

Mayor's Question Time – Thursday 19 March 2020

Transcript of Item 4 – Oral update to the Mayor's Report

Len Duvall AM (Chair): Can I ask the Mayor to provide an oral update of five minutes in length on issues around the virus? It might be a little bit longer than five minutes. Over to you, Mr Mayor.

Sadiq Khan (Mayor of London): Thank you, Chair. This is an extraordinary time for our city, our country and the entire world. We are in the midst of the biggest health, economic and social crisis since the Second World War. We have so far had 104 people losing their lives across the United Kingdom with 41 deaths in London as of yesterday. While only at the beginning of the process of dealing with coronavirus, it is already clear that we will be living with the fallout for many years to come.

I hope that Assembly Members will understand that the full resources of the Greater London Authority (GLA) and mayoral bodies are currently being used to crisis-manage the impact of coronavirus on our city and that the situation is incredibly fast moving. I therefore apologise if I am not able to answer your questions in as much detail as I would usually do, particularly if they are not related to coronavirus.

Make no mistake: this is a crisis. I make no apologies for focusing the full resources at my disposal on tackling it.

I also suggest, Chair, that the London Assembly will want to give some urgent thought to how future meetings comply with the Government's scientific and medical advice in force at the time because this advice is designed to save lives. It is absolutely vital that all Londoners strictly follow the advice and that we set the best possible example to Londoners.

I want to start by providing updates to the Assembly on the latest advice for Londoners, what we are doing from City Hall and how we are helping to co-ordinate the response across London.

As I have said from the very beginning of the outbreak of COVID-19, it is essential that we act in accordance with the best medical and scientific advice. That is why I support the decision to introduce the new measures this week as part of our efforts to slow down the spread of the virus. This means that anyone who lives with someone who has a continuous cough, or a temperature should stay at home for 14 days.

Londoners should work from home if they can. This includes me. I will be working from home whenever possible to set the best possible example. Mass gatherings should not happen. Everyone should halt non-essential contact with others and stop all unnecessary travel. This means not going to pubs, clubs, restaurants or other social spaces. In particular, those who are over 70, those who are pregnant and those who have a significant health condition should limit contact with others. Those who are most at risk with the most serious underlying conditions should expect the National Health Service (NHS) to be in touch shortly to outline special measures to protect themselves, including being shielded from the wider population for a potential 12 weeks.

I would like to repeat, because this is so important, that all Londoners must follow the advice that applies to them. You can find the latest advice on the NHS website. Please do not phone 111 unless your situation is deteriorating.

The Government has now also ordered schools to close for the majority of pupils at the end of the day tomorrow, but the most vulnerable children and those of key workers will be able to continue attending. The scientific and medical experts say that this unprecedented step is now necessary to slow down the spread of coronavirus. Many parents will understandably be concerned about what this means for their children's education and the difficulty of juggling childcare and jobs, but this is not a decision that has been taken lightly and I support it. However, it is crucial that the Government now sets out how it will support parents, pupils, teachers and staff during these difficult times, and we will wait to see more details.

We are, clearly, still in the early phase of this crisis, but the spread of the virus is at a more advanced stage in London than in other parts of the country. This means that further measures will need to be introduced at the point at which they will have the biggest effect. I can assure Londoners that this is under constant review by the experts. As Mayor, I remain in regular contact with the Government, the Chief Medical Officer, Public Health England (PHE), business leaders, local authority leaders, the third sector, trade unions and the Police, Fire and Transport Commissioners. I attended the Government's COBRA meeting earlier this week and I will be meeting the Prime Minister and senior officials after this meeting.

Public authorities are all working very closely together as we seek to deal with the crisis and our London-wide strategic co-ordination arrangements have been activated to address all aspects of this situation. First and foremost, this is about helping to protect the health of Londoners, particularly those most at risk, and giving the NHS and our incredible health workers the chance to save as many lives as possible.

It is also about dealing with the very serious economic and social consequences of coronavirus, which cannot be overstated. I have been clear from the outset that the Government's responsibility on the economic side of this crisis is to ensure that nobody permanently loses their job or their home and nobody is evicted or left homeless. There is no doubt this will require fundamental changes to our economy, and I welcome the first measures the Chancellor announced in the Budget last week and on Tuesday this week to support businesses and workers.

However, the Government will inevitably need to go much further and faster in the weeks and months ahead. In particular, there is a need to move quickly to ensure there is no lag between the Government announcing support and the support being deployed to help those it is designed to help. That is why I will continue to stand up for London by putting pressure on the Government to do whatever it takes to help Londoners as quickly as possible.

I remain particularly concerned about those Londoners in the lowest-paid jobs, those who are self-employed and those who are working in the gig economy, many of whom may feel they have no choice but to work even if they fall ill. Given the scale of the extraordinary challenge we face, we are changing the way we are working at City Hall, putting as much resource as we can behind this effort. We are already providing support, whether financial or advice, to businesses and employers. We are working with councils to see what more we can do to help support the vulnerable, those who require care and the homeless during this period. Just yesterday we announced that we will be investing £1 million into a new Emergency Support Fund to help community and voluntary organisations affected by the impact of coronavirus.

We have, understandably, been getting many questions about Transport for London (TfL) over recent days and so I will touch on this briefly now. TfL has enhanced the cleaning regime and the transport network is still running for those who need to make essential journeys. Key workers still need to be able to get around our city, something which is vital to helping our emergency services function, but there will now be reduced

services. This means the closure of the Waterloo & City line and the Night Tube on Friday. Up to 40 stations will also be closed from today. I want to be clear now that the frequency of services is likely to continue to reduce, potentially very significantly over the days and weeks ahead. We will do this in a way that makes sure essential workers can still get around and we will not reduce service levels such that the remaining trains and buses are crowded.

I cannot say this clearly enough. People should not be travelling by any means unless they absolutely must. The scientific advice on this is very clear. Londoners should be avoiding social interaction unless absolutely necessary. This includes avoiding using the transport network. I want to see more Londoners following the expert advice, which means it is critical that we see far fewer Londoners using our transport network than is currently be the case. This crisis will inevitably have a profound impact on TfL's finances, and we are talking to the Government about managing this already, but saving lives must come first.

I also want to let the Assembly know that I have asked the Transport Commissioner, Mike Brown MVO, who was due to leave TfL in May [2020], to stay on for a few months longer than planned in order to lead TfL's response and I am pleased that he has agreed.

Let me just finish with this. We are in the midst of an immensely challenging and anxious time for all Londoners. We are all, rightly, worried about our most vulnerable family members, friends and neighbours, but London has been through tough times before and throughout our city's history we have repeatedly demonstrated the power of coming together in common cause. Now is the time for us to do so again because we all have a part to play in preventing the spread of the virus and helping to save lives. I would urge all Londoners to pull together and to stay united as we seek to navigate our way through these difficult times.

Chair, thank you. I look forward to answering any questions.

Len Duvall AM (Chair): Thank you very much. I am going to go back to the order of Party groups asking questions from the Priority Order Paper, but I am going to assure people that even though we have limited time we are going to get through all their key points and everything else. We are going to start with Dr Onkar Sahota AM.

Dr Onkar Sahota AM: Thank you. Mr Mayor, thank you very much for your leadership in dealing with this crisis across London. I also want to thank the Deputy Mayor [for Fire and Resilience], Dr Twycross AM, for all the hard work she has done to make sure London is resilient and able to cope with this.

Dr Fiona Twycross AM (Deputy Chair, GLA Strategic Co-ordination Group - COVID-19): Thank you.

Dr Onkar Sahota AM: I also want to thank the frontline nurses and doctors, the public health staff, the cleaners and the porters in the hospitals, all those people in the gig economy and all the essential services. Some of them may be low-paid but they are not low-skilled, and we really value them, and I want to thank them also for the hard work they are doing.

I am going to focus on the NHS because that is where I specialise. I know that my colleagues will ask questions on other areas. I, of course, bring the perspective of being a GP who is on the front line. I know the strategic thinking is absolutely right, but how we get those decisions down to the ground is what is important. You can have the best strategy in the world. If we do not implement it correctly, then we will not be able to achieve it.

The first thing I want to ask is whether you are assured that the decision-making in London is co-ordinated and is getting down to the ground? The reason I ask, for example, is that as members of staff are getting sick in surgeries, they are facing problems keeping surgeries open. When they are going to the Clinical Commissioning Groups and saying, "We need to do X, Y and Z in our practice", they are being told, "We refer you back to the contract". We cannot keep going on being referred back to the contract. We need someone to be making decisions, allowing practices to respond to the crisis they are facing in delivering the services. Who is making those sorts of decisions?

