

**Sadiq Khan**  
**Mayor of London**

(Sent via email)

15 March 2018

Dear Mr Mayor,

## **Review of the GLA's role in supporting philanthropy in London**

Following the fire at Grenfell Tower on 14 June 2017, there was a huge response from the public who donated generously in terms of money and gifts in kind to help the victims, their families and the surrounding communities. People wanted to help. Many of these donations reached their intended recipients and did so quickly but there was also a degree of confusion in the raising and distributing of funds and gifts which had an impact on the local community and attracted negative media coverage.

The London Assembly's work on Grenfell has focused on the pan-London response to the tragedy. Its work is summarised [here](#). On the issue of charitable donations, we were interested in whether the right channels were in place to manage the donations.

This letter makes a contribution to your Philanthropy Review, based on the evidence heard by the Assembly's GLA Oversight Committee on 31 January 2018. The committee heard from a range of organisations including: City Bridge Trust; Charity Commission; some of the funding distributors (London Emergencies Trust; Rugby Portobello Trust) and the fundraising bodies (Kensington and Chelsea Foundation; British Red Cross; London Community Foundation); and a representative of the Mayor of London. In terms of scope, the investigation looked at the raising and distribution of money (and gifts in kind) donated by the public and distributed to survivors and victims' families. It did not examine: monies raised by trusts/foundations; contributions of time (by volunteers/members of the public); or support for businesses. A transcript of the meeting can be found [here](#).

## What could have gone better?

There were many positive elements to the way donations were raised and managed in connection with Grenfell. However, we accept that these might not have been clear or apparent to survivors and communities on the ground. We have met residents who have had negative experiences including not being deemed eligible for donations in kind, or having to wait too long for support or financial help. Clearly, the system didn't work well for everyone. We are therefore keen to ensure that the lessons are fed into responses to future disasters. With that in mind, we would recommend that:

- In addition to the British Red Cross having a formal role in resilience planning,<sup>1</sup> the London Emergencies Trust should be part of the Strategic Coordinating Group where high levels of public donations are expected. This would allow early decisions about how to best coordinate distribution of donations.
- Progress is made on the issue of producing accurate data on admissions and discharges by NHS Trusts, and having protocols to share this with trusted organisations. While we understand the critical issue of patient confidentiality, following the Grenfell Tower fire, London Emergencies Trust was unable to quickly access reliable data from hospitals about fatality and victim numbers, limiting their ability to make payments promptly.

We also recommend that you review the role of the Mayor in respect of such emergencies. The feedback we received was that you were on the ground quickly and provided a good focal point for the community. But we believe that you could have done more and been a stronger voice for Londoners. In any future emergency, we would expect you or future Mayors to be:

- more strident in pushing out messages about what gifts in kind are required and when public donations should cease; and
- directive about how best to donate money and in particular where and how to give (to avoid the problems that can occur with money which has been raised via crowdfunding).

As part of your Philanthropy Review, we also recommend that you consider the wider issue of how to address the scepticism and lack of trust which was apparent among the Grenfell communities with respect to the larger charities. As Sarah Atkinson, Director of Policy, Planning and Communications at the Charity Commission, told us: "the lack of trust in state agencies and the way that that has spilled particularly into the larger charities ... that context of lack of trust and uncertainty was much more acute than we have experienced before around the public response."

## What went well?

Notwithstanding the issues highlighted above, we would like to pay tribute to the range of charities that raised and distributed funds following the fire. London owes a debt to all the organisations and individuals who rushed to the aid of the local community after the fire. The organisations involved had to set up systems and make decisions quickly in a complex, dangerous and rapidly evolving set of circumstances. Their work did (sometimes contrary to media reports) get money and gifts in kind out to displaced householders quickly. In doing so, the local knowledge of organisations such as the Rugby Portobello Trust was invaluable.

---

<sup>1</sup> The British Red Cross already feature in local and national resilience plans.

We were also impressed by the Charity Commission. It played a role in co-ordinating the charitable response to the Grenfell Tower fire via regular meetings of all bodies involved. It also provided and published regular updates on the amounts raised and distributed. These were not roles it normally plays: the Commission stepped in after the fire at Grenfell Tower because it has a statutory objective “to increase public trust and confidence in charities” and in response to the scale of public donations and the urgent need of survivors/families. In this role, the organisation conducted itself well, providing much-needed data and performing an important coordination and communication function.

As distributors, the London Emergencies Trust (LET) brought clarity in terms of who should receive what. This helped to bring transparency to a muddled situation. The division of responsibility between the Rugby Portobello Trust (RPT) and LET (with LET distributing to the bereaved and the injured, and RPT distributing to the survivor households) was helpful, although this should have been firmed up sooner. In short, LET was involved in providing funds to compensate those who were injured or who had lost family members and RPT’s primary focus was with survival/immediate needs.

Finally, and compared with other recent disasters, we were pleased to establish that there was a very low instance of fraud. This leads us to conclude that funding distributors struck the right balance between ensuring genuine eligibility for donated sums and getting money out quickly to those in need.

I hope that the above helps you in your ambition to support and enable effective giving in London.

Yours sincerely



**Len Duvall AM**  
**Chair of the GLA Oversight Committee**