

London Assembly Mayor's Question Time – Thursday 21 March 2019

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 in length on matters occurring since the publication of his report. Assembly Members have submitted several requests for topics for inclusion within the update, details of which have been provided to the Mayor. Mr Mayor.

Sadiq Khan (Mayor of London): Thank you, Chairman. I would like to start by reiterating on behalf of the Greater London Authority (GLA) and all Londoners that our city stands with the city of Christchurch following the horrific terrorist attack last week. Our hearts go out to all the victims and their grieving families and friends. While London might be more than 11,000 miles away from where this attack took place, it did feel, as you said, Chairman, like an attack on all of us, on our values and on the freedoms we hold dear. We felt the ripples, the fear and the grief.

Understandably, many Muslims in London and across the world are not only mourning the victims but also worried about what this means for their own safety. I want to reassure our Muslim communities at this time that there is increased policing around mosques and other places of worship and we will be hosting a safety and security session at City Hall this evening. Experts, including the Metropolitan Police Service (MPS), will provide advice to London mosque leaders on how to build security capacity, share best practice and improve safety and security. I welcome the commitment from the Government for extra security funding. I have written to the Home Secretary seeking clarity that this will be provided immediately to enable mosques to prepare ahead of Ramadan in six weeks' time and they will be provided to other places of worship around the country to protect citizens of all faiths at risk of being targeted by extremists.

I can also inform Assembly Members this morning that I have announced that we will be installing air quality monitors at London's most polluted hospitals. Vulnerable patients are more susceptible to the harmful effects of air pollution, which has been linked to stunted lung growth, asthma, cancer and dementia. This is part of our effort to do all we can to protect Londoners from our toxic air, which is leading to thousands of premature deaths every single year and disproportionately impacting our poorest communities. London now has the most comprehensive air quality monitoring of any city in the world. This is a complete contrast to the previous administration, who hid away important research and failed to take action. We are now counting down the days until we introduce the world's first 24-hour, seven-day-a-week Ultra Low Emission Zone (ULEZ). The ULEZ will dramatically help clean up our air and reduce road transport emissions in London, including around many hospitals. I know the Conservatives oppose my measures but I hope that other Assembly Members will get behind these vital initiatives.

I have also, Chairman, as you mentioned, been asked for three separate oral updates. The first question is on advertising on Transport for London (TfL). TfL was approached by the Michael Jackson Innocent Group to run an advertising campaign on the side of TfL buses for a period running between 25 February and 24 March 2019. As with other advertising requests, this came through TfL's advertising partner, Exterion. The adverts ran on 60 buses. Before TfL accepted these adverts they sought advice from the Committee of Advertising Practice, the independent body that provides guidance on the acceptability of adverts. On the basis that the adverts complied with TfL's advertising policy, they were accepted. At no point were these ads referred to me or anyone in the Mayor's Office.

Under TfL's guidelines, it is able to review adverts once they are running and if, upon review, it decides that an advert is no longer appropriate, they can be removed from the network. As set out in TfL's Advertising Policy,

clause (h), advertisements can be reviewed and rejected if the content contains images or messages which relate to matters of, and I quote, “public controversy or sensitivity”. In light of the concerns raised by members of the public and victims’ charities about the advertisements, TfL came to the view that it would not accept an application to extend the advertising run and decided it would be appropriate to remove the adverts ahead of schedule.

The second oral update is about City Hall loans for affordable homes. Last year Anthology, a small developer, approached the GLA for assistance in financing the purchase and delivery of Woodlands and Master’s House in Lambeth. The site was being sold off by a National Health Service Trust with no requirement for affordable housing and encompassed the Cinema Museum, a locally significant cultural asset. The GLA agreed a fully repayable, interest-bearing loan of £29.9 million to Anthology to build 254 new homes at Woodlands and Master’s House in Lambeth. A condition of the loan is that the level of affordable housing in the scheme is 50%. The funding comes from the Land Fund, which I set up to enable the GLA to take a more interventionist role in the land market. This includes supporting new home builders, securing higher levels of affordable housing and speeding up build-out rates. The loan to Anthology supports all three of these objectives.

The decision-making process for the loan was in line with the Mayoral Decision to authorise the establishment of the Land Fund. That Mayoral Decision delegated authority to the Executive Director of Housing and Land to approve investments via a Director Decision form. Before the Director Decision is made, investments are considered by the GLA’s Interest Rate Setting Board and the Land Fund Investment Committee, the latter of which includes independent members. This particular loan was considered by the Investment Committee on 24 July 2018 and authorised by the Executive Director on 3 December 2018. Another loan relating to the Marshgate Lane site in the London Borough of Newham was authorised by the same Decision.

The same process is followed for similar loans, including the one I recently announced to support Peabody to deliver more affordable homes at the Holloway Prison site, which led to over 60% of over 1,000 homes on the sites to be socially rented and genuinely affordable, and include public green space and a centre for women. In the event of the scheme not progressing in line with the agreed milestones, such as failing to achieve planning satisfactory to the GLA, it is fully recoverable, protected through a charge against the land.

The third oral update, Chairman, is in relation to Interserve. Interserve is a multinational group of support services and construction companies based in the United Kingdom with a revenue of £2.7 billion in 2018 and a workforce of 68,000 people worldwide. They provide a number of services across the GLA Group, including cleaning for London Fire Brigade, support to the MPS, and security guards, track cleaning and vegetation clearance for TfL. Last Friday, the holding company was put into administration after shareholders did not back a rescue package put forward by Interserve’s lenders. Later that day, the lenders then bought the Interserve trading businesses from the administrator.

