

London Assembly Mayor's Question Time – Thursday 22 November Transcript of Item 4 – Oral Update to the Mayor's Report

Tony Arbour AM (Chairman): The Mayor will now provide an oral update of up to five minutes on matters occurring since the publication of his report. Assembly Members have submitted one request for topics for inclusion within the debate. Mr Mayor.

Sadiq Khan (Mayor of London): Good morning. As colleagues may be aware, overnight there was a serious fire at Orpington Bus Garage and a number of buses have been damaged. The London Fire Brigade and its Fire Investigation Unit are on the scene. The bus depot fire is now under control. The bus garage is closed. Route 358 between Orpington Bus Garage and Crystal Palace Parade is currently suspended and three other routes are on diversion.

Chairman, this Mayor's Question Time comes during an extraordinary moment for London and for the whole of the country. The news has been dominated by Brexit and we are now facing more uncertainty than ever before. After months of missteps and a litany of missed opportunities, the Government has reached a tentative Brexit deal that, in my view, not only risks damaging jobs and growth for the next generation but is a million miles away from what was promised during the referendum campaign. The proposal for the future trading relationship also does not go anywhere near far enough to protect London's vital services sector and will undoubtedly create huge additional costs for businesses, especially small and medium-sized enterprises and our public services. Faced with the possibility of the Prime Minister's [The Rt Hon Theresa May MP] bad deal or a catastrophic no-deal Brexit, it is now clearer than ever that the British public gets a first say on this deal with staying in the European Union (EU) an option on the ballot paper. I would respectfully encourage all Members of Parliament (MPs) to vote against this agreement, which would hit London hard, damage our public services and make life more difficult for our children and grandchildren, and support a people's vote.

Since we last met, I have continued to stand up for our city as Mayor and to work on a number of new initiatives to improve the lives of Londoners. These include: establishing a new Violence Reduction Unit made up of specialists in health, police and local government, as well as community and youth groups, to lead and deliver a long-term public health approach to tackling the causes of violent crime; continuing to work with the Metropolitan Police Service (MPS) Violent Crime Task Force, funded by City Hall, to crack down on violent crime across the city; launching five new low-emission bus zones to tackle London's toxic air; agreeing a £1 billion plan to build 11,000 new council homes; and leading trade missions to Berlin and Paris to bang the drum for London and attract new investment.

Chairman, today marks the start of celebrations marking the centenary of women being allowed to join the MPS. The Commissioner [of Police of the Metropolis, Cressida Dick CBE QPM] and I are keen to use this celebration to appeal to all women to consider having a career in the MPS. In the words of our Commissioner, "There is no better time to be a woman in the MPS".

I look forward to answering further questions today but, before I do, as you said, I have been asked for one oral update. The oral update request has come from Assembly Member Sian Berry.

I welcome the Information Commissioner's Office's (ICO) finding in its review of the Gangs Matrix. The ICO found that whilst there was a valid purpose for the database helping to keep Londoners safe by tackling gang violence, the inconsistent way it was being used did not comply with data protection rules. I have discussed

this with the Commissioner. These are serious matters and so I welcome the fact that the MPS has been working with the ICO and is in the process of implementing an action plan to ensure that its processes and practices are correct. The ICO's enforcement notice requires the MPS to ensure it complies with data protection laws in future and has given them six months to make these changes, which the MPS has accepted and has started to implement. The MPS has stopped sharing personal data on the Gangs Matrix with third parties where there is no individual sharing agreement in place. They have also committed to being more open about the database and are working with the ICO to complete a data protection impact assessment.

I have previously and separately asked for a review of the Gangs Matrix and Mayor's Office for Policing and Crime officers have been working with the ICO as part of my review. The purpose of my review is to seek greater assurance about the impact of the Gangs Matrix and any disproportionality, the processes by which it is operated and governed and transparency. The report should be completed by the end of this year [2018].

