

London Assembly (Mayor's Question Time) – 22 February 2016

Transcript of Agenda Item 4b – Final Draft Consolidated Budget 2016/17: Questions to the Mayor

Jennette Arnold OBE AM (Chair): The Assembly will now put questions to the Mayor which seek clarification on the Final Draft Consolidated Budget. Initial questions to the Mayor will be asked by a Member from each group and then there will be follow-up from all Members if appropriate to that question.

We will start with a question from the Green Party group and it is a question in the name of Baroness Jones [Jenny Jones AM]. Can I have your question, Baroness Jones?

Jenny Jones AM: I wanted to ask you about knife crime, Mr Mayor. Last month, you said that you agreed with me that you would like the Metropolitan Police Service (MPS) to be doing more to support and work with youth groups. I wonder if you had actually mentioned it to them because Camden --

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): Sorry, Jenny. Can you say that again? I did not catch that.

Jenny Jones AM: Camden is closing youth centres and an advice centres for under-25s and Southwark is going to close at least one youth centre and axe two-thirds of youth workers. There is a lot of eating-away at youth support services. Is that something that you would encourage the MPS to do?

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): Yes. The MPS, as you know, already engages in quite a lot of activity on this front already. The Kicks programme is very widely supported in the city and very successful. The MPS has a big Cadets programme. Sir Bernard [Sir Bernard Hogan-Howe QPM, Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis] has an ambition to have 4,000 young people in the Cadets. Many years ago Kit [Kit Malthouse AM MP] and I started this programme. It has been very successful because young people who join the MPS Cadets programme who have been involved in crime virtually never reoffend. It is quite extraordinary success that the MPS is having. Sir Bernard, as you know, has an ambition to go up to 5,000 Cadets. Those are a couple of things that the MPS does.

In terms of what is happening in Camden and the difficulties that they are facing, if there is anything we can do to help either through Team London or through the Mayor's Fund or any way that that youth provision could be supported, I would be interested to look at that. I would point out that it is beneficial, obviously, to wider London spending and council budgets that City Hall is able to bear down on its own share of the precept. Although I appreciate that that will be pretty small across London, it certainly will help.

Jenny Jones AM: Yes, it will be very small across London. What about raising this particular issue about youth services with local town halls?

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): Yes, I am interested. I will look at Hackney and Camden. I certainly know that there are boroughs elsewhere that have managed their finances in such a way as to be able to continue to provide youth services and, indeed, to be opening libraries now. Some boroughs I know of are able to have drop-in centres and places where young people can meet, get online, look at job opportunities and look at what is going on. They have been able to invest in these things, even in relatively difficult times. I would certainly be happy to look at what is happening in Camden and see what we can do to support.

Jenny Jones AM: Thank you. Can I just clarify, then; I have had a promise from you that you will mention this issue to the MPS and that you will mention this issue as well, say, to London Councils as a matter of priority?

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): Yes. I do not know when the next meeting of the city congress is but I would be happy to do that. If there is a meeting before purdah, I would be happy to raise that.

Jenny Jones AM: Thank you.

Jennette Arnold OBE AM (Chair): There are no follow-ups and so let us then go to the second question from the Liberal Democrat group. Assembly Member Pidgeon?

Caroline Pidgeon MBE AM: Thank you. One of the few changes in this final budget is that you say you intend to put an additional £26,000 in funding for male rape and sexual assault services and so it is no guarantee. This is actually £7,000 less than you had awarded in 2014/15. Is this not just a sop to get your Conservative colleagues on board to back your budget?

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): No. I congratulate the GLA Conservatives for their initiative. I am not entirely sure. I think Kemi [Kemi Badenoch AM] and others have played a part in this. This is very important. This is something that --

Caroline Pidgeon MBE AM: It is less than you funded in 2014/15.

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): -- has been raised several times in this place by Members of the Assembly. It is good news that there is another £26,000 a year for the next three years to --

Caroline Pidgeon MBE AM: Is that a guarantee? You only say you intend to. Is that a guarantee?

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): Obviously, I cannot fetter the discretion of a future Mayor, but the provision is there in the budget.

Caroline Pidgeon MBE AM: OK. Thank you.

Jennette Arnold OBE AM (Chair): Any follow-up questions for that? No. Next is the Labour Group. Can I call upon Assembly Member Duvall to put that question.

Len Duvall AM: Thank you very much, Chair. Mr Mayor, part of your European policy here in City Hall could be described as *status quo*. You had argued for change but *status quo*. Yesterday afternoon you changed that position in your role as executive Mayor.

In your article today, most of it is spent on structural and political implications. Very little is spent on the impact of leaving the European Union (EU) on the economy and jobs, as well as the financial sector.

There have been comments today in the papers and it is a question that needs to be put to you today. Are you really sacrificing London's economy and its future - the issue of the financial centre - on the basis of your personal ambition?

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): No. It is very important to be reasonable about this because this, obviously, will be a debate that is heard many times. When you look at the business at hand, which is the GLA

budget, and you contrast that with the European budget, there is a clear difference in financial management and, clearly, we are losing out at a European level in waste of money. One of the arguments I would make is that huge sums go from the United Kingdom (UK) to the EU that we do not really see again and in many cases are misspent. I suppose that might be the relevance to your point to this conversation.

Len Duvall AM: Thank you, Mr Mayor --

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): If you are asking a wider question about the City of London and our membership of the EU, there will be arguments both ways. You will certainly hear in the next few months all sorts of scaremongering and you will hear people saying that we cannot survive outside. You will hear quite a lot of 'Angloscepticism'. I saw somebody use that word yesterday in *The Sunday Times*. There are people who do not think that Britain could stand on our own two feet and all the rest of it.

I have to say that that is profoundly wrong. The people who make these arguments are the same as the people who warned that we should not leave the European Exchange Rate Mechanism (ERM), which turned out to be the salvation of the UK economy. They are the same people who said that we had to join the euro, which turned out to be a catastrophic mistake and a very unfortunate enterprise. Therefore, I am inclined to take those views with a pinch of salt. I hear all sorts of prognostications from the City. I read plenty of people who think actually that the British economy could prosper outside the EU and not just the British economy but London and the City of London, too.

You say that there has been a change in the attitude of City Hall. Actually, the interesting thing that you may have forgotten but perhaps you did not read it, Len, is that Gerard Lyons, my Economic Advisor, produced a report at least 18 months ago that set out very clearly, in his view as the former leading economic Director at the Standard Chartered bank, why Britain could prosper outside the EU.

