

## London Assembly (Mayor's Question Time) – 25 March 2015

### Transcript of Agenda Item 5 – Questions to the Mayor

**Roger Evans AM (Chairman):** We will move on to the questions at Item 5. The first question about the Garden Bridge I have decided with agreement to combine with question 6, which is also about the Garden Bridge. I am going to take Caroline [Caroline Pidgeon MBE AM] first and then I am going to take John [John Biggs AM].

**Boris Johnson (Mayor of London):** Do you want both answers together?

**Roger Evans AM (Chairman):** No, we want them separately, please. We will take Caroline's first.

#### 2015/0879 - Garden Bridge (1)

Caroline Pidgeon MBE AM

*Are you satisfied with the way in which the procurement process for the Garden Bridge was conducted?*

**Boris Johnson (Mayor of London):** On the first point, on Caroline's point, let me stress that the Garden Bridge, as I have said many times before, is a fantastic project for London.

You have asked whether the procurement process was conducted in a satisfactory way. The answer to that is emphatically yes. Transport for London (TfL) has a lot of experience in managing procurement processes. The competitive tendering and all the rest of it for the design consultants was entirely appropriate. There were three candidates and Heatherwick Studio came out considerably ahead on the criteria. The *Architects' Journal* under a freedom of information request (FOI) has sought details of that procurement process and you probably have them yourself.

**Caroline Pidgeon MBE AM:** Thank you very much. Yes, I have had a look at that information. In the assessment to design and build the bridge, Heatherwick Studio was awarded more points for relevant design experience than either of the rival bidders, despite the fact that they have only ever built one bridge, whereas one of the other bidders had built over 25 bridges, even winning the Stirling Prize. Are you 100% satisfied that the process was not prejudged in any way?

**Boris Johnson (Mayor of London):** Yes, of course. Michelangelo had probably never built a *duomo* or had never painted the roof of a chapel before he did the Sistine Chapel. It is a totally ludicrous complaint, in my view. The process was entirely reasonable. I can give you them: Wilkinson Eyre, Marks Barfield and Heatherwick Studios all entered.

**Caroline Pidgeon MBE AM:** You are saying you are completely satisfied?

**Boris Johnson (Mayor of London):** On relevant experience, Heatherwick scored slightly lower. On relevant design experience, Heatherwick scored slightly higher. On understanding the brief, Heatherwick was ahead. There were different considerations that were applied. Most impartial punters who look at that design think it is fabulous and it will be a wonderful adornment to our city.

**Caroline Pidgeon MBE AM:** Yes, you keep saying it is wonderful, but let us focus on the procurement, Mr Mayor.

**Boris Johnson (Mayor of London):** I find it very depressing that you persist in this Taliban-like hatred of objects of beauty. I urge you to desist.

**Caroline Pidgeon MBE AM:** Mr Mayor, let us look at the procurement and let us keep focused on that. What is your explanation for experienced bridge architects being scored lower? Joanna Lumley [British actor], who is the main campaigner for the bridge, is someone who has known you - I think she said - since you were four and she finds you amenable. You had a very warm letter from her following the election in 2012 in which she thanked you for the tulips and said, "Please say yes to the Garden Bridge". You have been lobbied by an old friend, who also happens to be an associate at Heatherwick Studio and has been working with them for over ten years. We have £60 million of public money going into this. There are some serious questions that need to be answered here. Do you not take any of these concerns seriously?

**Boris Johnson (Mayor of London):** No, of course not, because I do not know quite what concerns you are alluding to. The proposal that was made about the Garden Bridge was one that was made by Heatherwick Studio, which is a very reputable and dynamic London firm. It did the Olympic Cauldron. It has had fantastic success in designing London's offering at the Shanghai World Fair.

**Caroline Pidgeon MBE AM:** OK, Mr Mayor. Can I just ask you a very simple question then on this -

**Boris Johnson (Mayor of London):** It has done fantastic stuff and is a world-famous design studio. It is one of the great export businesses of this country. It has produced a spectacular design for the Garden Bridge.

**Caroline Pidgeon MBE AM:** OK. Let me just ask a simple question, Mr Mayor. If you have full confidence in this process, there are questions out there and they may be completely unfounded --

**Boris Johnson (Mayor of London):** I am glad you say that, Caroline. I am glad you say that because they are indeed completely unfounded.

**Caroline Pidgeon MBE AM:** -- but could you, Mr Mayor, agree to a full and independent audit of the procurement process to reassure everyone that it was not something that was prejudged in any way? Will you agree to that?

**Boris Johnson (Mayor of London):** What I will certainly agree to is showing you all of the relevant documents and I believe you have them already.

**Caroline Pidgeon MBE AM:** You will not agree to an independent audit of the procurement?

**Boris Johnson (Mayor of London):** I do not know quite what you mean by that. This Assembly is paid considerable sums of money by the taxpayer to invigilate that kind of thing and there you are, Caroline, sitting there in authority. You have all the documents. They are transparent.

**Caroline Pidgeon MBE AM:** You will not agree to a full audit of the process?

**Boris Johnson (Mayor of London):** You have all the relevant qualifications to assess whether or not there has been transparency. It seems to me that there has been complete transparency. Adding all the criteria together, you get 62.5% for Wilkinson Eyre, Marks Barfield had 65% and Heatherwick Studio had 72.5%.

**Caroline Pidgeon MBE AM:** Mr Mayor, let me just ask a final question on this, please. Finally then, you will not agree to that but can you confirm - very simply, yes or no - whether the Greater London Authority (GLA) will guarantee the annual and ongoing maintenance costs for the bridge? It is a planning condition from Westminster.

**Boris Johnson (Mayor of London):** Through you, Roger, this is basically the second question, which I am perfectly happy to take if you --

**Caroline Pidgeon MBE AM:** Is it? OK. I will leave it there, then. I will let John [Biggs AM] pick that up. Sorry, I had not realised that. I will let John pick that up.

**Roger Evans AM (Chairman):** We will move on to John.

## **2015/0910 - Garden Bridge (2)**

John Biggs AM

*Do you intend to apologise to Londoners for misleading them about the Garden Bridge?*

**Boris Johnson (Mayor of London):** I will direct my answer - thank you - to John. We have to be absolutely clear about this. The Garden Bridge is a great project for London. It will be absolutely spectacular when it is complete. We need to get it done at quite a lick because the Thames Tideway Tunnel is coming in in 2017.

In respect of the guarantees, there are in fact two theoretical guarantees in question. One of them is unavoidable and one of them I do not propose any public money should be committed towards. Let me explain what I am talking about.

The commitment that we have made is to fund the Garden Bridge to the tune of £30 million. That is of a total budget of about £175 million and that is overwhelmingly being raised by charitable giving and by public donations because it is a project that excites a great deal of enthusiasm.

I have repeatedly made clear that I do not want us to be putting in any more than £30 million. The Chancellor is effectively contributing £30 million. He could have done it another way. He could have waived the Value Added Tax (VAT), but he is not waiving the VAT and so effectively he is contributing £30 million to offset that. We are determined not to pay more than £30 million.

In order to guarantee the bridge and in order to get the thing done at all, we have to show the relevant planning authorities - Westminster and Lambeth - that there is a plan for the long-term maintenance of the garden. I do not think that the public sector should be paying for that. That would be totally ludicrous. The Garden Bridge Trust is well capable of raising the funds.

Therefore, what we have done in order to get the planning process moving along is to give a temporary undertaking to Westminster in the form of a letter from Fiona [Fiona Fletcher-Smith, Executive Director of Development and Environment, GLA] from the GLA that we will guarantee the maintenance until such time as the planning can be improved and until such time as the Garden Bridge Trust can satisfy us about their long-term plans to guarantee the maintenance. I will not release that £30 million from TfL unless and until they have a satisfactory long-term plan to pay for the shrubberies or whatever it is. The current bill for the annual maintenance costs is about £3.5 million. That is the figure that has been plucked out of the air. We think that is absurdly high. If that really is going to be the cost, then they are going to need to work very hard to show us how they can guarantee it.

That is my first point. That is the extent to which we have had to make a guarantee on the upkeep. We will not release any funds at all until such time as they have counter-guaranteed and have shown that they can support the maintenance of the bridge.

The second guarantee --

**John Biggs AM:** You are taking up an awful lot of time.

**Boris Johnson (Mayor of London):** Forgive me. The second guarantee relates to a catastrophic incident that might --

**John Biggs AM:** You could have written this to me.

**Boris Johnson (Mayor of London):** I am sorry, but it is complex.

**John Biggs AM:** Go on. A catastrophic incident?

**Boris Johnson (Mayor of London):** The second guarantee relates to a catastrophic incident that might befall the bridge if it were to be the subject of a terrorist attack or if a ship were to collide with it or whatever. Then, inevitably, the cost of dealing with that would fall to the city. There is no way around that. It is simply a fact of life. That is the case with every big infrastructure project. There is no way any charity can provide a guarantee. It is vanishingly unlikely, as you will appreciate, but we have to stand behind it to that extent.

**John Biggs AM:** When you said, "I can confirm that no such agreement to cover the maintenance costs has been made and nor will I make any undertaking to do so" --

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

**John Biggs AM:** -- you were being dishonest with Londoners?

**Boris Johnson (Mayor of London):** No, I was not.

**John Biggs AM:** Before you come back again, let us be clear. You have spoken at enormous length already --

**Boris Johnson (Mayor of London):** No, I was not because I have just made absolutely clear --

**John Biggs AM:** With respect, you have spoken at great length already. You have eaten up a large chunk of our time.

**Boris Johnson (Mayor of London):** If you do not like the answer, then --

**John Biggs AM:** The fact is that the Planning Committee in Westminster has said that it needs an undertaking that there will be somebody there to secure the ongoing maintenance costs of the proposed bridge and your senior officer has given an undertaking that you will enter into a detailed agreement.

**Boris Johnson (Mayor of London):** Yes, I understand the point you are making, but that somebody will be the Garden Bridge Trust. What we will not do --

**John Biggs AM:** No, clearly not. The only way they could do it would be if they had a £400 million endowment or something, which would help fund in perpetuity the costs.

**Boris Johnson (Mayor of London):** No, they will have to --

**John Biggs AM:** You need to bear in mind that it is not just --

**Valerie Shawcross CBE AM:** Can you intervene, please, Chairman? Our Member is trying to ask a question and the Mayor, having spoken solidly for four-and-a-half minutes, is now talking over the top of our Member. Can John please have a clear minute to get his point in?

**Boris Johnson (Mayor of London):** He will not let me answer.

**Roger Evans AM (Chairman):** That is a fair point. Mr Biggs, we would like to hear your question.

**John Biggs AM:** OK. There are two simple questions. The first is that you gave an undertaking and you have fluffed around it but your officers have now indicated that there is going to be an undertaking from City Hall that will help underwrite the costs or, alternatively, you are saying they cannot build the bridge unless they can secure some sort of absolute guarantee above waving collecting buckets that they will raise £3.5 million - or whatever it is - a year to maintain the bridge. On top of that, it will need renewal at some stage. It has a 125-year life. One day, you and me and Joanna Lumley, tragically, will all be dead and the thing will have to be rebuilt. There is a risk that history will judge.

There is a competition a little further up the Thames at Nine Elms. There is a competition for bridges there and we have seen images all over the media of very attractive possible designs, whereas in the case of this one the design was secured, apparently, by a bunch of flowers. A competition in one place; a bunch of flowers to the north --

**Boris Johnson (Mayor of London):** I do not know. I have explained the detail of the competition that is taking place.

I just want to draw your attention, John, to the letter that was sent by City Hall to the Garden Bridge Trust explaining the circumstances in which we were willing to help out to get over this planning

hurdle. I have explained that this is purely in order to speed the thing up. You know perfectly well that it is incredibly difficult to get big infrastructure projects done in London at anything like a reasonable speed. You know the difficulties we face with planning. We have the Thames Tideway Tunnel coming down the track. They need to build a huge outlet in 2017. Unless we get this thing moving, it simply will not happen.

What we have said is that the guarantee that we are making is subject to agreement on the terms of the guarantee, including defining the obligations to be guaranteed and the circumstances in which the guarantee may be called upon. What I am telling you is that we will not release that £30 million until we are absolutely certain that for a period of five years, ten years or more, the Garden Bridge Trust has the wherewithal to guarantee the maintenance of that bridge.

**John Biggs AM:** The problem we have, Mayor, is that in five or ten years' time there will be another Mayor, there will be another Assembly Member and we will be asking these questions about why we are paying for something when a previous Mayor by the name of Boris Johnson told us it was not going to cost us anything. People looking at that will ask how it is that the same Mayor did this once before when he promised a cycle hire scheme that would cost us nothing and is now the most heavily subsidised form of transport in London.

**Boris Johnson (Mayor of London):** If you want to get rid of the cycle hire scheme, then just say so. Have the guts to do so. You will have the enthusiastic support of this particular audience in the gallery and I can understand why, but that is not what I want to do. It is not what most Londoners want to do. It would be completely counterproductive for our city.

Be honest about it. If you hate cyclists, clap your hands. [Clapping and interjections from the public gallery.] I do not. They are a wonderful thing. If you want to play the demagogue and if you want to suck up to this particular audience in this particular gallery today, that is your prerogative. Go right ahead.

**Roger Evans AM (Chairman):** All right. Can we just pause for a moment and consider why we are here. This is a statutory meeting to question the Mayor. There is a verbatim record taken of everything that is said and it is also filmed and broadcast, which means that it needs to be very clear what the Mayor is saying and what the questions are that are being asked. That is not helped --

**Tom Copley AM:** There is no one talking over him.

**Roger Evans AM (Chairman):** That is not helped if members of the audience are making contributions from the back of the room. I am rather loath to stop people applauding or demonstrating support, but I do not want catcalling. If we have it, I will ask the people who are doing it to leave and so please do not. Mr Biggs?

