

London Assembly (Mayor's Question Time) – 23 July 2014

Transcript of Agenda Item 5 – Questions to the Mayor

Roger Evans AM (Chairman): The first question, with the indulgence of the Mayor's Office, is the question on London's relations with Europe, which has been moved to the top of the agenda. Can I also give Members notice that I have decided to take together the questions which deal with the estuary airport, as they are substantially on the same thing. We do not want to go over the same matter twice.

2014/2768 - London's Relations with Europe

Fiona Twycross

What, in your view, should be London's relationship with the European Union?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): This is a very broadly framed question. London's relations with the European Union (EU) are of course very, very close since London is a part of the EU. I would point out that London is, to the best of my knowledge, the biggest, the most successful, the most prosperous and the most economically powerful city within the EU. It is the most visited city of the EU. It is the financial capital of the EU. It is the artistic, cultural, tech, theatrical and dramatic capital of the EU. That is the relationship it bears to the EU and that is widely accepted, not just in this country or in this city but also across the EU. In particular, there is an increasing understanding that London's leading role in financial services makes it integral to the global competitiveness and success of the entire EU.

Fiona Twycross AM: Thank you very much for that response. I am going to hand over to Andrew Dismore who has some supplementary questions.

Andrew Dismore AM: A year ago at the Economy Committee, Gerard Lyons [Mayor's Chief Economic Advisor] told us that he would be publishing a report on London and the EU in January 2014. It has been rather delayed, has it not? Last week at the Economy Committee, Mr Lyons told us that he gave you a copy of the report on 17 July. Have you read it and when are you going to publish it?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I can tell you. You can all come and I invite all Members of the Assembly - particularly you, Andrew - to an event on 6 August where we will be unveiling the report and I will be talking about the issue in greater depth and detail than you could possibly desire.

Andrew Dismore AM: Perhaps I could ask you about something else that Mr Lyons said at the Economy Committee when I asked him about the interest rates. What he said was --

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Actually, it will be wonderful. You should come. You will enjoy it. It will be good. I think we are doing it at Bloomberg in Finsbury Square.

Andrew Dismore AM: All right. Let us just stop obfuscating and let us stick to the question of interest rates, which I was going to ask you about. Mr Lyons told us that he would like to see interest rates stay low and go up gradually, but that they should eventually peak at a high level, not a low level. Quote: "I would sooner have them at 5% or 6% than at 2% or 3%". Do you agree with your Chief Economic Advisor that the norm for interest rates should be 5% to 6% when the current economic cycle ends?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I am not entirely certain that I would, with the greatest possible respect, Andrew, trust you to quote accurately the substance or indeed the gist of what Gerry [Gerard Lyons] was trying to say.

Andrew Dismore AM: I have the transcript.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): What he was getting at was that you have to have monetary policy to suit the needs of the economy. In particular, you have to make sure that you have monetary policy that suits the needs of the whole United Kingdom (UK) economy. London's circumstances are different from the rest of the UK. I think Gerry would almost certainly agree were he here now that you would not want to whack up interest rates too high too soon. Clearly, you are going to want to be in a position to constrain irrational exuberance.

Andrew Dismore AM: I do not think I misrepresented what he had to say because I gave you the direct quote of what he actually said from the transcript, Mr Mayor.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): We all know what wizardry can be done with so-called direct quotes from transcripts.

Andrew Dismore AM: I have read out the transcript. Are you agreeing or disagreeing with your Chief Economic Advisor? That is the question because the impact on Londoners and the London economy of an interest rate of 5% to 6% will be horrendous. The average house price is now £492,000. A rate increase of this scale would double the average mortgage payment in London from around £2,000 a month to £4,300 a month. That is what your Economic Advisor is advocating at the end of this economic cycle.

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

Andrew Dismore AM: Do you agree with him or not? It is a simple question.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Many Londoners would also say that they do not want to see the housing market continuing to get out of control. I am not for one minute advocating interest rates of 5% or 6% now. That would be quite wrong and --

Andrew Dismore AM: Nobody is advocating that. That is not the point.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): -- it is perfectly obvious from what I am saying that I think the state of the economy more broadly needs to be taken into account. You need to look at the circumstances across the whole country, where the recovery is not as strongly embedded

as it is in London and where interest rates of that level are, frankly, uncalled for at the present time. As Gerry Lyons and you know full well, monetary policy has to be kept under constant review, as it is by the Bank of England, to make sure that we deal with any future circumstances that may arise.

Andrew Dismore AM: I am not quite sure whether you are agreeing with him or disagreeing with him because nobody is saying interest rates --

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I am agreeing.

Andrew Dismore AM: Let me finish the point. You are agreeing with him? Fine. The Resolution Foundation says that if rates increase to 5% by 2018, the number of households spending more than half of their disposable income on repaying debt could rise from 600,000 today to around 2 million and the human and social costs of that will be huge. You are agreeing that at the end of the economic cycle, which is what he says, not now, 5% or 6% interest rates are appropriate and that is the social consequence? You are prepared to accept that?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): No. Interest rates are a matter for the Bank of England and for the Governor and the Court of the Bank of England. They have, very wisely, been steering a course of extreme prudence with regard to interest rates. What Mark Carney [Governor, Bank of England] has been doing is absolutely right. He has been very, very restrained about putting them up, though you are starting to read increasing calls in the newspapers for a hike in interest rates. It is absolutely right to be extremely prudent about the state of some sectors of the UK economy and about areas outside London, and you make a reasonable point about the effect of high interest rates on the London mortgage market. For all those reasons, it is right to be prudent. On the other hand, as Gerard Lyons rightly said, when economic circumstances change, you change your policy.

2014/2655 - Swiss Cottage Avenue Road Development

Andrew Boff

Will you confirm that, contrary to views expressed by some people locally, Camden Council has a great deal of autonomy in determining this planning application and should be expected to take full responsibility for any judgement that it makes on this planning application?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): The crucial point to make is that this is a decision for Camden, a borough that is not within my control or indeed the control of the Conservative Party. It is up to them to decide what they want to do. I would urge local people who feel strongly about this matter to make representations to them.

Andrew Boff AM: Mr Mayor, therefore, what would be your view of Camden Labour councillors and planners saying to residents that actually the Greater London Authority (GLA) has already decided and it is up to them? What would be your view of that?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): This is complete nonsense. This is an absolute, flat lie. There is a democratic system. Everybody knows how the planning process works. Camden

Council has responsibility and must discharge that responsibility. If they choose to throw out that scheme, it is entirely a matter for them.

Andrew Boff AM: Would you, Mr Mayor, ask for an update on the stage 1 report that was received by Camden with regard to this application, on the basis that the language within that stage 1 report inferred that a tall building was preferable? That is not the case and I know the planners would like to amend that. Would you like to ask for that update as soon as possible?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I would. To the best of my knowledge, Andrew, it has actually been amended, so what it says is that a tall building is acceptable in that area given the high public transport accessibility level (PTAL) ratio and so on. To repeat, however, this is a matter for locally elected councillors in Camden. To the best of my knowledge, the Labour Party has a majority on that council. If they choose to throw it out, it is entirely their prerogative. If they choose to go ahead with it, it is their decision.

Andrew Boff AM: I welcome that, Mr Mayor, and I also hope that we will no more see any misinterpretations in stage 1 reports.

Andrew Dismore AM: I have the stage 1 report here, and it says that the Mayor considers that the "principle of the development" is supported, so you have already approved the building in principle in your stage 1 report. If Camden were to refuse it, you would still force the approval of it anyway by calling it in, as you did with Mount Pleasant when Camden and Islington indicated --

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): No. I do not know --

Andrew Dismore AM: Let me finish. When Camden and Islington --

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): No, I will not let you finish. You are talking nonsense.

Andrew Dismore AM: -- wanted to turn down the Mount Pleasant development, you called that in and you would do exactly the same thing here, would you not? The least worst option for those who oppose this building is for Camden to impose as many planning conditions as it can on it on the basis that you want to overturn it.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): No, Dismore, no.

Andrew Dismore AM: Are you saying you will never call this in, then? Are you undertaking never to call this in?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I am not making any commitment on any future planning decision I might make.

Andrew Dismore AM: Exactly.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): You are alleging - if I may say so, quite wrongly - that it is absolutely inevitable that this building will go ahead because I am going to impose it on Camden. That is completely untrue.

Andrew Dismore AM: Will you undertake not to call it in if Camden refuses it? It is a simple question.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): What I have said to you --

Andrew Dismore AM: Will you undertake not to call it in if Camden refuses it, yes or no?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): What I have said to Andrew Boff, who asks questions, if I may say so, in a much nicer and more productive way than you, is --

Andrew Dismore AM: It is a simple question. Yes or no: will you undertake not to call it in if Camden refuses it?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I am not. This is a planning matter for Camden and --

Andrew Dismore AM: Exactly. Will you call it in if Camden refuses it, yes or no?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Let us see what they do. If we had some ham, we would have ham and --

Andrew Dismore AM: You will not give me an answer?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I want to see --

Andrew Dismore AM: People in the area of Swiss Cottage will read that interpretation into your answer.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): People in the area will want to know what a spineless representative they have in the form of Dismore. Come on. What is your point?

Andrew Dismore AM: It is pretty clear that you cannot answer and you will not answer.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Do you have any influence whatever with Camden Council, you protoplasmic jelly? Why do you not --

Jenny Jones AM: What?

Andrew Dismore AM: Oh, dear. Here we go again.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): If you are so hostile --

Andrew Dismore AM: The Bullingdon Club bully strikes again. Here we go again.

Roger Evans AM (Chairman): Can we just stop for a moment. We are not treating each other with the respect that we merit.

Jenny Jones AM: Hear, hear.

Roger Evans AM (Chairman): That goes, to some extent, to shouting at the Mayor as well and provoking him.

Andrew Dismore AM: It was a simple question.

Roger Evans AM (Chairman): Have you finished, Mr Dismore?

Andrew Dismore AM: It is pretty obvious that I am not going to get a sensible answer to a straightforward question, so I think I have.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I will give you the answer. The answer is that if the Member, Mr Dismore, objects so vehemently to this scheme, it is open to him and his fellow members of the Labour Party in Camden to throw it out. That, as far as I know, they have chosen not to do. People following this debate will want to know why Mr Dismore's relations with the Labour Party in Camden are so frail and so feeble - even though he purports to represent them - that he cannot persuade them to go against this building. That seems to me to be the relevant question.

Andrew Boff AM: Mr Mayor, could you acquaint Mr Dismore or perhaps write to him with the number of occasions on which you have called in applications with less than 200 flats? Could you also acquaint him with your role as the planning authority and that to declare your hand at this stage would effectively make it impossible for you to carry out your role as that planning authority?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Of course. The Member knows full well that if I were to say anything about any future decision, I would thereby fetter my discretion and would be subject to judicial review. The point you rightly make is that the total number of call-ins is so far fewer than the fingers on one hand, let alone for schemes with only relatively small numbers of flats. This is a matter for the Labour Party. They are pathetically trying to spread responsibility around. Local democratically elected politicians in Camden have a decision to make and I do not see any sign of Dismore having any influence. Is that not a tragedy? He has been elected and yet he has no influence on this decision whatever.

Andrew Boff AM: Mr Mayor, perhaps you could also find out how he can have spent so long on the London Assembly and not understand the absolute basics of your roles with regard to planning? It is astonishing to me. It sounds like a political game is being played with this. That would be a terrible thing.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I began this morning by saying that I do not think --

Andrew Boff AM: No doubt Mr Dismore is consulting his solicitor at the moment. He does on every possible occasion. It does sound like a political game might be played on this and you have reminded us that Camden is the planning authority with regard to this planning application. Thank you.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Yes, Camden is the planning authority, Dismore is the Labour member and Camden is the Labour council concerned. We have heard the mutterings of the media. Let us see the ectoplasm. Let us see what they have to say about this building.

Roger Evans AM (Chairman): It all seems fairly simple to me. Mr Dismore, do you want to make a point of explanation here?

Andrew Dismore AM: Yes. As I have been personally attacked, I think I should. I fully understand the planning system. I had been in local government before I came here and I have been in politics for over 30 years. I fully understand the system. I also understand when people are playing politics with a planning application, like the Conservative Party is in Swiss Cottage, and I also have seen what the Mayor does when he calls things in like he has done in Mount Pleasant.

Jennette Arnold OBE AM (Deputy Chair): Absolutely.

Andrew Dismore AM: It was a clear political decision on his part. The fact is that planning decisions are not political decisions. They are not party political in any local authority. If they were, it would make them subject to judicial review. The fact is that the Mayor and Mr Boff are playing politics, as is the Conservative Party, in Swiss Cottage because it is a marginal constituency that they hope to win at the next election.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I am perfectly open. That is complete nonsense.

Roger Evans AM (Chairman): You are expanding the personal explanation envelope a fair bit there. We will move on to the estuary airport question. I have decided to link this with the question in the name of Dr Sahota. Mr Mayor, the floor is yours.

2014/2683 - Estuary Airport Studies

Darren Johnson

What is your response to the Airport Commission's Inner Thames estuary airport studies?

