

**London Assembly (Mayor's Question Time) – 2 July 2014
Transcript of Agenda Item 5 – Questions to the Mayor**

2014/2300 - Safeguarding children

Caroline Pidgeon

What are you doing to better safeguard children who go missing from care who are at risk of exploitation from gangs and groups in London?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Thank you, Caroline. I know you have done a study and some work into this and I am grateful to you for highlighting a very important issue. Children who go missing from care are a very vulnerable group. We think they numbered about 261 between January 2012 and August 2013 in London, so slightly over 250 a year, perhaps, going missing.

What we are doing is working with a body called Missing People that helps to tackle this problem. More particularly, the police have introduced 20 Missing Persons Coordinators whose responsibility it is to identify these vulnerable missing young people who go missing on more than one occasion and to do whatever we can to make sure they are not victims of crime or getting involved in crime.

Caroline Pidgeon MBE AM: It is acknowledged that even after the Rochdale and Oxfordshire scandals, thousands of children are still at risk of child sexual exploitation by gangs and groups and that runaways, as you have mentioned, are especially vulnerable. The Office of the Children's Commissioner identified 16,500 children nationally at risk. In April I produced a report that showed in 2012 and 2013 around 930 looked-after children went missing from the care of London boroughs, so I really think this is a serious and growing problem that needs to be addressed.

I wonder if you will ask the London boroughs to take action on this important issue at your next Congress of Leaders meeting.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Yes, I will certainly raise it with councils and they are primarily responsible for this issue. I know you have written to virtually every council asking about the number of missing young people they have on their lists. One of the things we are doing, is working with the multi-agency safeguarding hubs (MASHs) to make sure that everybody - social services, health, police, the borough - has knowledge of the families that are particularly vulnerable and from which these kids are most likely to come.

Caroline Pidgeon MBE AM: OK, but we are talking about looked-after children who are in the care of local authorities. There is a growing acknowledgement and awareness about child sexual exploitation and looking at the children in care is a real issue. Evidence also shows that

only about 35% of safeguarding boards across the country have properly analysed and developed a picture of local child exploitation.

Will you commit to commissioning a specific piece of work led by the Mayor's Office for Policing and Crime (MOPAC) with the London Safeguarding Children Board, of which MOPAC is a member, to analyse and develop a real picture of the problem in London and what needs to be done?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Yes, I am very happy to do that. As you know, MOPAC is already working with the London Safeguarding Children Board to refresh the guidance on safeguarding children affected in this way. So far, it would be fair to say they have been looking more at children being dragged into gangs than at the risk that you specifically identified. You are really talking about children being vulnerable to sexual abuse and we are certainly very happy to look at that as well.

Caroline Pidgeon MBE AM: A huge amount of child exploitation is linked to gangs and serious youth violence. I mentioned Rochdale and Oxfordshire. I welcome that you say that you will do that piece of work because your recent strategy only mentioned gang strategy and child sexual exploitation twice, so it is an area where you need to do some more work.

In April, the Metropolitan Police Service Assistant Commissioner for Specialist Crime and Operations, Mark Rowley, told the Assembly that 3,000 London children could be at risk of abuse or other mistreatment and that requires police intervention. Evidence shows, however, that half of all police forces have identified a lack of resources in being able to offer appropriate support to children and young people who are at risk of sexual exploitation.

Will you review your resources and ensure the Metropolitan Police Service (MPS) has the appropriate level of both funding and officers available to tackle this problem?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Absolutely. As you know, Stephen Greenhalgh [Deputy Mayor for Policing and Crime] and Blair Gibbs [Principal Advisor, MOPAC] have written about this issue in some detail recently. I am more than happy to put them in touch with you about what they are proposing to do.

Caroline Pidgeon MBE AM: Reviewing the resources is essential to make sure that, if you need to, you put additional resources in to tackle this problem.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Absolutely.

Andrew Boff AM: Mr Mayor, I welcomed the question from Caroline Pidgeon with regard to children who go missing when in care and the practical measures that boroughs can take to prevent this from happening. In meeting with the Congress of all the boroughs, can you ask them to make themselves familiar with the practical steps as a result of my report, *Shadow City*, that are taking place amongst three London boroughs - Southwark, Lambeth and Croydon. These seek to look at the social work caseload of those three boroughs and share information between each other with a mind to identifying human trafficking, including sexual exploitation.

This is not just in order to protect those people but to provide intelligence to the police so they can identify the perpetrators. I would ask you to spread that message when you are amongst borough leaders of these practical steps being taken in these boroughs to end the scourge of human trafficking in London.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Yes, certainly. What you are really asking is if we can get the message across to the boroughs that they look not just at what Caroline [Pidgeon] has done but also at what you have done in your report, *Shadow City*. I am more than happy, Andrew, to do that. Thanks for what you have done.

Andrew Boff AM: Thank you. I do urge you and other Members to keep an eye on what is going on in Lambeth, Southwark and Croydon. It is a pilot scheme for a way forward because, actually, London is possibly too big an entity to understand what is happening about trafficking at a local level and a borough is possibly too small an entity. Consortia of boroughs working together to share information and with all the problems that shared information has, including all the agencies - police, social workers, teachers, as well as non-governmental agencies (NGOs) working in the field of trafficking - really is the only way forward, as far as I can see, for solving this problem. I would urge you to urge other boroughs to look at that pilot scheme.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I certainly shall and I am grateful to you for the work you have done in this field. I know you have a question later on about slavery and I will be sure to make that point to borough leaders about your report.

2014/2415 - Labour market inequality

[Fiona Twycross](#)

Are you concerned by inequality in London's labour market?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Yes, I am concerned about labour market inequality in this city and we are trying to address some of the problems with the London Living Wage, which has so far proved successful in the sense that there has been a big expansion in the number of firms that are paying it.

It is also totally wrong that in London we still have 20% of 16 to 24-year-olds unemployed at the moment, in spite of the boom we are seeing in the London jobs market and the huge number of jobs we are creating. That is an inequality that we should be trying to address. We are trying to solve it through the apprenticeship scheme and through the HeadStart scheme that we are pushing now with Team London to get young people in this city a volunteering qualification. That always makes them much more employable and that is being taken up by a lot of businesses across the city.

I would, though, draw your attention to the broad background of what is going on at the moment, which is very striking and very positive. The number of jobs in London is at an absolute all-time high. Employment is at an all-time high at 5,432,000 jobs. In spite of what I said about young people not in education, employment or training (NEETs), those numbers are

now at a record low. Employment in London is now at a high we have not seen for 25 years. There are good things going on in the London job market and what we have to make sure is that young Londoners are able to get the jobs that London is creating.

Fiona Twycross AM: Absolutely. I just wanted to talk a little bit about women in London because, looking at the statistics around London's labour market, despite some good news, they are suffering a triple whammy in relation to inequality in the labour market. Despite the overall rise in jobs in London, the number of women who are now unemployed has actually risen by 42% since 2008 while male unemployment has fallen by 2%. The pay gap between men and women in similar roles is increasing, with women still much more likely to be in low-paid work. What specific measures have you carried out to reverse this particular trend in London?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): We support all measures that are currently in place to prevent women being discriminated against in their place of work and it is obviously right that women should be paid the same as men. That is enshrined in our law. Wherever people deviate from that or fail to adhere to that, it is a matter that we think is unacceptable. We certainly lend our support to those who are fighting such injustices and inequalities.

Fiona Twycross AM: There is a slight difference between lending support and doing things actively, however. I was privileged earlier this year to meet two of the women who fought for equal pay at Ford among the machinists at Dagenham.

What would you say to them about the chances that their granddaughters and women in London generally have, who still do not have equal pay today? What specific measures will you undertake to push this agenda forwards? It is going backwards at the moment.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): As I say, it is absolutely vital that this protection for women in the workforce is enshrined in law. The statute is very clear. It is both at a national and indeed at a European level. There can be no deviation from it. If there are particular cases of injustice at Ford in Dagenham that you would like my help with, I am more than happy to do what I can.

Fiona Twycross AM: That is historic. It is about what is happening now and the things that organisations from the Fawcett Society to *Grazia* magazine are highlighting as real issues now for women with the pay gap increasing.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Are you saying the Ford issue is now historic?

Fiona Twycross AM: It was 40-odd years ago that they fought for equal pay, so in that sense, yes, it is a historic campaign. What people are campaigning for now is to reduce the growing income gap between men and women, which is an issue that is quite shameful, not just here in London but across the country. What is your Enterprise Panel doing specifically on pay for women in London?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Sorry, I misunderstood you just now. I thought there was some particular case of inequality in pay that you wished to highlight.

Fiona Twycross AM: It was 40 years ago. It is still happening now.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): That would be, frankly, the most useful way forward. What we need to do is to be quite forensic about this and to isolate cases of manifest injustice and to make a fuss about them. I am more than happy to join you, Fiona. You mentioned some evidence from *Grazia* or another publication. If there is some substance there and if there are some cases in London where we can isolate discrimination against women in the workforce, then I am more than happy to do that.

Fiona Twycross AM: There are particular sectors, so the creative sector, the medical sector and so on, for example.

If I can move on to another issue around income inequality which is particularly linked to those who are on zero-hours contracts. Nationally, there are 1.4 million people, according to the Office for National Statistics, who are currently employed on zero-hours contracts. I know previously you have stated your support for people being on zero-hours contracts rather than being unemployed, but on average they earn just half that of those on more conventional contracts. It is around £236 a week compared to £482. For those people, there is an issue around their pay.

Do you have a current estimate for the number of workers in London currently employed on zero-hours contracts?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I would be very happy to get you any statistics we have on that. What I can say about low pay generally and zero-hours contracts is that the evidence I am hearing now is they can be OK and in some cases perhaps, you have to be a little bit cautious about the way they are being used. My thinking on this has evolved, as it often does. I have been talking to some business leaders who are concerned and who share your concerns and the concerns that Members have raised about zero-hours.

That is not to say that I think we should have a blanket ban on them. As I have said before in this place, it is much, much better to get people into work and to get young people into a place of work and teach them what it is to be an employee than for them to be languishing on benefits and not getting the confidence they need. Apprenticeships, the schemes that we are pushing forward and the success we are having in getting many young people in London into work is the way forward. I would much rather see people at a desk in the company of others in a workplace environment than losing the momentum and out of work.

Fiona Twycross AM: It is about young people, but it is not just about young people. I recently hosted a roundtable discussion on zero-hours, which did include businesses as well as employer and employee representatives. There is a staggering amount of consensus about the need to reform zero-hours contracts. I am coming at it from the rights of workers --

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Yes, I understand.

Fiona Twycross AM: -- but there are also issues around productivity and skills. If you have people who are only working 10 or 15 hours a week, not only are they not able to access the benefits that they would be entitled to if they were working a bit more, but they are basically not economically productive for those hours.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I understand that completely. Can I make a proposal, Fiona, on these concerns about how zero-hours contracts may be operating? I propose that you take it up with Kit [Malthouse AM, Deputy Mayor for Business and Enterprise] and we have a look at what we can do through the London Enterprise Panel (LEP) to give further advice about this. I am starting to receive mixed messages.

Fiona Twycross AM: OK. Thank you.

Joanne McCartney AM: I am glad that you said that you want to do all you can to stop discrimination against women in the workplace and you will be familiar today with the case of Firearms Officer Carol Howard, who has just won her case on both sex and race discrimination against the MPS. That is very close to home for you because you, of course, have oversight of the MPS as Chair of MOPAC. The tribunal found her claims were well-founded.

