

11 April 2024

Dear Candidate

I am writing to you on behalf of over 72,000 members of the Royal College of Nursing (RCN) in London to ask you to be an active champion for the capital's nursing community if elected as the next Mayor of London.

London's nursing community are the life blood to our city's health and care service. They work in hospitals and care homes, out in the community and with vulnerable groups to provide vital care to patients and help tackle health inequalities in London.

The nursing workforce showed professionalism and unwavering commitment to their patients in responding to the COVID-19 pandemic, and this dedication remains today. However, while nursing staff are working hard to continue to keep Londoners safe, mounting pressures in the city's health and care service are making everything a relentless battle for them. Chronic staff shortages, rising waiting lists, and the increasing incidence of violence and aggression towards staff are pushing many in the nursing profession to the brink. Members are telling me they feel undervalued, unheard, and taken for granted by politicians.

Furthermore, the current cost of living crisis has had a detrimental impact on London's nursing community. A survey conducted by RCN London in January 2024 found that 75% of respondents said they are financially worse off compared to 12 months ago; 62% reported rationing gas and electricity while 90% said financial pressures are having a considerable impact on their mental health.<sup>1</sup> Worryingly, 55% of RCN London members said that they are likely to leave nursing altogether within the next 5 years, citing the lack of affordable housing as the main reason for leaving.<sup>1</sup> Despite nursing being a highly skilled, degree-educated, safety-critical profession, poor pay and soaring living costs are forcing staff to leave nursing at a time when Londoners and the city's health and care system need them most.

While the Mayor of London has no direct powers or responsibility for nurse recruitment and retention, they do have important levers that directly affect the system's ability to recruit and retain nursing staff, such as on housing and transport policies. When asked which interventions would help stop our members leaving London, they said: increased pay followed by cheaper accommodation and discounted travel.

My members have been open about the challenges they face in London and about what action must be taken. The next Mayor of London has the power to take decisions that could make a significant difference to the capital's nursing community, but there must be a willingness to do so. As a candidate to be the next London Mayor, I am asking you to commit to implementing our five key priorities to help stabilise London's nursing workforce and ensure Londoners get the care they deserve. These are:

- 1. Publicly support the RCN's campaign Fair Pay For Nursing:** poor pay and working conditions are forcing staff to leave nursing at a time when the city's health and care system need them most. The next Mayor must be a vocal supporter of Fair Pay For Nursing to attract and retain nursing staff.
- 2. Advocate for increasing nurse staffing levels in London to ensure safe and effective care for patients:** safe staffing means having enough nursing staff with the right skills and knowledge, in the right place, at the right time. Currently, London's NHS has nearly 9,000 vacant nursing posts, as well as thousands of unoccupied posts in social care.<sup>2</sup> This shortage of staff results in essential care tasks being left undone, and many Londoners having to wait longer for treatment.
- 3. Take urgent action to protect nursing staff from acts of violence and aggression:** our members are telling us they are experiencing an increase in violence and aggression from patients, service users, and/or their families. This is unacceptable. Every nursing staff member deserves to feel safe and secure in their workplace.
- 4. Make access to genuinely affordable housing a priority for nursing staff:** access to affordable housing is key to attracting and retaining London's nursing workforce. Long before the current cost of living crisis, access to genuinely affordable housing was one of the biggest reasons nursing staff were considering leaving London. This challenge continues and has worsened in recent years.
- 5. Introduce free travel on public transport for nursing staff:** London's public transport network is key to supporting the capital's nursing workforce. Unlike other public sector workers, such as Metropolitan Police officers, nursing staff do not get free travel on public transport. Like police officers, registered nurses have a specific duty to intervene should a passenger become unwell, however, nurses have yet to be afforded the same privilege of free travel.

When voting on 2 May, nursing staff will look for candidates who will actively champion their cause and show real commitment that will be backed up by concrete action, to support London's nursing community and the patients they care for. This will require investment, leadership, and large-scale support from the next Mayor of London.

I hope London's nursing community can count on your support if you are elected.

Yours sincerely,



Lisa Elliott  
RCN Regional Director for London

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<sup>1</sup> The RCN's Cost of Living survey ran for two weeks between 8 January and 21 January 2024 and members across the UK were invited to respond. For the London region, a total of 1,952 responses were received and analysed. Topics in the survey covered how much respondents earned and spent on a range of costs such as housing, utilities, food and transport.

<sup>2</sup> NHS Vacancy Statistics England, April 2015 - December 2023, Experimental Statistics - NHS England Digital, 29 February 2024.