

London Assembly (Plenary) – 7 December 2011

Transcript of Item 4: Question and Answer Session with the Metropolitan Police Service and Metropolitan Police Service

Jennette Arnold (Chair): Can I ask the Assembly to welcome to the meeting Kit Malthouse in his capacity as Chair of the Metropolitan Police Authority and Mr Bernard Hogan-Howe, Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis. Thank you for attending this meeting.

The Commissioner is accompanied by Catherine Crawford, Chief Executive of the Metropolitan Police Authority, and Anne McMeel, Director of Resources at the Metropolitan Police Service.

Assembly Members will be putting questions to Mr Malthouse and Mr Hogan-Howe as set out on the agenda. Just for note and for those watching and visiting us here today, neither Catherine Crawford or Anne McMeel will not take questions unless specifically invited to do so by me.

Question No: 257 / 2011 - Policing In London

Dee Doocey

What will policing in London look like in 2 years time?

Dee Doocey (Deputy Chair): Before I ask the Commissioner to reply, I have already said to you before the meeting that my concern is to deal with mainly custody centres and Safer Neighbourhood Team bases. I appreciate it is such a huge question you could spend an hour answering it. Unfortunately I do not have that time.

Bernard Hogan-Howe (Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis): You would like me to address that particular part really, rather than going to any more broad detail? Would that be helpful?

Dee Doocey (Deputy Chair): Yes.

Bernard Hogan-Howe (Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis): In terms of Safer Neighbourhood Teams, first of all I want to confirm my commitment to neighbourhood policing. I hope people have picked up some of the things I have said publicly about my approach to policing and what I want the Metropolitan Police Service to do around becoming the best and about what I have described as a total policing approach. I do not want there to be any doubt about the fact that embedded in that is the fact it is based on community policing. If you have a good relationship with the community they will tell us things, hopefully, trust us and then we can do our job. We cannot do it without that link. There is no way that the 53,000 people the Metropolitan Police Service employs can provide a service to 7.5 million unless you have got that link so it has got to be embedded in neighbourhood policing.

The size of the teams is something that we are in the process of looking at. You know one of the things we are waiting to hear is exactly what the Mayor's final settlement will be in terms of the budget and once we have the budgets we will have the police numbers and presumably then we will work out exactly how many people we have to work with. The fundamental model I do not see changing. If I can find a way to enhance it then I will come forward with proposals after I have heard the budget. One of the things I want to be open minded about is, when we have our £3.5 billion, which is what the public gives us, at the moment the pie is carved up in various ways so something of the order of 60% goes towards territorial policing. That does not have to be set in stone. It could be more. That is one of the things I want to address with the Police Authority about how to take that forward. That might give us an opportunity in the future around neighbourhood policing.

In terms of bases I am very open minded. It seems to me that first of all we can base them in police stations but they are more effective if they are based in the neighbourhoods which they serve. If we can get them shared with other services then they are incredibly effective. If you get local neighbourhood management - I know this Government has an approach about total police, it has slightly different perspective but, for me, if you can get the police working with a local authority and with the other partners, with local community management, you can be really effective.

You can also look at commercial premises. There is an opportunity there. I will not name them but some of the big supermarkets have got incredible footprints - not least of which is that thousands of people in cars travel to them and do their shopping which provides an opportunity to meet with the public in a place that they prefer to be. We can have a constructive dialogue about that. I know some of that has happened already but, for me, that would be part of the strategy.

In terms of detention centres, there is more efficiency that we have already started by having fewer detention centres. The critical test for me is if you have got a difficult prisoner how long does it take to get to the cell because it may be the most efficient place when you get there but it has got to be a safe journey. It has got to be a safe journey for the prisoner and it has got to be a safe journey for the police officer. I would always want reassurance that both are being handled well. The first thing is that the custody centre is run efficiently and we are not wasting money by keeping officers there who do not need to be there and the second is that we have a journey that is a reasonable time, particularly if we are dealing with somebody who is difficult to deal with. Otherwise it can be a very confined space in which to control a violent person and all the various mechanisms we have can still leave it to be a very risky situation. So, for me, that has got to be a short journey.

Those are the two things I always look at. The plan we have already started with I can support, but I do want a straight answer to that first question which is, is it a safe journey.

Dee Doocey (Deputy Chair): If I can perhaps take them in the reverse order, so deal with the custody centres first. My concern is not what it is that the Metropolitan Police Service is trying to do but the fact that the Metropolitan Police Service seems to change in mid flow and there does not seem to be any corporate memory. This is a theme that I have returned to on a

number of occasions. In my own area, in 2006 the Metropolitan Police Service proposed that Richmond, Twickenham and Kingston shared a cell block which is a custody centre. There was fierce opposition from Members of Parliament (MPs), councillors and community leaders and the plan was eventually dropped as being unworkable. One of the issues is, because the journey is no more than seven miles but there is heavy traffic, limited roads and bridges that go across the two, we were told - I was specifically told by the Deputy Commissioner at the time - that in future if any proposal was looked at again it would twin the borough of Richmond with Hounslow, where you would not have those problems, and it would twin Kingston with somewhere else.

My concern is that this proposal has now come back to the Panel that deals with property issues in almost exactly the same form in that the proposal is there is now a big cell block in Kingston - which I am led to believe makes sense - but that Richmond's cells would close and prisoners would be transported from one to the other. It is, first of all, in my view, unworkable because of the issues, bearing in mind that the Metropolitan Police Service's figures say that the key time for arrest is 4pm, the traffic would be horrendous.

My concern is mainly that although we had all of that opposition and all those problems a few years ago we are now coming back with almost the same proposal and I must say that the cynic in me wonders if this is because it is at the time when the Metropolitan Police Authority (MPA) is being abolished. That is my first concern.

On the second area of Safer Neighbourhood Teams, I very much welcome your commitment to the teams and I also believe fervently that Safer Neighbourhood Teams should be in the communities they serve. I think the idea of having them in supermarkets is a superb idea but it does raise the issue again of corporate memory and why we keep reinventing the wheel. When the Safer Neighbourhood Teams were set up the plans were just as you have outlined them; people serving the community in the community. Then the Metropolitan Police Service decided that it needed grills on the windows, bars on the doors, huge amounts of information technology (IT) and they had almost to be like prisons: impenetrable. We have spent up to £500,000 on some of these bases and I understand the plan is now that, when the leases run out, these bases are going to be sold. I know we have got problems with money but it just seems to be a huge waste of public money and, again, it proves that the Metropolitan Police Service does not learn lessons. One minute it is doing Plan A, the next minute it is doing Plan B.

The question I would really like you to address on both of those is how are you going to ensure that under your watch, and indeed under anyone else's watch who might follow you, that this stops, corporate lessons are learned and there is a corporate memory in the Metropolitan Police Service?

Bernard Hogan-Howe (Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis): It would be easy for me to promise you that you will never see that happen again. The first thing is we need a strategy that we can support. I suspect what has happened in the past is perhaps there has been a strategy and a plan but it has not always been easy to achieve. In fact, one of the things that happens, as probably we might discuss here today, is that local issues can become a big

problem for where to put a custody centre, for example. Sometimes people regard it as a threat. I actually think it is an opportunity. People think they are going to have late night vans closing doors and prisoners escaping - neither of which is generally true but that is how it can be perceived sometimes. Establishing what was a nice strategy into a plan and implementation can be quite a challenge.

In terms of local issues I am quite happy to go away and look at that because I do not know enough about that combination you have mentioned since 2006.

To reassure you, certainly from my perspective, I do not sense any difference from the MPA. It is certainly no policy or strategy from me that just because the MPA is leaving we will push through everything that we want to get through in the intervening period. Probably the best protection you have is you have got a Chief Executive and a Chair who I suspect will form part of that future. There is no push from us to do that. If it is happening I suspect it is happening in spite of that, rather than because of it, so it is certainly no plan from me. I do not really understand why it has come back on the table.

The only thing I would remind everybody of course is that if we hear feedback and people say - either our own staff or representatives - "We would like you to look at that again". If we say we are resistant to that we appear to be closed minded and if we consider it again then we appear to be transient and inconsistent. I hope that we are just trying to be open minded about the possibility of a new way of doing things.

You are right. If we invest in estate we should expect to see a ten to 20 year - I would have thought - return on that, rather than start to move it within what appears to be five years, or start to change the thinking. I am quite happy to go away --

Dee Doocey (Deputy Chair): Three years.

Bernard Hogan-Howe (Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis): -- and look at the Twickenham and Kingston plan and see whether there is any more we could do on it.

Dee Doocey (Deputy Chair): I am not at all happy. I am not at all reassured. I understand the position you are in. You have not got the detail at your fingertips but the fact is to lurch from buying properties that cost a fortune to a couple of years later selling them is just not a sensible way to run any police force, particularly at a time when money is at such a premium. I will leave it there.

