

London Assembly (Mayor's Question Time) – 22 June 2017

Transcript of Agenda Item 4 – Oral Update on the Report of the Mayor

Jennette Arnold OBE AM (Chair): Over to you, Mayor.

Sadiq Khan (Mayor of London): Thank you, Chair. First of all, may I offer you my congratulations on your appointment as Chair of the London Assembly?

Jennette Arnold OBE AM (Chair): Thank you.

Sadiq Khan (Mayor of London): I look forward to your assured chairing of Assembly meetings. Can I also thank Assembly Member Arbour for his excellent work as Chairman over the last year?

I also want to extend my congratulations to former Assembly Member Kemi Badenoch on her election as the Member of Parliament (MP) for Saffron Walden and to welcome Assembly Member Susan Hall as our newest Assembly Member. I look forward to working with you in helping to make London a better place for all.

Finally, like you, Chair, I am sure we were all delighted to hear that Assembly Member Eshalomi recently gave birth to a baby boy, Malachi. Many congratulations to her and her family.

Today I have called for continued membership of the European Single Market to be at the heart of the Government's Brexit negotiations. Even those in favour of Brexit have to accept that the result of the general election has moved the goalposts. I am now calling for the Government to listen to the will of the people and abandon its extreme hard-Brexit approach and secure a deal that protects jobs, investment and prosperity across the country. I believe that a jobs-first Brexit and continued membership of the single market is the only deal that will serve the best interests of London and our country. I have also joined business leaders, the Chancellor and the Governor of the Bank of England in repeating my call for a transitional agreement to be reached with the European Union (EU) soon. This will allow continued access to the single market until any Brexit deal is finalised and would remove the threat of a cliff-edge and give London businesses the security they need to continue investing and growing over the next two years.

On 12 June, I announced my new Cultural Leadership Board. Inspirational leaders from London's world-class creative organisations have been appointed as cultural ambassadors. Their collective experience and passion will ensure we are able to harness the power of culture and creativity to transform communities, drive our capital's economy and maintain our pre-eminent position on the world stage.

I have appointed Claire Waxman as the first Victims Commissioner for London to help dramatically improve the experience of victims of crime in the capital, alongside a three-year £47-million investment in services to better support them. Working with victims, the

Government, Metropolitan Police Service (MPS), Crown Prosecution Service (CPS), Ministry of Justice (MOJ) and others, Claire will act on victims' behalves to ensure their voices are heard, support their recoveries and improve their experiences of the criminal justice system and ability to recover.

Speaking at the launch of London Tech Week last week, I outlined my ambition to harness the new technologies that are being pioneered right here to transform London into the world's leading smart city. The potential for cutting-edge technology to tackle a host of social, economic and environmental challenges is immeasurable. From air pollution and climate change to housing and transport, new technologies and data science will be at the heart of the long-term solutions to urban challenge.

I unveiled a new £1.6 million clean-tech incubator called Better Futures, which will help 100 London-based small businesses to deliver low-carbon and clean-tech products to tackle the causes and effects of climate change. I also officially opened Europe's largest collective technology and biggest business innovation ecosystem, Plexal, at Here East in the Queen Elizabeth Olympic Park.

As you said, Chair, I have been asked to give two oral updates from the Conservative Group. Yesterday, I was proud to publish my draft Transport Strategy for consultation. My bold aim is to reduce the capital's dependency on the car, transforming the experience of walking, cycling and public transport in London over the coming decades. It is my ambition to increase the percentage of journeys made by walking, cycling and public transport to 80% by 2041, up from 64%.

My Healthy Streets approach will create a fairer, greener, healthier and more prosperous city, helping Londoners reach at least the 20 minutes of active travel they need each day to stay healthy. I have set out wide-ranging plans for making cycling and walking safe and accessible in every neighbourhood, transforming our network and ensuring that new housing is designed directly around access to public transport links.

