

AGENDA

Meeting: Economy Committee

Date: Wednesday 13 December 2023

Time: 2.00 pm

**Place: Chamber, City Hall,
Kamal Chunchie Way, London, E16 1ZE**

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Members of the Committee

Marina Ahmad AM (Chair)

Neil Garratt AM

Andrew Boff AM (Deputy Chair)

Krupesh Hirani AM

Hina Bokhari AM

Zack Polanski AM

Anne Clarke AM

A meeting of the Committee has been called by the Chair of the Committee to deal with the business listed below.

Proper Officer: Mary Harpley, Chief Officer
Tuesday 5 December 2023

Further Information

If you have questions, would like further information about the meeting or require special facilities please contact: Jack Booth, Committee Officer; Email: jack.booth@london.gov.uk. For media enquiries please contact: Emma Bowden, Senior Communications Officer; Email: emma.bowden@london.gov.uk. If you have any questions about individual items please contact the author whose details are at the end of the report. If you have a public enquiry please contact the City Hall Public Liaison Unit on 020 7983 4000.

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Certificate Number: FS 80233

Agenda

Economy Committee

Wednesday 13 December 2023

1 **Apologies for Absence and Chair's Announcements**

To receive any apologies for absence and any announcements from the Chair.

2 **Declarations of Interests** (Pages 1 - 4)

Report of the Executive Director of Assembly Secretariat

Contact: Jack Booth, jack.booth@london.gov.uk

The Committee is recommended to:

- (a) **Note the list of offices held by Assembly Members, as set out in the table at Agenda Item 2, as disclosable pecuniary interests;**
- (b) **Note the declaration by any Member(s) of any disclosable pecuniary interests in specific items listed on the agenda and the necessary action taken by the Member(s) regarding withdrawal following such declaration(s); and**
- (c) **Note the declaration by any Member(s) of any other interests deemed to be relevant (including any interests arising from gifts and hospitality received which are not at the time of the meeting reflected on the Authority's register of gifts and hospitality, and noting also the advice from the GLA's Monitoring Officer set out at Agenda Item 2) and to note any necessary action taken by the Member(s) following such declaration(s).**

3 **Minutes** (Pages 5 - 50)

The Committee is recommended to confirm the minutes of the meeting held on 9 November 2023 to be signed by the Chair as a correct record.

4 **Summary List of Actions** (Pages 51 - 62)

Report of the Executive Director of Assembly Secretariat

Contact: Jack Booth, jack.booth@london.gov.uk

The Committee is recommended to note the completed and ongoing actions arising from its previous meetings, the additional correspondence received.

5 The Impact of Remote Working on Central London (Pages 63 - 66)

Report of the Executive Director of Assembly Secretariat

Contact: Tim Gallagher, tim.gallagher@london.gov.uk

The Committee is recommended to:

(a) Note the report as background to putting questions to invited guests and note the subsequent discussion; and

(b) Delegate authority to the Chair, in consultation with party Group Lead Members, to agree any output arising from the discussion.

6 Economy Committee Work Programme (Pages 67 - 68)

Report of the Executive Director of Assembly Secretariat

Contact: Tim Gallagher, tim.gallagher@london.gov.uk

The Committee is recommended to note its work programme.

7 Date of Next Meeting

The next meeting of the Committee is scheduled for 11 January 2024 at 2.00pm in the Chamber, City Hall.

8 Any Other Business the Chair Considers Urgent

Subject: Declarations of Interests

Report to:	Economy Committee
Report of:	Executive Director of Assembly Secretariat
Date:	13 December 2023
Public Access:	This report will be considered in public

1. Summary

- 1.1 This report sets out details of offices held by Assembly Members for noting as disclosable pecuniary interests and requires additional relevant declarations relating to disclosable pecuniary interests, and gifts and hospitality to be made.

2. Recommendations

- 2.1 **That the list of offices held by Assembly Members, as set out in the table below, be noted as disclosable pecuniary interests;**
- 2.2 **That the declaration by any Member(s) of any disclosable pecuniary interests in specific items listed on the agenda and the necessary action taken by the Member(s) regarding withdrawal following such declaration(s) be noted; and**
- 2.3 **That the declaration by any Member(s) of any other interests deemed to be relevant (including any interests arising from gifts and hospitality received which are not at the time of the meeting reflected on the Authority's register of gifts and hospitality, and noting also the advice from the GLA's Monitoring Officer set out at below) and any necessary action taken by the Member(s) following such declaration(s) be noted.**

3. Issues for Consideration

3.1 The Monitoring Officer advises that: Paragraph 10 of the Code of Conduct will only preclude a Member from participating in any matter to be considered or being considered at, for example, a meeting of the Assembly, where the Member has a direct Disclosable Pecuniary Interest in that particular matter. The effect of this is that the 'matter to be considered, or being considered' must be about the Member's interest. So, by way of example, if an Assembly Member is also a councillor of London Borough X, that Assembly Member will be precluded from participating in an Assembly meeting where the Assembly is to consider a matter about the Member's role / employment as a councillor of London Borough X; the Member will not be precluded from participating in a meeting where the Assembly is to consider a matter about an activity or decision of London Borough X.

3.2 Relevant offices held by Assembly Members are listed in the table below:

Assembly Member Interests

Member	Interest
Marina Ahmad AM	
Lord Bailey of Paddington AM	Member, House of Lords
Elly Baker AM	
Siân Berry AM	
Emma Best AM	Member, London Borough of Waltham Forest
Andrew Boff AM	Congress of Local and Regional Authorities (Council of Europe)
Hina Bokhari AM	Member, London Borough of Merton
Anne Clarke AM	Member, London Borough of Barnet
Léonie Cooper AM	Member, London Borough of Wandsworth
Unmesh Desai AM	
Tony Devenish AM	Member, City of Westminster
Len Duvall AM	
Peter Fortune AM	
Neil Garratt AM	Member, London Borough of Sutton
Susan Hall AM	Member, London Borough of Harrow
Krupesh Hirani AM	
Joanne McCartney AM	Deputy Mayor
Sem Moema AM	Member, London Borough of Hackney
Caroline Pidgeon MBE AM	
Zack Polanski AM	
Keith Prince AM	Member, London Borough of Havering
Nicholas Rogers AM	
Caroline Russell AM	Member, London Borough of Islington
Dr Onkar Sahota AM	Congress of Local and Regional Authorities (Council of Europe)
Sakina Sheikh AM	Member, London Borough of Lewisham

3.3 Paragraph 10 of the GLA's Code of Conduct, which reflects the relevant provisions of the Localism Act 2011, provides that:

- where an Assembly Member has a Disclosable Pecuniary Interest in any matter to be considered or being considered or at
 - (i) a meeting of the Assembly and any of its committees or sub-committees; or
 - (ii) any formal meeting held by the Mayor in connection with the exercise of the Authority's functions
- they must disclose that interest to the meeting (or, if it is a sensitive interest, disclose the fact that they have a sensitive interest to the meeting); and
- must not (i) participate, or participate any further, in any discussion of the matter at the meeting; or (ii) participate in any vote, or further vote, taken on the matter at the meeting

UNLESS

- they have obtained a dispensation from the GLA's Monitoring Officer (in accordance with section 2 of the Procedure for registration and declarations of interests, gifts and hospitality – Appendix 5 to the Code).

3.4 Failure to comply with the above requirements, without reasonable excuse, is a criminal offence; as is knowingly or recklessly providing information about your interests that is false or misleading.

3.5 In addition, the Monitoring Officer has advised Assembly Members to continue to apply the test that was previously applied to help determine whether a pecuniary / prejudicial interest was arising - namely, that Members rely on a reasonable estimation of whether a member of the public, with knowledge of the relevant facts, could, with justification, regard the matter as so significant that it would be likely to prejudice the Member's judgement of the public interest.

3.6 Members should then exercise their judgement as to whether or not, in view of their interests and the interests of others close to them, they should participate in any given discussions and/or decisions business of within and by the GLA. It remains the responsibility of individual Members to make further declarations about their actual or apparent interests at formal meetings noting also that a Member's failure to disclose relevant interest(s) has become a potential criminal offence.

3.7 Members are also required, where considering a matter which relates to or is likely to affect a person from whom they have received a gift or hospitality with an estimated value of at least £50 within the previous three years or from the date of election to the London Assembly, whichever is the later, to disclose the existence and nature of that interest at any meeting of the Authority which they attend at which that business is considered.

3.8 The obligation to declare any gift or hospitality at a meeting is discharged, subject to the proviso set out below, by registering gifts and hospitality received on the Authority's on-line database. The [gifts and hospitality database](#) may be viewed online.

- 3.9 If any gift or hospitality received by a Member is not set out on the online database at the time of the meeting, and under consideration is a matter which relates to or is likely to affect a person from whom a Member has received a gift or hospitality with an estimated value of at least £50, Members are asked to disclose these at the meeting, either at the declarations of interest agenda item or when the interest becomes apparent.
- 3.10 It is for Members to decide, in light of the particular circumstances, whether their receipt of a gift or hospitality, could, on a reasonable estimation of a member of the public with knowledge of the relevant facts, with justification, be regarded as so significant that it would be likely to prejudice the Member's judgement of the public interest. Where receipt of a gift or hospitality could be so regarded, the Member must exercise their judgement as to whether or not, they should participate in any given discussions and/or decisions business of within and by the GLA.

4. Legal Implications

- 4.1 The legal implications are as set out in the body of this report.

5. Financial Implications

- 5.1 There are no financial implications arising directly from this report.

List of appendices to this report:

None

Local Government (Access to Information) Act 1985

List of Background Papers: None

Contact Information

Contact Officer:	Jack Booth, Committee Officer
E-mail:	jack.booth@london.gov.uk

MINUTES

Meeting: Economy Committee
Date: Thursday 9 November 2023
Time: 10.00 am
**Place: Chamber, City Hall,
Kamal Chunchie Way, London, E16 1ZE**

Copies of the minutes may be found at:

www.london.gov.uk/about-us/london-assembly/london-assembly-committees

Present:

Marina Ahmad AM (Chair)

Andrew Boff AM (Deputy Chair)

Hina Bokhari AM

Anne Clarke AM

Neil Garratt AM

Krupesh Hirani AM

Zack Polanski AM

1 Apologies for Absence and Chair's Announcements (Item 1)

1.1 There were no apologies for absence.

2 Declarations of Interests (Item 2)

2.1 The Committee received the report of the Executive Director of Assembly Secretariat.

2.2 **Resolved:**

That the list of offices held by Assembly Members, as set out in the table at Agenda Item 2, be noted as disclosable pecuniary interests.

3 Minutes (Item 3)

3.1 Resolved:

That the minutes of the meeting held on 17 October 2023 be signed by the Chair as a correct record.

4 Summary List of Actions (Item 4)

4.1 The Committee received the report of the Executive Director of Assembly Secretariat.

4.2 Resolved:

That the completed and outstanding actions arising from previous meetings be noted.

5 Free School Meals in London (Item 5)

5.1 The Committee received the report of the Executive Director of Assembly Secretariat as background to putting questions on free school meals in London to the following invited guests:

Panel 1

- Daniel Kebede, General Secretary, National Education Union;
- Barbara Crowther, Campaign Coordinator, Sustain; and
- Dr Katharine Vincent, Director, Reconnect London.

Panel 2

- Joanne McCartney AM, Deputy Mayor for Children and Families;
- Emma Pawson, Head of Health and Programme Director for Free School Meals, Greater London Authority (GLA); and
- Richard Watts, Deputy Chief of Staff, GLA.

5.2 A transcript of the discussion is attached at **Appendices 1 and 2**.

5.3 The meeting adjourned at 11.31am and reconvened at 11.41am.

5.4 During the course of the discussion the Campaign Coordinator for Sustain agreed to provide Bremner & Co's report *Impact on Urban Health*.

5.5 Over the duration of the meeting the General Secretary for the National Education Union agreed to provide information on which London boroughs were paying £3.00 per school meal.

5.6 The Head of Health and Programme Director for Free School Meals, GLA agreed to verify when the London Food Board team would convene a meeting between boroughs and schools to discuss and encourage sustainable transport and delivery strategies.

5.7 **Resolved:**

- (a) **That the report and discussion be noted.**
- (b) **That authority be delegated to the Chair, in consultation with party Group Lead Members, to agree any output arising from the discussion.**

6 Economy Committee Work Programme (Item 6)

6.1 The Committee received the report of the Executive Director of Assembly Secretariat.

6.2 **Resolved:**

That the work programme, be noted.

7 Date of Next Meeting (Item 7)

7.1 The next meeting of the Committee was scheduled for 13 December 2023 at 2.00pm in the Chamber, City Hall.

8 Any Other Business the Chair Considers Urgent (Item 8)

8.1 There were no items of business that the Chair considered to be urgent.

9 Close of Meeting

9.1 The meeting ended at 12.30pm.

Chair

Date

Contact Officer: Jack Booth, Committee Officer; Email: jack.booth@london.gov.uk

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London Assembly Economy Committee - 9 November 2023**Transcript of Agenda Item 5 - Free School Meals in London – Panel 1**

Marina Ahmad AM (Chair): To our main item of business, which is a discussion with our invited guests on free school meals (FSM) in London. The item will be split into two panels. Joining us at City Hall for the first panel are Barbara Crowther, who is the Campaign Coordinator for Sustain; Daniel Kebede, who is the General Secretary of the National Education Union (NEU); and Dr Katharine Vincent, the Director of Reconnect London. Could I also pass on the apologies of Councillor Jasmine Ali, the Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Children, Education, and Refugees, at Southwark Council, who is unable to attend this morning.

Thank you to the three of you for being here this morning. I will start with the first question and it is to the three of you. What are the main health and educational financial benefits for children of receiving FSM? Katharine, I wonder if you could start.

Dr Katharine Vincent (Director, Reconnect London): Thank you, Chair. I will start by saying that FSM has significant and wide-ranging benefits for young Londoners and their families. They help ensure that all children can flourish and thrive, regardless of the circumstances in which they or their families are living. They also have long-lasting benefits into adulthood in relation to educational outcomes as well as social, financial, and health benefits, both for individuals and for wider society. FSM are particularly important for children living in poverty and we know that child poverty has risen in London in recent years and that it has grown further since the COVID-19 pandemic.

At the same time, the attainment gap between children experiencing disadvantage and their peers has been growing and is now at its highest for over a decade. Without funding for FSM, this attainment gap would almost certainly be even greater and schools would be struggling even more than they are at present to support children who are experiencing adverse financial circumstances.

Across the country, around 30 per cent of children are living in poverty. That includes 1.3 million primary school children and 1 million children under the age of four. Increases in child poverty are reflected in the increasing numbers of pupils who are eligible for FSM and the pupil premium. The pupil premium eligibility has risen from just over 1.2 million children in 2011/12 to over 2 million or one in four pupils nationally in 2022.

Furthermore, we know that low-income families often experience a higher inflation rate than higher-income households and that this has been the case over the last two years because the recent rise in inflation has been driven by increased prices of essentials like energy and food. Therefore, for many lower-income households, the cost of preparing a hot, healthy, nutritious evening meal is extremely difficult, particularly for families with several young children, making provision of FSM even more important.

We know that some groups are more likely than others to experience poverty and therefore particularly benefit from the provision of FSM. That includes several groups that are overrepresented in London and are also among the key groups who often underachieve at school. Therefore, 49per cent of children in single-parent families are living in poverty; 46per cent of children from Black and minority ethnic groups; and 47per cent of children in families with three or more children.

Children with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) are also significantly more likely to be living in poverty than those without additional needs. FSM are particularly important for those children. In Tower Hamlets, for example, 56per cent of children are living in poverty after housing costs, but this rises to over 80per cent in the borough's special schools, Pupil Referral Units (PRUs), and other alternative provision settings.

In London, there are particular issues, which exacerbate the situation for low-income families, which I know the Committee has heard about in previous evidence sessions. Families in London are more likely than those elsewhere to be affected by the two-child limit and the benefit cap as well as the freeze in local housing allowance and the high costs of childcare and travel. This makes funding for FSM even more important for London families who are facing adverse socioeconomic circumstances.

Research, including by the Child Poverty Action Group (CPAG) has explored in detail how children affected by poverty are more likely to experience overcrowding, poor living conditions, homelessness, food insecurity, poor nutrition, fuel poverty, social exclusion, and mental health difficulties. They also often face the challenge of not being able to fully participate in school life because, for example, they cannot afford new school uniform, take part in charity events, or pay for school trips.

Research carried out by Teacher Tapp for Fair Share in September 2023, showed that 26per cent of teachers were giving food to children to avoid them going hungry. In this context, funding for FSM is not a luxury, but a necessity. It alleviates the financial burden on families, freeing up crucial funds for other basic living expenses and making it more likely that children will be able to succeed in school. Because, fundamentally, we know that children cannot learn if they are hungry.

Therefore, providing FSM --

Marina Ahmad AM (Chair): Katharine, I am really sorry, you have covered an awful lot, thank you very much. I am going to ask both Barbara and Daniel, if there is nothing more that you want to add to that, I have two very specific questions for you both. Is there anything you would like to add?

Barbara Crowther (Campaign Coordinator, Sustain): I have some evidence of benefits that might be worth drawing to your attention. Just to add to what Katharine is saying, there have been evaluations of delivery of FSM. One study indicates that there is a £10 saving per child per week to families; a potential £34.50 saving for a household with one parent, one child; or up to £69 a week for a family with two parents and two eligible children. It is significant when we know how pressurised family budgets are. We know that can often then result in the family then freeing up budget to buy better-quality food, therefore better school food can lead to better-quality food at home. We also have talked to one school where the parents are saying they are signing their children up for exercise classes, therefore there is an overall health benefit.

