

## London Assembly Plenary – Thursday 5 November 2020

### Item 4 – Question and Answer Session: COVID-19 and London’s Economy.

**Navin Shah AM (Chair):** Now we move on to today’s principal business, which is a question-and-answer session on COVID-19 and London’s economy.

The first question is to the Deputy Mayor for Business, and that is from me. What are the main challenges for London’s economy for the next 12 months and beyond, and what steps are London’s recovery structures taking to address these issues? Thank you.

**Rajesh Agrawal (Deputy Mayor for Business):** Thank you very much, Chair, and thank you to all the Assembly Members for giving me the opportunity. I do also apologise for not being able to make it last time around because of the timing constraints.

There is absolutely no question that London’s economy is going through a period of crisis and uncertainty which is greater than anything we have seen in more than a generation. It is important that we do not try to view the health crisis and the economic crisis as separate things. They are entirely interlinked and ultimately it will be our ability to deal with the virus and, to an extent, to live with it that will impact most heavily on the depth and length of the economic crisis. As the Mayor has said, there is no dichotomy between saving lives and saving the economy. We take the view that decisive action to slow transmission must be taken as early as necessary in order to prevent longer and more restrictive measures later on.

Of course, we recognise the terrible impact that the measures are having on businesses and the wider economy. It is clear that above all, central London’s retail, hospitality, leisure and cultural businesses are suffering greatly. Recent analysis by the Greater London Authority (GLA) Economics Team of Visit Britain data shows that just this year, we are losing out on £10.9 billion in tourism spending as well as a £1.9 billion fall in spending by commuters due largely to home working. Clearly, we are unlikely to see a significant return of international tourism, which accounts for £7.4 billion of lost spending, as long as the global pandemic is ongoing.

Therefore, the level of governmental support needs to be increased so that it is more than just a sticking plaster. The Mayor and I have been working very closely with the London Boroughs and the business community to put in place measures to support the economy while also making the case for further support from the Government. I would be very happy to go into more detail on some of the schemes put in place by City Hall, such as Pay It Forward London and the Back to Business Fund, if that would be more helpful to the Members.

London has always shown itself to be a resilient city and it will do so again as we emerge from this pandemic, but in order to help our businesses and economy through it there is no question that we urgently need to get two things right: public health measures, including a functioning Test, Track and Trace system that keeps transmission in check and ultimately helps to slow the virus, and a level of Government support which is adequate for the profound challenges faced by businesses. The whole of London government will continue to

play its part in supporting businesses and planning for the recovery, but without adequate and urgent action from the Government in Westminster I fear that thousands of businesses and hundreds of thousands of jobs could be lost. As ever, the analysis shows that it will be the most disadvantaged Londoners who will be the worst hit.

**Navin Shah AM (Chair):** Thank you very much, Deputy Mayor, for your full answer. Can I invite Assembly Member Shaun Bailey to put a question, please?

**Shaun Bailey AM:** Thank you, Chair. Good morning, guests. Good morning, Rajesh. I would like to start with you. The Mayor was very enthusiastic about calling for tighter measures in London around the coronavirus. Now that we have those measures, what planning has been done to mitigate some of the economic impact? You yourself just made the point that the two things are greatly related. If you are going to have these extra measures, what extra can you do, your team and the Mayor, around reducing the impact?

**Rajesh Agrawal (Deputy Mayor for Business):** Thank you very much, Assembly Member Shaun Bailey. This is a hugely important point and I am glad we agree on this, that the two are highly interlinked and one cannot be secured without the other. We are doing a number of things from City Hall for the short term to support businesses and then there are a number of long-term things that have been done. There are things which are directly in our power, but we are also lobbying the Government for a number of things.

In September the Mayor relaunched the Growth Hub as the London Business Hub, which is a new and improved platform to support businesses facing uncertainty from the consequences of COVID-19 and preparing for the possibility of the United Kingdom (UK) failing to secure a deal with the European Union (EU) by the end of the year. Brexit, by the way, is also a huge risk that businesses are facing at the moment.

The Hub includes an online portal, the URL for which is [www.businesshub.london](http://www.businesshub.london), to help London's businesses to start, sustain and grow, and a programme to equip around 240 businesses with the leadership skills necessary to safeguard against future economic shocks. Small and medium enterprises (SMEs) will also get advice on business rates and landlord negotiations and how to navigate Government support schemes and recover from reduced revenue streams. The Hub is also launching a property advice service to help SMEs understand business rates and landlord negotiations, as well as a peer-to-peer programme to facilitate action learning for a further 250 businesses.

The Mayor also launched the London Resilience Fund. Applications for £1 million of this fund opened in September. Funding of up to £30,000 will be awarded to projects that will develop innovative solutions to the environmental and economic challenges facing the London economy.

Pay It Forward London was launched in April [2020] and over 12,000 individual donations have been made by Londoners through this platform. This has helped raise over £900,000 for over 300 small businesses to help them go through this crisis.

The Mayor also launched the Back to Business Fund on 30 July [2020], which offers up to £5,000 in match funding to small businesses. We have already seen a lot of businesses taking advantage of that. So far, over 200 businesses have applied and in excess of £200,000 has been allocated through this particular fund.

There are also a number of grants as well, which are hugely important, particularly for eligible SMEs, which are between £1,000 and £5,000. It will help them access professional legal, financial and other advice, helping to

adopt new technologies and address their immediate needs in response to the impact of coronavirus. Again, there is huge demand, as you can imagine, at this point in time.

**Shaun Bailey AM:** Yes, I am sure.

**Rajesh Agrawal (Deputy Mayor for Business):** Just in three hours, when we launched it, we had 600 applications. That shows the scale of the challenge that we are facing at the moment.

Of course, culture is a huge part of London's economy and we face a huge --

**Shaun Bailey AM:** I will come on to culture. I have a separate question about culture. Can I ask, one of the criticisms I have been hearing from small businesses is that it is a very scattergun approach, there are too many initiatives, and they wish that there was a more focused approach to dealing with them because then the money may be slightly bigger. For many businesses, as I am sure you are aware, this is a bottom-line thing.

The other question I will put to you as well: on 17 June [2020] you talked about an economic recovery plan and that one was "imminent". That was the word you used. Indeed, our own Jules Pipe talked about an economic recovery plan as well. We have seen no plan from the Mayor. Can we expect that plan to arrive? If it does, could you give us an indication of when?

**Rajesh Agrawal (Deputy Mayor for Business):** First of all, on the scattered support, I do agree it has been a problem, and not just during the coronavirus. It has been a longstanding problem across all different governments. As an entrepreneur I have seen this, where whilst there is government support available, often the information is all scattered. That is why we launched [www.] businesshub.london, to put all of that into one place so that the businesses are able to go to that one place and access all the information available across all the different support programmes that we have. It is very important, and I urge the Assembly Members to also help us amplify all these schemes that we have launched so that we can reach out to as many businesses as possible.

Regarding the economic recovery, I have my colleagues here on the panel as well who will be able to throw more light on it but I made it very clear that there is no separate 'economic recovery strategy' as such. The economic recovery plan is, first, short-term, but also then the longer-term plan, because the way it is looking at the moment, we require a short-term strategy and a longer-term strategy. My colleagues will be able to throw more light on that.

**Shaun Bailey AM:** Councillor, Jules, do you want to pick that up, or Nick?

**Dr Nick Bowes (Mayoral Director for Policy):** I am happy to talk about this if that is helpful.

Deputy Mayor Agrawal is correct that there are two strands to this. There is the immediate focus, which has been primarily owned and driven by the work of the London Transition Board, which was established jointly between City Hall, the Government and London Councils. Councillor Gould is a member of that Board. Then there is the medium- to long-term work, which is being driven by the London Recovery Board, which was jointly established between the Mayor and London Councils. It is important to recognise that there are links between these two pieces of work, both in terms of some of the people who are on both of those Boards but also a very strong link at officer level to make sure that the work that is going on is joined-up.

The Transition Board work has been primarily driven by a number of subgroups. There is one on business reopening which is very much focused on the here and now, how we get through the immediate period and what we will need to do to make sure that business is in a strong position when we get to the stage of being able to gently and carefully reopen the economy. Maybe Councillor Gould might want to say a bit more about the Transition Board, given that she is a member of the Board?

**Shaun Bailey AM:** Councillor Gould, could I just put another focus on that? We had an Economy [Committee] meeting yesterday and many of the experts there were worried that the Board's scope was too wide. They wanted something that was short and immediate and now. It would be interesting to have your take on that.

Of course, the piece still missing, even when you do complete your piece of work, is that the Mayor has not given something. What they were saying was that they are looking for something from the Mayor around his convening powers and his immediacy, the day-to-day. You are looking at strategies. They were very concerned about the day-to-day and why there is no direction of travel. Could that be provided? Of course you may have a problem answering on behalf of the Mayor but I am just giving you the scope of what they were saying.

**Councillor Georgia Gould (LEAP Board Member and Chair of London Councils):** Thanks for that question. I agree that the Transition Board, whose scope is set by Government, has a number of issues. It is meant to be short-term and has set a number of structures up. We do need to bring together an urgent piece of work around how we support businesses in the short term, and the Mayor has been doing that and using his convening power to bring businesses together. The transition structures, if I am honest, have been sometimes cumbersome to deliver that.

The work that I have been leading, the economic recovery, is a longer-term piece of work but it is very action orientated. For example, we have identified over £1 billion of shovel-ready green infrastructure projects which could immediately create jobs in the capital. The work on digital exclusion is very immediate. It is action-orientated, it has a number of missions and work is going on already with boroughs to deliver against those. For example, it is very involved in work around Kickstarter and jobs for young people.

As I say, the Transition Board is something that Government set up and Government has been leading on. I agree with your comments, and any help you can give us in making the case of how we bring all of that work together, so that we are not stuck in some of those structures, would be really helpful.