This means that Interserve continues to provide services, including to the GLA Group, and there is no interruption to the service provided to us. The GLA Group has arrangements for monitoring the financial health of key suppliers both when they bid for contracts and throughout their delivery. Where risks are identified, suitable contingency plans are produced. This was done in this case. However, it was not necessary to implement them as Interserve continue to trade.

Caroline Pidgeon MBE AM: Mr Mayor, given your promise to be the most transparent and open Mayor, will you agree to publish the agendas, minutes and papers for the GLA Interest Rate Setting Board, the Land Fund Investment Committee and GLA Land and Property Board?

Sadiq Khan (Mayor of London): I am happy to look into that, Chairman.

Caroline Pidgeon MBE AM: Thank you very much.

Andrew Boff AM: Mr Mayor, with regard to the Michael Jackson adverts that appeared on buses, did you approve the action prior to the advertisements being withdrawn?

Sadiq Khan (Mayor of London): I was not aware of them, Chairman.

Andrew Boff AM: You were not aware of the adverts or TfL's actions prior to them being withdrawn?

Sadiq Khan (Mayor of London): Both.

Andrew Boff AM: Thank you. Did you or TfL inform Exterion Media before the order was issued to withdraw the advertisements?

Sadiq Khan (Mayor of London): Sorry, did TfL -- ?

Andrew Boff AM: Did you or TfL inform Exterion Media, TfL's agent, before the order was issued to withdraw the advertisements?

Sadiq Khan (Mayor of London): I am not sure if it was quite an 'order'. It is worth explaining how it works. TfL receives, roughly speaking, 16,000 adverts a year, 50 a day. The process does not involve TfL, it involves Exterion, who have a process in place. It goes through a team at the advertising partner. They have their own specific copy approval terms. They assess that against TfL's Advertising Policy.

Andrew Boff AM: This was Exterion Media that rejected the advertisement?

Sadiq Khan (Mayor of London): Yes. Exterion Media go through the process. If they feel there are issues around the advertising it is raised either internally or with the Committee of Advertising Practice and then it comes to TfL after that process. In the process of the review mechanism, as I understand it, TfL, when they were contacted by the victims' charities and members of the public, discussed it with Exterion and decided to remove them using Clause (h) criteria.

Andrew Boff AM: So Exterion Media withdrew the advert, not TfL?

Sadiq Khan (Mayor of London): They are the partner that does the advertising.

Andrew Boff AM: The partner does the advertising. The instruction came from TfL to withdraw the advertisement?

Sadiq Khan (Mayor of London): There was a review against Clause (h) once the complaints came in.

Andrew Boff AM: Who did that review?

Sadiq Khan (Mayor of London): I think that was TfL and Exterion working together. I am not sure.

Andrew Boff AM: Perhaps you could write to me and tell me how that decision was taken.

Sadiq Khan (Mayor of London): I have the answer here. I beg your pardon. Sorry, that was my fault. TfL heard the concerns of members of the public and victims' charities who objected to the adverts, reflected on its position and made a decision accordingly.

Andrew Boff AM: Was the advertiser informed of the decision prior to the messages being posted by TfL on social media of that decision?

Sadiq Khan (Mayor of London): I am not sure but I am happy to --

Andrew Boff AM: If you could write to me with that.

Sadiq Khan (Mayor of London): Yes.

Andrew Boff AM: Did you or TfL inform the advertiser before the order was issued to withdraw the advertisements?

Sadiq Khan (Mayor of London): I cannot answer specifically but I am sure TfL or Exterion would have had discussions with the advertiser because they made the request to extend the adverts. That request was declined but also a decision was taken, using the policy and bearing in mind the concerns raised, to remove the adverts in advance of the first tranche.

Andrew Boff AM: Could you write to me and confirm whether or not the advertiser was informed prior to the decision to withdraw the adverts? Could you let me know that?

Sadiq Khan (Mayor of London): In the same letter I will answer that question as well, yes.

Andrew Boff AM: Thank you. Did TfL meet with the advertiser to suggest alternate wording for the advertisements?

Sadiq Khan (Mayor of London): Again, I am not sure but I can --

Andrew Boff AM: If you can again write to me.

Sadiq Khan (Mayor of London): What I can do, Chairman, is ask TfL to write to the Assembly Member answering the various questions he has raised today.

Andrew Boff AM: Mr Mayor, you summed up the reasons as being a review of Clause (h), which said, "Images that concern a public controversy and sensitivity".

Sadiq Khan (Mayor of London): Yes.

Andrew Boff AM: You did however allow the People's Vote advertisements on TfL. That is quite controversial, is it not?

Sadiq Khan (Mayor of London): The advertising partners and TfL have an advertising policy which they use and as I said, they receive roughly 50 a day, 16,000 across the year. As I understand it, there is no breach of the policy and in their view it is not particularly controversial or sensitive.

Andrew Boff AM: You do not consider the People's Vote controversial?

Sadiq Khan (Mayor of London): I do not consider the adverts on the TfL estate in relation to the People's Vote to be controversial or sensitive.

Andrew Boff AM: Thank you, sir. Thank you, Chairman.