

News special Where's Kenny?

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hopeful that the mayor can see culture in London as one of the really important factors about why people want to spend more time in the city, as well as being a very significant part of its economy.' In particular, he admires Trafalgar Square events and Livingstone's appointment of Lola Young.

One area where the mayor can have an indirect positive impact on culture is in transport – like most Londoners, leading figures in the London arts scene are waiting wearily for progress on that front. Trevor Nunn, artistic director of the National Theatre, has another transport-related concern: 'We're seriously worried about the planned congestion charging for private cars because of the obvious disincentive this will be for theatre-goers.' However, Nunn balances his criticism with praise for Ken's 'vigorous support' of West End theatres and tourism campaigns.

Others, like Pete King, owner and manager of Ronnie Scott's, are more generous. 'I do wish he had the same powers as he had when he was leader of the GLC.' Likewise Philip Headly, director of the Theatre Royal Stratford East, praises the St Patrick's Day and Chinese New Year celebrations: 'He understands the role arts can play in solving social problems and how London's diverse communities should be able to express themselves, but he hasn't any power.'

But Livingstone does have a few staunch fans. The South Bank Centre, for example, won his support over the renovation of the Royal Festival Hall (RFH). The mayor helped persuade Lambeth Council to grant planning permission for the overhaul. 'Livingstone wants to see great new arts facilities on the South Bank that can compete internationally, and a world-class park,' says Lord Hollick, South Bank Centre chairman.

Planning permission for the RFH, the first step in the overhaul of the entire South Bank, was finally granted in March, following years of delay. The long-running redevelopment saga included three separate masterplans over more than a decade, among them a plan by Richard Rogers to place a glass roof over the site. The various proposals failed, partly because of a lack of funding and partly because of Lambeth Council's indecision over planning permission.

The £51m refurbishment of the RFH has been described by Hollick as 'an important first step in the redevelopment of the whole of the South Bank site to create a world-class cultural centre'.

Livingstone also gets brownie points for supporting London's comedy scene: he asked organisers of the London Comedy Festival to take part in Respect. 'We're grateful to see Mayor Livingstone supporting new initiatives in the arts,' says Mick Bateman of the London Comedy Festival. 'I cannot think of anything that I have been unimpressed with.' ●



Mayor apparent

We present Mayor **Ken Livingstone** with his complete mid-term report (*Time Out*-style) and the opportunity to explain himself. Interview **Chris Wheal**

If power corrupts, Ken Livingstone must be the least corrupt politician in the country, if not the world. Livingstone's big gripe is that the office of London's Mayor lacks real power over the police, over planning and over the tube's PPP.

Livingstone regularly contrasts his meagre muscle with the power of his opposite number

in New York, until recently Rudi Giuliani. He says it is a long-standing conservatism in British political history that denies London its own power.

The tube PPP is a classic example. 'This is all about the fact that the Government can't lose face and admit it is wrong. Margaret Thatcher did the same with the Poll Tax,' he

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► says. He reckons the funding gap in the PPP project will lead to massive fare increases or £1.50 a week on a London Band D council tax, provoking a similar non-payment problem. He has promised to challenge the PPP contracts in the courts if they go through unamended.

Even over such issues as the arts, Livingstone is frustrated at how little he can do. 'As GLC leader I increased the budget for cultural events from £60 million to £160m a year. We were able to lay on something for everyone. Under this regime I have no power to even set a budget.' Much of what he has done has been a result of his ability to influence others. 'Before I started, only about 3 per cent of Arts Council grants in London went to ethnic minority arts. Now about 30 per cent do. Most of it is influence – and you can do a lot with that.'

He has no power at all over London's train network, but has worked hard to influence the Strategic Rail Authority's thinking. 'What we want is a Métro-style service so nobody has to plan their journey, they just turn up and know there will be a train at least every 15 minutes,' he says, claiming that message has, in theory at least, been accepted by the SRA.

There are currently 19 different train operating companies running services in London. Livingstone has argued that when the franchises are re-tendered, he wants one company to have the lot. That would almost require the renationalisation of the railways. He claims to have persuaded the SRA that, logically, each London terminus should have a single train operating company.

Livingstone says police numbers can only be increased by influencing the Met's budget and suggesting where he would like to see the extra officers used. It will take years to get the number of police officers up to his stated target. 'If I had the power of Giuliani I could do it in six months,' he says. A stark example of his impotence is that after September 11, 50 officers were taken off crime duty to provide additional protection for parliament. Many more escorted Royals and other bigwigs. Not only did nobody consult Livingstone on the issue, but he was not even told about it, only finding out when asking about the rise in street crime months later.

Even in the area of planning, Livingstone says that, again, it is his influence rather than his legal powers that have achieved successes.



FINAL REPORT
KEN HAS INVESTED A LOT OF ENERGY IN TRANSPORT BUT IS OFTEN HELD BACK BY GOVERNMENT. HE SHOWS PROMISE IN AREAS OF SOCIAL HOUSING, EQUALITY AND THE ENVIRONMENT AND HAS ENGAGED WITH BUSINESS, BUT ON THE ARTS HE MUST TRY HARDER. ULTIMATELY, LITTLE POWER MEANS FEW RESULTS.

POLICING: C
EQUALITY: B+
ECONOMIC COMPETITIVENESS: C++
TRANSPORT: B-
ENVIRONMENT: C+
PLANNING: C
CULTURE: D+
OVERALL GRADE: C+

But that has limits. 'Until the spatial development strategy has the force of law, we are stuck with this, and when you are working with recalcitrant councils there's a limit to what I can do.' Some of those councils refuse to set ambitious targets for developers to provide social elements within their proposals. He argues that borough planning departments don't have the skills needed to negotiate to each developer's limits. Harrods, for example, offered just £700,000 towards social housing but ended up paying £2.5m. The Arsenal development went through with 15 per cent of the costs going on community developments. 'We haven't had a single developer walk away from a site because of our demands,' Livingstone insists.

It's influence that will lead to his next big success – Crossrail. 'People from all over London will be able to get to the jobs that are coming to east London,' he says. He is determined to work with local education authorities to ensure that the unemployed in London have the skills to take advantage of the jobs. 'There are two jobs coming for every one out of work in London. It would be a tragedy if people in Hackney or Newham were still out of work but more people were commuting from Guildford.'

Livingstone believes he can do still more. He reckons London could cope with all the growth required in the south-east using brownfield developments – it has one of the lowest densities of any city in Europe. And he insists this can be done while improving air quality and reducing noise pollution. 'It will take us four years to catch up with the rest of Europe,' he argues, 'but then we want to be setting an example.'

Ironically, the area in which Livingstone has real power is the one which has seen the most successful results. His proudest achievement has been the improvement in London's buses. Bus use has just gone up 8 per cent, the biggest increase in history. He has just opened the first new bus route in London in ten years and is about to launch the first of his bendy-buses, taking into account that few Londoners want to ride on the top deck any more.

The real power he would like is the power to set his own budget, rather than see it stick at the current 7 per cent. He'd like the power to issue bonds to raise additional funds and he'd like proper control over the police. He will be watching proposals for regional assemblies in England to make sure his powers are at least as good as theirs, but fears it will happen slowly. 'In 25 years' time, maybe my successor will have the powers of the mayor of New York.'

Livingstone says politicians fear London because, on its own, it would be the eighth biggest state in the EU with an economy bigger than Austria. And, playing to the gallery, he says: 'Politicians are too afraid of people who read *Time Out*. They're the sort of people their parents warned them about – young, educated, critical, and they stay out late.' ●