi-agency partnership bringing together criminal justice and health agencies to develop an effective response to drug related harms and crimes across the city."⁵ The Forum is co-chaired by Sophie Linden, the Deputy Mayor for Police and Crime, and Tom Coffey. During the Committee meeting, it was

³ Senior Coroner for the Coroner area of Manchester North, [Awaab Ishak - Prevention of future deaths report](#)

⁴ Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities, [February 2023 – update on government's work to improve the quality of social housing](#)

⁵ Mayor of London, [The London Drugs Forum](#)

agreed that Members would be updated on the specific work of the Mayor's London Drugs Forum, and that the Health Committee's Reducing Drug Deaths in London report, which was published in March 2022, would be taken to the Forum for their feedback on the recommendations.⁶

Recommendation 6: The Mayor should ensure that the Committee is updated on the work of the London Drugs Forum, and that the Health Committee's Reducing Drug Deaths in London report is presented to them for their feedback.

HIV Prevention Campaign

The 'Do It London' HIV Prevention Campaign was discussed by the Committee, in particular the opportunities for advertising on the TfL estate. 'Do it London' is part of the London HIV Prevention Programme, (LHPP), a "London-wide sexual health promotion initiative".⁷ Farrah Hart, Consultant in Public Health at the PHU told the Committee that the campaign was "very effective". According to the Terrence Higgins Trust, the UK's leading HIV and sexual health charity, London has the highest rates of HIV in England, with 37 per cent of new diagnoses in 2020 being London residents.⁸ Despite this, the Committee learned that there will be no further free advertising space offered on TfL for the upcoming year. Given the campaign's effectiveness, the Mayor should reconsider this decision and look to work with charities such as the Terrence Higgins Trust to offer free advertising space on the TfL estate.

Recommendation 7: The Mayor should explore expanding the HIV prevention campaign Do it London through additional advertising opportunities on the TfL estate, in conjunction and with the support of the Terrence Higgins Trust.

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).

Yours sincerely,



Krupesh Hirani AM
Chair of the Health Committee

⁶ London Assembly Health Committee, [Reducing drug deaths in London](#)

⁷ Do It London, [HIV Prevention Home](#)

⁸ Terrence Higgins Trust, [HIV statistics](#)