2014/2759 - Estuary Airport

Dr Onkar Sahota

Given the findings of the Davies Commission's Thames Estuary environmental impacts study, will the Mayor reconsider his advocacy for his island airport?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): The three reports that we had from the Commission were extremely encouraging and what Sir Howard [Davies, Chair, Airports Commission] is doing

is, firstly, recognising the huge economic benefits for Britain as a whole of having a new Heathrow in a much better site. The studies also show that there are no big showstoppers to achieving this. It is very important to bear in mind, when you see the huge sums that are bandied around about infrastructure costs and so on, that in almost all cases these are investments that we are going to have to make as a city and a country in that part of London anyway if we are going to exploit the potential of the Thames Gateway area for regeneration. That is broadly my response to the Commission's findings so far.

Darren Johnson AM: If you are encouraged by those reports, I hate to think how you would react if you had some really bad news because those reports were absolutely devastating in terms of the credibility of the Thames Estuary airport and the habitats. The habitats report suggests it will cost up to £2 million to replace the habitats. The report makes clear it is impossible to create this scale of new habitats in the immediate vicinity of the site. Can you not accept now that this is a showstopper and that it is time to knock this on the head?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): No, I do not accept that, Darren. I know that you come from an intellectually respectable position, though I think gravely flawed. Your position is that there should no more runways anywhere. That, I believe, is your Green position.

Darren Johnson AM: As far as London and the southeast goes, we should be using our existing capacity more rationally, rather than building new runways or new airports.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Would you want to build more runways in, say, Birmingham where they have existing capacity? I do not know where you would like to have more capacity. Is there somewhere else you would like to have more capacity?

Darren Johnson AM: I am asking the questions. Given how devastating these reports are in terms of the credibility of the Thames Estuary airport --

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): They are not, though.

Darren Johnson AM: -- is it not now time to knock this painful experiment on the head and actually concentrate on some of the things that you can make a difference on as Mayor of London. Tackling the growing noise problem and the growing pollution problem around Heathrow, for example, and speaking up for Londoners on that? Surely, you could be playing a more useful role as Mayor on those issues.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): As you know, the primary objective is to get the country the long-term solution it needs. One of the most extraordinary facts about our current position is that there are already three-quarters of a million Londoners who suffer excess noise pollution, as defined by the EU, around Heathrow. A third of all the victims of plane noise pollution in the whole of Europe are around that airport.

This is actually a fight that is supported by virtually every single Member of this Assembly with possibly only one exception, who is also an honourable exception because he wants to expand Heathrow. He is wrong. I might be misrepresenting my friend John Biggs there, but I believe

that virtually everybody else is in favour of saying no to a third runway at Heathrow. That is the position that this Assembly has successfully supported. Virtually all of us have campaigned on that. I respect your desire to build a new runway somewhere other than the southeast --

Darren Johnson AM: I never said that.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Nowhere, in that case. You do not want to build any more runways, anywhere, ever.

Jenny Jones AM: Keep to the point.

Darren Johnson AM: I am just concentrating on London and the southeast.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): All right. It is one of the two. I am trying to elicit your position. It is not entirely clear what it is, but I respect your position, which is either to build more runways somewhere outside the southeast or not to build more runways anywhere, ever! It is one of the two!

I disagree with it, however, because this country will need long-term connectivity. What the estuary airport offers is the ability to connect 24 hours a day with 300 destinations around the world. It will give London the ability to send our businesspeople to parts of the world that are growing very fast and enable Britain to be an open, free trading country with access to the rest of the world in the way that we were in the 19th century when the ports of this city dominated the economic life of the planet. It is absolutely vital that we do have that infrastructure.

It is tragic that Heathrow, which is a wonderful airport in many ways, is basically located in the wrong place for expansion. There is a lot of support now for trying to solve it with Gatwick. I do not believe that is a long-term answer to the question we face. I do not think a dual hub system will really work and you will just have more concentration in Heathrow. There will be more pressure by the airlines to get into this very, very restricted space in west London.

The regeneration and economic benefits of going for the estuary site are phenomenal. You say that we should abandon this. I do not think we should. I think we should keep going. The logic of geography is very much on the side of what we are trying to do.

Darren Johnson AM: These serious reports have thrown up problem after problem after problem. What is it going to take for you to abandon this whole estuary airport idea? What is it going to take?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I certainly will not take any advice from a party that I do not think has a credible strategy on aviation. I am afraid to say, with great respect to you and to the Green Party, that that is my view of your strategy. I do not think it works for the country. Britain is a great economy that needs to be properly connected and we need to be able to compete with France, Germany, Holland and Spain in a way that we are currently failing to compete. I am not content with your approach. I am not content with Heathrow as the long-

term approach. I do not think the dual hub works. The benefits of doing what we are proposing to do in the estuary are phenomenal.

I want to stress that we take very seriously what Sir Howard [Davies, Chair, Airports Commission] has had to say about every aspect of the estuary proposal, in particular the environmental impacts. However, when you look at the environmental impacts of a third runway - let alone a fourth runway - on west London, they are colossal. The health impacts on Londoners are very, very severe indeed. I know Onkar has also joined in this question --

Darren Johnson AM: OK, I am happy to hand over to Onkar now.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): -- so I direct my remarks now to Onkar, who is a doctor and will have seen some of the medical reports about the greater risk of heart disease and stress and the lower educational attainment that is associated with a high degree of noise pollution of the kind there is in west London. Bear in mind that any expansion of Heathrow will inevitably involve more aircraft passing over the centre of London with hundreds of thousands more flights in a way that is, I believe, wrong for this city. As I said in my answer earlier to Fiona [Twycross], this is the greatest city in Europe. It is a beautiful place to live. It would be completely regressive and economically counterproductive for us to exacerbate a gross planning error of the 1940s and 1950s and to expand Heathrow in a way that is environmentally catastrophic.

Dr Onkar Sahota AM: Mr Mayor, last week the Airport Commission published four papers on your proposal for an estuary airport. The report says:

"Overall, the challenges to transition are considerable and amount to a significant cost and risk to the taxpayer in terms of commercial negotiations, infrastructure development and potential failure."

The environmental impact assessments by the Airport Commission and the British Trust for Ornithology are damning of the scheme. The Conservative Leader of Medway Council, Councillor Rodney Chambers OBE, as quoted in last night's *Evening Standard*, said:

"This latest research is yet another stumbling block in these Mickey Mouse plans. We'd like to know where Mr Johnson plans to home these birds as we're not aware of a spare 3,400 hectares in Medway, or anywhere else on the southeast coast."

Under EU environment directives, the estuary airport could go ahead only if the planners demonstrate that there are no alternative locations elsewhere and suitable habitats could be found. Mr Rehman Chishti, the Conservative Member of Parliament (MP) for Gillingham and Rainham, recently held a roundtable on this issue and said, "The evidence against a hub airport at the Thames Estuary is compelling".

Mr Mayor, in the face of overwhelming evidence, you seem to be in denial. You keep continuing to waste Londoners' money. Why do you do this?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Just to go back to the point that Darren [Johnson] made, if I may, this arises out of the strong desire of all of us to prevent a third runway being built at Heathrow, which I think is your position as well. Of course, I have been able to study the conclusions of the Airports Commission so far and I do not believe that they do contain anything like the showstoppers that you are trying to imply.

Actually, on the wildlife and the birds, we do think that we could cater for that. In terms of environmental impact, obviously, you have to set the needs of migratory birds, which are very important, but which can be properly and sensitively addressed, against the needs of a growing city of 8.6 million. There is a compromise to be struck that would be perfectly acceptable in environmental terms. Just on the economics of the proposal, the estuary airport --

Dr Onkar Sahota AM: Mr Mayor, you are clearly continuing --

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Can I just finish the point? You have asked about the economics of it, a point, if I may, I will continue to answer.

Dr Onkar Sahota AM: I have heard your answer. You are clearly continuing to live in denial or you have delusions of grandeur. I am not sure which one.

Tom Copley AM: Both.

Dr Onkar Sahota AM: Maybe both, yes. That is true.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Please.

Dr Onkar Sahota AM: Let me say that not only are you content with destroying the site of a London borough in Medway, but you also want to destroy the lives of west Londoners. You want to get the estuary airport allowed so that the west London economy is destroyed. You will be destroying jobs in west London. Can you please explain why you are hell-bent on destroying the economy of west London?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): For starters, the overall benefits to the economy, as I was about to say before you rushed in again, we think will be about £652 billion from the estuary airport before 2050. There are huge benefits to every single part of the city. Do not forget that we are going through a huge housing famine in London. People cannot afford to live anywhere near the centre of town in many, many cases. The area at Heathrow is an area about the size of the Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea. It is fantastically well served by transport. You have four Tube stations. You have Crossrail. You have the line for the Heathrow Express. That site would be redeveloped at fantastic speed and would represent an outstanding opportunity area for London and would produce a huge quantity of growth and jobs. The total contribution of Heathrow to the entire west London economy is about 3%, so, again, you are being too negative and you are underestimating the potential of this city and of this country to sort out the problems.

Dr Onkar Sahota AM: Mr Mayor, if you have the courage of your convictions, why do you not stand for Uxbridge and South Ruislip, the seat that will be vacated by Sir John Randall MP, and let the people of west London hold you to account? Have the courage of your convictions.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Onkar, are you inviting me to stand as the Labour candidate? Is that your intent? Would I have your support?

Dr Onkar Sahota AM: We have a candidate there, but your seat has been vacated for you, ready for you to test your ideas out.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I am fulfilling my mandate here in London, amongst which was, as you seem to have forgotten, a pledge we all made to have a better solution for aviation than a third runway at Heathrow. That is what we are doing. We have had tremendous success so far. We are putting new ideas on the map and on the landscape and actually changing the direction of this debate.

Before we intervened and before City Hall became involved in this, there was only one question and there was only one thing people were saying: there has to be a third runway at the Sipson site. That is now dead. The Sipson site will now not happen. There are all sorts of other Heathrow proposals now and perhaps some of them better than the Sipson site; perhaps they are worse. In my view, none of them answer the fundamental question. There is also now the Gatwick solution, which is marginally better and certainly a lot better from an environmental point of view for Londoners than the Heathrow solution. To have come that far by making these arguments is a considerable achievement so far.

What we need to do is to keep going and keep making the arguments for a site that will deliver long-term growth and prosperity for this country and enable us to compete, and that is what we are going to do.

Kit Malthouse AM: Mr Mayor, you have covered the basic question I was going to ask, I guess, but I just find the whole debate depressing because it gets mired in politics with a capital P and becomes about personally attempting to damage you as if it is some kind of grandiose --

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I did not mind that, really.

Jenny Jones AM: No, you are just deluded.

Kit Malthouse AM: -- vanity project, rather than thinking carefully about the problems of London and what possible solutions there might be. In the end, would you agree that the option of dealing with the aviation capacity that is a problem for London is actually about choosing the least worst option and that there is no option that is without negatives?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Absolutely right.

Kit Malthouse AM: Often, this is about prioritising. Is it birds or people? Is it east or west? Is it 24 hours or not? It is all these kinds of things. All you are trying to do is to, as you say, present an option that opens people's minds to other possibilities.

There is one thing in particular, though, since Onkar [Sahota] raised it, and that is the reaction of the north Kent MPs, which I find inexplicable, really. If you had said to any MP who wanted to deposit this massive infrastructure investment next to where you are, in what are often areas of severe deprivation that are not that well connected to the rest of the world, you would expect them to greet it with open arms. What efforts are you making to highlight to the elected representatives both on the Council and in Parliament in that area, the economic benefits that might accrue to their area of the airport?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): It is very interesting, Kit, that you say that because actually, of course, there is quite a lot of support for it in north Kent and indeed in that part of the world generally because they can see exactly the points you made. There is a certain timidity about voicing that support in public and I have met councillors in the area - Conservative councillors, I might say - who are passionately in favour of the scheme.

In answer to your question, there is a lot of engagement between us and Daniel Moylan [Mayor's Chief Aviation Advisor] and that part of the world. There is a group called DRINK [Demand Regeneration in North Kent], which means something like 'direct regeneration in north Kent'. That is their campaign and they are completely in favour of it.

Kit Malthouse AM: I also wanted to ask whether you had had a chance to drop in at the New London Architecture exhibition that is currently on and was opened last week, advertising what the possibilities might be with the Heathrow site. Three architects there have been asked to envision what Heathrow City might look like and what the enormous potential might be of that site.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I have not been able to drop in but I have seen the pictures and I think it is fantastic. I would urge Members of the Assembly to have a look at it, even if they cannot get to the exhibition to have a look at the prospectus. It is absolutely right, it is visionary and it is the way forward for us.

People say, "This is too big. We do not do this kind of thing", or, "This is what the Chinese do", as one Member of the Government said to me. "We do not behave like this", said one, "We believe in incremental steps. We do things organically". That is a powerful analysis of how Britain has done things and it happens to be true, but it does not mean it is right.

If you look at the history of the railways in the 19th century, it proceeded organically and it proceeded by step, but it was in many cases catastrophic. We are now having to invest hugely. The whole reason we have Thameslink and Crossrail going through now is to sort out the mess created by having lots of independent partial schemes coming into the centre of London.

Effectively, Heathrow has been allowed to grow and grow and grow in what is fundamentally the wrong place. It is a very hard decision. I accept the conservative instincts of people like

Onkar [Sahota] who shudder at the idea of any dramatic change of this kind. I do understand why people feel so spooked about it in a way, but it is the right thing to do.

