

# MAYOR OF LONDON

**Rory McKenna**

GLA Monitoring Officer

[MonitoringOfficer@london.gov.uk](mailto:MonitoringOfficer@london.gov.uk)

**Date:** 16 August 2023

Dear Rory,

Thank you for your letter of 8 June regarding complaints relating to comments made at People's Question Time (PQT) in Ealing on 2 March 2023, informing me that you will now conduct your initial assessment of the complaints received.

Many of the complaints cover ground beyond the PQT meeting of 2 March, straying into general points about the ULEZ expansion. You are clear in your letter that the complaints relate to my conduct at that PQT meeting only, so I will not address any point made by the complainants beyond the scope you have established. One complaint refers to my tweet at 11.15pm on the evening of PQT, saying 'To the conspiracy theorists who tried to disrupt tonight's #PQT: Londoners have no time for your dangerous misinformation.' That tweet was from my personal account, rather than the Mayor of London account through which I act as an elected Member, so would not fall within the scope of a Code of Conduct complaint. In any case, the information provided below is applicable to that tweet, as well as to my words at the meeting itself. I hope the information below will aid your initial assessment.

Many of the complainants did not initially make it clear how the issues they wished to raise could be considered formal complaints relating to the GLA Code of Conduct, and you have helpfully encouraged those to clarify the basis on which they assert there has been a breach of the Code. I do not accept that my conduct at PQT contravened the Code as alleged by the complainants, or at all.

The complaints are various and touch on different topics, but in relation to the conduct complained about, they fall into three categories:

## **Complaint type 1**

The majority of the complaints suggest that I said *all* opponents of the ULEZ expansion *are* far-right, Covid-deniers or similar. For example, the complaint from [REDACTED] says 'Mayor Khan publicly denounced all opponents to the expansion of ULEZ as 'Far Right' and 'Covid Deniers'. This is not accurate.

# MAYOR OF LONDON

## **Complaint type 2**

Some of the complaints suggest that I said that *all* opponents of the ULEZ *are associated with* the far-right, Covid-deniers or similar. For example, the complaint from ██████ says 'He [the Mayor] publicly accused me and anyone else that opposed his ULEZ and Road charging scheme as being associated [with] the far right, Covid deniers, vaccine deniers and of being a Tory.' This is not accurate.

## **Complaint type 3**

Some of the complaints (although it is a small minority) quote what I actually said in the meeting, usually in response to requests from you for more information.

Thank you for providing a transcript of the meeting (noting your caveats about this being a draft transcript). I understand the complaints relate to three sections of the meeting. I will reproduce them here for completeness:

### **Section 1 [page 8]**

*SADIQ: What I find unacceptable is some of those with legitimate objections joining hands with someone outside part of a far-right group, who are ... some of those outside ... some of those outside ... let's be frank, let's call a spade a spade. Some of those outside are part of the far-right, some are COVID deniers, some are vaccine deniers and some are Tories.*

*ONKAR: Hang on, the Mayor has a right to be heard. Right? This People's Question Time is not to hackle or shout. It is to hear people's views. It will end very quickly.*

*SADIQ: To those people with legitimate concerns ...*

*ONKAR: Excuse me, no hackling, if you do, I will have some people removed.*

*OK.*

*Let's hear what the Mayor has to say.*

*SADIQ: So, for those who have, there are people with legitimate concerns we seek to address those and will continue to listen to make sure that we make ULEZ a success. [Applause]*

### **Section 2 [page 11]**

*SADIQ: Some of you have good reasons to oppose ULEZ, but you are in coalition with COVID deniers, you are in coalition, you may not like it... you may not like it. You may not like it. You may not like it. You are in coalition with the far right and you are in coalition with vaccine deniers as well.*

### **Section 3 [page 27]**

*SADIQ: By the way there are far-right people outside. They were outside. If you, you should be careful who you campaign with.*

I would note that Assembly Member Sian Berry agreed with my assessment of the situation, saying [page 11]:

