

London Assembly (Mayor's Question Time) – 20 March 2013 Transcript: Agenda item 4 – Mayor's Report

Jennette Arnold OBE (Chair): The Mayor will now give an oral update of up to five minutes on matters occurring since the publication of his report. Once the Mayor has provided the update, Assembly Members can ask supplementary questions on matters relating to the five-minute update. Then we will move on to questions listed in the Priority Order Paper.

The Labour Group has requested that the Mayor be asked to address Mayoral decision (MD) 1166, and that is the Mayoral Scheme of Delegation. Could the Mayor update the Assembly on the matter and reason behind this Mayoral decision?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Certainly.

Jennette Arnold OBE (Chair): Thank you.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Thank you very much, Chair. Good morning Members of the Assembly. There has been a lot of work going on in the last month. I would single out the beginning of our Pocket Park Scheme: 100 pocket parks are going to be created thanks to £2 million worth of funding, including 150 metres of dead space behind a bus stop in Stockwell, which will grow vegetables, herbs, fruit and hops to sell to the Brixton Beer Co-operative. Work will begin later this year on a similar edible bus stop in Norwood. In Shepherd's Bush we are turning a kind of dip in the ground on the edge of Cathnor Park into an amphitheatre, where people can sit and observe beautiful new water features.

We have just announced the UK's largest new floating village to be created on 15 acres of water at Royal Victoria Dock. A fantastic scheme, attracting a great deal of international interest, served by wonderful transport links, not least the cable car, the Docklands Light Railway and Crossrail to come, creating a kind of Venice in London.

We have announced cheaper travel for apprentices. From May, apprentices will get 30% off adult rate for Travelcards, bus and train season tickets. This will be expected to benefit about 40,000 apprentices, help them getting to work and stay in work. We have a further £100 million to boost affordable housing for the London Housing Covenant, which you will remember is particularly designed to tackle the problem of people who cannot get onto the housing ladder, who cannot hope to get the mortgage funding that they need.

We announced a "Crossrail for the Bike" scheme, as part of what I think is the most adventurous and thorough-going cycling revolution this city has ever seen. Including numerous quiet ways, much improved Cycle Superhighways and a Crossrail for the bike, a 15 mile route, all the way from the western suburbs of London through the middle of the City to Canary Wharf and beyond to Barking - probably the largest partly segregated cycleway anywhere in Europe.

Finally, the Labour Group has asked about Mayor's Decision 1166. This is a common sense improvement which takes account of the fact that the Greater London Authority (GLA) is a delivery body disposing of more than £3 billion from the Department of Communities and Local Government (DCLG), and I think it makes sense to bring our delegations in line, or nearer to those of other functional bodies. In fact, other

functional bodies have delegations considerably in excess of this. I know that Assembly Members should want to know that there will be abundant opportunities to scrutinise all of this because I have lowered the threshold above which decision forms are required from £10,000 to £5,000 so members will have plenty of opportunity to scrutinise all of this.

Jennette Arnold OBE (Chair): Assembly Member Duvall?

Len Duvall (AM): Mr Mayor, good morning. Can I just ask for transparency reasons just to follow up that last part. You said will you be publishing on the website these decisions in real time?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): As far as I am aware, the intention is to publish all delegated decisions above £5,000 so you will have that opportunity to scrutinise those.

Len Duvall (AM): But in real time? Not six months later after the decision, or three months later. I am not trying to push this, but because I think that this is very important for transparency reasons. Could you give a commitment to us today?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Well I mean I would have to consult about how fast we can reasonably do it, but yes we will make sure you get the information you need in order to draw reasonable judgements with a reasonable delay. I cannot commit now to a particular time table because I am not aware of the practicalities.

Len Duvall (AM): But you would accept that for transparency reasons that you should be able to do it in real time?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Well of course. I do not know quite what you mean by real time. We will try to get all these decisions on the web as soon as possible. Members of the Assembly and people watching will recall that this is a body that under my mayoralty has been considerably more transparent than before. We have done a great deal to not only publish information about the stuff we are spending tax payers' money on but to also use that publicity as a way of driving down expenditure in the public sector. If you looked at what we have done in the last few years, we have actually greatly reduced spending on bureaucracy here in City Hall. And as we have now got the London Development Agency and Homes and Communities Agency in City Hall, effectively, we have reduced the numbers of officials.

