

68. At the MAG, the Deputy Chief Medical Officer ('DCMO') Dr Jenny Harries and others gave an update on what was known about the spread of the virus at that time, including that there were then 35 confirmed cases in the UK, of which 5 were in London. I recall vividly that given my role as Chair of TfL, I probed Dr Harries extensively about the risk posed to Londoners travelling on public transport. I used the details of my own daily commute on the Tube each day to City Hall to ask at what point an average Londoner might be at risk. Dr Harries informed the meeting that, based on her analysis at the time, unless commuters were in close proximity for a period of "fifteen minutes" or more, the risk of passing on Covid was minimal. There was an update on planning assumptions, nationally and for London, and an explanation of the current health advice for the public from the NHS. I recall that the Deputy Mayor for Policing and Crime, Sophie Linden, gave an update on rising incidents of hate crime against members of the Chinese and South-East Asian communities in London. There was an update on the work being done by London Resilience, with an SCG scheduled for the next day.
69. I recall that a COBR meeting was also held on 2 March. It was about the sixth COBR meeting focusing on Covid-19. I had not been invited to attend any of these meetings up to this point. I asked my Government Relations team to contact Number 10 in advance of the 2 March meeting to request that I should attend, given that London was clearly one of the most at-risk places in the country due to its large number of airports and international travellers, and high-density population. A reply from Number 10 said that I would not be invited [SK/8 – INQ000118997]. No explanation for this was given.
70. On 3 March, the first meeting of the SCG was held. It was agreed that rather than nominating a single agency (such as PHE) to lead the response, this should be done on a cross-agency basis led by the LRF to ensure that the SCG considered the wider impact to London, and not just health impacts. There was an update from MHCLG on the Government's Covid-19 Action Plan, which had been published that day. An MHCLG representative had attended the MAG the previous day and it was agreed that they would feed back the issues raised at the next COBR. There was also a request for feedback from SCG meetings to be passed to any future MAG meetings.
71. In the context of a discussion around public comms, the PHE London Comms Director (who was the Chair of the SCG comms sub-group) noted the need for consistency between national and regional messaging. It was agreed that the SCG comms sub-group should propose a strategic approach to comms for consideration at the next meeting.

LRFs daily, with lines to communicate in support of local level communications. This was aimed at ensuring consistency of messaging given the concerns previously raised.

76. On 11 March, I attended a meeting with the CMO, Prof Chris Whitty **[SK/10 – INQ000118799]**. The purpose of the meeting was to discuss the rising number of cases in the capital and around the country, and planning for the response. I recall that some of those who attended this meeting with me had come straight from a meeting of the London Assembly’s Health Committee where they had been asked questions about London’s preparedness to deal with the outbreak. The briefing paper prepared for this meeting refers to the fact that I was relying on the CMO and PHE for reassurance that the Government’s approach was being guided by the best available scientific advice – because we were not directly sighted on internal Government discussions at that time.
77. Having reviewed the notes of this meeting, I recall that the CMO said that this was going to develop into a global pandemic **[SK/11 – INQ000118810, SK/12 – INQ000118821, SK/13 – INQ000118832]**. I cannot emphasise strongly enough how shocking this was to hear. Despite attempts to engage, City Hall was yet to have any meaningful interaction with the Government at this point. Any attempts had been entirely proactive from our side and continued to be met by either silence or refusal without explanation. We had a wide-ranging discussion, covering the way in which the situation was thought likely to develop over the coming weeks, noting that the highest concentration of cases in the country was in London, which was not surprising given the density of its population and status as a major transport hub. I remember that we discussed with the CMO whether the London Mayoral and Assembly elections, scheduled for 7 May, could go ahead and at that time his advice was that they could. As it turned out, the Government decided to cancel the elections just a couple of days later. The CMO’s advice at this meeting was that mass gatherings and major events did not need to be cancelled and people would not be advised not to use the Tube, although they might be advised to avoid making unnecessary journeys and to walk and cycle more, in the hope that we could make public transport less crowded and space people out.
78. The day after my meeting with the CMO, on 12 March, there was another meeting of COBR. Once again, my Government Relations Team contacted Number 10 to request that I be invited to represent London. Again, the response was that I would not be invited to attend. No explanation was given **[SK/14 – INQ000118843]**. I was deeply concerned and worried about this, particularly given my discussion with the CMO the previous day and the expectation that London was likely to be the first area of the country to be hit

hard by the virus. The decision to exclude the Mayor of the country's capital made little sense.

79. On 13 March, increasingly concerned about the impact of the virus on London, before any official advice from Government around avoiding mass gatherings, I took the decision to cancel London's St Patrick's Day Parade.
80. By 15 March, the SCG had been stepped up to daily meetings, and there were frequently several meetings a day.

#### **16 - 24 March 2020**

81. I will now outline the events of the week commencing 16 March 2020, which had far-reaching consequences for London and the whole nation.
82. On Monday morning, 16 March, I was finally invited for the first time to a COBR meeting **[SK/15 – INQ000118854, SK/16 – INQ000118865, SK/17 – INQ000118876, SK/18 – INQ000118887]**. I joined the PM, members of the Cabinet and leaders from the devolved administrations in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland to hear confirmation that in terms of the virus, London was 'a few weeks' ahead of the rest of the country. The rate of infection in the capital was far greater and spreading far quicker than anywhere else in the country and the greatest concentration of cases in the Intensive Care Units was in London.
83. This was a moment I will never, ever forget. Although I had been becoming increasingly concerned about the situation since my meeting with the CMO on 11 March, it was shocking to learn in that COBR meeting directly from the Government for the first time just how bad things were. I remember that the PM referred to the need for draconian measures and said the country would not have faced anything like it since the Second World War. I simply could not understand why, particularly given the increasing severity of the outbreak in London and my repeated requests to attend previous COBR meetings in order to be kept informed, this information was only being shared with me at this stage. I was both deeply worried, and furious that London had not been involved in conversations until this point.