

London Assembly (Mayor's Question Time) – 16 December 2015

Transcript of Agenda Item 5 – Questions to the Mayor

Jennette Arnold OBE AM (Chair): Let us move to item 5: questions to the Mayor.

2015/3988 - London Ambulance Service

Dr Onkar Sahota AM

After our discussion at the last MQT session, and now knowing the result of the CQC inspection into LAS, what confidence do you have that Londoners are being properly served by the ambulance service in London?

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): Thank you, Onkar. Your concerns and the concerns of the Assembly are certainly shared by me and by many others. The London Ambulance Service (LAS) has been facing some quite significant difficulties in the last couple of years, principally about recruitment. That has been the heart of the problem. There are various other issues, but that is the nub of it. The culture of the service has been called into question a little bit as well, but that seems to be improving.

The crucial thing is the times for the ambulance to get to the victims. Things are improving. I want to stress that there has been an improvement in the times this year on last year. However, after talking to [Dr] Fiona Moore, the new Chief Executive Officer, I am confident that she has plans to get things even better.

Dr Onkar Sahota AM: First of all, Mayor, I want to congratulate you for your comments on public health. I share that agenda with you and I am very grateful that you have stated publicly your position on that.

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): Not for the first time, either.

Dr Onkar Sahota AM: However, coming back to the LAS, since you realised that it was with the Care Quality Commission (CQC), what steps have you taken to make sure that services are improved for Londoners? We had a discussion last week and --

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): We did.

Dr Onkar Sahota AM: -- you were saying that they were doing so well. A few days later on, the CQC report came out --

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): That is right. That is exactly right and you will have seen the CQC report. I have had regular meetings with the LAS and with my Health Advisors on the way forward.

You will recall that the CQC found various things that it worried about. Basically, it was the number of frontline staff available and there was a little bit to do with a culture of harassment within the Service. You will have noticed that. That was very concerning. I am sure that it is not very widespread but I think it was to do with the intense pressure under which ambulance staff have been finding themselves and the need to get on and cope with quite so much work. The LAS is on call the whole time. They work harder than any other ambulance service around the country. They will be coming up now to an absolutely exhausting period around Christmas onwards through to New Year. It is a massive time for our ambulance service.

I have to say that they are starting to turn it around. They are answering 95% of calls within two seconds and the national target is five seconds. If you have a really critical problem in London, you will be reached within 15 minutes of the initial call 95% of the time and the national standard is 19 minutes. Considering the difficulties that they face, they are doing a pretty good job. One thing that I have always found whenever I have been out and about and there has been an ambulance called for any reason at all is that I have been amazed at the promptness and the professionalism of the service.

Dr Onkar Sahota AM: I agree with you that the problem is about recruitment, Mr Mayor. Professor Sir Mike Richards, the Chief Inspector of Hospitals, said that the staff are “working long hours with high levels of stress and fatigue”. The reason that we are having difficulty recruiting is the cost of living in London and the cost of housing in London. Is there something that we can do for keyworker housing in London in the future?

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): With respect, Onkar, that is obviously a factor, as it is a factor in all London conversations. The problem with recruiting ambulance staff is more subtle than that or more complicated than that.

There is also the fact that the qualification to be a paramedic changed in the sense that it is now recognised and valid for all sorts of other professional opportunities. Ambulance staff are going off to work for football clubs, in hospitals or wherever and there are all sorts of other private sector opportunities available to them. We have seen this big throughput of ambulance staff. They cannot be begrudged their opportunity to move on, but that has meant that the LAS has had to recruit, as you know, substantial numbers from Australia. About 170 or 200 Australian paramedics have been recruited.

A really interesting discussion is to be had about what is going on in our universities, which are failing to supply enough paramedics for what is a great career in the LAS. Why is it that we are going out to Australia to recruit?

Dr Onkar Sahota AM: The last thing I would say, Mr Mayor, is that we have a problem with nurses, also. With a cut the training bursary for nurses, we will also have a nurse shortage in London. We need to be looking at how we train our health professionals.

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): Onkar, we have a general practitioner (GP) shortage and here you are in this Assembly --

Dr Onkar Sahota AM: They are all leaving the profession to take early retirement.

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): -- when you are needed with your stethoscope.

Jennette Arnold OBE AM (Chair): He is still practising.

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): What of your patients, Onkar? We have a terrible GP shortage.

Dr Onkar Sahota AM: Of course and no one wants to be a GP in London any longer, Mr Mayor.

Jennette Arnold OBE AM (Chair): There are no other questions on that.

2015/4353 - Advice for Londoners in the event of a Paris style attack

Kemi Badenoch AM

The National Counter Terrorism Policing Security Office recently released advice on what people should do in the event they are caught up in a Paris-style gunman attack. What plans do you, MOPAC and the Metropolitan Police Service have to make Londoners aware of this advice?

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): Yes, Kemi, you are perfectly correct in that there has been some general advice given about what to do in the event of a marauding gunman attack of the Paris or Mumbai variety. Basically, the gist of it is to hide, to make yourself scarce and, if you can, to communicate what is going on but to not put yourself at risk. That is the gist of what the advice is.

It is very important for Londoners to bear in mind that these events are vanishingly rare and they should not get excessively alarmed about them. The most important thing is to deal with the marauding terrorists in as summary and as powerful a way as possible and to stop them with their automatic weapons. That is why I have no hesitation in endorsing a policy of shoot-to-kill for people who have taken the lives of innocent people and are continuing to present a threat.

Kemi Badenoch AM: Thank you, Mr Mayor. Have you given any advice directly to large public buildings – museums, shopping centres, football stadiums – to help them keep visitors safe?

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): No. The Mayor's Office for Policing and Crime (MOPAC) has not issued advice to tourist venues or destinations in that way, although I will have discussions with the Deputy Mayor for Policing and Crime about what the advice is and whether we need to promulgate it.

My only cautionary note is that I do not want this to become like the 1980s when every child grew up in terror of atomic destruction. *Protect and Survive* was the pamphlet, as I seem to remember, and we were all taught to hide under tables and that kind of thing.

This is a vanishingly rare occurrence. Let us make sure that we deal with it in all sorts of ways. If we can be helpful in giving advice about how to deal with it, then I have no objection to that.

Kemi Badenoch AM: Is it time to introduce gunfire detectors? They have been shown to significantly police response times and to save lives. You may remember that my colleague Roger Evans [AM] recently proposed that the Metropolitan Police Service (MPS) should introduce them.

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): I am very happy to look at that proposal and to see whether it would add value. I am aware that Roger has tabled that proposal for gunfire detectors. They have been used in some places in the United States (US).

Kemi Badenoch AM: Yes.

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): If it can be made to work here, then we will certainly have a look at it.

Kemi Badenoch AM: Thank you.

Kit Malthouse AM MP: I just wanted to clarify slightly on the point that you made on the police firearms policy. Am I right in thinking that there has been no change in police operations in firearms and that we do not have a 'shoot-to-kill policy'; we have what is called a 'shoot-to-stop' policy? There is this idea that the police who are discharging their weapons at somebody who, presumably, is presenting a threat to either them or others would somehow try to clip the gun out of their hand or shoot them in the leg to disable them. They

shoot them, broadly, where the biggest target is, which is in the centre. If that kills them, well, that happens to be a by-product, but it is broadly a 'shoot-to-stop' policy.

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): That is absolutely right. Clearly, the concern today is that unless you immobilise and fully incapacitate the individual, the risk is that they will be able to detonate a device that they are carrying. That is why it is so very difficult to make the distinction between shooting to stop and shooting to kill.

Kit Malthouse AM MP: Have there been specific separate instructions given to the police?

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): No, there are not.

Kit Malthouse AM MP: Essentially, whether it is a terrorist or not, the same terms of engagement for a firearms officer apply, which are that they should shoot to stop? Effectively, you are shooting at the same target, right?

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): You are shooting to stop them causing any threat to innocent life. I am afraid that given the risk that such individuals may be carrying bombs, suicide vests and so on, you have to take a decision about how to prevent those devices being activated in as timely a way as possible. That may mean shooting them in the head. There is no point in mincing words.

James Cleverly AM MP: Mr Mayor, will you join me in sending out a very clear and unambiguous message to our armed police officers that in the event of a terrorist incident or other dangerous armed incident, as long as they act with professionalism and within the rules of engagement laid down for them, they will always have our backing if they feel the need to use lethal force?

Tony Arbour AM (Deputy Chairman): Hear, hear.

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): Of course. They do an extremely difficult job and they keep us safe. It is very important that people should know that one of the amazing things about London is that the number of times the police actually discharge their weapons in the cause of their duties is amongst the lowest of any capital city in the world.

James Cleverly AM MP: Hear, hear.

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): That is a tribute to the restraint of the Specialist Firearms Command (SCO19) and our police officers generally.

We do not have a culture of [police officers] carrying guns in London. There is a lot of pressure for us to vary that culture. I do not want to see it change. It is very important in reaction to events like the terrible killings in Paris that we do not move away from our general policy of policing by consent. An unarmed police force is one that most people respect and value.

Roger Evans AM: One of the benefits that we enjoy as a city in the United Kingdom (UK) is that very lethal weapons are less available to potential terrorists than they are in a lot of other countries around the world, but that does not stop people trying to commit acts with smaller weapons. Sometimes the police officers who get to those types of incidents are not armed with live rounds.

Is it worth considering rolling out more Tasers to police officers on the beat so that they are able to neutralise that type of threat from a distance?

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): You will have seen the response of the police to the incident in Leytonstone [on 5 December 2015], for instance, when Tasers were used actually quite effectively and I really pay tribute to the bravery of the officers concerned and to the Transport for London (TfL) staff, who behaved very bravely and very sensibly.

Tasers do have a place. I do not want to see Tasers used everywhere and, as I said, I do not want Tasers being carried everywhere, but one of the things that we have discussed is making sure that in the 'panda' cars and in the squad cars there is the possibility of making a Taser available in pretty short order.

Jennette Arnold OBE AM (Chair): Let us move to the next question.

2015/4392 - Pressure on small businesses

Jenny Jones AM

Are you concerned about small businesses in London struggling with rising rents and insecure leases as a result of property development?

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): This is an absolutely vital question, Jenny, and you are right to ask it. I have spoken to people in small and medium enterprises (SMEs) in London who are feeling the pressure of rents now. What happens is that, because of the huge pressure on housing, landlords are jacking up rents for small businesses.

It is vital that we do what we can to protect employment space and to create more employment space. We are supporting that through the High Street Fund, which is creating 19,300 square metres of commercial space and supporting 680 businesses. You will be familiar with all of the Regeneration Fund money that we are putting into outer London high streets and places of work.

This is a real challenge for the city. I can tell you that with Eddie [Sir Edward Lister, Deputy Mayor for Planning]] and our planners, we are all focused very hard on preventing loss of workspace.

Jenny Jones AM: My problem is that there is a squeeze on existing businesses. It is all very well to develop an area and say, "The number of jobs is going up", but what is happening in several places is that businesses that have been there sometimes for many years are being squeezed out because of the rent rises that you are talking about.

Here is one example. TfL has a lot of space that it is redeveloping. At Parsons Green Depot, TfL is clearing out about a dozen very successful businesses of all kinds including furniture makers, photographers and so on. They are offering them places --

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): Where is this, Jenny?

Jenny Jones AM: Parsons Green. I would like to ask you perhaps to work with TfL to see if anything can be done about this.

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): Yes, I will. I am not aware of that.

Jenny Jones AM: It is not good enough to say, "There are more jobs and these people can be relocated nine miles away". It is just not good enough when it is a local workforce quite often and there are people working locally. Will you speak to TfL about this particular issue? You have some influence with TfL.

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): Yes, I certainly shall. I am not aware of the Parsons Green problem. You may remember that there was a great deal of concern about buildings in Hackney Wick and we were --

Jenny Jones AM: Yes.

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): Actually, there is a huge amount of new space that has been created there for businesses of sizes --

Jenny Jones AM: Yes, but I have visited there as well and you are driving out businesses that are there already, brewers and all sorts of people who have --

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): Perhaps you are right, but my impression was that we had created a huge amount of extra space and that is what I want to achieve. I will look at the Parsons Green problem.

Jenny Jones AM: I would be very grateful. One of the things that you could do is to stabilise rents in some way on TfL's commercial premises and to perhaps link them to inflation or something like that so that the businesses can project what their costs will be over the next few years. At the moment, just as you said, rents are rising exponentially and it would help the businesses there already to stay put.