Kit Malthouse AM: Yes, I agree. You, of course, will know that the biggest battle [Isambard Kingdom] Brunel [19th century British engineer] ever faced was on the Great Western Railway when he wanted to build the railway in sweeping arcs rather than jiggering around between little villages and towns because, he said, in 200 years' time we want them still to be using these with trains at twice the speed we travel now. Of course, we are still using the tracks that he laid down.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Yes. We are spending billions and billions and billions trying to retrofit them and upgrade them when we could have got it right the first time.

Kit Malthouse AM: Exactly. The final thing I wanted to ask you - and I have tabled some questions in the past and asked you at Mayor's Question Time (MQT) a couple of times ago - is about the safety aspects of expanding Heathrow and what the emergency plans might look like in the event of an air disaster and whether that would be more likely in the event of an expansion of Heathrow. I wondered if you had had a chance to turn your attention to that yet.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Yes, I have. I am grateful to you, Kit, generally, for the pioneering interest you have taken in this whole subject, if I may say. That is one of the arguments. It is obviously the case that statistically, if you fly hundreds of thousands more planes over the centre of a city every year than you might otherwise need to do, you are going to risk one day or another a catastrophic incident.

Kit Malthouse AM: Hear, hear.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): That is just an objective fact. It is not the prime reason why we wish to go for a better solution, but obviously it has to be borne in mind.

Kit Malthouse AM: In that awful event - and pray God it never happens - my guess is that people will be asking when we can move the airport, not if.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Yes. Obviously, that is not an argument that we can make because it is an argument of despair. We very much hope that that does not happen but, as I say, you cannot rule it out altogether.

Tony Arbour AM: Are you aware, Mr Mayor, that my constituents in southwest London expect you to hold to your election promise to oppose expansion at Heathrow? They are very grateful to hear you today once again doughtily spelling out the terrible effects that Heathrow has on the atmosphere around the airport.

Are you further aware that the campaign to expand Heathrow really is going up a gear? The Heathrow Airport authorities have employed large numbers of public relations officers, who are delivering lots and lots of meretricious leaflets all around southwest London and the area around the airport, purporting to say that the overwhelming majority of people who live nearby

actually want Heathrow to expand. Will you seek continuously to give the lie to that kind of propaganda?

Can I ask you, when you are doing that, to bear in mind the fact that there was of course a referendum held by the two boroughs of Hillingdon and Richmond, which are severely affected by any expansion at Heathrow, which overwhelmingly came down against this? Under those circumstances, can I please – and I am sure it is not really required – ask you to stiffen your sinews and carry on opposing any expansion at Heathrow?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I shall. Clearly, there is a democratic element here. If the people of west London demonstrate somehow overwhelmingly that they wish to have much greater noise pollution and traffic congestion and so on, then obviously I would have to listen to that. All the evidence I have seen so far, however, suggests that it would be very, very damaging indeed to their interests and I am opposing it.

2014/2633 - Oxford Street

Stephen Knight

Given its high pedestrian-vehicle collision rate and dangerous levels of air pollution, is it now time to pedestrianise Oxford Street?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): You seem to imply there has been a rise in the casualty rate or collision rate at Oxford Street. Actually, there has been a 60% reduction in pedestrians killed or seriously injured (KSIs) over the last ten years and there have been very substantial reductions in pollution.

There has been a 20% reduction in buses along Oxford Street, which is something the council in particular was keen to see. That has reduced mono-nitrogen oxides (NO_x) by 33% overall in the last two years. There has been a big programme to get some of the older taxis off the street. One of the problems we have had in Oxford Street is that we have taken a lot of the buses out but their place has been filled with taxis, which are themselves considerable polluters. This is part of our general strategy to beat air pollution in London by modernising the bus fleet and the taxi fleet and introducing the Ultra-Low Emission Zone (ULEZ) in 2020, which will have very, very considerable impacts on both NO_x and particulates.

Stephen Knight AM: The reality, though, is that Oxford Street continues to have one of the highest – if not the highest – collision rates for pedestrians of any road in London and probably any road in the UK. It is a dangerous place for pedestrians. It is also the case that Oxford Street has consistently the highest level of measurement for nitrogen dioxide (NO₂) of any road monitoring station not just in the UK but anywhere in the world. Sadly, when this was pointed out by a King's College scientist recently, your response was to take to Twitter with expletives and to say that this was 'bollocks'.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): It is, of course.

Stephen Knight AM: Is not the answer actually that it is extremely dangerous --

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): That was your word, not mine, by the way.

Jenny Jones AM: I think you will find it was yours.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I put asterisks in it.

Stephen Knight AM: You did put an asterisk in but I --

Darren Johnson AM: He said "asterisks"!

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): He did not say "asterisks"! I heard two vowels there!

Stephen Knight AM: Chair, I will withdraw the expletive --

Roger Evans AM (Chairman): Thank you. It is good when Members control themselves without requiring me to do it.

Stephen Knight AM: -- but I was merely pointing that that the Mayor's response to this was to take to Twitter with expletives. Should your response not be, Mr Mayor, to take firm action to make Oxford Street, which is London's prime shopping district, a safe and clean environment for Londoners?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Yes.

Stephen Knight AM: The only way of doing that is to get rid of buses and taxis, get rid of vehicles from Oxford Street and pedestrianise it.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): It is a very interesting proposal. First of all, in the big picture, yes, Oxford Street - and I cycle down it a lot - is still polluted. No one is going to contest that. What I do contest is the idea that somehow London has the worst air quality of anywhere in the world. It is complete nonsense. There are plenty of --

Stephen Knight AM: Mr Mayor, with respect, it is not nonsense that London has the highest level of NO₂ pollution.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): It is complete nonsense. No, average NO_x monitored across busy roads in --

Caroline Pidgeon MBE AM: It is not NO_x.

Stephen Knight AM: I did not say "NO_x", did I, Mr Mayor? I said "nitrogen dioxide". Do you understand the difference?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Nitrogen dioxide, NO₂?

Stephen Knight AM: NO₂.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): NO₂ across monitoring sites near busy roads in Stuttgart, Paris, Munich, Rome and Milan are all higher than London. Mexico City's levels are nearly double those of London. I just think you need to --

Stephen Knight AM: Mr Mayor, with respect, that is not the case. Can I give you the figures from King's College London? The mean average NO₂ measurement in Oxford Street was 135 micrograms per cubic metre. Set against the legal limit of 40 micrograms, 135 micrograms is almost three and a half times the legal limit. The highest recording of any monitoring station anywhere else in Europe is 94 micrograms. That is significantly less than Oxford Street and I have to say that from the measurements in India, the highest recording in Mumbai or Delhi in 2010 was 62 micrograms.

The point is, Mr Mayor, that modern diesel engines deliberately emit more NO₂ than older diesels in order to burn particulates. This is a problem of modern diesel engines. That is why we have the worst pollution in NO₂ terms of any city in the world, and Oxford Street has the highest level recorded anywhere on the planet. Mr Mayor, instead of denying the evidence, we need measures to deal with it.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Yes. If you will stop shrieking for a second, I will just try to go through some of the things we are doing. We have already reduced, as I said, buses in Oxford Street, which is what you want to see, by 20%. The NO_x emissions from buses are down by 33% in the last two years and --

Stephen Knight AM: That still will not bring it within legal limits and actually measured values in Oxford Street have remained constant --

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): There is one --

Stephen Knight AM: -- this year against last year and against the year before. There has --

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

Stephen Knight AM: -- been no fall in measured values, has there?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Chair, through you, it is very difficult to answer these questions if I am going to be continually interrupted and I look to you to exercise some authority.

Roger Evans AM (Chairman): You make a good point. Carry on.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I could not hear the last question because it was being shouted.

Caroline Pidgeon MBE AM: Oh, dear.

Roger Evans AM (Chairman): Mr Knight, can you repeat the question?

Caroline Pidgeon MBE AM: He is desperate.

Stephen Knight AM: Mr Mayor, despite any measures to reduce the amount of NO_x being produced by buses, and you have made some measures to fit filters to some buses to reduce the amount of NO₂, the reality is that at three and a half times the legal safe limit for NO₂, the only way of getting anywhere near the legal limit is going to be to withdraw diesel vehicles from that road altogether. Is that not the only way we are going to make this road safe? Is that not the only answer, Mr Mayor?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I do not think that pedestrianisation is the answer because what you would have to do. By the way, I continually raise this with the New West End Company (NWECC) and with the businesses there and Victoria [Borwick] I know has done a lot of work on this, but I am afraid the regrettable fact is that that is not really what they want. If you were to pedestrianise Oxford Street, it would not be the right thing in planning terms. What would happen, unfortunately, is that the street would start to take on a very different character. It would not necessarily be for the better. The buses would be sent down Wigmore Street or another parallel street, where you would reproduce the same problem. We have taken a lot of buses out of Oxford Street. What we are doing is moving towards an ULEZ in the whole city. That will actually reduce NO_x --

Stephen Knight AM: Thank you, Chair. I am out of time.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): By the time that comes in, it will reduce NO_x by 47%, particulates less than 10 microns in diameter (PM_{10s}) by 58% and carbon dioxide (CO₂) emissions by 12%. That will take us very, very close to meeting all our requirements under EU law. I will just repeat --

Stephen Knight AM: Mr Mayor, thank you for that, sir. I appreciate it but I am now out of time, so --

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): -- that nitrous oxide is down by a third in the last two years as a result of bringing in the New Bus and we are continuing with a programme of bringing in new technology, which is enabling us to have much better air quality. I do not want in any way to minimise the importance of this issue, but we are bringing in abundant measures to tackle it.

Murad Qureshi AM: We well know that the real problem with the pedestrianisation of Oxford Street is the Westminster City Council, but even they want to see the introduction of tighter restrictions on diesel lorries, buses and taxis that pollute our roads. They wrote to you, along with Camden Council and the City of London, at the beginning of your term. We have had a more recent letter from Camden and Islington for the same. Why do you not just get on with implementing phase five of the Low Emission Zone? It is a simple solution that you can do here from City Hall. It is within your means and you have seen fit not to do that.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): No, what we are doing is the biggest programme of technical transformation of our vehicle fleet that this city has ever seen. We have retrofitted about 1,000 buses. We are retiring all the remaining Euro 3 buses by next year. We are going to have 1,700 ultra-low hybrid buses --

Murad Qureshi AM: I am not talking just about buses here. I am talking about all the diesel products.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I will not hear any lessons from the Labour Party about air quality. You did nothing about taxi age limits. Did you ever put in an age limit for taxis? No, you did not. It was this administration that did it and by the time the ULEZ comes in, we will be making sure that all new taxis have to be zero-emission capable to go through the centre of town. As I said, that will result in very, very substantial falls in NO_x, in PM_{10s}, in particulates less than 2.5 microns in diameter (PM_{2.5s}) and in CO₂. The ULEZ will reduce CO₂ emissions by 12% from London's vehicle fleet. That is a fantastic thing, but it is on top of what we have already done. By the way, on NO_x emissions in this city, we have halved --

Murad Qureshi AM: Just look at what you have available that you have not done so far: Low Emission Zone (LEZ) phase five to all other vehicles apart from buses --

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): You talk about nitrous oxide. Since I have been Mayor, the number of people living in areas of excess NO₂ has gone down from 3.6 million to 1.7 million, from memory. We have virtually halved exposure to excess NO_x. We have cut NO_x emissions by 20%. We have cut PM_{10s} and PM_{2.5s} by 15%.

I am not complacent about it and I appreciate the work that you do on this, Murad, and I appreciate the support that you give to people who fight for better air quality. However, this is something where we are absolutely determined to make London an exemplar city in the rest of the world. I do find it mystifying when people seek to denigrate London --

Murad Qureshi AM: I have not done that.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): -- and to say that we have worse air quality than other cities, which is patently not the case.

Murad Qureshi AM: I have not done that at all.

2014/2661 - Tube Strikes

Richard Tracey

Considering the Prime Minister's recent statement on strikes, would you encourage him to go further and ban strikes on the Tube, in favour of binding arbitration?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): The policy that you are advocating is interesting, though where we are really at one is in wanting a threshold for the ballots. That seems to me to be

reasonable. We now seem to be within striking distance of achieving it in the sense that the Government has said it is in favour of the idea and that it will use the next Parliament to bring it in and that is very good news.

Richard Tracey AM: Yes, indeed, Mr Mayor. I share your optimism that a Conservative government would bring in some legislation at last to deal with this, despite the shilly-shallying of the current Liberal Democrat Business Secretary [Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills], who I believe is not in favour of such legislation.