We know that FSM reduces stigma when provided on a universal basis. That does not necessarily occur when you only provide a targeted basis. It shows how it reduces pressures of anxiety, depression, for children who worry about what is happening home and bring those worries into school, as well as the effects of stigma, embarrassment, and shame, if they are singled out, for example on school trips. It might be controlled very well when they are in school, but then once there are these peripheral activities, there is extra registration that singles them out.

The University of Essex has produced a study showing that there is, in the four London boroughs that have been doing universal school meals for quite some time, that there has been a reduction in the trends on obesity prevalence of around 9.3per cent among reception-aged children and 5.6per cent among year-6

children. Then, as Katharine said, we have evidence of learning and attainment. Not particularly in the United Kingdom (UK) evidence of increased attendance, but that is because there is not very much research in the UK around that. There is evidence of that occurring in other countries.

But we do know that the original pilots that the Government conducted, where they did pilots in Hull and Newham of universal entitlement versus targeted increased entitlement in Wolverhampton, in the universal schools there was an increase of between four and eight weeks attainment in maths and English. That did not occur in the targeted attainment boroughs. Therefore, that is just a few additional points to add.

Marina Ahmad AM: Thank you very much. Daniel, did you want to add anything?

Daniel Kebede (General Secretary, The National Education Union): No.

Marina Ahmad AM (Chair): OK, thank you. The next question is, what are the advantages and disadvantages of universal free school meals (UFSM) as opposed to targeted provision? Barbara, I know you have answered some of that, therefore I wonder, Daniel, if we could start with you.

Daniel Kebede (General Secretary, The National Education Union): Yes, absolutely. Just as a starting point, I would like to absolutely commend Mayor [of London, Sadiq] Khan and the London Assembly for a really ambitious approach here. It is something that should be absolutely celebrated. Before being elected, I was a teacher and I have taught in the northeast of England and I have taught in Stockwell and have seen first-hand the impact and benefits of FSM provision and am really a huge supporter of its universalism. As we have already heard, it can lead to an increased level in attainment. But one thing that I will say is that child poverty generally leads to an entire wastage of human creativity. We lose doctors, we lose architects, and it is down to essentially a political choice, therefore I really do commend you all for taking that on.

Children who use foodbanks or in families who use foodbanks can tend to get lower grades by half a grade on average. But to focus on that universalism and the benefits, every child has access to a nutritious lunch, eating together is a social experience in which children will try new foods. But of course it impacts on every child during the day having that healthy lunch. It improves their mood, their attention, and of course it improves their learning outcomes.

But the cost-of-living crisis has been really profound on families. In 2022 we saw families, on average, being £800 a year poorer, 4 million children in food poverty, essentially going hungry. One argument for UFSM that is not made enough, I do not think - is around the economic benefits more broadly to the economy. PricewaterhouseCoopers (PwC) have done some research. For every pound that is spent on UFSM, the economy gets £1.71 in return. We do need to look at this provision as an economic investment in the future of the country.

Marina Ahmad AM: Thank you very much. We have heard some people say that UFSM would be like a reverse Robin Hood tax, taking from the poor to give to the rich. I wonder if anybody would like to comment on that. Barbara?

Barbara Crowther (Campaign Coordinator, Sustain): Thank you and just to endorse what Daniel was saying about how we commend this activity. Just to build on the last point that Daniel made; that economic benefit for universal approach is compared to a £1.38 for every pound, therefore it is £1.71 under universal, £1.38 under a targeted approach, relating to Universal Credit (UC). Therefore, there is a wider economic benefit.

What we also do see is there are improvements in classroom cohesion, classroom behaviour, therefore you do see attainment benefits. It helps teachers get back to teaching because teachers are not having to deal with all of these additional requirements for support and the effects of children being hungry, lack of attention, tiredness, and poor behaviour in the classroom. There has been a really interesting study in Sweden by [Petter] Lundborg that has shown that children exposed to their universal school meals programme, the average across every child was a lifetime increase in earnings of around 3per cent. For children from the most disadvantaged backgrounds, it was 6per cent. Therefore, basically, the programme has lifted all children's potential, but it has disproportionately lifted children from disadvantaged backgrounds and closed that gap.

I wanted to just say that there is a really good rapid evidence review that has been produced by Bremner & Co, *Impact on Urban Health*, that is available that looks across all of this evidence and I recommend that the Committee does take that documentation, which we can supply, and it has now been published as well. So I will pass to Katharine.

Dr Katharine Vincent (Director, Reconnect London): Thank you, Barbara. Thank you, Chair. I absolutely agree with the points that have been made so far. In addition, it is important to talk about why we are having the conversation about universality. That is partly because it is widely agreed that we need to broaden the current eligibility criteria for FSM. Research by *Impact on Urban Health* again suggests that up to a third of children in the UK living in poverty do not meet current eligibility criteria. Therefore, there are quite a lot of children living in poverty and living in low-income families who currently are not getting FSM. That is partly because the threshold for eligibility has been frozen since 2018 while inflation and wages have been rising.

It is also important to mention the alternatives to universal provision compared with the current system. One alternative would be to provide FSM to all families in receipt of UC. That would mean that an additional 1.7 million children across the country whose families are eligible for UC, 69per cent of that group, would become eligible for FSM. That will cost about £1 billion a year compared with £2.5 billion, which it would cost to make UFSM available to everybody across the country. Therefore, there is a significant cost saving there. Of course one thing that would do would make sure that families up to an annual household income of about £55,000 could all know that when their children went to school they were always going to get a hot, healthy, and nutritious meal.

One of the things that would do for families, it would take away the worry, take away the stress, take away that knowledge that, if you earn a little bit more money, you might stop being eligible. If your circumstances change, you may no longer get that benefit. Therefore, I think that the idea of increasing eligibility to encompass all families who receive UC could be an alternative if universality was felt not to be affordable. One reason that seems sensible is because it uses an existing mechanism for means testing. One of the things we do not want to do is introduce any new mechanisms for that because we know that they are expensive and also that they can lead to families falling through the gaps in the net.

Marina Ahmad AM: Thank you very much. We have touched on the issue of stigma, you have all said the word "stigma". What I would like to ask you is, is there a stigma associated with receiving means-tested FSM and, if so, could you give examples of how this is experienced by children and the evidence of it? Does the universal provision of FSM help to alleviate stigma? Barbara, if you could start please?

Barbara Crowther (Campaign Coordinator, Sustain): Thank you. Obviously, schools go to great extent to try to avoid children in receipt of FSM being singled out. In many schools they try to manage it incredibly well. Obviously there are occasions when schools need to bring forward children in receipt of FSM in order to send additional information home to parents and things like that, therefore it is quite hard to avoid.

Particularly, the stigma, the evidence around secondary schools is particularly strong because the FSM grant is on the card, quite often that relates to the meal of the day, children cannot always buy everything that is on the menu, and therefore it starts to become very apparent who is buying what, therefore that can show in that way. What we do know is around 11 per cent of eligible children are not taking up their entitlement and that is to do with families not wanting their children to be identified in school as well as the form-filling exercises.

Therefore, another solution that we are currently advocating is the automated enrolment, automatic enrolment for FSM and also ensuring that is happening on pupil premium and there is some really interesting work happening. It started in Sheffield and Yorkshire and now several London boroughs are looking at automating entitlement and what they have realised is there are missing millions in school budgets as a result of the loss of people premium from families not signing up for their entitlement.

Marina Ahmad AM (Chair): Thank you. Daniel.

Daniel Kebede (General Secretary, The National Education Union): Yes. Means testing brings its own costs and its own bureaucratic burdens to the school system, therefore I would really warn against that. On the broader point around packed lunches and those sorts of things, even the middle classes are not doing a good job, 2 per cent of packed lunches meet nutritional requirements. Therefore, there is something really beneficial to the universalism here. A very important point is around the stigma. Stigma is well documented, even when schools are doing their best to minimise that, children very much deserve the right to live in dignity. Of course, there is a stigma that comes with poverty beyond just being in receipt of FSM. Providing that universalism will enable families to have greater financial security to minimise that stigma. There were protests in Newham, the parents protesting in Newham when the UFSM were being withdrawn. It is something that all parents appreciate when they have access to them.

Marina Ahmad AM (Chair): Thank you. Assembly Member Bokhari, you had a question.

Hina Bokhari AM: Thank you so much, Chair. I want to touch on the stigma and shame element. We did a previous Committee meeting on foodbanks and that was very much the emphasis that we got when we were talking to particular groups there. The one particular group that I want to focus on is the Gypsy, Roma, and Traveller communities. There was a lot of stigma and shame discussed about that community when they were approaching foodbanks and that is definitely the case here for children as well. Interestingly, it is quite a high percentage of children from that community that are on FSM. Can you tell me a little bit about why that might be the case?

Daniel Kebede (General Secretary, The National Education Union): We all need to focus particularly on racial and ethnic disparities in education. There has been lots of good work go on. However, data suggests in every regard Gypsy, Roma, and Traveller children are struggling the most in terms of education and we need to focus resources to support that community particularly, I believe. There is a great stigma associated with poverty and if you are a community that is more likely to access foodbanks then you are more likely to experience that stigma. That is something that we all must do much more to work on.

But it is not just those in absolute poverty that are experiencing great deals of stigma also. Much of our member feedback currently is also around families who are just about managing. Those families who are not eligible for FSM, who are struggling day-to-day with the cost of living. Our feedback from our members at the moment is that those are experiencing high levels of stigma also.

Hina Bokhari AM: Thank you.

Barbara Crowther (Campaign Coordinator, Sustain): Might I just add one point?

Hina Bokhari AM: Sorry, yes.

Barbara Crowther (Campaign Coordinator, Sustain): Another group that we have been particularly concerned about are children from households with no recourse to public funds. Obviously through a universal approach all children on the roll are automatically entitled. I was visiting a school in Wandsworth in Battersea where, although the Government has temporarily extended that entitlement, it had taken two administrative staff about three weeks working every single day, several hours a day, to try to get those two children in their school through the system. That is another kind of way we can make sure that we are not just singling out individuals who are already very vulnerable.

Hina Bokhari AM: I would like to come in on that point of the automatic enrolment. The Minister for Schools has come back to the Economy Committee about this and says that there is complex data systems, legal implications to such a change. What would your response be to that? Because the implications that you were referring to, on balance the challenges compared to the benefits of automatic enrolment could mean differences for the education of these children? Do you want to come in on that, Barbara?

Barbara Crowther (Campaign Coordinator, Sustain): I am not the expert on automated enrolment, but I do know that it is something that a lot of the London boroughs are looking at in detail. One of the ways that it is being currently approached is through an opt-out process rather than an opt-in process with parents. That has resulted in Lewisham has managed to recoup about £1.2 million of pupil premium. Obviously, this is one of the complications that we do have in the school meal system is that FSM entitlement is used as this proxy for disadvantage. We are already managing that on a national basis on UFSM. Therefore, there are other ways to make sure we can connect data systems and the information around welfare and benefits into our local councils so that schools can access pupil premium, which is their entitlement, while rolling out a universal school meals system. But I am not an expert on the logistics I am afraid.

Hina Bokhari AM: Thank you. Just my last point and this is linked to the stigma and the issues of claiming FSM, 14per cent of eligible children have not claimed. Is that because of stigma? Is it perhaps even particular ethnic groups that are not taking it on for particular cultural reasons?

Daniel Kebede (General Secretary, The National Education Union): There are barriers that communities can face, language barriers being one of them. There is a real issue, the nature of the economy and society at the moment, it means that families' financial situations can change very quickly and unless you are up to scratch with all your knowledge on eligibility around anything you can access, it can cause a real problem. Autoenrollment does alleviate some of that problem for families and is, I think, something that we should really be looking towards. Not just ensuring that young people have access to the FSM that they are entitled to, but also that schools are able to access the pupil premium funding that they are in turn entitled to.

It is important to remember that last year the majority of young people who went hungry were those who were not in receipt of FSM for whatever reason but living in poverty. Therefore, 57per cent of children who missed a meal last year were not accessing FSM at the time, and that is something autoenrollment can help alleviate.

Marina Ahmad AM (Chair): Thank you. Assembly Member Boff.

Andrew Boff AM (Deputy Chair): I just wondered which schools in London are reinforcing that stigma.

Dr Katharine Vincent (Director, Reconnect London): I am going to be brave enough to answer that question by saying that I know that London schools and schools across the country have done a huge amount to reduce stigma and a huge amount to make sure that all children receive the benefits for which they are eligible and that they minimise any potential negative consequences of that. The feedback that we have been receiving from headteachers within our network, albeit anecdotal at this stage, is that the current policy is helping to bring children together in school and having benefits even though they have already done a lot to reduce stigma. For example, they are finding that children who previously did not eat at lunch time are eating now because everyone is eating and everyone is sitting down and their friends are eating, and therefore they are taking part.

They are also finding that they can monitor more closely vulnerable children and what they are eating. One head teacher mentioned a child who is on a Child in Need Plan who they know has issues with access to healthy food at home. They know that she does not always have a healthy meal at home in the evening. But now food is available at school, they can make sure that she is having that one meal a day at school and --

Andrew Boff AM (Deputy Chair): Thank you very much for that anecdotal evidence but I just want names of schools.

Dr Katharine Vincent (Director, Reconnect London): I know the --

Andrew Boff AM (Deputy Chair): I want to give them some stigma. Which ones are they?

Dr Katharine Vincent (Director, Reconnect London): One particular example of something that is quite difficult for schools, when I was a head teacher in east London, one of the things that was mentioned to us was that we needed to make sure that children who were eligible for FSM had access to the carry-over amounts every day. Therefore, if a child receiving FSM receives that kind of nominal amount, £2.41 or £2.65 a day, if they are absent or if they do not have a meal that day, one thing I had not previously realised as head teacher is that the catering system would automatically then take that balance down to zero the next day. Therefore, we were then able to start to create a system whereby it was fairer for those children because the money could be rolled over and they could then have access to it later.

Andrew Boff AM (Deputy Chair): I am looking at stigma here, I am not looking for back office calculations, things which teachers rightly conceal from other pupils and rightly keep confidential, I am talking about school names. Where does this happen in London? I have never heard of it happen anywhere in London. It did when I was a boy and people used to have a ticket and it was considered divisive and they got rid of that system decades ago. I just have never heard of a school where this is apparent. I would love to get a name because, if you are going to justify on the basis of stigma, which is a big part of the impact assessment, then you have to show where that stigma happens.

Marina Ahmad AM (Chair): Assembly Member Boff, I absolutely applaud your vendetta against the schools that are doing this and we have discussed it a number of times but --

Andrew Boff AM (Deputy Chair): There is no point in having a vendetta if you have nobody to pursue.

Marina Ahmad AM (Chair): -- one of the issues that we have looked at, at the last meeting that we had, the panel is there and our panellists here are making it very clear that stigma now is far more subtle. We have had an example of the type of food that can be bought. My understanding is that, while the ticket system and things like that are gone --

Andrew Boff AM (Deputy Chair): Chair, I am not going to get the name of a school out of this, am I?

Marina Ahmad AM (Chair): No, and you keep asking for names of schools and you do not get one.

Andrew Boff AM (Deputy Chair): I am not going to get one because I kind of think they do not exist. Therefore, do you not think that there is also a stigma to being auto-enrolled?

Daniel Kebede (General Secretary, The National Education Union): No. I do not think there is a stigma to being auto-enrolled and just to take on some of your points on stigma more generally. When you have a child come to class, arrive in school tired and hungry, it is very difficult to hide that from the rest of the class. When you have a child who needs some seconds wrapping up to take home, it is very difficult to hide that. Stigma does not come because schools are not doing a good enough job to try to mitigate it or minimise it, because they absolutely are. Every teacher I know prioritises young people and wants them to live in dignity. The fact is poverty creates its own stigma. That is what UFSM mitigates against.

Andrew Boff AM (Deputy Chair): Can I just challenge you on that? Absolutely we should be addressing poverty. But we are going to have a situation where children are still coming to school undernourished and tired from families that do not qualify for FSM, do not receive UC, who are not on the face of it poor, but they just have pretty neglectful parents. Now, I would have thought that is a role for the teachers and the school authorities to identify those children as individuals rather than as a mass, would you not say that it is best that we identify pupils for their individual needs rather than as a group?

Daniel Kebede (General Secretary, The National Education Union): There is a problem, because children in receipt of UC, from families in receipt of the UC, are not automatically able to access FSM. If you have a parent in work, for example, you may not be able to access FSM. The state of the economy, as we have seen over the last 18 months, has created unmanageable levels of poverty for many people and many of them, the majority of them, have parents in work, three-quarters in fact. Stigma is created from that poverty and schools do everything they can to mitigate against it.