**Shaun Bailey AM:** OK, thank you for that. I wonder if it is a case of the Board itself taking charge. The Government have set it up but we are expecting the Mayor, at this level, to give some steerage. One of the comments that came out of the Committee yesterday was about the Mayor's changing direction on people travelling in and out and people working. People wanted some leadership, some direction, some 'what are we doing next' steps.

I wonder, Jules, if you can speak to this. Is it possible for your team, your broader team, including Rajesh's team, and the Mayor in particular to give a much more clear steerage around what people are expected to do? We have had lots of talk about what the Government is saying but people are looking to this level of Government.

The point I want to make, Jules: once we come out of lockdown, what will the Mayor be doing to support the Christmas markets, if there are any businesses left to carry them out? That is where people say there is a void,

and they want to hear from the Mayor what they are expected to do moving forward to come back into the centre of London.

**Councillor Georgia Gould (LEAP Board Member and Chair of London Councils):** Can I quickly say one thing? It would be deeply irresponsible for any London Mayor to go against national guidelines about the coronavirus. We are doing our best to keep Londoners safe as cases spike. The national guidance - we are now in lockdown - is that people should not go into work, and in tier two the national Government was very clear that people should work from home. For a London Mayor to go against national guidance on public health would put Londoners at risk and would be deeply problematic. Of course we need to do what we can to support businesses to recover and work with them, and the Mayor has been doing that, but any call on the Mayor to go against national guidance would be wrong.

**Shaun Bailey AM:** You are right, and that is why I said that once the lockdown ends and the guidance is different, what are you going to do to help rebuild our central economic zone? Of course, as the Deputy Mayor, Rajesh, said, that part of our economy is failing spectacularly, it is under huge pressure, and when we can do that, we need very clear and decisive instruction on how that can happen. That falls to the Mayor. I was wondering where Jules and the rest of you think that direction could come from.

**Jules Pipe CBE (Deputy Mayor for Planning, Regeneration and Skills):** Thanks very much, Shaun. I agree very much with what Georgia [Gould] just said. We need to be very careful that we fall the right side of being ready to intervene and intervening when it is right to do so. I have been shocked at calls from some quarters about - how I would describe it - wanting the Mayor to create a super-spreader event in central London. The Mayor puts the safety and security of Londoners above all else, and until it is safe and we are all agreed, including the Government and everyone involved in this, that it is safe to hold events, the Mayor cannot be put in a position where he is expected to be promoting that.

We have seen how much London's economy is reliant on tourism and particularly international tourism, some £7 billion to £8 billion a year from international tourism alone. The Mayor, I am sure, would love to stand up, bang the drum for London and get people to come here, and he stands ready to do that as immediately as it is safe to do so, but I see little point in discussing what the Mayor can do to get tourists to come here now when we are quite some long way away from being able to deliver that as a country, as well as a capital.

As I started by saying, we need to be ready to intervene at the right level when it is right to do so. There have been periods over the last eight months where we have wanted to help reopen high streets. As soon as this lockdown, tier two or whatever regulations that are preventing normal operations change, we would reinvigorate that work on high street reopening. High street reopening is a very good example of where we have been intervening between pan-London government and local government.

Take the High Streets Reopening [Task and Finish] Group, chaired by Amy Lamé [Night Czar], Niall Bolger, who is the Chief Executive of Hounslow Council, and Sophie Linden, the Deputy Mayor for Policing and Crime. That has provided a mechanism to co-ordinate all the different agencies, all their activity, to support the recovery and the reopening of London's high streets. It has looked at safety, regulation and public health as well as the primary justification, economic recovery, and it has done lots of practical things. It has published guidance for local authorities and businesses via the London Growth Hub that you heard Rajesh talk about earlier and it has publicised it through all the local authority networks that are out there.

It has looked at alfresco dining, including not just how to deliver alfresco dining in a time of COVID but also things like counterterrorism advice and giving that kind of advice to businesses in central London, as well as

how they can open alfresco, how they comply with the COVID regulations, how they can, in practice, 'winterise' alfresco dining areas in a sustainable way using the heating arrangements that are the most sustainable.

There is advice on reopening public toilets as well. How do you do that in a COVID-safe way? Running workshops and webinars for local authorities and businesses on all these issues. Training for trading standards officers and how they can support businesses to make the workplace safe for workers. They have all had to deliver these things, co-ordinate these messages. Even if they are simple messages, there has had to be a lot of co-ordination and dissemination.

There has been all the lobbying that has gone on in this strand as well, trying to get funding and appropriate powers for local authorities and their enforcement teams so this idea about COVID marshals can actually be effective. Also, we can talk, I am sure, at great extent throughout this session about all the financial support for businesses and grants that we have been wanting to get in, to get them through this period.

**Shaun Bailey AM:** Can I just - just on my final question - steer you a bit in a particular direction? What more can the Mayor do to protect jobs in London? The two big tasks now are physical health, protecting the health of Londoners, and of course protecting jobs, ultimately. We say "the economy" but we are, to my mind, really talking about jobs.

We have heard a lot from the Mayor and your team about what the Government could be doing and should be doing, and that is fine. Is there anything else that the Mayor could be doing going forward? Is there another strand of thinking you are having, now that we have had a second lockdown? Has it changed your view on what we need to do in the medium and long term or not? I am very interested in what we are doing to help Londoners maintain the employment we have and then, into the future, build some new employment as well.

**Jules Pipe CBE (Deputy Mayor for Planning, Regeneration and Skills):** There will always be more to do because we will always need to be adaptive. Taking the thing that I was just talking about, the local interventions in street trading and pavement licences, there is the practical tactics on the ground, then there is the strategic, and then there is the lobbying.

You have, for example, on the tactical, the pavement licences, bringing in fast-tracked pavement licences that we work with local authorities on. Then you have the abolition of the curfew that we would like to see once it is safe to go back into restaurants. That is a practical thing at a strategic level across London to enable the restaurant economy to recover more quickly once they are able to reopen safely, when the regulations change. Then there is the strategic lobbying about furlough and other support for restaurants and cultural uses. Whilst Eat Out to Help Out was seen as a success and I do not want to detract from the economic success that that might have been for restaurants, was it exactly the right thing to do instead of some other sort of help for them? The second wave we are seeing now, how much can that be attributed to encouraging people back into restaurants perhaps prematurely? I put that specifically as a question mark. I am sure we will continually be adapting what our strategies are, both at the tactical, the strategic and the lobbying level, depending on the situation that we find ourselves in because we are learning things all the time.

**Shaun Bailey AM:** Thank you. In the interests of time I am going to move on to one of my colleagues, but that is the point, is it not? We need some direction from the Mayor, if only so we can judge it against the learning we are supposed to be making. While we keep talking about everything the Government is doing, we are losing the fact that you and your team are much closer to the ground so you should be going at a greater pace. Thank you, Jules. Thank you, Chair, back to you.

**Navin Shah AM (Chair):** Thank you. Next we have a supplementary question from Assembly Member Léonie Cooper.

**Léonie Cooper AM:** Thank you, Chair. I chaired the Economy Committee meeting yesterday and there was not a single person who said there was a void coming from the Mayor at all. There were a lot of people who were very thankful for the support from Deputy Mayor Rajesh Agrawal, London & Partners and a long list of others. Perhaps the previous Assembly Member was in a completely different meeting.

I would just like to put my question to Councillor Georgia Gould, and congratulations on your new role at London Councils leading the 23 boroughs across London now. Looking from your perspective of co-chairing the Economic Recovery Board, what do you consider to be the biggest challenges facing London in our recovery from COVID-19?

**Councillor Georgia Gould (LEAP Board Member and Chair of London Councils):** Thank you very much for that. Rajesh started to set some of them out. It is a deeply challenging environment for our economy, facing this level of uncertainty and trying to combine our public health response and keeping the economy going. Rajesh mentioned the reduction in tourism we have seen and that has led to us losing out on £10.9 billion in tourism spending. We are seeing that impact particularly in the Central Activities Zone (CAZ). In the 10 CAZ boroughs, we have 56% of London's jobs. I know in my own borough in Camden and also in the West End we are seeing a 60% reduction in footfall and a dire impact on businesses as a result.

The big concern from all of this uncertainty and all of the reductions in footfall is around loss of jobs, and we have seen big increases in people claiming Universal Credit as a result. There are some parts of London and also some communities that are disproportionately hit by unemployment. There are some long-term issues and questions for us about what will happen to the economy as a result and how we will end up in terms of how people use offices in the future. We still do not know how some of that will play out, although the Mayor has commissioned a really important piece of work looking into some of these trends for the CAZ.

The London Recovery Board is doing a huge amount of work to try to understand these challenges. I will just give our grand challenge, which is to ensure confidence in the city, minimise the impact on communities and build back better the city, its economy and society, recognising that although London's economy was growing before the pandemic, underlying that were deep inequalities and real differences in how the economy benefitted different Londoners. Over 60% of families who were in poverty were in working households, so we had issues of in-work poverty and some communities cut out of the labour market, and this pandemic has exasperated that.

**Léonie Cooper AM:** Yes, that is a very good point. I would just like to move on to Dr Nick Bowes. Addressing inequality at the same time as responding to what is clearly the second wave, how do we build that into the work that I know that you have been doing on addressing London's longer-term social and economic recovery?

**Dr Nick Bowes (Mayoral Director for Policy):** Thank you, Assembly Member Cooper. It is a really important point and it is one that we are very mindful of as we are working through the Recovery Board programme and the missions. As well as the grand challenge that Councillor Gould has just talked about and the actual specific nine missions themselves, we have these cross-cutting principles. All of the work is meant to be written through all of the work. This drive to do all that we can as part of this work to reduce inequality and tackle deprivation, it has to be written into all the work.

