

London Assembly (Mayor's Question Time) – 20 November 2013
Transcript of Agenda Item 5 – Questions to the Mayor

Darren Johnson (Chair): We then move to questions on the order paper.

2013/4039 - Homes for London

Stephen Knight

How will you ensure that enough homes are built for London's growing population and that they are affordable to those that need them?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Thanks very much, Stephen. I think the answer clearly is to build many more homes and we are building a record number of affordable homes in the last period since I was elected, 67,000 so far. We are on target to deliver 100,000 over the eight-year term, but you need to go up to 40,000 homes a year and the way to do that, you have to let the boroughs borrow to build more, in my view. I think you should have the devolution of property taxes to London you will be familiar with, and we have to continue to bring forward the land that we have done for development and, as you will know, we have made a lot of public land so far available for homes for Londoners.

Stephen Knight (AM): Mr Mayor, thank you for that answer. I am glad you have reiterated the point that London needs at least 40,000 new homes a year to be built just to meet ongoing growing need, and indeed back in February you said that,

"If we do not come up with a new plan to build the homes we need this great city will stagnate and the country will suffer as a consequence. It is time to turbo-boost our response."

Your call then was for central Government to hand over £1.3 billion a year in stamp duty. The response from [George] Osborne [Chancellor of the Exchequer] was a very swift and predictable "no" to that and what, Mr Mayor, is your plan B?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I am not convinced that the battle is by any means lost there. There continues to be a very active campaign supported by I think politicians in all parties to get the suite of property taxes devolved to London. I think that is something that we believe would be sensible. I think we had a very good meeting yesterday with heads of Select Committees from the House of Commons who are very interested in the idea, very supportive. Stephen, I would not give up on that at all. I just point out that affordable housing starts doubled but it has been difficult. There has been a credit crunch. It has been hard to get housing moving, but affordable housing starts doubled in the last financial year and then increased seven-fold in the first six months of this financial year compared to the same period last year.

Stephen Knight (AM): Nevertheless, Mr Mayor, we know that achieving your 55,000 target is going to be incredibly difficult given that there are about 5,000 homes that have not been started yet that have to be finished by the end of March 2015. It takes 18 months usually to build a house, so even your current target looks like it is going to be difficult to achieve.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): There are a lot of people who have had a lot of egg on their face in the past from saying that we would not build our target; let us see what happens.

Stephen Knight (AM): Indeed, and I am sure we will see what happens, and we will hope of course they will be built because they are desperately needed.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Yes, that is the spirit. That is more like it.

Stephen Knight (AM): Mr Mayor, I recently sent you a document that the Liberal Democrat group here has produced with a range of proposals for action that you could take now.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): A mansion tax is what you want.

Stephen Knight (AM): Not, as it happens, including that because that is not in your gift sadly - some of us wish it was - but our report did show you proposals, for instance, for how you could double the investment available for affordable housing in London using your existing prudential borrowing powers if you were to renegotiate with Ministers your current borrowing targets. Are you looking at doing that, Mr Mayor? Clearly, if this is the gravest crisis the city faces, as you said, then surely you ought to be doing more as Mayor using your existing powers to tackle it.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): We are, indeed. I think that it would be a good thing if the boroughs could borrow to fund more affordable housing and I think it would be a good thing if London as a whole had a long-term financial settlement underpinned by the three to five property taxes, which would enable us to borrow and to finance a huge increase in housing. That is the way forward and that is what I lobby for.

Stephen Knight (AM): We all wish, I think, around this Chamber, that boroughs were given the freedom to borrow more but, Mr Mayor, you have prudential borrowing powers as well. You have a revenue budget across the whole GLA group of over £10 billion a year. If you were to do some more prudential borrowing yourself you could support a much bigger affordable house building programme in London, Mr Mayor. Will you commit to doing just that, borrowing money on the market against your revenue stream to finance a bigger affordable housing programme in London?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I am certainly lobbying for that power and --

Stephen Knight (AM): I am glad to hear that.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): -- I think it would be nice to hear some congratulations for the housing team here who came over from the Homes and Communities Agency who have actually done an amazing job in keeping the thing going and who are now building more or getting more affordable homes built than at any time since many years ago.

Stephen Knight (AM): I look forward to news on you expanding your programme. Could I press one other point, and that is the use of GLA land? When you first became Mayor you had a manifesto to build 39,000 homes on GLA land and in that first term you actually only delivered 5,000 - not 39,000, but 5,000. Can you commit now to doing much more and committing most, if not all, of GLA land for new affordable homes?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): How much GLA land do you think I put on the market since May last year, to the value of what? I have the figure, £3.5 billion --

Stephen Knight (AM): You have available for development about 400 hectares.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): -- worth of land we have made available for house building.

Stephen Knight (AM): You have enough land, Mr Mayor, for building something like 50,000 new homes.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): We are going to build about 25,000 and one of the reasons we want to extend the Overground line to Barking Riverside is to build a further 10,000 or 11,000 homes in that area to join Andrew Boff [AM]. We see huge opportunities to build more homes around London. There are 33 brown field sites and 33 opportunity areas around the city where we can build the homes that London needs. I think actually you are going to see a big take-off, a big acceleration --

Stephen Knight (AM): I have run out of time, but thank you. We look forward to more action.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Indeed, we will see a big acceleration in housing in London.

Darren Johnson (Chair): Thank you. Assembly Member O'Connell.

Steve O'Connell (AM): You would agree with me that clearly you and the GLA have a pivotal role in delivering the much-needed affordable housing in London, but would you also agree with me that the boroughs themselves must take a leading role in that delivery?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Of course, and in my experience boroughs want to do that and most sensible boroughs understand that they are going to benefit from building good, quality homes in their neighbourhoods and Londoners need to live near their place of work, people really get that.

Steve O'Connell (AM): Indeed, Mr Mayor, and speaking from my own two boroughs, would you join me in congratulating Croydon in delivering the third-highest number of affordable homes over the last four years, much of it with your support, Mr Mayor?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I congratulate Croydon on virtually everything that they do and your helmsmanship remains a constant source of admiration.

Darren Johnson (Chair): One month we will have a Mayor's Question Time where we do not congratulate Croydon and that will be --

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): That would be constitutionally improper of me not to congratulate Croydon, the third city of London, gateway to the south.

Steve O'Connell (AM): My point in this instance is to compare and contrast with my other borough, which is Liberal Democrat-controlled Sutton, and we have heard reference to Liberal Democrat action. Would you agree with me that Sutton's record in delivering affordable homes is indeed woeful and over the same four-year period they delivered only 260 homes, which is the eighth lowest in London?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): You are joking. Is that the Liberal Democrats? Was that the Liberal Democrats who claim to be such avid homebuilders, Steve? Our coalition partners who want to impose swingy new property taxes, is that the results of their policy?

Steve O'Connell (AM): Indeed, and I am sure you will share my disappointment and I would urge yourself and myself and hopefully Councillor Knight [Councillor, Richmond-upon-Thames] also to put pressure on --

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Is he a councillor?

Steve O'Connell (AM): I believe so, but temporarily perhaps, and I would urge you to join me and hopefully Councillor Knight to join me in urging Sutton Council to improve on their abject record.

Roger Evans (Deputy Chairman): What about Kingston?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I think 'by their deeds shall ye know them'. Look at what they do, not what they say. They should pull their finger out, get their skates on and not necessarily in that order.

Steve O'Connell (AM): But the point is, through you, Chair, a serious point, that all boroughs must step up to the plate and deliver sufficient affordable homes for their families. Thank you, Mr Mayor.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Thank you.

Darren Johnson (Chair): Assembly Member Tracey.

Richard Tracey (AM): Thank you, Chairman. Mr Mayor, I wonder whether you saw the reported comments of Tom Copley [AM], who unfortunately seems to have left the Chamber for a moment?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Yes, I was going to mention that, but then I decided to be merciful.

Richard Tracey (AM): He said that there should be apologies from the Labour Party because the last Labour Government failed to build enough affordable homes in London and actually built fewer homes in 13 years than Margaret Thatcher's Government did in a single year. How about that?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Yes, I find it absolutely incredible, and I wonder whether these words have been communicated to Len Duvall, leader of the Labour group. Is Len aware of what his own Assembly Members are saying about their housing policy and what disciplinary steps has he taken to correct this? I mean it is unbelievable, to quote Tom Copley

"As a Labour politician, one of the things that really galls me is that there is a statistic that more council homes were built in the last year of Thatcher's Government than were built in the 13 years of the Labour Government and that is something I think the Labour Party as a whole need to apologise for."

There you go. I could not agree more with what Tom Copley has had to say. I am surprised that he is allowed to retain the Labour whip in view of his extraordinary disloyalty to his party, but there you go. Perhaps he would like to cross over to the house-building party, to the people who get things done. He seems to have vanished, actually. I think he is undergoing a political metamorphosis.

Darren Johnson (Chair): Thank you. On that note, we will move to the next question on the order paper.

2013/4095 - Wages

[Fiona Twycross](#)

Are you concerned that the cost of living in London is rapidly outstripping pay in the capital?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Yes, I am, of course. I mean, Fiona, everybody is concerned about this issue, it is that and housing, and they are interrelated, are the two big questions facing Londoners, and of course it is true that at the margin you are seeing some improvements. You are seeing inflation actually starting to come down a bit, I think about 2.2% say GLA Economics, and if I cannot believe GLA Economics what can I believe? They tell me that average household incomes will increase this year by, admittedly not much, 2.4%, , so taking into account inflation, in real terms 1.6%. Then 2.4% next year; 2.7% in 2015, so they are seeing improvements in what is clearly a very tough position for loads of families. We do what we can to

mitigate this, as you know, and we champion things like the London Living Wage, free travel, cutting council tax, and so on.

Fiona Twycross (AM): Thank you. How do you explain how there are more jobs paid below the London Living Wage now however than in 2007 before you became Mayor?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Actually, there has been a 700% increase in the number of firms paying the London Living Wage since I became Mayor and --

Fiona Twycross (AM): In 2012, 600,000 jobs were paid below the living wage and in 2007 420,000 were.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): There is a very simple reason for that. That is because there are far more jobs now in London, but there has been a simultaneous expansion of the London Living Wage and there are other key things you can do. I think the London Living Wage is a wonderful campaign that I think is really starting to catch people's imagination and it will be a real shame if it became excessively politicised.

