

London Assembly (Mayor's Question Time) – 20 March 2013 Transcript: Agenda item 5 – Questions to the Mayor

Jennette Arnold OBE (Chair): We now move to part 5, that is questions to the Mayor from the Assembly Members. The first question is in the name of Assembly Member Knight and it is entitled Air Quality - Children's Health.

940/2013 - Air Quality - Children's Health

Stephen Knight

Do you agree with the comments of your Environment Adviser - made to LBC Radio on 27th February 2013 - that in areas of high smog, "It may be sensible for the children not to be in the playground"?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): This arises from an interview that Matthew Pencharz [Environment and Political Advisor, GLA] gave on LBC Radio, when I think he was being put into an extreme hypothetical situation and asked whether kids should have to inhale extremely bad air during particularly bad periods. I do not, as I have made clear frequently, think that the position is being fairly represented at the moment. What is happening in London is that air quality is being improved and has improved over the last four or five years, in my first term, by amounts I do not think the London public really have yet appreciated. PM10 and PM2.5 [measures of particle pollution] emissions are down 15%. Nitrogen oxides emissions are down 20%. Those figures cannot be gainsaid, or they cannot be contradicted.

I do think it is important to recognise that we also have a very aggressive programme to tackle emissions, particularly in the vehicle fleet. 1,600 new hybrid busses, about 20% of the bus fleet is going to be hybrid, including 600 New Buses for London and abundant other measures which I am obviously capable of reciting to you.

Stephen Knight (AM): Mr Mayor, my question does not deal with what you are doing about air pollution. The question dealt with what schools should be encouraged to do in the face of air pollution.

Mr Mayor, are you familiar with the work of Dr Ian Mudway, who is a lecturer in respiratory toxicology at King's College London, who has been studying the effects on children's lungs and health from air pollution for the last few years? He is very clear that the pollution that children are facing on our streets has not reduced significantly in recent years and indeed is having a huge impact on children's lung capacity, which is lifelong. Are you aware of this work and does it worry you?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I do not want to minimise the importance of this problem, OK? Let us be clear, this is a serious issue for London and for Londoners. What I am trying to convince you of is not only has the situation improved - and we can disagree about how significantly it has improved - but also we are taking very significant steps to continue to improve it.

Stephen Knight (AM): Mr Mayor, it may or may not have improved, but we do know that on a regular basis there are high smog days in London, you must accept that. There are high smog days in London and in London we have over 1,100 schools within 150 metres of very busy main roads carrying more than

10,000 vehicles a day. They are disproportionately in poor areas of London. We also know that official Government advice is that when we have high smog days that people, particularly those with respiratory problems and other health issues, should reduce or avoid physical exertion, particularly outdoors.

Your own health adviser, as I said, on LBC Radio said it may be sensible for children not to be in the playground. It is clearly an issue. Your administration has accepted it is an issue and I think that is helpful.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Can I say what Matthew said? This is Matthew Pencharz, my excellent Environment Adviser, saying that children should not be allowed outside when the levels are in human health boundaries, "I think that is a little unreasonable and perhaps a little bit hysterical". That is what he said and I think he is right.

Stephen Knight (AM): We can trade quotes, Mr Mayor, because he actually said, "It would be sensible for children not to be in the playground".

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): He did not. He was pushed very hard and --

Stephen Knight (AM): Mr Mayor, there are 320,000 children in schools that are within 150 metres of busy polluted main roads. Will you ensure that head teachers of schools in London are sent dedicated information and health advice when air pollution reaches dangerously high levels? Will you do that, Mr Mayor?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Obviously I am supportive of the air text scheme, which means people who --

Stephen Knight (AM): Mr Mayor, we know that very few people are signed up to air text.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): If you stop interrupting me I will try to answer your question.

Stephen Knight (AM): What schools need is dedicated advice being sent to head teachers. Will you put in place a system to warn head teachers when we have high smog days so they can take action?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): No. I will tell you why not. The situation is actually improving and we are going to continue to improve it. Insofar as it was ever necessary to introduce smog warnings they should have been introduced in the last 10-15 years. It is absolutely nonsensical. What we are going to do is continue to go forward. I repeat the data: Air quality is actually improving. It is not improving as fast as we want, but that does not mean that we are not going ahead with a very aggressive programme like the Ultra Low Emission Zone that we are going to be instituting in the centre of London, like the age limits for taxis, which were never done under the previous administration. We have reduced the age limit for taxis, we have brought in a record number --

Stephen Knight (AM): Mr Mayor, whilst we wait for the Ultra Low Emission Zone introduced by your successor --

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Sorry, let me finish my answer. We brought in a record number of hybrid busses and it is this administration that has continued with a very aggressive plan of retrofitting homes, which reduces the Nitrous Oxides emissions.

Stephen Knight (AM): Mr Mayor, is the truth not that your own figures estimate that over 4,000 people die every year in London prematurely from exposure to air pollution? That is over 20,000 deaths since you became Mayor from poor air quality in this city. I do not think this is an issue to which Londoners want glib answers.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): No.

Stephen Knight (AM): They want this to be taken seriously. Mr Mayor, let me ask this question. The House of Commons Environmental Audit Committee concluded, and let me quote, "A public awareness campaign would be the single most important tool in improving air quality". I say again, will you put in place a system to warn schools on days where we have high smog in London, so they can take the action, which your own adviser said would be sensible, which is avoiding strenuous exercise for children outdoors.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): He did not say that. No he did not, and I think if you had any logic in your position then you would have been calling for this five, ten, fifteen years ago, when air quality was considerably worse.

Stephen Knight (AM): If you have heard the LBC Radio clip he did say that.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Air quality is now improving and has got better in the last four years. I repeat, PM10 and PM2.5, which are the particularly nasty particulates, are down by 15%, that is very good over four years. We are not compliant on PM10 and PM2.5. Nitrous Oxides emissions are down by only 20%. I wanted to go much further with Nitrous Oxides emissions. I agree with you, Stephen, that this is a serious issue and that we need to tackle it. We are doing that with a very progressive programme of retrofitting and making our vehicle fleet much, much cleaner.

Stephen Knight (AM): I am afraid the truth is that whilst you are dreaming of becoming one sort of PM [Prime Minister], Mr Mayor, the more noxious sort of PM [particulate emission] is leaving London's children choking; that is the truth. I have finished now.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I have to say I think your intervention is in bad taste and inaccurate.

Jenny Jones (AM): Mr Mayor, you have a Clean Air Fund, have not you?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Yes.

Jenny Jones (AM): Which I think is a great idea. So, in fact the schools that Mr Knight is talking about could apply to your Clean Air Fund, could not they, so that they could take measures?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I think that the principle applicants for the Clean Air Fund are intended to be the boroughs but I will investigate whether individual schools could make applications. I think we are looking at supporting borough schemes, such as in Putney High Street, for instance, where they are doing a fantastic amount of good. That is the kind of proposal we are supporting.

Jenny Jones (AM): Are schools actually prohibited? Could they apply?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I think the scheme at the moment is designed to support borough measures.

Murad Qureshi (AM): Mr Mayor, the leaders of central London councils, City, Westminster and Camden, did write to you at the beginning of your term. In particular they were concerned about PM2.5.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Yes.

Murad Qureshi (AM): As you know, they cause the most harm to the development of young children's lungs. Can you tell me to what extent your Ultra Low Emission Zone actually deals with that pollutant, if at all?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): The Ultra Low Emission Discounts (ULEDs) will have a very considerable impact on that part of central London. It will also drive new technology generally. We think the impact on motor manufacturing will be very benign and they will want to comply with the Ultra Low Emission Zone and so that will have a general effect on technology and a general reduction of PM10 and PM2.5 and indeed of Nitrous Oxides Emissions. In other words, vehicles will move towards low- or zero-tailpipe emissions. I cannot give you the figures now, Murad, I am sorry to say but if we can get an estimate for you of the impact of ULEDs on PM10 and PM2.5 I would be more than happy to do so. I do think it would be a good and a generous thing if the Assembly were to acknowledge the work we have done so far in promoting clean vehicles, cycling, walking and all the other steps we have taken that has actually reduced these particulates by 15%, which is a considerable achievement.

Murad Qureshi (AM): Mayor, can I bring you back to your Ultra Low Emission Zone proposal?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Yes.

Murad Qureshi (AM): Effectively, is that not another example of you kicking your responsibilities into long grass?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): No.

Murad Qureshi (AM): You are expecting the next Mayor to do this in 2020 when you have targets for NitrousOxide Emissions by 2015.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Do not forget you have to be reasonable, Murad. I understand where you are coming from.

Murad Qureshi (AM): I think if you are taking the problem seriously you have to deal with it now.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): You have to be reasonable with the consumer and with the motor manufacturing industry. You cannot ask people to comply with an Ultra Low Emission Zone when they do not readily have access to the kind of technology that will enable them to comply. We are calling for zero- or near-zero-tailpipe emissions. That means moving either to hybrids or to range-extender electric vehicles (EVs) or to pure EVs or perhaps even to hydrogen vehicles. The technology is there but it is very, very important that we do not insist on improvements that the market simply cannot yet deliver for consumers.

What we are trying to do is give the manufacturers a sense of London's ambitions and where they have to be by the time that ULEDs comes in. That is the fairest way forward and we have done it already with the taxi age limits. We will be bringing forward further measures to clean up taxis, but you have to be fair to consumers and you have to be fair to the industry.

Murad Qureshi (AM): My last point here: you do have one power in your hand and that is changing the specification of taxis and you have not used that.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Hang on.

Murad Qureshi (AM): The biggest source of PM10 has been black taxis. You can make the less expensive for the cabbies as well. I will leave it at that, thank you, Chair.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Murad, that is a criticism that you are perfectly entitled to make but it comes, and I must say slightly oddly, from a Labour Party that did nothing in your eight years in power to set age limits on taxis and allowed Londoners to endure the most colossal belching of fumes from those machines without any improvement at all. We have now set a 15-year age limit and we are about to bring forward proposals that will greatly improve the emissions of taxis. I agree with you about the impact that that will have.

997/2013 State of the London Economy

Valerie Shawcross

Of the £231 million you currently have to invest in London's local places and infrastructure, £112 million is available to the London Enterprise Panel via the Growing Places Fund. However, despite the potential of the fund, it has not been clear how it is planned to be spent or what benefits it will provide to London's economy. So much so, that two Government ministers - Business Minister Michael Fallon and Housing Minister Mark Prisk - have been forced to write to City Hall expressing 'serious concern' over the your failure to invest these funds and the slow progress being made by London's mayor to help the capital's economy. This criticism follows a 'furious' letter you sent to George Osborne in April 2012 in which you claimed London had been, "Excluded from serious consideration by the [Regional Growth] Fund" and arguing that you were reluctant to encourage your partners to submit application to the fund, "If the roulette wheel will never spin in our favour". London's economy is being let down. You blame the Government, the Government's ministers blame you. What are you doing to resolve this issue?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Thanks, Val. This question relates to the operations of the London Enterprise Panel (LEP) and what we are doing there. I have made it perfectly clear to ministers that we have an ambitious pipeline of investments that have so far awarded £47 million, and a further £44 million is currently in the pipeline. The difficulty is that some of those are the subject of commercially confidential negotiation but they relate to such areas of the London economy as the film industry, better broadband, information and communications technology (ICT) improvements and particularly live sciences but I do not necessarily want to get into too much detail obviously.

Valerie Shawcross (AM): Thank you, Mr Mayor. Good morning.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Good morning.

Valerie Shawcross (AM): Actually it is not a good morning because we have just heard since January there have been another 5,000 Londoners who have started to claim Job Seekers Allowance, so unemployment is going up on London. I think those people and the struggling businesses in London want to know that you are doing everything you can to boost the economy in London and get some growth. As I understand it, we have three big regeneration funds which are under question in London at the moment. We have the Regional Growth Fund, which even you have said from which we have only been allocated a paltry £9 million out of a huge £2.4 billion Government fund. There is the Growing Places Fund that this question refers to, £110 million, which the Government is now publically criticising you for not getting on with spending. We also heard at the Budget Monitoring Sub-Committee yesterday that there are two major European structural funds, over £500 million probably, over the next seven years, which we are in danger of losing out on unless the Government decides to give us control of that money.

Just on the LEP, you have known since last budget day in March last year, that we had £110 million to spend on growth in London, but so far not one project funded, not one big idea, not one job created.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): That is completely untrue.

Valerie Shawcross (AM): How is it possible for you not to get on with spending that money when we have an urgent crisis in London?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Thank you. First of all, on unemployment and what is actually happening to the London economy, I think you should be aware that actually the position in the city is comparatively strong. Nobody denies that there has been a serious downturn over the last four years, but the unemployment rate actually fell in the most recent quarter.

Valerie Shawcross (AM): Sorry, Boris, I know you will not have seen them but they were statistics from the Office for National Statistics released at 9.30am this morning.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): We now have 70.3% of Londoners in employment, which is 2.8% more than last year. That is the highest figure since January 2009.

