

**London Assembly (Mayor's Question Time) – 23 February 2015****Transcript of Agenda Item 4b – Final Draft Consolidated Budget 2015-16: Questions to the Mayor**

**Jenny Jones AM:** Mr Mayor, since the last Budget meeting the Metropolitan Police Service (MPS) has announced that now it will not facilitate certain protests. I am just curious whether or not you think that your budget is so tight that you cannot afford to facilitate the democratic process.

**Boris Johnson (Mayor of London):** I understand. You are talking about the recent communications from the MPS about not policing certain protests. I am in discussion with the MPS about that.

Just for your guidance and the Assembly's guidance, obviously I am very much of the view that the police do a fantastic job of looking after and managing about 5,000 protests of one kind or another in our city every year. It is important that they should continue to do so. One of the factors is that if you say that it is going to be a peaceful protest and you decide to leave it just to TfL to manage or whatever, the risk is that by withdrawing police support and police presence you might encourage the opposite result. I am concerned that that should not be the way forward. I am probably at one with you, Jenny, in wanting to see the MPS continue to police protests in London.

**Jenny Jones AM:** That is fantastic because in fact the effect of what the MPS is suggesting is that peaceful protests would have to pay to happen, whereas if you say you are going to a violent protest the police will be there for free. It is illogical.

**Boris Johnson (Mayor of London):** It is a serious point and it is well made. I understand that argument. We have a great, vibrant democracy in London. People are allowed to come and protest and they are allowed to shout things whenever they want and are allowed to shout back, too. However, in the end, the police have to be there and that is my position.

**Jenny Jones AM:** I am really pleased you are saying that and I am just curious that the MPS did not run this idea past you. Did they really not tell you?

**Boris Johnson (Mayor of London):** We are in discussion with them.

**Jenny Jones AM:** Thank you.

**Caroline Pidgeon MBE AM:** Obviously I welcome your decision about daily caps as far as it goes, but I do not think it helps those who perhaps work one day a week or who have very variable part-time work.

**Boris Johnson (Mayor of London):** No, I have to be honest about that. No.

**Caroline Pidgeon MBE AM:** Given that there was unanimous support in the Assembly, will you rethink your hike of outer London daily fares? If you will not for this year, will you at least reverse this anomaly for next year's fares package?

**Boris Johnson (Mayor of London):** No. We have gone a long way to satisfying the needs of outer London part-time workers. People who are working two or more days a week in my view satisfy my definition

of 'part-time workers'. Their concerns will have been addressed. The refund system that TfL has been able to come up with is a smart way forward and that is where we will stay.

**Caroline Pidgeon MBE AM:** For next year's fares package, if you are not going to change it this year, will you look at reversing this anomaly for those who just travel one day a week?

**Boris Johnson (Mayor of London):** I will be honest with you, Caroline. It is unlikely. We are where we are and this is a good package for part-time workers. That was the intention.

**Caroline Pidgeon MBE AM:** That is a shame because it is only £2 million for what you have decided to do. £10 million was the total budget and so it is only one-fifth of part-time workers you are effectively helping.

**Boris Johnson (Mayor of London):** Hang on. By this programme, we have helped 200,000 part-time workers already. We are now helping the overwhelming majority of part-time workers and the huge numbers of part-time workers who were affected by the problem that was identified. We have gone a long way to sorting out the problem for the overwhelming majority of people. The vast majority of people in this city are benefiting from the reductions in the daily caps, a move that helps part-time workers.

**Caroline Pidgeon MBE AM:** I would just encourage you to look at this in next year's fares package to try to make sure there is something that is fair for everyone, however many hours they work, if they are a part-time worker.

**Boris Johnson (Mayor of London):** We always look at all fares packages with a great deal of imagination and fertility of thought, but this is as good as you are going to get.

**Caroline Pidgeon MBE AM:** Thank you.

**John Biggs AM:** History will judge that this is a budget with two sides to it. The first is that you have failed to challenge the bloated budgets and opacity of TfL. Caroline Pidgeon is quite right. TfL can afford to reverse those decisions about outer London travellers quite easily and that will be taken up by my colleagues.

The second part of it, though, is about the precept and council tax. I worry about your successor, whomever that is, whether it is a Conservative, Labour, Green or whatever. They are going to be facing £200 million-a-year cuts in their budgets year-on-year for policing, just as one example. Can we really justify your flag-waving totemic cut on the council tax?

I will give you a couple of quotes. I asked a number of councils - Lincolnshire County Council, Lincolnshire Police and Crime Commissioner, Buckinghamshire County Council, Dorset County Council, Guildford Borough Council, Surrey County Council, Worcestershire County Council - and what do they all have in common? They are all flag-waving Conservative councils and they are all increasing their council taxes this year. I am not suggesting we increase the council tax --

**Boris Johnson (Mayor of London):** That is what you say.

**John Biggs AM:** -- but can you really justify the cut? I will just give you a couple of quotes. Lincolnshire say they are increasing council tax to maintain services; they are "only steering clear of a referendum to avoid burdening taxpayers with the cost of a poll", so they would like to put it up by more than 2%. Buckinghamshire say:

*"We do not want to increase council tax. However, over the next three years our Government grant will be cut."*

Dorset say there was a reduction in grants to the local authority, "a large proportion of which was due to school budget changes", forcing them to put their council tax up. At Guildford Borough Council, because of the "black hole created by the lack of Government funding", they are putting their council tax up.

You are making a rather small change, but nevertheless it will create a cumulative problem for your successor. How do you really justify that?

**Boris Johnson (Mayor of London):** It is obviously the case that previous Labour administrations in this place have put up council tax massively by about 153%.