We continue to lobby for Crossrail 2, which is vital to the success of the wider United Kingdom (UK) economy by creating the 1.2 million new jobs and more than 1 million new homes that London desperately needs.

My Strategy will deliver a more frequent Tube service to achieve a fast, accessible, affordable and reliable network across London. It seeks to expand the network further with the Elizabeth line set to open this year, while Transport for London (TfL) will progress extending the Bakerloo line, the Docklands Light Railway (DLR) line, the Northern line and London Overground.

As part of my Transport Strategy, I will also seek to ensure London has a safe, secure, accessible, world-class taxi and private-hire service designed around passengers' needs. I will talk to the Government about powers to limit the overall number of private-hire vehicles licensed for use in London to ease congestion and to help improve air quality in central London. However, this can only work if we are able to introduce a requirement that all journeys by TfL-

licensed drivers either start or end in the Greater London area, which is why I have asked TfL to speak to the Government about putting this in place.

I look forward to hearing what Members think about my Strategy when they put questions to my Deputy Mayor for Transport, Val Shawcross [Valerie Shawcross CBE] and Mike Brown, the Transport Commissioner, next week.

I have also been asked for an update on the Al Quds demonstration. I share the very real concerns about this event felt by London's Jewish community and others across the capital. That is why I discussed the policing of this march with the MPS Commissioner and wrote to her setting out my concerns. It is worth being clear that as Mayor I do not have the power to ban a march or protest in London. That power lies only with the Home Secretary. However, the MPS and I take a zero-tolerance approach to hate crime including anti-Semitism. Protesters have the right to march as long as they do so within the law.

I understand there was one large Hezbollah flag and one flag draped around a wheelchair-user. Both were investigated and did not constitute offences under section 13 of the Terrorism Act, a law that is set by the Government. There were also a number of small flags on sticks; a large number stated on them that they were supporting political Hezbollah. This, of course, is not proscribed; it is the military wing that is.

I also understand that the MPS had good engagement with both groups at the march and had a dedicated Jewish officer who is well known to the community advising the command team. The gold commander also had language speakers monitoring all the speakers and chanting.

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

Keith Prince AM: Mr Mayor, thank you for all you have done over the last few weeks in relation to the different attacks and tragedies.

Can I just say that we welcome your Transport Strategy? There are going to be quite a few questions coming out of that and I certainly will be responding to the consultation.

Mr Mayor, it is regrettable that you will not be able to attend the Transport Committee when we are looking at that Transport Strategy and we would welcome a conversation with you at some point.

However, having said all of that, what I would like to focus on today specifically is around bus deaths. You have set a target, Mr Mayor, in your Strategy of ending deaths by bus by 2030. Do you not think that that could be achieved far sooner?

Sadiq Khan (Mayor of London): Absolutely, that is a long stop, Assembly Member Prince. The zero-vision plan is to make sure we have zero deaths of pedestrians, cyclists and others, including by bus as well. That is a long stop and I would want to reach that much sooner.

Keith Prince AM: Are there any other measures that you think you could bring forward, Mr Mayor?

Sadiq Khan (Mayor of London): There are lots of things we are already doing. The pedestrianisation of Oxford Street will improve things, particularly in central London. We are improving the quality of training of bus drivers. The vision-zero cabins will make a difference. We are making sure that Walking and Cycling Commissioner, Will Norman, is consulted in relation to road layouts because we have to make roads not just for vehicles but also thinking about those who walk and cycle as well. The location of bus stops is also important, particularly around cycle lanes.

Keith Prince AM: Just one other point, Mr Mayor. Are you aware that TfL rewards bus operators for achieving timetable targets but they do not reward bus operators and there are no incentives in relation to improving safety?