Valerie Shawcross (AM): What are you doing to help the people who are unemployed then with this funding?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): As you know, we have a massive programme of apprenticeships. We have done more than 100,000 so far. We are well on target to deliver our 200,000 increase in employment as a result of the investments that we have secured and that we have made. These projects that you attack are extremely beneficial to Londoners. I have mentioned the areas that they are in. What I will not do is go back to the approach of the old London Development Agency (LDA). It became a by-word for waste and profligacy, in which money was fire-hosed away, often by Members sitting there [points to the Assembly Members] on projects that had no conceivable economic value. We will not go back to that approach. We will use taxpayers' money in a prudent and thrifty way to generate the maximum returns and that is what Government would expect.

Valerie Shawcross (AM): The Government would rather prefer that you got on spending that money. It says it is important, "That this as with the other LEPs, that the Panel starts to have an impact on growth

through the allocation of Growing Places Funds". You have had that money for a year. You have been in post now for five years. You ought to know how to use regeneration funds.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Oh come on. I think the figures speak for themselves.

Valerie Shawcross (AM): You have failed to capitalise on the funds you have for economic growth in the capital. We want to hear how you are going to rectify this situation, but possibly more importantly how are you going to --

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): We have got the biggest programme of investment in transport this city has ever seen. We have built a record number of affordable houses in my mayoralty and we will spend our funds on regenerating London and delivering the job.

Valerie Shawcross (AM): Mr Mayor, let me just finish my question. I know you like talking over the top of Assembly Members, but can I just get to the point here? Chair, can I finish my question? I do have a question I would like to ask.

Jennette Arnold OBE (Chair): Can you just put the question that you want an answer for, Assembly Member Shawcross?

Valerie Shawcross (AM): Right. The question is: What are you going to do to stop the Government deciding against allowing the GLA to have managing authority status for European funds? It is a massive amount of funding that they have to make a decision about now. They have clearly shown a lack of confidence in you, both in the Regional Growth Fund allocations and by what they are doing now- publicly criticising you in writing about not getting on with spending the Growing Places Fund. It is really important that London gets this money and they need confidence in you to get it.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I think, Val, have a look at what comes out in the budget today and you will see a measure of the Government's confidence in this place to deliver jobs and growth and to deliver Londoners the housing that they need. We have been entrusted with the biggest ever programme of investment in transport that this city has ever seen. We have delivered a record number of affordable homes. We have secured huge funds, in spite of the financial difficulties that the country is facing, to regenerate both inner and outer London. Under this mayoralty it is now a fact that London forms a larger share of the United Kingdom economy than at any time in history. That is partly because of the investments that we have been able to make and we will continue to make.

Valerie Shawcross (AM): Mr Mayor, thank you very much for that. I wonder whether or not unemployment would have gone up by 5,000 if that Growing Places money had actually been spent.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Thank you. I am sorry, if I can just repeat we have unemployment now down by 2.8% on the year.

Valerie Shawcross (AM): Thank you, Chair.

960/2013 - IPCC Investigation

Roger Evans

In light of the IPCC report on the MPS Sapphire Unit - which said rape was ignored due to 'the pressure to meet targets' - what is in place to prevent more crimes from being screened out in response to your latest ambitious targets?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): This relates to the Sapphire Unit, I believe. This is a very serious business and I think we were all shocked to see what apparently happened in Southwark. Of course we have had extensive conversations about this. The Metropolitan Police Service has taken, and is taking, steps to make sure that no such approach is ever followed in the future and indeed to establish that no such approach has been taken in other parts of London. I do not want to see people discouraged from reporting rape or any other crime of sexual or domestic violence. I want to see people feeling confident to report it. That is why we put in the expansion of the Rape Crisis Centres, a four-fold expansion, and why we instituted - with Kit's [Malthouse AM] help - the first comprehensive strategy for violence against women and girls. This is something I have raised repeatedly with the Commissioner and I know that he takes it very seriously indeed.

Roger Evans (AM): Thank you for that robust response, Mr Mayor. Can you take this opportunity to reassure Londoners, particularly women in London, that supervision is now in place to ensure that claims of rape are dealt with properly by the Metropolitan Police Service and that reporting of rape is encouraged?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Absolutely. I think that this was something that the IPCC spotted relating to Southwark in 2008/09 and I think there was a great deal of shock amongst the management board of the Metropolitan Police Service about what had been going on and we want to make sure nothing like this happens again. It is absolutely vital. The result may very well be that we see an increase in reporting of this type of crime. I would much rather see that. I would much rather see a red panel in my indicators, of an indicator going in the wrong way, than people being discouraged from reporting this type of crime. It is absolutely vital that people have the confidence to do it. I do not want to see people being asked to think again about their allegation. I want these allegations properly investigated.

Roger Evans (AM): Good. I wonder if the Mayor's Office of Policing and Crime (MOPAC) have considered the wider implications with respect to other crimes in London. I know that my colleagues, Victoria Borwick [AM] and Tony Arbour [AM] have done pieces of work with their local police over the last couple of years. This work indicated that there have been quite a lot of crimes involving theft which have been effectively screened out when the complainant has decided, after discussion with the police, that in fact no crime had taken place. Here, the targeting culture was actually encouraging fewer crimes to be declared in order to keep the crime rate down. Is that something which you will ask MOPAC to audit on a per-borough basis so that they can actually see if there are any discrepancies?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Yes, we will look at that. There are only two types of crime at the moment that are moving in the wrong direction. Broadly speaking, over the last year, crime overall in the key areas came down by about five-and-a-bit percent, just in one year. The two types of crime of the 20 or so that you might look at on the list that are going in the wrong direction are, firstly, domestic violence, rape and sexual violence. Those are going in the wrong direction and that is why this discussion is so important and that is why it is absolutely vital that the police take these allegations seriously. Second is theft from a person and we are looking at the causes of that. We had a good discussion in the recent

MOPAC Challenge Board session about that, with the Commissioner, because there is a question about certain brands of mobile phones, and we are trying to address this. We are trying to make sure the mobile phone companies understand their obligations to make sure that their phones cannot be traded and, therefore, represent a negotiable asset for people who steal them. To get to your point about under-reporting of theft, it may be that in some cases there are thefts that are not thefts, if you see what I mean and we may want to look at that as well. There may be two sides to that particular equation.

Roger Evans (AM): Would MOPAC be willing to help us to make our own minds about this by publishing the number of crimes which are effectively declared as no crimes per London borough? That way the Committee here and members of the public can see if any borough is particularly out of line with the average?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Yes, I do not see why not. It seem like a reasonable idea, Roger, I do not see why we should not do that. We need to look at that.

Roger Evans (AM): Thank you.

Jenny Jones (AM): I do not know if you know, Mr Mayor, but in fact there were other boroughs whose rape reporting leapt up when Sapphire was centralised. For example, Sutton, their rape reporting went up 70% and in Haringey it was something like 59%. So I am glad to hear --

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Greenwich and Bexley also..

Jenny Jones (AM): So you had heard, that's great.

Kit Malthouse (AM): I just wanted to ask you about what you said regarding two crime types that were moving in the wrong direction. One was sexual violence and domestic violence.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): That is right.

Kit Malthouse (AM): Of course we are referring to reported crime.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Yes.

Kit Malthouse (AM): It is not necessarily the case that the underlying incidence of those crimes is rising but more that a possibly declining population are reporting it more. Actually, on the assumption that there is greater underreporting of those often domestically-based crimes, then actually a red box in your report is a positive, rather than a negative.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I think you have to avoid complacency about this. Yes, you have to feed that into your calculations, and certainly we want to encourage reporting. I want to see people having the confidence to come forward and talk to the police about what has happened to them. I think it would be a mistake to be complacent and to say that simply because the figures are going up that shows what a great job we are doing. It may also show that we need to work even harder to tackle the problem.

Kit Malthouse (AM): Again on the personal robbery of telephones, one of the things that might confuse the numbers as well is I understand there is a fairly high level of fraudulent reports of robbery on the basis

that insurance claims are then triggered. Would it be possible to break out the numbers that you are able to see that? Certainly I have heard instances of police officers calling the telephone number of the phone that is supposedly stolen and the reporter answering the phone themselves. Can you find out whether the insurance industry is working closely with the police to try to drive that out, so we can see the true pattern of what is actually happening?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I think that is a very good thing to do, because it is, after all, deeply and bitterly unfair on everybody else who is being genuinely robbed and who is genuinely trying to do the right thing and insure their machine, if people are simply ripping off the system; so I think that is reasonable, yes.

Kit Malthouse (AM): This afternoon [the Chancellor's Budget announcement] may turn out to show a testing financial environment for us over the next three years. I just wanted then, on the rape and sexual violence thing, to get your reassurance that our support of the Rape Crisis Centres, and indeed through the Metropolitan Police Service budget, the Havens [sexual violence victim support centres], will continue during the rest of this term.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): It will. I would just remind Members that the GLA set up three new Rape Crisis Centres. We now have one in each quadrant of London following the example set in Croydon and that is, I think, an improvement. I also want to make sure that everybody is aware of the actions of the Havens and Londoners must have the confidence to report these crimes.

810/2013 - Overall Benefit Cap

Darren Johnson

Do you support the overall benefit cap in spite of your failure to win any major changes to its design to account for London's higher cost of living?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Yes, I mean the general answer is I do support the idea of the form of the welfare system and I think a cap is integral to trying to do that. As Members of the Assembly will remember, we got many concessions from the Government to try to mitigate the impact in London.

Darren Johnson (AM): You did not get that many concessions though, did you? Last year you told the Assembly that you supported the idea of excluding child benefits from the cap. That did not happen. Did you actually lobby for that? Did you approach the Government on that?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Yes, I did, but then you have to bear in mind that what we are talking about here is a very difficult situation in which you can have £26,000 coming in for a family not in work, to pay for them to live in a house, which is simply out of the reach of most other people in this city. You have people who might be on exactly that income paying in their taxes to support that. I think many people find that very, very difficult to understand. It is important to reform Housing Benefit. I am afraid it was being exploited by a great many landlords. There were huge sums being paid in this benefit to keep people in very expensive accommodation. I think most fair-minded people can see that other hardworking families should not be paying in their taxes for a system that was completely impervious to reform. It was right to change it.

Darren Johnson (AM): Even in a relatively cheap part of, say, Lewisham, a family would have to pay rent and childcare costs that are on average around £200 a week higher than the national average. Is it fair to punish that family just because they live in Lewisham and have children?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): There are several questions about the impact of the cap. The impact of the cap is not yet clear. I do think it is reasonable to try to restrict the Housing Benefit Bill. Bear in mind that these caps only apply to households where there is no one in work at all. For households where a member is in full or part-time work, and indeed a family where there is somebody who is disabled, or a war widow, the cap does not apply. I think the principle of imposing such a cap is one that is accepted by all the parties, with the possible exception of the Greens.

Darren Johnson (AM): No, certainly not. In July you supported Andrew Boff's [AM] idea of giving people a grace period following the loss of their job so that they had time to get back on their feet.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Yes.

Darren Johnson (AM): That sounded like a reasonable concession that could be argued for.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): We have got it. I am sorry, you have to pay attention. We have got an exemption from total benefit cap for nine months for those who lose their job. I think you need to follow the discussion. Thank you! The Mayor intervened, following your advice with Government and secured an important concession, which you seem unaccountably, Darren, to have overlooked.

Darren Johnson (AM): You have been relatively quiet on this whole issue. You warned at the start that the cost of this being social cleansing.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I think you have been reduced to relative quietness.

Darren Johnson (AM): What we have not seen is the enthusiasm and the rigour that you have applied to lobbying for reduction in the top rate of tax, for lobbying for the protection of bankers' bonuses. Week in, week out we hear you arguing and lobbying and writing articles in columns on that, but we do not hear you lobbying on the impact of the benefit cap.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): On the contrary, I have been quietly but ruthlessly effective, as usual. I am afraid your sheer inattention to detail that has allowed you to miss the important point.

Jennette Arnold OBE (Chair): His inattention to detail?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I am afraid my cousin Darren does not share the punctilio of all other Johnsons in attending to detail.

Jennette Arnold OBE (Chair): Just like you.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): The fact is we not only got a £25 million hardship fund for London and a further £15 million over the next two years, but we got an exemption from total benefit cap for nine months for those who lose their job. I do not want to be glib about this, it is an important problem. This is not a simple equation. There will be very hard cases and there will be cases that ring the heartstrings. There

will be some cases that do not quite ring the heartstrings so much and those will doubtless appear in the *Daily Mail* and so on and so forth, but there will also be cases where people genuinely deserve to continue with their current accommodation for one reason or another. Those cases we have tried to help with the Hardship Fund and indeed with the grace period that we have secured.

Darren Johnson (AM): What we do not know, which was very clear when we had the evidence session last week, what we do not know is the cumulative impact of all of these changes.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): No we do not.

Darren Johnson (AM): Even the Government has not attempted to give any real thought to the cumulative impact of all of these changes and how they will hit people.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I think what everybody wants to see is a London where communities remain mixed and balanced in terms of economic power. I think it absolutely vital that we continue to support people of all incomes to live across the city. The best way to do that is not just with the various hardship measures that we have secured, but to build more homes for Londoners. That is, I think, where you are going to see some more action today from the Government, which I fully support. We want to see a big programme of home building in our city. We have the space for it; we have the brown-field sites to do it in. We could build beautiful homes for Londoners and get the economy moving. That is the way to tackle the problems of overcrowding, the problems of high rents, many of the problems that are now affecting our city.

