

MAYOR OF LONDON

Bassam Mahfouz AM

Chair of the London Assembly Economy, Culture
and Skills Committee
C/o James.Cotter@london.gov.uk

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Dear Bassam,

Thank you to your predecessor, Hina Bokhari OBE AM, for sending me the Economy, Culture and Skills Committee's report, *A London for every child: Reversing the city's declining child population*, following its investigation into the declining number of children in London.

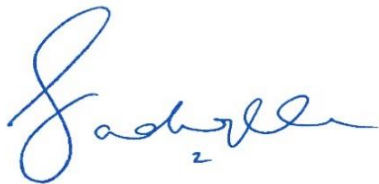
First, I would like to thank the Committee for this important work looking at the current and projected trends in London's child population, including the causes and impact of changes on the city's services, particularly its schools.

Since becoming Mayor, I have been determined to make London the greatest city in the world to grow up in, where every young person has the support needed to fulfil their full potential and to overcome the barriers that hold them back. I am working to deliver the opportunities young people need to build the skills to benefit from London's success, live healthier lives, and stay safe from violence and criminal exploitation. Across the Greater London Authority (GLA) Group, I am delivering world-leading interventions, including funding free school meals for all state primary children; and the groundbreaking work of London's Violence Reduction Unit (VRU) has seen London's per capita homicide rate fall to the lowest levels on record.

Alongside this, I am also working to ensure the capital remains a place where Londoners choose to raise their families. I am working with the Government to build record numbers of social and affordable homes; have frozen bus and tram fares; and my investment in benefits advice has raised the incomes of the lowest paid Londoners by nearly £100m. From my ongoing support for the London Living Wage to supporting more Londoners into good employment, we are delivering a fairer city for all.

My response to the recommendations is set out in the appendix below.

Yours sincerely,



Sir Sadiq Khan
Mayor of London

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Annex

Mayor of London's response to the recommendations of the London Assembly Economy, Culture and Skills Committee's report A London for every child: Reversing the city's declining child population

Recommendation 1

The Mayor should make data and expertise available to London's local authorities, nearby education authorities, the Department for Education, and London Councils to support evidence-based decisions in school place planning. The Mayor should commit to making this information and expertise available in a usable form for relevant bodies in time for the 2026-27 academic year.

The Mayor, via his City Intelligence Unit, publishes a range of resources to support school place planning in London and surrounding regions on the London Datastore. These include population projections, subregional pupil projections, and 'nowcast' birth estimates. Some examples are listed below:

<https://data.london.gov.uk/dataset/trend-based-population-projections-vqzo7/>
<https://apps.london.gov.uk/population-projections/>
<https://data.london.gov.uk/dataset/sub-regional-pupil-projections-e66jz>
<https://data.london.gov.uk/dataset/modelled-estimates-of-recent-births-2w43n>
<https://data.london.gov.uk/dataset/gla-population-projection-service-e16z6>

More comprehensive support is provided to London local authorities through the [GLA's School Roll Projection Service](#). A majority of boroughs subscribe to this service and use the projections to help inform planning decisions and their annual submissions to the Department for Education's School Capacity Survey.

Recommendation 2

The Mayor should make relevant data and expertise available to London's local authorities to support evidence-based decisions on the optimal use of vacant school premises. This includes the GLA's demographic forecasts, pupil number projections, and good practices from local authorities that have successfully repurposed school premises. The Mayor should commit to making this data and expertise available in a suitable format and at a time useful for the authorities considering how to reuse a school building prior to the 2026-27 academic year.

The Mayor publishes a range of resources to support school place planning in London as outlined in his response to recommendation 1.

The management of school closures takes place at a local level, and the Mayor has no statutory duty over education. However, the Mayor is concerned about the situation facing many local councils, communities, children and families across the capital and remains committed to working with partners to support London schools.

The Mayor's London Plan 2021 encourages the retention of education facilities as well as applying flexibility if it can be demonstrated that there is no ongoing or future need for the school. Local authorities have the opportunity to repurpose vacant school premises for a range of uses that fall within the same Use Class F1, including museums, libraries, public halls, and places of worship, without needing to apply for planning permission. This flexibility enables local authorities to adapt to the changing requirements of the local community over time.

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If a vacant school is to be repurposed for an alternative use, outside of Class F1, then this would normally require planning permission and would be decided at the borough level, with information available to the public.

London local authorities are best placed to provide specific expertise to support decisions on the optimal use of vacant school premises plan and can do this alongside the GLA's City Intelligence Unit data publications.