**John Biggs AM:** I rest my point, Chairman.

**Boris Johnson (Mayor of London):** I think you rest your point in disarray.

**Roger Evans AM (Chairman):** Are there any more supplementary questions on this?

**John Biggs AM:** I am sure the audience was appreciating the superb quality of my questions. The Mayor will ask what we want to get rid of and I would like to get rid of a Mayor. He may continue as Mayor, a Mayor who tells us about what these things --

**Boris Johnson (Mayor of London):** You have tried that twice. Stand yourself, then, Biggs. Why do you not put yourself forward? Labour does not have a candidate. What about Biggs?

**Roger Evans AM (Chairman):** With respect, this does not sound like a supplementary question.

**John Biggs AM:** You are telling porkies. That is the problem. You are telling porkies.

**Roger Evans AM (Chairman):** Can we move on to the important matter of London Bridge Station, which is the next question on the agenda. The question is in the name of Assembly Member Shawcross and I am combining it, with agreement from the parties, with question 4, which is in the name of Assembly Member Johnson, because they are largely the same question, in fact. Can you respond to Assembly Member Shawcross?

### **2015/0916 - Rail devolution and London Bridge**

Valerie Shawcross CBE AM

*The recent chaotic scenes at London Bridge further highlighted the disadvantage of a chaotic and fragmented rail system in London. What are you doing to progress the devolution to City Hall of control London's suburban rail services?*

### **2015/0818 - London Bridge chaos**

Darren Johnson AM

*Can you update the Assembly on what you have been doing to bring an end to the chaos at London Bridge Station?*

**Boris Johnson (Mayor of London):** Yes. This is about London Bridge Station. Val, you and Darren have both asked about it. The crucial point here, as I have said in this Assembly before - and I hoped that it would be widely publicised, but I discovered that you can say something in the London Assembly and people just ignore it, rather irritatingly - is that the chaos at London Bridge, in my view, is an overwhelming argument for the further devolution of rail to this city and further democratic control of our railways and our suburban rail networks. I am grateful to you, Val, and to everybody around this horseshoe who has supported that campaign.

We have made progress. On 31 May the suburban services out of Liverpool Street will be managed by TfL and on the West Anglia Line a few years later. Passengers will immediately get the pay-as-you-go fares from May as a result of the deal we have done on the West Anglia Line. The suburban services out of Paddington by 2018 will transfer to TfL as part of Crossrail. The argument that we make to the Government is not only that this is hugely popular but that it delivers better services. I think we are winning that argument.

Actually, the chaos at London Bridge has been helpful. It was very striking that on 23 February when announcing the Long Term Economic Plan for London - and I know that Members for south east London will be heartened by this - the Chancellor said not only that he wanted to devolve skills to London and the other things we discussed but that:

*"I think we should look at giving the Mayor more of a say over future commuter train franchises ... so we have one coherent transport system that serves well not just those who live in London, but those who come in every day to work here too."*

He singled out the Southeastern network and the possibilities there. That franchise is coming up. That is the next big prize. In 2018 the suburban Southeastern services we think could be devolved subject to agreement by a future Government. Obviously, Val, with your influence in the Labour Party, it would be great to hear that that has cross-party support as well.

**Valerie Shawcross CBE AM:** Thank you, Mr Mayor. I absolutely agree with you for once that it is really important to press the case now for devolution of rail. I actually met with the Secretary of State for Transport last week with a number of Members of Parliament (MPs) and we urged him to take responsibility - because that is the system at the moment - for the chaos and to try not just to improve the situation but to give some decent compensation to passengers. Really, they deserve 50% of their season tickets back.

I was happy to see that at last the Secretary of State had announced that there would be a review of the Network Rail board. Believe it or not, I met Mark Carne [Chief Executive, Network Rail] this morning in London Bridge Station --

**Boris Johnson (Mayor of London):** By chance?

**Valerie Shawcross CBE AM:** He was there with Louise Ellman [Louise Ellman MP, Chair, Transport Select Committee] and I gave him a full account of the frustrations of south London passengers --

**Boris Johnson (Mayor of London):** Did he enjoy that experience, Val?

**Valerie Shawcross CBE AM:** -- and of the knock-on impact on passengers on the rest of the network because there has been a huge knock-on impact. Is it not appalling, Mr Mayor, that a London transport crisis that began in early January - actually, there were problems in the months before that - takes MPs going to see a Cabinet Minister in March to get anything like the kind of attention that we need to have this issue resolved? I can tell you we have had lots of conversations with our front bench and there is a lot of support now for rail devolution, including amongst our most senior people.

Can you tell me what you have done to seize the moment and make sure this is the turning point for London getting control of its own railways?

**Boris Johnson (Mayor of London):** You have made a lot of the points for me there and I am obliged to you. We have had, obviously, endless meetings with Mark Carne and with the Department since the problems began. One of the interesting features of --

**Valerie Shawcross CBE AM:** Have you had a meeting with your Secretary of State, Mr Mayor? Have you pressed the point with your Cabinet?

**Boris Johnson (Mayor of London):** I do not want to go into the details of every meeting I have with Cabinet Ministers, but I have had abundant meetings with Patrick [The Rt Hon Patrick



McLoughlin MP, Secretary of State for Transport], with Mark Carne and with everybody on this issue. One of the interesting features of this whole crisis is actually that the guy they now have in charge of sorting it is Phil Hufton [Managing Director of Network Operations, Network Rail], as you know, who is a fantastic operator and whom they nicked from us. Network Rail nicked him from us at top dollar, by the way. If anybody --

**Valerie Shawcross CBE AM:** I agree that he's absolutely great, but can I just point out to you that they have left in him charge of Network Rail's national operations as well, which is too much for one man to do?

**Boris Johnson (Mayor of London):** Can I just finish my point? The basic problem is that there is no single political ownership of this crisis.

**Valerie Shawcross CBE AM:** Agreed.

**Boris Johnson (Mayor of London):** That is what I said to you in this Assembly a couple of months ago and that is why that it does underline the case for devolution. If we had a problem like this at one of our big Tube stations like Victoria Tube Station, if we had this kind of crisis and this kind of congestion, it would be me. My ass would be grass - or whatever - unless we fixed it and we would have to fix it fast.

However, the problem with the current situation is that we do not have control. We do not see the timetabling. We do not have access to the signalling decisions that are made. These are not TfL decisions. The sooner you have rail devolution in London, the sooner you will get proper accountability. That is basically the only way to protect the travelling public from this kind of situation. That is the argument that we have been making and it is very interesting now to see what George Osborne [The Rt Hon George Osborne MP, Chancellor of the Exchequer] is saying. The Chancellor absolutely gets it.

**Valerie Shawcross CBE AM:** Thank you.

**Darren Johnson AM:** I completely support your call that these franchises need to be devolved to TfL and for London directly to take control of the situation, but that is going to take time. I do wonder what sort of leadership you are providing on this issue now.

**Boris Johnson (Mayor of London):** Let me give you some examples, Darren. Obviously, we are in constant touch with Network Rail and the train operators. We are trying to make sure that all our customers have information about where the congestion is and how to use alternative routes. TfL has deployed additional staff from the Special Requirements Team at stations affected by the London Bridge works. We are increasing staffing where it is necessary to cope with the greater flows. Staff have been deployed at Elephant and Castle, Waterloo, Southwark, New Cross, Canada Water and Victoria. We are trying to help people across the network to reroute --

**Darren Johnson AM:** It is not working, is it?

**Boris Johnson (Mayor of London):** -- and obviously we are laying on bus services where appropriate to try to cope with the problem. TfL is absolutely there dealing with the problem, as you

would expect, because we take full responsibility for managing the network that we are in charge of. You would expect us to do that?

**Darren Johnson AM:** Yes, but do you remember back in 2012 and the Olympics? That was an absolute triumph for London --

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

**Darren Johnson AM:** -- in terms of efficient and effective management of the public transport system right across the board.

**Boris Johnson (Mayor of London):** That was because TfL was in charge.

**Darren Johnson AM:** We were told that so many lessons had been learned from that that could be applied to future situations not just in terms of crowd management, not just in terms of public information, but actually in terms of TfL and the different rail operators working together to come to a solution. Why is that not working for London Bridge?

**Boris Johnson (Mayor of London):** Actually, your memory is not wholly perfect because in the run-up to the Olympics there were serious anxieties and there were some things that went wrong. We addressed them, but we addressed them by bringing people together.

**Darren Johnson AM:** We were told that lessons had been learned.

**Boris Johnson (Mayor of London):** The problem that we have at London Bridge is that they have grossly overestimated the benefits they would achieve by the resignalling they have so far put in and they are not able to deliver the numbers of trains that they were expecting. There is, frankly, a cock-up and we need now to manage that and we need to have a clear understanding of what can be achieved.

The broad point I am making - and I think it is one that Val [Valerie Shawcross CBE AM] certainly accepts - is that this is largely caused by the kind of drift you get when, basically, the thing is being run by a bureaucracy without the political terror that is necessary to drive change and improvement. When we had the Olympics, everybody was conscious that when everybody started to arrive in London at the end of July, we had to get our city ready. That was a massive imperative and a spur to co-operation, to exertion and to getting things done together. You are not seeing that at the moment, I am afraid, at London Bridge. One of the problems is that there is no overall political control and no oversight and that is what we would like to see.

**Darren Johnson AM:** I know the situation is a mess. I am not seeing much in the way of political leadership on behalf of Londoners from you on this. I have checked your diary. It appears you have had three meetings on this since January: two with Network Rail bosses and one with the Secretary of State for Transport. Is that really enough given how many times this has been in the headlines of the *Evening Standard*?

**Boris Johnson (Mayor of London):** That, I am afraid, is an underestimate of the number of meetings I have certainly had with Patrick McLoughlin about it --

**Jenny Jones AM:** Your diary is inaccurate?

**Boris Johnson (Mayor of London):** -- and you would expect me to have regular conversations with Patrick, as I do. By the way, there are constant meetings now going on between Isabel [Isabel Dedring, Deputy Mayor for Transport], TfL, Peter Hendy [Sir Peter Hendy, Commissioner, TfL], Mark Carne and Network Rail to try to sort this out.

However, as I say, the silver lining - and it is a very considerable one - is that it will lead to further devolution to London. I think people are seeing the political imperative to have a central locus of accountability. That has to be democratically accountable to London.

**Darren Johnson AM:** We are absolutely all around the whole Chamber completely at one on that.

**Caroline Pidgeon MBE AM:** Hear, hear.

**Darren Johnson AM:** We certainly want devolution of rail services to TfL and London.

**Boris Johnson (Mayor of London):** That is the spirit, Darren. That is the spirit. With you on their side, who can lose, Darren?

**Darren Johnson AM:** Absolutely.

**Boris Johnson (Mayor of London):** It is going to be fine.

**Darren Johnson AM:** However, Londoners know that that is going to take some time and they are wanting to see more leadership from you as Mayor on this issue. You have found time to visit Kurdistan, to have lunch with Rupert Murdoch [Executive Chairman, News Corp] and to unveil a statue of a horse in Trafalgar Square. You have found time for loads of things. You need to put your mind to the issue of sorting out London Bridge far more.

**Boris Johnson (Mayor of London):** You do not like the horse? Can I tell you about the horse? It is very interesting that you should raise it. What that horse in fact stands for --

**Jenny Jones AM:** Off the point.

**Boris Johnson (Mayor of London):** He is objecting to the statue of the horse. I am allowed to talk about it.

**Darren Johnson AM:** I am not objecting to the statue of the horse.

**Roger Evans AM (Chairman):** Indeed, as the horse was mentioned in --

**Boris Johnson (Mayor of London):** The statue of the horse, of course, stands for transport infrastructure!

**Darren Johnson AM:** Does the horse have a right of reply?

**Boris Johnson (Mayor of London):** The horse stands for vital investment in transport infrastructure!

**Caroline Pidgeon MBE AM:** We need a horse at London Bridge.

**Roger Evans AM (Chairman):** The horse does not have a right of reply, but it did seem that you were levelling a criticism at the Mayor and he is allowed to respond to it.

**Jennette Arnold OBE AM (Deputy Chair):** No, it was an example.

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

**Roger Evans AM (Chairman):** Swiftly.

**Boris Johnson (Mayor of London):** That skeletal horse, of course, represents transport infrastructure and the vital tubular structures that run beneath the surface of any great and beautiful city.

**Jenny Jones AM:** This is absolute nonsense.

**Boris Johnson (Mayor of London):** It commemorates the huge investment that we are making in the Tube and the Piccadilly line --

**Darren Johnson AM:** A few horses at London Bridge might work better than the train services at the moment!

**Boris Johnson (Mayor of London):** The pity of it is - and here I think you and I are at one, Darren - that we are in City Hall not given more control over the suburban rail services that we need in order to deliver happier outcomes and faster outcomes at London Bridge.

**James Cleverly AM:** Mr Mayor, we have had quite an extensive discussion about the conversations you have had about what is going wrong at London Bridge at the moment. Obviously, my constituents in the London boroughs of Bexley and Bromley traditionally came into platforms 1 to 6 at London Bridge and they have now been constrained to platforms 1 to 3.

Can you give me an assurance - or can you help me give my constituents an assurance - that the lessons that hopefully will be learned with the changes made at the platforms that have already been refurbished will be applied when the platforms that my constituents typically rely upon go through their period of refurbishment?

**Boris Johnson (Mayor of London):** Obviously, we will do our level best in our conversations with Network Rail, with Phil [Hufton], with Mark Carne and with all the people there to ensure that your constituents are served better. This whole thing has been utterly chaotic. Clearly, again, if it had been a TfL station and if this had been something for which I had direct responsibility, there would be a massive price to pay. We are working very hard to make sure that people who come in from Bexley and from Bromley are better served. It is sad that basically there has been an underestimate of the difficulties that this whole modernisation would cause.

