

London Assembly (Mayor's Question Time) – 20 January 2016

Transcript of Agenda Item 5 – Questions to the Mayor

2016/0163 - Housebuilding

Andrew Boff AM

How will you be supporting the government's plans to directly commission new homes on public land in Old Oak Common?

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): Thank you, Andrew. The Government's announcement is very welcome. The Old Oak and Park Royal site is going to deliver more than 25,000 new homes.

The way that we can best support the idea of direct commissioning of those homes is for London government - the Greater London Authority [GLA] - to be given the land parcels. That is really what is required. We need all of that land to be assembled, as it was at the Olympic Park, in order to push that all ahead. Some of it is in various bits and bobs owned by other bits of the public sector, not us.

Andrew Boff AM: Do you agree, Mr Mayor, that the scheme presents a really fantastic opportunity to support small developers and self-builders in London, and therefore get housing built much more quickly than otherwise would have been the case?

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): We will see. There is, obviously, an opportunity for small builders and developers to apply, although I cannot make any predictions now about who will be successful.

Andrew Boff AM: Already we have received a commitment from Ed Lister [Sir Edward Lister, Chief of Staff and Deputy Mayor, Policy and Planning] about engaging with organisations like Create Streets to ensure that the quality of the developments is what Londoners actually want.

I was just wondering, however, how this approach that the Government has adopted and you have adopted with Old Oak Common can be used to encourage more public sector land to be brought forward for development in London.

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): Currently, 25% of London is owned by the public sector. Huge quantities of land are in the hands of the state. What needs to happen is that those parcels or polygons of land need to be agglomerated and the different bodies that own them need to come together and work out development plans. For instance, across the city you will find that a chunk will be owned by Network Rail, a chunk by Transport for London [TfL] and a chunk by the National Health Service (NHS). They will be contiguous and there should be a plan to develop them all but it is not done.

What we want is powers for the London Land Commission to direct that amalgamation of land. That is the way forward. We are in discussion with the Government about the way that the current Housing Bill can be used to help to speed up that process.

Andrew Boff AM: I know you like these questions. Do you agree with me that your approach, combined with the co-operation of the Government, has replaced housing obstacles with optimism?

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): That is right. There is a massive opportunity now. Anybody who looks around London can see that we are building at a faster rate than at any time in the last 40 years. There is an extraordinary growth going on across the city. That is a testament to the dynamic approach that is currently being taken.

However, you have to build stuff that is in keeping with the city and that will last for a long time and so I appreciate the point you make about Create Streets and all of those people. Sometimes, I have to say, where you have a high public transport access level (PTAL) ratio and where you have good transport links, you have to be able to go high. Not every Londoner wants a tall building near them, but some of these tall buildings are truly wonderful. That is the way forward, very often.

Andrew Boff AM: Let us not get into the tall building argument. Otherwise, we will be here all day, Mr Mayor.

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): I know.

Andrew Boff AM: Thank you very much.

Jennette Arnold OBE AM (Chair): OK. We will move on to the next question.

2016/0032 - Right to Buy replacement homes

Darren Johnson AM

Have you achieved your aim of ensuring a one-for-one replacement of homes lost through Right to Buy in London?

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): Thanks, Darren. I am delighted to tell you that the funding that the GLA receives from the Right to Buy underspend, when we have been entrusted with that funding as we have been by three boroughs, we have been able to produce a ratio of 3:1 rather than 1:1. Across the city, since the Right to Buy programme was reinvigorated in the last couple of years since 2012/2013, we have evidence from the starts that the ratio is actually running at something like 2:1. For instance, I think I am right in saying that since the Right to Buy programme was reinvigorated in 2012, 536 additional homes were sold in the first year and 1,139 were built. If you look at the additional homes that were sold as a result of the programme above the forecast sales rate, you could say that the rate has actually been 2:1 for replacements.

Darren Johnson AM: According to a written answer from you last November, the GLA does not even collect any data on the Right to Buy sales represented by the money you are spending on replacement homes.

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): Such is the diligence and enthusiasm with which we try to answer your questions, Darren, that we seem to have some statistics for you today and so I am --

Darren Johnson AM: At least I have prompted to you begin gathering data.

Jenny Jones AM: Do something right!

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): The brief I have is that, in the three boroughs that ask us to do it, we have done it at 3:1. Look, the crucial thing --

Darren Johnson AM: That is just for three boroughs?

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): Yes.

Darren Johnson AM: There are a further 29 boroughs that you do not have data for?

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): We do not cover them. Look, your basic point is whether social homes are being lost at an unacceptable rate under Right to Buy and whether we are failing to replace them at the rate that we need to. Obviously, it has historically been a cause of great concern that council houses have not been replaced at a fast enough rate. One of the important developments in the Housing Bill is that the sale of the high-value council homes will be followed by a mandatory two-for-one replacement rate in this city.

Darren Johnson AM: If you look at the figures across London since 2012, so far only one in six homes sold in London has been replaced. Both you and the Government promised a one-for-one replacement rate. You have not delivered, have you?

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): That is, clearly, the responsibility of councils. I have stressed that we can only act as the GLA when the councils transfer the responsibility to us. That has happened. There are three councils that have done that. Where we do it, we have been able to get three-for-one.

Darren Johnson AM: Is it not showing that there is a clear problem right across London about the replacement of homes lost through Right to Buy?

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): I am concerned. You have to set it in context. I am concerned about replacement. However, I would remind you that in London 33% of homes in the centre of the city - and across the city it is something like 24% - are social homes. In the heart of this city, 33% of homes are social homes. Across the whole of Greater London, it is 25%. Other cities have nothing like that rate of social housing. In New York it is something like 5%; in Paris it is something like 17%. Yes, I am very concerned to keep the proportion high --

Darren Johnson AM: Are you saying that we have a problem of too much social housing in London?

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): No.

Darren Johnson AM: That seems to be the thrust of your argument there.

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): I did not say that. I said that we have a large amount of social housing in London and that, therefore, people should be confident about the way the city is organised and continues to be organised, particularly in view of the two-for-one replacement rate that has been secured in the Housing Bill to help with the consequences of the Right to Buy for housing association tenants.

It may be that people in this Assembly do not support the Right to Buy for housing association tenants. I do support it. I think it is a good thing. I know that the Labour Party did support it and then did not support it and now cannot make up its mind. The Labour Party may be split on it. Their Leader probably does not support it, but lots of the Labour Members of Parliament support it.

It is the right thing to do, but you have to make sure that you do not lose the social housing provided by the high-value council homes and we have to look to --

Darren Johnson AM: If you look back over the past four years since April 2012 when you talked about Right to Buy being re-invigorated, we have had a net loss of over 8,000, meaning that only one in six has been replaced so far.

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): I have given you the figures for what the GLA group has achieved and the figures for --

Darren Johnson AM: Strategically, across London, we have a big problem, do we not?

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): We have had a net increase in affordable homes over this mayoralty and we have built a record number of affordable homes. We are on target --

Tom Copley AM: He is changing the definition.

Darren Johnson AM: You are changing the definition now because I am actually talking about social homes and like-for-like one-for-one replacements, which we are not seeing, are we?

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): I will tell you that 86% of Londoners want to own their home or have a share in the value of their home at the very least. I know that you basically want the state to own all housing. That is not the right way forward.

Darren Johnson AM: I have never said that.

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): That is totally wrong. At 33%, we have a very high rate of social housing in London by comparison with any other city already. I am keen to protect that. The steps that we have taken in the Housing Bill will ensure that that happens. However, we also have to build homes that people can afford to buy and can afford to buy a share of --

Darren Johnson AM: It is a huge mess that the next Mayor will have to pick up.

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): -- and that is why the part-buy/part-rent scheme has been so successful.

Darren Johnson AM: Thank you, Chair.

Jennette Arnold OBE AM (Chair): Assembly Member O'Connell?

Steve O'Connell AM: Thank you, Chair. Mr Mayor, we need to strip the ideology out of this particular one. As a former council estate boy for the first 24 years of my life, I saw the benefits that Right to Buy gave to many people at that time as a leg-up and empowerment. That is the right thing to do.

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): That is something that the party opposite, the Labour Party, resolutely refuses to acknowledge. Actually, it is one of the reasons why it is completely out of touch with the world today. People, if they can, want to be able to buy a share in the value of their home.

Steve O'Connell AM: Be that as it may, that was 30 years or so ago and I do have some sympathy for Darren's [Darren Johnson AM] position about looking at the number of replacements over those 20 or 30 years. I am a great supporter of social housing. London is somewhere where there is a lot of social housing and that is the right thing to do because it is the right mix for our great city. The introduction of the Right to

Buy for housing associations is, again, in principle, to be welcomed. However, we do need to have some statute around enforcing those two-for-one replacements.

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): Absolutely.

Steve O'Connell AM: Mr Mayor, you have already commented on it, but can you reinforce the fact that you very much welcome the enshrinement in statute that there will be two-for-one of a higher value?

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): Absolutely. I congratulate Zac Goldsmith [MP and mayoral candidate] on his success in getting that amendment to the Housing Bill. It was very important and I hope that Londoners have noted that the problem that Darren [Darren Johnson AM] has - as you say, rightly - raised is one that is being addressed in the Housing Bill thanks to the work of, amongst others, Zac [Zac Goldsmith MP].

Steve O'Connell AM: I welcome that too but, also, the incoming Mayor - whomsoever that will be - does have a job on their hands because we do need to keep a close eye on ensuring that there is two-for-one across the boroughs, not just at the higher value, and that we and housing associations are building good-value family housing for the people whom it suits - that is absolutely right - whilst still giving the opportunity to Londoners to buy their first home. Therefore, I support this, but I agree with colleagues probably all around this Chamber that we do need to keep a close eye on that.

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): Look, I totally agree with you. That is why we have built such a huge number of affordable homes and why we have had such an ambitious housing and development policy. It is only when you get development going that you can build the social homes as well. You simply cannot get projects going if they are going to be 100% monocultural social housing. I am afraid that the laws of economics mean that developers simply will not do it. You have to have market housing as well. There has to be a mixture. It has been very successful in London and we have got huge numbers of affordable homes going by being very aggressive and very ambitious about it.

Look, you are right about the two-for-one stipulation and that has to be enforced, but it is in statute now.

Roger Evans AM: I am pleased that we are constructing so much new housing, certainly in my constituency in Havering and Redbridge for my residents, but I am getting complaints from residents of one of the new sets of buildings that was constructed recently that the work has not been up to standard and that people are having to come back to do plumbing, electricity, decorating and basic things.

I appreciate that this is largely the responsibility of the local authority's building regulation people to make sure that it is done right, but can you just reassure me that we have processes in place to make sure that the housing associations and building partners we work with are constructing to a high standard and are providing properties that will last the test of time and be there for Londoners in many years' time?

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): Of course. You will know that in the London Plan, in the Further Alterations and in the many alterations to the London Plan that have taken place over the last few years, there is now abundant guidance for councils and for developers about the standards, in particular room size standards, insulation standards, Building Research Establishment Environmental Assessment Methodology standards and all of those types of things. The quality of materials, the use of brick and all sorts of stuff is now in there. If it is not being properly enforced, then the council has a duty to go in and sort it out.

I am very pleased now that we are no longer building rabbit-hutch homes in London. Nowadays, we have Parker Morris plus 10% room sizes. We are building rooms that are bigger than the standards of the 1960s and that is right, not least because we are all considerably fatter than we used to be and we need bigger rooms.

Roger Evans AM: Thank you.

2016/0095 - Air quality plan for reducing nitrogen dioxide in London

Stephen Knight AM

How do you respond to the government's latest plan for reducing nitrogen dioxide emissions in London?

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): Thank you very much, Stephen. I would say that in reality what has happened is that the Government has really picked up a lot of the plans that London was setting out. We have been working very closely with the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra) and other parts of the Government. The standout measure is the Ultra Low Emission Zone (ULEZ), which will cut nitrogen oxide (NO_x) by about 50%. From memory, 80% of London will meet nitrogen dioxide (NO₂) limits by 2020. I have great hopes for the ULEZ.

The one thing that would really make it difficult for London to meet air quality targets is, of course, an expansion of Heathrow Airport. It really cannot be allowed to proceed on that basis alone, though of course there are many other reasons for thinking that a third runway would be a disaster. It is not just the air quality pollution; it is the noise pollution as well.

