

London Assembly (Mayor's Question Time) – 22 May 2013
Transcript: Agenda item 5 – Questions to the Mayor

1318/2013 – Benefit savings from the living wage

Jenny Jones

Do you agree that the benefits bill would be lower in London if everybody was paid at least the London Living Wage?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Yes, Jenny, thanks very much. The answer to your question, which is a good one, is obviously yes because if the 10% of full-time workers and 44% of part-time workers in London who earn less than the London Living Wage were paid that wage, then there clearly would be a reduction in the in-work benefits that they receive. That is why I think you are on the right track and that is why this body has so supported London citizens over the years in their campaign for a London Living Wage and we want to see more. We have 121 firms already in London that have adopted it. That is obviously nothing like enough. Kit [Malthouse, AM, Deputy Mayor for Business and Enterprise] is leading on that now for us in City Hall and we want to increase as fast as we possibly can. Not just the corporations that are paying the Living Wage but obviously to get parts of the public sector that are currently not picking it up to do so as well. Some London boroughs do. Most London boroughs at the moment do not and we want to see faster progress, not just of course in the boroughs but across Whitehall as well.

Jenny Jones (AM): It is to your credit that you have kept up this concept of the London Living Wage because it has always been true that the national minimum wage --

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Accelerated.

Jenny Jones (AM): -- has never been enough for people to live on in London. Now what is happening is that the London Living Wage and the national minimum wage, there is a gap opening up between them. It means that in effect taxpayers are subsidising big businesses who will not pay the London Living Wage. Would you agree on that?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I do agree with that, effectively, Jenny. I do agree with that and I think the answer is to expand the London Living Wage. Clearly at the moment there is and there has been for the last ten to 20 years a widening gap in incomes in London. The cost of wages has stagnated over the last four or five years if not depreciated in real terms. People face huge pressure on their incomes. Energy costs continue to rise. The London Living Wage actually represents a very sensible way forward, economically speaking. It is not that expensive for companies to implement. I do think it represents a great campaign. Kit [Malthouse] may want to ask a question about this or somehow make his views known, but one of the things that we are now looking at is whether you could expand the London Living

Wage faster by creating particular zones where it is agreed amongst all the companies there that they will pay it. That might be one way of getting a bit of a tiger in the tank.

Jenny Jones (AM): You have a target at the moment of 250 companies by 2015 or something. The problem is that will still leave 1,000 big companies in London not paying it. It seems to me that that is actually not fair on the taxpayer. So do you think there is something you could do, apart from these zones, just to put pressure on through all your government contacts?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Yes. The challenge is London's citizens who started all this and who I think have the right idea have always fought shy of having a compulsory approach.

Jenny Jones (AM): That is not in your remit, you could not do that.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): We could not do that anyway. So we do not want to go down that route, even if we could. I would accept your criticism. I do think that the target of 250 is possibly capable of being improved and we could do better than that.

Jenny Jones (AM): Will you?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I would like to see a lot more political awareness of the benefits of this policy. It does not really hurt corporations that much in their bottom line. It does engender a great deal of loyalty in staff. It helps reduce staff turnover. It increases productivity. I think companies in London should go for it and I would exhort them to do so.

Jenny Jones (AM): Will you in fact then put up your target? Could you do something a little more proactive and make a more ambitious target to draw in some more of these companies that we are paying --

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Our target is obviously 100%. That is what I want to achieve.

Jenny Jones (AM): I will have a word with Kit [Malthouse].

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): To be fair to this administration, I think people looking back at the growth curve of firms paying the London Living Wage has gone up faster under this mayoralty than previously. That shows the seriousness with which we take it. If you are saying that we could do better and we could go faster, then, yes, I would agree with you, Jenny.

Jenny Jones (AM): Thank you.

Andrew Boff (AM): Mr Mayor, the Latin American Women's Rights Service points out very clearly that the people who depend upon their services find that they are in cleaning and hotel jobs that not only do not pay the London Living Wage but can often pay because of the way it is constructed less than the minimum wage, especially when those people are paid according to

the number of rooms they clean rather than an hourly rate which effectively brings them under the minimum wage. Will you make sure that the Greater London Authority (GLA) is particularly conscious when entering into contracts with people who will rely upon cleaning and hotel cleaning services that they themselves are aspiring to pay the London Living Wage and not embarking upon strategies to pay less than the minimum wage?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Yes, absolutely. We do that as far as we possibly can already. At the moment, as you know, we are going through a process of accreditation of all the GLA bodies so that we are approved of as London Living Wage payers. That means that all our downstream contractors also have to honour that obligation. That is taking a bit of time to do because of the complexity of the different operations and the different organisations that make up the functional bodies, but we are determined to get there. I am fairly confident we will get accreditation for the GLA, for the London Fire and Emergency Planning Authority (LFEPA), for all our functional bodies by the end of this year. I will look into it.