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): I will certainly look at that. Do not forget, folks, that we have all these conflicting objectives. TfL is also told that it is the biggest landlord in London with space the size of Hyde Park. Why does it not get on and develop these sites for residential [use]? Yet of course it has conflicting obligations towards worthwhile businesses that are perhaps obstructing the creation of the very residential [space] that the city needs.

Jenny Jones AM: I do understand that, but --

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): What I am saying to you, Jenny, is that it is possible for TfL to be between a rock and hard place and it will be damned either way, but I will certainly look at it.

Jenny Jones AM: For example, you have supported Tech City, where offices are being turned into flats and so on. People there as well are struggling because of rents. Another constituent, Tom, runs a small web design company. It took him a year to find a new office and his rent has doubled. It just does not seem logical when you have a creative business that is a good business, functions well and has local people to drive it out because of the rents.

I do not know if you have spoken already to the Federation of Small Businesses, but perhaps talk to them about how to stabilise rents to some extent so that such businesses do not get pushed away. I understand about the competing priorities but the fact is that if you drive some businesses out, you are losing the character of a place as well as local jobs.

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): I completely agree. We have just established something called the Open Workspace Providers Group, which is looking at this whole problem. We have set up quite a lot of hub spaces. You will be familiar with the 639 Enterprise Centre in the Tottenham High Road. The Camden Collective is providing co-working space and pop-up retail in vacant shops and ex-office buildings. We have

funded something called the Blackhorse Workshop from the Outer London Fund. The Outer London Fund has put a lot of money into this kind of thing and --

Jenny Jones AM: No, I know that you are doing good work and I accept that it is very difficult, but at the same time it is good to understand where things are getting squeezed out.

Your officers at the moment are putting together all sorts of evidence for the new London Plan for the new Mayor and the Federation of Small Businesses could do some research into this specific thing for those officers for the next London Plan. Would you consider some sort of approach to do that? Then you would have the facts and figures and it would not just be me lobbying you here at Mayor's Question Time.

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): Of course, this is something that City Hall takes incredibly seriously. As I said right at the beginning, I believe that this is one of the real challenges that we are facing as a result of the colossal economic success of London. It is just that the pressure on workspace is overwhelming. Yes, we are totally focused on it.

If we can supply you, Jenny, with a clearer picture of what is happening, the spaces that are being lost and the plans we have to redeem that, we would be very happy to do so. Talk to Eddie [Lister] and we will keep you informed.

Richard Tracey AM: Mr Mayor, are you aware that a couple of days ago the Port of London Authority (PLA) launched its vision for the next 20 years to 2035? It was right across the river here at Tower Pier that the launch took place.

Apart from talking of all the success with river transport and so on, there was much discussion at the launch between the PLA and your officers about the potential along the sides of the river downstream of Tower Bridge for the creation of new workshops; obviously, there is Royal Docks, but other places where just these sort of workshops and setup units for small businesses can happen. Do you think that is a very good idea?

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): Absolutely, yes, you are completely right. Yes, of course. There are two things there together, Dick.

First of all, thank you for all the work that you have done on river transport, which has now more than doubled in your tenure as the supreme --

Richard Tracey AM: It has almost reached your target --

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): Have we not exceeded it?

Richard Tracey AM: -- of 12 million by 2020.

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): Anyway, there has been a massive increase in river transport. The riparian opportunities are huge, particularly if you put in the 13 new river crossings that we are putting in and so you combine the boats with the new bridges. They are not just huge projects like the Silvertown Tunnel. We are talking about cycling bridges, walking bridges, garden bridges and all sorts of bridges. The Garden Bridge is obviously in the centre of town, but there are loads of bridges to the east that will be small in scale but will help to intensify economic activity on either side.

Richard Tracey AM: Of course, there are prospects for new piers downstream, too, in various places, far beyond what we have thought of before.

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): Absolutely, yes. Those will be necessary. One of the issues will be, as ever, how much of the riparian land you have to consecrate for old-fashioned wharf activity and how much you can allow to go into new development of one kind or another.

2015/4243 - Knife crime in London

Caroline Pidgeon MBE AM

15 teenagers have been stabbed to death on our streets this year. What immediate actions are you taking to stop these tragic and preventable violent deaths in our city?

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): The reality is that knife crime is a tragedy for the --

Caroline Pidgeon MBE AM: That is my question --

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): -- victims and for their families and one death from a knife --

Jennette Arnold OBE AM (Chair): Sorry, Mayor. Assembly Member Pidgeon?

Caroline Pidgeon MBE AM: That is my question you are answering and you are looking at a different Member.

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): I am so sorry. Forgive me, Caroline. Well, the point holds good. I hope that you caught that, nonetheless. Every knife crime is a tragedy and particularly, obviously, a fatal knife crime.

It is no consolation to the families of victims to point out that the level of knife crime is at its lowest for seven years and is down 30% since 2008. We have made some progress over the last few years. Knife crime with injury is down about 12%. The number of knife crime-related deaths has fallen by a third since 2008.

However, as I say, that is cold comfort for people whose lives are blighted by this and so we have to continue with our work and to step up our work. There is a lot that MOPAC and the MPS are doing. You will be familiar with the Anti-Gangs Strategy and the service that you have championed yourself, Caroline, whereby we work with trauma centres to intervene with victims of serious youth violence who present at accident and emergency (A&E).

There is a great of work going on also through enforcement. We tackle the gangs issue in all sorts of ways including trying to get people out of gangs with, as it were, soft interventions of one kind or another and then there is the tough enforcement. What we focus on is taking knives off the streets through stop-and-search - if it is done sensitively and politely - and we reiterate the huge importance of people understanding today that if they are caught twice carrying a knife they will face a custodial sentence. That law is now on the statute book and it is being enforced.

Caroline Pidgeon MBE AM: Thank you for that outline. I have to say that our figures clearly differ because, actually, we have seen the highest level of knife crime with injury offences, serious youth violence offences and murder since 2010/11. However, I do not want to get into that because you are right that this is about individuals and tragedies.

What I wanted to pick up on was – you are aware because I sent it to you – that I produced a report last month looking at the issue of how we could try to reduce knife crime in London. I have three specific asks for you today.

One is around the issue of education and engagement with young people. Chief Superintendent John Sutherland [MPS] last week on the *Today* programme said, “We can’t just talk about enforcement. We have to look at education”. When I have spoken to various charities, it is clear that many schools are choosing to opt out of having any kind of knife crime education programmes because they want to avoid a stigma. Actually, we probably need to have this rolled out to all schools so that there is not then a stigma and it is just something that routinely happens in every school in London.

Will you ask MOPAC to look at funding and developing knife crime education programmes that can be rolled out to every school in London?

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): I will certainly consider that, Caroline. There was excellent work done by, for instance, the Ben Kinsella Trust --

Caroline Pidgeon MBE AM: Yes, absolutely.

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): -- which you are familiar with. I am sure you will have been around the amazing exhibition and educational experience that they offer and --

Caroline Pidgeon MBE AM: That is one of the charities that raised this with me.

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): -- I have been to see it myself. MOPAC has given that organisation funding on at least one occasion and we are looking at giving it some more.

Caroline Pidgeon MBE AM: You will consider that? Thank you for that. Secondly, we have mentioned the Cardiff Model and A&E departments sharing this non-confidential data to reduce violent crime. Yesterday, coincidentally, I had a nice long letter from MOPAC arrive in the afternoon updating me on this issue. It is a year since I raised this with you last, yet still a third of A&Es in London are not taking part.

Will you now get the Chief Executives of hospital trusts into City Hall to get this resolved once and for all so that we can share this anonymised data and start to make progress?

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): Yes, I totally agree with you. I will find out what is going on with the Chief Executives and why some of them have not agreed. Clearly, the priority has to be the care of our population.

What they may be anxious about, Caroline, is if victims of knife crime think that by presenting themselves at A&E they may be liable to reprisals or punishment by the gang members or whatever if their attendance is publicised, so to speak.

Caroline Pidgeon MBE AM: It is anonymised, though.

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): It is very important to counteract that suggestion and to make sure everybody understands that they will be perfectly safe and that there will be no breach of the Hippocratic Oath.

Caroline Pidgeon MBE AM: You are going to get the Chief Executives in to sort that? That is fantastic.

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): We have made a great deal of progress on it already.

Caroline Pidgeon MBE AM: Finally, MOPAC has just started recently funding Red Thread, which is an organisation that has youth workers in major trauma centres in London. They are doing some great work diverting young people at that crossroads when they come in.

Would you consider extending this further and helping other similar projects such as groups like Oasis Youth, which has youth workers in St Thomas' A&E, where they are able to reduce the escalation of violence? Will you look at that issue?

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): Yes. Look, when you say "reduce the escalation of violence", it is very important to say that violence has been diminishing in any event --

Caroline Pidgeon MBE AM: It is to help these young people steer away from --

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): -- and so possibly a more felicitous way of saying it is "accelerate the de-escalation of violence" or "keep violence coming down faster".

Caroline Pidgeon MBE AM: Will you consider looking at other funding? Just a simple yes or no. Will you consider that?

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): Yes, in that case.

Caroline Pidgeon MBE AM: Fantastic. Thank you very much for your support of those suggestions this morning.

2015/3989 - Knife Crime in London

Joanne McCartney AM

What further action are you taking to tackle the scourge of knife crime involving young people in London?

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): Perhaps I could just say that I have given a substantive answer, I think, on most of the points to Caroline.

Joanne McCartney AM: Yes. Thank you. Some of the requests I was going to make of you Caroline [Pidgeon MBE AM] has covered and I heard the same interview last week on Radio 4 with Chief Superintendent Sutherland. He quite clearly said and I quote him, "If we only ever do enforcement, we're never going to fix the problem". He talked about the cycle of the "madness" of knife crime coming around again every few years and that it needed to have a culture change.

Picking up on the point that Caroline raised about schools engaging with pupils on the dangers of carrying knives, I know that it is something you agree with. However, we have heard in our Police and Crime Committee on a number of occasions that because of the piecemeal nature of the supervision of schools - because we now have academies and we now have free schools - it is increasingly difficult to make sure that there is a consistent approach to this issue.

Therefore, I was going to ask you. Will you write to all secondary schools in London and urge them to make sure that they deal with knife crime during school time --

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): No, I will not. I will certainly support good projects like the Kinsella [Trust] project.

I have to say that I remember in 2007/08 when we had this discussion a lot around this place. There are a lot of complicated psychological factors at work here, particularly in the imaginations of young people. What slightly concerns me - and I must be very honest with you - is the glamorisation of knife crime and the escalation of knife crime in the imaginations of young people to the point where it is simply inflaming their curiosity about what is going on. I do not want knife crime to become, as it were, part of the daily curriculum of schools in this city.

Joanne McCartney AM: Yes, but it is about destroying those myths and --

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): I understand exactly what you are saying. I am just hesitant about some of the methods that could be used.

Joanne McCartney AM: We had evidence from the police in some of our sessions to say that they did have difficulty getting into some schools. A very powerful letter from you urging schools to do this and, if I can just say, certain boroughs, for example, if you would think about it --

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): Let me think about it, Joanne. If you could send me a version of what you think might be useful, I would be very happy to study that.

Joanne McCartney AM: The other thing is that certain boroughs had an exponential increase. For example, Islington had a 79% increase in knife crime with injury involving under-25s in the last year. In my own borough of Haringey it was 31% and Tower Hamlets had a 103% increase. It seems to me that if you wanted to target you could target those specific boroughs --

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): You could. Look, I do not want to sound negative about suggestion or proposal. I just have long memories of this now and --

Joanne McCartney AM: Eight years ago --

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): Certainly, if you look at the movement of offences overall and, indeed, knife crime with injury, it is way down on seven or eight years ago.

Joanne McCartney AM: It is going up and it seems to be a trend.

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): It is up on 2013/14 but it is down from a peak. It peaked, as Caroline [Pidgeon MBE AM] was saying, around about 2011/12. As Kit [Malthouse AM MP, former Deputy Mayor for Policing and Crime] used to say, it is like going down a ski slope. You go down and down like that --

Joanne McCartney AM: It is going back up again.

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): -- and we have had peaks and troughs on the way down. There is a mixture of solutions. I would be very happy to look at your proposal. If you send it in, I will see what I can do with it.

Joanne McCartney AM: It is about making sure that schools, who for one reason or another do not want to do this or are not confident in doing this, have a package of best practice so that they feel confident to do it.