Bernard Hogan-Howe (Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis): Could I just add one thing - not to dispute that at all - it is one point I should have addressed earlier about the costs of building these individual properties. One is about the procurement process. The other one is that once we have put the IT in that gives access to our systems. What we therefore have to do is enhance the security around that building, which sometimes seem disproportionate I acknowledge, but once you have got the IT link in it gives access which, if people got access to that IT outlet, would give them a more generous access to our systems. That is the logic although it looks odd.

Dee Doocey (Deputy Chair): I do not think it is logic at all but I am short of time. What we should be moving to is a system of personal digital assistants (PDAs) for police officers and them going back to the station at night in order to key in. We should not have these expensive IT things. We should not have these prisons almost for Safer Neighbourhood Teams and I do not agree with them.

Tony Arbour (AM): Are you aware, Commissioner, and you, Chair, that the points made by the noble Baroness [Dee Doocey] about the custody centres in Richmond and Kingston probably bear a closer relationship to the fact that there are local by-elections next week in the area than any attention to the facts. The truth of the matter is that the reason that the previous scheme went down was because of a total lack of consultation and communication by the MPA with the local population that the new custody centre was going to be located in the middle of a residential area which, quite naturally, upset the locals.

The current proposal is that the cells be located at the existing Kingston Police Station which is not in the residential area, that the entirely unsatisfactory cells at Twickenham are going to be transferred to this modern facility and I know that you are far more aware of the geography of the area than Ms Doocey and you will know that the amount of additional time which would be taken to get people from across this very unusually shaped area to Kingston Police Station for custody is going to be much simpler than before.

There is also the fact, of course, that the Magistrates' Court where these people would have been taken to be charged the following day at Richmond is being closed from January 2012 so that journey is not going to take place and prisoners would have to be taken either to Wimbledon or to Lavender Hill. She is entirely mistaken and I would suggest that the reason she has posed that particular problem is so that she can put it in a leaflet related to the local by-election.

Jennette Arnold (Chair): That was a comment from Assembly Member Arbour --

Tony Arbour (AM): No, I was asking if they realised.

Len Duvall (AM): Like many people round this table I am a strong supporter of robust effective policing in times of disorder and against the background of rising knife crimes, rapes and street robberies. Aren't we in danger, in some of the rhetoric that is being used, of shifting the Metropolitan Police Service to being a police force rather than a police service and aren't we, in doing that, in danger of losing some of those gains that you earlier outlined around trust and confidence with the majority of the community who are not engaged in crime?

Bernard Hogan-Howe (Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis): I agree with you entirely. There has been a debate with various people about force or service. I have just said I am not going to get involved in that; I think it can become a sterile debate. My point is just to have effective policing. The first point is to be built on the community link that I have said already. Then the things that I hope they will be able to bring is the stuff that people do not see very often but is the most effective; the stuff that can be perceived as boring but 80% of

the time you have to achieve. Things I am interested in are things like, for example, burglars leaving fingerprints at scenes of burglaries. We find them, identify them and lock them up quickly. Now that is not boring for me. That is just doing a professional job consistently and to a high level.

There is a lot more that we in the Metropolitan Police Service can do on that. The challenge that I am putting to the Metropolitan Police Service is, although at the moment we are not at the top of many of the league tables and we understand London is different, but I am not prepared to accept that we cannot do far better. That is the challenge that I am putting in about the routine.

The second side is that I think, from time to time - I would say in the order of once or twice every 28 days - there are some big operations we can carry out across London, this huge city, that 7.5 million people might notice we are doing something. In a way they may never notice whether we take all the fingerprints we should, or not. In that respect the operation we have had around no car insurance and around drug warrants which we have seen over the last few weeks, is just trying to make sure that we act together across London in a way that does not just displace crime. If we do it in one borough or two boroughs together the danger is all we do is shove it into the adjacent one. I do not think that is a wise idea. If we do go for all the uninsured cars on the same day we can have an impact. Just to remind this forum, we are not just taking uninsured cars but 70% to 80% of the people that we take uninsured cars from are criminals, 60% of which are active. It is that point about immobilising the criminal as opposed to just taking your uninsured car.

I hope that is what people will understand from what I am trying to push. On the one side the consistent delivery of high levels of service. It is not just the total enforcement side - I mentioned that - people have heard that. I have said the second part is about the total care for victims and about doing it in a totally professional way. For me the victims' part is vital. If you looked at just crime, around 75% of all the people that have the crime committed against them do not have the benefit of getting that person caught. They still need some care. The thing for me is that they approach victims in various ways. They may be a victim of anti-social behaviour, road traffic collision or sudden death. They are people who need support at that time. When they come to us with a second language, psychiatric illness, do not hear very well or do not always make themselves very clear, it is vital that we treat them in a professional way. It is the two sides of policing for me. It is not only about those two sides but if one is about doing our job on the enforcement side in a professional way which gains public support and does not enforce against their consent - we are locking up the people who need to be locked up. On the other side it is supporting the public when they are victims and there are far more victims that need our support.

Len Duvall (AM): You are looking for a balance between a police force and a police service under the effective policing banner. What steps are you going to take about the language and the pictures - people support the police and hopefully you are going to get the bad people that cause crimes against communities and individuals. The media in the past months, as the language and the rhetoric goes out, what steps are you going to take to address that? You seem to have done it there. I do not see any of that has appeared in the last couple of months.

Is that deliberate or is it not? Does it not send mixed messages to some of the police officers that there is only one type of policing that we want them to do, rather than they are here to serve the community and support. The majority of the community are not engaged in crime. A majority of our young people are not engaged in crime. Are we not in danger of going back and shifting back? What are you going to do to make sure that we do not go back to some of the issues and excesses that we saw in the past?

Bernard Hogan-Howe (Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis): I think it is a good point. Of course the press only report what it chooses to report at times. As often as I have spoken here in this room with the Authority about the total victim support and the total professionalism, the only part that has been reported in the press is the war against criminality. I cannot control what these things are like.

It would be a fair point to say that we have not been as clear about some of the other areas; the care for victims, the professionalism and how we are going to develop that. They will be things that will take a little longer to develop.

The second point I would make is that in coming to take over the Metropolitan Police Service at what you know is a pretty difficult time in leadership terms I have to give them something to build around and give some impression of what I stand for and also try to give the public some impression. It seems important to me that there is no reason to be defensive about enforcing the law. It is a great privilege, it is a duty and if we do not do it no one does. I know we do other things too. I am never one ever to say that that is the only thing we do. There are many things that we do. We work at schools, with social services, around psychiatric homes - there are loads of things we do. It is trying to get the Metropolitan Police Service to understand that these are the core things that we must do but of course there is a broader church.

Now one of the things I would have said in my broad response to Baroness Doocey's question, I have been here since 26 September 2011 and the first three month period has enabled me, together with the support of the Metropolitan Police Authority and the Home Secretary, to get in two new Assistant Commissioners who start this week. We should have selected a new Deputy Commissioner by Christmas. That team, from January 2012 onwards, will be a great opportunity to embed some of the things you have discussed and get it to be a more comprehensive account both for our staff and for the public. I would not run away from enforcing the law but I agree with you entirely; it has to be targeted and it will only be targeted on those people who have committed crime. There is no other group to target. As you say, even in the most difficult communities, 90% odd of our people are good people. It is about supporting that 90% odd and not ignoring the 8% who are causing real problems. Nobody gets any benefit from growing crime or criminals and it is that determination and passion that I bring to it.

Len Duvall (AM): Can you see the benefit of an independent commission on policing and a different wholesale look at policing and its role today in terms of austere times? Do you see any benefit in that in terms of an independent commission? What is your view?

Bernard Hogan-Howe (Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis): That you mean the Mayor's Office for Policing and Crime (MOPC) role that will exist here in January --

Kit Malthouse AM (Chair, MPA): No, I think he is referring to the Stevens inquiry.

Bernard Hogan-Howe (Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis): I am sorry. What the police service has been arguing for for a few years is a Royal Commission.

Len Duvall (AM): You think there should be a Royal Commission?

Bernard Hogan-Howe (Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis): I am not sure about a Royal Commission. I am just making the point that generally the Association of Chief Police Officers (ACPO) has been arguing for a Royal Commission and it has been supported by the Police Federation, who represent the rank and file, and also by the Superintendents' Association, the management team. The point that is being raised, which I can support, is that sometimes policing is too important to be left to the police. It does need a broader debate; some wider commission was needed. Whether it is a public inquiry or a Royal Commission, that is for politicians to decide. I suppose what has happened here is that the Labour Party has decided it wants an independent look and Lord Stevens has been invited to look at that. I am quite happy to support his work. It will be for politicians to decide how well they accept that work and I am not sure when it is going to be delivered.

The last time we had a Royal Commission I think was the back end of the 1960s. Think how many things have changed since then. It is an awful long time. It is 40/50 years. For academics, social commentators, politicians and police officers to play their part in that debate would be wise. The form of it I have not got any strong views about.