**John Biggs AM:** It has been used to provide policing for our city.

**Boris Johnson (Mayor of London):** This is a way of bearing down on the cost of council tax, which falls on all homeowners, all --

**John Biggs AM:** It has been used for policing for our city.

**Roger Evans AM (Chairman):** Mr Biggs, can you not heckle the Mayor when he is responding to your question?

**John Biggs AM:** I was being helpful to the Mayor.

**Roger Evans AM (Chairman):** That is questionable.

**Boris Johnson (Mayor of London):** Indeed, John was being helpful because he is highlighting one of the gross injustices of the previous regime, which was to whack up council tax mercilessly year after year. It falls on every resident in London and every council taxpayer in London. It is a tax that nobody can escape no matter what their income. We decided to reduce it and we have. We will continue with admittedly modest but not insignificant cuts in council tax throughout this mayoralty.

On the broader point about transport funding and the allegedly bloated TfL budget, I would remind you of the huge sums that have been taken out of TfL's spending packages. I would remind you of the substantial cuts that have been made in TfL, the numbers of buildings disposed of and the reductions in the numbers of staff. Above all, I would remind you of the colossal programme of investment that we have to meet. Actually, it was extremely encouraging that last week the Chancellor was able to guarantee the next £9.7 billion of funding for TfL over the lifetime of the next Parliament, which is by no means something we could have taken for granted. These sums are absolutely indispensable for the continued upgrades of the Tube, for the maintenance of the biggest bus fleet.

**John Biggs AM:** OK. That is very helpful as far as it goes, but it is basically flannelling now.

**Boris Johnson (Mayor of London):** It is not.

**John Biggs AM:** He is not really answering the question.

**Boris Johnson (Mayor of London):** I am often attacked by your side of the Assembly, for instance, for cutting bus routes or --

**John Biggs AM:** You are eating up time with no real additional information.

**Boris Johnson (Mayor of London):** With great respect, I do not think your question sought any particular information.

**John Biggs AM:** You are doing it again now. He has finally stopped. The problem we have with your argument is that Londoners are not really as stupid as you think they are. They are facing on the one hand a big whack out of their wallets for fares while there is a miniscule cut in the council tax and it does not really add up. A Mayor who pretends to be hair-shirt is in reality ripping people off. The problem is --

**Boris Johnson (Mayor of London):** No. I am sorry. You cannot have it both ways.

**John Biggs AM:** Let me finish the argument.

**Boris Johnson (Mayor of London):** You cannot go around endlessly demanding more bus routes, as your side does --

**John Biggs AM:** No, the argument is very --

**Boris Johnson (Mayor of London):** -- and endlessly demanding more investment in transport without having a serious and sensible fares package.

**John Biggs AM:** The argument is very simple.

**Boris Johnson (Mayor of London):** You will remember full well that it was your side of the Assembly --

**John Biggs AM:** I have not finished the question, Roger [Roger Evans AM, Chairman].

**Boris Johnson (Mayor of London):** -- that pretended to cut fares or rather alleged that they were frozen before elections and then whacked them up vertiginously after elections. That is not an approach that we have adopted.

**John Biggs AM:** Wait and see when we have a Labour Mayor whether they do that or not because I do not --

**Boris Johnson (Mayor of London):** It is certainly what the last one did. We had it. That is what he did. Maybe he has been written out of history in true Stalinist fashion. Perhaps like Trotsky he has been expunged from the photographs! However, that is what he did.

**John Biggs AM:** I will finish with this, then. I will finish with this. You are taxing working Londoners who live in outer London. I will quote you a well-known socialist, who said:

*"We need to make sure that Tube and bus fares are cheaper so that Londoners, especially those who keep the city running - the nurses, teachers and paramedics - can pay less for the effort of getting into work."*

Do you know which socialist that was? It was Stephen Greenhalgh, the Conservative [Deputy Mayor for Policing and Crime]. --

**Boris Johnson (Mayor of London):** I agree with him in the obvious sense that we have over the last few years done absolutely everything we can to bear down on fares. We have kept them at the retail price index (RPI) for two years running.

**John Biggs AM:** You should have listened to him.

**Boris Johnson (Mayor of London):** We have kept them at RPI for two years running. If you had pursued the meretricious and duplicitous policy of cutting before the election or going into an election pretending that you are going to cut fares, as you did before the 2012 election with the 7% cut you were offering Londoners, you would immediately have had to rectify that with dramatic increases in fares --

**John Biggs AM:** You are just making it up. He is making it up.

**Boris Johnson (Mayor of London):** -- in order to staunch the haemorrhage of cash from TfL. That cash is, I am afraid, essential if we are going to have a world-class transport network and get people to work.

Those people earlier on who were protesting about housing, they want homes built. There is no way we can build homes --

**John Biggs AM:** This is just blather.

**Boris Johnson (Mayor of London):** -- in those brownfield sites in London unless we put in transport infrastructure --

**John Biggs AM:** OK. We have had enough now. Thank you.

**Boris Johnson (Mayor of London):** -- that will get people to those sites and you know that very well.

**Richard Tracey AM:** Mr Mayor, can we thank you for what you have been doing about the part-time fares and the off-peak point, which of course particularly impacted on the outer London boroughs. My colleague, Steve O'Connell, and indeed you, Mr Chairman, both have raised this particularly with you as having hit their constituents. Thank you very much for your prompt action.

In future, could you ask TfL to publicise this sort of thing rather more graphically and rather more fully so that they can be scrutinised and also so that people living in those outer London areas do know quite specifically what is hitting them? Thank goodness you have put it right --

**Boris Johnson (Mayor of London):** The scrutiny process has been effective in the sense that an anomalous consequence of that fares package, which has many moving parts, came up and we have addressed it in such a way as to make life cheaper and simpler for part-time workers in outer London and in Zones 4 to 6. As Caroline [Caroline Pidgeon MBE AM] says, there will be some people - an even smaller minority now - who do not benefit from the reimbursements that we are able to introduce. I am afraid that is just a fact of life that we are going to have to live with. The overwhelming majority of people in outer London will see significant benefits from these changes.

