

London Assembly (Mayor's Question Time) – 14 December 2011

Transcript: Question and Answer Session with the Mayor

3756/2011 - London Fares

Caroline Pidgeon

Are your fares fair for Londoners?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Yes, the answer is that they are and that we were in a good position to take advantage of the decision by the Chancellor in the Autumn Statement to give London an extra £136 million which we have been able to use to cut the fare increase in January and to hold it down as much as we possibly can. This is without in any way prejudicing either our infrastructure investments or the valuable concessions that Londoners have for older people, younger people and people in search of work, or indeed the incredibly valuable work that we are continuing to do on improving disabled access on the Tube and other parts of our transport system.

Caroline Pidgeon (AM): But clearly fares are just part of the investment that goes into infrastructure. They are just one small part of that. But I asked you about whether your fares are fair for Londoners because there are people in London, particularly those on low incomes, who struggle to pay your fares. I wanted to look at what could be done to perhaps target measures at those poorer Londoners. Since you came to power, single bus fares will have gone up by 50% in January, far more than Tube fares.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I do not believe that is true.

Caroline Pidgeon (AM): It is. Looking at the figures, Tube fares have gone up 33% and bus fares will have gone up 50% in January.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I have 31%.

Caroline Pidgeon (AM): I am using Transport for London (TfL) figures. One easy way to simplify fares and make them fairer for people on low incomes who particularly use buses would be to introduce a one-hour bus ticket where you can change buses within an hour and pay only one fare. Will you commit to that now?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): As I have said to you before, it is an interesting idea. The problem, I am advised, is that it will cost a lot of money and these are very tough times. People have to understand that it is very difficult. If there was some mythical pot of money that I could use to solve this problem and to give you what you want and to give Val what she wants on step-free access on every Tube station, of course I would use it immediately.

Caroline Pidgeon (AM): But will you look at introducing a one-hour bus ticket?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I cannot make promises that I will not keep.

Caroline Pidgeon (AM): But I believe it can be afforded within the TfL budget. Will you look at introducing a one-hour bus ticket?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Caroline, as I have said to you before, if it is genuinely affordable, I am more than happy to look at it, but please do not take that as a commitment.

Caroline Pidgeon (AM): Perhaps we can meet outside to discuss how we could look at that further.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I am always willing to meet you, Caroline.

Caroline Pidgeon (AM): Many people on low incomes travel to work very early in the morning, whether they are cleaners, hospital porters, hotel staff, nurses and so on. Will you consider introducing early morning fares which are cheaper than peak fares that would encourage and help those people on low incomes and that would also help with the peak fare periods?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I am looking at that. I am certainly looking at what we can do around variations in some of the times to help people as much as we possibly can.

Caroline Pidgeon (AM): Do you accept that all Londoners should have access to the lowest fares?

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

Caroline Pidgeon (AM): Would you concede that if you give access to the lowest fares only to people who have credit or debit cards that would be unacceptable?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Yes, I suppose that sounds right.

Caroline Pidgeon (AM): Given that you are rolling out wave and pay bankcards on buses in the Spring and then it is going out to the whole of the transport network, will you here and now commit and guarantee that Oyster cards will always have the cheapest fares?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Yes. I am aware that there is a problem with that. I will certainly make sure that Oyster cards have the cheapest fares, but I am dimly aware of a timing issue about the use of the bankcards and whether we can make sure that we have complete equality between bankcards and Oyster cards. But what I have said is that it would be quite wrong for people to feel that they are being in any way penalised. We are certainly doing our best to make sure that does not happen.

Caroline Pidgeon (AM): One in five Londoners does not have a debit or credit card and it is quite clear from TfL's discussions with the Transport Committee that they are going to bring in a weekly cap for Pay-As-You-Go on bankcards. They have not promised to bring that in on Oyster cards. Will you guarantee that it will come in on Oyster cards?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Yes. That is the very problem that we are trying to deal with. What I do not want to do is stop what I think will be a valuable reform, which is allowing people to use their bankcards or their debit cards to swipe on the buses. That is a great step forward.

Caroline Pidgeon (AM): Will you guarantee that Oyster will always be cheapest?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): What I want to do is to make sure that as far as it is technically possible we have equality across the piece so Oyster card users are not in any way disadvantaged.

3872/2011 - More in Tune

John Biggs

Should Londoners be pleased with George Osborne's correction to your large fare rises?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): What we are doing, as I explained just now to Caroline, is making use of the £136 million to deliver the cut in the fare rise in January to an average of 5.6% and some key fares are going to be held below the rate of inflation. The Oyster Pay As You Go bus fare is going up by only 3.8% or 5p and Oyster Pay As You Go Tube peak - so that is 2 to 5, 3 to 6 and 2 to 6 - are only going up by 4%. But this is the key. We are only doing that because we can simultaneously keep investing in London and keep improving London transport. I heard you say 'rubbish' or something when I was saying that I thought that was what Londoners wanted and maybe I am mishearing you. In that case, we are in agreement.

Actually, I do think it is right to make sure that even in tough times you keep going with vital investment that will improve the quality of people's transport in this city. I go back to what I was saying to Caroline. If I had £727 million and if TfL was unlike any other body in the public sector and we had a great big pot of money that we could pour into the fares box, then of course I would do it. Of course I would do it. I am a democratically elected politician and I would certainly want to do that. But I am afraid the hard truth is that you cannot do that without doing grave and irreparable damage to the infrastructure programme and to upgrades of the Northern Line, the Piccadilly Line, the Bakerloo Line; vital interchanges that people want improved. Maybe it is a tough argument for me to make. Maybe it is an argument that we will have to have repeatedly. But it is an argument that I propose to make and that I am confident of.

John Biggs (Chair): With respect, Chair, there is no indication yet that he is going to think about answering the question. The question was whether Londoners should be grateful for

having been rescued from your 7% fare rise by George Osborne [Chancellor of the Exchequer]. I think Londoners probably should, on balance. If it is a choice between being boiled alive and slowly pickled, then it is probably best to be slowly pickled. But I do not have any further questions.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I am delighted to receive the gratitude of John, not for the first time. There was a very important alliance built there, I hope you will notice, between me and John on the importance of infrastructure.

4138/2011 - Fares

Richard Tracey

What is your initial estimate of the impact of the Autumn Statement on future fares increases?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Thank you, Dick, and I am obliged to you for allowing me just to repeat the point I have made to John already. Because of the extra cash that we secured from the Treasury, the £136 million, we are able to abate fares to reduce the fare increase in January, but to go ahead with all the programmes that matter to Londoners. If we went down routes that are being proposed to us by others, you would be seriously jeopardising improvements in the quality of life and transport in London that matter hugely to people in this city. You would be damaging our long-term competitiveness and actually you would be undermining TfL's ability to borrow and the financial robustness of our transport system.

You will be familiar with these arguments because you have heard them many times before, but promises to cut fares which have been made in this place by previous incumbents have never been kept. They were made in 2000 to keep them in line with inflation. The previous Mayor then whacked them up in 2004. In 2003 or thereabouts, he promised to keep fares in line with inflation for the next term and put up the bus fare by the Retail Price Index (RPI) plus 10% two years in a row, so promises to cut fares are obviously made with a clear political intent. They have never been kept by the previous incumbent. I do not believe they would be kept and they would be damaging. They are the wrong stuff for London in the current circumstances.

Richard Tracey (AM): Thank you for that. I think it does show that you and George Osborne do understand the economics of this far better than some of the politicians on either side because you are not either suggesting a fares freeze because you are about to face an election and nor, indeed, are you whacking the fares up by RPI plus 10%, which I think happened in one or two years under the previous mayoral incumbent.

Can I ask you, Mr Mayor, to spell it out. If we accepted these lines about reducing fares, can you say again just what damage it would do to the likes of my constituents who are waiting for the Northern Line to be upgraded and many others in London? Also, how many bus routes would we see actually either being curtailed or closed down completely?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Dick, I can tell you that there would be huge damage done across London. On some projects that are currently underway there would be suddenly a

massive question mark because you are talking about taking out £1.06 billion up to 2015/16 and a further £60 million from Docklands Light Railway (DLR) revenues. It just does not make sense for London. In your case in Merton and Wandsworth, your constituents would be affected by the delay or cancellation of congestion relief schemes at Bank, Victoria, Bond Street and Tottenham Court Road, and there would certainly be more overcrowding on buses, longer waits and reduced night services. I do not think that is what people want.

I will fight this argument. I will keep fighting this argument because I happen to believe that we are right. It is the right thing to do, particularly since this investment is one of the critical ways in which you drive jobs in the short-term and you help to keep people in employment. The Olympic investments - which I completely applaud and I applaud the work of everybody in this place who helped to secure those investments - have been of massive importance for the construction industry in London and indeed throughout the UK. It is actually the tailing-off. If you talk to the Treasury, it is because we are completing those Olympic investments so fast - that construction - that you are starting to see a contraction now in construction and I do not want to see that. I want to see the London economy keep turning over. That is why our housing programme is so important and our ambition to build 55,000 new affordable homes between 2011 and 2015. That will create 100,000 jobs.

Darren Johnson (AM): We have seen before the passion and the commitment and the determination that you have shown in terms of fighting regulation in the City of London and speaking up for financial institutions in the City of London. Are you ever going to apply that same passion and determination to actually looking at making fares affordable for ordinary Londoners?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Yes. I believe we have done that consistently throughout my administration and I am very proud of the record that we have. I would remind you, Darren, that it was this administration and not any previous one that gave Londoners the 24-hour Freedom Pass for older people. That is one of the things and that is something that would be potentially at risk from a reckless vote-grabbing promise to cut fares. It was this administration and not a previous one that gave special rates for people in search of work and indeed for war veterans. We have preserved every single one of the concessions for young people and that was very tough. We had huge pressures, as you will remember, from all sorts of people who said it was the wrong way. I said, "No, this is the best and simplest way that you can help families on low incomes and we are doing it". What I cannot do --

Darren Johnson (AM): So you are saying that people are not struggling to pay fares in London at the moment?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): No.

Darren Johnson (AM): You are saying that the public transport system is perfectly affordable for everyone?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): No, that is not what I said, Darren, and you should not try to put words in my mouth. What I said was that I am proud of my record and that we have kept every single one of the concessions. That is of great value to London.

Darren Johnson (AM): I do not think you understand how much Londoners are struggling.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I am also proud that we have worked very hard by making massive economies in TfL and by cutting huge quantities of waste in our budgets; we have kept fares as low as we conceivably can. I would just remind you there has been a 255 reduction in the number of directors in TfL. There have been massive cost cuts. Overall, the Horizon project of budgetary reforms in TfL is going to take out £8 billion worth of cost. That is money that we have been able to give back to Londoners in keeping the fares down as much as we possibly can.

What we cannot do and what I will not do is make promises that I do not think Londoners would believe because they have heard previous Mayors promise to keep fares down, come in and then whack them up. Why should I? That would be completely wrong and dishonest.