Stephen Knight AM: Thank you, Mr Mayor. Are you aware that within the Government's proposals there is reference to work that is currently going on between your officials at TfL and London Councils to radically redraw plans for emission control policy in London to be put before the next Mayor, who is to be elected in May 2016, to not simply restrict emissions within the congestion control area but, indeed, to bring in ULEZ-type controls as early as 2023 - that is one of the options - across the whole of Greater London, effectively banning all but the very newest diesels in London?

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): Yes. That is not anything new. That is one of the options that we looked at a while back for the ULEZ. The issue is how big you draw the zone and what impact you have on vehicles.

Stephen Knight AM: Mr Mayor, these are very different proposals to the proposals that you have to apply restrictions within the very tiny ULEZ because these are looking at applying rigid restrictions within inner London, within the North and South Circulars and, indeed, within the whole of Greater London in the existing Low Emission Zone (LEZ) boundary --

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): I understand.

Stephen Knight AM: -- controls which up until now, Mr Mayor, you had not supported.

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): From memory, that was one of the options that was presented to us and that we thought about a while back for the ULEZ. The reason for not proceeding with that one is just because of the impact on businesses and individuals of all kinds of asking them very radically to change their vehicles.

Stephen Knight AM: OK --

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): Can I just finish the point? Think of the grief and disappointment of the people who bought diesel vehicles in the expectation that they would comply and then found that they had effectively been cheated by the state, which had it all wrong about diesel emissions. When you proceed with clean-air policies, you have to be reasonable to the consumer. In the end, consumers --

Stephen Knight AM: Mr Mayor, these were the arguments --

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): For many people, this represents a huge outlay. They have invested in vehicles. It is unfair to tell them that the whole of Greater London is effectively going to be a no-go area.

Stephen Knight AM: Mr Mayor, we have heard these arguments before because this was exactly the argument that you put when you decided three years ago to cancel the application of NO_x emission control across the Greater London LEZ, proposals which would have brought in for the first time NO_x emission controls across Greater London from 2015. You decided three years ago to cancel that, if you remember --

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): We delayed stage 3 of the LEZ.

Stephen Knight AM: No, that was a decision you took in 2009, seven years ago, to delay the application of particulate emissions to vans.

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): Yes, we did, and that was --

Stephen Knight AM: Your record, Mr Mayor, is that in 2009 you delayed the application of emission controls to vans and in 2013 you cancelled the first proposed NO₂ emission controls for heavy goods vehicles across the whole of London. Your record on this is actually to cancel and delay controls across Greater London.

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): No, the record is to actually cut NO_x by 20%, as you know full well, but also --

Stephen Knight AM: Mr Mayor, as you know, that 20% figure relies on --

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

Stephen Knight AM: They are projections based on the Euro standards working and you have told us, Mr Mayor, that the Euro standards do not work. Mr Mayor, given --

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): No, it is also validated by the measurements that are taken in --

Stephen Knight AM: No, it is not. Mr Mayor, that is not true.

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

Stephen Knight AM: It is not true. They are not based on measurement. That 20% figure is not based on measurement and do not tell me that it is because you know that it is not. It is based on projections based on the Euro standards working.

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): No, the figures for reductions in --

Stephen Knight AM: Mr Mayor, your own estimates are that over the eight years you have been in office 75,000 Londoners, who would otherwise still be alive today, will have died due to air pollution in London. That is 75,000 avoidable deaths, Mr Mayor, due to air pollution in London. If we had seen 75,000 people die due to any other cause, there would have been, rightly, absolute outrage and huge amounts of resources would have been spent.

Do you regret, Mr Mayor, your decisions to delay and cancel emission control proposals in Greater London in 2009 and in 2013?

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

Stephen Knight AM: No regrets?

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): No. It was the right thing to do --

Stephen Knight AM: "*Je ne regrette rien*", as I believe you said once.

Jennette Arnold OBE AM (Chair): Assembly Member Knight, let us get an answer.

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): -- because we have been able to use new technology very substantially to reduce emissions both of NO_x and of particulate matter up to 10 microns in size (PM10s) and particulate matter up to 2.5 microns in size (PM2.5s). We have much cleaner vehicles on our streets now.

I accept the point. The statistical conclusions or extrapolations that you make are a little bit farfetched, but there is no doubt that there is a serious problem of air quality in London. We have been tackling that with all sorts of measures and we have had a great deal of success. Contrary to what you have just said, it is not just the calculations or the extrapolations based on emissions.

Stephen Knight AM: Mr Mayor, I am out of time and so I --

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): Actually, measurable pollution is falling at key sites across London and that is thanks to new technology. The reason why it has sometimes been prudent --

Stephen Knight AM: Thank you, Mr Mayor. I am out of time now.

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): I do not care if you are out of time. I am going to finish my answer. The reason why it has been prudent in 2009 and at other stages to go a bit slower on some of these --

Stephen Knight AM: Chair, the Mayor is repeating himself now.

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): -- measures is because we have faced a very severe economic downturn in which you were asking London businesses, for whom their vehicle is a major part of their outlay and their lives, effectively to get rid of them and to go bust. It was not right in 2009 when this economy was, basically, in danger of going off a cliff.

Stephen Knight AM: And 75,000 deaths was right?

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): It was not right and the solution we have come up with is extremely good.

Stephen Knight AM: Thank you, Mr Mayor. We have heard your answer.

Jennette Arnold OBE AM (Chair): Thanks for that.

Murad Qureshi AM: Mr Mayor, can I just move this discussion to the impact on schoolchildren. Your favourite think-tank, Policy Exchange, released a report just before Christmas 2015, *Up in the Air*, which stated that 328,000 children are attending schools in London where the NO₂ concentration exceeded the legal and health limits. That is nearly 25% of all pupils in London.

Can you tell me what specifically you have done to limit the exposure of London's children to toxic air in your time?

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

Murad Qureshi AM: Specifically. I do not want the general stuff, Mr Mayor.

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): Yes. We have brought in a huge range of measures to reduce the emissions of all kinds from vehicles including NO₂. We have changed the rules on taxis. We have brought in the biggest number of hybrid buses ever seen on the streets of London. Our bus fleet emits less pollution than ever before. By 2016, this year, we will halve NO_x emissions from London buses, which greatly affect schoolchildren because they use buses so frequently in London, on 2008. That is a massive achievement for London's bus fleet, which kids use to travel to and from school. To have halved NO_x on them is a huge achievement.

I would point out that we are going to go on. The ambition is to make the whole of the bus fleet either hybrid or zero-emission.

Murad Qureshi AM: That is for the next Mayor to do, as we all know very well. Can I suggest that, actually, there is a compelling case to consider locations of schools in the formation of the ULEZ geographically? We know that it is very much concentrated in inner London boroughs like [City of] Westminster to [London Borough of] Tower Hamlets. Across inner London, 58% of their students are affected. In Westminster, it is all 30,000 students. In Tower Hamlets, it is 30,000 of their 45,000. How many schools will be sited within the ULEZ as you currently propose it?

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): If you are saying that we should move all of our schools and not site them in the --

Murad Qureshi AM: I have not said that. I am not -- anyway --

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): The ambition has to be to improve air quality and to build more schools. That is what we are doing.

Murad Qureshi AM: Yes. The response I was hoping was not actually a precise figure but just suggesting more than we would like and that we should expand the ULEZ boundaries to take on board --

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): As Stephen [Stephen Knight AM] is suggesting?

Murad Qureshi AM: Yes, exactly. Like I said, there is a compelling case to take on board the location of schools when you are geographically defining the ULEZ boundaries, particularly within the inner London boundaries.

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): Yes. There are some boroughs that want to come into the ULEZ and we are totally relaxed about that. [London Boroughs of] Islington and Camden want to come in. If we can make that work, I have no problem at all. Obviously, there is a technological issue. There is the issue about how we monitor it because currently we think we would use the congestion charging technology and so we would have to think about how to do it. However, I have no problem with it at all.

Murad Qureshi AM: You do feel that, when we look at the geographical boundaries of the ULEZ, we should take on board the locations of schools that are adversely affected by NO₂ concentrations?

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): Do you mean schools on the boundary? Sorry. I am not quite following you, Murad. What do you mean?

Murad Qureshi AM: What I am saying is that all of the schools are not in the Congestion Charge Zone, are they?

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): No, of course not.

Murad Qureshi AM: Exactly. If you are going to reduce the impact on young children, you are going to have to take that on board.

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): I see what you mean. Look, the objective has to be to improve air quality in London generally. At the moment, the boundaries of the ULEZ make sense and I am willing to look at the expansion of those boundaries, but you have to be reasonable to consumers and you have to be reasonable to those people who have invested in cars.

Murad Qureshi AM: I trust that you and TfL will take that on board in your negotiations with local authorities at London Councils.

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): We certainly will.

Richard Tracey AM: Mr Mayor, can I bring up with you once again the subject of Putney High Street. You will have read the stories that within a few days of the beginning of this year Putney High Street's pollution level had exceeded the legal limit. Many councillors and local people there are asking that TfL should make a specific move to introduce all hybrid or indeed electric buses on the services that run along the High Street and also to look at the possibility of moving the bus depot, which is right by the side of the High Street. It surely is not an impossibility to do these things, particularly in the circumstances that I have described.

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): Sure. I will look at that. We did a £10 million bus retrofit scheme specifically targeted at Putney and it reduced NO_x emissions from buses in Putney by 45%. Putney High Street saw the largest reduction in NO₂ concentrations across all London sites with 10% reductions at the roadside. We have already made a big effort with Putney, but clearly the ULEZ will go further. We think it will lead to a further 16% reduction in NO_x emissions in Wandsworth and that there will be a 69% reduction for Wandsworth residents living in areas exceeding NO₂ limits by 2020 as a result of the ULEZ.

Richard Tracey AM: Yes, Wandsworth Council is very good at pursuing this problem. Interestingly enough, when Putney Bridge was closed for about three or four months, it completely solved the problem at Putney

High Street because there were not the number of buses and lorries going down it. The street was not closed but it did reduce the amount of traffic going over the bridge itself. Clearly, if one can reduce --

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): Clearly, if you can ban all cars, you will get rid of all pollution, but that is not economically sensible.

Richard Tracey AM: They were not all banned, but it was simply the reduction of the numbers because it has this extraordinary canyon effect and never really clears the street of the pollution.

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): I understand the problem. The answer is to have zero-emission or hybrid buses and we are moving towards that. As I said, there have already been very substantial reductions in NO_x in Putney as a result of the programmes that we have been implementing.

Richard Tracey AM: If you could press TfL to try even harder?

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): The plans that you have seen in Putney High Street are as a direct result of your urgings already, Dick. You have done a huge amount of work in that area and I congratulate you. Looking at the figures that I have seen, we have really focused on Putney High Street.

Richard Tracey AM: Indeed. Thank you.

2016/0166 - Child poverty

Fiona Twycross AM

What forecast has the Greater London Authority made of the likely changes in the child poverty rate in London?

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): Fiona, listen. The reality is that at the moment there are no specific statistics for child poverty that are collected by the GLA that I have been able to find. However, what we are committed to doing is bringing all London families out of poverty if we possibly can.

The most effective way of doing that is to raise the number in employment and to get families into work. The number of parents in employment has gone up by about 250,000 since 2008. The claimant count is now down to less than 2%. The London Living Wage has helped about 30,000 low-income Londoners. There are all sorts of ways. Yes, we still have a massive problem with deprivation in some parts of London, but in many ways the growth in the economy and the improvement in schools are helping. The figures that I have seen suggest that the crucial driver of that is, as I said, employment. That is the most important thing.

Fiona Twycross AM: While I do not disagree with you on that, it is slightly complacent to assume that this is going to happen without actually having a focus on child poverty. My colleague Jo [Joanne McCartney AM] has previously asked about a child poverty strategy and I have asked about it in the past as well.

I just wondered whether you would reconsider this in light of new figures from the Fabian Society, which forecasted that child poverty is expected to rise nationally from 2.5 million to 4.4 million children by 2030. As you will be aware, London already has the highest rates of child poverty with an estimated four out of every ten children living in poverty, with that being considerably higher in central London.

Will you commit in this last stage of your mayoralty to look at what the Mayor can do and come up with some solutions to tackling it beyond simply saying that we need to get people into work and we need them to earn more? As we have debated, the numbers being paid the Living Wage are simply not rising.