I am aware of a data leak related to the matrix. The MPS has told me that this is not a recent data leak; the leak occurred in May 2017. This matter has come to the fore, having been referenced in a recently published serious case review, following the death of a young person in Newham. I am of course concerned by this leak and it is important that appropriate data safeguarding processes are in place. I understand there is an ongoing investigation into Newham Council by the ICO in relation to this data loss incident. As such, it would be inappropriate to say any more on that data leak until the investigation is complete.

Fiona Twycross AM: My question is on the EU negotiations. I probably need to declare an interest in my question because I am married to a European Economic Area (EEA) citizen.

How confident are you that the rights of EEA and European Free Trade Association (EFTA) citizens in London and those of EU citizens will be safeguarded following Brexit?

Sadiq Khan (Mayor of London): Chairman, the Assembly Member's experience in relation to her personal family is not uncommon for many Londoners. Many EU citizens are our employees, our friends, our neighbours and members of our families.

I have been concerned for some time that EU citizens are being used as bargaining chips when it comes to our exit from the EU. It is worth reminding ourselves that these EU, EEA and EFTA citizens, as part of negotiations conducted by 28 governments, have freedom of movement and freedom to come to our country, and so the idea that we would use denigrating language like "queue-jumping" to describe members of our families, our friends and our neighbours worries me. It is even more astonishing that those words come from our Prime Minister [The Rt Hon Theresa May MP]. You can understand why our neighbours, friends and families are anxious and nervous about their futures.

Fiona Twycross AM: Thank you. The Government has announced that following a transition period if we do get a deal, an independent monitoring authority will be set up to monitor the rights of EU citizens living in the United Kingdom (UK). Understandably, at the moment a lot of the focus has been on the deal and the immediate issues next March [2019] and preceding and following that, but with 1 million EU citizens in London alone, how confident are you that the independent monitoring authority is being planned for an appropriate moment and will be given the teeth and resources it needs to protect people's rights?

Sadiq Khan (Mayor of London): So far, I would challenge anybody to explain the reasons for confidence in a Home Office-devised independent monitoring authority. We do not have the details yet. I have asked my officials to work closely with the authorities in relation to this being set up.

You will appreciate that as a consequence of the hostile environment created by this Prime Minister [The Rt Hon Theresa May MP] when she was Home Secretary and carried on for the last eight years, the Windrush generation and their descendants have had a difficult experience with the UK Border Agency (UKBA) and with the Home Office. You can appreciate why the EU is keen for there to be a separate independent monitoring authority going forward.

We will have to wait to see the details, but it is really important that it has the confidence of EU citizens, many of whom have chosen London as their home, have had children here and are married to British citizens. It is really important that their rights are safeguarded and that the new body set up does what it says on the tin and is an independent monitoring authority.

Fiona Twycross AM: Thank you.

Andrew Dismore AM: On the same theme, Mr Mayor, with less than five months to go until the date the UK is due to leave the EU, is it fair – according to [The Rt Hon] Caroline Nokes MP, the Immigration Minister, at the Home Affairs Select Committee last month – that the Government is expecting London’s businesses to check whether EU citizens have a right to work in the event of a no-deal Brexit without giving them details of how this will work, especially bearing in mind that Ms Nokes herself did not know how it was going to work either?

Sadiq Khan (Mayor of London): Quite. Anybody who saw the Immigration Minister’s [The Rt Hon Caroline Nokes MP] evidence will have been astonished by the lack of grip she had, not just this week but last month, as you alluded to. What the Government is doing is subcontracting to employers and landlords the job of being UKBA officers, and that is not the job of employers. The job of employers is to be able to recruit and retain workers who will fulfil the potential of the business. I am worried particularly for small businesses, which will be worried fairly wrongfully about the consequences of taking on somebody who may fall foul of government rules. It is really important for the Government to find certainty as soon as possible and for there to be minimal red tape when it comes to employers’ abilities to take on employees. The chilling effect of this could be an employer being nervous to take on any worker who has an accent or is not clearly somebody who is a British citizen. Nobody wants employers to be discriminating directly or indirectly against anybody.

