

## London Assembly Mayor's Question Time - 18 January 2024

### Transcript of Agenda Item 4 – Mayor's Report

**Andrew Boff AM (Chair):** The Mayor will now provide an oral update of up to five minutes in length on matters occurring since the publication of his report. Mr Mayor.

**Sadiq Khan (Mayor of London):** Good morning. Since September [2023], City Hall's Universal Free School Meals (UFSM) programme has enabled every child in every London state primary on every school day, the opportunity to sit down with their classmates and enjoy a nutritious lunch. Such has been the success, last week I announced our groundbreaking scheme would be extended by another academic year through an additional £140 million of investment. All told, our programme will save parents and carers up to £1,000 per child. UFSM have been a lifeline during the worst decline in living standards on record, and now further benefits have begun to surface. A recent study found some schools reported higher attendance and greater concentration, as well as enhanced social skills and healthier eating habits. As someone who relied on free school meals, I know the difference they can make. I also know the embarrassment of having to stand in a separate queue to receive them. But with UFSM the stigma and shame are gone and instead, as one parent told us, this will make everyone equal. Chair, I have long championed the value of UFSM. I was proud to implement a universal offer in London for the first time ever, and prouder still to extend the policy.

It is important, however, to recognise that child hunger does not stop when school stops. A scandal we have been working to address through a Free Holiday Meals programme. In partnership with the Mayor's Fund for London and the Felix Project, our scheme has to date delivered more than ten million meals to hundreds of thousands of low-income families during school holidays and at weekends since April [2023]. More than a million more are expected to be provided by the end of March [2024]. Today I am announcing my plan to invest an additional £4 million to continue a Free Holiday Meals programme for a further 12 months.

No child should suffer the indignity, pain, and disadvantage of hunger. That is why I have consistently called on national Government to tackle this injustice. Regrettably, they refused to act, so I have stepped up. My message to Londoners is the cost-of-living crisis has not disappeared, therefore neither will the support we are providing to help you through it. Our UFSM and Free Holiday Meals programmes are about doing what is right for young Londoners. As Mayor, I will continue to do everything in my power to make sure every child in our city has the energy and capacity to reach their potential. It is a goal integral to my mission of building a fairer, safer, and more affordable London for everyone. Thank you, Chair.

**Andrew Boff AM (Chair):** Thank you. Assembly Member Berry.

**Siân Berry AM:** Mr Mayor, you mentioned one budget announcement that you have made in that introduction there. I am very concerned to find that you have not sent us any more announcements yet, despite publishing your new draft consolidated budget last night [17 January 2024]. However, I do note in it that you have received an additional £512 million that you can distribute. Looking at the table for Transport for London income on page 78 of that document, it is clear there that your passenger income has dropped compared with the consultation draft budget by £128 million. That is on top of whatever extra you would have been receiving due to the regulated fares going up by 4.9 per cent compared with four per cent. Therefore, we know that there is at least £128 million coming in what appears to be fare reductions or discounts. Is that an estimate you would agree with, Mr Mayor?

**Andrew Boff AM (Chair):** Assembly Member, I am sorry to interrupt, but the purpose of this particular part is to ask about what the Mayor has raised in his oral update, not - which you specifically alluded to --

**Siân Berry AM:** He chose very selectively to make one announcement based on his new budget.

**Andrew Boff AM (Chair):** -- what he has not raised in his oral update.

**Siân Berry AM:** The new budget is in play for us to ask as many questions as we want about it, I would say. Otherwise, where are we going to do?

**Andrew Boff AM (Chair):** You would have had to have requested an oral update on that.

**Siân Berry AM:** But we did not get the budget until last night. It has to come now. There is no other place for it in the meeting.

**Andrew Boff AM (Chair):** OK, all right, I am looking around and --

**Caroline Russell AM:** He mentioned the budget.

**Andrew Boff AM (Chair):** All right, sorry, sorry for interrupting. It is just within the strict rules you really should not raise something that has not been raised by the Mayor.

**Siân Berry AM:** We raised it with the clerk as soon as we had this, basically, and the question to ask. Mr Mayor, to summarise, there is a big drop in passenger income noted between your consultation draft and your consolidated draft budget. You are looking to make some fare cuts, am I right about that, and can you tell us any more about it today?

**Sadiq Khan (Mayor of London):** I am afraid I cannot. What I can do is to invite the Member to come to the [London Assembly] Plenary next week [25 January 2024] when we will be going through the draft budget as published last night.

**Siân Berry AM:** I think we need to be told more about that as soon as possible. But thank you, Chair, that is all my question for now.

**Susan Hall AM:** Sorry, can we clarify, is it "cannot" or is it "will not"? Because I think Assembly Member Berry and all of us would like to know, is it a "cannot" or a "will not"?

**Sadiq Khan (Mayor of London):** Chair, to be clear, the briefings I have today is for Mayor's Question Time (MQT). I am more than happy to answer any question in relation to the draft budget allocation next week during the Plenary.

**Andrew Boff AM (Chair):** Mr Mayor --

**Siân Berry AM:** I mean, he has published information, which raises questions. This is MQT.

**Andrew Boff AM (Chair):** Assembly Members, we have a process, we have committees available to us in the future to ask those questions. I do not think now is the most appropriate time, otherwise it is a feeding frenzy on the Mayor on any issue whatsoever. That is really not what we are about. I am afraid we will now move on from that.