Joanne McCartney (AM): The question is about what policing will look like in two years' time. I want to focus a little bit about what police officer strength will be in two years' time. I ask that because at the Police Authority we have been looking at a draft policing London business plan for the next three years and it shows in that the Metropolitan Police Service's plan, given the budget constraints and the budget gaps it has got to fill, is to reduce officer numbers down to just over 30,000, which is a substantial drop. All of us round the table want to keep those police numbers high but if they are to be kept at a 32,000 level there is then a massive budget gap of over £400 million over the next three years. My questions really are: can you guarantee that that level of officer numbers will be there for the next two to three years; and, if you can't give that guarantee today, what are you going to need from Government or from the Mayor to be able to guarantee that level of officer number?

Bernard Hogan-Howe (Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis): In terms of guaranteeing, I know it is a fairly stock answer but it is a genuine one which is that until we see the grant and the budget it is going to be difficult to guarantee something. Those numbers were drawn up on the expectation, if you remember, of the announcement by the Government that the grant would be cut by a certain percentage over the next few years. That is one element that is fairly straightforward. Secondly, there is the local part of the precept which is gathered to create the budget.

Until I see the actual numbers and the money in the bank it is pretty hard to be absolutely certain. I cannot stand behind the thinking that has gone into that planning around the numbers until we see the money.

One question that goes on from that - Joanne, you may have asked it at the Police Authority - is if you have less money or you have the same money but you expect to keep the same police numbers, does that cause a disproportionate effect on the police staff that you have and cause the wrong balance to be had in the Metropolitan Police Service? I think I said there that until I see the numbers it is hard to be sure and if somebody distorted the support base by 1%/2% I do not think that matters too much but if I felt as though the Metropolitan Police Service was getting out of kilter and getting too little support for a larger number of police officers I would say so, because I do not think there is any benefit in having a large conscript army that is not supported in the right way. I do not see that at the moment but I would say so if I did.

Joanne McCartney (AM): At the moment, until you see the money, the plan is to reduce police officer numbers down to just over 30,000. The report also talks about the fact that the Metropolitan Police Service is going to shrink. Your predecessor said the Metropolitan Police Service will undoubtedly shrink over the next few years. Given that you have been in post now for a few months do you have any figure as to what you think it is a sustainable number of police officers for London?

Bernard Hogan-Howe (Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis): No! Not yet. I do not think it is an unfair response because we are right in the middle of the budgetary cycle and in the middle of the planning cycle. I am prepared at the moment to accept the previous assumptions that have been created. I can live with that. We are in the process of working out what money we are going to get and then what we are going to do with it. By March 2012 we will have a very clear idea but just at the moment I have to reserve my position until I see the money. The plans that have been drawn up are very reasonable plans. They give a good idea of how the money could be spent if it is what we expect. We have to wait and see what arrives in the bank.

Kit Malthouse AM (Chair, MPA): There is another part of the equation, of course, which you have not mentioned which is the savings programme and there is still a lot of work to do over the next two to three years on bringing forward new savings. There are quite a lot of savings that have just been in scope for the last 18 months and have not actually yet come to fruition. Once we cost those in of course the gap will start to close but it is not unusual in a public finance planning cycle to have a gap at this stage on which you work from both ends, the saving end and the income end, and that is what we are currently doing.

Joanne McCartney (AM): The difference here is that the strain of the gap is just that much greater. I want to go on to ask about current figures. I have got the figures to the end of October. They stood up to 31,500 officers which is 800 less than we had originally planned for this time last year. I want to ask what pressures that is putting on the police? I am aware, for example, that there are staff shortages at the Bow Control Centre, one of the three emergency control centres in London, and that approximately 60 officers are being taken from boroughs to

go down there and staff the phones. I know from my boroughs six or seven officers are regularly being taken off the streets and being sent down to the Bow Control Centre. That is one pressure that I can see that the Metropolitan Police Service is under at the moment. Can you comment on what other pressures there are and what plans you have to deal with them?

Bernard Hogan-Howe (Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis): First of all although 800 is a lot there is never a time, usually, when the Metropolitan Police Service is fully up to strength. People retire and people are being recruited so there is always some number - I do not know what the normal number is. I am not going to disagree with your basic point but there is always a level of turnover that we ought to acknowledge.

There are some pressures because during the year obviously, as you said at the beginning, there is a plan to adapt to another budget so it is not good recruiting people you cannot afford to pay next year. That is why some of this reduction we are seeing. One of the ways that we manage the police budget is around either police staff numbers or police officer numbers. It seems that in terms of the call handling centres vacancies have been allowed to accumulate probably for too long, so that was causing pressure in the call handling. To try to manage the budget we had allowed some of the numbers to drop. The call handling started to get tricky so therefore they started recruiting again, but in a reasonable way that does not overshoot the budget. That is what we have been trying to manage - and now I am trying to manage - during the year.

To fill those gaps quickly - because we have got to answer the calls - some police officers have been drawn in to answer some of the calls. They will be back filled eventually by the people who have been recruited, the police staff, who will fill those jobs. There is some quick pressure I accept. They were originally drawn in for about 12 weeks. I was talking to one of the Assistant Commissioners (AC) the other day who said that the 12 weeks had been extended for another 12 weeks because they had not been able to get all the recruitment of police staff in on time. That is a total of 24 weeks which is quite a long time actually. I accept there is some pressure but I am not sure it is overwhelming yet. Some of it we might have seen in a normal year anyway.

Steve O'Connell (AM): Commissioner, it is pleasing to hear from you your commitment to safer neighbourhoods and Safer Neighbourhood Teams. My feedback to you is that they are something that are massively important to Londoners and there has been an immense amount of credit built up over the last half a dozen, eight years, with the evolution of them.

First of all I want to explore your thoughts around the future and how you see Safer Neighbourhood Teams balanced with maintaining response teams balanced with back office duties. The commitment is there from you and I would like you to repeat it again that you have that commitment to Safer Neighbourhood Teams. I support, for what it is worth, the readjustment of sergeants. I think that makes sense and the feedback I have had from my two boroughs is that hence far it has worked although it needs to be reviewed. First of all I would like to pursue your thoughts around that balance of maintaining the commitment to Safer Neighbourhood Teams but the constant pressure within the Territorial Policing (TP) of response safer neighbourhood and back office. Your thoughts on that, Commissioner?

Bernard Hogan-Howe (Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis): The first thing to say is that the AC, the new one for Territorial Policing, Simon Byrne, who arrived on Monday, one of the first things I have asked him to carry out a review on is the shift system. You may think that is slightly off the point but it is vital because if we have got the right numbers of people on it allows us two benefits. One the response side can get forgotten and of course the response side is the thing that day in day out 24 hours a day delivers when people say, "I want you now". It is vital we keep those numbers right. There is some evidence that in looking at how we responded in August to the disturbances which became a riot in Tottenham we clearly did not have enough numbers. One of the big pools that we draw from is response. If we only set those numbers according to the number of calls we get we do not have a reserve to deal with the extraordinary. That is one of the major things I want to really get to the bottom of.

There is that commitment to both response and neighbourhoods. What you see over the years is that gradually that pool goes down and down and down while the specialist functions go up and up because they have a very explanation of why they want the resources. That is why - by the time I have worked through the numbers - I want to give you a clear answer and by the time we have had the discussions with the Authority about what those numbers can look like but the commitment is there.

I will concede one thing because it is a good place to discuss this. One of the things we are seeing at the moment is a disproportionate effect on the neighbourhoods and on response of the aid that is going to central London around protest. It is essential that we police those things in a way that firstly, maintains a democracy and allows people to protest but also allows other people to not be subject to crime or to infringe on their rights and, secondly, we make sure that we carry that out in an ordered way. We have seen significant numbers of police officers committed to those protests and on the last two we have had about 4,000 police officers. If you say it quickly it does not sound much, out of 32,000, but we had to have aid from outside London and that 4,000 is bigger than probably 90% of the police force in this country. It is a large number of people. We are taking people out of neighbourhoods sometimes and we are taking people out of response to manage that but it is essential that we police those events in a thoroughly professional way. We have seen, over the last two years, some of those events become out of control and the police have then been criticised for not dealing with them proportionately. We are trying to get that balance right but I do anticipate for a few months that we are having that pressure, some of which may materialise in other neighbourhoods, but we have a professional commitment to make sure that those things are policed properly.

Steve O'Connell (AM): Moving on to the rather sterile debate about force or service, on this side we are very keen and welcome your tougher line on criminals through total policing, whether that is a more muscular service or a more listening force I do not know. At the end of the day it does not really matter. Linking into that the important thing we need to be focusing on - and if you were listening to this from Mars you would be thinking about outcomes and not numbers, although numbers are a valid debate of course - is outcomes. Would you not agree, with your new tougher approach, if you drive down outcomes would that not, in itself, take communities with you? It is those vulnerable communities in London that are often disproportionately affected by crime and, if we drive down the figures, we take the bad guys off

the streets and we give that reassurance and visibility on the streets. There have been concerns voiced about taking communities with us. Would you not deem that that, in large part, would take the communities with us?