Jennette Arnold OBE (AM): Thank you, and good morning, Mr Mayor. Can I follow on the theme? I think we just do need this settled. Can I ask you to write to me clarifying that the whole of the GLA family is conforming with your commitment to the London Living Wage? I know that there were some outstanding issues that may have been transferred from the Metropolitan Police Authority over to the Mayor's Office for Policing and Crime (MOPAC) and I would welcome your assurance on that.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I certainly will write to you, Jennette. I just want to clarify that I am confident we can get the accreditation for the GLA ourselves and Transport for London (TfL) by November this year and we will then begin on the accreditation of MOPAC, LFEPA and the London Legacy Development Corporation (LLDC). Len [Duvall] mentions London & Partners (L&P). I do not know the status of L&P but clearly L&P must also be accredited.

Jennette Arnold OBE (AM): Yes. It is all aspects of the GLA family that I would like confirmation on. Can I just follow up then and just tease out where my colleague Assembly Member Boff started about the services, especially around the security sector and just ask you: is it not time now that we looked and that you led some sort of review at these key sectors for London? It is in these key sectors where it is part-time workers and women workers and where many members from London's diverse communities are employed that the Living Wage is not paid. Will you look to focus your attention in those sectors?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Yes. All the points I have made this morning are good ones that apply to all those sectors as well in terms of loyalty, higher staff morale, productivity and so on. These costs are not in my view insuperable for some of the very big corporations that we are talking about. They produce very substantial revenues and I think it is the right way forward. In tough times when you are seeing a growing gap between rich and poor and huge pressures on the cost of living in London, it is morally right. So, yes, Jennette, we will make sure that all those types of business that you are talking about, contract cleaning, security, those sorts of organisations are properly addressed in the run-up to next November.

Jennette Arnold OBE (AM): Can I just make a quick hook and say it is great that we are talking about those in employment but of course we cannot forget that huge group of Londoners, the 16 to 24 year-olds, who are unemployed.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): They cannot really be paid the minimum wage because at the moment they are not employed.

Jennette Arnold OBE (AM): You rejected a proposal that we put to you in the budget about the six-month job guarantee that we thought that you as Mayor could actually help move forward. Would you take it away and see if you can consider whether it is now time for you to look at that six-month job guarantee and take a leadership position on that?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Sorry, forgive me, Jennette. The thing we should be expanding fast and the thing that is working well is the apprenticeship programme. You talked about the 16 to 24 year-olds and you are quite right. There are currently about 100,000 of them who are not in employment at the moment.

The way to deal with their issue is not the London Living Wage, frankly. It is to get them into apprenticeships and get them into a place of work. That has been very successful. So far we have done about 100,000 apprentices in the last couple of years but we have to go faster. To be frank, I think we have made fast progress because we have been able to find some of the more fertile areas for generating apprenticeships. We are now starting get into the hard yards. We are really looking to London's businesses to recognise the benefits to them of taking on young people. Many of the same arguments I have made about the London Living Wage can be made about apprenticeships. You get hardworking people. All the evidence is they stick with the job, they increase productivity and you reduce your labour costs and employee turnover.

Jennette Arnold OBE (AM): Thank you.

1254/2013 - Crossrail spending

Caroline Pidgeon

Is Crossrail being delivered cost effectively?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Yes, Caroline. You are asking me about whether Crossrail is being delivered in a cost-effective way. I think the answer is yes. We have obviously cut the overall spending envelope for Crossrail since the Comprehensive Spending Review (CSR) in 2010 from £15.9 billion to £14.8 billion, so there has already been a substantial reduction. If you remember, there was a lot about descopeing some of the station boxes and deciding to do the tunnels first rather than the station boxes first and that took a lot of cost out.

But, clearly, this is something over which TfL will want increasingly as Crossrail becomes more and more of a London project. I do not want to mince my words. TfL and the GLA generally will want to have very close oversight of this project because, after all, we are going to be running it. This is going to be a London railway.

Caroline Pidgeon MBE (AM): Thank you for that. The points you make are fair. You have recently been touring Britain and Whitehall making the case for investment in London and I and my colleagues here, I am sure, wholeheartedly support this effort. If you are going to make the case for London, you have to make sure that the money you have in your spending is being spent wisely. Crossrail is, as you said, a £14.8 billion programme and yet there is considerable waste of public money, not in the tunnelling and some of the mechanics but actually within some of the support services. So, for example, within their external affairs team, are you aware that Crossrail has spent some ridiculous sums of money, £320,000 on photography and video, £320,000 on printing, £900,000 on staff training?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Staff training? That does not seem to be totally ludicrous.