Fiona Twycross (AM): I am not seeking to politicise it, but I am seeking to ask you to do a bit more on it because at the current rate of progress it will take over 400 years for everyone in London to be paid over the living wage.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): It is also true that there has been a big increase in the number of firms paying London Living Wage. When I came to office there were 27 companies paying the London Living Wage and there are now 214 and nearly 100 in the process of accreditation. The scheme has put about £60 million into the pockets of the Londoners who need it most. Yes, I want to see other sectors of the London economy paying this wage and I have been very upfront with the retail sector, with supermarkets, with catering, with all those sectors, which are currently not paying it. I do not believe that they have a decent enough excuse. I think that it would be a good thing for their employees - they pay massive dividends, these companies, and it would be a good thing for those companies too.

Fiona Twycross (AM): Yes, I agree that it would be hugely beneficial for their employees to be paid the London Living Wage, but I am trying to establish exactly what you have been doing to promote the London Living Wage and I understand that over the summer you wrote to 100 employers, which in my view seemed quite small, compared to the number of employers in London, and I wondered what response you had to those letters.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): As soon as we have a breakdown of what the responses are I would be very happy to give you them, but do not forget some of those employers will be responsible for literally tens of thousands of Londoners on low pay.

Fiona Twycross (AM): How many of these employers have you met? How many out of the 100 employers have you met as a result of the letter you sent out over the summer?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I do not want to go into my private conversations with chief executives of big London companies about their pay strategies, but you can take it from me that I have raised it repeatedly with the people who run supermarkets, with the people who run hotel chains, with --

Fiona Twycross (AM): Could you check and let us know how many of those 100 employers you have met with and how many of those 100 employers have committed now to introducing the London Living Wage?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I meet everybody and probably we can get you some information about it, but I think what would be more useful really would be, I think what you really want to know is what are they doing, how fast are we getting on with this.

Fiona Twycross (AM): I want to know what you are doing to promote it because I think that it is a good campaign and I agree that it should not be overly politicised. I think it is very valuable that there is cross-party support on this, but I am afraid that I do not think that 100 letters over the summer is sufficient input, and you have a huge role, I mean I do not really want to admit it, but you have a huge role in promoting this and I think that I would really welcome you doing more on this issue.

I would like if I can to go on to ask about the minimum wage while we are talking about pay in London, which was to wait for 400 years for the living wage to get sorted out, is what all too many Londoners have to live on. Do you support the Centre for London's proposals for a London minimum wage?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I would rather focus on the London Living Wage if that is OK, Fiona, because I think that is the campaign we have going at the moment.

Fiona Twycross (AM): No, the question I have asked now --

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Just to answer your question, I think it would be diverting our energies and confusing my targets - and there are many, by the way I am constantly lobbying business about this, if we then said there is an alternative campaign --

Fiona Twycross (AM): Yes, it is fine. Maybe you do not want to talk about the London minimum wage, but it would benefit a huge number of Londoners.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): We have such a scheme called the London Living Wage.

Fiona Twycross (AM): We do, and I think that should be the ultimate destination, but in the meantime introducing a London minimum wage would benefit around 175,000 of London's lowest-paid workers giving them, in the short term, a 7% pay rise up to £800 a year and longer-term the proposal suggests a pay rise of 20% on the current rates could be sustained without affecting employment, which would mean up to £2,300 a year. Do you not agree that would be a valuable boost to these low-paid workers' incomes while we are campaigning jointly cross-party on the London Living Wage?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): It would, yes, and I can see where you are coming from. I will study the proposals from the Centre for London. My instinctive anxiety is that we would be starting to muddy the waters and there is a clarity, there is a popularity in the idea of the London Living Wage, everybody knows what it is, everybody understands the campaign, everybody hears the arguments about benefitting their companies as well as their employees, everyone understands the arguments about fairness. I want to keep that as my focus.

Fiona Twycross (AM): I have to say, for the lowest paid workers, I think they would probably understand what a 7% or 20% pay rise would mean and I think that you are not giving Londoners enough due for their intelligence, I think they are a bit more savvy than that to get too confused about the issue, and so I welcome the fact that you will review the proposals.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Fiona, with the greatest respect, all we would be doing is suddenly campaigning for a wholly different thing, which --

Fiona Twycross (AM): I think we can campaign for more than one thing at a time. It is a stepping-stone towards the Living Wage and I welcome your response that you will review the proposal, thank you.

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

Darren Johnson (Chair): Thank you. Assembly Member Arnold.

Jennette Arnold OBE (AM): Mr Mayor, my follow-up question is about the increase in the gender pay gap in London and I just wanted to know whether you were aware of the evidence that shows women earn an average of 15% less than men? So, for instance, for every £1 a man earns, a woman takes home 85p. Are you aware of this?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I have not seen any recent data on this but I am aware of the general problem, Jennette, and obviously it is something that we struggle to compensate for and to make sure that everybody in London gets the pay they need and deserve.

Jennette Arnold OBE (AM): Can I commend you because you are an example to others? I raised this with you a couple of years ago and I will not say it was my action but what you then did was you equalised the pay of your staff, so you then upgraded the only woman who was on your management board and all of your management board members now get the same pay. I would like you, in your position, having shown that as an example, to consider whether in your conversations with business you would ask them to consider whether it is fair that in 2013 the women in their businesses are being paid 85% for every £1 that they pay the men. Are you up for this and can I give you the information?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I would be very grateful, yes, please, would you give it to me? I do think it is inequitable and I would be very grateful if you would do that.

Jennette Arnold OBE (AM): I am going to go on a high then and I will be getting that information to you and I hope that we can do something together to actually ensure that we actually deal with this inequality, because you did make that commitment in 2008.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I am more than happy to look at it.

Jennette Arnold OBE (AM): Thank you.

Darren Johnson (Chair): Assembly Member Dismore.

Andrew Dismore (AM): Last time, Boris, you could not remember when you had last travelled on the Northern line, so let us try another one. When was the last time you topped up an Oyster card at a Tube station ticket machine?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Quite recently.

Andrew Dismore (AM): You cannot remember again, can you?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): It was a couple of weeks ago I think.

Andrew Dismore (AM): You have a very poor memory when it comes to transport, have you not? Perhaps that is --

Darren Johnson (Chair): We are on the topic of pay. We are on wages, rather than transport.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I am so sorry but what --

Andrew Dismore (AM): I am coming to that. We are on costs as well, Chair, and that is what I am coming to now because you may be --

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I think I have given you quite a detailed answer. I did it quite recently, Dismore.

Andrew Dismore (AM): You made a pre-election promise during a BBC debate that you would bear down on fares. On your watch, fares have gone up by 33% so far, 20% more than inflation. It looks to me like you are auditioning for a job with one of the big six energy companies, does it not? When are you going to honour your pledge not to put up fares?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I think you were in Parliament. I think you were a member of the party that supported the Labour Government that put all the green taxes on the energy companies that necessitated the incredible increases in energy prices.

Andrew Dismore (AM): Let us hear your answer about your fares pledge. What about your fares pledge?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Did you say anything then? Does anybody remember Dismore protesting then about that?

Andrew Dismore (AM): Let us hear about what you are doing to bear down on fares.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Does anybody remember Dismore doing anything when he was in Parliament? Does anybody think he will be returned to Parliament? Does anybody --

Jennette Arnold (AM): Yes, yes.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Highly unlikely.

Jennette Arnold (AM): I think he probably will, yes.

Andrew Dismore (AM): Let us hear about fares.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Will he do any more when he gets back into Parliament? He did absolutely nothing. He sat around at great --

Andrew Dismore (AM): When are you going to honour your pledge to stop jacking up fares faster than inflation when under your government prices have gone up faster than wages for every single month but one? That one month was bankers' bonuses month when they benefited from your tax cuts for higher-rate earners.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Under the previous Mayor, I seem to remember exorbitant rises in fares which were put in to pay for his cynical short-term cuts.

Andrew Dismore (AM): No, that is not the record. When are you going to honour your pledge to bear down on fares?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Are you finally asking a serious and sensible question?

Andrew Dismore (AM): I have asked that question five times now. When are you going to bear down on fares like you promised?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Are you asking what I am going to do about the fares package in January? Is that what you are asking now?

Andrew Dismore (AM): I have asked you six times. When are you going to bear down on fares like you promised before the election?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): We bear down continually on fares and I am going to look at the --

Andrew Dismore (AM): They keep going up faster than inflation, do they not?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): -- fares package and do what I can to abate the costs for Londoners. Do not forget that we continue to offer - indeed, this Mayoralty was the first to offer - a 24-hour Freedom Pass for everybody over 60, as you will shortly be. We offer free travel for kids. We offer a 30% discount for apprentices.

Andrew Dismore (AM): Everybody else has to pay above-inflation fare rises.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): How many apprentices have you told that they have a 30% discount on London travel? Nobody.

Andrew Dismore (AM): When are you going to stop these above-inflation fare rises?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Do you tell people that? Tell people. Tell people who are in search of work that they have a 30% discount. People who are on the Jobseeker's Allowance get cut-price travel.

Andrew Dismore (AM): Everybody else has to pay above-inflation fare rises.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): We continue to offer cheap travel and I will do everything I can to make sure that we have a sensible fare package in January that keeps the costs down for Londoners but also enables us to invest in the transport network that we have and we need.

Darren Johnson (Chair): Thank you. We will then move on to the third question on the order paper today.

2013/3982 - TfL LIP funding

[Gareth Bacon](#)

Why is the Managing Director, Planning, TfL, still telling representatives of the London boroughs that TfL is planning on cutting next year's LIP funding by 25%?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I do not think she is saying any such thing. I can tell you now that it is, and always has been, my position that Local Infrastructure Plan (LIP) funding will be protected. LIP funding is going to be continued in line with the current stonking £147.8 million in funding from TfL to the boroughs to spend on the projects that they value. We are going to continue to support LIPs throughout my Mayoralty. "LIPs" is not the word for the money we are putting into this local funding. "Trout pout" is the word. We are going to stuff those LIPs so full of funding that it is going to be fantastic. I hope that all boroughs will hear the glad tidings of great joy that I bring to you.

Gareth Bacon (AM): Thank you, Mr Mayor. Just to clarify, she did in fact say exactly that. She came to the London Councils meeting on 24 October of the Transport and Environment Committee and told the members present that TfL was planning on cutting LIP by 25%. However, that said, I am extremely grateful for what

you have just said. Just for clarification, you have just said that LIP funding will not be cut at all while you remain Mayor. Is that correct?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): That is what I have just said.

Gareth Bacon (AM): OK. In that case, then, Mr Mayor, I would like to thank you. I am sure you will be getting a flood of letters from boroughs of all political persuasions thanking you for resisting the siren calls of TfL and keeping --

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): What do you mean? I am TfL. There is no division. It is entirely false. 'Three in one; one in three'.