Darren Johnson (AM): Many of the beautiful homes that we see being built in this city are completely unaffordable for all but the wealthiest overseas investors.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Absolutely.

Darren Johnson (AM): That is not meeting the housing need in London.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): No. I agree with you completely and this is why --

Darren Johnson (AM): Will you agree to press for regulation of the private rented sector so we can actually give tenants some protection?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): No. I understand the argument. The last time we did that and we had rent controls [The Rent Act 1965] what happened was that people simply moved out of the sector. In other words there became far fewer properties for rent. We need to encourage the private rented sector but we also need to build more homes. At the moment, a third of the housing stock in inner London is already social housing. What we need to do is to address the needs of the millions of people who, as you rightly say, Darren, who do not have a hope of getting a mortgage in today's climate, do not have a hope of getting a share in the value of their property. Hardworking people who need to live somewhere near their place of work. We need to build homes for them with part-buy, part-rent schemes, discount schemes where we put in some of the money. That is the way forward for the city. As I say, because we have been doing a lot of work on this in the last few months, I very much hope we will have something today to say about some of the funding we have secured to do that. We have built a record number of affordable homes over the last four years. I am absolutely confident we can do 100,000 over eight years. That has never been

done before. I am confident that we can do that, but we also need to stimulate a massive programme of building for people on middle incomes who are now absolutely priced out of the London market.

Richard Tracey (AM): Mr Mayor, do you remember the article in *The Guardian* last year written by Liam Byrne, who was the last Chief Secretary to the Treasury?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Yes, he said there was no more money.

Richard Tracey (AM): He also said [Sir William] Beveridge [Economist, 1879 1963], who you will remember was the founding father of all this [the Welfare State], would scarcely have believed that Housing Benefit alone is costing the United Kingdom over £20 billion a year and, "That is simply too high", said Mr Byrne. Spending on Housing Benefit under the last Labour Government went from £11.2 billion, when they came into power in 1997 to £20 billion in 2009/10. That is an 80% increase and yet Labour voted against the cap. Do not you think that they need to be properly honest with the public?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I do not expect any such thing from Labour, frankly, because we have had a lot of nonsense from them this morning. They have succumbed to opposition-itis. This is a measure that they would almost certainly have enacted themselves. It was in their manifesto! There you go. They are attacking a measure on which they in fact stood for election with absolutely brilliant incoherence and inconsistency of the kind you expect from the Labour Party, but I will leave it to them to ask more questions on this issue.

Richard Tracey (AM): Thank you.

983/2013 - London's Record on Monitoring Child Sex Offenders

Victoria Borwick

The Metropolitan Police Service has lost track of more convicted child sex offenders who had signed on to the sex offenders' register than any other United Kingdom force (with 40 missing, compared to the force with the second highest number missing, which has lost seven). The Mayor has previously led the way nationally with its approach to Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG). Is it time for London to lead the way in changing the way they monitor convicted paedophiles?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Thank you, Victoria. This is obviously a difficult area where the police have to be extremely vigilant. The Metropolitan Police Service monitors approximately 10% of the total of sex offenders in this country, which I suppose in this country is actually a little under the rate you would expect per capita for London. We have made inquiries, there is a very small percentage - 0.5% - of that number is unaccounted for. This is because, the police believe, they have gone overseas to avoid the UK's stringent monitoring processes.

Victoria Borwick (AM): That is fine, Mr Mayor, but the concern is that obviously, as you say, criminals do not necessarily respect either London boundaries or country boundaries or national boundaries. If we in London think that we have lost, I believe 40 registered child sex offenders, that is obviously of concern. Therefore, I hope that you will join with me in asking the Metropolitan Police Service to look at how we can get all the various agencies involved with this to work better. We are talking about the Ministry of Justice here, the London Probation Trust, Her Majesty's Prison Service, the Parole Board and other services. In the same way as we talk about meat having to go through too many agencies before it arrives on our plate, we

do not want so many agencies involved. Actually we do, I think, need to see a lead agency here in order that we can keep Londoners safe. That is really our concern.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Yes. MOPAC is actually leading an operation to make sure that we bring all these bodies together and that the police have a very, very clear idea of the whereabouts of these individuals and they are properly monitored. I cannot, for confidentiality reasons go into the numbers, but they are pretty low. I think slightly lower, in fact, than you mentioned.

Victoria Borwick (AM): We only have the figures from what the police give us. Thank you.

987/2013 - Welfare Reform

Tom Copley

Do you stand by your statement of October 2010 that, "On my watch, you are not going to see thousands of families evicted from the place where they have been living and have put down roots" in London as a result of the Government's welfare reform?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): You asked whether I stand by what I said in October 2010 and the answer is yes, of course. As I said in my answer to Darren [Johnson AM], we are not yet in possession of conclusive evidence about thousands of families being evicted or having to move. Obviously, what is true is that there will be, and are, families who will have to make choices. Indeed, most of the families who are not in work who are receiving benefits, they will have to make choices; just as families who are in work and who are not receiving benefits have to make choices about where they can and cannot afford to live. That is an inevitable result of the cap. The question is, is that right or fair? Again, I would humbly direct Labour Members back to the policy on which they themselves fought the last election.

Tom Copley (AM): I did not.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Then you are a noble dissident of the Labour movement.

Tom Copley (AM): Can I just clarify or correct something that you said to Darren Johnson, because I think earlier you accused the Labour Group of dishonesty.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Serial dishonesty, yes.

Tom Copley (AM): You said to Darren Johnson that the benefit cap does not apply to households where there is a family member in work. It is only the total benefit cap, not the Housing Benefit cap. The Housing Benefit cap does apply where there are members of the family in work. Also a couple would have to be working 24 hours a week in order to be exempt from the total benefit cap, and there are a lot of people who do low-paid work who work fewer hours than that. So let us have a little bit of honesty here and let us have a little bit of honesty from you as well, Mr Mayor.

We will come back to the issue of people being moved out of London. Several councils, of all political colours as it happens, have said they are going to need to move families out of London. Camden Council say they will need to move 2,816 adults and children out; Westminster 2,327 households out of London. In

fact Westminster Council has been in talks with Peterborough City Council about building property in Peterborough to house these people. Are you aware of that?¹

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I am aware of that. You asked me specifically about my remarks in October 2010 and whether I stick by them, and what we are not seeing is the kind of mass exodus that I said I would not tolerate and that is not happening. It is inevitable under these reforms that some people who were receiving very considerable sums in benefit will have to change their arrangements; that I am afraid is inevitable, and you may not have supported that at the last election, but it was certainly the policy of the Labour Party.

Tom Copley (AM): We have about 5,000 people here between just two London councils who they say are going to need to be moved out, and that is just two boroughs; are we not looking at a mass exodus here?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): No, because we have not seen a mass exodus. With great respect to you, Tom, it is one thing for a borough to enter into discussions, as indeed is perfectly reasonable, with other parts of the city or indeed the country. What we do not have is a headcount to justify your suggestion that a mass exodus is already going on.

Tom Copley (AM): I think Crisis [charity for single homeless people] would beg to differ. I have a quote here from Crisis:

"Following the cuts in April 2011 there has been a dramatic shift in where Londoners who get local housing allowance are living with fewer households in inner London and major rises in outer London boroughs."

People are being forced to move, Mr Mayor. Coming back to the Peterborough example, do you think it is right for Westminster to be in these discussions with Peterborough Council about building houses out there for Londoners to go and live in? Do you think that is an acceptable solution?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I think the priority, as I said just now, is to build homes in the city, and that is what we are doing.

Tom Copley (AM): So you oppose --

¹ Subsequent to the meeting, Tom Copley AM corrected this statement formally:

Tom Copley (AM): At the March Mayor's Question Time I stated that Westminster City Council was planning to move 2,327 households to Peterborough. In actual fact it is Kensington and Chelsea who are in discussions with Peterborough Council to potentially build homes to move households into. The 2,327 households I mentioned is in fact the total number of households in Westminster that will be affected by the household benefit cap. I also referred to reports that Camden was considering moving out 2,816 people. This was also inaccurate as Camden Council has said that this number of families would be contacted by the council and that the only option for some of them would be to move.

Given the seriousness of this debate, it is absolutely vital that facts and statistics we use are 100% accurate. I will write to both boroughs concerned and would therefore like to publicly amend this mistake and apologise for any confusion caused.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Let me finish. I have to tell you, I think it is perfectly reasonable for a borough to seek to satisfy its statutory obligations to house people as best it can. As far as I understand, and I of course have raised the matter with the boroughs concerned, there is no prospect of any kind of compulsion. It seems to be entirely reasonable where people cannot get the home that they want or need, that they should be offered the maximum possible choice. If that is an option that is put on the table, that seems to me to be not unreasonable. I want to get back to the central point, we are asking taxpayers to support families not in work who receive very, very considerable sums in benefits --

Tom Copley (AM): Hang on a minute, no, many of these families are in work, Mr Mayor, and you continue to repeat this lie. The people who are in receipt of benefits and who will be affected by this cap, and affected by the Housing Benefit cap, and a good number of them will also be affected by the total benefit cap - these are people in work doing low-paid jobs in London. The people that sell you your coffee in the morning, the people that clean our offices here at City Hall. So can we just get away from this language that implies that everyone who receives a benefit is out of work; it is not true.

Now, Stewart Jackson, who is the Member of Parliament for Peterborough and a man whose vote you may need to court when you go off to try to be leader of the Conservative Party, has described this act of building homes in Peterborough to house Westminster residents as social cleansing. Do you agree with him?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): No, because clearly I do not know what proposition was put to Stewart, and I doubt it was a fair reflection of reality, but it is certainly not social cleansing. What is being proposed, as far as I understand, is that there should be an option and that cannot be called social cleansing.

Tom Copley (AM): I did not realise you were the one who set the definitions of these things, Mr Mayor.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I will tell you, funnily enough, I was attacked in 2010. I said I did not want to see anything remotely approaching what happened in Kosovo, if you will remember.

Tom Copley (AM): I remember it well.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): People said that was an outrageous thing to say, but I stood by that. I do not want to see that, and we are not seeing anything like that, nor do I think it likely that we will.

Tom Copley (AM): Well I am sorry, Mr Mayor, but when thousands of families are being forced out of this city I think the situation is serious. As someone who is meant to be standing up for all Londoners, included the poorest Londoners, many of whom are in work, I think you need to do more about this.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Come on, you are either in the Labour Party or you are not.

Tom Copley (AM): Last time I checked I was, Mr Mayor.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Are you in the Labour Party, or is he now Green? What is he? This is a policy that was supported by your party.

Tom Copley (AM): Mr Mayor, you are now wasting my time and you are wasting the Labour Group's time, of which I am a member, so thank you. Thank you, Chair.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I am helping you to reach the truth.

Tom Copley (AM): I do not require your assistance, Mr Mayor.

Jennette Arnold OBE (Chair): Mr Mayor, can we stop for a moment. Can we welcome to this Chamber the students from Chingford Church of England Junior School from the blessed borough of Waltham Forest? Can I just say, I am proud to be your Assembly Member.

I am now going to call Assembly Member Twycross.

Fiona Twycross (AM): Thank you. I think if you applied your views on the actual reforms and our views on the actual reforms, I think it is important to accept that the welfare reforms are already creating a whole series of unintended consequences. These include the movement of families and this is creating pressure on services in the areas to which they are moving. For example, last week we heard reports, which quite clearly you have not heard already. We heard reports that school places are already under pressure in outer London as families move as a direct result of benefit cuts.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): School places are under pressure in outer London because of the population.

Fiona Twycross (AM): The population is changing because people are moving out of inner London. For example my colleague Joanne McCartney [AM] quoted last week that a governor in Kensington and Chelsea had told her the roll was falling because people are leaving because of the changes. Yet Joanne's own constituency there is a problem with movement of families into the area, which is putting pressure on school places. What will you do to ensure families on low income are not forced out of central London and what will you do to support services in the areas into which they are moving?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): As I said earlier on in answer to Darren, we did win concessions from the Government for the Hardship Fund. That particularly is to be used in cases where kids have to be in a certain school for one reason or another. Councils do have discretion when people have to live near such and such a place of work, but not every case is a hardship case. Often people who are not in full-time work who are receiving very considerable sums in benefits, eye-watering sums, to pay for accommodation in London, will have to make choices that are faced by many other people in this city. Not everybody can live exactly where they want in London. Of course we are trying to minimise the impact of these changes and it is very, very important, we received the concession that Darren did not know about to minimise the impact on people who lose their jobs. We have the Hardship Fund and that is a valuable thing. But, in the end, it is and it was the policy of the Labour Party to reform this benefit.

Fiona Twycross (AM): Can we get away from that and just look at the unintended consequences that this Government's reforms are creating? What are you going to do in terms of urgent action that is needed? In terms of looking at what movement is taking place - and we heard last week at the meeting on welfare reform that movement is taking place. There is evidence, not just from school places, but from other services too. What are you going to do as Mayor to review what is happening?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): We are closely monitoring, with DCLG and with the boroughs, the impact of what is happening; that is absolutely correct. Tom is right to focus on that aspect of it, but what we cannot yet say with confidence is that there is a Kosovo-style exodus.