We are working through the missions at the moment. Each of the teams that is working on those missions is working very closely with colleagues in our Social Policy Team to help them to make sure that we are addressing these concerns. It is writ large across all of the work and we are driving it as hard as we can from the centre.

We have a Recovery Board meeting coming up and one of the items of the agenda there is how we ensure that the work we do is tackling inequality in London but with a particular focus on black Londoners. Deputy Mayor [for Social Integration, Social Mobility and Community Engagement, Debbie] Weekes-Bernard will be presenting on that topic at next week's meeting to show how we are trying to make sure that this is written through all of the missions.

**Léonie Cooper AM:** Thank you. Thank you very much, Chair.

**Navin Shah AM (Chair):** Can I invite Assembly Member Siân Berry to put a question, please?

**Siân Berry AM:** Thank you very much, Chair, and good morning to the panel. My first question is for Jules Pipe CBE as the Deputy Mayor covering skills. This week is Youth Work Week. Organisations like London Youth are marking this. Last year I hosted them in City Hall. This year they have had to hold their awards celebrations online, like many of their services.

Now, youth support includes career support and mentoring. We can see from the data so far that about one in ten young people have lost their jobs during the crisis, and they are very vulnerable to financial trouble and falling through the cracks in support systems. They need more support than ever with their jobs and careers.

Now, the Mayor has recently pledged £2.1 million for mentoring support for young Londoners at risk, but this is not going to go anywhere near closing the long-term gaps in prospects and careers that young people are facing. Do you agree that our city needs to provide more support for our young people right now?

**Jules Pipe CBE (Deputy Mayor for Planning, Regeneration and Skills):** At the moment, we are increasing dramatically the amount of support that is going to young people. One of the areas is through the Adult Education Budget. A great deal of work has been done with providers, both college providers and independent providers, over the last eight months. This has ranged from looking at skills provision to sector-based work academies, progressing young people into local vacancies, courses to support employment aligned with the expanded Work and Health Programme and work support that is related to the emerging recovery priorities, and supporting young people, the newly unemployed, as well as others like perhaps older people, at most risk of redundancy.

We have also supported the development of Keep London Learning. It is a website consolidating adult community learning, but that looks at young people as well from 19-plus across the 32 boroughs. The Enterprise Advisor Network has been doing a lot of work with institutions even when they have been closed, with schools and colleges through the summer period, in order that the careers advice service is supported in London ready for student return when they came back in September.

Certainly, all the work that we have been doing with colleges as well has involved practical financial support. There has been around £12 million that we have put into expanding certain courses. It is over £10 million that we are putting into practical support for enabling colleges to adapt to enable them to keep connected with their students, particularly addressing the digitally excluded. Also, we have agreed tens of millions of funding



for colleges whose rebuilding projects and adaptations projects were running into problems directly related to COVID, so we wanted to see those council programmes come to fruition as well.

**Siân Berry AM:** OK. Thank you, Jules. My original question was, “Do you need to do more?” Your answer to that is, “No, we are doing plenty”. Can I possibly ask you in writing for a summary of any money you have diverted into more COVID-related support, particularly for young people, from all those that you just said?

**Jules Pipe CBE (Deputy Mayor for Planning, Regeneration and Skills):** Absolutely.

**Siân Berry AM:** OK, great, I need to move on.

**Jules Pipe CBE (Deputy Mayor for Planning, Regeneration and Skills):** On doing more – though I will never say that anyone is doing enough. There will always be more to do.

**Siân Berry AM:** OK, I am going to move on to my next question, which is going to go to Nick as it speaks a little bit more broadly to the Mayor’s priorities.

Youth centres are struggling at the moment and my work has consistently exposed gaps in funding to youth services. The latest report shows over 100 youth centres have closed since 2011 across the city. Yesterday, from the National Youth Agency guidance that was published, the latest lockdown has brought even more complications for how youth workers can help people safely. Are you providing any more emergency funding for youth centres to be able to operate in a COVID-safe way in the light of this new guidance?

**Dr Nick Bowes (Mayoral Director for Policy):** Thank you, Assembly Member. We totally agree with you that the avid pressures that there have been on this sector during this crisis are causing real difficulties for a number of youth and to the community programmes across the city. We continue to provide the funding that we were already providing to many of these initiatives through things like the Young Londoner’s Fund, regardless of whether the initiatives are able to carry on during some of the tightest periods of lockdown. We were determined that we would keep that funding going because we knew that there would pressures.

We have worked very closely with other agencies and organisations through the London Funders Network. We contributed additional money into that pot which, in turn, generated contributed from all sorts of different organisations including City Bridge Trust and others, which distributed quite a substantial amount of money during the first wave. I know that there are discussions going along at the moment about now repeating that same process, and hopefully we will be in a position in the coming days or weeks to be able to announce that there will be a similar type of scheme that organisations will be able to apply to which is designed to help address all of those concerns that you have just highlighted.

In an ideal world, we would have the resources that we need to be able to support everybody at this time. We are not in that position but the Mayor, as part of his lobbying and advocacy work on behalf of the city, has drawn to the attention of the Government the importance of us maintaining support to these organisations. We know how valuable they are, we know how much work they do and we do not want to be in a position, coming out the other end of this, that we have lost so many critical organisations in our civil society fabric that we cannot do the work that we need, including work around --

**Siân Berry AM:** Thank you, Nick. Yes, I have also written to the Government about this as well. Thank you, thank you so much.

My final question is to Georgia Gould. The pandemic exposed a lot of problems with the existing systems of social security, and we know there is substantial support for the introduction of a basic income. Last week, 520 elected representatives from every part of the UK wrote to the Chancellor of the Exchequer asking him to support pilots of a universal basic income (UBI) in their areas. The Mayor said to me in September that this was an idea worth exploring.

Georgia, in your role as Chair of the Economic Recovery Working Group, have you looked specifically at UBI at all?

**Councillor Georgia Gould (LEAP Board Member and Chair of London Councils):** Thank you for the question. There are eight missions, and one of them is about financial vulnerability, which is actually led through the social stream and I know that they have been looking at different models. I do not know if they have looked specifically at UBI, but we will be looking at how we increase individual incomes.

In Camden, as you might know, we have been experimenting with universal basic services trials looking at access to transport, access to digital, access to childcare and access to food, as some of the basic needs that have emerged out of the pandemic. There is some real interest and I would certainly be interested in experimentation around universal basic services and UBI, but it is not something that is formally part of the programme as of yet.

**Siân Berry AM:** OK, thank you. Hopefully, it is something that we can lobby the Government on, similarly, to make sure that London does not lose out if Wales or somewhere else gets to be the pilot area. Thank you.

**Navin Shah AM (Chair):** We will move on to Assembly Member Caroline Pidgeon, please.

**Caroline Pidgeon MBE AM:** Thank you very much, Chair. I want to ask some questions on the continued economic impact the pandemic is having on women. For my first question to the Deputy Mayor for Business, during the first lockdown women were more likely to work in the sectors that had to completely shut down. While 75% of furloughed male workers had their wages topped up beyond the 80% cap, this was only the case for 65% of female workers.

How are you working to ensure that the second lockdown does not have a similarly disproportionate economic impact on women in London?

**Rajesh Agrawal (Deputy Mayor for Business):** Thank you very much for that question. It is a very, very pertinent question. We all know that women have been disproportionately affected by the pandemic and the lockdown that followed, whether it is domestic violence, whether it is disproportionately getting more childcare and household workload, etc. My colleague, Debbie Weekes-Bernard, who is the Deputy Mayor for Communities and Social Integration and Social Mobility, has been leading the work on that, on domestic violence and related stuff. She is working closely with Sophie Linden [Deputy Mayor for Policing and Crime].

If you look at the first lockdown and the second lockdown, both times women bore the brunt of the restrictions not just at home, but also business-wise. For example, there were nail bars and hair salons where women are in particularly larger numbers than men. Most of the nail bars are run by women, worked by women and have female customers. Again, that whole sector has a huge amount of problems and that is why some of the schemes that we launched to support small businesses are extremely important, and we make sure that those schemes reach out to the more vulnerable communities and hard-to-reach communities. Those

include people of black, Asian and minority ethnic (BAME) backgrounds and also women. You are absolutely right, there cannot be recovery without having adequate support for women.

**Caroline Pidgeon MBE AM:** Thank you for that. Could I move on to Nick Bowes, please? As a result of the COVID pandemic, mothers are 47% more likely to have permanently lost their jobs or resigned. Analysis suggests that where women could continue in work, they were less able to do so or had to reduce their time commitment due to childcare responsibilities. As I have raised previously, the childcare sector is in crisis. Many providers at risk of folding. We understand about 150,000 childcare places are at risk.

How is the Mayor working to support the childcare sector in London and the high levels of women that work in it, as well as the working mothers who rely on such childcare places to enable them to remain in work?

**Dr Nick Bowes (Mayoral Director for Policy):** Thank you for the question. Yes, it is clearly absolutely critical. I know that the team are constantly engaged with the sector and we know just how difficult it is. We have heard from a number of organisations that they do not believe that they will be able to survive this difficult period, leaving many, many people in London without the childcare support that they need to be able to return to the workplace themselves at the appropriate time.

The work that we have been doing in providing advocacy on behalf of the city to the Government around the key building blocks that we need to have in place to support a recovery then has to include making a case for more targeted and specific support for the childcare sector and for early years. As I mentioned earlier with the recovery work, we are ensuring that in all of the missions and the work that is going on around the Recovery Board, these issues around equality are absolutely front and centre. All of the missions will be focusing very much on the equality issues.

**Caroline Pidgeon MBE AM:** OK, thank you. Can I just ask Councillor Gould what the Economic Recovery Working Group is doing to ensure gender equality is at the heart and that we do not allow progress on gender equality to be undone as we come out of this crisis?

**Navin Shah AM (Chair):** I am sorry, but I am afraid the Assembly Member is out of time. Can we have that reply in writing? We would very much appreciate that.

