

London Assembly (Mayor's Question Time) - Thursday 9 September 2021**Transcript of Item 3 – Oral Update to the Mayor's Report**

Sadiq Khan (Mayor of London): I will begin my opening comments in Mayor's Question Time by sending my good wishes to Assembly Member Duvall, who is not with us today. Len has been a stalwart presence in this Chamber since the day the Assembly first met and has always been a thoughtful, passionate and insightful influencer since I have been Mayor. At the Assembly he is a dedicated representative of Greenwich and Lewisham, and I am sure we all wish him a speedy recovery and look forward to seeing him back on his feet - or in his chair - as soon as possible.

In a few days we mark the 20th anniversary of the 9/11 attacks. Even though two decades have now passed, all of us in the Chamber will vividly remember the shocking events of that fateful day. It is right that we take a moment this morning to honour and remember the thousands of innocent people who tragically lost their lives, including the 67 Britons who were killed, many of whom hailed from London. Today, and in the days leading up to the anniversary, our thoughts are with all the friends and family members who lost loved ones and to everyone who suffered life-changing injuries. Sadly, here in London we are no strangers to cowardly attacks on our city and on our values, and failed attempts to divide us in our communities. As ever, we stand united with our friends in America against terrorism and we remain determined to show the world that those who seek to destroy our way of life will never succeed.

Nothing is more important to me than keeping Londoners safe. That is why in July I announced that Lord [Toby] Harris would be completing a new independent report into what can be done to further improve our city's preparedness for a major terrorist attack. It is why, today, I am announcing that we will be investing an additional £400,000 to do even more to help prevent radicalisation and violent extremism in all its forms. The new investment is about building on the great work of our Shared Endeavour Fund, which is empowering communities to deliver grassroots projects that not only work to prevent violent extremism and to stop vulnerable Londoners from becoming radicalised, but also to fight racism and hate crime. Since 2020, this fund has already directly benefited 25,000 people and reached more than 600,000 altogether. The additional funding we are announcing today will ensure that we can reach thousands more.

I look forward to answering questions later on this morning, Chair, but I have been asked for one oral update by Assembly Member Russell about the Extinction Rebellion policing. The Metropolitan Police Service (MPS) has done a very good job in challenging times over the last two weeks, ensuring disruption has been minimised and Londoners have been kept safe. The police have fulfilled their duty by facilitating these protests. Where protesters have taken direct action and broken the law, they have responded. In the past two weeks, specialist removal teams have removed 133 people locked on or glued to structures. Officers have also made in the region of 480 arrests.

Caroline Russell AM: Thank you very much, Mr Mayor, and I appreciate your support for the right to peacefully protest. I realise that policing London can be a difficult job, but I am worried that the way that the leadership of the MPS chose to police these protests may have worsened some of the disruption. For example, on the first day, until the police encircled the protest in the six-way junction at Long Acre and St Martin's Lane, it was calm, mellow, and almost like a performance art event with people passing through the area accessing cafes, shops and restaurants.

However, when the police came in, that changed things. Charing Cross Road was filled with police vehicles and the junction was completely closed off, which really was disruptive to people trying to walk through the area.

We know that, by its nature, peaceful protest is a bit disruptive. But do you agree that the police need to consider whether the way they choose to police peaceful protest contributes to the disruption experienced by people in the city?

Sadiq Khan (Mayor of London): I am always keen to avoid commenting on operational matters, but when it comes to protest, the police always look at the evolving situation and act accordingly. They always seek to act in a proportionate manner.

Caroline Russell AM: On the Today programme and in *The Guardian* last week, a retired MPS detective sergeant described the policing of the London Bridge protest on 31 August [2021] as an appalling example of policing. He said that the police used, in his words, unreasonable force. I have also seen worrying footage of MPS police officers climbing on to a bus that appears to show them punching peaceful protesters and striking them with batons. Is this kind of policing proportionate?

Sadiq Khan (Mayor of London): I cannot comment on the description given by the Assembly Member. I did not see those images. However, the Member will know that she gets an opportunity on many occasions during the course of a year to speak to and engage with both the Commissioner and the Deputy Commissioner [of Police of the Metropolis]. Anybody who has allegations of that level of severity can always make a complaint to the Independent Office for Police Conduct (IOPC) or to the police, and I would encourage them to do so. It is really important that the police be held to high standards.

Caroline Russell AM: I am sure that policing a big protest like this requires a lot of planning and preparation. That would include things like risk assessments of the tactics to keep protesters and police officers safe. What sort of risk assessments were done by the MPS in relation to these protests? Can they be published?

Sadiq Khan (Mayor of London): I am not sure about risk assessments; I am almost sure the tactical and strategic and intelligence work done by the police cannot be published for obvious reasons. What I would say to the Member is, when it comes to any police operations, particularly public order operations, the police always learn from previous experiences. The police, like most good organisations in our city, are learning organisations. Just as people who protest, hopefully safely and lawfully, but sometimes unlawfully and not in a safe way, evolve and find different ways to protest, it is important for the police to find different ways to safely police these protests.

Can I just underscore the point you made at the outset; it is a fundamental right living in a democracy to protest. I would encourage anybody who wants to protest to do so peacefully and lawfully. We cannot have a situation where people are breaking the law. The police's job is to enforce the law.

