

The Rt Hon David Lammy MP
**Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth
and Development Office**
House of Commons
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Dear David,

I'm looking forward to meeting to share the work we're doing in Hackney for our local communities, particularly in the Brownswood and Woodberry Down wards that, since the 2024 boundary changes, you represent as Member of Parliament. I must also acknowledge the gravity of your work as Foreign Secretary, the headway you're making in strengthening partnerships in the face of conflict and climate challenges, and in particular your evident commitment to supporting Ukraine and Sudan.

Israel, Gaza and the West Bank

As you know, our communities in Hackney, alongside many others across the country, have long campaigned for our government and allies to call for a halt to military operations in Gaza, ensure immediate access to humanitarian aid for Palestinians and free all hostages. This devastating conflict has caused a great deal of distress amidst Hackney communities and you can find a summary of actions the Council has taken to support community cohesion and reflect residents views, here: <https://hackney.gov.uk/israel-and-gaza>

In January 2024, Hackney Council adopted a cross-party motion calling for the former government to work to secure a ceasefire on all sides, for humanitarian aid and basic services to be immediately restored, and all hostages immediately released. At the same time, I wrote to your predecessor to raise this call and to urge the UK government to provide funding to support community safety and cohesion work to foster unity here in Hackney.

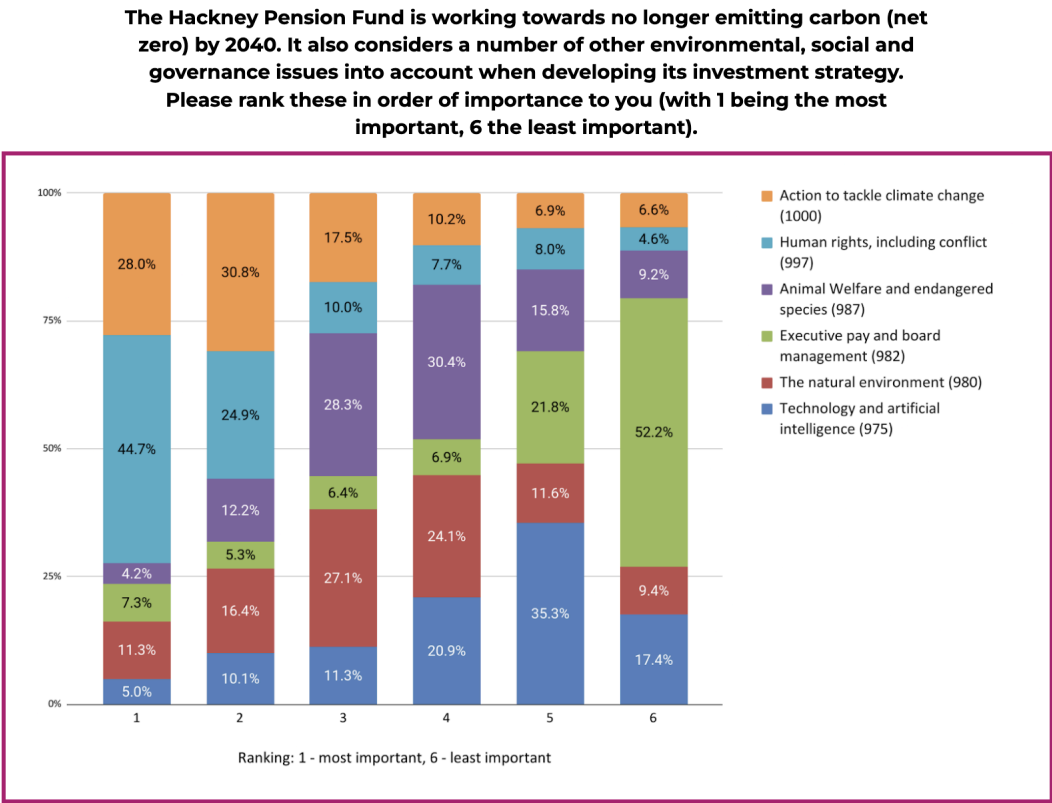
In October 2024, the Council marked one year since the horrifying attack by Hamas on Israel, and the fact that many hostages remained captive since 7th October 2023.