Valerie Shawcross (AM): Mr Mayor, can I bring you some good news. You did say that you were looking for a pot of money which you could use to bring down the fares.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): No, I did not. I said that no such thing existed.

Valerie Shawcross (AM): Would you accept that in the last year TfL made a £729 million surplus over and above its capital expenditure plans and that this year, up until 23 November, TfL had actually reported in the paperwork to the TfL finance board a £206 million actual surplus in the papers that was over and above capital expenditure plans and derived mainly from surplus income on fares and lower than expected expenditure on capital projects? Do you not accept that those monies were reported in TfL's published accounts, and are available online?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): No. I understand why you are saying this, Val, and clearly you have a political campaign to run. But I am afraid, with greatest respect to you, that this is not economically sensible and, indeed, literate. It is an interesting fact that if you look at the occasions when you and the previous Mayor raised fares by the greatest amount - and I am talking about the huge swingeing increases of RPI plus 12% - there were --

Valerie Shawcross (AM): Mr Mayor, can I ask how you have handled your surpluses?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Would you allow me to finish, there were identical or comparable sums in the TfL budget. These are sums --

Valerie Shawcross (AM): Can I ask you about how you have handled your surpluses, Mr Mayor? These are not mythical pots. They are reported in your accounts. You are Chair of TfL. These reports do come to you. If I could just move on, the debate about how you would fund a reduction in the massively expensive fares in London is really important to Londoners.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Yes, it is. Can I just say that --

Valerie Shawcross (AM): I wanted us to look at the paperwork because it is very clear and simple. Since you were reporting in your TfL papers on 23 November a mid-year surplus of £206 million, who took the decision for the TfL Board last week to use an enormous amount of additional money to repay debts in an unscheduled way? In the papers last week what happened was that you shifted from a budgeted £289 million debt repayment at the beginning of the year to a £487 million debt repayment by December. If you had that surplus, Mr Mayor, and you said you were looking for ways of doing additional capital projects and reducing the fares, why did you instead apply that enormous amount of money to put cash back into the hands of the bankers and actually repay debt when the interest rates TfL was paying were extremely low?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): The bankers? We are funding the bankers? Goodness me. Can I explain?

Valerie Shawcross (AM): Do you accept that you have repaid debt earlier than scheduled in order to disappear the surplus that we had identified?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): No. I am very sorry, Val, that you are arguing in these terms. I do understand the hard political necessity that you face. These sums are not surpluses. They are not cash reserves. They are cash that is earmarked for expenditure on vital infrastructure projects. I think John and everybody in this horseshoe would actually accept that there is a massive argument for keeping going in tough times with things that London desperately needs. I will not cut those and all your allusions to £727 million or £729 million - all these figures - I am afraid that cash is already hypothecated for other projects.

On your point about the debt repayments, let me explain that, because I think it will be of advantage to people to understand what that is. You make an interesting though absurd point. What we are doing is trying to minimise the impact on our finances of sustaining these debts and actually in the long-term the repayments we are making will save £140 million. If you choose, you can fire-hose away that £140 million to the bankers in interest, if you want. Is that what you want? Is that your policy? You want to give your friends the bankers £140 million in interest? I do not think that would be the right way to go.

Valerie Shawcross (AM): Do you understand, Mr Mayor, that Londoners are being forced to pay above inflation fare rises again in order now, it seems, for you to pay off debt early?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Can I just remind you of what I have just said?

Valerie Shawcross (AM): Do you accept that that is what has happened?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): No. As I have just explained to you, we are saving. By making these repayments, we are actually saving Londoners £140 million that would otherwise go to the banks and would be lost to this city.

Valerie Shawcross (AM): What interest rates were you paying on those debts, Mr Mayor?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): If that is the course that you really want us to embark on, if you want us to haemorrhage another £140 million, then that is really the policy. By the way, that was the economic philosophy of racking up unsustainable debt that had got this country into the difficulties that it is in. I will just go back to my point. You mentioned inflation and fare rises. As I said earlier on, we have done our level best to keep fares down to 5.6% and the Oyster Pay-As-You-Go bus fare is actually coming below the rate of inflation and I am proud of our record.

Roger Evans (AM): I think many of us have been wondering what Gordon Brown [former British Prime Minister] has been doing for the last couple of years. It is now clear he has been acting as an adviser to the Ken Livingstone [former Mayor of London] budget team with an approach which can only be described as Grecian to racking up debt and to keeping it. But, Mr Mayor, you drew our attention rightly to the RPI plus 12% increases that we experienced under your predecessor's administration. Would it surprise you to learn that not only did Labour Members vote for that budget, but so did the Green Members, who talk about making fares affordable?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): You are joking. What, the Green Members?

Roger Evans (AM): They spent four years propping up that administration.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Do you mean to say the Green Members supported swinging fare increases?

Roger Evans (AM): I thought it was just worth drawing the Assembly's attention to something which they often hope that we would forget. But can you enlighten us, Mr Mayor, as there are people from Redbridge in the audience today, what would be the effects on transport in Havering and Redbridge of an unsustainable fares freeze, as proposed by Mr Livingstone?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Obviously it is hard for me to predict what anybody who was in that crazy position would be forced to cut, but I can certainly tell you that in Redbridge you face a threat to all kinds of things, not least the concessions I have already mentioned and some of the vital improvements to our network, particularly in outer London bus services. You and I have worked together to try to improve them in your neck of the woods and I congratulate you on that.

Roger Evans (AM): Successfully, I might add.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): There is no doubt that they would face under these proposals a very substantial erosion. I am absolutely determined to prevent that from happening.

Roger Evans (AM): You will ensure you protect our police on buses in London as well, which have been so successful in reducing crime in Havering and Redbridge and which would be threatened by this unsustainable fares freeze?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Yes. Can I just say parenthetically how nice it is to have the younger generation here following our deliberations?

Brian Coleman (AM): It [child in the public gallery] is crying from boredom.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): No, on the contrary, it is a protest against the grievous misuse of statistics by some of the Labour Party. I am delighted that they are here. The issue is what happens to bus services. TfL makes substantial contributions to policing on our public transport network. How could that conceivably be continued if you have more than £1 billion cut from your programme?

Jennette Arnold (Chair): Assembly Member Cleverly.

James Cleverly (AM): Mr Mayor, I am just curious as to who we should believe when it comes to these things. I seek your guidance on this. I am curious as to whether we should believe Ken Livingstone when he claims that he will use 'excess profit' at TfL to cut fares or whether we should believe a Mr K Livingstone, former Mayor of London, who in 2006 said, "We do not make a profit. We are not allowed to make a profit". I am curious as to whether we should believe the Ken Livingstone currently campaigning to be Mayor of London when he says he will deliver his fare cuts policy without touching either future investment budgets, reserves or existing operating budgets, or whether we should believe Mr K Livingstone, former Mayor of London, who in January 2000 said with regards to proposals to cut fares, "That is fine, as long as it also has the honesty to go on and say what I should cut whilst cutting fare increases".

Finally, I am curious as to whether we should believe the Ken Livingstone currently campaigning to be Mayor of London when he says, "The operating surplus is a completely separate budget to capital budgets which fund investment" or whether we should believe Mr K Livingstone, formerly of this parish, who said in October 2004, "Capital investment will be funded from grants provided by government grants and revenue surpluses". So I am just unsure whether we, you and indeed Londoners should believe the Ken Livingstone currently vying to be Mayor of London or the former Mayor of London when defending his incredibly high fare increases in former years.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I think the point is well made. The real difficulty is you had two occasions when Londoners were promised that fares would not go up. On both occasions they did go up, on the second occasion by a huge amount. I do not want to get into the game of making false promises. We keep fares as low as we conceivably can and we are going to get on with improving Londoners' transport.

Gareth Bacon (AM): Mr Mayor, the debt repayment that was referred to earlier by the other side is, as you have just outlined, effectively paying an early gratuity which reduces the length of the debt and the amount to be repaid; thereby delivering considerable savings to Londoners.

The surplus that has been talked about endlessly by the other side has also endlessly, we have been told, been swallowed up by inflation - much of it. So would you agree, Mr Mayor, that given that things have been repeated endlessly and in public many times, there may be a reason that God gave people two eyes, two ears and one mouth and perhaps certain Opposition politicians should read more, listen more and speak less about subjects they clearly do not understand?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I do not want to get into a needless party political polemic about all of this. Put it this way: if there was not an election campaign on, I think there would be a wide measure of agreement around the policies that we are proposing.

4137/2011 - Riots Panel report

Roger Evans

What is your view on the Riots, Communities and Victims Panel's interim report?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Darra Singh's work and the work of the Riots, Communities and Victims Panel is very interesting and it will be something that we will want to look at. The interim report was extremely interesting and we will look forward with interest to the final report.

Clearly, what happened in the riots was a huge concatenation of problems surfacing themselves. It is not something you can point to a single cause or, as I think I saw one newspaper headline suggest, just blame the police. That was not the entire truth. It was not just the closure of youth centres in some boroughs. It was not just a materialist culture among young people. It was not just gangs. It was not just the loss of the Education Maintenance Allowance (EMA). There were a number of things coming together and what you really had was a phenomenon that the police had not really seen before which was the dispersal of provocative messages by new social media and the ability of people who meant harm to organise very fast. By the third day, the police performed fantastically well. A point that is really worth repeating: when other cities have had riots and most other capital cities have had troubles of one kind or another, what you do not see is huge numbers of citizens standing up when the police pass to applaud them for what they did. What you saw was a fantastic piece of commonsense, robust, British policing. That is what we intend to pursue.

Roger Evans (AM): We were heartened by some of the responses we had from the new Metropolitan Police Service Commissioner last week when he appeared in front of us and certainly the most recent demonstration was handled extremely well with large numbers of police and the availability of plastic bullets. And possibly in future, the Commissioner has suggested, the availability of water cannon to control public order situations. Do you feel he is along the right lines here?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): The Commissioner is doing a first-rate job and his total policing concept is absolutely right. As you know because we have discussed this before - and I am sure Metropolitan Police Authority (MPA) members and former MPA members will agree

with me - we do not want to be in the game of ratcheting up our arsenal in London. We have a style of policing that works very well. I do not want to see, as it were, an arms race. But it is right that the Commissioner should keep, as he does, those options in reserve.

Roger Evans (AM): Do you feel that the Commissioner is correct when he says that criminals should fear the police or that the *Guardian* is correct when it says that they should love them more?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Who, the criminals should? No, it is certainly correct that criminals should fear the police. That must be right. I do not know whether the *Guardian* really said that. I cannot believe it said anything quite as crass as that. But it is vital that communities should respect and know the police. That is a vital part of our work in London and that is what the MPA is there for. That is what the Mayor's Office for Policing and Crime (MOPC) will help to do. It is to make sure that the police are as integrated as possible with their neighbourhoods.