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): I accept that. The numbers are rising but the trouble is that the proportion is not rising because the numbers in employment are rising.

Fiona Twycross AM: There are around 1 million people not paid the London Living Wage now.

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): Yes, the numbers of people --

Fiona Twycross AM: The proportion and the actual numbers who are not paid the Living Wage have gone up under your mayoralty. We have had this debate several times and you have had to consider this in the past. The number of employers --

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): Yes, but you did not put it quite the right way around. The numbers who are paid it have risen considerably and --

Fiona Twycross AM: Can we talk about child poverty? This is the essence of this question.

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): Yes.

Fiona Twycross AM: Will you commit to publishing or looking into what the Mayor can do and the Mayor's powers to specifically tackle and measure child poverty in London?

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): Yes. Look, there are lots of things that we can do that go beyond just driving the economy and helping to improve schools. For instance, there are the programmes that we have been doing to get kids a proper breakfast in schools, to make sure that we tackle homes that are inadequately heated and that people know their rights about heating and all those sorts of things. The protection for Londoners of free travel to children has been really very important for this city. There are specific things that we have done that are targeted at child poverty.

The figures I saw showed that since 2008 400,000 Londoners have been lifted out of poverty, although I totally accept, Fiona, that we cannot be complacent about this. This is a very rich city in which the gap between rich and poor has grown too big.

Fiona Twycross AM: It is great for you to say that we cannot be complacent about it, but there is a slight lack of a co-ordinated strategy from your end, which indicates that even if you have not been complacent about it, you have not been as proactive as you could. While some of the measures you have indicated are --

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): I totally reject that.

Fiona Twycross AM: -- valuable and while I value the rise in the number of children who are getting breakfast in the morning, this is still relatively small proportions of those children who would need it.

The Fabian Society's forecast is based on decisions made and policies proposed by the Government since the 2015 General Election, the biggest influencing aspect of which will be the welfare changes. I am aware that you recently commissioned GLA Economics to produce an analysis of the welfare reforms in London that were imposed since the General Election. I wondered whether you are going to publish this or whether you would send me that analysis.

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): The welfare changes, as you recall, were withdrawn --

Fiona Twycross AM: GLA Economics is working on it or has produced something.

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): If you will recall, in the Comprehensive Spending Review (CSR) the Chancellor [Chancellor of the Exchequer, The Rt Honourable George Osborne MP] announced that he was withdrawing those changes.

Fiona Twycross AM: He is changing how they are introduced. The overall level of cuts is still going to be the same --

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

Fiona Twycross AM: -- and GLA Economics is apparently working on an analysis of the welfare reforms that had been proposed. Will you send me that analysis?

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): No, GLA Economics was looking at the implications of what was proposed in the Budget, but that was fundamentally reversed by the CSR, if you recall.

Fiona Twycross AM: Can you look into it? If it is about the stuff that is happening post-CSR, will you send me the analysis?

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): My memory of it was that this was about the changes to tax credits that were announced in the Budget and you will appreciate that those changes are no longer operative.

Fiona Twycross AM: Thank you.

Andrew Dismore AM: Can you tell me how many children were in homeless families at Christmas last year?

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): I cannot give you those figures but I would be very happy to write to you with them if we have them. I am sorry. I do not have them before me.

Andrew Dismore AM: I can tell you that, as far as [London Borough of] Barnet is concerned, children in homeless families placed in temporary accommodation by Barnet increased by a third in the last three years to 3,968 children or almost 4,000 children. In [London Borough of] Camden, it actually went down --

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): Well --

Andrew Dismore AM: Let me ask you the question. In Labour's Camden, it actually went down by 100 in temporary accommodation. Can I put to you what --

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): That is a bit of good news. There you go. I hope you are --

Andrew Dismore AM: Barnet Homes, the arm's length management organisation (ALMO) in Barnet, which deals with the borough's social housing stock, says that the increase in homelessness amongst children in families is down to private sector rent increases, is down to the welfare reform that you have just referred to, which has absolutely hammered families in private sector accommodation, and is down to the shortage of affordable accommodation. That is what the independent Barnet Homes, an ALMO, says.

These are all issues that you and the Conservative Government can deal with. Do you feel ashamed that so many children have no permanent home?

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): Certainly, it is a fact that the population of London is growing at a record rate and that we have a huge pressure to house the people who want to live in this city. Quite properly, we are doing the biggest programme of homebuilding ever, including building record numbers of affordable homes. That, fundamentally, is the way to address this problem.

I am glad that you note that in some boroughs in London the numbers are actually coming down. That is good news. I note your continuing *jihad* against Barnet Council with interest. I will look at what is happening in Barnet. If there is anything that we can do to give advice and help there, we will. However, our best bet is to continue to build record numbers of affordable homes.

Andrew Dismore AM: When Barnet Homes says that the reasons for this are the increase in private sector rents, the welfare reform, the bedroom tax, the cuts in the Housing Benefit as well as the shortage of affordable housing, they are wrong, are they?

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): Most people feel that in a time of acute housing shortage you should be allocating social housing fairly. When people are living in homes where they have spare bedrooms and are not making use of those bedrooms, there has to be a way of sorting that out.

Andrew Dismore AM: The net result is an increase --

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): If the whole thing is being paid for by the state I think it is fair.

Andrew Dismore AM: -- in children in temporary accommodation with no permanent settlement. Is that good for those children, do you think? Is it good for children to have no permanent home?

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): To get back to the point I was making to Fiona [Fiona Twycross AM], actually, London kids are doing better than ever before and now --

Andrew Dismore AM: Is it good for children not to have a permanent home?

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): Of course it is not, Andrew. We are doing our level best to provide homes for Londoners. It is a huge struggle at the moment because of the sheer popularity and success of the city, but as I said --

Andrew Dismore AM: It is not because of that. It is because of the factors that Barnet Homes identified, is it not? Why can Barnet's numbers go up and Labour Camden's go down? It is because Camden has got to grips with it and Conservative Barnet has not. You have not and the Government has not.

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): That is the point that you seek to make, in a slightly partisan way, about some parts of London. The population of London has gone up by about 800,000 or perhaps 1 million since I have been Mayor. That is a huge number. We are adding colossal quantities of citizens to London every week. We have to provide for them and for their families.

That puts pressure not just on housing, by the way. Another thing you might have mentioned is schools. We need to build huge numbers --

Andrew Dismore AM: I am asking you about housing, Mr Mayor. Do you feel ashamed about the number --

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): No, because I feel --

Andrew Dismore AM: -- of children in this capital --

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): No, I do not, and I would defend --

Andrew Dismore AM: -- under your watch, who are now in temporary accommodation?

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): I do not.

Andrew Dismore AM: You do not feel ashamed about that?

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): I will defend what has been done by the officials, by the GLA Housing team, by everybody involved and by the Homes and Communities Agency . They have worked heroically over the last few years. They started off with an appalling credit crunch where absolutely nothing could be built and they have built a record number of affordable homes.

Andrew Dismore AM: Not in Barnet.

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): It is an extraordinary achievement given the financial background that we faced back in 2008 and 2009.

2016/0140 - Tackling FGM in London

Andrew Boff

According to recent data from the Department of Health, healthcare professionals discovered 758 newly reported incidents of FGM in London between July and September 2015, constituting more than half of all cases reported across the country. What further work is the Metropolitan Police Service doing to tackle this crime?

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): Thanks, Andrew. Look, this is a huge issue. We work closely with Government. Jane Ellison [MP], the Public Health Minister, has obviously been very important on this. City Hall, as you know, has done a great deal of work to draw attention to this evil and to mobilise people to crack down on it.

What we are doing now is trying to reach families who we think are at risk and who are taking their daughters, often abroad, to have this procedure carried out. At Heathrow we have had 10,000 families spoken to. Five arrests have been made. We have a partnership in five boroughs, the Ending Harmful Practices partnership, and that includes female genital mutilation (FGM) as well as honour-based violence, forced marriages and other practices. Obviously it is disappointing that there has been, so far, no successful prosecution, although I believe that there are currently two FGM cases that have been referred by the Metropolitan Police Service (MPS) to the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) and are now under consideration.

Andrew Boff AM: Thank you very much, Mr Mayor. Some of those figures are new to me and I am delighted that there is some progress. However, there does seem a problem with convictions. We read in the *Standard* just recently of an FGM case that fell through only a couple of days ago. I welcome the information that there have been five arrests. That is five more than I knew about.

May I just say, Mr Mayor, that I am particularly indebted to the work of the former Member of the European Parliament (MEP) Marina Yannakoudakis, who certainly shone the spotlight on the problem related to London with regard to FGM?

This is what I do not understand, Mr Mayor. We have 758 newly reported incidents. That must mean that we have 758 names of girls who have been abused. From that, we are only getting five arrests and no convictions that I know about. That is the concern I have. I am sure you are worried as well by those particular figures.

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): Can I just explain why I think that might be happening? These 758 cases that you rightly cite are reported not by the police but by health professionals. What will happen typically is that the police will try to investigate the case but obviously it may be some time or a long time since the mutilation took place and since the crime was committed, and the difficulty may be that the individual concerned is reluctant to go into detail about what has happened. My understanding is that that is the problem we are facing. These are very difficult and very sensitive cases. As I understand it, it is one thing for the medical practitioner to find evidence of this, but getting to a prosecution is proving much more complex, I am afraid to say.

Andrew Boff AM: I am aware of the complexity in cases like this of securing sufficient evidence to carry forward a prosecution. I am just saying that the weight of number is astonishing. If you could have said to me that out of 758 cases there were seven convictions, it would have been some progress.

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): Of course it is not even 758 people who have been charged; this is 758 women or girls who have presented with evidence of this appalling practice. 'We need to do better' is the gist of what you are saying, but the difficulty is trying to get from that basic evidence to a prosecution and finding the individuals who are culpable when neither the individual concerned nor their families may be willing to say anything useful. That is the problem.

Andrew Boff AM: I see. The work at the airports - at Heathrow, for example - is very useful and I applaud the MPS for taking that up because of course a spike in FGM cases was seen during the periods of July and September 2015 when during the holidays young girls were taken away - I cannot even call it an 'operation' - for the abuse to happen. I applaud that, but we still fail to get the message to parents that if any agency finds that FGM has been committed on your child, your child will be taken away from you and you will go to jail. At the moment we do not have those messages and I am worried that in the absence of any successful conviction, we are unable to enforce that message.

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): I see where you are coming from. Basically, you are saying that because the parents must overwhelmingly know what is going on or be complicit in what is going on, there could be --

Andrew Boff AM: There is other abuse, Mr Mayor. If a child came into school with a broken arm or scarring on their face, if they had obviously been beaten up or had external injuries, they would be taken away from their parents without so much as a by-your-leave. Because this abuse is not visible, it appears as though we are leaving it. I would love to provide you with the answers, Mr Mayor. All I know is that we need to do more. The police need to provide more.

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): The 1985 statute [Prohibition of Female Circumcision Act 1985] makes it a crime for somebody to perform the procedures, quite properly. I am not certain how the law works in respect of the parents. That is the only question mark that is forming in my mind about what you say, although clearly there must be a law against being an accessory to a crime and so on. Let me look into this.

Andrew Boff AM: Thank you.

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): I will make some inquiries about the point that you make because it is a very good one. Could we be coming down much harder on the parents of these people? That seems to me to be a very legitimate point. I will try to find out why that is not happening at the moment.

Andrew Boff AM: Just for the avoidance of any doubt, in case my words are misinterpreted, the work and progress that the MPS has done to date has been wonderful because there was nothing going on and your intervention has been very good.

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): They are trying. I truly believe that they are trying. They are facing real problems. As you will remember and as everybody will know, there was one prosecution last year that was, frankly, disastrous because an innocent doctor was prosecuted. That had a bad effect on the whole conversation about this. We need to get back to looking at the people who are really responsible.

Andrew Boff AM: Thank you, Mr Mayor. Thank you, Chair.

Jennette Arnold OBE AM (Chair): Just taking Chair's license: can I thank Assembly Member Boff for bringing this issue up yet again and for the answers that we have received on this? Speaking personally as a campaigner against FGM now for over 40 years, I am sure that Mr Boff will join me in congratulating the communities that are affected by this and the huge difference that they have made.

Andrew Boff AM: Of course.