Can I draw your attention to my question, however? It talks about binding arbitration. The reason that we on this side support the idea is that in New York, a law was brought in in 1967, which is commonly known as the 'Taylor Law'. It has meant that since 1967 there have been only four strikes in New York's public sector. In your manifesto in 2008, you said that you hoped to bring in a no-strikes situation, particularly in the Tube. Do you not think that Londoners still support what you said in 2008 and want a no-strikes situation, despite what the union would prefer?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): If you look at what has happened in New York in more detail, Dick, you would find it very instructive because it is perfectly true that they have had the Taylor Law since 1967. It has, however, meant that the Metropolitan Transportation Authority (MTA) has basically been in a continual position of being - as it were - induced or obliged to move closer to the position of the union and in many cases, to head them off at the pass or anticipate their demands by simply agreeing, rather than going to binding arbitration and risking losing. The result is that if you have travelled on the New York Subway, as I am sure you have, you will see that it does suffer from underinvestment. It does suffer from problems that we are starting to sort out. It does suffer from a lack of modernisation that we are addressing. Things like the reform of ticket offices and concourses, the new signalling and many of the reforms that we are putting in would be more difficult to achieve. Therefore, I am not tempted down the line that you indicate and nor, frankly, do I think that any Conservative should be.

Richard Tracey AM: All strength to your arm in persuading a future Conservative government to bring in the right legislation. It loses £50 million a day every time there is an Underground strike in London. Frankly, all Londoners are sick of these sorts of strikes.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): They are and I appreciate that point. The message that I want to get over again to anybody following this and certainly to our staff in Transport for London (TfL) and London Underground (LU) is that we think that by modernising, by improving and by investing, we will create a better and bigger service with more jobs. They will not be the same old jobs. They will be different jobs. They will be new jobs interacting with customers in different ways. However, that is progress and that is what we are determined to achieve.

2014/2765 - Air Pollution

Murad Qureshi

Why should Londoners have any confidence that you are competent to tackle air pollution?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): We are, as you know, going through a series of very, very ambitious measures to reduce air pollution. You will certainly have heard what I have just said. I will just repeat the answers.

Murad Qureshi AM: There is no need to.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Emissions of particles are down by 15% and emissions of oxides of nitrogen are down by 20%. This is a really important statistic: the number of Londoners living in areas exceeding legal limits for NO_x has halved from 3.6 million to 1.7 million, despite, obviously, a massive increase in population. We already meet the targets for regulated pollutants in eight of the nine cases. We are determined through the measures we have set out to beat the problem.

Murad Qureshi AM: Can I just make one point to you from the roundtable that I hosted last week. Professor Jonathan Grigg [Professor of Paediatric Respiratory and Environmental Medicine, Centre for Paediatrics, Blizard Institute] spoke and he said:

“There is tremendous inertia which frustrates me enormously to see kids in Whitechapel. By the time anything happens, their lungs will have been damaged. They will not have obtained their maximum growth potential. In ten years or so, they will suffer all the effects we now see coming through, increasing vulnerability to a range of respiratory disorders in childhood and goodness knows what that leads to in terms of vulnerability to diseases in later life.”

He is clearly outlining the effect it is having on young children in our city and in Whitechapel.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I agree. I completely agree and it is a point you might make to John Biggs, by the way. He wants to have a third runway at Heathrow.

Murad Qureshi AM: Can I just finish? I have not finished my question. Should you not bring forward by at least a term your ULEZ proposals, given that you have kicked it into the long grass anyway until 2020?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): No. I understand what you are saying. By the way, my point about all the Labour support for a third runway at Heathrow needs to be seen in the context of what you are rightly saying about the threat to air quality. The pollution impacts of not just aviation fuel but the vehicular impacts of a third runway at Heathrow on west London would be catastrophic for air quality.

On the 2020 deadline for the ULEZ, you have to be fair to people and you have to be reasonable. People buy cars on the assumption that they are going to last a certain time. You cannot put in measures by 2016, 2017 or whenever you would like this to begin when people in good faith have invested in a very, very important and very, very expensive piece of kit on the assumption that it will last for many years to come. Therefore, we are being absolutely straight with the public about where we want to go. We are giving what is a reasonable deadline. We are giving the manufacturers a reasonable deadline and we are giving them enough time to start

to make the changes to their factory tooling-up and to make sure they are producing the kinds of models people will want - the plug-in hybrids, the range extenders and so forth - by 2020.

Roger Evans AM (Chairman): Mr Biggs, you may feel you have been misrepresented.

John Biggs AM: Yes. I think I am entitled to a personal explanation. I resisted the first time around but, just for the record, I am not personally a passionate supporter of a third runway at Heathrow. I would, however, follow what Mr Malthouse said. We are considering a range of options and we need in the end to latch on to the least worst option. Were we to have such an option, it would have to have safeguards about noise, about air quality and about pollution. I would simply observe that the greatest cause of poor air quality at Heathrow is from surface access, not from the aeroplanes themselves.

Murad Qureshi AM: Yes, it is the cars.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): That is a very good point, if I may say so, by Mr Biggs and --

Murad Qureshi AM: We have been making that point for a long time.

Roger Evans AM (Chairman): It was not actually a question. Mr Biggs has stated his position and we can move on.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): -- of course that vehicular pollution would massively increase.

2014/2674 - Democratic Oversight of the Police

Steve O'Connell

Under the new system of police and crime commissioners, the Metropolitan Police Service has reduced waste while increasing officer numbers and ensuring that crimes of importance to Londoners reduce significantly. Does the Mayor agree that the Local Government Innovation Taskforce's plans to scrap elected police commissioners and replace them with boards of local authority leaders would be bad for democratic oversight of policing and would weaken the role of the elected Mayor of London?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I have seen what the taskforce has to say. I do not think it is the right way forward. We have a good system now here in London and we need to have proper democratic oversight of the police and I am surprised that they should want to remove that.

Steve O'Connell AM: Since the creation of the Mayor's Office for Policing and Crime (MOPAC), we have seen crime dropping like a stone. Costs have been taken out of the back office and extra police are on the streets. Clearly, we have reinvigorated the whole engagement process around the introduction of boards. Do you share with me in my congratulations to the development of MOPAC and the achievements that it has achieved over this short period of

time? Whilst there is still much to do, are there any other particular high points that you would like to illustrate since the creation of MOPAC and what it has done for London?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): It is very important and thank you for all the work you do to support MOPAC and particularly the MOPAC Challenge Board that you sit on. Crime was down by 66% in one year and is falling faster in London. We had a long discussion about this recently at the Police and Crime Committee (PCC). It is falling faster now than in the rest of the country. There are 120 fewer victims of crime in London every day. We have been able to get 2,500 - and it will go up to 2,600 - police out into the neighbourhoods.

I appreciate that there is a question coming from Joanne [McCartney] later about the Local Policing Model (LPM) and, actually, there is more agreement about that than you might expect. We all understand the need to have a Safer Neighbourhood Team (SNT) in every ward. On the other hand, you have to make sure that the police are there where the public can see them. Some of the concerns that have been raised by you, Steve, and by others about visibility are definitely being tackled and certainly should be tackled.

The results speak for themselves, however. Across virtually every crime type, we are seeing massive success by the Metropolitan Police Service (MPS). It is not MOPAC so much that deserves congratulations as the men and women of the MPS, who are doing an outstanding job.

Steve O'Connell AM: This is an example, Mr Mayor, would you not agree, of the benefits of having a commissioner system? Through you as Mayor, we are able to challenge you publicly and --

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Yes. The lines of accountability are pretty direct and people know that the mayoralty is responsible. They follow what is happening with police numbers in their wards and in their boroughs. They know that if they feel things are not working, it is us that they need to make their complaint and we then do our level best to try to sort it out where it is appropriate. There will be all sorts of arguments about where the best deployment should be, but I have been very, very determined to keep numbers high. You cannot solve this problem of crime in London unless you keep numbers high.

Steve O'Connell AM: I have two examples here where direct mayoral involvement produced results. We talked about the LPM and I know Joanne [McCartney] has some questions around the LPM. We all have some concerns about some of the gaps in the posts at the moment and I know you have, Mr Mayor. I would like you to comment on that and give your thoughts around that. I would also like you to comment on the rather excellent initiative with the London-only recruitment policy, which was announced by you and Bernard Hogan-Howe [Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis] last week. All around this horseshoe I am sure that we are very keen that the MPS increasingly looks like Londoners and the Londoners it serves. It is a very good policy.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): It is a sensible policy. We are doing it for a couple of years. It is actually falling in line with what is already done in Surrey, for instance, or possibly also in Kent.

The idea is exactly as you say: to have a police service that looks more like London and that knows the London scene. I was very struck a year or so ago when we had a big, big recruitment drive and I went to one of the passing-out ceremonies and it was pretty obvious that the overwhelming majority of the successful candidates, who are unquestionably doing a fantastic job for our city, were being sucked in from outside London. They were from Hertfordshire or wherever. That is fine. It is wonderful. However, when you have young people in London who are not potentially thinking of themselves as police officers when they could be brilliant police officers, from whichever community, you want to encourage them by whatever way you can. That is what we have been doing.

Steve O'Connell AM: I will not pre-empt as Joanne [McCartney] is going to speak about the LPM, which has been a great success and it has come to the stage where it needs a review. Do you have any thoughts around how we can take the LPM to even --

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Yes, I do not think it is --

Roger Evans AM (Chairman): We have actually strayed completely from the original question and we are well into the next question, so we will take that question..

2014/2764 - Local Policing Model

Joanne McCartney

What input will you and MOPAC be having in the Metropolitan Police Service's review of the Local Policing Model?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): You are absolutely right that the LPM is so far proving successful, but it will throw up questions and anxieties about whether there are enough police in this or that area, whether it is too rigid or whether it needs to be flexed. What we are saying is, yes, we can improve it and we should do that, but we are not chucking the baby out with the bathwater. We are going to proceed with the model that we have, which is having great results in bringing crime down.

Joanne McCartney AM: Thank you for that, Mr Mayor, because I must say this is the first time I have heard you say there is anything wrong with the LPM. I have been putting concerns --

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I did not say it was wrong --

Joanne McCartney AM: You said you had concerns and I believe that Steve O'Connell said there were gaps, which is honestly the first time I have heard that from Mr O'Connell as well.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Did I say concerns? I thought I said U-turns?

Joanne McCartney AM: In this Chamber, Members across all parties and I have warned you about the dangers with a rigid LPM. I remember you telling us a couple of years ago that you were not going to throw the baby out with the bathwater with the previous model either.

We have been putting to you that concerns of our residents that there were not enough dedicated officers who were known locally patrolling the same streets. Last week when you appeared before the PCC with the Commissioner, he stated, and I am quoting him here:

“For me there has to be more dedication of those neighbourhood officers to the wards with some deployment into the neighbourhoods, and I think the balance has gone the wrong way.”

Do you share that view of the Commissioner?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Since I was sitting next to him at the time --

Joanne McCartney AM: You had your head in your hands at that point, I noticed.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): -- I do not remember dissenting then from what he had to say and I do not really dissent now. There is a distinction without a difference here. We are proceeding with the LPM, which is working very well. If we look at the results, crime is down by 6% or 7% in just one year. The old model, which was the thing I objected to, was a one-size-fits-all, one-plus-two-plus-three structure in every ward. That was patently not sensible. Actually, that was a point that Assembly Members did accept.

Joanne McCartney AM: You stood for election saying you were going to retain it, Mr Mayor. Can I move --

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): No, I did not. That is completely untrue.

Joanne McCartney AM: You said you were going to maintain Safer Neighbourhood Teams.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I did, and we have.

Joanne McCartney AM: Not that we noticed, Mr Mayor.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Actually, I take grave exception--

Joanne McCartney AM: Mr Mayor, can I --

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): No, come on. Through you, Chair, I take really quite violent exception to that because in all intellectual honesty, Joanne, you should concede that I have sat here many, many times with you and said that I did not think it sensible to have a one-size-fits-all template for the Safer Neighbourhood Teams. I would like some acknowledgement of that because I said it many, many times, before Dismore got here, thankfully.

Joanne McCartney AM: Mr Mayor, can I ask you then --

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I know there are many who support him in --

Roger Evans AM (Chairman): Mr Dismore is going to be called to ask questions next.

Joanne McCartney AM: This is a waste of my time, Mr Mayor --

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): It is completely untrue that I wanted to keep the geometry of Safer Neighbourhood Teams completely unchanged. I said many, many times and I think you would concede that there should be variable geometry in the Safer Neighbourhood Teams. I said it many times.

Joanne McCartney AM: No. Can I carry on, Mr Mayor?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Yes.

Joanne McCartney AM: There are other concerns, so I take it you are going to feed those concerns in.

The other thing that I am being told and hearing from my local residents is that they are actually not seeing the police that you say are there on the streets. MOPAC and your Deputy Mayor had a roadshow just before the election and they did an evaluation. We got this via the last PCC. One of the key areas that the public are telling MOPAC that they are concerned about is the lack of visibility of the police. I am hearing that officers are not visible in part because they are taken away on aid and abstractions, often at very short notice, and that re-rostered days or rest days are regularly cancelled and are now at epidemic levels. That is partly why we are not seeing officers on our streets at the moment in our local wards.

Is that something that you are hearing as well and that you are asking the MPS to rectify?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): It is important not to exaggerate this. It is certainly the case that I want to see police out there. Where I certainly agree with you, Joanne, is that there are huge pressures on the MPS to satisfy all sorts of competing objectives. What you say about aid to other forces is correct. We currently have --

Joanne McCartney AM: Not to other forces, internally.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): -- two officers in Ukraine, for instance. We have officers all over the world.

