

16 November 2020

Rt Hon Sadiq Khan
Mayor of London
City Hall
The Queens Walk
London
SE1 2AA

Dear Mayor,

Central London's recovery post Covid-19

I am writing as the Chief Executive Officer of the Heart of London Business Alliance (HOLBA) to share our thinking on Central London's economic recovery from the Covid-19 pandemic. I would welcome the opportunity to discuss these points further with you and your team.

As you know, the businesses operating in central London have been particularly heavily hit by Covid-19, and London itself has been recovering more slowly than other UK cities such as Manchester, Edinburgh or Birmingham. With footfall down by over 50% following a dramatic decline in commuters, domestic visitors and international visitors, many central London businesses face an uncertain future and will require continued support as we move away from the current lockdown. It will not be enough for central Government to simply allow businesses to reopen: the process of easing people back into central London will not be immediate, and during the transition period we will all need to work together in pursuit of shared objectives, including by providing additional support where it is most needed.

HOLBA have consulted with our members, and our view on the measures that would be most helpful to central London's recovery and future success are set out below.

As an immediate measure, the lockdown period should be used to **re-examine the measures in the tiered system** and reset them where appropriate, working with local government leaders and taking into account local circumstances. In particular, this gives us a chance to **remove the 10pm hospitality curfew**, which has had major adverse consequences for the hospitality sector and placed unnecessary pressure on public services by creating a spike of late night commuters, without helping stop the spread of Covid-19.

Our businesses have also called for **greater clarity of messaging** on what restrictions mean for central London and its business sectors and what people can and cannot do, and increased transparency around the way that tiers are set. We believe that local and national Government should be speaking with one voice, and that businesses should be given as much guidance and notice as possible; they are anxious to do the right thing but have, on many occasions, found themselves uncertain of what is and isn't permitted.

Once businesses are allowed to open again, there will clearly need to be a balance struck between getting London back to normal as quickly as possible, and avoiding further spikes of the virus. HOLBA's position is that there will need to be **continued sectoral support for businesses** that cannot operate normally due to lockdown restrictions – which is especially important for the hard-hit cultural and hospitality sectors – but that there are also **creative measures** that can be introduced by local and national Government to help get visitors back.

We believe these **incentives** could include discounted travel or flexible travel cards; Government-backed culture vouchers similar to the Eat Out to Help Out scheme; a Government insurance scheme for live events designed to cover the costs incurred due to lockdowns (nationally or regionally) and incurred by Covid-related risks; temporary relaxations on congestion charging and traffic to boost retail visitors ahead of Christmas; and investment of a proportion of the £20m DfT's Active Travel Fund for London on our ready to be delivered cycling and walking scheme on Piccadilly. These measures will be important nudge factors to persuade

domestic and international visitors to return to London and enjoy its amenities – which will provide a real boost to hard-hit businesses and cultural institutions. I would be particularly keen to discuss possibilities in this area with you.

As London recovers, **public transport** will continue to play a critical role. The closure of a large proportion of TfL services earlier this year was a major factor in keeping people away from London. As soon as the objective becomes to increase footfall, public transport will be vital in building back commuter confidence. Crossrail and the night tube will both be significant elements in improving the visitor experience and every effort should be made to have them up and running as soon as possible. We recognise the difficult situation with regards to TfL funding, and will continue to argue in favour of a long-term funding settlement for London transport that puts the passenger first.

Finally, as the country begins to look at measures to help the public finances, it will be important to **maintain and even increase funding for London**. As well as public transport and policing – vital to keep London moving and to keep London safe – 2021 will be a critical year for a **large-scale campaign to sell London domestically and internationally, as a world-class global destination**. This will be one of the quickest ways to get London firing on all cylinders and helping the national recovery. The value that London & Partners (the international trade, investment and promotion agency for London) has added since it was set up in 2011 is incontrovertible: 142 million people have been inspired through visitlondon.com, over 66,000 jobs have been created or supported, over 2000 overseas companies have been helped to set up or expand into London, and this has cumulatively added over £2.2bn to London's economy.

Yet London spends considerably less on promotion than other competitor global cities – Paris and Berlin spends more than double, Singapore spends over ten times as much – so if anything, we should be increasing what we do, and we should certainly **resist any cuts to this important part of London's budget**. I have also written to Robert Jenrick in the Ministry for Housing, Communities and Local Government to raise this point, and HOLBA will continue to be vocal in making the case that London's recovery cannot be placed in jeopardy from a lack of funds.

I am sure you will be aware of the narrative currently in circulation that claims that London has received special treatment during the Covid-19 pandemic. Far from this being the case, the evidence on the ground proves that London has been disproportionately badly hit. There are huge economic and social benefits to be gained from getting London back to normal and doing what it does best. To do this it will be vital for all parties to work together, and I stand ready to offer any help I can give in this respect.

Yours sincerely,



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Chief Executive Officer
Heart of London Business Alliance

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