

# MAYOR OF LONDON

**Zack Polanski AM**

Chair of the London Assembly Environment Committee  
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**Date:** 17 October 2024

Dear Zack,

Thank you to the London Assembly Environment Committee for writing to me after its session on Food Security and Sustainability. I am sorry for the delay in responding.


I am grateful to the Committee for investigating this issue, and I welcome its recommendations. My responses to these can be found in the annex to this letter.

I understand the vital importance of household food security and broader food system resilience for Londoners, which are even more important in light of events such as the COVID-19 pandemic, the war in Ukraine and the cost-of-living crisis. That is why I pioneered work to measure household food insecurity in London, introduced a ban on unhealthy food advertising on the Transport for London network, and is one of the reasons why I put at the heart of my election manifesto my pledge that I will work to make my Universal Free School Meals (UFSM) programme permanent for all state primary school children in London.

In addition to those initiatives, my investment in emergency food provision during school holidays and at weekends and my partnership with the Felix Project have increased the number of meals distributed to low-income families via community partners whilst also helping to improve existing food infrastructure. My Food Roots programme supports local food partnerships to embed more sustainable and resilient approaches to tackling food insecurity in their communities, including by embedding cash-first approaches.

Thank you again for investigating this issue.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Sadiq Khan', with a small '2' written below the name.

**Sadiq Khan**

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## Annex

### **Mayor of London's response to the recommendations of the London Assembly Environment Committee's investigation into food security and sustainability**

#### **Recommendation 1**

**The Mayor should publish an action plan by September 2024 at the latest, setting out how the GLA will take steps to improve the resilience of London's food system, including addressing the recommendations of the 2022 Oxford University report.**

The Mayor welcomes this recommendation in what is a complex area and is already investing in a range of programmes to create a more resilient London food system, particularly to ensure that vulnerable Londoners have enough food to feed themselves and their families.

In terms of the next steps, it is important to note that the Mayor does not have powers to improve the resilience of the whole of London's food system. That system, or set of systems, is highly complex, wide-ranging, and delicate, full of myriad interdependencies, with much of it outside the Mayor's ability to influence.

Officers will evaluate what evidence about the wider food system is available, including the 2022 Oxford report on London's food systems resilience, that may be useful in informing GLA work in this area.

Officers will develop thinking on areas that the Mayor could prioritise to increase London's and Londoners' resilience to food shocks. This is different from increasing the resilience of the whole food system but has the potential to be more impactful and achievable within the Mayor's powers.

This work will be developed in partnership with the London Resilience Group, GLA policy teams, including the resilience team, the London Food Board and its Boroughs Food Group, and other partners to help build upon work already undertaken in this increasingly important policy area.

#### **Recommendation 2**

**The Mayor should allocate an increase in its funding to the Capital Growth programme to:**

- **Allow it to employ 2 full-time staff, instead of 2 part-time, as currently;**
- **Develop an accurate, in-depth database of food growing projects and allotments in London and opportunities to expand these; and**
- **Support an increase in food growing through Capital Growth projects.**

The Mayor recognises the health, environmental and wellbeing benefits to be gained for Londoners and their communities of growing food together. Since 2021, Capital Growth has received funding of £35,000 from the Mayor's Healthy Place, Healthy Weight mission.

The funding is a contribution towards the delivery of the Capital Growth programme, including some support to schools and community-based food growers in School Superzones. School Superzones are the Healthy Place, Healthy Weight mission's flagship programme, where grants are

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provided to local authorities to work directly with schools to address locally identified challenges. A number of Superzones have chosen to focus on exploring opportunities for food-growing spaces and community gardens.

Future support for the Capital Growth work will be considered alongside other work to support child health and child healthy weight, as well as in discussions with other GLA teams, some of which have recently become involved with some elements of Capital Growth work, such as the example referred to in response to Recommendation 3, below.