Gareth Bacon (AM): Really? Be that as it may, Mr Mayor, I think the boroughs will be very grateful for this and very appreciative of the gesture, so thank you very much.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Good.

Darren Johnson (Chair): Thank you. Assembly Member O'Connell?

Steve O'Connell (AM): I very much welcome that commitment, Mr Mayor. For the sake of completeness, I have asked you this before. Will you continue to confirm that you will allow the boroughs that flexibility in how they can deliver their funding?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): The flexibility I gave them?

Steve O'Connell (AM): Exactly.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): The previous administration did not.

Steve O'Connell (AM): Exactly. You will continue with that?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I will continue to protect that. Particularly for good Conservative boroughs but also for other boroughs.

Steve O'Connell (AM): Thank you very much, Mr Mayor.

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

Roger Evans (Deputy Chairman): Thank you, Chair. Can I add the thanks of my boroughs in Havering and Redbridge for the statement that you have just made? Just to note that when we had TfL at the recent Transport Committee, they were telling us that boroughs were receiving other sums of money which were hypothecated to particular pieces of work from TfL. Their argument was that maybe boroughs did not need the LIP funding because they were giving money to them.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): No. Do not worry. Read my lips.

Roger Evans (Deputy Chairman): Can you just make sure that TfL does not pursue a back-door policy of hypothecating more of the money? As you and I know, it is much better to give boroughs and local people --

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I know. The boroughs need to spend it on special pork-barrel schemes.

Roger Evans (Deputy Chairman): Local people make better decisions about the projects --

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I understand that, absolutely. That is why I decided to smash the little pots of money and give boroughs more freedom. I believe in that. I believe in local democracy, unlike the previous administration.

Roger Evans (Deputy Chairman): Thank you.

Darren Johnson (Chair): Thank you. We will then move on to the fourth question on the order paper today.

2013/4042 - Benefit sanctions

[Jenny Jones](#)

Do you share my concerns about the massive and often inappropriate use of benefit sanctions against Londoners in recent years?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Yes. I certainly have done what I can, as you know, Jenny, to try to mitigate the impact of benefit reforms on Londoners where Londoners are particularly exposed, mainly because of the cost of living in London and the cost of housing of London. We received an awful lot of funding for Discretionary Housing Payments, an extra £25 million to London boroughs in 2012/13, rising to £115 million over the next couple of years. We delayed the implementation of a benefits cap for existing claims, giving time to make new arrangements. There was an exemption for the total benefit cap for nine months for those who lose their jobs and need to claim benefits.

We tried to soften some of the impact, but I think all parties agree that it was right to reform housing benefit, which was running at £20 billion. I think all parties would probably agree that it is right to stop people from claiming benefits if they do not do the basic things like turn up to find work or turn down jobs that are offered to them or fail in some pretty obvious way to do what is necessary to claim those benefits.

Jenny Jones (AM): Let me put a couple of cases to you and I think you will be shocked as well. I would like to get your reaction about them. These are from Citizens Advice. A constituent in Hillingdon, a 21-year-old single parent, was accused of not doing enough to find a job, but the Jobcentre could not say what aspect of her job search was inadequate. Citizens Advice helped her overturn the sanction, but she still had to go three months last winter without Housing Benefit, without the Jobseeker's Allowance and had to get a crisis loan to pay the bills and feed her family. That cannot be right. It just cannot be. I know you are not frightened to --

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): It is very difficult for me, Jenny, to comment on individual cases, but I have seen the --

Jenny Jones (AM): OK. What about --

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): If you want to --

Jenny Jones (AM): No, I understand, but you must be shocked at these incidents.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Again, I do not know what the circumstances are exactly. Obviously, the way you have described it unquestionably makes it sound shocking. I think I read a headline this morning, though, that the Labour Party wanted to cut all benefits from people under 25.

Jenny Jones (AM): Could you focus, please?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Is that right? I read it in the *Daily Telegraph*. Is this the party of the people?

Darren Johnson (Chair): If you can concentrate on the questions from Jenny Jones --

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I see. They have leaked something to the *Telegraph*, hoping to curry favour with middle England, whereas actually they do not really believe it. Is that it? What is their policy?

Darren Johnson (Chair): If you could concentrate on answering the questions posed by Assembly Member Jones, who is a member of the Green group, not the Labour group --

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): You could have fooled me.

Darren Johnson (Chair): -- then we can continue. Assembly Member Jones.

Jenny Jones (AM): Let me tell you about another one. A constituent in Lewisham was accused of not trying hard enough despite exceeding her job search target and she lost her benefits for a month and was refused hardship payments or loans. This cannot be right.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Jenny, you make it sound very tough. It sounds very tough. I do not know the circumstances. Obviously, to do this properly, I would need a constituency surgery in which I actually asked the complainant you describe to go through her experiences. I would then take it up with the Jobcentre Plus office and would try to get to the bottom of it. It is difficult for me to do that as Mayor. It is something you could do as her Assembly Member or indeed her Member of Parliament should really be doing it.

Jenny Jones (AM): Would you or somebody in your office talk to Citizens Advice, just to get a feel for the misuse? I am talking about massive and inappropriate use of the sanctions. Would somebody in your office take some evidence from Citizens Advice and perhaps then you can --

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I am sure that Kit [Malthouse, AM], who is the Deputy Mayor for Business and Enterprise --

Jenny Jones (AM): That is very kind of Kit. Kit, thank you.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): He is in charge of employment generally.

Jenny Jones (AM): That is very kind. I am very happy with that. Thank you so much.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Kit is always very happy to co-operate with you, Jenny, on any matter.

Darren Johnson (Chair): We note that commitment on behalf of Assembly Member Malthouse. We will then move on to the next question on the order paper.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): If Kit wants to pass that back to me or if Kit refuses that mission, then I will understand and I will do by best --

Darren Johnson (Chair): We will await an update in your next report.

2013/4096 - Universal Free School Meals

[Fiona Twycross](#)

With a third of London's children sometimes finding it hard to concentrate due to hunger, do you agree that free school meals could contribute to tackling food poverty in London? If so, what will you do as Mayor to promote this amongst those organisations that are responsible for school meals?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): On this, in an ideal world, I will make it clear that I think families who can pay, should pay. It has been put to me very vociferously by the great Henry Dimbleby [co-founder, Leon restaurants] and others that actually the only way to deliver this programme and the only way to have take-up of free schools meals properly is to have universal free school meals and to do it that way. That is an argument that I accept. Let us do it.

What I want is to see London kids getting solid nutrition. and this may sound incredibly old-fashioned but all basically eating the same thing at the same time together and enjoying the benefits of a communal meal. That is what I remember from my primary school. I was a great enthusiast for school dinners, as you can imagine. I would like to see all London kids having what we had, which was mandatory liver and cabbage. That is what I would like to see.

Fiona Twycross (AM): Let us get away from your favourite meal at school. I just want to clear up the confusion over what your position is on this. Actually, I genuinely want you to agree with Henry Dimbleby and I want you to just state publicly what your current position is.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I do. You have me there. I do. I have surrendered to the universal free school meal lobby. I buy what Henry says. To be fair, I was in Camden along with Ed Milliband [MP, Labour Party Leader], as you will recall, at the same school and we did not produce dinner money then.

Fiona Twycross (AM): I am absolutely delighted. You have absolutely undermined my arguments for this session, but I am delighted that you have done.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Fiona, it was universal. Everybody ate the same thing and we did not produce dinner money, though the Milliband family could well afford it, as indeed could mine.

Darren Johnson (Chair): We have heard enough about the Millibands' policy on school meals. Assembly Member Twycross?

Fiona Twycross (AM): To be honest, parents who can afford it can always make an additional donation to the school, which is another thing you can suggest.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): They can.

Fiona Twycross (AM): However, I would be quite keen for you not just to have been battered down to accept this argument, but would you like to visit a school?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): No one batters me down.

Fiona Twycross (AM): Nobody batters you down, obviously, Boris, but I would be very keen for you to not just be convinced of the argument but see the argument for yourself. Would you commit to going and seeing the transformational impacts at schools?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I have. Actually, I did. I do not think I need to take you up on this because I have done it. I went with Henry and his team and I saw the benefits. I talked to the kids and I asked them whether they were happy. I asked them whether they would prefer chips and they all said they would much prefer chips.

Fiona Twycross (AM): Thank you. I think I am very happy with the answer. Thank you.

Darren Johnson (Chair): Assembly Member Cleverly?

James Cleverly (AM): Mr Mayor, do you agree that free school meals should be given to all the children at your great competitor school of Harrow? Do you think they should all get free school meals?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): No, we are talking about the maintained sector.

James Cleverly (AM): Why? Why only the maintained sector?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): That is what the state is responsible for. What they do in the fee-paying sector is entirely a different matter.

James Cleverly (AM): What about free schools, Mr Mayor? Should we have universal free school meals in free schools? It is a yes or no question.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Yes. The argument they make --

James Cleverly (AM): What about when, so impressed with the improvement in educational outcomes, a parent moves their child from Harrow to a nearby free school and they were quite willing and able to pay for school meals whilst paying for the education at Harrow? Do you think it is right that poor Londoners, who despite everything that has been done by the Government still bear a disproportionate burden of the tax-take, should cross-subsidise the children of millionaires and oligarchs who choose to send their children to high-performing state-funded schools?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Actually, one of the great things that is happening in London is that our schools are improving quite fast and it is a wonderful change on the 1960s, the 1970s and indeed the 1980s that the children of millionaires and oligarchs actually are going to inner London school and what a fantastic thing that is.

James Cleverly (AM): Should they get free meals?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): If in order to deal with some of the diet problems and the nutrition problems we have to have free school meals and a universal provision of the same meal, I can see why that works.

James Cleverly (AM): This is the point I want to make. It is not who pays for the meal that matters so much as that the child gets the meal. The universal take-up of school meals and the universal provision of good quality, healthy school meals I absolutely agree with.

However, we undermine our ability to deliver that if poor Londoners in effect cross-subsidise wealthy Londoners. The technology is there. Actually, the money that could be saved from not going down the universal route could be used to have, for example, swipe cards so there is absolutely no stigma whatsoever between the children who pay and the children who do not pay.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Why? Nobody would notice a swipe card?

James Cleverly (AM): No, everyone gets a swipe card. Everyone swipes in. Everyone gets fed. The children have no idea whose swipe card is being paid for by their parents and whose swipe card is getting paid for by

the state. Do not be seduced by what is basically a status desire for universality which will actually have a negative impact on the poorest children in London whose parents will fundamentally be cross-subsidising the parents of the richest children in London. What I am saying is do not confuse the argument. Universal provision of healthy food: yes. Universal state paying for that food: no.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I may have misunderstood some key point in the argument but, as far as I understand the proposition, what the proponents of the universal principle say is, if you just have one group paying for it, then they will want to choose perhaps to have packed lunches or whatever and not want to have the universal free meal.