Len Duvall AM: Mr Mayor, he says that of course we could leave the EU and that there are issues, but he also says that we are better off in the EU in that report. There are lines in there that say that.

London First has said that leaving the EU would cost the capital £13.9 billion a year and 75,000 jobs from the London economy by 2030. City UK has said that the links between the financial markets in the UK and the EU are extensive and are fundamental to the prosperity of the whole of the region. HSBC recently said it would ship around 1,000 investment jobs to Paris as a result of Brexit.

Are you saying that they are all wrong? No one disputes that this country could leave the EU. The question that I am asking you is about the implications. Are you prepared to risk the implications of that "leap in the dark", as your Prime Minister has said, in terms of the economy and in terms of living standards in this country by leaving the EU?

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): I genuinely think that those fears are wildly exaggerated. Those are the arguments that we have heard time and time again. We heard it before. I remember hearing it in 2008 when the financial markets crashed and everybody said that the banks were all going to leave London. I remember vividly hearing it in the run-up to the decision on whether or not to go into the euro. People said that if we did not join the euro Throgmorton Street would crack and yaw and great mutant rats would gnaw the faces of the last bankers and all of this sort of nonsense. It did not turn out to be true. On the contrary, the City of London is overwhelmingly the preponderant financial centre here in this part of the world. Indeed, it is the biggest on earth and it has a conglomeration of skills and a huge range of talents --

Len Duvall AM: That you want to put at risk.

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): -- that I do not think would be jeopardised at all. I am quite interested by the commentary that I have read. In any case like this, there will always be people who say that we should stick with the *status quo*, but the trouble with the *status quo* is that it is formidably bureaucratic. It is producing more and more legislation over which neither our Parliament nor any parliament in Europe has any control. That is, ultimately, the issue. The issue for the British people in the next few months is whether they really think when they look at what is happening in Europe now and they look at the extension of power and of authority into every aspect --

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

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): I have been asked about this. Forgive me; I have been asked about an issue that is not to do with the budget but I am going to answer the question. When they look at the extension of EU authority into areas that we never dreamed of when we joined in 1972, do they really think that this is the same organisation --

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

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): -- as it was on that day when Parliament gave primacy to the EU?

Len Duvall AM: Chair, under Standing Orders, there is an issue about the repetition. I would like some time back because he has eaten into our time. It is really interesting stuff --

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): Sorry, if you are going to ask about --

Len Duvall AM: -- but there is an element of repetition in answering my questions to the Mayor, Chair.

Jennette Arnold OBE AM (Chair): Yes. OK. No --

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): I am perfectly happy to talk about Europe if he wants to talk about Europe.

Jennette Arnold OBE AM (Chair): No --

Len Duvall AM: I am happy to talk about it in your time. You stay extra and we can have the debate.

Jennette Arnold OBE AM (Chair): Mr Duvall, you will be interested to hear what I have just said. I asked for the clock to be stopped --

Len Duvall AM: Thank you.

Jennette Arnold OBE AM (Chair): -- because it was clear that the Mayor was actually talking about the EU in general in his answer at the last part. It is reasonable for every Member to put to you questions about London in Europe in terms of the economy and the GLA spend.

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): That is reasonable if --

Jennette Arnold OBE AM (Chair): It is not reasonable for you to use this as another platform for your Brexit purposes.

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): I see. Fair enough. It is reasonable for him to attack me but it is not reasonable for me to put the other case? Fine!

Jennette Arnold OBE AM (Chair): No, because you have had all of yesterday.

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): What about democracy?

Jennette Arnold OBE AM (Chair): You are all over the place.

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): That is what it is all about.

Len Duvall AM: Talk to London.

Jennette Arnold OBE AM (Chair): No, Members will be under the same regime. Can I have questions now. It is going to be specifically about the Mayor's position and whatever action he has taken in the last 24 hours in relation to London and its budget and its future.

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): Fine.

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

Andrew Dismore AM: Thank you, Chair. Perhaps I can ask you, Mr Mayor, what your hero, Churchill [Sir Winston Churchill, former British Prime Minister], might have thought about all of this business about London in Europe and so forth. He wrote to Anthony Eden [former British Foreign Secretary] in October 1942, "I look forward to a United States of Europe, in which the barriers between the nations will be greatly minimised --

Jennette Arnold OBE AM (Chair): OK. Sorry --

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): Look, you cannot beat me on that one, mate. I have written a book on it.

Andrew Dismore AM: Let us see, shall we?

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): You are totally wrong. Just go away. This is rubbish.

Jennette Arnold OBE AM (Chair): OK. No. Assembly Member Dismore --

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): Choose another line of attack.

Jennette Arnold OBE AM (Chair): Assembly Member Dismore, that was totally my fault. You should not have been called.

Andrew Dismore AM: That is a bit much. I was just warming up!

Jennette Arnold OBE AM (Chair): No, you had an unfair start. Put it like this. I am so sorry.

Andrew Dismore AM: I was just warming up.

Jennette Arnold OBE AM (Chair): Can I call upon Assembly Member Bacon to put his question on behalf of the GLA Conservative group.

Gareth Bacon AM: Madam Chair, I am going to defer that to Assembly Member Badenoch.

Jennette Arnold OBE AM (Chair): You can do anything you like. Can we have the question?

Kemi Badenoch AM: Yes, thank you, Chair. My question is for the Mayor regarding the funding for male rape charities. The Conservative Group thoroughly welcomes your commitment to continue the funding for charities that support the victims of male rape and sexual assault, as does the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of Survivors UK, Keith Best, who said that he was very grateful and delighted for this funding.

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): Keith Vaz [Member of Parliament (MP) for Leicester East]?

Kemi Badenoch AM: Keith Best.

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): Keith Best? Sorry.

Kemi Badenoch AM: Definitely not Keith Vaz. My question to you is: could you tell us a little bit more about the impact that you think this additional funding will have?

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): This is something that is not widely enough known about. This is a problem and a phenomenon that people sometimes find it difficult to accept. People can be very blinkered about this. I am very grateful to the GLA Conservatives for the way they have championed this. You, Kemi [Kemi Badenoch AM], and Andrew [Andrew Boff AM] have been very hot and tough on this. I am grateful that some money is going to be put into this. It is appropriate that this particular evil should be treated in a particular way. It requires particular sensitivities and it is right that the Mayor's Office for Policing and Crime (MOPAC) should be funding it in the way that it is.