Operation Hawk, which we had the other day, was very successful. It made loads of arrests of people that people in communities and in estates really wanted to see arrested. It worked because the Safer Neighbourhoods Teams were in contact with the police about what was going on and were able to alert them about these guys - almost always guys - that needed attention. It is that kind of interrelation between the police and society that has made the police force in London unique for a long time. It is something we should work to preserve.

Roger Evans (AM): Certainly in Ilford where we did have some instances of disorder, it was quite difficult for the police to control them. I do pay tribute to them because the riot control trained police had been sent elsewhere in London, so the local police ended up having to clear the high street with basically Criminal Investigation Department (CID) people and the guys who sit on the front desk and they did so very bravely. But will you make sure that we have more police trained in crowd control for the future so that this type of situation cannot arise again?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Yes. That is certainly one thing we have looked at. I cannot remember what budget has been allocated for that. We might want to take it up with Kit Malthouse AM [Deputy Mayor for Policing] afterwards. It is certainly something that we are doing more of, provided it is cost-effective.

Andrew Boff (AM): Mr Mayor, you saw for yourself the damage that was done to the businesses on Clarence Road in Hackney.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I did.

Andrew Boff (AM): It is through the persistence of local campaigners like Naomi Newstead, who visited all the shops on a regular basis and helped progress/chase their claims with the Mayor's fund, that you may be delighted to know that the majority of those businesses have now received some support from the Mayor's fund.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Is that the High Street Fund?

Andrew Boff (AM): From the High Street Fund, not from the Riot Damage Fund, but I will move on to that. There have been, however, delays in those payments and I would ask you to address the problem as to how some bureaucratic requirements are getting in the way of the submission of some of the claims. Naomi Newstead has had this experience and I have been on the phone to banks, trying to get them to accept a claim from a business. They did not even get to the point of submitting the form and I had to persuade the teller there that they could. I said, "The Mayor of London says you can take this". You did not actually tell me, I must admit, so it was a bit of a porkie.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Thank you for using my name.

Andrew Boff (AM): But it was only through that sort of persistence that we managed to get the forms submitted. Could you look into those procedures and ensure that they are much more rapid and - obviously we do not want another riot soon - but there is still the Riot Damages Act that we have to consider - that bureaucracy is not getting in the way of these people receiving some kind of compensation?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Absolutely not. I am pleased that the High Street Fund has been able to be useful. I want to thank again Bill [Sir William] Castell and everybody who helped us set that up. A lot of charitable money came in, not least from the banks that everybody bashes and other firms, and that was very useful for London. If there are delays in getting the cash through, is it from the High Street Fund?

Andrew Boff (AM): It was the High Street Fund, but I also hear of similar bureaucratic delays like proof of ownership of equipment that had been damaged. You know. You went to see the shops on Clarence Road.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I know the one you are talking about. I know exactly what you are talking about.

Andrew Boff (AM): Some of the equipment he has he does not have a receipt for. It has been there for decades.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I know exactly the gentleman you are referring to, yes.

Andrew Boff (AM): It is a real problem to produce this sort of bureaucracy. The point is that you do not even get to the point of submitting the form because that one piece of information is not there. If you have not submitted, you do not feature in the statistics.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Andrew, we will take it up with Sir Peter Rogers [Mayor's Advisor Regeneration, Growth and Enterprise] and we will see what is happening to his particular claims. I remember the damage that was done to that shop and we will see what we can do to sort it out and generally to expedite High Street Funds as much as we can.

Andrew Boff (AM): Thank you.

Jennette Arnold (Chair): Just taking Chair's action for the following on there. It is Peter Rogers. The borough officers and everybody is already on the case, so you will find information ready and available to you, Mr Mayor.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Thank you very much, Jennette, and you are speaking now as the Assembly Member for that kind of area.

Jennette Arnold (Chair): Assembly Member O'Connell.

Steve O'Connell (AM): I would like to echo Andrew Boff's comments around the wish to cut through the swathes of bureaucracy, if indeed it is there, particularly on behalf of my residents and businesses in London Road.

There are evolving reports and inquiries to report soon on the events back in August and I think we would all agree that individual officers showed enormous bravery and restraint over those two or three nights. But there are evolving comments and critique around tactics and strategy. First of all, Mr Mayor, what is your view on the Metropolitan Police Federation's report that they believe that the strategic response was compromised by past - in essence - politically motivated criticism of so-called heavy-handed tactics?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): There are going to be a lot of ping-pong type arguments this way and that about whether the police felt in some way fettered in what they could do because of criticism around the G20 and all that kind of thing. As I say, there was a range of things that came together. The police did a marvellous job and they were a credit to London. Could there have been a different approach on the Saturday night? Were there things that might have been done differently in retrospect? Of course Tim Godwin [Deputy Commissioner, Metropolitan Police Service] would say that and everybody involved would say that. But we were not there. Those decisions are very hard to take. The police have learned no end of lessons about how to handle these things and, as I say, there was a very rapid spread of mischief-making and violence with the use of new social media. There was a kind of mental contamination that took place throughout the City amongst loads of the usual suspects. It took the police a while to understand fully what they were dealing with. Once they got there, they dealt with it impeccably and 2,400 people have been arrested. Loads of them are now doing custodial sentences. The job we have as a society is to deal with them when they come out and what kind of lives they are going to have and how they are going to be resettled and how we are going to make sure they do not reoffend.

Steve O'Connell (AM): I agree completely. It is a very broad cocktail of issues. It is a complex picture and any reports or suggestions or recommendations coming out will be on a range of issues. The point I am really trying to pursue is those individual officers who found themselves faced by those --

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): They were heroic. In your particular case in Croydon, they were absolutely heroic and they behaved with great bravery. I have spoken obviously to

the officer who was in charge that night and they did a wonderful job in very difficult circumstances.

Obviously, what we have to do now is to use the resources we have to make sure that we take Croydon forward and indeed Tottenham and everywhere else that was affected and improve it beyond the level that it was at in August 2011 so that, as it were, the legacy of that experience is positive and that things happen in Croydon - and you know some of the things we are talking about like potential shopping centre developments - and things happen in Tottenham that take those communities forward. There is scope in both those areas, both Tottenham and in Croydon. There is real scope for projects that will deliver lasting economic benefits.

Brian Coleman (AM): Whilst of course wishing to support colleagues in Croydon, Tottenham and elsewhere, one must not take more off those parts of London which behaved themselves impeccably and of course your Outer London Fund is assisting those areas like Barnet, Richmond, Kingston, Sutton and other places which did not riot. So there must not be any rewards for rioting, I would suggest, Mr Mayor. But can I take your answer to the --

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Yes, of course Brent Cross remains an extremely important and attractive area for development.

Brian Coleman (AM): For landscaping. For building less on, Mr Mayor, as I am sure colleagues would agree.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): It has great potential.

Brian Coleman (AM): You will know that one of the members of the Panel was of course the excellent Simon Marcus, a constituent of mine, who has done some pioneering youth work in Haringey, particularly around his boxing academy, and in fact down in Hackney, I am reminded as well. Of course, that is a very similar programme and a similar approach to that taken by the Fire Brigade on the Local Intervention Fire Education (LIFE) course. You would accept the need for more investment not just in Simon Marcus-type projects but of course in the Fire Brigade's LIFE course.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Yes, and I congratulate you, Brian, on your astute management of the London Fire and Emergency Planning Authority (LFEPA) budgets that has allowed us to continue to support the LIFE course. But I also think that Simon Marcus wrote one of the most brilliant pieces about the riots that I read and he is a guy who in my view gets it and is coming up with grassroots solutions that deliver real value to young people. The more we can support people like him and encourage others to get into that kind of work, the better it will be for our city.

That is why Team London is so important. That is why it is so important to mobilise loads of people to volunteer. David Lammy [Member of Parliament for Tottenham] was saying the other day in an excellent analysis that the Scouts and the Guides and the Cadets may be unfashionable, but there are huge numbers of young people who want to be involved. There is a big waiting list. If you can get the adult volunteers to help, then you can start to give them

real alternatives in their lives. The more we can expand that kind of work through Team London or the Mayor's Fund or whatever it happens to be, the better it will be for our city.

Brian Coleman (AM): Absolutely. But, Mr Mayor, you will also be aware of course that it is an interim report at the moment and it has very few recommendations. But one recommendation in the interim report is around the London Regional Resilience Forum (LRRF). Will you ask your officers to look at that recommendation and look at how the work of the London Resilience Forum can perhaps be more focused and more timely in future events and whether we need to revisit the settlement that came around Resilience with the abolition of Goal.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I listen acutely - attentively - to what you are saying there, Brian, and I want to pay tribute to the work of Richard in the LRRF and I think that it is a very important and valuable function which I think should be concentrated with the GLA. I think there may be some lessons that we need to draw from the recent performance of the Ambulance Service during the strike. It may be that we want to look at that and see what conclusions there are. It may be that there are no conclusions. It may be that there is no reform that needs to be made, but it is certainly our job to look at it and I know that Richard is doing that.

Brian Coleman (AM): Because you will know, Mr Mayor, that the Fire Brigade have just in the last three weeks moved their control into the new multi-million pound control centre building - at huge cost by the last Government - down in Merton, acquired for London at a bargain rate by LFEPA, and that is now functioning down at Merton and has huge scope for dealing with a lot more than just fire control.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): The point is well-made, and Richard is nodding and I know that that is something that you may want to develop further with him.

3710/2011 - High cost of affordable housing

Jenny Jones

Are you concerned about the cost of family-sized affordable homes for sale in London that have been built in the last few years?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): On the high cost of affordable family-sized homes for sale, my impression is of talking to officials that the increase in the average sale price of these homes has risen less than the average price of outright market sales over the last five years, and the earnings of those buying these affordable homes for sale has remained static actually at around £34,000. I mean, it may be that you come across examples of exorbitantly priced ones, in which case I would be interested to hear.

Jenny Jones (AM): In fact, the price of those houses has risen 19% between 2008 and 2011. I am just worried that we are sort of dealing with the fringes of a problem that is getting much worse. We need some big ideas now because, for example, your Housing Market Assessment which was done for the London Plan said that we would need to build 45,000 per annum to stabilise prices, but your target is only 33,000 and so while it is laudable to have the target of

33,000, it is just never going to catch up with demand. I think it is time that you started thinking about some --

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Let me just tell you what we are doing - some of the things - because I think you are right to focus on this, and I think Nicky might have a question later on about affordable housing. I just want to get it across to you that I do think there is a good record over the last few years. I think people were very worried about the effect of the credit crunch and we have been able to deliver - we will have delivered - 50,000 by May next year, but more important than that, we are now able to use the affordable rent model, in spite of a lot of the anxiety about it, to go ahead with another 55,000. So that is the rate of construction actually increases rather than decreases between 2011 and 2015.