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): Yes.

Joanne McCartney AM: Can I ask my final question, then, on the availability of knives? In Scotland, all shops that sell knives or any weapons over 8.9 centimetres long have to be licensed and a record has to be kept that has to be kept for three years as to who bought that knife. Is that something that you think we should have in this country?

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): I will look at what has happened in Scotland and whether that has worked. We have to go with what works and what is practical.

Joanne McCartney AM: You will look at it. Thank you.

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): I am concerned that knives of a particularly vicious kind are readily available over the internet. There is no doubt that it is horrific what you can buy --

Joanne McCartney AM: Yes, and you can buy them in shops.

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): -- and you can buy them in shops. Many of them of course will be bought wholly innocently, but there is increasing evidence that because of stop-and-search knives are being kept in public places so that they can be called upon by kids in gangs for use in their activities. We have to stop those kids, we have to take the knives off them and we need to impose custodial sentences if they do it more than once.

Tony Arbour AM (Deputy Chairman in the Chair): Assembly Member Arnold?

Jennette Arnold OBE AM: Chair, thank you for bringing me in. Mr Mayor, we have touched on this briefly but I did not have time to really put a full call to you. You talked earlier about the mixture of solutions. Can I just say that I welcome the support that you have given to the Ben Kinsella Trust and the work that it does in terms of the education package it delivers across London? Members will remember that Ben was tragically murdered in the week of his 16th birthday on 28 June 2008.

I am calling on you for a knife amnesty. If you cannot commit to seeing it across London, let me just say why it should be targeted and let me speak firstly about my constituency. In the last year, what we have seen in my constituency is we have seen seven young people under 25 murdered on our streets because of knife crime. That is certainly by itself an awful number that we all regret, but there have been 15 murders across London so far this year. In 2014, there was a total of just 11. It is not 'just' because every life matters but there were 11 deaths.

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): That is right. It was eight the year before.

Jennette Arnold OBE AM : We know that when we have had these amnesties they do work in that we get a sense there. Can you see that as a response?

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): Yes. I am not against that, Jennette.

Jennette Arnold OBE AM : If you are not against it, then will you give your full support to it?

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): Can I make a proposal that I respond in more or less the same way as I have to Joanne [McCartney AM] and take it away? I will look at what area, whether it is your constituency or Islington or Hackney, and what the most appropriate way of doing that might be. I will talk to Sir Bernard Hogan-Howe [QPM, Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis] about whether he thinks it would be of real practical benefit right now. If he does, I have absolutely no problem with that at all. We have done it before; I see no reason why we should not do it again.

Jennette Arnold OBE AM: I have written to you and I have written to Sir Bernard and I will have the opportunity tomorrow to raise this in public with Sir Bernard. You would find that there is cross-party support for it, if not London-wide then targeted.

As Joanne has said, in Islington we have had 33 more offences so far and a 78% increase and in Haringey, her own constituency, 19 more offences and 31%. I believe that there are boroughs where the percentage increase is now going even higher than that and so there is a time now for us to think about that.

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): You are quite right. The fact is that the large percentage increases reflect the very low levels that were achieved a couple of years ago. Even today, yes, you are right to say that 15 deaths is 15 too many --

Jennette Arnold OBE AM: Too many.

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): -- but it is roughly half the number that there were seven or eight years ago.

Jennette Arnold OBE AM: No, we do not look at that.

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): That is no consolation to the families of the victims but I am just trying to --

Jennette Arnold OBE AM: No, it is no comparison.

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): It is important to see the figures in context and to recognise that murders in London are currently running at about 100 a year and they were running at 150 a year. Overall, crime continues to be well down.

Listen. The amnesty proposal is something that should be considered. We do not want a ludicrous situation in which people are handing in the wrong types of weapons and all of that sort of thing.

Jennette Arnold OBE AM: No, that does not happen.

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): Let us see what practical steps we can take and what geographical zone would be most appropriate.

Jennette Arnold OBE AM: Thank you.

Andrew Boff AM: Mr Mayor, I absolutely welcome your words with regard to some of the initiatives that are taken with regard to trying to tackle knife crime. They tend to be about politicians wanting to be seen as though they are trying to do something.

There are parts of London where youth clubs cannot get funding unless they push under the noses of young people posters about how they should not carry knives. They bring to the centre of the debate, "What is the best way for me as a young person to oppose authority? What they are telling me to do is not carry knives". The result has been that the only way to get that funding in some parts of London is to have a very rigorous knife crime agenda within your youth club or organisation.

I very much value what you have said. What we need is to concentrate more on funding generic youth work, not targeted youth work, because you are actually providing an incentive for people to do what you are asking them not to do when you target.

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): I am afraid that there is a grain of truth in that.

Andrew Boff AM: I welcome your words on that and thank you. Realise that you do have support for that approach.

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): Alas. There are lots of ways of looking at this. The scourge of knife crime is something that must be tackled with interventions, that I have said, that are helping the kids to find alternative lives and to get them out of the madness of the gang culture. That is absolutely vital. We need to come down very hard on the key gang nominals and on people who carry knives. That is also vital.

There is a question about the psychological efficacy of some programmes that I have seen. I will just say that. This is a very emotional and a very emotive subject. *Romeo and Juliet* is about this subject, basically. You have to be very careful in how you approach it. Let me put it that way.

Kemi Badenoch AM: Mr Mayor, I only wanted to echo Assembly Member Arnold's calls for a knife amnesty and I was very pleased to hear your response. I am just reiterating that it is a cross-party issue. It is something that we are all concerned about and I know that you are concerned about it as well. It does have the advantage of not imposing onerous burdens or regulations on all the schools or all the licensing across London; it is something that would be fairly easy and cost-effective to do.

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): As I said, I am going to look at all of the proposals that Members of the Assembly are making on this and we will feed them into the mix. I am very grateful to you as well.

Kemi Badenoch AM: Thank you.

Jennette Arnold OBE AM (Chair): Thank you. I am back in the chair. Let us go to the next question.

2015/4371 - Breathalyser tests

Steve O'Connell AM

In the run up to Christmas and during the office party season, what assessment have you made of the scheme in Croydon where those wishing to enter licensed premises were asked to pass a police-style breathalyser test in order to reduce alcohol-related violence.

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): Yes, Steve, it is terrific that the Business Improvement District in Croydon has embraced this scheme and we will see how it goes. We have run such a breathalyser pilot in London and by the New Year we will have an understanding of how that pan-London breathalyser pilot has helped to reduce alcohol-fuelled violence. It is very encouraging that Croydon is taking the lead.

Steve O'Connell AM: The scheme is in Haringey and Croydon in London and also in other parts of the country. To assist colleagues' understanding, this is to perhaps fight against the scourge of preloading. Many people go out but they drink a lot of alcohol before --

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): Absolutely; bingeing.

Steve O'Connell AM: -- and then they go out into our town centres. The idea here is that the door supervisors are now empowered very much, if they have the kit and if they identify someone coming along in the queue who does look particularly worse for wear, to ask them to breathe into a breathalyser. The level of that breathalyser is something like three times the drink-drive [limit] and so it is going to hit people who are heavily preloading. The door supervisors are then allowed to eject those people and also to notify the police that these guys and girls are out there. It is a scheme that has a lot of value. It is used, as I said, in several district centres.

Mr Mayor, you said that you think this is a good idea, but is this something that you could ask MOPAC and also other boroughs to enforce? It is a pilot at the moment but it does have worth particularly at this time of year when there are obviously a lot of people enjoying themselves. Is this something that you think we could roll out in the New Year?

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): Let us see how it goes, Steve. It is very interesting. I am not certain that I want to be breathalysed every time I walk into a pub but --

Steve O'Connell AM: Me neither. Mr Mayor, what we are talking about is using it post 1.00am in the morning, say, outside clubs in the district centres when people have already had the opportunity to have a good evening out drinking. It gives the possibility to reduce the antisocial behaviour that also imposes upon our police resources and our district centres. It has been very successful across Haringey and Croydon and in other cities.

I would ask you to look very seriously at the project and to instruct colleagues in MOPAC and elsewhere to implement it in other parts.

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): Look, I am very grateful to you for your initiative in this area. Let me see whether we think it can deliver the value, the costs, the benefits and the extra imposition upon businesses. It might be something that late-night entertainment businesses would welcome. Some of them might think it would be burdensome. Let us see how it works.

Steve O'Connell AM: It is specifically targeted, as I say, at those late-night businesses post 12.00am or post 1.00am in town centres where there are issues. Thank you.

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): Yes. Let us have a look at it. That is all I will say.

Steve O'Connell AM: All right.

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): By the way, the Alcohol Abstinence Monitoring Requirement, which we trialled in Croydon, if you remember --

Steve O'Connell AM: It seems to be going well.

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): -- is working well.

Steve O'Connell AM: I am pleased. Thank you.

2015/3990 - Cold Homes Crisis

Murad Qureshi AM

Following the news that the number of excess winter deaths more than doubled last winter, what will you do in your final few months in office to tackle the "Cold Homes Crisis" in the capital?

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): This is a very interesting question, Murad, because last year for reasons that we do not fully understand, even though it was not a particularly cold winter, there was an increase in 'excess winter deaths', as they are called, by about 4,000 in London alone. We are trying to work out what was going on there. Generally speaking, life expectancy is going up. People are in better health for longer.

One suggestion may be that the flu vaccine was not as effective as it could have been, but there is no question that too many Londoners are living in inadequately heated homes. It is the cold, combined with infections in your chest, which zaps you. That is why it is so vital to help people with the cost of insulation and to help people with the cost of heating. People know their rights. They know what payments they can expect. We get on with RE:NEW and RE:FIT and all that good stuff.

Murad Qureshi AM: Thank you, Mayor. You are right that it has gone from 1,700 in 2013/14 to 4,000 last winter and we had a mild winter, let us not forget.

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): You are right.

Murad Qureshi AM: It is suggested that at least 30% of it is down to cold homes, apart from the flu jab variations and what have you. I take that on board. When did you first become aware of the increase in deaths - I, for example, heard about it in the summer but I was waiting for the official figures to come out - and what action did you take?

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): I have to tell you that I am afraid that it is only really in the course of the briefings for this session that I have seen the figures, to the best of my knowledge. I am happy to get back to you on that but I do not think that I had been briefed on the excess winter deaths phenomenon before. That is my memory.

Murad Qureshi AM: I just hope it has not fallen between the stools of your Health and your Environment teams. That is my concern.

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): No, I do not think it has. I do not know when the figures became available but those are the figures we have for last year. As you say, they are striking and there may be a number of factors at work. We need to dig into them and see what is going on. Insofar as cold homes may be a part of it, we need to be helping people to sort that out.

Murad Qureshi AM: These are provisional figures and we will have to wait for the Office for National Statistics to confirm them but, nonetheless, in a mild winter - and it looks as though we may get another mild winter - we had 4,000 deaths.

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): Maybe a mild winter is worse.

Murad Qureshi AM: Yes, that is an interesting thought.

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): Could be.

Murad Qureshi AM: Can I just draw to your attention there is a Turn2us cold homes campaign at the moment on the Tube system? I do not know you have noticed the small advertisements --

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): A what?

Murad Qureshi AM: There is a Turn2us cold homes campaign on the Tube system, which suggests that one in two working families is struggling to pay their energy bills. I have to really ask you why, after nearly eight years as Mayor, London still does not have a fuel poverty strategy.

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): It does. That is not quite fair, Murad.

Murad Qureshi AM: The elements you have talked about are actually part of your environment programmes.

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): We do a huge amount to make sure that Londoners are aware of their rights to Cold Weather Payments and their rights to help with their heating costs. The cost of hydrocarbons is incredibly low at the moment, as you know.

Murad Qureshi AM: It has not been passed on.

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): It is a scandal that it has not been passed on to the consumer but it is helping to hold prices down a bit.

The crucial thing is that in this city we waste prodigious quantities of money and fuel through inadequately insulated homes. It is absolutely disgraceful. London does not get enough funding for this. We have about 23% of the solid wall homes in the country and we get only 6% of the retrofit money. We need to be properly helped by the Government to retrofit more homes. We have done about 500,000 so far and we have a further 175,000 in the pipeline but we need to do about 1.2 million.

Murad Qureshi AM: Mr Mayor, I do not deny that is being done. What I was really pushing at are the things that councils like Islington have done with its Seasonal Health Intervention Network (SHINE) programme, where it has given people fuel poverty advice and referral services. I would not be surprised, for example, when we get the breakdown of the figures by borough, if Islington's excess winter deaths are a lot less by proportion of population.