Perhaps even more worrying is that it found that in the MPS, when there was a fairness-at-work complaint and if a finding of discrimination was made and the officer had made a claim to an employment tribunal, there seemed to be a retrospective policy of deleting all references to that in the internal report so that it would not be disclosed in the legal proceedings that would follow. That seems to me to be extremely worrying and in fact an appalling practice. Would you agree with me in that assessment?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I was very dismayed to read the account this morning of the findings in respect of Carol Howard. There is no doubt that there are lessons to be learned and certainly we in MOPAC will be taking it up with the police to make sure that all the comments of the tribunal, which I agree do raise serious concerns, are properly addressed.

Joanne McCartney AM: We need to go further than that because my colleague Andrew Dismore has done some digging on this over the past few months. In a Freedom of Information response to him, the MPS has said that internally there have been 34 employment tribunal claims that had an allegation of racial discrimination. Out of the 34, 30 were settled by the MPS. It does imply that the MPS accepts in those cases there had been some element of truth.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I would not be so sure about that.

Joanne McCartney AM: Yet in those, it appears that only one officer had a first written warning, so it may be that this is --

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Let us be totally clear. It is a bit difficult to draw generalisations from this case. We live in an environment where, as everybody knows, in

tribunal proceedings it is customary now to slap in all sorts of grounds for grievance. That is just part of the way things work.

Joanne McCartney AM: Actually, it is very strict at the moment and the complainant has to pay now.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): It is often cheaper, I am afraid, for the defending party simply to settle. That is a fact of life in today's system of government. I am not necessarily convinced that in the act of settling these cases the MPS has necessarily conceded the absolute truth of all the allegations. I am not convinced of that and that would be a false conclusion to draw.

I am concerned about this particular case. I am concerned about the tribunal's findings and I will certainly want to get to the bottom of it.

Joanne McCartney AM: The reason for raising those 34 is that the tribunal found that in Ms Howard's case there was a practice of redacting and taking out, in effect falsifying an internal document, because that is what it amounts to. If someone has found there has been discrimination and they are told to take it out, in my mind, it is falsifying a document.

If there are 34 other cases that have gone to a tribunal, it is incumbent upon you to review those cases and to check that in those 34 cases the same practice did not go on as well. Will you commit to do that today?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Yes, certainly. We need to get to the bottom of what has been going on in such cases. I repeat what I said to the Committee just now. I am dismayed by this case.

Joanne McCartney AM: Mr Mayor, could I ask you to actually make sure that something is set up immediately so there is some element of independence in this review, whether it is MOPAC or your ethics panel or whatever, and to do it with utmost urgency?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I agree very much with the sentiment, Joanne. We will discuss the best way forward.

Jennette Arnold OBE AM (Deputy Chair): I want to go back to the London labour market's inequality. It is a subject that we have discussed previously and it is an area that was highlighted in your Education Inquiry report in 2012. It is the fact that ethnic minority graduates find it harder to find employment than their white British peers.

If we are going to be forensic about this and stay specific, I have some figures for you. If you were to look at some figures that came out of a Deloitte report and also figures from a Manchester University report, they show for instance that if you took the white population with degrees as a benchmark, you would find 26%. Not far behind that, let me just pick the Pakistani community out because I represent one of the largest groupings of Pakistanis in my constituency. They are 24% in the population with degrees. Then, when you look at

unemployment, you will find that for the white British group is 6%, whereas if you look at Pakistanis it is something like 12% and rising.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Absolutely. I am concerned about this, Jennette, and it is something we are trying to dig into and try to see what is really going on in the London labour market. It is very interesting and we need to be active. As I said to Fiona, we need to be getting young Londoners into work and, actually, Londoners of all ages into work.

It is an amazing thing that in the London construction industry at the moment, 60% of jobs are being taken by non-UK nationals, most of them, as you know, from other European Union (EU) countries. As I have said many times in this place, it is a mark of the strength of this economy that we attract talent from overseas. However, when we have 19,000 vacancies in the construction sector alone, you have to ask yourself what is going wrong in our schools and in our further education (FE) system that is not skilling up our kids to take the jobs that are going. That is a subject of real concern to me.

Jennette Arnold OBE AM (Deputy Chair): The evidence is there and shows, even when they are skilled-up, there is still seemingly what has been termed an 'ethnic penalty'. In 2013 you were in this Chamber and you spoke to a Black History Month event with young graduates and black businesses. You said then, much as you have said today, that we need to do something. What one tangible action have you endorsed regarding black and ethnic minority graduates and their current situation?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): The best thing we can do is, in an impartial but dynamic way, help young Londoners to get the opportunities that are available to them. There are huge numbers of jobs being created in this city.

We need to be frank and realistic with young people in this city that these jobs need not be seen always as an end but a stepping stone. They are a beginning. They are something to get their foot on the ladder of employment. If I am going to be totally frank, I worry that sometimes they are not seen in that way by young Londoners and they are seen as jobs that somebody else could be doing. These are fantastic jobs with huge opportunities and there is no reason why people growing up in this city should not get them.

Jennette Arnold OBE AM (Deputy Chair): That could be misinterpreted as you putting the blame at the feet of the graduates and that they do not take opportunities. There are tangible barriers, especially when you look at black and ethnic minority graduates. They do not have access to the networks. They do not have access to where the deals are being done around dinner parties that people like you frequent.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): We are talking about two slightly different things here.

Jennette Arnold OBE AM (Deputy Chair): No, it is about those barriers and what they are. Can we identify them? Can you do a specific programme like the work you are doing with apprentices? Should there be something that we are doing? Is there a call to do something? Would you support the call to look?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I would be. Sorry, I think we are talking at slightly cross-purposes and that is my fault. There is the general problem of London creating huge numbers of jobs which are not going to Londoners and then there is the specific problem you have hit on, Jennette. What about black graduates who have plenty of ideas and plenty of ambition who somehow are not getting the jobs they would like? That is a knotty problem --

Jennette Arnold OBE AM (Deputy Chair): Can you commit to doing something?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): -- and I would be very happy to see what I can do to help and to work with you to try to unknot it. I am not saying we are going to have all the answers, but we should certainly be looking at it.

Valerie Shawcross CBE AM: Can I just raise with you the issue of labour market inequality and the pay differentials within one of your organisations, Transport for London (TfL)? It looks, according to the current figures, as if the ratio of the highest to the lowest paid within TfL is over 22, so the highest paid is earning more than 22 times the lowest paid in the organisation.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Are you certain of that?

Valerie Shawcross CBE AM: That was from the 2014 Annual Report. My point is that I am concerned that what is going on with the imposition of performance-related pay, to the pay bands 1, 2 and 3 - so the bulk of TfL employees - is actually going to polarise that situation and increase the inequality within TfL. Is that something you are aware of? Have you looked at that?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I will certainly have a look at what you are saying and I will certainly want to dig into the 22 times ratio that you mention. I do not think you should have huge multiples of that scale in any organisation. We do not have them, for instance, at the GLA. One of the difficulties in running a vast transport network in a world city is that you need to have the best people in the world. That was a point that in your previous incarnations you considered yourself.

Valerie Shawcross CBE AM: My point is not that TfL and Crossrail have 13 people earning more than £250,000 at all. My point is that about 50% of TfL staff are likely now to be suffering a five-year pay freeze and the imposition of a performance-related pay system, as opposed to what they have had so far, which is an incremental pay system. That will mean that they will, over time, have a pay cut to their prospects.

Most significantly, there is going to be a big impact on their future pensions. If you have somebody within the pay grade 2 band, who is earning about £40,000 a year and who is in their early 50s, under the new arrangements that TfL is seeking to impose, they are going to take something like a 25% hit to their pension prospects. Instead of retiring at 65 on a pension of, say, £31,000, they are going to be retiring on a pension of £24,000.

Are you saying to me and is TfL's management saying to us that they believe the bulk of TfL staff are currently overpaid and that their pensions are too large? It is a huge hit for a workforce to take.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I will just point out that a pension of £24,000 represents more than the average wage in this country, so it is not a bad pension to have, even if it is subject to the reduction that you describe.

We will, of course, look at everything we can and look at the conditions of employment of everybody at TfL, but it is reasonable and Londoners would expect there to be some element of performance-related pay. They would expect the city to be run in that way. The results of what TfL employees have achieved over the last few years are very obvious to Londoners.

Valerie Shawcross CBE AM: That is correct and you, amongst others, praise TfL staff for their performance during the Olympics.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I do.

Valerie Shawcross CBE AM: They are often in difficult and complex situations. They took on contracts where they expected a certain pay structure. They expected a certain level of pensions. What is going on now is a profound undermining of the expectations of thousands and thousands of TfL staff.

Can I urge you not just to look at what the impact is going to be on those individuals and on future recruitment and retention of TfL staff, but also to look at what the impact is going to be on labour market inequality within TfL? You can bet your bottom dollar that, like all the organisations within the TfL family, it is women and ethnic minority employees who tend to be at the bottom of the pay ladder and it tends to be older white men at the top of the pay ladder. I would urge you to examine that closely.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Yes. We are certainly examining that closely and all policies have to do equalities impact assessments and all the rest of it, as you would expect. I would say - and I think Londoners would appreciate this - that TfL is a very good employer. It has excellent terms and conditions of work, not least free travel for spouses and partners of TfL employees and friends. There are many, many benefits to being a TfL employee. The salaries are generally held in the industry to be good and they are engaged in very good work for the city. I will certainly look at what you say.

Valerie Shawcross CBE AM: Mr Mayor, I have no doubt that the 326 staff in TfL who earn over £100,000 at the moment think that TfL is a jolly good employer. I would put it to you that a lower-paid staff member on £24,000 or £25,000 does not think TfL is a good employer if it is going to pull the rug out from under their pension mid-career.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): If you are going to accuse TfL of being a bad employer, Val, you need really to produce chapter and verse. That is not the evidence I have. They are a great employer.

Andrew Boff AM: Mr Mayor, it appears to me from your comments that you have been taken in a little by that nonsense peddled by the book *The Spirit Level* [*The Spirit Level: Why Equality is Better for Everyone* - Richard Wilkinson and Kate Pickett]. Could you tell me which is your priority: to end substantial pay differentials or to end poverty?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I completely agree with you, Andrew, that the priority has to be to end absolute poverty and that is one of the many things we are attempting to do.

I also think, however, that it is not in the long run healthy for a society to have people who have incomes many, many times those of other people but who do not have any sense of engagement with wider society. That is where I come in on this. I do not mind that London has more billionaires than anywhere else on the planet. We have 72 billionaires in London, according to the *Evening Standard*. I am perfectly happy to have billionaires in London. I just think they should be engaged in the city and they should be committing their millions and their billions to good works around London.

Andrew Boff AM: Thank you very much, Mr Mayor. I thought you were backsliding then from your previous comments.

Could I also ask that in the meetings between Mr Malthouse and Ms Twycross concerning zero-hours contracts we also take into account that the Government is currently consulting on ending exclusivity of zero-hours contracts because it does view them as a definite problem? Could you also take into account the 62 Londoners on zero-hours contracts who are employed by Labour Members of Parliament (MPs)?

