

MAYOR OF LONDON

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Dear Darren

London Assembly (Plenary) meeting 5 June 2013

Thank you for your letter of 11 June. I apologise for the delay in responding to you. I will respond to each of your Motions in turn:

Woolwich

What happened in Woolwich was an appalling and barbaric crime and no words of mine could ever successfully convey to Fusilier Lee Rigby Rigby's family the sadness and horror felt across London at this attack. Like the Assembly, I commend the response of the local people and the remarkable bravery and resolve of Amanda Donnelly, Gemini Donnelly-Martin and Ingrid Loyau-Kennett who showed remarkable heroism in the face of such violence.

I do not want the killers' actions to divide us and our communities. London is a city of incredible resilience and we will come through this. We have to protect us the best security forces and most professional police in the world.

Air Quality

I am committed to improving air quality in London and have set out an ambitious strategy for doing so. In my first term I tightened Low Emission Zone standards, retired the oldest, most polluting taxis and took steps to clean up the bus fleet. Together, these and other measures helped reduce emissions of particulate matter (both PM10 and PM2.5) from 2008 to 2012 by 15% and emissions of oxides of nitrogen (NOx) by 20%. On 13 February this year I announced an additional package of measures, building on my Air Quality Strategy, to be delivered during my second term and up to 2020. These include proposals for a central London Ultra Low Emission Zone by 2020. My understanding is that this will be the first zone of its type in any world city and will place London on a trajectory to a zero emission future.

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I continue to work with the Government closely to put in place measures and appropriate regulatory powers to improve air quality, working together on issues ranging from the Clean Air Act review to the Government's new Low Emission Vehicle Strategy. Over the past four years I have secured over £37m in additional funding from Government departments to help implement the measures set out in my Air Quality Strategy.

With reference to the effectiveness of the Euro standards, the recent Defra-funded King's College London/Newcastle University report only confirms what has been well known for some time. Indeed, I raised this matter with European Commission Vice-President Kallas personally in April 2011. My air quality strategy remains fit for purpose, setting out the broad measures required to improve air quality in London - getting people to walk and cycle more, promoting the use of low emission vehicles, cleaning up buses and taxis, and using the planning system to build in long term reduction in building emissions. I do not intend to revise it.

Draft 5th London Safety Plan

To respond to each of your points separately:

"This Assembly notes the draft 5th London Safety Plan contains the proposal to close 12 fire stations, cut 18 fire engines, and axe 520 firefighter posts as a direct result of the financial constraints being imposed on the Fire Brigade by the Mayor."

The financial constraints arise from reductions in Government grant. It is disappointing that the Assembly does not see any scope for a more efficient and effective operational model for the London Fire Brigade, particularly given that the Brigade attends half the number of fires it did a decade ago.

"This Assembly believes that forcing the Fire Authority to consult on cuts that the Authority itself does not support is completely unacceptable."

The unacceptable aspect of this process is surely that a majority of LFEPA Members have refused to live within the budget constraints arising for the Authority in 2014-15 from reductions in Government grant. Those reductions in Government grant are a direct result of the economic mess the last Government created.

"This Assembly also regrets that the Mayor has refused to attend the public meetings to make the argument for the cuts he has demanded from the London Fire Brigade."

The public meetings were held so that LFEPA officials could note down the views of members of the public as part of a properly constituted consultation process. They were not staged so that the Mayoralty, LFEPA Members or the Fire Brigades Union could put their views forward. In each case those views are already well known.

"This Assembly is also concerned at the overall co-ordination of the consultation process, which has resulted in widely inconsistent levels of public participation at the meetings in different boroughs."

I suggest that those Assembly Members sitting on LFEPA take this up with the lead LFEPA officials. The co-ordination of the consultation process was entirely down to LFEPA and was in no way the responsibility of the GLA or the Mayoralty. Indeed LFEPA ran the consultation without any interference from the GLA or the Mayoralty.

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Barking to Gospel Oak Line

Turning to your point about the electrification of the Gospel Oak to Barking line, as you know, both Transport for London (TfL) and I have been arguing for substantial improvements to be made to the Gospel Oak to Barking line for some time. As you rightly point out, TfL has committed to contribute £25m to the cost of the electrification of the line and I am delighted that the Government confirmed their commitment to fund this in the recent spending round.

Crown Post Office Network

On the matter of the post office network, you rightly point out that the reforms are necessary and long overdue. I agree that the Government has made welcome progress, reducing losses by over 20 per cent, although as you note the post office network is still running at a loss of £40m per year.

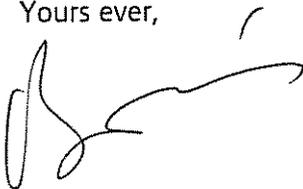
I am satisfied that the Government has properly considered communities' needs when drawing up these difficult reforms. As the UK's largest and most densely populated city, London will still have convenient access to a network of hundreds of post offices.

Therefore, I do not think it would be helpful for me to write to the Parliamentary Under-Secretary responsible for Post Offices regarding the five branch closures that you mention. However, as Chair, you are obviously more than welcome to write to the Parliamentary Under-Secretary on behalf of the Assembly. However, I would be happy to write to Jo Swinson to encourage the Post Office network to pay the London Living Wage to all its London employees.

Conversion of offices into flats

The Government's recognition of the nationally important office locations for which I sought exemption is welcome and reflects the force of the case I and the boroughs concerned made to Government. It will now be important to monitor the outcomes of the new permitted development rights, and officers are working up proposals for discussions with the boroughs to do this through the London Development Database. I would also like to invite the Assembly's Planning Committee to consider undertaking its own investigation of the impact of this change in Government policy in a year to eighteen months so that we can make representations to Government at the appropriate time.

Yours ever,



Boris Johnson
Mayor of London