Bernard Hogan-Howe (Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis): It does. I might challenge your language for the same reason that Len raised the language and the impression it gives. I do not think it is about being tougher. It is about being assertive and it is about not walking away when it gets hard and not ignoring things. That is what I am arguing for. I am not arguing for being aggressive and I am not arguing for being confrontational. I am arguing for people, the police and the Metropolitan Police Service, doing its job when it sees that there is a job to be done. That is my argument. The bravest people I have met have not been the most aggressive; they just do not walk away. That is my argument. It is not about being 'tough'. I challenge that word.

On the whole I do agree that the vast majority of our communities, as I said, are good people who need the support of the police to challenge the bad guys. The bad guys need help sometimes to change their lives around. We do it in one way but other people can play their part - probation and local authorities can play their part - but the starting point is making sure they realise where the line is and we do not cross it.

Steve O'Connell (AM): Partly picking on the debate that was brought up earlier about front counter bases and police stations, again moving that debate on, residents throughout London want to see their police on the streets. They do not necessarily want them camped in stations. That is a view that has taken a while but finally the MPA certainly has the view that we need to see officers out on the streets. You mentioned about shift patterns earlier. This is something that we have been talking about for some considerable time and I do still sense when you go further down in the service there is a cultural resistance. Will you be instructing your new AC to genuinely roll up his sleeves and look at shift patterns? I often say to residents when they talk about police numbers if you go back six or seven years you had one officer in the ward, he often was not there because he was so good he got abstracted and you have now got six or eight or whatever it is. There has been almost, over the last few years, an explosion in numbers. However, are we getting the most out of those numbers? My point really to make is that with an adaption of shift numbers and shift times could you give us that assurance that we will be seeing more officers on the streets which, in itself, will counter any arguably scaremongering around police numbers themselves?

Bernard Hogan-Howe (Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis): The first thing to make clear in this forum is that I am for single patrolling. It was a strategy that was brought in by my predecessor, Sir Paul Stephenson, and I support it totally. There was a challenge to that around the disorders that we saw in August because there was a period when we had to think about the effectiveness of officers and their safety. Fundamentally I am still for it and you will see more of that in the future.

In terms of the numbers I was trying to give, I hope, not too coded a reassurance that when we have settled the budget and when we have settled the numbers we will look at whether we have got enough people in territorial policing and then we will look to see whether we have got

enough in response in the shifts and enough people in neighbourhoods. I do think that patrolling police officers have an impact certainly on perceptions of safety and I do believe they have an impact on crime. The very least you do is talk to people. If you do that they will tell you stuff and if they tell you stuff you can use it to make an impact on crime. It is vital and I do not accept the argument that patrolling has no impact on that. There are other things we need to do too.

You will see over the coming couple of weeks, certainly before we get to April, something that makes that broad promise more solid but I will give you a number; I will not give you a broad promise.

Richard Tracey (AM): Commissioner, I want to try to get from you some idea of how you see the style of policing in the next few years. The reports that have come out since August and the awful affairs in August have rather suggested that there is an attitude that policing has become a bit too much like social services. That has come out in the reports, various ones - I am sure you are conversant with all of them - and the various discussions on television. The assumption has then been made that the people who were committing the offences in August were rather taking advantage of that. It was pure opportunism. You have said that you think the service has got trapped into some sort of partnership working which is not always about fighting crime, "I am trying to get police to concentrate on our strengths." We observed when the student protests took place since August that there was strict control of the protest and then it was a peaceful day, largely. Where do you see us going? You touched on it but the public would really like to know how you see the style in the next few years.

Bernard Hogan-Howe (Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis): As I tried to explain in the answer to the other questions it is really important that you make clear what the line is and then you either enforce it or you at least explain to people what is acceptable behaviour and what is not and if they conflict with that then you do something about it. It may just be that you ask somebody to stop doing something but what you do not do is ignore it. It is encouraging police officers to do the things they do best - and there are some very good ones as you know. There are great people out there who are doing it day in day out and they work with people, they challenge them about their bad behaviour and hopefully that stops it. If it is serious enough then there needs to be some action taken. That is my broad line; be clear about what is acceptable and what is not and enforce it. There are times when it is very difficult to enforce because with 7.5 million people you cannot do everything all the time, but it is to encourage police officers to be professional, not to ignore even what appears to be sometimes only minor infractions.

The point that I made about the no insurance is it may appear to be a minor infraction and it may appear to be a minor thing that people do not send in the new ownership of a vehicle when they buy it in the way that you used to do it immediately, but if you do not fill in your new ownership form the automatic number plate recognition (ANPR) camera does not work and the speed cameras that we have become less effective. From small things great things grow.

If you were to define the two things I stand for, one is to be clear what your standards are, internally for the police as well as to people who are going to offend, and the second thing is to

pay attention to detail. When you work in business or public services the people who have paid a lot of attention to detail have had more success and do not ignore things that appear minor. They rarely are. You have got to get stuck in to detail. If you only do it 80% of the time it is better than doing it a third of the time.

Richard Tracey (AM): You are going to be much more prepared in the future are you, in terms of the training of officers for protests and in your general command policy to deal with that sort of thing than it seems the Metropolitan Police Service was in August?

Bernard Hogan-Howe (Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis): There are two things that we saw from the past. There are two things we need to separate. One is the public protest and the other is the events we saw in August; public disorder and a riot. We have to deal with them in slightly different ways because they are different. The first thing is prevention in both cases. If we are policing protests there is a right to protest and we expect to support that but we cannot allow bad behaviour to allow a crowd to get out of control because when crowds are out of control people get hurt.

In terms of public disorder then we see similar things. If the crowd gets out of control and then it carries on into a riot no one's life is safe. It is critical that, first of all, we have sufficient police numbers there, then that they carry out their role effectively and, if there is bad behaviour, we challenge people and arrest them if we can or at least disperse if we need to.

That is the principle for me. Prevention is better than trying to cure it. That means either good intelligence or having enough officers there. Secondly, set clear standards. Finally, enforce it.

Richard Tracey (AM): I read somewhere that when you were in Merseyside you had the lowest number of complaints of anywhere in the country. Is that correct?

Bernard Hogan-Howe (Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis): It is. One of the things I did not say but I probably should have said earlier is that I was proud of the crime reduction we had and we achieved nearly 40% in four years. It was the highest amount of crime reduction in the country. It was from a style of being direct in a way that I have just described that I think the Metropolitan Police Service can be.

The thing I most celebrated was the fact that we had the lowest number of complaints per officer in the country. We had that for two years running. In the third year Dorset beat us. Civil litigation came down too. As did, as it happened, our grievances internally.

My point is it is not about being aggressive. It is about being professional and you are confident to do your job. Often our officers are not always confident so we have to train them and make sure they are aware of the law. Then we have to support them when they do it. If they start to worry that we do not support them then the fear is that they either do it badly or they do not do it at all.

I know that not everybody complains about bad behaviour. I do understand that. But it is one indicator we must look at. Civil litigation is a reasonable other one.

Richard Tracey (AM): One other question on a slightly different tack but something that is worrying people all over the country at the moment is the matter of metal theft and particularly metal theft on the railways. Obviously there is the other thing about war memorials which is so distasteful it is appalling. The call has gone out from the Deputy Mayor here and indeed from the Chair of the MPA for some further toughening up of the law to deal with this. I understand that there are some forces in Northumbria, Durham and Cleveland who have found ways of dealing with this. Is there anything further that you think you can do in the Metropolitan Police Service or do you think that the law needs to be considerably toughened up?

Bernard Hogan-Howe (Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis): Maybe the Chair wants to talk about the statutory thing but for me for the Metropolitan Police Service, rather than the statute, there are two things really. One is some of the things we used to do which we need to do again; so checking scrap metal dealers. We need to get neighbourhood officers and our response officers to get out there and do more things. I do not want to make an announcement now but, within the next few weeks, I will make an announcement about how I intend that we take that forward in the future. We need to have some people dedicated to this area. It is very clear that some people are making millions of pounds out of other people's misery but the opportunity is there because it is mass business. We are talking about large amounts of metal which is creating large amounts of money. There are only so many places you can get rid of it. There will be only so many of the dealers who are dealing with it criminally, frankly.

Our task is to get the intelligence and then do something about it. British Transport Police are trying to do it nationally but we need to do something in London. What you always find with this type of thing, having started out in South Yorkshire, is that scrap metal theft when it is high value, is not just people who steal scrap metal, organised crime uses it too. It is just another opportunity. We have got to deal with them as organised criminals and not leave it to a patrolling officer to do alone. That is something that I will make an announcement about over the next few weeks.

John Biggs (AM): Quickly, following on Mr Tracey's question, do you anticipate there being a greater likelihood of civic unrest in the near future?