**Caroline Pidgeon MBE AM:** Thank you.

**Navin Shah AM (Chair):** Moving on, can I ask Assembly Member Len Duvall to put in his question, please? Thank you.

**Len Duvall AM (Deputy Chair):** Thank you, Chair. My question is to Nick Bowes. I am very pleased with the answer you gave earlier about childcare as being integral in the economic recovery. My question relates to the budget. I understand about mainstream budgets being used to support the recovery work when we can kick in with the strategy. Can you tell us what new monies are being allocated and how they are being funded?

**Dr Nick Bowes (Mayoral Director for Policy):** Thank you, Assembly Member Duvall. This is an important question. As Assembly Members know, the budget process is in full swing at the moment. I do not need to rehearse the arguments around the fiscal challenges that we face at as an organisation and the pressure that there is on the budget. We are working through at the moment how we can better align both existing activity and potential future activity around the recovery priorities that are identified by the Recovery Board.

There will be new money that we will be able to devote toward those missions. I cannot put an exact quantum on that at this time because we are still working through that. It very much comes down to us trying to find efficiencies and projects that perhaps we have not been able to spend that much money on during lockdown, which has freed up some resources which we have been able to use to divert towards recovery. I cannot promise that it is going to be mega bucks, but it is really important that we try as hard as we can to bring something to the table.

The Recovery Board has a very different way of working to the GLA and it is not a structure that we have used before in quite this way, and a missions-based approach is a very different way of working too. It is very much meant to be an alliance of organisations across London, including London Councils and other public and private sector organisations. We will be looking for other organisations to bring something to the table too, either in kind or financial, whether they are public sector, private or voluntary sector. Also, we will be using the Recovery Board as a vehicle with which we can make the case to Government, when the time comes, for specific areas of recovery work which we think align with their priorities, which we would need funding for.

**Len Duvall AM (Deputy Chair):** Thank you for that. My next question is to Georgia Gould. How is London Councils, considering the pressure on local government finances, going to repurpose - and 'repurpose' may not be the right word - their budgets to deliver this economic strategy that you are committed to doing? How will that work, and can you give an example about where that may well be taking place, given the pressure on your finances?

**Councillor Georgia Gould (LEAP Board Member and Chair of London Councils):** Thank you for that really pertinent question. As everyone will be aware, we have had over ten years now of austerity, and certainly my budget in Camden has been cut by half. We are in a similar position across London, so there are really limited resources in local authorities. There is a lot of work going on to try and ensure that there is support available for businesses. I know some of that is business engagement.

There is an enforcement role in ensuring businesses are compliant, but a lot of that is supporting businesses to change the way they operate to be COVID-safe. I know Brent have estimated they spent £300,000 on those efforts alone and there is a lot of work happening to go through business grants and get them out to businesses. We have just heard that there will be new grants coming through to London. I know London Councils are already putting in place structures to get those grants out as quickly as possible and to learn from what happened last time.

In terms of one of our ambitious things we are looking to do together, we are looking at how we pool resources. High streets is a really good example. It is a shared priority of City Hall and councils. We are putting together, in many boroughs, teams to support our high streets, looking at how we repurpose empty streets and looking at town centre type managers. If we can put what is still some resource on both a borough level and at City Hall together, that can create vibrant economic centres, knowing that we will have to be creative and move quickly. A really good example is some of the work that is already going on to improve walking and cycling on high streets, which has been a very fast-moving, collaborative effort between City Hall and London Councils.

I cannot pretend that we can do all of it without more money and that is why we have been working very closely together on lobbying, particularly in relation to this latest lockdown. We have put together quite a strong set of shared lobbying asks of City Hall and London Councils to Government about what it would take to keep businesses going through this very difficult month.

**Len Duvall AM (Deputy Chair):** I was thinking beyond these very difficult months, but that is very pertinent what you said. You say that you are committed to making a contribution within the difficulties that you face within local government finances. Does that mean that boroughs need to realign their strategies, given that there are inner and outer London boroughs, to meet with the consensus that you are developing at the centre? I am aware of London Councils as a consensus body, but some councils will want to go it alone and still receive some of the cash but not put in some of the resources. Where does your role in London Councils come into that about those issues, and about how we go forward together on this economic recovery to make sure we get the best bang for our buck?

**Councillor Georgia Gould (LEAP Board Member and Chair of London Councils):** I have never known us to be working as closely together as we are. All of the missions have a borough lead. I talked about high streets. That work is been led by an officer at City Hall. We have a senior officer at Enfield Council working with a coalition of their contemporaries across London boroughs. It is not that there is a central programme that is being imposed on boroughs, it is that we are co-creating this together. I have been in several workshops which have had high attendance and engagement from almost all boroughs. We meet every two weeks with four Chief Executives that represent the sub-regions of London, and that is cross-party.

This is being developed together, there is strong engagement on all of the missions from boroughs and it is being co-created. It is not so much that we need to completely realign what we are doing. The missions bring together what is important to us: our communities, unemployment, and reinvigorating our high streets. These are core issues to boroughs. Digital exclusion is something that came up really deeply through the pandemic. We saw the impact of lack of access on school children and those who were facing unemployment. These are shared priorities that come from our communities, come from boroughs and the programme is co-created together. There is a real opportunity, now we are working so closely, to really scale our impact.

**Len Duvall AM (Deputy Chair):** One last quick question, but to Nick Bowes on the issue of scrutiny of you and your partners on key outcomes, once we get to firmer ground, if we can have a talk of post-COVID. We must talk of post-COVID and we are going to get that economic downturn still with us. How do you think we should be judging the success of your programmes, the outreach they are reaching to and what they are meant to do?

**Dr Nick Bowes (Mayoral Director for Policy):** Thank you, that is a really important question. We are at the stage at the moment where each of the missions are very intensively working on how they plan to implement the overall objective. We are still working through what the work programmes are going to look like but we hope they will come into shape pretty soon. We have to bear in mind that the aim of this, the mission-based approach around the recovery bodies is very medium to long-term. It is really focused on tackling some very deep-seated issues that face the city. Having said that, it is important that we can point to progress in the short term as well as keeping our eye on the prize, which is a more medium- to long-term prize of tackling these deep-seated issues. That is the kind of guidance that we have been providing to the missions.

The Recovery Board next week will have a first opportunity to look at progress with the missions, with a follow-up opportunity early in the new year to look at them in even more detail. I am hoping that over the next couple of months we will be in a position where there will be a very clear public-facing plan of how we are going to progress the goal of these missions.

**Len Duvall AM (Deputy Chair):** Thank you.

**Navin Shah AM (Chair):** I have Assembly Member Devenish, please.

**Tony Devenish AM:** Chair, good morning. I do not see any sense of urgency from what the Mayor has been doing over the last eight months. We have been told this morning by the Deputy Mayor that this crisis is as big as World War II. He is absolutely right, so why is there no economic recovery strategy that has been put in place yet, and why do we not seem to have the Mayor yet again for the second meeting in a row? This is about jobs. As [former United States President] Bill Clinton famously said, "It's the economy, stupid".

Jules, I have two questions for you. The first is to congratulate Transport for London (TfL). They have made the Tube safe. The Tube, as TfL say, is cleaner than it has probably ever been. My question to you, sir, is that once we get lockdown over, hopefully on 2 December [2020], will the Mayor get off his backside and shout from the rooftops, "London is open"?

**Jules Pipe CBE (Deputy Mayor for Planning, Regeneration and Skills):** Thank you very much, Chair. Thank you, Tony, for that question. As I said before, the Mayor stands absolutely ready to bang the drum for London, both nationally and internationally, but this has to be guided by the context that we are in. Would it have been responsible to try and promote London as an international destination over the last four to six weeks between these lockdowns? I would say that it would not have been consistent, and it would have been dangerous.

You are absolutely right that TfL has done an outstanding job at making the Tube safe and clean, and we are absolutely ready to promote that as and when it is appropriate to be encouraging people back on the tube. At the moment, it is absolutely right that it has been made as safe as it has now for those few people that do have to travel and whose jobs absolutely require them to be at their place of work, not least of all National Health Service (NHS) workers and other core services. But it would be irresponsible for us to say now, "The Tube stays. Please come into central London and wander around and do some shopping".

**Tony Devenish AM:** Nobody is saying that, Deputy Mayor.

**Jules Pipe CBE (Deputy Mayor for Planning, Regeneration and Skills):** Sorry, Tony. They have. People have practically organised the creation of super-spreader events in the CAZ because they think that would somehow save theatres and sandwich shops.

**Tony Devenish AM:** I cannot think of anybody who has said that in a serious way, Deputy Mayor. Let me ask you another specific question. Once this is over - and I stress, of course, not at the moment, Deputy Mayor - once we can, will you support Primark boss George Weston's call to the Government to let shops open all hours including on Sundays in the run-up to Christmas, subject to the regulations being loosened? We have to start getting the West End to keep creating the jobs that we all need.

**Jules Pipe CBE (Deputy Mayor for Planning, Regeneration and Skills):** As this next few weeks progresses and we have a better handle of what effect the tier-two regulations have had and what our prospects are when we get to December and whether we can be back down into tier one or only down into tier two. It is entirely possible when you look at some areas of the country that we would still be in tier three after this lockdown. Once we know the direction of travel, then we can start rolling out an approach for how London delivers Christmas for our residents. Yes, we have these next few weeks to be able to discuss with partners in local government about what is appropriate for different areas. Clearly, the CAZ and particularly the West End, if Westminster is up for this, could be an area in which we all consider and embrace a relaxation.

This is something that we would want to do with local authorities and taking resident and business concerns into account.