Caroline Pidgeon MBE (AM): Yes. £32,000 on travel. My favourite is an amazing £1,000 on cake for staff communications. It must be some hell of a cake, I have to say. What are you doing as chair of TfL to drive down these excessive costs at a time of belt-tightening across the whole public sector?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I cannot testify as to the whereabouts of the cake.

Caroline Pidgeon MBE (AM): You did actually get a slice, then?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): My policy on cake, as you know, is pro having and pro eating it. Spending a certain amount, £900,000, on staff training does not feel to me like the most totally ludicrous expenditure I have ever heard, Caroline. Your point in general is a good one. I have to reiterate what I said at the beginning. I think that the condominium arrangements that currently exist between us at the Department for Transport (DfT) cannot go on for ever. We need to make sure for the benefit of London and indeed for the London taxpayer and for taxpayers generally. I think that in the end Crossrail is going to have to be brought under TfL in London and the GLA and I hope I have your support in that.

Caroline Pidgeon MBE (AM): Good. Last autumn Crossrail put out a contract for £250,000 for crisis communications guidance. Crossrail also has awarded contracts nearing £500,000 to one single communication agency, 39 separate payments over two years, some of this for management and support consultancy for communications, without going through a normal tender process. Is there really no one within TfL who could have provided this kind of support without spending hundreds of thousands of pounds worth of public money?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I am grateful to you for drawing my attention to these items in the Crossrail budget. As I say, I do think that we are going to have to change the supervision arrangements for Crossrail in the fairly near future. At the moment it is jointly governed by two sponsors in the form of us and the DfT and I am not convinced myself that that is an arrangement that is sustainable in the long term. We will sort that out.

Caroline Pidgeon MBE (AM): I welcome what you are saying because Crossrail currently employs 39 external affairs staff for just this one project and yet talking to TfL (and I am, as you know, not always the greatest fan of expenditure at TfL), they only have 40-50 staff and that covers all modes of transport and ones that are actually running rather than a project that is being built. So I really would encourage you to stop this waste and look at whether you could -- we talk about shared services all the time. Bring this in-house and let TfL actually manage this to save the waste of public money and help you in your case to Government for investment in London transport.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Yes, Caroline, I am grateful to you for that question because you have brilliantly illustrated the difference between the way we have been running TfL and the way things can be run if not wholly and exclusively managed by this benign operation. What we certainly did was to reduce overheads at TfL very considerably and you will know that it is not just a question of reducing people in the external affairs department of TfL. We have cut costs in TfL and we have taken costs out of about £9.8 billion and --

Caroline Pidgeon MBE (AM): Will you just agree to bring this into TfL to manage?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): -- what you have there is a perfect case for wanting to see (and I think you and I would agree strongly about this) closer and more direct scrutiny and management of that project by London because in the end this is a London project. By the way, I do not want to --

Caroline Pidgeon MBE (AM): Will you commit to bring this into TfL so that their team can manage this expenditure and make sure that we are getting value for money? Just yes or no.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Yes. Nothing would give me greater pleasure than to make sure that Crossrail was run by London since it is a London project.

Caroline Pidgeon MBE (AM): Lovely. Thank you. Thank you, Chair.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I would just remind you before you criticise Crossrail too heavily for employing loads of people, it is the biggest engineering project in Europe. It is colossal. It is going to add 10% to the rail capacity of this city. It is not a small undertaking that they are involved in.

Caroline Pidgeon MBE (AM): Thank you.

1387/2013 - 'Bedroom tax'

John Biggs

In most democracies, the higher taxes are levied on the rich and not the poor. In contrast to your support for tax cuts for the rich, you seem to support what is widely regarded as an additional tax on poor people. What representations have you made on this?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Thank you, John. I cannot really agree with the thrust of your question about this because it seems to me that obviously there will be hard cases. It will be very important that people who have an extra bedroom that they absolutely need, and are facing this withdrawal or reduction in subsidy, should not be unfairly penalised and there should be ways of managing the transition. We have very considerable funds to try to help with the tougher cases. In the end, you have to face the reality that there are many, many people in London living in severely overcrowded social homes and also a considerable number of people living in social homes with more rooms than they need. You have to do something about that problem. That is why I think that managing this reduction in the spare room subsidy is one way forward which would be absolute folly to reject.

John Biggs (AM): I am implacably opposed to this policy for a number of reasons. If you sincerely believe that is the case, then one of the greatest groups of under-occupying people would be pensioners who are exempted from this policy. Can you rationalise that?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): The objective, obviously, is not to cause excessive hardship to people who are older and particularly vulnerable. The objective is to try to get a more equitable distribution of what is a public good, which is subsidised accommodation. At the moment there are many people who are facing real difficulties in housing themselves and their families, whilst other families who are receiving very considerable subsidies from the state are living in homes, leaving aside all the hard cases that we can easily summon up, with more rooms than they need.