James Cleverly (AM): No, Mr Mayor, that does not follow. If the school rule is simple, all children will have the food provided by the school using the swipe card provided by the school, paid for either by the parent if they can afford it or the state if they cannot, all those arguments go away. Do not be seduced by what is a fundamentally flawed argument.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Really? I hear what you say. All I can say is that I remember my time at primary school in Camden where we all had free school meals. Nobody had different stuff. We all had the same stuff, delicious it was. Mince. It was funded by the Inner London Education Authority. It was absolutely delicious.

James Cleverly (AM): But this proposal is the wrong argument to that desire.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): It made me what I am. Nobody had anything different. The Millibands, the Johnsons, we all ate the same thing together and there was no dinner money.

James Cleverly (AM): Mr Mayor, I do not want to eat into my colleagues' time.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): We were all a lot thinner then and we were allowed to climb in the playground and fall off and there was much less health and safety. It was fantastic.

Jennette Arnold OBE (AM): Chair, just briefly, I would just ask the Mayor to stay firm with his position that we heard from him in answer to Assembly Member Twycross's questions and not to be side-tracked by Assembly Member Cleverly. In Islington, where we piloted this, this is the borough you live in, Mr Mayor --

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): This is what Gove wants!

Jennette Arnold OBE (AM): These issues were explored and the swipe card would not deal with stigma. I am a governor of a school and the girls will go there and they will talk because the swipe card is dependent on having money on your account. In some homes, many homes that I represent, there is no money to put in the pot and that is where the stigma starts, so take no notice of Assembly Member Cleverly.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): You could have a swipe card that is kind of like Ken Livingstone's [former Mayor of London] Freedom Pass, which never had any money on it at all but you used to travel freely across London just using this thing. You could have one like that.

Jennette Arnold OBE (AM): I will not go there. Be advised by Assembly Member Twycross.

Darren Johnson (Chair): Thank you. We will then move on to the next question on the order paper.

2013/4097 - London Energy Costs

[Murad Qureshi](#)

What have you done to insulate Londoners from the impact of another round of double-digit price rises by “the big six”?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Thank you, Murad. You are asking about the huge energy price increases by the big six. There is a very interesting thing going on in Britain, which is that the gas prices are in fact quite low per unit and the consumption is very high. What we are doing to cut the costs is, of course, we have already retrofitted 99,000 homes in London, saving homeowners up to about £180 per year. We continue to try to advise people through know-your-rights campaigns and everything else about how they can minimise their energy costs and how they can pay their energy bills most efficiently.

Murad Qureshi (AM): I hear what you are saying, Mr Mayor, but the keyword in the question was “insulate” and what you have done to help Londoners face the cost of living crisis this winter. You mentioned your own programme of the home energy efficiency, the RE:NEW programme, but it delivered well below its own targets last term. We have had the energy companies renegeing on their eco obligations, particularly in London, and it is clear that they will not be doing anything further on that front if you listen to EDF, particularly. The national Green Deal programme has become a bit of a joke with only 219 properties getting eco works done nationally. I just want to know: have you done anything to dissuade the energy companies against these crippling price increases and to make sure the energy companies undertake their obligations in London in particular instead of sending light bulbs?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Yes. For instance, with British Gas and other energy companies, we are making sure that they spend their eco funds on helping us to insulate Londoners and we have a further 60,000 homes in the pipeline and 500 public sector buildings additionally trying to reduce the energy bills overall. Right at the beginning in my oral update, I pointed out that we have a programme now with Islington to capture excess heat and help about 500 homes across the city.

Murad Qureshi (AM): That is TfL. That is not an energy company, Mr Mayor, with all respects.

Jennette Arnold OBE (AM): It is Islington’s own energy company.

Murad Qureshi (AM): OK. That is the local authority, not one of these six energy companies --

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): No, it is TfL.

Murad Qureshi (AM): You are just going off the point here, Mr Mayor. Can I just point out another reality on fuel poverty? The reality is a 1% increase in energy prices nationally pushes 40,000 households into fuel poverty. If you look at the cold homes crisis and results from 2011/2012, we had 2,800 excess winter deaths in London. Do you have at all a ballpark figure of the number of families in fuel poverty at this present moment?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I can certainly say that just off the top of my head I think there are probably 180,000 elderly people anyway in London who face that problem. It is very acute and I understand the difficulty people face. I think it was John Major [former Prime Minister] the other day who made this point very vividly. Some families are facing a real crisis. These energy companies face very considerable increases in their green responsibilities and their green taxes and --

Murad Qureshi (AM): I am not asking you that question, Mr Mayor. I am actually asking what you are doing.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I can tell you what we are doing. We are retrofitting tens of thousands of homes. We are continuing to run very big know-your-rights campaigns and we are trying to help Londoners to access the funds they need to get them through the winter. I in no way underestimate the scale of the problem.

Murad Qureshi (AM): According to figures for 2011 from the Office of National Statistics, we have 300,000 households in fuel poverty and that is about 10% of London households. You can imagine how much that is going to increase now with these crippling increases.

I also want to be clear with the John Major comments, actually. Only this week, you were prepared to get out of bed to defend the super-rich in your column in the *Telegraph*, yet you do not seem to be prepared to beat up the energy companies.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Do not be ridiculous.

Murad Qureshi (AM): EDF has done very well out of the Olympics and all the marketing they had. They operate like a private utility here and when they go across the Channel they would not dare do the things they do here in the UK in France. I suggest --

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I would beat up anybody but --

Murad Qureshi (AM): I have not finished my question, Mr Mayor. I suggest you actually support John Major's suggestion of a one-off windfall tax on excess properties and energy companies because there are families in London choosing between heating and food on the table. That is the reality for many tens of thousands of households in London this winter.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I understand that and certainly, if there was an easy way of doing this, I would. What I do not think is credible is for Labour people to argue that energy companies are now charging too much when they festooned those companies with regulation, when they piled tax upon tax, when they saw a huge reduction in the number of energy suppliers --

Murad Qureshi (AM): I would rather see it be done on their profit margins than the general taxation bill for Londoners.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): -- and they now claim to be able to somehow magically cut the bills. That is not credible. In London, we face a shortage of electricity substations. We face a serious shortage of power.

Murad Qureshi (AM): You are going to be supporting their price hikes for the future?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): We need to keep investing in our energy supply. Otherwise, quite frankly, you can have a quick fix. You can have a quick Wonga-like fix.

Murad Qureshi (AM): You are going to accept their crippling price increases for the foreseeable future?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Murad, you can have a Wonga-like fix, but then the bills will go up in the future. I think you have to look at some of the ways the energy companies have been regulated. You have to look at the decisions that were taken to spend vast sums on totally pointless or only marginally useful wind farms over thirteen years. You did absolutely nothing to tackle the problems of supply.

Murad Qureshi (AM): Chair, I have made my point. I did not want to go into supply issues.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): If you do not have enough supply, you cannot expect the energy to be produced at a reasonable price. That was the fundamental problem that Labour failed to tackle because you did not have the guts to go and build the nuclear power stations 20 years ago that this country needs. You fudged the issue year after year and we are reaping the whirlwind now.

Murad Qureshi (AM): That was not my question.

Darren Johnson (Chair): We have stopped the clock. Assembly Member Shah?

Navin Shah (AM): Mr Mayor, do you think the big six companies are right to blame the green levies for the latest round of price rises proposed on Londoners?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I think they are right. I refer you to what I said just now. The mistakes have been legion in our energy policy in the last 20 years. They have been led by Labour inertia and failure to grip the issue. We are now seeing a shortage of supply, which is inevitably impacting the prices people are paying. If I could, I would build energy generators across London to try to meet the need we have. Indeed, we are putting one of the TfL power stations back in use if we possibly can.

Navin Shah (AM): Mr Mayor, is it not true that those companies first blamed wholesale prices but, even when the wholesale prices fell, they did not take down the costs for customers? Do you know what the actual cost of the green levy is on the household bills? Can you tell us? Do you have a figure for what it actually costs in terms of additional costs from green levies?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): What is unquestionably true is that we have inadequate power supplies and we have an energy industry that has been endlessly belaboured with new requirements and new green taxes of one kind or another. That feeds through into the bills that the public are paying. The way to bring them down is not just to berate the energy companies, which is a good idea and I am not against that. If you want to shout at the energy companies, fine. What you can also do is you can insulate people's homes and reduce their consumption. As I began by saying in my answer to Murad, we have quite low gas prices per unit by comparison with the rest of Europe. It is our consumption that is so high.

Navin Shah (AM): Mr Mayor, you have not answered my question.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I am answering your question. The answer is to concentrate on that.

Navin Shah (AM): Mr Mayor, the fact is that an average householder cost for a dual fuel bill is about £1,247. Of that, the wholesale energy cost is 47%, the other suppliers and their margins are 19%, whereas the cost of energy, including climate change policies, is only 9%. The question I would like to put to you is: what impact will scrapping green levies have on your RE:NEW home insulation programme and carbon reduction targets? Surely, if you are serious about your own strategy, for these green levies, it is essential that they carry on. It is not at all --

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): You are in favour of more green levies?

Navin Shah (AM): Green levies as they exist are viable and they are part of the whole strategy.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Sure, but let us --

Navin Shah (AM): What would be the impact? Answer my question.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): It is vital and the green levies are not the only way we do this. We use all sorts of means to fund the RE:FIT and the RE:NEW campaigns. You have to retrofit people's homes. As I say, we have done 99,000 already. You have to retrofit public buildings as well.

Navin Shah (AM): How are you going to do it without the levies if you are going to scrap those? If you agree with the big six, where you will find the tax from?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): No, I am very confident we could get on with our retrofitting programme without the levies that you describe.

Navin Shah (AM): Let me just ask you a final question. The energy companies are calling the shots, very clearly. The Government is doing nothing about it. Do you really think it is right for EDF to hold consumers as hostages unless they get what they want? Is this right?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): The problem, as I have said, Navin, is that you in the Labour Party did not address the issues of supply of energy for a long --

Navin Shah (AM): Can you address my question?

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

Navin Shah (AM): This is not a matter of what the Labour Party did or did not do.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): You will remember, though, Navin.

Navin Shah (AM): You answer my question.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): We need to get on and insulate people's homes. We are doing that. I think we need to accelerate it. We need to do many, many tens of thousands more homes. What I do not think is credible --

Navin Shah (AM): Mr Chairman, he is not answering my question. Could he stop here, please?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): That is the way to reduce people's energy bills. What I do not think is credible is to confiscate cash from the energy companies and expect them somehow miraculously to invest in the new plant that this country needs and the new generation of Londoners require.