Barbara Crowther (Campaign Coordinator, Sustain): I absolutely agree with you that schools and teachers have a role in identifying when children are arriving and there are clearly issues at home. I am a governor of a primary school and in our safeguarding reports we get chapter and verse on measures the school is taking to address when children are turning up with torn clothing, when children are turning up clearly not having had breakfast, etc. Therefore, FSM I agree with you there is a role there. However, we have created a system here that is stigmatising by means-testing children in what is meant to be an education free at the point of use and treating our food and the nutritional safety net in the middle of the day where children are required to be, by law, treating that nutritional safety net as something to be means-tested in a public service, which we do not do in hospitals for anybody of any background economically and we do not do it even in our prisons with sometimes very wealthy fraudsters, we do not means-test them, we feed them regardless. Therefore, we are means-testing children in a public service in a way that we do not means-test other parts of our society. There are other countries around the world, Sweden, Finland, eight United States (US) states now, as of September [2023], India, Brazil, Estonia, Portugal, have all moved away from this and increasingly we are seeing, across the world now, a shift towards saying good nutrition equals good learning. The universal system is the only one capable of making that school lunch experience a completely non-divisive experience.

Andrew Boff AM (Deputy Chair): Thank you very much for that. Thank you for those round of questions. It still does not stop me from believing that this Snark is a Boojum.

Marina Ahmad AM (Chair): Thank you very much, Assembly Member Boff. Just for smoother running of future Committee meetings, I do not think you are going to get the name of the school. We have established in various Committee meetings that stigma is a much more subtle issue these days than an issue of tickets. Thank you. Moving on to Assembly Member Hirani.

Krupesh Hirani AM: Thank you, Chair. I am going to start with a question to Barbara. What has been the impact of UFSM delivered by the London boroughs?

Barbara Crowther (Campaign Coordinator, Sustain): Do you mean the London boroughs that were doing this ahead of the Mayor [of London]'s initiative?

Krupesh Hirani AM: Yes. We were due to have a speaker from one of the boroughs that had it previously, but if you have any experiences from the ones that had it existing before the universal programmes was rolled out by the Mayor.

Barbara Crowther (Campaign Coordinator, Sustain): Obviously, there has been some work looking at how, over the years that they have been delivering universal school meals, I mentioned the evidence around obesity prevalence. In Newham, for example, they are anchoring 60 jobs at London Living Wage through their universal school meals programme. Since the Mayor announced his initiative, they have looked to reinvest some of their money, therefore most of those boroughs are topping up the £2.65, in Newham they are topping it up to £3, in Southwark they are topping it up to £2.90. I believe that in Islington it was previously well below the £2.65 and now they are meeting the £2.65 as a result of this.

Westminster, as well as implementing the Mayor of London offer and increasing the per-meal price to £3 per meal, they also have introduced a free lunch offer for targeted two, three, and four-year-olds in nurseries and are maintaining those settings. They are also expanding a free lunch offer for children in key stage 3 resident in Westminster as well. I do not believe they would be able to continue that once the Mayor's funding, they would have to then revert their funding back to their core primary school offer, therefore that is an extended one-year pilot.

Tower Hamlets, as has been published, have introduced a universal secondary school meal offer. That was made available to every school in the borough. Not every school felt able to take it up fully in one term, because it is quite a major scale-up, but there has been a fairly impressive take-up in the first half-term in the schools that have taken up that offer.

In Newham as well they are putting resource into topping up to £3 to ensure the full costs of sustainable healthy food and [London] Living Wage, therefore they have associated it with a healthy meal bundle and the Food for Life programme, to make sure they get good-quality London Living Wage, the London Government Procurement Standards are being met, as well as maintaining a £3.9 million investment in their holiday meals programme with holiday vouchers for all eligible children.

Those are just some of the things that I am aware of. In Southwark they are expanding to all pupils in receipt of UC, including those children with no recourse to public funds who are not currently eligible for FSM and that includes 6th form, year 12, and year 13.

Krupesh Hirani AM: I am glad you mentioned funding as an issue as well because, certainly in one of my boroughs, projections are showing that there is a medium-term reduction expected in primary school places needed. Are you factoring that in terms of future projections of what this policy would cost? I imagine that would mean a massive cost reduction of what this policy delivers at the moment.

Barbara Crowther (Campaign Coordinator, Sustain): I believe that the studies that have been conducted have also looked at the population trends. I am not sure what has been done in London. Every projection, you need to look at what might happen around the costs of delivery, the costs of food itself, fuel, transport, staffing, as well as the numbers, the projected numbers, the quality of food and whether we are trying to align the procurement of food also with good sustainability standards. Therefore, the per-meal rate nationally is well below what the Local Authority Catering Association (LACA) believes should have been the case. It had not been increased for many years. It has just gone up from £2.41 to £2.53, which is still below what the Mayor is funding. LACA believes it should sit around £2.87. That is particularly challenging for small schools, therefore we do know that there are schools in London who are struggling to meet the £2.65 meal cost at the moment. Some boroughs are topping that up and some boroughs are not.

Krupesh Hirani AM: Moving to the Mayor [of London]'s universal programme for all of London, I am going to start with Daniel on questioning for that, what have been the experiences of schools so far in implementing the Mayor [of London]'s UFSM programme in London?

Daniel Kebede (General Secretary, The National Education Union): Our members have been absolutely celebrating this as a policy and providing excellent feedback to us as a union on its rollout. We have to bear in mind, when we are talking about teachers and support staff, we survey them regularly and number one, top of their concerns, beyond their own pay and workload, is child poverty. The FSM provision rollout was welcomed with open arms broadly by the profession. We are very grateful for the collaborative approach from the Greater London Authority (GLA) and the profession on this rollout. There has been open dialogue that has been really welcome. But one thing that we are all keen to establish is that this is something that lasts beyond one year and has that long-term funding commitment.

Krupesh Hirani AM: I will move to Dr Vincent for the next one, do you have any information on the impact of the programme on parents and children?

Dr Katharine Vincent (Director, Reconnect London): It is too early to say because we do not yet have the evaluations that I know will be taking place later this year, which will give us a much better insight into the impacts. However, what schools are saying to us is that the scheme is very welcomed by children and families in their school because many of them are facing very difficult financial circumstances and that parents have very much welcomed the opportunity to take up that offer of a free lunch; that many have taken that up and that many more children are now receiving that hot, cooked meal every day.

Schools have also talked about those children for whom it has been particularly beneficial. One head gave an example of a child with special education needs and disabilities (SEND) and with autism who is now able to supplement their packed lunch that they bring in from home, which contains quite a restricted range of items, with the items that are available in that free lunch at school to encourage them to expand their repertoire. Therefore, headteachers are certainly talking about noticing benefits for children and families but, as I say, it is too early to have a full evidence base for that.

Krupesh Hirani AM: Thank you. Just on that, I would like to say that I did take the opportunity to visit a primary school in my constituency where this is being rolled out, Kilburn Park School in Brent, and we did manage to speak to parents at the school as well. I met a single mother who has two children at the school and the difference that it has made for someone in her situation who was ineligible for FSM in the past. The difference that it has made is the difference between not providing a hot meal, providing a packed lunch on occasions, and picking and choosing what days to pay for a meal for children and just the logistical difference it has made not having to worry about packing a packed lunch or preparing a packed lunch for two kids in the

morning and having that stress and relief off her mind has made a world of difference, just one example that I have cited from my constituency. I would encourage others to also visit schools and ask the questions about the impact that it is having because I have found it an eye-opening experience for myself, thank you.

Marina Ahmad AM (Chair): Thank you very much. Moving on to Assembly Member Garratt.

Neil Garratt AM: Morning. I was just thinking about practicalities. There is a revenue cost, a marginal revenue cost for each extra meal, but then obviously there is a capital infrastructure element of perhaps when you get to a certain tipping point to provide x-extra meals it becomes challenging within the existing facilities. I just wondered whether schools had run into problems with that. I do not know whether that is something you have looked at, Katharine, where schools have run into either a capacity constraint with the kitchen or the dining room or facilities of that sort.

Dr Katharine Vincent (Director, Reconnect London): Yes, thank you for the question. Again, it is relatively early days to talk about the impact of this on schools, but the anecdotal evidence that we have gathered so far suggests that many of the anticipated infrastructure challenges were successfully overcome by schools and academy trusts and that they had a lot of support from the GLA in relation to overcoming those. Therefore, I think that is an example of how those barriers were anticipated and they were successfully overcome.

In some schools, nonetheless, capacity has been an issue. One head teacher talked to us about how it has been financially challenging because they have had to pay out from their budget for extra hot serving stations, kitchen equipment, crockery, utensils, and cutlery, which sounds relatively low level, but if every school in London is having to do that then that cost obviously adds up. Another head mentioned that they have had to recruit more midday meal supervisors, which again is an extra cost and difficult to recruit to at the present time when it is harder to recruit to those kind of relatively low-paid roles.

One head of a large all-through school talked about how, because of the sheer volume of children now taking lunch, they are having to run lunch time between 11.30am and 2pm so that the school is very busy and they have had to put quite a lot of procedures into place, you can imagine, including extra duties for senior staff in order to manage that. Therefore, there have been some logistical and capacity challenges but a lot of those have been overcome.

Neil Garratt AM: Sorry, you said it was early days, but presumably all the things that happen day one, therefore literally the first day is when all those things come, even before that obviously because a well-planned school is going to notice 50per cent more covers - I suppose if you were a restaurant you would call it - that you have to get through.

Dr Katharine Vincent (Director, Reconnect London): That is right. Therefore, when the policy was announced earlier this year, there was a lot of work that happened in a relatively short amount of time to make sure that the capacity was in place. Therefore, schools were set up to deliver to what was anticipated to be a significant increase in uptake. I know that there have been reports from local authorities of uptake increasing but that has not always been as much as people thought. Therefore, one of the things that schools are saying to us is that they are still getting the message out there but at the moment their uptake may have gone from 75 to 80per cent or from 80 to 85 per cent . They are still working on trying to, for example, persuade families that it would be better for them to have their child take a hot meal at school, rather than bringing in a packed lunch because some families are still saying that that is their preference. Schools are still working on that and anticipating potentially more increased capacity over time.

Neil Garratt AM: OK, so by and large that was a challenge, but that has largely been overcome. Are there places where that is still a problem? What are the big challenges that are harder to overcome or are proving more persistent?

Dr Katharine Vincent (Director, Reconnect London): One of the challenges is that logistical one of having more children that need to get through the lunch hall in a certain amount of time at a time when teachers and school leaders are very busy in other regards. There has been an extra pressure on staff to undertake extra duties to manage the school building during that time and to make sure that that all runs smoothly, but as they always do, schools have made that work.

Neil Garratt AM: Was there support from the GLA for that, financial or logistical advice, sharing best practice, that sort of thing?

Dr Katharine Vincent (Director, Reconnect London): There was some sharing of good practice and the GLA made a website available with resources for schools and examples of good practice in that regard. I know that it also has a £5 million fund to support extraordinary costs such as, for example, in special schools where it might be that there is an extra cost to providing school lunches. To the support that children need while they are eating lunch, it has provided financial support to schools as well in that regard.

Neil Garratt AM: Daniel, were you indicating that you wanted to say something on that point as well?

Daniel Kebede (General Secretary, The National Education Union): Yes. Broadly on the challenges, we are in regular contact with members. I am sure there will be some logistical challenges in schools in London somewhere; it has not been a primary source of feedback. We have had some feedback around difficulty around managing queues, getting more young people through the lunch hall; that is true. Also, some of these logistical challenges will be ironed out should there be that long-term funding commitment, I believe. It is not only an issue around those sorts of logistical challenges. I have taught in schools where the catering is done in-house because they have the necessary facilities. I have taught in schools where they do not, the food has to be brought in in polystyrene and it gets all sweaty and does not look all that good. Should there be that long-term funding commitment, schools can make those then necessarily long-term logistical commitments to ensure that children have access to not only FSM but really high quality FSM. Believe me, if you have a good chef and the necessary facilities, FSM can be exceptionally good.

Neil Garratt AM: There are still some where there are problems, you think, but longer-term funding would help with those problems?

Daniel Kebede (General Secretary, The National Education Union): That is right, yes. It just gives schools the ability to plan.

Neil Garratt AM: OK.

Barbara Crowther (Campaign Coordinator, Sustain): There is a degree of scepticism that comes in when you are talking about a one-year programme, about how much you then take out of a school budget to invest in a more permanent upgrade of kitchens if the Programme is going to be withdrawn. In my school, my Headteacher reported a little bit of scepticism from parents about enrolling their children in the Scheme because it is only a one-year Programme. When the Government brought in universal infant FSM, there was a £150 million investment in the logistics and the infrastructure. That meant there had been an upgrade of quite a lot of primary school kitchen facilities, which made the focus on primary a good place to be with this policy. That is ten years old, there is a need for more equipment and that is experienced right across the country. One

of the things that we are doing is talking across other local authorities in the rest of the country about what they can do to help support their schools to maintain adequate facilities in preparation for any further national policy developments.

Neil Garratt AM: If there are capital costs as a result - whether it is cutlery, crockery, extra tables or chairs, extra kitchen equipment, that sort of thing - there is a scaling up in terms of cost. That cost automatically falls on the schools, but it may be that they could apply for some money from the GLA to cover that. That is where that stands? Sorry, Katharine, you are nodding. That is the state of play there?

Dr Katharine Vincent (Director, Reconnect London): Yes, that is right.

Neil Garratt AM: OK. Is the funding provided by the Mayor overall adequate, you think?

Dr Katharine Vincent (Director, Reconnect London): I can answer that from the perspective of Headteachers and trust Chief Executive Officers (CEOs) that we have spoken to and say that they certainly welcomed the fact that the rate was set at £2.65 a meal. That then potentially influenced the decision to move the national rate to £2.53 from where it had previously been, £2.41. As Barbara [Crowther] has mentioned, there are boroughs already topping up to £3.00 a meal and there are many who feel that that is a more realistic place for the cost to sit. If the per meal rate had increased in line with the Consumer Prices Index (CPI) since 2014, it would currently be at £2.87 so even the £2.65 leaves a shortfall. Therefore, it has been the case that schools - and academy trusts to some extent - have been having to subsidise this, while nonetheless appreciating that the funding rate they are receiving from the Mayor is higher than the national rate.

Neil Garratt AM: OK. That is the revenue side and on the capital side you mentioned the £5 million fund. Is that adequate? I do not know if some, all or more than all of that has been bid for.

Dr Katharine Vincent (Director, Reconnect London): I do not know the answer to that, I am afraid.

Neil Garratt AM: Our next panel can probably answer that question for us.

Dr Katharine Vincent (Director, Reconnect London): Yes, I will leave that to them.

Neil Garratt AM: OK, thank you very much. Thank you, Chair.

Marina Ahmad AM (Chair): Thank you. Assembly Member Clarke, before we go on to you - and, sorry, Assembly Member Boff - could I ask the panel, just a context? What effect have Government cuts to local authority funding for schools had on the implementation of this? Daniel, would you like to start?

Daniel Kebede (General Secretary, The National Education Union): Broadly, feedback we have been getting is very similar around the funding that has been made available from the Local Government Association (LGA) and so on to support the FSM rollout in London. It has been very good. Ideally, we would like to see that funding commitment to be from Government over the long term. There is a more broader problem around capital investment, the cuts to local authorities and the school estate that has manifested a huge problem across education, not just in terms of school kitchens. There is much more to do from Government in that regard, but I do not think that should be any barrier to what we are currently doing around FSM.

Marina Ahmad AM (Chair): Thank you. Assembly Member Boff, you had a question.

Andrew Boff AM (Deputy Chair): Very quickly. You said some boroughs are paying £3.00 per meal. Perhaps you could share with us at some point which boroughs those are. It would be interesting to see that. Thank you.

Marina Ahmad AM (Chair): Thank you. Moving on, Assembly Member Clarke?

Anne Clarke AM: Thank you, Chair, and I will skip right on to question 13. In terms of schools, are they managing with that amount to cater for children with special dietary needs and those meals because they need kosher or halal meals but also because they may have special educational needs?

Dr Katharine Vincent (Director, Reconnect London): I can answer by saying that I know that that £5 million pot of money that the GLA has made available across London is there partly to ensure that those additional costs are met. The two particular areas where it is aware that there are additional costs are in relation to children in special schools and children with special educational needs and in relation to particular dietary requirements, including the high cost of kosher food compared with non-kosher food. I know that it is using some of that money to support schools with that.

Anne Clarke AM: I was wondering if you could come in on this. I represent Barnet and Camden, so I am lucky to serve London's largest Jewish community. When the FSM Programme was announced, it was the Jewish schools who immediately got in touch. I was aware of the high cost of kosher meals, but what I had not realised until that point was the difference is currently being made up by schools for the lower years for the amount they get per meal from Government. They are making that up and it is a significant shortfall. I am wondering what we could do as the GLA to push the Government and inspire the Government to realise that it needs to do an impact assessment on kosher meals but also on meals for children with additional needs.

Barbara Crowther (Campaign Coordinator, Sustain): It is a really good point. I think automatically the meal rate for kosher meals has been adjusted in light of the feedback that was received. There is no London weighting involved and there is no special meals price involved in the way school food is currently managed and funded. That is why we, alongside about 30 organisations in the School Food Review [Working] Group, are asking the Government to conduct a little bit more of a root and branch review that looks at the triple pillars. That is the quality of food being put on the plate, making sure it is adequate, it is culturally appropriate and it is sustainable. There are little pots of money coming from all sorts of places, so the funding system is very complex for schools to administer and manage. That is quality and funding and then there is the access issue and the fact that the threshold for benefit-entitled FSM is sitting at £7,400 before benefits. It has not changed since 2018 when it was introduced and, prior to that, it was being rolled out under UC with no threshold. The Institute for Fiscal Studies has said there is a cliff edge so there is a disincentive to work because you could then lose FSM entitlement down the line. We are really wanting to look at that bigger review and perhaps things like special meals and culturally appropriate food could form part of that.