Sadiq Khan (Mayor of London): Thank you for your comments about the bravery, the dedication and the professionalism of everyone on the front line. You are right to remind us that they are not just brilliant doctors and nurses, but they are cleaners and others who are essential workers in London.

There are a number of responses. We from City Hall have a Strategic Co-ordination Group (SCG). There are four chairs of that. John Barradell from the City of London Corporation, Dr Fiona Twycross, Eleanor Kelly from the London Borough of Southwark, and Deputy Assistant Commissioner (DAC) Laurence Taylor. Underneath the SCG are various subgroups, one of which is health. I will bring Fiona in to explain the structures, which are important, to give you the reassurance.

In relation to your really important question in relation to resources, the Prime Minister has said again and again that whatever resources are needed to save lives, they will be there. Whatever flexibilities are needed in relation to contractual arrangements, they are there. Nobody who is a lifesaver should worry about contracts that will be there. The Secretary of State for Health has also spoken with the Prime Minister and those who could be assisting with more ventilators, respirators and other issues to make sure they are there as well.

A concern expressed to me has been about the provision of protective equipment for frontline staff. This point has been made to the Government, which has said it will accelerate this. The concern clearly is that some people who already may have been treating patients without the right equipment could have been infected.

I am also concerned about the lack of testing for those essential workers who should be out there treating but could be self-isolating because a member of their family has symptoms and they may not have themselves the coronavirus. One of the things we want to do is to triage those tests that there are so that those who are on the frontline, particularly NHS workers, can be tested and, if they do not have the virus, can get back out there and help people with this condition.

I want Fiona to deal with the structures because they are quite important for the reassurance and to make sure there are proper checks and balances.

Dr Onkar Sahota AM: OK, thank you.

Dr Fiona Twycross AM (Deputy Chair, GLA Strategic Co-ordination Group - COVID-19): Absolutely. The London Resilience Forum (LRF) has statutory responsibility for preparing for and managing the strategic co-ordination around any major incident. We learned quite a lot from the Brexit no-deal planning in terms of how to deal with an issue or a crisis over a longer period of time.

We have set up, under the LRF, which I chair on behalf of the Mayor, a London COVID-19 SCG. This is responsible for determining the strategic aim, objectives and priorities of the response to an incident on behalf of London. There are also well-rehearsed routes into the Government through the Ministry for Housing, Communities and Local Government from the London Resilience forum and the SCG.

The SCG is the decision-making body for the response phase. It is about sharing information, but it is also about setting the direction and priorities as we go through and to give a broad overview and represent each agency's interests and statutory responsibilities, which vary slightly between the different agencies.

The SCG has a leadership role. It also has established a number of subgroups, bearing in mind that there are a lot of different strands of work that need to be carried out quite rapidly. We have a number of subgroups reporting into the SCG, which helps us decide the strategy and implementation of strategic objectives. If it is helpful, I can go through those subgroups briefly. It also ensures the co-ordination and delivery of consistent public and media messages.

In each incident, it will be decided who the lead agency is. In this case, it was a unanimous decision by the partnership that given it is a system-wide issue, albeit one that is triggered by a health crisis, the SCG should feed in direct through me to the Mayor because the Mayor has a role both as a category-1 responder and also as a clear spokesperson for London.

I will just mention briefly - and maybe others might like to come in on it a bit more - the structure. We have the Health Oversight Subgroup, which the Mayor has referred to, which has the NHS, PHE and the Association of Directors of Adult Social Services and so it covers social care as well. That co-ordinates the response from the healthcare system perspective, including the delayed transfer of care between the NHS and local authority social care, more commonly known as 'bed blocking', to ensure that that does not become an issue that clogs up the system.

We also have an Excess Deaths Subgroup, which is led by a local authority lead. This is going to oversee the preparations and ensure that any excess deaths as a result of the COVID-19 outbreak continue to be handled with dignity and respect and as close to normal procedures as possible.

Also, there was an announcement about fundraising and volunteering yesterday by the Mayor. We have a Community Volunteers and Fundraising Subgroup, which will provide co-ordination of the funding arrangements and volunteers at a community level to support those made vulnerable through self-isolation, and linking to structures here, as well as making sure the voluntary sector is co-ordinated.

Clear communication is key and so we have a Communications Subgroup, which is to provide consistent communication between partner agencies and ensure that London partners provide consistent messaging to the public from the LRF structures.

We have a Business Sector Subgroup, which is GLA-led, and an Information Cell, which is intended to provide a single source of information for the SCG on the current and potential future impacts on London.

Finally - and apologies for the long list of subgroups - we have a Scientific Technical Advice Cell, which is led by PHE and is intended to be a single point of trusted and credible scientific and technical advice to the London SCG and the Mayor to make sure that in the midst of a range of rumours out there, we make sure that we have credible intelligence about the situation in London, building on the national work undertaken by the Scientific Advisory Group for Emergencies (SAGE).

Dr Onkar Sahota AM: Thank you very much for that very full answer. It is very important that we communicate with Londoners and we also communicate with NHS frontline staff so that the doctors and nurses get information.

Mr Mayor, you raised, quite correctly, that the equipment for these clinical staff is very important and also testing, as you say. Of course, London is ahead of the curve and I hope that the Government is making more tests available in London at a sooner rate. Have you had reassurances on that also?

Sadiq Khan (Mayor of London): Yes. The Government has accelerated the number of tests available. There were 10,000. Within a month, that should go to 25,000 a day.

The key thing is to triage. We know, for example, that there are people who are self-isolating and who may not have COVID-19 and could be back out there. What I have said to the Government is that it is important that the essential services – police officers, firefighters, NHS staff, etc. – have the test done speedily. The Government is going to respond.

Dr Onkar Sahota AM: Deputy Mayor Twycross, are the Resilience Forums in the 32 boroughs well-co-ordinated and effectively bringing together the NHS, social care services and public health at a borough level?

Dr Fiona Twycross AM (Deputy Chair, GLA Strategic Co-ordination Group - COVID-19): They all have their own structures. The LRF is in very close contact with the borough Resilience Forums. The information and intelligence from those areas will feed in. The local authorities also have a local authority gold system, which is led by Eleanor Kelly [Chief Executive of London Borough of Southwark], who is one of the co-chairs of the SCG as well. That is to make sure that everything meets up from the central co-ordination to the local areas, where actually a lot of the response will be delivered.

Dr Onkar Sahota AM: Finally, Mr Mayor, I know that you will have the ears of the Secretary of State for Health. This is the busiest month of the year in the calendar of GPs. They have to do contractual arrangements for what are called Quality Outcomes Framework (QOF) payments. They have to bring people who are diabetics and who are asthmatics into the surgery to do certain tests. These are very vulnerable people. We do not want them coming to the surgery. At the same time we do not want practices destabilised because of loss of income.

GPs have been asking for a direction on this matter and there has not been a direction coming directly from London, but other parts of the country have said to their GPs that they do not need to do QOF work anymore. Can we please get some clear guidance so that practices do not get destabilised at the end of the year?

Sadiq Khan (Mayor of London): Absolutely. Fiona will chase that up.

Dr Fiona Twycross AM (Deputy Chair, GLA Strategic Co-ordination Group - COVID-19): Yes. I will follow that up today.

Dr Onkar Sahota AM: Great. Thank you, Mr Mayor.

Len Duvall AM (Chair): Assembly Member Whittle?

Peter Whittle AM: Good morning, Mr Mayor. Thank you very much for your statement. I am sure that we all support all your efforts in the coming months.

I am sure that you also would appreciate that many Londoners are trying to work their way through all the detail and the information they are getting and that one thing that might, if they are listening today, have

struck them is when you mentioned this period of 12 weeks when you were talking about what we should and maybe should not do.

Could you just explain a little about that and could you also explain what happens after 12 weeks? I know it is all notional but what does this actually mean, do you think, to people?

Sadiq Khan (Mayor of London): The categories of people that the experts are particularly worried about are those who are above the age of 70, pregnant women and also those who have underlying health conditions. The gov.uk website will give you a list of the underlying conditions they are worried about. The sorts of people are those who have weak immune systems, those who may be recovering from cancer, those who have had a transplant and those on dialysis. There is a list of people.

