

MAYOR OF LONDON

The Prime Minister

10 Downing Street
London SW1A 2AA

Date: 22 March 2020

Dear Prime Minister,

I am writing to you privately, and in confidence.

As you will be aware, since the COVID-19 emergency began, my team at City Hall has worked closely as best as we can with officials across government. Despite representations, Monday was the first time I was allowed to attend the Cobra meeting. We have used our extensive social media channels and the TfL estate to amplify public health messaging. We have maintained seamless, joined-up messaging to the public across City Hall and government.


Given the scale of the crisis we face, I have put party politics to one side as I hope you and others in your government have also sought to do. I have used my media appearances to reinforce official government advice at every turn. This has been particularly important over recent days as the advice to the public changed to one of increased social distancing. I also declined to publicly comment when asked to do so on briefings to the media last week regarding London's lockdown, despite how damaging these mixed messages were to a confused public.

However, I feel I must again express to you in the strongest terms possible my serious concerns that the current approach, and the messaging to the public, is failing. As a result, the lives of thousands of people are being endangered.

I am hearing time and again that Londoners feel the messaging is either unclear, or they are simply choosing to ignore it. This weekend has demonstrated how government advice is not being heeded – local shopping areas were busy, many people were out and about, and too many were still using public transport. London needs specific public health messaging that acknowledges the COVID-19 situation in London is a few weeks ahead of the rest of the country and the unique nature of our major metropolitan area.

There needs to be an immediate strengthening of the public health messaging to London. Advice is being seen as something that can be ignored. I do not use the phrase lockdown lightly, but I believe Londoners must be told to stay home unless they are an essential worker, are buying food or collecting medication from pharmacists. Alongside this, there must be clear reassurances about the supply of food to avoid further stockpiling and panic buying.

The consequences of not acting now are unimaginable. Thousands more people will die as a result. Our NHS will be overwhelmed. We only have to look to Italy at the horrors that could lie ahead for London if we do not change course. That is why I urge you to act urgently, and in a clear and decisive manner.

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I assure you that with any strengthening of the message to Londoners or its enforcement, I will support you completely.

But, alternatively, if you insist on continuing with the same course, I will be left with no choice but to speak directly to Londoners with a tougher message if it means thousands of people's lives could be saved.

I need to hear back from you on this as a matter of urgency this evening. I do not believe this matter can wait any longer. We must speak to Londoners immediately.

Yours sincerely,

Personal Data

Sadiq Khan
Mayor of London

cc. Rt Hon Robert Jenrick MP, Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government