Fiona Twycross (AM): Leaving aside the rhetoric, what are you doing to review what is happening?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): We are not seeing anything like that.

Fiona Twycross (AM): No, I mean leaving aside rhetoric, what are you doing to ensure both that families are not affected and that local services are not impacted.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Some families will be affected, Fiona.

Fiona Twycross (AM): Yes, but what are you doing to review the situation and what will you do to ensure that local services do not reach breaking point in areas?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): On your point about school places, which is a valid one. I do not believe the problem is caused anything like exclusively by this particular housing benefit cap; that is not the reason why we have pressure on school places in outer London. I do not think Whitehall yet has a handle on the reason, which is why we are hoping this budget will be sensible. What we are seeing in London is a fantastic growth in population and that is putting enormous pressure on school places across the board. The population in London has gone up 600,000 since I have been Mayor; we are expecting a further 1 million by 2021. There is huge pressure on school places altogether. What I am saying is we need to have many, many more schools and many, many more school places.

One point I would like to make is that it is completely nonsensical of some councils, Fiona, currently to be saying that they want to resist new free schools when they are crying out for more places for kids in their borough and I would encourage those boroughs to create more schools and solve the problem that Fiona correctly identifies.

Richard Tracey (AM): Mr Mayor, just to bring a few facts into this discussion, are you aware that certain survey data from the DWP has shown that only 3% of Londoners have had to move home to deal with the shortfall in Housing Benefit.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): 3% of Londoners or 3% of Londoners on the Housing Benefit?

Richard Tracey (AM): According to my information it is 3% of Londoners, yes.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I think I need to have a look at your statistics there, Dick.

Richard Tracey (AM): I would guess it is 3% of Londoners on Housing Benefit, yes. The other point is that Freedom of Information requests by Full Fact [independent fact-checking company] found that no London boroughs had apparently booked any accommodation outside of London to move their social tenants to. That is despite some of the scaremongering that we have heard from Labour politicians, including Mr [Ed] Miliband [MP, Leader of the Labour Party].

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Mr Miliband, Mr [Tom] Copley, and all those people who are now claiming they are not members of the Labour Party and never supported this idea in the first place, perhaps you could enlighten them about that and perhaps they might support the policy.

Richard Tracey (AM): I do not think they are ever willing to accept any enlightenment, Mr Mayor, as is so often evident.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Well, you never know. We live in hope.

Onkar Sahota (AM): Mr Mayor, I want to carry on, but I want to talk to you about the bedroom taxes. Your own Health Inequalities Strategy consistently makes the point that to live a healthy life and in order to lose health inequalities it is important that families need a decent household income. Poor quality housing and overcrowding is a major driver of poor health. You have said previously that you want support regional vision, good leadership and sports trading partnership with actions. Can you explain to me why a child who is autistic, or a child who suffers from Down's syndrome, or a child with a severe neurological condition, or a child who suffers from violent trauma in their life, needs to be forced to share a bedroom?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I do understand the point that you make, Onkar, and can I just say, as far as I am aware, the context of this is an attempt by the Coalition to reduce the problem of under-occupancy. There are many homes in London, which are very heavily subsidised, where there are at least one or sometimes more spare rooms, and the question is, could those rooms be better used? What I do not think the Government ever intended was to have an impact on the kinds of cases that you rightly describe. As far as I am aware, they have made some changes to the measure in order to make that absolutely clear. So as far as I understand it, families with disabled children of the kind that you describe, foster carers, and members of the Armed Forces I think do now have new protections.

Onkar Sahota (AM): No, well let me pick up this question about foster carer children you talk about; this is only for a family where there is one foster child. If there are two foster children, and I can imagine situations where there is a sister and a brother who need to be fostered in the same family, they will not get an exemption at all. This policy is dividing up families who need to live in a house together. On the one hand we want more foster parents to come forward, on the other hand we are taxing them unfairly.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Sorry, do you mean, if there is a foster family with --

Onkar Sahota (AM): If a family has two foster children, they will need two separate bedrooms, but this exemption you are talking about that the Government has given only applies to one bedroom.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): So you are saying, suppose each foster child occupied one bedroom, that would be viewed by this Government as being excessive?

Onkar Sahota (AM): Exactly what I am saying, Mr Mayor.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I did not know that.

Onkar Sahota (AM): Mr Mayor, I hope you will ruthlessly pursue this and pounce upon the Government on behalf of Londoners.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I am very interested in what you say, Onkar, I had not been made aware of that. The brief I have says that there are now protections for foster carers and foster children.

Onkar Sahota (AM): No, it only applies to one bedroom.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): If these protections are inadequate then I am grateful to you for drawing it to my attention and we will see what we can do, but I am not certain of what that exemption is.

Onkar Sahota (AM): I can give you the references and quotation from the Foster Care Association or something, but for your information, if you look into this, it will confirm what I have said.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): As members of the public and I think everyone understands, these are not my regulations. I have not promulgated these myself, but I will try to establish whether that particular adverse impact is genuinely the case and I will be happy to write to you about it.

Onkar Sahota (AM): I appreciate that, Mr Mayor.

Jennette Arnold OBE (Chair): Assembly Member McCartney.

Joanne McCartney OBE (AM): My two boroughs are Enfield and Haringey and they are two of the four boroughs in London that are going to be testing the proposed welfare changes from this next month before it gets rolled out across London.

In Enfield and Haringey poverty is already disproportionately high. Those boroughs have both seen increases in people applying for Local Housing Allowance (LHA) and Housing Benefit. Between March 2011 and November last year, there was a 29% rise in the case of Haringey, and a 21% rise in the case of Enfield. We believe that this is due to increasing poverty, unemployment, but also that families are moving out of other boroughs. If I can quote to you what [Mayor] Jules Pipe, the Chair of London Councils, said to us when he was in this Chamber only a couple of weeks ago, he says that --

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): A 29% increase in Haringey?

Joanne McCartney OBE (AM): Yes. We certainly have figures for placements, particularly in temporary accommodation, that boroughs have made and that clearly show that some boroughs, like my own, have placed a number of families in the low-tens in a three-month period in immediately adjacent boroughs. He says that is compared to, in the same quarter, boroughs who have exported hundreds to north-eastern boroughs, and Enfield and Haringey both fall in that north-eastern quadrant of London. I think we can see that there is some effect already happening. In my two boroughs, can I say, do you believe that the total benefit cap is going to adversely affect these boroughs who are already disproportionately affected by deprivation?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I will look into the figures for the increase in LHA applications and Housing Benefit applications and see what we can do.

Joanne McCartney OBE (AM): That does seem to be a shift, a great shift.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): That is interesting. Again, just repeating what I have said earlier on, the data we have is inconclusive at the moment. It may be that that changes, Joanne, I have to be clear with you, it could be that what you are saying is part of a pattern. The big challenge really is to make sure that people on low incomes in London can get the housing they need, and at the moment we need roughly speaking to double our rate of home-building in this city in order to deal with that problem. In Haringey in particular there are huge opportunities for new and better housing, in Enfield too. That is what I would like to see. That is by far the best way of attacking the crisis, we have a housing crisis in London, but it is a sign of the attractiveness of London that we have a large and growing population, and it is something that we can turn to the advantage of Londoners.

Joanne McCartney OBE (AM): This is why our Party argued for a higher rate of cap, for it to have regional variations.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I understand that; I have looked into that.

Joanne McCartney OBE (AM): Can I also ask then, are you aware why the four boroughs that are going to be the pilot for the total benefit cap have been chosen in London?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I cannot give you a reason.

Joanne McCartney OBE (AM): Can I suggest that I was quite shocked to hear that they have been chosen because they share the same DWP assessment office in Stratford and most of the rest of London, their assessment office is in Northern Ireland, so the pilot is not to test the benefit on people, it is to test do the DWP systems work.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I understand your concern about that, although I have to say that my bitter experience of bureaucracy and DWP systems generally is that it is quite a good idea to test whether these things work. That is not a wholly stupid thing to do.

Joanne McCartney OBE (AM): Testing two of the most deprived boroughs in London when the impact is going to be seen sooner is perhaps the wrong thing to do, and those boroughs are very concerned that they will have to make up that shortfall during that four-month test period, particularly on Housing Benefit. When I put the question to [Mayor] Jules Pipe [Chair, London Councils] whether those boroughs should receive compensation from the DWP, he said, "Yes, and London Councils have lobbied". Can I ask for you to lobby on behalf of the four boroughs?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Because they will have to make extra payments?

Joanne McCartney OBE (AM): They may well do if they choose to do that, yes.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I am sure that that is a point that will be made to DWP, and if it is the case that London boroughs are now being placed under genuine and unexpected strain --

Joanne McCartney OBE (AM): I am asking, will you make the case as well?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I am about to join you and say, yes, of course, it is my job to represent boroughs in that sort of situation.

Joanne McCartney OBE (AM): Thank you.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): But we need to bottom it out, Joanne.

Darren Johnson (Deputy Chair): Thank you. Assembly Member Evans.

Roger Evans (AM): I think there have been some reasonable concerns raised this morning, but we do need a reality check on some of the things that have been said. In my own borough of Havering we have quite a lot of social rented property and some of it belongs to the London Borough of Newham who built it there many years ago because it was a cheaper and more pleasant option for housing their tenants than doing it in Newham. Waltham Forest Council, 20 years ago, was housing some of its tenants in properties in Essex. These are Labour councils that very wisely decided to make the best use of their money by doing that. Do you not agree that to describe the situation as a crisis suddenly is somewhat alarmist and disregards --

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Well that was my word.

Roger Evans (AM): Well it was not, it was Tom Copley's word, and it is alarmist and it disregards what has happened in history.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): You are totally right, Roger, and there are lots of ways of looking at this, and I think Tom is very concerned about a deal between Westminster and Peterborough and talks about social cleansing. Actually, you look at the history of London over the last 100 years; there have been repeated waves of emigration by Londoners to other areas, to form the garden cities, to Essex and so on and so forth. There is nothing intrinsically wrong with people finding the accommodation they need elsewhere.

Where I think I would agree with Tom and with others is if there is an element of compulsion, if people were simply told, "Like it or lump it, we are kicking you out to some far-flung place", I think that is not what we want to see. Again, I must repeat what I have said to Fiona [Twycross AM] and to others this morning, we must be realistic about this. Any proposal of a kind that the Labour Party supported in 2010 to reform Housing Benefit in the way that it must be reformed would lead to some families inevitably having to make choices about where they live that affect all working families. Everybody has to try to decide where to live; that is just a fact of life. What we are trying to do is to mitigate the impacts for some of the harder cases and that is why I referred to the funds and so on.

990/2013 - Rents

Nicky Gavron

Has reform of Local Housing Allowance led to a reduction in private sector rents?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Again we do not have data for the rents of private renters on Housing Benefit, but according to the interim results from the DWP's independent evaluation of the LHA changes, around one in ten landlords had reduced their rents as a result of the reforms. That is all I have to go on so far and we will have to wait and see what further data comes out.

Nicky Gavron (AM): Yes. Thank you for that. Lord Freud [Welfare Minister], Iain Duncan Smith [MP, Secretary of State for Work and Pensions], [David] Cameron [Prime Minister] and yourself all said, and have consistently said, that in fact the LHA and the Housing Benefit caps would bring rents down. As you have all been saying it at the top of the Tory Party and it has not happened, except in a very few isolated cases, can we conclude that this is a Tory myth?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I can only refer you to what I have just said; one in ten landlords had reduced; that is 10% had reduced their rents as a result of the reforms. If you were being fair you would have to concede that we have huge pressures on housing stock in London. People are finding it very difficult to get mortgages, with the result that many people are moving into the private rented sector because they cannot buy homes in the way that you or I could, Nicky, when we faced that challenge. That is simply impossible for millions of people in this city and that is why I repeat what I said earlier that the goal must now be to help hard-working families to get a stake in the equity of their home. I think what Darren [Johnson AM] had to say was completely right, why should a share in the London property market be something that is reserved to plutocrats from around the world or people who are now middle-aged and older. This should be something that we help families across London to achieve.

Nicky Gavron (AM): Can I just go on, I think everyone, except of course for the Tory Party, was actually sure that rents would not go down.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I am sorry, you do not seem to be listening to what I have just said.

Nicky Gavron (AM): What we did not realise, you might be interested in this, we did not realise that rents would increase more for families on low incomes and increase more than for any other income group. We now know, in fact there were new figures yesterday, that there is a 10% increase if you are on a very low income, and yesterday Barnet was cited finding a 43% increase. So I think what I want to ask you is, that even in your terms, welfare reform is not doing what it said it was going to do on the tin, is it?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Again, I do not want to accuse you of failing to hear what I have just said, but I repeat that one in ten landlords had reduced their rents as a result of the reforms, according to the DWP's independent evaluation of the changes. Maybe they are lying, but I can only tell you what -- and that seems to me to be beneficial. What is also happening of course is that, as a result of the changes, we are able to bear down on a benefit that was costing lots of taxpayers on low incomes huge sums and I think seemed to many people to be unfair, and that is also a benefit of the reforms. This is not something that has been easy to do but, just to remind you, it was a policy that was supported by your party.