Anne Clarke AM: OK, thank you.

Marina Ahmad AM (Chair): Thank you, Assembly Member Clarke. Assembly Member Bokhari?

Hina Bokhari AM: Thank you. I am going to touch on pupil premium that I think everyone has mentioned already. I was a primary schoolteacher when pupil premium came in under the coalition Government and it made a massive difference. It completely changed our approach in terms of helping children who had never been to a theatre before or were missing out on extra educational support, so it has made a massive difference. I know that there has been a discussion about the risk of that being lost because of the funding as a result of

the Mayor's Programme. Could you tell us a little bit about how the schools are making sure that that does not happen?

Barbara Crowther (Campaign Coordinator, Sustain): I know [Dr] Katharine [Vincent] will have a lot to say on this. The GLA did a special webinar for schools and local authorities on pupil premium. There is experience from universal infant FSM and from what the four London boroughs had been doing, who were already doing universal school meals, to make sure pupil premium enrolment was remaining high. In Hammersmith and Fulham, when they did a pilot in two secondary schools - one special school, one mainstream secondary school - they had to then adopt a different process for getting parents to register for pupil premium. They incorporated it into a broader information-gathering exercise with parents, which resulted in an increase in pupil premium. There is some evidence that if we start to handle pupil premium and registration for pupil premium differently, it could lead to --

Hina Bokhari AM: Does it impact on the workload though on the staff?

Barbara Crowther (Campaign Coordinator, Sustain): It does, and the automated enrolment pilots are very time-intensive and resource-intensive. Again, that is why we are trying to use that work that is going on on the ground, the piloting of this, to try to push for a more integrated system of linking pupil premium to benefits and indicators of disadvantage so that schools can automatically access that funding. I will let Katharine pick up more detail.

Dr Katharine Vincent (Director, Reconnect London): Thank you. I would definitely agree that there is concern amongst both primary schools and secondary schools about the potential loss of pupil premium funding. Secondary heads are quite worried about this because if parents are not incentivised to apply for FSM while their children are at primary school, then it could be the case that they enter secondary school and there is a big drop. That worry is understandable, given that about 30 percent of Headteachers reported a drop in pupil premium funding in 2014 after the introduction of universal infant FSM. It is a legitimate concern. Also, we know that about 11 percent of children were eligible for FSM but not receiving it before this policy was introduced and that that gap is greater in some places than in others. In London, that gap is smaller than in lots of other places and that is a testament to the huge amount of work that London schools have done to make sure that families are aware of this benefit, that they are signed up for it and that they do fill in the form. I know that schools and the GLA have worked incredibly hard to avoid a drop in pupil premium enrolments this year. One of the things they have done is to look at those boroughs who were already offering universal primary FSM - Newham, Tower Hamlets, Islington and others - to learn from their good practice. Islington was one example that they looked at because they had been particularly successful in making sure that there was not a drop.

We do not know yet. We do not have the data yet to know how pupil premium enrolment across London might be affected by this Scheme. To be honest, there is some emerging data, but even when that comes through it will be really hard to identify cause and effect. That is also affected by the transitional protections that are currently in place, which mean that if a child was eligible for FSM in 2018, they will remain eligible until the end of their current phase of education. There may be children now who are receiving that and therefore would not show up, even if there was --

Hina Bokhari AM: The emphasis is on the parent to apply.

Dr Katharine Vincent (Director, Reconnect London): Yes.

Hina Bokhari AM: Is that the reason why there is this discrepancy between primary and secondary? Is that an issue there? Primary schools are quite used to communicating with their parents and getting things to happen and in secondary schools this is a new thing for them, is it not? Is that the reason why there is a difference there?

Dr Katharine Vincent (Director, Reconnect London): Primary schools see children first and so they do the role around making sure that parents are aware of this, that they apply and that they know about it. Then when they enter secondary school, many families have already gone through that process and they are already in the system. Secondary schools are concerned that if that is no longer taking place, it could have a negative impact on them, particularly with pupil premium eligibility because it is about the “Ever 6” measure. If a family’s circumstances change, it may mean that they lose out if they had not applied while they were at primary school, if that makes sense.

There is a real case here, coming back to auto enrolment and it would be hugely beneficial for schools, for parents and for children. I know it is complex, but if it were possible for the Government to use the data that it already holds to simply make schools’ funding settlements reflect the proportion of children whose families are eligible for that benefit and put that into the school’s funding, it removes then an element of stigma. You are not identifying individual children, just simply making sure that schools get within their funding the amount they need. It removes the need for parents to apply via the local authority or the academy trust. It removes the need for schools to do the huge amount of work they do chasing that and it removes the burden on those home school and family school support workers who do so much of this incredible work to support families. There would be one less thing for them to do so auto enrolment could have huge benefits there.

Hina Bokhari AM: Daniel, you have probably heard from your members about the challenges that they are having to deal with in this particular aspect. Do you think the Government does have a greater role here in making that change, particularly on the enrolment that everyone has been talking about?

Daniel Kebede (General Secretary, The National Education Union): Absolutely. One piece of feedback that we are getting from our membership at the moment is that the time and workload aspect is growing in this regard. One way to ensure that schools do recoup pupil premium funding is that commitment to a long-term investment in the Programme and the rollout, with appropriate mechanisms for auto enrolment established.

Hina Bokhari AM: Yes. That will be coming up in our next question, but that emphasis of the need for it not to be just one year has been very loud and clear. Thank you.

Marina Ahmad AM (Chair): Thank you. Assembly Member Polanski?

Zack Polanski AM: Thanks, Chair, and morning, panel. Daniel, I recently spoke at one of your union events and, just to amplify, unsurprisingly a lot of your members were talking about child poverty and how important those FSM have been. Assembly Member Bokhari set me up nicely to ask: in your view, could the Government change the rules so that schools could access pupil premium funding, without parents having to register for FSM?

Daniel Kebede (General Secretary, The National Education Union): Yes, absolutely. We need long-term commitment to a FSM programme nationally. What we have seen in London for one year, we would love to see rolled out throughout the country. There absolutely does need to be then a mechanism for auto enrolment to ensure that parents and families can access the benefits they are entitled to but also that schools can recoup valuable pupil premium money to ensure that adequate education can be provided.

Zack Polanski AM: That is loud and clear, thank you. Would you like to see UFSM introduced to primary schools as a long-term programme?

Daniel Kebede (General Secretary, The National Education Union): Absolutely. I cannot emphasise enough the benefits of high quality FSM for young people in terms of the social aspects that it allows children to develop. There were previous questions around young people with special educational needs having specialised food. In schools that I have worked in where there are young people who are fussy about food and do not want to try things, there is no better environment than the school lunch hall to get children trying new things, experiencing new foods. When you have high quality provision, it has a real benefit to those young people. Where you have young people who will only eat a certain type of food, they soon develop a wide repertoire. It really impacts on the learning of young people. Quite simply, hungry children cannot learn at all and to alleviate that burden and help young people improve attainment is something that we should all be aiming to do. That universalism, the removal of stigma to allow every child to experience education and live in some dignity throughout the school day, is something that we should aspire to.

Zack Polanski AM: Thank you. Finally, Daniel, if this does not continue and it drops off for whatever reason, what impact would that have on parents, schools and children if this scheme just finished?

Daniel Kebede (General Secretary, The National Education Union): As I mentioned earlier, there was a FSM scheme in Newham and there was a protest from parents. All parents, I think, value FSM, they can see absolute benefit and it is great to hear about some experiences of Assembly Members going to schools and speaking to those parents. Also, there is that real economic argument that is just not made enough, I do not think. We often hear from a national Government viewing children as almost burdens and we often hear around feckless parents and workshy people and it is just wrong. Poverty is a political choice that impacts on every single one of us. If we are to see a prospering economy and a growing Britain, investing in children has to be the starting point. The fact of the matter is how rich in nutrition their daily intake of food is is a real determining factor in their outcomes over the long term.

Zack Polanski AM: Thank you. You are also making really good arguments for Universal Basic Income, but I will not go there because the Chair will throw the gavel at me. Barbara, I can see you want to come in.

Barbara Crowther (Campaign Coordinator, Sustain): I agree with everything Daniel is saying. One of the things that I want to emphasise is those impacts that we see on physical health. They become greater the longer the child is exposed to the policy and that is very, very clear. We do believe it is the responsibility of national Government to step in. There is a postcode lottery now across the UK and we can see other councils, who do not have the resources of London, wanting to move forward. In Stockport, they are doing an enhanced entitlement project because they cannot afford universalism. I believe that what we should be looking at is a progressive roadmap. It cannot be brought in overnight. There are logistical challenges, but you could look at a phased programme. We are seeing now disparities across the UK, with Scotland and Wales rolling out universal primary [school meals] and Scotland saying that it will go further once it achieves that model. The Republic of Ireland has also committed to universal primary [school meals] and a commission to explore full universalism.

I would like to see us get rid of the term “free” in “free school meals”. They are not free. Somebody does pay for them, but they could be part of a virtuous economy that is about a really vibrant catering industry, providing good jobs. We could be linking a school meals system into support for British farmers, feeding into that system their potatoes and their carrots. There is more that we can do. Everybody agrees that schools are a place where we want children to learn about good food and if there is not good food on the plate or if there is a divisive system, then we need to address that. We have got huge potential through a different vision for

school food that is not about only giving a meal to a child if they will go hungry. It is about good food as part of good learning and good food as part of achieving and investing in that future.

Absolutely, we would love to see this Programme at least extended for another year or two if that is possible whilst we try to push for that broader policy shift, but also to give this Programme a real chance of bedding down some good nutrition and supporting families because of the cost of living. I think 23.4 percent of households with children are still living with food insecurity. Slowly, the curve is slightly changing, but it is going to be still very high in a year's time.

Zack Polanski AM: What you are saying about that holistic approach is so important and links to my final question. For a long time, I have been advocating for plant-based foods within schools and we know this reduces chronic health diseases, it reduces the climate impact and it reduces bills, too. I wrote to the Mayor last year [2022], asking him to sign a plant-based treaty and, sadly, he refused to do so because he said it was not in his power. If we are giving FSM, do you think it is something in his power to look at, working with organisations like yourself or ProVeg, who have been advocating for this in schools, for the Mayor to recommend that schools are moving towards at least plant-based as a default, whilst still offering other options?

Barbara Crowther (Campaign Coordinator, Sustain): There needs to be a lot of work with communities because we also want families to take up school meals. What you do not want is to push a top-down policy and then families start to opt out again. That is what we need to see. We need to be aligning school food and public procurement with our broader climate ambitions, a good procurement system. Lots of London boroughs and we are also pushing for the Mayor to encourage this funding to be aligned with that green procurement programme. That could be about scaling up the amount of plant-based food, but also not scaling it up in a way that is an increase in ultra-processed vegan foods. There is something which is about making sure that also this is good, solid protein, increasing vegetables and fruit in the diet. Financially, we could be also scaling back a few of the sugary desserts that are still allowed in school food standards in order to make that better, holistic, nutritious food the core of what is the offer in our schools as well.

Zack Polanski AM: Healthy plant-based food, co-designed with communities is something we can all get behind - or me, certainly. Thank you, Chair.

Marina Ahmad AM (Chair): Thank you. Assembly Member Garrett?

Neil Garratt AM: Thanks. I am not sure I can get behind getting rid of sugary school puddings. Surely, that is the whole point of the setup. Anyway, on a slightly different question, looking at the bigger picture, we are looking exclusively at lunches. In the context of hunger, there is also discussion around breakfasts. In a world of finite resource, I wondered what research there is between lunches and breakfasts and the relative merits of one or the other. I am sure you are going to say, "Let us do both", which is the easy mode option. However, if there are difficult choices to make between those two, is there evidence? Do we know one way or the other which would be better or maybe equally good? Katharine?

Dr Katharine Vincent (Director, Reconnect London): I was just going to say that we do not have that evidence in this country. There is some evidence from overseas, but it is not completely clear and so more research is needed there.

Neil Garratt AM: It is not a well-researched question, OK.

Dr Katharine Vincent (Director, Reconnect London): Yes, I do not know that there is comparative evidence about which is better because, like school lunches, school breakfasts have been of varying quality and nutritional value. Sometimes, there has been some quite bad practice in very sugary items that give children a bit of a sugar hit and then they slump. There is some very good evidence that a balanced, nutritious breakfast does lead to improvements in classroom performance and in attainment. Magic Breakfast and the National School Breakfast Programme have some good, strong evidence for a school breakfast. In secondary schools, we have a particular challenge where children might arrive at the very last minute in school. The children who take up the breakfast club are not always the children that you most want to take up that offer, they might arrive a little bit late and they will then be very hungry at break time. They will eat lots of not very nutritious food from the break time offer and then they will not then take up their lunch.

Yes, we do have to look across the school day and the School Food Review [Working Group] is saying, "Let us look at school food across the school day", including before school and after school clubs. It is right that if children arrive at the start of the day without a breakfast, they are going to struggle through the day. Likewise, if they get to lunchtime and they have not had anything, then we do really need them to take up a nutritious lunch. Things like fruit and vegetable intake and protein intake are much more likely to come through a school lunch, than something that is probably going to be a bit of a 'grab and go' at breakfast time for children to be able to get hold of it at the point when they arrive.

Neil Garratt AM: I see. That is the issue, perhaps the understated assumption there. There is a defined quality of what may be put inside a packed lunch but certainly a cooked lunch is whereas a breakfast could be almost anything, just a croissant maybe.

Barbara Crowther (Campaign Coordinator, Sustain): Yes, or a muffin.

Neil Garratt AM: That is the issue with the research.

Barbara Crowther (Campaign Coordinator, Sustain): Magic Breakfast has a fortified bagel-type offer, which has a much more slow release of energy and is protein enriched. There are some examples of how that can be delivered very cost effectively and very simply without too many burdens on the school. I know some parties have committed to breakfast rollout as well as lunch. Ideally for us in terms of nutrition and that solid nutritional safety net in the middle of the day at school, we do feel that is the absolute number one part of the school meal system we need to crack.

Neil Garratt AM: Understood. OK. I do not know if you want to add anything to that, Daniel.

Daniel Kebede (General Secretary, The National Education Union): No, nothing.

Neil Garratt AM: Great. If not, that is me done. Thanks, Chair.

Marina Ahmad AM (Chair): Yes?

Andrew Boff AM (Deputy Chair): Will the UFSM Programme for primary pupils end the need to focus on those in particular need, the dietary requirements of those?

Barbara Crowther (Campaign Coordinator, Sustain): Yes, I do not think any one intervention --

Andrew Boff AM (Deputy Chair): We will not have to bother anymore?

Barbara Crowther (Campaign Coordinator, Sustain): Absolutely not, no.

Andrew Boff AM (Deputy Chair): All right, OK.

Barbara Crowther (Campaign Coordinator, Sustain): As Katharine [Vincent] said, families in need are coming with multiple issues of deprivation. For children in my school, it is cramped living conditions and there are also things to do with ability to afford uniforms. No, it is one part of a bigger jigsaw but a really important one. With the Children's Food Campaign, we work with a wide range of public health specialists and the evidence shows that good nutrition in those early years is absolutely critical for that lifetime.

Andrew Boff AM (Deputy Chair): This will solve that, will it not, in terms of nutrition?

Barbara Crowther (Campaign Coordinator, Sustain): It will certainly make a huge impact and it will be a very significant contribution, but we would also argue that we do need to address other cash-based support and wage systems for families living in poverty. We would always argue that in terms of poverty.

Andrew Boff AM (Deputy Chair): Sorry, I do not understand that. You will argue for?

Barbara Crowther (Campaign Coordinator, Sustain): Poverty is multidimensional, Andrew. We do need to have cash-based systems - whether that is benefits or wage levels - to address poverty and we need to address things to do with rental costs in London. School meals are not going to solve those issues for us. What they are going to do, very clearly and very powerfully, is provide that nutritional safety net in the midst of this situation that will enable children to learn, hopefully achieve more and hopefully have a more holistic educational experience here in London. That is why we absolutely back what the Mayor is doing.

Andrew Boff AM (Deputy Chair): If we are going to still have to focus on the nutritional needs of children after the implementation of UFSM, then what value is UFSM?

Barbara Crowther (Campaign Coordinator, Sustain): Immense value, as we have all been talking about. We can see its contribution to increasing fruit and vegetable uptake. We are living in an era of high levels of childhood obesity and obesity affects children of all backgrounds.

Andrew Boff AM (Deputy Chair): Are schools not already doing that?

Barbara Crowther (Campaign Coordinator, Sustain): Schools are doing a huge amount, but they can only do what is within their means and at the moment their means does not allow them. In London, temporarily for this year, it is allowing primary schools to do this, but schools can only do what is within their means. We need a bit of a system-wide approach to this as well.

Andrew Boff AM (Deputy Chair): I have got to ask the questions. Surely those funds that are going towards subsidising the wealthier families could be better redirected in supporting those families that are having severe problems?

Barbara Crowther (Campaign Coordinator, Sustain): The families who are particularly affected, as Daniel [Kebede] said, are the working poor, who are currently not eligible. We are seeing high levels of food insecurity happening by people and the same with food banks.

Andrew Boff AM (Deputy Chair): Yes, nobody is arguing that.