Navin Shah (AM): Can we stop it there, please, Chair?

Darren Johnson (Chair): Thank you. We will then move on to the next question on the order paper.

2013/4098 - Advice to London pensioners

[Andrew Dismore](#)

What advice can you offer to London pensioners who cannot afford both to heat their homes and buy food this coming winter?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Yes. Again, thank you, Andrew. A very similar question. This is unquestionably difficult. We are probably going to have another cold winter. We cannot tell. It could be as cold as it has been in the last four or five years. There will unquestionably be many people suffering fuel

poverty in London. I have already given a figure in my earlier answer to Murad about the number of old people we think are vulnerable.

My advice to people and to families facing fuel poverty this winter is, please, look at our know-your-rights campaign. Look at the funds that are available. The evidence is that when people do make use of those campaigns and they do sign on and they do take up the opportunity to find out what is available, they can get quite considerable sums to help them through the winter. Clearly, we have loads of advice. We have an Older People's Advisory Forum and an Older People's Assembly and other bodies that try to get these points across to Londoners.

Andrew Dismore (AM): Thanks for that answer. I presume you are not going down the Liberal Democrat route when Energy Secretary Ed Davey just tells people to wear jumpers instead of turning the heating on, which was rather fatuous advice, I thought.

In Camden, we have more than 26,000 households in fuel poverty, about 10.8% of the total. Perhaps you might be interested in what some of the pensioners are actually saying at the moment because I have been asking them in my constituency: "Food prices have risen alarmingly. It all seems out of control" - "I'm a pensioner. My pension goes up by pennies. Food and gas have gone up by pounds - "All in all, the past year has been a struggle. Thank God it's not cold yet [obviously preceding this] with food and heating up, rent up" - "The cost of living has gone up rapidly. Also rising food and jumping gas and electricity bills has been hurting the common man very badly" - "How can anyone who has not suffered deprivation know what hardship is?" - "It seems the only people being looked after are bankers, big business and other high-income earners, all of whom manage to avoid tax" - "Boris only represents the haves and cares nothing for the have-nots" - "How can a Prime Minister and Chancellor who are both millionaires understand real people?" - "Prices go through the roof. The rich get richer. Same old Tories, really".

The fact is, Boris, you do not actually have an answer to the question, do you?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Why do you not plug yourself in as a hot-air machine? That is a good idea. Why do you not go around and plug yourself in as a kind of hot-air machine? That is what you are. Brilliant. You are the solution.

Darren Johnson (Chair): Let Andrew finish his question.

Murad Qureshi (AM): He always gets under your skin.

Andrew Dismore (AM): The fact is you do not have an answer to what to say to --

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): No, on the contrary, I have given you a lot of answers.

Andrew Dismore (AM): -- and with the prices of energy going up and up and up. Their pensions are not keeping pace with that inflation. You have nothing to offer them.

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

Andrew Dismore (AM): The only answer is to freeze the fuel prices like Labour is proposing and your Government just does not want to know, does it? You do not, either.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Come on. I think everybody can see through what you are doing. They can see the vast hypocrisy of a party that took many steps and made many mistakes over the last few years to

allow us to get into a situation where we simply do not have the adequate supply we would need to be able to keep energy prices down. We are massively accelerating our retrofitting programme.

Andrew Dismore (AM): That is not going to help people this winter, is it? It is too late.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): That applies, obviously, to pensioners as much as to anyone else. We are very happy to offer advice and --

Andrew Dismore (AM): There are 34,000 people in London now using food banks under your watch. Is that acceptable?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Which was the Mayoralty that brought in the 24-hour Freedom Pass?

Andrew Dismore (AM): You cannot eat a Freedom Pass, Boris.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Which was the Mayoralty that cut council tax for pensioners year after year? Which was the party that put it up by 153%? It was Labour and there was no way pensioners could escape council tax. We did it. We helped and we are going to continue to help.

Andrew Dismore (AM): There are 34,000 people using food banks against 400 four years ago. It is not acceptable. You do not even tell them to wear a jumper, do you? You cannot even go that far.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I cannot even hear what you are saying. Whatever you are saying is completely irrelevant.

Andrew Dismore (AM): You must have your earphones in.

Darren Johnson (Chair): Assembly Member Dr Sahota.

Dr Onkar Sahota (AM): Mr Mayor, we have heard the difficult decision pensioners will have to make this winter between heating and eating and there already is a group of people who are at increased risk of unnecessary winter deaths this winter. We already know that too many older people are admitted through accident and emergency departments (A&Es) in London, putting even more pressure on overworked doctors and nurses and understaffed hospitals. The elderly are a big reason why we have long waiting list and that half the time we have failed to treat patients within four hours. That is almost 200,000 people who have not been treated in London within the four-hour target.

Mr Mayor, you met the Secretary of State [Rt Hon Jeremy Hunt MP, Secretary of State for Health] on 5 November 2013. Did you discuss with him the energy crisis in London and what reassurances did he give you that London will be safe this winter?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Obviously, I make repeated representations, Onkar, as indeed I know you do, about healthcare in London by making sure that London gets a fair deal and gets fair support. That is one of the reasons why we have set up the London Health Board and why we have asked Lord Darzi [Chair, London Health Commission] to look into London healthcare. It is very important that we stick up for the needs of our city but, as I said to you and to others many times, it is also important that we have a forward-looking and pragmatic approach on reforms and on A&Es. What we want to do is ensure that we have the best possible service for Londoners and we reduce deaths.

Dr Onkar Sahota (AM): Mr Mayor, I want to concentrate on the A&E crisis this winter. You may be aware that the Health Select Committee [of the House of Commons] called for an urgent care board to have in place

this winter plans by 30 September. Given that you have made appropriate resourcing for London's health economy, one of the key priorities of the London Health Board - which meets in private and which you chair - have you examined the plans for the A&E departments this winter? Have you examined them? Has the Health Board examined them? Are you able to give reassurances that you are on top of it?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Yes. We have had discussions already. I know that if Victoria [Borwick AM, Deputy Mayor of London] were here, she would be intervening now because I know that we have had discussions about our plans for this winter and what we can do to make sure London copes.

Dr Onkar Sahota (AM): You have personally examined them at the Health Board and you can give reassurances to Londoners?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I have not examined the plans of each and every A&E. That is not my job. I do not have, as you know, responsibility for healthcare in London. I think Victoria may be able to confirm this --

Dr Onkar Sahota (AM): I was told by NHS London that these plans will not be ready until the end of the month. If you will not examine them, can you give me a reassurance that you are satisfied they are adequate?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): What we have sought is general assurances that the National Health Service (NHS) is confident that it can deal with any problems that it may face this winter. I think that would be --

Dr Onkar Sahota (AM): The Health Board has not seen them yet? You are the Chair, Mr Mayor. You are the Chair of it.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Yes, but you would not expect me to go over the specifics of NHS plans.

Dr Onkar Sahota (AM): All I am asking is: have you or has the Board seen them? You are the Chair of that Board, which meets in private. I cannot answer the question for you. Have you seen them?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): No, but I think I have just answered it for you. The answer is that we have certainly sought reassurances from the NHS about whether they are happy with the arrangements that are in place for this winter and, to the best of my knowledge, they are.

Dr Onkar Sahota (AM): Thank you, Mr Mayor.

Fiona Twycross (AM): I just wanted to go back to the point about older people and their access to food. During the investigation into food poverty in London that I led on behalf of the Health and Environment Committee, we found that two-thirds of organisations taking part in a survey on food poverty in the over-65 age group thought that the older people they worked with were finding it harder to access food. Meals on Wheels probably needs reinventing for the 21st century, but there are 10 boroughs in London who have now completely withdrawn the service. Touching on Onkar's point, the biggest cause of hospital admissions in older people is now related to malnutrition. Can you ask your Food Board to consider and come up with proposals as to how to address food poverty in malnutrition, particularly among older people, which I think sometimes get forgotten a bit?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Particularly amongst older people? To be fair to Rosie [Boycott, Chair, London Food Board] and her team, that is something they are already looking at, Fiona, but I am more than happy to give you details on what they are doing.

Fiona Twycross (AM): Good. Thank you. If the Food Board comes up with suggestions for pilots, for example, will you commit to supporting funding pilots to help test some solutions and to make sure the scandal of older people in London going hungry is addressed?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I am more than happy to look at it, Fiona. I cannot give big funding pledges without really --

Fiona Twycross (AM): For some of the pilots, hopefully, it would not be too much money, but I think it is really important that we address this serious issue that is --

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I understand. I am sympathetic and I am supportive, but I would much rather Rosie Boycott find out what we can do first.

Fiona Twycross (AM): Thank you.

Andrew Boff (AM): Mr Mayor, would you not agree that taking advice from a Labour politician about health and the A&Es is not dissimilar to taking investment advice from that other famous Labour politician, the Reverend Paul Flowers?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Just remind us who Paul Flowers was. Is he the chap who gives lots of money to the Labour Party, the banker?

Andrew Boff (AM): Would you not, Mr Mayor, like to give your support to those A&E staff who this winter will be up against it and will be facing an overwhelming amount of work, partially if not mainly due to the doctors' contracts negotiated under the last Government?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I am fed up with blaming the last Government, but I will.

Andrew Boff (AM): Yes, I know. It is tiresome, but it is always there, is it not?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Unfortunately, it is true. They did bog it up. They spent spectacular sums of money. I think their whole GP contract thing was absolutely muffed and we have to sort it out now. This is the point that I think all parties find difficult but I continue to make: we have to be robust about delivering hard-headed and serious solutions to the health problems London faces. Healthcare in London needs improvement and it needs reform. We did brilliantly with stroke care. We can do better in other services as well.

Andrew Boff (AM): Thank you, Mr Mayor.

Darren Johnson (Chair): We then move on to the next question on the order paper.

2013/3990 - Tree Loss

[James Cleverly](#)

Has there been any assessment of the loss of tree coverage in London as a result of the recent storms, and in which areas? Will there be any support to help restore tree coverage, especially street trees, in the hardest hit areas, for example through your Street Trees or RE:LEAF programmes?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Thanks, James. It does not look as though the St Jude storm, as I think it is called, was anything like as bad as 1987 or 1990. It was far less severe. We lost it looks like about 2,400 trees, but of course they are going to be replaced. They are being replaced the whole time. We have already planted 12,000. We are going to plant 20,000 by March 2015 and we continue to invest good sums of money, supported by volunteers across London, in planting trees.