# MAYOR OF LONDON

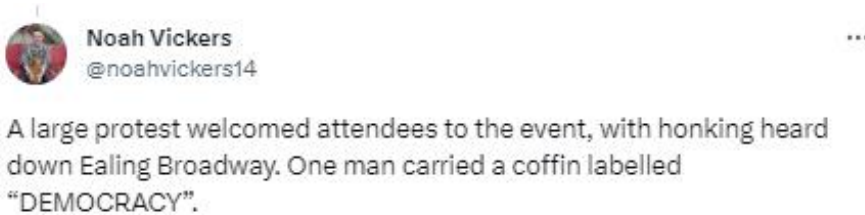
*SIAN: I think there are different kinds of people who are opposed to this [the ULEZ]. There are people who are raising practical suggestions, asking the Assembly and the Mayor for help and who want to get out of their cars but cannot at the moment and need the support to do it. Then there are people I think who, whatever we were doing about this problem of too much traffic in London, would be against it. They are not constructive and I do worry that the Conservatives are teaming up with just about anybody, no matter what their background, who is opposed to the Mayor's proposals now. Some of them are from the far right, so I think the mayor makes a real genuine point here.*

Assembly Member Berry was right to agree with me, because what I said on the evening was a matter of fact.

A group of protestors had gathered outside the hall on the evening of PQT and were leafletting attendees as they entered the meeting. Some of those protesting appear also to have been in the hall during the meeting.

Photos circulated on social media of some of the protestors carrying a makeshift coffin, and were showing some of the conspiracy theorist literature they were handing out. See for example this tweet from journalist Noah Vickers:

<https://twitter.com/noahvickers14/status/1631373290601062402>



Some of those gathered distributed leaflets containing conspiracy theories.



7:17 PM · Mar 2, 2023 · 3,765 Views

## MAYOR OF LONDON

There were further examples of protestors holding placards featuring deeply offensive and extreme imagery, including swastikas and imagery associated with harmful conspiracy theories. See for example this tweet from journalist Adam Bienkov:

[https://twitter.com/adambienkov/status/1631406216243978240?s=46&t=MUkkGxCu\\_HoePuW9KasFwQ](https://twitter.com/adambienkov/status/1631406216243978240?s=46&t=MUkkGxCu_HoePuW9KasFwQ)



Note in the above image the swastika, the imagery around the swastika that is associated with the Agenda 21 conspiracy, and the reference to Davos, associated with the Great Reset conspiracy. Both the Agenda 21 and Great Reset conspiracies are linked to Covid denial and claims that the pandemic was a hoax that aimed to wipe out the global population – for explanations of some of these links, see:

[Agenda 21, a wild conspiracy theory reignited by coronavirus - Big Think](#)

and

[“The Great Reset” Conspiracy Flourishes Amid Continued Pandemic | ADL](#)

It is therefore a matter of documented record that what I said on the evening was accurate – there were far-right and conspiracy theorist elements, including Covid deniers, present in the gathering outside the PQT hall that evening.

# MAYOR OF LONDON

Members of my team and Assembly Members also heard language associated with the Great Reset Conspiracy being used inside the hall immediately after the conclusion of the meeting. There is no doubt that far right and conspiracy theory sentiment was being expressed by some around the event.

It is not true, as complaint type 1 asserts, that I said that all those who oppose the ULEZ are part of those far-right or conspiracy theorist elements. As is clear from the transcript (the relevant sections of which I have reproduced above), I was in fact careful to be clear that some people have legitimate concerns about the ULEZ, which I have been working to address. I made this point repeatedly, referring to “some of those with legitimate objections”, and “people with legitimate concerns” (which I said twice), and saying “Some of you have good reasons to oppose ULEZ.” I could not have been clearer that I was not identifying those far-right or conspiracy theorist views with all those who oppose the ULEZ.

It is also not true, as complaint type 2 asserts, that I said that all those who oppose the ULEZ are associated with those far-right or conspiracy theorist elements. Firstly, my comments were addressed only to those people with legitimate concerns who were protesting alongside far-right and conspiracy theorist elements outside the venue that evening – not all those who oppose ULEZ. Secondly, far from being directed at all those seeking to raise objections to the ULEZ, my words were seeking to suggest that they may want to distance themselves from those elements that were seen around the event so that their concerns can be rightly heard, rather than being drowned out by the extreme views of others. I clearly and directly said on the night to those with legitimate concerns, “you should be careful who you campaign with.”