The concern with those with underlying conditions is that the virus will cause them huge problems. You will be aware that there is no vaccine or antiviral treatment. You will have heard the conversations about ventilators and respirators. The reason is because what is clear is those who suffer serious consequences need ventilators. That is one of the reasons why the containing and delay was to get us to spring and summer when there is spare capacity freed up in the NHS from winter.

To avoid anybody who has an underlying condition getting the virus, the advice is for three months and that is to do with the curve of how this illness, we think, will spread. You will have seen the upside-down U or the bell curve. The idea of shielding for 12 weeks is to get us over that curve until we are out the other side but also to get as near as we can to summer. That is why it is really important.

It is difficult. I know it is difficult. One of the reasons why - let us be frank - there was a keenness to avoid going too early was because, human behaviour as it is, the idea of sustaining a long period of shielding is very hard. One of the things we have done is to involve Thrive London to try to give particularly mental health advice to those who may be self-isolating and others. Imagine the stress young people are going through who are revising for their GCSE or A levels. It is really important that we have a holistic approach to those.

That is the thinking behind the 12-week shielding period. It is to shield them from getting the virus.

Peter Whittle AM: I see. Thank you. There is a completely unrelated point while I have my time I would like to ask. A lot of people will be extremely concerned and maybe fall into depression. I wonder whether there would be any form of advice they could get not just from the doctor but from here.

Sadiq Khan (Mayor of London): There are two things, actually, and it is worth us bearing this in mind. Our own fellow colleagues will need emotional support, including some of you, maybe. Mary Harpley, the [GLA's] Chief Officer, has made sure the employee assistance line you can ring up is available 24 hours a day. There is a human being you can ring up and speak to. Mary will be doing, as Chief Officer, twice weekly reports to staff. I have recorded a message for staff as well. We need to look after their wellbeing, physical as well as mental.

Separately, we are speaking to colleagues in the mental health space to provide assistance, not just Thrive London but, as Fiona referred to, there is a subgroup looking into whole area of health. We have unfortunately seen from other parts of the world examples where there have been increases in domestic abuse and domestic violence. As part of the Mayor's Advisors Group meeting I had yesterday on the telephone were those who work in violence against women and girls. They are really worried about what will happen in that area.

We are looking at all potential areas, but if you are concerned about an area please do not assume we have thought about it. Get in touch with my office. We will make sure we are looking into this area if we are not already. We are trying to think about all the potential unintended consequences. You are absolutely right to refer to depression and mental health issues.

Peter Whittle AM: Thank you, Mr Mayor.

Len Duvall AM (Chair): Assembly Member Bailey?

Shaun Bailey AM: Good morning, Mayor. Good morning, Dr Twycross. Thank you for your update, Mayor, at this time when we are facing unprecedented public pressure. It is very good to hear your update and understand the level of work that is going on in the GLA and also out in councils.

I just want to ask a little question about testing. There was talk about a 10-minute test that will let people know if they have already had the virus and have immunity to it. Is that test available and how many Londoners have been tested?

Sadiq Khan (Mayor of London): Do you mean somebody is not showing symptoms, but they may have already --

Shaun Bailey AM: Yes.

Sadiq Khan (Mayor of London): Yes. The Chief Scientific Adviser explained yesterday in the press conference with the Prime Minister that they are making progress on this and this will be really important in relation to learning about the virus. Also, we know from other viruses that if you catch it you are immune and so one of their schools of thought is that if some people can catch it early, it means they are immune to help and do other things. We do not yet know definitively if that is the case with COVID-19. What the Chief Scientific Adviser referred to yesterday was some work they are doing because - you are right - somebody could have had it and not exhibited symptoms. It would be good to know whether they did. The Deputy Chief Medical Officer also spoke yesterday with the Chief Scientific Adviser. They are optimistic and so watch this space.

Shaun Bailey AM: Just to move on to travel, some of the TfL stations - Tube stations I am talking about - on the network have been closed. Is there any particular rationale around which stations are closed?

Sadiq Khan (Mayor of London): Yes. One of the things we avoided was closing key interchanges and so the 40 stations chosen were those stations, including my own one, which are not key interchanges. That is taken on just looking at the map of London and working out where it is possible to make a closure. There are alternatives for essential workers still to use.

Let me be frank. There are too many people still using our Tubes, our buses, our Overground and our trams. Too many. There are, frankly, more people using public transport than there are essential workers and some. We are moving iteratively towards reducing the service, making sure we have a handle on where the essential workers are and where they are needed, trying to give people notice so that they can make alternative arrangements because, clearly, some people do need to get from home to work and from work to home. That is the rationale behind the 40.

You will also have seen that there is no Night Tube tomorrow night and no Night Overground going forward indefinitely. The Waterloo & City line is closed as well from tomorrow. We have to give people time because you are changing your travel patterns if you are an essential worker.

Shaun Bailey AM: One of the things around not closing the interchanges is that as you go further into outer London there are fewer interchanges, but a lot of key workers live quite far out. I would just like that to be borne in mind with what is happening.

There is a worry that going forward the police will need extra capacity. One of the suggestions has been made that retired officers or recently left officers could be brought back in. The Commissioner [of Police of the Metropolis] backed that that suggestion.

Has any work been done to see what those numbers would be like; how many we could get back and how quickly?

Sadiq Khan (Mayor of London): The Commissioner not just of the Police but of the [London] Fire Brigade (LFB) and others are looking at all sorts of issues in relation to capacity and resilience. I speak, normally, regularly with the Commissioner during the course of a day and, clearly, we are speaking more regularly during the course of this crisis.

I spoke to her yesterday on this specific issue about resilience and capacity. At the moment, we are in a good place, but the police are already exploring the issue of recently retired officers in relation to violent crime. You will be aware that often officers retire and there is an issue with pensions. We have not managed to persuade the Government to change the pension provisions in relation to the police, but already we are working on writing to recently retired officers to get them back to do the back-office functions. The Commissioner is exploring that.

Just to reassure you, also, recently retired firefighters, who are quite young as in they are not over 70, are Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) approved. Fiona mentioned the voluntary and community sector. One of the challenges is that a lot of volunteers are over 70 and so we are losing those. Are there people who are already DBS checked whom we can fast-track into community and voluntary groups?

We are thinking outside the box but, again, any ideas you have, do not assume they have been thought of. Please let us know. We are more than happy to explore them.

Shaun Bailey AM: OK. Thank you. The last one from me will be on the Congestion Charge and the Ultra Low Emission Zone (ULEZ). Is there any opportunity for them to be temporarily suspended? Some of our key workers will have far to come, particularly if they work at a hospital, and they could be provided with parking at one end. It would mean that they could sort of self-isolate so that we still have some capacity, particularly in our health scene, firefighters, etc.

Sadiq Khan (Mayor of London): All transport measures in London are being reviewed. We are speaking to the NHS about consequences of the changes we are making. There are currently no plans to cancel the Congestion Charge and the ULEZ.

I will make two points. One is that nobody should be travelling, whatever mode of transport you use, unless you are an essential worker. Secondly, we do not want to inadvertently make the quality of air worse in

London, which would exacerbate those suffering from COVID-19 and some other conditions. We are balancing those things.

Just to reassure you and colleagues, TfL is reviewing all our transport networks to see what we need to do going forward. Bear in mind this will be here for some months now and so do not be surprised if in the future there are further changes. I will make sure that colleagues know here because you clearly have channels to let people know, but we are reviewing all policies to make sure we are doing what is commensurate to deal with the crisis.

Shaun Bailey AM: Thank you, Mayor.

Len Duvall AM (Chair): Assembly Member Prince?

Keith Prince AM: Thank you, Chair. Mr Mayor, I would like to say a few words around rough sleepers. I know it is an area that you are very interested in. I work with probably the country's largest rough-sleeper group plus also some small ones locally. They have a lot of concerns. I know some of the questions have been answered and I will ask a few specific questions.

More importantly, Mr Mayor, do you think that you or your team could provide some kind of single point of contact (SPOC)? Even though I know that a lot of the responsibility lies with either the Government and/or the local authorities, they could come to you centrally for advice to be directed into the right direction.

Sadiq Khan (Mayor of London): Thank you for your question. They already are. There is a SPOC in City Hall and various charities and experts know how to reach us. Just to reassure you, I raised this issue particularly at COBRA with the Secretary of State and through the Prime Minister. You will have heard the announcement made this week to give additional help around rough sleeping and homelessness.