Jennette Arnold OBE AM (Chair): We now have the alarming figures that we have heard but we have moved away from a position where it was universally done. We should also commend those boroughs that have school programmes. I can refer you to Waltham Forest Borough where there are funded programmes going on speaking to young people and teachers and raising the level of understanding. It is such a difficult issue to get to.

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): It is.

Andrew Boff AM: I do not underestimate that, Chair.

Jennette Arnold OBE AM (Chair): Can I also refer you to the work of the Assembly's Police and Crime Committee, which has looked at this and has agreed not so long ago that it would return to this issue at the appropriate time? Let us move on now to the next question.

2016/0167 - A&E Crisis

Dr Onkar Sahota AM

Have you now read the Independent Health Commission report by Mr Mansfield QC and what steps are you taking to ensure equity to health services in North West London?

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): Thank you very much, Onkar. Listen, I have not read all of Michael Mansfield's [Michael Mansfield QC, Chair, Independent Healthcare Commission for North West London] report. In fact, I have really just been given a brief account of what it says.

Yes, we all want A&Es in London to be doing better and we all want to see reforms. I am not necessarily wholly convinced that a report commissioned by the Labour boroughs by Michael Mansfield QC, who is the last self-professed Trotskyist in this country, is necessarily going to be a monument of impartiality. The medical directors of the hospitals concerned take a very different view. They say that there is a very high level of clinical support for the programmes across North West London and that they think the changes will save many lives. That is the key thing for me. We cannot leave things as they are.

Dr Onkar Sahota AM: Look, the answer you gave, Mr Mayor, is that you have not read the report. The fact that it was commissioned by Labour councils does not diminish the relevance of it. Just because the people of those boroughs trusted Labour councils to represent them should not be counted against them --

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): No. I am not certain of the impartiality of Michael Mansfield; that is all.

Dr Onkar Sahota AM: -- just like I do not hold it against people for trusting you as Mayor. I do not think being commissioned by five Labour councils diminishes the relevance of the report at all when you look at the evidence.

The evidence is this, Mr Mayor. I really come at this question from an inequalities point of view. You have a responsibility to reduce inequalities and make sure there is access to good healthcare across London. The London North West Healthcare NHS Trust performs the worst in A&E in the country, worse than all other A&Es. The nurse vacancy rate across London is 17% and in North West London it is 28%.

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): Yes, certainly.

Dr Onkar Sahota AM: There are inequalities here. There are clear data marks that show that since the closure of two A&Es in Hammersmith and Charing Cross things have gotten worse. Of course the people who put forward the plans will say that it is working. Turkeys never vote for Christmas.

The question I am asking is: what have you done, as the Mayor of London, to look at the inequalities that are taking place and to address them?

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): Back to the impartiality of the report, obviously, I do not necessarily impugn the good intentions of Labour boroughs. I happen to be familiar with a lot of the work of Michael Mansfield QC over many years and he does not strike me as being a man of the centre, shall we say.

Dr Onkar Sahota AM: He was not the only commissioner.

Jennette Arnold OBE AM (Chair): Can we get an answer to the question, Mr Mayor, please?

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): On what we have done and on health inequalities in London, you will be familiar with the basic data, which is that life expectancy has massively increased in this city. People are living longer. The fascinating thing --

Dr Onkar Sahota AM: Health and life inequalities have increased.

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

Dr Onkar Sahota AM: Yes, they have.

Jennette Arnold OBE AM (Chair): Assembly Member, listen to the answer, please.

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): Life expectancy has --

Dr Onkar Sahota AM: Mr Mayor, my question was --

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): Can I just --

Dr Onkar Sahota AM: My question was: what have you done about inequality in North West London?

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): We have reduced inequalities because --

Dr Onkar Sahota AM: No, you have not.

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): We have reduced inequalities because what has happened is that the gap in life expectancy between the richest and the poorest in our city has diminished over the last eight years. All life expectancy has increased very substantially but the gap in life expectancy between the poorest boroughs and the richest boroughs has gone down. When I became Mayor it was about five-and-a-half years, the gap in life expectancy --

Dr Onkar Sahota AM: Mr Mayor --

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): Can I just finish my point? It is now down to about three-and-a-half years.

Dr Onkar Sahota AM: Hang on. You want to answer the question that you want to answer. Please answer the question that I asked.

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): I have just answered you.

Dr Onkar Sahota AM: I do not want you to answer the question that you want to answer. You get zero marks for that. I want you to answer the question that I have asked you, which is: what have you done to look at the inequalities in the north of London? What have you done about it and have you looked at it independently yourself?

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): As I have just told you --

Dr Onkar Sahota AM: The answer is no, you have not.

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): By the most important measure that you could devise, health inequalities in London have come down over this mayoralty. We have done a great deal to help Londoners in all sorts of ways but chiefly, of course, helping to make sure that people live longer and in better health by championing their needs through their rights to benefits, making sure they know that they can heat their homes, giving them free travel and making sure that they are part of a dynamic and growing economy. That is the fundamental reason why you are seeing substantial increases in life expectancy.

Jennette Arnold OBE AM (Chair): Dr Sahota, you are right to feel aggrieved. Your question is specifically about North West London. If the Mayor has no details about North West London, will he just say that and then offer to provide you that information at a later date?

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): I have given a general answer about health inequalities in London. It applies to North West London as much as to anywhere else. As I have said, I do not happen to think that the report by --

Dr Onkar Sahota AM: Mr Mayor, people – your constituents and my constituents – are getting worse service in North West London and you are doing nothing about it. That is the bottom line of the answer.

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): No.

Dr Onkar Sahota AM: You have given me a waffling answer to the question that you wanted to answer, not the question that I have asked --

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): No, you --

Dr Onkar Sahota AM: -- and you get zero marks for it.

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): You are part of a party that endlessly tries to weaponise the NHS. You play upon people's fears.

Jennette Arnold OBE AM (Chair): OK. Mr Mayor, let us move on. Have you finished?

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): You play upon people's fears of reforms that are driven --

Jennette Arnold OBE AM (Chair): Mr Mayor, we are not going to record that --

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

Jennette Arnold OBE AM (Chair): -- because it is quite clear that you have answered the question. You have talked about the generalities and then made reference to North West London. Dr Sahota, do you have any further questions?

Dr Onkar Sahota AM: No, thank you.

Jennette Arnold OBE AM (Chair): Thank you. Let us move on to the next question.

2016/0144 - Domestic Abuse

Kemi Badenoch AM

According to a report by Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary, police forces in England and Wales are on the verge of being "overwhelmed" by "staggering" increases in reports of domestic abuse. What measures have the Metropolitan Police Service put in place to ensure that it is not overwhelmed by a sharp increase in reports of domestic abuse?

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): Thank you very much, Kemi. Look, domestic abuse is, absolutely, an appalling crime. We are seeing much more reporting of it. It is difficult to know how to evaluate that. It may be because people are more confident about coming forward. What we have done, though, to deal with the big increase is we have increased staffing levels for domestic abuse by 30% in 2015 and 18,500 frontline officers have specialised training now in how to deal with domestic abuse.

One thing that will make a big difference is body-worn cameras, which the Assembly has campaigned for and which will now be worn by a vast majority of officers. They will enable us to get a lot of data about what is going on with domestic abuse. We have also put £5 million into the independent domestic violence advocates (IDVAs) across London to help people to come forward. This is something that will help us to reduce crime of all types because somebody who is willing to engage in domestic abuse is very likely to commit other crimes as well. It is a major part of our crime-fighting strategy.

Kemi Badenoch AM: Thank you, Mr Mayor. I do agree with you that the MPS is doing a lot of good work on this. I note the 30% increase in staffing levels and the rollout of body-worn cameras. All of these things will make a big difference. The follow-up questions that I have are about finding even more ways to improve.

My first question is about something you mentioned in September last year. You said that there was a project that was identifying the gaps in the MPS's response to domestic violence. Has this work been completed and will it be made publically available?

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): I am so sorry, Kemi. I cannot give you the answer to that. I do not know whether that work has been completed. I have tried to give you a flavour of the ways in which we have increased the response to domestic violence – the increase in the staffing levels, the work with body-worn cameras and the IDVAs – but if there is some further information I can give you I would be very happy to write to you.

Kemi Badenoch AM: Fine. Thank you for that. My next question is a little bit more operational. When we had our report on online hate crime, it turned out that the Community Safety Unit, that was set up to tackle online hate crime – or hate crime in general – was spending most of its time investigating domestic violence cases. Given that that is not what it was set up to do, how is the MPS making sure that domestic violence cases are not being investigated by units set up for a different purpose?

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): Sorry, to make sure domestic violence cases are being investigated by the wrong unit?

Kemi Badenoch AM: Yes, effectively.

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): I would hope that officers had a general understanding of the issues. As I said, 18,500 officers have training now in this field. Every MPS officer, ultimately, should be able to deal with these issues. Yes, we have a big specialised unit but I would like everybody to be good at handling it.

Kemi Badenoch AM: OK. It is more of an operational question about making sure that while we are increasing staffing levels that cases are not going to the wrong place. Maybe that is something that I will raise at the Police and Crime Committee specifically and ask the MPS about.

Just finally, I know that the increased reporting has had an effect in this spike and that there is a limit to what any Mayor can do, but while we are talking about getting the reporting up, what preventative measures can be taken to stop domestic violence occurring at such a regular rate in the first place? I do not know if you remember the horrible case about the *EastEnders* actress Sian Blake, whose body they found.

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): Terrible, yes.

Kemi Badenoch AM: Things like that are at the forefront of people's minds and while a lot more people are coming forward and while that is great, is there anything that you think can be done? In the Police and Crime

Committee we talked about alcohol-fuelled crime and people cutting alcohol consumption. I do not know if that is using a sledgehammer to crack a nut but --

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): No, that is a big part of it. The sobriety test trials that we have done - making sure that people who are particularly domestic violence offenders carry monitors on them that they cannot remove to test whether they are drinking again so that if they breach their bail conditions they are straight back into prison - have been working very well. That could be particularly helpful in tackling domestic violence because very often this is, as you rightly say, alcohol-driven.

I want to see all Londoners feel confident in reporting domestic violence. The men who engage in this - and it is overwhelmingly men - have to know that society will come down on them very hard and that the women they abuse are going to find somewhere safe to go. That is why we have invested in the rape crisis centres, in domestic violence counselling and in the IDVAs. The crucial thing is that the victims should have confidence that the person who has power over them could himself become the subject of a criminal inquiry and all the rest of it. They have to know that we are going to come down hard on them.

Kemi Badenoch AM: Absolutely. Thank you very much, Mr Mayor.

2016/0174 - Combating traffic-related pollution using electric vehicles

Valerie Shawcross CBE AM

Given the traffic-related air pollution crisis facing London, do you regret having failed in your manifesto pledges to extend the Tram network or to increase the number of electric vehicles in the GLA Fleet to 1,000?

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): Taking the tram first and the extension of trams, we have massively increased the volume of passengers on the Croydon trams. We have put in some new trams and have greatly expanded that network. We have not yet done a big extension either to Sutton or to Crystal Palace. That is perfectly true. I would like to have done those projects.

In the end, the one that has the best business case is the Sutton extension but it does require a very considerable borough commitment to help us with the financing and to go for the big development that will be entailed to raise the cash. At the moment, that is where we are. Although people want the tram in principle, they are not yet happy, Val [Valerie Shawcross CBE AM], with the idea of the scale of development that would be involved. It is a negotiation that is going on now between TfL and the borough.

I heard what Zac Goldsmith [Zac Goldsmith MP, Mayoral candidate] has said about it. He has been very positive about it in his campaign and I perfectly understand that.

Valerie Shawcross CBE AM: Sorry. The question is about you, Mr Mayor.

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): That is where I am. That is as far as we have been able to get.

On the electric vehicles, yes, in an ideal world I would like to have had many more electric vehicles on the streets. We do have a large number on the London streets, many more than there were before. There are about 54,000 hybrid or electric vehicles on the streets of London now and that is a huge increase. Pure electric has been slower to get off the ground than I would have liked, basically because they are still relatively expensive and people are still suffering from range anxiety. We have a few of them in our various fleets. It is the way to go and the ULEZ will drive it forward much faster.

Valerie Shawcross CBE AM: Thank you for that answer, Mr Mayor, and in particular that you are still supportive of the tram.