Sadiq Khan (Mayor of London): The TfL Board is looking at the issue of safety of buses. It is a particular concern that has been raised. What we do not want is perverse incentives. The reason why there are incentives to make buses efficient in relation to getting from A to B on time and, as you will be aware, one of the reasons why Londoners are not using buses now is because of the uncertainty getting from A to B. We are helping that in relation to roadworks and other things we are doing from priority traffic lights to junctions but, obviously, bus companies can do a lot as well.

Keith Prince AM: Thank you.

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

David Kurten AM: Thank you very much. Thank you, Mr Mayor, for your statement and particularly for broaching the issue of the Al Quds Day parade when Hezbollah flags are marched through the streets of London. The Hezbollah flag, as you probably know, has an assault rifle on the front and it causes great distress and alarm to lots of people. You did mention the loophole that allows it to happen in that the political wing of Hezbollah is not proscribed as a terrorist organisation whereas the military wing is, unlike in countries like the United States, Israel, France and the Netherlands, where the whole of Hezbollah is proscribed as a terrorist organisation.

In the Mayor's Question Time last year on 20 July [2016] I did ask you about that and whether you would call for the political wing of Hezbollah to be proscribed and you would probably need to approach The Rt Hon Amber Rudd MP, the Home Secretary, to do that. You said, "No, that is what I have committed to do".

In the light of everything that has happened this year and what you know now, which may be more than what you knew 11 months ago after a year in the job, I want to ask you again, Mr Mayor. Will you call or do anything to ask and to see that the political wing of Hezbollah is proscribed as a terrorist organisation in this country? That will close the loophole and will stop people marching through the streets of London with a flag with a gun on it.

Sadiq Khan (Mayor of London): There is nothing stopping you writing to the Home Secretary. I am sure that you have over the last year.

David Kurten AM: I will and I hope you will wish me success. You, as the Mayor, are in a very powerful position. If you do this, it will be a very powerful voice to move to close this loophole.

Sadiq Khan (Mayor of London): Can I suggest, Chair, that the Assembly Member sends me all the letters he has sent over the last year, which I will consider? I will read those letters he has sent and then decide whether to do so. I remember the representations made by Assembly Member Dismore, Assembly Member Bacon and others after the march last year and I was concerned by the representation made from the community, which is why I discussed this matter with the Commissioner [of Police of the Metropolis] and wrote to her. You will be aware, of course, being well versed with the law, that it is the Home Secretary who decides whether marches take place and also whether organisations are proscribed.

Once I have read your letters setting out the evidence, I am sure I will consider whether writing to the Home Secretary is the right thing to do.

David Kurten AM: OK. It seems I have an answer of sorts. Thank you. Thank you, Chair.

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

Andrew Dismore AM: Thank you, Chair. As you know, I represent the biggest Jewish community in the country in Barnet and Camden and there has been a lot of concern about this protest or Al Quds demonstration. I wrote to the police myself about it and I attended the counter-protest and spoke at the counter-protest.

I am concerned that there has been a bit of mischief-making by some people who have been blaming you for what happened rather than reflecting that the powers actually lie with the Home Secretary. There is concern that there is a false distinction between the alleged political wing and the military wing of Hezbollah, but I simply put it this way. If there was a distinction, would it not have been better if those flags, instead of displaying a Kalashnikov, were displaying a ballot box?

Sadiq Khan (Mayor of London): Your logic cannot be argued with. Can I just say this? It is worth us recognising the difficult job that the police have. The police sought legal advice and they had people on the ground who were well versed in the languages, but the law is the law, as you will appreciate. You will be aware, of course, that the Home Secretary can if she wants to proscribe the political wing of Hezbollah. She does not need to wait for a letter from Assembly Member Kurten or the Mayor of London. You are right, of course.

Let us also remind ourselves that a lot of people and a lot of Londoners are caused huge distress by demonstrations with flags being waved which are questioning the existence of not just states, but also people who are very concerned about families and others were also on the demonstration, which also raises lots of questions.