**James Cleverly AM:** Thank you. In that regard, I have spoken with Peter Hendy about what TfL would have done in similar circumstances and it has been enlightening. If my constituents are affected as detrimentally as some other Londoners have been, will you join my calls for Network Rail and the train operating companies to properly recompense my constituents if they are put through the kind of hell on a daily basis that I know many other Londoners have been?

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

**James Cleverly AM:** Thank you.

**Steve O'Connell AM:** On that same point, it is well argued and it is unanswerable, the case for one coherent transport system under mayoral control.

Picking up on Val and James's point, I wrote last week to Govia Thameslink Railway (GTR), in essence demanding that it considers proper compensation - and I think there is agreement around this horseshoe - and not the compensation that you can automatically get for 30 minutes late, which is the business-as-usual compensation. We have a structural problem here. My letter to Charles Horton [Chief Executive Officer, GTR] was demanding on behalf of my constituents in Croydon and Sutton the consideration for a discount when they come to renew their season tickets next time around.

Again, I would ask for your support for that so that proper compensation can go to all of those constituents across south London who have suffered.

**Boris Johnson (Mayor of London):** You shall certainly have it. You shall certainly have my support in that respect.

**Steve O'Connell AM:** Thank you very much.

**Richard Tracey AM:** Mr Mayor, it is well recognised that Network Rail is not really very good at co-ordinating. That was particularly shown at Christmastime at King's Cross. The problems are pretty well-rooted.

I recollect that the Secretary of State [for Transport], Patrick McLoughlin, did talk about appointing a special Department for Transport director to Network Rail to make sure and to oversee their co-ordination. Have you heard what progress is being made with that?

**Boris Johnson (Mayor of London):** I cannot give you an answer about that appointment. I will take it up on your behalf and I will see what Patrick is doing about that.

**Richard Tracey AM:** Thank you.

**Roger Evans AM (Chairman):** Are there any more supplementaries on London Bridge? Assembly Member Pidgeon, who chairs the Transport Committee, has asked me to inform Members that there will be a meeting of the Transport Committee on Friday afternoon specifically to consider the situation at London Bridge and to take evidence from Network Rail and the train operating companies. Hopefully, there will be some progress there.

## 2015/1182 - Foreign language skills in the capital

Tony Arbour AM

*A recent report suggests that low level of language skills costs the United Kingdom (UK) economy £59 billion every year. Can the Mayor let us know if he intends to pursue any foreign language initiatives, as part of his education remit, to help London make the most out of its trade links?*

**Boris Johnson (Mayor of London):** Thanks very much, Tony. Foreign language skills are absolutely vital for our economy. As you rightly point out, there was a study recently showing that the absence of foreign language skills costs the UK economy about £59 billion a year. What we are doing to support languages in London is funding 11 language projects through the London Schools Excellence Fund. We are teaching Mandarin, for instance, in partnership with the Qatar Foundation and the British Council. We are piloting the teaching of Arabic in London schools. Actually, we are seeing an increase in London schools in the number of pupils at General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE) level taking languages. The highest proportion of pupils taking a language at GCSE is in London. They are increasing at nine out of ten local authorities. We are seeing an increase in foreign languages in schools.

The problem basically began when it was decided under the Labour Government that there would no longer be a requirement for a foreign language at the age of 14. That led to roughly a halving of the number of people learning a foreign language in our schools. That has been catastrophic.

**Tony Arbour AM:** Thank you for that, Mr Mayor. Clearly, something is happening. Probably Londoners do not realise within this global figure how much it is actually costing London, what you describe as a catastrophic mistake. Last year, extrapolating the figures that you have already used, it cost London just under £7 billion, which is the equivalent of 65,000 jobs.

In your response to a previous question, you said that there is not sufficient political terror when it comes to dealing with Network Rail. It may be that in your final year here you can unleash your political terror to seek a reversal of the decision to stop compulsory language at 14. It is astonishing to me - and I suspect to most people - that when foreigners come to --

**Boris Johnson (Mayor of London):** I think Michael Gove [MP, former Secretary of State for Education] did bring it back, didn't he, from memory?

**Tony Arbour AM:** Indeed. When foreigners come to this country, they speak perfect English. For example, I have been astonishingly impressed by the lucidity of the Finance Minister for Greece, who comes here and puts most of us to shame with the quality of his English.

**Boris Johnson (Mayor of London):** Yes. He is better at English than he is at economics!

**Tony Arbour AM:** That sums up the modern-day Greeks. Mr Mayor, through your influence on education and the Education Panel here, can I ask that you actively seek the reinstatement of compulsory language teaching in this country, particularly in London schools, certainly to the compulsory school-leaving age?

**Boris Johnson (Mayor of London):** I am going to have to check this because it does not seem to be here in my brief, but my memory is that Michael Gove brought it back. I am going to have come back to you about that.

**Tony Arbour AM:** It is currently 7 to 14. In most of Europe, it is 5 to 16.

**Boris Johnson (Mayor of London):** OK. I am very pro the study of foreign languages and, as I say, we are encouraging it. I am also, I have to say, very pro the study of English by everybody who comes here and who lives here. There are communities in London where people are spending several generations without actually learning to speak English fluently. It is a huge shame and a huge pity for them. They are lacking a vital tool to engage with our economy and to empower themselves. I want to see everybody in London and everybody who comes to London speaking English. I love foreign languages. Additionally, they should speak foreign languages, too. However, English has to be a priority.

### **2015/1170 - Starter Homes**

Steve O'Connell AM

*Following the Government's announcement of its new Starter Homes scheme, what London sites are being considered to benefit from the scheme and how many homes would this deliver?*

**Boris Johnson (Mayor of London):** Yes, this is an interesting proposal. It is very good stuff and I welcome the Starter Homes exemption site policy. We will have to see which sites now come forward. That is the difficulty in London and, obviously, Croydon. I am sure you will be working hard as usual for Croydon to deliver some great new starter homes there.

**Steve O'Connell AM:** Thank you, Mr Mayor. Yes, certainly, the scheme sounds very promising. It is a scheme that homes will be offered at a minimum of 20% discount and that will be achieved in essence by the removal of the section 106 on the builders. That has to be welcomed to enable people to get perhaps their first step on the housing ladder.

I am keen, however - although I am aware now that the list has yet to be established - that clearly we want the lion's share of this scheme in London. It is our responsibility to see that one through. When I looked at the website, I was a little bit disconcerted to see that the local authorities that have pledged their support predominantly, other than the illustrious London Borough of Bexley, are all outside London.

Therefore, Mr Mayor, although it is relatively early stages with this, although our residents can register for that scheme, I would like your assurance that you and your officers will seek to pursue this scheme and to pursue boroughs to register an interest so that London does get the lion's share.

**Boris Johnson (Mayor of London):** Yes, of course. The issue will be finding the sites. Boroughs already identify all suitable housing sites as part of the Strategic Housing and Land Availability Assessment and so they are already doing that.

Where there are good sites for this particular Starter Homes exemption sites policy, I would be very keen to hear about them as soon as possible. If you are aware of sites in Croydon or wherever that are not coming forward and that you think would be eligible, can I propose that you talk to Ric [Ric Blakeway, Deputy Mayor for Housing, Land and Property] and get them moving?

**Steve O'Connell AM:** Yes, but of course the issue we have is the land prices in London. If the commitment is 100,000 homes, the builders may be tempted to look elsewhere and we need to consider that. I will be speaking to Ric to make sure that London, not just my part --

**Boris Johnson (Mayor of London):** Yes, the whole thing, of course.

**Steve O'Connell AM:** -- gets its lion's share and we will look at this as the year progresses, Mayor. Thank you, Chairman.

### **2015/0917 - Taxi and Private Hire - Future Proof**

Valerie Shawcross CBE AM

*There are currently 68 MPS cab enforcement officers. As highlighted in the London Assembly Transport Committee's report Future Proof, this number has stagnated since 2008, despite the number of private hire drivers increasing by 10,000 vehicles over this period. What commitment will you make to increase the number of enforcement officers in the capital?*

**Boris Johnson (Mayor of London):** Thank you. The question Val has asked is about the MPS cab enforcement officers. The particular statistic you have highlighted is that the number of those officers has stabilised - or 'stagnated', as you put it - since 2008, despite the number of private hire vehicles increasing by 10,000 over the period. You are asking what we are going to do to increase the number of enforcement officers.

The first point to make is that in 2008 when I came in, after long discussions with the taxi trade, we doubled the number of enforcement officers.

What we are now doing is increasing also the number and those 68 officers are directly funded by TfL. There are 61 in the MPS and seven in the City of London Police. They work side-by-side with TfL's taxi and private hire compliance officers and we are increasing their numbers this April from 41 to 48, a 17% increase. That group can also draw on the support of about 400 officers all told for major operations of one kind or another. The Cab Enforcement Unit has access to a pool of 290 specially trained female officers who will work on covert anti-touting operations. If you take all this together, we believe that that is a good number. I am always reluctant to draw comparisons with other world cities because they are very difficult to make, but I am told that in New York they have a total of only 189 officers available for similar work.

You will be aware that simultaneously we are funding and creating the MPS Road and Transport Police Command (RTPC), which we announced the other day up in Islington. With 2,300 uniformed officers, it is the UK's largest police command. We think that the RTPC will give us the ability to have significantly greater cab enforcement activity.

I am conscious that there will be many members of the audience who think that we should be doing more and who think that there are still touts who are not being dealt with and there are still private hire vehicles flouting the law. I am afraid to say that there is truth in some of those assertions.

I am particularly concerned about what is happening with touting and with violations by minicabs in the West End, at Heathrow and at Paddington, for instance, where I am told that we are perhaps being unfair in the way that we are dealing with black cabs and dealing with minicabs. If that is the



case, then we need to grip that and be fair on both types. I certainly think that it is time that we looked at that.

Pursuant to what I was saying earlier on, I do not think we can have a situation in which minicab drivers, who one way or another are regulated by this city, should be able to drive around and take fares without being able to speak English properly and without knowing the basics of the geography of London. Therefore, I have asked TfL to bring forward regulations to require a certain basic knowledge of English for all minicab drivers --

**Valerie Shawcross CBE AM:** Sorry, my question was about touting, Chairman.

**Boris Johnson (Mayor of London):** -- and some sort of basic test of the geography of London.

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

**Valerie Shawcross CBE AM:** Thank you, Chairman. Mr Mayor, yes, on this question there will be comments from other political parties.

I want to make it clear to you that it is not just - although it is a hugely important industry - the cab drivers and the taxi drivers sitting here in the public gallery who think that touting has become totally endemic in this city. Actually, the Assembly believes that touting is massively under-enforced in this city. There has been a growth of something like 50,000 additional private hire drivers in the last ten years. We have 100,000 drivers and yet only 68 dedicated enforcement officers. Despite the figures you gave us, Mr Mayor, the Committee was told that only 14 TfL compliance officers are on duty at night when touting is at its most dangerous. I looked at arrest rates for touting. They have fallen by 37% since 2010, Mr Mayor. We have a massive problem. There are two cab-related sexual assaults a week, which I am sure you want to completely wipe out, and touting is all part and parcel of that risk.

We have taxi drivers who are paying a Knowledge qualification fee of £1,136. They have seen an 8.3% rise. We have taxi drivers and private-hire drivers paying enormous amounts of money for their regulation for their licence. Yet we seem to see none of this money going into protecting not just the livelihoods of decent, law-abiding taxi and private hire drivers in London, but also actually our safety as the passengers of London. As it stands at the moment, touts are getting away with it the whole time and one does not have to be a taxi driver to be able to tell you where it is going on. You can go to almost any Tube station in London and see somebody touting at almost any time of day or night.

Mr Mayor, a plea from the Transport Committee is that you really put some welly now into enforcement because this problem has grown worse on your watch.

**Boris Johnson (Mayor of London):** Yes, certainly. Very sincerely, we will redouble our efforts and indeed multiply many times our efforts to tackle touting. The point that you are making is a valid and a powerful one. We have made 1,000 arrests for touting just in the last year. The overwhelming majority of them have resulted in successful prosecutions. We have won 96% of the cases we prosecuted. However, I am going to put my hands up here, Val, and say that we need to be doing more.

We have to accept also that the London black cab trade is a great part of the London transport economy and does a vital job, but it is threatened now by disruptive technology in the form of apps, which --

**Valerie Shawcross CBE AM:** Sorry, this is not my time, Chairman.

**Roger Evans AM (Chairman):** Can you just hold on a moment, Mr Mayor? We are going to come on to it.

**Boris Johnson (Mayor of London):** Of course. I will be happy to.

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

**Richard Tracey AM:** Indeed, Mr Mayor, a lot of the overall confusion about enforcement and everything is being caused by the proliferation of these apps for securing a car. Can I ask you point blank what the situation is over the legal case and the verification of what Uber [taxi hire mobile phone app] is up to in London? Clearly, it is quite a popular means of getting a car amongst many people, but we really need to be clear.

**Boris Johnson (Mayor of London):** All right. I will tell you where we are with the legal case, Dick. Until last month, there was a case that the Licensed Taxi Drivers Association (LTDA), which many people here today may be members of, had a criminal case before the Magistrates Court against various Uber drivers. The Magistrates Court, as I understand it, did not want to hear that case, yet the LTDA would not withdraw it. It was impossible for us at TfL to proceed to adjudication in a higher court under the rules of this country as long as that case was before the Magistrates Court.

The LTDA has now withdrawn that case from the Magistrates Court because it was not getting anywhere and we are now asking the High Court to make a resolution on this legal point, which is whether an mobile phone app of the kind that Uber drivers have is a taximeter or not. In my view, if it calculates the fare, if it tells you how far you have gone and if it enables the driver to present you with the cost of the journey in the course of the journey, then that is a taximeter.