**Richard Tracey AM:** Can you ask TfL also that they begin to publicise far better the benefits of using Oyster and perhaps the benefits over using Travelcards? There does seem to be some confusion amongst people about how far out one can use Oyster. Some mainline train companies allow Oyster to be used on their services going further out, but it is not at all clear. I do believe that various people travelling do misunderstand and it would be useful to have some more information about this.

**Boris Johnson (Mayor of London):** To be fair to TfL, they always make it clear that the Oyster Pay-As-You-Go fare is going to be the cheapest one you can get and that that is the one to go for. You are always better off using Oyster. That is our advice to the world.

**Richard Tracey AM:** Thank you.

**Joanne McCartney AM:** I think all of us around this horseshoe realise that the police are under great financial pressure at the moment and an issue that Jenny [Jenny Jones, AM] has raised I was also going to raise about how it looks as if the police are now asking people to pay for protests.

Secondly, I think all of us are concerned about funding for counterterrorism (CT). Your own Deputy Mayor for Policing and Crime has said that the Government is penny-pinching and it is a scandal that they are not passing on appropriate funding to the MPS. [Sir] Bernard Hogan-Howe, the Commissioner of Police, said only last month:

*"We think [in CT] it is vital that we invest more. If we do not do that the only thing we can do is redeploy people from other places."*

We know in the past that has come primarily from local policing when we have those abstractions. Are you convinced that the police budget as you have set it out actually will deliver the extra funding and resources that the Commissioner himself is saying he needs and does not believe he has?

**Boris Johnson (Mayor of London):** As you can imagine, Joanne, particularly in light of all the recent events, I have had a lot of conversations with the Commissioner and with Assistant Commissioner (AC) Mark Rowley about funding for CT. We have been around this a great deal. The sum has gone up from £5 million and then to £9.4 million and now to £13.4 million. I have had them around several times now and they absolutely assure me that this is as far as they want to go. They are content with this --

**Joanne McCartney AM:** This is the Home Office or Scotland Yard?

**Boris Johnson (Mayor of London):** I am talking about the MPS. However, that does not mean that I do not think we should continue to campaign for adequate funding for London. If you look at what is happening with the radicalisation of young people in our city, it is perfectly obvious that people are exposed to all sorts of ideological, nightmarish cults on the internet or wherever. That needs to be challenged and it needs to be challenged by old-fashioned policing as well as by all sorts of other interventions. That must be properly funded. It is a point that I have made, as you can imagine, very vociferously both to the Treasury and to Number 10 [Downing Street; the Prime Minister]. It is absolutely essential that London's CT police get proper funding for their footwork and for the daily grind they have to do in countering terror.

To answer your question on the £13.4 million, I am told by AC Mark Rowley [MPS] and by Sir Bernard [Sir Bernard Hogan-Howe, Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis] that they are content with that for the time being. Obviously, it is a conversation that continues.

**Joanne McCartney AM:** Thank you. I am glad that that money has gone up, but only two weeks ago the Commissioner was saying the actual funding he needed is in the tens of millions and your Deputy Mayor for Policing and Crime said it was at least £20 million and so it is short. We will be looking at officers having to be redeployed from elsewhere if the need is there, which it certainly seems to be.

**Boris Johnson (Mayor of London):** I am not certain of that. What I can say is that there has been a significant increase and I am assured by the MPS that they now regard the funds they now have as adequate, although the conversation continues.

**Joanne McCartney AM:** Mr Mayor, our Labour [Budget] Amendment, which includes freezing council tax, actually puts an extra 1,000 officers on the streets. We know that not only is CT having unprecedented demands, but also local people are having concerns about local policing and needing those extra officers on the streets. Of course, they are being abstracted on a regular basis.

Is that something you actually looked at and considered? Did you consider our budget proposals?

**Boris Johnson (Mayor of London):** Obviously, I consider all budget proposals. I have given my general point about wanting to bear down on council tax and it is a point that Members should support. Council tax is something that falls on every person and every resident of this city who pays council tax. It is inescapable and it is the right thing to bear down on.

As it happens, if you look at the position for police officer numbers, we have now a very substantial increase, actually even an increase from when I was elected in April 2008. If you look at the figures for April 2008, there were 31,395 police officers including trainees. There are now 32,160 including trainees. Net of trainees, the numbers are also up. That represents a significant advance for London when you consider that across the country other police forces have had their numbers slashed. It would be a fine thing if the Assembly were to pay tribute to the good work of the MPS in organising their finances and organising the way they do things so effectively as to get officers to that level.

**Joanne McCartney AM:** Mr Mayor, for eight pence a week, I think Londoners would actually appreciate an extra 30-odd officers patrolling their local streets in each and every borough across London and so I would ask you to look at that again.

Did you actually look at the proposals we made for victims? You said you would go away and look at them.

**Boris Johnson (Mayor of London):** This is a proposal that there should be proper funding for --

**Joanne McCartney AM:** We asked you to look at having a victims' champion at MOPAC and to look at having an independent advocacy pilot for those with learning disabilities and mental health issues.

**Boris Johnson (Mayor of London):** Yes. I am interested in this kind of thing.

**Joanne McCartney AM:** Would you write to me about this, Mr Mayor?

**Boris Johnson (Mayor of London):** I certainly will write to you, Joanne.

**Joanne McCartney AM:** Thank you.

**Boris Johnson (Mayor of London):** What I can tell you is that we are piloting hate crime advocates as part of the Hate Crime Reduction Strategy and we are certainly working with all our partners to ensure --

**Joanne McCartney AM:** If they work for domestic violence, they could work for others.

**Boris Johnson (Mayor of London):** As you know, we have gone in to fight for proper support for victims of crime.

**Joanne McCartney AM:** If you would consider that, I would be grateful. Thank you.

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

**Stephen Knight AM:** Mr Mayor, whatever the tactics earlier of the protesters raising the issue of lack of affordable housing in the capital, they did at least identify a very important issue, did they not?