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): I would be interested to see that.

Murad Qureshi AM: That is why the Labour Group has made similar proposals with our home energy action teams to make it pan-London.

Can I finally ask you what your Christmas message is to Londoners who are having to choose between heating and food and are frightened to switch the heating on?

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): My Christmas message is that they should be of good cheer because we are going to be retrofitting huge numbers of homes in the next couple of years and they should get on to our website and discover all the ways in which they can reduce their bills. We stand like coiled springs ready to help Londoners in all sorts of ways.

I am delighted to hear what you say about Islington. It happens to be where I live. My house leaks like an absolute sieve. If they have some brilliant way that will help me insulate my home, I am all for it.

Murad Qureshi AM: I will mention that to them tonight.

2015/4341 - Sexual Health

Andrew Boff AM

Do you support the calls from NHS staff and the Royal College of GPs for 'ChemSex' to become a public health priority in London to help reduce health inequalities relating to HIV, sexually transmitted infections and mental health problems?

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): Look, this is a phenomenon that we probably have to take very seriously. Yvonne Doyle, the statutory Health Advisor, is looking at what the exact risk is from this ChemSex phenomenon to see if we need to have some new guidance on this, Andrew.

Andrew Boff AM: Thank you, Mr Mayor. It certainly does seem to have attracted a considerable amount of commentary. The idea of people taking drugs in order to improve their sex life is as old as the hills --

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): Is it?

Andrew Boff AM: Yes, absolutely.

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): Hills are a bit older than that.

Andrew Boff AM: Hills are quite old. They are as old as I am. The Royal College of General Practitioners (RCGP) is particularly concerned about the rise in not so much the risks from that particular drug but the vulnerabilities it then gives the people involved to things like HIV (human immunodeficiency virus) infection and of course one of the cocktails of drugs is effectively a date-rape drug and it makes those participants very vulnerable to further risks.

What I would be interested to hear from you is the public health response and what you will be doing in terms of ensuring there is a public health response or public health information, one that does not involve just banning things because that almost never works.

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): Banging?

Andrew Boff AM: Banning.

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): Sorry.

Andrew Boff AM: That is probably the most unfortunate Freudian slip I have heard for a long time. No, it does not involve banning things.

Jennette Arnold OBE AM (Chair): OK. Stop, Mr Boff, let the titter finish and then we can hear your question again.

Andrew Boff AM: What is the public health response going to be that does not just involve banning things or making them illegal?

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): No, that is all right. In the sheltered life that I lead, Andrew, it was not something that I was aware of as a particular problem but it is obviously something we have to take seriously. We need to evaluate the strength of the problem and Yvonne Doyle, as I say, is trying to get a handle on what steps we could take, particularly to minimise the spread of HIV.

Andrew Boff AM: According to the ChemSex study that is referred to by the RCGP, the practice has become popular in the boroughs of Lewisham, Lambeth and Southwark. What work do you think should be done to tackle the practice specifically in those boroughs?

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): At this stage, we would really want to try to understand the extent of the problem. What I will do, if you will forgive me, is I will consult Yvonne on how we could be most useful. There are two basic problems in this. One is the extent to which consent may or may not be given to various activities and the second is the spread of HIV. On both issues we may have points to make and there may be useful things we could contribute, but before we do that we would really need to understand better exactly what the problem is.

Andrew Boff AM: I hope you could copy me in on the communication that you get from your advisors because it is something that the public feels is probably getting out of hand. Thank you.

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): All right. Well, thank you. I will certainly do that without delay.

Andrew Boff AM: Thank you.

2015/4359 - South West Trains

Richard Tracey AM

With South West Trains' operating contract ending in July 2017, what work is TfL doing to maximise the chances of it taking control of South West London's commuter rail network?

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): Thank you, Dick, for your excellent work on this topic, including your recent report on the South West network. There is a massive potential win here for London and we are looking forward to working with the Government to achieve further rail devolution in the city. As you know, the West Anglia has just been devolved. TfL is very much on its mettle there and it will have to do well, but we have done well before. The London Underground generally has been a great success story and London Overground has seen a huge fall in delays and a huge improvement in services.

Richard Tracey AM: As you know, Mr Mayor, the work that has been done on South West Trains has been cross-party in the Transport Committee and, if I remember rightly, you joined the party leads in signing a letter to South West Trains about their poor services. The point that is very important is that the Overground now is the most popular rail service in the country.

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): It is.

Richard Tracey AM: In my constituency it runs in Clapham Junction in just the same way as South West Trains does and commuters there are constantly critical of the poor service and overcrowding on South West Trains. Do you think that in taking this forward it is possible to split the service so that we do not

talk about TfL trying to run all of the services all the way to Exeter, way into the southwest of this country, but particularly in the Greater London Authority (GLA) area and maybe out to Windsor and so on? Do you think that is going to be a feasible division?

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): Yes, that is very feasible and you have seen that already. TfL already extends into Hertfordshire and Buckinghamshire. There is no reason at all why we should not make it work for Greater London without in any way disadvantaging the peri-urban areas. Indeed, we think they will do better as a result of rail devolution investment in suburban rail in this city. That is a case that the Government now very much accepts. I do not want to get everybody's hopes up too much but be prepared for some more interesting announcements on that front.

Richard Tracey AM: Interestingly enough, today the Department for Transport (DfT) has, in the case of the Midlands services, called for work between the rail companies and the local authorities in order to improve the services and to cut down on overcrowding on some of the trains in that area. Surely there is something that could be done by the DfT with the rail companies, with us in the GLA and with the boroughs in London because everybody is complaining about this overcrowding.

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): They are absolutely right. The way forward is for much greater co-operation between TfL, Network Rail and the train operating companies. There has to be a general process of devolution. That is my view and it will be massively to the benefit of Londoners. What we need is a proper turn-up-and-go metro-style service across the city where the suburban rail network becomes fully integrated with the whole Tube system and delivers a viable, vibrant service for Londoners. That is the way forward and that is eminently achievable.

Richard Tracey AM: Hear, hear to that. Thank you.

Steve O'Connell AM: Mr Mayor, you mentioned a turn-up-and-go service. I refer to the 'turn-up-and-gone' service, which was in meltdown yesterday on the second day of the new timetable around London Bridge with Southern and Govia Thameslink Railway (GTR). It was an absolute disgrace what happened yesterday morning. I went to East Croydon Station to see a complete array of 'delayed' signs but across the whole south there was awful service. It is the second day of a new timetable of the new franchise holder, GTR Southern. That is the first point to make.

I met some of their leaders the day before - hopefully, it was not my fault - to complain about the detrimental effect in parts of Coulsdon and parts of Norwood Junction. Mr Mayor, this is a new franchise with a new timetable that discomfited many thousands of your residents yesterday across south London. I would urge you, Mr Mayor, to --

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): I hope you pointed out to them that it was not a TfL franchise.

Steve O'Connell AM: No, it was not a TfL franchise. I did point out to them on the Monday, the day before, the threat to them, which I support, that the next time out it will be a TfL franchise.

However, what I would ask, Mr Mayor, is for you to urge the new franchise holder - which TfL did support, frankly - to review its service certainly over the first three months because it has changed the timetable, the service has worsened and many Londoners who are paying a lot of money for their journeys are being severely discomfited.

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): Yes.

Steve O'Connell AM: Mr Mayor, these are your residents. These are your constituents.

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): Hang on a moment. That is the whole problem. It is not our service.

Steve O'Connell AM: No, I appreciate that, Mr Mayor, but you do have --

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): That is the point to make.

Steve O'Connell AM: Exactly, and your successor will get their mitts on that service and that franchise in four years' time.

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): I hope so, yes.

Steve O'Connell AM: However, in the meantime, I would urge you to use your offices through TfL - and you can bring yourself up to speed about the details - to express your displeasure at the service that is being delivered to Londoners. It was absolutely disgraceful yesterday.

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): I am obliged to you for pointing it out. I have not had a report from TfL about that --

Steve O'Connell AM: Can you get a report please, Mr Mayor?

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): -- but I will find out what happened at London Bridge yesterday. In fact, I did meet a discontented passenger who had come from that area yesterday morning. I was cycling at the time. I was aware of irritation. Let me find out exactly what happened.

Steve O'Connell AM: Could you do so?

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): I will, yes.

Steve O'Connell AM: Thank you.

2015/3991 - Food poverty

Fiona Twycross AM

How many older Londoners suffer from malnutrition?

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): Yes. Thanks, Fiona. This is difficult to quantify. Obviously much malnutrition amongst elderly people may be associated with illnesses of one kind or another that they have but, clearly, insofar as malnutrition or undereating is caused by poverty, then it is absolutely unacceptable. We are working to make London a Zero Hunger City by 2020, as you know. The Malnutrition Task Force estimates that one in ten over 65 is malnourished or at risk at being malnourished and that is a huge figure. That would be about 98,000 people. That shows the extent of the potential problem.

Fiona Twycross AM: Thank you for that. I welcome the work that the Food Board has been doing in highlighting issues around food and malnutrition in London.

In regards to older people and malnutrition, I just wanted to highlight the fact that there is a real potential crisis around provision of Meals on Wheels. Nationally, the charity Sustain has estimated, only around one in three local authorities is still providing Meals on Wheels to older people. In London currently 13 of the local authorities are still doing this but we know that more of the local authorities are likely to cut that due to the central Government slashing the funding of local government. This is a real issue. Sustain has pointed out that in some cases local authorities are giving vulnerable older people takeaway menus as a replacement for Meals on Wheels.

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): Yes.

Fiona Twycross AM: While it is probably financially unsustainable for local authorities to do this independently in all cases given the constraints they have on their finances and the high unit cost of meals, as some of the local authorities I have spoken to have highlighted, there is a potential that the issue of vulnerable older people not getting sufficient food provided will be addressed only by a tragedy unless something is done.

What I would ask you to look at would be whether you could establish some sort of taskforce in London to look at the issue of malnutrition in older people – as you say, the estimate is around 100,000 older people in London suffering from malnutrition – and specifically to look at how you can address the issue of the almost complete loss of Meals on Wheels and look at a 21st-century solution to this.

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): Thanks. On Meals on Wheels, Rosie [Boycott, Chair, London Food Board] and the London Food Board are producing some guidance and a plan to try to help local authorities to come up with innovative ways of retaining the Meals on Wheels service. That might be working with supermarkets or working with schools to keep the facilities going. What I had probably better do, as I do not have a very full briefing on it here now, is give you some more details about what that involves and how we are trying to keep food getting to people who need it in that way. You will be familiar with the work of the social supermarkets and all those efforts, but there is a particular effort now being made on Meals on Wheels and I would be happy to share it with you.

Fiona Twycross AM: I would appreciate that. The only other point I wanted to make at this time would be that in your last budget it was outlined that the GLA Food Team's funding is going to be cut in half during the financial year beginning April 2016. Given the acute need for the work that it does in co-ordinating and bringing together different partners, are you still intending to make this cut to its funding?

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): Rosie [Boycott] and the team were OK with the budget conclusions that we came up with. They think that they can manage. I am more interested in results and output than in how much we are spending as a body. They are happy with the funding they have at the moment and, with it, they are doing a huge amount of work on capital growth, on the London Food Map and on trying to make sure that we tackle malnutrition in all sorts of ways. There is obesity as well as under-eating among the elderly population.

Fiona Twycross AM: Absolutely. I am concerned, however, that you --

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): There is a huge amount of City Hall work going on.

Fiona Twycross AM: You could review at least some of that cut in light of some of the issues they have to deal with.

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): Well, yes. If I may, I will take advice from the team because at the moment they are not asking for more money. Just spending money on it for its own sake is not necessarily the answer. The answer is to raise awareness of some of the challenges that the city faces.

Andrew Dismore AM: Mr Mayor, what do you think of a council that is planning to scrap its Meals on Wheels service and replace it with, among other options, referring people to foodbanks instead?

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): All councils are facing particularly challenging financial times at the moment and they have to make economies where they can. It is very important that people, elderly people in particular, who are facing malnourishment should be looked after. I am sure that no council would want to leave its elderly people without the support of some kind of service and is making sure they gets access to the right sort of support.

At a guess, I imagine you are thinking of Barnet Council as you always bring up Barnet Council. If Barnet Council needs help and guidance on how to keep its Meals on Wheels service going, I am sure that Rosie [Boycott] and the Food Team stand ready to provide it.