Kemi Badenoch AM: Thank you.

Jennette Arnold OBE AM (Chair): OK. That is all the opening questions from Groups. I now have a list of Members who have indicated that they have questions. I have Assembly Member Dismore.

Andrew Dismore AM: Thank you, Chair. I was asking the Mayor about Churchill. I have plenty more about Churchill but he does not want to engage on that one. Well, perhaps one. In 1948, Churchill said that he looked forward with confidence to the day when the union would be achieved.

Perhaps I could ask about Napoleon [19th century French statesman], then, and the Continental System. You are about to achieve what Napoleon 200 years ago could not do by cutting London's trade off from Europe with the Continental System. He could not do it. You are about to do it, are you not? You believe in what *The Times* said in 1857, "Fog in Channel; Continent cut off".

Jennette Arnold OBE AM (Chair): Budget-related questions please.

Andrew Dismore AM: You are about to cut London off from the Continent, are you not?

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): No. On the contrary, we are about to --

Jennette Arnold OBE AM (Chair): Budget-related questions.

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): -- if I can use --

Andrew Dismore AM: It is London-related, Chair.

Jennette Arnold OBE AM (Chair): London's trade.

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): We are going to save Britain by our exertions and Europe by our example. That is what we are going to do, if I can quote the man who defeated Napoleon.

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

Andrew Dismore AM: I have not finished, Chair.

Tony Arbour AM (Deputy Chairman): Yes, you have.

Jennette Arnold OBE AM (Chair): Yes, you have. I will come back to you later on.
Assembly Member McCartney?

Joanne McCartney AM: Thank you, Chair. Mr Mayor, this is one of the last meetings we are going to have with you. Last week, Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary (HMIC) judged that the MPS on your watch requires improvement. It said that it was failing to investigate crime adequately and to keep people safe. It pointed to the fact that some boroughs lacked basic equipment such as digital cameras to take crime-scene photographs, that there were insufficient detectives and that staff shortages in monitoring offenders were reducing the capacity of the MPS to prevent reoffending. Are you leaving a legacy that is not to be proud of?

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): I do not agree with that at all, obviously. I would have to look at what the HMIC has said in detail but I think it would recognise that actually --

Joanne McCartney AM: The MPS has recognised and accepted the recommendations.

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): If I can just finish, there has been massive progress under the MPS and I congratulate every man and woman in our fantastic police service for what they are doing. Confidence in the police is up. I am very pleased with that. It has been tough but confidence is rising. It is crucial that Londoners should be confident in their police. We have a MPS that looks more like London in the sense that we have been able to recruit from black and minority ethnic groups.

Joanne McCartney AM: They are lacking basic equipment to do their job, Mr Mayor.

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): We have the largest rollout of body-worn video technology anywhere in the world. This is a huge programme that is now going on. We are going to have 22,000 body-worn cameras, which will make a huge difference to confidence, to policing and also to judicial effectiveness because --

Joanne McCartney AM: Are you going buy them some cameras to take crime-scene photographs, too?

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): -- you are a lawyer, Joanne. You know that so often the issues are evidentiary. Body-worn cameras will make a real difference in building up people's trust that the police are going to behave well and also in enabling the police to secure convictions. That is the way to go.

Joanne McCartney AM: OK. You have not read the report yet?

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): I am telling you about what we have done. You asked about cameras. I am telling you --

Joanne McCartney AM: You have not answered my questions about the lack of detectives, the lack of basic equipment such as digital cameras for crime-scene photographs and staff shortages in reoffending teams, which is hampering the MPS's ability to prevent reoffending.

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): I am happy to look at whatever --

Joanne McCartney AM: The MPS has accepted all three of those criticisms. You are telling me that you have not read the report?

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): What I am telling you is that it would be pretty churlish of anybody not to see that we have put more funding into the MPS as a result of the Comprehensive Spending Review (CSR) settlement than anybody expected - certainly much more than you expected - at the time. We are going to be able to keep officer numbers up at around 32,000, which nobody thought we would be able to do. That is, as you know, in spite of huge financial pressures all around. We have been able to ensure that MOPAC's funding has increased by £46 million for 2016/17.

The points that you make about shortages of equipment and cameras for photographing evidence I will certainly look at. I am not familiar with the particular problem that you raise but I am sure we have the funds to sort it out.

Joanne McCartney AM: Mr Mayor, as you are the Police and Crime Commissioner, I am appalled that you have not read this important report.

My final question to you is that you said you want to leave the EU. The Home Secretary, Theresa May [The Rt Honourable Theresa May, Home Secretary], has come to a different decision. She has said that remaining in the EU for reasons of national security will protect against crime and terrorism and that it is in the national interest to remain. Is she wrong?

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): Look, we have to be clear about this. There are advantages to European co-operation. That is absolutely true. Nobody can conceivably deny that. Procedures such as the European Arrest Warrant - which, I have to say, many years ago I was dubious about - now do make sense. We want people rapidly extradited to this country. If we proceed with the --

Joanne McCartney AM: You will put that at risk.

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): No, you do not because all of those arrangements can be done intergovernmentally. They do not need the supranational judicial authority of the European Court of Justice. They simply do not. It is this constant intrusion.

You as a barrister and a lawyer should understand. I am sure you appreciate that there is now a voluminous body of new legislation that is coming from the EU and it is touching areas of life that we never expected in 1972. Because of the inclusion of the Charter of Fundamental Rights in the EU treaties at Lisbon, the European Court of Justice is now able to adjudicate on questions that we never imagined would be things for the EU. That is simply going too far.

Joanne McCartney AM: This is going into security issues.

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): My answer is that the European Arrest Warrant and that type of thing all used to be done intergovernmentally and there is no reason why they cannot be done by intergovernmental co-operation. We do not need to create a supranational federal structure to do.

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

Stephen Knight AM: Mr Mayor, your budget before us this morning – and this is a budget meeting, after all – allocates £77.5 million to the London Enterprise Panel. The London Enterprise Panel, which you chair, Mr Mayor, has as its core *An Agenda for Jobs and Growth*, which was approved at a meeting that you chaired. We were told in this very Chamber, Mr Mayor, that this document was approved by consensus and that you did not object to the fact that the central core of your jobs and growth agenda is around London and the UK's relationship with Europe. It is listed as the key challenges facing London in the future in your own strategy first of all competition from other cities and, secondly, I will read this to you because you might have not read your own strategy:

“Second, national public opinion and hence UK government policy could put pressure on some of the critical underpinnings of London's leadership, in particular its openness to immigration and its relationship with the European Union.”