**Boris Johnson (Mayor of London):** They did.

**Stephen Knight AM:** The lack of affordable housing is, to quote you, Mr Mayor, "the gravest crisis facing our city". At the last meeting, Mr Mayor, I asked you whether or not you understood that instead of cutting the council tax over the next few years, as you propose, if that money were ring-fenced for funding affordable housing together with the Olympic precept that is due to drop out, there would be enough money to finance a £2 billion affordable housebuilding programme in London. Is that not a higher priority, Mr Mayor, than delivering what is essentially a trivial cut in council tax?

**Boris Johnson (Mayor of London):** I do not think that the council tax funding would make much difference to what is a serious crisis, which we are addressing in the most thoroughgoing way that any London government has ever seen. We are building more homes now than the city has built for 40 years or so. We have plans in place for at least 15,000 new affordable homes between 2015 and 2018. We are coming forward and we announced on --

**Stephen Knight AM:** Mr Mayor, if you used this revenue, you could support an extra £2 billion of investment. It more than doubles the programme you are talking about. It is something you could do as Mayor to solve this "gravest crisis facing the city". Instead, you are choosing a small cut in council tax.

**Boris Johnson (Mayor of London):** That is nonsense. Your proposal does not work. What we are doing instead is a much more sensible way forward, which is to fund the London Housing Bank with £200 million to get sites going and using purpose-built private rent models. We have the nine new housing that we confirmed on Friday --

**Stephen Knight AM:** Mr Mayor, you are just listing the existing programmes.

**Boris Johnson (Mayor of London):** The reason I am listing them, with great respect, is because they are delivering huge results.

**Stephen Knight AM:** Mr Mayor, the question for you is: why are you choosing small cuts in council tax rather than using that revenue to finance a huge new investment in affordable homes? You have said it is "the gravest crisis facing the city". Surely it should be a higher priority than small cuts in council tax?



**Boris Johnson (Mayor of London):** We are addressing that crisis with the biggest package of measures this city has ever seen and you are seeing a massive increase in the number of homes.

**Stephen Knight AM:** It is not enough, Mr Mayor, is it?

**Boris Johnson (Mayor of London):** I repeat: it is fair to Londoners when times have been very tight to continue to bear down on council tax, which is an inescapable tax faced by everybody. I know that it is the policy of the Liberal Democrats to whack up council tax but it is not one that we support.

**Roger Evans AM (Chairman):** Thank you. The Liberal Democrats are out of time. Assembly Member Copley?

**Tom Copley AM:** Mr Mayor, I wanted to ask you about what your budget will do for the quarter of Londoners who rent from a private landlord. Last week I was contacted by a constituent, Emma, who lives in the London Borough of Islington. She says:

*"I live in a two-bedroom flat along with my husband and children. We pay well over £1,000 a month for this privilege. The flat has had numerous problems, many of which we've had to fix ourselves as the landlord refused to, and we still have numerous problems such as doors that don't shut properly, ceilings stained with water from a leak in the flat above, cracked glass in the windows which are over 50 years old, having to remind the landlord constantly of his legal obligations such as getting a gas certificate and protecting our deposit. My son has asthma because the walls are damp and there is mould, which I constantly have to clean off."*

Mr Mayor, how will this budget do something to help people like Emma who are struggling in the private rented sector?

**Boris Johnson (Mayor of London):** She should obviously expose her landlord. If he is not a subscriber to the London Rental Standard or to any other registered landlords' body, then he should be exposed. It seems to me that there are --

**Tom Copley AM:** How many landlords are currently signed up to the London Rental Standard, Mr Mayor?

**Boris Johnson (Mayor of London):** -- ways of exposing such Rachmanite behaviour. What you will not do --

**Tom Copley AM:** How many landlords are currently signed up?

**Boris Johnson (Mayor of London):** I cannot give you the figure off the top of my head.

**Tom Copley AM:** I can give you the figure. The most recent figure is 13,499 and you have a target to get that to 100,000 by next year.

**Boris Johnson (Mayor of London):** I have no doubt that we will get a very long way there and I do not know what you are --

**Tom Copley AM:** Mr Mayor, I am not sure whether to --

**Boris Johnson (Mayor of London):** I do not know what your proposals are. If you want to drive private landlords out of the market --

**Tom Copley AM:** I will let you know.

**Boris Johnson (Mayor of London):** -- or impose rent controls, then be honest and say so. There is no legal way that we can do so. The landlords have statutory obligations to meet certain standards. I do not think it is your constituent, actually, in Islington. I think it is your neighbour's constituent and I do not why she is writing to you and not to Jennette [Jennette Arnold OBE AM].

**Tom Copley AM:** Mr Mayor, I can tell you what the Labour people are proposing. If you had read our budget amendment, you would know what we are proposing. We are proposing to invest £1.65 million in extra enforcement officers, which will help boroughs uphold standards in the sector.

**Boris Johnson (Mayor of London):** I am sorry. It is up to boroughs to enforce standards and --

**Tom Copley AM:** We will establish a private rented sector decent homes fund to help bring properties up to standard. We will create a programme to tackle London's 100 worst landlords.

**Boris Johnson (Mayor of London):** -- what we are doing is the previous programme of building and building, by the way, for private rent as well. The ultimate answer for people such as Jennette's constituent is to ensure that they have the widest possible choice of landlords and also to expand the London Rental Standard.

