

London Assembly (Mayor's Question Time) – 17 June 2015

Transcript of Agenda Item 4 – Report of the Mayor

Jennette Arnold OBE AM (Chair): The Mayor will now provide an oral update of up to five minutes in length on matters occurring since the publication of his report. Mr Mayor?

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): Thank you very much, Jennette. Good morning. Can I echo, of course, your tribute to John Biggs [John Biggs AM]. Everybody is genuinely glad to see John returned there at last as Mayor of Tower Hamlets.

Since we last spoke, there has been an awful lot going on. I would single out the Team London programme. We have now 190,000 young Londoners who are taking part in volunteering in their schools and elsewhere through the Team London Young Ambassadors scheme. We confirmed plans for the Beam Park development, which will allow 2,000 new homes on that formerly derelict bit of land. That is going to be made possible, of course, by the Beam Park railway link into Fenchurch Street. We launched London Technology Week just a couple of days ago to stress the huge success of London's tech sector and the importance of getting our kids able to code and to take part in that success. I saw the work done by Team London in supporting the Maypole Project in Bromley and the fantastic work that they do for severely disabled young Londoners. The more people who know about the work of the Maypole Project, the better.

You have asked for a couple of updates on current matters. The first was about the use of mobile phone towers to intercept communications and whether this was being done in a sinister fashion. I must say that the concerns are entirely legitimate in the sense that it seems that there are mobile phone towers that are capable of intercepting people's communications throughout the city. There are about 20 of them. I am sure that they fulfil a valuable counterterrorism security purpose, but it is very important for Londoners to have the assurance that their conversations are not being randomly monitored. I have written to The Rt Hon Sir Christopher Rose, who is in charge of the Office of Surveillance Commissioners, directly and asked him for his views on this matter and for any report that he makes about such surveillance to be communicated to me and to us at the Mayor's Office for Policing and Crime (MOPAC). Obviously, Members of the Assembly, I would be very happy to share all that correspondence and indeed that report, if and when it comes, with you.

The last request was about the recent House of Commons debate on air quality. It was, judging by the accounts I have seen of it, an excellent conversation at which a lot of good points were made and some slightly less good points. It is very important that this subject is high up the political agenda. It was notable that almost all Members confirmed that London is making progress, that there is a way to go, that the Ultra Low Emission Zone (ULEZ) is a very important part of our next steps forward and that Heathrow expansion is simply not possible if the Government is to do anything to fulfil its air quality requirements. It was a useful debate.

Jennette Arnold OBE AM (Chair): OK. Assembly Member McCartney?

Joanne McCartney AM: Good morning, Mr Mayor. Thank you for your response in regard to my request about these fake mobile phone towers or 'stingrays', as they are known colloquially. Sky News undertook an investigation and said that it found 20 in London that appeared to be intercepting Londoner's phone calls before they reached the official mobile phone towers, which obviously gives great concerns for Londoner's security of their personal information. There are two main issues with this.

Firstly, I understand that they can be bought for about £1,000 and so they are relatively cheap. I understand that criminals can use them to intercept personal data. My first question is: what are the police doing about ensuring that criminals are not using this bit of equipment?

Secondly, of course, the police and security services may be using them for counterterrorism purposes. Mr Mayor, you may not be aware that David Anderson QC, the Government's Reviewer of Counterterrorism Legislation, [Independent Reviewer of Terrorism Legislation] brought out a report last week that cited that these surveillance instruments in particular - and I quote him here - "do not have a clear and explicit basis in legislation". There were concerns about the judicial or otherwise oversight of these. I wondered whether you can just answer those two questions.

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): Thanks very much, Joanne, and you are quite right to take this up, frankly. On the first point on what the police are doing, I do not know the extent to which the police have so far detected illicit use of these scanners. You are right in what you say about the possibility of buying them on the market. I cannot give you any information about that, but I would be happy to write to you and of course I will be taking it up with Sir Bernard [Sir Bernard Hogan-Howe QPM, Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis].

On the second point, it is absolutely correct. To the best of my memory, in the old days when everybody used landlines, if the police or the security services wanted to intercept a phone conversation, they had to get an individual warrant from the Home Secretary for the wiretap. What seems to be at least plausible from this account is that the police and the security services are able to listen in randomly, as it were, to all the conversations that may be taking place in a certain vicinity of this 'stingray' scanner.