Andrew Dismore AM: It is not going to come as a surprise that I am referring to your old friends on the Conservative Barnet Council, who put it forward as an option.

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): I know. Mysteriously, I wonder every day to this: how did the people of Barnet fail to elect this man? What was going on? What happened?

Andrew Dismore AM: Yes. Well, the fact is that I am standing up for the 157 recipients of the Meals on Wheels service in Barnet, including the 57% who are over the age of 85. Frankly, to suggest that they might like to go to a foodbank instead is pretty appalling, is it not?

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): With great respect, Andrew, I have to take your account of what is going on at face value. I have no independent means of verifying here and now what you are saying. Take it from me that if there are serious concerns about malnourishment in any part of London, Rosie [Boycott] and the Food Team will be on it and, if there is any advice or help they can give to any council, I am sure they will be wanting to do that.

Andrew Dismore AM: There we are.

2015/3992 - Christmas gridlock

Valerie Shawcross CBE AM

Is London going to be in traffic gridlock this Christmas?

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): Thank you very much, Val. This is, again, another very important question at the top of Londoners' concerns at the moment. There is no question that we are facing severe pressures on our road network. There is an urban obsession, if I may say so, that this is caused entirely by the Cycle Superhighways. That is not the case and I am sure that, since you have studied these matters closely, you will be aware of the reality of the situation.

What we have is a population rising very quickly. We have 120,000 more people in London this year than there were last year. The cost of petrol, as I say, is falling very sharply. You will have seen the recent headlines about the price of petrol. It is cheaper than it has been for many years to get into your car. There has been a massive growth in central London of private hire vehicles (PHVs). You will be familiar with the statistics. From

2009/10, PHV drivers have gone up from 55,000 to 89,000. From being one in 100 drivers in the Congestion Charge Zone, it is now one in ten. One in ten vehicles in the Congestion Charge Zone is probably a PHV; in many cases, an Uber vehicle.

There is also - and this is not fully understood yet - a massive boom in internet shopping that is causing huge numbers of vans. I wonder how many people around this horseshoe have ordered goods to be delivered, either to their home or indeed to this place, over the internet. Has anybody done that? That is leading to, as you know, a huge increase.

Valerie Shawcross CBE AM: Thank you, Mr Mayor.

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): Then there is the matter of construction and then the cycling measures.

To mitigate all of that, what we are doing is very extensive. You will be familiar with the Lane Rental Scheme and with the Split Cycle Offset Optimisation Technique (SCOOT). We are investing huge sums - £4 billion - in the Road Modernisation Plan to try to get traffic flowing more smoothly. It will start to get better, basically, from the turn of the year and then it will steadily get better thereafter.

Valerie Shawcross CBE AM: Thank you, Mr Mayor. I do share your concern about the impact of this on our daily lives and the economy and I would agree that the list of items you have come up with - the minicabs growing to 91,000 now and the huge growth in light van traffic - are important long-term trends that need tackling. Population growth is well in there as an issue. The Cycle Superhighways are causing a temporary problem but, in the long run, it is important that we do promote cycling.

The problem with this perfect storm of issues coming to cause congestion on our roads is that the key thing we needed to achieve, which was the transference from private cars to public transport, is also starting to be eroded here. What I wanted to ask you about was the impact on the bus users. I have been reading TfL reports that are talking about there now being a reduction in bus passenger journeys even though the population is rising rapidly. There were 19 million fewer last year. They say the primary cause of this decline in demand is due to the deterioration in bus reliability because of the increased traffic levels.

What are you going to do to turn this downward spiral back into an upward spiral, protect the bus services, improve their reliability and get people going back on them with the confidence that they can get to work?

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): There is an important point there that TfL would also make, which is that the massive improvements in reliability of the Tube and the upgrade, for instance, of the Jubilee line have taken a massive number of passengers off the surface and put them underground. You can see that in some of the bus routes. [TfL] is having to vary its provision and that is entirely understandable.

Valerie Shawcross CBE AM: Mr Mayor, TfL's own analysis says that the traffic problems are causing some of this. I am certainly getting emails from members of the public - I am sure we all are - saying, "I cannot get to work. The bus is too unreliable". What are you going to do to invest in bus priority?

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): We already have the bus lanes, as you know. Actually, bus patronage is roughly static while the use of the Tube continues to boom. Bus usage overall is vastly up on where it was a few years ago.

Valerie Shawcross CBE AM: It has started to slip back, according to TfL's figures.

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): The figures I have seen suggest that it is more or less flat. It has started to rise again. The answer, as you rightly say, to increasing reliability and minimising the journeys of private vehicles as far as we possibly can is that we need a numerical cap on minicabs and on PHVs. There is no question that we have to deliver that and we are having further discussions with the Government about that very shortly, although I have to say that there is not a great deal of appetite in the Government for that because it regards that as an infringement of the free market. We need to do something here.

Valerie Shawcross CBE AM: What are you going to do for the bus passengers, Mr Mayor?

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): The most important thing that we can do for the bus passengers is to make sure that their journeys are reliable and the way to do that is, as I say, to have lane rental for roadworks to minimise roadworks. Once the programme of construction starts to simmer down a bit, they will start to see a return in the timeliness of their journeys.

Plainly, what we are seeing now is the busiest time of the year. This is the time of the year when everybody is on the roads. There are many things that are coming together to make journey times on buses difficult to achieve, but TfL assures me that by the turn of the year, from January on, it will steadily get better. Every week it will get better and you will start to see a return of reliability.

Valerie Shawcross CBE AM: Mr Mayor, I hope you are right. That was a somewhat, unusually, wishy-washy answer.

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): No, I am being very --

Valerie Shawcross CBE AM: I would just put it to you now in your eighth year that maybe it was a mistake to remove the Western Extension of the Congestion Charge Zone. Sadly, I have run out of time.

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): At no stage has TfL produced any evidence that that would have made a bean of difference to anything. If Labour is now saying that its candidate wishes to introduce a congestion charge, the people of London should know. We have just had a very important political development this morning. It is clear; it has come out.

Valerie Shawcross CBE AM: I am out of time, Chair.

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): This is the Labour transport spokesman in the London Assembly who has let the cat out of the bag. Labour plans congestion charges for Londoners; that is their agenda. The council tax will go up and new taxes on motorists. Be warned, folks. Be warned.

Tony Arbour AM (Deputy Chairman): We cannot trust [Sadiq] Khan.

Valerie Shawcross CBE AM: Thank you.

Jennette Arnold OBE AM (Chair): It was there to come out.

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): I know.

Jennette Arnold OBE AM (Chair): We have stopped the clock.

Valerie Shawcross CBE AM: Thank you.

Roger Evans AM: Boris, if you look around the city there is a lot of wonderful, iconic construction work going on around the place. New buildings are going up everywhere. I am surprised, travelling around the centre of town, how many of those developers seems to have found it necessary to extend beyond the curtilage of the development and appropriate parts of the road and indeed parts of the pavement, if we go on to Val's [Shawcross CBE AM] later question about walking. All of these add to congestion as well.

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): They do.

Roger Evans AM: Could you ask your officers at TfL and your planning team to take a look at what seems to be a creeping trend for private developers to block up parts of the road for months on end?

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): Yes. I am very much opposed to that. All of the development projects I see I will not let go out into the pavement. It is monstrous. One Hyde Park - which I did not agree; it was done before my time - is quite extraordinary in the amount of public space it seems to invade. I am not in favour of that. I am in favour of creating more space for walking. That is why, amongst other things, we are supporting the Garden Bridge, which will create an entirely new, absolutely superb project.

Tony Arbour AM (Deputy Chairman): Hear, hear.

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): That is the spirit. Come on; stick it up them. A wonderful new Garden Bridge will radically increase the liveability and the walkability of that whole area.

Roger Evans AM: You could start with the scheme on the north side of London Bridge, which has taken a lane out of action, or some of the schemes around Aldgate, where people seem to have found it necessary to build out into the road while they are doing work.

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): Yes. Sometimes if you want to preserve a lovely old façade, I am afraid you have to construct these steel fasciae or whatever in front of the building to keep it upright while you get on with the work. I appreciate that. That is just, I am afraid, probably an inevitable result. That is in a nutshell what is going on at the moment. We are seeing the biggest construction boom this city has had for 40 years or more and there is a transport cost to that. It is a good thing.

Richard Tracey AM: Mr Mayor, I must say I did agree with what Val [Shawcross CBE AM] was saying until she mentioned the congestion charge.

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): You see; the cat is out of the bag. I hope Zac's [Goldsmith MP, Conservative mayoral candidate] people are watching. This is a sensational development.

Richard Tracey AM: I did agree with what she was saying about the bus services because involving both Val's constituency and mine there is the problem of Vauxhall Bridge with a massive tailback of buses both into Kennington and indeed north of the river and the 87 buses being diverted off Wandsworth Road because of building works. It is related to the Northern Line extension. There is massive gridlock there.

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): Yes, it is. That is what is about, the whole thing. I was trying to drive through that area the other day to get to my mother-in-law's and a new city is being built there, basically.

Richard Tracey AM: That is true, yes.

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): It is colossal. We have seen nothing like it for 50 years and it is causing a great deal of congestion. It will get better as the projects come to completion.

Richard Tracey AM: Yes. Well, I hope so. Obviously, the work at Elephant and Castle and indeed the cycle lane creation over Vauxhall Bridge have caused, of course, some problems. There was a big review of that on a British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) programme a few days ago. Obviously, it is very frustrating for the bus users.

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): I accept that point, Dick, and I repeat what I have said to Val [Shawcross CBE AM]. We are acutely aware of this. We are seeing some improvements now in bus patronage and overall bus ridership is colossally up on where it was a few years ago. We will continue to use every effort to remove blockages from the road network and to keep London traffic flowing freely.

Chair, through you, could I just say that the Mayor of – where is it? – Tower Hamlets is continuing to make the most – you cannot hear him but he is chuntering away and it is quite distracting.

Tony Arbour AM (Deputy Chairman): Disgraceful.

Jenny Jones AM: Shut up!

Jennette Arnold OBE AM (Chair): I cannot believe that mayors chunter.

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): Are you saying that you do not propose to stop him from chuntering?

Jennette Arnold OBE AM (Chair): I just do not believe that mayors chunter, do they?

Jenny Jones AM: He should leave the room.

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): Chair, if you are not proposing to stop him, then I will be disappointed but not surprised.

Tony Arbour AM (Deputy Chairman): Go and hit him.

Jennette Arnold OBE AM (Chair): I would not want you to start chuntering back, if there is such a thing as ‘chuntering’.

Darren Johnson AM: Stop him chuntering, Chair.

Jennette Arnold OBE AM (Chair): OK.

Tony Arbour AM (Deputy Chairman): Turn him off.

Jenny Jones AM: You have to do something about it, surely.

Jennette Arnold OBE AM (Chair): Assembly Member Jones, are you chairing this meeting?

Jenny Jones AM: No, but if I were I would ask him to shut up.

2015/4363 - Taxi report

Richard Tracey AM

Does the Mayor agree with the recommendations of our report, which calls for the reform of the taxi trade to make it more competitive?

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): Thank you very much, Dick. Your report has some good things in it. However, I have to say that the point you make about The Knowledge [of London] is perhaps one that I would not go along with. The Knowledge is vital. It has proved itself over many years to be a unique feature of the London taxi trade and something that passengers certainly value. It would be a great shame to lose that. Many experiments have shown that the Knowledge is vastly superior to satnav, TomTom or whatever.

Richard Tracey AM: I absolutely agree with you on that and of course we were not talking about scrapping The Knowledge or anything like that. The whole purpose of the report was to help the black cab trade. Seven points in it are aiming at that. I was disappointed to hear you say just now the Government is not, it seems, too keen on your idea of limiting the massive growth in PHVs.

There are one or two things that I would just like to ask your opinion on. We were suggesting that perhaps there should be interest-free loans or certainly lower-interest loans for the black cab drivers and owners so that they are able to equip themselves with new black cabs for 2018 to make them compliant with the Ultra Low Emissions Zone. What do you think of that?

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): That is a very good idea. We are already making available £600,000 for taxi ranks. There is a £65 million fund that we have secured to help achieve a target of 9,000 zero-emission-capable taxis by 2020 and that will be used to help drivers trade in their vehicles and get zero-emission or low-carbon vehicles. There is still a £5,000 plug-in grant available from the Office of Low Emission Vehicles (OLEV).