**Tom Copley AM:** Mr Mayor, we have set out --

**Boris Johnson (Mayor of London):** I am delighted that we have 13,600 - or whatever it is - already signed up and I am confident that we will get to 100,000.

**Tom Copley AM:** You are easily delighted, then, Mr Mayor.

**Boris Johnson (Mayor of London):** At least we are trying. At least we are doing something. At least we are building homes, unlike the pathetic Labour administration --

**Tom Copley AM:** Can I just say the Labour Group has set out --

**Boris Johnson (Mayor of London):** -- which sat here doing nothing with huge budgets during times of plenty and failed to build the homes that Londoners need. You should be ashamed.

**Tom Copley AM:** No. You are now deviating, Mr Mayor. You are now deviating. You are showing --

**Boris Johnson (Mayor of London):** By the way, I think it was you who said that the Labour Party should apologise. You said the Labour Party should apologise for its failure in 13 years to build more --

**Tom Copley AM:** You should show a little respect to people who are struggling to rent in the private rented sector, Mr Mayor. You should show them a little respect by answering the questions that I am putting to you.

**Boris Johnson (Mayor of London):** Why not do it yourself now? Why not apologise? Why not take it upon yourself to apologise for Labour's deplorable failures?

**Tom Copley AM:** Thank you. I will carry on.

**Roger Evans AM (Chairman):** If this is a question, yes?

**Tom Copley AM:** It is a question. Thank you, Chairman. Your approach to this has been entirely voluntary with this London Rental Standard, yet we have seen complaints against landlords rise by about 50% since you took office and conditions continue to worsen.

What is there contained within this budget? We have set out some proposals, which I hope you have looked at and which I hope you will consider. Can you tell me? What is there in the budget that will help tenants?

**Boris Johnson (Mayor of London):** I have explained that the proposals are that we will massively expand the choice and availability for private rental tenants in London by increasing the number of homes we are building across the city. That is the best way forward. We are also, of course, supporting the London Rental Standard and that is a way forward for tenants. Obviously it is not compulsory and it is voluntary, but huge numbers of people - as you have attested - are signing up and I have no doubt that more will sign up as the months go by.

**Tom Copley AM:** Thank you.

**Jenny Jones AM:** Mr Mayor, you suggested last week that children could be bussed from Norfolk to breathe our alpine air, but that does not quite fit with the illegal levels of air pollution that surround many of our schools caused primarily by TfL's dirty buses. You promised some time ago that by 2012 you would have budgeted to have clean buses for London, hybrid or better.

**Boris Johnson (Mayor of London):** We have.

**Jenny Jones AM:** You have not. Where is it in your budget that says you are going to have clean buses so that our air is not going to be polluted?

**Boris Johnson (Mayor of London):** Two things. First of all, there was a recent bad air day across the whole of the United Kingdom (UK) and it was certainly true that the air quality in Norfolk was worse than it was in London. That is absolutely true. That is point one.

Point two: we have a budget here that will continue to deliver the cleanest, greenest new bus in the world, will continue to enable us to invest in hybrid buses for London and will continue therefore to reduce nitrogen dioxide (NO<sub>2</sub>) plus the particulate matter less than 10 microns in diameter (PM10s) and particulate matter less than 2.5 microns in diameter (PM2.5s) that is most pernicious in our area. We have seen substantial improvements in air quality not just in theoretical emissions calculations but also in the measurements that have been taken at key sites. The most recent one was either Euston or Marylebone Road. I cannot remember where it was but it was significantly down, to such an extent that it caused consternation in the clean-air lobby because they thought that their fox was in danger of being shot.

**Jenny Jones AM:** Mr Mayor, you know as well as I do that you have fiddled the figures consistently throughout your term of office on air pollution.

**Boris Johnson (Mayor of London):** Absolutely untrue.

**Jenny Jones AM:** You have done everything you could to lower air pollution by technical measures instead of actually doing the right thing, which is to clean up TfL.

**Boris Johnson (Mayor of London):** Absolutely untrue. You should withdraw that. You should withdraw that, Jenny. It is complete nonsense.

**Jenny Jones AM:** I would like you to withdraw that comment about Norfolk children. It was very flippant about the problem of air pollution in London. You were very flippant.

**Boris Johnson (Mayor of London):** It was not remotely flippant. It happens to be true. It is very important that people should be educated on the reality of air quality rather than listening to endless scaremongering and nonsense from the Greens. Air quality is affected by a variety of causes and it can be that bad air moving across from the continent can cause worse pollution in places like --

**Jenny Jones AM:** Mr Mayor, you talk rubbish.

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

**Jenny Jones AM:** You sit here and talk rubbish to us.

**Boris Johnson (Mayor of London):** No, you talk rubbish. I recycle rubbish. I dispose of rubbish. You talk it. We get rid of it. We use it to create clean, green, renewable energy. That is what we do with rubbish!

**Jenny Jones AM:** Where in your budget, as you promised for 2012, does it say that all buses are going to be clean in London? They are not. You have dirty buses rattling around London, which are actually causing huge problems with pollution around schools for our children.

**Boris Johnson (Mayor of London):** I do not want to be unnecessarily adversarial, Jenny, but, as you know, by 2020 we are bringing in the Ultra Low Emission Zone, which will mean that no bus will be able to go into --

**Jenny Jones AM:** You will not be here.

**Boris Johnson (Mayor of London):** Certainly, in one form or another, I will be here. Like Gandalf, I will be translated into some new form, more powerful than you can possibly imagine. I will be here and we will make sure that under the Ultra Low Emission Zone there will be no bus that goes through the centre of our town that is not a hybrid and does not have very low emissions. That will be fantastic.