Mr Mayor, are you going to use the last few weeks of your mayoralty to undermine your own jobs and growth agenda for London? It would appear that that is exactly what you are doing.

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): On the contrary, we will remain an open, free-trading and dynamic economy under any circumstances. It is really illusory to think that London would somehow wither away and die if it were not for our membership of the EU. On the contrary, there are opportunities. We should be confident --

Stephen Knight AM: Why, Mr Mayor, does your own strategy list as the second key threat to London's jobs and growth the risk to our relationship with Europe?

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): Under any circumstances, we will remain open and friendly and free-trading with the EU. It is simply inconceivable to imagine that they would want to cut us off. After all, we are massive net buyers of their goods. There is every reason for them to want to cut us a deal that will be extremely favourable – to go back to what I was saying to Joanne [Joanne McCarthy AM] – without that need for quite so much supranational regulation and intrusion into every aspect of British public policy. That is the problem with the EU at the moment.

Stephen Knight AM: Mr Mayor, with all due respect, you cannot on the one hand sit there and adopt a strategy that says that the future of London's growth and jobs relies on the UK's relationship with Europe --

Gareth Bacon AM: That is not what it says.

Stephen Knight AM: That is what the strategy says that was adopted. You then say, "Of course, we can leave the EU and none of these things will be affected". You are --

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): Under any circumstances, Stephen, we are going to have a fantastic relationship with the EU.

Stephen Knight AM: Even if we have left the EU, we are going to have a fantastic relationship with the EU?

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

Stephen Knight AM: Obviously we will have to wait and see, but some of us might find it odd --

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): Why on earth --

Stephen Knight AM: Mr Mayor --

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): If you were Germany and you were a massive net exporter of BMWs and Mercedes and all the other goods that they send to us, why on earth would you cut off your nose to spite your face and not do a great deal for the UK?

Stephen Knight AM: Why is it, Mr Mayor, that you are funding to the tune in this budget of £77.5 million a strategy that relies on remaining in Europe at the same time as campaigning to leave Europe?

Caroline Pidgeon MBE AM: It makes no sense.

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): Can I just inform you? There is no way --

Stephen Knight AM: How are we supposed to understand the inherent conflict in your position, Mr Mayor?

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): No, there is no conflict whatsoever. Unless you tow Britain out into the middle of the Atlantic and try to sink it with a battleship, Britain is going to be a part of Europe.

Stephen Knight AM: Harvey McGrath [Sir Harvey McGrath], your own Deputy Chair of the London Enterprise Panel, was very clear when he was before this Chamber, Mr Mayor.

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): We are a part of Europe. We are a great European country and a great European civilisation. We love Europe. It is very important to stress in wanting to have a different relationship with the political project that the EU has become that it in no way diminishes our attachment, our love and our desire for friendship, intensified trade and an intensified partnership --

Stephen Knight AM: Come on, Mr Mayor. This is about putting your future above the future of London, is it not?

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): -- with the EU. That, by the way, is what our strategy involves.

Jennette Arnold OBE AM (Chair): Assembly Member Knight, your Group is out of time. Thank you. Assembly Member Deputy Mayor Evans?

Roger Evans AM: Thank you, Chair. Boris, it is almost 12 months since you invited me to take on the role of Deputy Mayor.

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

Roger Evans AM: Thank you. One of the greatest privileges of that role has been meeting people from all over the world who want to invest in and be a part of our city because they admire it and they want to have a part of that success. I have met senior politicians from China. I have met business start-ups from India and business owners and American football team owners from the United States, thanks, I have to say, largely to the efforts and the enthusiasm of Neale Coleman [Neale Coleman CBE], your former advisor, who set that up. I met the High Commissioner --

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): I know. What happened? A great man. Where is he?

Jennette Arnold OBE AM (Chair): No, the Member is putting his question.

Roger Evans AM: I know I should not have mentioned that! I would not have said anything if I had thought it was going to cause all of this fuss!

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): He was and is and probably will be a very great servant of this city.

Roger Evans AM: I have met --

Jennette Arnold OBE AM (Chair): Stop. Assembly Member, stop. No, Mr Mayor. We cannot record what the Member is asking if you are --

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): He may be a communist but he has some rather good ideas!

Roger Evans AM: I met the High Commissioner of Bangladesh, the Brazilian Ambassador and local government figures from Australia and New Zealand. I have even met the Mayor of Mogadishu. All of these people want to invest in this city. Do you think, Mr Mayor, given that it is such a big and enthusiastic world out there, that the little Europeans who want us to cling on to Brussels are selling our great city short?

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): I do. I go back to my point about 'Angloscepticism', which was this phrase that --

Jennette Arnold OBE AM (Chair): I am disappointed in him. That was not a proper question.

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): -- I was supposed to have appreciated in *The Sunday Times* yesterday. What a load of absolute cobbles. London is the most dynamic urban economy in the world. Yes, of course that is partly because we have great relationships with friends and partners and great trade across the Channel, but that will persist.

What we also have to do is to build up our links. Thank you, Roger, for what you have done in your year as Deputy Mayor. Thank you very much for all of those meetings that you have had on our behalf in City Hall, building those friendships, building those relationships and doing your part to bring in investment.

This is a very relevant point. Actually, before I made my decision, I asked London & Partners what they were seeing in terms of inward investment into London in the run-up to the whole debate on Europe. It is at record highs. They see no apprehension at all and that is very encouraging indeed.

Jennette Arnold OBE AM (Chair): The next question is from Assembly Member Baroness Jones.

Jenny Jones AM: Thank you, Chair. I am going to ask you a question that is not about the EU, Mr Mayor. It is about --

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): Jenny [Jenny Jones AM], I think we agree on this.

Jenny Jones AM: We do.

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): Amazing!

Jenny Jones AM: We are both going against our parties on this, Mr Mayor. Something that came up at the --

Tony Arbour AM (Deputy Chairman): We do not have a line.

Jennette Arnold OBE AM (Chair): Excuse me. Can the Member ask the question, please?