What I want to do is to create a kind of doomsday book of all the land that is held in the public sector in this City, and there are huge quantities of it, so it is not just all the land and the assets that have been brought together now in this place, so that is the Homes and Communities Agency (HCA) land, the London Development Agency (LDA) land plus the cash. We have got another £3 billion to spend on housing between now and 2015. But all the land held by other public bodies of whatever kind, so it could be the National Health Service (NHS), the Ministry of Defence (MOD), TfL --

Jenny Jones (AM): I understand, I understand. That sounds --

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): -- and make that available to developers in order to create yet more affordable housing, because the answer - and I think you and I probably agree on this - in the end is supply. It is about creating more affordable homes.

Jenny Jones (AM): Absolutely, and I like the idea of the doomsday book. That sounds like something that would fit very nicely into a political manifesto, but --

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): You are welcome to it. We can have a joint manifesto.

Jenny Jones (AM): But the problem is still that affordable houses - most affordable houses - are still only affordable at the first time they are sold, and after that they just go into the market system and so they become unaffordable for the next people. What I am talking about is perhaps having bigger ideas about how you could keep affordable houses affordable, how you can start thinking about things like land value taxation, about increasing or building social housing. I am just wondering if you are lobbying the Government for any big thinking. I am worried that everything that is happening at the moment is too small scale, is never going to catch up with the problem.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): With respect, I think the Government does understand the scale of the problem and we want the lion's share of the money for upgrading houses to come to London. We have an ambitious programme to build more family-sized affordable homes than I think any previous Mayoral regime has done. You mentioned what happens, you say they have been sold then they are lost, and we want a one for one replacement. If you sell social housing, then that should be only on condition that another social rent or affordable

housing becomes available, and it is important that the income from those sales is recycled and used to create more affordable housing.

Jenny Jones (AM): That is all very sensible. What I am saying is though that this is all tweaking at a massive problem --

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I do not think it --

Jenny Jones (AM): Look, it is laudable, the houses that are being built, but they are just not enough.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Did you say it was laudable?

Jenny Jones (AM): For example, there is a new three-bed affordable flat in Homerton at the moment that is going to cost £1,700 a month. Now, a family with two children that want to buy that have got to have a joint income of £73,000. As you pointed out earlier, it is nearly double the average income of people needing that sort of house. How are they ever going to? If you do not have any big ideas, really big ideas, we are just never going to catch up with the problem.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): With great respect to you, I think that we have confounded the sceptics already with the sheer number of houses that we have built. I think it is a record that we can be very proud of, everybody involved, the London HCA, everybody involved, and London and the boroughs have worked fantastically hard to do this. We are convinced that we can accelerate the programme and do even more over the next period, and there is an increasing uptake of affordable products in the part by part rent market, the First Steps scheme. You are seeing a doubling of the number of people who are doing First Steps. I think that is the way to go.

Jenny Jones (AM): You know as well as I do it is not enough.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): This particular scheme, I will look at --

Jenny Jones (AM): You just look at the figures. It is your figures that I am talking about and it is just nowhere near enough. Thank you very much.

Mike Tuffrey (AM): Can I follow on because we are all agreed that the costs of all types of housing, family-sized, affordable is going up and that the fundamental answer to that is to increase supply, and you said that actually you are going to do that, but you are not. Can I put it absolutely to you that your new strategy that came out yesterday is incredibly disappointing. On appendix 1, the number of homes delivered per annum is 13,000 fixed, 13,623 previously, 13,710 going forward. So there is no increase in your new strategy, and that is because you say 40,000 to 55,000, just to be clear. You think that is an increase, but the 40,000 is over four years and the 55,000 is over five years, so the amount per annum is not going up.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): No, let me explain the figures, because it is common ground - and I think even Jenny was kind enough to acknowledge it - that we have done much better than expected.

Mike Tuffrey (AM): I am talking about the new strategy which is not going to build more houses.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Over the four years, 2008 to 2012, we will have done 50,000. From 2011, which involves counting 2011 twice, but from 2011 to 2015 we can do 55,000.

Mike Tuffrey (AM): Yes, but the amount per annum is not going up. It is black and white.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): It does actually increase and it does involve --

Mike Tuffrey (AM): Just take my word for it, I have it absolutely in front of me and the point I am trying to make is that the only way we will get the big increase that Jenny is absolutely right we need - and you are saying you want - is to get the public land released, married with private investment and motoring forward.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Yes, I agree with you.

Mike Tuffrey (AM): Now, I have, over the last three years, asked you 11 times about the London Housing Company. We are not seeing the release of public land married with private investment going forward and I see no reason --

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): You are, actually.
I mean, look at what is happening in Silvertown. You are seeing that, Mike. I mean, do not be so despairing. You are seeing that.

Mike Tuffrey (AM): Not on the numbers, not on the scale that we need to shift the --

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Look at the incredible interest there is now in those sites in Silvertown and in the Royals. You are seeing that land that is held in the public sector --

Mike Tuffrey (AM): But you have been Mayor for nearly four years. You have been Mayor for nearly four years. To be telling us now there is incredible interest in the future, what have you been doing in the last four years?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): In those years, as you have been kind enough to say, we have, in spite of your prognostications, built a record number of affordable homes.

Mike Tuffrey (AM): Not enough.

Andrew Boff (AM): Mr Mayor, some of us prefer to judge housing records not on rhetoric but on achievements. Under the last administration, there were talks about increasing family

housing, and only under your administration of the targets for family-sized homes improved. The last administration talked ad nauseum about the community land trusts and how they might be possible in the future. Only under your administration are we actually going to see the first one in London. Under the previous administration, we had developments for the Olympic Park that were predominantly flats for yuppies. Only now under your administration have we seen the development of Cheltenham Manor, which is going to be a new estate, a family-friendly estate --

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Absolutely right.

Andrew Boff (AM): -- with houses with gardens. Under the previous administration, which Jenny Jones supported, they talked about making land available for development. Only under your administration is that now being moved forward and land is being made available. Are you aware, Mr Mayor, that you will always receive the Conservative group when you make more land available for family housing, because ultimately the price is a product of supply --

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Yes, absolutely right.

Andrew Boff (AM): -- and the more supply we have, the more Londoners will be able to afford family houses in the future.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): This is the right policy for London, because we have a young, dynamic workforce that needs to be able to live within reasonable distance of their place of work, and that is why we have been so determined to construct more affordable homes and good quality homes with Parker Morris plus 10% standards. We are not building rabbit hutches. We are building more family accommodation, because I do not want families to be in a position where they are forced to move out of London when they have children. It is vital that we keep a mixed economy and that we support families with children in this. The second big reason for doing that - and that is a reason enough, because it keeps the London workforce where it is - is of course that if you have an ambitious house-building programme, and everybody who is anxious about numbers and demography should bear in mind that London currently has 7.6 million people. In the past, in 1911, it had 9 million. In 1939, it had about 8.1 million people. There is scope for expansion, and the reason for doing it is that it drives the construction industry, and that is of huge importance during the recession. The construction industry is a major employer of young people. It helps give people skills, gets them off benefits and into work and we think that with our programme of 55,000 new quality affordable homes by 2015, we will generate 100,000 jobs, and that is a good reason as well.

3870/2011 - Autumn Statement

Valerie Shawcross

Please state how much actual Government funding has been allocated to (a) The Northern Line extension to Battersea and (b) the Silvertown and Gallions Reach river crossing projects?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Just to be clear, what the Chancellor was saying particularly on the Northern Line and the new stations at Nine Elms and at Battersea, what is proposed is that there should be an enterprise owner, which there will be a CIL (Community Infrastructure Levy), and that CIL will be used to fund the two new stations. But the Treasury guarantee to me is that they will stand behind that CIL, in other words, they will underwrite that investment, and so we are able to proceed with the Transport and Works Act (TWA) to get going on those two new stations. The great thing about that is that there will be no barrier. There was some reporting on the BBC saying that the collapse of one particular holding there at the Battersea Power Station itself would undermine it. It is not true at all. You are already seeing the River Light scheme going up at a great speed; you are seeing the Americans coming. There are massive investments going in there. These tube stations will help to unlock it and to make a very considerable difference and revolutionise the economic logic of those areas. On the river crossings, we are confident that these can be funded, and I will be in negotiations with the Chancellor about how to take that forward.

Valerie Shawcross (AM): I think we all want to see Battersea Power Station redeveloped and there is a very broad support for the extension of the Northern Line, and indeed, the other developments in the area. It is an underused area, it has huge potential jobs and homes.

Did you know that the Treasury Holdings, who were due to fund the Northern Line extension, were going to go into administration the next day when you did your photo shoot on the site, and did you do any contingency planning about how you would handle that?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I have to tell you, Val, I think most sensible people in London who knew anything about anything - and I do not exclude you from that category - knew that --

Valerie Shawcross (AM): They were in trouble.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): -- Treasury Holdings was underwater and that that was not the way forward. I think to go back to a conversation we were having earlier about uncertainty and the difficulty, the difficulty in the eurozone is that everybody knows that Greece is unable to meet its obligations, and you need to unblock that --

Valerie Shawcross (AM): Can I just ask on the Northern Line extension --

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Of course I knew, but it is immaterial, because we are able to go ahead with the TWA, which will unlock that development.

Valerie Shawcross (AM): The Treasury Holdings were due to fund the bulk of the work on the Northern Line extension.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): No.

Valerie Shawcross (AM): I think the main concern in the interim period, while things are being sorted out, and hopefully the site resold, would be that the work that is going on at the

moment that Treasury Holdings were funding, the design work, the public consultation, they have done a lot of that, the preparation for the TWA might grind to a halt. Are you giving an undertaking that TfL will continue this work and is the Government actually offering any practical or financial help in this interregnum period?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): The answer is yes, and as I said just now in my answer to your question, TfL is going to go ahead with the TWA, the two stations at Nine Elms and Battersea --

Valerie Shawcross (AM): But for the extension as a whole.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): -- and for the extension as a whole. I mean, obviously we will not have stations --

Valerie Shawcross (AM): So we are expecting the TWA to go ahead?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): -- without a track, I can assure you of that, Val, and that will enable us to unlock the whole potential of that area, which could be the most exciting thing that has happened in London since the Olympic cycle at Canary Wharf.

Valerie Shawcross (AM): Yes, it is. We all agree we want to see this happen. Is the Government doing anything practically to help you though?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Yes. What they have is that they will underwrite or stand behind the SIL, so that we have a Treasury guarantee that we can proceed with those investments.

Valerie Shawcross (AM): We will leave it there, Chair.