**Jenny Jones AM:** I am talking about your promises about the current fleet. You have broken your promises.

**Boris Johnson (Mayor of London):** Nonsense. It is part of a continuous programme. You call them using 'technical fixes'. I do not think it is a technical fix to have the cleanest, greenest buses in Europe.

**Jenny Jones AM:** Glue on the roads? Glue?

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

**Jenny Jones AM:** Thank you.

**Roger Evans AM (Chairman):** Assembly Member Shawcross?

**Valerie Shawcross CBE AM:** We are glad that you have made a partial backtrack on the way to help relieve off-peak passengers from a problem that you created.

**Boris Johnson (Mayor of London):** Off-peak part-time workers.

**Valerie Shawcross CBE AM:** Yes, for part-time workers. Mr Mayor, you do need to accept that this is just one of the many ways in which you did make the entire transport system unaffordable for many Londoners.

I just want to talk to you about a particular case study. A young graduate called Kim gave us her story. She is one of two million Londoners living on the National Minimum Wage. There are two million Londoners living on the National Minimum Wage. She travels from Hillingdon in Zone 6 into Zone 1 to work in a hospitality job and her journey now costs her £58.50 a week. That is almost a quarter of her weekly salary, yet in 2008 she would have paid 31% less. She would have been paying £44.60.

Obviously, this is not a unique case, Mr Mayor. Your fare increases have affected millions of Londoners living on the National Minimum Wage. The rise has completely put into the shade any tiny reduction in the council tax. You have been charging the fares in pounds and pounds, not relieving them in pennies.

**Boris Johnson (Mayor of London):** I understand that --

**Valerie Shawcross CBE AM:** Did you know that London is now the highest fare city in the world?

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

**Valerie Shawcross CBE AM:** Independent studies have shown that.

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

**Valerie Shawcross CBE AM:** London is the highest fare city in the world.

**Boris Johnson (Mayor of London):** It is not, but it is --

**Jenny Jones AM:** It is.

**Boris Johnson (Mayor of London):** It is not and I would be happy to supply you with details.

**Valerie Shawcross CBE AM:** Which city is worse?

**Boris Johnson (Mayor of London):** There are plenty of other cities that are more expensive.

**Valerie Shawcross CBE AM:** Go on. Name me one. Name me one city where the fares are as high.

**Boris Johnson (Mayor of London):** I believe I have been to one of them recently.

**Valerie Shawcross CBE AM:** Where was that, Mr Mayor?

**Roger Evans AM (Chairman):** Can we allow the Mayor to finish, please?

**Boris Johnson (Mayor of London):** The answer to your point is --

**Joanne McCartney AM:** Would you write to us?

**Boris Johnson (Mayor of London):** I would be happy to write to you with a list. The answer to your point is that of course there is a choice for this city between investing in transport infrastructure and cutting the fares. That is what we have faced time and time again.

I will get back to my answer. Under this mayoralty, we have actually given people over 60, every single one of them in London, free transport 24 hours a day --

**Valerie Shawcross CBE AM:** Mr Mayor, before you filibuster too much of my time --

**Boris Johnson (Mayor of London):** No, I am sorry. You have wasted too much of my time, to be honest.

**Valerie Shawcross CBE AM:** -- can I go back to that point about investment, Mr Mayor?

**Boris Johnson (Mayor of London):** We have given every young person --

**Valerie Shawcross CBE AM:** Mr Mayor, can I just ask you about investment?

**Boris Johnson (Mayor of London):** We have perpetuated free travel for every young person. We have continued to support those in search of work, disabled people, indeed veterans, people who are in apprenticeships --

**Valerie Shawcross CBE AM:** Chairman, can I ask Mr Mayor about investment?

**Roger Evans AM (Chairman):** Yes. Carry on, please.

**Valerie Shawcross CBE AM:** You made the point there that the fares are higher than the rest of the world, basically, because --

**Boris Johnson (Mayor of London):** No, I have not. You have asserted that and I have denied it.

**Valerie Shawcross CBE AM:** -- you have invested in transport. OK. I have been looking at some of the projects that we call your 'white elephants', those projects where you have wasted money. They have been badly run and some of them have been, frankly, frivolous. We have looked at the cable car and the cost of the cycling hire scheme, which should not have cost us anything.

**Boris Johnson (Mayor of London):** Sorry. How were you going to pay for it?

**Valerie Shawcross CBE AM:** We have looked at the estuary airport. We have looked at the extra cost of the Routemasters over and above normal hybrids. We have looked at the loss you made on the private finance initiative (PFI) credits for the bridge. We have looked at other things like the Garden Bridge, the cable car and all of that.

**Boris Johnson (Mayor of London):** You have mentioned that already.

**Valerie Shawcross CBE AM:** Do you know, Mr Mayor, how much all of that waste now adds up to?

**Boris Johnson (Mayor of London):** There has been virtually no waste by comparison with the previous regime.

**Valerie Shawcross CBE AM:** All of those frivolous, bonkers, wasteful projects --

**Boris Johnson (Mayor of London):** You talk about the cable car. Let me tell you. The cable car --

**Valerie Shawcross CBE AM:** -- Mr Mayor, now add up to £500 million.

**Boris Johnson (Mayor of London):** Rubbish. Absolute rubbish. You are talking total rubbish.

**Valerie Shawcross CBE AM:** There was £565.2 million spent basically standing under a shower, tearing up Londoners' money, which is what you would say the estuary airport was, Mr Mayor.