Jenny Jones AM: Something that came up at the Police and Crime Committee last week was that in spite of road fatalities being higher than murders here in London, the roads unit has only £7 million to investigate these, whereas homicide has £41 million. There are all sorts of changes to our roads happening at the moment. Do you think perhaps that resources to traffic and the roads unit and collision investigation ought to be more of a priority?

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): I will look at that, Jenny [Jenny Jones AM]. Of course, the great thing about what is happening on the roads - and I really pay tribute to Transport for London (TfL), to Surface Transport, to Leon Daniels [Managing Director - Surface Transport, TfL] and to all of his team, as well as to the MPS - is that the numbers of people killed or seriously injured (KSIs) are at record lows. As far as I can remember, they have come down by about 40% or 50%.

Jenny Jones AM: It is more about the deaths and the fact that they do take a lot of investigation but the unit does not have the resources.

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): I will look into that.

Jenny Jones AM: They have two collision investigators.

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): I will certainly look into that and I am interested in what you have to say there, but one of the great bits of news in the last few years is the fall. That really makes a difference to people because the people who die in road accidents are overwhelmingly people on low incomes. The same can be said of people who die in fires. Those improvements are a blow for social justice, in my view.

Jenny Jones AM: It is more than that as well. Particularly with things like the [Cycle] Superhighways, drivers are getting more aggressive and there seem to be more cases where drivers are driving at, for example, cyclists

with intent to hurt them. Personally, I think that if you hurt a cyclist or any road user like that, it is a criminal case, but there is never enough money for that unit.

Jennette Arnold OBE AM (Chair): A quick answer as Jenny is out of time.

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): I will look at it. I will certainly look at it. All I can say is that Ken Livingstone [former Mayor of London] once said that one of the reasons he did not learn to ride a bike was that he was worried about being run off the road by drivers. I have been cycling around London. It is perfect. Nobody has tried to assassinate me on my bicycle so far or at least --

Jenny Jones AM: That is a surprise but --

Jennette Arnold OBE AM (Chair): No, you are out of time. No, on that note, the Green Group is out of time.

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): -- they may have tried but I probably did not notice.

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

Richard Tracey AM: Mr Mayor, undoubtedly one of the great successes of your last eight years has been transport in London and there are significant parts of the budget to do with transport.

Can I ask you one thing. The whole budgeting of TfL itself is tied up with successful operations and being able to run free of industrial disputes. The Night Tube is a classic example of something that has been held up by this constant threat of industrial disputes by the transport unions. When are we going to have some prospect of an end to these?

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): The disputes?

Richard Tracey AM: Yes.

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): The trouble is at the moment that we have a system whereby it is relatively easy to take industrial action. As you know, new legislation is coming through that was pioneered by this place. People forget this. It was Peter Hendy [Sir Peter Hendy CBE, former Commissioner of Transport for London] and it was TfL who were really at the genesis of that whole idea of the ballot thresholds and how to stop strikes going ahead --

Richard Tracey AM: And GLA Conservatives.

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): I am so sorry. I should have said. For goodness sake! What am I thinking? GLA Conservatives played a historic role in that as well. It was not possible to do in the first term when we were in coalition, as you will remember. It was very difficult. That is now going through the Houses of Parliament and it will become law. In the meantime, we have had to take some strikes and we have had to take some industrial action really just to get things done.

The difficulty is that we work very hard with our friends in the unions. This is a joint enterprise. We are trying to do this together. They want to modernise the Tube as much as we do. Let us be clear. There are shared ambitions here. However, too often, I feel, it is difficult to get things done because any kind of modernisation is an opportunity to recruit new members and all the rest of it. We have taken some strikes. We are in a much

better place now. The unions have really got the advantages of the Night Tube, they are selling that now to their members and I hope very much that we will be able to go ahead pretty soon.

Richard Tracey AM: When, realistically, are we going to see driverless trains, which you have been talking about – and we have – for a very long time?

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): Dick, thank you. I congratulate you and GLA Conservatives on what you have done to promote this. You have been banging on about this, if I may say so, for a long time and you are quite right.

What I can say is that there will be a New Tube for London, as you know. Mike Brown [Mike Brown MVO, Commissioner of Transport for London] and I unveiled a New Tube for London a year or so ago, perhaps a bit more. That will be the model of the future. It will require no driver to sit in the cab in the old-fashioned way. It will be automated. It will deliver a much faster and more reliable service when it is combined with the new signalling.

To get all of that done properly, as I think Mike [Mike Brown MVO] would tell you, you also have to have the passenger protection doors on a lot more of the Tube stations and so that investment will have to proceed hand-in-hand with the driverless Tube programme. At present, the new trains are scheduled to come in in 2018 with the new Piccadilly line trains and the intention is to put in the passenger protection doors as we go along.

This will clearly be something that will stretch on into the next decade. Over the next five or ten years, you will see a gradual move towards greater automation of the Tube. It will not happen everywhere at once. It will start to happen on some lines, just as we already have automation on the Docklands Light Railway.

Richard Tracey AM: You are aware, are you not, that so many cities of Europe, which we have been talking about somewhat this morning, already have driverless trains?

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

Darren Johnson AM: And strikes as well.

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): They do have strikes, as my cousin, Darren [Darren Johnson AM], points out. You can even strike when you have driverless trains. That is perfectly correct. You always have to negotiate.

What people have to understand is that this is a massive period of investment in the Tube and in TfL. People who work in our transport networks have great jobs and there are fantastic opportunities there. There is no reason to fear new technology. We will go forward with driverless trains. We have a very old system. We were the first. That is why it is slow to modernise.

Richard Tracey AM: Another thing that we have talked about quite a bit during the budget process when talking to TfL is the matter of extending TfL's control particularly of the metro railway services within the GLA boundaries. When, realistically, do you think that that is going to happen?

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): There will be progress on that over the next year or so. As the franchises come up, you are going to see more and more devolution to London and that is entirely right. I think that many people would say that the service they get on the suburban rail services is not good enough.

We believe TfL that has done an amazing job in the suburban railway in London. The Overground is a fantastic service. It is amazingly popular. The stations are good. They are well lit. The trains look good and run well.

Obviously, we will be on our honour. We will be on our mettle. We will have to deliver for London. I have said this to TfL. If we are going to take on these franchises, as we have on the West Anglia and elsewhere, we have to show Londoners and the world that we can do it better, but I am absolutely sure that we can.

Richard Tracey AM: The last thing is that of course one thing that you have not created during your eight years – but there is a prospect that somebody might in the next few years – is a black hole in TfL's budget.