Joanne McCartney AM: I hardly think two is responsible, Mr Mayor.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I am giving an example of how far-flung the role of the MPS is. We have huge numbers of officers, as you know, dedicated to the hacking inquiry which is still going on, to inquiries now into historical allegations against --

Joanne McCartney AM: These are neighbourhood officers. These are not specialist investigators, Mr Mayor.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): The net effect is to put a huge amount of pressure on numbers with the MPS. Notwithstanding that, we have been able to get 2,500 of the 2,600 extra officers out on to the beat in the neighbourhoods.

Joanne McCartney AM: They are being taken away from the beat.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): There are now more police constables than at any time in the history of the MPS. There are 26,000 police constables.

Joanne McCartney AM: Mr Mayor, you are talking about senior officers and they are not on the street. Even the Commissioner said last week with regards to the response to aid that it is driving him crackers at the moment because it is a random allocation of the aid. I hope you are going to feed that back into the system.

One final thing I would like to ask you about is the shift system. I am hearing from my local officers that actually they are exhausted. Rest days are cancelled. It is eroding their morale and goodwill. Can I ask you if you would commit to looking at the shift system because it needs a significant overhaul? The new shift system is not working. I understand the Commissioner's desire to get a minimum number during the night, but in some boroughs there is no nightlife, yet there has to be a minimum number of officers there and others are having to have rest days cancelled. It is playing havoc with their lives at the moment.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I understand. On that, if you supply some details of the specific concerns --

Joanne McCartney AM: I will.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): -- I would be very happy to look into that. The general point I would make is that the LPM is continuing to deliver very considerable reductions in crime. Where there are problems of lack of visibility caused by one abstraction or another --

Joanne McCartney AM: It is many abstractions, on a daily basis.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): -- we will try to rectify it, though the proof of the pudding is in the results that the Metropolitan Police Service is achieving.

Andrew Dismore AM: I would like to ask about how the new model is performing in relation to emergency calls in Barnet. For 'I' calls in Barnet, the target is supposed to be 15 minutes. In March, April and May they were averaging against that target around 89%. The longest call - and this is supposed to be 15 minutes - was 79 minutes in March for heavy demand, 60 minutes in April and over 100 minutes in May to attend an emergency call when they are supposed to be there in 15 minutes. For 'S' calls, where they are supposed to be there in 60 minutes, the

performance against the target for March, April and May was less than 88% on average. Again, the longest calls were in March over 4,000 minutes, April over 4,000 minutes and May over 2,700 minutes.

Do you think it is right that it should take over an hour and a half for a call to be answered that is supposed to be answered in 15 minutes? It is nearly three days, 69 hours, for a call that is supposed to be answered in 60 minutes. The real problem here is that your model is not working for emergencies because there are not enough police officers in Barnet. As of May 2014 Barnet had 542 officers, 65 fewer than in May 2010. That is 11% fewer. We have 64 Police and Community Support Officers (PCSOs), 108 fewer than in May 2010, a reduction of 63%. The fact is we do not have enough officers in Barnet to cover the growing population and the geography of the borough. That is feeding through into these emergency calls' performance. Do you find those times acceptable?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): No.

Andrew Dismore AM: If not, what are you going to do to give us more police officers so they can make your targets?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I will certainly study the length of time taken to answer these emergency calls in Barnet to see whether there is a particular problem in Barnet.

Andrew Dismore AM: Yes, there are just not enough policemen.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): The times that you have mentioned are unacceptable and I will undertake to write to the Member to try to give him a full answer as to what we think is going on in the answering of emergency calls in Barnet.

I will just stress that in Barnet and across the whole of London there are very steep falls in crime and that is a credit to the --

Andrew Dismore AM: Not in violent crime, Mr Mayor, which has gone up dramatically.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Just on that, we had a discussion about this in the PCC. I do not believe you were there. To the satisfaction of the PCC, we were able to show that the rise in violent crime is due to a redesignation of certain types of domestic crime into the violent crime category. It is a category change that has produced those figures. Across the board you are seeing falls in crime in this city.

Andrew Dismore AM: We do not have enough police officers and that is why we cannot meet the attendance times.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): The proof of the pudding, as I say, is in the eating. There are steep falls in crime.

Andrew Dismore AM: It took an hour and a half to get there.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): If I were in your shoes, I would be congratulating police officers in Barnet on their achievement rather than trying to run them down.

Andrew Dismore AM: I am not trying to run them down; I am challenging you over the poor performance of your --

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I would be congratulating them rather than trying to run them down because they are serving their community very well, unlike their Assembly Member.

Richard Tracey AM: Mr Mayor, just so that people listening to these exchanges do not get the impression that it is all complaints from all of us here, in Wandsworth and Merton, which I represent, people are very satisfied with more police officers coming into both the forces there. They are also satisfied with the fact that the LPM has allowed for a much more rapid response, guided by the borough commanders, where it is necessary. One-size-fits-all is not as ideal as some might seem to have thought.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): That is right, and I was very disappointed that it was not acknowledged that that was a point that I have been making consistently for the last six years. I absolutely agree with you, Dick, that that is the way forward for policing in London and we are having a great deal of success. Kit [Malthouse], the former Deputy Mayor of Policing and Crime, will remember the many discussions we had. I wonder, Kit, whether he shares my surprise at the amnesia of the Labour Party about this?

Richard Tracey AM: Can I ask you to look at one or two other ideas that have come up? Are you a supporter of attaching a police officer to every secondary school across London, which does seem to be rather a good move? In my boroughs we do see this. Will you also consider perhaps having a police contact point in Tube stations?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I am in favour of the maximum public contact with the police. One of the most important things that Sir Bernard Hogan-Howe [Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis] brought in was the idea that if you have experience of crime or if you want to report a crime, then the police will come to you. Since that pledge has been made, there have been 200,000 personal visits. That is very often what people want to see. They may not want it in their home. They may not want a police officer walking up to their front door. They may prefer to meet somewhere else and that is why we have set up the contact points. Contact points are not being used in quite the way that they perhaps could be, but that perhaps is a fault of lack of publicity or whatever. If we can do more with sites at Tube stations or wherever, we certainly shall. So far, the ones that seem to be working best are the ones in supermarkets.

Richard Tracey AM: Are they?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Yes.

Richard Tracey AM: There is one that I gather has been piloted in Cheshire with interactive computer police kiosks. Have you heard about that one? Do you think that might be a good idea?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): We are doing something pretty similar in Westminster, are we not? We are going to have a pretty interactive police kiosk. I will look at it. Is it a sort of Doctor Who-type thing? What is it?

Richard Tracey AM: I am told it exists. I do not know all the details of it, but perhaps --

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): No. Is it surprisingly capacious inside?

Richard Tracey AM: From your great office you could ask MOPAC and the MPS to investigate what is happening in Cheshire?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I will investigate.

Steve O'Connell AM: I really wanted to reinforce Dick's comments about how it is clearly not all doom and gloom about the LPM. Croydon particularly was very badly served by the previous formula. The introduction of the LPM with a 117 extra officers was very much welcomed across Croydon and is driving crime. It is not all doom and gloom.

I want to pick on the shifts point. The movement to the new shifts is a good thing for our residents. Mr Mayor, hopefully, you will agree. In the past it was a criticism of the one-two-three system where the Safer Neighbourhood Teams would come out for eight hours, say. It would be 8.00pm to 4.00am or 10.00pm until 6.00am. We must get the right vacancies filled --

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Yes. One of the problems --

Steve O'Connell AM: -- and would you agree that if we get the vacancies filled, it will take the pressure off the police boys and girls? Will you agree with me that the new shift patterns for the LPM are something that is very much welcomed by our residents?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Yes. It is welcomed by the residents and that is our primary duty. What Joanne [McCartney] is getting at is that the maximum pressure points for people reporting crime is towards the close of day when people, generally speaking, are thinking of knocking off. That is putting pressure on people's lives and on their habits. We need to think about how to address that. It is a perfectly reasonable question. It can be solved but we need to discuss it properly.

Steve O'Connell AM: Hopefully this review will force those sorts of issues out and improve it. Thank you.

2014/2678 - Swift and Certain Sanctions

Tony Arbour

What do you think of recent Centre for Social Justice (CSJ) recommendations for a programme called Swift and Certain Sanctions, which mirrors my recent recommendations on the justice system, and has reduced re-offending by half in Texas? Can you ask the Metropolitan Police Service (MPS) to consider the implications of the report and/or lobby the central Government to look at its recommendations?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): This is a very interesting idea, Tony. Characteristically, you are in the ideological vanguard. You have found what is going on in [the United States of] America and you are trying to import it to the United Kingdom and to London. We are looking at these sorts of things. You were one of the people who were originally advocating it and you will be familiar with the sobriety test that we are now putting in to try and reduce alcohol-related violence, because so often it is simply repeat offenders going back and drinking again. We want to stop that happening. It is one of the ways of tackling domestic violence as well, which I mentioned just before.

Tony Arbour AM: Are you as disturbed as I am, Mr Mayor, by the large number of repeat offences caused by people who receive what the public at large and victims, in particular, would think were simply slaps on the wrist? For example, the large number of people who receive cautions or simple financial penalties who go out and repeat the offence knowing that they are not going to be punished very much. Indeed, last year in the MPS area nearly 300 people were on their fifth caution. Do you not think that perhaps we should have a rule which suggests something along the lines of two strikes and you are out? You can have one caution, but if you are back again for a second one there should be the application of what I am advocating here, the Texas proposal, and that there should be a real punishment.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Yes. I certainly agree with you about cautions being handed out too liberally. A caution obviously is a serious matter and it means that the crime is recorded, and certainly receiving a caution can badly affect your future chances if you are caught again, or at least it should be. To give a caution five times in a row is obviously wrong and is not what Parliament intended by the system. What we have done is that MOPAC has established an independent review panel where magistrates can look at cautions and decide whether the issuing of those cautions was appropriate or not.

On the swift and sure approach, generally for people in breach of their non-custodial sentences in some way, then what you want is to see them locked up swiftly and certainly for a short sharp shock?

Tony Arbour AM: Yes, exactly right.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): We will look at that. It is not something I have direct power to implement, however, with the Mayor's London Crime Reduction Board, we will certainly have a look at it.

Tony Arbour AM: In relation to non-custodial sentences, particularly the issuing of cautions, do you not think that in addition - and I very much welcome the idea of having magistrates reviewing the issuing of cautions - the victims of crimes which are punished by way of caution should be notified that that is the way the offence has been dealt with?

One of the great complaints that victims of crime have, not just in London, is that they do not know what happened at the end of it. You have already told us this morning, in response to an earlier question, that people can follow up what the police are doing but then it stops. They do not know what has actually happened at the end of the day.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Yes, it is a very fair point. In an era where data is so much more readily transmitted and we should be able to know what is happening so much more easily, I do not see why that should not be possible. I agree with you, Tony. If it is a matter of public record, which after all a criminal punishment is, then I see no reason why the victim should not be informed just by email or whatever as a matter of course.

Tony Arbour AM: Of course, it is not only the victim who is being notified about that. The thing about cautions is, if you like, it is secret justice. Justice in the courts is open to all. That of course is the significant thing about justice in a democracy: everybody can see what is happening. Perhaps you might encourage MOPAC, in addition to suggesting to the Commissioner that victims are told what has happened at the end of the day to those people who have actually been caught committing a crime, that it be published generally so that the public as a whole has some idea of what is actually happening.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Yes. Sort of Wild West-style pictures up everywhere of criminals who have been punished and stuff?

Tony Arbour AM: Why not?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): With a noose around their neck, did you say?

Tony Arbour AM: Not even I will go that far, Mr Mayor.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Frankly, I cannot see any very serious objection if it is a matter of public record. I am not saying that you would want to stick posters of criminals around. The awful truth is that humanity being what it is these days they might relish the publicity, so I am not certain it would have the effect you want, Tony. Insofar as it is possible to give victims the satisfaction of knowing what has happened, or indeed to stoke their indignation if they find that they think the offence has been disposed of in the wrong way, then I see no reason why victims should not know.

Kit Malthouse AM: While I welcome my colleague Tony Arbour's concern on this issue, Mr Mayor, do you think in your consideration of this that you might bear in mind the possible disincentive that it might give to police officers if the system became more onerous around cautions to actually take the crime seriously, if you like? One of the advantages of a caution is

that it is administratively lighter and things are dealt with there and then, whereas would be there any kind of disincentive, do you think, to --

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Cautions are a useful tool. In many cases they will be what the victim actually wants, or at least in some cases. You can think of plenty of cases of crimes of domestic violence or whatever where it is very, very difficult to work out the best way forward. The victim themselves would be pleading for the thing not to get into more of the criminal justice system, as it were, and the caution may be the right way forward. The trouble is that clearly they have been applied too many times and they are being applied too many times. The caution that you are exercising is absolutely right.

2014/2766 - Heatwave Preparedness

Dr Onkar Sahota

Is London prepared for a summer heatwave?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Let us certainly hope we have a good summer. We are having a wonderful summer. We have all sorts of plans in the event of a heatwave. As you know, temperatures and conditions have not met the threshold, unfortunately, for a heatwave as defined in the Heatwave Plan for England. In accordance with the Heatwave Plan, a level 2 alert was issued this weekend. Everybody was alert and ready for a forecast heatwave, although the threshold temperatures were not, in the end, reached.