That leaves complaint type 3. I accept that the complainants should be able to express their opposition to the ULEZ expansion – that is their right, and I respect that. But the complaints relating to the comments I made at PQT on 2 March are based on a misunderstanding and do not reflect what I said.

It benefits no one to make issues like ULEZ part of the culture wars some have been trying to stoke in recent years. Rather than distancing themselves from the extreme protestors present that evening, some Conservative Assembly Members chose to misrepresent my words – with one saying in PQT, for example, “if you disagree on ULEZ, you are called a Nazi” and later saying on Twitter that I was ‘channeling Putin’. That evening, the City Hall Conservatives Twitter account tweeted:

*Sadiq Khan labels people who disagree with his ULEZ expansion far-right. #PQT*  
[https://twitter.com/search?q=%22PQT%22%20until%3A2023-03-03%20since%3A2023-03-01&src=typed\\_query](https://twitter.com/search?q=%22PQT%22%20until%3A2023-03-03%20since%3A2023-03-01&src=typed_query)

with a video that in fact shows (as set out above) that I had said no such thing.

This proves the point I was making on the night. At a time when far-right and extreme sentiment is on the rise – with real world consequences for many – campaigners need to be clear that their legitimate concerns are not associated with those who would seek to hijack them for their own ends. Professional politicians should know better than to stoke those tensions for political gain.

I note, however, that one of the complaints – from [REDACTED] – itself contains language associated with conspiracy theories, and also has racist undertones – ‘As Mr Khan seems intent on bringing London and the western world to its knees in a sly, discreet and underhanded way, I feel it would be in the country’s best interests that he is relieved of any further duties as Mayor of London and replaced with immediate effect.’ This shows how extremist language can creep into the



# MAYOR OF LONDON

arguments made by anti-ULEZ campaigners, owing to the influence of the far-right around this debate. This is exactly the danger I was warning against at PQT.

However the complainants feel about the ULEZ expansion, the complaints must of course be assessed against the GLA Code of Conduct. The complainants refer to aspects of the Code including the Nolan principles of selflessness, objectivity, accountability, openness, honesty and leadership, and the general obligations to treat others with respect and not to bully, victimise or harass any person.

I do not accept that my suggestion that those with legitimate concerns should not ally themselves with those far-right protestors who were shown to be present around PQT that evening could be considered to have been in breach of any aspect of the Code – those relied on by the complainants or otherwise. My comments were expressing legitimate concerns based on evidence I refer to above, and they were not targeted at any specific individuals. I was repeatedly careful to distinguish between people with legitimate concerns and those extremists seeking to hijack their concerns.


It is entirely appropriate to highlight the dangers of far-right and conspiracy theorist ideologies and the risk of legitimate objections to mainstream policies being highjacked by others for their own ends.

Some complainants refer to the general obligations set out in paragraph 3 of the Code, including in relation to the Equality Act 2010 and intimidatory behaviour directed at witnesses or complainants involved in investigations concerning alleged breaches of the Code. Whilst those latter provisions do not appear to be relevant, I do not accept that anything I said could be considered to have been intimidatory, unfair or discriminatory, or to have breached equalities legislation for the same reasons set out above.

Three of the complaints mention language they consider to be discriminatory. The common meaning of the phrase 'to call a spade a spade' is to speak clearly and directly about things, and that was my intention and understanding of the words as I used them at the meeting. This is self-evident from the context in which the phrase was used – I went on to be clear and frank about what was happening outside the meeting. I am wholeheartedly opposed to the use of racist or otherwise discriminatory language in any context and that was certainly not the intention behind the words that I used.

I hope the information set out above has been helpful. I look forward to hearing the result of your initial assessment. Please let me know if any further information from me would assist you with that process.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Sadiq Khan', with a small number '2' written below the name.

**Sadiq Khan**  
Mayor of London