Nicky Gavron (AM): Yes, just that that is not my line of questioning, but that benefit bill is rising and we must not forget that. I just wanted to go on on this thing. What we did not realise, and there is massive evidence now for this, is what we are hearing now from the National Landlords Association. That more than 50% of their members are not going to take benefit claimants and the DWP has done research saying that 40% of landlords are not going to take benefit claimants. We just heard from Crisis that in Lewisham, if you are young, under 35, in Lewisham and you want to share a flat, then of the flats that are affordable only 7% will be available. So, it is a new situation. Do you think it is actually fair that if you are in need, if you are on low pay in Lewisham, and you need Housing Benefit to help you out, that you should not only almost certainly lose your home, because the rent will be put up, but that you cannot find another because they are not available to you because you are on benefits?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): As I say, the objective is to increase the supply for people across all income groups and that is the single best solution and that is what we have done over the last four years and that is what we are going to continue to do, in Lewisham and elsewhere. If you impose rent controls or some other solution of a kind that I think you would like to introduce in London, all that would happen is that you would constrict supply. You would stop people investing in housing, and they are thinking of getting rid of it in New York. That would be completely against the interests of the poorest people in society. What we have to do is build more homes for social rent and more homes for people on low incomes.

Nicky Gavron (AM): When the Government talked about reducing rents, they did not talk about supply, they just said the line was, this was going to reduce rents, and I think you and the Government have been stringing us along all the time. First you said the impact was exaggerated, and I do not know how huge 'huge' is for you, in terms of numbers. Then you said you would get mitigation, and you got a little bit, but it is tokenistic. Now you say that it is reasonable and it is a natural consequence that people should have to move out of London. I think that there are things you should be doing. You should have asked, as Labour asked nationally, as Labour around this Chamber asked, for a regional variation to the cap. You should ask for a comprehensive impact assessment. You should be doing something about the private rented sector. You are doing nothing.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): On the contrary, we have done a huge amount. We have done more than you lot ever did, and I think that you are back again in the same old groove of the record that got stuck four years ago. We have delivered more affordable homes than you ever expected us to do. We have continued, in spite of the massive financial crisis engineered by the Labour Party in the middle years of the last decade, to deliver more homes for Londoners of all incomes. And, as has been made abundantly clear this afternoon, we have the policies that will continue to get housing moving in London. What would be absolute retrograde would be to bleat away about rent controls, which would achieve absolutely nothing except to stifle that sector, or now hypocritically to say that you oppose a benefit reform that in fact your party supported. I think it is absolute nonsense, but I have found over the last four or five years that the best thing to do when listening to criticism from you, Nicky, on the building of affordable homes in London is to take it with a pinch of salt. Our record speaks for itself.

Jennette Arnold OBE (Chair): Assembly Member Gavron, have you finished your questioning?

Nicky Gavron (AM): Yes, I have.

996/2013 - Draft Fire Plan Public Meetings

Navin Shah

Will you attend the consultation public meetings on the draft fire plan?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Navin, you are asking whether I am going to come to these consultation meetings and the answer is no. I have every confidence in Ron [Dobson, Commissioner for Fire and Emergency Planning, London Fire and Emergency Planning Authority (LFEPA)] and in James Cleverly [AM] and I think that it would be much better if the proceedings generated the maximum possible clarity and information for the public, which is what we want, and that they are not occasions for political agitprop of one kind or another.

Navin Shah (AM): Mr Mayor, it is extremely regrettable that you are not being accountable to Londoners.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Are you saying you cannot hold me to account?

Navin Shah (AM): Can I finish please?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Yes.

Navin Shah (AM): Mr Mayor, show some courtesy. You need to be accountable to Londoners who have elected you and trusted you to defend their safety and security. Now, it is your budget, which you have imposed on LFEPA, unprecedented cuts of £45 million. These are resulting in the Fire Commissioner proposing - and therefore they are your closure plans - closing 12 fire stations, 18 fire appliances and 525 fire-fighter force reductions. I know that you have vetoed in the past at Assemblies other calls for public meetings. But in that scenario, now that LFEPA has got public consultation meetings right across London through our efforts, should you not be defending your closure plans and be accountable to Londoners? Because if you do not trust in your instructions to close fire stations then why are you imposing that?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Navin, with the greatest possible respect, I think you are showing too little confidence in your own ability to hold me to account. That is what we are all here for. I am more than happy to engage in a conversation about the draft Fifth London Safety Plan (LSP5). If you look back at the Police and Crime Plan consultations that have just concluded, I think they were very successful. I did not go to them, I think they were very successful. They were led by Stephen Greenhalgh [Deputy Mayor for Policing and Crime] and Simon Byrne [Assistant Commissioner, Metropolitan Police Service].

Navin Shah (AM): Mr Mayor, can I stop you?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): No, you cannot stop me because I want to finish my answer. Every one of London's --

Navin Shah (AM): You are not talking to the point, you are wasting our time.

Jennette Arnold OBE (Chair): Assembly Member Shah--

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): -- was visited and there was a good --

Jennette Arnold OBE (Chair): Mr Mayor, that is not the question that was put to you; the question was a straightforward question from my point of view. Are you going to be attending the fire plan public meetings -- and you have given the answer "no", is that right?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I did give an answer to that and the reason is that we have just had a very successful series of consultations on the Police and Crime Plan, none of which I attended, because it was important that these occasions should be genuinely illuminating and not give the Labour Party an opportunity to make noise. It worked, it engaged the public, it got people interested in the issues, and I think the same will happen again with the draft fire plan.

Jennette Arnold OBE (Chair): Assembly Member Shah has a follow-up question for you.

Navin Shah (AM): Mr Mayor, you are supporting the closure plans? In effect, you have caused the closure at massive levels. We will be there, OK, putting other case forward, engaging with residents who have elected us, why are you afraid of standing up?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): You can do whatever you like, Navin, and I would encourage you to do it, and I am sure you will. We have just had some excellent consultations in respect of the Police and Crime Plan, I think that is the way to do it. I have full confidence in Ron Dobson, the Fire Commissioner, and in James Cleverly, the Chairman of LFEPA. What people want is clarity on the issues; what they want to hear is about response times, they want to hear about how the London Fire Brigade has reduced deaths from fire in the last ten years, indeed in the last four or five years by more than 18%, they want to hear about the success of the London Fire Brigade, they want to have the statistics accurately and impartially conveyed to them, they do not want the whole thing captured by the Labour Party and turned into some ridiculous political football match..

Navin Shah (AM): Mr Mayor, the difference here is that LFEPA does not want to implement these plans, which you are pushing for. You have issued a legal direction. I thought, and I believe that you owe it to the Londoners to defend your legal imposition and therefore attend public meetings.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): You have made that point, if I may say.

Navin Shah (AM): It is shameful that you owe it to the Londoners and you are not standing up to your responsibility.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): On the contrary, I think it is shameful that you have completely abandoned your duties on LFEPA, you failed to get on and do what you are paid to do, which is make the savings that are necessary to deliver an ever-safer London.

Navin Shah (AM): I do not need to be lectured about my responsibilities.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I think you do need a lecture, it is exactly what you do need, and I think what you should do is get on and approve the plan and improve fire cover in London.

Jennette Arnold OBE (Chair): Assembly Member Twycross.

Fiona Twycross (AM): Thank you. Will James Cleverly be attending the consultation meetings?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I am sure he will be at as many of the meetings as he possibly can. I cannot guarantee that he will be at every single one but I am sure he will be leading from the front.

Fiona Twycross (AM): Our understanding is that he was not intending to attend the meetings, so you might want to discuss that with him. You have previously stated in response to a question on Lewisham Hospital that the whole point of a consultation is to hear from the public but it is not a referendum. So far our evidence from talking to people, which we do regularly, and from public attitude research carried out by the fire brigade itself, it proves that nobody really wants these cuts apart from you, the Tory-led Government and the Conservative members of LFEPA. What will it take for you, at the end of the

consultation process, not just to hear what the public says, but to take onboard what they say, if Londoners make it clear that they do not want these cuts?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): What it will take is clarity about the data, a genuine argument, and some responsible behaviour. This is a genuine consultation; I am more than willing to listen to a case that is sensibly made.

Fiona Twycross (AM): OK, and if next Monday, Londoners do not see that the concerns raised at a wide range of consultation meetings – where we saw concerns raised about the Police and Crime Plan – reflected in the final outcome, what reassurance will you give to concerned Londoners that their views on the fire cuts will be listened to?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): The most important point, Fiona, is that what we are doing is making sure that more London boroughs are within the target response times, both for the first appliance and the second appliance. I think people should bear in mind that the London Fire Brigade has had astonishing success in the last ten years in bringing the numbers of fires down, they continue to have that success. I have to weigh up, as I said to you many times before, the advice of seasoned professionals who have devoted their lives to fighting fire in London, against the, if I may say so, opportunistic and irresponsible claims and scaremongering that I think is sometimes peddled by the Labour Party. I will listen to the points that are made. If there are genuine cases where we think we can modify the plans, improve them in some way, of course we will do that.

Fiona Twycross (AM): Can I go back to the seasoned professionals that you have referred to? In a letter to staff, the Fire Commissioner makes it clear that if the changes are agreed, as he appears to be anticipating, he is planning for closures from the autumn. Are you planning to force through these changes irrespective of the arguments made? So are you effectively planning on saying, “I hear what you say but I am going ahead with these cuts anyway”, to Londoners?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): This is a genuine consultation.

Fiona Twycross (AM): OK, thank you.

Andrew Dismore (AM): Should fire-fighters be allowed to respond to the consultation on the closure of 12 stations, 18 pumps and 520 jobs?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I see no reason why anybody should not respond to the consultation.

Andrew Dismore (AM): Well I am pleased to hear that. Would you agree that it is part of a fire-fighter’s community fire safety role to tell the public about the consultation and to encourage the public to participate?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I believe that people should be encouraged to participate across London and I am sure they will, and by the way, if I may be allowed to revert to the police consultation, we had a huge participation and very good I think it was too.

Andrew Dismore (AM): That has nothing to do with it. Well, in that case, why have fire-fighters been banned from doing this? Why have you banned them from publicising the consultation? Why have you banned them from telling the public about LSP5 and the closures?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Tell them about what?

Andrew Dismore (AM): Why have you banned the fire-fighters from telling the public about the consultation?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I am not aware of any such ban, Andrew.

Andrew Dismore (AM): I have the correspondence here to prove it. Yet again we have Macavity [the main character in the TS Elliot poem *Macavity - the Mystery Cat* who is a master criminal] the mystery Mayor, have we not? "He always has an alibi, one or two to spare, whatever time the deed took place, Macavity" - or in this case Johnson- "is not there". It always seems to be the case, does it not, that whenever something happens you try to wriggle out of it?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): on the contrary, you have "Macavity the mystery LFEPA, the bafflement of Scotland Yard, the flying squad's despair, Dismore has gone missing, would make a fakir stare --

Andrew Dismore (AM): Keep trying, keep trying, you are no TS Elliot. Let us get on. I mean the fact is you are not really going to allow genuine consultation, are you, just like the police was not a genuine consultation, you are just forcing through --

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): "Macavity, Macavity, there's no one like Macavity, he's broken every human law, he breaks the law of gravity --"

Andrew Dismore (AM): I know you have the attention span of a goldfish, but you might like to listen to the question.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Sorry, do you compare yourself to a goldfish?

Andrew Dismore (AM): No, I am comparing you to a goldfish.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I may say that was an uncommonly felicitous comparison.

Jennette Arnold OBE (Chair): Can we just have some order back into the Chamber. Assembly Member Dismore, will you put the question to the question to the Mayor so that we have some hope of getting an answer.

Andrew Dismore (AM): That is what I would very much like to do, Chair.

Jennette Arnold OBE (Chair): Will you put the question now and can we have an answer to the question?

Andrew Dismore (AM): I have not asked the question yet. The question is this: what we are looking at here, is not a genuine consultation, just as the Police and Crime Plan was not a genuine consultation. You are trying to force these cuts through by closing down public awareness of what you are up to, you refuse to meet the Fire Brigades Union (FBU), you are refusing to attend the meetings, you have misrepresented the Commissioner.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I like that. The last time we had Mayor's Question Time, you will remember, members of the audience --

Andrew Dismore (AM): It is Orwellian-1984 newspeak spin that we are engaged in here. This shouldn't happen in London, it is what happens in Pyongyang [capital of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea]. You are not modelling yourself on Pericles. It is not Prime Minister you want, it is the Eternal President Kim Jong-Johnson, is it not? The Eternal President who can impose his will on London despite what Londoners say; that is what you are about.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): No, this is a genuine consultation and, as I say, I think it is important to listen to the views of serious and seasoned professionals. I do take it a little bit awry to be told that I refused to meet members of the FBU when actually they were all here last time, if you will remember. The big crowd that you had organised ready to join in the show, then unaccountably the Labour Group decided they were going to abrogate their constitutional duties of scrutiny and they brought proceedings to a halt. They did not have the guts to put me under the spotlight and they curtailed proceedings. They are paid by the taxpayer to interrogate me and they did not want to do it, and the poor old FBU were left sitting in that audience spectating on absolutely nothing, it was a tragedy.