We are braced. We have the National Health Service (NHS) Heatwave Plan for England and London's Adverse Weather Framework, which is consistent with the Heatwave Plan for England. We are certainly waiting for the heatwave.

Dr Onkar Sahota AM: My concern, Mr Mayor, is that the last resilience plan was planned in 2011 and it has not been updated since then. There has been a whole change in the NHS. We have had hospital closures. We have had reconfiguration of services. I wondered why the resilience plans had not been updated in response to these changes in the NHS in anticipation of that hot heatwave.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): That is a very good question, Onkar. I am not certain. It may be that the answer to that question is that the changes in the NHS, although they may be significant, have not been thought substantially to affect our heatwave preparations. That may be the answer.

Dr Onkar Sahota AM: One of my concerns, of course, is this whole fragmentation. In case there is a heatwave, what is the responsibility of the GLA? Who takes leadership in London in dealing with that situation?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): We lead through the London Resilience Partnership in any event of that kind. You would expect James Cleverly [Chairman, London Resilience Forum] to be taking a leading role in that. We will be trying to co-ordinate London's response.

At the moment, as I say, I just repeat the advice I gave, carry water on the Tube. We are doing a huge amount to upgrade the Tube, to put in air-conditioning to make it cooler and so on. I am, at the moment, satisfied with the resilience arrangements we have in place.

Dr Onkar Sahota AM: I will just urge that there is that leadership in London and that you take responsibility for it and make sure the resilience plan is updated.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): It goes without saying that it falls to us. As we had to do, for instance, you may remember, during the blizzards in the winter of 2009/10. Inevitably the slack will be brought together. There will be responsibility for the GLA in concerting a general pan-London response involving the NHS, the London Ambulance Service (LAS), the MPS, LFEPA and all such bodies.

Dr Onkar Sahota AM: Good, thank you.

2014/2760 - Council Tax on 'Buy-to-Leave' Homes

Tom Copley

You have said there should be strong sanctions on 'buy-to-leave' properties in London. Camden Council has proposed such a sanction through charging double the amount of council tax on empty properties, but has been told by the Government it cannot do this. What representations will you make to the government urging them to allow councils like Camden to tackle the problem of 'buy-to-leave' homes in London through measures such as this?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Yes, I am in favour of this premium on empty homes. I note that some boroughs are now applying it. I encourage that. It is absolutely right that there should be a punitive council tax on people who buy homes specifically as an investment but do not occupy them, although I would stress that council tax records show that empty homes in London are now at the lowest proportion on record. It has gone down from 0.7%, which is what I quoted last time I talked to you about this, down to 0.6% now. The answer is to increase supply and that is what we are doing.

Tom Copley AM: Thank you for that answer. I welcome the fact that you have written to 15 London boroughs who do not charge the extra rate encouraging them to do so, and that is very positive. You have previously stated in an interview on LBC that you would favour 1,000% council tax on properties that are left empty for more than one year. Is that your official position?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): What I said was that the current stipulations could be strengthened. You could go up to several multiples of the tax. I would stress, if you look at the way it is actually applied, you have to be careful. I am sure you will have looked at the figures. In Camden, for instance, where they apply the premium, there are 312 dwellings that are being charged the empty homes premium in Camden. That is about 0.3% of all properties in Camden. Of those, about a third were in band A and they were flats in council-owned properties. In other words, these were not buy-to-leave flats being bought by plutocrats. These were council

homes that were being charged this surcharge. You have to be pretty careful about how you administer this because --

Tom Copley AM: On principle, when you said on the radio 1,000%, is that your position? Is that what you would favour? Have you asked the Government for this?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): We certainly said that we think that the ability to charge a premium should be increased by a factor of several times.

Tom Copley AM: Would you want to give councils the flexibility to determine that rate for themselves?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Certainly, although it is worth bearing in mind, just to repeat my point, that of the homes that are charged the premium, in one borough that I have studied because I thought I better see who was actually being hit by this, it is only a tiny minority of homes that are actually in bands G and H. Most of them are in band A. You would need to think about who you are hitting.

Tom Copley AM: George Osborne [Chancellor of the Exchequer] was in Camden recently and pressure was put on him by councillors there to be given this power and he declined to do so. Would you commit to making a representation and writing a letter jointly with the London Borough of Camden to the Government asking them to give councils this freedom?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Yes, it depends how they apply it, as I said. I am sure you have heard what I just said.

Tom Copley AM: You would say that. In principle you are happy to join me to make a representation?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Yes, but I am sure you would have heard what I have just said about the kinds of properties that are being --

Tom Copley AM: I did hear what you just said, yes.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): You would want to be careful that you were not imposing very, very high rates of council tax on people who simply could not afford anything like that sum.

Tom Copley AM: Of course. Can I ask you finally whether or not you would favour a power to, via the precept, set a higher rate on empty properties? Is that a power you would like?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I am certainly open to that. It might be very difficult and bureaucratic in the sense that, just thinking off the top of my head, it would entail an awful lot of knowledge on the part of this authority about the circumstances in which such and such a dwelling was unoccupied. It would put us in a role you would normally expect to be occupied

by the local council. The borough is probably the right level at which this should be imposed. As I say, I am in favour of the boroughs having this power and exercising it.

2014/2684 - Solar Energy

Jenny Jones

Will you consider the recommendations in my solar energy report, London is Ready for a Brighter Future?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): We are supporting solar energy, Jenny, through London Plan policies RE:NEW and RE:FIT. I have asked TfL to look at solar roads. In [the United States of] America, they are trialling a scheme where you extract the energy from the sunlight falling in the road and it seems to work there.

Jenny Jones AM: Is that Texas as well?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): It may be.

Jenny Jones AM: The things you can learn from Texas.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): It may be. Just because it comes from Texas does not mean it is a bad idea.

Jenny Jones AM: What I am really concerned about is whether you will consider my recommendations because they are slightly different from yours. I am very interested in what you are doing and I would love to read about it in a newspaper but I do not have much time, so will you consider my recommendations?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I am always happy, yes, of course, to consider your recommendations, Jenny.

On solar in general in London, it is never going to be, I am afraid, a big game-changer, just because of the difficulty of fitting photovoltaics (PV) in London by comparison with elsewhere in the country. We have many more flats and much less roof space. We have huge parts of the city that are already conservation areas where you cannot put in this stuff. It costs a lot to do it. In London, there is a lot of rental accommodation where nobody wants to go ahead and do it. Solar, we think, is only really going to meet about 5% of our needs. We need to be going for other forms of low-carbon energy as well.

Jenny Jones AM: The point my report makes is that, even taking into account all the difficulties in London, and we have looked at all of those, we are still underperforming. If I could just give you a few facts and figures, compared with other parts of Britain, London is doing very badly. Sunderland, for example, has around 4,000 domestic installations; Southwark, which is about the same size, has 200. Rotherham has over 3,000 and Redbridge, which is about the same size, has 400. Wigan has nearly 3,000 and Wandsworth has 300. Comparatively, London is doing really badly.

The cost of the technology has fallen by 50% since 2011. We are talking about a different situation than was happening even two or three years ago. You have a team here who could look at this and who could think about it. For example, I went to visit a school in Islington that gains 25% of its electricity needs from solar panels. Will you look at this --

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

Jenny Jones AM: -- for schools and businesses and so on, because it is actually a way of improving the wellbeing of Londoners?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Sure. I am a big fan of solar. What you said about Redbridge versus Rotherham was interesting because actually Southwark you might excuse on the grounds that there are many dwellings where it would be difficult to fit solar. In Redbridge it might be that there is more scope. Maybe we should be more encouraging of solar in those areas where it could be more readily fitted in London. I will look at it. I know Matthew Pencharz [Mayor's Senior Environment & Energy Advisor] is a great fan of this and a fan of your work in this, so let us see what we can do.

Jenny Jones AM: That is brilliant. Thank you.

2014/2592 - Bakerloo line extension

Caroline Pidgeon MBE

What is the timescale for producing route options for extending the Bakerloo line south?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): All I can say is wait and see, wait and see. In due course, with a not unreasonable delay, you will hear some more about that. I do not want to go into it now but in the soonish future you will be hearing more about it.

Caroline Pidgeon MBE AM: You have talked a lot about this over your time as Mayor, but people want to know when they are going to actually see a detailed consultation. Can we expect there to be a consultation in this calendar year?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): You can certainly expect to hear a lot more about it soon. Although I have talked about it in general terms for a few years, it is only really recently, it would be fair to say, if you talked to LU and TfL planners, that they have concluded that is really a very exciting and interesting option. The change is really in TfL, where they have been over and over all sorts of options for different types of rail capacity improvements in south London and they now think this is much more attractive than possibly they used to.

The big game-changer is giving London more control of suburban rail. That is really vital if we are going to make sense of our transport networks. It is absolutely crazy that we have most of the rail capacity in London completely outside the control of Londoners.

Caroline Pidgeon MBE AM: We completely support you on that, and we have lobbied alongside you on that. However, previous work on the Bakerloo line extension south has looked at at least 14 route options. I have the paperwork historically from TfL. We know previous studies have looked at both the Old Kent Road and Camberwell route options. They say they will provide huge economic benefits to those areas already earmarked for regeneration. Will you confirm that when you do consult on the Bakerloo line extension that it will serve both of these areas?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Yes. Sorry, I will confirm I will look at it. I cannot confirm which route it will be and you are just going to have to hold your breath a little bit longer, Caroline. I am sorry.

Caroline Pidgeon MBE AM: We know from the success of London Overground that there is huge suppressed demand. We also know from work that has just come out on Crossrail from the Public Accounts Committee that we really need to look at benefit-cost ratios because we often underestimate economic benefits. Will you make sure you look at all of this as part of your work to look at extending the Bakerloo line south? Given you are doing work on this at the moment, when would you like to see such an extension open?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Can I just refer you back to what I have just said, Caroline? You are going to hear a lot more about it. I do not want to anticipate that. Suffice it to say, we are working up to making some more detailed announcements about routes and timescales in the nearish future.

Caroline Pidgeon MBE AM: One of the other really important things is that it links to other really good interchanges such as Lewisham. Will you also consider making sure that Lewisham Station is a key part of any such extension?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I am sure you will quite probably be making representations about the route. I do not want to say much more than I already have. We are confident that we can. Where I would certainly echo you, is that the economic benefits we think will be very substantial from an extension of the Bakerloo line.

Caroline Pidgeon MBE AM: People in southeast London have been calling for this for years. You have tweeted encouraging things about it for a few years. I am glad to hear there is proper substantial work going on and I hope we will get a consultation this year so we can start to get this project moving forward in the future.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): As I say, there has been a big change in our thinking about it and you are going to hear more about it quite soon.

2014/2762 - London Rental Standard

Andrew Dismore

How many Barnet landlords are signed up to your London Rental Standard scheme?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): The number of landlords signed up to the London Rental Standard in Barnet is 448.

Andrew Dismore AM: Thank you for that.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): We are encouraging everybody to promote the London Rental Standard, which is a great thing for tenants and indeed for the landlords themselves.

Andrew Dismore AM: We established before that councillors who are landlords should set a good example by signing up to the London Rental Standard. I do not suppose it would surprise you to know that in addition to Mayor Councillor Rayner, whom we have discussed before, five other Barnet Conservative councillors who are landlords in the borough - Councillor Peter Zinkin, Councillor Dean Cohen, Councillor Melvin Cohen, Councillor Helena Hart, Councillor Tom Davey and of course Councillor Rayner - have not only failed to join the scheme but at the last council meeting secured a dispensation from the council itself to dis-apply the normal direct pecuniary interest rules to enable them to participate and vote in matters directly related to landlords in the borough. Do you think that is right?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): If I may respectfully say to you, Andrew, you have raised the gentleman concerned several times now in this place and made a series of allegations about him. Some of them have been allegations of criminal misconduct. If you feel that that is the case, then you really must take those up with the police.

My general view about the London Rental Standard is that it is an excellent thing and I would encourage everybody to sign up to it if they possibly can.

Andrew Dismore AM: If it is so important and so successful, do you think it is time for us also to have a rental standard code of practice for landlords of commercial properties, especially in light of what is happening as a result of the new permitted development rights introduced by your Government, which allow change from office to residential use?

I will give you a couple of examples. The Camden Town business improvement district (BID) set up 100 young entrepreneurs at Carlisle House in Camden Town. 500 people worked there. They have all been evicted from the buildings so it can be converted into flats. On Monday, I met with businesses in Premier House in Edgware. There are 150 individual businesses, charities and other small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) based there. There are 400 staff between them. They have just been told to get out, some with only four weeks' notice, so the landlord can convert the building into flats at the suggestion of Barnet Council. For example, Mr Hayman runs a chartered accountancy. He employs four people and has been in there for 13 years. Mr Shah runs an import business. He has been in Premier House for 18 years. He employs 11 people and yet he has been given just four weeks to leave.

Do you think we should have a rental standard for these business premises? More importantly, what help can you offer these SMEs to either persuade the landlord not to vacate them or otherwise help them out in their particular difficulties in trying to relocate in the area? Unfortunately office space there is in short supply and the premiums of office rents have gone up precisely because of this building being turned into flats.