Specifically on the GLA fleet, I accept that there are difficulties around all of these issues but that is the bit that you do have control over.

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): Yes.

Valerie Shawcross CBE AM: You did have a manifesto pledge to increase the number of zero-emission electric vehicles in the various GLA fleets to 1,000. In 2008 there were 81 electric vehicles in the fleet. Last year the figure was 139. If the next Mayor carries on at the same snail's pace, we will not have 1,000 electric vehicles in the GLA fleet until 2139. Is the issue about money or technology or did you just take your eye off the ball?

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): It is basically money. They are considerably more expensive. We are getting --

Valerie Shawcross CBE AM: A Routemaster bus is considerably more expensive, Mr Mayor, and that is not very good.

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): They are wonderful and I am delighted that you support that investment in hybrid technology.

Valerie Shawcross CBE AM: No, I do not. I do not support the Routemaster buses. However, we did support electric and so you could have bought a few.

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): They are much more expensive. The trouble is that for an electric bus, particularly for a double-decker, you have to rely on it to do hundreds of miles a day and to not conk out. You have to have a very efficient recharging system. We are now in discussions with a Chinese company, as it happens, about a double-decker electric vehicle. It does look very promising but it would be very expensive. I have to think about the cost to TfL of advancing very fast when changes in battery technology are bringing the costs down. We have already, as I say, about 1,600 hybrid buses.

Valerie Shawcross CBE AM: OK. Thank you, Mr Mayor.

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): There are going to be 3,000 by 2020. The first five pure electric double-decker buses --

Valerie Shawcross CBE AM: We have that data, thank you, Mr Mayor.

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): -- are coming into service this year. A great deal of progress has been made. I just do not think Londoners would want us to be spending hundreds of thousands of pounds, if not millions of pounds, on every unit for Chinese-made buses when the price is not yet affordable for Londoners. The technology is not quite there yet.

Valerie Shawcross CBE AM: I will have to leave it there, Mr Mayor. Thank you.

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): We do have loads of electric cars with the London Fire Brigade, I am pleased to see, 57.

Navin Shah AM: Mr Mayor, I have a specific question about my constituency and clean buses but, before I ask that, can you tell us what your plans are for rolling out clean buses in outer London, very briefly?

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): I want to see clean buses everywhere. We are looking at all technologies. As I said just now to Val [Valerie Shawcross CBE AM], we have a large number now of hybrid buses. That is increasing fast. We have plans to introduce not just electric single-decker but electric double-decker buses and we are going as fast as is consistent with good business practice. What we cannot do is spend way over the odds when the technology is changing so quickly.

Navin Shah AM: Coming to specifics, Mr Mayor, I have recently submitted a petition on behalf of four of our resident associations in Brent about buses on Chamberlayne Road in Brent. I welcome your recent announcement on biofuel buses, which is in a positive direction. As I understand, Metrolink runs all seven routes in Chamberlayne Road and so the expected 15% reduction in carbon emissions is also welcome.

The question is whether you can let me know when our residents can have the introduction of clean buses on Chamberlayne Road. The petition calls for clean buses by March this year. I would like to have your response to residents on whether that is feasible and, if not, what you reckon TfL can do to expedite it. There is a serious concern about major air pollution and nitrogen dioxide --

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): On Chamberlayne Road, yes. Thank you for bringing that up, Navin. I will look into it. I do not know the answer. I will certainly look at the petition that you have given. If we can give some undertakings to residents in that area, then we certainly shall, but I do not know the state of our preparations at the moment.

Navin Shah AM: There is a huge volume of buses. I have figures here. There are 1,700 buses. Sorry. I will give you the figures as to the volume --

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): There are loads of buses using that route.

Navin Shah AM: -- on Chamberlayne Road.

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): Look, let us see what we can do. I cannot make any promises now but, if we can clean up the buses on that route, then we certainly should.

Navin Shah AM: Thank you.

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): We tried to do it in Putney where Dick [Richard Tracey AM] has been campaigning for a long time. This is a big job now for us.

Richard Tracey AM: Mr Mayor, you know very well that my colleague Steve O'Connell [AM] and I are constantly supportive of extending the Tramlink and indeed Val Shawcross and I were present at Wimbledon to see the improvements that were recently inaugurated.

You have mentioned the question of finding the money for extending the tram. Surely, when Sadiq Khan MP, the Labour aspirant to be Mayor, talks about freezing or reducing fares, it is hardly a practical step for getting the money to do this when TfL are worried about their own future.

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): No. You are completely right, Dick. It would be catastrophic because not only would it be impossible to deliver schemes such as a tram to Crystal Palace, Sutton or any other part of south London, but you would take away the ability of TfL to deliver absolutely core projects such

as the upgrading of the Piccadilly line or Bank station or Tube upgrades. It would be an absolute disaster. £2 billion out of the business plan would hobble this city and it is not the right way forward.

Richard Tracey AM: Indeed. Thank you.

Steve O'Connell AM: My colleague, Dick Tracey [Richard Tracey AM], has stolen my later question in a much more thorough way than I probably could. I am pleased to hear your continued commitment for the tram. I believe that we are perhaps inching our way rather painfully over these last seven-and-a-half years towards, hopefully, a happy outcome, particularly around the Sutton tram.

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): Yes. Thank you, Steve, for all the work that you have done on that.

Steve O'Connell AM: Certainly one of the mayoral candidates, Zac Goldsmith MP, has given me and others his commitment to deliver that tram, but I rather hope that when he inherits your seat he will also inherit something a little bit firmer in the TfL plan towards the tram.

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): There is a lot of stuff in the TfL plan about the tram. As I said to Val [Valerie Shawcross AM], the critical thing is to get the funding package and also to get agreement with those parts of south London that are going to receive the tram that this is something they devoutly want and indeed are prepared to help to pay for, not least by engaging in some of the regeneration and homebuilding. I remember vividly - with you - standing up on a bench in Sutton town centre and making a passionate speech about the tram, the peroration of which consisted of, "We all want to see a tram in Sutton, do we not?" At that point everybody looked completely blank and then one person said, "No".

Steve O'Connell AM: We have moved on since then. That was some time ago. We have had a consultation in Sutton that has proven there is a demand for it. Your Deputy Mayor for Transport [Isabel Dedring] is leading those conversations with the local boroughs, which admittedly a while back were slow in coming forward but are getting with the action now.

There is to be a further iteration of the TfL plan, an annual iteration, which there always is, and I would rather expect a firm commitment in that plan to the delivery of the Sutton tram. Hopefully you can push towards that.

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): Absolutely.

Steve O'Connell AM: It would be an excellent legacy for you and for south London.

Jennette Arnold OBE AM (Chair): OK. Thank you. I wonder if every time the Conservative candidate Zac Goldsmith or the Labour candidate Sadiq Khan is mentioned I should have a list that mentions Caroline Pidgeon [MBE AM], the Liberal Democratic candidate, and Siân Berry [mayoral candidate] --

Steve O'Connell AM: Hear, hear. I will put them into my question somehow!

Jennette Arnold OBE AM (Chair): -- in the name of fairness with all the free publicity that some candidates are getting via this meeting!

Tony Arbour AM (Deputy Chairman): It is not doing them any good, is it?

Jennette Arnold OBE AM (Chair): It was just a thought before Mr Cleverly gets up, just a Chair's thought. OK. Assembly Member Deputy Mayor Evans.

Roger Evans AM: I undertake now not to mention the names of any mayoral candidates because, clearly, it will make such a difference to the election result! My colleagues are obviously delighted with the news that you are giving them about extensions to the tram in south London. For those of us who live north of the river, Mr Mayor, can you just reassure us that your predecessor's expensive and disruptive proposals for a West London Tram and a Cross River Tram will remain in the dustbin of history where they belong?

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): Of course. They rather remind me, as policies, of the current Labour Party policy on the nuclear deterrent, which is to spend a lot of money on some rigs but to not have a nuclear deterrent on them. The last Labour administration spent a fortune, £34 million, on the West London Tram without producing a tram. I certainly agree with you there. Those projects were characteristic of Labour. They involved huge public expense with no visible result. We do not want that approach.

Of course, Crossrail, which is going ahead on time and on budget, will be massive for your area, Roger, and you have campaigned vigorously for improvements to Crossrail to make those stations even better for your residents.

Jennette Arnold OBE AM (Chair): Let us move on to the next question.

2016/0168 - Housing

Tom Copley AM

Are Government reforms making it easier to deliver housing that meets the housing needs of Londoners?

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): Thanks, Tom. Yes, the Government's Spending Review has helped a great deal. We have a funding increase for affordable homes. We have a £2.5 billion package for London to deliver at least an extra 60,000 homes for ownership by 2021. The Park Royal site, as I have already said, is massive - 25,000 homes - and that is on top of the nearly 100,000 affordable homes delivered so far over this mayoralty.

We have had a long discussion already about making sure that we have two-for-one replacement of the high-value council homes under Right to Buy. The Housing Bill generally offers the prospect of giving Londoners, 86% of whom want to buy their own home, all sorts of prospects: access to Starter Homes, Help to Buy and all sorts of stuff like that.

Tom Copley AM: As we know - and we have been over this already - the two-for-one replacement is a lie. It is not like-for-like. You are replacing council homes with homes that a lot of people would not regard as affordable. In fact, you have a Housing and Planning Bill that defines 'affordable housing' as up to £450,000 in London, meanwhile centralising huge amounts of power in the hands of the Secretary of State to impose Starter Homes on boroughs and calling it 'localism'. It is the kind of abuse of language that [George] Orwell [20th century British author] would have recognised, is it not?

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): Nonsense. At least, Tom, you are honest and consistent in your approach. You basically think that affordable rent is the way forward and you are content for people on even very high incomes to be living in social rented homes. That is quite wrong. I think it is absolutely monstrous that the state should be subsidising --

Tom Copley AM: Mr Mayor, I want --

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): Certainly I want to see more affordable rent homes but I want to see Londoners given a chance to buy a share in the value of their property. It cannot be right that there are basically two groups who do OK in London, the very rich who are able to afford a mortgage and then the people who are entitled to social housing. I want to see the huge numbers of Londoners who fall in the middle categories, who do not get help, who do not have the capital to afford a mortgage --

Tom Copley AM: We all do.

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): We are helping them --

Tom Copley AM: In the post-war period, the way that we have achieved that is to build more homes for social rent. That ultimately has helped more people into home ownership because it has helped --

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): Yes. Just remind me --

Tom Copley AM: Hang on. It has helped people to save. Now, at yesterday's --

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): There is a statistic about how many council homes Labour has built --

Tom Copley AM: Hang on. I have not finished. At yesterday's Housing Committee we had the City of Westminster's Director of Housing [and Regeneration, Barbara Brownlee] and she told us this. She said:

"The Housing and Planning Bill is a swiftly moving beast. Should all the changes go through in anything like the shape they are proposed, it is doubtful that we will have a Housing Revenue Account business plan in four years. The high-value void sale in a borough like Westminster will have a devastating and huge effect and I doubt that you will even have a Housing Department of any description."

That is what the Director of Housing at the City of Westminster told us yesterday. Why are you supporting a Bill that will make the provision of genuinely affordable housing more difficult in inner London boroughs?

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): You rightly said that the Labour Party should apologise for its failure --

Tom Copley AM: No. I want you to answer the question that I have put to you, Mr Mayor.

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): -- over 13 years to build as many council homes --

Tom Copley AM: I am sure that everyone watching will note the evasiveness of the Mayor on this point --

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): I would like to know why neither you --

Tom Copley AM: -- by not providing an answer and showing contempt for Londoners --

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): -- nor anyone else has apologised.

Tom Copley AM: -- showing contempt for the hundreds of thousands of Londoners on the housing waiting list --

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): I will defend the record of this administration --

Tom Copley AM: -- and showing contempt for the workers on low incomes in the City of Westminster who do the jobs the City relies upon --

Jennette Arnold OBE AM (Chair): OK. Enough.

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): -- in building more affordable homes than any previous administration, including the Labour administration. You belong to an ideological --

Jennette Arnold OBE AM (Chair): Enough, Mr Mayor.

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): Tom is probably the only Corbynista in the Assembly.

Jennette Arnold OBE AM (Chair): Mr Mayor.

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): He is.

Jennette Arnold OBE AM (Chair): He is not, I can assure you.