Barbara Crowther (Campaign Coordinator, Sustain): Characterising the people that this policy is benefiting as being “the wealthy” --

Andrew Boff AM (Deputy Chair): I am not. I am not.

Barbara Crowther (Campaign Coordinator, Sustain): -- is not correct.

Andrew Boff AM (Deputy Chair): Wealthy people will benefit from this policy, will they not?

Barbara Crowther (Campaign Coordinator, Sustain): In the way that wealthy families benefit from an education system that is free at the point of access and this is an anomaly within our education system.

Andrew Boff AM (Deputy Chair): £400 a year is going to buy a good bottle of claret, is it not, for --

Marina Ahmad AM (Chair): Assembly Member Boff, we addressed this in the first part of this meeting and we have had evidence after pieces of evidence to show --

Andrew Boff AM (Deputy Chair): Yes, OK. Thank you for that.

Barbara Crowther (Campaign Coordinator, Sustain): I think Daniel wanted to say something.

Andrew Boff AM (Deputy Chair): That is all right. I --

Barbara Crowther (Campaign Coordinator, Sustain): Daniel wanted to comment as well.

Marina Ahmad AM (Chair): Daniel, please?

Andrew Boff AM (Deputy Chair): Oddbins of Islington is going to benefit enormously.

Marina Ahmad AM (Chair): Sorry, Assembly Member Boff, could the panellists answer your question, please?

Daniel Kebede (General Secretary, The National Education Union): Assembly Member Boff, it is really important to recognise that just because a policy does not completely alleviate the burden of poverty from young people we should not take steps towards alleviating poverty from young people. The fact of the matter is - and I have worked in schools like this - one in five schools is also a food bank at the moment. Providing UFSM is not going to end the food crisis that many families have to endure and many families will still be having to access food support from outside, many accessing school-based food banks. As has been said, we need systems in place to assist with the cost and expense of school uniforms and there are some policies that would be very helpful in regard to that, ensuring that families do not have to pay for branded things that are excessive. There is lots that we can talk about, but it is a multi-faceted approach that is needed. As has been said, the majority of families who are in poverty at the moment are working. I do not think there is much any of us in this room can do about it currently. The real underlying issues are low-paid, precarious work --

Andrew Boff AM (Deputy Chair): Can I just say? We are all caricaturing here. The idea that I am caricatured as saying, “Nobody should get school meals and we should sod the poor” is ridiculous. I think there is something to be done with the resources that are available to address the serious poverty that is in London and anybody who has consulted my record knows that that is the case. It is this idea of universality which implicitly has wasted costs and it has wasted resources on things that could be addressing the real root

causes of poverty in London. That is what I want an answer to. Is it worth the price? Bearing in mind that money is limited, is it worth the cost of neglecting other programmes that could come around with those resources in order to provide the kids of the wealthy with a subsidy?

Daniel Kebede (General Secretary, The National Education Union): There is a cost of means testing and there is a cost of the extra bureaucracy that that brings. It is not the socialists who are putting it forward, like PwC, that for every pound we spend you get £1.71 returned to the economy. That is what you should be listening to.

Andrew Boff AM (Deputy Chair): Well, there are misguided capitalists, too.

Marina Ahmad AM (Chair): OK, thank you. Asking the same question, expecting a different answer from this panel is a tough one. On that note, what I am going to do now is bring this part of the investigation today to a close. I would like to thank our panellists for your incredibly interesting answers. It was, personally as Chair, a really interesting session and [thanks to] the Committee for the questions that you have asked. Thank you very much. We will have a few minutes' break and then we will have our new panellists in place. Thank you.

Daniel Kebede (General Secretary, The National Education Union): Thank you very much.

London Assembly Economy Committee - 9 November 2023**Transcript of Agenda Item 5 - Free School Meals in London – Panel 2**

Marina Ahmad AM (Chair): OK, thank you for joining us for the second part of today's Economy Committee meeting and welcome back, everyone. We will now move on to our second panel on FSM in London. We are joined by our panellists: Joanne McCartney, who is the Deputy Mayor for Children and Families; Emma Pawson, Head of Health and Programme Director for FSM at the Greater London Authority; and Richard Watts, Deputy Chief of Staff for the Greater London Authority. If we could start with our first question, Assembly Member Bokhari?

Hina Bokhari AM: Thank you, Chair, and this is for anyone on the panel. Why did the Mayor take the decision to provide UFSM to all primary schoolchildren, rather than targeting provision at all children, including secondary schools, on lower incomes?

Richard Watts (Mayor's Deputy Chief of Staff): Shall I answer that? Two reasons. Firstly, there is an overwhelmingly strong evidence base for universal primary FSM. You will be aware and you may have gone into it in the last session that we are not the first people to do this, although we are the first people to roll this out at the scale that we have rolled it out. This goes back to Labour Government-funded pilots in Newham and Durham. As I recall - and, Emma [Pawson], correct me if I am wrong - they also looked at the evidence base around extending eligibility but not making it universal. They found overwhelmingly the benefits from a universal approach outweighed the approach of extending eligibility but not making it universal. Therefore, there is an academic evidence base around universality that is very strong.

Given the time period with which we had to roll this out, there is also a very strong administrative argument for universality. If you are doing this, you still have to count pupils, eligible under the national rules, for pupil premium purposes. It would be catastrophic to not do that, so you need to a means test whatever you do. To then have to do another separate new London-wide means test, there is not the same level of national support and policymaking support for what would be extremely administratively burdensome for schools. Therefore, the joy of universality is that once you have done the necessary national bureaucracy that everyone has to do, then everyone gets it and it is easy. From our point of view, it was better to spend money on food provision than introducing yet another separate, new means testing programme and that is why we made the decision we did.

Emma Pawson (Head of Health and Programme Director for Free School Meals, Greater London Authority): Yes.

Joanne McCartney (Deputy Mayor for Children and Families): Yes. Can I also add to that? That research also shows that the earlier you can intervene with children, the better. We do know from the research that the benefits from UFSM carries on with the child throughout their school life and into adulthood in terms of better health but also better educational attainment as well. Putting it at the younger age group was a good idea, too.

Hina Bokhari AM: Great. We have been hearing from the previous panel about some of the challenges and one of the challenges that you just mentioned, pupil premium and schools not wanting to lose out on that because of the need for parents to apply themselves. One of the things that they kept on talking about was the automatic enrolment scheme and that was something that maybe the Mayor could have considered. Was

that considered and what was the decision-making process? Was it the challenges? Was it the difficulties in getting that to happen?

Joanne McCartney (Deputy Mayor for Children and Families): I will let Richard [Watts] go first because Richard was one of the council leaders that initially introduced UFSM in a borough. This is something that has got to be done at a borough level, working with their schools because they know those boroughs best. One of the things we have done throughout this process is to take advice from the boroughs that already have it in, including those boroughs that have a model of universal registration of all parents. We have been sharing that good evidence in webinars and with our formal meetings, as well as producing resources that illustrate those models. For example, [the London Borough of] Lewisham has now trialled an auto enrolment system and it has identified an extra 500 families through the data it already has in its own systems. It has informed parents that it will apply on their behalf unless parents opt out and it believes it will get approximately £1.2 million extra in pupil premium in this next year so that they do have benefits, yes.

Hina Bokhari AM: Yes, we were hearing that from the schools, but can we focus on the automatic enrolment, if you can tell me about that?

Richard Watts (Mayor's Deputy Chief of Staff): Certainly. As Joanne says, ultimately it is a borough decision about how they wish to approach that. The strong advice we gave to boroughs was to run an auto enrolment system and we arranged training and webinars from boroughs like Islington, who have previously run that kind of system. As Joanne set out, it found quite a lot of children who were entitled to FSM but were previously not claiming them and that upped pupil premium income, as opposed to it dropping off. Ultimately, it was for boroughs to run that. It is important both from an administrative point of view and a devolution point of view that boroughs needed to adapt their own systems to implement this within their own school setting. Therefore, it was for boroughs --

Hina Bokhari AM: If it was a national Government approach, they would still have to do it in that way, do you think?

Richard Watts (Mayor's Deputy Chief of Staff): If it is a national Government approach, the Government can just change the rules because it has access to the UC database so it could do it differently. We do not have that data and boroughs do not have that data, so they have to do the approach that they do, but auto enrolment is clearly our recommendation to boroughs about the best way to implement this.

Emma Pawson (Head of Health and Programme Director for Free School Meals, Greater London Authority): When we initially did the engagement with boroughs around that approach being part of the grant principles, there was a mixed reaction so we felt it was not appropriate to mandate it. It is not something we would mandate for a borough. We did reach out to national Government. I think it is something it has looked at and has not adopted as a more national approach and that is interesting in itself. Since we have been doing this, as Joanne has just mentioned, some of the boroughs that have been doing this and looking at ways in which they can do auto enrolment have started to see massive success. We have heard one example. We have had another example of a borough who has found another 600 families who are now eligible for FSM, who did not know that they were. Therefore, just going through this process, we are getting more and more boroughs come on board. We have just run one of our webinars again and we will be running another one in the next couple of weeks to share that good practice and, as we go over this year, I expect more and more boroughs will adopt it as a policy.

Marina Ahmad AM (Chair): Thank you. Before we move on to the next question, panellists, could I ask you to move your microphones closer to you, please? Thank you. Assembly Member Garrett?

Neil Garratt AM: Hi, morning. On the decision, a question I put to the previous panel was about lunch versus breakfast and there seems to be evidence that lunch helps and evidence that breakfast helps. You went down the lunch route. Did you review the alternative of breakfast or did you weigh that up or was it just too complicated or too difficult or not on the menu, as it were? Sorry.

Richard Watts (Mayor's Deputy Chief of Staff): Very good. We did look at it. The reason we went for lunch was, again, because there was very strong evidence of its effectiveness, which is not to say that breakfasts are not effective. We really welcome where that is being rolled out. However, what you have with school lunches is an existing infrastructure. There are already kitchens and many of these meals are being served, they are being served at pace and there is an ability for schools to cope with that. Most school breakfast clubs are significantly smaller and therefore, you are having to do a much bigger administrative burden on schools to shift a breakfast club from typically 30 kids to, like, 250 for lunches where you are already getting larger numbers of schools going through. Conscious of the administrative burden on schools in a very difficult period, we took the view - and the feedback reflects this - that lunches would have been a significantly easier programme to administer. That is not to say that where breakfast clubs exist they are not of value; we really welcome them.

Neil Garratt AM: Yes, understood. On that point about infrastructure for lunches, one of the discussions that we had earlier as well was about effectively you pay the revenue costs of the extra lunch, the marginal cost if you like of the extra lunch. Then there are certain tipping points where you need extra capital in terms of maybe tables, chairs, cutlery and crockery. Then you can get to certain tipping points. Maybe their room is not big enough and you have to significantly rethink the way that they did the lunch shift and we heard earlier about how that is a challenge in some schools. How did you address that challenge, what support did you give to schools and have you had feedback? Some schools have struggled with that. Are they now all beyond the struggling phase?

Joanne McCartney (Deputy Mayor for Children and Families): Yes, I will come to Emma in a second, but there is a difference between primary and secondary. Primary schools have to seat all children anyway, so they have already got very sophisticated systems for getting children in at different times. It is at a military operation in effect to get them all in and then out. I do not think that there has been that same issue that there would have been if it was perhaps in secondary schools. Initially, issues were --

Neil Garratt AM: We did hear earlier that it is an issue. For example, dispensing hot meals is different. If you are doing packed lunches, you could do that in a classroom; if you are doing hot meals, you have to do that somewhere near the canteen. That does increase the number of kids going through that bit.

Joanne McCartney (Deputy Mayor for Children and Families): Yes, but generally in most primary schools children do tend to eat together, although they might have separate packed lunch tables as opposed to school dinner tables. Very early on, we were getting quite a lot of concern about exactly those things, but boroughs and schools have just got on with it and have adapted what they already have. Zack [Polanski AM] and I went on a Cost of Living Working Group [visit] to a school where they had done exactly that. They have just adapted what they already have and they have not had any issues at all. Emma, I do not know if you want to add?

Emma Pawson (Head of Health and Programme Director for Free School Meals, Greater London Authority): Thank you, Joanne. I would add to that that at the start we were getting concerns coming through, but that has not really been seen in fruition. When we looked at the five boroughs in London who already were offering UFSM and heard from them, they tackled most of these problems in very, very creative

ways. We then shared that with the other boroughs so they could learn from that, which they found really helpful.

The other thing which I would flag is that the formula that we have used for funding is very flexible and there is surplus in there, partly because we used 2022 census data. That means that when we look at 2023, unfortunately - and it is unfortunately - there are more children who are now living in poverty and therefore eligible for Government funding. We took an agreement in the GLA that we would keep the higher point and therefore boroughs have more money than children. We also funded them at a 90 percent uptake rate, we expect that there will be a gradual uptake to get to that point and in some schools they may not quite reach that and therefore, again, there is extra flexibility in the funding. We have been as supportive and as flexible as possible. We also have a contingency pot if there any schools that are having extreme problems, but we have not seen that come through to us yet.

Neil Garratt AM: The answer I got earlier was that the cost of the extra infrastructure, the extra capacity, would fall automatically on schools, but there was some funding from the GLA that might cover it. The potential there is that it is sort of a white elephant gift in the sense that you get the gift and then there is a cost that you have to pay yourself to go with it. You are confident that you have not imposed a burden like that on schools?

Emma Pawson (Head of Health and Programme Director for Free School Meals, Greater London Authority): We have a number of touchpoints throughout the year to talk to Headteachers because there are so many of them. If there are voices that we are not hearing, then we will hear those at several points throughout the year. We have been also having regular engagement with boroughs, so we have been around all of the boroughs and spoken to them to see how things are going. We have not heard anything come up. There are one or two boroughs who have invested - they have been fantastic - in their kitchens, but they are because of longstanding issues that they have, not because of something that we have created.

Neil Garratt AM: You are confident you have not put a cost burden on to schools?

Emma Pawson (Head of Health and Programme Director for Free School Meals, Greater London Authority): At the moment, that is not the evidence that we have heard.

Neil Garratt AM: OK.

Emma Pawson (Head of Health and Programme Director for Free School Meals, Greater London Authority): The money goes to boroughs though, not to schools, and our agreement sits with the boroughs. If the boroughs are not --

Neil Garratt AM: Understood, OK.

Emma Pawson (Head of Health and Programme Director for Free School Meals, Greater London Authority): -- doing the contracting with their schools, that is something that -- our relationship in terms of contracting and funding is with the boroughs.

Neil Garratt AM: OK, yes, so there is a potential wrinkle in terms of you are funding the boroughs and then if the boroughs are not dealing with it. Is it then the boroughs who are dealing with these practical issues with schools? OK, but you are confident that to whatever extent there was a problem, it has been dealt with by schools and boroughs?

Richard Watts (Mayor's Deputy Chief of Staff): First things first, this was a big policy shift and we and the Mayor would like to thank London's school community for the way it has responded so positively to all of this. London's schools have done an incredible job of work and enormous thanks and credit are due to them for that.

Second, this was a one-off early intervention and costing is not a precise science. You are right to say, Assembly Member Garrett, that there is a risk that if you try to penny pinch and just look at the precise marginal extra cost to a school and cost it on that basis, you are at risk of unintended consequences of missing extra costs that schools face. We have effectively as a one-year policy intervention overfunded boroughs deliberately in order to give some margin in the system to manage low costs like a bit of cutlery here, a bit of crockery there. Clearly, we are reliant on boroughs - and this is right, in my view - to do that implementation with their schools. They have that relationship with their schools already and it is not for the GLA to try to usurp the borough relationship with schools, using this policy as a mechanism to do that. It is a sign of maturity in the London government system that cross-party, cross-borough universally a very professional job has been done by boroughs of implementing this and enormous thanks are due to all boroughs for their work on that.

We have designed it to show flexibility and to have some spare cash in the system deliberately in order to smooth implementation. We are determined - and the Mayor has already said this - that no school should be out of pocket from all of this. Therefore, we are paying at 90 percent, but we have designed into the system that in the event that any school or any borough gets more than 90 percent take-up, there is a way of claiming back some of those expenses towards the end of the year. However, I have to say that in itself was designed to be a deliberately generous estimate of take-up. To pick a borough I happen to know well, when Islington did it, uptake was averaging around 85 percent when this policy had matured.

Neil Garratt AM: OK, my final question. We were speaking earlier about the funds you were just referring to, a £5 million pot. You tell me. I got the sense that it was money that could be applied for in order to help cover those costs. What has the take-up on that £5 million been? Has it been oversubscribed, undersubscribed?

Emma Pawson (Head of Health and Programme Director for Free School Meals, Greater London Authority): We have used the information that has come out of our Equalities Impact Assessment (EqIA) as our starting point. Within there, we identified that there is a higher cost associated with certain meals, whether that it is SEND or Jewish kosher food. We have paid that out or that will be going out in the borough's grant claim, I think in April. That has already been allocated. As I say, we are going around the boroughs and --

Neil Garratt AM: Sorry, is that one of the things from that extra money?

Emma Pawson (Head of Health and Programme Director for Free School Meals, Greater London Authority): Yes.

Neil Garratt AM: OK, that extra £5 million is covering things like that. Understood.