976/2013 - Public Houses

Steve O'Connell

Would you support further measures to retain pubs as community assets and ensure that they are protected from inappropriate development?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Thank you very much, Steve. I congratulate you on what you are doing to try to protect pubs in London; it is a very important cause. Yes, indeed, in my draft Supplementary Planning Guidance (SPG) I support the Community Right to Bid, which gives communities powers to save valued community assets, including pubs, where they are threatened with closure.

Steve O'Connell (AM): Thank you, Mr Mayor. I would like to also congratulate Tom Copley [AM] on his work, it one of these very unusual - and I think it is probably because it is us new boys - situations where we are able to work in parallel and link arms. I think I would probably rather have Tom as a fellow Coalitionista than some others that the Tory Party have accepted in the past.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Yes, he has already indicated his deep unhappiness with Labour. I think the Assembly will have noted that he is on the verge of defection.

Steve O'Connell (AM): No, that was not my point, Mr Mayor. However, the report *Keeping Local* does recommend various measures to protect our pubs, and you have mentioned about the emerging SPG. Mr Mayor, you would confirm that public houses are an essential element in what you would call lifetime neighbourhoods, as envisaged in your plan?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Yes, absolutely, and keeping pubs going in local town centres, in high streets, is part of what we are trying to support through the Growing Places Fund, the regeneration funds, and indeed the Outer London Fund, all of which continue to operate. I look back over the last four to five years at the stuff we have done, the money we have spent, and I think you could argue the Outer London Fund has been among the most successful and popular things that we have done. I think it was high time that City Hall paid more attention to outer London and the high streets, and if we can be more useful in saving more pubs then I am all for it.

Steve O'Connell (AM): Specifically on the forthcoming SPG, you do mention community assets, community hubs, but what I am urging is for you to instruct and request from your planners that there is specific mention of community public houses because at the moment they are covered in a broad generalisation. What we are asking for, and I know Tom would agree with this, is that we want specific mention for specific protection of community pubs that are seen as an asset for the local community. Would you agree with that, Mr Mayor?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I do. I do completely agree, and I thank you for what you are doing. What was that pub we visited, the real ale pub?

Steve O'Connell (AM): The Hope in Carshalton.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): The Hope in Carshalton, that was a wonderful establishment, yes.

Steve O'Connell (AM): Indeed. Lastly, Mr Mayor, on the subject of saturation zones. We all know that many of our high streets are plagued with far too many retail outlets selling cheap beer, typically six cans of extra-strong something for a fiver. They are cropping up all over the place. I know very much that the boroughs do have a very key role in this, but would you agree that we do need to introduce and increase the number of saturation zones throughout London so that we do not have so many of these outlets selling cheap beer that can cause potentially antisocial problems on our streets?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Yes, I would much rather see that, Steve, and indeed the alcohol exclusion zones, or whatever they are called [Designated Public Place Orders], which are also enforced by the boroughs. I would much rather see that than some Government-led minimum pricing regime for alcohol that I think is unlikely to work. I think that approach is sensible, and indeed I congratulate the work that is being led by the boroughs in stopping underage buying of alcohol in supermarkets; that is also very important.

Steve O'Connell (AM): Yes, test purchasing is a good tool that is being used by boroughs. Thank you very much, Mr Mayor.

Richard Tracey (AM): Mr Mayor, I am glad you paid tribute to the excellent work of Steve O'Connell, which is I think of very great assistance to the boroughs in formulating their planning policies, because you may have heard that in Southwark local residents have saved a pub by specifically identifying it as a community asset. Indeed, in my own borough of Wandsworth, Jane Ellison, the MP for Battersea, is seeking to save two - the Castle pub and the Eagle pub, where developers clearly want to buy up these places and simply build housing on them.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Which takes away a vital resource. Whenever I see applications before me, that involve getting rid of a pub, I am always against it. I hate the loss of a pub in London where it is unnecessary. If Jane is supporting these pubs, who can lose, I am sure they will be fine.

Richard Tracey (AM): Indeed, thank you very much.

992/2013 - Police and Crime Plan and Estate Strategy

Joanne McCartney

Have you signed off your Draft Police and Crime Plan and Estate Strategy?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Thank you very much, Joanne. I have not yet signed it off. It is going to be published at the end of the month and, as I say, it has received widespread consultation. We will be taking account of the responses and the feedback that we received and finishing off the work that we are doing.

Joanne McCartney OBE (AM): You said the end of the month; up to now we have been told that it is 25 March, which is on Monday. Is that still your understanding?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): All I can tell you is: I have by the end of the month.

Joanne McCartney OBE (AM): Can I ask, have you actually seen the consultation responses yet?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I have not looked at them in detail.

Joanne McCartney OBE (AM): Because I think there are quite a few, and so between now and Monday it is quite a short time for you to make what are going to be quite significant decisions.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Sure, and I mean I have received lots of representations in different ways about different aspects of the plan and we will consider it carefully.

Joanne McCartney OBE (AM): Because I have concerns over the process, which I have expressed before, but let me tell you two latest concerns I have had, and why I have them. I'll take the example of my own borough of Enfield, because during the consultation process, Winchmore Hill Police Station was actually closed two weeks ago during the consultation. On 7 March, which was the day following the end of the consultation period, I received an email from my local police in Enfield telling me that they had just attended a borough Challenge Panel where the decision has been made to close the front counter at Southgate Police Station. Can you understand why I now have great concerns? You have closed one of my stations during the consultation process and I have been informed that there has been a meeting at Scotland Yard and the decision has been made.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I am sorry, Joanne, I cannot give you any guidance on that now, I will find out what the state of the matter is, but across the board I think what I can do is give you a broad idea. I mean I have seen some early indications of how we are thinking, and I think it is certainly fair to say that the consultation has had an impact on what we are proposing. To Navin [Shah AM] and to Andrew [Dismore AM] and to others who have asked about the fire proposals, there are some changes that we are going to be proposing, they will involve modifications I think they do take in a lot of what

Londoners have been telling us, but my impression, and I follow this very closely as you can imagine, that once the arguments are made, once people understand what they are talking about and they get the point about police visiting you if you report a crime, then actually the process has been valuable and the results are valuable as well.

Joanne McCartney OBE (AM): My question is about the process because I have had one police station close during it and I have been notified and other Assembly Members have also been notified about local stations where they have been told decisions have already been taken. So if you have not signed them off yet, I have concerns.

Can I ask will you make sure that you read all the consultation responses before you sign off the closures?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I certainly take account of the consultation responses --

Joanne McCartney OBE (AM): Will you read them?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): -- and I will certainly. I do not quite know how voluminous they are but I will faithfully take account of the consultation responses.

Joanne McCartney OBE (AM): I have certainly read the responses and I am sure other Assembly Members have.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I think you are going to be very interested in the approach we are taking. I think Londoners will be satisfied with what we are trying to do which is to get them better access to the police but also to maximise the value of the assets. 497 police buildings of which only 136 are ever available to the public at any time. We want to improve that.

Joanne McCartney OBE (AM): Mr Mayor, you have told us before, can I move on to the contact points which are the alternatives when front counters close? I and other Members have also been told and have actually received a frequently-asked questions sheet that the Metropolitan Police Service has given out to their boroughs. They actually say that with these contact points there is going to be a standard minimum offer across London and that standard offer is going to be for them to be open, I believe, either one or two evenings a week for one or two hours and then one or two hours on a Saturday in respect of local need. Does that look like a good response to the local need across London?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): No, I would be very surprised if that was what --

Joanne McCartney OBE (AM): I have the FAQ sheet here.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): What we want to have is better access to the police and the single most important change that [Sir] Bernard Hogan-Howe [Commissioner of the Police of the Metropolis] has brought in is if you report a crime, you will be visited; the police will attend you in person to listen to you.

Joanne McCartney OBE (AM): We understand that. I am talking about contact points now, Mr Mayor.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): The interesting thing about this consultation is it is overwhelmingly what the public want.

Joanne McCartney OBE (AM): Chair, can I bring the Mayor back to the particular question about the contact point?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): They would much rather meet the police at a place of their convenience rather than in an intimidating environment perhaps at a police counter that is also being attended by people on bail or whatever.

Joanne McCartney OBE (AM): Yes but I am asking about your contact point. Are you aware that the police are telling us that actually there will be a standard offer across London of the same minimum hours in every contact point? That seems to me to be inadequate but also it does not meet your pledge about the same number of hours. Also it is going to be, quite frankly, useless to some commuters? The Saturday opening in Andrew Dismore's [AM] constituency or mine makes it nonsense.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I think what Londoners have told us during the consultation is yes, there are places where people not only want to keep a front counter but perhaps also want to keep a police station and we are going to listen to the arguments. What I have said is that Londoners will have better access than before. It is absolutely crazy. You have all these buildings. Most of them are completely forbidden to the public and they could be better used and that could be by putting police officers on the beat where we want to see them. That is what the objective of this programme is. It is to get Londoners better access to the police and we are putting 2,600 more into the neighbourhood teams and this is something that again is about the housing argument. This is something that Labour, when it is in Government, accepts but in opposition --

Joanne McCartney OBE (AM): I want to move on to another area, Mr Mayor. We have had a spat about police numbers before in the figures. I do not want to go into that again but --

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): No, I am not surprised you do not want to go into it again because you were defeated.

Joanne McCartney OBE (AM): Hold on. The United Kingdom Statistics Authority (UKSA) has agreed there are disparities between the various numbers in the plan and the data store. They talk about the fact that there might be differences, for example, in maternity cover, people on external secondment but none of the reasons they put in here are actually reasons that your Deputy Mayor [for Policing and Crime, Stephen Greenhalgh] has given to us to date.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): That is not true. Completely untrue.

Joanne McCartney OBE (AM): It is.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): You mean Stephen?

Joanne McCartney OBE (AM): No, yes, no, yes.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): No, yes?

Joanne McCartney OBE (AM): No. In order to assist informed public debate, the UKSA has suggested to you, although they say they cannot compel you, that you publish where the differences are. Your response, I understand from your press office upstairs, was that you would do it in due course. Can I ask you to do that within the next seven days because in due course could mean anytime, Mr Mayor?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I know. Well, I will look at it as I have said to you many times before. I actually had the benefit of having the letter from the head of the UKSA [Andrew Dilnot CBE, Chair of UK Statistics Authority] to you, Joanne, where he basically exposes it as a pack of Labour lies.

Joanne McCartney OBE (AM): No, he does not at all.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): It is a pack of Labour lies you have been trying to peddle, the confusion and despondency you have been trying to set amongst Londoners and the general tripe that you talk.

Joanne McCartney OBE (AM): He says we need informed public debate. No, he agrees there is disparity between the three sets of figures.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I am sorry, it is tripe.

Joanne McCartney OBE (AM): No. He talks about there is disparity between the three sets of figures and asks you to publish an explanation. He also, at the end, states that --

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): What he also says, on the basis --

Joanne McCartney OBE (AM): Can I finish my question, Mr Mayor? He also states that they endorsed a recent request from the GLA to prepare a formal document setting out how you are going to produce and publish statistical material. He wants to see that as closely aligned with the principles of the statutory Code of Practice for Official Statistics and this is what has put you into this trouble.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Nonsense, nonsense.

Joanne McCartney OBE (AM): It is, Mr Mayor.

Joanne McCartney OBE (AM): Will you publish a reconciled --

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): What you are facing is the reality, is the cruel reality that your attempts to scarify Londoners about police numbers have been utterly refuted. I quote from his letter --

Joanne McCartney OBE (AM): No. You still have not published an explanation, Mr Mayor.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London):

"On the basis of the three available sets of published figures on the number of police in London, it appears that the numbers on police service that the Metropolitan Police Service published by the Home Office, the Home Office are the highest, the figures published by the London Data Store are slightly lower and the draft Police and Crime Plan figures are lower again."

In other words, we were the most conservative, we were the most rigorous, we were the most honest of all and instead, all you do --

Joanne McCartney OBE (AM): Mr Mayor, by having a low figure, it makes the end result look better and it is not. Those are actually losing officers; you are misleading.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Absolute nonsense, absolute nonsense.

Joanne McCartney OBE (AM): If that is the case, why do not you publish the explanation?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): The explanation is well known to you and indeed --

Joanne McCartney OBE (AM): No, it is not.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): The reason for the variances include this, and I quote again Mr Dilnot's letter --

Joanne McCartney OBE (AM): I know you are going to do what Mr Dilnot asked you to do.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): "The treatment of staff who are on maternity leave, career breaks and those of us --"

Joanne McCartney OBE (AM): That is not the explanation that has been given though.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): The only reasonable comparison is between budgeted --

Joanne McCartney OBE (AM): Are you going to do what Mr Dilnot asked you to and publish the reconciled figures? Are you going to do it, Mr Mayor?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Mr Dilnot is following in the footsteps of his predecessor, Sir Michael Scholar [former Chair of the UK Statistics Authority] in asking this question --

Joanne McCartney OBE (AM): Are you going to call him a Labour stooge as well, are you, Mr Mayor?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Those are your words.