**Tony Devenish AM:** Absolutely, Deputy Mayor. The issue is that I cannot believe either Ken Livingstone or Boris Johnson [former Mayors of London] as Mayor would have been as absent as Sadiq Khan [Mayor of London] has been. We at the right time - and I agree it is not right now - need to get the footfall back up. Christmas cannot be lost for jobs for our economy. I make a plea. There is a sense of urgency because overseas visitors and visitors from the rest of the country do not just decide on a Monday to come to London on Tuesday. We need you to help plan. It is about jobs.

Finally, where is this economic recovery strategy? You have had eight months.

**Jules Pipe CBE (Deputy Mayor for Planning, Regeneration and Skills):** I disagree with you about the absence of the Mayor. The Mayor has not been absent. The Mayor has been seen on every avenue available to him, whether it is social media or the TV or through the press. Any perceived absence by you is not because the Mayor has not -- there have been other gatekeepers who control the media. It is not the Mayor avoiding it.

**Tony Devenish AM:** Deputy Mayor, you know full well that businesses tell all of us that the Mayor is far more invisible than the two previous Mayors. Can he put his head above the parapet and actually do his job? I know you do a good job and your colleagues. It is what he does that I am worried about.

**Jules Pipe CBE (Deputy Mayor for Planning, Regeneration and Skills):** No, I am sorry, Assembly Member. I disagree with you on that about visibility. What you are referring to about the frustration of business is the fact that - I go back to my point before - it is hard for the Government or the Mayor to predict what is going to be the situation on the ground in four to six weeks' time. It would be irresponsible for the Mayor today to be saying, "Come now to London. Book hotels. Book your flights to come to London in four to six weeks' time". That is completely irresponsible.

**Tony Devenish AM:** Chair, I will leave it there because of time.

**Navin Shah AM (Chair):** Thank you. We move on to Assembly Member Hall, please, with the next question.

**Susan Hall AM:** Good morning. Thank you. My question is, please, to Rajesh. Good morning, Rajesh. We have talked a lot about employment because it is very important. Therefore, it is absolutely essential that we look after our employers and their businesses. I am glad to hear you say this morning that everything sits underneath the London Business Hub now. That is good to know. How many businesses is the Business Hub helping at the moment?

**Rajesh Agrawal (Deputy Mayor for Business):** It has helped a good few thousand. First of all, it is a portal to provide a lot of information and it redirects a lot of small business going there on to a variety of different schemes. It also offers one-to-one advisory sessions. More than 2,000 sessions have taken place. Businesses can call and fix up an appointment over the telephone or a video call and get an advisory session.

We have continued to support small businesses in a number of ways. One of the big sectors that has been massively affected by this pandemic is the hospitality sector and the businesses themselves.

**Susan Hall AM:** Yes, I know. If we can go back a bit, you think you help about 2,000 businesses?

**Rajesh Agrawal (Deputy Mayor for Business):** Yes, well over 2,000 businesses. That is just one on the advisory side of things. I am saying there are a number of different businesses being helped through a number of different -- like Assembly Member Bailey just said, there are so many initiatives going on.

**Susan Hall AM:** Yes, that is right. He did. You answered him by saying that a scattergun approach was no good and, therefore, you would put everything under the London Business Hub. That is what I started by saying. I was pleased you have done that because then you can quantify the amount of assistance you are giving to businesses.

If I go back, you have helped 2,000-ish businesses through that?

**Rajesh Agrawal (Deputy Mayor for Business):** No, that is only on the advice front. But, for example, on --

**Susan Hall AM:** No, go back to figures if we can because --

**Rajesh Agrawal (Deputy Mayor for Business):** I will, but if you let me --

**Susan Hall AM:** Look, with 2,000 people on that front --

**Rajesh Agrawal (Deputy Mayor for Business):** It is not just one big number, is it? There are different kinds of schemes supporting different kinds of businesses and there in turn helping a lot of different employees. It is not one big number.

**Susan Hall AM:** OK. How many businesses do you think you are interacting with and helping?

**Rajesh Agrawal (Deputy Mayor for Business):** We are interacting with a number of businesses. One is on the --

**Susan Hall AM:** No, how many, approximately?

**Rajesh Agrawal (Deputy Mayor for Business):** This is what I am saying. If you let me finish, the first is on the advisory front. Well over 2,000 sessions have taken place with the advisers. Then we have 240 businesses where we are providing the leadership skills that are necessary to safeguard jobs and helping them with mentoring. There are about another 250 businesses where we are helping them with renegotiation with their landlords through our property advice service. Then we have the Pay Forward London, where about 300 small businesses have taken advantage of that and have raised about £900,000 using 12,000 individual donations. Then we have 200 businesses that have so far benefited from the match funding provided by the Mayor. That is about £200,000. Then we have a number of businesses - like I said, about 600 businesses - that have applied for the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) grant as well so far already. Then there is the Culture at Risk Fund, helping businesses in the cultural and creative industries. Then there is the Mayor's International Business Programme, which is helping businesses to expand internationally through the London & Partners programme. There is a long list but there is no --

**Susan Hall AM:** There is a long list, you have that list and you know how many businesses in London you are helping. That is very important, as the Deputy Mayor for Business.



How many businesses are there in London?

**Rajesh Agrawal (Deputy Mayor for Business):** Again, it depends on how you classify. If you say --

**Susan Hall AM:** OK. In your head, how many businesses are there in London?

**Rajesh Agrawal (Deputy Mayor for Business):** If you look at the total number of companies registered in Companies House, that would be about 1 million. It depends on how you classify them on a sector-wide basis as well and how many people they employ. Quite a few are self-employed people also who form companies.

**Susan Hall AM:** Yes, the figure I have is 1.1 million and so we are more or less at the same amount, but the numbers that you have given me add up to around 3,300, which I have just written down, which is 0.3% of businesses in London. While you can make a lot of noise about all these businesses, it is not even 1% of businesses in London that you are helping. That is about right, is it not?

**Rajesh Agrawal (Deputy Mayor for Business):** First of all, I would say, yes, we like to make a noise because the Mayor's job is to promote London --

**Susan Hall AM:** No, I asked --

**Rajesh Agrawal (Deputy Mayor for Business):** We have to talk up London, first of all, and help business as we can.

**Susan Hall AM:** Yes, I know you do, but --

**Rajesh Agrawal (Deputy Mayor for Business):** I have a list. There have been 30 letters written by the Mayor to the Government supporting businesses, right from supporting self-employed people and small businesses with furlough schemes and so on.

**Susan Hall AM:** Deputy Mayor, I am trying to ascertain just how many businesses in London you are trying to help, bearing in mind that there are millions of people working in London in businesses. We have established that there are over 1 million businesses. I am trying to work out what percentage of businesses in London you are helping. With the figures you have given me at the moment, it is 0.3%.

**Rajesh Agrawal (Deputy Mayor for Business):** Again, it depends on how you classify the help, for example, as well. There are so many ways to help businesses. This is the direct interaction that we have had with businesses.

**Susan Hall AM:** All right. Whichever way you look at it, what percentage of businesses do you think you are helping in London?

**Rajesh Agrawal (Deputy Mayor for Business):** This is not a relevant question. The question is --

**Susan Hall AM:** No, I asked the question. I think it is relevant and, therefore, I asked the question. What percentage of businesses do you think you are helping in London? That is my question.

**Rajesh Agrawal (Deputy Mayor for Business):** For example, throughout the pandemic, we kept TfL running. The Tube, the buses --

**Susan Hall AM:** No, no --

**Rajesh Agrawal (Deputy Mayor for Business):** No, you asked a question, let me answer.

**Navin Shah AM (Chair):** Can I stop you both here, please?

**Susan Hall AM:** With respect, I am the one asking the questions and I just want an answer. You are the Deputy Mayor for Business --

**Navin Shah AM (Chair):** Assembly Member Hall --

**Rajesh Agrawal (Deputy Mayor for Business):** You have to let me come in. What I am saying is that, for example, throughout the pandemic, the Tube and the buses kept running. Is that helping businesses? Yes, it has been helping businesses by doing that. There are numerous ways to help businesses. There are a number of challenges that businesses face and we help them address those challenges by helping the staff get to work and providing digital skills. How many businesses is that reaching to help them solve those problems?

**Susan Hall AM:** How do you advertise the London Business Hub to all of those hundreds of thousands of businesses that you are not interacting with at all? How do you suppose that they could find out about the London Business Hub?

**Rajesh Agrawal (Deputy Mayor for Business):** We use all the social media channels as we can. My issue is that back in the day there used to be a national scheme called Business Link, which was a one-stop-shop. In the last 10 years the Government has cut all the support that was provided to any kind of small businesses across the country. We have tried to do that and the funding level for the Business Hub is extremely limited. I must say that my team is working extremely hard to do the very best we can with the limited resources we have.

**Susan Hall AM:** Of course you are. You are saying that the London Business Hub is extremely limited. That is what you have just said.

**Rajesh Agrawal (Deputy Mayor for Business):** I am saying that the resources are at a level that is extremely limited.

**Susan Hall AM:** The resources are extremely limited. The most important thing is that we keep businesses going in order that they continue to employ people. I would have thought that as Deputy Mayor for Business you would know what sort of goal you have for the percentage of businesses that you keep in touch with. Unfortunately, you do not know that. Talking about TfL is just a distraction, quite frankly. I would have thought that 0.3% of businesses that you are interacting with, when you are saying how wonderfully it is all going, is a very low percentage. If we look at the Mayor's Good Growth Fund, it is worth £70 million and has created only 109 jobs from three projects, despite a projection that it would create over 6,000 jobs from 83 projects. Some of these things have to come into line so that we have ideas when we come out of this pandemic for how we get things working. I am not at all enthused by what you are saying about the London Business Hub having one minute said that it was the answer to everything and then saying that really there is not enough money in it. You are certainly not protecting enough businesses with it with 0.3% --

**Navin Shah AM (Chair):** Can I stop you here, please? Your time is up.

**Rajesh Agrawal (Deputy Mayor for Business):** It is very unreasonable -- you are taking a percentage of it and saying that that is only the number of businesses we have helped. That is not true.