Do you think it is time for the Government to rethink this and not allow evictions of long-established businesses but only perhaps convert empty office blocks? More importantly, what are you going to do for these people who are about to be thrown out of their livelihoods? How can you help them?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I will certainly study the case that you mention. I genuinely share your concerns about the temptation to try to solve the housing crisis by turning too much of London's employment space and London's office space into residential. Many boroughs are concerned about this now and it is entirely proper that they should be concerned. We need to make sure that London retains substantial supplies of space for economic activity.

I cannot give you a top-of-the-head answer to the precise problem that you raise in Barnet, but generally speaking we have a housing crisis. It may well be that there is an argument in some cases for turning disused office space and you see it around --

Andrew Dismore AM: The point about it --

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): If I may just finish the answer, I can give you a general answer. There are schemes I have seen in Croydon where very much underused office space has been turned into residential quite successfully. It will not always be wrong, but you have to be very careful about how you do it.

Andrew Dismore AM: The point is here this is not disused office space. This is office space used by long-established businesses of 15, 18 or more years. Will you meet a deputation from the people who run the businesses in Premier House to discuss their problem and see what you can do to help?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): It is a matter for Barnet Council. I suggest that you take it up with Barnet Council and see what you can do to sort it out.

Andrew Dismore AM: That is what we are doing, but they would also like to know what you can do to help. You said you will look into it. Will you meet or will you ask one of your senior officers to meet?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I will invite you as a Member of the Assembly to meet with Barnet Council. I would urge you as a Member of the Assembly to meet with Barnet Council as fast as possible to see what they can do to sort out the problem.

Andrew Dismore AM: You see what you can do. Will you help?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I would not want to interfere with the relationship between you and Barnet Council, which I understand is obviously very close and very strong. I would like to encourage you, Andrew, to do your job and --

Andrew Dismore AM: I am doing my job. Will you do your job and see what you can do to help these people?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): -- see what you can do to sort out this problem rather than raising it fruitlessly and pointlessly and endlessly trying to attack the reputations of people who are not members of this place and who have no ability to defend themselves.

Andrew Dismore AM: I am asking you: will you help these people?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Several times now you have used your position as an elected Member. I know everybody rejoices in your membership of this Assembly, Andrew, and even more rejoice in the prospect of your departure from this Assembly to become an MP. Contrary wise, there are Labour MPs who rejoice in the prospect of your continuing membership of this Assembly. On the other hand, it is up to you to see what you can do with Barnet Council and to sort it out.

Andrew Dismore AM: I am doing that. One of the things I am doing is asking whether you will help? Will you help?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I will help by urging you to repair your damaged relations with Barnet Council by doing what you can to help in the case concerned.

2014/2654 - Street Based Developments

Andrew Boff

Would you consider amending the London Plan to give greater priority for street-based developments where possible?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Yes, Andrew, I am in favour of street-based developments where possible. As you and I discussed the other day, however, there are some interesting problems raised sometimes by street-based developments, but generally you can achieve wonderful things. If you look at what we are doing in the Olympic Park area, it will look like the best of London, terraces, squares, in the new London vernacular, and it will look fantastic.

Andrew Boff AM: Yes, you know my view on the Olympic Park. It will actually contain the best and the worst of design.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I appreciate that.

Andrew Boff AM: I suppose you are acquainted with my view on that. There are some requirements in the London Plan that actually make it quite difficult to provide street-based developments. Would you support a review of the London Plan to see what gets in the way of providing street-based development?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Yes. One of the things people need to focus on here is that we do want street-based.

Andrew Boff AM: He said yes.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): It would be wonderful to have a return to the Georgian terraces with even five or six-storey structures such as you find in Pimlico, perhaps even seven storeys.

One of the difficulties, of course, is that within the London Plan there is a stipulation that any building above three storeys must have a lift. We could take that out and say you did not have to have a lift until you were five, six, seven, eight or nine storeys. The trouble is we have reached the stage now where people would find that suddenly a restriction on the accessibility of the building. People would say, "Are you really seriously going to take lifts away when we have so many elderly people, so many disabled and so on and so forth?" Walk-ups which are so attractive are limited in their flexibility. That is one of the problems that we face. If you put in a lift for a building of four, five or six storeys people will say, "Why?" The economics of it will not add up. You will be spending an awful lot on the core and the shaft of the lift and not actually maximising the potential habitation in the building.

The Create Streets agenda is slightly in conflict with the general acceptance now of the need to provide disabled access and access for the elderly and indeed for buggies and all the rest of it.

Andrew Boff AM: Thank you. That was a good summary of why a street-based development may sometimes not be suitable. Let us talk about specifics. Would you be supportive of developers having to provide a reason in their application why a street-based development is not possible in that particular instance?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Yes. That is something --

Andrew Boff AM: Yes, that is another yes.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): What they tend to do is explain why the PTAL ratio - or whatever it happens to be - necessitates a certain approach.

Andrew Boff AM: You have been so much more co-operative than even I imagined you were going to be.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): No, I am a huge fan of street --

Andrew Boff AM: Just for the record, Chair, we now have two yeses.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): When I look around, there are things that are being built now and I think a lot of them look absolutely fantastic. I really do. There is a growing use of brick in a beautiful way. People are using brick. It is 21st century. We are not trying to redo Georgian terraces again, but they have something of that spirit. With the designs that people are coming up with, organically, people have settled on a new London vernacular. It is something we should support and perhaps we should give some extra push behind.

Andrew Boff AM: Thank you, Mr Mayor. I invite you - and I think you have been, actually - to come down to Galleons Drive in Barking Riverside and look at the sweep of the terraced houses there. It looks like a new Bath without trying to pretend to be Bath, if you know what I mean. They are very high quality developments and I do invite you to come down.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Chelsea Barracks will not be quite the same.

Andrew Boff AM: However, it will be streets and squares. Thank you very much. Fantastic.

2014/2761 - Affordable Housing Programme

Len Duvall

Was the 2015 - 2018 Affordable Homes Programme undersubscribed when the bidding process closed on 10 March 2014?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): There was actually a very good response in the bidding round to what we were offering. I think I am right in saying that almost £500 million has been allocated to 54 providers. Partly as a result of that - and there are several other programmes obviously - we are on course to deliver 100,000 homes over two mayoral terms and I think I am right in saying 45,000 between 2015 and 2018. If you take this current programme together with the Housing Bank and the Housing Zones, those are good numbers but, as we all know, they are not yet high enough.

Len Duvall AM: Have we allocated the full £1.25 billion capital funding that has been given to you by central Government? Is that fully allocated now across all these various programmes?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I cannot give you that answer. What I can tell you is that we have allocated the thick end of £500 million this week. That is all I can tell you about the progress we are making on that, as a result of which, as I say, we are on target to deliver 45,000 between 2015 and 2018.

Len Duvall AM: Mr Mayor, you said there was a good response. How many housing associations did we turn down to bid against the programme?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I cannot give you the number we turned down. I can tell you that the number that succeeded was 54.

Len Duvall AM: There has been some speculation in the press that has not been completely rebutted by the GLA here, that a number of housing associations did not bid as part of this programme. A number of housing associations have gone to the press and said, "If we went into this programme, tenancies would be doomed to fail". Traditional social housing tenants cannot afford the higher rents that you are forcing them to charge. This was on the affordable rent element of your strategy and they have chosen not to bid. That is why you say there was a good response. That seems to imply to me that you had more people responding which you would think. We are in a housing crisis. Everyone would like a subsidy and all the rest of it. We would have turned down a number because there is limited money to go around in terms of these schemes.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): It is certainly the case that there was a big spread in the number of homes that the various organisations were offering to build. Some were up at more than 2,000 homes; some were down at 200. It would be fair to say we would like to see a greater scale of ambition from the housing associations. We are making that point to them.

I do think that the numbers are currently very encouraging. London generally is building more affordable homes. The key statistic: more affordable homes will be built this year than in any year since 1980. More affordable homes will be built in London this year than in any financial year --

Len Duvall AM: Is it this year or over this term, the period of this programme?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): This financial year.

Len Duvall AM: This is a target, is it not? You are not meeting these targets.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): More affordable homes.

Len Duvall AM: Mr Mayor, I did a quick calculation, and the reason why I asked if you have allocated the full £1.25 billion this year from different programmes - and you have allocated it to various programmes - is that there seems to be a missing £100 million-odd that does not seem to be allocated to any of the schemes. Is this because a number of housing associations have not bid for the scheme?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): No.

Len Duvall AM: Therefore, somewhere it is in the system and you should be able to provide this information to me?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Yes. We should be able to get you it. Perhaps the reason for the discrepancy is that our housing budgets are allocated across a range of schemes now, including the Housing Zones and the London Housing Bank, as well as the Mayor's Housing Covenant. We are using lots of ways to achieve the goal of building more homes in London. Just so you know, more affordable homes are expected to be built in this financial year than in any year since 1980.

Len Duvall AM: In that sense you do not believe there are any disincentives then, nor engagement with housing associations for on this scheme, that everything is all right?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I understand where you are coming from and the response, as I say, has been very good. I would just reassure everybody that I do think this model - whatever the criticisms may be made of it - is not 80% across the board. As everybody knows, it is 65% across the market. There is plenty of scope for rents lower than that and we are seeing good uptake by a great many - by 54 providers across London.

Len Duvall AM: Having said that, Mr Mayor, and I listened very carefully to what you said, why are these housing experts and these substantial housing associations not choosing to bid and be part of your scheme? Surely they should be biting off your hand in terms of this money and they are not. They are walking away from you. They are not playing with this. This is not some ideological issue. They are just saying it does not meet the needs of poorer tenants and that you are forcing them into a new poverty trap.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Well, I do not know --

Len Duvall AM: That is what they are saying. That is what they have said in Inside Out [television documentary]. --

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): -- if you look at the G15, the Notting Hill Housing Trust has had £59,313,000, Peabody's £20 million, Network Housing £22 million, East Thames £16 million, Circle Anglia £14 million and so on.

Len Duvall AM: A number of buffers are not there that we would expect to see. Big players that you would expect to see that are active in building new homes are not choosing to sign up to your scheme. Does that not cause you a concern?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): As I say, we have seen very, very good uptake. Insofar as you may have a point, Len, which I am not for a minute accepting you do, but insofar as there may be people who for one reason or another have not been as energetic as they might have been, then I would urge them to come forward and not sit on their surpluses and not sit on this cash and get building in London. We are here to build and that is what we are doing.

Darren Johnson AM: The Mayor's Homes for London Board confirmed recently that you will be delivering 52,747 homes by March 2015. That is short of your manifesto 55,000 target. Are you disappointed?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): We will not be short because we are going to deliver 55,000 by December 2015 and it will be a record 100,000 completions over two terms and there are more than 76,000 of them completed so far.

Darren Johnson AM: You will be late rather than short?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): We are going to deliver 55,000 homes by December 2015. That is a massive achievement and people will have heard what I have had to say on the rate we are now building at. It is not just the affordable homes, however. If you look at what is happening across London, the cranes are up everywhere and we are leading in the building of new homes for Londoners and that is the best solution: get Londoners the chance of having some bricks and mortars of their own and get them a roof over their head.

2014/2763 - Race Claims against the Police

Andrew Dismore

I first raised race claims against the police by way of a Mayor's Question in February 2013. Despite repeated questions and correspondence, it has taken until June 2014 to get satisfactory answers as to how many claims, how much was paid in compensation, and to establish that just 1 of the 66 successful cases in the previous 3 years resulted in any disciplinary action whatsoever, and this was the equivalent of a mild ticking-off.

Do you consider it satisfactory that I should have had to be so persistent and waited so long to get to the bottom of the story? What is your explanation for this? And what do you think this says about the MPS's approach to racism in the police?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Thank you, Andrew. You did ask a series of questions and I agree with you that it did take too long to answer. That was not because of any reluctance on behalf of MOPAC to get details to you but it did involve an awful lot of collating bits of paper, some of which were stored in Derbyshire in salt mines or some inaccessible place, and it did take a long time. Deputy Assistant Commissioner Fiona Taylor [Metropolitan Police Service] wrote to you on 9 June providing all the details that you wanted, and you did ask a great many questions and I hope that the answer was illuminating.

You asked a series of questions about how many cases there had been involving racial discrimination and we were able to show that there were 34 such cases and that the cost of settling the cases was £179,000.78. The cost of answering your questions, by the way, was about £1 million, so that may give you some --

Andrew Dismore AM: In fact, Mr Mayor, that is not quite true, not the £1 million. I am sure it was not £1 million. Mr Mayor, there were, in fact, 34 internal cases which cost just over £196,000 to settle. There were 33 involving the public which cost £469,000 to settle. There were a total of 67 cases. Total compensation was just a whisker short of £666,000. The key problem here was that only one - only one - resulted in any disciplinary action at all and that was just a first written warning, no more than a slap on the wrist.

What I was going to ask you was this and I am going to ask this question again. At Mayor's Question Time for the year 2013/14, which has just finished, so you know it is coming, how long do you think I am going to have to wait for an answer in September?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Sorry, what is the question?