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): We had not mentioned that black hole, no.

Richard Tracey AM: We have now.

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): Sorry, you have. That is right. There could be nothing more fatal to our ambitions and indeed to confidence in our city – far more damaging than any question about leaving the EU – than the suggestion that there might be a £2 billion black hole in TfL's finances. I really cannot recommend that to Londoners. It just is not the way forward for our city.

Richard Tracey AM: Thank you.

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

Murad Qureshi AM: Thank you, Chair. Mr Mayor, during your time it has been established that premature deaths from toxic air in London have gone from about 1,000 annually to about 10,000. That has been established --

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): I must say that that is not proven.

Murad Qureshi AM: Can you tell me what your 2016/17 budget is doing to tackle London's toxic air?

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): I really, really must just contradict --

Murad Qureshi AM: I said 'established'. The scientific evidence has --

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): No, that is scientifically totally illiterate because what has happened --

Murad Qureshi AM: No, I can check them --

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): That is not true. They have changed the various ways that they measure these deaths or compute these deaths. These are all statistical calculations based on the number of deaths that you think would take place given the ambient air quality. What has happened in the last few years is that they have changed the way they calculate so as to increase the estimate of the number of deaths that might be taking place as a result of poor air quality. It is absolutely not true – and you really ought to take it back – to say that the number of deaths has risen. That is absolutely rubbish. It is absolute rubbish.

Murad Qureshi AM: Look, I said 'established' and I am not going to have a science lesson from you.

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

Murad Qureshi AM: Can you answer the question, please?

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): You are talking --

Murad Qureshi AM: Can you answer the question? What are you doing --

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): What are we doing? What has actually happened is that thanks to the measures that we have put in, we have seen very substantial reductions not just in carbon dioxide, which is not toxic in the way that particulate matter less than 10 microns in diameter (PM10s) and particulate matter less than 2.5 microns in diameter (PM2.5s), but we have cut dust in the air by about 15%. That is PM10s and PM2.5s. Stuff from the backs of lorries and buses has massively come down. We have cut nitrogen oxide, which is so very damaging to health, by 20%. The number of people living in areas exceeding the legal limits for nitrogen dioxide has come down by 50% since I have been Mayor. Actually, by using cleaner and greener technology, we have been able to make the environment much better in London.

I gave you a statistic the last time I was here that I wish I could find about the actual quantity of crud in the air. It was something like 200 tonnes a year and it is down to something like 19 tonnes. There has been an amazing reduction. The actual black stuff and the particles of soot in the air coming out of the backs of combustion engines has come down from about 200 tonnes, from memory, to about 19 tonnes. That is the way forward. I am not saying that there is not further progress to be made, but we are doing it and there is provision in this budget to do just that.

Murad Qureshi AM: Thank you, Mr Mayor, for that. Every time you quote those figures, you sound very much like a Volkswagen executive to me for the simple reason that these are computer-generated figures rather than real figures and this has been told to you time and time again.

My real concern, though, as a supplementary question is that very often when we have had peak pollution here in London, you have always said that it has been wafting in from the Continent. If we were to leave the EU, how would a future Mayor deal with the impact of European smog on London?

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): Are you saying that our membership of --

Murad Qureshi AM: You have been making this excuse many a time.

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): That is a very good point. Tell me how our --

Murad Qureshi AM: You have been making this excuse many a time.

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): We have now been members of the EU since 1975 or whenever it was that we had the referendum. Is there a 'common European windmill policy' that enables us to puff this air back across? No, there is not. I am afraid that the climatic conditions of --

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): My friend Mr Malthouse [Kit Malthouse AM MP] offers a very helpful intervention, which is that what we could do is join the Arab League or join the Maghreb countries from where we get so much of the Saharan dust.

Murad Qureshi AM: The important thing here --

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): Look, obviously, these are big international problems --

Murad Qureshi AM: Yes, they are transnational. How are you going to deal with them?

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): They are transnational problems, but at the root it comes back to the same basic philosophical question that we have been asking all morning. In order to tackle that problem, do we really need to have these measures enforced by a European Court of Justice? You may say that we do and that is a perfectly respectable point of view. As it happens, most other European countries do not observe these fines when they get them. We are extremely punctilious. One of the problems we have in our relationships with Europe is that we take such an extremely humble and subservient approach to the implementation of EU rules and regulations.

Murad Qureshi AM: Indeed. I am --

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): We use Brussels as the great boss telling us what to do. Other countries take a very different approach and that is one of the disasters of the whole system.

Murad Qureshi AM: Mr Mayor, I am very grateful for the targets that the EU sets. You should listen to the pearls of wisdom of Mr Johnson senior [Stanley Johnson] of Environmentalists for Europe, who sees that as one of the benefits of remaining in the EU, as he said on the radio this morning.

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): Look, my father did many fantastic things. I remember him pumping through incredible directives across Europe that had an extraordinary effect and did a lot of good for the environment, such as the Habitats Directive, for instance.

My only question is: do you need to have this continually enforced at a European level and is it not something that individual national government could do?

Murad Qureshi AM: No, they are transnational --

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): If you say that these national governments would not do it, then, in my view, you are undermining national democracy. That is the core of the whole conundrum.

Murad Qureshi AM: Thank you.

Jennette Arnold OBE AM (Chair): I will just say to Members that we have agreed that this section of the meeting will take an hour. The Conservatives, if you are still with that agreement, there are ten minutes for two questions from you. You have ten minutes on your time. Assembly Member Bacon?

Gareth Bacon AM: Thank you very much, Chair. Mr Mayor, we have had lots of questions about your views on the EU this morning, which is perhaps understandable given the weekend's events. We have had a few questions on your actual budget as well, which has been good.

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): Unlike an EU budget in that it is actually going to be signed off by the auditors --

Gareth Bacon AM: Indeed.

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): -- which has not happened with an EU budget for 20 years.

Gareth Bacon AM: Thank you for that. I was trying not to harken back to --

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): Sorry, I was a bit Farage [Nigel Farage, Member of the European Parliament for South East England] on that, was I not? Never mind.

Gareth Bacon AM: We had a question from Assembly Member McCartney [Joanne McCartney AM] that levelled criticism at the MPS - and therefore you - and alleged various failings, lack of equipment, staff shortages, etc, and another one from Assembly Member Qureshi [Murad Qureshi AM] just now when he asked what your budget is doing to deal with the problem of air quality and made some fairly large claims about deaths to do with air quality in London.

