

# MAYOR OF LONDON

**Matthew Lewin**

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**Date:** 7 November 2023

Dear Matt,

Thank you for your email to my Chief of Staff of 5 October, requesting further information in relation to the complaint made by ████████, and the opportunity to address the specific points ████████ raised.

I was sorry to hear of ████████'s wife's ill health, and expressed my genuine concern during the meeting, as you will see from the transcript you kindly shared. I went on to discuss the health impacts of poor air quality on people driving cars.

Car drivers are exposed to high levels of air pollution. This has been established for some time – for example, in 2015, a report published by the previous Mayor<sup>1</sup> found, with reference to academic studies, that 'Overall car drivers are exposed to higher levels of air pollution than cyclists: fine particulate matter (PM2.5) and elemental carbon or soot. [...] The level of exposure to air pollution in cars is increased during heavy traffic as a result of the exhaust emissions of surrounding vehicles.'

In June 2017, Professor Sir David King, then chief scientific adviser to the UK government and honorary science adviser for the British Lung Foundation, wrote in the Guardian<sup>2</sup> that pollution levels inside cars are higher than outside, where nitrogen dioxide emissions are dissipated into the wider atmosphere.

Various studies have reinforced these general findings in the intervening years, and in September this year, the GLA published<sup>3</sup> an evidence review of research conducted over previous years, undertaken by Imperial College London, which found that car users are subject to the highest rates of in-vehicle air pollution, with up to 70 per cent higher exposure levels than cyclists to certain pollutants. The report notes that 'Long-term exposure to TRAP [traffic-related air pollution] has been associated with adverse health from pre-birth through to old age', including adverse birth outcomes, respiratory issues, cardiovascular disease, and increased cancer risk.

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<sup>1</sup> [https://www.london.gov.uk/sites/default/files/health\\_impact\\_of\\_cars\\_in\\_london-sept\\_2015\\_final\\_0.pdf](https://www.london.gov.uk/sites/default/files/health_impact_of_cars_in_london-sept_2015_final_0.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.theguardian.com/science/2017/jun/12/smoking-in-cars-banned-but-children-still-inhale-toxic-fumes-in-backseats>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.london.gov.uk/publications/vehicle-exposure-traffic-and-road-generated-air-pollution>

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The Ultra Low Emission Zone (ULEZ) is designed to reduce concentrations of the pollutants that contribute to these health risks across London. As a result of policies like the ULEZ, nitrogen dioxide air pollution has been cut in central London by nearly a half, and in inner London by over 20 per cent.

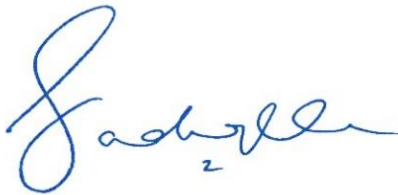
While I understand the cost-of-living challenges many Londoners are experiencing, we desperately need to clean up London's air to help reduce the health impacts of air quality in London. Many Londoners may not be aware of the increased risk driving presents to their health and the health of their loved ones. Increasing the proportion of the vehicles on our roads that meet the ULEZ emissions requirements will reduce the toxicity of the air associated with traffic in London, thereby reducing the health risks to drivers and passengers, as well as to the population more widely.

It was this point that I was communicating in my interaction with [REDACTED]. I do not know the details of [REDACTED]'s wife's health conditions, beyond what he said on the night, and I was seeking to make a wider point about the impact poor air quality can have on the health of people who travel by car, including contributing to a range of serious health conditions.

Making this argument could not be understood to be in breach of any aspect of the Code of Conduct. It is part of my role as Mayor to raise awareness of issues that affect Londoners, and it was appropriate to discuss these matters of fact in this public forum. I regret that [REDACTED] was upset by the interaction, and wish him and his wife well.

I hope this information has been helpful.

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