Tom Copley AM: I voted for Yvette Cooper [Labour Party leadership candidate].

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): I support the Bill.

Jennette Arnold OBE AM (Chair): Mr Mayor --

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): Sorry.

Jennette Arnold OBE AM (Chair): That was not even good pantomime, really, was it?

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

Tom Copley AM: I have been in a few and, no, it was not.

Jennette Arnold OBE AM (Chair): Do you have any other questions?

Tom Copley AM: Yes, I do.

Jennette Arnold OBE AM (Chair): Can you put another question and see if you can get an answer?

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): I am very happy to answer the question.

Tom Copley AM: What I would like is for him, rather than to obfuscate and to evade, to answer directly the point that was made at the Housing Committee yesterday by the Director of Housing of an inner London borough. Why are you supporting policies that will make it almost impossible for them to provide genuinely affordable housing and, as she has said, could lead to the end of their Housing Department?

Jennette Arnold OBE AM (Chair): Thank you. It is a reasonable question.

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): I support the policy because, as I said earlier on, it will lead to a two-for-one replacement with the sale of high-value council homes.

Tom Copley AM: Not in the City of Westminster.

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): It cannot be right that in a city where there is an appalling shortage of housing there are some council homes that are worth in excess of £1 million when those receipts could be taken and be used to build many more affordable homes. It is absolutely incredible that you continue to defend the state possession of these assets and the state subsidy of people on high incomes living in social housing. That is the wrong way forward. You need to build many more affordable homes. The receipts from high-value council homes can be used to do this. We now have a commitment to a two-for-one replacement rate that comes on top of record numbers of affordable homes being built in this city.

Tom Copley AM: You know full well that it is not like-for-like. Zac Goldsmith [MP] told the *Camden New Journal* that there is a 'mathematical obstacle' to replacing lost social housing in inner London. Why do you think he believes that we should be providing more unaffordable homes in inner London and replacing much-needed social homes with £450,000 Starter Homes in outer London?

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): That is not true. I have explained many times in this place that they do not have to be £450,000 Starter Homes. There is a huge variety of products and the median household income for our part-buy/part-rent schemes for two people was £37,000. You add two incomes and people who were on £37,000 collectively were getting part-buy/part-rent schemes. Already 56,000 have been helped into such homes.

That is the sort of policy that you find anathema because you only want people to be in homes that are wholly owned by the state. I do not think that is the right way forward. That is not what Londoners want. Yes, we do need more affordable housing but we need affordable housing of all kinds. This Housing Bill will help us to achieve that now that it has Zac Goldsmith's important provision inserted into it.

2016/0137 - Absconding while on bail for terrorism offences

Tony Arbour AM

Abu Rumaysah absconded while on bail for terrorism offences and is now suspected to have featured in a Daesh video making threats against the UK and murdering captives. What steps are being taken to ensure that individuals suspected of serious criminal offences in London are not able to abscond and commit crimes in other jurisdictions?

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): Tony, this is a response to the horrific scenes we saw from Syria - or wherever it was - involving what seems to be a British citizen, somebody from London, who seems to have absconded while on police bail. I very much support the suggestions that have been made by Assistant Commissioner of the MPS Mark Rowley and others that what you should have, instead of the police bail, for anybody who is charged under the 2000 Terrorism Act should be bailed under a roster of judges 24 hours a day. There should be absolutely no question of them being allowed to leave the court or anywhere else without their passport being produced. That is the solution for outrageous cases like this. Police bail obviously is an imperfect instrument for dealing with suspects such as Mr Siddhartha Dhar and I would like to see a judicial approach.

Tony Arbour AM (Deputy Chairman): I am pleased to hear you say that. The incredulity I had in relation to this is that when bail is customarily given by police it is given as conditional bail. In this case it seemed to me that the obvious thing that should have happened was to say to this man, "We will grant you bail upon surrender of the passport".

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): Yes.

Tony Arbour AM (Deputy Chairman): It is nothing whatever to do with confiscation. It is customary for such a person to be held in the cells until the passport is produced.

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): That is right. The difficulty is, as I understand it, that the police powers in this matter are unclear to say the least. The point that has been put to me is that police bail is not as binding as judicial bail. That is why I believe that this should now be transferred to a judge. There should be no mucking around. If you are being charged under the 2000 Terrorism Act, or indeed any prevention of terrorism Act, you should have to produce your passport before you are allowed to move a muscle.

Tony Arbour AM (Deputy Chairman): Suppose, Mr Mayor, such a person is able to retain his passport despite the fact that he may already have been arrested for terrorist offences. What controls are there over such a person taking his family abroad with him? Manifestly, if someone has been arrested for this but for one reason or another is allowed to retain his passport before being charged --

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): Look, he was not. He was allowed to retain his passport, basically, only because he broke the conditions of his bail. Therefore, he should not have been allowed to travel anyway.

Tony Arbour AM (Deputy Chairman): I accept that point but, manifestly, there must be negotiations for someone who has been arrested for such an offence - before charge - for the police to have reasonable suspicion that such a person has committed an offence.

Under those circumstances, what relationship is there between the MPS and police abroad to say that this person, who has been arrested but not charged and has not surrendered his passport, is travelling abroad? Is there any way in which that can be notified? If there is not, should there not be?

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): Hang on a moment. You are talking about people who have been arrested but not charged?

Tony Arbour AM (Deputy Chairman): Yes.

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): He had been charged, had he not? Suffice it to say that if he is on bail and one of the conditions of his bail is that he surrenders his passport, then - just to get back to my original answer - he should be under judicial bail and there should be absolutely no question that he has to produce his passport before he can go anywhere. Therefore, there can be no question of his relatives accompanying him anywhere.

Tony Arbour AM (Deputy Chairman): All right, Mr Mayor. I will not pursue the matter further except to say that this is one of those cases, of which we have increasing numbers, where the police appear to make themselves a laughing stock. Indeed, the entire system appears to make itself a laughing stock and I very much hope --

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): Can I just address that point, respectfully?

Tony Arbour AM (Deputy Chairman): Yes.

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): The MPS and the counterterrorism units do an absolutely outstanding job – and have done an incredible job over all of my time in office – in fighting what is a very substantial threat from thousands of individuals whom they monitor every day. The fact that we have had relatively few serious terrorist incidents over the last few years is a testament to their hard work. To call them a ‘laughing stock’ is pushing it.

Tony Arbour AM (Deputy Chairman): Let me just say --

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): By comparison to many other forces in Europe, they have done an outstanding job. Their intelligence-gathering is outstanding and the level of work that they perform is absolutely outstanding.

Tony Arbour AM (Deputy Chairman): My respect for the police in regard to antiterrorism is second to none and I was not criticising them for that. I was merely criticising the particular circumstances of this case, where it appeared – on the basis of the facts that you have gone into yourself just now – that police bail for one reason or another was not able to ensure that this man’s passport was taken away from him. As I say, I am not absolutely convinced by that. This gave people an opportunity to say, “Is it not strange that there is a loophole in this particular case?” I do not criticise the police at all. As I say, my admiration for them is as great as yours. We need to tighten up on such matters.

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): Yes. I quite agree with that. You did say, though, Tony, that it was one of a series of incidents that was making the police into a laughing stock and I take exception to that.

Tony Arbour AM (Deputy Chairman): Yes, but it was not in relation to terrorism, Mr Mayor, that I was saying that. One only has to see the leading story in today’s newspapers, which makes the police look a laughing stock and of course has nothing whatever to do with terrorism.

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): Forgive me. You have the advantage there, Tony. I read the *Telegraph* and the *Financial Times*. What is the lead story?

Tony Arbour AM (Deputy Chairman): The case of the child being abused.

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): All right. I am sorry.

Jennette Arnold OBE AM (Chair): Let us move on to the next question.

2016/0173 - Privatisation of Police Services

Joanne McCartney AM

Will the Mayor confirm that private companies such as Serco and G4S have not been used by the Met to perform any core policing functions?

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): Thanks, Joanne. No, we do not engage any private company to do any core policing service, although obviously we do try to outsource stuff where we can to save money. Non-core functions such as information and communications technology, human resources and transport have so far contributed to savings of £387 million. We do not outsource core functions.

Joanne McCartney AM: Mr Mayor, can I ask you to clarify that and get back to me? *The Times* stated that the MPS has paid both G4S and Serco for the recruitment of ex-detectives and ex-police officers. When I put this to Craig Mackey [QPM, Deputy Commissioner, MPS] in the Budget and Performance Committee [5 January 2016] just a couple of weeks ago he said, “We go back to a number of companies”, and, “People will go on as an ‘agency’ status”. I believe that was for some of the current investigations including some of the recent child abuse investigations and operations such as Withern, Madeleine McCann and so forth. Could you look into that?

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

Joanne McCartney AM: Particularly with those two companies, given that they are under investigation by the Serious Fraud Office at the moment for mis-billing with regards to tagging and given that some of their employees have recently been alleged to have misbehaved at a young offenders institute --

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): Yes, I saw that.

Joanne McCartney AM: It was the subject of a *Panorama* [investigation]. We have to be very careful where we obtain services. You will look into this?

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): I certainly will. I am just reading the brief here and it suggests that we do occasionally recruit officers to conduct interviews through an agency.

Joanne McCartney AM: I believe that the MPS goes to Reed Employment Agency, which then subcontracts from G4S and Serco.

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): Yes.

Joanne McCartney AM: Would you look into that for me?

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): I will. In all these cases we are talking about ex-police officers who have been recruited to help conduct interviews.

Joanne McCartney AM: Yes. That is my second point, actually, because we now know that the MPS is 800 detectives short. In its submission to the Police Remuneration Review Body it has stated that there is an urgent operational need for detectives, “It is a very real need for our operational effectiveness”. If there is a need for detective capacity and the MPS is having to go outside to private companies, that appears to me to be the creeping privatisation of core policing, which gives me concern.

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): That is a bit of a stretch. What is certainly the case is that the MPS, because it is the biggest crime-fighting agency in the country, has a responsibility to all these national cases, like [Madeleine] McCann or Yewtree or whatever. Yes, it is perfectly true, as far as I understand it, that they may simply want extra pairs of hands to do some of the interviewing.

Joanne McCartney AM: The allegation is that they are being used on investigations and that they are paid for by private companies. That is the concern. Would you look into that? It would be very helpful.

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): I understand the concern. I am not sure that I share completely your horror at recruiting through Reed ex-police officers, who may be very competent and who can be very useful at helping to do these investigations, when you have some political pressure for the MPS to cover this huge child abuse case or whatever it happens to be.

Joanne McCartney AM: The Commissioner said that investigations should be done by warranted officers. If they are not warranted, that is --

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): Yes.

Joanne McCartney AM: My final question to you, Mr Mayor, if I can, is about core policing functions. I note that the Home Secretary today is about to make some announcements about volunteers - not special constables but volunteers - being given extra powers. There are reports today that powers may be extended to volunteers to be able to make arrests, to detain suspects and to stop-and-search.

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): I am not familiar --

Joanne McCartney AM: Are you in favour of ordinary civilians being given those sorts of powers? They seem to be core policing powers.

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): You and I can make an arrest. Anyone can make an arrest. I would urge you to arrest the rest of the Labour group.

Joanne McCartney AM: Do you think that volunteers should be able to stop and search?

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): Obviously I have not seen the proposals that you are alluding to. I would have to study them.

Joanne McCartney AM: The Commissioner [Sir Bernard Hogan-Howe QPM, Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis] has said in the past when we have questioned him about this that if they need extra, they should increase specials and not use a third option, as it were.

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): A third course.

Joanne McCartney AM: I would have great concern with civilian volunteers doing stop-and-search. That is extremely dangerous for them and for the public.

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): I have not seen that, Joanne. You have the advantage over me; I have not seen the proposal. I am hugely in favour of specials. We had a massive increase in them. They have now gone down a bit again. I would like to see the focus there myself, but I will study the proposals.

Jennette Arnold OBE AM (Chair): Agreed. Yes, Mayor, we have eight more questions and so can we now get some quick, sharp answers from you?

2016/0033 - Threats to London's green spaces

Jenny Jones AM

Do you share my concern that the combined pressures of Government spending cuts, housing and school place pressures are becoming a significant threat to London's green spaces?