John Biggs (AM): A good way to get people working in London would be to make progress with building river crossings in East London, and we are delighted that after four years of doing nothing, you have come round to the view that we should build them. However, Val's question asked how much money there is for this, because it is going to cost money, there are not fairies building it. The answer is there is none, so --

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Well, that is not true, but we can certainly advance both projects --

John Biggs (AM): What figure appeared in the Chancellor's Statement then?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): -- and the Government has assured us that it will work with us to make sure that these projects are financed, but what we could not do --

John Biggs (AM): Let us get this right then.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): -- and I have to say, at the risk of belabouring the point, there is a certain incoherence in asking me to take £1 billion out of TfL's budget and then to belabour me later on in the morning for not proceeding fast enough with river crossings. You have got to get your line of attack straight, team.

John Biggs (AM): It is very simple, Chair. The scheme for a river cross which you inherited, which I know you found unsatisfactory, was fully funded and did not touch TfL's revenues. Now that has gone down the plughole, but what you are saying then is the Chancellor made an Autumn Statement in which he proudly said he had balanced all the numbers and in those numbers there was not a single penny for crossings of the River Thames. Yet by magic he has told you you can have the money. So there is no money, and yet you can have the money. I think that tells me we have a Government which is incoherent, promising things that are not going to happen.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I think what you heard is the Chancellor committing himself, which is very important, and good news for London. There in the House of Commons you have in the Autumn Statement the Chancellor of the Exchequer rightly committed to Government support for new river crossings. That is obviously a promise that we propose to vindicate and --

John Biggs (AM): But are we going to build it with words?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): You are going to see a great deal of progress on that.

John Biggs (AM): But are you going to build it with words or are you actually going to use money and construction?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): We are going to build a new river crossing, and by the way, I am being interrogated by the man who promised to vote for me if we did a cable car. Do you remember that?

John Biggs (AM): That is not quite what I said.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): It is.

John Biggs (AM): I do seriously wonder --

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): The cable car is rising.

John Biggs (AM): I do seriously wonder --

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): You are going to. We are already building one and we are going to do at least two more.

John Biggs (AM): Absolutely. I mean, I do seriously wonder, it is a waste of the public's patience and time for you to give us this twaddle, but I do seriously wonder whether you should --

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

John Biggs (AM): -- seek medication for your attention disorder. But seriously, we have asked you a question of whether you are going to build anything. You have blustered and told us you will, yet there is not a single penny of money to help build it, but you have not told us when it is going to open. You cancelled the scheme to build it. There is no team working on it. There is nothing happening so --

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): That is not true. That is not true at all. TfL are about to produce a --

John Biggs (AM): They are about to do something? Oh, that is pretty good, so after four years --

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): -- proposal on how to make it work.

We are going to work with the Government to achieve that. Contrary to your initial scepticism, I am delighted to say we are building a cable car. I think you can see the signs of that cable car, and I know Caroline has been anxious about how quickly that cable car is -- so am I. It is rising fast. I look forward, John, you and I, to being conveyed in the first or one of the first gondolas across the river. No, you are first, sorry.

Jennette Arnold (Chair): Do you wish to move on? Have you got any further questions, Mr Biggs?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): After you have fulfilled your promise to vote for me, which is what you said.

John Biggs (AM): I simply wanted to applaud the Mayor on --

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): That is the spirit. That is the spirit.

John Biggs (AM): -- after four years --

Jennette Arnold (Chair): Can we hear what he has to say?

John Biggs (AM): -- after four years being about to do something.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Oh, come on.

John Biggs (AM): It is about time, Chair. Thank you.

Darren Johnson (AM): I am delighted that the cable car is going ahead, and if you recall, it was an idea that first came from a sort of catapult.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): You wanted --

Darren Johnson (AM): It was you who was suggesting the catapult. We suggested the cable car and I am delighted it is actually materialising, but given that money is so tight, would it not be better to keep the cable car and scrap the plans for the two river crossings?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I hear what you say. I do not agree with that. I think that if you look at the congestion at Blackwall, you look at the economic opportunities in that part of London and the desire for more river crossings, and to be fair to John, he has been a passionate campaigner for this for a long time. I think he is basically right and I am afraid that I am not as hostile to motorised traffic as you are, Darren. I think that if we have cleaner, greener vehicles - we already have more electric vehicles in London than any other city - there is a future for river crossings, and I am not going to exclude that and I am going to push that ahead.

4142 / 2011 - Battersea Power Station

Richard Tracey

Following recent reports regarding Battersea Power Station going into receivership, what effect do you anticipate this will have on the Vauxhall Nine Elms Battersea regeneration area, especially the recently announced enterprise zone, and are there any contingency plans in place to deal with this eventuality?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): No, I think I have probably given quite a full answer already, Dick, to your excellent question.

To get back to Val's point, the difficulties that Treasury have found themselves in were widely known. They do not affect the huge potential of that area. A solution will be found and it is closer now, thanks to the intervention of George Osborne, the Chancellor, who has enabled us to go ahead with two new stations in advance of the development.

Richard Tracey (AM): Yes. This is course is probably the most important question this morning for a good many of my constituents. The company that has gone into administration on Monday this week - and it was not two weeks, as was rather suggested by Val - Real Estate Opportunities went into administration on Monday - and it does of course throw up quite a few question marks about the whole area. River Light and the St James company are going ahead at a pace, as you know.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): An amazing pace, yes.

Richard Tracey (AM): Indeed, Valleymore with the area around the Embassy and certainly obviously the Embassy is going to go ahead, but I think one key question for you is are you

guaranteed by George Osborne and so on that the enterprise zoned proposal is going ahead for Nine Elms?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Yes, and I explained just now to Val how it will work. Within the Enterprise Zone (EZ), there will be a CIL. The proceeds of that CIL will be underwritten by the Treasury to allow us to proceed and do the necessary work with the extension of the Northern Line, and that will be a fantastic thing, and actually not just for that area, but also for areas that I think Val represents that do not have sufficient transport access at the moment, and it will be of huge benefit to existing communities in that part of London. But obviously I am grateful to you for your support and the way you have pushed this argument on.

Richard Tracey (AM): I mean, there are one or two other questions, because I gather in the Autumn Statement it was said that,

“Subject to commitment by April 2013 from a developer to develop the site and make agreed contributions, the Government will consider allowing the Mayor and partners to borrow against SIL to support the scheme.”

So clearly that is a big question, to make sure that there is somebody committed to develop by April 2013.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I am sure that you two - Dick, you are well plugged in, and Val as well - will have had extensive conversations with many people who have been following what was happening with the National Asset Management Agency (NAMA), looking at what was happening with Treasury and who are extremely interested in taking that side forward. I mean, the difficulty obviously is the listing of the power station and people will endlessly say, “Why don’t we just blow it up?” There you go, you have got a supporter in John, who wants to blow it up. I am afraid that is not a course I want to commend to Londoners. I believe it is a historical totemic building. I think it would be a great shame if we went around destroying our heritage simply in order to please every developer. It is possible, I think, and I have seen many schemes, and we in City Hall have been working with planners on a variety of schemes that make sense of that power station that deliver huge numbers of homes, new businesses and integrate it with that fantastic Gilbert Scott structure. I want to go down that line and if my information is correct, there are plenty of people around town, plenty of people who have the cash to move in, to help out and to get that project going. What we can do now is go ahead with the transport infrastructure, which so often in London, in the history of the City, it is the transport infrastructure going in first that actually allows the development to take place.

Richard Tracey (AM): But of course the power station, as you have touched on, is a two-star listing which makes it a very high listing under national heritage, and we have now had suggestions from Terry Farrell [British architect] of keeping the front wall and the back wall and knocking the rest down. What do you think of that? How is Chelsea Football Club allegedly trying to put a football ground on that site with the power station there?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Come on. You would not expect me now to fetter my discretion in any planning matter about one proposal or another. What I can say to you is that the power station is listed. That listing will be very difficult to remove. I believe there are ways of making it work for London.

3879/2011 - Government funding for the MPS

Joanne McCartney

What arguments are you making in your representations to the Home Office for extra funding for the Metropolitan Police?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Thank you, Joanne. Obviously there are loads of arguments that we are making at the moment in the course of the negotiation, which I said at the beginning are not yet quite concluded. There are extra pressures on the police that everybody will appreciate. There is currently a particular pressure in the form of a series of student demonstrations. I think there have been 11 student-related demonstrations between November 2010 and January 2011. In fact, that sounds very high, but that is the figure I have here. Obviously there was the Trades Union Congress march, the wedding, the Olympics, the Diamond Jubilee. There are big pressures on the police and we need to make sure that we keep numbers high in London. I think the police are doing a great job. Their crime is coming down. Particularly murder rates are well down, rates of violent offences are well down, but people need the sense of reassurance that comes with having large numbers of officers out there, and that is the case I am making.

Joanne McCartney (AM): Thank you, Mr Mayor, and can I just thank you, after three years of telling me when I have questioned the amount of police officer numbers we have in London, you telling me it is a stale debate. I am glad that you have now come round to recognise that police numbers do matter.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I do not think I said it was a stale debate.

Joanne McCartney (AM): But your Deputy has certainly called it that on many occasions. Can I just ask, the Draft London Policing Plan for the next three years shows that there is a great budget gap of around £450 million over the next years to find.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): No, it is not as high as that.

Joanne McCartney (AM): We all want to see numbers high, but in that policing plan, based on the current finances, the police deployment plan is to reduce officer numbers down to just over 30,000 over the next three years.

Now, we all want to maintain police officers numbers at a high level. Your £30 million grab from LFEPA reserves for this year is a one-off payment only, so how are you going to guarantee a higher number of officers given the state of the budgets?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): As I explained to you right at the beginning in my initial statement, I am absolutely confident that in the course of our discussions, which have been going on for many months now with the Chancellor about funding and about police numbers, that we will be able to keep numbers high going through 2012 and then protract that out way beyond 2012 as well, and until such time as we need to make the case again. I think that you will be getting more news on this, Joanne, so I am not going to conceal that from you, but this is a conversation that has been going on for a long time, led by Kit, and I think David Cameron and George Osborne are fully aware of the importance that Londoners, that everybody attaches to have police out there.

I am proud that we have we will have roughly 1,000 more officers, warranted officers, in 2012 than there were when I was elected. That is a considerable achievement in the face of real economic difficulties, and what I want to do is to protract that. I want to keep that number high.

Joanne McCartney (AM): I dispute the figures you have put down. At the end of 2008, officer numbers were about 31,400, but the budget that your predecessor left you took them a lot higher, 1,000 higher than that. So actually what you are planning is a cut from the previous Mayor's legacy.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Well, it is not. Nonsense.

Joanne McCartney (AM): Can I just finish my question?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Complete nonsense.

Joanne McCartney (AM): But in any event, the current figures --

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): We did not have any settlement at all.

Joanne McCartney (AM): -- to me, the current figures we have at the moment show that at the end of October, the police numbers had actually fallen to just under 31,500, 800 less than you had actually planned this last year. So you are already 800 down. The Commissioner has told us that he is not going to start recruitment until he knows what their finances are going to be like, and at the moment, there are great pressures on the police. For example, I have in Enfield and Haringey five or six officers each day going down to man the call centres because there is not enough staff down there.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Can we check that out?