I can tell you that that is not necessarily the view of my learned friends and I had a long and acrimonious conversation with a very senior High Court judge who said, "Of course it is not a taximeter", and so on and so forth. We have a legal problem.

**Interjection from the public gallery:** Germany does not.

**Boris Johnson (Mayor of London):** Unfortunately, my understanding is that the other European jurisdictions that have banned Uber apps have banned the car-sharing part of it, which we do not actually seem to have in London.

We have to face the fact that, Dick, as you say, we and the black cab trade are fighting very considerable forces. They are one legal obscurantism and delay. We are fighting also, I am afraid, a very powerful force, which is consumer price sensitivity and convenience. That is something that we need to focus on. The black cab trade has been around for more than 100 years. It is going to be around long after Uber has come and gone. However, we need to address the technological challenge

and we need to understand how to make technology our friend and our ally. I cannot dis-invent the mobile phone. I cannot take away --

[Interjection from the public gallery]

**Boris Johnson (Mayor of London):** -- mobile phones from everybody aged 20 to 40.

**Roger Evans AM (Chairman):** All right. Can I just stop you, Mr Mayor, for a moment?

**Boris Johnson (Mayor of London):** Of course.

**Roger Evans AM (Chairman):** I want to just reiterate the point that catcalling is not acceptable. In fact, I am going to issue a second warning, which means that if people do it again I will ask them to leave. Please carry on.

**Boris Johnson (Mayor of London):** I want to just end by making this point: I accept and I understand that the black cab trade is a vital part of London's transport economy. They are the gold standard of cabs around the world. They are appreciated by visitors to this city. They are a hugely vital service to this city and indeed to this country. We need to protect and support them. That is why I have announced the measures I have to increase enforcement of touting. I take Val's point and I take the point that was made by members of the audience today: we need to raise our game there; we need to get to a conclusion of this Uber problem.

However, we also need to help the black cab trade itself to be the technological leader and the natural people that the customers want to go to. That is going to need some thinking about how to make the black cab trade more technology-friendly, to use apps itself and indeed to be able to take payment by card and all those kinds of things that would assist the cab trade as well.

**Richard Tracey AM:** Can I ask you to prevail on the Justice Secretary, Chris Grayling, to make sure that this very senior High Court judge and his friends actually do get down to looking at this case? It is clearly an urgent matter.

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

**Richard Tracey AM:** If indeed they do decide that the Uber process is a meter, will TfL follow the German Government in banning this thing from the roads?

**Boris Johnson (Mayor of London):** Yes, we will. As I said, you have to be careful about what is actually happening in other European jurisdictions. As far as I understand the matter, they are not banning the Uber app that we are seeing in London. They are banning a car-sharing app. The only place where the Uber thing has been banned altogether, as I understand it, is Delhi. Other European jurisdictions have not done so. However, if we could get the legal go-ahead, then of course we will do what the law commands us to do. Unfortunately, with the present state of play, we are unable to do that.

In those circumstances, what we have to do is to support the black cab trade in many of the ways that *Future Proof* sets out, not least cracking down on touting but in other ways also, in trying to help the black cab trade to take advantage of technology. In the end, we will not win this thing and we will

not make progress if the young people whom I talk to continue to tell me that they get better value from some app system. We have to make technology our friend.

**Richard Tracey AM:** Thank you.

**Caroline Pidgeon MBE AM:** Thank you very much. Mr Mayor, you can see the huge support that we have had from the taxi and private hire industries for our report, which I do hope you now have had the time to read.

There is a desperate need for a simple strategy and a vision for how we can support the industries going forward and, clearly, to sort TfL out because there are huge problems there, as we have raised in our report. You said we have to raise our game; TfL has to hugely raise its game.

In the spirit of transparency, I want to pick out one of the small issues that we raised. Will you agree to open up your Cabbies' Cabinet so that Assembly Members can attend and observe and to publish online the minutes and agendas so that the whole industry can see what is being discussed and have an input?

**Boris Johnson (Mayor of London):** I do not think I will agree to that because the Cabbies' Cabinet benefits from the real informality and the ability to exchange views very powerfully and very frankly - sometimes abusively - with me. That is a good thing and I want us to continue with a strong informal relationship. We have had regular Cabbies' Cabinets under this mayoralty and indeed you will remember that I put representatives of both the black cab and the private hire trades on the board of TfL.

**Caroline Pidgeon MBE AM:** Will you agree to provide a summary of the issues discussed?

**Boris Johnson (Mayor of London):** Also, I have had slightly bitter experience, Caroline, of allowing you into meetings because you tend to tweet out irritating things in the middle.

**Caroline Pidgeon MBE AM:** That is the nature of our job.

**Boris Johnson (Mayor of London):** Again, I am against it.

**Caroline Pidgeon MBE AM:** Will you agree to publish a summary of the issues raised?

**Boris Johnson (Mayor of London):** No, I will not, but I will have --

**Caroline Pidgeon MBE AM:** Mr Mayor, have some respect. We have cross-party support for this issue --

**Roger Evans AM (Chairman):** I think we have had an answer. Caroline?

**Caroline Pidgeon MBE AM:** Will you at least publish a summary of the issues that have been discussed so that the industry knows what is being discussed in these little closed meetings? It is a simple yes or no. I thought you believed in transparency.

**Boris Johnson (Mayor of London):** I have given you a simple yes or no and the answer is no. There you go.

**Caroline Pidgeon MBE AM:** OK. That is a shame. Thank you very much.

**Boris Johnson (Mayor of London):** You have representatives of the cab trade coming to these meetings. They are perfectly entitled to communicate with their members about what has happened in those meetings and a great deal of progress is made.

**Caroline Pidgeon MBE AM:** It is poor, very poor. They are held behind closed doors.

**Boris Johnson (Mayor of London):** However, it would be to the detriment of those meetings if they were to become public pieces of theatre when actually what we need to do is to get down and discuss serious business for the benefit of the cab trade. I do not see any reason why they should be excessively politicised and there you go.

**Caroline Pidgeon MBE AM:** It is stitched up behind closed doors.

**Darren Johnson AM:** You say that we need to raise our game on touting. Can I just have your assurance, therefore, that you will urge TfL to implement fully the recommendations from the cross-party evidence-based report that this Assembly did?

**Boris Johnson (Mayor of London):** Yes. I have said already that insofar as the Assembly is calling for a crack-down on touting, on people who are breaking the law and on unfair sharp practices, you are totally right, and also we need to do positive things to support the black cab trade. This is an industry that is going through convulsions of change caused by technology of all kinds, and caused also by the demands of air quality.

If I can make just one small plea, sometimes - and this may fall on completely deaf ears - the level of abuse of individual officers in TfL is quite severe. That is not conducive to good relations between TfL and the black cab trade and sometimes there is a level of personal vituperation against individuals that I think is unfair.

**Darren Johnson AM:** That was not about our report. I am drifting from my question, Chair.

**Boris Johnson (Mayor of London):** I hope you will agree with the sentiment.

**James Cleverly AM:** I declare an interest. I have a large number of taxi drivers resident in my constituency and I also have a large number of black cab users. One of the concerns I have from both the operators and the users of black cabs in suburban London is the availability of suburban taxi ranks. Will you pay serious consideration? Will you talk to officers at TfL about making availability on the roads that we control and making greater availability at suburban transport hubs for suburban taxi ranks?

**Boris Johnson (Mayor of London):** Yes. The issue that I found, I must say, in many suburban taxi ranks - and Yellow Badge are holders, in particular - is that they simply feel there are too many people at the ranks. That is something that has been brought to my attention at some suburban rail stations.

We are looking into what we can do to address that logistical problem and it is something that I have raised repeatedly with Leon [Leon Daniels, Managing Director of Surface Transport, TfL].

**James Cleverly AM:** Thank you. Just reinforcing one of the points that you have already touched upon, but I would like to get a bit of clarity on this. We are in a situation where we have two competing elements in this sector. One is heavily regulated - and we can argue there are very good reasons for that - and one is much less heavily regulated. The difficulty that we are finding - and we are seeing this with regard to the conversations you have been having with the judiciary about the legal position of the Uber app - is that the speed of change of technology is not being matched by the speed of change of legislation and regulation, which means that by definition half of this sector is sprinting to catch up with the other half that is more liberated.

My personal view - and this probably will not be popular in the crowd - is that even if the legislation comes down to say that Uber is a taximeter and it is banned from the drivers, there is absolutely nothing stopping passengers downloading it and using it as a hailing service and a negotiation tool with a minicab driver. Ultimately, even a win in the High Court will give only brief respite and the only way that we can create a level playing field for the cab trade and the minicab trade is to equalise that regulatory regime.

Will you look at actually making it easier for the black cab trade to keep up with technology so that they can provide the kind of service I know they want to provide to exactly those Londoners who are born and brought up using mobile phones for absolutely everything?

**Boris Johnson (Mayor of London):** Yes. You have heard what I have said. We will be announcing later on this week considerable investment in new technology for black cabs. Also, you have heard what I have said about trying to level the playing field in respect to speaking English and knowledge of the geography of London. I do think that there is an imbalance and there is unfairness, and technology is now exacerbating that imbalance and we really need to address it. I am acutely conscious of it.

I want to stress again: the black cab trade is a historic trade. It will always be here. It will outlive any app, provided we take on the new technology. We cannot be in the position of the people who broke up spinning jennies in Spitalfields. That will not work.

**James Cleverly AM:** As a final point with regard to being technology-neutral in this regard, I noticed that the taxi app page on the TfL website still has some but not all of the available apps. I think because of how contentious this issue has become that that page should either have absolutely every available app on the market or it should just point users to the download pages on either the App Store or the Android landing page to say, "We are not going to make a judgment or assessment on all of these. Go and find them". Otherwise, there is an implied - I know it is not explicit - endorsement of the apps listed on that page.

**Boris Johnson (Mayor of London):** I will certainly have a look at that. Everybody in London needs to appreciate the scale of the problem and the scale of the hypocrisy of the London travelling public. We all love the black cab trade but the reality is, I am told, there are now 1 million people in this city who have an Uber account. That is a huge number of people. We are seeing the number of new drivers signing up for Uber schemes and so on at absolutely colossal levels at the moment. That needs to be regulated. That is why I have said what I have said about language and about geography

because it is absolutely obvious to me that this problem is not going away. I appreciate the pain. I understand the pain and confusion of the black cab trade.

Also, I understand the basic sense of unfairness, which is that they are the people who are regulated by TfL in this very, very thoroughgoing way, all the checks, all the expense of getting the right vehicle, all the roadworthiness tests and all of that stuff and the colossal expense of buying the thing. I understand the anger. We really need to work together to bring the black cab trade forward so that it is properly competitive, and we also need to work together to make sure that with the growth in the private hire trade and with the growth of these apps, we are regulating them properly and that they are not getting unfair advantages and using sharp practice, which is, I am afraid, commonplace at the moment.

**James Cleverly AM:** Thank you.

**Victoria Borwick AM:** The point about us having this open discussion today - which, as you have said before, is not just seen in this Chamber but obviously through people watching it elsewhere and on the web - is that I hope you feel and understand the strength that we feel in supporting this unique part of London's transport infrastructure.

I also wanted to mention disabled accessibility and how important that is. The guys who become black cab taxi drivers have trained for many years, as you say yourself. They have invested in their vehicle, they have invested in their training and, at the end of that, they are then very regulated and they become, as we all know, what we believe is the gold standard. Now they are facing what they perceive as somebody who is not properly regulated, who does not have to have the proper insurance and who can seem to flout all the rules. Because they have so much money behind them, we are having a time to catch up.

What I am urging you, Mr Mayor, is to make sure that we do continue this energy that you see in the room today. It is not just a one-day wonder, this debate. A thoughtful report has been done, which is cross-party. We should take that forward. We should review it again, not only in one month, in three months and in six months, but convene again in a year's time to see if we have managed to get everyone to catch up and in order to support our black taxi industry.

**Boris Johnson (Mayor of London):** I totally agree. We must support the black cab trade and we must also support the needs of the London travelling public. They need vehicles that have disabled access, that conform to certain emission standards, where the drivers have been properly checked, where they are not in danger of being sexually harassed or abused or whatever, and that we have to insist on. Then the London travelling public need drivers who can communicate with them, who know the city and who are not going to rip them off. That is why we need to have proper regulation on both sides of the equation.

**Victoria Borwick AM:** Thank you.

[Meeting adjournment].

## 2015/0912 - Cuts to policing

Joanne McCartney AM

*Have cuts gone far enough?*

**Boris Johnson (Mayor of London):** You are asking about cuts in policing. Actually, the cuts are £500 million for the period 2013/14, 2015/16, are being exceeded by the MPS. They are on target to do better than that. Savings of £573 million they think they are going to deliver by the end of 2015/16 at the same time as bringing crime down very substantially. I have mentioned the cuts of 20% in the neighbourhood crime types, the Mayor's Office for Policing and Crime (MOPAC) seven crimes, and getting more police officers out there. We are making progress there.

**Joanne McCartney AM:** Mr Mayor, I do not think you actually answered the question, which was: do you think the cuts to the MPS have gone far enough?

**Boris Johnson (Mayor of London):** Clearly, there are further savings that will have to be achieved between now and 2020 --

**Joanne McCartney AM:** Yes, £800 million.

**Boris Johnson (Mayor of London):** -- but we are confident that by a combination of further economies, further amalgamation of units and sharing of resources, we can make further considerable savings, although I have also made it clear that you cannot cut front-line policing too far. Indeed, I would like to see investment in London policing of the kind that we have seen over the last few years.

