

London Assembly (Mayor's Question Time) – 25 May 2016

Transcript of Agenda Item 3 – Oral Update on the Report of the Mayor

Tony Arbour AM (Chairman): Mr Mayor, you will now provide an oral update of up to five minutes in length on matters occurring since the publication of your report, including the matters on which you have been specifically asked to comment.

Sadiq Khan (Mayor of London): Good morning, everyone. Good morning, Chairman. First of all, can I offer you my congratulations on being selected by your fellow Assembly Members as the new Chairman of the Assembly. I will try to keep to your strictures and keep the spontaneous banter to a minimum.

I would like to also take this opportunity to congratulate all 25 Assembly Members on being elected to the London Assembly. I am aware that some of you are seasoned veterans and others, like me, are new to this Chamber and new to the Assembly.

I would like to make it clear that I fully appreciate the vital role that the Assembly plays in holding the Mayor to account, investigating important issues and making recommendations to the Mayor and the Government in order to improve the lives of Londoners. I look forward to - genuinely - working with you all to make London a better place to live, work and visit. I also want to assure both Assembly Members and Londoners that I will do my best to answer Mayor's Questions the best that I can.

However, this being my first Mayor's Question Time (MQT), I would also like to ask for your patience. I hope you will appreciate that I am still in the process of shaping many of my policies and appointing my team. Therefore, I may not be able to answer each and every question in a manner that fully satisfies you at the moment. However, I promise you that I will give it my best.

Mr Chairman, as you all know, I am delighted to have appointed Assembly Member Joanne McCartney as my statutory Deputy Mayor for London.

Over the last few days I have made some further appointments to my team, pending Assembly Confirmation Hearings and approval by the relevant boards. Valerie Shawcross CBE, whom many of you know from her years on the Assembly, has been appointed as my Deputy Mayor for Transport; Sophie Linden as my Deputy Mayor for Policing and Crime, subject to a Confirmation Hearing by the Assembly's Police and Crime Committee; Assembly Member Fiona Twycross as Chair of the London Fire and Emergency Planning Authority, subject to a Confirmation Hearing by the London Assembly; Lord Andrew Adonis as Chair of Crossrail 2, pending approval by the Transport for London (TfL) Board; and James Murray as Deputy Mayor for Housing.

I would also like to take this opportunity to say a few words about the full extent of London's housing crisis. On 16 May 2016, whilst visiting the Landmark Court site in Southwark, I revealed that my audit of City Hall's preparedness to tackle the housing crisis showed that the previous Mayor left the cupboard bare when it comes to delivering affordable housing in the city. The audit revealed the shocking scale of the challenge I now face to tackle the housing crisis. It showed affordable home delivery at a near standstill. Last year, the previous Mayor delivered the lowest number of new affordable homes since current records began in 1991 - just 4,880 - and left a legacy of just 13% affordable homes coming through planning permission.

There is an acute construction skills crisis with annual construction apprenticeship starts in London averaging just 7% of the national total and with a total of 100,000 planned apprenticeship starts missed during the previous Mayor's second term.

There is a flawed process of identifying public land for homes. As I revealed, the previous Mayor's work to produce a digital 'Domesday Book' of public land in fact includes scores of sites that will never be built on, including City Hall, 10 Downing Street and the British Museum. Landmark Court in Southwark, which is owned by TfL, is one example of public land that I believe is ripe for building new homes on; at least 120 in this case. I have pledged to build many new homes on land owned by City Hall, including TfL land, and I intend to fast-track scores of sites like Landmark Court that are suitable for development but were not utilised by the previous Mayor.

I would, Chairman, like to take the opportunity to update you on my pledge to ensure safer and easier cycling for all Londoners. On 20 May 2016 I launched an incentives scheme to encourage London's business to get their staff cycling by announcing that businesses that sign up to a new Santander Cycles business account before 1 July 2016 will receive a 10% discount. Following a successful pilot scheme, the initiative, which offers easy cycle hire access, is now being targeted at businesses across the capital to encourage their employees to cycle to and from their offices or meetings.