Given that both of these are directly connected to what they perceive to be budget shortages, are you therefore surprised that the Labour group has not only accepted your precept cut this year but completely failed to table an amendment so far?

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): I am conscious that there has been a certain kerfuffle on the Labour handling of this whole issue. It is not for me to intrude on private grief, except to say --

Tony Arbour AM (Deputy Chairman): But I will?

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): It is not for me to intrude on the divisions in the Labour Party. I do not in any way wish to embarrass the 'people's party' by referring to the unhappy event in which its mayoral candidate took it upon himself, as I understand it, to try to rewrite its budgetary position and was - quite properly, in my view - sent packing by the leader of the Labour Group [Len Duvall AM], who deserves the admiration of everybody in London for what he did. I think that is the reason. As I understand it, there is some sort of internecine feud going on in Labour and a quite proper defence by GLA Labour against the crackpot ideas of the Labour mayoral candidate, who wants - in case we have failed to mention it already today - to take £2 billion out of TfL's budget and to hobble our ability to invest in transport in London.

Gareth Bacon AM: Mr Mayor, if you are correct about the Labour Group --

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): I think that is what happened. I am not --

Gareth Bacon AM: -- dismissing the Labour mayoral candidate's opinions on this, we look forward to seeing its budget amendment in due course.

Tony Arbour AM (Deputy Chairman): Yes.

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): I wait with bated breath.

Gareth Bacon AM: Indeed.

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

Andrew Boff AM: Mr Mayor, on 1 February 2016 City Hall hosted the launch of the Sexual Abuse and Sexual Violence Awareness week, accompanied by the hashtag #ItsNotOk. The launch heard testimony from both female and male victims of sexual violence. Attending that event, as I did, I was therefore encouraged by what

you have done in your budget, which is to recognise that there is a need for male victims of sexual violence to have some kind of support in order to encourage them to come forward. That will be welcomed by virtually everybody in that field.

However, we still are faced with an issue that the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) carries on classifying in its statistics all sexual abuse as violence against women and girls (VAWG). Without undermining any of those strategies about VAWG, it does actually undermine the efforts that we need to recognise violence against men and boys.

Could you make a recommendation to your successor that perhaps this is an area that he or she needs to look into in order to ensure that there is a level playing field when we are talking about sexual abuse?

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): You would like a parallel strategy called 'violence against men and boys' ('VAMB') or something?

Andrew Boff AM: I would like a strategy that is inclusive of what is needed. At the moment, there is either --

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): Take away VAWG and make it more gender-neutral?

Andrew Boff AM: Either make it gender-neutral or have two strategies. At the moment, you have a strategy that excludes people.

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): I will think about that. As far as I can remember, we did specifically make reference to that problem in the original Strategy, but I am happy to work out a way of being inclusive.

Andrew Boff AM: It is always a footnote and it is always a sort of explanation; it is never in the main paragraph of the statistics to say that this is happening.

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): OK. Fair enough.

Andrew Boff AM: Secondly, Mr Mayor, I must come out as an achingly sycophantic pro-European here. However, I recognise that there are actually 48 countries in Europe, not 28. The 28 is some bureaucratic body called the EU and I back you in what you have said.

Tony Arbour AM: Hear, hear.

Andrew Boff AM: Thank you very much.

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): Phew.

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

Andrew Dismore AM: Going back to where we were, I was going to ask you why you are now impersonating Bismarck [Otto von Bismarck, 19th century Prussian statesman] and his efforts to isolate Britain from Europe and whether you agree --

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): We saw him off, too.

Andrew Dismore AM: -- that those who forget the lessons of history are destined to repeat them. Yes, you can see his pointy helmet, can you not?

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): Are you 'Dismarck'?

Andrew Dismore AM: I would like to move on to the Fire Brigade. Incidentally, I assume you are aware that the EU has given the London Fire Brigade €1 million for next week's exercise, which no doubt we will not have had, had you had your way.

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): Andrew, I am always grateful for funds that return to London out of the billions, effectively, that London contributes to the EU. As you know, we are net contributors to the tune of about £8.6 billion a year and rising. One of the main --

Andrew Dismore AM: Anyway, I want to ask you about the Fire Brigade cuts.

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): As you know, one of the main reasons why the cable car is a project in London that will --

Andrew Dismore AM: You have indicated that you intend to direct the London Fire and Emergency Planning Authority (LFEPA) to cut 13 fire engines, which we do not need to do and we can balance without doing so.

Were you aware when you decided to issue that directive that on 6 February 2016 nine fire stations were out of action for an entire shift and five more were off the run for at least two hours due to staff shortages? Of those nine stations, three of them - one third of them - are where you have taken one of their two engines away and, if you had not, those stations would have remained operational. Were you aware that this is not the first time recently we have had large numbers of stations off the run? For example, on 26 October 2015, the day of that fatal fire in Camden that we have debated before, nine stations were off the run for the entire shift, including one of those where you have taken the pumps away, and two more were off the run for part of a shift. Five of the 13 stations that you want to lose an engine from are not even on your optimum list to lose a pump.

Did you know all of that when you decided to put two fingers up to the public consultation, which overwhelmingly decided that they wanted to keep those 13 fire engines because they recognised that they did not need to lose them? They have a greater concern for the safety of London than you, do they not?

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): Your last point is really, frankly, totally wrong when you consider that deaths from fire and fires have come down by about 50% since I have been Mayor. As I was saying earlier on, it is of huge importance to people across the city and the London Fire Brigade does an outstanding job and a really amazing job.

Andrew Dismore AM: Nobody is disputing that. Will you answer the question? Were you aware that those nine stations were off the run? Were you aware of that when you made your decision?

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): It is true that there is extra cash, as you have discovered, in the budget. The pensions cash is available. I understand the point that you make about keeping the 13 appliances. I listened to what you have to say and I will have a --

Andrew Dismore AM: It is a simple question. Did you or did you not know that nine stations were off the run?

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): No. I did not know that, no.

Andrew Dismore AM: No, you did not, did you?

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): I was not aware of that but I will have a look at --

Andrew Dismore AM: Did you know that nine stations were off the run on 26 October 2015? Did you know that?

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): It has done nothing to change the record, which is that --

Andrew Dismore AM: Did you know that, Mr Mayor? It is a simple question.

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): Actually, can I tell you that --

Andrew Dismore AM: No. Did you know that? It is a simple question.