Israel's counter attack in Gaza had already by then created a death toll in the tens of thousands of Palestinians. Throughout the year, Hackney residents and campaign groups called on the Council to divest its pension fund from companies linked to Israel's military operations in Gaza and the West Bank, and to end our civic twinning relationship with Haifa.

To clarify the Council position, the community-led twinning relationship with Haifa has in effect been dormant since the onset of the pandemic, and as a Council we will not engage in any twinning activity with Haifa whilst conflict is ongoing. We are committed to reviewing this position once the conflict is resolved and to considering future twinning relationships brought forward by the Hackney community, where meaningful and sustainable connections are in place between communities in Hackney and overseas, including in Palestine.

In January 2025, the pensions committee decided to consult the members of the pension fund in updating their responsible investment policy - 20,623 members were contacted and 1023 members responded to the survey. Respondents were asked to rank six different issues, with 1 being the most important and 6 being the least important. The chart below shows the breakdown for each issue by how it was ranked in importance.



Now that the pensions committee has taken the time to secure feedback from the members of the Hackney pension fund, I am looking to central government to reset the framework. This could, for example, be through the UK government application of sanctions, that will allow Council pension funds and their pools to prioritise human rights, and - if it would not compromise our fiduciary duties - legally divest pension funds from occupied territories and any arms companies operating in breach of international human rights. To our knowledge, no local authority with investments in the London Collective Investment Vehicle has as yet been able to divest from arms companies associated with the conflict in Gaza.

By way of precedent, following Russia's invasion of Ukraine, international sanctions devalued Russian assets, presenting direct financial concerns. Divestment decisions are permitted by the Law Commission guidance where there is a clear financial rationale for doing so.

In May 2025, I welcomed the joint statement you issued as an alliance of leaders of the United Kingdom, France and Canada on the situation in Gaza and the West Bank - you can see my response here:

<https://news.hackney.gov.uk/news/statement-from-mayor-woodley-on-the-situation-in-gaza-and-the-west-bank>

I also welcome that in June 2025, the UK was joined by Australia, Canada, New Zealand and Norway in placing sanctions on two Israeli government ministers, Itamar Ben-Gvir and Bezalel Smotrich, over comments about Gaza, including plans to destroy the territory and use violence to gain control of new settlements in the West Bank.

The UN has on several occasions warned that Israel's warfare methods in Gaza may be consistent with genocide, including the use of starvation as a weapon. I therefore take great hope from seeing new alliances emerge and urge you to continue to work together to swiftly take further steps, not only in terms of securing the release of hostages and supporting distribution of aid as a matter of desperate urgency, but also in imposing sanctions, an arms embargo, ending displacement and loss of territory, and recognising the State of Palestine.

I know you are committed to continuing the call for a permanent ceasefire, as it is the only route to a sustainable peace for both Israelis and Palestinians, and to opening a political pathway to a two state solution.

Hate Crime and Community Cohesion

My primary goal as Mayor of Hackney is to foster community unity, a task which is challenging in a borough so diverse and so deeply and directly impacted by concerns not only here in the UK, but around the world. I remain committed to ensuring that there is no place for hate in Hackney. The Council has adopted motions supporting the IHRA definition of antisemitism and the All-Party Parliamentary Group on British Muslims definition of Islamophobia, and we have a strong history of interfaith collaboration. Yet, when I meet local imams and rabbis, who play such a crucial role in supporting hurt and grieving communities, and hear that in the face of this crisis they are too often feeling isolated, it's clear to me that more must be done.

Thank you for your consideration. I look forward to your response and to discussing this further when we meet.

Kind regards,



Caroline Woodley
Mayor of Hackney