Can we move on to some serious inequality issues concerning the plight of many Latin American women? They are in many ways the invisible minority in London and are employed by some London hotels for effectively below minimum wage because their contracts are expressed by the rooms they clean rather than paid by the hours they work. How would you view reputable London hotels effectively exploiting some of the weakest in London society - and I mean Latin American women, who are invisible to all intents and purposes - in the catering and hospitality industry?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I would not say they are invisible. I am against discrimination against any group of people, whether they are Latin American women or anybody else. I do not see why Latin American women should be less visible than anybody else. They seem perfectly corporeal to me.

I am in favour of the London Living Wage. We have tried very hard to get the retail, catering and hospitality industry to adopt it. We are making glacial progress with them, but we are making much faster progress with others.

Andrew Boff AM: While there is a law - and one might debate about whether it is a good law or a bad law - about the minimum wage, do you support the idea that it should at least be enforced?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I do. The law should always be enforced.

Andrew Boff AM: Good. If I were to present to you a list of hotels that were effectively exploiting people for less than the minimum wage, is that something you would progress?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): It would be of interest to the police, rather than me.

Andrew Boff AM: Indeed. Thank you very much.

Fiona Twycross AM: I just wanted to clarify that just because there is an article on *LabourList* that implies it is a common practice among Labour MPs, that I would personally find it acceptable. I do not find it an acceptable practice, which I have been raising it. None of us do. We do not find it acceptable amongst MPs of any party. Thank you.

2014/2393 - TfL buses hospitalising Londoners

[Richard Tracey](#)

We congratulate TfL on its receptiveness to our recommendations around transparency by publishing more data regarding bus safety. However, we notice that approximately one person has been hospitalised a day due to a collision with a TfL bus in the first quarter of 2014. Could you provide some previous figures to provide context around this information?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Thanks, Dick. Thank you for all the work you have been doing in this area. What has been happening is that the number of people who have been killed or seriously injured (KSIs) as a result of a collision with a bus or a coach has more than halved since 2000 to 195 KSIs on London's roads in 2013. The number of bus passengers has more than halved since 2000. The number of pedestrians - those outside the bus - has gone down to 69, which is the lowest level on record.

It is very interesting if you look at the statistics for the last few years. For pedestrians who have come into contact with a bus, they are 2,434, 2,541, 137, 147 and 133. It drops dramatically in 2009, 2010, 2011, 2012 and 2013. It has been coming down and down. Val [Shawcross] has raised the issue of TfL employees. That is a tribute to London's bus drivers who, in my view, are becoming more and more sensitive. They are very well trained and I applaud them for the alertness they generally show.

Yes, we could do better. Yes, there are black spots and I know you are worried about some of those black spots. You should look at the record. Look at the achievement of London's bus service, considering the huge number of journeys that are made by bus now, the huge crowding on our streets and the constant risks that pedestrians are running. That is a creditable achievement, though there is obviously more to be done.

Richard Tracey AM: It is good to hear the statistics you have pulled out of your briefing. However, TfL has just started producing statistics for bus casualties and hospitalisations in response to a report which my colleagues and I wrote a few months ago.

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

Richard Tracey AM: This is the first time that they have come out with these statistics and they are for the first quarter of 2014. What we would like to see is --

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): It is not. It is for the last ten years I have just given.

Richard Tracey AM: We would like to see, published on the website of TfL, far more detail. As you have just mentioned, I am very keen to see the hot spots particularly identified and see TfL and the boroughs take some action about those particular hot spots. At the moment, the boroughs do not know whether they have had more bus accidents or not and it is about time that they did.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): You are quite right, Dick. You can never be complacent about this. I just wanted to draw your attention to their good work. It would be wrong if we did not do something to congratulate and to praise those who are trying very hard to deal with what is a difficult problem. They are making progress. If you look at the KSI figures, there was one person killed or seriously injured for every 10 million bus journeys undertaken each year in London. That compares to one in every 1.8 million car journeys, so that is a much smaller ratio, and one KSI involving a motorcycle for every 100,000 journeys. Buses, by and large, have a pretty good record, but clearly there is more that could be done.

I go back to what I was saying the last time we met. We are now on target to meet our 40% reduction in the number of people killed or seriously injured on London's roads by 2020, on a 2005-2009 baseline.

Richard Tracey AM: I do not deny your recognition of the skill of the bus drivers. We have 7,500 buses on London's roads --

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): There are 8,500.

Richard Tracey AM: -- and a very large number of bus drivers having to negotiate through traffic and all the congestion --

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): And many more cyclists.

Richard Tracey AM: -- and many more cyclists, indeed. It is perfectly true that the bus drivers do often mention that very fact. I am sure you must agree that it would be very helpful to know where the particular hot spots in London are exactly so that action could be taken at those hot spots.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Victoria [Borwick] has done some excellent work on Oxford Street and, as I recall, the risks that pedestrians run in Oxford Street.

Richard Tracey AM: That is clearly one hot spot.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): The hot spots are pretty well known to us. If I can supply you with any detailed information, I would be more than happy to do that.

Richard Tracey AM: If you could ask TfL to give us more detail, we appreciate what they have given us but we could do with some more, and perhaps also if they would consider taking some action against any particular bus contracting companies that have a very bad record. This is something else that campaigners - including some who have actually been seriously injured - ask for.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Yes. If there is such evidence, I would be happy to share it with you. However, I just want to repeat the overall picture, which is very positive.

Darren Johnson AM: Will you agree to rewrite bus contracts to include casualty reduction as a performance target, so there is a financial incentive for bus companies to treat road safety more seriously?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): We have, as I have tried to point out just now, some pretty good processes in hand to ensure that bus drivers do have the training that they need. This is against a background of continuing reductions in the numbers of people killed or seriously injured. If there is some advantage in rewriting a contract, I am prepared to look at it, Darren.

Darren Johnson AM: Thank you. You will look at it?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I will look at it. I will make no further commitment than that.

Victoria Borwick AM: Whilst of course we should be extremely pleased to welcome that the figures are moving in the right way, three people a week are hospitalised because of contact with a bus. I am sure you would like to acknowledge to their families and others that it is a very traumatic situation, so I do not want us around this horseshoe to trivialise that, sadly, there are effects when this does happen.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Absolutely. We all know people whose families have been absolutely blighted by cataclysmic accidents involving buses and very often pedestrians who have been struck through absolutely no fault of their own. That is not universally the case, but what you say is very true and we should certainly reflect on that.

2014/2342 - Police spying on their critics

[Jenny Jones](#)

How many other people with no criminal record who have scrutinised or criticised the police are tracked in Metropolitan Police Service databases?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Your question arises from the extraordinary revelation that there was a file on you as a domestic extremist or something. I have to say I think that was an absolutely absurd view of that situation because there could be no one less extreme than you, in my view. You are a pillar of the establishment and more conservative than me in many ways. It is absolutely true. I looked at the pathetic things that were on your file and really, seriously, I thought it was wrong. I looked at what you said about it, which was that it was something to do with the tweets you had sent.

Your question is about how many other people with no criminal record appear on MPS databases and what we can do about this. It is a very serious and important issue because all kinds of people have their details recorded in one way or another by the MPS, whether they are victims of crime, witnesses or whatever. Inevitably, that is going to crop up and they will not, obviously, have a criminal record. Under freedom of information (FOI), they should be entitled to all details about what is held about them or upon them by the police.

What I can tell you in terms of the absolute figures I can give you is that the number of entries on the National Domestic Extremism and Disorder Intelligence Unit's database has been significantly reduced. It is down from 8,931 in May 2013 to around 2,500 at the moment. If anybody thinks, like Jenny, that they might be on this database, they are perfectly entitled under FOI to see whether they are one of the 2,500 or indeed to see what other data the police have about them.

Jenny Jones AM: Have you asked the police any questions about their domestic extremist database? For example, are members of [murder victim Stephen] Lawrence's family still on their database?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I have not made such inquiries personally. I am sure that there have been conversations within MOPAC about this. If there is anything we can share with you about that, we will be happy to do so.

Jenny Jones AM: I would be pleased because I actually met with the National Coordinator for Domestic Extremism. That is a MPS post, not somebody who organises domestic extremism. He is the top spy cop, as it were. I asked him about the reduction in the files and what criteria he used. He would not tell me. I asked him if I still had a file on the database. He would not tell me. It is very difficult to get any answers and I would be glad if you could ask him these questions. I would be very grateful. Are you allowed to know the criteria under which they reduced the number of files?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I am told that it was in line with their principles of management of police information and certainly I would need to know a bit more about why and how they make these decisions. I cannot give you that information now. If you have particular questions you want me to ask, then I am more than happy to do that, though I stress is it open to anybody as a citizen to do it themselves.

Jenny Jones AM: Interestingly, people from all political parties - well, most political parties - have actually asked me for that information about how to get their files, so the MPS is probably going to be swamped with demands.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I welcome that and I applaud it. It is the right way to do it.

Jenny Jones AM: Exactly, yes. Earlier this year, as you know, the police updated their 'domestic extremism' definition and I am just wondering if they have cleared out the database using that new definition, which of course involves serious criminality.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I would have to get back to you on that.

Jenny Jones AM: All right. If I send you a list of the things that I think ought to be public knowledge, you can ask them the questions and get the answers.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): No problems.

2014/2416 - Part-time Travelcards

[Valerie Shawcross](#)

Do you still expect to introduce part-time Travelcards in January 2015?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): The GLA Conservatives have successfully lobbied for part-time Travelcards and others have bobbed in their wake, such as you, Val, and I congratulate you on that. Yes, the deadline remains January 2015, which is what you were asking. The devil is a bit in the detail on how we are going to do it. All I can say is it will be done.

Valerie Shawcross CBE AM: All right. In order to do it in January 2015 - and we are all really happy that it is going to happen and it has cross-party support and Caroline [Pidgeon] has done a lot of work on this - what we need is an announcement of what the mechanism and what the level of fares will be sometime in the autumn. Will you be in a position to announce the new arrangements in October?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I am always in a good position to announce whatever I need to announce. By January 2015, we should be able to do it. I do not know when in the autumn it will be.

Valerie Shawcross CBE AM: It is not just the part-time workers because you do get a magnificent discount for having an annual season ticket. It is not just the part-time workers who are not able to benefit from that level of discount and pay a much higher fare. Of course, it is the zero-hours workers who we were talking about earlier on and in many ways it is even more difficult for them because they do not have predictable working hours - or working days, even - at all. If you are a zero-hours worker and you have to use the daily pay-as-you-go

Oyster card, for zone 1 to 4 you are going to be paying £10.60, whereas the season ticket travellers are paying less than half of that for the same journey. They are paying £4.98.

When your part-time Travelcard is announced, will it be a mechanism that will also benefit irregular hours workers like zero-hours workers?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I am afraid you are just going to have to contain your impatience a bit because those are the sorts of questions that we are looking at now and I am not in a position to announce any detail.

Valerie Shawcross CBE AM: Mr Mayor, can I just encourage you to put your foot on the gas? Here it is in July. Lots of people are going to disappear off on holidays.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): You are not going to get anything before you go away on holiday.

Valerie Shawcross CBE AM: You need to make the announcement in the autumn in order that the ticket machines, on which you now are increasingly relying, can be amended and adjusted and the ticketing products advertised, marketed, etc.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): You need to have no fears on that, Val.

Valerie Shawcross CBE AM: Do you think you will have announced it by the beginning of November?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): We will certainly have made all the relevant announcements in good time to implement the plan, as I have said, for January 2015.