Bernard Hogan-Howe (Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis): I do not know to be honest. I am not sure I know --

John Biggs (AM): Can I rephrase it then. Do you see that as being a higher priority in terms of ensuring readiness?

Bernard Hogan-Howe (Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis): In terms of London's experience over the last two years - taking my point about the distinction between public protest and how we have dealt with that and then public disorder and how we dealt with that in August - we have to be better prepared than we saw in August. The very least is that professionally we just have to be ready. There are many reports now into the disorder and the riots - we have got the Darra Singh report, we have got one within the Metropolitan Police

Service and there are other people; the London School of Economics (LSE) published a report this week. What is commonly accepted is there were not enough police officers available to deploy quickly and when they were deployed we could have worked better - not individuals but the leadership level. It is vital that we have enough officers available should disorder break out but the first thing is to make sure we have the intelligence to notice it may be possible, secondly, to make sure there are enough officers available and thirdly, to make sure we react positively and constructively.

John Biggs (AM): I will swiftly move on to the question that was probed by Joanne McCartney on policing strength and capacity. Here is an easy question: would you agree with the statement that, as Commissioner, if the Mayor wants you to employ 32,000 police officers, providing he gives you the resources to employ 32,000 police officers, you would be happy to do that?

Bernard Hogan-Howe (Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis): Broadly. I tried to say in my answer to Joanne if someone says, "I will give you enough money for 32,000 police officers, have 32,000 but you will only have 1,000 support staff" that just will not work. I do not think anyone is proposing that. That is why --

John Biggs (AM): You have obviously seen my briefing because that is the next question which is about whether the Authority is at risk of getting out of balance in its workforce. If one looks at the numbers you are moving towards balancing a budget by forever reducing the number of staff and police community support officers (PCSOs) but frozen on police officer numbers. We all support police officer numbers but is that creating an unbalanced workforce?

Bernard Hogan-Howe (Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis): I do not see that imbalance. That is what I was trying to say to, Joanne. If I did I would say so. I would not support a budget that ended up with that type of disproportionally or anywhere near it.

One thing I would say - and it was raised by the Chair in response to one of the questions - you may be surprised about this but there are still opportunities in the Metropolitan Police Service to save money. You will not be surprised, of course, but there are opportunities to save money and we have really got to pursue that vigorously. One of the things we have, as you know in public services, is we do not have a competitor so what it means is we have got to challenge ourselves about those cost savings. I am not going to name the individual things but I have got at least four or five things on my hit list which would include particular roles - I am struggling to understand how they enhance the value of what we do? We have got to get into that as well as just worry about the budget.

John Biggs (AM): You recognised the statement in the draft business plan from your, Treasurer, which I think has been often recited to you, saying, "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, Police Community Support Officers (PCSOs) and staff numbers." Yes, efficiencies but you have very clear advice from your head finance officer that you cannot do it without cutting, among other things, police officer numbers. You recognise that on your current resources?

Bernard Hogan-Howe (Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis): That is indisputable. I do not think anybody has ever argued that. The odd million you can work out. When you are talking about tens and hundreds of millions then it is a people base because that is what we pay most of our people. 80% odd of our budget is people.

John Biggs (AM): So without additional resources you are skewered. Can I ask one further question then --

Kit Malthouse AM (Chair, MPA): Or additional savings.

John Biggs (AM): I was asking the Commissioner. We are currently in a position where one in five officers are paid for by third party funding, principally from Transport for London (TfL) but also from the boroughs. Do you feel comfortable with that balance of resourcing?

Bernard Hogan-Howe (Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis): The one in five of which five?

John Biggs (AM): It is principally Safer Transport Teams who get something like £400 million a year from TfL --

Kit Malthouse AM (Chair, MPA): No, we do not.

Bernard Hogan-Howe (Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis): I would need to check the figures. I am not sure I recognise a one in five figure.

Kit Malthouse AM (Chair, MPA): It is not £400 million.

Bernard Hogan-Howe (Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis): I do not know if the Chair wants to answer that but if the other providers withdraw their funding we have got to consider that.

John Biggs (AM): The question is whether that is a sustainable model for policing?

Bernard Hogan-Howe (Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis): I was last in the Metropolitan Police Service between 2001 and 2004. As I arrived in 2001, the year before we had had 25,500 police and in 2001 we had 26,500 police and then it zoomed up to 32,500. We have got to be really careful in understanding, even if the numbers change, it is possible to police London with different numbers. I would always argue - with you and for you - that we need more police. It is possible that these numbers are not set in stone. What has happened over the years, as you say, is other providers come in and provide us funding. Whether or not they are now getting challenged about funding is not really for me, politically, to work out. I will work with whatever people give us.

John Biggs (AM): You recognise there is a risk that with other public authorities being under pressure on their budgets that funding could be under risk?

Bernard Hogan-Howe (Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis): Of course.

Roger Evans (AM): We are looking at how the Metropolitan Police Service might evolve in the next couple of years and one of the key parts of this is using new technology to communicate with residents and with members of the public. It is very commendable that internet and text services are now being used to inform people of crime threats in their area and precautions they need to take. What steps is the Metropolitan Police Service going to take to ensure that vulnerable elderly residents who may not have access to text or internet can receive those messages as well?

Bernard Hogan-Howe (Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis): We do quite a lot already. For example we do leaflets. Some of the big operations we carry out we will leaflet in the area. We do leaflet with advice. We produce information every year that goes out to the residents of London. I agree with you that we cannot assume that the internet will work for everyone so we have to provide it in a way that people want it.

The other thing I do think is that sometimes we might assume that people who are more mature and are at home may not use the internet but it is one of the great ways in fact they can communicate either to get services or get things. We are finding more and more people are using it in a way we might not expect because the benefits are there.

You are right that we might assume everybody has it. We are having a tweet contact session. We are going to have an internet forum once every four weeks where if somebody wants to contact the Commissioner online then that will be possible. We have got an event tonight so the Commissioner is going out to meet members of the public from three boroughs. We are trying to do as much as we can on communication but it is not only the internet, I do accept. The meetings I am going to have every four weeks in different parts of London and people come to a hall and say they are happy with the policing or perhaps they are not is just another part of the engagement. Tonight's is in the evening so perhaps more mature people may not want to do that. We will put it at different parts of the day too.

Roger Evans (AM): In the past you have used some elements of telephone messaging to vulnerable residents but that is something that has been ceased now. Is that something that you would look at reinstating for, admittedly, the dwindling number of people who would have to rely upon it?

Bernard Hogan-Howe (Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis): It is a good point. I had not realised that; that it has fallen away. Certainly some of the automatic systems that do a ring round are very effective because 99% of the population has a telephone, a landline, so you are right; it is one of the most effective. If that has dropped off I can always inquire in to that. I had not heard that.

Roger Evans (AM): Thank you.

Richard Barnbrook (AM): Good morning Commissioner. From my own point of view I was quite happy to see we have a Commissioner that will be on the front line. From your letters I have read through and your comments today, a no nonsense gentleman in charge of our police force. I have two questions I would like to put to you. I was going to ask them after the next question but I think they are more appropriate now as much as the next question to follow.

According to a poll that has been carried out, 72% of Londoners believe the Metropolitan Police Service should use water cannons to quell rioting in London if and when things get out of order. What is your opinion on the use of water cannons in necessary circumstances?

Bernard Hogan-Howe (Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis): The reason that this is being considered at all is because the Government was very challenging of the Metropolitan Police Service and other forces around the country in terms of whether or not they had water cannon available - to which the answer was they were not available. The challenge was on the Saturday night in Tottenham it would not even have been helpful had we had it available. A piece of work, a review, is being carried out by AC Lynne Owens which you will get around Christmas and it will look at: 1) whether or not it is a practical alternative; 2) if it is practical, who is going to pay; and 3) where are we going to keep it if all these things should work out.

I have an open mind about whether it should work or not. I have to be confident standing in front of you - as answering the question earlier - we do not want to see what happened on the streets of London again. There were people who died in those three days. I am always amazed that so few did. Burning buildings at the rate we saw is not something we can tolerate. I hope it never happens again and I hope our intelligence makes sure that it does not. When we have to act we have to act effectively. We saw on that Saturday night police officer who stood for four or five hours being stoned and bricked without the possibility of going forward. Anything that assists us to get the right numbers and get the right training. We have at least got to have an open mind to things. We have to, at least, consider it.

Richard Barnbrook (AM): I can't really tie you down. I will accept what you said. Another thing I would like to ask: a comment was once made in history that an army marches on its stomach. The Police Federation made complaints about lack of support and comments of rubbish food: sandwiches with perishable fillings in hot vans; one bottle of water for a period of 19 hours duty; some police having to use their own mobile phones because the radio system collapsed or did not work; one officer's shield split in half and police vehicles not being up to great standards at the moment - the comment was police vans in poor condition. What are your comments about that and how can they be rectified?