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): Thanks so much, Jenny. I do not think that you should be pessimistic about green spaces in London. We have more green space than any other European city. London is vast. The thing that we should be doing is improving and upgrading our green space by investing in parks, in

planting trees and in generally improving the amenities and quality of life of Londoners. We have done a huge amount over the last few years to do that.

Where there is a loss of green space, it has been very small, and in the planning applications that I see it almost always involves flipping a site so that a school can build on one bit of the patch whilst restoring green space in another. I am not against that.

Jenny Jones AM: You recently approved a development in Ealing on Metropolitan Open Land with a loss of 40 acres of green space. You will find when Sian Berry, the Green Party's mayoral candidate, is in this building, she will be very tough on this sort of thing. However, for example, because of Government cuts, councils are really under pressure at the moment. Bexley Council drew up a list of 27 open spaces that it was going to get rid of and is now trying to dispose - or is considering disposal - of four of those open spaces, including Old Farm Park. Do you have no concern that --

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): Of course I do, but we have invested massively in parks and in green spaces in London.

Jenny Jones AM: I just mentioned a loss of 40 acres, and in Hounslow --

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): I do not recognise --

Jenny Jones AM: -- you have got rid of a playing field, which is also Metropolitan Open Land, and so you not only lose the green space --

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): Where, in Ealing?

Jenny Jones AM: -- you lose a school's facility for sports for children.

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): Sorry, where are you saying? In Camden?

Jenny Jones AM: No, in Hounslow. It is a school academy that you approved. Also, for building on Metropolitan Open Land, your London Plan says that you have to have special circumstances. I do not see any very special circumstances.

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): Look, yes, of course it is theoretically possible to build schools in skyscrapers if that is what you really want. If that is the Green Party approach, then be honest about it. You can do that. You can shove children up in high-rise blocks. If that is, you think, a sensible way to build schools in this city, then I am interested in that Green Party policy. I happen to think that --

Jenny Jones AM: I am talking to you about loss of green space.

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): I am talking to you about why --

Jenny Jones AM: Can you please focus on the question?

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): I am talking to you about why, in some cases, it is sensible to allow schools that are already on Metropolitan Open Land to change the configuration of their sites. I do not know what you are talking about either in Ealing or in Hounslow because the cases I have seen involve expanding the footprint of the school buildings and putting the playing fields back in some other way.

Actually, if you fly over London, it has more green space and more trees. It is the most extensively - rather than intensively - developed city in Europe. It is about 659 square miles and --

Jenny Jones AM: In that case, if you are so proud of our green space --

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): -- if you are really saying that you want every new school --

Jenny Jones AM: Mr Mayor, will you reject the principle of selling off open green space to plug council gaps in their budgets? That is the issue we are talking about.

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): Of course. We do not allow that, and time after time I have refused developments on Metropolitan Open Land or on Green Belt land in London and many times we have sat and just thrown them out.

Jenny Jones AM: I do not have the details of how many that is. I would be very interested to know because here it says that you have approved 29 planning applications on protected land like Metropolitan Open Land, Green Belt and local spaces. You are approving quite a lot, are you not?

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): I am because in many cases you need that land for schools.

Jenny Jones AM: You do understand there is no new green space being created that you can just --

Tony Arbour AM (Deputy Chairman): The Garden Bridge.

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): That is a very good point, a brilliant point --

Jenny Jones AM: When Sian Berry, the Green Party mayoral candidate, is in this building, she will be looking for this --

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): -- a characteristically brilliant point by my friend Tony Arbour. Such is the genius of this mayoralty that we have prestidigitated a new green space in the middle of the city out of nowhere. *Ex nihilo*, we are creating a Garden Bridge.

Jenny Jones AM: I am so glad that you are leaving; I am so glad that I am leaving.

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): Why are you --

Jenny Jones AM: You do talk complete nonsense.

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): No. You talk complete rubbish and you have talked rubbish --

Jennette Arnold OBE AM (Chair): OK. The Green Party is out of time.

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): You talk even more rubbish than we have recycled.

Steve O'Connell AM: On the same subject but stripping schools out of it for the moment, there are proposals in Croydon as part of the consultation on the Croydon plan to downgrade many acres of Metropolitan Open Land in Shirley. There is a very strong campaign around that and that is not to build schools but to build homes and we all agree that homes are needed, but that there are sufficient brownfield spaces.

You said earlier that you have refused many such applications and I would not expect you to prejudge any particular application, but would you not agree that our green spaces in suburban areas need to be protected whilst there are still areas on brownfield sites to build the necessary homes?

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): Of course, and that is one of the reasons I am passionately against relaxing the rules on the Green Belt. The minute you do that, you take all the economic value out of the brownfield sites and so it would be absolutely crazy to do that. London needs to keep going to redevelop our brownfield sites.

Steve O'Connell AM: I would urge that if this application does come forward, there will be a degradation of protection around that green land and that, as night follows day, a planning application would follow. It may not come across your desk, but I would hope that any successor of you would turn away any application to build many homes on green spaces where there are brownfield sites appropriate, particularly in the Shirley area.

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): You are totally right.

Steve O'Connell AM: Thank you very much.

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): You are totally right and I congratulate you on your campaign.

Jennette Arnold OBE AM (Chair): Thank you.

2016/0001 - Congestion in London

Caroline Pidgeon MBE AM

What plans do you have to make the congestion charge more effective at reducing congestion?

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): Thanks, Caroline. I gave part of an answer to that earlier on.

One of the reasons we have seen a general rise in traffic is because we have a big rise in population with 120,000 more people in this city this year than last year and unbelievably rapid growth. That is something that we have to deal with. We also have a fall in the price of petrol, which is getting people into their cars in a way that most of us would think we wanted to discourage and, as I say, a huge number of Private Hire Vehicles. I have mentioned already some of the proposals that we have to try to tackle that.

We are also of course tackling congestion with all sorts of interventions on the carriageway, including the Split Cycle Offset Optimisation Technique (SCOOT) for traffic lights, which have cut delays by 12% at the junctions where we have it. We have 1,200 sites with SCOOT now across London, saving Londoners hundreds of thousands of hours sitting in traffic by managing those junctions better, and of course we have the Lane Rental Scheme for roadworks as well.

Caroline Pidgeon MBE AM: Brilliant. Thank you very much for that. Obviously any congestion really is bad for the city and has a cost.

One thing that I want to ask you about is whether you would look at, in your final few months, considering a workplace parking levy in central London. This is something that has not been considered thoroughly for probably 15 years, but City Hall as a building functions with only four parking places and they are rarely used, from what I understand. Surely it cannot be right for employers to effectively encourage their workers to drive

into central London by providing them with free parking. Will you investigate or ask TfL to look into whether this sort of levy is an option to try to tackle congestion?

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): I will look at that, actually. The whole thing is crackers. The number of people who make very short journeys in their cars to go to work in London is amazing. Much of the increase we are seeing on the roads is of course caused by white vans that are driven by internet shopping, and that is a real problem we have to deal with. We have still too many people in cars and too many people in limos going around feeling grand and posh because they are in the back of a car when really they should be on a bicycle or on the Tube or on a bus.

Caroline Pidgeon MBE AM: Is this something that you will properly consider and ask TfL to look at? It is a power that you have under the GLA Act and it is not something that you have done over the last seven-and-a-half years.

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): I have not done it, but I know that we do have that power. I will look at it. As I say, I sometimes cannot believe people's decision to get into a car and drive a very short distance to work. I just cannot understand it.

Caroline Pidgeon MBE AM: Thank you very much.

Jennette Arnold OBE AM (Chair): Thank you. Let us move on.

2016/0171 - Incident Response Units

Fiona Twycross AM

Do you think that five London Fire Brigade Incident Response Units are sufficient to provide London with adequate cover in the event of a chemical, biological, radiological or nuclear attack?

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): Thanks, Fiona. Yes, it is actually six Incident Response Units to respond to a chemical, biological, radiological or nuclear attack, and obviously the risk of such an attack would increase under Labour's very interesting new nuclear deterrent policy, which is not to have a deterrent.

Fiona Twycross AM: Could I ask for an answer, Chair, rather than comments about this?

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): I am content that the six units that we have are sufficient to provide an effective response.

Fiona Twycross AM: When you take into account the one that is permanently on loan to the training provider for training purposes, it is actually five. Do you remain confident in that capacity?

Also, with the fact that the Prime Minister has admitted that there have been seven terror plots that have been foiled in the last six months, cutting response units at a time when the United Kingdom (UK) threat level has been severe for over a year now seems an unusual move. Did they ask for your view or permission on this before they took this action? Did they consult you as Mayor of London about whether you felt it was appropriate?

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): The Fire Brigade?

Fiona Twycross AM: Not the Fire Brigade. This was a Government decision. This is a Government decision to remove these vehicles from London. It has nothing to do with the Fire Brigade.

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): I am certain that the London Fire and Emergency Planning Authority (LFEPA) was consulted. I am afraid --

Fiona Twycross AM: LFEPA was not consulted. Unfortunately the Chair [Gareth Bacon AM, Chairman of LFEPA] is not here today to confirm whether or not he was, but LFEPA was not consulted on this. This was dealt with in a review document that has not been published, in which the decision was announced when the House of Commons had risen just before Christmas [2015] and the vehicles were removed before there was an opportunity to debate this.

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): I know the enthusiasm of the Labour Party to have pointless vehicles of all kinds, not least nuclear submarines without warheads and all the rest of it.

Fiona Twycross AM: This is irrelevant. Chair, this is not relevant.

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): I understand your basic ideology, which is that it does not matter what function they have provided; they exist because that is what the unions want. The reality is that we are confident that the six --

Fiona Twycross AM: This is irrelevant, Chair. Can I just ask you, Mayor --

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): Yes, I am giving you the answer. We think that the six units that we have are adequate.

Fiona Twycross AM: Were you consulted on it, then? If you think that this is correct, were you consulted on this and have you seen the review document?

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): I was not personally consulted on this, as far as I can remember, but I am confident --

Fiona Twycross AM: Who relating to this sort of cover in London was consulted by the Department of Communities and Local Government before this decision was taken?

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): Look, I will have to get back to you.

Fiona Twycross AM: This is an issue --

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): Will you forgive me? I --

Fiona Twycross AM: I would welcome you getting you getting back to me and other Members of the Assembly on this. Also, I would ask whether you would lobby the Government to provide further funding for the fire service to ensure the safety of the capital in the event of terrorism, as Theresa May [The Rt. Honourable Theresa May MP, Home Secretary] did with the police, particularly now it has gone to over --

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): Look, I have not. Obviously I will wait and there may be a further question about the LFEPA budget and so on, but my general principle is to look at the purpose and the function of these appliances and these units and I do not believe --

Fiona Twycross AM: You are saying that you did not and you are saying that you were not asked. How can you take a view on them if you were not asked?

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): Can I just finish my answer? I do not believe in having them for the sake of having them.

Fiona Twycross AM: You were not consulted on this and so how can you take a view on something on which you were not consulted? I am happy that that is a non-answer, but --

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): You are asserting that, if I may say so. I will have to check to what extent we were consulted, but I am very content with the arrangements that we have for tackling chemical, biological or nuclear radiation in London. The interesting question is what is the Labour Party policy on nuclear.

Fiona Twycross AM: No, this is not relevant, Chair. This is not relevant.

Jennette Arnold OBE AM (Chair): OK, next question. Let us move on.

2016/0169 - London Rental Standard (1)

Tom Copley AM

Will 100,000 private landlords be signed up to the London Rental Standard by May 2016 as you pledged during the last mayoral election?

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): Yes. The London Rental Standard has been a great success in the sense that we now have 135,000 properties registered under the London Rental Standard as opposed to nil during the Labour mayoralty. I would rather have 135,000 homes registered than zero. That is good. Obviously there is a long way to go, but the London Rental Standard is helping to benchmark good practice across the city and I am pleased with the progress we are making so far.

Tom Copley AM: Could you remind us what your target was for the number of landlords to be signed up by May 2016, Mr Mayor?

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): We wanted 100,000 landlords. We have in fact 135,000 properties.

Tom Copley AM: A property is not a landlord, Mr Mayor. I do not have to explain these details to you.

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): No, but on average, one landlord has about one property in London. It is not bad going. I would have liked more.

Tom Copley AM: You had a target for 100,000 landlords to be signed up by May of this year and according to figures from the GLA you had just 14,795 landlords and 359 letting agents currently accredited. It is pretty unlikely that you are going to get up 100,000 by May 2016, is it?