Richard Tracey AM: Mr Mayor, I am pleased you mentioned that excellent piece of work, which of course was presented by our Chairman, Roger Evans.

It did talk at some length about the whole idea of what we would call 'flexible commuting'. We have launched a survey over a 90-day period, which is running now and which the public can get on to through the website www.flexiblecommuting.com to give their views. We have had so far a lot of support for this, which I will hope you note. It just shows that your thinking and your policies are obviously receiving acclamation.

I would also add that of course there are models in different parts of the world. There is a place called Paris where they do have a *billet* system where people can buy --

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): A *billet*? That is a ticket.

Richard Tracey AM: I think it is a *carte*. You probably know it well from your many visits to Paris. There are, indeed, these models which we can work up.

Richard Tracey AM: Flexible commuting is what the public should be looking at.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Yes, it is. Yes, but before we endlessly invite the public to comment on new ways in which their tickets can be made cheaper, do not forget there are costs for other groups. If you favour one particular group of travellers, then you put pressure on other parts of the fares package, so you have to bear that in mind.

Caroline Pidgeon MBE AM: I am sure this part-time Travelcard is going to claim as many creators as the bike hire scheme seems to have, but some of us have had it in our manifesto for the last few elections, so we have it on record.

I welcome the fact that you are doing lots of detailed work on this. Could I urge you, rather than just announcing this as part of your fares package - which I hope will be a lot earlier than 3 December, which it was last year - that you consider doing a specific campaign around this to promote the benefits not just for people who work part-time, but also for those who want to cycle or perhaps walk to work one or two days a week?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I am happy to look at that. With new technology and with the ability to use swipe-cards that we have now - and we will be moving increasingly to that, not just Oyster cards but bankcards - it may be that much more sophisticated ticketing models will become possible. We are certainly looking at it.

Caroline Pidgeon MBE AM: Brilliant. Thank you. There was a very interesting article in the *Standard* yesterday Lucy Tobin [Senior News Feature Writer, *London Evening Standard*] had written, which showed that only 10% of people travelling around benefit from the cap that they get from having an annual Travelcard. Obviously, those people who cannot afford to pay upfront cash really struggle. Promoting this scheme is going to benefit far more people than we could ever have imagined.

Given that you have taken on board this idea, will you also look into the other proposals I had come up with that would make fares fairer for Londoners, both early-bird fares to help those who travel early in the morning and also one-hour bus tickets?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): We do already have differential fares depending on the time of day. The difficulty with a one-hour bus ticket and accentuating the early-bird structure is of course that there are swings and roundabouts. If you give money away with one hand, you are going to have to take it with the other. You need to think about that.

Caroline Pidgeon MBE AM: Will you look at these options again?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): They are always being kept under constant review.

Caroline Pidgeon MBE AM: Will we expect the detail of them in your fares information when you make your fares decision?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): You will get a very full account of where we are in the fares announcement, whenever it comes.

2014/2385 - Fire prevention in recycling facilities

[James Cleverly](#)

What action will the Mayor take to support the London Fire and Emergency Planning Authority's calls for better fire prevention in recycling and waste management facilities?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I certainly think that the London Fire and Emergency Planning Authority (LFEPA) is right to highlight this issue and I congratulate you, James, on the attention you have drawn to this problem. Recycling is vital for London and most recycling facilities do a fantastic job. We should stress that.

There is, however, clearly a big problem when you have quite so many fires in some recycling centres. It is absolutely absurd. I was looking at the figures here. There is one particular place where they have had 23 separate fires since December 2011 and 17 fires in the last 12 months and that has cost about £650,000 to the London Fire Brigade (LFB). There is clearly a problem there. It is absolutely ludicrous to have that level of fires.

James Cleverly AM: Thank you, Mr Mayor. You were right to highlight that there are many, many companies and the vast majority of companies working in this arena do so professionally and effectively. As a former Chairman of the London Waste and Recycling Board (LWARB) - and Dick [Tracey] and I have discussed this in his capacity as Chairman of LWARB - I would be very keen to put on record the fact that this is an incredibly important industry both in London and nationally and the vast bulk of operators in this sector do a very, very professional job. However, it is, as you say, the sad truth that a small number of less professional operators have caused a disproportionately negative impact on the London Fire Brigade in particular and on London in general.

One of my concerns is that they are actually damaging the reputation of what is a very important sector. As you know, the London Fire Brigade is in the process of agreeing a national memorandum of understanding with the Environment Agency to give us a bit more protection on this. Will you add your support and pressure to the Environment Agency to sign and finalise that memorandum of understanding as quickly as possible?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Yes. It is absolutely right that there should be such a memorandum of understanding (MOU) about the fire code of practice in the waste sector. The faster we can sort this out the better, though we should also be casting the spotlight pretty aggressively on some of the areas where it seems to be going wrong. We should be asking ourselves and, indeed, asking the companies concerned quite why they are having such a high incidence of fire.

James Cleverly AM: If I could turn to the specific location that you mentioned, the Waste4Fuel site in my own constituency - which, as you say, has had an estimated cost impact

on the LFB of some £650,000 over the last few years - the LFB prosecuted this particular company. The company pleaded guilty and was ordered to pay the maximum fine that we can put forward under the regulatory fire safety Act [the Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005], which is £1,000. The simple truth of the matter is that that is not a substantial enough fine to deter some of the less professional operators.

Would you support me in calls to give the LFB and the Environment Agency more teeth in terms of taking these kinds of organisations to task? When it costs Londoners £650,000 and the company gets fined £1,000 plus costs, as you can see, there is a massive differential there.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Are you suggesting, James, that there is a financial incentive in some of these cases for these outbreaks of fire?

James Cleverly AM: I need to be very careful not to imply that there is anything more going on than we can prove. However, the simple truth of the matter is that with scrap - particularly scrap metal - prices being as high as they are, a maximum fine of £1,000 can very easily be factored into the ongoing running costs of an operation. I will work this through the Fire Authority, but my personal view is that whilst the maximum fine is only £1,000, it provides no disincentive to unprofessional and dangerous behaviour by some of the rogue operators in this sector.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I am very happy to support you in that. If we can get a way of getting a proper financial disincentive to outbreaks of fire that are costing us an awful lot, then we should do that.

James Cleverly AM: Thank you for your support.

2014/2406 - Electronic tagging

[Tony Arbour](#)

Following your 'sobriety' scheme whereby criminals convicted of serious drink-related offences were given electronic tags, what are your views on Dutch proposals where some prisoners who are electronically detained would be forced to search for and keep a job (and if an electronic detainee did not have a job then they will only be allowed to leave their residence for a maximum two hours per day) and if they were unable to do so would be forced to do community service?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): This follows from the sobriety scheme that we are launching in south London - Croydon, Lambeth, Southwark and Sutton - this month and it is going to run for a year. This is to try to reduce the incidences of alcohol-based violence and recidivist alcohol-based violence and crime of one kind or another by tagging people so we can detect whether they are consuming alcohol and breaking the terms of their agreement.

The Dutch proposal is more elaborate. It basically means they have a tag on them which detects whether they are in work or not and whether they are trying to get a job. I think I have that

right. As far as I can make out, this is to try to incentivise offenders to get work. It is not proceeding in Holland, as far as I understand it.

The best way to get offenders into work is through resettlement brokers and some of the programmes that we are supporting. They were clearly open to your ideas, Tony.

Tony Arbour AM: I am pleased to hear that. Really, what I want to do in relation to this is to discuss with you the efficacy of tagging at all. Currently, for an average sentence imposed by the courts for tagging over a three-month period, it costs something like £1,200 to tag someone. Over half of the people who are tagged break the rules which relate to tagging. Moreover, this is a really, really simple technology. There is a cartel of contractors. It not the police; it is this cartel which simply clips on the tag and receives a substantial payment. It is in excess of £1,000 for a period of three months.

What I would like to suggest you is, firstly, this is an old technology and, secondly, it is a very expensive technology. It is quite possible for the tags to have a global positioning system (GPS) so that you know exactly where the people are. There are infamous cases of tags being transferred to animals by the offenders. More importantly - and you may not be aware of this, Mr Mayor - the Government is proposing to substantially increase the amount of tagging as a way of --

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I thought tagging was cheaper than keeping people in prison?

Tony Arbour AM: It certainly is. However, if you allow me to expand on this, they want tagging because it is cheaper and non-custodial and is seen as a simple thing. The bill for tagging nationally is due to go up next year from £180 million to around £1 billion because of the large numbers of people that the Government wants to see tagged.

The point I am putting to you is - and this is where it relates to you being in charge of MOPAC - for the technology of tagging to be substantially altered, for example, to have GPS and the police to apply them themselves. The figure I have been given suggests that had the police operated the system rather than it be given to one or other of the operators of the cartel, it would have saved over the past decade or so, £800 million on a very small number of people who have been tagged.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): That is very interesting.

Tony Arbour AM: Given that the number of people who are due to be tagged because the Government wants this is going to increase six-fold, then those savings would be really very substantial indeed.

It may well be that the Dutch system is not as successful as one would have liked, but they are making sensible use, as you were seeking to do with your sobriety scheme of tagging. What I am asking is whether you would ask MOPAC to investigate (a) the efficacy of tagging and - this is something that I would rarely ask as a Conservative - (b) actually ask that the police take over

something from a private organisation because they can manifestly do it much cheaper than the private organisation.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): All right. What you want us to look at is the police doing the tagging and thereby doing it more cheaply than contracting it out?

Tony Arbour AM: Yes.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I think that is the gist. I am very happy to look at that. We will get you some answers, Tony, on that.

2014/2387 - Crossrail 2

[Steve O'Connell](#)

How optimistic are you that Crossrail 2 will open by 2029?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Crossrail 2 we think we can get in by 2029/2030. It is going to be one of the highlights of the London Infrastructure Plan which flows from the 2020 Vision.

Everybody who has studied the route will see what an amazing scheme it is. You could argue that the business case for Crossrail 2 is even better than the business case for Crossrail 1. You look at what it will do for southwest London, for Hackney, for the whole Lee Valley area. I was up there the other day looking at the scheme at Meridian Water. You could do even more fantastic developments on those Broomfield sites if you had Crossrail 2 in as well.

The next step on the timetable is to get the Government to safeguard the route by the spring of next year. That is what we are working on.

Steve O'Connell AM: Thank you very much, Mr Mayor. Yes, indeed, the case certainly in this building and elsewhere is made for Crossrail 2 and for the benefits it will give to London. Your point was a well-made one because the increase in the population of London is expected to be pushing past 10 million by 2029, which gives credence to your lobbying and wish to put it in your infrastructure piece.

You have mentioned one first milestone, which is probably early next year. Have you any ideas what other timetables of actions will be necessary for Crossrail 2 to open in 2029?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Yes, we would need to have the statutory powers by late 2017. TfL would need those. We need the consents and the funding package by 2019. The contract would be let by 2020 and we think it could be therefore open to the public by 2029. That is the timetable.

Steve O'Connell AM: You mentioned the funding package which is clearly key. How do you see that package being made up? It is a cocktail of funding measures.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): It was quite interesting that London First said that at least 50% of the cost of Crossrail 2 could be found from non-governmental sources. It is very important as we make the case for Crossrail 2 - and I hope we will be able to do it as collectively as possible - that we argue, as was done very effectively in the case of Crossrail 1, that this is jobs and growth for the whole country and is something that will benefit the whole of the UK and has a magnificent business case wherever you live.