**Joanne McCartney AM:** Thank you, Mr Mayor. In your introduction this morning, you said that numbers were back up to the 32,000 mark, which we all welcome. Throughout this mayoralty, as the Commissioner reminded us recently, he has been running about 2,000 under strength. At election time, it is going to be back up. The Commissioner gave an extremely important speech just a few days ago to the Royal Society of Arts, where he stated that in actual fact the MPS would have to get a lot smaller with fewer officers and he also in a subsequent interview said that he could not guarantee the future of police community support officers (PCSOs). Have you had those discussions with him and what is your view on that?

**Boris Johnson (Mayor of London):** Of course I saw Bernard's [Sir Bernard Hogan-Howe, Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis] excellent speech. What Sir Bernard is confident he can do is to continue to deliver high numbers of frontline police officers and continued falls in crime. The issue is how we make the savings work. Where are the savings going to come from? Do we indeed have to find £800 million or can we argue for more funding for London? That is the question.

**Joanne McCartney AM:** That is actually not quite what he said. I am quoting from the press release now on the MPS website.

**Boris Johnson (Mayor of London):** That is what I am saying.

**Joanne McCartney AM:** It is his own press release. He states that we need radical transformation of policing but, in actual fact, his question is how we keep the public safe with less money and fewer officers. He is quite clear. He is stating there have to be fewer officers and he says after the election



and has said that police community support officers he could not guarantee. Is that your view as well, Mr Mayor?

**Boris Johnson (Mayor of London):** As I have said before - and you have heard me say this many times now - there is an important political consideration, which is the numbers of frontline officers. Indeed, it is essential to keep that number high. We have picked 32,000 or thereabouts.

**Joanne McCartney AM:** We agree with you, Mr Mayor, on that.

**Boris Johnson (Mayor of London):** That is something that, as Members of the Assembly have pointed out before, is a pretty arbitrary figure but you might as well have a high figure. Unless you do that, the risk is that the cuts will be made in frontline policing rather than elsewhere. We want to intensify the concentration of the MPS on finding savings in other areas: on buildings, on backroom stuff, on waste and on duplication across the organisation. This is a budget of £3.6 billion or so per year. There are savings to be made. It is absolutely reasonable that a public sector body should make savings, but my priority is to keep numbers high. There may be some element of tension in that priority between us --

**Joanne McCartney AM:** There is a lot of tension, Mr Mayor.

**Boris Johnson (Mayor of London):** -- as politicians and the police. That is a creative and healthy tension insofar as --

**Joanne McCartney AM:** The tension is clearly there, Mr Mayor, because the Commissioner is warning that he cannot hold numbers high. You only have one year left to go, but the warning signs around policing, as I think we would all agree, are warning signs. You have had the Commissioner saying we are going to have a small MPS and difficult choices have to be made. He has, for example, raised the issue that the police in future may have to say no to missing persons enquiries. He cannot go into the future of PCSOs in the future. The Deputy Mayor [for Policing and Crime] has accused your own Government of penny-pinching on counterterrorism funding. He says it is a scandal, the Government action with regards to that. The Commissioner has warned about risks to public safety in the future. It is not really a legacy that we want you to leave.

**Boris Johnson (Mayor of London):** Joanne, these are all legitimate things that you would expect us, as believers and defenders of London policing, to be saying. Clearly, it is axiomatic. If you do not manage the police well, if you do not fund them properly, the risk is obviously that at some future stage there could be spikes in crime. That is the problem. As it happens, the police have been managing the very considerable budgets that they have very effectively to deliver substantial and continuing falls in crime, and actually the numbers in the neighbourhood teams have increased by 2,600 and the overall numbers of officers are up, as I said, at almost 32,000. It is about results and it is about the attitude that you have. Bernard [Sir Bernard Hogan-Howe, Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis] and his team have a can-do attitude. They appreciate that times are tight, but they think they can continue to deliver better results.

**Joanne McCartney AM:** Thank you.

**Andrew Dismore AM:** A straightforward question, Mr Mayor. Please, a straightforward answer. How many police officers did we have in Barnet in May 2010?

**Boris Johnson (Mayor of London):** I am very happy to write to you afterwards with the numbers, but the relevant comparison, if I may say so, is not with 2010 but with 2008 when I was elected.

**Andrew Dismore AM:** I will tell you, Mr Mayor, how many there were. I will tell you how many there were, Mr Mayor, because you do not know the answer.

**Boris Johnson (Mayor of London):** How many beans are there in an average tin of baked beans?

**Andrew Dismore AM:** Are you comparing police officers to baked beans, Mr Mayor? You think police officers are baked beans, do you?

**Boris Johnson (Mayor of London):** I am asking you. I am comparing you to a tin of baked beans. In fact, a tin of baked beans might do a considerably better job of representing the people of Barnet than you.

**Andrew Dismore AM:** Let me tell you the answer, Mr Mayor.

**Boris Johnson (Mayor of London):** In fact, a tin of baked beans is more full of beans than you.

**Andrew Dismore AM:** In fact, in May 2010 we had 607 police officers in Barnet. We now have 539, a cut, despite what you say, of 69 officers or 11%; 112 fewer PCSOs or a cut of 65%; and in the last six months of last year we lost 98 officer shifts a week on average with our officers being taken off to do duties elsewhere. Is it any wonder that people in Barnet tell me they do not see the police about any more and they are not satisfied?

**Boris Johnson (Mayor of London):** Actually, I can tell you that the overall satisfaction in London is at levels we have not seen for a very long time. It is rising and crime is falling and it is falling in Barnet as well in spite of the lamentable --

**Andrew Dismore AM:** Actually, it is not. I have the MOPAC figures here. Crime in Barnet over the last year went up by 1.5%, violence went up by 32.7%, criminal damage by 9.1% and so it goes on. Hate crime has gone through the roof. You are not right, Mr Mayor.

**Boris Johnson (Mayor of London):** Absolute nonsense.

**Andrew Dismore AM:** Crime has gone up in Barnet, not down. Let me ask you another question.

**Boris Johnson (Mayor of London):** You can pick and choose your periods if you want.

**Andrew Dismore AM:** That is the last year. These are your figures, not mine.

**Boris Johnson (Mayor of London):** Crime overall in London went down by about 8% last year.

**Andrew Dismore AM:** Let me ask you another question, Mr Mayor.

**Boris Johnson (Mayor of London):** Perhaps Barnet might have the good sense to get rid of their useless Assembly Member and they might see a corresponding fall in crime.

**Andrew Dismore AM:** Are you satisfied that Barnet police meet their emergency response time targets?

**Boris Johnson (Mayor of London):** Actually, crime overall is down and crime in Barnet is down very substantially over the last four years and the last seven years.

**Andrew Dismore AM:** Are you satisfied that Barnet police meet their emergency response times, Mr Mayor?

**Boris Johnson (Mayor of London):** I do not have the emergency response times before me for Barnet, but I am sure that the police in Barnet do a great job and you should pay tribute to them.

**Andrew Dismore AM:** They certainly deal with the limited resources they have.

**Boris Johnson (Mayor of London):** You continually come to this place to slag off public servants when you should be supporting them. It is true. It is absolutely true. He does.

**Andrew Dismore AM:** Let me give you the answer, Mr Mayor. In February, the Barnet police met their target only 80.7% of the time.

**Boris Johnson (Mayor of London):** There you go, endlessly whinging and moaning.

**Andrew Dismore AM:** Emergency calls are being missed because there are not enough of them and you are to blame, are you not?

**Boris Johnson (Mayor of London):** The people of Barnet, given the choice between you and a tin of baked beans, would go for a tin of baked beans every time.

**Andrew Dismore AM:** Let me ask you another question, Mr Mayor.

**Boris Johnson (Mayor of London):** Actually, crime in Barnet over the last four years has come down.

**Andrew Dismore AM:** How many burglaries in Barnet resulted in a prosecution?

**Boris Johnson (Mayor of London):** Crime in Barnet has come down substantially --

**Roger Evans AM (Chairman):** Can I just stop you both? When we record this meeting, we do not do it in two columns and so we cannot write down what you are saying next to each other and leave people to decide.

**Andrew Dismore AM:** Tell him to answer the questions, then.

**Roger Evans AM (Chairman):** Yes. You need to ask a question and then wait for a response. Mr Dismore, what was the question? It was about Barnet.

**Andrew Dismore AM:** I have asked him several questions, Chair, and every time the Mayor just does not answer them.

**Roger Evans AM (Chairman):** Yes. What was the question?

**Andrew Dismore AM:** The last question was this. What percentage of burglaries in Barnet resulted in a criminal prosecution last year?

**Roger Evans AM (Chairman):** Thank you. Mr Mayor, what is the answer?

**Boris Johnson (Mayor of London):** The answer is that I am very happy to write to you, Andrew, with the detail and the breakdown of criminal prosecutions of burglaries in Barnet. However, overall crime in Barnet, as indeed crime in London, has come down very substantially not just over the last four years but over the last seven years and you --

**Andrew Dismore AM:** That is not what your figures show.

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

**Andrew Dismore AM:** Look, all is red. All of these columns have red. Crime is going up. All of these columns have red. Crime is going up.

**Boris Johnson (Mayor of London):** If you look at what has happened in the last four years --

**Andrew Dismore AM:** I will tell you, Mr Mayor. Only 3% of burglaries resulted in prosecution.

**Boris Johnson (Mayor of London):** If you are really contesting that crime has not fallen in Barnet in the last four years, I really think you need to look at the statistics because you are totally wrong and you should withdraw that.

**Roger Evans AM (Chairman):** Mr Dismore, do you have a supplementary?

**Andrew Dismore AM:** Yes. Can I tell you, Mr Mayor, that only 3% of burglaries in Barnet resulted in a criminal prosecution last year? Can I also tell you that last year RAC did a survey in the autumn and found Barnet the most burgled borough in London? Are you proud of that record?

**Boris Johnson (Mayor of London):** I am proud of the record that the police in Barnet have achieved in bringing crime down. Unquestionably, historically, there has been a problem of burglary in that area and nobody contests that. The police in Barnet have put in a huge amount of work to deal with that. There are problems with people coming from out of London to burgle those properties. We are all familiar with that problem. Overall, the record this year in bringing burglary down is colossal. Far from rubbishing the efforts of the police, you should look at the successes that they are having.

**Andrew Dismore AM:** Mr Mayor, I am not rubbishing the efforts of the police. They did very well with what they have and what they have is not enough and you are to blame.

**Boris Johnson (Mayor of London):** That is not true because they have succeeded in bringing crime down very substantially. If you had a single grain of honesty or intellectual candour --

**Andrew Dismore AM:** Your figures.

**Boris Johnson (Mayor of London):** -- you would accept that and your election literature would consist of paeans of praise to the police of Barnet and the success that they have had in fighting crime.

## **2015/1151 - Night Tube**

Richard Tracey AM

*Will you assure Londoners that London Underground will deliver the Night Tube without being held to ransom over excessive wage demands?*

**Boris Johnson (Mayor of London):** Yes, I can give you that assurance. We are in the middle of some negotiations, as you would expect, over that issue, but the Night Tube is a wonderful thing and the trade unions also think it is a wonderful thing. They do now. We are hoping very much to bring it in, but you would not expect me to go into the detail of the negotiation now.

**Richard Tracey AM:** No. I hope you are not overoptimistic about the unions, Mr Mayor, because there is a rather worrying story published today in the *Evening Standard* that is setting out some of the demands that seemingly the main unions representing the drivers will be making. Clearly, it would be a travesty for Londoners, would it not, if this Night Tube plan were to flounder because of excessive demands by these union members and their leaders?

**Boris Johnson (Mayor of London):** As I say, I have every confidence that we will be able to deliver the Night Tube without, as you say, being held to ransom by the unions. I look forward, as I am sure all Members of the Assembly do, to a Conservative Government bringing in, finally, the legislation that we have been calling for, which Patrick McLoughlin [The Rt Hon Patrick McLoughlin, Secretary of State for Transport] has now pledged so that London cannot be held to ransom, as you so eloquently put it, by wildcat strikes and irresponsible strikes triggered by a tiny minority of the relevant union membership. We have to get away from that nonsense. There are legislative proposals going to be brought forward by the Conservative Party at least to do away with them. I know, looking around the Assembly, that that will command your support.

**Richard Tracey AM:** Indeed, Mr Mayor. Can I just say to you that when you and our three revered colleagues move up the Thames to take your extra seats in the House of Commons, you will be making sure that the Government does deliver that legislation and carries it all through?

**Boris Johnson (Mayor of London):** Obviously, I will continue to argue for London in whatever guise I may have. May I say, by the way, how striking it is that there have been so many successful applications from City Hall, from the Assembly, for Parliamentary seats? I congratulate those Members. I must say that the Labour Party has, in my view, made some grievous errors of judgment in not selecting other Members of the Assembly who might have served with great distinction. They have made one catastrophic error in continuing to select Andrew Dismore. It is my strong view that there has been a sad asymmetry in the Labour Group.

**Roger Evans AM (Chairman):** I have noticed a straying from the original subject matter of the question. Mr Tracey?

**Richard Tracey AM:** Clearly a winning team on this side, Mr Mayor. I am not sure about north London.

## **2015/0911 - London Rental Standard**

Tom Copley AM

*How many private sector landlords are currently accredited by schemes approved by the London Rental Standard?*

**Boris Johnson (Mayor of London):** Thanks, Tom. There are currently 115,000 properties now managed under the London Rental Standard (LRS).

**Tom Copley AM:** How many landlords?

**Boris Johnson (Mayor of London):** There were 14,139 private landlords and 300 letting agent firms by January. We think that is obviously pretty good going. We need to go further. We want to sign up 100,000, as you know. We are going to keep our foot to the floor on that. What we will not do is what you want us to do, which is impose rent controls. I do not think that is the way forward.