Emma Pawson (Head of Health and Programme Director for Free School Meals, Greater London Authority): We have also had a recent unfortunate instance where we have got an influx of pupils because of extreme circumstances in the world where we are making sure that that is covered as well through this fund. We have been round, as I mentioned before, all boroughs, doing check-instructions and nothing has come up

at the moment, but we have kept it open. We have six-weekly check-ins with them and, as and when things come up, absolutely we will be considering that on a case-by-case basis.

Neil Garratt AM: Of the £5 million, roughly how much of that is allocated, spent, left over?

Emma Pawson (Head of Health and Programme Director for Free School Meals, Greater London Authority): Currently, at the moment for the SEND pupils' costs, the kosher food and the influx of pupils, about a third of it so far is allocated at this point.

Neil Garratt AM: OK. Oh, I see, in that case I have misunderstood. I do apologise. The sense I got earlier was that the £5 million was available, let us say, for schools that needed extra tables or something and did not have the capacity. It is not for that; it is for where there are certain special sorts of meal that cost more than the standard amount?

Emma Pawson (Head of Health and Programme Director for Free School Meals, Greater London Authority): It is for any extreme circumstance that may inhibit a child being able to access that, whether that was through something that was identified in the EqIA or, as we go round, if something is happening with a school where they are struggling. We have not had that come up yet in any of our round of engagements and we have been doing a lot of engagement with schools, with Headteachers, with boroughs.

Neil Garratt AM: OK, thank you very much. Thanks, everyone. Thanks, Chair.

Marina Ahmad AM (Chair): Thank you. Assembly Member Boff?

Andrew Boff AM (Deputy Chair): The £5 million contingency is in two tranches. There is £905,000 for supporting individuals and then there is £4,095,000 to support schools. However, that is over a two-year period and that £905,000 for supporting individuals disappears in 2024/25, but the amount of money for supporting schools carries on until the following year. Why is that?

Richard Watts (Mayor's Deputy Chief of Staff): Shall I answer? The money to support individuals from that has been where we have identified through the EqIA groups of people who, for primarily religious reasons, feel excluded from the State school system. Primarily, the Charedi Jewish community particularly has been identified in Haringey and Barnet in north London where we decided we needed to do something --

Andrew Boff AM (Deputy Chair): And Hackney.

Richard Watts (Mayor's Deputy Chief of Staff): -- to support that community separately through the --

Andrew Boff AM (Deputy Chair): Do not forget the Charedi's in Hackney. They will be very upset.

Richard Watts (Mayor's Deputy Chief of Staff): Sorry, forgive me. Hackney as well, in fact primarily in Hackney where we needed to do something separate to support that community and ensure some degree of equality outside of the school system. That is a one-year programme for this financial year. The reason it runs between two GLA financial years in schools is because we are funding it for this academic year, which does not unfortunately align to the GLA's financial year. That is why it runs over two GLA financial years.

Andrew Boff AM (Deputy Chair): That is the £4 million goes over two years.

Richard Watts (Mayor's Deputy Chief of Staff): Yes, because the funding is aligned to the academic year, not the financial year.

Andrew Boff AM (Deputy Chair): OK, thank you.

Marina Ahmad AM (Chair): Thank you. Assembly Member Polanski?

Zack Polanski AM: Thank you very much, Chair, and good morning, panel. If I can start with you, Deputy Mayor, what feedback have you received from schools and parents on the delivery of the Programme since the start of the school year and have they identified any challenges and, if so, what have you done about this?

Joanne McCartney (Deputy Mayor for Children and Families): OK. We have dealt with a lot of the challenges. The challenges we perhaps would have expected have not really arisen, but it has gone remarkably well and the feedback has been extremely positive. Emma can talk a little bit more. We set up a programme, a partnership group, with boroughs and they are extremely keen and enthused about this Programme and that enthusiasm has increased as the Programme has gone on. What we are doing, building into this year, is regular insight work with different groups, with headteachers, with parents and with children for example. We should have the first formal insights next month, which we can happily share with the Committee. Obviously, we have done visits to schools. I went with you to one where we have talked to headteachers, catering staff, parents and pupils, and it has been overwhelmingly positive. Emma, I do not know if you want to say anything extra about some of the insight work and the feedback you have been getting.

Emma Pawson (Head of Health and Programme Director for Free School Meals, Greater London Authority): Thanks, Joanne. Bear with me, I am just going to read a couple of lines from a letter that we have had from a parent, which gives you a flavour of just some of the things that we are getting in to the team. This says,

"Dear Mayor Khan, I couldn't believe when the school let me know that the meals are for free. I'm a recent single mother of two. I live with my elderly mother, but I'm also a paediatric nurse, and I'm trying to improve my life by doing study. It has been a huge struggle. You cannot believe how my life has improved since I do not have to prepare the meals for the children. Not only does it save me time, but it saves me money. Thank you for your kindness, for you and your team."

We have had so many of those come through to us. As we have been going around in the insights work with the boroughs and as we have been talking to headteachers, the overwhelming response has been phenomenally positive. I have never worked on a policy where it has been adopted by all boroughs across London. We have heard from all schools are doing this. We have only one school that has slight logistical issues at the moment. But the fact we have over 1,900 primary schools now doing this in such a short space of time, I think, is testament to itself.

As Joanne has just said, we are making sure that we have a lot of work going through our monitoring and evaluation throughout the year, and regular touch points insights work going on. Some of it will be independent to make sure that we are hearing from people the experience that they are having throughout the year. If necessary, we will adopt and adapt as we go.

Zack Polanski AM: Thank you. Just to echo, when I went to visit with Joanne, just how pleased the teachers, parents and students were with the food. They had some niggly problems, but I am sure those are being resolved. Overwhelmingly, the narrative was that this had been a really good thing. Could I ask you

about specific dietary requirements, particularly – I suppose I will stick with you, Emma – for religious needs or specifically dietary requirements, and how you have approached that?

Emma Pawson (Head of Health and Programme Director for Free School Meals, Greater London Authority): Thank you. It is something that we did look at very carefully, and that was also one of the reasons why we commissioned the EqlA, which was published quite early on in the policy development cycle. Within there, it did identify that there was a higher cost as I mentioned before with kosher food, and therefore we took the policy decision to top that up. We have topped up state-funded Jewish schools 85 pence, so they are funded above the other rate that we have paid other schools.

Within the EqlA, we did a lot of engagement with faith groups, with faith schools to look at whether this would meet their needs. We did follow national Government policy around national food standards, and we took the decision not to do anything bespoke because that would be extremely confusing for people and we did not have time. Everything that is done by schools and by boroughs is in line with the national Government standards for school food. We also spoke to a range of other faith leaders to make sure that this was meeting dietary requirements, and that was the feedback that we got that it was. Halal is always catered for by schools if there is need. Vegetarian and vegan is always part of a main offer as well.

Zack Polanski AM: Thank you. Finally, I may have mentioned this before, but I have been working with an organisation I am meeting with called ProVeg who are looking particularly at healthy plant-based foods within schools. They have worked with over 5,000 schools across England and Wales, and their argument is that this lowers chronic health disease, lowers bills, and lowers climate budget. I put them in touch with your team. I am just wondering if you could give us any update on if there has been any progress.

Emma Pawson (Head of Health and Programme Director for Free School Meals, Greater London Authority): I can find out if we have done work with them. We have been running webinars to look at the sustainability angle, which brings in the vegan and vegetarian options. As I mentioned, all of our policy is in line the national Government food standards, and that is where we have talked to boroughs about doing it. We are meeting the organisation that you just mentioned, we are meeting them soon, so that is in the diary. Thank you so much for connecting us as well. I know that Assembly Member Boff has mentioned vegan foods to us before.

We are running a good practice session with the Food Board in the next four weeks, I think, where we are also sharing more and more good practice, and we are bringing in organisations as you just mentioned and looking at where we can share resources. A lot of that is also on our Resource Hub, so boroughs and schools can access that if they cannot get to one of our webinars or meetings as well.

Zack Polanski AM: Thank you. I know something ProVeg often talk about – and it is something I talk about a lot too – is that this is slightly different to vegan because vegan comes with a set of moral choices. I am vegan myself, but actually plant-based food has nothing necessarily to do with those choices, just to do with healthy options that happen to be vegan, but it is not about veganism. However, I can see you nodding.

Richard Watts (Mayor's Deputy Chief of Staff): Yes, noted. The thing I would say is that we took a very deliberate decision at the beginning of this that it was going to be a big enough administrative job to the education system in London to get this out full stop, so we were not going to add extra criteria. In the complex devolution settlement there is around education, while we are funding this, schools have individual responsibility for their catering contracts and stuff like that. They will sometimes, but not universally, offer a central catering contract that schools can choose to buy into if they wish, but individual school governors – of which I am one, and I know other people will be here as well – have the ultimate legal responsibility for

ensuring each school meets Government's nutritional criteria. There were no nutritional criteria for academies because they are exempt from that under academy freedoms, so called.

We deliberately chose to not do anything that added to the criteria that we are doing. We have deliberately not chosen to intervene on the nature of this food that is served, given the complexities of doing this and the cost of doing that already. So, wholly understanding the points everyone wishes to make around this as an issue, we have taken the call that to date, while this remains a one-year programme, it is beyond our responsibility to start questioning the nature of the food that is served beyond ensuring everyone hits their legal requirements.

Zack Polanski AM: You have set me off slightly. It is like you have put 50 pence in the metre. The Mayor talks about lots of things around the 2030 net zero target, and often they are not entirely in his power and it is about that leadership. There are things, particularly around procurement, that are in his power, and I have often had those conversations, and most of the time I would say he accepts those arguments. Surely, if UFSM is to be extended, this is an example where the Mayor in hitting his net-zero targets can show leadership by encouraging or at least nudging schools to make more appropriate choices for meeting net zero, while co-designing those with communities for healthy food.

Richard Watts (Mayor's Deputy Chief of Staff): I wholly accept your point around nudging schools, and I think that is exactly why we are doing those training seminars and that kind of awareness-raising, so I think that point is wholly accepted. I am sure we will come to the question of whether this policy is extended or not; I can pre-empt that by saying we do not yet know if it is financially possible for the GLA to do that. In a more sane world where every local and regional government had a multi-year spending settlement to give us more predictability, we would then have a multi-year view that allows us to go down that more, with more clarity.

Zack Polanski AM: Thank you. Thanks, Chair.

Marina Ahmad AM (Chair): Thank you. Assembly Member Clarke.

Anne Clarke AM: Thank you, Chair. Emma, you have partly answered this incidentally, but I am just wondering, what steps have you taken to ensure that schools do not lose out on pupil premium funding as a result of this programme?

Emma Pawson (Head of Health and Programme Director for Free School Meals, Greater London Authority): We have been doing a lot of work. It was one of the things during our engagement with boroughs and with schoolteachers that they were concerned about. I will give you some examples of things we have been doing. We have held a number of good practice webinars where we have shared with them what auto-enrolment means in practice, where the boroughs are who have done it, what their experience was, and how they did it, so the process that they went through. We are taking a very close eye. We are monitoring the pupil premium data that the Department for Education (DfE) produce. We do not think until December's data cut that we will be able to see the impact of the work that we have been doing with the boroughs.

We have seen, as I mentioned, where it has worked, the number of families - I was quite shocked actually by the number of families who have been identified through that process - who were eligible for Government and funding that did not know they were. We have also done letters directly to parents. In there, we have highlighted the need, "If you are eligible, please keep registering". We have translated all our materials into different languages to make sure there is no language barrier for people not understanding that as well. So as much as we can, we have been really empowering boroughs, explaining how they can do it, and looking at how we can encourage them to do this as well.

Richard Watts (Mayor's Deputy Chief of Staff): I think it is worth saying in all of this, there are two fundamental problems with the national eligibility system on FSM that we are trying to address. Number one is that because FSM is an out-of-work benefit, effectively, there are many, many families under the poverty line or close to the poverty line who do not qualify for it. The second is that there are many families who do qualify who for whatever reason - fear of official forms, language issues, whatever it is - choose not to claim. There was a significant problem with the national policy. It is not a criticism of this Government; it was not changed under Governments of previous parties either. But that is one of the policy reasons why we thought this was a priority for limited public money in this very difficult set of economic circumstances for people.

Anne Clarke AM: Finally from me, when the Mayoral Decision was published, it said that the EqIA will be published in July 2023. Why was there a delay into the publication of the EqIA?

Joanne McCartney (Deputy Mayor for Children and Families): The EqIA was published early in the summer, yes.

Anne Clarke AM: OK. Well, the question must be -- sorry about that. Thank you.

Marina Ahmad AM (Chair): Are we talking about the Integrated Impact Assessment (IIA)?

Richard Watts (Mayor's Deputy Chief of Staff): Yes, the EqIA is different from the IIA.

Marina Ahmad AM (Chair): Thank you, Richard. OK. Assembly Member Boff.

Andrew Boff AM (Deputy Chair): I have a few questions on the evidence base in the IIA. One is the most trivial, really, and perhaps you should address it. According to this, on the EqIA it says that lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer or questioning, and more (LGBTQ+) parents or guardians are more likely to be economically constrained than heterosexual parents. Where did you get that from? Where did the pink pound disappear to?

Emma Pawson (Head of Health and Programme Director for Free School Meals, Greater London Authority): The EqIA was done by an independent organisation called Arup. We took their evidence, and that is what was in the EqIA.

Andrew Boff AM (Deputy Chair): I will address it to Arup. OK. We talked about stigma. You said that those schools which already have UFSM have programmes for completing forms in relation to the pupil's premium. How are their tactics for improving the take-up of people premium being shared amongst the boroughs, because that was one of the objectives in the IIA?

Emma Pawson (Head of Health and Programme Director for Free School Meals, Greater London Authority): I can repeat what I have answered before, if that is helpful. We have done a number of --

Andrew Boff AM (Deputy Chair): I am sorry. Did I miss it? I apologise if I missed it. But you are convening a group and that is active at the moment. That is all I needed to know.

Emma Pawson (Head of Health and Programme Director for Free School Meals, Greater London Authority): Yes. We have run a number of webinars which are available, as recorded, etc.

Andrew Boff AM (Deputy Chair): Webinars, right. So that is pupil premium; there are others as well. I am sorry about this. You talked about convening the boroughs and schools to encourage more sustainable transport and delivery strategies. Has that been done?

Emma Pawson (Head of Health and Programme Director for Free School Meals, Greater London Authority): We have a joint session which is being organised with the London Food Board team. That is being planned for the next couple of weeks. I do not have the date in front of me but it is --

Andrew Boff AM (Deputy Chair): You have it. It is underway.

Emma Pawson (Head of Health and Programme Director for Free School Meals, Greater London Authority): Yes.

Andrew Boff AM (Deputy Chair): That is all. One of the things that was identified was the potential for increased waste, and that the Food Group should convene and share good practice. Has that been done?

Emma Pawson (Head of Health and Programme Director for Free School Meals, Greater London Authority): I can double check if that is part of the criteria, but that is what we have planned into this session that is happening. We also have an independent evaluation going on that will look at what the IIA findings showed us, to be able to monitor that as we go. It is a little bit of an unknown for us at the moment. That is what we have asked our independent evaluation to look at.

Andrew Boff AM (Deputy Chair): Yes. It is definitely in there saying that you should convene that and share good practice on that. But you are not sure if it is underway?

Emma Pawson (Head of Health and Programme Director for Free School Meals, Greater London Authority): I do not know if it is part of the agenda for the next joint session with the Food Board, but we have also got another six months to do this as this policy continues into the next financial year, so it will not end until September [2024].

Andrew Boff AM (Deputy Chair): OK.

Emma Pawson (Head of Health and Programme Director for Free School Meals, Greater London Authority): We have only been running a couple of months.

Andrew Boff AM (Deputy Chair): Yes, but you need to catch the data on --

Richard Watts (Mayor's Deputy Chief of Staff): Shall we write to you with clarification on this?

Andrew Boff AM (Deputy Chair): I think that is a good idea, yes. Thank you.

Marina Ahmad AM (Chair): Thank you. Could we just go back to these two different assessments? We are just really unclear about the answer here. Could you just explain? The IIA and the EqIA: what dates were they both published, please?

Emma Pawson (Head of Health and Programme Director for Free School Meals, Greater London Authority): The EqIA was published on 20 July [2023]. The IIA was published this week, on the web. It was available and we were using the findings earlier than that, but it went on the web. For a number of reasons to do with copyright checking it and legal people checking it as well, there was a slight delay.

Marina Ahmad AM (Chair): OK. That was meant to be published in July, is that correct?

Emma Pawson (Head of Health and Programme Director for Free School Meals, Greater London Authority): The EqIA was, and we were on track and we did do that.

Marina Ahmad AM (Chair): No, the IIA. That was supposed to be published in July, is that correct? No. Great. Thanks very much. Thank you for clearing that up. Assembly Member Bokhari.

Hina Bokhari AM: Thanks, Chair. I want to talk about the evaluation of the programme. Can I just say, Emma, when you were asked to do this you must have been in a bit of shock: one year to implement this in the entirety of London with every single school, and I know how different every school is in different boroughs. I have to commend you because you are a bit of a wonder woman for managing to do this. I would like the Committee to recognise how difficult this was and what a challenge it must have been for you.

The evaluation that we obviously need to see of this is really important. At what stage do you think that you will be able to publish those findings and when will the final evaluation be published?

Emma Pawson (Head of Health and Programme Director for Free School Meals, Greater London Authority): Thank you for the acknowledgment. I would also say that it was a massive team effort and we could not have done it if the boroughs did not get behind us and schools.

Hina Bokhari AM: Lots of sleepless nights, I am sure.