Steve O'Connell AM: In only the last couple of days there have been comments from the Leader of the Opposition, and this is not about transport infrastructure, but about taking investment potentially out of London. I guess the case that you are making, and we are all making around this whole issue, is that for the country to be prosperous London needs to be prosperous.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Absolutely. It would be a disastrous miscalculation to think that you could somehow stimulate other parts of the country by depriving London of vital investment in transport infrastructure. I do not think that is a position that actually any party is currently adopting. To be fair to all parties, I do not think anybody is trying to say anything quite so foolish. It is very important that as Londoners we make the case to the rest of the country for the advantages of the transport infrastructure that we have for the whole of the UK. It is not just a question of satisfying London's population growth; it is also about making sure that London continues to be the motor of the UK.

Steve O'Connell AM: I think we all, across this whole issue, particularly get that. What is specifically exciting for us, and probably for Tony [Arbour], is the the advantages of moving towards southwest London and that is something that is welcome. Too often south London often loses out on large-scale infrastructure investment. We are delighted that southwest London would benefit.

I have lobbied for some time that indeed there is a stop at Worcester Park. There is an aspiration there whereby, if we deliver the tram to central Sutton we can have a strategic transport diamond linking Crossrail 2 to Worcester Park, the tram going into Sutton town centre and a fast bus service betwixt the two to give that infrastructure link. It is an aspiration, and I would ask you perhaps if you could put your muscle behind that as well.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I cannot confirm now that it will stop at Worcester Park but it is all to play for. The time is now, Steve. At the moment the stations are Clapham Junction and Tooting Broadway in Wandsworth, and in Merton they are Wimbledon, Raynes Park and Motspur Park.

Steve O'Connell AM: I do not want to go in to too much detail but Tony [Arbour] and I particularly agree that Worcester Park as a strategic destination would work better than Motspur Park for the reason I have just talked about. There will be others who will disagree about that. Before we start internecine warfare, all I would suggest is that Crossrail 2 is an excellent investment and I would ask you to look perhaps at the addition of Worcester Park as a potential stop.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): If the local authority is keen and is prepared to put a funding package together, then obviously that would make it easier.

Steve O'Connell AM: I will be lobbying the relevant council. Thank you, Mr Mayor.

Richard Tracey AM: Mr Mayor, of course the original talk was about 2033 and you have been very successful in bringing this down to 2029.

You have mentioned the advantages for the Upper Lee Valley and we have just heard about southwest London. However, are you confident that the Government understands the enormous benefits that Crossrail 2 would bring? I notice in your report you had lunch at Chequers on 15 June, so in between the lunch and the tennis did you impress upon the Prime Minister just how important this is?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): You can take it from me, unless I specifically tell you otherwise, that the subject of Crossrail 1, Crossrail 2, Crossrail 3 and Crossrail 4 are seldom off my lips whenever I meet either the Prime Minister, the Chancellor, the Secretary of State for Transport or indeed anyone else who might favour us with more investment in transport in London.

Steve O'Connell AM: Excellent, thank you.

Victoria Borwick AM: I just want to make a representation on behalf of the residents of Chelsea who, in the previous consultation, were 71% in favour of having Crossrail there. Certainly, as far as the council is concerned, we feel the opportunity of regeneration in that area would be significant. Inevitably there will be some time during the construction period when there will be havoc, but if we are here to improve London for our successors it is very important that we consider that particular part of Kensington and Chelsea. We, as a council, would favour a route that is as far as west as possible, although there are others who would favour a different course.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): The people of Chelsea do not actually want the Hackney-Chelsea line?

Victoria Borwick AM: We do.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): They just do not want it near them?

Victoria Borwick AM: Over 71% responded in favour. Inevitably, however, those who will be affected by the disruption during the construction are obviously extremely nervous. Nobody is disputing that. You have said it yourself, Mr Mayor, when you spoke on it. We all feel the long-term possibilities and benefits for the area would be very welcome.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): We will look very carefully and make sure that all disruption is minimised. I am sure the anxieties of your constituents will be fully taken into

account. If there is something we can do to improve the route to take account of those concerns, then obviously we should do that.

2014/2417 - Healthy workplaces

[Dr Onkar Sahota](#)

Given that his report London's Business Case for Employee Health and Wellbeing demonstrates the need to reduce workplace absence, what more can the Mayor do to support businesses reduce their employee sickness rates?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): You are asking about what we could do to reduce employee sickness rates. I will just give you a couple of things that work.

The first is the Living Wage. All the evidence is that has big benefits in reducing absenteeism. There has been a 25% fall in absenteeism in the companies that pay it. If you pay your workforce decently and you treat them well, they will turn up. They will feel committed. They will feel motivated. The second thing that also works well is the TfL active travel-to-work programme where employees are encouraged to either cycle or walk to and from work. That has reduced absenteeism by 27%, apparently, thanks to active employees feeling better about their lives and being full of serotonin and all the rest of it.

Dr Onkar Sahota AM: Mr Mayor, the London Healthy Workplace Charter has been in place for two years now and so far only 31 organisations have signed up. This means that only some 100,000 people are guaranteed healthy working environments out of nearly four million people working in London.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): No, 5.43 million. We have 5.43 million jobs now.

Dr Onkar Sahota AM: The point I am trying to make is that the majority of these people are not covered by the Healthy Workplace Charter.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): No, you are completely right.

Dr Onkar Sahota AM: Also, this means that the companies who are signing up are the big companies rather than the small companies. Is the scheme too complex for employers to sign up to or is it because it is voluntary that there is this poor uptake on it?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): You are quite right that the number of employees who are part of it is still 92,000, but it is growing the whole time, I am told. Twenty-two boroughs have signed up and we are trying to build it up at a local level. If you think it is too complex that is interesting and maybe there is something we can do to make it simpler.

Dr Onkar Sahota AM: The other thing of course is that I know that the GLA has just now reached the anti-standard of the scheme. Can you tell me whether the MPS and the Fire Brigade are part of this or not?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I cannot give you that information. I am sorry. I will give you all --

Dr Onkar Sahota AM: My information is they are not. Perhaps you will use your good offices to make sure that all the organisations that come under the mayoralty and the London Assembly are signing up to this.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Absolutely. I see no reason why they should not. I will get you some details on that.

Jenny Jones AM: Last week the Archbishop of York, [Dr John] Sentamu, published a report on the Living Wage. In that, he said that they found there were all sorts of benefits to the Living Wage but amongst those benefits was the fact that the sickness rate fell in the companies that were paying the Living Wage. I just wonder if you would agree to have another push to try to hit your target for getting people to sign up to the Living Wage.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Yes. I did make exactly that point, but it is a very good point and Archbishop Sentamu is quite right to make it. We think that the Living Wage helps to reduce absenteeism. It is one of the reasons we have had a 700% expansion in it, but it should go much further. It is a very sound Conservative policy to pay people decent wages.

Jenny Jones AM: Very good.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): That is why we support the scheme.

Jenny Jones AM: I am already concerned that your target is not demanding enough. In fact, even if you hit that target, only one in five big employers will be paying the Living Wage. That is something like only 0.03% of the businesses in London. It is bit of a feeble target. Therefore, as well as pushing towards that target, perhaps you would look at increasing it.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): It has increased dramatically in the last few years.

2014/2418 - Letting agents

[Tom Copley](#)

Do you agree with proposals to prevent letting agents charging administration fees to tenants?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): The important thing is that the fees should be fair and people should be upfront about the fees that they are charging. That is in the London Rental Standard. Some private rent providers such as Get Living London have already decided not to charge letting agent fees and that is just a function of the way the market is working. Organically, people are moving away from that. There is now a law in place. The Government has legislated to stop exorbitant and unexpected fees being charged. Letting agents are

required to put their fee structure upfront. There is an independent consumer redress scheme that they are all obliged to join.

I just point out that all these protections are far more than were put in in 13 years of Labour and it is absolutely vital and --

Tom Copley AM: Sorry, Mr Mayor, is this a very long-winded way of saying that, no, you do not think that letting agents should be banned from charging tenants fees?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): -- no, I am not in favour of --

Tom Copley AM: We have got there in the end.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): -- forbidding people by law from charging fees for services, any more than I am --

Tom Copley AM: You are in favour, I see, of transparency. Basically, are you saying that you are fine with tenants being fleeced as long as they know how much they are going to be fleeced in advance?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): No, we are not in favour of them being fleeced. I have outlined some of the ways in which we think that they can be protected from being fleeced, some of the statute that has been put in place and the transparency and publicity that they are obliged to give to the fees that they charge. One thing you cannot reasonably do in a free market economy is tell people who provide a service that they may not earn any fee, for instance.

Tom Copley AM: Your rental standard makes no reference at all to the level of fees. All you say is that the fees should be transparent. The wonderful guys that everyone loves at Foxtons charge £420 as an administration fee to new tenants and £210 just to change a tenant's name on the tenancy agreement. Do you think that is acceptable?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): As I say, provided the tenant is able to see what the fee is, the market should operate. At the moment, as you have seen, some private rented sector providers such as Get Living London have decided to charge no letting agent fees precisely in order to attract business. What we cannot do in a free market economy is tell people who do provide -- you provide a service to the people of London in the form of the interrogations you conduct here. You charge a fee for that, for turning up. As far as I am aware, you have a salary. It seems to me entirely reasonable that you should.

Tom Copley AM: They should be able to charge whatever they can get away with and you are fine with that, so long as people pay it?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): No, no. That is absolutely not the case.

Tom Copley AM: There we go. We have established that. That is fine. I can go to people and I can say the Mayor of London thinks that £420 as an administration fee just to move into a property is a good thing.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): No, as I have said that --

Tom Copley AM: You think it is a bad thing?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): -- spurious, unexpected or exorbitant fees are catered for in statute. If there is gouging or if people are being ripped off or charged huge fees for trivial advice or information, then there is a scheme that can prevent that.

Tom Copley AM: People watching will be quite clear that you think that a £420 administration fee is perfectly acceptable.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): No, I do not think that. I think it is --

Tom Copley AM: You do not think it is acceptable?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I think it is unacceptable.

Tom Copley AM: You think it is unacceptable? Good.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): It is unacceptable and I would be foolish if --

Tom Copley AM: Once again, you have identified something that is unacceptable but you do not advocate doing anything about it in law, which appears to be your habit.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I have given a pretty clear indication of what the consumer can do.

For instance, Andrew [Dismore AM] is a lawyer and he charges fees. His clients may feel his fees are ridiculous and that they are unfair. It would be wrong of me to try to legislate and to tell him that he may not charge --

Tom Copley AM: You talk as if this sort of policy is completely and utterly undeliverable or unworkable. Yet you go to Scotland and they have done this precise thing. In Scotland they have banned letting agents from charging upfront fees to tenants and you know what? The sky has not fallen in. In fact, Shelter has done a report. They did a survey into this and they have found, if I can find the figures here, nearly 60% of letting agency managers said the ban had had no impact on their business and 17% said the change had had a positive impact. Renters in Scotland have not reported unexpectedly higher rents than two years ago and 70% of landlords who use letting agents have not noticed an increase in their fees. The evidence from Scotland completely contradicts your position.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): No, it does not.