The black cab trade is going to continue to flourish and prosper provided it moves with the times. It is very important that they should take cards and should take contactless payment. That has to be done and I hope everybody on the Assembly supports that. There are various other ways in which we are working to help those black taxis.

Richard Tracey AM: Do you support our idea, perhaps, of sponsorship of those card reader machines, which will be mandatory, I believe, from 2016?

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): What do you mean by 'sponsorship'?

Richard Tracey AM: Equipping a cab with them is going to be quite costly and it is possible - as happens, I believe, in New York and Las Vegas - for companies to sponsor those machines in the cabs. Have you heard of that?

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): I have no objection to companies sponsoring a card payment machine, none whatsoever.

Richard Tracey AM: The other thing we suggested is that black cab drivers are finding TfL to be rather difficult and obstructive in some of the regulation. Is there a possibility of bringing back the Public Cab Office as part of TfL but making it a specialised operation for the black cabs?

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): There is already a Public Carriage Office that works --

Richard Tracey AM: It is not the same as it was. It is now TfL officers who are doing the work. That is what upsets the black cab trade, as we understand it.

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): The black cabs are independent commercial operators and actors and TfL regulates that trade. We have a regular Cabbies Cabinet in City Hall that I chair and we have very good relations with representatives of the black cab trade. If you talk to them at the moment, they will say that business is by no means as bad as it has been.

One of the interesting things in the Cabbies Cabinet has been the progress we have been able to make together on some of these issues such as card payments and making sure that there is proper support for black cabs as they move to low-carbon vehicles. The relationship is not too bad at the moment. Yes, of course there will be black cab drivers who want to return to the old system whereby it fell under the MPS, which is probably what you are getting at. I do not think that is the way forward.

Richard Tracey AM: Well, I hope you will be able to make some progress --

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): It would come to the same thing, anyway.

Richard Tracey AM: I hope you will be able to make some progress with the limiting of this vast growth.

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): Yes. I am grateful for your support on that.

Richard Tracey AM: Thank you.

2015/3993 - Affordable Housing

Tom Copley AM

Can the Mayor update the Assembly on the implications of the November 2015 Spending Review specifically for social and Affordable Rent housing in London?

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): Yes. Thanks, Tom. The Government is embarking on a massive programme of building homes for Londoners and indeed across the country. As you know, we are now building more than ever before. What I want to see is a mixture of tenures so that there is affordable rent and part buy/part rent in the mix as well. We are still in negotiations with the Government about exactly how the housing build is going to play out in the city.

Tom Copley AM: The [Comprehensive] Spending Review (CSR) did not pledge any new money for either social rent or affordable rented housing but will instead put all of the funding into things like starter homes, which, as I am sure you know, in London cost up to £450,000 and, according to research by Shelter, would be unaffordable except to people on the highest incomes. In fact, there is no income limit on starter homes as there is for all other forms of affordable housing, including part rent/part buy.

Your own evidence base says that we need to build 15,722 new social rented homes a year between now and 2034/35. Where are these homes going to come from?

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): Again, if I may say so - and I repeat the answer I gave to Nicky Gavron [AM] - you are out of tune with some of more sensible things that are being said by the Labour front bench, which now --

Tom Copley AM: I heard what you said to Nicky. Can I just say that John Healey [MP] has called for us to build 100,000 new social homes per year in this country?

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): Can I finish the answer?

Tom Copley AM: John Healey, on our front bench, does recognise the need for social housing.

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): Would you mind if I finish my answer? There was a great deal of emphasis yesterday from the Labour front bench on the fall in home ownership in Britain and indeed in London over the last two decades. A great deal of stress was placed on the need to help people into home ownership and that is entirely correct.

As I said to you before, we have a situation in London where 33% of the accommodation in the centre of the city is social housing already. The people who are really struggling --

Tom Copley AM: Yes, but --

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): Can I just finish my answer?

Tom Copley AM: You are repeating what you said to Nicky Gavron and that is on the record.

As I said, despite whatever percentage of social housing we have now, your own assessment of need says we need to be building just under 16,000 more social units every year? Is that assessment of need wrong?

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): Well, we built a record number of affordable homes over --

Tom Copley AM: I am asking you how you are going to achieve what we need to be building in the future. Is that assessment of need wrong?

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): No. We are going to continue, as I say, with a mixture of tenures. Affordable Rent will continue to be part of it. We will continue to build a record number of affordable homes.

Tom Copley AM: You will be aiming to build 16,000 social units a year?

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): I know that you have an obsession with affordable -- with people living in, basically, entirely -- in flats --

Tom Copley AM: I have an obsession with homes that people can afford to live in.

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): I know that you defend the idea of senior Labour politicians living, basically, at the taxpayers' expense in social housing, which is --

Tom Copley AM: If I could just interject there, in your Government's rush to get the housing association debt off the books, it has now said that 'pay to stay' for housing association tenants will be optional. Pay to stay is for households earning over £40,000 a year. That is two nurses, Mr Mayor. Do you think two nurses should be able to live in social housing or not?

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): If you think that a City Hall Deputy Mayor under Ken Livingstone [former Mayor of London] earning £125,000 should be living in social housing, you are in cloud cuckoo land.

Tom Copley AM: What do you think about the two nurses living in social housing, Mr Mayor?

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): Really, you need to get with the programme and you need to think about the needs of Londoners who really need social housing --

Tom Copley AM: I am thinking about the needs of Londoners when I say we need to be building 16,000 homes a year. That is what the planners at City Hall have come up with.

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): -- and not the people on massive incomes who are, in my view, abusing the system.

Tom Copley AM: Thank you.

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): I really find it incredible that you defend that system. It is unbelievable.

Tom Copley AM: Thank you very much, Chair.

Jennette Arnold OBE AM (Chair): OK, Mr Mayor. We will go to the next question under the name of Assembly Member Shah on the 13 appliances.

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): I am sorry. I am being heckled. They say my answer is disgraceful.

Jennette Arnold OBE AM (Chair): Mr Mayor, I did hear, on that occasion, heckling and I am saying to Members: pay respect to other Members and let us get their questions to the Mayor so that he can answer them.

Navin Shah AM: Thank you, Chair.

Jennette Arnold OBE AM (Chair): I have called on Assembly Member Shah. Do you not have anything else to do, Assembly Member Cleverly?

James Cleverly AM MP: Not at the moment.

Jennette Arnold OBE AM (Chair): Assembly Member Shah, you have the floor.

2015/3994 - 13 Appliances

Navin Shah AM

Why does LFEPA want to risk the safety of London by proposing removal of 13 fire engines?

Navin Shah AM: Thank you. Thank you very much, Chair, and --

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): Thank you so much. Thank you, Navin.

Navin Shah AM: -- I am waiting for the Mayor.

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): Thank you so much for your question. The answer really is that there are two options on the table. Andrew Dismore, who chairs the London Fire and Emergency Planning Authority's (LFEPA) Resources Committee, has come up with one proposal that involves making some cuts to the Fire Rescue Units (FRU) and using about £500,000 worth of reserves. Another option has been put forward by the Commissioner for Fire and Emergency Planning (Ron Dobson QFSM). I look forward to seeing what the outcome of the consultation will be in February, to see what action is taken and indeed what decision I need to make.

Navin Shah AM: Mr Mayor, I will come to the issue of what is on the table at LFEPA in terms of alternative proposals to your drive to remove 13 fire engines. I do not know if you know but Brent has one of the highest rates of fire deaths across London and also it is missing the target response times by about 41% when it comes to callouts. Why are you still proposing decommissioning a fire engine at Willesden Fire Station?

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): As I say, I do not want to pre-empt the outcome of the consultation in February. Let us see what the arguments are. I draw your attention to the fact that the appliances that you refer to have been out of commission for two years. In that time deaths from fire have continued to fall, there were fewer than 20,000 fires in a year for the first time since records began and response times for both first and second engines remain well within target.

Navin Shah AM: Mr Mayor, records suggest that since the closures of fire stations, the removal of fire engines, etc, which happened last year, the target times have been exceeded in terms of callouts in probably half of the boroughs. That does pose a question of safety in London.

Given that, like you mentioned, there is already a budget proposal agreed by the majority of LFEPA members that will save you from removing 13 fire engines and frontline services, why are you still absolutely insisting that 13 fire engines be removed? That is your ultimatum.

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): You are slightly begging the question here.

Navin Shah AM: I am not.

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): Like I said, I will await the outcome of the consultation. LFEPA has yet to make a determination about the two proposals. I will take a view in due course and rely on the judgement of the professionals concerned.

Navin Shah AM: Thank you.

Jennette Arnold OBE AM (Chair): I have two Members but, before I call them, Assembly Member Dismore, will you raise your point of clarification?

Andrew Dismore AM: Yes. The Mayor, in returning to the alternative budget that I produced as Chair of Resources at LFEPA, said I wanted to cut two FRUs. That is not the case. I do not wish to cut any appliances whatsoever. In fact, I want to bring the 13 fire engines back into use. What I have suggested is alternate crewing some of the special appliances, including just two of the FRUs.

Gareth Bacon AM: Mr Mayor, Assembly Member Shah has been off the Fire Authority [LFEPA] for a while, which might account for his slightly hazy grip of some of the facts around this. He repeatedly, during his questioning, referred to 'your' drive to remove appliances and 'your' proposals to remove appliances from the run. Will you join me in recognising the fact that you have no proposals at all at this point in time?

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): I await the proposals of the LFEPA.

Gareth Bacon AM: There are two proposals on the table, one from Assembly Member Dismore acting as Chair of the Resources Committee at LFEPA and one from the London Fire Brigade Commissioner; no proposal whatever from you.

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): That is entirely correct. Thank you and I congratulate you on all the work that you do as Chairman of LFEPA.

Gareth Bacon AM: Thank you, Mr Mayor.

James Cleverly AM MP: Mr Mayor, do you agree with me that one of the Members of this Assembly still, despite all of the discussions we had through the production of the Fifth London Safety Plan (LSP5) and despite the fact that he sat for a number of years on LFEPA, seems not to understand the relationship between the mayoralty and LFEPA, and LFEPA and the London Fire Brigade?

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): It is very striking but there is no accounting for the level of ignorance of some of these people who --

Jennette Arnold OBE AM (Chair): Excuse me here. No. Members are to ask the Mayor questions about his statutory responsibility. He does not have a statutory responsibility about Members' knowledge or how they behave.

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): I probably do, actually.

Jennette Arnold OBE AM (Chair): Can you rephrase that question, Assembly Member Cleverly? If not, I shall move on. Ask him about his statutory responsibilities.

James Cleverly AM MP: Sorry, Madam Chair. Are you ruling my question out of order?

Jennette Arnold OBE AM (Chair): I would ask you to rephrase it. The Mayor is not here to give an opinion --

James Cleverly AM MP: No, I am happy with the phrasing. Are you ruling my question out of order?

Jennette Arnold OBE AM (Chair): Will you rephrase the question? It is not for you to ask the Mayor to comment on an Assembly Member. You are to ask him about his statutory responsibilities.

James Cleverly AM MP: Through the production of LSP5, there were serious issues about comments made by members of the Fire Authority, both those who are borough representatives and Members of the Assembly, which showed a fundamental misunderstanding of the difference between scrutiny of the Fire Authority --

Jennette Arnold OBE AM (Chair): That is not a mayoral question and I am ruling it out of order. Do you have another question to put to the Mayor? I want to move on. I will take that responsibility and we can take it up elsewhere.

James Cleverly AM MP: Would you be willing to tell me under which standing order that is deemed out of order?

Jennette Arnold OBE AM (Chair): I will tell you in a moment. In fact, let me tell you that there is a standing order that says the Chair determines what an appropriate question is. I will give you that number in a moment.

James Cleverly AM MP: Noted.

Jennette Arnold OBE AM (Chair): Now, do you have another question or do I need to move on?

James Cleverly AM MP: I do have another question.

Jennette Arnold OBE AM (Chair): Thank you. I will take that other question.

James Cleverly AM MP: Mr Mayor, do you think it is time, because of the fundamental misunderstanding that some Members have about the role of the mayoralty, LFEPA and the London Fire Brigade, that the functions currently discharged by LFEPA are taken into the mayoral office so that people both within this Chamber and outside can understand the difference between a proposal that has come from the operational head of the Fire Brigade, from the Chair of one of its LFEPA committees and a proposal that might have come from you? Certain people seem to be struggling at the moment.