## **Recommendation 3**

**In developing the Local Nature Recovery Strategy, the GLA should ensure that opportunities to strengthen and expand food growing, including in allotments and community gardens, are mapped and widely discussed. This would help strengthen the evidence base for food growing to feature more strongly in any updated London Environment Strategy and London Plan.**

The London Local Nature Recovery Strategy (LNRS) is being prepared collaboratively with London Boroughs, the City of London and Natural England and will consider their priorities. As part of this process, the Mayor's environment team is also working closely with many stakeholders across London, including Sustain and their Capital Growth programme and network. That work includes partnering on Sustain's nature-focused project, [Growing for Nature](#), which is helping the environment team to understand the scale of nature-related action and engagement taking place across London's food growing network and its potential for opportunities to recover nature strategically.

Whilst production of London's LNRS is not primarily driven by food-growing interests, this is an important part of the picture in our city, and the aim of the Growing for Change work is to map food-growing spaces that can contribute to the broader recovery network.

This is closely aligned with the environment team's work to review and update the All-London Green Grid (ALGG) and the Green Infrastructure Focus Map, which aim to create a comprehensive new spatial framework for green infrastructure across London. Depending on the availability and consistency of data, allotments and community food-growing sites will be considered for inclusion.

## **Recommendation 4**

**The Mayor should increase the number of staff on the GLA Food Team to support the London Food Board, Sustain and delivery of the London Food Strategy and its Implementation Plan.**

The Mayor agrees with the Environment Committee about the importance of the GLA's work on food, its need to be well co-ordinated across the organisation, and the imperative to work closely with and learn from external partners.

The GLA's City Intelligence Unit now oversees all food-related work across the organisation. It hosts the food policy manager position, which exists to coordinate the extensive work on food-related areas in many policy and delivery teams across the GLA to help increase its overall impact. This includes working with the GLA Secretariat, which supports the Chair of the Food Board, and with a wide range of external stakeholders, including the Borough Food Group.

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The return of this cross-cutting food policy function has been welcomed from all quarters. Decisions on future staffing levels and other resource allocations will be considered as part of the annual budgeting process in response to demands across the whole city and in line with priorities identified in the new mayoral term.

## Recommendation 5

**The Mayor should explore how the Universal Free School Meals programme can connect schools with food growing projects in London as well as the role the programme can play in leveraging procurement strategies which benefit locally-produced and sustainable food.**

For the first time in London's history, all primary-aged pupils in state-funded schools are entitled to a free school meal every day. The Mayor of London introduced this to support families through the cost-of-living crisis and has committed to making the provision permanent for the rest of his administration.

In delivering the UFSM scheme, City Hall does not have direct relationships with caterers, and the content of school meal contracts is decided locally. However, the grant principles for the Mayor's UFSM programme do ask boroughs and schools to comply with national School Food Standards. This requires fruit and vegetables to be provided each day and encourages schools to consider a meat-free day each week. UFSM officers are also working with organisations such as ProVeg UK, Veg Power, Sustain, and the Food Foundation to promote their guidance around sustainable procurement via our webinar series and online hubs to help schools source food responsibly.

Schools that are not participating in Healthy Schools London (HSL) are encouraged to register. HSL is a comprehensive approach to supporting pupil health and wellbeing, and some aspects of the programme specifically support sustainability. Similarly, schools are encouraged to become water-only. Resources and a toolkit to support schools are available through the HSL website. The grant principles for the Mayor's scheme ask that schools and boroughs meet sustainable catering guidelines and support environmental aims in their delivery of the scheme, including where these relate to monitoring packaging and food waste.

The Mayor also continues to champion other opportunities; for example, the School Superzones programme provided grants to local authorities to work directly with schools to address locally identified challenges. A number of Superzones have chosen to focus on exploring opportunities for food-growing spaces and community gardens. As part of this work, a budget was made available in 2023/24 to support the Capital Growth programme – London's largest food growing network – to develop support for schools and community-based food growers within Superzone areas.