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

Andrew Boff AM: Mr Mayor, last year you acquainted us with the problems that the police have with regard to policing these kinds of demonstrations and it is not always very easy just to go in and snatch a person who may be displaying an illegal banner. You did, however, at the time say that the police tend to use video and subsequently will prosecute or take further action as required.

Could you write to me and let me know what action was taken as a result of last year's Al Quds march, which you undertook at the time? Could you undertake to do that?

Sadiq Khan (Mayor of London): I am happy to do so, Chair, through you.

Andrew Boff AM: Thank you. With regard to the questions that have already been raised with you, do you understand how difficult it is for the police to make that subtle distinction between the political wing and the military wing of an organisation that fundamentally at its core is a violent organisation?

Sadiq Khan (Mayor of London): Just to give you an example, some of the flags had stapled on them the word 'political' and so you can appreciate the loophole that is obviously there. Of course I do.

Andrew Boff AM: Do you think that your opinion would assist in the Home Secretary putting into place perhaps a redefinition of a banned organisation in order that the police can do a better job? I am sure that it is in your interests, and that you want the police to be able to do a better job and to have laws and definitions that assist them in doing their job.

Sadiq Khan (Mayor of London): Of course, Chair, if the Assembly Member wants to send me all of the letters he has written and the evidence he has sent to the Home Secretary, I will also consider that as well.

Andrew Boff AM: You will consider that or you will write to the Home Secretary to say that this needs clarification?

Sadiq Khan (Mayor of London): I will read all the letters you have written to the Home Secretary and consider whether that would give me grounds to write to the Home Secretary.

Andrew Boff AM: I am sorry. I am asking about you, Mr Mayor. What action will you take with regard to making the job of policing these demonstrations easier for our police officers?

Sadiq Khan (Mayor of London): The biggest help I can give the police in doing their job is to get the sufficient resources they need from the Government, and that is what I have been doing first and foremost. The more resources they have, the better they can do their job in policing London. That includes demonstrations, obviously, in relation to policing protests; having people who speak the language; people to take video evidence, people to seek legal advice from the

CPS. I am sure you will join me in doing my best to give the police the resources they need to keep us safe.

Andrew Boff AM: There was a reply about two questions ago which would have been fine if you had just said, "Yes, I will do that", but you seem to be avoiding saying, "Yes, I will do that". Let us try to readdress it. Will you write to the Home Secretary and say that we need to clarify what is a banned and a not-banned organisation in order to assist in policing such demonstrations in the future? Will you do that?

Sadiq Khan (Mayor of London): I am really happy to read all the correspondence you have sent to the Home Secretary and then decide what to do.

Andrew Boff AM: Will you do that, Mr Mayor? Will you do that?

Sadiq Khan (Mayor of London): I am really happy --

Andrew Boff AM: Do not ask me what I am doing. I am asking what you are doing. Will you do that?

Sadiq Khan (Mayor of London): I am really happy to read all the letters you have sent to the Home Secretary and consider whether there is evidence to make the submissions you want me to make.

Andrew Boff AM: Will you, Mr Mayor, look after the interests of the Jewish population of London and write to the Home Secretary to ask for clarification of the rules on what is a banned organisation?

Sadiq Khan (Mayor of London): I have been in close contact with the MPS Commissioner and one of the best ways to protect vulnerable Jewish Londoners is to get --

Andrew Boff AM: I will stop. I am not getting any more out of him.

Sadiq Khan (Mayor of London): -- more resources for the police service. That is what I intend to do. If you want to join me in that, it makes my life a lot easier.

Andrew Boff AM: I will join you when you start doing your job, Mr Mayor. Thank you very much for those answers. I am sure Londoners will be fascinated with your lack of willingness to address this problem.

Sadiq Khan (Mayor of London): Can I congratulate you on that prewritten rant from you? It is appreciated.

Andrew Boff AM: If you want to check, I will show you. You show me your briefing; I will show you mine. All right?

Jennette Arnold OBE AM (Chair): OK.