Jennette Arnold (Chair): This is rambling. Can we just sort this out?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I am going to look at that and what I would like is a retraction and an apology.

Joanne McCartney OBE (AM): I want an explanation.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): -- when you knew fine well that they were increasing on the figures 2011 to 2015, the crucial figures are the budgeted figures. We have done spectacularly well.

Jennette Arnold (Chair): Can we be quiet? Mr Mayor.

Joanne McCartney OBE (AM): The adjusted; it is the adjusted we want to know about.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): We have done spectacularly well in getting more police out there and in decreasing crime.

Jennette Arnold (Chair): No, Mr Mayor, it just prolongs this whole session when Members and you go into this discussion between yourselves because we cannot record it, we cannot hear it, and we do not have a clue what you are talking about anyway. So what I would suggest is --

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Well, then, why did not you listen to me?

Jennette Arnold (Chair): No, can I just finish? If Assembly Member McCartney would like, we would put the letter that has been referred to into the minutes.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I would like an apology.

Jennette Arnold (Chair): There is no case for an apology here this morning from what I have heard, so can we move on?

Joanne McCartney OBE (AM): Chair, can I ask via you, he hasn't answered my question yet: will he actually publish the reconciliations? That is what we have asked for.

Jennette Arnold (Chair): Will you?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): If and when the Assembly Member Joanne McCartney apologises for misleading Londoners --

Jennette Arnold (Chair): It is ridiculous.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): -- for misleading Londoners about police numbers.

Joanne McCartney OBE (AM): This is meant to be the most transparent Mayor.

Jennette Arnold (Chair): No, there is no answer from the Mayor on that question.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Then I may consider what she says but not until such time.

Jennette Arnold (Chair): I want to move on. Assembly Member Jones.

Jenny Jones (AM): Thank you. During the consultation, there was a lot of basic information which wasn't circulated, the sort of stuff that Jo [Joanne McCartney OBE AM] has been asking about. So you left Londoners to actually answer your consultation in the dark but it sounds as if you are in the dark as well. You cannot answer her questions. You do not know --

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Nonsense, on the contrary. I gave you a very full answer. We are putting more --

Jenny Jones (AM): You do not know where these new counters are opening, all this information, the number of officers adjusted, all of this wasn't in the consultation and you have actually lied to Londoners.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Oh, nonsense. Jenny, you must have been asleep for the last hour because you can do better than that.

Jennette Arnold (Chair): No, the Green Group are out of time. Assembly Member Evans.

Roger Evans (AM): Thank you, Chair. Mr Mayor, are you looking forward to reading the Assembly's Police and Crime Committee's response to the Draft Police and Crime Plan?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Of course I am.

Roger Evans (AM): When you read it, you will find in there evidence from academics who appeared before the Committee including Professor Marian Fitzgerald [Visiting Professor of Criminology, University of Kent] and Professor Mike Hough [Professor of Criminal Policy and Co-Director of the Institute for Criminal Policy Research, University of London]. They talked about the Metropolitan Police Service Estates Strategy and pointed out to Members of the Committee, several times it has to be said, that the existing arrangements were not very welcoming for people who wanted to report a crime when you had to queue up with people answering bail and people filling in forms.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): That is absolutely right.

Roger Evans (AM): They felt that the new arrangements may well actually improve public access to policing. Would you be surprised to hear that?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): No and I think that is entirely right and indeed that is a point that when they are being less oppositionist and hysterical that I think the Members on the Labour side also accept. The objective of these reforms is to make the police more accessible to Londoners and yes, there will be contact points and yes, they will all be spelt out but the crucial thing is that you will get, if you report a crime, you will get a visit in person. I have asked for the figures for the increases in numbers of visits for crimes reported and I hope to be able to publish those as well shortly.

Roger Evans (AM): Another of our academic witnesses, Dr [Ben] Bradford [Career Development Fellow in Criminology, University of Oxford], pointed out to the Committee that he felt that changes proposed to the Safer Neighbourhood teams were actually a rational approach to the problem of solving crime and may well make the situation better. Would that surprise you?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): No and I think that what people want is, in the end, it is officers out on the beat, and an increase in Safer Neighbourhood teams having an impact in driving down all crime types. I mentioned earlier on that I think the Metropolitan Police Service have done a great job in the last year in reducing all crime types by about 5.3%. That is a considerable achievement in one year. They should be applauded. They should be congratulated on doing that in tough times.

Of course there is more to be done. Yes, we are going to continue to reduce crime in London but you will not continue to reduce crime in London if you are a stick-in-the-mud, if you fetishise buildings, bricks and mortar that do not actually play a big role in fighting crime. You have to convert those buildings into crime fighters and that is what we are trying to do.

Roger Evans (AM): Would it surprise you to learn that, in fact, you would only be reading that evidence in the report because the Conservative Group insisted it was included? The original authors wanted to exclude that evidence despite their passion for openness.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Are you saying they tried to conceal the reality from Londoners of what expert witnesses thought about these changes? Are you saying they tried to censor you wrongly?

Roger Evans (AM): Maybe they just overlooked it and needed to be reminded by us, Mr Mayor.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): In that case, I congratulate you on getting that in, on publishing that information. I hope Londoners will study it as attentively as I have, if not more.

Roger Evans (AM): I know Labour Members are very keen on consultations as they have told us this morning, Mr Mayor. How many Members of the Labour Group do you think came to the Havering Police and Crime Plan consultation which was the last one that Stephen Greenhalgh [Deputy Mayor for Policing and Crime] officially took?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I would not be surprised if they were all there. Were any of them there?

Roger Evans (AM): It was a round number. It was none, Mr Mayor.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): None?

Roger Evans (AM): Do you find that surprising given the fuss they made --

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Do you mean to say they were not -- was Navin Shah not there?

Roger Evans (AM): Certainly none of the Members here were there.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Well, they are not doing their democratic duty.

Roger Evans (AM): Not only that, none of their local Councillors attended either.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): So no major Councillors attended.

Roger Evans (AM): None of the Members and none of their local councillors attended.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I am slightly surprised to hear that but probably, that is a measure of the power and the conviction with which Stephen Greenhalgh and [Assistant Commissioner] Simon Byrne have been able to get their point across and that is precisely why I think it would be very foolish to allow the LSP5 consultation to be captured by Labour and turned into some kind of political football. The important

thing in these processes is to help people to understand what we are proposing to do to their much loved, valued, public services and how we are trying to improve them. That is the objective. The objective is not to waste time scoring Party political points.

Jennette Arnold (Chair): Thank you. Just for the record, can we just show that Assembly Member Shah is the Assembly Member for Brent and Harrow? Why he should have been referred to in a matter about Havering when you're speaking to the Member for Havering is beyond me.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Are you biased, Jennette?

967/2013 - Crossrail

Richard Tracey

Will you update the Assembly on the progress on Crossrail?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Thanks very much, Dick. I know this is something you follow closely. I am grateful for your support. Crossrail has made very considerable progress in the last year. Already six of the 42 kilometres of tunnel have been dug. By the middle of this year, we are going to have six tunnel boring machines (TBM), and by later on this year, Crossrail will have completed the Western tunnels between Royal Oak and Farringdon; it is absolutely stunning. Crossrail is roaring ahead and it is a fantastic tribute to the engineers and the whole team involved. Obviously we are keeping a close eye to make sure they stick to the timetable and that it does not slip and that costs are kept exactly where we want them to be.

Richard Tracey (AM): Very good news and I believe that one of the boring machines has passed through Bond Street, so well into central London.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Very exciting, boring machines.

Richard Tracey (AM): Is it your belief that Crossrail will be completed on time and on budget? Is that your hope?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Yes. I think there is every chance it will be completed on time and on budget although clearly we have to be vigilant.

Richard Tracey (AM): What is the case looking like for extending it to Reading? We have had many discussions about this that it should actually go further than the current Western limit. What do you think the chances are?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I am generally in favour. I think there has been big change in Government too. I think Government has seen the huge benefits of transport infrastructure in London. They have seen that London is driving the rest of the UK economy. I mentioned earlier on to colleagues that we now contribute a bigger share of the UK economy than at any time in history. You make London move; you make London work by investing in transport infrastructure. The exciting thing that is now on the table that will be a big part of the 2020 vision is Crossrail 2. We want to get that going as soon as possible. Indeed, we think there is now scope to accelerate the timetable of Crossrail 2.

The critical thing is that we do not lose sight of the other stuff we are doing and we do not allow the Treasury to cut budgets that we need, for instance, for the Tube upgrades and other vital improvements, but I am a maximalist in this. I believe in setting out the biggest possible range of proposals for transport infrastructure improvements which are vital when you consider the population pressure that we face. We have talked a lot about housing this morning but, in the end, when we build those new homes, Londoners have to be able to move rapidly to their place of work and that is why Crossrail 2 is vital. I think your idea, I will certainly look at the idea of an extension to Reading, but at the moment, you can make a good business case for virtually any big rail improvement in London and I am certainly interested in all of them.

Richard Tracey (AM): We obviously hope that the Chancellor [of the Exchequer, George Osborne] will indeed talk about this in the budget. You gave me a written answer about Crossrail 2 which you have been mentioning and you said, I think, that you had Transport for London (TfL) working on the planning and so on. So if indeed Crossrail is finished on time, it would make a lot of sense to have the expertise and the equipment used really to start instantly on Crossrail 2 which would make such a difference to linking South and North London.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Yes. You are completely right, Dick, and I have had conversations with Terry Morgan [CBE, Chairman of Crossrail] about this very point, as you could imagine. There are going to be synergies between the two projects. Whether we will literally be able to turn the boring machines around and send them down towards Tony [Arbour AM, Member for South West London], in the South West, I am not certain because the teeth of the boring machines wear out, all that kind of thing, but we are trying to make the two plans work together. [Sir] Peter Hendy [CBE, Commissioner of TfL] and his team are looking at how they can do that.

Richard Tracey (AM): Thank you very much.

Tony Arbour (AM): Yes. I am glad you mentioned South West London, Mr Mayor. Do you realise that if Crossrail 2, option B, is followed through, you will have the opportunity to right an historic wrong and that wrong is that the Royal Borough of Kingston-upon-Thames only has access to one railway line which goes into Waterloo. We have no Underground. We are pretty well cut off from the rest of London. It is true, many of my constituents think that is a good thing, but nevertheless, Crossrail 2, by going through Kingston and extending to the delights of Chessington, will be a --

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): It will be fantastic, it will absolutely fantastic.

Tony Arbour (AM): It would be a most considerable advantage and so can I ask that should you be given a choice of Crossrail 2 options, that that is the one you will go for?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): What I can say in general is that I think it would be transformative for commuters coming in from South West London who face massive and will face massive crowding on those routes into Waterloo, this is the solution. It will deliver huge economic growth for London, but I just want to make it clear to everybody in the South East of London that we are not neglecting that quadrant either and we are now looking at extending the Tube and indeed being very, very aggressive in our campaign for greater integration of the Underground and the Overground in South London and South East London as well.

Tony Arbour (AM): Thank you very much.

Gareth Bacon (AM): My colleague, Dick Tracey, made the case for Crossrail to be extended into the West to Reading. Could I just reinforce the case for the East?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): It would get better, no doubt it would.

Gareth Bacon (AM): Indeed but many of us actually would like to see it extended to Ebbsfleet and I am sure you are aware of the £2 billion Paramount Park which is due to be built in the Swanscombe Peninsula which has enormous economic potential, economic benefits to the eastern side of London. An extension of Crossrail to Ebbsfleet would actually be a very powerful addition for economic benefit there. Can I ask you to lobby Mr [George] Osborne [Chancellor of the Exchequer], when he does get his scissors out, not to be cutting things like that and to actually extend it to Ebbsfleet?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Yes, certainly, and I think we need to review the whole connectivity of that area, particularly in the light of any solutions to aviation capacity that we may need to bring forward.

Gareth Bacon (AM): Thank you, Mr Mayor.

Jennette Arnold (Chair): It is 12.30pm, so can I ask the Assembly to agree to suspend Standing Order 29B so that we can finish the rest of the questions?

All: Agreed.

887/2013 - London Pedestrians

Caroline Pidgeon

Are you doing enough to maximise pedestrian journeys?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): You are asking me about pedestrians in London and what we are doing to increase the number of pedestrian journeys. I can tell you that walking is already attracting 6.2 million journeys a day, second in terms of mode, second only to private car. The ambition is to go to up to 6.8 million by 2031 and there is a huge amount of work going on, and has already gone on, to make London more walkable, more attractive to move around on foot. I would single out really just in my time alone, the Oxford Circus diagonal crossing, that X marks the spot thing there, Exhibition Road being two-way, all the stuff we have done in urban projects in town centres, Wimbledon, Richmond and so on, Leicester Square; all of these have improved permeability. They have made the cityscape much more attractive for walkers plus, and one of the legacies of Cool Beer, you remember, was a great proponent. There was the Legs 11 nonsense. Cool Beer range had a big role in absolute nonsense in selling up the legible London signs. There are 1,100 signs now.