Joanne McCartney (AM): There are great pressures with reducing numbers. Even if you manage to put some money in the budget for this year to raise numbers before your election, after that, the hole is still there.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): No, I understand the point that you are making, but as I said, I think this is a conversation we have been having, that goes right back to August of this year, when everybody saw the need for high police numbers. I came out and made that point very firmly to Government. I think it is something that Government completely understands, and as I say, whatever you say about promises of more police numbers that were going to be delivered. We actually delivered more police on the streets of London. We liberated officers to do single patrolling. In fact, we have had an increase in Police Community Support Officers (PCSOs) and a huge increase in special constables as well, and as a result - and the proof of the pudding is in the eating - you are seeing, in spite of a very, very tough economic climate, crime down in London. It is down, overall total notifiable offences are down about 10%, murder is down 23% and virtually every single indicator is down. If you look at the 43 months of mayoralty and you compare it to the previous 44 months, virtually every single one, with the exception, I think, of a few categories, we have a great record in crime. Off the top of my head, I think domestic violence, rape --

Joanne McCartney (AM): Burglary, robbery.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): No, I am not certain you are right. Not over that period.

Joanne McCartney (AM): Mr Mayor, as the recession bites deeper, crime is escalating in certain signal crimes. Residential burglary is up 7.5% this year and personal robbery up 17% and knife crime is up 15%, so the resources --

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Not over the whole period, not over the whole period.

Joanne McCartney (AM): -- you put in are important. The report I have quoted, which is a police report, the Director of Finance states that,

“Given the scale of the financial challenge, it is currently not possible to close the budget gap in any of the three years without further reductions in officer PSCO staff numbers.”

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): That is why it is so important for us to conclude successfully this negotiation with the Government, and may I say that that is why it is also important that people do not approach financing of London budgets with unrealistic expectations. Given the huge number or the substantial number of police on transport that are funded by TfL, given the huge benefits that Londoners have got from the reduction in transport crime, it is quite wrong to go around proposing massive hacking back of those budgets and simultaneously to ask for more budgets for the police. You have got to have a consistent and credible approach.

Kit Malthouse AM (Chair, Metropolitan Police Authority): Mr Mayor, would you agree that when comparing police numbers over a period, it is helpful if you compare like with like, and that therefore when Assembly Member McCartney is comparing the number in 2008 with the number we have now, she has to take into account the change in the training regime. The number in 2008 will have included up to 1,000 trainees who were in the classroom at Hendon rather than out on the street, and that in the intervening year, we have had a change in the

training model, which means we no longer have those trainees sitting in classrooms in the way we did before. We had them represented in the over 5,000 special constables in our patrol on the streets, many of them preparing to become full officers, and that if you actually compare like with like, your achievement in raising police numbers is significantly above 1,000 and is looking more like 3,000.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I think it is a good point, and of course it is your achievement, Kit, and I would say that it is partly Joanne's too, because you have been sitting there in the MPA doing some of this work, and I think, putting party politics aside, everybody is working to keep police numbers high in London and we are coming to the end, I hope, of negotiation that will enable us not just to have that success and not just to continue the success we have had, but to protract that on beyond 2012.

Kit Malthouse AM (Chair, Metropolitan Police Authority): Would you also agree that while questions about the budget are obviously a legitimate area of business for this Assembly, it is a little dispiriting to see a repetition of exactly the same questions as last year when we were also presented with a budget gap, which we successfully closed and therefore maintained capacity, and that there seems to be a lack of acceptance in certain quarters in the Assembly, that the way local authority business is done - and they should know, those who have been councillors - is that you start with a budget gap and you work on it and you attempt to close it, and that is what we have done over the last three years.

The other bit of the equation which is yet to form up, which you have obviously had a drive across the GLA, is the savings programme, which is still in its infancy as far as many organisations in London are concerned and offers potential to meet at least the income growth halfway.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I completely accept that, and I congratulate you, Kit, on all the work that you have done to make that, I sincerely do. I would just say that if for some reason roles were reversed and Joanne was sitting where you are sitting, she would now be saying exactly that, and the fact is - and I think she knows that - I think that people have worked very hard to keep police numbers high in tough circumstances and we are determined to continue to do so.

Jennette Arnold (Chair): OK, thank you. Can I thank Assembly Member Boff for withdrawing his question on council housing finance, because he has received the answers in previous responses from you, Mr Mayor. We now go to a question from Assembly Member Cleverly; that is 4124 on Operation Hawk.

4124/2011 - Operation Hawk

James Cleverly

What has been the impact on crime and local communities since the launch of Operation Hawk last month?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Yes, thanks, James, and I already alluded to this in my answer to an earlier question. Operation Hawk, it is a bit early to say quite what impact it has had, but the early signs are very encouraging. There were 600 operations across London, or 600 activities, 370 arrests, 163 that were drug-related, 284 warrants executed, 36 weapons seized, 26 drug houses were closed down. Those raids were of huge benefit to communities that are oppressed by people involved drugs and who carry weapons and who make the lives of others in their communities miserable, and I think it was a great tribute to the work of the police and the Safer Neighbourhood Teams that they were able to do it, and I was there to see myself that it was conducted in a proper and sensible way.

James Cleverly (AM): Thank you, Mr Mayor. The figures that you gave for seizures and warrants executed and that kind of stuff I think is incredibly important, and I know much of that work will continue over the next weeks and months. One of the areas that I think is particularly important about this, and I seek your opinion on, is the reassurance that comes to local communities when they know that their Safer Neighbourhood Teams are not there just to do reassurance work - which is an important part of what they do - but they are also proactive crime fighters who are more than willing - eager - to get on the front foot; to actually take the battle to the criminals and make them feel uncomfortable in their homes. Rather than the people who have been at the receiving end of crime in the past.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Well, that is absolutely right, and that is why it is so vital that support our Safer Neighbourhood Teams and keep a Safer Neighbourhood Team in every ward.

James Cleverly (AM): Will you give us assurances that periodically other operations of this type will continue so that people see their Safer Neighbourhood Teams as the recipients of local intelligence, so that businesses know who they can go to to report instance of business crime and so on? Then we will keep this relentless pressure on the criminals, because the figures speak for themselves and the feedback I have been having from local residents is that they have seen this operation, they value this operation, they absolutely want to see more of it.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Yes. Obviously, I am not in charge of the operations for the police. I would not seek to give operational guidance to Bernard Hogan-Howe [Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis]. Plainly, this is very much part of his vision for total policing in London. It is something I completely support and I have no doubt we will be seeing more of it.

James Cleverly (AM): Finally - and again, I know this is an area where you do not have direct statutory responsibility - but there have been online some concerns that have been expressed, that the work that the police have put in apprehending these criminals will be undone if the sentences that they receive are too lenient. I know you do not have a statutory responsibility for this, but from your pulpit which I know Assembly Member Biggs is very keen to remind you of, will you remind the people involved in the other elements of the criminal justice system that they also need to support the work of the police? They need to reinforce that reassurance that

has been created, and actually ensure that criminals are given appropriate and forthright sentences.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Yes, and that idea is something I hope will come out of general conclusions we reach about the Riots, Communities and Victims Panel. Because I think in a climate where people feel that the law has absolutely no sanctions and that there is no comeback from society at all, that, I am afraid, is a society that will encourage people to commit further crimes. So it is vital that we get the message out; the judiciary get the message out to criminals that they will be properly punished, and that is number one. Of course it is also important that we rehabilitate and we get people back into society and do not throw their lives away.

3871/2011 - Transparency

John Biggs

In your meetings and relationships with advisers and bankers, do you believe you have met your standards of transparency?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Yes, I am very pleased that this is an administration of a transparency that goes beyond pellucidity. It goes beyond virtually any other branch of government and certainly was a pioneer of clarity. I said before I was elected we would put expenditure on the web and we have done. Every single expenditure down to £500 is now up there for the public to invigilate, and we declare all gifts and hospitality. I think I have been out now to 550 visits, open, accessible to the media --

John Biggs (AM): No, they are not.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): -- across London in different parts of the city --

John Biggs (AM): This is just a photo opportunity.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): -- in three and a half years, 550 compared to 255 over eight years by the previous incumbent - get those figures down - 550 visits over 3½ years compared to 255 over 8 years. We said that we would have more People's Question Time. We certainly would submit we would all be there. I thought there was a bit of a no-show last time by the way, Assembly. Can I just say that? I thought there was a bit of a no-show by some. Did anybody notice that? Where were we last time?

John Biggs (AM): Can we use our time for questions?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I will come back to that because I thought there is a question about transparency for the Assembly and I thought it was very wrong that so few Members of the Assembly turned up to be scrutinised.

Jennette Arnold (Chair): No, Mr Mayor, have you finished your answer?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Let me complete my answer then by saying that I am delighted that there are now more People's Question Times rather than just two a year, and there are four for Londoners to question me directly about my duties.

John Biggs (AM): I am wondering, given this conversion apparently to transparency - let us keep the medication up, that is my advice - why you do not hold open press conferences. You refuse to do that. Are you scared of open questions from the press?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): No, and as I said, I --

John Biggs (AM): So why do you not hold them?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I hold innumerable press conferences. I have just given you the figures, John, and if you --

John Biggs (AM): No, you do not hold them though, do you? When was your last press conference? When was your last one?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): If the media wanted to get out --

Jennette Arnold (Chair): Mr Biggs, can I just have a little bit of order here? The question that we are dealing with is quite clearly to do with,

"In your meetings and relationships with advisers and bankers, do you believe you have met your standards of transparency?"

If we have had an answer to that, can I have a related follow-up question to this question?

John Biggs (AM): OK. You are quite right. I was carried away by his answer.

Jennette Arnold (Chair): Can I have it now, please, so that we can get on?

John Biggs (AM): I was carried away by his answer because he would not answer the question.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): That is not true. I gave you a very detailed answer.

Jennette Arnold (Chair): Can I have a follow-up question?

John Biggs (AM): OK. Why is it, if you are so transparent, that you have taken four months to admit to the existence of Lynton Crosby, a man who costs you £60,000 a month from your campaign, a man who allegedly --

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): £60,000 what?

John Biggs (AM): £60,000 a month retainer plus the polling. Are you happy to be open about your meetings with him and why has it taken so long to admit that they exist?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): You have asked me repeatedly about Lynton. I have got lots of written questions about this. I think the truth is that Lynton has probably met me in City Hall rather fewer times than I have met you, considerably fewer times than I have met you either formally or informally. If you want to check who I am meeting when, John, then maybe you could sit in the gateway to City Hall with a clicker and see who comes in and out. That is what I recommend to you.

John Biggs (AM): This is the Mayor who said,

“Creating a culture of transparency and openness from day one of our administration is an essential first step in re-establishing London’s trust in City Hall.”