On your point about Scotland, actually, the evidence from Scotland is mixed at the moment. There is some evidence that the fees are simply being transferred to landlords who are, of course, passing it on to tenants.

Tom Copley AM: This is something that is actually supported by landlords as well because landlords often find that letting agencies are charging both them and the tenants. Often one does not know that the other is being charged.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Yes. One way or another, in a free market economy, what is important is the consumer should not be ripped off. If there are fees on the scale that you describe for basically trivial functions where people are gouging, then they have the perfect right to go to bodies such as Get Living London who do not charge a letting agency fee. They have a right to shop around, provided that information is transparent. Just as if any member of the UK services economy offers a --

Tom Copley AM: You have made that point, Mr Mayor. I am out of time. Thank you.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): -- a fee that is excessive, there is already redress. Indeed, there is much more redress that has been introduced by this Government than under the previous administration. I would point out --

Tom Copley AM: Hang on. I am just shocked, Mr Mayor. The evidence from Scotland, as I say, obtained by Shelter, is that this policy is working, is not having an adverse impact on landlords and is not resulting in unexpectedly higher rents.

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

Tom Copley AM: To quote something else that Shelter has said, I wonder if you would agree with this. Shelter says that:

"[Letting agency] upfront fees are preventing households from being able to adequately predict and meet the costs of renting, and whilst rental costs can at least be anticipated and paid over time, high and unpredictable letting agency fees leave many in unanticipated financial difficulty."

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): My briefing is that what is happening in some cases, at least, is the fees are simply being transferred to charge to the landlords who are then passing it onto the tenants.

I agree with you, Tom, about gouging. I agree with you about disreputable behaviour by letting agencies. We do not want to see that --

Tom Copley AM: I am glad you agree with me, but what I want you to say is that you actually want to see something done about it rather than just sitting there saying, "I have identified this problem but I am not going to do anything".

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): What we want to do is to see many more homes for rent in London. I just remind you that in one year of the Conservative administration --

Tom Copley AM: We have got there. We have got there. He has got there. He has got there. You know what? We always know he has lost the argument when he wheels that one out, so I will bring my question to a close, Chair.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): -- we have built more council homes than in 13 years of Labour's spinelessness, apathy and general indifference, a record for which, as you have so rightly said before many times, Tom, the Labour Party should apologise and I am still to hear that. I am still to hear that apology.

Tom Copley AM: Thank you, Mr Mayor.

James Cleverly AM: I declare an interest before I ask my question. I am a private landlord. I have a tenant in a house that I own and his rent has not been put up by me for three years, so I just want to put that on the record. Do you share my concern and consternation that, as evidenced through the questions we have just had, the Labour Party seems to have a fundamental lack of understanding of how a market works?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): That has always been the case with the Labour Party. The Labour Party has to explain to us how a service economy is supposed to work if you forbid people from charging fees for services. I do not think you could do that. What you can do is protect the consumer from bad behaviour. That is what we are trying to do through the London Rental Standard and through the statutory changes the Government has made. Some letting agencies are now moving to a situation where they do not charge fees at all.

To be frank, I do not think you could call the London housing market at the moment a success. There is certainly a market failure and that is because the of prohibition or the difficulties in new supply, very largely around planning and other constraints, mean that the prices are exorbitant and the supply is inadequate. It is the supply that we must address. That is a market failure.

James Cleverly AM: Mr Mayor, you describe it as a market failure. I would describe it as an inevitable consequence of a limitation on the supply side of a high-demand product, which is housing in London.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I think we are saying the same thing, yes. The market has failed to supply enough houses.

James Cleverly AM: No, the market has not failed. That is like saying gravity has failed because someone falls over. It is a factor of the market.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): The market has succeeded in not providing enough houses. Let me put it that way.

James Cleverly AM: The market has done what markets do, which is increase costs as a direct result of a constraint on supply. That is what a market does. My concern is that the policy portfolio presented by the Labour Party with regard to the rental sector will only serve to further constrain the supply side of the argument.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): There you are right, yes.

James Cleverly AM: For the rent controls that they are so keen to bring in, in the UK when rent controls were last in place between 1971 and 1980, the --

John Biggs AM: We are not calling for rent controls.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): You are calling for rent controls.

James Cleverly AM: -- numbers of private rented accommodation in London fell from 3.7 million to 2.4 million. Since 1988, when rent controls were fully abolished, that figure has gone back up to 4.9 million. In Venezuela, where the London Labour Party seems to take so much of their inspiration, after rent controls were introduced, the number of rental properties reduced in two years by 72%. That is the detrimental impact of the Labour Party's policy. It is also 5% more expensive than London in Caracas. Will you join me --

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I will join you, yes, absolutely.

James Cleverly AM: -- in condemning the portfolio of policies the Labour Party has put forward which will constrain the supply of private rented properties, drive up prices and invariably price more Londoners out of the market. I will give them the benefit of the doubt and say they are well intentioned, but they are fundamentally wrong.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Yes, if you look at the history of the city and indeed of this country, it is always Conservative administrations that build the most housing. It was the same in the 1930s, it was the same in the 1950s and it is true today. Absolutely true. Look at the big peaks in housing delivery. It was under Conservative administrations. That is what is happening now. We have built a record number of affordable homes and you are going to see a lot more built over the next couple of years.

Steve O'Connell AM: Again, I declare an interest. I am a landlord to a flat but not in London. I have not put their rent up since I bought it. There you have it.

Mr Mayor, going from the general to the more specific - and it has taken me all of two hours to mention Croydon - at a recent cabinet meeting this week, the new Labour administration has introduced something called a Private Rented Property Licensing Scheme. Mr Mayor, this is a tax, in essence, on housing. This is a premium and an addition that is being added to landlords.

Do you not agree, Mr Mayor, that what inevitably will happen is that this premium will be passed on to the tenants?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Of course it will. If there is any delay or difficulty as a result of this in giving Croydon the homes they need, we will know who to thank for that and who to blame.

Steve O'Connell AM: As my colleague said, it is all about supply. I am sure everyone around this whole issue knows that we need to increase the supply and we want to keep rents down. If you are going to penalise landlords in boroughs and put an additional premium and an additional tax on those new landlords, you will limit supply. Is that not inevitable, Mr Mayor?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Completely right.

Steve O'Connell AM: Hopefully colleagues who are on the other side - Val [Shawcross AM], perhaps, and Tom [Copley AM] - when they talk to my Labour colleagues will perhaps have a word in their ear that this scheme will actually push up rents and limit supply. It is fundamentally bad for tenants and people who are the most vulnerable in the housing supply list. Mr Mayor, thank you for your comments and support on that.

Tom Copley AM: I will tell them you guys are in favour of £420 letting fees.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): If you did that, you would be misleading them.

James Cleverly AM: It is competition, Tom. I'll show you how it works.

Andrew Dismore AM: The Mayor suggested that I was a lawyer who was charging fees. I am a solicitor. I have a practising certificate but I have not charged fees to any client since 1997 when I went into politics full time.

2014/2419 - Private Sector Social Housing

[Andrew Dismore](#)

Given your strategic responsibility for housing in London, do you think it is right that some London local authorities should as a matter of policy place greater reliance on the private sector to meet their social housing obligations to Londoners in need of social housing, rather than on their own housing resources?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): The priority has to be the need of the families concerned and the people who need to be housed, whether they are homeless or whatever difficulties they are in.

As I understand what you are driving at, only 53 homeless households have been housed in the private rented sector in one year, 2013/2014. I think better that way than in a bed-and-

breakfast very often. As I say, it remains the case that the answer is to build more affordable homes and that is what we are doing.

Andrew Dismore AM: Thank you for that. I am not sure about your figures because we know one landlord in Barnet who has 19 social tenants, so your figures are probably wrong. You are right about the importance of building --

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Sorry, this is homeless households.

Andrew Dismore AM: This is social housing generally; it does not refer to homelessness. The point I am making here is that one of the real problems we have is that homeless people or other people in housing need, who are entitled to social housing from the council, are being housed increasingly outside London. In Barnet, for example, people have been deported as far as Northampton. They have been sent right off the East End, away from their local roots, and that is a serious problem.

The other issue with the private rented sector is the quality. A third of private sector tenants spend less than a year in a home and over a half less than two years. Shelter's report in the five years to 2013 noted that complaints by London's private sector tenants went up by 47%. A recent English housing survey found 30% of private rented properties failed the Decent Home Standard and so on. It is a serious problem.

Do you not think that councils should be trying to do a lot more to house people within their own resources and with housing associations?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): As I say, the councils have to do the best they can for their constituents and for the people most in need. In the private rented sector you have much higher satisfaction ratings than for council or housing association tenants. The private rented sector generally gets higher tenant satisfaction rates, I think 81% at the moment.

The general answer is to help councils and help all Londoners by increasing the quantity of housing. I just remind you, Andrew, that during the period in office of the previous Mayor, the number of social rented homes in London declined by 15,246, whereas by 2013 under this mayoralty, it had gone up by 11,683. We are on track to deliver 100,000 affordable homes over two terms. That is the solution. It is a Conservative approach of looking in a very dynamic and enthusiastic way at the housing market and trying to build more supply.

Andrew Dismore AM: One of the concerns I have is that we are now seeing incentives to private landlords to take social tenants. The scheme launched by Barnet Homes in October 2012, which is Barnet Council's wholly-owned arm's length management organisation (ALMO), has incentive payments to landlords ranging from £1,500 to £3,000 if a landlord will take a social tenant. In a management agreement with Barnet Homes, which was approved at the council's Business Management Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 2 May 2013, rent deposits and landlord incentives were budgeted at £230,000 for the year.

Of course, landlords benefit from these tenants because the rents are tied to Local Housing Allowance (LHA) rates. That is where the Housing Benefit comes from. Discretionary Housing Benefit payments are on top to guarantee the rent. The payments can be direct to guarantee the rent. If we look at a particular Barnet landlord, for example, direct Housing Benefit to his company alone, as I found out from an FOI, from the council were £25,694 and from Barnet Homes £2,769, a total of £28,463. That is only a fraction of his total income from Housing Benefit. If we put the benefit paid via tenants into the mix, we know that his income is at least £106,000 per annum, from the ones that we know about, and it could be as high as £318,000 in terms of rent from Housing Benefit.

It seems to me that incentives are not required when you see that sort of level of income. He received most recently - or his company did - a £3,000 incentive to take on another tenant. We do not know how much he received direct because only four of his properties are held by his company and the other 15 held privately. Do you think that is the sort of --

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Sorry, can I just interrupt you for a second? Are you referring to a case of a particular individual?

Andrew Dismore AM: Yes, I am.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Just to ask, is this the gentleman that you brought up before? Was it last time there was a particular case that you had it in mind? Is this the same issue?

Andrew Dismore AM: I am afraid it is, Mr Mayor. I am afraid this happens to be Conservative Councillor Hugh Rayner, the Mayor of Barnet.