**Tom Copley AM:** You are going to have to really put your foot down if you are going to reach this target. You have, as you say, 14,139 at the moment. Since you launched your campaign last spring, which was to promote the LRS, just 627 additional landlords have gained accreditation. At the current rate, it would take you 103 years to reach your target and that is in 2118. I would be embarrassed if this was my policy. I do not know how you can sit there and say that you are going to reach your 100,000 target by next year. Why do you think that London's landlords seem so reluctant to sign up to your voluntary accreditation scheme?

**Boris Johnson (Mayor of London):** Actually, we are seeing an increase in people signing up. I am grateful to you for confessing your embarrassment about your housing policy and you should be embarrassed because --

**Tom Copley AM:** No. I said I would be embarrassed if your LRS was my policy, Mr Mayor, because I have to say --

**Boris Johnson (Mayor of London):** If I remember correctly, you are the gentleman who has called on the Labour Party to apologise for its failures.

**Tom Copley AM:** How can you define 627 additional landlord signups since you started your campaign to promote this as a success? It is not a success, is it, Mr Mayor?

**Boris Johnson (Mayor of London):** No. We announced just this week a huge new swathe of estate agents and others, Foxtons and others, who have signed up. Foxtons, by the way, have a reputation in the sector, it would be fair to say, for being pretty vigorous.

**Tom Copley AM:** They do, Mr Mayor. Foxtons charged fees to tenants of £450, which the Labour Party are pledging to abolish.

**Boris Johnson (Mayor of London):** As a result of the moral pressure, Foxtons have sent all their senior letting staff on a comprehensive LRS-approved training course in order to qualify. I do not want to make excess claims - of course I do not - but this is, we think, a good way forward for private rental tenants in London. What is crucial is that you must not --

**Tom Copley AM:** You have just mentioned letting agencies. I am going to ask you about letting agencies, Mr Mayor.

**Boris Johnson (Mayor of London):** What you want to do is to impose rent controls and to take London back to the 1960s.

**Tom Copley AM:** I want to ask you about letting agencies, Mr Mayor, since you have raised letting agencies and you said you had 300. The press release said 307 lettings agents signed up. Can you tell me how many of them were accredited in 2012?

**Boris Johnson (Mayor of London):** I cannot give you that number. No. I am sorry. No.

**Tom Copley AM:** When you published your Housing Covenant in December 2012, it said that 1,300 agents were now accredited. Why has that number fallen by 1,000 since 2012?

**Boris Johnson (Mayor of London):** No. I see what you are talking about. No. There was the London Landlord Accreditation Scheme (LLAS), which had accredited about 1,000 letting agents before the LRS came into being. We then discovered that that LLAS was not accrediting those agents in compliance with the LRS. As soon as that was discovered - and this addresses the anomaly that you are talking about - they were excluded.

**Tom Copley AM:** You have had to start again, essentially?

**Boris Johnson (Mayor of London):** They were excluded from the total. The data that I am giving you and that you are citing does not include those letting agents.

**Tom Copley AM:** OK. Thank you very much, Mr Mayor.

**Boris Johnson (Mayor of London):** If I have misrepresented that, I will be very happy to clarify later on.

**Roger Evans AM (Chairman):** All right. Can we just welcome pupils from the George Mitchell School in Leyton, who have joined us?

**Boris Johnson (Mayor of London):** Hello. Good morning.

**Roger Evans AM (Chairman):** And students from Debate Mate, who are looking for good examples of public speaking.

**Boris Johnson (Mayor of London):** Great.

**Roger Evans AM (Chairman):** You have come to the right place.

### **2015/1143 - Building on Lordship Recreation Ground**

James Cleverly AM (on behalf of Andrew Boff AM)

*Lordship Recreation Ground recently received £5 million in public money for redevelopment, including £400,000 from the GLA. Can the Mayor assure us that he will protect the Rec, and the GLA's interests, against the housing development plans of Haringey Council?*

**Boris Johnson (Mayor of London):** Very quickly, both the London Plan and the Haringey Local Plan seek to protect Metropolitan Open Land. Any development, in particular residential development, on the Recreation Ground would be inappropriate and would require justification through exceptional circumstances. However, probably that is the limit of what I can say because my officers obviously will be bringing a further report for my consideration and I must not fetter any discretion I may have.

**James Cleverly AM:** Mr Mayor, I appreciate that you are not allowed to state or imply any judgment on this. I was wondering if you might consider a number of courses of action which should not fetter your future discretion. For example, send Haringey Council a map of their own borough highlighting areas of Metropolitan Open Land that they might consider or perhaps sending them a copy of the rules regarding the development on Metropolitan Open Land, for example. The feedback I have had and, whilst this is outside my own constituency, the conversations that my colleague, Andrew Boff, has had indicate that people actually are very concerned about the loss of this important not only green open space but their local amenity and would very much want to see that you were doing everything you could to ensure that Haringey Council understood the gravity of the decision that they are thinking of making.

**Boris Johnson (Mayor of London):** Of course I understand that. I am grateful to you, James, and to Andrew [Boff AM] for raising this point powerfully. You can take it from my earlier answer that we will bear all of these considerations very much at the front of our minds.

**James Cleverly AM:** Thank you.

### **2015/0909 - School places**

Jennette Arnold OBE AM

*Given your commitment in your Education Programme Delivery Plan 2013 to help address the crisis in school places, what are your thoughts about the latest figures that show a rise in the number of pupils missing out on their first school choice in London?*

**Boris Johnson (Mayor of London):** You have asked what we are doing, given the Education Programme Delivery Plan 2013, to help address the crisis in school places and what about the rise in the number of pupils missing out on their first choice school in London. I agree completely; this is something that is of great concern. The issue is not just about the number of school places, though



that is clearly important. We need more schools of all types, and you will be familiar with the campaigns we run with Government to get more funding for schools. London's population is growing. It is also about giving parents more confidence that they are going to get a good school. We have to build more schools of all types, and we have to increase the performance of schools.

One of the things that we launched was the Interactive London Schools Atlas in 2013 so that you can see where all the schools are and see what your options are for your kids, though it is true already that London schools are now outperforming the rest of the country for all sorts of fascinating reasons. We are focusing on improving standards through the London Schools Gold Club, the Schools Excellence Fund and the London Curriculum. What I want is more schools in London, and that is what we are fighting for. That is one of the reasons, when we come to disposals of public buildings and public land in London, why we put the accent when we can on good, new school developments as well.

**Jennette Arnold OBE AM (Deputy Chair):** Firstly, this question is not about performance. I totally agree with you about their performance. There is not a competition here. At last it seems to me that everybody is on the same page.

**Boris Johnson (Mayor of London):** Totally, yes.

**Jennette Arnold OBE AM (Deputy Chair):** We are in a situation of crisis and unless action is taken, it is not going to get any better. I welcome pupils from George Mitchell School in my constituency. I know from the statistics that they probably had their first choice of school because this is one of the very few - a handful - boroughs that are able to accommodate their current populations. If I say to you and get on record and just give you a sense of the scale of the crisis heading our way unless action is taken on what is going to be, in three years' time Barking and Dagenham will need 2,128 additional primary school places; Harrow will need an additional 2,421 additional primary school places. As we know, children grow and so they go on to secondary school. Currently, 37% of schools are at or over their capacity. Going back to some figures now that I am sure my colleague Onkar [Dr Onkar Sahota] would like to hear, in three years' time in Ealing, you will need an additional 2,042 additional secondary places. I do not like to speak without referencing my colleague, Tony Arbour; in Sutton they will need 1,940 additional secondary places. The situation is critical.

As well as looking at your GLA land responsibility, will you just take away this proposal that I am putting to you? You have used the Free School Department that you have and I disagree with you in terms of how you used it because, indeed, you provided free school places in boroughs that had no need. I am asking you today to use your powers for the wider good of London and in your last year to scrap your Free Schools Department and turn it into a unit focused on providing provision in areas of dire need of school places. That would be something that you would be leaving behind and it is something that will have to be addressed by the next Mayor of London. This is a strategic issue and an issue that is beyond council and territorial boundaries.

**Boris Johnson (Mayor of London):** Sure.

**Jennette Arnold OBE AM (Deputy Chair):** It is about ensuring that London's children, with the support of their parents and everybody else, can get their first choice because we know first-choice schools nearer to homes deliver performances. That is what we all want.

**Roger Evans AM (Chairman):** That was a record-length question. Congratulations.

**Boris Johnson (Mayor of London):** The answer is yes.

**Jennette Arnold OBE AM (Deputy Chair):** Thank you.

**Boris Johnson (Mayor of London):** I do not know what the question really was, but the answer is yes. We have to increase the number of school places.

**Jennette Arnold OBE AM (Deputy Chair):** Do consider it.

**Boris Johnson (Mayor of London):** London has a massive crisis and huge demographic pressures, but we also have to have a wide variety of schools. I do not know of any borough that actually is rejecting any of our initiatives to help with more schools.

**Jennette Arnold OBE AM (Deputy Chair):** Use your powers.

**Boris Johnson (Mayor of London):** On the contrary, they are very supportive. All I can say is that we have to step it up and we had another £300 million, if you remember, for school places in London. London parents show absolutely no sign of producing any fewer children, quite the reverse. The population is growing the whole time and we need more.

**Jennette Arnold OBE AM (Deputy Chair):** OK. I hear you saying yes to refocusing your unit. Thank you.

**Boris Johnson (Mayor of London):** No. The unit is doing very well at the moment and I am supporting --

**Jennette Arnold OBE AM (Deputy Chair):** Refocus.

**Boris Johnson (Mayor of London):** You can put words into my mouth if you like, but what we will do - go ahead, it will not do you any good - is to continue with the record of success that we have. I agree that the problem is there.

**Jennette Arnold OBE AM (Deputy Chair):** School places in the right places.

## **2015/0913 - Toxic London**

Murad Qureshi AM

*It is my view that, after seven years of inaction, you will leave a toxic environmental legacy - not least in terms of the capital's appalling air quality - both for Londoners and the capital's next Mayor. Why has the environment been such a low priority during your mayoralty?*

**Boris Johnson (Mayor of London):** I have been looking forward to this one.

**Murad Qureshi AM:** Have you? So have I. Keep it brief.

**Boris Johnson (Mayor of London):** I just want to give you some of the ways in which we have tackled it. Just shush. You have asked a totally ludicrous question. I am going to give you the answer, OK?

London now meets the legal limits for eight out of nine European Union (EU) pollutants. We have halved the number of Londoners living in areas above nitrogen dioxide (NO<sub>2</sub>) limits since 2008. Halved it. Nitrogen oxide (NO<sub>x</sub>) has been cut by 20%. Particulate matter less than 10 microns in diameter (PM10s) and particulate matter less than 2.5 microns in diameter (PM2.5s) are down by 15%. We have put a record number of hybrid buses on the streets of London, including the cleanest and greenest of their type. We have taken 6,000 of the oldest and dirtiest taxis off the road. We have seen massive investment. We have seen a 14% reduction in CO<sub>2</sub> emissions since I was elected, despite the colossal increase in population and economic activity. We have reduced CO<sub>2</sub> emissions by more than 50,000 tonnes per year. We have retrofitted 110,000 homes, to say nothing of the 400 public buildings that we have done, savings hundreds of thousands of carbon per year. We have invested hugely in green space. We have had 11 rundown parks improved, 12 strategically important green spaces done up and 100 pocket parks created. We have planted 20,000 trees. By 2025, a quarter of the surface of London, thanks to this mayoralty, will be covered with trees and it goes on.

**Murad Qureshi AM:** Thank you very much, Mr Mayor. Thank you.

**Boris Johnson (Mayor of London):** It goes on. Waste to landfill, under this mayoralty, has been reduced from 53% to 25%. We have cut it in half. You should be cheering. This is the greenest, cleanest mayoralty in history.

**Murad Qureshi AM:** Thank you. Thank you very much, Mr Mayor.

**Boris Johnson (Mayor of London):** It absolutely is, and you should be proud even to have been in City Hall throughout this period. It is true. I have mentioned the parks.

**Murad Qureshi AM:** Mr Mayor, my original question was kiboshed by monitoring officers.

**Roger Evans AM (Chairman):** Can we attend to this side of the room?

**Murad Qureshi AM:** Yes, yes. Do I have your attention, Mr Mayor?

**Boris Johnson (Mayor of London):** Yes.

**Murad Qureshi AM:** OK. Thank you very much. My original question was actually kiboshed by monitoring officers and the assertions made were actually made by your cheerleaders in the *Evening Standard*. On 5 March 2015, this month, in their editorial they said,

*“Today’s figures on air pollution in the capital should be deeply worrying for Londoners and a source of shame for City Hall. All 50 of Britain’s worst blackspots for dirty air are in the capital, with toxicity levels up to three times the EU legal limit. Marylebone Road is the most polluted, though each site has at least double the EU limit for nitrogen dioxide.”*

Actually, the only salvation you have from the figures that Maria Eagle’s [Maria Eagle MP, Shadow Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs] office released was that, of the streets,

not the worst, it is actually Marylebone Road, which actually most of us in Marylebone knew anyway. They ask, "We still need City Hall to take the problem much more seriously: London's health is at risk". That is from your cheerleaders, Mr Mayor.

When you appeared before the Environmental Audit Committee last year, you were asked what advice you would give to the next Mayor. Your response to Joan Walley [Joan Walley MP, Chair, Environmental Audit Committee] was, "My advice to the next Mayor is to take the tough decisions early, take the heat, and it will all pay off". Is that not an admission that you regret dodging the difficult decisions --

**Boris Johnson (Mayor of London):** No. I am just going to repeat the figures. I am going to repeat the figures.

**Murad Qureshi AM:** -- on, for example, air pollution, by dealing with the issue now rather than in the future?

**Boris Johnson (Mayor of London):** Absolute nonsense. We have heard just this morning the justifiable feelings of resentment from people in the taxi trade who have invested massively in vehicles and are now facing an extra cost as a result of having to modernise and clean up their taxis. That is something that we have imposed. It was never done before. There was never a clean taxi proposal from the previous administration. They never dealt with taxi emissions, and we have done it, and you are seeing the results in improvement in air quality.