**Navin Shah AM (Chair):** Thank you, Deputy Mayor. Can I stop you here? I am afraid the Conservative Group is out of time.

**Susan Hall AM:** What a shame.

**Navin Shah AM (Chair):** Any further communication you want, please do it by other means. Thank you very much.

I will move on to the next question, which is from Assembly Member Unmesh Desai. Thank you very much.

**Unmesh Desai AM:** Thank you, Chair. My questions relate to the hospitality sector, the country's third-largest employer. My main question is for Deputy Mayor Rajesh Agrawal.

Rajesh, reference has already been made to the restaurant economy on the high street. I want to ask you this. We are now in a second wave and, while public health must come first, this will hit the hospitality sector very hard. The Chief Executive of UK Hospitality has recently warned the Mayor that 250,000 jobs are at immediate risk. What immediate support can the GLA provide to the hospitality sector?

**Rajesh Agrawal (Deputy Mayor for Business):** Thank you very much, Assembly Member Desai, for that question. The hospitality sector is one of the hardest hit by the pandemic. We are now missing out on £10.9 billion in spending from tourists this year alone. Our analysis shows that overseas tourists will spend £7.4 billion less on goods and services in London from 2020, while domestic tourists will spend £3.5 billion less. The international tourist spend in central London represents 40% of the UK total. That is basically Westminster, Kensington and Chelsea and the City of London.

With a return of international tourism likely to be a long way off, businesses reliant on it will need Government support for a long time to come. The Mayor has called on the Government for an extension of the business rates holiday to next year, as well as the long-term targeted support. While we do not have the resources to support many businesses directly, we have done the following things.

I have already talked about the Pay It Forward scheme and the Back to Business Fund, which many hospitality businesses have taken advantage of. We have substantially expanded TfL's Streetscape programme to maximise capacity for cycling and walking into and across central London so that people can get to attractions safely. Since March, TfL has mounted a vast multichannel and multilingual campaign to communicate the evolution of travel advice and what we are doing to keep London moving and how we are doing it. The campaign has reached over 95% of all Londoners. We are funding and supporting the London & Partners-led Because I'm A Londoner campaign, which is built around the London Alliance for Consumer Confidence.

This is a very important point, Assembly Member, because this has been raised before as well. When it is safe for us to bring international tourists back to London, London needs to be at the top of their minds. That is why we have been running this campaign to help London be on top of people's minds when they do it.

We have also worked with stakeholders across central London including the New West End Company, London First and Central London Forward to share knowledge, collaborate with them and inform the Mayor of the

position and future policies. We have also established the High Streets Reopening Task and Finish Group, working with local authorities, the Metropolitan Police Service (MPS), TfL and other partners to continue to ensure a safe and secure reopening of our London high streets.

We have convened a roundtable with key stakeholders from the pubs, hospitality and night-time sectors to see what more can be done to convene, lead, support and align on calls to action, policy asks, etc. I know my colleague, the Night Czar Amy Lamé, is also doing a huge amount of work in this direction, working very closely with the hospitality sector.

**Unmesh Desai AM:** Thank you for that answer, Deputy Mayor. We could look more at how to get the message out to small businesses, especially in outer London, and to local councils, but that is another issue.

I have a question for Dr Bowes. My constituency extends from the City of London, where the Corporation has recently released a report, *London Recharged: Our Vision for London in 2025*, all the way out to local high streets in Barking and Dagenham, where this week they launched Eastwood Studios and Made in Dagenham, a £2 billion project. That is the sort of politicking that we need. It is a huge constituency, which has a number of self-employed workers in the hospitality sector, whose residents now face another extended furlough period and a reduced income. Many will struggle to pay the rent on 80% of their wages.

What support and advice will be available from City Hall to these workers about their finances?

**Dr Nick Bowes (Mayoral Director for Policy):** Thank you for that question. Yes, we are entering another very difficult period for a lot of people in London, as you have just highlighted. The Mayor has and will continue to press the case to the Government for the need for specifically targeted support for all those who are most in need. We really do need to have a mechanism and support package in place so that all of those businesses, organisations, institutions and self-employed people who were making a profit and contributing to the wealth of this country at the beginning of this crisis can continue to be able to do so when we come out of it at the other end. Their viability is under threat at the moment because of the very special circumstances we find ourselves in.

City Hall will also continue to lobby for the right level of support for people whose jobs are threatened and for businesses who are struggling to pay the salaries of their workers. I know that the Mayor is not alone in arguing that the end to the eviction ban, which came in in September, was premature and should be reinstated for this period. There was some data the other day that I read in one of the newspapers about the increase in the number of people who are struggling to pay their rent and having to rely on debt to do so. The Mayor will be using his power to try to persuade the Government that we need those same emergency support mechanisms back in place for the coming weeks.

**Unmesh Desai AM:** Thank you. I had a question for Councillor Gould, but I will write to her. Thank you, Chair.

**Navin Shah AM (Chair):** All right. The next question is from Assembly Member Dr Onkar Sahota.

**Dr Onkar Sahota AM:** Thank you, Chair. My question is to the Deputy Mayor, Rajesh Agrawal. The aviation industry is very important not only for London but for us as a country. Recent analysis by City Hall said that £7.4 billion will be lost by London because of the loss of tourism.

What support is London able to provide to the tourism industry to make sure that we recover well and make sure that we get tourists coming back into London?

**Rajesh Agrawal (Deputy Mayor for Business):** Thank you very much for that question, Assembly Member Sahota. Clearly, aviation and all industries reliant on international travel and tourism are going to need support for a very long time to come. You are absolutely right about the loss in international tourism and the aviation industry is very interlinked.

For workers at Heathrow itself, this will be a very uncertain time and the Government will need to provide ongoing support to those who need it. I understand that at one point at Heathrow the number of passengers was 3% of the normal number. It is incredibly worrying.

I understand that Hounslow Council's cabinet has agreed a recovery plan, which sets out the range of actions to tackle the economic, environmental and community impacts of COVID-19. This also includes the call for action and for a national aviation communities fund to tackle the downturn in aviation activity across the UK, most notably in Hounslow itself where it is a big employer and also in Crawley in West Sussex as well.

**Dr Onkar Sahota AM:** Thank you. The next question is to Deputy Mayor Jules Pipe. The connection has already been made between the virus and the economy. They cannot be separated. It beggars belief that this Government does not have the testing and tracing in place. We should be testing all people coming into the UK and testing should be compulsory at the airport of entry.

What has been the impact of having no test and trace system in place and especially not making it mandatory for travellers? What has been the impact of that on the London economy?

**Jules Pipe CBE (Deputy Mayor for Planning, Regeneration and Skills):** I heard the question or part of the question, which I think was on the impact on the high street.

**Dr Onkar Sahota AM:** No. I was concerned about the fact that we do not have the testing and tracing in place. We are the only country that has no testing of people coming into London. It beggars belief that we still do not have this sorted out and that people are coming into this country and are not being tested and traced.

What is the impact of that on the economy of London? Would it help if testing and tracing was mandatory at the airport of entry?

**Jules Pipe CBE (Deputy Mayor for Planning, Regeneration and Skills):** The issue here is about readiness. I go back to my previous point. The lack of testing and tracing is hugely problematic across every area of activity in the country, whether it is the provision of care in care homes, work in hospital, all essential workers. It is potentially damaging the whole economy by not freeing up people to be able to go to work when they are able to and when the general regulations permit them to.

On the issue of international travel specifically, yes, when everyone's regulations are relaxed across the Europe or across the world to allow international travel to happen easily, we will be at a disadvantage if we are unable to operate fully because of a lack of a test and trace mechanism. Also, it will prevent our population from travelling abroad, styming their ability to interact globally and, again, disadvantaging our economy, all because of a lack of testing and tracing.

As I say, we have heightened lockdown restrictions. They have probably the bigger effect on our economy than a lack of testing and tracing, but once regulations allow our economy to reopen and normalise, that lack of testing and tracing will hamper us both in operating internally and also in our ability to operate at a global level.

**Dr Onkar Sahota AM:** The Director of the Confederation of British Industries (CBI) says that the aviation industry is on its knees and Chief Executive of Heathrow Airport have been demanding from the Government that it gets testing and tracing sorted out, particularly at Heathrow and other airports. It is a failure of the Government. It has had 11 months to sort this out and have not done it. Unless we get testing and tracing sorted out for our airports, we will not get the confidence to get people coming back to this country. I hope that this message can be given to the Government by the Mayor. Thank you.

**Navin Shah AM (Chair):** All right. The next Member on the list is Assembly Member Murad Qureshi.

**Murad Qureshi AM:** Thank you, Chair. Good morning, panellists. My question is about the CAZ and the high streets. Given Councillor Gould has made some comments, I will start with her first.

What specific actions in the London Transition Board have been undertaken to support both the CAZ and local high streets and how has this changed now that we are in a second wave?

**Councillor Georgia Gould (LEAP Board Member and Chair of London Councils):** Thanks for that question. Jules talked in detail about the High Streets Reopening Group and the work that that has been doing. That has, as he set out, been a joint endeavour between councils, Business Improvement Districts (BIDs) and City Hall to ensure that guidance and support is there and that we are doing everything we can to open high streets. That links into the recovery work that I have been leading and we have a mission that is around high streets and about reinvigorating our high streets. Again, there is a lot of work going into that.

In terms of how that is changing with lockdown, the thing we have been immediately focused on is the support offer we need. We have been working together across London Councils and City Hall to put together an ask around a support package from the Government. The Mayor and I wrote to the Government last week requesting a meeting to set out what we think. We need a substantial support package to keep businesses alive because they have just opened and are struggling. There is not really much we can do during a lockdown to reinvigorate high streets. What we do at this point is about supporting those businesses that have to close.