What makes it worse, of course, is not just that he is making all this money out of Housing Benefit, but the fact when he chaired the Committee that approved this agreement for rent deposits and landlord incentives on 2 May 2013, he did not make a declaration of interest, nor did he make any declaration of interest when approving the switch in housing policy from the social sector to the private sector on 12 July 2010, nor in December 2012. He only declared a non-pecuniary interest in January 2014. He made no declaration of interest at any council budget setting meetings, and he had no register of interest entry other than indirect through ownership of his properties until a week or so ago, after I raised the matter here in Mayor's Question Time and a letter to him on 18 June. He still says it is a non-pecuniary interest, even though he is making all this money out of Housing Benefit from the council and Barnet Homes. Do you think that is right?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): As I said to you the last time you raised the particular dealings of this gentleman, I am sure that you will have advised him in advance that you were going to raise it in this way. As I understand the matter, Barnet Council have confirmed that a complaint has been made - I do not know by whom, perhaps by you - to the Monitoring Officer. That complaint is being processed under the council's complaints procedures. It would be clearly inappropriate for me to say anything about that until the process is complete.

Andrew Dismore AM: I did notify him I was going to raise the issue today and I also wrote to him two weeks ago setting out the detailed figures, although he has not deigned to respond to that.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): You will appreciate it is difficult for me to get involved in particular cases.

Andrew Dismore AM: Yes. Can we move on to the reform of the LHA as part of this particular problem? Historically they are always linked to rents. The problem is that the areas are too big. In northwest London, for example, in Barnet - this includes both Edgware and Burnt Oak, as well as Stanmore and Pinner - what we found is that they do not reflect market rents. They are either too much or too low compared to the LHA. Moreover, they are not linked to inflation either, which creates all sorts of other issues.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): When you say the rents are too low for the LHA, what do you mean by that?

Andrew Dismore AM: In some places they are too low, and some places they are too high. Again --

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): The LHA is excessive?

Andrew Dismore AM: In some places it can be and in some places it is not, as opposed to market rents. The real problem is that landlords can work the system. Heads I win; tails you lose.

I presume you know how the LHA works. If the LHA is below market rent, then the landlord can charge the market rent and the tenant then is required to top it up out of their other benefit or other income. They may get a Discretionary Housing Allowance as well to top it up beyond the LHA or, alternatively, they can charge LHA rates, making the Housing Benefit pay and the public purse pay, even if the market rent is below the LHA.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): That was the problem the reforms are really trying to address.

Andrew Dismore AM: The reforms are not addressing that because they are not linking to the actual local levels.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I see the point you are making.

Andrew Dismore AM: I will give you an example again of our old friend.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Is this the same gentleman.

Andrew Dismore AM: I am afraid so. The figures are here.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): It will be helpful for the purposes of this conversation if you could make it general rather than specific.

Andrew Dismore AM: We have done a lot of research on this, Mr Mayor. There are five properties we have researched of his. The market rent is £5,590. The London Housing Allowance is £7,540 across the five properties. The rent he is charging per month is charging LHA £1,850 more than market rent, which makes a total of an extra £22,200 a year. Therefore, the public purse is losing over £22,000 beyond market rent because of this crazy system.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Yes, obviously, I do not want to comment on the specific case, but there are some general points that can be made that would be useful. This is the very problem that the reform of Housing Benefit was trying to address. It was clearly the case that some landlords were able to take very considerable sums in Housing Benefit and there was no downward pressure therefore on the rents.

Andrew Dismore AM: That is exactly the point.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): That is exactly the point that you are making. That is why the reforms of Housing Benefit, although they have sometimes appeared controversial in this place, as far as I know, have been supported by all parties. I remember that both the Labour Party and the Conservative Party went into the 2010 Election campaigning to reform Housing Benefit.

I cannot comment on the case that you raise, but clearly there have been perverse incentives as a result of the way these benefits are being paid.

Andrew Dismore AM: Part of the key to it, would you not agree, is to try and make the rents and LHA much more closely aligned by looking at much smaller areas, rather than huge sub-regional assessments which is inevitably going to create these anomalies?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): You need to have the maximum possible flexibility, yes. I certainly accept that.

Andrew Dismore AM: The last point I would like to raise about this is something you said last time about the case when I raised it. You said the individual tenant should find legal advice in relation to the position she found herself in. I looked into this on her behalf. It turns out that because of the cuts the Government made to legal aid in the Legal Aid, Sentencing and Punishment of Offenders (LASPO) Bill in 2012, she would not get legal aid because legal aid has been removed from virtually all housing advice.

You quite rightly criticised the Government for its legal aid cuts for victims of domestic violence and we agree with you about that. Will you also now - let me make the point - lobby the Government and the Secretary of State for Justice to ensure that tenants of landlords who, for example, break your own London Rental Standard should be entitled to legal aid to enforce their rights? You said earlier on the law should always be enforced. You said that earlier on today. If the law should always be enforced, then people have to have the mechanism to

enforce it. Without legal aid to deal with dodgy landlords, people simply cannot do that. They are in an impossible position trying to enforce their rights against people who treat them badly. Would you not agree?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I do not know the particular case and it is hard for me to advise the lady in question because I --

Andrew Dismore AM: It is a general point.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Generally speaking, people should have access to justice and the legal aid budget is there to do that.

Andrew Dismore AM: Not for these people.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): If there is some particular reason, which I do not understand, why your constituent cannot get access to --

Andrew Dismore AM: The Government removed legal aid for housing cases in their reforms of 2012. The point I am putting to you is a simple one. As you have argued about legal aid being available for victims of domestic violence, will you also lobby the Government to say that legal aid should be available for victims of bad landlords in the private sector?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I am not certain that such victims have been deprived of all --

Andrew Dismore AM: They have.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I need to satisfy myself further on that point. It is always open to you until we have that all cleared up, Andrew, to offer your services *pro bono publico* to your --

Andrew Dismore AM: I am not a housing lawyer.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I am sure you are adept in every field. I have no doubt that you could readily settle the matter and give her the advice she needs.

Andrew Boff AM: There is a substantial difference between Labour's approach to housing and the Conservative approach to housing. We saw that in the previous debate. Mr Copley lauded Scotland's decision to abolish the agent's fees. Are you aware, Mr Mayor, that since that abolition of agent's fees, the rent increase in Edinburgh went up by 5.1%, in Aberdeen it went up 6.1% and Aberdeen is now the most expensive place to rent in the country?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I was not aware of that. It is certainly the case that we have some evidence of the fees being passed on to tenants and the rents accordingly going up. That is just human nature. That is what is going to happen.

2014/2420 - London 'super-sewer'

Murad Qureshi

What actions are you taking to ensure the proposed 'super-sewer' does not leave Londoners out of pocket?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I do indeed have concerns about the cost of the 'super-sewer', the Thames Tideway Tunnel. It is a huge scheme. The concern must be that there is an incentive on the part of Thames Water to increase the size of their regulated asset base in order to improve their overall financial position. We need to monitor it very closely. At the moment the scheme is being controlled by Water Services Regulation Authority (Ofwat). We need to keep a very, very beady eye on it. I have raised Londoners' concerns both with Thames Water and with the Government.

What I do not think we can do is to say that the scheme has to be junked. The Thames Tideway Tunnel is an important way of addressing the unacceptable situation in London's river with millions of tonnes of raw sewage pumped into it every year. We can do something about it and we should.

Murad Qureshi AM: Mr Mayor, I am certainly not saying that. I asked this question because your record for standing up for Londoners against Thames Water price hikes is not particularly good, I would suggest. Last year it was only the Labour group that lobbied against the £29 hike for 2014/2015 which they wanted to use to fund this.

More recently, the Managing Director of the Thames Tideway Tunnel has stated that the chance to invest in the sewer will be a keenly fought-out opportunity. There is a spectacle of sovereign funds fighting over who gets the share of a potential 11% increase in Londoners' bills - it is not a dignified one and it is not going to be a low cost one - to deliver this major piece of public infrastructure. Are you satisfied that Thames Water have done the most to minimise the risk to taxpayers and customers in London?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): To water ratepayers is the real risk. No, I am not. This is something where we need to keep continual pressure. It is absolutely legitimate for London boroughs and for the GLA to be extremely wary of the system by which this is being financed and being run.

We really need to be extremely vocal and active on this, as I have been, both with Thames Water and with the Government. There is a concern that water ratepayers will simply be used to finance a gigantic expansion of the regulated asset base of Thames Water in a way that is not properly controlled. It is down to both the Government and to Ofwat to make sure that that does not happen. We, as London, need to send a very strong signal that that would be unacceptable. I can assure you that we are looking very carefully at the terms under which this scheme is being financed.

Murad Qureshi AM: Thank you for that response. It is also useful to know that Bloomberg has reported that Thames Water have already failed to prepare for the Thames Tideway by not allocating sufficient capital in advance. *Financial Times* commentators suggest that the construction risk is enormous, the likelihood of delays or problems is huge and, in all truth, the expectation is customers are going to have to pay for it.

In that instance, I do not want this millstone around the necks of Londoners and we lack a strong voice for the consumer interest of a private monopoly provider that none of us can actually walk away from.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Yes, that is right. It is also right, though, that we should face up to the truth, which is that we cannot go on as we are and that we need major investment in our sewers and we must have a Thames Tideway Tunnel. We have looked at all the other schemes and the alternatives that have been put forward by Wandsworth, Hammersmith, Fulham and others. In the end you have to do the Thames Tideway Tunnel. It is the only real answer.

We cannot pretend to Londoners that this is not going to cost anything. It will cost something. The question is how we keep the downward pressure on those costs when Thames Water themselves do not appear to have such an incentive. That is the problem.

Murad Qureshi AM: I agree with you on the need for it and so do all the parties around this circle. What we do need to focus on is the funding of it. You only have to see the National Audit Office's report on what is being proposed when suggesting there are parallels with the public-private partnership (PPP). Given that we have learnt the lesson from that, I do not want to see that repeated here in this case for the sake of Londoners and their water rates.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Murad, I completely agree with you about this. This is something about which, speaking frankly, we are increasingly concerned in the GLA and the mayoralty. We are going to want to see some very, very clear assurances from Government about how on earth we are going to protect the London water ratepayer in the long term from what you rightly describe as the potential overruns and the inevitable explosion of the bills in a huge project that involves building a tunnel underneath the middle of the Thames, bigger than a tube tunnel, right the way through from Hammersmith to Beckton. It is a huge, huge thing. Clearly, the cost risks in doing that are massive. You need to build into such a project a huge disincentive to overruns. I am seriously worried that we do not yet have that disincentive built in.

2014/2377 - Human slavery and the prawn industry

[Andrew Boff](#)

The United States is considering downgrading Thailand to a human trafficking blacklist because of the frequent use of slaves in the production of prawns sold in leading European supermarkets. Would the Mayor look into calling on the United Kingdom Government to do the same and

recommending supermarkets buying these prawns - including Tesco, Aldi, Morrisons, the Co-operative and Iceland - stand up to this horrific crime?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I know you have written about this as well and that this is one of the things that you campaigned on. I do not think I necessarily want to beat up on any particular British companies today, but it is certainly the case that the Government is looking at the EU-Thailand free trade agreement for ways to get to the bottom of this.

I cannot accept at face value and I have no personal knowledge of allegations of slavery in Thailand or wherever relating to the prawn trade. It is not something I am familiar with. Clearly, it is something that is arousing a lot of concern and the Government is exploring ways of raising those concerns in the best way with Thailand, and the EU-Thailand free trade agreement seems to be the right forum.

Andrew Boff AM: Thank you, Mr Mayor. Carrefour has already withdrawn its dealings with buying prawns from Thailand, persuaded as it was by the argument that human slavery and trafficking is endemic in the Thai fishing industry. The way it works is that people from Burma and Cambodia are shipped into Thailand under daily risk of murder and are abused with hardly any pay.