I just want to knock on the head this idea that London has uniquely bad air quality. It is simply not true. You look at Stuttgart, Paris, Munich, Rome, Milan; they all have higher NO<sub>2</sub> than London.

**Murad Qureshi AM:** Actually, I was talking about in the UK.

**Boris Johnson (Mayor of London):** Mexico City has virtually double the levels.

**Murad Qureshi AM:** I am avoiding nitrous oxide altogether.

**Boris Johnson (Mayor of London):** Hong Kong, Istanbul, Beijing and Shanghai all have higher readings and we are continuing to get them down. We have reduced, as I say, emissions by 20%. One of the fascinating things the other day was the horror on the part of the doughty campaigners for clean air - I salute them - when they discovered the progress that we were making on the Marylebone Road. They could not believe it and they could see their fox being shot before them.

**Murad Qureshi AM:** I will have to take you down the Marylebone Road --

**Boris Johnson (Mayor of London):** We will continue to shoot their foxes, in a humane way, and will continue to improve air quality.

**Murad Qureshi AM:** I have run out of time.

## **2015/1144 - Health devolution**

Victoria Boff AM (on behalf of Andrew Boff AM)

*Given that Manchester recently received a dose of health devolution, does the Mayor think that London could also benefit from some form of health devolution?*

**Boris Johnson (Mayor of London):** Victoria, I thank you for all your work that you have done on health. You have been an absolute stalwart and fantastically knowledgeable and passionate about this subject and it has been greatly to the benefit of Londoners that you have been able to help me on this issue.

There is a great prospect now for devolution of health. It is something that we need to work at very hard in conjunction with the boroughs to understand what can be achieved and what is reasonable. Let me put it this way: there is a certain amount of anxiety at council level about the devolution of acute care. It would be fair to say that it is the case that London boroughs, Mayor Jules [Pipe, Chair, London Councils] and colleagues do not yet feel they understand. The implications of it are very considerable.

The situations in Manchester and London are very different. The health economy in London, as everybody knows, is massively in deficit. The first question that the Government would put to us were we to take on healthcare in London is, "How will you deal with the huge health deficit? How are you going to tackle that?" We need to have a good answer to that. I do think there is scope for progress in primary care. I do think there is scope for amalgamation and for co-operation between primary care and social services. These are areas where the boroughs together with City Hall can make progress. There is an offer to be made.

What we are doing, as you know now, is to work with Government, to talk to Simon Stevens [Chief Executive, NHS England], whom I have known for many years, to understand what Manchester is getting because, to be frank, there is quite a lot of confusion about that at the moment and what, if anything, is the read-across for London. What kind of offer should London now be making? What should we be aspiring to? My feeling at the moment is that it should be in the area of primary care and the economies that are to be made between primary care and social services and working with the boroughs to put forward a package for that type of devolution. If we were to go for the whole thing and to bite it off in one chunk, ultimately, that is the way to go, but at the moment there are some very big questions about funding that are as yet unanswered.

**Victoria Borwick AM:** Thank you, Mayor. Of course the question was originally asked by Andrew Boff, who is particularly keen on devolution and has always spoken up on that point and how important it is to devolve decision-making to the closest and easiest area for making those decisions in order to make it the most effective. I think he was very concerned that around this horseshoe we should speak up in favour of devolution. Of course, as you say, Greater Manchester will become the first English region to get full control of its health spending and we would very much welcome continuing to see that sort of investment in London's healthcare, particularly bringing together, as you say, primary care so that we can do something about bringing together the budgets, which are in the care of the councils, and the health, which is obviously still with the National Health Service (NHS). Many people who are caring for people at home or have other caring roles will know that the problem at the moment is you need to put the patient in the middle and have an opportunity of

sharing the care and the budgets for both the social care and the healthcare, and that at the moment is causing great anxiety to many people.

Back to the point that Andrew [Boff AM] made, I think he wanted to make sure around this table that we do all call out for further devolution gradually over time as it becomes appropriate for London. I think Andrew was very disappointed to see that Andy Burnham [Shadow Secretary of State for Health] had come out against the Manchester plan for devolution.

**Boris Johnson (Mayor of London):** Yes. I was not sure how strongly he had come out against it.

**Victoria Borwick AM:** All I know is that Andrew wishes me to raise that because he wanted to hear from you.

**Boris Johnson (Mayor of London):** I am not certain that that is exactly what Labour in Manchester is saying. Richard Leese [Sir Leader, Manchester City Council] and others might find that a bit confusing.

**Victoria Borwick AM:** I think Andrew is a staunch advocate of devolution.

**Boris Johnson (Mayor of London):** I do not know what the view of London Labour is about that. As far as I understand the position of London Labour, London Labour is progressive on this and sees the logic of devolution. If Andy Burnham really did come out against what was proposed in Manchester, that was a mistake and one which Labour will pay a price for.

**Victoria Borwick AM:** I am sure. Anyway, I wish to put on the record that Andrew Boff is very keen on devolution.

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

**Dr Onkar Sahota AM:** Mr Mayor, I concur with the views expressed by Victoria and of course by you, Mr Mayor, that you are in favour of devolution, as indeed I am. Andy Burnham was not against the idea of merging social services with primary care and hospital care. He was the one who had put forward the policy of the whole person care and what he was concerned about was making sure we do not get a postcode lottery in this country. I want to come back to this --

**Boris Johnson (Mayor of London):** Was he in favour of devolution to Manchester?

**Dr Onkar Sahota AM:** I do not know about it, but I think, as a concept, he was in favour of integrating the central care budgets. I do not know the details about Manchester myself, to give you the answer.

**Boris Johnson (Mayor of London):** Fair enough.

**Dr Onkar Sahota AM:** Mr Mayor, what I want to know is what you are doing about this. I have been reading a document on your response to the Health Commission specifically to the 14 recommendations. This document quite clearly has a lot of lovely words and is using a lot of waffle. There is a lot of waffle in it but no specific target and no specific plan. What are you doing about it to

make sure London is the leader on devolution? Also, that document does not have any specifics, any deadlines or the road map and I want to know, Mr Mayor, what you are doing specifically about that.

**Boris Johnson (Mayor of London):** OK. Thanks, Onkar. Through you, Roger, the last question, which is number 914, is basically the one that Onkar has just asked.

**Dr Onkar Sahota AM:** That is what I asked, yes.

**Boris Johnson (Mayor of London):** Can I, with your permission, put that?

**Roger Evans AM (Chairman):** Yes, of course. Yes. We will cross it out.

**Boris Johnson (Mayor of London):** Obviously, as you and I have discussed many times before, we do not have statutory powers over healthcare in this body the way that we do over transport, housing, policing or whatever. That is one of the reasons why we are not taking --

What we are doing is as a result of the Darzi Report - and I again thank Ara [Lord Ara Darzi, Chair, London Health Commission] very much for what he did and for his analysis - and the aspirations that we have are the right ones for London. To answer your question, the four areas we are going to be focusing on are kids, improving the health of Londoners, particularly young people, and tackling obesity, which has, interestingly, stabilised but it needs now to go down. Obesity in young people in London has stopped going up. Our kids have stopped getting fatter, but they need to start getting thinner.

Number two, we need to do more to promote London's life sciences sector and here I really pay tribute to the work of Kit [Kit Malthouse AM] in setting up MedCity, which has been a fantastic success. That is a big priority for us. It is something that Ara Darzi totally understands and he has been one of the driving forces behind it and we are seeing success now. You are seeing a real awareness around the world of investors that London is the place. We will be bigger than Boston in the end. We are already by far the biggest centre for this stuff in Europe. We have all the potential. If you look down Euston Road, you know about all that stuff.

The third area, of course, that we want to take forward in that report is the NHS estate and the London Land Commission, putting that land forward for development, but also improving hospital services and healthcare services as well.

**Dr Onkar Sahota AM:** Mr Mayor, thank you. I really am out of time, but I will pick this up with you --

**Boris Johnson (Mayor of London):** Thank you. I would be obliged.

**James Cleverly AM:** Mr Mayor, who do you think we should listen to when it comes to the devolution of health budgets? Do you think we should listen to experienced, thoughtful and well-respected medical professionals like our own Dr Onkar Sahota or should we listen to the Shadow Health Secretary, who was quoted in the *Manchester Evening News* as having "slammed Greater Manchester's shock NHS devolution master plan - warning that it will create a 'two-tier' health system" and saying it would "not be on offer" if he were in charge in May?

**Boris Johnson (Mayor of London):** I do think that most fair-minded people would see there is a bit of incoherence here. Onkar and I do not really have many differences between us on this subject. I do not think that the Labour Party in London really has many differences with me in this area. We both see the case for strategic devolution and for progress in this area. Manchester is actually an even more obvious unit of local strategic control over health. It is actually a much more natural unit in many ways than London. It has, as I say, a much smaller health deficit. Devolution is obviously the way forward there and it is very surprising to hear it opposed in a knee-jerk way by Andy Burnham, and I am sure that Onkar Sahota would be a much better Shadow Health Secretary were he ever to aspire to that office.

**James Cleverly AM:** Therefore, Mr Mayor, would it be fair to say that Conservatives in London think this is a good idea, Conservatives nationally think this is a good idea, Labour in Manchester thinks this is a good idea and Labour in London thinks this is a good idea? The one person who seems not to recognise this as a good idea is the Shadow Secretary of State for Health, Mr Andy Burnham.

**Boris Johnson (Mayor of London):** Yes. I do not know what they are up to. It is just a case of 'not invented here' by Andy Burnham and they were totally blindsided and actually not a little cross with Labour politicians in Manchester who had the vision and the farsightedness to go with this. Labour probably needs to get its act together and work out what it really thinks about this.

**James Cleverly AM:** Thank you, Mr Mayor.

**Roger Evans AM (Chairman):** All right. Can we welcome members of Age UK Harrow, who have joined us in the audience?

**Boris Johnson (Mayor of London):** Hello.

## **2015/1131 - Affordability of homes in London**

Stephen Knight AM

*What is the current ratio between the average London house price and median full-time annual earnings in London?*

**Boris Johnson (Mayor of London):** Thank you, Stephen, and you are absolutely right that the ratio is bad and has been getting worse. According to GLA estimates, the ratio between median house prices and median incomes was 11.1 in 2014. That compares with, say, 4.9 in Manchester, 4.7 in Birmingham, although I might point out to you that it is not that much different from Cambridge and Oxford, which are about 10% and 9%. In hotspot cities, we are seeing in this country - particularly in London - huge ratios between prices and median earnings.

The answer is not to engineer a catastrophic fall in the value of people's homes. The answer is to build more houses of all kinds and that is why we have the highest housebuilding target in GLA history and we are building more affordable homes this year than any year since 1981, which is before Tom Copley was born.

**Stephen Knight AM:** Thank you, Mr Mayor, for that answer. With the housing inflation we have seen since those figures you quoted, the ratio is probably more like 15 times. You said last week in



Haringey at People's Question Time - and I think I quote you correctly - that house prices in London need to fall by 30%, although --

**Boris Johnson (Mayor of London):** No. What I said was that people want more affordable homes. They do not want their own home suddenly to become more affordable. That is the tragic reality of the human being, and that is how we all are. I look around this Assembly and I see people who live in very, very substantial homes and, were the value of their property to fall by 30%, they would be very sad and they would feel that they had suddenly become much poorer. In the sense that housing equity does underpin the economy and is absolutely vital to investment of all kinds. They would be correct. It actually would not be the right thing for the UK economy. If you look at the periods when house prices have fallen dramatically, such as in the recession of the early 1990s, they were accompanied by catastrophic rises in unemployment and catastrophic falls in economic performance. Be careful what you wish for. If you want a fall in house prices --

**Stephen Knight AM:** Mr Mayor, clearly, if we were to see falls in house prices, then we would get negative equity problems and nobody as a homeowner has an interest in seeing house prices fall, not unless they need a bigger home, which some certainly do.

**Boris Johnson (Mayor of London):** How much would you like to see them fall?

**Stephen Knight AM:** Mr Mayor, it was you who gave the 30% figure.

**Boris Johnson (Mayor of London):** I do not know what you are talking about.

**Stephen Knight AM:** In this country, the Chancellor of the Exchequer sets a target for inflation in all sorts of consumer goods, including things like curtains and frozen chicken nuggets and many, many other things, but nowhere does anybody set a target for inflation in house prices. Would it not be better, rather than seeing huge bubbles and crashes, which are very economically damaging, if we saw some policy aimed at stabilising house prices over the long term? Would that not be sensible?

**Boris Johnson (Mayor of London):** Yes, absolutely, and the point I am trying to make to you is that there is a thing called the law of supply and demand. At the moment, if you look at house prices in some parts of this country, there are terraced streets, I am afraid, in the north of this country where you can pick up a house for a fiver or even less.

**Stephen Knight AM:** Mr Mayor, I want to get one last question in before --

**Boris Johnson (Mayor of London):** That is a function of the market.

**Stephen Knight AM:** Mr Mayor, you are absolutely right. This is about supply and demand --

**Boris Johnson (Mayor of London):** Of course I am right. I am right, and I am always right.

**Stephen Knight AM:** -- and, Mr Mayor, everybody agrees that we need to do more on the supply side, but that could take 30 years. I asked you back in November 2014 what demand side measures you would support to control the high rates of inflation in London's housing market, and you said, and I quote you, "I am open to proposals through additional council tax bands for more valuable

properties, which would tend to reduce demand at the top of the market", effectively a mansion tax. It is fairly interesting, Mr Mayor --

**Boris Johnson (Mayor of London):** No, I am not in favour of that.

**Stephen Knight AM:** -- that you are now coming out in favour of such measures. Is this the sort of policy that you would like to see: more demand side measures to control housing inflation?