Len Duvall (AM): Mr Mayor, can I take you back to the question? And we will have to agree to disagree - there have been some steps on transparency but some steps in reverse on transparency. Can we go back to the issue around the mayoral decision sheets? Annex 2, under specified staff to be delegated appointees, on mayoral appointees. It does beg the question, why do you not trust Ray Lewis [Senior Adviser, Mentoring] or Andrew Gilligan [Cycling Commissioner] with money?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Ray Lewis and Andrew Gilligan have particular jobs to do and they do them brilliantly. What we are talking about is if you want to cast aspersions on the members of my mayoral team, you are free to do so as members of the opposition. They do a brilliant job. What we are talking about now is the threshold. What I think you are asking about is the publication of the decision forms on the website and the timeliness of those decisions --

Len Duvall (AM): Sorry Mr Mayor, what I am asking you is why, of all your Mayoral Appointees, why everybody else gets a slice of the cake of spending money? Why have these two not been given your trust in terms of this delegation?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I do not know if that is true. You have got to work out in your mind how you want to attack me. You are simultaneously attacking me for delegating too much and now you are attacking me for not delegating enough. Make your mind up, what is your attack?

Len Duvall (AM): Mr Mayor, I am sorry you do not know, but you signed the mayoral form. This is part of the mayoral delegation that they are not included. You were the one who promised an independent investigation into Ray Lewis when he left us. You are the one who reappointed him. I asked you a question: Why do you not trust Ray Lewis or Andrew Gilligan with delegated authority?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I am not sure that is the case.

Len Duvall (AM): That is the case Mr Mayor.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Insofar as it may be the case, it seems to me your question is paradoxical, because I thought the gist of your attack was one of delegating too much or too many decisions, you are now attacking me for not including --

Len Duvall (AM): Chair, can we bring the Mayor back to answer my question?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): -- You are now attacking me for not including people in these delegations --

Len Duvall (AM): You misunderstood my question, Mr Mayor --

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I understood your question.

Len Duvall (AM): -- I want to know why they have not been given delegated authority, why do you not trust them with it? They are the only two who have not been given the authority.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): They both do a much better job than the appointees of the previous administration --

Jennette Arnold OBE (Chair): Excuse me, just for the record. If we can just stop the conversation between you two for a minute. You are making reference to page number 28 [of the Mayoral Decision], is that where you are, Mr Duvall?

Len Duvall (AM): Annex 2 of the Mayoral Decisions sheet.

Jennette Arnold OBE (Chair): Annex 2 - and it is a quite straightforward question, it seems to me. What Mr Duvall has identified is that there are two names - Ray Lewis and Andrew Gilligan - who are not listed here.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Well I am sorry, therefore I imagine there are about approximately 9 billion names - sorry 7.6 billion possible names - not listed there. There are a lot of people in the world who are not expressly identified on that list, I do not know what you are driving at --

Jennette Arnold OBE (Chair): A silly answer. What a silly, silly answer. And there we were --

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): If I may say so Jennette I think you are abusing your position as Chair. In order to dig this poor fellow out of a hole, you have to intercede and direct him to the correct paragraph. I think you are going above and beyond your position as Chair.

Jennette Arnold OBE (Chair): Actually, I am not going to take lessons from you on behaviour or how to chair a meeting. And there I was, thinking you were being Prime Ministerial.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): That is just speculation of the media, which I deprecate. I thank you Jennette for the opportunity to knock that on the head.

Jennette Arnold OBE (Chair): And there was me thinking you were using us to practise --

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Once again Jennette you have saved me from potential embarrassment.

Jennette Arnold OBE (Chair): Mr Duvall, I can only just say to you that we are going to get no further with your line of question and we will move on.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Well if he had a better line of question we might.

Roger Evans (AM): Chair, I would like to take the opportunity to welcome the announcement on cycling, which excited quite a lot of the constituents in my home borough of Redbridge, where they are very keen on putting together a bid to be a mini Holland. Not only do we have a lot of cycling enthusiasts in Redbridge but we have a relatively flat borough with only gentle gradients, unlike some other outer London boroughs which might struggle more to emulate Holland. Would you look kindly on a bid from Redbridge for this, should they decide to make the bid?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Of course I will look kindly on it, Roger. I think what we have said is that we want between one and three mini-Hollands. I am delighted that Redbridge is off the blocks and obviously we will have to look at their proposals, but we are very keen to support good proposals.

Roger Evans (AM): Thank you.

Jenny Jones (AM): Mayor, you often mention the previous administration.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): No, not unless I can specifically avoid it.

Jenny Jones (AM): Ken Livingstone [former Mayor of London] has cast a long shadow over you, hasn't he? You often compare yourself with him. Do you feel you have come up short?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I try to avoid it. I am here to answer questions about this mayoralty and what is going on now.

Jenny Jones (AM): He has been gone for five years. We are holding you to account for what you are doing now. You often talk about the previous administration and it is a bit irrelevant after five years.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): It is a fact, Jenny, that you did sit licking the boots of the previous administration for ten years, or whatever it was. It is a relevant consideration when answering your questions to point out mild inconsistencies in your argument.

Jenny Jones (AM): He has been gone for five years.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I think that is something the public would expect you to do.

Jenny Jones (AM): I think you should worry about your record and not the previous administration.
Thank you.