There is just a final point I wanted to make, which is about the support that has already been given by councils. Councils have given over 100,000 businesses grant support, which amounts to over £1 billion. That comes from central Government but has been administered by councils. We have been writing to businesses to setting out how they respond to each different restriction change. We have just written again to all of our businesses about how helpful it has been to include the guidance from the Business Hub and to have that London guidance. I know we have just written to 10,000 businesses in Camden setting out the guidance. That wide support has been really helpful.

**Murad Qureshi AM:** Thank you, Councillor. I am trying to work out the tension between promoting internationally recognised high streets like Camden Market and Oxford Street as compared to Kilburn High Road. We have to keep a balance there.

In the time I have left, I would like to go to another critical issue for a lot of our shopkeepers and businesses in the CAZ. It is the business rates holiday - I know that you and the Mayor have written about this - for the retail, leisure and hospitality businesses, which ends in March 2021.

Can you tell me why businesses need this extension and what would happen if the Government does not agree to it?

**Councillor Georgia Gould (LEAP Board Member and Chair of London Councils):** It is about stability. Businesses really struggling to plan. We know how many businesses are already on the edge of closure. I have seen even this week well-loved businesses close in my borough and I know it is happening across London. It is happening across London. It is the difference between a lifeline to create a plan to stay open through uncertainty and closure and the job losses that come with that.

I would say that one of my real worries about the economic support package that has been put through for the lockdown is that it does not recognise the distribution of businesses. It is by population and not businesses. My borough and I know Westminster are really concerned because we will not get enough money. I know that our Discretionary Business Fund was hugely oversubscribed last time. If I could make one urgent plea in terms of helping with lobbying, it is to ensure that any formula is also based on distribution of businesses and that grants come to that. That links to your point about supporting the CAZ as opposed to the smaller high streets.

**Murad Qureshi AM:** Thank you. I have just a final thought, not really a question but a plea. We appreciate that business rates grants go to the landlords and not necessarily the tenants. The tenants are usually smaller businesses. Can we please keep an eye out for them, and these grants being passed on? That is critically important. Otherwise, we are going to lose a whole swag of businesses. Thank you.

**Councillor Georgia Gould (LEAP Board Member and Chair of London Councils):** I have a really quick point on that. I absolutely agree. One of the big issues we had last time were people in co-working spaces. Again, the only way they could get money was through the discretionary grant. Ensuring that there is enough flexibility to allow councils to support smaller SMEs that are in co-working spaces and that do not pay business rates is really critical.

**Murad Qureshi AM:** Thank you.

**Navin Shah AM (Chair):** Thank you. We move on to a question from Assembly Member Dr Alison Moore.

**Dr Alison Moore AM:** Thank you very much, Chair. My question will be directed at Councillor Gould.

The economic impact of recession so often falls hardest on young people. Young people's life chances are being severely damaged by the effects of COVID-19. My question to you is: what are you doing to ensure that young people have opportunities and good job prospects and do not become the lost generation, as we all fear?

**Councillor Georgia Gould (LEAP Board Member and Chair of London Councils):** That is such an important question. We have seen through the last recession the scarring impact that unemployment at a young age has. Unfortunately, we are starting to see with the numbers coming through that unemployment is disproportionately hitting younger people. It is a key concern for boroughs in the recovery programme.

The Government has launched the Kickstart programme, on which the GLA, boroughs and Jobcentre Plus (JCP) are working with very closely together. Nineteen boroughs have applied to the gateway organisations to support the Kickstart programme. For example, in my borough, we hope that that will produce 300 jobs and we are working with over 60 organisations, many of which, because of the way that the programme is, could not do it alone but, through a council helping them, are able to take on employees. I know that, for example, in Tower Hamlets there is no collocation with JCP and local programmes and also in Waltham Forest. These are called Youth Hubs and there is a lot of work going on to ensure that there is real integration.

There are some challenges, still. There is a lack of flexibility with that programme. Also, they are Minimum Wage jobs, not Living Wage jobs. My own borough is topping up 30 jobs to the Living Wage but, for some young people, it is just not possible to live in London on that.

More broadly through the recovery programme, one of the mission areas is a New Deal for Young People, which is focused on supporting young people. We talked earlier about the work to get a mentorship programme up and running. That is to support young people to thrive in different ways, whether it is their mental health or access to employment.

The final point I would say is that there is a lot of work that Jules could probably talk about through skills to ensure that we are giving young people opportunities for apprenticeships and young adults through the adult community learning pathways.

**Dr Alison Moore AM:** Thank you. You have talked a little bit about how you are adapting what you are doing. How are other boroughs doing that to avoid the impact you have talked about?

**Councillor Georgia Gould (LEAP Board Member and Chair of London Councils):** I have referenced some of the work that is happening. I know Lambeth, Lewisham and Southwark have joined forces to align their front doors for Kickstart. As I said, Waltham Forest and Tower Hamlets are already collocated. I know we are working across London around this idea of collocating JCP services and borough services. As I said, 19 boroughs across London have applied to be Kickstart organisations to bring the different businesses in their place together. That is really good. All boroughs are interested. It just takes a little bit of time to get through the national programme.

The other thing that many of us are doing to try to create a youth offer across our services is bringing together our further education, adult community learning, training providers and schools to ensure that there are really strong pathways. That is something that we are being supported to do through the GLA. It looks slightly different in different places, but that fundamental ask of supporting Kickstart and developing a youth offer is something that now most boroughs are leading on.

**Dr Alison Moore AM:** Sadly, I am old enough to remember the 1980s. The danger is that youth unemployment could exceed the levels we saw then.

Do you think the Government's Kickstart scheme will be sufficient to address the problem or do you think it could do more?

**Councillor Georgia Gould (LEAP Board Member and Chair of London Councils):** No, it is not sufficient. I talked about some of the challenges with it in terms of flexibility and pay. It is welcome but it does not give enough autonomy to local places and so it is not appropriate for all young people. We have some long-term frustrations with the apprenticeship levy. We could have some rapid flexibility around the apprenticeship levy



and any unspent funds in London devolved back to London to support young people who are furthest from the labour market. There is a real concern about some of those young people, who were already struggling into pathways to work and now even more so.

There is some specific funding that has come from youth safety work to support those young people who are at risk into work, but in order to really face this, it is going to require a comprehensive economic package because we have to keep businesses alive in order to provide the jobs as well as give support to young people. There is a lot more we want to do, but we are working as hard as we can to make what we do have work as hard as it can.

**Dr Alison Moore AM:** Thank you very much. That is really helpful. I will leave it there, Chair.

**Navin Shah AM (Chair):** The next question is from Assembly Member Jennette Arnold.

**Jennette Arnold OBE AM:** Thank you, Chair. Can I start by thanking you all for the job that you are doing at this, our most difficult time for our city and for the rest of the world? Sometimes we forget about the global scale of the crisis that we are in.

My questions were concerned with the links between economic inequality and racial inequality. It was good to hear from Dr Bowes that the Board will be focusing on a paper at its next Board meeting - you can say if I have not heard this correctly - on the impact on black businesses.

Can I ask Dr Bowes to confirm that that is the case and to ensure that Members are sent copies of the paper, which I think he said will be presented by Deputy Mayor Debbie Weekes-Bernard, and the minutes of that discussion?

**Dr Nick Bowes (Mayoral Director for Policy):** Yes. Thank you for that question. The presentation is not specifically about the impact on businesses. It is about how we ensure that all of the missions that the Recovery Board has identified are taking into consideration and addressing the challenges of tackling inequality in London but with a specific focus on black Londoners.

Yes, we can certainly ensure that we circulate it. All of the papers and the minutes are published on the website as well, in case any colleagues want to look at any previous meetings. It is also livestreamed if anybody wishes to listen to that particular discussion. We will make sure that we send that directly to the Assembly Member.

**Jennette Arnold OBE AM:** Thank you. My other quick question is for Deputy Mayor Agrawal. You talked about the impact on women during this challenging time, but I would like to drill down because there are particular groups of women that are disproportionately impacted. Sometimes we miss this when we talk about, "We are going to do this for this community".

When you talked about the high streets and that whole area of what I would call the beauty and nail salon sector, it is women from the south Asian communities of London, who -- it is so sad because these are the very communities that built up some of the most grotty and awful of our city spaces and they now are being impacted on the most.

Do you acknowledge that there is this huge impact on them? What are you doing specifically?

It is not, for me, about the numbers. It is about who is working with them and who is in there being with them at this time. I recently was at an online meeting with the Mayor of Hackney, Phil Glanville. It was heart-breaking what we heard from this hardworking, committed community.

**Rajesh Agrawal (Deputy Mayor for Business):** Thank you very much for that question. You are absolutely right. I fully acknowledge that the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic has been huge. The communities that are really the backbone of London have been badly hit and disproportionately so. If you are a black man, you are twice as likely to die from the virus. Equally, from a business point of view, it has been devastating for so many businesses. As an entrepreneur from one of those communities, it is heart-breaking to see how businesses are suffering in their own financial nightmare. It takes blood, sweat and tears to build a business. To see those businesses in such challenging circumstances and in many cases closing down is very tough.

Whatever we have done in City Hall in the last four years, we have made sure that equality, both racial and across communities, is enshrined in everything we do. All our programmes are designed and we measure the reach in various communities. There are programmes we are running and in particular there are two programmes I want to draw your attention to.

One is the Pay It Forward London scheme, designed particularly for small businesses. Again, a very large number of small businesses, particularly from BAME backgrounds, have been able to take advantage of that. You just mentioned Hackney. I am glad that the Hackney Theatre is one of the businesses that benefited from that scheme. The second is the Bounce Back scheme for businesses, where the Mayor match-funds the amount given by Pay It Forward between £1,000 and £5,000. Both of them have had a wide reach within the BAME community, which is incredibly important.