James Cleverly (AM): Mr Mayor, thank you for that. I am very pleased to hear that. As you say, we were fortunate that the storm was not as severe as that one in the 1980s, but we are looking at a situation where there are particularly acute examples. For example, in Ealing, the figures that we have back from the council there indicate that they have lost something in excess of 450 trees just in that borough, so there are pockets of London where the impact has been quite severe.

Will you be sending a message to prioritise through your tree-planting scheme those areas that were disproportionately hit by the tree loss?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Yes, I believe we are. I am grateful to you for your support for that and National Tree Week is coming up soon. I do not know when it is, but it is going to be wonderful anyway. We are going to plant loads of trees in all of those areas. We will plant an arbour of trees. The aptly-named Tony Arbour [AM] will live up to his name by covering his borough with an arboretum.

James Cleverly (AM): Indeed. Mr Mayor, the application programme for some of these schemes I know closed prior, I think in the summer of this year. It does not need to be particularly complicated or extensive, but can you ensure that we do a little retrospective look at some of those applications in light of the fact that their circumstances would have changed because of the storm?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I am more than happy to do that, James. Can you please take it up with Matthew Pencharz [Mayoral Adviser, Environment and Political Affairs] as soon as possible so that we come up with something to make that happen?

Darren Johnson (Chair): Thank you very much. Assembly Member Tracey?

Richard Tracey (AM): Thank you, Chairman. Mr Mayor, you talk about hoping to make great progress with your street trees campaign. Can I put a bid in for some of those trees for the Balham High Road, which is a TfL road? For a long time, my residents there have been seeking to create a Balham Boulevard with a wonderful line of trees down the middle of the road.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Absolutely. I am more than happy to support Balham Boulevard in any way that we can. I do not know how popular it may be with local residents. Some of them worry about subsidence.

Richard Tracey (AM): No, I do not think there is any worry about that.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Fantastic. OK.

Richard Tracey (AM): It is a very wide road and it would be very possible to put not only trees down the middle --

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Come on. What do you want? Your wish is my command. What do you want? Do you want London plane trees? Beeches? Oaks?

Richard Tracey (AM): Yes, probably plane trees, I would guess. I am not an expert.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): OK. Gingkoes?

Darren Johnson (Chair): I think this exchange can probably be concluded in writing. We probably do not need to involve the full Assembly.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): We will do another project. We will do Balham Boulevard.

Darren Johnson (Chair): Assembly Member Evans?

Roger Evans (Deputy Chairman): Thank you, Chairman. Can I take this opportunity to welcome volunteers from St Francis Hospice in Havering to the audience and thank them for the good work they do?

Mr Mayor, you may recall - and I am sure you do - that during your first term of office you had an initiative called Help a London Park in which we invited people from around London to vote for their favourite park. The winners had trees and other investment made in their park. That was a fantastic scheme because it really involved local people and got them interested. We had schoolchildren coming here. We had people logging on. We had a huge amount of interest. Also, it was a fantastic scheme because the decision was made by local people rather than by a faceless team of bureaucrats or the usual suspects which we see so often when schemes are approved.

Can you commit to having another Help a London Park in the next couple of years so we can really motivate and involve Londoners in greening our city?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Yes. It was a hugely popular policy. I remember it well. We will do it again, funds permitting. Do not forget what I said in my introduction, which you may have unaccountably not been paying attention to, Roger. We are on track to deliver 100 pocket parks. Do you remember that bit?

Roger Evans (Deputy Chairman): Yes, I do --

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Fantastic.

Roger Evans (Deputy Chairman): -- but they are not voted for by the people like Help a London Park was .

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Yes, but they are strongly locally supported. I take your point. There was great excitement about the London parks with the Help a London Park scheme. We did some fantastic things. We did a huge number of parks around the city and perhaps you are right. Perhaps it is time to have another go.

Roger Evans (Deputy Chairman): Excellent.

Darren Johnson (Chair): Thank you very much. We will then move on to the next question.

2013/3963 - London's Bus Network

[Richard Tracey](#)

What route and capacity planning for the London bus network will you be proposing in your Transport Strategy?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Thanks, Dick, and thanks also to the Assembly's Transport Committee, which described the London bus service as world-class. I think that is entirely correct. We have 8,600 buses

now, more and more hybrid buses, some of the greenest buses in the world, as you know. We are carrying 2.3 billion passengers a year on London's bus network. On the whole, the service is terrific.

Clearly, in expanding it, which I think is what you will want to know, we will take very close note of what local communities want, what boroughs want and where people want the routes and how it should be. To get back to what Roger was saying, there will not be just a top-down TfL decision that the buses have to go this way. We will very much take account of local preferences.

Richard Tracey (AM): Thank you for that. What we were concerned about on the Transport Committee and in our report was the fact that there really is no built-in growth to take account of nearly another million people in the next few years and up to ten million in total by 2030. The growth of the bus network, we accept, is excellent on the actual network but we really do think that there needs to be some more forward planning. What about that?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): We do assume growth.

Richard Tracey (AM): Not enough.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): The issue is how you fund it. We certainly assume that the network will increase by at least 4% to 2021. We have to continue to get the funding through to make sure that we are able to expand it properly.

Bus ridership is quite interesting because it is not quite the same as Tube ridership. If you look at the figures, you are not seeing quite the same angle of increase that you are seeing on Tube ridership. Clearly, we need to expand it.

Richard Tracey (AM): We did find that the route planning as conducted by TfL is not really acceptable and it is not adequate. We do not think that they do frankly --

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Are you criticising TfL, Dick?

Richard Tracey (AM): I am, actually, yes.

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

Richard Tracey (AM): It was a cross-party report you got. We believe --

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I liked the bit where you said the service was world-class. Why do you not just stick with that?

Richard Tracey (AM): As it stands, but it is the planning forward. You mentioned the boroughs and the constituents, quite rightly. When you said that TfL would take account of them, they are not doing so. The constituents come and ask for either particular amendments to routes or perhaps extensions to routes and they do not get them.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Hang on. Is this the same Dick Tracey who is going to be supplied in March 2014 with a new service in Lavender Fields after lobbying --

Richard Tracey (AM): I hope so. Mr Mayor, it did take me nearly six years to get that.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): My wish is your command. You asked for a new bus in Lavender Fields. I have delivered. We are extending the S1 via Holborn Way and London Road and Victoria Road. There you go. You are getting it. We are nothing if not responsive.

Richard Tracey (AM): It did take a lot of fighting by the residents.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): You can just ping a bus here, there and everywhere. Anybody can come and ask, "I want a bus". Of course, you have to do some detailed consultation. You have to think about it. Send a bus down one road and people lose it down another.

Richard Tracey (AM): The case of the residents of Lavender Field was that it did not comply with what is laid out in your Transport Strategy of people having public transport within 400 metres.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): That is all the more evidence of the flexibility of TfL. Since May 2008 there have been 350 changes to the network to support town centre schemes that councils have come up with to provide extra peak-time capacity or just alterations that local people are asking for in one way or another. I do not think we are quite as marmoreal and monolithic as you are suggesting. We do listen. We are here to support you, Dick, and we have this bus going down Lavender Fields now or will be soon.

Richard Tracey (AM): Indeed, you have, but if you had been sitting at the Transport Committee and listening to what various residents from all over London said. You could get an account of this if you want one from Leon Daniels, the Managing Director of Surface Transport [TfL], because he was there. Frankly, there was a lot of dissatisfaction. It came also from TravelWatch and so on, so I think, frankly, Mr Mayor --

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Where do you want another bus?

Richard Tracey (AM): No, it is in general. I am not simply after Merton and Wandsworth, although of course that is the first priority in my mind. Frankly, it was a cross-party report. Each one of the parties represented on the Transport Committee took the same view.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): In my experience, everybody wants a bus to connect their neighbourhood to another neighbourhood, except the people who are in between and who do not want the bus going down their street or who are NIMBYs [not in my backyard]. They are not problems that we can solve with a snap of the fingers, but we are doing our best. We have a record number of buses on the streets and we are going to continue to invest in more.

Richard Tracey (AM): Will you ask TfL to look very carefully at the report we have produced?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): They admire your report, Dick. I know because I have a lengthy series of answers to all your recommendations, many of which seem to be strongly supported by TfL.

Richard Tracey (AM): Indeed. We hope, therefore, that you will produce some further plan and response to that by spring in this coming year because that is what we asked for in the report.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I am sure we will be as obliging as we possibly can.

Richard Tracey (AM): Thank you.

Darren Johnson (Chair): Thank you very much. We then move on to the next question.

2013/4099 - Foreign ownership

Tom Copley

Do you believe that Capital Gains Tax should be applied to overseas investors in housing? What impact would such a measure have on your plans for housing in the capital?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Tom, yes. I congratulate you, by the way, on your sterling defence of Conservative housing policy.

Seriously, the point that you make about foreign ownership is a good one. Actually, I see no reason why there should not be a level playing field for foreign owners. The question is how much the Capital Gains Tax will actually raise. I have seen figures of £10 million or £100 million. It is not going to be a huge figure, but it is probably on balance the right thing to do.

Tom Copley (AM): Thank you for that answer, Mr Mayor, and I am sure you will be as appalled as I am that your Government is presiding over the lowest level of house-building in this country in peacetime since the 1920s. I just thought I would raise that. Can I ask you, though? You have been pretty consistent in opposing any kind of action which would involve some sort of tax on overseas investment in housing. In fact, as an avid lover of fiction, I always read your *Telegraph* column and you have used that, indeed, to oppose any kind of action. Why are you now contradicting yourself?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): No, I have not. I think you will find I campaigned for the stamp duty thing. I thought it was outrageous that foreign owners were not paying stamp duty. You need to read my articles more closely, Tom.

Tom Copley (AM): I read your articles very closely.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I think it is disgraceful: *ignoratio elenchi*. Indeed, the stamp duty change has been incredibly beneficial from a revenue point of view. The money has been pouring into the Treasury after that change came in. I think it was the right thing to do and what it shows is the robustness of the London housing market and the strong demand for London houses.

Tom Copley (AM): I am pleased you agree and that you welcome the idea of imposing Capital Gains Tax. The London Assembly, as you will be aware, has passed two motions now, I think, calling on you to investigate the whole issue of the effect of overseas investment in housing on the London property market and yet you have refused to do so. Why is that?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Forgive me. I have not seen your motions, but we are endlessly looking at what happens --

Tom Copley (AM): Either of them?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): -- with the property market. We are looking at the impact of overseas investment and it is a relevant consideration that without overseas investment in London property, we would not be able to get away with big schemes like Battersea, which is going to deliver thousands of homes. These investments are generally very, very helpful.