Emma Pawson (Head of Health and Programme Director for Free School Meals, Greater London Authority): There were, yes, but thank you.

The monitoring and evaluation has a number of workstreams in it. We have independent evaluation going on that has been funded by the Education Endowment Fund (EEF) and also by Impact on Urban Health, to make sure that we do have independent evaluation, not just an internal one.

We also have insights which will be taken throughout the year. We will be getting the first take of that in December [2023]. We are getting really rich insights from the actual experience of parents, teachers and local boroughs as well. As I have mentioned, we are also doing six-weekly check-ins with boroughs to find out their experience of this. We have insights into the impact and we have insights into how it was done, so the actual process evaluation will be underway as well.

We also have PwC. You heard in the previous panel one of the quotes from that, which said for every pound invested the economy gets £1.71 returned. We are working with them - it has been funded by an external partner - to update that because we think that is out of date and it does not reflect the work that we have been doing in London.

We have a whole series of workstreams. The longer-term evaluation cannot be done within a year so that will not be ready until next year, but these insights will be ready throughout the year as we go.

Hina Bokhari AM: As part of that evaluation, I am also quite interested in how it has been advertised as well. The GLA delivered leaflets to 175,000 families telling them about the FSM scheme. Was there a particular way of those families being targeted? What was the thinking behind that?

Richard Watts (Mayor's Deputy Chief of Staff): It went to parents who could be identified. There is a clear rationale for public money on communications on all of this, which is exactly what we discussed earlier, which is continuing to ask people to register for pupil premium. Clearly, the GLA can only communicate where there is a clear public benefit to that communication. Because we had a clear policy ask to both make people aware of this policy for family budgeting purposes but also because we had an ask of families around pupil premium, that is where the comms plan around this came from.

Hina Bokhari AM: Where are the costs in this? I would like to know how it was decided, the cost of the implementation of the scheme itself and the cost of advertising it on public transport, Tubes, every school sending emails out to parents, and the leaflets that I have just mentioned. Will this be evaluated and will this be open and transparent so that we will be able to see all of the figures for that as well?

Richard Watts (Mayor's Deputy Chief of Staff): Yes, I am sure we will. I do not have a figure off the top of my head, forgive me, for the total comms cost for all of this but it is a tiny fraction.

Hina Bokhari AM: Is it separate to the FSM budget?

Richard Watts (Mayor's Deputy Chief of Staff): No, it is all part of the same budget.

Hina Bokhari AM: It is all the same.

Richard Watts (Mayor's Deputy Chief of Staff): Yes, it all comes in the overall budget that was --

Hina Bokhari AM: The FSM budget includes the comms budget?

Richard Watts (Mayor's Deputy Chief of Staff): Yes, because the comms is integral to the delivery of the policy.

Hina Bokhari AM: My concern is this. Was it really necessary to have that amount of advertising, considering that schools were going to be implementing it anyway and you had the support of all the schools to do it? Advertising it has caused concern for a lot of parents who have talked to me, and we heard from the previous panel about cynicism about it being just for one year, pre-election year. There is lots of support for this scheme, quite rightly, but having that part of the budget committed to advertising risks a very serious risk where the Mayor of London is using this budget to promote a political campaign pre-election. Using FSM in this way has caused a lot of parents concern and cynicism, not just from myself but lots. Lots of people are very concerned about it.

Richard Watts (Mayor's Deputy Chief of Staff): I have to say we have not had any feedback to that extent. If you can point to any, then we would be happy to address it with those individuals.

Hina Bokhari AM: It was mentioned in the previous panel, the cynicism towards this.

Richard Watts (Mayor's Deputy Chief of Staff): As I say, that is really not a --

Hina Bokhari AM: There is one year to this approach.

Richard Watts (Mayor's Deputy Chief of Staff): I will come on to that and then we will come on to the advertising point, because they are two separate.

As we have discussed already, the reason why there was a one-year approach is that is the time period that we had confidence we could guarantee the funding of it. It would be appalling and we would be rightly criticised if we put this forward as a multi-year policy when we could only be confident of one year's funding, in a world in which all local and regional government bodies are currently only getting one-year funding settlements. That is unfortunately the world we are in. We did advertise it very clearly --

Hina Bokhari AM: I want to go back to the advertising of this.

Richard Watts (Mayor's Deputy Chief of Staff): You did ask about one year. On the advertising, as I say, there is a very clear public policy rationale for publicising this policy, and it falls into two things. First, families - particularly on tight incomes, which too many families are at the moment - will be making budgeting decisions around school meal costs where they need to be aware of this policy. If they are not aware of this policy and they just turn up to school on the first day --

Hina Bokhari AM: I think that is ridiculous because every parent knew it was going to be happening. We got lots of emails from our school teachers and headteachers about it. To have even more money invested, which could have been going back to schools, into advertising is a bit of a waste.

Richard Watts (Mayor's Deputy Chief of Staff): Do you not think they knew because of the advertising?

Hina Bokhari AM: Also, there are many other things that the Mayor of London could have been promoting that would have been far more useful, for example, the Cost of Living Hub, which a lot of groups have said to us has really struggled. There are advice centres and charities who are having to do their own promotion of the Cost of Living Hub. Would that not have been a better way of using resources, to advertise that instead of the FSM approach? What we have here is a political decision that was made, using FSM in this way. It is a concern for me that we should not be using this approach in such a political way pre-election.

Richard Watts (Mayor's Deputy Chief of Staff): Well, it is not for me to comment on. I am a politically restricted officer of the Authority. It is not for me to comment on the politics of it.

However, all I can say is that there is a very clear public policy rationale for the communications we did. I am delighted you say it worked. That clearly shows it was needed to both bring awareness about the policy but also to make sure that families are aware of the pupil premium implications for them and the need for them to fill out that form --

Hina Bokhari AM: Again, we have webinars doing that, so we already know that that is being --

Richard Watts (Mayor's Deputy Chief of Staff): Not with families.

Hina Bokhari AM: That information has been spread really well on the pupil premiums.

Richard Watts (Mayor's Deputy Chief of Staff): That is with schools, not with families.

Joanne McCartney (Deputy Mayor for Children and Families): Are you suggesting we should not have done the programme?

Hina Bokhari AM: No, no, no. I am saying that I am concerned about the advertising of the FSM. That is my concern.

I want to go on to the fact that it is just a year, and that has caused cynicism and that was raised by the panel previously. The NEU have also said that this is a concern, that it is only for a year. Does the Mayor have any plans to extend it, and how will that happen?

Richard Watts (Mayor's Deputy Chief of Staff): That is a decision for the GLA Budget process, clearly. At the moment, we are stuck - as I have complained, and Assembly Member Garratt will know I have complained because he sat through me complaining about it - in this annualised budget process that we face, where we can only make decisions of this financial scale on an annualised basis. We are not in a position to know whether the GLA has the money to carry on this policy until we have received the local government finance settlement, which is commonly now around 18 or 19 December. Therefore, the Mayor will be equipped to make a decision, after we have that, about whether we can carry it on or not. It is fair to say the Mayor would like to carry this on but clearly we cannot --

Hina Bokhari AM: There is a big risk that it will not. Inflation rates are going up. There is a risk that it may not without Government support. I think, again, this is where we have the cynicism rising because of the fact that it is a year's approach rather than a long-term approach. Again, this has been raised by the previous panel and a previous Committee. We cannot continue to have short-term approaches when it comes to children.

We have had Education Secretary after Education Secretary after Education Secretary. There has been no consistency in education recently in our Government. Then to have another short term policy like this -- it is a brilliant thing to have UFSM. We know that. As a Liberal Democrat, I know that. That is something that I am passionate for, but I want it to work and I want it to be long-term. I do not want it to be used in a way that is actually cruel, to say, "Sorry" -- it is an Oliver Twist situation, is not it? "Please, sir, can I have more?" "No, you cannot because it was only for a year." That is not fair.

Richard Watts (Mayor's Deputy Chief of Staff): I have put forward the policy rationale for why we can only commit to a year at the time, because we simply do not have any financial ability to make commitments beyond that. It would be unlawful, in fact, for the Authority to make financial commitments beyond its ability to meet those means. If you wish to suggest an alternative approach I am genuinely all ears.

Hina Bokhari AM: I wish that we could have a long-term approach.

Joanne McCartney (Deputy Mayor for Children and Families): We agree.

Hina Bokhari AM: I am glad we are in agreement there.

Richard Watts (Mayor's Deputy Chief of Staff): I think we are in violent agreement about the need for a long-term approach. What I am saying is the thing we need to get that is a multiyear funding settlement for local and regional --

Hina Bokhari AM: I hope the Government will work with you.

Marina Ahmad AM (Chair): Assembly Member Bokhari, could you let the panellists -- Richard was speaking when you --

Hina Bokhari AM: I will not interrupt.

Marina Ahmad AM (Chair): Richard, did you want to finish?

Richard Watts (Mayor's Deputy Chief of Staff): I think we are in violent agreement, Chair. We are completely agreed about the need for as much certainty as possible. The practical thing that enables that is having confidence about the GLA's finances beyond the one-year horizon we are currently working on. That requires multiyear funding settlements and, in particular, multiyear confirmation about business rates retention requirements, which is where much of this was funded from. I am sure we going to end up discussing this further in the Budget process.

Marina Ahmad AM (Chair): Before we go on to the two Members who wish to intervene, can I just also point out that I think the panel identified 1,100 families who were not aware of the policy? We talked about Lewisham where 500 families have been identified. Emma [Pawson] talked about 600. It is clear that there are gaps there as well. Assembly Member Boff.

Andrew Boff AM (Deputy Chair): How much was in the budget for advertising?

Emma Pawson (Head of Health and Programme Director for Free School Meals, Greater London Authority): There was a central marketing budget, which is not part of this grant at all. There was £24,000 spent on posters that came from the central marketing budget. If you then look at what proportion that is against the grant, it is 0.02 percent.

Andrew Boff AM (Deputy Chair): You are saying that £24,000 was not from this budget?

Emma Pawson (Head of Health and Programme Director for Free School Meals, Greater London Authority): It came from our central marketing budget.

Andrew Boff AM (Deputy Chair): What proportion of the budget we have just heard was allocated to advertising?

Emma Pawson (Head of Health and Programme Director for Free School Meals, Greater London Authority): We have ringfenced £100,000 but we have not spent all of that yet.

Andrew Boff AM (Deputy Chair): £100,000.

Neil Garratt AM: What is that in percentage terms?

Emma Pawson (Head of Health and Programme Director for Free School Meals, Greater London Authority): I know the £24,000 is 0.02 percent, for the posters.

Andrew Boff AM (Deputy Chair): Yes. £100,000 is a lot of money. What are you doing to bridge the gap between those boroughs who are currently spending £3 on FSM and the £2.65 that is in the Mayor's budget?

Emma Pawson (Head of Health and Programme Director for Free School Meals, Greater London Authority): Interestingly, that has been seen in the boroughs that were already offering the universal offer. Therefore, because we are offsetting any cost that they would be incurring anyway as they were funding it, they have used that money to top it up.

When we set that price point we did that by looking at, across the boroughs, what they were currently paying and what they were contracted to pay in their contracts. We did not find many - there were, I think, three -

that were paying above the £2.65 rate, and that is why we set it at that rate. We took the decision to pay more than Government. After we set it, Government then increased their rate to £2.53.

Andrew Boff AM (Deputy Chair): But what are those boroughs doing? Are they going to bring down the cost of their meals or what are they doing, the ones who are currently spending £3?

Emma Pawson (Head of Health and Programme Director for Free School Meals, Greater London Authority): The ones who were already offering it anyway?

Andrew Boff AM (Deputy Chair): The three that you have mentioned.

Emma Pawson (Head of Health and Programme Director for Free School Meals, Greater London Authority): They were the universal offer anyway. Five boroughs were already offering it. We have given them extra money.

Andrew Boff AM (Deputy Chair): You are transferring an amount of money that is £2.65 per head. They are spending £3 per head. Do they have to spend in addition in order to top up? I do not know how they are doing it.

Emma Pawson (Head of Health and Programme Director for Free School Meals, Greater London Authority): It is an interesting question.

Andrew Boff AM (Deputy Chair): I hope so.

Emma Pawson (Head of Health and Programme Director for Free School Meals, Greater London Authority): They are keeping it because they are contracted into it, but it is money that they were going to be paying anyway. We have given them money and asked them to offset it on to cost of living interventions.

Andrew Boff AM (Deputy Chair): I am not really understanding that.

Richard Watts (Mayor's Deputy Chief of Staff): Sorry, I think --

Andrew Boff AM (Deputy Chair): They spend an amount of money on their school meals programme.

Richard Watts (Mayor's Deputy Chief of Staff): For the small --

Andrew Boff AM (Deputy Chair): We are giving them a chunk of money for their school, which is less than the amount that they are currently spending. Are they spending up to their £3 or are they coming down to the £2.65? I am sorry, I do not understand the answers so far.

Richard Watts (Mayor's Deputy Chief of Staff): Sorry, I think we slightly misunderstood the question.

There are two answers to that question. I think there is one borough that has been cited as spending that amount of money. I think the gap on the rest, when they are contracted to, is over. Clearly, that is a central borough contract that not all schools buy into - the complexity of this is enormous - and so it is not clear that all schools in that borough, which is Westminster, I believe, will be paying that amount of money for a meal anyway.

The answer to your question is simple, which is: as we have already talked about, we are deliberately overfunding this programme by paying for more pupils per borough than are eligible for funding and by having a very high assumption of take-up, in order to deliberately to put more money into the system.

If there is a risk that a borough is being underfunded for it because they have a particularly expensive catering contract that they have chosen to sign up to, which is more than the amount, we hope that is offset by the extra that we are putting into the system because we do not want to leave any school out of pocket for this. So far, it has not been flagged to us in any borough - we have spoken to every borough already in this process and we will carry on with that as well - that any borough is leaving its schools out of pocket because of the cost of individual meals.

Andrew Boff AM (Deputy Chair): Well, Dr [Katharine] Vincent earlier in the previous panel identified that there were a number of boroughs paying £3, and I would not leave any policy to hope, to be honest.

Richard Watts (Mayor's Deputy Chief of Staff): No, and we are not. That is why we have a contingency budget and it is why we have deliberately put extra money into the system. As I say, we have overfunded this deliberately to support boroughs. Given this is the first and we announced this at a relatively short-term basis, that is the only way to do it. Where there is an issue, we have always said we will support that from the contingency budget that we have identified. However, no issue has yet been flagged to us.

Marina Ahmad AM (Chair): Thank you. Assembly Member Hirani.

Krupesh Hirani AM: Thanks. Sorry, I am just recovering slightly from that exchange about promoting the policy. I know Assembly Member Bokhari passionately always makes the case and promotes the fact about the Liberal Democrats including and introducing this policy in Government. I am sure she shares equal passion about other Liberal Democrat policies such as the bedroom tax, the benefit cap, and also the trebling of tuition fees and smashing records in taking record amounts of funding from local services. My question to Richard, at what point do you feel you will be in a position to make a decision on whether this can continue going forward as a permanent policy?

Richard Watts (Mayor's Deputy Chief of Staff): I should be clear it is the Mayor's decision, not mine. However, we need two critical bits of information that are not yet available to us. Number one is confirmation of the local government spending settlement, which is traditionally now in the last week before Christmas. We hope it is earlier but that is, I think, what we have come to expect.

The second is early confirmation in borough returns from business rate and council tax returns. While it is not a perfect stab at the GLA's cut of that because we do not get that until late February, we will have - we hope before that, but almost certainly next calendar year - enough financial confidence to allow us to make a lawful decision on whether to carry this on or not, because you can only make a lawful decision on this if you are confident you can fund it.

Marina Ahmad AM (Chair): Thank you. The final question is from Assembly Member Clarke.

Anne Clarke AM: Thank you. Confidence in funding brings me neatly to the next question, which is: what action has the Mayor taken to lobby the Government or work with Government to provide UFSM for primary children in London?

Joanne McCartney (Deputy Mayor for Children and Families): Well, it obviously formed part of his submission to the Autumn Statement last year. We have joined together with some of the organisations that

you spoke to earlier, and there is a cross-party but also extensive stakeholder body that now is lobbying very hard on this and we are part of that.

We have, also, of course, listened to our young people here at City Hall. We have, for example, our Link Up Crew (LUC), our primary and secondary-age children, and we have lots of organisations talking to us about that, for example, Bite Back, who are particularly involved around food insecurity. The lobbying from them has been very strong. LUC is lobbying Parliament and Government this week on the need for future funding for FSM for the long term. I have also obviously visited schools and spoken at various events, as has the Mayor, to call on the Government to put this in the central Government Budget.

Marina Ahmad AM (Chair): Sorry, I was about to use the gavel then. I am getting a bit gavel-happy here, aren't I? We have now reached the end of our panellist questioning. I would like to thank the panel for the answers that you have given today and for being here today, and, as always, our Committee Members for the incisive and interesting questions that you have asked.

We have reached the end the session. The Committee has a few more items of business to deal with but before I do that, could I just thank you, panellists, and if you could take this back to your team, please? On behalf of London's children, thank you very much for taking forward this policy. I know how hard it has been to get it into place and the positive feedback that we have had from children and families has been incredible. Thank you and thank you to your team as well.

Richard Watts (Mayor's Deputy Chief of Staff): Can I thank the Committee for your thanks to Emma and her team, who have really gone above and beyond on this? It has been very new to the GLA, we have never done anything like this before and so the team worked really hard. Thank you for your recognition of that.