Just to remind colleagues, if we are saying that you should socially distance yourself, one of the concerns outreach workers have is that if they find a vulnerable person or a rough sleeper and they bring them back to a refuge, a hostel or a dormitory, they could inadvertently be making it worse for them. When you bear in mind that many rough sleepers have underlying health conditions that I referred to in answer to the question from Assembly Member Whittle, it is a real concern that they have.

One of the things I am calling upon is for the Government to look into using the hotels that are empty, the motels are empty and the empty spaces. Maybe we could use them to provide temporary shelter for those who are sleeping rough. You are right. This is a vulnerable group that needs additional help. When I see the Prime Minister today, I will be following this up. It has been raised at COBRA and Robert Jenrick [MP, Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government] is looking into what more assistance can be given.

Keith Prince AM: You say there is a single point of contact, but I know for certain that one of my smaller charities does not have that detail. They do not know. Would you publish that, please?

Sadiq Khan (Mayor of London): Sure.

Keith Prince AM: Perhaps you or one of your staff could email me the contact so that they can make contact? They have some real worries about how they are going to get through this because they are not funded privately. Something like 30% of their funding comes from fundraising and they raise about £20,000 from fundraising. Of course they cannot do that at the moment.

Sadiq Khan (Mayor of London): The Assembly Member has articulated a problem that many groups across our city are facing in relation to the impacts on donors and fundraising. Just think about an example we all know about, the [London] Marathon. That being delayed until September could affect the cash flows people are expecting.

One of the reasons why I chaired yesterday a Mayor's Advisory Group of voluntary and community sectors and I announced the £1 million fund - which will be doubled by the City Bridges Trust and is now £2 million and we are hoping for other people to donate - which is just the point you raised, Keith. We are worried about these charities that rely upon these regular bits of donations and fundraising that will stop for very good reasons. They need our support and so we will continue to support them.

Again, when I advertise and let you know the contact, we can make sure others can feed into that as well to get assistance. We have deliberately made it very easy for people to apply for this emergency money.

Keith Prince AM: Thank you for that. That is really helpful. Luckily, in Ilford, where we do a night shelter, thanks to funding from the Mayor, of course, we have now opened our Project Malachi and so we do not have people sleeping 28 in one room, but that is not the case across a lot of London. I know you have touched on it, but I really would appreciate your support in encouraging the Government to give the funding to the local authorities to get these people into individual accommodation. As you quite rightly say, 28 very vulnerable people all sleeping in the same room within a couple of metres of each other is not a great place to be.

Sadiq Khan (Mayor of London): I agree, Chair. I could not say it better myself and I will continue to do that.

Keith Prince AM: Thank you.

Len Duvall AM (Chair): Assembly Member Pidgeon?

Caroline Pidgeon MBE AM: I have two questions I would like to ask. One you have already touched on. For many people, home can be a place of danger rather than a place of safety. Considering many people are going to be spending so much more time at home for the foreseeable future and there has been this link found between self-isolation and increases in domestic abuse, I am wondering specifically what you are looking to do to provide additional support, particularly when these services are stretched at the best of times?

Sadiq Khan (Mayor of London): Thank you. One of the groups of children that will continue to have schooling is those children who have a social worker. Often they will have a social worker because there is domestic abuse and domestic violence at home. That is good news. What you do not want is a child spending more time in that sort of environment.

In relation to the particular issue that you raised, you will be aware that we from City Hall gave £59 million to this area in relation to violence against women and girls. We are quite clear. We are saying to everyone we fund, "You can relax the normal rules in relation to how the grant is supposed to be used to help you during this crisis". It is really important that those groups know that.

The other point is that in yesterday's meeting that I had, this was a concern raised that you have raised from those who are experts in this area, and so we are seeing what support they need in the short term to help them out. One of the issues, as you will be aware, is that often it is overcrowded rooms. Even when you leave that

sort of environment, you could be in a refuge or a shelter in one room with three or four kids, which has challenges. We are doing what we can to help them.

One of the things that the Government has said is that money will not be an issue and so the Government has announced several packages of measures for local authorities. Some of these groups can go to local authorities.

Separately, we are lobbying the Government to top up the money we have announced yesterday, which is currently £2 million, and we hope it will go higher to help groups like the ones you mentioned.

Caroline Pidgeon MBE AM: Thank you for that. That is reassuring. The other issue I wanted to raise with you is that even before coronavirus was around, when you look at the Crossrail project, they were already some really serious challenges, as we know, going forward. From what I have read from Mark Wild [Chief Executive, Crossrail], some systems can still be tested remotely, and they can be working on that.

Do you anticipate you are going to have to close down some of the Crossrail sites and some of the works that are going on as people self-isolate and keep a distance? Is this likely, to be honest, to have an impact on the opening next year?

Sadiq Khan (Mayor of London): Things are moving fast. On Monday when I met with the Chief Executive of Crossrail, things were still going according to plan. Things have changed from Monday to now and so the short answer is that I am not sure. I meet regularly either on the phone or virtually now with the Chief Executive and the Chair was on the line when I met with the Chief Executive. We will have to revisit this.

Clearly, there will be an impact in relation to this if I am saying only essential workers should go to work and if I am saying that actually the best way to reduce the spread of this virus is to stay at home unless you have to work. That has an impact.

The Crossrail team will do what they can to work remotely where they can but some of the things you need to be physically there to do and so it is inevitable, but that is without having the benefit of speaking to the Chief Executive and the Chair to see what can be done not from the stations and the tunnels.

Caroline Pidgeon MBE AM: Also, it is part of your financial ask to the Government. If it is delayed, it is more cost, which it should help with.

Sadiq Khan (Mayor of London): In this and in a number of areas, there will be huge knock-on consequences and stuff. To be fair to the Prime Minister - and it is important that I am fair to him, he has said he is keen to make sure that money is no object. We have to take him at his word on that and he is right to do so, as has been the message from leaders across the world and it is the right message.

Caroline Pidgeon MBE AM: Thank you very much.

Len Duvall AM (Chair): Assembly Member Russell followed by Assembly Member Berry.

Caroline Russell AM: Thank you, Chair. Firstly, Mr Mayor, I would like to thank you and all your teams for all you are doing in providing advice, support and very strong guidance for Londoners. That is very much appreciated. We are all concerned about our colleagues here in City Hall, our families, our friends and our

communities. I just want to thank everyone, actually, in this Chamber for working so collaboratively at this time because we have to work together.

We have had some recent experience in London of ways to help small and microbusinesses after terrible circumstances disrupt their income. After the awful Grenfell [Tower fire] disaster, I worked with your Deputy Mayor for Business, Rajesh Agrawal, on making sure TfL's business tenants, small and microbusinesses that were operating out of TfL-owned railway arches near the tower were given support and, crucially, rent relief. Small businesses make up 86% of TfL's customer base. Have you and TfL considered a citywide programme of rent holidays, particularly for your small and microbusiness tenants?

Sadiq Khan (Mayor of London): First of all, thank you for your comments. It really is appreciated.

For those properties for which we are the landlord, we are already looking at, if not reducing to zero, holidays or we have already reduced the rents. TfL is already doing that. The problem is, as you will appreciate, many landlords are not us. Network Rail is in a different situation. We are lobbying them to do the right thing.

The good news is the Government has announced a package of measures to support those who may have maybe a landlord with a mortgage to pay in relation to mortgage holidays, but you are right that many businesses have no income coming in and the cash flow they use is to pay for rent and staff. What we do not want is them losing their businesses and so we will continue to lobby the Government.

I am quite comfortable that we are being a responsible landlord on the TfL estate. It is the other areas that I am worried about.

Caroline Russell AM: Yes, as you said, these businesses do not have money coming in. If TfL can lead the way by showing that a rent holiday is possible, then perhaps those other landlords will follow suit. Thank you. I will hand over to Siân.

Siân Berry AM: I just wanted to thank you also, Mr Mayor, for the clarity of the guidance that you gave earlier today. It is really clear. People need to hear as clearly as possible from their leaders that they need to be following the stay-at-home guidance and that this will save lives. Thank you for that.

I wanted to ask you about flexibility within some of the potential budget money that we have within London. In my local borough, we are doing things like, for example, planning to release Community Infrastructure Levy money to help with building up networks in the community and voluntary sector in preparation for needs. We see that as community infrastructure, and we think we can do that.