I also reaffirm my commitment to make cycling safer and easier for every Londoner as I begin scrutinising major plans for three new Cycle Superhighways and the transformation of key junctions in the heart of the capital. The first completed consultations I am considering are the North-South Cycle Superhighway phase 2, a 1.5-mile extension from Stonecutter Street to King's Cross; East-West Cycle Superhighway phase 2, a 4.5-mile extension from Paddington to Acton via the Westway; Cycle Superhighway 11 from Swiss Cottage to the West End, a 2.5-mile route from Swiss Cottage to Portland Place; the Hammersmith Gyration, Better Junctions; and Highbury Corner, Better Junctions.

Mr Chairman, I will now respond to two oral update requests from Assembly Members. The first one is from Assembly Member Eshalomi. May I congratulate her on winning her seat.

From the point at which I became Mayor, it was quite clear that it would cost Londoners more to cancel the Garden Bridge than it would to finish building it. It is, therefore, in the financial interests of London's taxpayers to complete the Garden Bridge. I will be transparent with Londoners. A total of £60 million in public funding has been pledged, £30 million from TfL by the previous Mayor and £30 million from the Government. Of the £30 million pledged by TfL, £20 million is in the form of a loan to be repaid in full. Of the £60 million of total public funding, £37.7 million has already been spent by the Garden Bridge Trust, £24.25 million of which came from TfL and £13.45 million from the Government.

If we were to cancel the project today, that full amount would have been spent for no benefit at all to Londoners. However, if we complete the Garden Bridge, not only will TfL be repaid the £20 million loan by the Garden Bridge Trust, but it will also pay roughly £22 million in value added tax (VAT) to the Government. That would leave an ultimate cost to the taxpayer of £18 million for completing the Garden Bridge, significantly less than the £37.7 million cost of cancelling it now. Clearly, it is in the financial interests of London and United Kingdom (UK) taxpayers to complete the Garden Bridge.

However, in return for my continued support for the project, I have insisted that the Garden Bridge Trust makes a series of amendments to its plans. I expect that the Bridge will be closed on fewer days each year for private fundraising events and for fewer hours. I want a guarantee that an ongoing programme of visits will be laid on for local schoolchildren. The Trust must also look to build a strong working relationship with parks

from all over our city so that seeds and plants grown on the Garden Bridge can then be replanted in parks across the capital.

There is a second oral update request from Assembly Member Prince. May I also congratulate him on his election to Havering and Redbridge. This is on the Night Tube.

I am delighted that the Night Tube service will launch on 9 August 2016 with the Central and Victoria lines running throughout the night, followed by the Piccadilly, Jubilee and Northern lines later in the autumn. This means, Assembly Member Prince, Londoners in Redbridge will be some of the first to benefit from this vital service. Unlike my predecessor, who announced the launch of the Night Tube on three occasions, I am committed to getting things done and improving the lives of all Londoners. The Night Tube will mean a 24-hour weekend service for the first time in London's history, helping to cut night-time journeys by an average of 20 minutes, with some cut by more than an hour. It will also play a vital role in opening up London's night-time economy to a host of new opportunities, supporting around 2,000 permanent jobs and boosting London's economy by £360 million. Most importantly, it will help shift workers and late-night revellers, who currently have to rely on night buses or minicabs to get back to outer London after the Tube shuts down. That I have managed to agree a date for this crucial service to London's future prosperity just goes to highlight how important it is to work with all Londoners, including trade unions. Londoners need both sides to talk and resolve their differences.

Tony Arbour AM (Chairman): Thank you, Mr Mayor. You actually spoke for 11 minutes but, given that it was your first occasion, it only seemed like five. Are there any questions, please, on the Mayor's oral report? Assembly Member Eshalomi?

Florence Eshalomi AM: Thank you, Mr Mayor. I welcome your commitment in terms of making sure that there is more transparency on the Garden Bridge, but I have to say that I am still yet to be convinced that this is the best use of money. For me, it is primarily a tourist attraction, not a transport scheme. I think it is quite telling that, despite the claim that it is going to promote wildlife and biodiversity, not a single environmental charity has signed up to the project yet.

Can you tell me that if it is going ahead, Mr Mayor, under your mayoralty, local community groups and residents in my part of Lambeth will be listened to and any of their concerns will be acted upon?