Bernard Hogan-Howe (Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis): That Federation survey, which is very helpful, has identified ten to 14 recommendations of things that need to improve in the future and we are building that into the review that I have already mentioned that Lynne Owens has carried out.

What we all ought to acknowledge is that over those three days London and the Metropolitan Police Service come under incredible pressure and had to rack things up at a rate it had never seen. If you bear in mind on the Saturday night there were over 300 police officers involved but

by the Tuesday night we had over 16,000 police involved. Any system will come under pressure when you have to provide resources to that level of commitment - whether it be catering or vehicles, things were tight. By the time we got to the end of the week that was far better. The catering department did an incredible job. In fact I know the force could have managed it. If the quality of food was poor I will take that on the chin and we will go away and we will do something about it. I do think our catering staff did a remarkable job.

It is fair to put on the table as well that some of them, who are not our best paid people - on the Saturday public transport was badly disrupted but I talked to quite a few who had walked in, whether it be to the Yard or other places, from Wandsworth and Southwark. They had done a huge amount to make sure they turned up for work when it was very, very difficult - yet they are some of our least well paid.

I am not going to accept too much criticism of them but I do take on the chin that if we need to improve services for the staff we will do it. Every night we doubled the amount of officers until we got to Tuesday and then we got 16,000. That was an incredible pressure. That was half of what the Metropolitan Police Service has got in terms of police officers. That sort of pressure is difficult to absorb quickly. If it had gone on for six months I am sure we would have been far better and we will be better prepared next time

We will take the survey from the Federation and build it in to our planning. We will not ignore it.

Richard Barnbrook (AM): Thank you.

Andrew Boff (AM): Commissioner, the Merseyside Independent Sexual Violence Adviser Scheme has been remarkably successful in that there has been a 400% increase in the number of women willing to give their details and report crimes to the police. 83% of those charged with offences against prostitutes have been convicted and 95% of the women involved have exited prostitution. Will you look in to the options for implementing the Merseyside Independent Sexual Violence Adviser scheme (ISCA) scheme across London?

Bernard Hogan-Howe (Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis): The Merseyside project has been examined by the Metropolitan Police Service and representatives from Liverpool have worked in partnership with SCD9 which is part of the Metropolitan Police Service. That project has been implemented in London in partnership with the charity Open Doors. I am told that London has a number of charities, not least of which is the wide number of support groups and agencies across the 32 boroughs. The project is not funded by the Metropolitan Police Service. It does have an effective link in to SDC9 through our third party reporting system and that system is linked to all third sector groups. It has seen a similar increase in victims reporting violence and trafficking within the sex industry to the project that took place in Liverpool, so you have seen a similar response. In the last year a number of prosecutions for rape and other cases of violence towards sex workers have commenced. European Union (EU) funding is being sought for a dedicated multi-agency team to bring a bespoke police response to vulnerable exploited people who work in that industry. That will

include an outreach worker, local authority officers and police team to work across Kensington and Chelsea and Westminster boroughs.

The information I have – and, Andrew, you may have different experiences – is that that project has been picked up on the report and at the very least has been attempted in London but it sounds like it is quite a challenge given the scale of London really.

Andrew Boff (AM): I understand that and at the moment it is at very early stages in London and in only a couple of jurisdictions in London. It would be good to see that spread across London not just because it has been so effective in protecting women against violent attack but also it is cost effective in terms of the conviction rate for rape which is much, much higher than one would expect from accusations of rape from other sources. I would urge you, if you could, to review that and take it across London.

Do you think that the policing of human trafficking should be evidence based?

Bernard Hogan-Howe (Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis): It is a bit of an open question. I can say yes quite easily but I am not quite sure what makes you --

Andrew Boff (AM): I am assuming your response will be yes.

Bernard Hogan-Howe (Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis): It is. I am just wondering what --

Andrew Boff (AM): Will you refer to Setting the Record which was published by ACPO in August 2010 when deciding how to fight human trafficking? Will you reference that document when reaching a decision?

Bernard Hogan-Howe (Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis): Of course we will. It is a difficult area and, often, a lot of it is hidden which makes it quite difficult to know what the scale of the problem is. Certainly we will react to that advice. I would not countenance an approach other than the evidence based. It is a challenge obviously to get the resources in for something that is hidden quite often.

Andrew Boff (AM): Indeed. A consultant on that report – Dr Nick Mai – has recently authored a peer review report called *In Whose Name: Migration, Sex Work and Trafficking*. Will you acquaint yourself with the findings of that report?

Bernard Hogan-Howe (Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis): We will.

Andrew Boff (AM): Dr Mai has presented this report to meetings of ACPO but has recently been criticised by politicians – but no academic criticism of the report – so I would ask you to very thoroughly reference that report. Will you provide the Assembly with a list of academic research which you will reference in deciding your priorities on policing trafficking?

Bernard Hogan-Howe (Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis): That I might reserve our position on. The other things you have asked are very reasonable. I will think about that just a little bit longer. It seems a reasonable request; I just want to think about it, that is all.

Andrew Boff (AM): We want to see the methodology and the reason for decisions being taken. It would therefore be useful to see the academic research that goes to underpinning those decisions. It is up to you what decisions you reach but it would be interesting to see and informative to see the academic research that you will be referencing.

Bernard Hogan-Howe (Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis): The thing I broadly support is doing what works and often academic research is helpful in that. I am pushing at the moment to try to get our major universities to have faculties for policing so I am broadly with you. The only thing I am a little careful about is making sure that I am not expecting people to go away and do lots of academic work before some of the things that we know work. I am not against you; I just reserve my position on the academic --

Andrew Boff (AM): I am not asking you to do any more original research and I am not asking you to invest any more money. I just want to know what informs the decisions that you make. It could be contrary to what some of those reports actually may boldly say but at least we know that that is the report on which you are basing those decisions.

Bernard Hogan-Howe (Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis): I understand what you are saying. The only thing I would point out is there is not an awful lot of academic research on policing. What there is is quite a lot of academic research from which we pick around sociology, around criminology and around forensic science. My debate with academia is if we have got 250,000 people dedicated to policing 60 million people it is an important enough academic discipline to deserve people to research it and test it. Sadly at the moment, they do not.

Andrew Boff (AM): In conclusion I am encouraged by your commitment that you will reference that document that I referred to and acquaint yourself with its findings. Thank you very much.

Brian Coleman (AM): There may not be enough academics looking at police although there are enough ex-senior police officers out there I am sure looking for positions in one place or another. They keep popping up on the news giving us the benefit of their out of date views - ex-Commander O'Connor springs to mind.

Anyway, Commissioner, will you continue to maintain robust policing against brothels in our suburban boroughs in particular, which is my concern and indeed in London, which often cause disturbance, nuisance and annoyance to neighbours, to women going about their legitimate business and so on.

Bernard Hogan-Howe (Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis): The first thing is to react to complaints. If we get complaints then we should take action. The broad policy that ACPO has followed, the strategy, is a good one; to stop the nuisance that arises from street

prostitution, to react to complaints and also to provide support to the women who are victims. 90% of the women who are involved in prostitution are drug addicts so there is something going off there that we have got to do together. It is a huge percentage who are involved in that way. The final leg is to make sure that people who are the customers are dealt with according to the criminal law. All of it needs to be addressed.

Brian Coleman (AM): Street prostitution is an issue and there should be robust policing on that. I am particularly concerned about brothels which pop up in very nice suburban middle class streets in north and south London and the disturbances they cause to neighbours with comings and goings at all hours of the day and night. It is the allegedly more respectable brothels that cause problem in the suburban boroughs.

Bernard Hogan-Howe (Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis): To repeat my first answer where we get complaints we should react to them.

Question No: 201 / 2011 - Priorities for London policing
Steve O'Connell

What are your priorities for London policing in the next three years?

Jennette Arnold (Chair): Thank you very much. Members, we have covered a huge number of areas in that first question. Let's go to the second question. Can I ask Assembly Member O'Connell for the specifics arising out of his question which is what are your priorities for London policing in the next three years? Can we have a specific follow up question?

Steve O'Connell (AM): I agree that we have covered a lot of the areas already, Commissioner, which is quite right. It would be right for the record for Londoners to understand what your priorities are. As a relatively new incoming Commissioner it would be right for you to lay down your marker on what you see as your priorities over the coming three or four years.

Jennette Arnold (Chair): You have touched on that for two years. Can you stretch it to the specific three?

Steve O'Connell (AM): That is not what I am asking.

Jennette Arnold (Chair): He has answered a number of questions so can we have some specifics then in terms of a three year plan and longer?

Bernard Hogan-Howe (Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis): There are at least two things we have not talked about which are really important and one is gangs. The impact of gangs on the boroughs of London are significant. We saw some evidence of that - they were not the cause of it - at the riots. They were disproportionately effective in the crowds. We have now had 14 boroughs together at leadership level that have all agreed that there is an issue for them around gangs. We will make an announcement together with the boroughs in January about how we intend to deal with that in the future. That is a vital piece of work that we need to do. It is partly about enforcement but it is not only about enforcement. It is about what we

can do together around young people being in gangs. That is something that is a change in London that we have got to recognise and do something about.