Potentially, there are some balances that you have within your own budgets that could be used - for example, the Strategic Investment Fund that we were pointing out during the budget - and also in relation to what you said earlier about, for example, homelessness and buying up hotels. You have balances in housing grants that we hold potentially that could be released now and dealt with in relation to Government later. I know you commented on the lag that there might be.

Are you exploring ways in which you might be flexible with money that we already hold in just getting some of this infrastructure and support built up now?

Sadiq Khan (Mayor of London): Yes, I am looking at all our budgets to see what I can free up to deal with this crisis.

You have expressed one of the things I am trying to get across: this is a crisis. It is really important that we understand that the normal rules of the game are gone. We have to think about it that way and it is a mind shift.

We are exploring all the budgets we have and the normal rules we have. We are looking at whether we can change them. If it needs a change in legislation, we are talking to the Government about that in relation to the rules. If it is grant funding with strings attached, we are seeing if we can be flexible with the strings. We have to be innovative.

Siân Berry AM: Yes, building up resilience now while we are not exactly in a calm before the storm, but things are not as crisis-hit as they were is the right thing to do.

Can I ask you quickly with the rest of my time about people's incomes and outgoings? We do not have balances within City Hall that can help people with their rents or their incomes. It is the Government that needs to do this. However, clearly, a lot of people's compliance with the guidance is put at risk by the fact that they are worried about their income and they do not know if they are going to need to pay their rent.

Will you be supporting calls that have been made for a guaranteed basic income for people to be as flexible as possible and to be instituted as soon as possible? People will continue going to work unless they have that reassurance.

Sadiq Khan (Mayor of London): Yes, we have made this point to the Government. It is really important. You can call it what you like - a universal basic income, a guaranteed minimum income, whatever it is - but people need to have peace of mind that they will have money to put food on the table. You know because you meet them like I do that there are people doing two or three jobs who cannot make ends meet and they have a conundrum if their young child has a cough and a temperature. Do they stay at home for two weeks as they have been advised to do by the experts or do they go out and work to get money to put food on the table? That is why the Government has to be thinking and acting now to stop those people going out and doing the wrong thing.

Siân Berry AM: Renters basically do not have savings. They are already paying out more than they can afford. The renting measures that the Government announced are for a rent holiday, which then, as far as I can tell, turns the rent into debt within three months. Will you be arguing for that to be a proper rent holiday?

Sadiq Khan (Mayor of London): Absolutely. That is one of my concerns. All you are doing is simply kicking a can down the road.

Siân Berry AM: Not very far, either.

Sadiq Khan (Mayor of London): That is why it is really important. The Government has set up a mortgage holiday. People who are renters should know that they are not deferring this, which means - human nature as it is - you will know that the money you are supposed to pay this month you will simply have to pay in two months' time. You will still have a problem and there will be a standing start in three months' time or four months' time when we return to 'normal', in inverted commas, in what we do. You are absolutely right.

Siân Berry AM: Thank you very much, Mr Mayor.

Len Duvall AM (Chair): Thank you. Moving on to Assembly Member Desai followed by Assembly Member McCartney.

Unmesh Desai AM: Thank you, Chair. Good morning, Mr Mayor, Deputy Mayor. Mr Mayor, firstly, can I start off by thanking you and your team on behalf of all my councils and constituents in City and East for everything that you are doing in the present times.

Sadiq Khan (Mayor of London): Thank you.

Unmesh Desai AM: Mr Mayor, you have already been asked by Assembly Member Bailey about your liaison with the Commissioner [of Police of the Metropolis]. Do you have anything else to add to what you already said to him about how you and the Commissioner are responding to the present crisis? Particularly can you use this opportunity to send a message to our police officers on the front line who are keeping Londoners safe?

Sadiq Khan (Mayor of London): Firstly, you know my views on our police. They are fantastic. They are under-resourced and overstretched. They are a credit to our city. They are the best in the world.

What we have done deliberately is that, as part of the structures that Fiona set out, one of the four co-chairs is DAC Laurence Taylor from the Metropolitan Police Service (MPS) for a very deliberate reason. It is really important that the MPS is integral to what we do as a response. The MPS itself has structures in place. Assistant Commissioner Mark Simmons has been asked to oversee the MPS's response to the coronavirus. We are learning from the MPS in relation to their gold command structures. We have made sure that TfL is now replicating those structures, which work really well. There is resilience being built in. I am already seeing the police changing the way they are policing our city. It is very important the police adapt.

Also, we have to bear in mind that this is here for the foreseeable future. We are not talking about a number of days. We are talking about the foreseeable future.

The other point I am well aware of is that the emergency legislation going through Parliament is giving the police additional powers to support public health measures, including to detain and isolate people affected by this. The Commissioner is live to this. It affects all 43 police forces around the country.

Our police have gone through challenges in the past and they have a can-do mentality, which I really support.

Unmesh Desai AM: Thank you, Mr Mayor. Just one more question. In your opening statement you talked about the need for, quote, "London to be united as we seek to navigate these difficult times", unquote. What message do you have for our communities in London to maintain community cohesion, particularly those who are concerned about a rise of hate crime as a result of the coronavirus? I have had groups in Newham, my home borough, that have written to me and the Mayor of Newham about their concerns.

Sadiq Khan (Mayor of London): Sure. Can I be quite clear: COVID-19 is COVID-19. It is not a Chinese virus. To use words like that is disgraceful. That is the sort of language that leads to incitement and hatred towards people of Chinese origin.

We are a city that celebrates our diversity and we think it is a strength, not a weakness. It is really important that we do not fall into the trap of some to use this virus as an excuse to denigrate, demean and dehumanise people.

What is really important is that if we see people picked on and discriminated against because of this virus, we act to stand with them in solidarity, but also the police will continue to have a zero-tolerance approach towards any form of hate crime. That is why we need a global response to this global virus, coming together rather than using this as another excuse to divide communities, divide countries, divide nations and divide ethnicities.

Unmesh Desai AM: Thank you, Mr Mayor. Someone said that the virus recognises no boundaries. Thank you for that very powerful message to London and indeed to the country.

Len Duvall AM (Chair): Assembly Member McCartney?

Joanne McCartney AM: Mr Mayor, you referred earlier to the emergency legislation that is being passed this afternoon in Parliament. It may be that it is needed, but in your role of Commissioner for Police you also have to ensure that the public trust is retained. It is going to be extremely difficult for Londoners to experience a level of policing and enforcement that we are not used to but also it is likely to be extremely difficult for those police officers and that relationship could be in danger of changing and that trust.

Have you given thought yet or has the Mayor's Office for Policing and Crime given thought to how you will carry out your oversight duties with those responsibilities in mind?

Sadiq Khan (Mayor of London): Firstly, we have to all accept that these are extraordinary times, but we must not give a blank cheque to anybody. This does not mean that people like me or the Prime Minister or experts are not tested. The more you test us, the more we will raise our game and provide good answers.

One of the things that the Government should be applauded for is talking to all opposition parties in Parliament in advance of the Bill being published. I know, for example, that Jeremy Corbyn [Leader of the Opposition] and Boris Johnson [Prime Minister] had a very good meeting to discuss the Bill. I am hoping that the Government will address any concerns people may have in relation to safeguards, checks and balances, sunset clauses and the like.

One of the things I do know is that we have a system of policing by consent. One of the things that police work really hard to do is to earn the trust and confidence of the British public. It is a hard-earned trust and confidence and we do not want to inadvertently see our police treated in a way that police forces around the world are treated and having a very different relationship with their citizens. I am sure the Commissioner is live to those challenges. I am sure, by the way, our police can rise to that challenge, being sensitive to the extraordinary times but bearing in mind the relationship we have with the British public as the police. It is a challenge for the NHS. It is a challenge for the fire service. It is a challenge for social care workers, transport workers and us as politicians, but we can rise to it.

Joanne McCartney AM: Thank you. If I could move on to support for businesses, the Government has given a package of support and says there is more to come. I know you have made representations on that front.

Most of our businesses in London are small or medium-sized businesses and they are at great risk. We know our high streets are extremely precarious at the moment, but we can already see some innovative solutions coming forward. For example, restaurants are talking about changing their delivery models to be food outlets.

Do you support that sort of innovative practice and the relaxing of, perhaps, licences? Will you be making that point to the Government?

Sadiq Khan (Mayor of London): Absolutely. It is really important for us to recognise that we do not people to be worried about wages coming in or the business they worked really hard to set up go under and all the rest of it. We have to realise that these businesses need support. You will know that more than 99% of businesses in London are small businesses. You will know that more than half of Londoners work in these businesses. Also, you will know that many businesses rely upon money that comes in and their cash flow to pay their wages and their rent and the charges and the rates. They do not have that now and many will go under unless they are given support.