Recommendation 3

The Mayor should designate a London Children's Ambassador within the GLA who will improve coordination across policy areas to make London a child-friendly city. The London Children's Ambassador should ensure that child-friendliness is considered across all areas of GLA policy, including by providing input to the Mayor's statutory strategies, mayoral mandates, and delivery plans. The London Children's Ambassador should be designated through a transparent process and be in place by the end of 2026.

The Mayor has already established strong leadership and coordination for children and young people's issues across London through the appointment of Joanne McCartney as Deputy Mayor for Children and Families. In this role, Joanne champions the needs and priorities of children, young people and families across London, with a particular focus on reducing inequalities, improving child health outcomes, supporting boroughs and ensuring every child has the best start in life.

The Deputy Mayor works across policy portfolios and with partners to ensure that the needs of children and young people are reflected in policies and programme delivery. This includes leading and supporting Mayoral initiatives such as the universal free school meals programme, Healthy Schools and Healthy Early Years award schemes, investment in mental health support in secondary schools and the New Deal for Young People.

The Mayor's wider policy work already embeds child friendly principles across a broad range of statutory strategies and mandates. The Health Inequalities Strategy sets out how the Mayor will build a healthier and fairer city where every child can grow up healthy, safe, and supported. Across the GLA Group, significant investment is being made in initiatives that support children and young people to thrive, including the work of the VRU, free holiday activities, free and discounted travel on Transport for London (TfL) services, and £2.2m of investment in 2026 for advice and support for low-income families with children. The GO! London partnership also uses sport and physical activity to improve outcomes for children and young people most in need of support.

The Mayor wants children and young people from all backgrounds to have a say in shaping the city they live in and is committed to ensuring that their voices are at the centre of decision-making at City Hall through the continued work of the London Partnership Youth Board, Peer Outreach Workers and Lynk Up Crew.

The Mayor's commitment to child-friendly London policy is also reflected in the London Plan. The 2021 London Plan incorporates child-friendly principles within its Good Growth objectives and key planning policies, recognising children and young people as a core group whose needs must be planned for. This includes policies on inclusive communities, play and informal recreation, healthy streets, green infrastructure, and inclusive urban design, all of which support safe movement, access to nature and play, and healthy environments for children and young people.

This work continues to evolve. In 2025, the Deputy Mayor convened senior stakeholders from across sectors to consider how the next London Plan could further support child friendly

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neighbourhoods, including opportunities for play, physical activity, access to nature and designing communities with children and young people in mind. These principles will continue to inform the development of the new draft London Plan, which will be consulted on this summer.

Taken together, these policies demonstrate that children and young people's needs are already embedded across the Mayor's strategic leadership, policy development and programme delivery through existing governance and structures.

Recommendation 4

London should seek to become a UNICEF Child Friendly City. The Mayor should identify the steps required for London to achieve this recognition and pursue actions that enable him to do so. This will involve working closely with London's 33 local authorities and building partnerships with key stakeholders in civil society, the private sector, academia, media, and children's organisations. The Mayor should commit by June 2026 to pursuing this recognition for London.

The Mayor strongly supports a children's rights approach to supporting young people. In 2024, the Mayor invested £1.4m in UNICEF UK's Rights Respecting Schools Award through London's Inclusion Charter, making it free for all state-funded education settings in London until 2028. The Award supports schools to develop policy and practice utilising the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, enabling students to become active citizens in school and beyond. Since the Mayor's funding, over 700 schools in London are now taking part, with participation in every London borough and 10 local authorities leading the way with strategic approaches to children's rights in schools.

The Mayor wants London to be the greatest city in the world for children and young people to grow up in and strongly welcomes and supports the aims of the Child Friendly Cities Initiative, whilst noting that it is best implemented by local authorities, which lead on delivering services for children. The Mayor's work aligns with the Child Friendly Cities and Communities approach in areas such as participation and improving access to a healthy environment. The Peer Outreach Workers, Lynk Up Crew, London Partnership Youth Board, VRU's Young People's Action Group, Team London Young Ambassadors and London Youth Assembly amplify the youth voice and help co-design, co-develop and co-deliver on policies and programmes. The Mayor has implemented a range of policies, including the Ultra Low Emission Zone, TfL junk food advertising restrictions, School Streets and School Superzones, which have improved the environment young people grow up in.

The Mayor works closely with a wide range of partners, including supporting the Government's Opportunity Mission, which aims to break the link between a child's background and their future success by ensuring 75% of five-year-olds reach a good level of development by 2028. Through his Supporting and Inspiring Young London delivery plan, the Mayor will continue to work collaboratively with partners and the Government to address the disadvantages and lack of opportunities that young people can face.