**Boris Johnson (Mayor of London):** No. It will not make a bean of difference. Any practical difference you can make is to help the hundreds of thousands of people to achieve what most people want, and that is to have a share in the value of their home and to have the opportunity not just to rent, but to have a stake in the equity of their home. People of all income groups should be given that possibility. That is why the first step is going to be so important --

**Stephen Knight AM:** Doing nothing has priced out a whole generation.

**Roger Evans AM (Chairman):** The Liberal Democrats are out of time.

**Boris Johnson (Mayor of London):** Actually, if you look at what we are achieving, as I say, we have delivered 85,000 affordable homes and we will do, contrary to all the prophecies of doom, more than 100,000 over this mayoralty.

## **2015/1148 - The use of technology to report rape**

Victoria Borwick AM (on behalf of Andrew Boff AM)

*Will the Mayor encourage the MPS to commission a specific mobile application which will allow the victims of serious sexual offences to report their experiences discreetly to the police?*

**Boris Johnson (Mayor of London):** Yes. I want to thank Andrew through you, Victoria, again for this question, and to thank Andrew in particular for the work that he does to draw attention to the problems of improving the reporting of rape and other sexual offences. It is all about confidence. It is all about access. Yes, the idea of apps is one that the MPS should be exploring and I am certainly very interested in that.

**Victoria Borwick AM:** Thank you, and I think Andrew was particularly keen to raise this after he produced a report, as you probably know, called *Improving the Reporting of Rape Using Technology*. He feels it is very important that we should examine different ways that people communicate. As you said yourself, Mayor, earlier on in the day, everyone uses mobile phones and every other form of technology now and if it means that people, therefore, have a confidential way of reporting a rape, then he was very keen that that should be available to people. Sometimes because of people's conditions, they may be locked away, not able to access the ability to go to a police station or to find one. He felt, therefore, there should be some way of reporting rape. Obviously, we have all seen the increase in confidence of being able to report rape and we obviously welcome the fact that more people now feel able to come forward to report this. I am delighted that you commend Andrew's report and, if you feel there is anything else that could be done to increase the number of victims to come forward, I know you would be very welcome to --

**Boris Johnson (Mayor of London):** As you know because you have been involved in a lot of this, we have just put another £5 million into the Independent Sexual Violence Advocates and the Independent Domestic Violence Advocates (IDVAs). Another 40 people around London we are now funding to give victims of sexual violence or rape confidence that there is someone there for them and to give the perpetrators of these crimes the knowledge that their victims will not be alone and there will be someone that we are funding who will assist them with prosecution and help them through the misery of the legal proceedings.

**Victoria Borwick AM:** Your support for Victim Support should also be noted.

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

**2015/0918 - Pay**

Fiona Twycross AM

*Has London become a low-wage economy?*

**Boris Johnson (Mayor of London):** London is not a low-wage economy in the sense that overall the London economy tends to attract higher pay than the rest of the country. A Low Pay Commission report in 2015 showed that London has the lowest proportion of minimum-wage jobs, 3.1% compared to 5.1% for England as a whole and 9.9% in Northern Ireland. As you know and as we have discussed many times before, the minimum wage is not enough for London. We should be going for the Living Wage and you know what I am going to say about expanding that and the numbers that we have achieved, which is good but could do better.

**Fiona Twycross AM:** Yes, and I obviously agree that you could do a lot better on tackling low pay and increasing the take-up of the London Living Wage, with almost 1 million people in London paid below that. The truth is also that you could have done much better to make the cost of living easier for those on low pay as well, and finally today we have the truth. A senior member of your team, with Stephen Greenhalgh [Deputy Mayor for Policing and Crime] just saying on Conservative Home this morning that he wants London to have the best public transport in the world but that, however, at the moment we actually also have the most expensive. He has actually admitted something that you have been resisting admitting, that London has higher fares than New York, Paris or Tokyo. Are you concerned, as he appears to be, that fares have gone up over 40% since you came to power, having a massive impact on those on low pay?

**Boris Johnson (Mayor of London):** Stephen is entitled to make his points, as you would expect. The reality is that if you look at what we have done with fares over the last few years, we have held them down at the retail price index (RPI) last year and at RPI this year. We continue to have a Freedom Pass enjoyed by all Londoners over 60, which they have nowhere else in the country, nowhere else. In the morning peak, too, we allow people to travel free on TfL services. We have done that for everybody over 60. We have concessions for apprentices. We have free travel for disabled war veterans and armed services in uniform. Unlike the previous Labour administration, we have helped everybody who lives in London by reducing council tax, which went up under the Labour mayoralty by 153%. As I say, we have had an increase in the number of organisations paying the Living Wage from fewer than about 23 when I took over to 516 today. That has put about £60 million into the pockets of poorer, hardworking people in London.

Yes, there is more to do and I would like to see more firms come forward and pay the Living Wage. If your question is really about the fares box and how we handle that, you have to answer what we would do, which investments we would cut, which track upgrades we would scrap, which bus services you would cut, and that would be a --

**Fiona Twycross AM:** You can list quite a lot, but it is quite hypocritical of Stephen Greenhalgh to have served in your top team while thinking that your policies are wrong.

**Boris Johnson (Mayor of London):** He is perfectly entitled to discuss what he would do.

**Fiona Twycross AM:** On apprenticeships and concessions to apprentices, do you think it is right that apprentices only get the concession in the first year of the apprenticeship while the National Union of Students (NUS) has raised concerns about the need for a better system of support overall in place for apprentices, who have to deal with the high cost of living in London overall and currently are only left with £15.52 a week after paying for travel, lunch and course costs? Would you look at extending that?

**Boris Johnson (Mayor of London):** Fiona, I will look at that. I am not going to make any promise now. A travel concession is something that really has to be wrung out of TfL. We make so many concessions now. If you go on a London bus now, under half the complement of the bus will be paying the fare. The majority of the passengers will be benefiting from a discount or free travel of some kind.

**Fiona Twycross AM:** It would be good to look at how you can help apprentices more. Thank you.

**Boris Johnson (Mayor of London):** If you do that and if you have all the elderly who are protected, young people who are protected, veterans and disabled people, then you are putting more and more of the burden on, effectively, a minority of the travelling public. There is a balance to be struck.

**Fiona Twycross AM:** Yes. Thank you.

## **2015/0915 - Tall buildings**

Navin Shah AM

*At the November 2014 Plenary Session, the Assembly passed a motion calling on you to rethink your approach to tall buildings in London. Have you changed your position?*

**Boris Johnson (Mayor of London):** I know of your own background is in this area and I am interested, obviously, in what you have to say. I do not think that my position has changed. The London Plan provides a robust framework for this. There are many applications we see that we turn down out of hand because the buildings are tall, unsightly and out of place, but I have always said that where you have a good transport hub, a high public transport accessibility level (PTAL) ratio, then tall buildings can look great. Most people looking out at the Shard today - wherever it is, behind us somewhere - would agree that it is a spectacular landmark for London. I think Nicky Gavron claims a significant role in bringing it about. Nobody would want to see it knocked down now.

**Navin Shah AM:** Mr Mayor, I only have one minute left.

**Boris Johnson (Mayor of London):** If your proposal is for a new commission or a new group of self-appointed busybodies to tell the mayoralty what to do or to tell London Councils what to do about the skyline, absolutely not. Stuff them; they should get elected. That is what I think.

**Navin Shah AM:** Mr Mayor, it is unfortunate that you approach this in such a negative and insulting manner because it is not I alone; it is the wishes of this Committee, this Assembly --

**Boris Johnson (Mayor of London):** I am so sorry. I did not mean to be insulting to your Committee.

**Navin Shah AM:** -- to agree a unanimous motion that to protect London's skyline the Mayor should consider setting up a Skyline Commission. It is just a simple request of the four key issues, which the Assembly agreed unanimously. Are you prepared to protect London's skyline by setting up a Skyline Commission or not? Yes or no, please.

**Boris Johnson (Mayor of London):** We have lots of protections already in place. We have very, very --

**Navin Shah AM:** That is the Assembly's decision, not just mine.

**Boris Johnson (Mayor of London):** Indeed, the London View Management Framework was greatly extended by me to protect strategic views of St Paul's, of the Tower of London, the view from Richmond Hill, which Tony [Arbour AM] campaigned on so eloquently. We put in protections.

**Navin Shah AM:** Mr Mayor, the experts in London are supposed to agree with you on this.

**Boris Johnson (Mayor of London):** Hang on. Let me finish because you are making, I am afraid, a completely unfounded allegation about the state of protection already in London.

**Navin Shah AM:** No, I am not. It is not just me.

**Boris Johnson (Mayor of London):** We already have very considerable protections. I do not see any reason --

**Navin Shah AM:** Your answer is no to a Skyline Commission, correct?

**Boris Johnson (Mayor of London):** -- to have a new tier of busybodies and --

**Navin Shah AM:** You are saying no to a Skyline Commission and further protecting London's skyline, are you not?

**Boris Johnson (Mayor of London):** -- my recommendation to those who presume to have views about this is that they --

**Navin Shah AM:** Mr Mayor, please answer the question for once.

**Boris Johnson (Mayor of London):** My answer is no and they should get elected and --

**Navin Shah AM:** It is not a question of getting elected.

**Boris Johnson (Mayor of London):** -- if they did get elected, it would be fascinating to see how many tall buildings they actually approved of.

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

**Navin Shah AM:** Londoners do not agree with you and the Assembly does not agree with you and the position you are taking.

**Boris Johnson (Mayor of London):** I respectfully disagree with you because you are wrong.

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

### **2015/0819 – Problem debt**

Jenny Jones AM

*Will you press the Government to reverse benefit cuts and sanctions, which are getting people in London into problem debt?*

**Boris Johnson (Mayor of London):** Yes. To be fair, Jenny, there is a risk that people are getting back into debt again and not just people on welfare. People in lots of income groups are starting to rack up debt again in a way we should watch. The answer is not to backtrack on important reforms of welfare, which have a lot of support around all parties from our coalition partners and brothers and sisters in the Liberal Democrats --

**Jenny Jones AM:** Please focus.

**Boris Johnson (Mayor of London):** -- and of course from Labour as well, who campaigned to --

**Jenny Jones AM:** Please focus on my question.

**Boris Johnson (Mayor of London):** I am answering your question. If you would be civil for a second --

**Jenny Jones AM:** No. I am asking about your belief in sanctions. Are you still supporting sanctions?

**Boris Johnson (Mayor of London):** I am answering your question. You have asked me, "Will you press the Government to reverse benefit cuts and sanctions", and I said I do not think we should be scrapping welfare reforms because they are vital.

What we should be doing is helping Londoners with debt advice. Credit unions are very important. We promote them on the GLA website. We have an annual Know Your Rights campaign. Victoria [Victoria Borwick AM, Deputy Mayor] has led the way on that. We are championing financial literacy

in schools so that people understand how debt works, how interest works and the terrible traps that they can get into, particularly with payday lenders. As I said, we continue to reduce the burden on low-income Londoners wherever we can, cutting council tax and helping people with free transport of all kinds and that is the best way forward.

**Jenny Jones AM:** What we found in the Economy Committee was that half a million Londoners are now in problem debt and a London School of Economics (LSE) report, which we looked at as part of the Committee examination, said that welfare reform is greatly increasing and complicating people's insecurity. Uncertainty is now prevailing around benefits due to sanctioning and people are struggling to pay for basic items like food and heating.

I have some stories here. I wondered if you had heard these. For example, on the sanctions, a man had a heart attack. He was taken to hospital, missed an appointment and was sanctioned for nine weeks. A young couple's address was wrong on the Department for Work and Pensions website computer and they had no money for a month. A man was sanctioned for going to a job interview instead of an appointment.

Sanctions are actually making things worse. They are so strict and so inflexible that they are creating more problems. Do you still support sanctions?

**Boris Johnson (Mayor of London):** Where you have clear cases of a lack of common sense or inhumanity such as you have outlined, although I cannot comment on the detail of those cases, it is absurd. What your question asks is whether we should reverse the benefit reforms or benefit cuts and I do not think that is something that would be sensible. The Housing Benefit had to be tackled. It was mushrooming. You have to help people to get into work and that is entirely reasonable.

**Jenny Jones AM:** That is an interesting comment because you had a workfare scheme. You co-funded a workfare scheme called the Day One Support for Young People trailblazer and actually young people aged 18 to 24 who went on your scheme were half as likely to get a job as people who were not on your scheme. It was worse for people to be on your workfare scheme with sanctions than it was for people not to engage.

**Boris Johnson (Mayor of London):** You are being a bit unfair there, if I may say so. You are being a bit unfair there because --

**Jenny Jones AM:** No, the facts are the facts, Mr Mayor.

**Boris Johnson (Mayor of London):** -- I remember vividly the scheme and we were trying to help some people who had had real difficulty finding work.

**Jenny Jones AM:** You made things worse for them.

**Boris Johnson (Mayor of London):** Actually, if you look at the record of this city and this Government over the last five years or so - and you talk about 18 to 24 year olds - we have young people not in education, employment or training (NEETs) at the lowest level for 25 years. That is a fantastic achievement and you should be proud of that, Jenny. You should be proud to be participating in London government and --

**Jenny Jones AM:** You should be ashamed of sanctions.

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

**Boris Johnson (Mayor of London):** Unfortunately I do not run the welfare system, but it would be wrong to scrap welfare reform.

**Roger Evans AM (Chairman):** That leaves only the Conservative Group. Are there any supplementary questions from the Conservative Group on this? No. In that case, that concludes the question-and-answer session.

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