Tom Copley (AM): You make these assertions and these are developers --

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): There is one thing I do oppose. I will just give you an answer. I think you may be interested. I am of the view that homes for sale in London should be marketed first to people in

this country and not marketed as a priority off-plan to people in other countries. I believe they should be marketed first to people in this country and indeed first to Londoners.

Tom Copley (AM): I hope this is something that you are saying to developers, but I want to come back to this point. We have made what I think is quite a reasonable request, which is that you investigate the impact on this, because there is no serious detailed research.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): We have obviously --

Tom Copley (AM): You have Gerard Lyons --

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I will give you the figures.

Tom Copley (AM): -- your Economics Adviser. The effect of this is it is pushing up house prices in the city. We can be pretty sure of that. Why will you not commit some resources to investigating it so we can actually get a clear idea of what the effect is?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I will give you some of the figures. It is certainly true that in the hot spot areas in central London you are seeing a lot of the market is being taken by international investors, but across the city as a whole the figures are currently at about 6.5%. That, by the way, includes many buyers from, say, Ireland who figure in that category. That is roughly the rate it has been since 1990. It is no higher than it was in 1990. The real question that you raise is to what extent the London market is being driven by the attractiveness of London to international investors and to what extent that is pushing up prices beyond the reach of Londoners. That is unquestionably a factor.

It is our belief, though, that it is not by any means the only factor and not the most important factor. The most important factor in determining London house prices is demand and supply. That takes us back to a conversation we have countless times, which is that we have had a chronic failure in this city - and indeed in the country - to supply enough homes and as long as there are not enough homes, you will see prices rising. There is very, very strong demand not just from international investors but from indigenous Londoners and that is the overwhelming reason why prices are so high.

Tom Copley (AM): I am going to leave it there, Mr Mayor.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): The only way to solve that is to build more homes.

Darren Johnson (Chair): Thank you very much. We will then move on to the next question on the order paper.

3952/2013 - Lights Instead of Tickets

[Andrew Boff](#)

Will you look into the merits of the "Lights Instead of Tickets" campaign which has been successfully trialled in Cambridge and consider its suitability for London?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Yes, thanks, Andrew. I think the answer here is we trialled it. It is an interesting idea. I am not massively enamoured of it. On the whole, given everything we have been saying earlier on about cycling, we should be taking a pretty tough line, but if you have a particular passion for this scheme I would be interested to hear it.

Andrew Boff (AM): Thank you, Mr Mayor. Yes, it is taking a tough line with safety, but it is taking a constructive line with safety if you say that once a ticket has been issued that ticket is effectively got rid of and lost if the cyclist can produce a receipt for lights. It is a constructive thing rather than just resorting to a penalty to bring about safety. That is why I would urge that we look at it, because I think the resentment that is created from receiving a penalty by cyclists can pretty soon disappear when they realise that all they have to do is look after their own safety and no penalty then exists. It is a constructive thing and I hope you can do it.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): We did try it. We issued 117 fixed-penalty notices and 90 cyclists returned within 3 days with working lights, so we did have a go.

Andrew Boff (AM): Thank you very much.

Darren Johnson (Chair): Thank you very much. The next question. The Liberal Democrats have very little time left, so if we can have a very quick answer to this?

3994/2013 - Early Bird Fares

[Caroline Pidgeon](#)

When will Londoners have the option of "Early Bird Fares" giving discounts to those travelling before the morning peak?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): OK, very good question. I am not in favour of doing this unless you can explain to me which fares I would increase in order to pay for the early bird discount.

Caroline Pidgeon MBE (AM): OK. Two years ago when I asked you about this, you said, "I am going to look into this. I am certainly looking into this".

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Yes, I have. I have rejected it.

Caroline Pidgeon MBE (AM): You even have a headline in the *Evening Standard*, "The Mayor's Office is looking to reward off-peak travellers with cheaper fares".

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I have now rejected it.

Caroline Pidgeon MBE (AM): Last week you looked at trying to get people on the Northern line who have --

Darren Johnson (Chair): Right, a very quick answer.

Caroline Pidgeon MBE (AM): Yes, Northern line passengers to get off and walk.

Darren Johnson (Chair): A very quick answer to that now.

Caroline Pidgeon MBE (AM): This is a way of getting people to use the trains earlier and help with overcrowding.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I have looked at the idea. I understand and I think that new technology may make it easier to manage demand on the network with the existing system.

Caroline Pidgeon MBE (AM): It is very easy; just change the peak hour in the morning.

Darren Johnson (Chair): No, you are out of time now, Caroline. Let the Mayor conclude.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): But what you are asking for at the moment is an immediate discount for a particular type of fare. That would have to be paid for by peak-time passengers and I am not convinced that the money is there to do it.

Darren Johnson (Chair): Thank you very much. The next question.

4100/2013 - Unsolved Crimes in London

[Joanne McCartney](#)

Are you concerned that the proportion of solved crimes in London has been sliding year-on-year since you became Mayor?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Yes, Joanne, there is quite a simple reason for this and Tony Arbour and others have raised it many times over the years. We are very, very keen to ensure that the police do not just give people a smack on the wrist and thereby deem that the matter has been settled, that there has been a sanction detection, as it were. We are having fewer out-of-court disposals. For instance, we have had half as many cannabis warnings and a third fewer fixed-penalty notices because we want things to be properly seen through and properly prosecuted. That explains why crime is simultaneously coming down and you are seeing a slight reduction in sanction detection rates, but I do want to see those go up as well. This is something that we have repeated discussions on in the London Crime Reduction Board.

Joanne McCartney (AM): Mr Mayor, the figures actually show that since 2008 solved crime has gone down by 5%, from 26% to 21%. Currently it stands at 21% and if you compare it with our most similar forces, it is significantly lower. The Metropolitan Police Service is similar, but if you look at Greater Manchester it is 25% and nationally it is 26%. Actually, we did look at the number of out-of-court sanctions and, for example, cautions that were given and they actually account for less than 2% of that decrease, so you cannot say that those figures automatically result in those lower figures.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): That is not what the Mayor's Office for Policing and Crime (MOPAC) tells me. They say this is primarily --

Joanne McCartney (AM): Did they give you figures for it? How many?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): -- because of fewer out-of-court disposals and they mentioned half as many cannabis warnings and a third fewer fixed-penalty notices.

Joanne McCartney (AM): But if you look at cautions totally, they have only gone down by 1.8% over the same period, so that does not account for the 5% drop, Mr Mayor. Of course you have said that crime is falling, so, if recorded crime is falling, you would expect the police to be able to solve more of the crimes they have because they have more resources, but actually that is not the case because police numbers have come down and Police Community Support Officers have come down. You actually mean that your cuts have meant that the police do not have the resources to solve crimes.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): No, I think you are talking complete nonsense. What is happening is there has been a reduction in sanction detections by moving away from out of court disposals. The headline figures remain extremely creditable to the Metropolitan Police Service. I think they are doing an amazing job in bringing down crime.

Joanne McCartney (AM): Those do not account for the reduction and if you look across London. For example, in some boroughs there are quite disproportionate drops. In Haringey, for example, one of my boroughs, there has been a 10% drop in solved crime; in Camden an 11% drop; Hackney 12%; Kensington and Chelsea 11% drop and London as a whole of 5%, so there is disproportionate drops in many of our boroughs. They seem to be where there is more crime in general anyway. You told us in May that you want to see sanction detections go up. What have you done about it?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): We have set a target for sanction detections with the police and what we want is to see an improvement in sanction detection, but do not forget the very considerable success that they are having in bringing down crime, and that for me is the most important figure.

Joanne McCartney (AM): So you accept that it is too low and you want to see a rise in sanction detections. Can I ask why does it --

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Yes, but not by encouraging some perverse behaviour, not by getting the police to give people a slap on the wrist. That is not the way forward, and that was what was happening. We are moving away from that approach. We are now taking crime seriously and we are trying to make sure that people who do something serious, then they are brought to justice.

Joanne McCartney (AM): You said you have now targets to increase sanction detection rates. MOPAC do not report them in their monthly report to the Police and Crime Committee. Will you ensure that they do in future record those targets?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I see no reason why you should not have access, Joanne, to the sanction detection rates. Fewer crimes, by the way, are screened out now and the figures I have suggest that far fewer crimes are being screened out, which is a point that Victoria [Borwick] and others have raised before, and we are doing our best to make sure that people who commit crimes are actually brought to justice. That is what people want to see.

Joanne McCartney (AM): There has been a slight reduction in crimes that have been screened out, but we heard yesterday at the House of Commons Select Committee from two former Metropolitan Police Service officers that actually the Metropolitan Police Service and other police forces regularly massage figures, so that they --

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I heard what that guy said.

Joanne McCartney (AM): Hold on: so that, for example, they will 'no crime' many things so they do not appear on the books. Can I ask you, give that those allegations have been made, and not just from the Metropolitan Police Service, but across the country, will you ask MOPAC to investigate that and to check that those figures are robust?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Yes. We have investigated and we have written to the Chairman, Bernard Jenkin [Chairman, Public Administration Select Committee], because I thought what one of the officers concerned had to say was very puzzling. I think he said that robbery was being re-categorised as theft from a person and burglary as criminal damage and that was somehow massaging those figures to make the MOPAC 7 [key crime types] look more favourable. All of those categories of crime appear in the MOPAC 7 anyway, so there would be no logic at all from the point of view of the targets to doing that.

Joanne McCartney (AM): But you are investigating?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I was slightly perplexed by that criticism.

Darren Johnson (Chair): Thank you very much. Before we move on to the next question, can we agree under standing orders to extend the meeting to cover the remaining business?

All: Agreed.

Darren Johnson (Chair): Thank you very much. The next question on the order paper.

4144/2013 - Bury Farm, Edgware

[Andrew Dismore](#)

In responding to the pre planning consultation on Bury Farm planning application, will you refuse the proposal to turn this valuable green belt land into a golf course?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Yes, thank you, Andrew. I have indeed read your letter - quite a brief one it was, I thought - for which many thanks. I really cannot say much more about the planning permission that is sought, because I think sooner or later I will be asked to pass judgment.

Andrew Dismore (AM): Thank you for that. In fact, not only have you read my letter, I have actually had a reply, which must be a record, which says that Sir Edward Lister [Deputy Mayor for Planning] is actually looking at the proposals today and perhaps through you I could pass on to Mr Lister the details of some of the concerns here.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Sir Edward.