Recommendation 5

The Mayor should include specific requirements for homes suitable for children across all types of tenure in the next London Plan. These requirements should be included in the draft London Plan, which is due to be published in 2026.

The 2021 London Plan addresses housing for all, including children, through a combination of design, space and accessibility standards that apply across all tenures. The key requirements are

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embedded in policy D6 (Housing quality and standards) and supported by the Housing Design Standards London Plan Guidance (LPG) adopted in 2023. These set out minimum internal space standards, requirements for private outdoor space, and expectations for dual-aspect design where feasible to ensure good daylight and ventilation. The Plan also links child-friendly housing to broader Good Growth principles of safe, inclusive neighbourhoods with access to play and recreation (Policy S4 Play and Informal Recreation), green infrastructure (Policies G1-G4), and Healthy Streets (Policy T2).

To meet London's housing needs in the future, it is essential that we continue to think about how we plan for children; however, homes that support their needs can be of varying types and sizes depending on individual families. The next London Plan will seek to address how London's places and homes – through their design – can consider all Londoners, including children. The Mayor will set out his proposed draft London Plan policies for consultation this summer.

Recommendation 6

The GLA should develop a map of all the spaces in London that children and young people can access for play and informal recreation. This would help boroughs identify where they have a deficit or surplus of provision and support cross-borough collaboration. An online interactive version of the map would also help families with children identify opportunities for play and informal recreation across London. The Mayor should start to consult with boroughs on the production of this map by June 2026, and it should be completed by March 2027.

Greenspace Information for Greater London (GiGL) provide a visual map of accessible open spaces in London at their Discover London online data portal [Spaces to Visit | DiscoverLondon Experience](#).

London-wide data identifying areas of deficiency in access to open space is also collated and managed by GiGL and available to boroughs that are GiGL partners. Some boroughs also hold and manage their own 'areas of deficiency' (AoD) mapping. This mapping commonly informs borough-level open space or green infrastructure strategies, and Local Plan policy development.

At a strategic level, access to green space is embedded within the Mayor's newly published [London Green Infrastructure Framework](#). This incorporates data on access to green space (including the AoDs mentioned above, as well as access to private garden space) and social indicators (including % of population under five). It also incorporates the Spaces to Visit dataset mentioned above, enabling analysis of local circumstances within this strategic framework. The Framework was launched on 2 March, and a well-attended webinar was held on 23 March.

Alongside mapping formal play spaces, the GLA is also progressing work to support children and young people's access to the wider ecosystem of youth provision – including funded holiday activities that provide safe, positive opportunities during school holidays, wider access to sports such as basketball and other community-based "third spaces" – where children and young people connect, play, and access informal recreation beyond traditional parks and playgrounds.

Recommendation 7

The Mayor should work with the proposed London Children's Ambassador and London's local authorities to develop a London Play Sufficiency Action Plan. This would involve conducting research on children's opportunities for play across the city and developing strategic priorities that would embed play sufficiency considerations in decision-making across London. The Mayor should commit to developing a Play Sufficiency Action Plan by June 2026 and research should begin by January 2027, with a view to finalising a publicly accessible Action Plan by September 2027.

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As mentioned in the response to recommendation 3 regarding the establishment of a London Children's Ambassador, the Mayor has already established strong leadership and coordination for children and young people's issues across London through the appointment of Joanne McCartney as Deputy Mayor for Children and Families.

The 2021 London Plan policies set strategic planning requirements across London, including embedding child-friendly design and equitable access to recreation, in all development decisions.

The importance of play space is captured primarily through policy S4 Play and Informal Recreation, which sets out a framework to ensure that all children and young people have access to safe, high-quality, and age-appropriate opportunities for play and recreation. Boroughs and developers are required to provide dedicated play space within new residential developments that is accessible, inclusive and within walking distance of homes. Play areas must be safe, stimulating and integrated into the wider public realm, with consideration for different age groups and abilities. The policy also links play space to policies G1-G4, promoting multifunctional green areas that support recreation, biodiversity, and wellbeing. In decision-making, planning applications must demonstrate how they contribute to play sufficiency, aligning with the Mayor's Healthy Streets and Good Growth objectives (GG1 and GG3). These are core priorities for future policies proposed in the new draft London Plan, which will be consulted on this summer.

Alongside this, the GLA is also progressing work to strengthen access to wider youth provision and "third spaces", recognising that play and informal recreation extend beyond designated play areas.