I think that is a pretty hypocritical thing for you to have said then.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I think we have been amazingly transparent. As I say, I think I have probably met Lynton Crosby in City Hall on many fewer occasions than I have had the pleasure of meeting you. If you were not --

John Biggs (AM): At least finally you are admitting that you do meet him from time to time in City Hall and I think Londoners would be interested to know that because you are spending so much of the hedge fund donations on retaining him.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Oh dear, oh dear.

John Biggs (AM): Can I ask you finally then if we look at the schedule of your meetings, it appears from that that you have met bankers on 12 occasions since September and the police on four. Is that the correct balance of interest?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): No, you are talking, I am afraid, complete nonsense and I am very pleased to say that --

John Biggs (AM): Twelve to four.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): No, come on. I meet representatives of the Metropolitan Police Service the whole time and I am very pleased to do so.

John Biggs (AM): OK. So you are now saying that your published list of meetings is not worth the paper it is written on because it does not record the meetings you are holding. Is that the case?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): No. I think what I would say to you is that your obsession with my published list of meetings and who you think I am meeting at what particular

time in City Hall is bordering on the obsessional and insane and that you are barking up the wrong tree. If you are looking for dead bodies, you are digging in the wrong cemetery or whatever the expression. This is not something about which I think you should be wasting too much of your time as a Member of the Assembly.

4125/2011 - Public sector strikes

Brian Coleman

Will the Mayor thank the many thousands of local government staff and others who defied the unions and worked normally on 30 November for the benefit of Londoners? In particular, will he thank GMB members who work for the London Fire and Emergency Planning Authority and voted not to strike and enabled the London Fire Brigade to function as normal?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Brian, I do want to thank everybody in the GMB and others who voted to work. I think that they did a great job and thank you and everybody at LFEPA for keeping things moving along.

Brian Coleman (AM): Of course, Mr Mayor, in many of our boroughs we ran normal services for residents. For example, in my own borough of Barnet we ran a full refuse service and full street-cleaning service and a full recycling service because the staff just were not interested in inconveniencing residents. Also I think many of them see the sense of the change that is needed in the local government pension scheme.

However, Mr Mayor, you will be aware that the one service that did not run properly in London by any stretch of the imagination was the London Ambulance Service (LAS). Will you tell us what interest you are now taking to look into the functions of the LAS? Is your thinking moving towards either bringing them into this building? Or better still I would suggest merging them with LFEPA, something that has been floated a number of times in the past, and bearing in mind there would be massive savings in use of resources and lands. I think the Fire Brigade has got 112 fire stations; the LAS has got about 60-odd fixed ambulance stations sitting all over London, and that would add to their democratic accountability which is currently zero.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Yes, you are absolutely right. There was difficulty with the LAS on that night and everybody understands that and Richard, I know, is looking into it particularly and we are certainly looking into that issue. I am not saying I will prejudge what the answer is because I know there are arguments on both sides, but it is certainly something that we are looking into.

What I would say about the strikes generally is that they were a very powerful argument by the way for the change of the laws on ballots. UNISON and the turnout, this is the turnout for "the greatest day of action in living memory" but the turnout for UNISON members - bear in mind how much union memberships have already shrunk, so you are down to people who really are committed - was 29% for UNISON, 35% for the ATA, 27% for UCATT (Union of Construction, Allied Trades and Technicians) and 41% for the NUT (National Union of Teachers). So in none

of those cases did they reach even the threshold of 50% so there is a fascinating argument going on there in my view about why it is that such a small minority of union members should be allowed to trigger that kind of action. I know the counter-arguments that we do not have thresholds for mayoral elections and all that kind of thing. On the other hand, we are talking about essential public services, we are talking about teachers, we are talking about kids who need to be educated in schools, ambulances that need to be run because there is a risk to life and limb if they do not. It does seem to me to be eccentric to allow a minority to trigger industrial action in that way.

Brian Coleman (AM): When you thank the staff of this building who worked normally on that day, Mr Mayor, you may recall the only staff that seemed to be completely on strike were the Labour office and the absence of any Labour Assembly Members in the building that day. But I have to say, I do not think anyone noticed.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): It seems unlikely to me that anybody felt the absence of the Labour group in London on that day. With greatest respect to our friends and colleagues over here, they do not provide an emergency service. It would be hard to argue they even provide an essential service.

3878/2011- Affordable Housing

Nicky Gavron

Why are you no longer promoting social rented housing in London?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Thank you very much. This is a question from Nicky. It is the Nicky Gavron Affordable Housing question. Fantastic. Thank you very much, Nicky, for your question. Yes, we are totally committed to promoting social rented housing in this city alongside all the other variants, part-rent, other types of affordable housing as well. Nearly three-quarters of the new affordable homes for rent to be delivered between 2011 and 2015 - I have already given you the figures there - will be delivered at or very close to target rents which of course are the same level as social rents.

Nicky Gavron (AM): I am not going to dispute that at the moment. I just want to unpack a few things because I do not know how much people are aware but there have been some very significant changes in both your housing policies and your housing powers. So if you do not mind just saying yes or no to just a few things. Can you confirm that currently you have a policy that 60% of all of affordable housing should be social rent? It is a 60/40 split. Well, I will go on. You are consulting. Confirm that that is your current policy but you are also now consulting on alterations to the plan which mean that the so-called affordable rent, that is the 80% of market rent, will be lumped in with social rent. Is that true?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): OK. That is where you are going wrong because it is not 80% to market rent. It is 65% or lower.

Nicky Gavron (AM): Well, it is up to 80%.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Yes, but it is not going to be. It is very important that you grasp this, Nicky, because it is not going to be 80%. It is going to be at or around the target rents which are the same as the social rent. Just to give you an indication of my commitment to social rent, in this term we have delivered on average per year - I think I am right in saying - 7,507 homes for social rent. That is my term, 7,507 for social rent. In the previous two mayoral terms, which you supported and I think you had a way with housing in that period, there was an average of homes delivered for social rent of 5,853 and then 6,400. We have taken it up to 7,507, comfortably eclipsing your admittedly excellent work, but comfortably eclipsing that. We intend to go forward and, as I explained earlier on, you must not confuse or you must be aware that if you keep the affordable rent down to the same level as the target rent, you are effectively delivering a social rent product.

Nicky Gavron (AM): Listen, the first thing is - I have said it so many times before - you had £5 billion, you have done it on the back of Ken Livingstone's starts. So you are actually completing what Ken Livingstone began most of the time. Your social rent figures for the forthcoming four years are mainly coming out of this term, this term you are in at the moment. Can you confirm --

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): No, it is all right. I will just explain why that is not true.

Nicky Gavron (AM): Can I please get some yes/no answers? Can you confirm that from April you will be taking over the funding, the budget, for housing?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Yes, and with that funding, we intend to --

Nicky Gavron (AM): Yes, right. Hang on a minute. Can you confirm that except in very special circumstances, you will no longer be funding social housing?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): No, because I think you are getting confusing, Nicky, with great respect. What we are doing --

Nicky Gavron (AM): Your governance is --

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): As I said at the very beginning --

Nicky Gavron (AM): Grants/funding for social rented housing in the 2011 - 2015 spending round and the funding will be for affordable housing. It cannot be for social rent.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Nicky, as I say, that is where you are getting jumbled up because what we are doing is making sure that, as I said, from 2011 to 2015, we are going to deliver. I pay tribute to the work of Ric Blakeway [Mayoral Advisor on Housing] and David Lunts [Interim Executive Director, Housing and Regeneration] and everybody involved and Alan, everybody involved who is working with the developers and with the boroughs. We are making the social rent model deliver.

Nicky Gavron (AM): You are not funding any social rent with your own money.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Yes, we are.

Nicky Gavron (AM): You are not backing the boroughs in doing that.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Yes, we are.

Nicky Gavron (AM): You are doubling rents. This 65% is an average and it is not a target rent. You are doubling rents.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): No.

Nicky Gavron (AM): Would you confirm, would you agree with me that your own rent increases are driving up social rent and that you are doing it on the back of benefit?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): What is certainly true is that the benefit build is being used effectively to subsidise housing and that is absolutely right. That is one of the reasons why it is so important that we work to ensure that the imposition of the benefit cap, which is otherwise a good idea, does not come on in such a way as to disadvantage London, and we have worked very hard to make sure that that happens.

Nicky Gavron (AM): The benefit builds go up.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Before you sort of come back later, let me just repeat the earlier point that three-quarters of all new affordable homes for rent will be delivered at or around target rent level. So you are effectively getting a huge new vein of homes for what is effectively the same as social rent. That is, I think, something that Londoners will value. We want to keep going with that model.

Nicky Gavron (AM): You should be lobbying Government about the lack of social rent.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I think, if you listened carefully to my answer, Nicky, and were not so sort of addicted to one formulation or the other, you would see that what we are delivering for London already has exceeded what was done in the last two terms. We are going to go forward with policies that will deliver a huge number of new homes for Londoners at or around social rent levels. That is, I think, what Londoners want to see.

3877/2011 - Bhopal and Dow

Navin Shah

Do you not agree that Chief Minister Singh of Madhya Pradesh's call for the Indian Olympic team to boycott the Games is not just affecting the reputation of the Games, but also putting the

success of the Games at risk and it would therefore be better if the Organising Committee of the Olympic and Paralympic Games (LOCOG) dropped this sponsorship deal with Dow?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Thanks very much, Navin. I do not agree that there should be a boycott of the Games or that we should bury our programme with the wrap around the Olympic stadium. I think that, talking to the Indian High Commissioner, this is not something that would be remotely welcomed by them. It is not something that I have been asked to pursue. Clearly, I am aware of the sensitivity about Dow and its links with Bhopal. What I would just point out to you and to everybody who is not perhaps familiar with this controversy is that Dow Chemicals is not so much a sponsor of LOCOG but actually is a partner of the International Olympic Committee. In that sense, it helps to fund amongst other things the Indian National Olympic Committee. Dow is there as part of the Olympic fabric and it is difficult to disentangle Dow from that.

The second thing I would just like to point out is whatever the relationship may or not be with Union Carbide and all the controversy about the compensation for Bhopal, the fact is that Dow Chemicals is and has already supplied products to a great many projects around London, including many on the Olympic Park already.

Navin Shah (AM): Mr Mayor, the Indian High Commission is a diplomatic mission here. Let us not forget that. The fact is that the state government, Chief Minister himself, has come out in opposition of this amid hundreds and thousands of both victims, including women and children, in Bhopal on 2 December at the 27th anniversary of this disaster. They do not think that this is the right thing to do.

Given the situation and given the very, very poor record that Dow Chemicals has and it is an ongoing liability that they are denying, first of all the question to you is do you not agree with LOCOG that the wrap is an added extra and not at all essential to deliver a successful Games? Do you not agree with that?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): The wrap is something that LOCOG has decided to go ahead with.

