

Councillor Ruth Dombey

London Borough of Sutton

Leader of the Council

Liberal Democrat Councillor for Sutton North Ward



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Dear Sadiq,

We all understand the importance of clean air and recognise the impact of pollution on the lives of people living in our city. In Sutton we have already introduced ten school streets schemes and are planning on implementing more. We want to help change lifelong habits and encourage more people to walk, cycle and use public transport.

But we also have to recognise the pressures that many of our residents are facing at the moment with soaring energy prices, high inflation and rising food bills. While over 70% of our residents have ULEZ compliant vehicles in the London Borough of Sutton (figures provided by TfL), that means that nearly 30% do not and it is on behalf of those people that I am writing to you to ask you to re-consider the roll-out of the ULEZ scheme to my borough.

I have been contacted by people who will suffer real hardship because of the scheme and the way it is being implemented. The speed of the roll-out, the need for a more inclusive and broader scrappage scheme and, above all, the lack of access to reliable, frequent public transport in my borough, are all leading to a rising wave of public anger and resentment.

Blue badge holders cannot, by definition, walk or cycle and struggle to access public transport so they need their cars to live independent lives. There are many blue badge holders who are not on benefits and so will not be eligible for the scrappage scheme. Many of them cannot afford to replace their non-compliant vehicles and will be trapped at home. Exemptions are already in place for blue badge holders in London's congestion charge zone and similar adjustments need to be made for the extended ULEZ zone.

Small and micro-businesses - which make up the vast majority of independent businesses in my borough - will be affected with window cleaners, pet groomers and many other self-employed working people using work vehicles which are non-compliant. After all the problems caused by the Covid pandemic, they are just beginning to get back on their feet again and the ULEZ charge will make many of their businesses unsustainable. For many self-employed residents, this charge is being introduced too quickly to give them time to adjust.

I have been contacted by several charities working in my borough. One of them is the Diamond Centre for Disabled Riders, a charity operating in a part of the borough which has no access to public transport. Their main vehicle is used daily to carry feed and hay to the horses grazing down the road in Surrey, to perform essential work such as field maintenance and fence repairs and to ferry staff and volunteers. They cannot afford to replace their non-compliant vehicle, even if they are eligible for the scrappage scheme, and the ULEZ charge will add a staggering extra £4,500 to their annual running costs. The ULEZ charge will add an extra cost on the disabled riders who use non-compliant vehicles - in some cases the charge will be higher than the riding fees and will deter them from benefiting from this therapy and potentially put the whole charity at risk. One of the sources of income that the charity has built up over the years is from hiring the centre's riding facilities for competitions and training. The equine sector is notable as having a large proportion of non-compliant vehicles and many of the horse owners who live outside of London will be deterred from hiring their facilities.

Another local charity provides vital outreach work for disadvantaged young people living in the borough. They were successful in obtaining a grant from MOPAC for their specialised outreach vehicle which is non-compliant. Should they return the vehicle to City Hall and disband all the work they have done to build up confidence and trust amongst the young people they are working with? Even if they are eligible for the scrappage scheme, it will not be sufficient to cover the cost of replacing the vehicle.

Unlike the introduction of the ULEZ charge in Central London, the cross boundary issue from Greater London into the Home Counties is key. Our local hospital Trust, Epsom and St Helier NHS Trust, extends into Surrey and does not recognise the ULEZ boundary. The exemptions, grace period and scrappage scheme do not apply to residents and businesses outside of London and this will have implications for residents in my borough if people choose not to travel into Sutton for work, leisure, shopping and to visit friends and family.

For all these reasons - and many more - we do not believe that the scheme being proposed is fair or equitable. When pursuing measures to clean up our air and tackle climate change, we need a just transition so that we can take people with us and help

them adapt. Climate action needs to be accompanied by fair and proportionate support to ensure nobody is left behind.

The inadequacy of public transport alternatives in my borough and the limited scrappage scheme being offered mean that far too many people will be disproportionately affected by the charge. Given the chronic underfunding of public transport in my borough over many years, compared to many other London boroughs, it is unfair to penalise Sutton residents and businesses for a situation that is not of their making. Will all the money raised from the fines due to be imposed in my borough be re-invested in the borough to address the lack of public transport? Will the many initiatives that have been shelved through lack of funding like the demand-responsive (Go-Sutton) bus service now be reinstated?

We call upon you to reconsider the scheme and take more time to assess the impact it will have on residents and businesses in Outer London who are struggling at this time. We ask you to push back the rollout of the scheme until you can guarantee that support will be in place for those who need it, not all of whom are on Universal Credit and other benefits.

The timelines for the rollout are unrealistic and will not allow people enough time to make the necessary adjustments during a period of severe and unprecedented financial crisis. I know that many leaders in Outer London would be happy to meet you to discuss how we can achieve our common goal of improving air quality without causing the hardship that the present scheme will impose on those very people who most need our support

Best wishes,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Ruth Dombey". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long, sweeping underline.

Councillor Ruth Dombey OBE
Leader of the Council