Caroline Pidgeon (AM): Can I move on to the question? Thank you for that detail Mr Mayor. Could I move into a couple of specifics? In terms of making sure and getting your increase in pedestrian journeys, which I think will be welcome, is that in 1995, the Department for Transport (DfT) recommended that all pedestrian crossings should have audible signals and/or tactile cones to help blind and partially sighted people.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Tactile cones.

Caroline Pidgeon (AM): They are on the paving.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): On the edge, on the paving, yes.

Caroline Pidgeon (AM): Do you think it is acceptable that 18 years later and five years into your term as Mayor that there are still 330 crossings in London which do not meet this standard? What are you going to do about that and can you bring forward the timescale to make sure all crossings meet this nearly 20-year old regulation?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): So you want audible --

Caroline Pidgeon (AM): Audible and all the rotating cones, exactly.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Tactile cones; I will look into it and write back to you.

Caroline Pidgeon (AM): Brilliant. There are also still 70 pedestrian crossings which do not meet the DfT standard that actually allows enough time for pedestrians to be able to cross the road. Will you again look to try to bring that forward in your programme to make sure crossings are accessible for everyone?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Yes. Do not forget we are also greatly expanding the pedestrian countdown system which is very valuable because you do not want to have that time --

Caroline Pidgeon (AM): Yes but will you look at making them all meet this standard, please, as soon as possible?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I will certainly look at it and I will write to you and I will give you a heads up on where we are.

Caroline Pidgeon (AM): Great, thank you. Finally, If you really want to increase pedestrian journeys, you could look at what they are doing in New York. I know you often say how much you admire their work on obesity and [Michael] Bloomberg's [Mayor of New York] efforts in the area of public health.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): They are fatter than us.

Caroline Pidgeon (AM): I am wondering, will you trial an extremely popular --

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I do admire their work but they are still fatter, they are very fat, so they are fatter.

Caroline Pidgeon (AM): Will you trial an extremely popular New York idea around summer streets. This idea that they close seven miles of roads for three consecutive Saturday mornings in the summer so that hundreds of thousands of people can come out and enjoy walking in their streets where perhaps cars normally are? Will you look at trialling a summer streets programme for London?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): We are looking at all sorts and I am very interested in pedestrianisation schemes. Do not forget that one of the best things you can do is to make parks ever

safer. That is why we had our priority park scheme to improve them but also the safe park scheme, which was massively popular and where we've had a bigger impact in driving down crime. So Londoners can exercise in green space without any fear or indeed --

Caroline Pidgeon (AM): Yes but will you look at piloting summer streets? Yes or no. Will you look at piloting summer streets?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Of course I will look at it.

Caroline Pidgeon (AM): Thank you.

Kit Malthouse (AM): Yes. Mr Mayor, when you provide Caroline Pidgeon with the data about these 330 junctions, could you also include data as to how many accidents there have been at those junctions involving blind people?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I will do my best, Kit. We may not have that level of granularity but I will do my best. What I will certainly try to do is show Caroline some of the progress we have made in making public space safer to walk around and particularly green space. I think that is important.

Kit Malthouse (AM): Could you also include up to date data about accidents on Exhibition Road, the development of which was the subject of ferocious lobby by the blind lobby effectively and blind charities? It was a disastrous plan.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Yes. I should pay tribute here to Daniel Moylan [Chairman of the London Legacy Development Corporation], to Daniel Moylan who really has been a visionary in this respect and who has received a lot of flak. Daniel Moylan who drove this thing through in defiance of opponents in his borough and has really done a fantastic job in promoting urban realm in London and there are plenty of other schemes that we are going to do.

Kit Malthouse (AM): In particular, there was vociferous opposition from the blind and partially sighted lobby and it would be interesting to know if what they predicted has come true.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Again, I cannot give you the detail but I would be happy to do our best.

Kit Malthouse (AM): Thank you.

Jennette Arnold (Chair): Can we now move on then to the next question and that is in the name of Assembly Member Arbour. It is question number 944 and it is about the Heathrow Expansion?

944/2013 - Heathrow Expansion

Tony Arbour

Do you agree that those who profess to oppose Heathrow Expansion but who are unwilling to commit to airport expansion elsewhere, are playing into the hands of those who wish to see a third runway at Heathrow?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Yes. Of course, as usual, Tony, you are completely right. I think that it is incumbent on those who oppose a third runway at Heathrow, which is the right thing to do. I think it is a view shared by absolutely everybody in this horseshoe. It is also to come up with their own view and I know that the Greens do not want any runways anywhere ever. That is their position. But people, who want to see economic growth, want to see this country competing with the rest of the world, profess to have an interest in the success in the UK economy, they have to come up with a solution. That is why I would like to see Liberal Democrats, who oppose the Heathrow runway, explain exactly what they would do.

Tony Arbour (AM): Yes. I was glad to hear your latter comment, Mr Mayor because the Member of Parliament for Twickenham [Vince Cable MP], who is a Member of the Government, has advertised the fact that he proposes to attend a rally which is going to be attended by you which is to launch a referendum of the residents of Hillingdon and Richmond-upon-Thames against the third runway. The Minister says that he is going to attend that no doubt because there will be photographers there. It is well known, is not it, Mr Mayor, that Liberals will attend the opening of an envelope providing a photographer is present.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Come on, Tony. That is not the worse vice of a politician. We have to be honest here. We are all in this game, Tony.

Jennette Arnold (Chair): Can we have the question, Mr Arbour?

Tony Arbour (AM): In those circumstances, without there being an alternative proposed by the Liberal Democrats to what would happen when there is no expansion of Heathrow, their lack of vision, the sort of vision which you and people sitting on this side of the horseshoe have expressed by suggesting that there should be an additional airport in the estuary or there should be expansion elsewhere, under those circumstances, do you think it right that a Liberal Member of Parliament should attend the rally?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I am sure that people will be making that point to Vince if and when he appears and I will certainly be making it myself and look forward to hearing what he has to say.

Tony Arbour (AM): No, I had not finished. The rally, as you know, is at Barnes Elms, Mr Mayor. Do you think that the road, therefore, to Barnes for Liberal Democrats, and I want to be fair to the Liberal Democrats and I find it very difficult, but I do want to be fair to them and indeed the local Labour Party.

Jennette Arnold (Chair): No, Mr Arbour, your question is about Heathrow Expansion. It does not say here in front of me that it is an attack on the Liberal Democrats. Now, can I have a question about Heathrow Expansion?

Tony Arbour (AM): Are you aware that there is absolutely massive support in South West London from all political Parties to the expansion of Heathrow but there is only one political Party, ours, which is suggesting a viable future for air travel into the capital? Under the circumstances, do you, like me, hope that the road to Barnes is going to be the road to Damascus for those doubters who sit opposite and to my extreme left?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Absolutely. Not obviously the road to -- I hesitate to compare Heathrow to modern Damascus which is obviously in a bad way. I think in that sentence, by the way, you meant opposition rather than support. You said there was massive support for Heathrow Expansion.

Tony Arbour (AM): Support for the rally.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Support for the rally, I am sorry. Yes, there is support for the rally and I certainly agree with you, Tony, that those who oppose Heathrow Expansion, which is the right policy for London, should be coming forward with a solution. We are currently at work on refining proposals which I believe are far more attractive and will deliver much, much greater economic benefits for this country.

Tony Arbour (AM): Thank you very much. Thank you, Chairman.

Jennette Arnold (Chair): Still on the Heathrow Expansion, Assembly Member Malthouse.

Kit Malthouse (AM): Mr Mayor, given that political campaigning and political advertisements are banned on London public transport, do you think it is appropriate for Heathrow to be advertising so as to try to influence the Davies' [Airport] Commission on the Tube at the moment?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I think it is very interesting that Heathrow are calling for that area to be built on. They are saying, "Let's build on Heathrow and let's have more runways and more planes coming into London". I think actually it is helpful that they are raising the issue to public attention. I think people can see what they are trying to do and I think it is also important that we explain the context in which they are making these claims. If you have more planes coming into Heathrow, you increase suffering, noise pollution, which is already endured by 766,000 people in London who already suffer noise pollution above European Union (EU) levels. That is a third of all the noise pollution victims in the whole of the EU. I think Heathrow's campaign is ill-judged by them because it gives us a chance to elucidate the reality of the situation.

Kit Malthouse (AM): Would you also, therefore, as the Chairman of TfL, welcome the other side of the debate being proposed through the advertising hoardings on the Tube?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): We would have to look at whatever advertisements came before us and make sure that we followed the name of the law but we will see what they produce.

Kit Malthouse (AM): OK.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I am content that what the campaign shows is the alarm in Heathrow that they are losing the argument. They are losing the argument about expansion of that airport. They know full well that Londoners will not tolerate a massive degradation of the quality of our lives and they also know that Heathrow does not provide the long term solution. We would be simply compounding a historic planning mistake.

Jennette Arnold (Chair): Assembly Member Tracey, do you have a very elegant question for us?

Richard Tracey (AM): Yes, madam, as ever. Thank you.

Jennette Arnold (Chair): On Heathrow express.

Richard Tracey (AM): Thank you for your kind attention to me.

Jennette Arnold (Chair): Expansion even.

Richard Tracey (AM): Yes, Mr Mayor. I believe you are going to be at the mega rally. Is that correct, on 27 April?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): If it is the one I am thinking of, yes, it is.

Richard Tracey (AM): I certainly hope so, along with Tony [Arbour AM] and myself and, of course, when you are there, I hope you will pay tribute to the very hard work and consistent hard work of Justine Greening [MP for Putney] and Zac Goldsmith [MP for Richmond Park] along with the two council leaders, [Councillor] Ravi Govindia of Wandsworth and [Councillor] Nick True of Richmond.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I certainly shall.

Richard Tracey (AM): They have been absolutely consistent and very important in this and while you are there, will you impress upon everybody, including the Government, that they do need to move forward very quickly on this? You have said this before but please say it again because I was at a meeting a couple of weeks ago when the managing director, I think he was, of Schiphol [Airport in Amsterdam], was sitting back and laughing whilst we vacillated in his country.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): They are laughing at us. They are eating our lunch. I know. I completely agree. We should get going on this thing. There is no reason at all why we shouldn't take a decision that will be massively in the long term interests of this country. We are losing business; we are losing opportunities to France, to Germany, to the Dutch, to Madrid. This is a great, great trading country and we make a historic mistake like we did in the 1960s by letting our dock business go to Rotterdam. We cannot lose our aviation business. It is absolutely vital.

Richard Tracey (AM): So let's make this a key note event on 27 April.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I am sure with you there, Dick, how can we lose? It is going to be stellar.

Richard Tracey (AM): Thank you.

966/2013

Roger Evans

Does the Mayor recognise the value in TfL seeking to reduce demand on London's overcrowded public transport by aiming to incentivise home working?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Yes, a very interesting question, Roger. We do see the value of encouraging home working and during the Olympics, people may remember that I tried to explain how we wanted them to modify their travel patterns. It can reduce pressures on the Tube and other parts of public transport. What I do not think you can do is expect people just to do everything online. In the end, human beings do need to talk to each other and to meet each other. I would just remind you what were Marconi's first words on the first ever telephone call ever made? Can you remember what they were?

Roger Evans (AM): I do not. I was not there.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): No. He said, on the first ever telephone call, do you know what he said? He said, "Come here, Watson. I need you". In other words, he wanted to have physical, face-to-face contact and the electronic communication wasn't enough. In the end, that is what goes on in London. People need to meet each other, need to have eyeball to eyeball contact and that is how business gets done. My experience is there is a limit to what you can achieve with home working but we certainly encourage it.

Roger Evans (AM): Yes. Can I carry on, Chair? We can maybe have this interesting debate outside the meeting?

Jennette Arnold (Chair): Of course you can. Can I have your next question, Assembly Member Evans?

Roger Evans (AM): Yes, thank you. This is about choice. I am not talking about forcing people to work from home and, of course, they do need contact with the people they work with, but given the tightness of TfL's finances and the fact that although lots of capital work is done, it still fills up with people very quickly and we are expecting the population to continue to rise. Do not you see the possibility of encouraging home working as being another weapon in our armoury when it comes to reducing overcrowding on public transport and making the whole experience more bearable for Londoners?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Yes, of course. As I think I said during the Olympics, I am sceptical, a little bit sceptical about home working. My only experience of home working is you sit around having cups of coffee and then eating that last bit of cheese in the fridge rather than getting on with it. I certainly think there is mileage in it, so to speak, or not.

Roger Evans (AM): Yes. One of the ways that TfL could help, of course, is to introduce travelcards which would work for fewer than the whole five days in the week or having arrangements that would rebate people for the days when they did not travel. That is the sort of thing that is well worth looking at with the changes in technology at TfL now. It is something they are going to pursue.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Yes, it certainly is. I am definitely willing to look at that. As Caroline [Pidgeon AM] will acknowledge, this is a variant of some of the things that she offered. Each of these improvements will mean some other part of the fare box has to pay or else we raise fares, so that is the dilemma.

Roger Evans (AM): Thank you, Chair.

Jennette Arnold (Chair): No follow-ups, no further questions.

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

Jennette Arnold (Chair): Thank you, Mr Mayor, for your attendance here this morning.