I want to also take this opportunity to pay tribute to the community of entrepreneurs and small business owners, who are really having a tough time right now. Despite all these challenges that they are facing, they are still keeping their spirits high and are trying to help other Londoners.

**Jennette Arnold OBE AM:** Thank you for that. You did not answer my question, which was specifically about the south Asian community. What I will do is ask Georgia to reflect on that and then I will perhaps write a letter. It is no good us talking about "BAME communities". We must absolutely start to drill down and talk about specific communities. "BAME" has no meaning in terms of us understanding where the support is going. If it is going to a borough, then the borough should be able to understand through its population needs where the communities are and what the business sectors are. If you cannot do that, then refer it to those people who can. I would hope that Georgia has this on her agenda given her overview and that she can come back with a written answer to that.

I will just finish and say hi, Jules, and we will be meeting later on to look at the work that you are doing with the adult education budget (AEB). I have been tracking that and thank you for all you are doing. Thank you.

**Navin Shah AM (Chair):** All right. My apology to Assembly Member Joanne McCartney. I nearly missed you out, sorry, but here is your opportunity. Please, go ahead with your question. Thank you.

**Joanne McCartney AM:** Thank you very much, Chair. My question is to Georgia Gould, if I can. As poverty levels increase, unemployment is rising. I want to know a little bit about what you are working on to ensure that those Londoners who are falling on economic hardship are being supported.

I particularly want to highlight the issue of food insecurity. We know that four in 10 of our children are in poverty and the campaign led by Marcus Rashford [English footballer] around free school meals has highlighted that many of our children go hungry. That is shameful. I would like to know what more needs to be done to ensure that we have the framework to make sure that, for example, our foodbanks do not run out of food, as they nearly did in the first wave of the pandemic. The Mayor and London Councils had to step in to support them.

Also, I understand that councils are still spending thousands of pounds every week to feed their most vulnerable. I want to know what you are doing and what the Government needs to do to make sure that those most vulnerable are supported.

**Councillor Georgia Gould (LEAP Board Member and Chair of London Councils):** Thank you for that. Again, it is such an important question. We are facing enormous need in our communities in terms of food poverty. It is growing. We have seen a doubling in the number of people claiming Universal Credit. The need in terms of family and children and also more broadly people who are unemployed and older people who are alone is enormous. Everywhere in London is reporting increases in foodbank usage and in that need.

If we had enough support, the answer unfortunately is no. Even in the next month, the support we have been given to feed the shielding clinically vulnerable is £14 a month. That is 50 pence a day. It is not enough. People are coming to us. All boroughs are operating phonelines that people can call to report need. Many of us are working with the voluntary sector, foodbanks and so on. We are seeing large numbers coming forward. It is now the responsibility of local government to support and we have stepped up to do that, but without the funding to back that up, which is really disappointing. We did not see the funding to support children over half-term and so, again, many councils cross-party and cross-London stepped in to support children over half-term. The investment is significant. Given the austerity we face, it is going to be difficult to continue that.

We are absolutely working on this together in terms of a food poverty strategy in the run-up to Christmas. Of course, we will continue to lobby and, if there is Government funding for free school meals over Christmas, that would be incredibly welcome in supporting families. If there is not, we will try to bring together the resources of London to support that. There are active conversations. There was a meeting yesterday between a number of borough chief executives on exactly this and we are connecting with City Hall. We will probably be in a position to talk more publicly about that soon.

**Joanne McCartney AM:** Thank you very much. My second question is to Deputy Mayor Agrawal. We saw during the half-term, when many of us - me, the Mayor, other Assembly Members - were urging the Government to provide free school meals and it refused to. The business community really stepped up, despite the financial difficulties they were in, and many of my local businesses gave out free meals for school children during that time.

We hope, as Georgia says, that the Government does step in but, if it does not, do you think the business community will stand ready to support our most vulnerable families over that Christmas period?

**Rajesh Agrawal (Deputy Mayor for Business):** The business community itself is facing such a difficult time, but this just shows the spirit and goodwill that exists in our communities when, despite all these challenges, the business community is ready to stand and to support that, especially at a time when the Government is not coming forward although we are the fifth richest country in the world. I just never imagined we would be in this situation.

**Joanne McCartney AM:** Thank you very much. Let us hope the Government listens this time.

**Navin Shah AM (Chair):** All right. At this juncture, can I request Deputy Chairman Assembly Member Arbour to take control of the chair so that I can ask my question, please? Thank you.

**Navin Shah AM:** OK. My question is regarding support for Londoners returning to work. I want to raise this very briefly with Dr Bowes as well as with Deputy Mayor Rajesh Agrawal in their dual capacities. What specific support can be given to Londoners who are returning to the workplace after a period away from work? Dr Bowes, first, please.

**Dr Nick Bowes (Mayoral Director for Policy):** Thank you for that question. If I may, Chair, I am not sure I am the best person to answer it. Perhaps Deputy Mayor Pipe might be better placed.

**Jules Pipe CBE (Deputy Mayor for Planning, Regeneration and Skills):** Thank you, Chair. There are two parts to this, essentially. There are those who are fortunate enough to be returning to existing jobs and those who are returning perhaps to a new workplace or are hoping to. Clearly, it is very important that employers support their staff when they do return to the workplace, as many have done while their staff have been working from home or furloughed. It is, clearly, a very difficult time for Londoners and many will be experiencing mental health challenges.

Thrive London provides a whole range of resources and support for Londoners and employers. One of the things that the Mayor did to highlight that support was on World Mental Health Day back in October, supporting those initiatives, reflecting on the heavy toll that the pandemic is having on mental health and raising the importance of seeking help when we need it. Throughout the pandemic, we have championed the importance of looking after our mental health and wellbeing and that applies to employees and workplace settings. The Mayor's Good Work Standard also continues to champion best practice in the workplace. It is about wellbeing as well as fair pay, diversity and developing staff and bringing them on. The Mayor is very strongly encouraging all employers to engage with that with the Mayor's Healthy Workplace Award.

As well as the mental health aspect, there is support in terms of training and skills and the changes that we have made to skills and training support there. Whether you are unemployed and trying to get back into work or whether you are returning to work, there is access to support and funded skills programmes through the AEB. The Mayor has specifically made changes to funding up to level 3 to fully fund those for those who are on low wages or no wages up to the level of the London Living Wage. Those are about A-level equivalent courses. That is supporting people to pivot or maybe change what they are doing in the workplace. If their job is adapting as a result of COVID, there are those opportunities.

A crucial change that the Mayor has made to skills funding is to allow AEB providers to use up to 10% of their budgets to provide employability support specifically. That is something we have been wanting to do for a while and this is the perfect opportunity that it has collided with introducing it. That is allowing flexibility to provide those employability courses that have sometimes been forbidden by the old national rules. That is an example of where devolution has really helped us and helped the Mayor be more nimble about supporting people with very practical and tactical support initiatives in terms of skills and training.

Also, there is what I mentioned before but I do not want to take your time reiterating: all the support we have given AEB providers to move their support and training and skills provision online and also the provision in some cases of devices to enable the digitally excluded to take advantage of that skills provision.

**Navin Shah AM:** Thank you very much. I am limited with time and so, if you can just carry on, Deputy Mayor Pipe, I am also concerned that there are barriers. You already mentioned mental health and, to a degree, disabilities. I am concerned that if we do not get the right childcare support in place across London, a number of women will be kept out of the workforce. How do you think that can also be managed?

**Jules Pipe CBE (Deputy Mayor for Planning, Regeneration and Skills):** This has been a perennial problem. It is in common with many other systemic issues that London has continued to face for decades about the underfunding of certain areas such as childcare. This is a national issue but it is acute in London because of childcare costs.

I am probably not the best person that you have on this panel to speak on this. They are probably sitting amongst your number, actually.

**Navin Shah AM (Chair):** Thank you very much. Can I move on to a question from Assembly Member Andrew Dismore, please? Thank you.

**Andrew Dismore AM:** Thank you, Chair. This will be to Georgia. London is home to some of the most innovative tech companies in the world, but our city is also home to many people who lack either the digital skills or the financial means to get online. The digital divide has been highlighted throughout the pandemic and has exacerbated existing inequalities with 4% of Londoners over the age of 15 offline and 11% lacking basic digital skills, which gives additional challenges, for example, in accessing healthcare or job opportunities.

How will the Recovery Board tackle digital exclusion, which prevents some Londoners from being able to participate fully in a more digital workplace?

**Councillor Georgia Gould (LEAP Board Member and Chair of London Councils):** Thank you for that question. This is an inequality that was exposed really deeply during the pandemic. We saw the lack of access, particularly starting with schools. There were stark numbers from every borough of children who did not have access to devices. That was one of the reasons that we chose to ensure that that was one of our key missions for the recovery. Our mission is for every Londoner to have access to good connectivity, basic digital skills and the devices they need to be online by 2025. That is really ambitious because the digital divide is enormous.

At the moment, we are doing some deep analysis to understand where the need is greatest. We will need to put together a package of support targeting the most vulnerable. That includes school children, learners and those who are shielding. At the same time, we are looking at how we can increase access to wi-fi outside of people's homes, whether that is in libraries or in other community centres.

I do absolutely agree that our tech sector businesses will be a key part of the solution. What we want to do is, when we have that picture of need, to go to those sectors and to work with them to deliver the solutions.

At the same time, there has been work ongoing to deal with some of the most urgent issues. Jules Pipe talked about the money that has been made available for digital skills from the AEB and also devices for learners. We will be working as local authorities to get devices to children who need them and to work with City Hall to procure those at an affordable rate for local authorities. It is a mix of urgent action and a wider mission to really take on this challenge across London.

**Navin Shah AM (Chair):** I am sorry. Under Standing Orders, we now have come to an end. The Labour Group is out of time. That brings an end to the question-and-answer session. May I thank our guests for answering the questions today?