Secondly, the other guarantee that I would like from you, Mr Mayor, is about what happens if the Trust is unable to fund the £158 million in construction costs, the additional ongoing maintenance bill and the TfL loan repayments so that taxpayers are not left with that bill.

Tony Arbour AM (Chairman): Thank you. There was a question buried in that but we would like to have the questions asked sooner.

Sadiq Khan (Mayor of London): I understand the concerns that you have expressed, but I have set out in the most transparent way that I can what has been spent so far and the consequences to taxpayers in London - and, by the way, around the country because it is also Government money - if we were to cancel the project today. I think it is viable, and I have said to the Garden Bridge Trust what my expectations are with it. You are right in relation to the gains to the community both locally and across London.

Insofar as the further contribution that could be made by the taxpayer is concerned, the Garden Bridge Trust has a credible ongoing business plan and has secured a large amount of private funding already. It has more funding opportunities in the pipeline and there is every indication that it will be able to meet its targets.

However, you are right in relation to the importance and I have stressed to them that I will ensure that no more of Londoners' taxes that I am responsible for go into the project.

Florence Eshalomi AM: Thank you.

Tony Arbour AM (Chairman): Assembly Member Copley?

Tom Copley AM: Thank you very much, Chairman, and congratulations to you, Mr Mayor. I do not envy the position you find yourself in on the Bridge, given your predecessor's lust for vanity projects. However, like Assembly Member Eshalomi, I remain unconvinced that this project should go ahead.

Taxpayer funding has been mentioned. Are you sure that once the construction of the Bridge goes ahead, there is no chance the Trust is going to run out of money and will come to you, cap in hand, for taxpayer funding? Are you sure that once shovels go into the river or whatever - I do not know how it works - it will not be coming to you asking for any more money?

Sadiq Khan (Mayor of London): Assembly Member Copley, it is my third Wednesday in the job and so I am still coming to terms with some of the mess left by the previous guy. Let me come back to you in relation to the assurances you seek.

Tom Copley AM: OK. The £3.5 million running cost your predecessor controversially agreed to underwrite, having said initially that there would not be any more money. Will you withdraw that commitment that your predecessor made to fund the £3.5 million running cost if the Trust cannot raise the running cost?

Sadiq Khan (Mayor of London): To be fair to the officials, let me wait and see the report that they are doing. I have asked them to undertake a report for me in relation to what has gone on before. I am keen to get on top of all the facts - and I say this to be fair to the previous Mayor - before I make a comment on that.

Tom Copley AM: OK. With regard to transparency, I am pleased that you have made a commitment on transparency. I have seen the list of donors that has been released. There are an awful lot of anonymous donors on it. If it is an individual, I can understand why someone might want to remain anonymous, but there are companies on there that are anonymous and that worries me. It particularly worries me if any of them turn out to be bidding for or to have won TfL contracts.

Could you make a commitment that if any of the companies that have anonymously donated money have sought or will seek a contract with TfL for London, their names will be made public?

Sadiq Khan (Mayor of London): Look, insofar as the procurement process is concerned, I do have concerns about the way that the procurement process was carried out. I have already begun to look in detail at how the design contracts were awarded in 2013 and I will be deciding shortly how I want to take this investigation further and take forward any lessons that can be learned for future projects. However, until I am on top of the facts, I cannot really answer specific questions in relation to specific contributions made.

Tom Copley AM: Sure, but this is not about the procurement process for the Garden Bridge. This is about companies that have made donations towards the Bridge itself that are anonymous. My slight concern is that if they were then bidding for TfL contracts and their contributions were not public, it might look a little bit dodgy.

Could you say that if any of the companies that have privately and anonymously donated money to the Bridge were seeking or have sought contracts with TfL, the names of those companies would be made public?

Sadiq Khan (Mayor of London): Let me see what I published last week and come back to you in relation to whether there is a need for any further transparency on that.

Tom Copley AM: Thank you.

Tony Arbour AM (Chairman): Assembly Member Prince?

Keith Prince AM: Thank you, Mr Chairman. Mr Mayor, may I congratulate you on your election to what is probably the most important job in this great city of ours.

Sadiq Khan (Mayor of London): That is very kind. Thank you.