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): Thank you so much. I want to say that in an uncharacteristically helpful heckle from my right, the Member for [City and East] [and Mayor of] Tower Hamlets has just suggested that I be made, effectively, emperor of all these areas. I want to stress that that is not my ambition. Like every Roman emperor, I explicitly deny my imperial pretensions. I do not wish to exercise sole sovereignty over this area. This is something that will be done in concert, I hope very much, with the Chairman of LFEPA and with the London Fire Brigade.

The fantastic professionals who lead that Fire Brigade have done an outstanding job for our city over the last eight years. I am very proud of the work that they have done. Ron Dobson has been an absolutely outstanding Commissioner for Fire [and Emergency Planning] in London and we all benefit from his advice. Londoners have benefited from his leadership in helping to bring fire down. I am not quite clear what value is added by some members of the LFEPA who luxuriate in their positions and do not, it seems to me, contribute much of note to the debate.

James Cleverly AM MP: Mr Mayor, would you concede that the position of Mayor of London is the position that is ultimately held responsible at the ballot box for decisions made around fire and emergency planning in London in a way, frankly, that none of the members, whether they be Assembly Members or borough members, of the Fire Authority [LFEPA] are?

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): I completely agree and there would be full democratic accountability under such a dispensation. The behaviour and the general level of ignorance shown - to return to your excellent point, James - by members of LFEPA is a powerful argument militating in favour of that conclusion.

James Cleverly AM MP: Thank you.

2015/4350 - Silent Suffering Report
Kemi Badenoch AM

Following the release of my report 'Silent Suffering - Supporting the male survivors of sexual assault', what response do you have to the recommendations?

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): Kemi, thank you. I understand that this is a report that you have done. I thank you for that report.

This is something that clearly we must take very seriously indeed, although the overwhelming bulk of sexual violence is against women and girls and that is why we have had a strategy particularly focused on that. People understand that that is the natural and logical thing to do. We must take account of the statistical evidence that violence against males is also a phenomenon that cannot be neglected and so we have commissioned an independent needs assessment and a review of those issues in order to inform an updating of the Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG) Strategy, should it be so needed.

Kemi Badenoch AM: Thank you. We are running out of time and so I will have my supplementaries written up for you separately. Thank you for your responses.

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): Thank you.

2015/3995 - Spending Review

Fiona Twycross AM

What assessment as Mayor of London have you made of the impact on low income Londoners of measures announced in last month's Spending Review?

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): Thank you. Low-income Londoners have benefited in several ways. The ambition to build more housing is extremely important in the CSR. That is something that we have discussed a great deal already, the ambition greatly to expand the number of apprentices to get young people into jobs. The general success of apprenticeships in getting young people into employment is something that we have observed in London. To expand that campaign has to be good for our kids. The CSR was also good for transport. We have all the big infrastructure projects going and we maintain a massive programme of investment in London. The city is in very good shape at the moment but obviously there is a huge amount of work to do and the CSR will help us to do it.

Fiona Twycross AM: The truth is, however, that despite the hype - which would have been worthy of you - the Chancellor's apparent U-turn on tax credits hides the fact that low-income working households in London on the Living Wage will be as much as £3,060 worse off by 2020. In the media, you had previously criticised the Chancellor's proposed cuts to tax credits, obviously, but then defended them here and voted for them in Parliament.

Do you support his cuts to the incomes of low-income working households through just shifting the cuts to Universal Credit or are you lobbying to make sure that low-income Londoners are not affected by the welfare cuts coming forward?

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): Even you would accept that we have to do something to reform a welfare system --

Fiona Twycross AM: These are working households that are going to be cut.

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): -- that has substantial poverty traps and substantial penalties for work. The move towards Universal Credit has to be right and that is something that I certainly support. The ambition to mitigate the impact of that in the short term and medium term was entirely correct. Do not forget the huge benefits of paying people properly. If I can finish --

Fiona Twycross AM: This is still going to leave people from working households on the so-called National Living Wage up to just over £3,000 a year worse off. What are you doing to raise it with the Chancellor and to highlight the impact this is going to have on Londoners' incomes?

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): To be fair, there was a very considerable change from the budget to the CSR and you saw the change in the handling of the tax credits reforms and --

Fiona Twycross AM: It is deferring the pain.

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): Can I finish my answer? What I want to see is a much greater expansion of the London Living Wage in addition to Universal Credit, which is something that is gaining ground. I had a great meeting yesterday with Citizens UK, with London citizens, and there are now well over 2,000 firms across the country paying the Living Wage, and --

Fiona Twycross AM: It is the number of people who are paid it, not the number of firms, and we come back to this point again.

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): More and more people are being paid the London Living Wage.

Fiona Twycross AM: What will you do in the last few months of your time in office as Mayor to make sure that Londoners are not left worse off by this Chancellor and his cuts?

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): We are doing a great deal to promote the London Living Wage and to ensure that Londoners get the benefit of the huge boom in employment that we are seeing in this city and that, when they get in to work, as they are at a rate that we have not seen for the last 25 years, and unemployment is low, employment is at a record high --

Fiona Twycross AM: Chair, I am finished with this.

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): I want to see work pay.

Fiona Twycross AM: He is not actually addressing the issue of what the Chancellor is doing in terms of welfare. There is absolutely no point taking these questions today.

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): Everybody will note that Labour has now boxed itself into a position where it opposes any kind of change to the welfare system at all. It is the party of welfare. It is the party of no change. It will not help people out of poverty traps.

Fiona Twycross AM: No, this is not the case. This is not the case.

Jennette Arnold OBE AM (Chair): Assembly Member Twycross, if you are quiet, then we can hope to get him quiet.

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): They will not help people into work.

Jennette Arnold OBE AM (Chair): Mr Mayor.

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): They have absolutely no interest in changing or improving the system.

Jennette Arnold OBE AM (Chair): Mr Mayor.

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): They have been exposed as congestion charge taxers and welfarists. That is who they are.

Fiona Twycross AM: I am not interested in talking to him about this today. He is not taking this seriously.

Jennette Arnold OBE AM (Chair): Mr Mayor, can I say that we have two Members who are yet to speak and we have six questions left? Can I ask Assembly Members to agree to suspend Standing Order 2.9 so that we can get answers to the questions on the paper?

Andrew Dismore AM: You won't get answers!

Fiona Twycross AM: You won't get answers!

Jennette Arnold OBE AM (Chair): Let us go to the next question in the name of --

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): You ask some decent questions, you idle bum.

Tony Arbour AM (Deputy Chairman): I beg your pardon.

Jennette Arnold OBE AM (Chair): -- Assembly Member Johnson on outer London cycling.

Andrew Dismore AM: Point of order Chair: he just called me an idle bastard!

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): No, I did not. I called you an idle bum.

Jennette Arnold OBE AM (Chair): Excuse me. Can I just ask Members to just focus on this question-and-answer session? I do not want to hear any more because we are getting the answer to a question that has been properly put by Assembly Member Johnson on outer London cycling.

2015/4393 - Outer London cycling

Darren Johnson AM

What is holding back cycling in outer London?

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): Thank you, Darren. I congratulate you on your excellent question, which is one of the best that has been asked this morning in a not-very-hotly contested field.

Darren Johnson AM: Thank you.

Jenny Jones AM: What about my question? My question was, too.

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): Actually, no, that is not true. There were some other good questions.

Outer London cycling is booming, as I am sure you know because you will have seen the figures. It is up by 22% this year on last year. The number of journeys almost has doubled in outer London since 2006/07. There is a massive increase in cycling in outer London but there is a huge potential for growth, as you rightly understand.

We are committed to more Mini-Hollands, Quietways and a superhubs programme at outer London stations, including Crossrail stations, so that the rail network is joined up with the cycling routes. There is a huge panoply of measures that we are putting through to try to boost cycling in outer London because that is where there are huge potential wins. There are still far too many journeys being made in outer London. There is still far too much vehicular congestion in outer London, which is unnecessary.

Darren Johnson AM: Although there has been an increase, it was obviously from a very tiny starting point, particularly when you compare that to the growth that we have had in central and inner London. We have the right model now in terms of the new Cycle Superhighways that are going in; very high quality in central and inner London and so on. When it comes to outer London, beyond the three Mini-Hollands we really need some big thinking. Is TfL working up distal Mini-Holland programmes with boroughs beyond the three that are already in train?

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): I will be happy to let you know what we are doing. If you remember, there was a big bidding process and several boroughs were very disappointed not to get Mini-Hollands. I wonder whether, when you now look at some of the difficulties, great cycling programmes in the abstract sound very attractive but, as soon as you get into digging up pavements and making changes to the carriageway, everybody freaks out. That is why these decisions are quite hard but you have to push ahead with them.

I really hope that the boroughs that are committed to the Mini-Hollands will show the leadership and the drive that is necessary to push these things through because - not to put too fine a point on it - sometimes there is an initial flush of enthusiasm and then there is the first whiff of grapeshot and everybody scuttles for cover. You need to keep going.

Darren Johnson AM: Yes, keeping going is absolutely the right thing to do. We do absolutely need the Mini-Hollands and they will transform life in outer London not just for cyclists but for pedestrians and for local businesses when there is more footfall and increased presence in local high streets and so on. There are definite benefits.

What do you think you can do now in your final few months to start building up that consensus more to ensure that we do not have months or years of dither and delay once the new Mayor comes in and that we have built up a really strong consensus from City Hall across London and across each of the main mayoral candidates that this is something that will be taken forward? What particularly can you do?

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): It is a very good question. This is something that Val [Shawcross CBE AM] and others asked in the last few months: how do we protract the tramlines of the cycle agenda? TfL has a very clear programme of work on the Superhighways, on the Mini-Hollands, on the Quietways and on everything.

My advice to you and to Londoners would be really to make sure that in mayoral hustings - and I am sure that there will be a cycling husting - people ask very careful questions about the commitments of mayoral

candidates and ensure that they get satisfaction about the answers. I would hope very much that any future Mayor would want to continue with this work. It is difficult and does require a great deal of energy and political leadership because, as I say, once you get into the detail, people starting reacting negatively and you have to have a certain amount of resolution.

Darren Johnson AM: You will continue ensuring that TfL, in your final few months now, works out programmes for outer London beyond the three Mini-Hollands so that we have a clear programme that the future Mayor can pick up and run with, rather than months and months of dither and delay?

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): On Mini-Hollands: it is vital that we deliver the ones that are currently in train. It would be frankly a mistake now, when those three are still proving quite difficult to deliver, to get a whole new competition going that I could not see through. There were some bids. They remain on the table. I would hope that a future Mayor would want to continue the Mini-Holland programme and to expand it.

As a matter of practical politics, the leadership to a great extent has to come not from TfL but from the boroughs. If boroughs want Mini-Hollands, they have to step up to the plate and show how they want to deliver them and show they have the political *cojones* to deliver them.

Andrew Boff AM: Mr Mayor, do you believe in shortcutting public consultation when introducing TfL-backed Quietways and Mini-Hollands or should there be full public consultation when introducing such schemes?

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): Yes, of course, and TfL does consult very widely. There are statutory consultations on all of these programmes and it is very important that they should proceed with public support.

Andrew Boff AM: “Yes, of course” is great.” That is what we have on the record and I am out of time. Thank you very much.

Jennette Arnold OBE AM (Chair): OK, thank you for that. I understand that, Assembly Member Duvall, you rise to raise a point of order?

Len Duvall AM: Very much so, Chair. I know about robust debates, Chair, but there is always a tendency and the Mayor does himself a great disservice when he starts to point to individuals and abuses them in answering the questions. He should reflect about those answers.

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): I do.

Len Duvall AM: There is nothing wrong in robust debate and challenging policies. It is when it becomes personalised. We have seen it before. It has happened twice now in this Chamber this morning. It should not continue.

Jennette Arnold OBE AM (Chair): Assembly Member Duvall, thanks for pointing that out. All I want to say to the Mayor is: Mayor, you have made a couple of remarks this morning, especially one, as I understand, that a Member has taken exception to. Will you withdraw that remark?

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): I withdraw it unreservedly and I certainly do at your suggestion, Jennette. Let me say that it slipped out only under extreme provocation.

Jennette Arnold OBE AM (Chair): No, we need go no further.

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): Not, I may say, from my friend Andrew Dismore but from the continual chunter-rama.

Jennette Arnold OBE AM (Chair): No, Members and Mayor, this is serious.

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): I agree.

Jennette Arnold OBE AM (Chair): This is serious. This broadcast is watched by young people and we regularly have them in here. I welcome your withdrawal of that comment and we will have no further comments like that.