It is important for the Government to make sure that nobody loses their job, nobody loses their business, and nobody loses their home because of coronavirus. The Chancellor's announcement this week was welcome, as was his Budget last week. He will need to go further and faster. I am seeing what governments around the world are doing. We have to do the same sort of stuff. You have seen the governments of Sweden, Denmark and others guarantee people's salaries to avoid them losing their jobs. The new [Governor of the] Bank of England was extremely impressive on his first day when he said that any business thinking about making staff redundancies should come to the Government and come to the Bank of England, who will try to avoid that happening.

If we are not careful, instead of the Government supporting business to stay open, in a few weeks' time they will be supporting those people who have lost their jobs in benefits. That does not make sense to me. That is why it is really important for the Government to think outside the box. I am confident that it as well can rise to the challenge because what we cannot afford to happen, as Gordon Brown [former Prime Minister] said this morning, is a health crisis turning into a work crisis turning into a childcare crisis turning into other crises. That is why we need a holistic approach to deal with all these things now to avoid that happening.

Joanne McCartney AM: Thank you.

Len Duvall AM (Chair): Assembly Member Devenish?

Tony Devenish AM: Good morning, Mr Mayor, and thank you for the consensual way you have dealt with things this morning.

I have two points and I do not expect answers now. You will want to reflect on these. How, if at all, can we use London's parks and open spaces to support the approach, while including social distancing? That would be my first question, please.

The second one: in due course, can we look at restarting as quickly as possible at least priority written mayoral questions to ensure there is a process in place?

Sadiq Khan (Mayor of London): In answer to your first question, it is a really important point. Somebody asked about mental health. Exercise is good in and of itself but good for one's mental health. Even though we are working from home, we should all try to exercise, keeping our social distance. I have been trying to walk my dog, just to get my head in the right space. I need exercise. I have been seeing a large number of people going for jogs, which is great. I have never seen so many joggers around Tooting Common. Keeping your distance and stuff is really important.

The good news is, unlike other cities, because we have commons and we are sensible around parks, we are not locking them up. Some cities are locking up their parks. I understand some may have chosen to do that because people were having picnics and acting in ways that are not conducive to this crisis that we face.

However, you have identified an issue which we need to think about in relation to how we use our public spaces at this difficult time, and it is really important to do so. You have seen, for example, how the BBC is pivoting towards realising that people may get bored at home and so they are going to think about programming to keep them occupied. Parks can play a role there as well. We will continue to think. Again, any ideas you have, please let us know. We are lucky because a lot of our open spaces are not fenced off, which is a challenge and an opportunity as well.

I am more than happy, Chair, to be guided by the Assembly in relation to more regular information, particularly, as you said in your opening, since we potentially have a long gap before the next Assembly. I am always happy to provide briefings and updates and Fiona can make herself available as well. I am guided by the Assembly and I am always happy to be as transparent as I can.

Tony Devenish AM: Thank you.

Len Duvall AM (Chair): Assembly Member Hall?

Susan Hall AM: Mr Mayor, I am really happy and grateful to hear your support for the Government and everything that the Government is doing to deal with this dreadful situation. Now is certainly not a time for politics and we all around this table certainly agree with that. I speak for my colleagues when I say all of us will do anything we can to support you and Londoners out there.

One of the things I am particularly concerned about is that last year the figures came out and about 5.3 million people did not use the internet or have not used it for three months and 79% of those were over 65. In this day and age, a lot of the information we give out does go out via the internet. How are we making sure in London in particular that we get to the vulnerable and the elderly who are not using the internet?

Sadiq Khan (Mayor of London): Yes, a good question. Thanks for that. One of the reasons I was keen to meet yesterday with the community and voluntary groups was to get a feel for what is actually happening around our city. You mentioned older people and groups. For example, the Leader of Bexley reminded me that a lot of the volunteers she usually relies upon are over 70. The volunteers have overnight turned into the vulnerable because of the way the virus works. They would usually be a good substitute for technology because of interaction. They know their neighbours. They know what to do.

The other thing that was clear to me yesterday from listening to experts from Age Concern, London Cares and others who work with people is loneliness and isolation. We are telling them to potentially shield themselves for three months. You will know from your constituents the impact that can have on people's mental health and wellbeing. We are looking at things we can pilot. Some of the groups we were talking to were talking about making available to older people technology that is really easy to use. I do not want to mention a brand, but there are things that talk to you and that you can talk to in relation to technology and tablets that make it easy, but also people helping them whom they trust, whether it is behind their porch door or through the phone. You are right in relation to those large numbers who have no technology.

We also have to be live to people being taken advantage of. There were unscrupulous people we saw after Grenfell [Tower fire]. We have already had - and it is upsetting to talk about this - examples of people knocking on doors, saying, "I can do your shopping for you", taking the money and not returning. I can give you other examples, which are really heart-breaking.

It is a combination of recognising that there are people who do not have technology, and making sure they do not become victims of crime and helping them.

The good news is that the response from London councils has been fantastic. With 33 councils, they want to play a leading role. The Secretary of State wants councils to provide hubs. They could be places where there is food available to take to your neighbour who is elderly and stuff. We have seen examples of supermarkets opening for the first hour for people who are either older people or their neighbours. They are being quite flexible and so you may shop for an older neighbour who cannot get out because you want to provide them with stuff. They are being sensitive and will continue to evolve.

The reality is, with the best will in the world, we cannot reach them from City Hall and nor can councils, but there are community groups and neighbours who can. I am a bit nervous about a chaotic build-up of local groups and mutual aid that is not co-ordinated because we saw in other disasters what can happen if it is not properly co-ordinated with duplication and things that are not needed being provided. We are working with community groups and voluntary groups to see how we can in the best possible way help with mutual aid and community groups.

It is a moving feast. You will be aware that never before in my lifetime have we had this scale of challenge. We are learning all the time. It is iterative. We have to suck it and see with some things. Any ideas for how we can address that big gap I am more than happy to look into.

Susan Hall AM: Lovely. Thank you.

Len Duvall AM (Chair): Assembly Member Boff?

Andrew Boff AM: Mr Mayor, on Monday I was in Paris and witnessed the slightly different approach of both Governments in response to the crisis. In Paris all the restaurants, cafés and meeting places were shut by order. It was not just a recommendation. It was an instruction.

If you walked to City Hall this morning, you will have noticed that a lot of restaurants are still open. Pubs are doing not very good trade, but they are trading all the same. I know that the Barking Wetherspoon is doing rather well.

When do you expect the police being expected to prevent social gatherings and enforce the closure of businesses?

Sadiq Khan (Mayor of London): That is a really big point you raise. We are not there yet. The advice from the Government is just advice and that provides a mixed message. Siân [Berry AM] and Caroline [Russell AM] referred to the clarity of the messaging. It has clearly not been clear enough.

We may move to a situation where we move from advice to bans. You will know of the legislation going through Parliament. You also know that London is ahead of the rest of the country by weeks, I was told at Cobra, and so I am concerned about people not following the advice. I am concerned that there are still too many people whom you have witnessed on our streets, in our bars, in our cafés, using our Tube, using our buses.

One of the things I will be speaking to the Prime Minister about is what more we have to be doing to reduce those numbers. I cannot give you a timescale as to when because it is a conversation. The good news is that

the Prime Minister has some experience of being the Mayor of this city. It is a huge advantage we have. I will be talking to him about that and some of the consequences, intended or unintended, and how we manage that.

Bear in mind this. We are talking about a long process. If you use the bell curve example, we are nowhere near the peak. The question we have to ask ourselves is whether we can sustain it going forward. What we would not want to have happen, God forbid, is it being forced upon us to change our tack in relation to forcing at a time when we are at the peak. It is a difficult combination of science and experience, but I hope to discuss this in detail with the Prime Minister after this meeting.

Andrew Boff AM: Thank you. Thank you, Chair.

Len Duvall AM (Chair): Assembly Member Dismore, followed by Assembly Member Cooper and then Assembly Member Eshalomi MP.

Andrew Dismore AM: Thank you, Chair. This is probably for Fiona. What steps has the LFB put in place to maintain acceptable response times and fire safety work through the pandemic? If an operational firefighter catches the virus, it is very likely others from the same watch and indeed from the same station will also be affected as operational personnel spend so much time in close proximity to each other. Similar risks will apply to control and civilian staff.