Caroline Russell AM: People have told me that they took their children to join a peaceful protest and felt threatened and intimidated by the scale of the policing. A Londoner also wrote to me describing how, as a bystander in Exhibition Road, they were left physically shaking while witnessing the police rushing to collapse a bamboo structure that ended up falling close to the head of a protester who had fallen to ground. These people attended a peaceful protest or were witness to peaceful protest, and yet experienced a sudden and frightening escalation of police tactics. Will you look into this?

Sadiq Khan (Mayor of London): As I said, if the Member has a complaint to make to the police, it is really important she does so. She can do so directly to the Commissioner and Deputy Commissioner. I would also encourage those members of the public she refers to, if they are unhappy and have a complaint to make about police behaviour, to make a complaint to the IOPC and directly to the MPS, as well. They have a Directorate of Professional Standards to look into complaints against the police.

Caroline Russell AM: Thank you. That will probably apply to this next example: constituents have also written to me with concerns about how protesters are transported after being arrested. They report being transferred without seatbelts over long distances in custody vans and suffering injuries as a result of being driven fast around corners and over speed bumps. Is that something you can look into?

Sadiq Khan (Mayor of London): Again, I would encourage the Member to look into this. She is in the privileged position of being a Member of the London Assembly, and gets access at least twice a year - often more - to both the Commissioner and Deputy Commissioner. But also I would encourage the people she has spoken to to make a complaint in relation to what they are worried about. It is really important that the police are held up to a high standard. The Commissioner and Deputy Commissioner believe that as well. If there are concerns the Member has, or members of the public have, I would really encourage them to pursue those.

Caroline Russell AM: Thank you very much. That is all my questions.

Andrew Boff AM (Chair): Given the potential overlap on this subject matter, I would like to bring forward Priority Question 2021/3776.

2021/3776 - Extinction Rebellion Protests Disruption to London

[Susan Hall AM](#)

What are you doing to minimise the disruption caused by the Extinction Rebellion protests to the lives of Londoners?

Susan Hall AM: I will just carry on if that is all right. First of all, Mr Mayor, I would hate for you to think that everybody was appalled by the police behaviour. I was certainly not. I was thrilled to bits to see them at last doing what many of us think they should be doing, which is not allowing these structures to be put up in the middle of the road, not allowing pink boats to be parked in the middle of Oxford Circus, etc. My questioning is around if you are aware of the amount of distress this has caused disabled Londoners, in particular. If you take to Twitter, as you know I often do, the number of people saying that they could not get their hospital appointments, they could not do what they wanted to do because they are disabled — while it is, and I will quote the other Member, “a bit disruptive”, it is very disruptive if you are disabled or if you are trying to get to a hospital appointment, a cancer appointment. I have copies printed of people who were desperate because they could not. I know you went on LBC talk radio the other day saying that you think they are damaging their own cause. I would like to hear what you, Mr Mayor, think that they are doing for disabled people and people that need to get to very important meetings or hospital appointments being disrupted by these people.

Sadiq Khan (Mayor of London): Chair, the questions from the last two Assembly Members explain the challenges the police face on a regular basis, because there are different points of view. What you are articulating is some of the consequences of protests having adverse consequences on other people. I will give you some examples. You mentioned an example that you had experienced when speaking to constituents. If you are stopping bridges having passing travel, what about when the blue-light services have to reach somebody in desperate need of either the police, a fire engine or an ambulance? If you are standing on top of a Tube train, not only is it very dangerous, but you are also stopping people getting to appointments; it could be a hospital appointment, it could be a job interview, it could be other issues as well. You will know that I am somebody who believes passionately about the right to peaceful protest, but it should be done peacefully, it should be done lawfully, it should be done in a safe way.

One of the pressures on the police is to make sure peace is maintained. Police officers are peace officers; they maintain the peace. Often you are right, some of the consequences lead to the police having to step in. You

mentioned the example of a distressed disabled person. It is really important for the public to be aware of the challenges the police face when it comes to policing protests.

Susan Hall AM: That is right. I agree with you and everybody else here that everybody should be allowed to protest. Having said that, we should put in that "thoughtfully". These protestors are not thinking about the disabled in our city; they are not thinking about people that have maybe got cancer and need to go for very serious appointments. As Mayor, I really wish you would start to underline this aspect to it, because, while there are some who agree with the protests, there are far more of us out there who are sick to death of it. It is causing untold problems.

The first policy announcement you made when you were re-elected - quite rightly - was Let's Do London, let's get businesses back. The Leader of Westminster City Council, Rachael Robathan, has said how concerned she is about businesses because this disruption stops people coming into London. You cannot get your way - and you have put £6 million into Let's Do London - they are messing it around. They had two weeks of protests, not one afternoon. There was a bicycle one yesterday when they stopped a junction working for five or ten minutes at the maximum. For these people, it is more like a party, and they have no right to disrupt the rest of us because they want to have a party in our streets.

You are right, they are spoiling their own cause. But I would like to see you, Mr Mayor, please start standing up for the disabled and those that are in difficulty in our city and need to get from A to B without the disruption of these wretched people. I will leave it at that. Thank you.