London has a proud history in ending slavery and I would hope you would echo that London-based companies should do their part in ending the curse of slavery around the world. We are not going to do that while we buy products where all evidence suggests that human slavery is endemic in an industry.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Seriously, people should study the global prawn business and the business in crustaceans. The way these things are flown around the world is absolutely unbelievable. I am a passionate believer in the free market, as I said earlier on, but the invisible hand of the market is moving the larvae of prawns from America to India, where they are then hatched and they grow or whatever. They go to school in India, these prawns get much bigger and then they are flown back for consumption in America. It is just unbelievable, the whole thing. If the Assembly did not have anything else to do, I would recommend an Assembly paper on it because it is unbelievably gruesome and gripping.

Andrew Boff AM: I bow to your knowledge of that industry. I know you have had some personal experience of viewing it, but I do want London-based companies to catch up with other companies as well. I understand they cannot at the moment. The evidence perhaps has not been made to them. This report in *The Guardian* which responds to this call was only last month.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I cannot judge the evidence.

Andrew Boff AM: Should that evidence prove to be conclusive, which I believe it will be, I hope that you would echo my sentiments that we need to do something from London.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Look, slavery is a very heavy accusation to make against any company or country and we would need to bottom that out, but clearly it has been taken seriously by our Government and they are taking it up.

2014/2413 - Muslim Council of Britain and FGM

[Victoria Borwick](#)

Do you welcome the Muslim Council of Britain's recent announcement that FGM is "non-Islamic", "against the teachings of Islam" and that it is "putting the health of women and girls at risk"?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Yes, we all agree here that it is savage, unacceptable, barbaric behaviour to conduct FGM anywhere, let alone in London, and I approve of all bodies that publicly stand up and denounce it.

Victoria Borwick AM: If you recall from the event that we both spoke at, I was very struck by some of the women who spoke, but some of them seemed to be keen on having this inflicted on the next generation because there was an expectation by the men. The point about this announcement is something that we should welcome and I would urge you to encourage others to speak out because, if there is not an expectation by the men, then hopefully the women will stop doing it to future generations.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Absolutely, and as you know, in order to try to reduce what we think is still going on and the instances of FGM still taking place in London, MOPAC has a multi-agency pilot in six London boroughs to try to bring together all the bodies that are involved in trying to find out what is going on, but also to try to bring those responsible to justice.

Victoria Borwick AM: I would urge you to use, as usual, your voice to speak out on this issue.

Jennette Arnold OBE AM (Deputy Chair): Mr Mayor, I agree with your sentiments. No sensible person could have any different view. I would just like to commend the Deputy Mayor for her leadership in this area and the work that she is doing in terms of leading the discussion on the Health and Wellbeing Network. I would also like to commend the MPS and the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) for their work, but one of the things we are tending to do is to use language that is not in the long term helpful to the communities we have to break into.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Like female genital mutilation?

Jennette Arnold OBE AM (Deputy Chair): No, I have always argued for it to be called female genital mutilation. At one time, that term was not used. No, I was thinking of when we talk about these communities as being of themselves savage and barbaric. The act itself of course is absolutely an act that words fail you on, but the consensus and all the evidence there is shows that when you want change within a culture, what you have to do is work with those people from within that culture. I know that there is great concern by many and at this time it is

them who are speaking out: Leyla Hussein, Daughters of Eve and others. What they do not need is any further closure of that community. Would you agree with me that we should all absolutely be working towards zero tolerance to FGM and bringing an end to it, but that we must be mindful in that we must continue to work with those advocates --

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Yes, I completely agree.

Jennette Arnold OBE AM (Deputy Chair): -- and those survivors within the communities. Nothing can change in the long term and over generations without those cultural practices changing from within.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Yes. I completely agree with you and it ought to be possible for people to differentiate between the condemnation of a savage and barbaric practice and a community as a whole. This is not going to be won unless we engage with these communities. In the end, it is a battle that can only be won from within. That is the truth. But we are seeing progress.

2014/2286 - Year of the Bus

[Caroline Pidgeon](#)

What does the Year of the Bus mean for bus passengers in London?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): The Year of the Bus. What is the Year of the Bus not giving London? It is absolutely fantastic. Let me tell you. We have had digital screens running countdown real-time bus information; interactive digital screens being installed in bus stops on Regent Street and Eden Street which provide live bus arrival information; digital clocks on every bus; location announcements on all-night bus routes to help passengers identify where they are, for example, "You are now entering Knightsbridge" - assuming you are in Knightsbridge - and "seats on the upper deck" indicators that tell you whether there are still seats in club class. There was a bus cavalcade the other day which helped attract something like 400,000 bus maniacs to Regent Street - enthusiasts, I should say - but there are loads of open days at bus garages across London: 5 July at Potters Bar, 19 July in Walworth, 7 September in Dartford, the Notting Hill Carnival Family Day Parade involving buses and a London Transport Museum Acton Depot open weekend on 13 and 14 September. Those are just some of the things that the Year of the Bus is offering the people of London.

Caroline Pidgeon MBE (AM): Thank you very much for that. We do value the celebrations. The bus enthusiasts and the spotters out there are coming out in their droves, I know, as well as families and so on and the digital screens are welcome. I went out of my way to make sure I looked at them and circulated that information, but in terms of practical benefit to millions of bus passengers who every day suffer on packed buses, I do not think there is anything in the Year of the Bus, and the problem --

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Hang on, I have just given you about 15 different examples.

Caroline Pidgeon MBE (AM): -- is TfL are predicting that bus ridership will grow by 10% in the coming decade. It may well grow more than that, but you plan to grow bus mileage by just 4% in the same period. Does that really mean that your Year of the Bus is the start of a decade of serious overcrowding for bus passengers?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): No. The buses are more successful - it is absolutely true - than ever before. We have more riders than ever before, and the Year of the Bus improvements that I have mentioned should do their bit, each in their several ways, to help with overcrowding because they will tell you when there is space on the upper deck or when the next bus is coming.

Caroline Pidgeon MBE (AM): The point is there is no space because the buses are so seriously overcrowded, Mr Mayor.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): That is not the observation of many people in London. Yes, of course in peak hours buses are crowded and we are trying to relieve that and we will be putting on more buses where necessary, but a lot of the time most people in London would observe buses are not particularly full. Victoria [Borwick] has herself noticed that buses are not always full in the middle of Oxford Street, for instance.

Caroline Pidgeon MBE (AM): OK. In terms of many people who are using the buses to commute to work to go about their everyday business, they find that buses are seriously overcrowded. Should you not be looking to put even more buses on to cope with your own forecasts of increasing bus passengers in London?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Yes, and we will be continuing to expand the bus fleet.

Caroline Pidgeon MBE (AM): But your TfL plan has no new bus capacity in it.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): We need to look also at the capacity of the London road network and what we can do there. It has been neglected. It does need to be improved. One of the reasons we are looking at a system of orbital tunnels is that, if you project, the rates of growth of traffic on London's roads at the moment are very considerable.

Caroline Pidgeon MBE (AM): You need to have more buses to allow people to get out of their cars and to use the buses to deal with the capacity issues, Mr Mayor.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): You certainly need more buses. On the other hand, there is a 45% increase in white vans predicted over the next ten years caused by use of internet shopping, a colossal increase in commercial traffic, and all those things need to be taken into account.

Caroline Pidgeon MBE (AM): Will you look to review your plan to increase capacity on the buses, yes or no?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): It is under constant review.

Valerie Shawcross CBE AM: The figures that Caroline is presenting there were of course agreed cross-party in the Transport Committee's scrutiny on bus services and certainly the fact that the crowding and overcrowding on the buses has been increasing dramatically over the past five years is really well established. In fact, anybody who represents a constituency on this Assembly will agree that there are too many routes which are too overcrowded in the morning.

One of the other issues that came up during that scrutiny was that because of traffic congestion, the bus operators are finding that there is about a 1% decrease in their journey time, so there is a 1% congestion blockage being added in every year. One of the things that would really help is a new bus priority programme so that we get more priority lights for buses to jump round, some new additional bus lanes and some division of the road space to get the buses through. Will you be looking at a good bus priority programme for the future? It is becoming a real problem.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Yes. Do not forget though, Val, you and Members of the Assembly simultaneously have been asking for a much more thoroughgoing cycle provision on the carriageway as well and all these objectives are not necessarily always compatible. You will appreciate that the road space of London is heavily contested already. We are certainly looking at trying to give more bus space where we can, but that will obviously be one of a number of competing objectives.

Valerie Shawcross CBE AM: There is a lot of competition for road space, particularly in central London. That is why, Mr Mayor, it is very important to have a policy hierarchy that puts pedestrians, cyclists and public transport ahead of private car use, and that is something that we have asked you to look at in the past.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): As you know very well, there has been a substantial reduction in private car use in London and that has continued to decline. We have seen a huge take-up of cycling and public transport schemes. One of the reasons the buses are so successful is, not only are they beautiful machines, but crime on buses is down by 40% now since this mayoralty began. Buses are safer, they are more beautiful than ever before and that is one of the reasons why they are more popular than ever before. I am proud to tell you that London buses carried 2.3 billion people in 2012/13, which is a 60% increase since 2000. That is half all the bus journeys made in England.

Valerie Shawcross CBE AM: Mr Mayor, you have made a jolly good case for putting more buses on the streets of London and we agree with that.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): What I have made is a case for is all of us saying to Government, "If you want to invest in transport in this country, invest it in London".

2014/2343 - Empty homes

Darren Johnson

Are you disappointed that you will only bring 624 empty homes back into use as affordable housing this financial year, when you had aimed for 1,100, as outlined in your Investment & Performance Board papers last month?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I am sure that you are asking this only sarcastically, or rather, that you do not really mean what you say when you say “am I disappointed”. The Investment & Performance Board (IPB) paper to which you refer shows that we have met the manifesto target that no more than 1% of stock should be empty for six months. In fact, the number of empty homes in London fell by 12,788 from 2012 to 2013 and the long-term empty homes in London are 0.64% of overall stock, which is a record low, so that is a record we can be proud of.

Darren Johnson AM: There are clearly still some problems and one of the reasons that your programme has been delayed is that you are asking boroughs to sign a 95-page legal agreement to get relatively small grants to bring empty homes back into use. Do you think that is excessive?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Ninety-five pages is not too much trouble to ask boroughs to go through.

Darren Johnson AM: The contracts for other schemes have been four to five pages long. The South-East London Housing Partnership wrote to David Lunts [Executive Director - Housing and Land, GLA] in October 2012 asking for bureaucracy to be cut down because they said it was making the process slower and more complex. They eventually signed off on an £850,000 grant, but that took 16 months of negotiations to get just £850,000. It does sound overly bureaucratic.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Look, if it is over-bureaucratic, then we will do what we can to improve it.

Darren Johnson AM: You will go away and look at that?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): It would be nice if you accepted that to have fulfilled the manifesto commitment year after year and to have got the percentage of empty housing stock down to 0.64% and to have brought so many empty homes back into use is quite good going by our Housing team and they should be congratulated.

Darren Johnson AM: On the numbers we need to be doing more, so I would like you to go away and look at the bureaucracy and the complex procedures that are in place that seem to be unnecessarily delaying. This is not me saying this. This is housing partners complaining about this. The process could be a lot simpler and you could more speedily bring empty properties back into use by simplifying the bureaucracy.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): We will have a look at it.