Andrew Dismore (AM): Sir Edward. What is going to happen here, if this is to go through, is a loss of valuable access to the public to what is a very vulnerable part of the green belt, one of the narrowest parts of the green belt around London, with well-used paths and bridleways. Access from the A41 will be very dangerous. It is a single-carriageway road each way and it just so happens the developers did their traffic study in the middle of the Royal Wedding public holiday weekend, which is not the most busy time for traffic on that road; surprise, surprise. There will be significant impacts on quite an interesting ecosystem, a wildlife habitat with a real diversity of birds, mammals and reptiles. There will be a loss of existing businesses and particularly a farm, which has been there for 500 years.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Yes, I was interested in that.

Andrew Dismore (AM): In fact, it has been probably farmed since the Roman times. It is owned by Oxford University at the moment, All Souls College, who seem to want to wash their hands of their responsibilities for what they are trying to do in promoting this golf course via their agents. It is not as though there are not any other golf courses around. There are 22 golf courses within 5 miles already and their businesses and clubs will be adversely affected if this goes through. It is a very important issue which I hope you will look at personally as well.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I will. I am grateful to you, Andrew, for all those points that you make and you can take it obviously that I will be taking them all into account, but I cannot say much about it now.

Andrew Dismore (AM): I hope you will not consider the objectors to be NIMBYs who do not like golf, like the same people you said that about last time in relation to the schools. One last point, really, a more general point about --

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Did I say that you did not like golf? I have no idea what your views are on golf. Are you pro-golf?

Andrew Dismore (AM): I am pro-golf, but not this particular golf course.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): OK, good. Are you a big golfer?

Andrew Dismore (AM): A more general question about the green belt, really. On Monday, the Prime Minister [David Cameron] made an announcement that he wanted to see more development in the green belt, and it must be true because it was in the *Daily Mail* today. The headline in the *Daily Mail* today says, "Cameron swore he'd treasure the green belt. What a hollow promise". Do you agree with what the Prime Minister had to say about the green belt on Monday --

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I remember it was John Prescott [former Deputy Prime Minister] --

Andrew Dismore (AM): -- or will you do your job and defend the green belt against overdevelopment?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): -- who said, "The green belt is a Labour achievement and we mean to build on it". That is what he said. I remember the immortal words of John Prescott.

Andrew Dismore (AM): But will you defend the green belt, not like Mr Cameron is doing, as the *Daily Mail* alleges today? It must be true if it is in the *Daily Mail*.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I will certainly study the points that you make with great care.

Darren Johnson (Chair): Thank you very much. We then move on to the next question.

3962/2013 - Smarter Ticketing

[Roger Evans](#)

Now that TfL are actively seeking to reduce demand on the Northern line by urging commuters to walk or cycle instead, do you accept that the time has come to take this process to its logical conclusion by offering part-time Travelcards and rebates on underused full-time Travelcards in order to encourage those workers who can do so to work from home more often?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Yes, thanks, Roger. I have tried to answer this before. We think that the best way forward is actually to keep freezing the one-day cap so that it becomes more and more in line with the use that people are making of their Oyster card per week. If you cap the one-day usage at about one fifth of the cost of weekly season, somebody travelling three days a week would pay about 60% of the cost of the weekly season as opposed to what it is now, which is about 80%. We think that is the best way forward.

Roger Evans (AM): That is quite an encouraging response actually, so thank you for that. Would it not be useful to actually have more flexible approach in cases like the one with the Northern line where TfL is trying to encourage people not to travel to reduce overcrowding? You could have a message which said to them, "If you do not travel on a couple of days of the week, we will rebate your ticket", and that would also be a good way to encourage those people to cycle or to walk instead as well.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): We are not encouraging people not to travel. This is the next big project. This is going to be something that will be fantastically beneficial for London: it is a big increase in capacity on the Northern line. It will be complete by the back end of next year. It will enable us, on the Northern line, to carry another 11,000 passengers and journey times will be cut by 18% as a result of the

investment that we are making in the Northern line. Obviously, I apologise to everybody who is experiencing inconvenience, just as I apologised a few years ago to everybody who was experiencing difficulties on the Jubilee, which we all remember, and the fury people had about weekend closures I well remember. But we have to make these changes if the Northern line is to have the future it needs. What we are trying to tell people is when we think the stations and the network will be most crowded and most busy so that they can make their decisions accordingly. We are not trying to debar them from using the line.

Roger Evans (AM): OK, thank you.

Darren Johnson (Chair): Thank you very much. The next question on the order paper in the name of Assembly Member Arbour on ambulance cancellations.

3950/2013 - Ambulance cancellations

[Tony Arbour](#)

Does the Mayor know how many calls for the provision of ambulances in London have been cancelled as a result of police turning up to an incident?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Thanks, Tony. The answer is I do not know. We do not have any specific evidence of ambulances being cancelled as a result of police turning up first, as it were. I think that is what you are asking about and, as I understand it from the London Ambulance Service, it does not downgrade calls as a result of police being on the scene. That is what I am told.

Tony Arbour (AM): OK. I make no apologies for returning to this one because I asked you about this at the last Question Time and you provided a written answer. In the month of September, police took people to hospital because ambulances were delayed. We are being informed and there is evidence on websites as well - I suppose it is a form of whistle-blowing - which says that the London Ambulance Service downgrade incidents once police are on scene, then at the end of the day the police become responsible for dealing with the incident. This is an important matter because I think that it affects the reputation both of police and the Ambulance Service when there appears to be a division of responsibility, creating a delay at the scene of an accident. If police have to wait for an ambulance to arrive because the Ambulance Service has downgraded the call, that means there is a substantial delay both to the person involved in the incident and to the police doing what is proper police work.

At the end of the day, Mr Mayor, what I want to put to you is that there really does need to be a protocol and perhaps some formal kind of joint working between the Ambulance Service and the police and indeed conceivably one should involve the Fire Service as well. Already it happens: at the Fire Service of course there is defibrillation equipment carried on fire engines. We know in the United States that people who work for the Fire Service in Los Angeles double up as ambulance people. Can I ask you, Mr Mayor, if you will see this question and the increasing reports there are of police having to do ambulance work as a catalyst for seeing that there is much more joint working but, more importantly, there is a protocol? I am very unhappy at reading on these websites and hearing from whistle-blowers that the police think the Ambulance Service is treating the Police Service as a substitute for their service. That cannot be right.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Right, I can see the anxiety. Plainly the London Ambulance Service and the police are in constant communication about their priorities. I will make sure, and obviously with your neighbour on your left, James [Cleverly, Chairman, London Fire and Emergency Planning Authority], and Victoria [Borwick], work is going on to see what we can do, what progress we can make to integrate the emergency services even further, so people can be confident that when a blue light turns up they are going to be helped by whoever they need. Work is certainly going on on that. I share your anxiety that people in need

of medical attention could be attended by people who are not qualified to do that. That is plainly what we must sort out.

Darren Johnson (Chair): Thank you very much. For the next question on the Leasehold Tenants' Association, I have been informed that is for a written answer now, so we will then move on to undercover policing in the name of Assembly Member Jones. A very brief answer again to this, because the Green group is running out of time.

4043/2013 - Undercover policing

Jenny Jones

Are you satisfied with the contradictory approach taken by the Metropolitan Police Service on undercover officers: telling the Assembly's Police and Crime Committee that the Metropolitan Police Service has always had a policy against officers having sex with targets, and their lawyers arguing in the High Court that undercover officers were authorised to have sex with targets?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Obviously Jenny is asking about romantic entanglements between police officers and their targets, so to speak, and undercover agents. There is plenty of fictional support for such an approach. I very much agree with what Sir Bernard Hogan-Howe [Commissioner, Metropolitan Police Service] has had to say about it and that is undercover officers should not target members of the public that way.

Jenny Jones (AM): Thank you. Will you urge the Metropolitan Police Service to make any abuse of that no-sex-with-targets rule a gross misconduct charge?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): You have heard what the Commissioner has had to say about it. I am sure that he takes it very seriously.

Jenny Jones (AM): I would like to point out there is no romance involved in this. There is absolutely no romance. It is use and abuse and I would say assault, so no romance.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): OK.

Darren Johnson (Chair): Thank you very much. The Green group is now out of time, so that concludes the questions. Can we thank the Mayor for his attendance today? You are now free to leave.

Can we then turn to Part B of the item and can I formally move the motion that the Assembly notes the answers to the questions asked? There is an amendment being circulated in the name of Assembly Member Pidgeon.

Can I call Assembly Member Pidgeon to move the amendment to the motion in my name?

Caroline Pidgeon MBE (AM): Thank you. I just want to move this very briefly. I think given the number of points that were raised from all sides in this Chamber today following the spate of tragic deaths of cyclists on London's roads, it is really important that we actually have some hard facts come to the Transport Committee in December, looking at the action plan for dealing with some of the problems on CS2 and the other Cycle Superhighways. I feel it is really important that we do not lose the momentum that we had built up two years ago, which perhaps has slipped, and it is really important if we can have this information for the Transport Committee. It deals with some of the concerns raised by Members cross-party today and I hope all parties in this Chamber can support this.

Darren Johnson (Chair): Thank you very much, and Assembly Member Biggs to second the amendment.

John Biggs (AM): I second it very briefly. I think there is a generic problem in Government, which is that things are done quite often in the first implementation very precisely and then they are rolled out en masse, in a mass production, and corners are cut. We have made serious mistakes with CS2. I am very clear about that. I think it is scandalous that so many people have lost their lives and there has not been urgent action. My private view is that suspending it to take away the signal that we are giving people that it is a safe road is something worth considering, but my colleagues have counselled against that. It is self-evident that things need to be done and that they need to be urgent measures. I want to throw into the note on this my anxiety that TfL have a bit of a stifling influence on this because they have too many conflicting producer interests. We need to have proper independent scrutiny of what happens in the design of cycle safety on our highways if we are seriously representing to people that they should feel safe on our roads.

Andrew Boff (AM): I would have been happy to second this, so certainly our group will be supporting this motion. It is arguable that the Mayor has kind of almost got there in his statements today about undertaking to review and improve the Cycle Superhighway network. I think the only distance we have to travel is the specific look at CS2, which I think the Assembly generally feels does need particular attention in order to boost public confidence more than anything. We are happy to support this.

Jenny Jones (AM): Thank you. I do support this and I welcome the urgency. I think it is very good bringing it in December and presumably something like this has already been formed in TfL. Could we also remember that pedestrians are not very well-served at the Bow Roundabout? I think that is an important part of the equation.

Darren Johnson (Chair): Thank you very much. Assembly Member Pidgeon, do you wish to respond?

Caroline Pidgeon MBE (AM): No.

Darren Johnson (Chair): Can we move to a vote on the amendment? Those in favour of the amendment in the name of Assembly Member Pidgeon, please show. That is unanimous. Those in favour of the motion, as amended, please show. Again, that is unanimous.