The second point is we have not talked about the Olympics. The Olympics will be with us very shortly now in about 250 days. I probably got a little relaxed about thinking that this was just a big project. It is a massive project. First of all it is a significant period of time where thousands of people from all over the world will come here and we hope have a great event. We have to be aware that we are planning for the potential for a terrorist threat because it is the risk - not that we have got a group of people out there planning to do it as far as we know but the risk is blindingly obvious. It will mean that significant numbers of police officers are dedicated to making sure that there is no terrorist threat and, if there is public protest around it, that we have enough officers to deal with that.

One thing to emphasise - it sounds obvious - there are 205 countries who are going to be visiting for the Olympics; a great event for the city. Each of those countries expects their interest to be preserved and looked after and their people protected in a way that is very special for them. Having to work with the 32 boroughs of London and the Assembly is quite a challenge but then add 205 countries on for the Olympics events. I do not think we yet know exactly how we are going to deal with that; lots of plans, lots of conversations. From the French to the Americans to the Israelis and the Russians, everybody will want a very clear plan as to how we are going to look after their people. That is a great challenge that we all need to work together on.

The final thing is, if it has not come out clearly already, I am passionate about cutting crime. We have got a challenge at the moment around robbery, particularly around street robbery - there is something to do there. We have not talked in this forum yet about anti-social behaviour. One is a precursor to the other quite often. I am of the view that if you do things about anti-social behaviour in a smart way you can reduce it and if you can do something about that you reduce the chances of crime. The only way round anti-social behaviour is to target repeat victims, repeat offenders and repeat locations. We can do something about that and we will. You will see under the new Assistant Commissioner that that determination is there.

Those would be three of the priorities. Of course during the next three years I suspect a few more may come up.

Steve O'Connell (AM): Thank you very much. It was helpful to pursue this because issues have come out that we have not touched upon before. If we had had this debate two or three years ago the gangs and youth violence would have been talked about for the previous hour so whether that is a comment that things are moving in the right direction I will let others be the judge of. I tend to think that probably is the case.

Bernard Hogan-Howe (Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis): Steve, can I just add one thing. I should have mentioned earlier, but is inherent in what I was saying about the Olympics. What none of us can forget is the terrorist threat. That has not gone away. We have got many people dedicated to preventing the terrorists that we believe are out there achieving

their aims. Although it is often unseen it is vital work and we have got a significant number of people dedicated to it. That threat has not gone away.

Steve O'Connell (AM): Thank you for that. Linked to that, many residents in London will understand that there is a terrorist threat and that there are youth murders - which are absolutely appalling and every one is absolutely shocking - but often the feeling of families in London is there are bad things but they happen beyond them. They do not affect them directly. What affects them directly is that anti-social behaviour that you have referred to, which is that feeling of unsafeness on their shopping parade or on their street corners. Again, I would like to drill down a little bit on your thoughts around how you pursue your work around anti-social behaviour and making our high streets and our neighbourhoods feel safe around that relatively low level crime.

Bernard Hogan-Howe (Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis): To regard it as important - and I know people query this - you have to set targets and you have to say what we want to achieve. The critical thing for me is to reduce the rate of repeat victimisation. Every one of us might have, at one time or another, experienced anti-social behaviour. It is not the once, unless you are very vulnerable, it is the repeat nature of it that means that you cannot either enjoy your home or public space. They are the two tests for me. If you can really support the repeat victims and reduce that rate which usually means reducing the repeat offenders, that is where we will see the most impact because the repeat offenders will pick on different victims but probably not far out of the same area. They have got to be confronted and dealt with. We do have legislation in place and it is our task, as police working with other agencies and local authorities - because some of these powers rely on agreement. The police do have anti-social behaviour orders (ASBOs) but we have to have agreement for local authorities to do those things. The task is to target those areas where it is most needed and provide respite to the victims. We have to set targets and make sure that the police - us - are doing our job.

Steve O'Connell (AM): Lastly from me, you touched upon powers and we could reflect on the speed and the justifiable severity of the court action post-riot offenders. Would you agree with me that there is work to be done about asking the courts to show some semblance of consistency with the severity of dealing with offences that in the past they may not have. Those events in August opened up all our eyes to how possibly these offenders need to be dealt with. Do you, Commissioner, feel you need more support from the courts?

Bernard Hogan-Howe (Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis): What we saw post the riots was one thing that had been forgotten, perhaps by the judiciary but probably by other people too, is that local magistrates have always had the power to react to local problems. They do not have to carry on sentencing as the sentencing guidelines say for the country. If you have a local problem with your windows being broken or cars being attacked or whatever it is, it is a local problem. The magistrates can send a signal by their sentencing. What we saw post the riots was both in the crown courts and in the magistrates courts a signal was sent by the sentencing. You could either regard that as inconsistent or society says we are not going to tolerate this type of behaviour and sending a very clear message. I regard it as the latter. That worked.

One of the few positives that came out of the riots was the criminal justice system was effective, quick and worked into the night. We saw quick and effective justice. It was not antagonistic to be done quickly. We got high quality justice. That is one of the things we all need to build on: Crown Prosecution Service (CPS), the courts, working with probation and the police to get that effectiveness in the system. I would encourage magistrates or crown courts to sentence appropriate to the crime. There is that thing to remember which is about local circumstances and what we saw in the riots was the local circumstances right across London because rioting took place right across London and a message had to be sent.

Jennette Arnold (Chair): Thank you very much. Let's go then to question three and that is in the name of Assembly Member Johnson and it relates to police station and front counters. A response, Assembly Member Johnson? Who would you like to answer that question?

Darren Johnson (AM): The Commissioner please.

Question No: 192 / 2011 - Police stations and front counters

Darren Johnson

Can you provide an update on the number and location of police stations and front counters that will be closed or modified as part of your savings programme?

Bernard Hogan-Howe (Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis): Broadly the update is that I have asked the Territorial Policing Development Team, with its new Assistant Commissioner who started on Monday - and the list of work is growing by the second, to take some more time to look at the issue of how people contact the police and use our services including the police stations and front counters. Your question is right to say we have been looking at this in terms of potential savings. We need to make the best use of the resources we have available. It is not just about money. We have also been asking questions as to what is the most effective means of people accessing police services and I need to be convinced of all the arguments, both financial and otherwise. I want to be absolutely sure that the access channels that we have are the ones that work for people.

As you know some of our police stations people do not go into. Referring back to Baroness Doocey's point, they often go into other places regularly but we are not available there. One of the things we have to look at is whether we are getting those numbers right. At the moment I am not sure that our plan makes the best offer in terms of the future or explains clearly what we want to do.

Darren Johnson (AM): You say various options are being considered. Can you confirm that the Metropolitan Police Service is considering a plan to close completely 51 of the front offices and reduce the hours at a further 51?

Bernard Hogan-Howe (Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis): What we have got is a piece of work which is not a plan. We have got a piece of work being done to work out: 1) what money we need to save; 2) whether or not all our buildings are being used in the best way, which is a reasonable thing that Baroness Doocey raised in terms of estate strategy; and 3) our links in with the community. It is trying to get that balance right. I am not convinced yet that

we have got that arrangement in the right place. I would not call it a plan at all. We have got suggestions being made but I am not persuaded that, for the money that is being offered in terms of savings, we are not going to end up with a terrible position where people think we are closing police stations for what is a relatively small saving. Until I am convinced of that argument I will not bring it forward.

Darren Johnson (AM): Do those suggestions include significant closures though?

Kit Malthouse AM (Chair, MPA): How many times are you going to try?

Jenny Jones (AM): Well answer the question.

Bernard Hogan-Howe (Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis): I think I have. There are various options in a paper and I am not going to start going through every one of them and say there is 51 of these to 200 of that or two of these. There are various options on the spectrum. I can only say I am not convinced by the arguments I have seen so I cannot be any straighter.

Darren Johnson (AM): I do not think anyone round here is arguing that every function must stay in exactly the building it is at the moment and sometimes there are front counters tucked away in Victorian buildings that are inappropriate around back streets away from where the population is and so on. If we are seeing closures we have previously been given an assurance by the Mayor who told us in February 2011, "In line with my priorities no police stations with front counters are being closed without another front counter service with the same, if not better, facilities replacing it". Are we still seeing that commitment that if there is going to be a closure it is going to be replaced by something of as good, if not better, value or are we seeing a changing approach from what we were told in February?

Bernard Hogan-Howe (Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis): First of all, no. Secondly that is the very reason why I am not persuaded that the work I have seen has actually answered that question very clearly. The opening of any new facility should precede the closure of an old one because there is no way to explain the closure of something as a positive event. We have to have in place the things that will succeed it if we are going to do that. I am not convinced, from the plans I have seen of the options put forward, that we have answered those questions yet. I cannot bring something to you that I cannot support.