Navin Shah (AM): Yes, but it is an added extra, not essential. It is dispensable.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): If you want my view on this, Navin, I think it would be a shame if you were to persuade LOCOG to get rid of something that would be of great advantage to the Olympics and will serve as an extra attraction to the stadium.

Navin Shah (AM): Mr Mayor, I was hoping --

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): By the way on the question of Dow's involvement --

Navin Shah (AM): Mr Mayor, I was hoping --

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I just want to point out one thing, there will be no extra advertising. There will be no sign on the wrap saying Dow has sponsored it. It will have no corporate branding.

Navin Shah (AM): But surely --

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): No sponsor has been approved by the Commission for a sustainable London 2012 and it would be irrational to rip off a wrap when Dow has already supplied products to Bankside, Dulwich Picture Gallery, Westfield Shopping Centre and has supplied components in the Olympic Park, including wiring, cabling, roof and floor insulation to improve --

Navin Shah (AM): Mr Mayor --

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): If you are seriously suggesting that we should rip all that out, then I think that that is --

Navin Shah (AM): I am.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): You are?

Navin Shah (AM): I am. The lives of people are more important than the sponsorship which means nothing because --

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I am sorry, but I must completely disagree with you.

Navin Shah (AM): -- they will be definitely at an advantage by sponsoring. This is at the cost of thousands of victims, not only 25,000 people who died from the disaster, but hundreds and thousands who are suffering from water contamination from the factory owned by Dow Chemicals. Is that not important? Are you putting the --

Jennette Arnold (Chair): Assembly Member Shah, we must now move on. You are out of time.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Can I possibly answer that question?

Jennette Arnold (Chair): No, because if I do that then we just end up extending the meeting.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I think there were several assertions made there that are not correct and I think it would be to the advantage of the record if I explain the position because it is a very emotive issue and --

Jennette Arnold (Chair): It is an emotive issue. Can you just be brief.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I understand the controversy, but it is, I am afraid, in dispute that Dow has responsibility for the tragedy in Bhopal. There has been substantial compensation paid and the matter was challenged and then upheld in the Indian High Court. May I say, I do think it is very, very regrettable that members of the Labour Party are going far ahead of either the Indian Government or the Indian Olympic Committee in seeking to bring politics into this matter, and to use this for party political purposes and they certainly are.

3745/2011 - Senior officers' subsequent employment

Dee Doocey

Do you believe there should be a code of practice for senior police officers to restrict the types of employment they may undertake immediately following their departure from the MPS, in the same way as Ministers and senior civil servants?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Thank you very much, Dee. I think your question relates to officers who go off into jobs in the private sector, and I am content that they should find employment of whatever kind that they see fit, provided of course that does not damage the reputation or the credibility of the Metropolitan Police Service.

Dee Doocey (AM): But you will have seen Sir Denis O'Connor's Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary (HMIC) report in which he said there should be an end to what he described as the 'revolving door' that allows officers to quit their jobs and start working immediately for a consultancy, for example, which earns millions from police contracts. I do not quite understand why you have not --

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Which person is this and which contracts are these?

Dee Doocey (AM): This is the Sir Denis O'Connor HMIC report.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): But who are you saying is going to get a job that has --

Dee Doocey (AM): No, I am just saying. I am not talking specifics. I am talking about the idea.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Generalities?

Dee Doocey (AM): Would you mind allowing me to ask the question?

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

Dee Doocey (AM): Thank you. Without interrupting, thank you.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Yes. By the way, can you turn up to the next Mayor's Question Times and to the next People's Question Time?

Jennette Arnold (AM): Stop the clock. Can we have the question?

Dee Doocey (AM): The point I am making is would you not agree that it would be much more sensible and the right thing to do for there to be a period of time between a senior officer leaving the Metropolitan Police Service and starting with employment from a company that is getting millions of pounds from the Metropolitan Police Service, as is the case for civil servants and government?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I have said what I have said about senior officers not doing anything, which I am sure they would not want to do, to bring the Metropolitan Police Service into disrepute. If you are alleging that an officer has done that, then I think we should have chapter and verse and you should be frank with us about your concerns.

Dee Doocey (AM): Mr Mayor, if I were alleging somebody was bringing something into disrepute, I would clearly state it right at the outset and I think you know that. But I do think that it is wrong for senior officers to be able to finish being a very senior member of the Metropolitan Police Service one day and to go and work for a company that has got contracts from the Metropolitan Police Service previously and is still on the Metropolitan Police Service's list of contractors. I think it is wrong. I think there needs to be a cooling down period and I am very disappointed that you do not share my view.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): No, I certainly share your view that no officer should retire and take a job that brings the Metropolitan Police Service into disrepute. What I am waiting to hear from you --

Dee Doocey (AM): Sorry, I was not mentioning the word 'disrepute'. I do not know where you are getting this from. I did not suggest that anyone had brought anything into disrepute.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I think it would be disreputable to do anything that appeared to be exploiting the advantage that an officer may have derived from his career in the police in a future private sector organisation in such a way as to seem that he was profiteering. If that is what you are alleging, then I think you need to come out with it, Dee. Say that --

Dee Doocey (AM): I am not alleging anything.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Come on, you are making a lot of innuendo here. Let us see what you are really complaining about.

Dee Doocey (AM): I am not complaining. I am not making innuendo. I do not do innuendo. What I am saying very clearly is it is completely wrong for an officer to finish with the Metropolitan Police Service one day and to go and work for a private company the next day that happens to be one of the Metropolitan Police Service's contractors. I think we have got to agree to disagree because you clearly do not share my --

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I think what people want to hear from you is what you are talking about and then we will be able to judge.

3865/2011 - Water shortages

Mike Tuffrey

With Britain facing a drought next summer, why are we not doing more to reduce water demand in London?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): This relates to the difficulties that the City faces in maintain water supply and obviously there is a big problem, not just arising out of drought but of leakage. I think one of the things we need to realise - and this has been brought home to me in the course of conversations about road works - is you know where it says, "Repairing or replacing London's Victorian water mains"? That is not what is really happening. The fact is they are not replacing them. In a huge number of cases, they are just making and mending and they are patching them up, and that is why they have to keep having to dig up the roads again. I think we need to have a discussion with the Treasury and with The Officer of Water Services (OFWAT) and with Thames Water about what the long-term programme is. Obviously, they say that the massive capital cost of replacing London's water mains would be prohibitive, but we need to look at what is really going on.

Mike Tuffrey (AM): You are not suggesting --

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): That, I think, would be of huge importance to reducing loss of water. Also of course we are looking at the possibility of creating a Water Commissioner, somebody who could speak for London on water; someone who could invigilate these matters for London. I am thinking about ways of doing that in such a way as not simply to replicate the work of OFWAT.

Mike Tuffrey (AM): Good. That is an interesting suggestion. Even at the best of times we have less rainfall in London than Rome, than Istanbul, and we are not in the best of times; we are facing a drought. On the demand side, there is leakage, but there is also ordinary usage. Let me just take those in turn. On leakage, Thames Water's argument is that they would actually like to replace more of the old sewers if OFWAT would give them the capital spending headroom.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): That is the issue.

Mike Tuffrey (AM): So what representations have you made to OFWAT so that London/the GLA has actually an effective input into what is a national regulatory arrangement? Have you lobbied?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): No, because I have only just recently had this conversation with Thames Water, and it has only really just recently been borne in on me, the

full problem that we have. I put it no higher than this: the perception that we are operating under, if we think that these pipes are being replaced, they are not being replaced. We are not actually putting in new infrastructure in the way that we need to do.

Mike Tuffrey (AM): The programme of replacement has been slowed down and Thames Water's line is that that is because of OFWAT and what they allow them to do. So I certainly think there is a case for you to be on the case on that side. But leakage aside, our consumption of water per head in London is higher than the rest of the country, for example. Can I take you to the controversial area of water metering? My own belief, unpopular though it will be in some quarters, is that we should move much faster to water metering. The evidence is that when people are paying per litre consumption actually goes down. They are more aware of their water usage, and yet your new water strategy has put back by five years the date when we are aiming to move metering across London to be more or less universal. Why have you slipped that by five years?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Let me get back to you on that, Mike. I will look at the arguments for accelerating a metering programme.

Mike Tuffrey (AM): Far from accelerating it, the strategy that you want --

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): You are making a case for accelerating it. I will look and see how that stacks up. It is not something that has been argued to me yet with any great force --

Mike Tuffrey (AM): I hope when you signed off your strategy you looked at that. That is quite a significant change to put back the deadline from 2015 to 2020 for houses and 2020 to 2025 for flats. Clearly, there is a problem with flats because that can involve completely re-plumbing the whole block. But for an ordinary house, the highest usage actually is in outer London, so the cynic in me would say that that was a concern to put that date back in the run-up to the election. Can you confirm that that was not part of your thinking?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Let me get back to you on this stuff, Mike. I am afraid to say no one has yet put a powerful case to me for accelerating water metering. I will come back to you with a --

Mike Tuffrey (AM): I am not asking you to accelerate it.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): You were asking me --

Mike Tuffrey (AM): I am asking you not to put it back which is what you have just done --

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I will come back to you with an answer as soon as I can.

Mike Tuffrey (AM): Can I try another one on you then, which is the design standards. You have taken a commendable lead in terms of the Parker Morris and Parker Morris Enhanced and so forth. Will you tell us what your ambition is for new build - and new build is only a small part

of the overall issue - in terms of water efficiency? What are the standards for reducing demand in new build that you are trying to get to?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Obviously there are some houses that we are building and supporting at the moment that have fantastic water conserving strategies and qualities, and I want to see that much more efficiently rolled out. Part of the Renew programme is to install water efficiency measures in your home so that you save money and you save water as well. That is being rolled out across 55,000 homes across London. It is installing water efficiency equipment as well as energy saving equipment, and we think that we will save nearly two billion litres of water a year.

3718/2011 - Privatisation of fire services

Darren Johnson

Do you think the recent and proposed privatisations of Fire Brigade services in London represent good value for money?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Thanks, Darren. I am not aware that the fire services are being privatised although, as far as I understand it, there is a decision to subcontract some Fire Brigade training from April 2012. That represents a substantial saving of about £1 million and I see no reason to oppose that provided it is done sensibly.

Darren Johnson (AM): Are there any functions of LFEPA that you believe are inappropriate for takeover by private operators?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I think that clearly you should get value where you can. I think that the London Fire Brigade did a brilliant job, particularly during the riots. I think there were from memory about 400 fires or a huge number of callouts certainly, and they handled them with capacity to spare with very great --

Darren Johnson (AM): So is there any where it is off limits for privatisation?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Listen, I do not want to privatise the Fire Brigade, of course I do not. But where you can subcontract bits/services of one kind or another and save the taxpayer money, then I think Londoners would support that.

Jennette Arnold (Chair): Thank you, and on that note we come to the end of this session.

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