2015/3996 - Local Policing

Joanne McCartney AM

Following the CSR announcement will you guarantee there will be at least one PCSO and one PC dedicated to each ward for the next year?

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): Yes, thanks. The answer actually is yes.

Joanne McCartney AM: You are committed and you have persuaded the Commissioner to commit to one Police Community Support Officer (PCSO) per ward?

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): Yes.

Joanne McCartney AM: Thank you. What about the other PCSOs who are also in danger of redundancy over and above those dedicated to each ward?

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): I believe in PCSOs, but the commitment that you have asked me to make today is about having at least a police constable (PC) and a PCSO dedicated to each ward. I am happy to repeat that one.

Joanne McCartney AM: Thank you.

2015/3997 - Tube ticket queues

Andrew Dismore AM

After you closed the ticket offices, queues to use the ticket machines at quite a few underground stations are now excessively long, for example at Euston. What are you going to do about it?

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): Thanks, Andrew. The reality is that you are perfectly correct in thinking that there were some problems with queuing. I did observe some a while back, but the information I have now is that things are flowing pretty smoothly and that there is a vast increase in the number of people using contactless payments. It is quite astonishing. Since the launch of contactless in September last year, 25% of pay-as-you-go journeys are now made using contactless and it is nearly a third at big stations like Euston. The move from Oyster to bankcards is amazingly fast.

Andrew Dismore AM: When was the last time you actually tried to get through Euston Tube Station first thing in the morning in the rush hour?

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): I regularly use Euston and I have seen pressure on the system, but the way to solve it is to get the staff out there helping passengers with their various issues and questions.

Andrew Dismore AM: When I was down there a couple of weeks ago, the staff were helpful. They stopped people going down the escalator because of the overcrowding in the ticket hall. That is the problem.

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): Yes.

Andrew Dismore AM: You now have security barriers fencing people off and trying to create new queues to the ticket machines. People are queuing up for half an hour. What does this say to people coming to London - for example, for a business meeting - and they find they cannot get out of the station promptly due to your queues that you have created through this system?

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): There is a massive increase in people using the Tube. It is a fantastically successful system. Actually, in spite of the characteristic pall of gloom that you have tried to create, customer satisfaction is at an all-time high. The most recent figures show that 96% now think that the staff are helpful and customers reported a doubling of the availability of staff at ticket machines offering hands-on assistance to passengers.

Andrew Dismore AM: Instead of listening to information that you have been fed through from your apparatchiks in TfL, why do you not go down and have a look for yourself?

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): As I say, I regularly --

Andrew Dismore AM: It is particularly bad in the main-line stations like Victoria, King's Cross, St Pancras, Liverpool Street and Heathrow, as well as Euston and all places where we see overseas visitors. I do not think they are going to feature in your surveys, are they?

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): You will not make your point --

Andrew Dismore AM: Do you really want, for new visitors coming to London, their first experience to be queuing up for ages just to get a ticket to get out of the station? Is that really the impression you want to create of London? It is hardly the impression that Pericles would want of Athens, is it?

Tony Arbour AM (Deputy Chairman): He is shouting.

Jennette Arnold OBE AM (Chair): He is shouting.

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): Actually, I regularly use the network at all times of the day and in the last few months I have noticed great pressure on it, but that is basically because there are now 25% more people on the Tube every day than there were when I was elected. It is a huge increase.

Andrew Dismore AM: Your changes have made things worse, not better, if you are taking the subway. When are you going to admit that there is a need to revisit your plan, particularly for the Main Line terminuses for new people coming to London who do not know the system?

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): No. That would be entirely retrograde since what customers value and what customers want is somebody out there helping them and --

Andrew Dismore AM: What they want is to be able to get a ticket quickly and out of the station. Visitors from abroad and visitors from other parts of the UK who do not know the system get stuck in these long queues and they are queues that you have created. You need to do something about it.

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): Actually, it is not true because the queues have very largely abated and that is because people are switching to contactless payment of one kind or another, as they do in many other cities around the world. There are many cities that now use contactless payment cities and we are, as it happens, far ahead, but we are managing the huge growth in our ridership very well indeed. If you want to go backwards and reinstate the old-fashioned ticket offices, then you must be out of your mind.

2015/4339 - Group Investment Syndicate investment policy

Stephen Knight AM

What ethical considerations are taken into account in investment decisions taken under the GLA's Group Investment Syndicate?

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): Yes, thank you. Most people, Stephen, would want the decisions that the GLA Group Investment Syndicate takes to be made without political interference of one kind or another. If you turned this question on its head and you discovered that, for political reasons or because of my prejudices in the matter, I had decided to divert GLA funding away from a particular London business, you would be jumping up and down. This is a thoroughly ill-informed criticism.

Stephen Knight AM: Mr Mayor, these are investment decisions made under delegated responsibilities by you, powers you have delegated to officers, to make investments on behalf of Londoners with their taxpayers' money. Presumably, Londoners may or may not be shocked to discover that you are putting their money into things like Heathrow, Saudi Arabian banks and so on but, Mr Mayor --

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): Heathrow is our number one hub airport and a very good business. The issue is not what goes on. The issue is whether we want to put another runway there. Your question is cretinous, if I may say so.

Stephen Knight AM: Mr Mayor, were you or your Chief of Staff [Sir Edward Lister] consulted before the decision was made to invest in Heathrow or indeed in Saudi Arabian banks?

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): No. I do not believe so. I certainly was not consulted. Whether Sir Edward Lister, Chief of Staff, was consulted, I do not know, but I very much doubt. It is important that this should be done at arm's length; it should be done as far as possible without political entanglement. This should be something that should be done to maximise taxpayer value and to get the best possible --

Stephen Knight AM: Nevertheless, Mr Mayor, are Londoners entitled to feel there is a sense of hypocrisy when, on the one hand, you as Mayor are issuing statements saying that the Government should not choose Heathrow because it would be investing in decline and a few days later your officers are making decisions to invest your money on your behalf in the very airport that you are describing as being investing in decline?

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): I will repeat for the third time: there is absolutely no inconsistency between wanting to invest money in an airport that has a good business case at the moment and not wanting to see that airport expand. Paradoxically, one of the --

Stephen Knight AM: Mr Mayor, the very prospectus for the bonds that the GLA bought refers to the need to raise capital to build the new third runway. In a sense, this investment was one very much in terms of backing Heathrow's expansion plans with one hand whilst publicly clearly not backing Heathrow's expansion plans. I ask you just to take this away. Is it not right that you look at the investment --

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): Take it away and put it in the bin. I really do not think that you are making a substantive or interesting point.

Stephen Knight AM: Mr Mayor, could I just put this last point to you? Will you take away and look at the investment strategy, which you sign off, to look at whether it is right and whether reputational risk to this authority should be considered --

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): No.

Stephen Knight AM: -- when making investment decisions? Many Londoners will think it undermines this authority --

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): No. I totally disagree.

Stephen Knight AM: -- if their money is put into things like Saudi Arabian banks and is put into investing in Heathrow expansion when we are opposed to it.

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): Do you have a car? Do you use Saudi Arabian oil? What are you doing?

Stephen Knight AM: Mr Mayor, with respect --

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): How can you sit here and fuel your vehicle with Saudi Arabian oil? How can you?

Stephen Knight AM: Mr Mayor, I am not making decisions about investing Londoners' money. You are. We are talking about London taxpayers' money.

Jennette Arnold OBE AM (Chair): The Liberal Democrats are out of time. Can we stop this? Let us end it there.

2015/3998 - Housing and Planning Bill

Tom Copley AM

Is the Mayor satisfied by the Government's decision to not accept a ring-fence that ensures the money raised from the sale of 'expensive' council housing is retained in London for investment in new affordable housing?

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): Thank you, Tom. The Bill has to make sense for London, as I have said before. What I want to see is a system that ensures we keep London mixed and balanced in a way that everybody wants. I have referred many times today to the large proportion of social housing there is in the

centre of the city and we want to keep it that way. We have to keep building homes in London and we have to keep building affordable homes. We have to keep the money that is raised in London building those homes in London.

The amendment that we have signed together with all London Conservative Members of Parliament (MPs) to the Housing and Planning Bill would ensure that there is a two-for-one replacement of all high-value council homes and that has to be taken seriously by the Government. We will have to see how. It will want to put down its own amendment to give effect to that. We will have to study the language it uses to do that, but it is very important that it should lead to a two-for-one replacement of those council homes as they are sold.

Tom Copley AM: I have seen the amendment and clearly the Government has given you a nod if all Conservative MPs have signed it. It is also completely toothless. What is not in the Bill is what you said was one of your red lines, which was that all the money raised from selling high-value council homes in London should stay in London. That red line is not present in the Bill. Why do you have such little sway over the Government?

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): The reality is that if I do not get satisfaction on the two-for-one replacement, then we will have no choice but to oppose the Bill, but that that is the best way forward. You will appreciate that the policy of supporting the Right to Buy for housing association tenants depends on a revenue source. That revenue source has been identified as high-value council home sales. The most lucrative source of such sales is obviously in London. It would not be possible to deliver the policy of allowing people to buy their housing association homes if we did not have an income stream.

Tom Copley AM: No.

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): It may be that you will tell us whether you are in favour of allowing people the right to buy their housing association homes.

Tom Copley AM: The Bill uses London as a cash cow to pay for a Conservative manifesto pledge that was thought up in a panic during the election when you thought you were going to lose. That is the truth of this. I have read your two-for-one amendment. It is essentially an aspiration. It does not show where any source of funding for this will come from and, crucially, it is not like-for-like. You will end up selling four-bedroom council homes in Islington let out at target rents and replacing them with £450,000 starter homes in other boroughs. Two-for-one is not like-for-like, is it?

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): You need to get clear in your own head what your position on this is. Are you against people in housing associations being able to buy their own homes?

Tom Copley AM: Yes. The homes that they are in.

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): In that case, you are the first Labour politician to have been clear on that. Actually, as I understand the policy of Labour's front bench, it is in favour of that policy. Perhaps you should ring up John Healey [MP] and get some elucidation on that point.

Tom Copley AM: I have been very clear. The Labour Party's position on this under John Healey is very clear and we do not want to see the loss of social housing. Let me ask you about the criteria.

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): Are you against the Right to Buy for housing association tenants?

Tom Copley AM: This is Mayor's Question Time, Mr Mayor: it is not my question time.

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): I am entitled to know on what basis you are asking me these questions. What is your point of view?

Tom Copley AM: I am entitled to ask you whatever questions I choose.

Jennette Arnold OBE AM (Chair): Can we just finish now? Can we just calm down? Mr Copley is entitled to put his questions to you and he would just like you to answer the questions he is putting.

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): I am sorry. I will.

Jennette Arnold OBE AM (Chair): OK, Mr Copley.

Tom Copley AM: Thank you. I have a supplementary, if I may. I have seen the Government's outline of what will constitute a vacant property. The Government says that if a council evicts tenants for engaging in antisocial behaviour, the property will be deemed to be vacant and, if it is high-value, it will have to be sold. Why should councils be punished for evicting tenants who are causing antisocial behaviour?

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): The general principle is that voids are the ones that will be eligible for --

Tom Copley AM: That will count as a void. That will count as a void.

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): How they become void is not something that I have dug into.

Tom Copley AM: The Mayor of London has not looked at the detail?

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): A lot of this will have to go through the detail, but I really feel that Londoners are entitled to know. Londoners who have housing association problems will be entitled to know that, in the London Assembly, Labour in London is not only in favour of higher congestion charges, is not only in favour of no reform to welfare, but would stop them buying the types of homes in which they live.

Tom Copley AM: Margaret Thatcher [former Prime Minister] just stopped them from buying the homes, but she did not include housing association tenants in the original Right to Buy, Mr Mayor, and so Margaret Thatcher is responsible.

Jennette Arnold OBE AM (Chair): Mr Mayor.

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): It has come out loud and clear from Tom Copley this morning that they are against the Right to Buy. They are against the Right to Buy.

Jennette Arnold OBE AM (Chair): Mr Mayor.

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): Let that be the record. They are in favour of high congestion charges, they are against reforms of welfare and they are against the Right to Buy. That is Labour in London.

Tom Copley AM: Merry Christmas, Mr Mayor.

Jennette Arnold OBE AM (Chair): OK. Mr Mayor, thank you. That brings us to the end of the tabled questions that we have today. We wish you a merry Christmas.

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