If that is going on, it is clearly unacceptable. That is *Stasi*-like monitoring of people's private conversations and transactions in a way that I do not think we would want to see in London. I very much share your concerns about that and I would want to establish that it was not going on. On the other hand, if they are validly in pursuit of known suspects, people who might mean us serious harm who are making use of mobile telephony or other means of communication to plan outrages against this city and this country, then clearly they are right to do what they do. In either event, there needs to be proper judicial supervision or some proper accountability and control of what is going on.

Joanne McCartney AM: Mr Mayor, therefore, as Mayor of London and as the Member of Parliament (MP) now for a London constituency, would you be able to write to the Home Office expressing that concern and the concern that has been expressed by the Independent Reviewer and saying that there needs to be some legal framework for the oversight of this apparatus?

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): Do you mean following David Anderson's words?

Joanne McCartney AM: Yes.

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): Yes. What I will perhaps do, if I may, is wait until I get an answer back from Sir Christopher Rose, see exactly how he accounts for what is going on and see whether he is willing to share information. Then, depending on his account of it, we will definitely take it up with the Home Secretary.

Joanne McCartney AM: Mr Mayor, when you get that response, will you send it to the Chairs of the --

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): I will make sure to. It will all be obtainable under the Freedom of Information Act (FOI) and transparent. You will get it all.

Joanne McCartney AM: Thank you.

Jennette Arnold OBE AM (Chair): Thank you. Assembly Member Knight?

Stephen Knight AM: Thank you, Mr Mayor. In terms of the debate on 9 June on air quality in the House of Commons, a debate at which I noticed you were not present and I am sure you had good reasons why you could not be there --

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): I am afraid I was unable to be there, Stephen. I had pressing engagements elsewhere, but one of the things I have noticed about --

Stephen Knight AM: I believe you were giving an LBC prerecord interview and so it cannot have been that pressing. Anyway, the point I wanted to --

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): It was very important.

Stephen Knight AM: A prerecording by its nature can be done anytime, can it not, Mr Mayor?

The question I want to put to you, Mr Mayor, is that the man whom you want to succeed you as Mayor of London, I believe, Zac Goldsmith MP [MP for Richmond Park], said in that debate that he would like to see the introduction and the establishment of the ULEZ brought forward. Do you agree with him and, if not, why not?

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): A couple of points there, Stephen. The first is that the Assembly will have to forgive me if I do not attend every single debate that takes place in the House of Commons or in Westminster Hall about matters pertaining to London. Anybody who goes there a lot - as Kit [Kit Malthouse AM MP], Victoria [Victoria Borwick AM MP] and James [James Cleverly AM MP] now do - will discover how absolutely extraordinary it is how much Westminster talks about the things that we do in City Hall. I am afraid it would be impossible to keep up with all the debates that are about housing in London or crime in London or all the other subjects that are really London-related. It is absolutely phenomenal. It is a complete eye-opener for me, not having been there for seven years.

On your point about Zac Goldsmith - the honourable member for Richmond, I should say - first of all, I would not want to blight anybody's candidacy for Mayor by offering my endorsement! There is Stephen Greenhalgh [Deputy Mayor for Policing and Crime] and Andrew Boff [Andrew Boff AM]. There is Ivan Massow. There are other strong runners in this field and it will be a very strong field.

Stephen Knight AM: Do you agree with him, Mr Mayor?

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): It is quite interesting what he said. He said there is a strong case for bringing forward the ULEZ to 2018. Respectfully, I would have to say that there may be such a strong case; there is an even stronger case for not doing so. Zac is --

Stephen Knight AM: You disagree with him?

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): I will tell you why. You say, "If not, why not?" I will tell you why not. The reason is that for compliance with the ULEZ, at the moment we estimate that for London motorists, Transport for London (TfL) and everybody to get their vehicles ready - and we are talking about loads of people who are driving vehicles that would not be compliant and who will have to change their vehicles - the costs are already expected to be in the region of £1 billion, including £400 million for the costs to TfL.

Stephen Knight AM: Do you think Mr Goldsmith does not know that?

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): In order to bring it forward --

Stephen Knight AM: Does he not care?

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): -- the cost to Londoners, which I am sure you would not want to impose, would be £1.7 billion. I do not think that is a sensible way to proceed. We have the balance right.

Stephen Knight AM: Mr Goldsmith is wrong, is he?

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): If it is really your contention that we should inflict another £700 million worth of economic cost as a price of bringing forward the ULEZ, it is a mistake and I do not support it.

Stephen Knight AM: It is a mistake, OK. Thank you, Mr Mayor.

Jennette Arnold OBE AM (Chair): Assembly Member Tracey?