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): How many were there accredited under Labour? None. We have done very well.

Tom Copley AM: Can I remind you, Mr Mayor, that this was your commitment and your pledge in your manifesto? One of the things we are here to do --

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): Do you support it?

Tom Copley AM: -- although I know you do not like it --

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): Do you support it?

Tom Copley AM: -- is to hold you to account for the commitments that you have made.

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): Do you support our policy?

Tom Copley AM: Mr Mayor, could you answer my question? Do you think it is likely that we are going to get to 100,000 landlords by May 2016?

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): We have 135,000 homes. That is a great achievement. It may be difficult to get 100,000 landlords --

Tom Copley AM: We will stay there. Londoners --

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): -- but we have 135,000 homes. When you consider that most landlords have one home for rent, it is not bad going. Yes, I would have liked to have done more. We are not going to get to 100,000 landlords in the next few months. That is perfectly obvious --

Tom Copley AM: No, you are not.

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): -- but it is better than nothing, and nothing is what you achieved.

Tom Copley AM: It is a total and utter failure?

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): No. Why do you say that?

Tom Copley AM: I will remind you, Mr Mayor, that you have sat there over the last few years - it has been nearly four years now - when I have questioned you on this and you have sat there and assured me that you were going to hit the target. We will note that you are not going to. Could I also remind you that you launched the scheme formally just a little over a year ago and since then --

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): Sorry, I thought you said --

Tom Copley AM: Hang on. Hang on.

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): I thought he said he had been questioning me in this chair about this for four years.

Jennette Arnold OBE AM (Chair): No --

Tom Copley AM: Let me finish.

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): Get your story straight.

Jennette Arnold OBE AM (Chair): Mr Mayor, no. Mr Mayor, let --

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): You cannot have it both ways.

Jennette Arnold OBE AM (Chair): No, let him finish his question.

Tom Copley AM: Thank you.

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): He has to be vaguely coherent.

Jennette Arnold OBE AM (Chair): Can he finish his question?

Tom Copley AM: Thank you. Since the scheme launched a little over a year ago, about 1,100 additional landlords and letting agents have signed up to the scheme. You launched it with a £250,000 advertising budget. What went wrong?

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): Again, I have to say that I find your attitude depressing. This is a good policy. It is one that, basically, you support. Yes, I would like to see it going faster, but we have achieved 135,000 homes that now have this protection. That is a lot of homes in London. I would like to see many more landlords sign up and they should. Rather than moaning, your energies might be more usefully directed into campaigning for landlords to take up the London Rental Standard.

Tom Copley AM: I will hand it to you, Mr Mayor. You are very good at redefining the goalposts when it is clear that you are not going to hit your targets. Can I ask you one final questions, which is this --

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): The object is not to hit the goalpost. The object is to get the ball into the net, not to hit the goal.

Tom Copley AM: It is much easier to get the ball into the net when you move the goalposts. Anyway, can I just ask you a final question, which is this? Last week you voted in Parliament against an amendment to the Housing and Planning Bill, which would have said that privately rented housing should be fit for human habitation. Why did you vote against that?

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): I am in favour of expanding the private rental sector and not imposing such controls on it as would destroy it.

Tom Copley AM: Do you think that a home being fit for human habitation is an onerous control?

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): You have come here time and again and advocated rent controls and other solutions that would have been totally disastrous for the private rented sector in London.

Tom Copley AM: This was not rent controls. This was saying that the home should be fit for human habitation.

Jennette Arnold OBE AM (Chair): No, Assembly Member Copley [Tom Copley AM], I have ruled on this previously and it was regarding your question. You are not here to question the Mayor on his behaviour or actions in the House of Commons.

Tom Copley AM: I will finish there, then.

Jennette Arnold OBE AM (Chair): No. Do you have any more questions?

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): You should campaign for the London Rental Standard.

Jennette Arnold OBE AM (Chair): OK. No, let us move on.

2016/0147 - Crossrail 2 (1)

Richard Tracey AM

When does TfL expect to have finalised the Crossrail 2 route?

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): We expect to conclude the fourth consultation on 8 January 2016. We are going to analyse the responses that we have received and we will be making further announcements later on this year in the spring. I cannot really give you much further than that, Dick, on the precise route for Crossrail 2, although obviously it is a work in progress and a lot of people are arguing for lots of different things at the moment.

Richard Tracey AM: Mr Mayor, it is my duty as the constituency Member to make you aware of the worries and the distress that some people are suffering, first of all, in the Wimbledon area and it includes the MP, Stephen Hammond, whom of course you know, and the councillors on both sides of the political divide. There is the prospect, it seems, in some of the plans currently being talked about by Crossrail of the whole of the centre of Wimbledon being destroyed, including a major shopping centre and so on. Do you accept that all of that is, really, unacceptable?

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): Look, this is early days, OK? We will look at the design to see what we can do to mitigate any damage to the shopping centre, or indeed to anywhere else. Do not forget that this goes, literally, as far as I can see, under my own house, and so there will be no damage at all, I hasten to say, or at least TfL assures me. We will try to minimise disruption and damage wherever we can.

Richard Tracey AM: What is the budget now - £27 billion - or the envelope figure? Do you think it would be acceptable for extra cost to potentially put the tunnel right underneath Wimbledon, bringing it in from further south or something like that? This is one of the proposals.

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): I cannot comment on that, Dick. I would have to look at the cost of doing that. With any big proposal such as this - and we went through all this with Crossrail; there are parts of London that have been dug up for ages because of Crossrail - in the end, it will be massively beneficial.

Richard Tracey AM: The other problem area is in the Tooting and Balham territory where originally the route was going to go through Tooting Broadway to link up with the Northern line there. Then they discovered what is called interestingly enough the 'Wimbledon fault', some geological fault underneath Tooting, and so there has been a proposal to reroute the line through Balham, which would mean some disruption at Balham, but also it would mean some disruption of the beautiful Wandsworth Common by putting in a vent shaft. There are many people complaining about that.

Here, in order to continue with the Tooting plans, it would cost £500 million more but, again, the argument that is being put forward is that within the £27 billion envelope that is surely reasonable.

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): You are making very good points and you are rightly representing the views of your constituents on this. We want to go ahead with a route that does minimal damage and we will obviously try not to damage Wandsworth Common at all.

Richard Tracey AM: Of course we all accept the principle of Crossrail 2, but these are really very difficult situations that do need a lot of work. Thank you.

Jennette Arnold OBE AM (Chair): OK, next question.

2016/0170 - Creative and innovative housing

Nicky Gavron AM

Do you agree that tall buildings are a “creative and innovative” way to get the housing Londoners need?

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): Thank you, Nicky . I believe that you are referring to an excellent article by the Deputy Mayor, Sir Eddie Lister, and I certainly agree that tall buildings can be part of the solution, although they are not always and everywhere the solution by any means.

Nicky Gavron AM: Yes, my question is about that, in which he says that skyscrapers are a creative and innovative way of delivering housing. I think he poses a false choice in that article between building high or paving over the green belt. We all accept that there are new residents coming into London and we have to meet existing Londoners’ needs, but by corralling us to accept tall residential buildings, I do not think that is the answer. The Planning Committee heard really excellent evidence over and over again that you can get high density without going high.

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): Yes.

Nicky Gavron AM: The examples were given by St Andrews at Bromley-by-Bow, Kings Cross --

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): Of course, yes.

Nicky Gavron AM: -- which originally, by the way, was a scheme with lots of skyscrapers around a park and the one we have replaces that. Why do you not press for these more innovative and creative solutions --

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): We do.

Nicky Gavron AM: -- that are high density but not high-rise skyscrapers?

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): No, look, I completely agree and there are plenty of places. I am thinking of an example in Hillingdon, Uxbridge, to pick a place entirely at random, where there was a scheme that was greenlighted by the previous administration under Ken Livingstone [former Mayor of London] that would have been very substantial tower blocks in that part of London. There was no need for it. We changed it when I came in and you now have a much more human level of development. You can get lots of high-quality, high-density homes without needing to go quite so high. That is something that Andrew Boff [AM] has pursued over many years, and quite rightly. We totally accept that.

Nicky Gavron AM: You accept that. Can I just say then --

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): All Sir Eddie [Sir Edward Lister] was saying was that when you have a very high PTAL ratio and you have got a transport hub right nearby – say Stratford Station, for instance – it can make sense to have a high-rise building.

Nicky Gavron AM: OK, let us take that, then, because the reason I am raising this is because there are literally hundreds of skyscrapers coming through the development and planning system at the moment and proposals.

Let us take the 72-storey tower in Paddington. Let us just take that one. Would you consider that one high density? Is that your example of high density?

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): Is this the same Nicky Gavron whom I remember making a passionate speech about the Shard and saying how instrumental you had personally been in getting it greenlighted? I remember that speech accurately.

Nicky Gavron AM: True, I did. I am now talking about Paddington Tower, which is a totally residential tower, and I pluck it out because there is an alternative scheme that has more commercial and retail space around it and three times the number of homes. The tallest building is 18 storeys and most of it is ten storeys and I just want to --

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): I had better be careful because --

Nicky Gavron AM: Let me just finish, please. I just want to say that this is a big idea, but it is an illusion that high rise is high density. We have not even yet got into the fact that they are very expensive to build, they are very expensive to manage, they are very expensive to buy or rent and live in, many are not lived in and they do not really meet Londoners' needs. Could you please listen to the Planning Committee, which put forward that there should be alternatives that are high density but not high rise?

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): Yes, I accept that totally. I do not want to fetter any discretion I may have about Paddington, but I will just remind everybody of your own illustrious record in getting extremely tall buildings built in London.

Nicky Gavron AM: We are talking about residential towers here, not mixed use, not commercial, but residential.

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): Yes, there can be. It obviously depends on what you mean by high rise. Anything over ten stories --

Nicky Gavron AM: Over 20 stories.

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): For me, anything over ten stories is high rise and there are plenty of schemes in London where you can get good-quality accommodation by public transport nodes or centres that go up a bit. I do not mind that. However, generally speaking, the architectural language of the city is to be low rise and to achieve high densities nonetheless. There are plenty of places across London whether that is Pimlico, Islington or Westminster. Of course we all understand that it can be done, but what Sir Eddie Lister was saying was that sometimes high rise can be a creative approach to it.

Nicky Gavron AM: He does not say 'sometimes'.

Jennette Arnold OBE AM (Chair): OK. Thank you to Assembly Member O'Connell for withdrawing his question, because he received an answer during the discussion. There are, Assembly Member Arbour, 17 seconds left on the clock for your group. That is no time at all and thank you for passing on your question.

Let us go to the last question. Assembly Member Dismore, you have one minute to get the answer on the LFEPA settlement.

2016/0172 - LFEPA settlement

Andrew Dismore AM

As the LFEPA settlement has not clawed back pension contributions, this means the savings target has reduced by £2.8 million pounds. Do you agree that proposed front line cuts can therefore be reduced accordingly?

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): Thank you, yes.

Jennette Arnold OBE AM (Chair): One minute, Mr Mayor.

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): LFEPA is currently consulting on two budget options for 2016/17, one put forward by Andrew [Dismore AM] and one put forward by the Fire Commissioner. That process needs to take its course. I am keeping an open mind about what should happen and I look forward to seeing the responses to the consultation exercise in February 2016.

The £2.8 million that you alluded to in your question is of course a one-off and you would have to think about the long-term budgetary impacts for LFEPA because down the line there will be very considerable pressures on that budget.

Andrew Dismore AM: I will just say to you that if the budget is as it is, we do not need to cut four fire engines this time. The LFEPA Resources Committee suggests that the best way forward is to look at operational changes as a package as part of London Safety Plan 6 (LSP6) because I do not think you would want to see more headlines like this of you cycling away, running away from a *Camden New Journal* (CNJ) journalist under a headline, "Fire death crew had no engine". That is the consequence of your cuts so far and we are going to see more of that if you get your way, are we not?

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): It is certainly Labour's policy to have pointless vehicles of all kinds and I understand why you bow to that, but I am content to wait and see the outcome of the consultation.

Jennette Arnold OBE AM (Chair): OK. On that, all groups are out of time.

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

Jennette Arnold OBE AM (Chair): Thank you, Mr Mayor, for your answers - and not - during the meeting.