Andrew Dismore AM: A few days ago, as you say, in her speech to the Confederation of British Industry (CBI), [The Rt Hon] Theresa May MP [Prime Minister] yet again peddled her nasty rhetoric about EU citizens jumping the queue. Bearing in mind the 43% decrease in people migrating here looking for work over the last year and in the 12 months after the Brexit vote the 9% increase in people leaving and the 12% drop in migrants coming in, is the real risk not queue-jumping but not enough people in the queue in the first place so as to fill key vacancies in the National Health Service (NHS) and care sectors, as well as other sectors in the London economy such as construction, retail and hospitality?

Sadiq Khan (Mayor of London): Absolutely. Anybody who speaks to anybody involved in the NHS, in construction, in hospitality, in agriculture or in tech and will tell you that the problem at the moment is the inability to fill the vacancies that currently exist. We have seen in the last period a reduction in the number of new EU citizens coming to London. We have seen an increase in those Londoners who are EU citizens returning to their countries of origin. The idea that these people are queue-jumping is not simply offensive and I would say denigrating to these EU citizens but also does not reflect the true picture.

Also, the idea that our Prime Minister would pit EU citizens against software engineers from Bombay or others from Australia is astonishing and is another example of this hostile environment created by the Government.

That is why it is really important, louder than ever before, we send the message loud and clear that London is open. London is open to these talented people who want to contribute to our economy.

Keith Prince AM: In your update you omitted to mention your visit to Newbury Park.

Sadiq Khan (Mayor of London): Thank you for giving me the opportunity and thank you very much for coming along to that Tube station. You, along with the council and the local MP [Wes Streeting MP], have been campaigning with local residents for some time to get step-free access at Newbury Park. I did not realise until I prepared for the trip that there are 5.5 million journeys through that station each year. I met some of the residents benefiting from the lifts on either side.

That is one of the reasons why our mission was to invest record sums in step-free across London, the most invested at any time. We want to get to 40% towards the end of the business plan. You have experienced some of the people who benefit from having step-free access. If public transport is what it says on the tin, it must be transport for all of the public, which is why step-free is so important.

Keith Prince AM: Thank you. My only ask, Mr Mayor, is if I could have a little bit more notice when you are visiting my area, not on a political nature, of course. I would like to put on the record my thanks from my residents for investing in that and making it happen. It is of great benefit. Thank you.

Jennette Arnold OBE AM (Deputy Chair): Mr Mayor, you quite rightly mentioned your concerns about public safety and in what I am saying I have no wish to appear complacent in any way, but will you join me in congratulating the Hackney Gangs Taskforce on its success in reducing knife offences by 46%? They did this by targeting over a nine-month period. Two notorious gangs that had been identified with some of the most horrendous crimes, including murder. I was so heartened by what Detective Sergeant [Matt] Webb said - and on an occasion like this, we do have to identify a leader amongst our police service - when he said, "Our message to gangs is that you do not own the streets". If we can do this in Hackney, let us see more of this so that we can get back to our safe streets.

Sadiq Khan (Mayor of London): Chairman, can I through you thank the Assembly Member for what she has said? It is really important we name and praise our brave officers, but they are our community leaders and you have given a good example of our police force being a police service working with the community. Our police rely upon the community to be the eyes and ears for them.

Also, you have articulated the best reason why a public health approach is the right way to finally solve the issue of the increase in violent crime. Of course, we are tough on enforcement and making sure that we stop people who are carrying knives freely on the streets, making sure that justice is done; but at the same time preventing somebody thinking it is OK to join a criminal gang or to carry a knife and thinking that that is the way to go about their business. The only way it will work is if the police work with communities like the community in Hackney, youth leaders, parents, faith leaders, politicians and others working together for the interests of the community. Thank you for raising that today.