Richard Tracey AM: Thank you, madam. Mr Mayor, on this question of Heathrow that you mentioned in your report, apart from whatever Zac Goldsmith's views on Heathrow and pollution and so on might be, you may have noticed yesterday that there was a little bit of confusion in the Labour ranks when Mr Sadiq Khan, MP for Tooting - who is also aspiring to be the Mayor of London - seemed to have changed his mind. He is now against Heathrow expansion, but back in 2008 and 2009 he apparently supported the expansion of Heathrow. Do you think Londoners might be a bit confused by this?

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): Really, Londoners will want to leave Labour to get on with it. We should not intrude on private grief in this matter. Labour should get on and work out its policies, its stance and how it rebuilds itself. Obviously, I expect that John Biggs [John Biggs AM] is now available for greater things now that he has secured the mayoralty in Tower Hamlets. I would not rule out any Labour candidate at present.

Just focus on the issue. The issue is, Dick, that Heathrow is basically undeliverable. If you want to expand Heathrow to provide the kind of 21st-century hub airport this country needs, you will do incalculable environmental damage not just to west London but to the rest of the city as well. It is not a runner and Sadiq [Sadiq Khan MP] has probably recognised that.

Jennette Arnold OBE AM (Chair): Assembly Member Qureshi?

Murad Qureshi AM: Thank you, Chair. Mr Mayor, can I just come back to the discussion at the House of Commons on air quality. I was actually very impressed by how informed our London MPs are on the issue and I was particularly impressed by the Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs (Defra) Minister, Rory Stewart OBE MP, responding to all those points, particularly from London MPs. Really, should you have not been there to respond to many of those points made by London MPs, particularly when the choice was between attending a prerecord at LBC or being accountable to London MPs on this issue?

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): It is peculiar that the Labour Members of the Assembly should take that line, having previously said what an outrage it would be if I were to become an MP. When it is your

constitutional function, if I may respectfully say so, for you to interrogate me about what I am doing in London and your job to interrogate City Hall about our air quality strategy --

Murad Qureshi AM: We are doing it. We are doing that. You are not listening.

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): -- it is slightly mystifying to hear you attempt to shrug off that responsibility to other --

Murad Qureshi AM: I would like to think that actually --

Jennette Arnold OBE AM (Chair): Mr Mayor. Sorry, no. I heard a direct question, which you can just answer yes or no to. Can you just repeat your direct question specifically about a mayoral responsibility that you felt the Mayor had?

Murad Qureshi AM: In terms of priorities, yes, we will take you and we will make you accountable on those issues, as we have done. Also, as a parliamentarian, I would not have raised this question if you were not an MP --

Jennette Arnold OBE AM (Chair): No, I want a mayoral question.

Murad Qureshi AM: The mayoral question is: does he think that a prerecording with LBC has a higher priority than being accountable to London MPs?

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): Through you, Jennette --

Jennette Arnold OBE AM (Chair): No, I am sorry. No, I am stopping that.

Tony Arbour AM (Deputy Chairman): You have a point of order.

Jennette Arnold OBE AM (Chair): I will take a point of order in a moment. No, I am stopping that. Can I just say to Members, we just have to be clear here. There is an order paper in front of us and then we are currently receiving the oral report and questions on that. Those questions must be specific to the role of the Mayor of London and must not be associated with what he does when he is in the House of Commons. It is a grey line but, no, we are going to leave --

Murad Qureshi AM: A grey line? I did not create the grey line between being an MP --

Jennette Arnold OBE AM (Chair): Excuse me, Mr Qureshi. We are going to navigate this and I just want you to try to follow me.

Murad Qureshi AM: I take your point and I do --

Jennette Arnold OBE AM (Chair): OK. Follow me and we will get through this. Assembly Member Cleverly, you had a point of order?

James Cleverly AM MP: Madam Chair, you have covered the point that I was going to make.

Jenny Jones AM: Sit down, then.

James Cleverly AM MP: I was merely going to make the point that there are a number of us --

Jennette Arnold OBE AM (Chair): No, let him stand. You are not chairing this.

James Cleverly AM MP: -- across the Chamber who for a period of time will have dual functions and you are very right to point out that the onus is for us to question the Mayor on his function as a Mayor for London, not as a MP for Uxbridge.

Jennette Arnold OBE AM (Chair): It is a delight when you can support me, Assembly Member Cleverly.

Jenny Jones AM: It is too rare.

Jennette Arnold OBE AM (Chair): It is too rare. OK. That is the end of questions to the Mayor on his oral update.