**Boris Johnson (Mayor of London):** Absolute rubbish. Let me just remind you. The cable car, or the Emirates Air Line as we should call it, is the only --

**Valerie Shawcross CBE AM:** It cost Londoners £61 million.

**Boris Johnson (Mayor of London):** No, it did not. That is a complete lie.

**Valerie Shawcross CBE AM:** According to Isabel Dedring [Deputy Mayor for Transport], it cost Londoners £61 million.

**Boris Johnson (Mayor of London):** That is a complete lie and you must not repeat that because it is absolute nonsense. The overall budget including contingency was £61 million, but there was £36 million --

**Valerie Shawcross CBE AM:** Do you deny that you have wasted £500 million of Londoners' money --

**Boris Johnson (Mayor of London):** Can I finish? This is actually quite interesting. There was £36 million in sponsorship. The overall budget, by the way, was £50 million and something. The spend was only about £50 million and something. There was £36 million from sponsorship and £8 million from the European Union. Within the next ten years, the cable car - which is already covering its revenue costs - will pay back the rest of its capital costs as well. There is no other piece of transport infrastructure in London that does that.

**Valerie Shawcross CBE AM:** The cycle hire scheme has cost £250 million alone, which should have cost nothing.

**Boris Johnson (Mayor of London):** As to the cycle hire scheme --

**Valerie Shawcross CBE AM:** The Parisians have their cycle hire scheme for free and you have wasted money --

**Boris Johnson (Mayor of London):** OK. I am sorry. This is absolutely --

**Valerie Shawcross CBE AM:** Mr Mayor --

**Boris Johnson (Mayor of London):** I am not going to sit here and take this. It is complete tripe.

**Valerie Shawcross CBE AM:** -- can I just make my last point because I have run out of time? Can I just say, Mr Mayor?

**Boris Johnson (Mayor of London):** You are talking complete tripe.

**Valerie Shawcross CBE AM:** If you will write to me and tell me which city in the world is more expensive to travel in than London --

**Boris Johnson (Mayor of London):** I certainly will. There are several more expensive and you are talking total tripe.

**Valerie Shawcross CBE AM:** -- I will write to you will a full account of the £500 million of Londoners' money that you have wasted. Thank you, Chairman.

**Boris Johnson (Mayor of London):** Your prime example was the cable car, on which I proved immediately that you were talking absolute nonsense.

On the cycle hire scheme, we actually attracted £50 million worth of sponsorship. Labour says that Ken Livingstone [former Mayor of London] had a plan for this cycle hire scheme and was somehow going to pay for it from sponsorship from the National Union of Rail, Maritime and Transport Workers (RMT) or something. Who was going to pay for it? Unite? Were they going to pay for the cycle hire? How was that going to work?

**Valerie Shawcross CBE AM:** Paris had a free system operated by an advertising company, JCDecaux.

**Boris Johnson (Mayor of London):** You are talking total nonsense and you know that that is untrue because you know that we do not have the same access to advertising panels in this city as they do in Paris.

**Valerie Shawcross CBE AM:** Chairman, I have to finish there because I want to save some time for my colleagues. Thank you.

**Boris Johnson (Mayor of London):** It is an insult to the intelligence of others.

**Steve O'Connell AM:** Mr Mayor, I would echo Richard Tracey's comments around the off-peak cap and would advise you in future to perhaps avoid these pitfalls in working with TfL. I thank you, however, for reacting very quickly, though I would urge you to ask TfL to perhaps do a fresh push on the Oyster card. There are still a very small number of people who are left in a worse position. They will benefit, clearly, from using the Oyster Card.

Moving on, first of all I would like to welcome very much the renewal of the Outer London Fund, which is a commitment that was an innovation led by you and is welcomed very much by the outer London boroughs.

My last point is a question to you around special constables. Again, I very much welcome the support that you are giving to special constables in your budget around discounts to the council tax. As we are aware



around this horseshoe, special constables serve a very strong purpose in the neighbourhoods supporting the local policing teams and this will be welcomed very much. However, I would also urge you to work with MOPAC through your budget to see further ways that you can encourage and support special constables and in your conversations with the Commissioner to urge him to ensure that special constables are supported fully through the MPS. In essence, thank you for supporting them but they do need more support, Mr Mayor.

**Boris Johnson (Mayor of London):** I am grateful to you, Steve, and thank you for all the support that you have given to policing in London over the years and indeed to policing in Croydon, where clearly Safer Neighbourhood Teams and special constables play a very important role.

**Steve O'Connell AM:** OK. Thank you.

**Tony Arbour AM:** I wonder, Mr Mayor, whether you would agree with me that one of the things that brings politicians into disrepute is the failure to keep election promises.

**Boris Johnson (Mayor of London):** I do.

**Tony Arbour AM:** Under those circumstances, do you think it is a bit of a cheek that those most promiscuous of election-promise breakers, the Liberal Democrats, have come to you this morning, aided and abetted by various members of the Labour Party, asking you to break your pledge, which hitherto you have kept, to reduce the GLA precept? Do you agree with me that although in each year the sums of money may not have been tremendously significant to these elitist politicians who sit around the table on that side, they may think that these are small sums, but cumulatively they have been a substantial sum and have been a substantial help to all of the residents of London?

**Boris Johnson (Mayor of London):** Yes. It is very odd that they do not see that point. People did feel very keenly that council taxes were allowed to rise too much under the previous Mayor. He simply milked it. He thought it would be concealed from the voters because it was there as a tiny item on the bill, but it went up and up and up by 153%. I did not think that was fair and we have decided to bear down on it and indeed to freeze it with reductions in real terms.

Just to get back to some of this, if the Labour Party is now really saying that they would scrap the cycle hire scheme because it has to be subsidised, they are out of their tiny minds. It is a great thing for our city. They never had a penny of sponsorship out of anybody. They do not believe in the private sector. They believe in going to their paymasters in the unions to get money. They would not have been able to get any alleviation of the cost of the cycle hire scheme, nor would they have got sponsorship for the cable car or indeed many other things that we have succeeded in delivering in this city.