Andrew Dismore AM: I am going to ask you the same question again. For 2013/14 how many cases have there been? How much has been spent in compensation? How many have been subject to disciplinary action? How long do you think it is going to take me to get an answer bearing in mind you know about the question coming now.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I hope we will be able to get an answer as fast as possible. As far as I can make out, you asked 219 on policing last year alone, 21% of all the questions asked by the Assembly all together. We have done our best to satisfy you on all the questions that you have posed and you have had quite a full answer about the Employment Tribunal cases. I do not know what conclusions you have been able to draw about --

Andrew Dismore AM: The conclusion I have drawn is that the MPS does not take race issues very seriously if only one has resulted in disciplinary action. You had 67 cases; you paid out £66,000. If you are telling me you cannot say what the numbers are going to be --

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): That is completely unfair. You are saying --

Andrew Dismore AM: -- for 2013/14, then it is a pretty poor show.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): That is extremely unfair on the MPS. The MPS takes racism extremely seriously and they stamp it out wherever they possibly can. I reject that but you have had the data that you sought; it has cost a considerable amount to produce it. I do not believe for a second that you can draw that conclusion. I was told yesterday in my briefing that it cost about £1 million. These are a very considerable number of questions.

Andrew Dismore AM: That is ridiculous.

Roger Evans AM (Chairman): Are we finished with this question?

Andrew Dismore AM: That is absolute rubbish.

2014/2767 - Pay

Fiona Twycross

Should employers pay the London Living Wage (LLW) when they can afford to do so?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Yes, I do encourage all employers to pay the LLW where they can afford to do so. I certainly do that. You may be about to bring up the case again of the Brixton cinema. I do not necessarily want to join in strike action. I believe these matters should be settled by persuasion.

Fiona Twycross AM: Yes, thank you. I received your letter yesterday and I was pleased that you had discussed this with Picturehouse Cinemas. I am not sure I was actually asking you to get involved in the strike action but I do think it is regrettable that you are refusing to meet the Ritzy cinema workers, who had a more positive view of you than I suggested might be the case in terms of whether you would meet.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Oh, no, do not tell me.

Fiona Twycross AM: They will be genuinely disappointed that you will not meet them --

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

Fiona Twycross AM: -- to talk to them about their frustrations.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Have you actually asked me to meet them?

Fiona Twycross AM: I did ask you to meet them. That is what we discussed at the last MQT.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): What did I say?

Fiona Twycross AM: You said it would depend on your diary and then we received a letter saying point blank that you do not want to meet them.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): All right. Oh dear, I am very sorry.

Fiona Twycross AM: It is a shame because they genuinely wanted to engage with you and talk with you about their frustrations. This is your opportunity to reconsider before I ring them this afternoon and tell them that you are not going to meet them.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I am sorry we have not been able to find time so far.

Fiona Twycross AM: It was less about the time. It was quite clear from the letter that you were not intending to meet them. It was not about the time in the letter, but we can revisit that with your diary. I wanted to ask you about something else --

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): It is very difficult. I would love to help the employees of the Brixton Ritzy cinema.

Fiona Twycross AM: It is just frustrating because you engage with the employers --

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I do not believe that I would necessarily --

Fiona Twycross AM: -- but not with the workers.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Let us be clear. There is a dispute going on between them and Picturehouse and Curzon who are not accredited to the LLW. I would encourage Picturehouse and Curzon to become accredited to the LLW. That is the best I can say. I believe I have written to them, by the way.

Fiona Twycross AM: Yes, you have.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I have written to them. Thank you. I have done, Fiona, already what you urge me to do. That is probably the best I can do.

Fiona Twycross AM: The frustration is that --

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I know that there are fans on the eighth floor of the Ritzy cinema and who go to it and who hope that the strike will end soon.

Fiona Twycross AM: Yes, we all hope the strike will end soon and it would have been helpful if you had met them as you suggested you might last time. In a recent --

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): What could I have done?

Fiona Twycross AM: It is about them understanding --

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Give me a clue. What could I have told them? What could I have told them that would have actually helped?

Fiona Twycross AM: It is about speaking on their side.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I have written to Picturehouse and to Curzon, and I have done my best to intercede on their behalf. People might say I was band-wagoning and opportunistic.

Fiona Twycross AM: I wanted to ask a separate point --

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I would be accused of a pointless photo shoot.

Fiona Twycross AM: If I can ask a separate point, you assumed that my question was about the Ritzy. I wanted to ask why at the London Assembly we are not paying people on traineeships. You have previously stated that all former work experience should be paid and suggested that at the GLA they should get the LLW. We have young people starting traineeships soon that are going to undertake real work at the GLA for three days a week for 12 weeks, which sounds remarkably like an internship and I just wonder whether you did not think they deserved to be paid for their work like apprentices who also study alongside their work experience.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I am not familiar with that. Are you saying we have loads of people who are not --

Fiona Twycross AM: In the scheme here, you have stated that anybody on work experience here on internships and things like that should be paid the LLW at the GLA. You have said that on a number of occasions. I will send you the information but I am quite disturbed that we are going to have young people on traineeships here, which just sounds a bit like splitting hairs in terms of what we call things.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Young people are doing fantastically well to get traineeships.

Fiona Twycross AM: So they should not be paid?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I would much rather see people in a place of work than --

Fiona Twycross AM: With no pay? They are not being paid.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Whether they are doing jobs in the sense of --

Fiona Twycross AM: How can people who have no money afford to do these traineeships if they are not being paid?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I will look at the evidence --

Fiona Twycross AM: I will send you the information and I will expect a full reply.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I am in favour of people getting into a place of work and learning the skills that go with it.

Fiona Twycross AM: With no pay? Thank you.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I will see if what you are saying is true and I am not certain that it is.

2014/2758 - Regrets re River Crossings

John Biggs

You expressed regrets at the last MQT for not making quicker progress with a Thames River crossing to replace the Thames Gateway Bridge proposal. What will you do in your remaining time in office to accelerate the development of a proposal and what position will we be in at the time of the next mayoral election?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Oh, regrets.

John Biggs AM: Yes. You have regrets?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Yes. You have asked what the position is going to be about on river crossings. The Silvertown Crossing is cracking on. The Blackwell 2 crossing is going at a lick and it has already been designated a project of national significance. We will be submitting a formal application to the Government for powers to build the Silvertown crossing before the end of 2015. That is just the beginning, of course, because we want to see a series of new bridges. I would like to be proceeding not with a new Woolwich ferry but two new

crossings at Gallions Reach and at Belvedere, so not the old Thames Gateway Bridge (TGB) model but two new crossings, each of which will take the weight off the other.

John Biggs AM: This is not a party political point – although it is tempting, of course – but a lot of us respect that you have expressed regrets at not making a greater move on this. Do you accept that there has been at least a four-year delay in implementing these proposals and that that has caused delay to the economic regeneration and opportunities for people in the East End of London?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): No, I certainly do not regret stopping the TGB.

John Biggs AM: We respect that.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): It was the wrong project and one that was thrown out by the inspector, so we did completely the right thing.

John Biggs AM: It is not quite the case but the reality is that you could, on the back of that, with your superb hindsight, have accelerated the development of alternative proposals. You spent four years doing nothing. Do you regret that?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): We are blasting ahead very, very fast indeed and you should rejoice at the speed with which the Silvertown project is going ahead and that we have extended the ambitions of the crossings east of Tower Bridge and there will be bridges both at Gallions Reach and at Belvedere.

John Biggs AM: When you leave office, assuming you do, in two years' time, where will we be with this?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): We will be very far down the track to much, much better.

John Biggs AM: What does that mean?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): To a much better solution for crossings east of Tower Bridge than we would ever have been otherwise.

John Biggs AM: As a celebration of your departure, if people want to drive across these new bridges, will they be able to?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Very shortly. Very shortly.

John Biggs AM: But not until long after you have gone.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Thankfully, they will not be able to drive over the Garden Bridge, which was the wrong solution. They will be able to thank me because they will not be funnelled up a tiny road called Knee Hill right through the heart of Bexley where they

would have done incalculable environmental damage. You will not be able to drive whatever car you drive, if you do drive one, through that neighbourhood off a gigantic motorway bridge --

John Biggs AM: This is not quite true, is it? This is not quite true.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): -- a sort of Ceaucescu-esque construction that was thrown out by the inspector, and quite rightly too, on environmental grounds.

John Biggs AM: The reality shows that you are just filibustering now.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): No, I am not --

John Biggs AM: The record shows that you are quite happy to cause vast environmental damage - apropos previous questions today - when it suits you, but on this occasion you have hidden behind that --

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): On the contrary --

John Biggs AM: -- for purely craven political reasons and you recognise now that the breadth of support for alternative is not a Labour plot to trick you --

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): No, I recognise there is a desire --

John Biggs AM: -- it is a project supported vigorously by the business community.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Look, you perfectly properly represent the interests of one side of the river and were determined to build a motorway.

John Biggs AM: No, my mate Len [Duvall] supports the other side of it.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): You were determined to build a motorway through the other side of the river --

John Biggs AM: There was no plan to build a motorway.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): -- into an area that was very different in character from your constituency and to cause a great deal of environmental damage. We had to decide how to proceed. We decided to go ahead with some better plans and that is what is going to happen.

John Biggs AM: Therefore, you will apologise to the people of east and southeast London? You will ask them to be grateful for rescuing them from the dreadful TGB, but you will apologise for having consigned them to endless traffic jams for the last six years as a result of your delay?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I will certainly be very happy to take the plaudits of both sides of the river for having found an equitable solution that deals with the demands of

everybody east of Tower Bridge and the needs of our economy. The TGB was a flagrantly political attempt to blight the lives of people --

John Biggs AM: It was not.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): -- of people south of the river with no regard to democracy and with no regard to their desires, simply because they did not vote Labour --

John Biggs AM: It was supported very solidly by Labour and Conservatives.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): -- and we already have come up with a much better solution.

Roger Evans AM (Chairman): The Labour Group is out of time.

John Biggs AM: At the last MQT I thought you had finally confirmed --

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): They are not only out of time; they are out of ideas.

Andrew Dismore AM: You are a coward.

John Biggs AM: -- that you are a modern politician prepared to accept that you have got things wrong, and here we go again.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I am prepared to accept that you have things wrong; I am perfectly prepared to regret your failure.

Richard Tracey AM: Thank you, Mr Chairman. Yes, Mr Mayor, we who are west of Tower Bridge very much feel for those east of Tower Bridge for the river crossings, so one or two questions for you. Will the Silvertown tunnel be completed by 2021? Are you confident of that?

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

Richard Tracey AM: You think so?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I think even earlier, 2019, soonish, yes.

Richard Tracey AM: I know that some of the senior officials in TfL have said that it will certainly be completed by 2021, but I just wanted your assurance on that.

I understand - particularly from my good colleague, Gareth Bacon [AM], who sadly is not able to be with us today - that the Belvedere-Rainham bridge option apparently would lead to the creation of considerably more homes than the Gallions Reach option. Are you aware of this?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I am.

Richard Tracey AM: Do you believe that the Belvedere bridge is perhaps the better option?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): It might well be but what I want to do is to proceed with both. One way to solve this problem is I would like to have a plethora of bridges. If you look at the number of bridges through the centre of London and compare it to Paris, it is absolutely absurd. This is the biggest growth area in Europe and we should be putting in more bridges, and that is what we are going to do.

Richard Tracey AM: Absolutely accepted, but which of the two bridges? If you are talking about two options, I do understand from colleagues in Bexley that the Gallions Reach one might well create some problems for them. You mentioned a certain hill, I believe, that a lot of traffic would be pouring up.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Yes.

Richard Tracey AM: Would you perhaps put your weight behind building the Belvedere bridge first?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): What we would want to do is build them together and to try to minimise, therefore, the traffic impacts of both because you would take weight off each of them.

Richard Tracey AM: Both together?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): That would be my ideal scenario.

Richard Tracey AM: Completion by what time?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): By the middle of the next decade.

Andrew Boff AM: Mr Mayor, there is a broad consensus in the Assembly for identifying that we do need more crossings east of London Bridge, but there is a very small number who do not agree with that.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): No, they want more crossings somewhere else.

Andrew Boff AM: Yes. Perhaps it is a consensus not in this building. Could you write to me about the environmental impacts of the Silvertown tunnel that you have planned, specifically with regard to the air quality in Royal Docks?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Yes, I would be very happy to.

Andrew Boff AM: I would welcome that. That was a major concern for the residents of that area, who already have to cope with the fact that you can breathe in in Royal Docks and taste

the airline fuel from the airport. Any addition to that would not be welcome and so I would like to see what we are doing to ameliorate that.

With that general welcome for the crossings, could I ask you again to write to me and see whether or not you have investigated what the main reasons are for rejecting a bridge at the Woolwich ferry area --

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I would be very happy to do that.

Andrew Boff AM: -- with the technical reasons for that because it is the most logical place for a bridge?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I went round this many, many times with TfL.

Andrew Boff AM: I would like to be acquainted with why that is not in the mix, and also whether or not there are other possibilities that are looked at, perhaps more ambitious ones. My own favourite - without the benefit of costing it - is a tunnel from the A13 at Beckton down to Shooters Hill, which would be big, long and very, very expensive. I want to know whether or not such a tunnel has been considered, bearing in mind there is now enthusiasm for tunnelling in London which we did not have a few years ago.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Yes. As you know, we are looking at all sorts of orbital tunnels and that may be one that we can consider.

Andrew Boff AM: Thank you very much.