Darren Johnson (AM): Can I ask the Chair of the Police Authority, at this stage has there been any movement from the Mayor's position in terms of your outlook that there should be no closure without a replacement of as good a value?

Kit Malthouse AM (Chair, MPA): No, there has been no movement for that.

Darren Johnson (AM): OK. That is a useful clarification. Can I ask briefly about the staffing as well. Are there any plans to replace non-uniform police staff on front counters with PCSOs who would cost several thousand pounds a year more to employ?

Bernard Hogan-Howe (Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis): What I understand from the history is that there was an arrangement where the most effective way of getting Government money was to put police community support officers into front counters which is why you see some of them around. That was cost effective because of the source of the money. Whether it is the most cost effective for the Metropolitan Police Service to do if it has to pay the salary I am not convinced. That is what has happened over the last few years; it is to do with the source of the money, when the PCSOs went to front counters. That is not what they were designed for.

Darren Johnson (AM): The public want to see the PCSOs out visible in the community and using support staff to --

Bernard Hogan-Howe (Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis): The other point is that you can do it cheaper if you do not use a PCSO. Because of the source of the money it has been helpful but I do not think it is a good middle term option.

Darren Johnson (AM): On the police counters issue as well, there will be more than one police counter open in every borough? You are not thinking of slimming front counters down to just one per borough --

Bernard Hogan-Howe (Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis): It is a return to the first question. Until I have a number I can put in front of you I am not going to discuss numbers, Darren, because I just do not know. I am not trying to avoid the question. I am not convinced in the arguments I have seen that we have a coherent plan. I cannot give you a number that we would have in one borough or two boroughs or whatever, but I will, when I have a plan to present to you, be able to answer that question.

Darren Johnson (AM): Have you effectively asked your team to go back to the drawing board with those plans if you are saying you are not convinced by the evidence you have been presented with so far? Have you effectively asked them to go away and come back with another approach?

Bernard Hogan-Howe (Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis): That would dismiss the work they have done and that is not necessary. They have done a good piece of work. There is nothing wrong with the work. What I am less persuaded by is where we are to change the facilities or the availability I am not sure I can stand behind what we are offering in place of where there is a change in service from one police station or counter. It is that that I cannot stand behind.

There is some argument for the change of providing counters in different parts of London because people are not going into some of them, as you have acknowledged, and we are paying people to stand there to do nothing. That is not a wise thing. What I am not persuaded by is the replacement that we are talking about is of sufficient quality where I can stand in front of you and make that case. That is that I have asked for further work on.

Darren Johnson (AM): Finally, very quickly, could you confirm when we are likely to see firm proposals published and put in the public domain?

Bernard Hogan-Howe (Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis): I can let you know. I have not set a date yet but I will certainly let you know as soon as we set a date.

Darren Johnson (AM): OK. Thank you.

Murad Qureshi (AM): Has the Metropolitan Police Service got any plans to close D Division police stations in the north of the city of Westminster and send all the response teams from the south? This is something that ex-policemen in the neighbourhood have suggested is on the drawing board and people are concerned that you will not be able to respond to the gang warfare we have got in Queen's Park from Bulgaria.

Bernard Hogan-Howe (Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis): I have to say I do not know the answer to your question. I can find out for you. This is not necessarily about closing or opening police stations; it can be within boroughs that Commanders take decisions about where they want their staff to work from. I am afraid I just do not know the answer to that but we can find out for you.

Murad Qureshi (AM): Can I ask the Chair of the Authority because he will have an interest given that it is his home borough? Can you substantiate any of those --

Kit Malthouse AM (Chair, MPA): I am not aware of any plan to do so, no.

Murad Qureshi (AM): OK.

Joanne McCartney (AM): I wanted to ask about the strategy for delivering a strategic plan and borough plans, particularly on front counters. Four years ago we had borough plans and the incoming Mayor put them on hold saying he wanted a review. It seems that four year, in effect, has been lost and we still do not have a strategic plan for London but for each borough. I am glad you are coming out and you are looking at it again. Can you guarantee me that you will have a borough plan for each borough that will be consulted on in public before any decisions are taken?

Bernard Hogan-Howe (Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis): We have all got to be careful. First of all, in terms of police stations, I do not suppose there is any good time to close a police station or front counter. I doubt anybody in this room would want to go on a public platform and try to explain it. It is an emotive issue as well as it is a rational issue. The second thing is we are making sure, in terms of that consultation, we balance it correctly in terms of the democratic process we are about to embark on which is around the Mayoral election. At the best of times it can be an emotive issue. I want to make sure, exactly as you say, it is a rational strategy that we bring forward that we can consult on and you have got a very well thought out plan. That is why I said to Darren I am not sure I could stand behind the one at the moment but we will consult over what we bring forward.

Joanne McCartney (AM): From that answer I guess that you will put in the public consultation and public awareness of this until after the election. Is that correct?

Bernard Hogan-Howe (Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis): I did not quite say that. It might be wise if I did probably. I take advice really. As you know there is purdah and how we manage that - I would not want to conflict with the election. We are just trying to get that right really. I take advice on how to manage it.

Joanne McCartney (AM): Can you guarantee that no decisions will be taken about disposal of front counters or police stations until you have put it out to the public? The public are quite realistic about this but they want to see what the plan is and what the alternatives are before they can make their mind up.

Bernard Hogan-Howe (Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis): I can guarantee that there should be public consultation before that significant change in service occurred.

Jennette Arnold (Chair): Thank you very much. We will now go to the fourth and final question for this session and it is in the name of Assembly Member McCartney and it is around effective police response.

Question No: 208 / 2011 - Effective Police Response

Joanne McCartney

How will the MPS provide an effective police response to Londoners at a time of increasing financial pressure?

Joanne McCartney (AM): Perhaps I could narrow it down again given the time we have left. Going back to some of the first things that were raised this morning, some of the interim reports that are coming out from the riots over the summer are talking about a level of disengagement and disenchantment particularly with young people in London and the police, stop and search in particular has been highlighted. Also, about the level of engagement. It seems that a lot more work needs to be done on that level of community engagement so that you can offer a very responsive police response to particular communities and to particular people. I want to ask the Commissioner and Kit what plans are you looking at to do that much needed community work that has obviously been missing?

Bernard Hogan-Howe (Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis): Two things. You would all acknowledge that a lot has been done. The Metropolitan Police Service and other agencies have been doing a huge amount to try to get that level of engagement and, in many places, it has worked. The challenge this week that came from the LSE report - which we need to remember was talking to the rioters. They are going to have further reports. I have just been invited - and the Metropolitan Police Service - to take part in their next phase because they are now going to talk to the police officers and the other people who were involved from a different perspective.

That first response that we saw this week and the Chair responded to publicly yesterday was the response for the people who were directly involved in the riots. We have to approach that with some caution before we take it fully. One of the things that has come out - and I have debated it at the Police Authority before - is around stop and search. We may come back to that a little later. I have indicated that I expect that we will take a smarter and more effective way of dealing with stop and search which we will bring back in the new year.

Finally, whatever forms of public engagement we can get better at, I am very happy to take any new advice about how we would get better at that. The dilemma for the police is what they are there to do is respond to the public's call for help and the more we invest in public engagement we have to be very clear what is it, what is it intended to achieve and how are we going to do that. The challenge I have had fed back to me in the Authority before is why do all these sergeants spend their time in meetings? Is that what effective engagement means? I do not think it is at all clear what engagement means. Does it mean playing football with kids? Does it mean going to schools - which I support? The clearer we are about what engagement means and what we want to achieve from it the more likely we are to be effective.

Fundamental for me would be where young people gather which is schools and colleges and our opportunity, not only to work with them but with their parents and with the schools about how we, the police, engage with them. That is vital. I want reassurance as we go forward that we have got a strategy that engages effectively there in a way that could be structured and beneficial for a local authority too.

Joanne McCartney (AM): You are going to do some work into it. It is not just about those young people that are in schools and colleges; it is those that are disenfranchised and are outside the system. It is how you get involved with those as well.

Bernard Hogan-Howe (Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis): It is a really good point. I talked to someone last week who works with those who are excluded from schools. That is quite a different population group. Smaller but very important for the very reasons we are talking about. You are quite right; it is not just schools, there are other groups that we need to work with. Of course you have got those who are not involved at all, which gets very hard, but if we did it with the first two groups at least we have got a base on which to build.

Victoria Borwick (AM): I would like to take us back to civil liberties. In view of the various reports that have come out and following on from the comments that have been asked on community cohesion, I am a little concerned and want your reassurance that the police will still support the public's right to public protest while not, of course, condoning violence.

Bernard Hogan-Howe (Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis): I do. The only two things I have added to that unconditional support is that no one has a right to commit crime and no one has a right to overwhelm other people's rights.

Jennette Arnold (Chair): Thank you. That is the end of our session with both our guests so can I thank Assembly Member Kit Malthouse for his attendance here and thank you, Commissioner, for your detailed answers to our questions.