Anne Clarke AM: Before we close can I say one more thing, since we are doing thanks? Is that OK, Chair?

Marina Ahmad AM (Chair): Yes, of course.

Anne Clarke AM: Since we are thanking, I also just want to say thanks for the maturity with which not just this Committee but your team worked, particularly around having an EqIA and really looking at the need for kosher school meals, having an uplift and addressing what is the national situation, that there is that budget gap, and also for children with SEND. Thank you. I have heard nothing but positive feedback from families and particularly from schools, if I am honest, so thank you.

Marina Ahmad AM (Chair): Thank you, Assembly Member Clarke, for raising that. I think that really needed to be said.

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Subject: Summary List of Actions

Report to:	Economy Committee
Report of:	Executive Director of Assembly Secretariat
Date:	13 December 2023
Public Access:	This report will be considered in public

1. Summary

- 1.1 This report updates the Committee on the progress made on actions arising from previous meetings of the Economy Committee.

2. Recommendation

- 2.1 **That the Committee notes the completed and ongoing actions arising from its previous meetings, and the additional correspondence received.**

3. Summary List of Actions

Actions Arising from the Meeting Held on 9 November 2023

Item No.:	Item Title	Responsible Person	Actions	Status
5	Free School Meals in London	Campaign Coordinator, Sustain	To provide Bremner & Co's report <i>Impact on Urban Health</i> .	Requested on 1 December 2023.
5	Free School Meals in London	General Secretary, National Education Union	To provide information on which London boroughs were paying £3.00 per school meal.	Requested on 1 December 2023.

Item No.:	Item Title	Responsible Person	Actions	Status
5	Free School Meals in London	Head of Health and Programme Director for Free School Meals, Greater London Authority (GLA)	agreed to verify when the London Food Board team would convene a meeting between boroughs and schools to discuss and encourage sustainable transport and delivery strategies.	Requested on 1 December 2023.
5	Free School Meals in London	Senior Policy Adviser	That authority be delegated to the Chair, in consultation with party Group Lead Members, to agree any output arising from the discussion.	Ongoing.

Actions Arising from the Meeting Held on 17 October 2023

Item No.:	Item Title	Responsible Person	Actions	Status
7	Child Poverty in London Part 1	Strategic Policy Manager, 4in10	Agreed to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide information on the impact the recent increase in Government support has had for children with special educational needs; and • Share information on the Minimum Income Guarantee. 	Ongoing. Followed up on 4 December 2023.
7	Child Poverty in London Part 1	Chief Executive Officer, Pecan	To share information as to how universal free school meals removes any associated stigma of those children who were previously in receipt of free school meals.	Ongoing. Followed up on 4 December 2023.
7	Child Poverty in London Part 1	Deputy Mayor for Communities and Social Justice	To provide information on how many people used the Mayor's Cost of Living Hub and the impact it had on these users.	Completed. See Appendix 2.
7	Child Poverty in London Part 1	Senior Policy Adviser	That authority be delegated to the Chair, in consultation with party Group Lead Members, to agree any output arising from the discussion.	Ongoing.

Actions Arising from the Meeting Held on 13 July 2023

Item No.:	Item Title	Responsible Person	Actions	Status
6	London's Post-Pandemic Labour Market and Working Practices	Senior Policy Adviser	That authority be delegated to the Chair, in consultation with party Group Lead Members, to agree any output arising from the discussion.	Ongoing.

Actions Arising from the Meeting Held on 14 June 2023

Item No.:	Item Title	Responsible Person	Action	Status
6	London's Post-Pandemic Labour Market and Working Practices	Senior Policy Adviser	That authority be delegated to the Chair, in consultation with party Group Lead Members, to agree any output arising from the discussion.	Ongoing.

Actions Arising from the Meeting Held on 23 May 2023

Item No.:	Item Title	Responsible Person	Actions	Status
9	Childcare in London Part 1	Associate Director, Institute for Fiscal Studies	Provide additional information on the differences, by ethnicity, in take-up of Government funded childcare entitlements.	Ongoing. Followed up on 4 December 2023.
9	Childcare in London Part 1	Senior Policy Adviser	That authority be delegated to the Chair, in consultation with party Group Lead Members, to agree any output arising from the discussion.	Ongoing.

Actions Arising from the Meeting Held on 22 February 2023

Item No.:	Item Title	Responsible Person	Actions	Status
6	Barriers to Work for People who have had Contact with the Criminal Justice System	Director of Diversity and Inclusion, Timpson Group	To provide the Committee with a list of employers who have demonstrated good practice in employing prison leavers.	Ongoing. Followed up on 4 December 2023.

Item No.:	Item Title	Responsible Person	Actions	Status
6	Barriers to Work for People who have had Contact with the Criminal Justice System	Chief Executive Officer, New Futures Network (NFN)	To provide: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A list of employers who have demonstrated good practice in employing prison leavers; • Data around recent trends in prison leaver employment rates; • About what advice and guidance prison employment leads at NFN give on the type of information prison leavers need to disclose for four types of a Disclosure and Barring Service checks; and • Share a list of third sector organisations who provide holistic support for prison leavers in London. 	Ongoing. Followed up on 7 November 2023.

4. Additional Correspondence

- 4.1 The Committee received additional correspondence from the Mayor of London on 31 October 2023. The correspondence relates to Mayor’s universal free school meals programme and is information that he agreed to provide to the Committee when he responded to the Committee’s output on food insecurity. The letter is attached at **Appendix 1**.

5. Legal Implications

- 5.1 The Committee has the power to do what is recommended in this report.

6. Financial Implications

- 6.1 There are no financial implications arising from this report.

List of appendices to this report:

Appendix 1 – Additional Correspondence, Mayor, Information on Universal Free School Meals, dated 31 October 2023

Appendix 2 – Response, Deputy Mayor for Communities and Social Justice, dated 1 December 2023

Local Government (Access to Information) Act 1985

List of Background Papers: None.

Contact Information

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Marina Ahmad AM

Chair of the London Assembly Economy Committee
C/o jack.booth@london.gov.uk

Our ref: MGLA200423-5393

Date: 31 October 2023

Dear Marina,

I am writing to you following my response to the London Assembly's Economy Committee regarding its report on Food Insecurity in London. In my response, I said I would write to the committee at the start of the 2023-24 academic year to provide further updates on my universal free school meals programme.

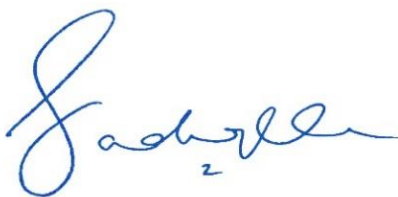
The universal free school meals programme will enable families in London to save upwards of £440 per child across the year, allowing up to 287,000 children in Years 3-6 in state primary schools to receive a nutritious meal each school day.

All 33 London boroughs have entered into agreements to receive funding for this programme, a testament to the months of joint working between the GLA and the boroughs. I have attached a briefing that was sent to all Assembly Members in September, which provides a more detailed update on the roll out of the programme. **(Annex 1)**

Deputy Mayor for Children and Families, Joanne McCartney, and GLA Programme Director of the Universal Free School Meals team will be attending the next Economy Committee meeting in November to give a verbal update on the progress made in the first term.

As stated in my response to the food insecurity report, I will continue to provide updates on my universal free school meals programme throughout the academic year.

Yours sincerely,



Sadiq Khan

Mayor of London

Dear Assembly Member,

We wanted to write to you to provide a brief update on the Mayor's emergency expansion of free school meals which will be rolled out across London this week.

Overview: The Mayor of London's historic **£135 million** emergency funding to provide state primary school children in London with free school meals during the **2023-24 academic year**, comes into effect this month. This unprecedented intervention is being delivered as an emergency cost of living support measure and will enable up to **287,000 more primary school children in Years 3 – 6** to receive a nutritious meal each school day.

Impact: Recent polling from YouGov shows that close to half (48 per cent) of parents or guardians with children between 5 and 11 years are buying less food and essentials. The expansion of universal free school meals will help these families facing the spiralling cost of living, potentially saving them upwards of £440 per child across the year. Research has also shown that making free school meals universal can help reduce stigma and boost uptake amongst families who need them most, alongside increasing educational attainment and concentration levels at school. **The Mayor continues to call on the Government to step forward and provide the necessary funding to make this intervention permanent.**

Borough & school engagement: We have worked closely with boroughs and schools through a range of forums, involving boroughs, schools and industry. Additionally, we have created and shared practical resources via our online hub. We have also convened a range of webinars for borough and school staff to share best practice, including specific sessions on pupil premium registration, programme delivery and catering procurement.

Funding allocations: The **price per meal is funded at £2.65** which is above the Government's recently increased rate of £2.53 for Universal Infant Free School Meals. Borough funding allocations are based on the number of Key Stage 2 pupils on school census day in **January 2022**, minus any recipients of the Government's Free School Meals. The Mayor has also made available contingency funding to support with any extraordinary costs associated with implementation of UFSM. Such costs may be due to specific access requirements (e.g. children with SEND) and/or pupils who have specific dietary requirements in connection with their faith (e.g. kosher meals).

Grants: London Boroughs have received their grant allocations as well as conditions and principles that accompany the grants. All 33 boroughs have entered into agreements to receive the funding for the provision of meals.

Eligibility: The Mayor has funding to all London boroughs, including those that were already providing Universal Free School Meals (UFSM) to their primary school pupils. These boroughs are all intending to offset funds to offer further support to families in the cost of living crisis.

Coverage: The Mayor's programme is consistent with the Government's existing funding of meals, as it will cover **state-funded primary schools, special schools**

and pupil referral units, including faith schools, but not private or independent schools.

Evaluation: There is a multi-strand approach to monitoring and evaluation, including GLA-led monitoring throughout the year to support implementation, and full evaluation of impact to be carried out independently by partners at the end of the programme. We will also track any changes to pupil premium rates and government FSM claims throughout the policy cycle, to ensure that we are responsive and continuing to support boroughs/schools to avoid a dip in pupil premium rates.

Nutrition: Boroughs will be encouraged to meet the Government's School Food Standards as part of the grant principles. Schools that are not already participating in the Mayor's Healthy Schools London and Water Only Schools programmes are encouraged to register for these programmes through their borough.

The Mayor continues to call on Government to step forward and provide the necessary funding to make this intervention permanent.

If you would like more information on this policy, please contact the Free School Meals team on freeschoolmeals@london.gov.uk.

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MAYOR OF LONDON

Marina Ahmad AM
Chair of the GLA Economy Committee

Date: 30 November 2023

Dear Chair,

I write in reference to the follow-up letter which I received from you on 1st November 2023. I have set out below the information requested by the Chair.

Over the course of the meeting you requested information on how many people used the Mayor's Cost of Living Hub and the impact it had on these users.

The Cost of Living Hub was set up in April 2022 as an emergency response to the rising cost of living. It is intended to serve as a 'first port of call' for digitally active Londoners looking for information on support available with the cost of living. This sits alongside other forms of awareness raising for Londoners who are not digitally active.

The CoL Hub met it's 2022/23 target of 300,000 Unique Page Views by the end of the 2022/23 financial year. The breakdown month by month is as follows:

April 2022	10,051
May 2022	4,741
June 2022	8,845
July 2022	8,613
August 2022	19,089
September 2022	17,746
October 2022	46,294
November 2022	31,154
December 2022	48,109
January 2023	43,439
February 2023	38,736
March 2023	30,311
TOTAL	307,128

MAYOR OF LONDON

The CoL Hub has recently been revamped after user testing, with a new simplified structure designed to make it much easier for users to find the information they are looking for quickly.

Since last Winter, the Hub now also features some digital tools funded through the digital tools grants programme. This includes an upgraded entitlement checker from Policy in Practice which now flags London-specific entitlements such as local welfare assistance, and an embedded grant search tool from Turn2Us.

A marketing campaign promoting the CoL Hub will be commencing in late November and will run throughout winter. This will include digital marketing alongside leaflets targeted at households which are more likely to be digitally excluded. The CoL Hub will continue to be highlighted as a resource with partners in boroughs and London's VCS sector in various forums, networks, and events.

In 2023/24 the GLA is in the process of moving to a new digital analytics platform, and we are still exploring the best metric to use to measure digital engagement for the CoL Hub.

Tracking engagement with the CoL Hub is challenging, as users are not required to create accounts, and many block the collection of cookies which are used to track various metrics. Officers are working closely with the Digital Experience Unit to explore possible ways of measuring engagement and impact going forward.

Yours sincerely,



Dr Debbie Weekes-Bernard

Deputy Mayor for Communities and Social Justice

Subject: The Impact of Remote Working on Central London

Report to:	Economy Committee
Report of:	Executive Director of Assembly Secretariat
Date:	13 December 2023
Public Access:	This report will be considered in public

1. Summary

- 1.1 This report provides background for the Economy Committee meeting focusing on the impact of remote working on central London.

2. Recommendations

- 2.1 **That the Committee notes the report as background to putting questions to invited guests and notes the subsequent discussion.**
- 2.2 **That the Committee delegates authority to the Chair, in consultation with party Group Lead Members, to agree any output arising from the discussion.**

3. Background

- 3.1 The recovery from the pandemic has been slower in the Central Activities Zone (CAZ) than in the rest of the capital. In July 2022, footfall in areas within the CAZ was on average 45 per cent lower than July 2019, while spending has recovered more slowly than in the rest of London.¹ There is data to indicate that there has been a partial return to the office since the pandemic. According to the Centre for Cities, in April 2023, central London workers came into the office 2.3 days per week on average, 59 per cent of January 2020 levels.²

¹ GLA, [Supporting the Central Activities Zone \(CAZ\)](#)

² Centre for Cities, [Office politics: London and the rise of home working, May 2023](#)

- 3.2 There is unlikely to be a return to pre-pandemic working patterns. As part of research carried out by King's College London (KCL) in 2022, 61 per cent of Londoners said they were hybrid working.³ 79 per cent of workers who reported working from home at least one day a week said it has had a positive impact for them, highlighting quality of life and a feeling of being "in control" as benefits.⁴
- 3.3 Office vacancies have reached their highest levels in 30 years, with vacant units now exceeding 20 per cent in Canary Wharf.⁵ It remains unclear what impact these trends will have on central London in the long-term. The research from KCL concluded that "There is little consensus on whether working from home threatens the quality of life in central London or future jobs in the capital."⁶

4. Issues for Consideration

- 4.1 The overall purpose of the meeting is to examine:
- To what extent workers have returned to offices in central London since the pandemic;
 - The impact of increased levels of working from home on the central London economy, in particular the CAZ and Canary Wharf;
 - Future trends relating to land use and office space in central London, and the opportunities and challenges these present; and
 - What action the Mayor, local authorities and Business Improvement Districts (BIDs) can take to support the central London economy.
- 4.2 Members will hold a public meeting with the following invited guests:
- Kaya Comer-Schwartz, Leader of Islington Council and Deputy Chair of Central London Forward;
 - Kate Hart, Chief Executive Officer, Eastern City Business Improvement District;
 - Jonathan Seager, Policy Delivery Director, Research and Impact, Business LDN; and
 - Rosie Day, Director, London Property Alliance.

5. Legal Implications

- 5.1 The Committee has the power to do what is recommended in the report.

6. Financial Implications

- 6.1 There are no direct financial implications to the GLA arising from this report.

³ King's College London, [The WFH revolution: how new ways of working are changing London, King's College London, June 2022](#)

⁴ King's College London, [The WFH revolution: how new ways of working are changing London, King's College London, June 2022](#)

⁵ CNN Business, [London is suffering an office 'recession.' Meta just paid \\$181 million to dump a lease](#), September 2023

⁶ King's College London, [The WFH revolution: how new ways of working are changing London, King's College London, June 2022](#)

List of appendices to this report:

None.

Local Government (Access to Information) Act 1985

List of Background Papers:

None.

Contact Information

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Subject: Economy Committee Work Programme

Report to:	Economy Committee
Report of:	Executive Director of Assembly Secretariat
Date:	13 December 2023
Public Access:	This report will be considered in public

1. Summary

- 1.1 This report sets out the work programme for the Economy Committee for the 2023/24 Assembly year.

2. Recommendation

- 2.1 **That the Committee notes its work programme.**

3. Background

- 3.1 The Committee receives a report monitoring the progress of its work programme at each meeting.
- 3.2 The Committee's work programme is intended to enable the Committee to effectively fulfil its role: To examine and report on matters relating to economic development, culture, skills, sport and tourism in London and to lead on scrutiny of the Mayor's Economic Development Strategy, the Mayor's Culture Strategy and Adult Education.

4. Issues for Consideration

- 4.1 The Committee's meeting dates were formally approved by the London Assembly at its Annual meeting on 4 May 2023. The Committee's work programme was formally approved at the GLA Oversight Committee meeting on 12 July 2023.

Schedule of Meetings

Meeting Date	Meeting Topic
11 January 2024	The Impact of Brexit on London's Economy
6 February 2024	Small Businesses Including Late Payments
12 March 2024	To Be Confirmed

5. Legal Implications

5.1 The Committee has the power to do what is recommended in this report.

6. Financial Implications

6.1 There are no direct financial implications to the GLA arising from this report.

List of appendices to this report:

None.

Local Government (Access to Information) Act 1985

List of Background Papers:

None.

Contact Information

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