

London Assembly (Mayor's Question Time) – 23 May 2012

Transcript: Mayor's Oral Update

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Thank you very much, Jennette (Arnold AM) and I want to echo your congratulations to all Assembly Members on their election. Obviously, since we last met we have had an election and I want to, if I can, quickly clear up some myths about that election because I do not think it was fought or won on some of the issues that were most salient in the press. It was not about who said what to who in the lift; it was not about who was most transparent in their tax returns (although obviously the answer to that was me); it was not about advertisements on buses or pasties, all the rest of it. I genuinely think that when Londoners came to decide, they had to look at two proposals, two manifestos to take London forward in different directions. I think they looked at what people have done in this place, in the Greater London Authority (GLA), the officials who are responsible for serving London, the many, many public servants that the GLA brings together that we help and direct, and I think they thought that over the last four years they did a very creditable and effective job.

Crime was down, as everybody knows, police numbers were kept high, we built record numbers of affordable homes, in spite of very tough times. Transport support has seen record levels of investment, Tube delays were cut by 40% over the last four years. This was not perhaps a point that I made forcefully enough in the election campaign, air quality actually improved in the last four years on the most important metrics. You put in the best bicycle hire scheme in the world and above all this administration, my administration, kept its promises to London. You saw that across the field. You saw what we did with the Oyster Card on the over-ground rail, you saw what we did with keeping council tax low, and of course with a new bus for London, which is on the streets now, I said it would be there, and there it is.

Now the challenge is to dedicate ourselves and to dedicate this body to the number one priority in difficult times, which is to get Londoners into jobs. We will build huge numbers of more affordable homes; we will continue to invest in transport infrastructure, we have a costed programme to deliver 200,000 jobs over the next four years and to get Londoners ready for those jobs by expanding apprenticeships. Those are our priorities. It is a huge task ahead of us. I know that everybody in the GLA will work very hard to achieve it and last week in a meeting with staff I set out some of the things I think we need to do immediately.

I want to welcome particularly the five new Members who have joined us today and pay tribute to the work of my Conservative colleagues Richard Barnes and Brian Coleman, and obviously also to say goodbye and thank you to Dee Doocey and Mike Tuffrey. We are all very lucky to be here. We are all very lucky, some of us luckier than others. We are all very lucky to be here in 2012 because this is going to be and already is one of the greatest years in the memory of this city, and people will be expecting wonderful things from the GLA, and I know that we are going to deliver. They will also be expecting us, by the way, with the minimum possible

recrimination and rancour and bickering, to get on with promoting the interests of Londoners and those who elected us and promoting the interests of the greatest city on earth.

Jennette Arnold (Chair): Thank you, Mr Mayor. Can I just say you have just opened the widest agenda here this morning, but can I just say to Members we have 20 minutes for follow-up questions. Any indications, follow-up questions to anything that the Mayor has just said?

Jenny Jones (AM): Congratulations, Mr Mayor, on your re-election. I am just wondering if you realise that restating pseudo facts endlessly does not make them true. I am concerned that during the election and here today you have said things that the general understanding would be completely erroneous. For example, I am talking about air pollution, you know that thousands of Londoners are dying premature deaths because of air pollution and yet you have stuck your head in the sand on this issue.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): No, I have not. Well let us re-run this one. Actually, can I answer the question?

Jennette Arnold (Chair): Have you finished your question, Assembly Member Jones?

Jenny Jones (AM): Yes. The question is, are you aware that pseudo facts do not become true by repetition?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Jenny, if I may say, I mean I am disappointed that after irenic opening remarks you should throw them back in my face with an assertion of pseudo facts. If anybody has been peddling pseudo facts over the last few months, Jenny, it is you. Actually, air quality in London on the key metrics has improved over the last four years and you can consult the BBC, which has not been a whole-hearted supporter of every single thing that I have done, and look at the BBC fact check, the BBC graph, you will see what we have done there.

Jenny Jones (AM): Thank you very much, but we have to come back to this.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): But that does not mean that we minimise, and this is where we have common ground, it does not mean that I minimise the importance of the issue, it does not mean that I do not agree with you that people are dying prematurely, they are dying prematurely, and that is why we took some very difficult and quite controversial steps to improve air quality. I took a very tough decision, which cost me huge numbers of natural supporters, when I decided to implement stage three of the Low Emission Zone and to insist that vehicles had to comply and people were thoroughly hacked off, but we did it. We did it because we believe in improving air quality and that is one of the reasons why the new bus is I think a considerable improvement on all other vehicles, and --

Jenny Jones (AM): I look forward to hearing more about your measures another time.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): -- and if you want me to continue I can, but what you must not do is make a general insulting allegation about pseudo facts and actually I have been scrupulous to describe the things as they are.

Jenny Jones (AM): Thank you.

Jennette Arnold (Chair): Can I just say to Members and the Mayor, we had quite a rough final year of this Assembly, and I think it was generally agreed, it is in the press, that we did not show ourselves at our best. I wonder if we could just start on a sort of higher level and refrain from any personal derogatory remarks or any challenges like that, just for today. Let us aspire, let us show Londoners that we --

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Is it just for today? Why just for today?

Jennette Arnold (Chair): Because, if we do it today, then we will have set our standard, and then we will be maintaining that standard throughout the year. So let us inspire Londoners, let us say that, "You voted for us to be here and we are here and we are going to show you how we work well."

While I am speaking, can I just say to anyone who is new to our procedures that the two hours, 30 minutes, here this morning is divided up between the groups, and so it follows the Members with the sort of numbers, the Greens have 12 minutes, Liberal Democrats have 12 minutes, the Conservative group have 54 minutes, and the Labour group has 72 minutes. It is also not my job to interfere with how groups use their time; it is just about bringing you when your time limit is up; that is when I will ask then, any Member speaking, and of the Mayor, to stop. Thank you.

Let us then move on. Do you have a question following up? Where we are is the Mayor's five-minute update. I want a specific question to that.

Andrew Boff (AM): More about your comment about us not making personal attacks; I did not actually see a personal attack in the exchange between Jenny Jones and the Mayor, I saw robust debate and I hope we are not going to be stamping on that or calling that personal attacks, because I did not see one.

Jennette Arnold (Chair): Mr Boff, thank you for your noting, but do you have a question?

Andrew Boff (AM): It was a query; I want to know what the personal attack was that you are upset about.

Jennette Arnold (Chair): I am not going to give you a personal attack, it was quite clear that the Mayor found that the terminology not appropriate. It is not for me, and I am not here to defend the Mayor, but why I am here is to ensure that our language and our behaviour is in keeping with good practice. Can I ask you if you have any questions and then I will move on? Thank you.

Andrew Boff (AM): No, Chair.