What measures are you introducing for fire stations, control and LFB headquarters to resist the spread of the disease and how will the LFB maintain sufficient staffing across its operational and other staff to meet response times?

Dr Fiona Twycross AM (Deputy Chair, GLA Strategic Co-ordination Group - COVID-19): That is quite a long question and so, if I miss a bit, please come back to me.

Like other parts of the GLA family, the LFB is following closely the Government and Public Health England advice. From last weekend, measures were put in place to allow only essential visitors to control to protect control as a key part of the operation of the LFB.

Firefighters have now been asked to sign up for a system of prearranged overtime to cover any shifts when their colleagues are unwell or self-isolating. As of this morning - I got figures just before this meeting - there have been over 1,000 applications of people wanting to sign up to do this. I am very grateful, as I know the Mayor will be, for the support of the London region of the Fire Brigades Union (FBU) in encouraging their members to sign up for pre-arranged overtime. Applying this system should increase the LFB's current capacity to improve resilience and the aim will be to maintain the current target response times. If it is helpful, in my role as Chair of the Fire and Resilience Committee, I can make sure that I do get in touch with you if there is any deviation from that as well.

We have also made sure that staff have been contacted telling them to work from home where possible. From Union Street, it is an emergency service and we do need people to maintain the service, but the majority of those people not working in operational roles have been encouraged to do that if possible. Those who are living with vulnerable people have been also encouraged to work from home.

We are really keen to make sure that we keep the service going. We have agreed with the LFB to suspend some of the home fire safety visits. This will not include suspending the inspection work because it is, as you

will be aware, really important that it continues, but the LFB will continue to take advice both from the Government and from Public Health England and will work with colleagues in the National Fire Chiefs Council to make sure that the LFB meets all the requirements of the service while observing the need to keep firefighters safe.

Andrew Dismore AM: People who are vulnerable are those who are most likely to die or be badly injured in fires at home and they are also the people now being told to self-isolate due to the virus.

Are you concerned there could be an increase in fires affecting vulnerable people as a result of self-isolation? You mentioned home fire safety visits. Could they be reoriented to check vulnerable people who are self-isolating or social distancing whilst also protecting our workforce?

Dr Fiona Twycross AM (Deputy Chair, GLA Strategic Co-ordination Group - COVID-19): There are some issues in this. This is where the need to make sure everything is joined up is important because we are also needing to make sure that firefighters do not inadvertently infect vulnerable people. We do need to work this through in terms of making sure vulnerable people are safe through the SCG, not just anticipate that one agency is able to solve the problem that you quite rightly identify as a problem by itself.

The LFB is reviewing all the communications messaging. The [London Fire] Commissioner has said that they are looking at making sure that people are not at increased likelihood of fire. The LFB communications messaging will take into account the fact that more people will be self-isolating, and they will continue to push out advice regarding smoke alarm testing and keeping safe from fire. They are working to offer online fire safety checks but, mindful of the point that Assembly Member Hall made, I will go back and ask the Commissioner exactly how that will work for people who do not have that online access.

Andrew Dismore AM: Thank you.

Len Duvall AM (Chair): Assembly Member Cooper?

Léonie Cooper AM: Thank you, Chair. I just wanted to thank you, Mr Mayor, as others have this morning, for the clarity of your messaging and taking a lead on behalf of London and Londoners, but some people have been more severely impacted already than others. Perhaps some are still being slightly irresponsible and do need to be reminded about that, but we also have to have concern for those who are already having impacts. In certain cases, if people are self-isolating or are themselves sick, in the context of London where weekly rent is way more than statutory sick pay (SSP), people are now starting to call for SSP to be trebled, which would be helpful and are calling for some of the benefits given to companies to be tied to them being responsible about their employees. In certain cases people will also lose jobs and Siân Berry AM mentioned some of this issue.

I just wondered if you had a thought as to whether or not the calls from Kier Starmer MP and others to treble SSP and also to suspend utility bills would be of assistance.

Sadiq Khan (Mayor of London): Absolutely. A number of things need to happen. That is why I used the phrase that the Government needs to go further and faster. Although it is welcome that the SSP will begin sooner than it normally does, it is not enough. £90 a week is not going to help you if your rent is much higher than that. For example, we have negotiated with the contractor who employs our cleaners to make sure if any of the staff there need to self-isolate or go off, they will get the remuneration they were receiving before or

the average salary they were getting before. That is really important. All employers should be doing what they can. I appreciate that for small employers and microbusinesses it is going to be very hard.

That is why the Government has to step in. The Government has to realise that it is in nobody's interests for people - for perverse incentives - to be working when they should not be or losing their jobs and livelihoods as a consequence of the virus. I am hoping the Government does announce a further package, but also there cannot be too much of a lag between an announcement and people receiving the monies they desperately need.

Léonie Cooper AM: I hope that later and on other occasions you are able to press that point with the Government. Particularly bearing in mind the context of school closures from this Friday, I am sure many of us are very concerned about the food situation for children who normally rely on having a hot meal at school. Also, there is the issue that a lot of the people who are going to be self-isolating themselves and socially distancing and staying at home for 12 weeks may already be the people who are most at risk of food insecurity and not eating properly.

Could you assure me a bit about what City Hall is able to do in that context, working with councils? What is the story around the food vouchers for people? This is something that is of grave concern, particularly for those two groups. I know children are not so affected by the virus, but the impact of the school closures is going to be devastating for them and we have this older cohort who may suffer.

Sadiq Khan (Mayor of London): Yes, you are absolutely right. One of the concerns we had was about those who receive free school meals and what will happen to them when the schools close on Friday. The Government has moved there in relation to vouchers.

The work we do during the holidays in relation to the Mayor's Social Cohesion Fund for health reasons we cannot continue and so there is a void there. We are speaking to councils in relation to the work we are doing around food security to try to see if we can step in to help there. There are local hubs that councils are going to provide. Fiona mentioned the LRF, but each council will be providing a local hub and the Government has stepped in to support them doing so. That is one way we can support those families who have children and who otherwise would not get a decent meal during the course of a day. It is a real concern we have.

Also, bear in mind there is a possibility - some would say likelihood - that the schools will not return after these holidays. We have to get a system in place now that has the resilience to go on for a number of weeks or - dare I say it - months. It is really important to get this right and that is why we are highlighting some of these issues through the SCG, through the LRF and through the Government to make sure they understand that we need some resources and some help here to address that.

Léonie Cooper AM: It would be really helpful if we could get some more detailed messaging out about the food vouchers because several people have said to me that they do not quite understand where they are going to come from, where they collect them from and how that is going to be dealt with. The message is clearly not getting out there at the moment.

Sadiq Khan (Mayor of London): To be fair to the Education Secretary, he has gone faster than he would have wanted. He has said he will announce tomorrow some further details in relation to both vouchers and exams. It would be unfair to criticise him because he is moving as fast as he can. We would hope by tomorrow to have some more announcements from the Government.

Léonie Cooper AM: That is fine. To hear that the information is going to be coming out by tomorrow is very welcome. It is just that people came to me and I could not really answer them. It is a very fast-moving situation. Thank you very much, Chair.

Len Duvall AM (Chair): Assembly Member Eshalomi MP?

Florence Eshalomi MP AM: Good morning, Mr Mayor. You have touched on it earlier but one of the issues that I wanted to pick up on is around the tourism and hospitality industries, which are being hit quite hard around this outbreak. I am talking about the area that I represent along the South Bank. They should be looking forward to a thriving spring and summer in terms of tourism at organisations like the London Eye, the Southbank Centre, which is really close, the National Theatre, the Old and the Young Vic and the historic Royal Vauxhall Tavern.

Can you outline if there is any additional support that you and London & Partners can give these organisations in terms of looking at the next few months?

Sadiq Khan (Mayor of London): Thank you for highlighting this really important area. We have to realise that people's livelihoods can have an impact on health because, if you are one of the 50% of the cultural workforce who is a freelancer and if you have no money, you cannot pay the bills, you cannot put food on the table and you may not want to stay at home for obvious reasons when you have symptoms.

Also, we know retail, tourism, travel, leisure and hospitality have already, before the change in policy this week, been seriously affected over the last couple of months. I was speaking to some businesses. I chaired a meeting with business groups earlier this week. Before the big changes, they were seeing a 40% to 50% and some a 60% dip in their incomes, and so they are really worried. They have no savings or capital to get them through this difficult time.