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): Did you know that there were fewer than 20,000 fires last year for the first time since records began? Did you know that deaths by fire have been cut in half over the last five years? Did you know that?

Andrew Dismore AM: Of course I did, but that is not the point, is it?

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): That is the key question.

Andrew Dismore AM: That is the result of the good work of the Fire Brigade on its present strength.

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): I know and --

Andrew Dismore AM: If you cut the Fire Brigade - as you have cut the police and seen crime go up - you will see a similar impact on fire deaths.

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): OK, that is a serious point and that is a --

Andrew Dismore AM: Did you know --

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): No, I did not. I told you.

Andrew Dismore AM: It is a simple question. No, you did not?

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): I have answered your simple question about 15 times now, always in the same way.

Andrew Dismore AM: No, you have not, actually.

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): I did, actually. I answered it about --

Andrew Dismore AM: You did not know, did you?

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): I did and so --

Andrew Dismore AM: You said you did not. You did?

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): I did answer your question. I said I did not know this pointless statistic that you quote because the crucial --

Andrew Dismore AM: It is pointless that nine stations are off the run, is it? It is pointless to Londoners that nine fire stations are off the run? You think that is pointless, do you?

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): I was not aware of this absolutely useless and recondite fact that you have dug up --

Andrew Dismore AM: The people of London do not think that nine fire stations being off the run is pointless, even if you do.

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): What I did know is that deaths are down at record lows and have been cut by 50% in the last five years and the number of actual fires in this city is down to its lowest since records began. That is very largely thanks to the work of the London Fire Brigade, which we are all trying to support, Andrew. Everybody here - and Gareth [Gareth Bacon AM] as Chair of LFEPA - is trying to support LFEPA.

Andrew Dismore AM: Yes. You support the Fire Brigade - to quote Mr Galloway [George Galloway former MP], of all people - "like the rope supports the hanging man", do you not?

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): Really, that is --

Tony Arbour AM (Deputy Chairman): Very original.

Andrew Dismore AM: Not original but appropriate.

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): First you quote Bismarck and then you quote George Galloway. Andrew, you need to come up with some better political heroes.

Andrew Dismore AM: All right. Let us try Pericles [Athenian statesman], your great hero. All right?

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): Pericles would do, yes.

Andrew Dismore AM: Pericles made Athens strong. You have made London weak through unprecedented cuts to the police and fire services.

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): That is complete nonsense.

Andrew Dismore AM: Pericles restored Athenian democracy. You override --

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): No, Pericles did not restore Athenian democracy. Pericles invented it. Pericles --

Andrew Dismore AM: -- public consultations and local councils' decisions. Pericles built the Parthenon. What have you provided? The Orbit and the cable car. What do you think? Will they last 2,500 years? I think not.

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): They will and --

Andrew Dismore AM: You are not Pericles. You are John Bull at the gates of Downing Street, not with a bulldog but with a Trojan horse containing your political ambitions at the expense of the British people.

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): I am delighted that you made the comparison with Pericles and you are quite right. Since you mentioned construction, as I said at the beginning, I do not think there has ever been a period in the history of this city when we have seen such a dazzling array of new buildings. In that sense --

Andrew Dismore AM: Do you think you will be revered like Pericles? You are more like Alcibiades [Athenian statesman] than Pericles.

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): -- it does resemble Periclean Athens. If you look at what is happening around the city, you should have great pride in Londoners --

Andrew Dismore AM: You are Alcibiades, not Pericles.

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): -- and what they are building. I am proud of all of the objects that you described and there are many more currently under construction.

Jennette Arnold OBE AM (Chair): Have you finished, Mr Dismore?

Andrew Dismore AM: Yes. Thank you. It was a useful history lesson that he provided, Chair, but the Mayor is losing his rank over the history lessons. Should I go back to Churchill?

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): I am not losing my rank. I did not lose my rank.

Jennette Arnold OBE AM (Chair): Thank you. No, I just asked --

Andrew Dismore AM: Should I go back to Churchill or --

Jennette Arnold OBE AM (Chair): No. Thank you. I liked the answer the first time around. Assembly Member Bacon?

Gareth Bacon AM: Mr Mayor, that was terribly entertaining, of course. However, to pick up on a couple of points as a prelude to my question, the reason that the nine stations Mr Dismore [Andrew Dismore AM] referred to were off the run is because there was a shortage of officers. It had nothing to do with second appliances. He knows this very well because he put exactly that question to the Commissioner [Ron Dobson CBE QFSM, Commissioner for Fire and Emergency Planning, London Fire Brigade] last week at the Fire Authority and received that answer.

He also referred to ignoring the public consultation, but 0.02% of Londoners responded to the consultation, Mr Mayor. As he well knows because it was his Government that passed the legislation, consultations are not referenda; they are consultations.

He mentioned also the 13 appliances and talked about how alternative funding was there available for it. Again, as he well knows, this funding is short-term funding. It is little pockets of unspent funding that will last for 12 months.

The question, Mr Mayor, is: do you think that Labour's 'magic money tree' will soon be sending volumes of cash to the fire service and that we should take the leap of using one-off pots of funding to fund ongoing revenue commitments or not?

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): The difference between this administration and the previous administration is that we have borne down on costs. When we had an opportunity to make savings, in spite of political pain, we have taken the pain and made the savings. That was the right thing to do for Londoners.

Gareth Bacon AM: Given that Labour's 'magic money tree' is not going to be delivering lots of funding for the London Fire Brigade going into the future, are you looking forward to receiving Labour's budget amendment that will put that money in?

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): It is very striking that Labour has not produced a budget amendment. As I said earlier on, it seems to be to do with some civil war taking place in the Labour Party. We should let them get on with it. I am grateful to you for your support.

Gareth Bacon AM: Thank you, Mr Mayor.

Jennette Arnold OBE AM (Chair): Have you finished, Assembly Member Bacon?

Gareth Bacon AM: I have, thank you, Chair.

Jennette Arnold OBE AM (Chair): Thank you. Mr Mayor, that brings us to the end of this question-and-answer (Q&A) time. Thank you for your attendance.

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

Jennette Arnold OBE AM (Chair): Thank you to Sir Eddie [Sir Edward Lister, Chief of Staff and Deputy Mayor for Planning and Policy] for his attendance and to Martin [Martin Clarke, Executive Director – Resources, Greater London Authority] for his attendance. Thank you.