Keith Prince AM: I also put on record that I very much look forward to working with you to help the residents of our great city.

On 2 February 2016 you said, Mr Mayor, "As Mayor what I'd do is to roll up my sleeves and make sure that I'm talking to everyone who runs public transport to make sure there are zero days of strike." Would you like to take this opportunity, Mr Mayor, to withdraw that commitment to Londoners or underline it?

Sadiq Khan (Mayor of London): Listen, whenever there is a strike it is a sign of failure on all sides, and so we should aspire to have zero days of strike. That means having good industrial relations, which means speaking to those who work their socks off serving our city. I intend to carry on as I started and just speak to them.

Keith Prince AM: Thank you, Mr Mayor.

Tony Arbour AM (Chairman): Can I remind Assembly Members that questions at this stage are on the Mayor's oral report? Assembly Member Kurten.

David Kurten AM: Thank you, Mr Chairman. Congratulations, Mr Mayor, on your election.

I just have a few other points to make about the Garden Bridge as well, if I may. You referred to your decision to continue with the Garden Bridge in financial terms, but I wonder if you can comment on some of the issues that are non-financial, which are of great concern to Londoners, particularly the fact that the views along the Thames Path may be blocked and destroyed by the construction of the Garden Bridge.

Also, the residents of the Coin Street community, which is very near the Garden Bridge on the south side, have expressed very grave concerns about overcrowding, particularly on Saturday afternoons, and potential littering, noise and other nuisances in their area. Overcrowding of people possibly may spill over into their community.

Would those not be reasons for considering cancelling the project of the Garden Bridge?

Sadiq Khan (Mayor of London): Mr Chairman, I am sure that the Assembly Members are aware that the permission has been granted by the local authorities of Lambeth and Westminster and I suppose those are points you would probably want to raise with those councils.

David Kurten AM: Thank you, Mr Mayor.

Tony Arbour AM (Chairman): Assembly Member Boff?

Andrew Boff AM: Mr Mayor, your previous exchange with the Labour Group has introduced you to the idea that your predecessor discovered, which is that just because some people are playing for the same team it does not necessarily mean that we will not tackle you occasionally.

Can I just ask, on your audit that you referred to in your report, could you provide me with a list of what data was revealed in your audit of 16 May 2016 that was not in the public domain when you made your election pledges?

Sadiq Khan (Mayor of London): Which election pledges?

Andrew Boff AM: Your election pledges. You know your election pledges more than I do, Mr Mayor. What data was revealed that was not available to you when you made your pledges within your manifesto? That is what I would like a summary of. I do not want you to rattle through it now if you could send that to me and the other Members of the Assembly. You are talking about data that was revealed. It is a very important subject, transparency, and we want to know what data was not there that then informed your subsequent decisions on this. --

Sadiq Khan (Mayor of London): I will give you one example and there are many. I am sure you heard because all of us were listening assiduously to the fantastic questions from Assembly Member Copley that he, for example, was not aware of some of the data that I have published recently. If he was not aware as an assiduous Member of the Assembly, you will appreciate that neither was I.

There is other information that I have published already. For example, the information - you may have known this; many Londoners did not - on the cost of cancelling is more than the cost of carrying on. There are other examples that I can give and, if you like, I can write to you in relation to specifics. Also, what would help me in my letter to you is if you could be specific about what election pledges you mean in particular.

Andrew Boff AM: You have revealed in your report that you did an audit and certain data was revealed. I just want to know what data that was that was not available to you when you made your election pledges.

Sadiq Khan (Mayor of London): Sure.

Andrew Boff AM: That is simply it. If you can write to me with that, that would be great. Can you do that, sir?

Sadiq Khan (Mayor of London): Fine. I will write to you - and I will copy in the Chairman - with all of the information I was not aware of before 5 May 2016 that I am aware of now. Is that what you mean?

Andrew Boff AM: It is what was not in the public domain, ie if you did not look for the data beforehand, you know ...

Sadiq Khan (Mayor of London): OK. Fine.

Andrew Boff AM: Yes.

Tony Arbour AM (Chairman): All right. Thank you, Mr Mayor. Anything else on your oral report? No? Thank you.