What we have done from City Hall within our limited resources is to strengthen the Culture at Risk Office. The Culture at Risk Office has done a huge amount of brilliant work in the last four years, reducing the numbers of places closing down and helping new ones open. It helped 400 businesses over the last few years. That has been strengthened to help.

I have given a grant to the Music Venue Trust to help them in relation to live music venues going forward because they will have no people going to their live music venues but will still have rent to pay, business rates, charges and staff salaries. They are really worried about this.

By the way, you are right because this is not just a short-term issue. In the medium to long term, we cannot see tourism picking up or people visiting those places picking up in the short or medium term.

Florence Eshalomi MP AM: What additional message and maybe plans can be put in place after - God willing - we get through all of this in terms of making sure that London continues to remain open?

Sadiq Khan (Mayor of London): One of the things that we have already started to give some headspace to - and I have to be honest with you, it is not my priority - is recovery. At some stage we are going to come out of this and so we are doing some work around recovery already. I do not want to spend too much of our resources on recovery for the obvious reason that we are nowhere near the peak yet and so forget about recovery, but this will need a huge amount of work. We will need to engender an Olympic spirit in relation to the recovery. We want a hockey stick type of bounce back, but it is going to be tough.

I am not one of these guys who does a blind, jingoistic, optimistic pitch without evidence. I am optimistic because of our history, but it is really important for us to realise that the recovery stage is really important. Imagine if we get out of this virus in the next few weeks and months but all the businesses we visit to engender a sense of community spirit and to enjoy ourselves are closed down because of the reasons you have articulated. We have to think about that.

Also, one of the things I will be lobbying the Government to do - and I am not going to spend time this week for obvious reasons - in the next few weeks, will be for them to start working on recovery. The problem is that in the meantime these businesses need support to pay their bills, to pay their staff and to do the things they need to do.

Florence Eshalomi MP AM: Thank you. I will leave it there, Chair.

Len Duvall AM (Chair): Assembly Member Prince?

Keith Prince AM: Thank you, Mr Mayor. Following on from Assembly Member Eshalomi MP's question, as TfL have direct responsibility for the black cab trade, as you know, will you be able to offer support to them? Clearly, following your very wise statement earlier that people should stop travelling, these people are all self-employed and will suffer greatly from these measures.

Sadiq Khan (Mayor of London): This was raised at the TfL Board meeting this week. It was a telephone meeting, as you would appreciate, rather than an open one. TfL is speaking with the Government because you are right that we are really worried about those self-employed black cab drivers who will have no income, basically, or a big cut over the next period and how we can help them. We are also seeing if we can get any assistance for private hire vehicle drivers as well and minicab drivers. We are doing that work with the Government.

Clearly, unless the Government steps in, we cannot help and so we are hoping the Government will step in and help all those black cab drivers and minicab drivers who have mortgages to pay, rent to pay and on and on. It is crucial.

Keith Prince AM: Will you be able to communicate with me and I can share that with the black cab trade?

Sadiq Khan (Mayor of London): Chair, as soon as we have some news, I am really happy to let Keith know and also make sure that all of us use our communication. All of you have really good communication channels and so you are really important people to get messages out. I will make sure that we keep you in the loop.

Keith Prince AM: Thank you, Mr Mayor. Thank you.

Len Duvall AM (Chair): Mr Mayor, we are coming to the end of this session. I have had a question given by a member of the public, which I just want to ask. It came up. Bits and pieces are there. These are unprecedented times. We know that. The issues about essential workers and travel and the impact on the fare box at TfL have always been important, but this is where we are.

Will you be looking at the issue of free travel for essential workers like the NHS? The nearest precedent I can think of in recent times was one of our first forays of the military during the Olympics when we gave free transport and we now do give free transport for other reasons around that. Will you be looking at that?

Sadiq Khan (Mayor of London): Yes, we are. We are looking at everything. It is also important for us to realise that, yes, NHS workers are essential workers but there are others as well who are essential workers and we need to think about them as well.

Len Duvall AM (Chair): There are others. Again, just very quickly, a follow-on question from them was about care workers. Of course everyone understands the importance of NHS workers as being up there and being very professional and being what we think as looking after our health. The really unsung heroes are care workers who sometimes use public transport or not.

Can you be intrusive to our colleagues in local government, whom I do trust with emergency planning, to make sure there is a plan B and to make sure that we reach those people who are not going to be able to get out but do rely on those care visits, no matter how small they are, to actually survive?

Sadiq Khan (Mayor of London): Yes. Can I firstly thank you for raising the issue of care workers? Secondly, can I reassure you that in every meeting I have had or discussion I have had with council leaders they have mentioned the issue of care workers. We already have a national health and care service in this country. It is not national – that is the issue – but we have a health and care service that needs support.

The other concern is, as you will be aware, many care workers receive a very low salary. They are the low-income people I am worried about who may for the wrong reasons make the wrong choice in relation to self-isolating. They need support. We are also concerned about the issue of the DBS and the backlog. We are having these conversations.

One of the groups that Fiona mentioned is looking at this issue as well with council leaders and many others because – it is a horrible phrase – of the issue of bed blocking. An unintended consequence of not having sufficient care in the community is the NHS using resources and using beds for people who could be in the community.

Len Duvall AM (Chair): I do not want to put you on the spot, but I think I am a responsible politician in terms of when people ask me questions. In terms of the further and faster actions, the reason why I do not want to put you on the spot is that it is not your call, but we are probably all in this together and we welcome it.

People come up to me and say, “OK, what do these further and faster actions mean and what do you think they mean, Mr Duvall?” I say to them, “I think you need to be prepared that there will be further restrictions on your activities over the coming days or weeks and you need to prepare”. Am I right or wrong?

Sadiq Khan (Mayor of London): The way I would describe this is one of the joys of living in this city and this country is we have fantastic civil liberties and human rights. The most important human right is the right to life. That is [Schedule 1, Part 1] Article 2 of the Human Rights Act [1998]. Sometimes our liberties and human rights need to be changed, curtailed, infringed – use whatever word you want – for reasons that are sensible and justifiable. The key thing is for it to be proportionate. Nobody wants to be doing what we are doing in this city. Nobody wants schools to close down two weeks before Easter and before many people have GCSEs and A levels. Nobody wants to be saying, “Stay at home unless you have to leave”, and on and on.

However, these are extraordinary times and so it is really important we understand that the consequence of people’s liberties and human rights not being deprived, curtailed or suspended is life being lost. We have in

our country as a consequence of this virus dozens and dozens of families who are bereaved prematurely because of this virus. We need to reduce the spread of this virus and reduce people losing their lives. That will mean people's civil liberties and human rights being curtailed, hopefully for a short period of time, hopefully not draconian, but it is important we have a common-sense approach towards this.

That is one of the great things about our city: that we respond in a proportionate manner to big challenges. I am sure we can do it again and we can come out of this more united even than when we went into it.

Len Duvall AM (Chair): You have two minutes [Assembly Member Dismore].

Andrew Dismore AM: I have received an email asking whether you would consider cleaners to be key workers if there is any lockdown.

Sadiq Khan (Mayor of London): One of the reasons why we have made sure that ABM and the contractor it employs as our cleaners gives them the right salary if they are off is because I consider them essential. I will give you an example of why they are essential. We have enhanced the cleaning regime on TfL to use an antiviral and antibacterial disinfectant that they use in hospitals. Who is doing it? Not me, but the cleaners.

We have tested a longer-lasting 30-day antiviral disinfectant. We piloted it this week in Waterloo and we are going to, hopefully, roll it out because the public transport system will need to stay open to help the essential workers. That cleaning job that needs to be done is being done by cleaners and I have a huge respect for our cleaners and for the work they do. They are essential to keeping our city as safe as we can.

Len Duvall AM (Chair): Thank you, Mr Mayor, for the way that you have answered our questions this morning. We will take up your offers of engagement. We are looking at slimming down and we do not have to worry about it for a period of time in terms of our scrutiny activities, but of course we do want to follow Government advice, whatever that may be and however quickly that changes in the coming days. We will take up that offer.

Accurate information is very important. I am amazed what Google and Facebook can do when they told us what they could not do before taking down misinformation. We need to follow up on that. We will not ever get back to normal times, I suspect, but we will come through this crisis through the endeavours and the work of the Government, you, local government and all the officials and bodies that try to make us safe. Thank you for that.