I will just remind you that Val Shawcross [Valerie Shawcross CBE AM] oversaw the spending of £34 million on something called the West London Tram. I do not know whether you have seen the West London Tram recently. Has anybody seen the West London Tram that Val Shawcross invested in? Has anybody seen the Cross River Tram on which she spent £20 million? There was no budget for it. There was no plan for it. It was completely undeliverable. She sat there wasting money on ludicrous, ceaseless election promises that were undeliverable. That is the problem with the Labour Party, in my view. They endlessly dangle these things before the electorate and do not realise that they are costing the taxpayer a huge amount.

**Tony Arbour AM:** Yes. I am very glad, Mr Mayor, that I gave you the opportunity to beat them about the head with their broken promises. However, can I draw your attention to the extraordinary thing which has been proposed by all the opposition parties here? They are suggesting that the savings that would be made

had you not reduced the precept would be hypothecated for some other purpose. Is it a fact that there are not and never have been any hypothecated taxes levied by this authority?

**Boris Johnson (Mayor of London):** I do not know. What about the Olympic levy? What about the Olympic precept?

**Tony Arbour AM:** That was levied specifically, Mr Mayor, to do something. What I am saying is that these people are coming to you and they are saying, "If you will not cut this tax, it would be spent on this other thing", and it would not.

**Boris Johnson (Mayor of London):** Yes, I get it. The congestion charge just goes into the general TfL budget, but it is certainly true, for instance, that the Crossrail business rate supplement or the Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) go for particular purposes.

Where you are right, of course, is to say that it is ludicrous to say that a particular cut in council tax or an increase in council tax is going to be used for one purpose or another. It is all fungible. It all goes into the same general pot. That is entirely correct.

**Tony Arbour AM:** Yes, I am pleased to hear that the congestion charge is indeed being recognised as a tax. Under those circumstances, we know some people who have not paid it, do we not?

**Boris Johnson (Mayor of London):** We do and we deeply regret it. We continue to urge them to come to their senses and do the right thing by London.

**Tony Arbour AM:** Thank you, Chairman.

**Andrew Dismore AM:** Could you tell me, Mr Mayor, how much you provided for spending on street homelessness in your budget?

**Boris Johnson (Mayor of London):** Off the top of my head, the entire £34 million budget should be there. I am afraid I am going to have to --

**Andrew Dismore AM:** OK. Perhaps I can enlighten you. It is £8.45 million, Mr Mayor, and street homelessness --

**Boris Johnson (Mayor of London):** It is £34 million over four years. I was right. It is £34 million over four years, Andrew.

**Andrew Dismore AM:** It is £8.45 million. In fact, over the period over your mayoralty, street homelessness has doubled. In the last year, it has increased by 13% and the money you are spending has not increased at all. In fact, there are 103 street homeless people living in Heathrow Airport, double the number of last year. Presumably on your five overseas jaunts in the last four months, you stepped over them on your way to the check-in desk and the very important person (VIP) lounge, did you not?

**Boris Johnson (Mayor of London):** Sorry, is that a question?

**Andrew Dismore AM:** It is a question, yes.

**Boris Johnson (Mayor of London):** No, I did not. However, yes, I agree with you that there is a serious problem of homelessness in London, Andrew, and it has been greatly exacerbated, I am afraid, by an influx of people from accession countries in Eastern Europe, who comprise 54% of the problem. We have to help them.

**Andrew Dismore AM:** That is not quite right, is it? The figures show that that is not the case.

[Interruption from the public gallery and meeting adjournment.]

**Roger Evans AM (Chairman):** Let us resume the meeting. As you were saying?

**Boris Johnson (Mayor of London):** Thank you. As you will have seen the other day, we announced a new No Second Night Out shelter, which we are going to be funding. We have £34 million over four years and --

**Andrew Dismore AM:** Yes, over a number of years. The fact is --

**Boris Johnson (Mayor of London):** -- and £15 million for capital funding.

**Andrew Dismore AM:** The fact is that the money has not gone up, has it? You are saying that it is a problem of overseas people, which is wrong.

**Boris Johnson (Mayor of London):** I am sorry. Can I just finish the answer? Through you, Chairman, can I just finish the answer?

**Andrew Dismore AM:** I expect you read the *Daily Mail*, do you not, Mr Mayor? There is even a story here of middle-class people living homeless in Heathrow. Do you see them when you are in the airport?

**Boris Johnson (Mayor of London):** Can I just finish the answer?

**Andrew Dismore AM:** I do not suppose you saw them either, did you?

**Roger Evans AM (Chairman):** Can you let the Mayor answer the question?

**Boris Johnson (Mayor of London):** Can I just finish? Of the homeless people, 67% were seen for the first time last year. Of that group of new people on the streets, 70% were prevented under No Second Night Out from spending a second night out.

**Andrew Dismore AM:** They are not the figures we see from the Combined Homelessness and Information Network (CHAIN). The fact is, Mr Mayor, you are not Gandalf. You are Sauron the Dark Lord and Deceiver, are you not?

**Boris Johnson (Mayor of London):** Can I just finish? Only 3% of those were in all four quarters of the year and that was 164 people. Only 164 were seen in all four quarters of the year. Just to get back to my point, there is a problem with non-UK nationals, most of whom cannot simply be assisted into hostels because they are not entitled to benefits.

**Andrew Dismore AM:** The majority, according to CHAIN, are UK-born and probably quite a lot are former servicemen.

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

**Boris Johnson (Mayor of London):** I would just point out for ease of comparison that in New York, which is obviously a rival city in many respects, every night there are 53,000 people spending the night rough. The problem in London, although I accept it is acute, is not the worst in the world by any means.

**Roger Evans AM (Chairman):** The Conservative Group has 12 minutes left. Does anyone wish to make use of that time to raise questions? No. In that case, that concludes our question and answer session.

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

**Roger Evans AM (Chairman):** Mr Mayor, can I thank you for your contribution.