The big answer is to build more affordable homes and to build more homes generally and that is what we are embarked on.

John Biggs (AM): Of course, you have not explained to the Londoners watching this how you have redefined the term “affordable” so it does not actually mean affordable anymore.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): That is not true.

John Biggs (AM): Let us move on from that. It is a valid argument that housing which is subsidised is a commodity which needs to be managed thoughtfully. What you are saying, though, is that people who are well off in subsidised housing can be left alone but people who are on low incomes, most often through no fault of their own, should be penalised as a result of this policy. Can you just take me through the thinking that lies behind that rather convoluted process?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I do not understand the logic of what you are saying, John. That is not true. The intention is to try to resolve a painful imbalance in the distribution of what is a very expensive and very scarce resource, which is publicly subsidised housing. At the moment there is a problem which is that many thousands of families are living in grossly overcrowded homes and --

John Biggs (AM): You do not need to repeat that because I think we all accept --

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): If you accept that that is the problem and you accept the logic of what I am saying, then I am --

Darren Johnson (Chair): Stop talking over each other.

John Biggs (AM): He needs to shut up so I can talk.

Darren Johnson (Chair): You need to be polite as well.

John Biggs (AM): Yes, OK. He needs to quieten himself, then, Chair, so that I can --

Darren Johnson (Chair): You will both behave. Can we have a question from Mr Biggs, please?

John Biggs (AM): Yes. If you stop interrupting me I will ask a question.

I am tempted to raise the Bob Crow [General Secretary, National Union of Rail, Maritime and Transport Workers] example because he is clearly a man who does not need a subsidy with his housing and yet is in subsidised housing. This policy does nothing about that.

The question is about the priority you give to this. I got my researcher to look at the amount of attention you have given to tax cuts to the rich. We gave up on about the 500th article. In order to identify the anxieties you had expressed in the media about the effect of this policy on the poor, we considered getting Jodrell Bank [Observatory, housing several large telescopes] to try to look for evidence that there was anything you had ever said on this issue and we found very, very little. There has been a representation about foster carers which is welcome, although it is quite a complicated policy, but there are many other people affected by this. I have constituents whose reward for a child getting married will be a 16% cut in their housing benefit.

Can you answer a simple question? Do most people on the housing benefit fit the category of lazy scroungers or are they actually working people who are having trouble getting by given the high rent levels in London?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Yes. There are many people who are facing very tough times. The primary answer is to build more affordable accommodation and to build more homes and social rent for every type of affordable home. That is what we are doing. We have built record numbers and we will come on to that later in the discussion. I also think that you have to look at the inequity in the distribution of this public good which is heavily subsidised housing. An attempt is being made to try to sort that out and to try to reduce what appears to many people to be an unfair subsidy that goes to people who do not need the rooms they have.

There is a separate problem that you mention about Bob Crow. I am delighted that you mention that. I do not remember Labour campaigning on that much in the past, do you? I do not remember Labour campaigning on people like Bob Crow, Frank Dobson [Labour Member of Parliament, Holborn and St Pancras] and Lee Jasper [adviser for the former Mayor of London]

living in social accommodation. This is news to me. If you want to come over and join us, John, on that point, then you are more than welcome.

John Biggs (AM): I am highlighting the intellectual poverty and inconsistency of your arguments, which I think is bordering on pathetic.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I think you are just resorting to common abuse. I have done my best to elucidate the matter. There is a serious failure of equity in the distribution of a vital social good. The Government is trying to do something about it. You should be in favour of equity. You should be in favour of fairness. That is the name of the game.

John Biggs (AM): I think the record shows that you are more energetic in standing up for your tax-dodging mates in business than you are for Londoners.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): No, I am not conscious of that.

Darren Johnson (Chair): I think it was a legitimate question of the Mayor.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Tax-dodging? By the way, I seem to remember there was a Mayoral candidate who did not -- whom you used to back.

Darren Johnson (Chair): We will move on. Assembly Member Twycross?

Fiona Twycross (AM): Thank you. Are you concerned about the issues created by the lack of suitable property available for the people affected by the bedroom tax to downsize to?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Yes, Fiona. That is the key issue. If I respectfully say to other colleagues here, I think that is the problem that this really raises and that is the pressure it puts on us. If you are going to say to people, "We are going to withdraw a subsidy because you have an unoccupied bedroom", that would put pressure on them to downsize. You have to provide for them somewhere reasonably close by the new accommodation that is smaller and that is of course the challenge that we face and that is why I get back to my original point. The best solution for so many of these problems and indeed for so many difficulties that the London and the United Kingdom economy faces at the moment is to get homebuilding going and get it building at an enormous scale. That is what this country needs.

Fiona Twycross (AM): I think the scale does need to be enormous obviously and it does need to speed up a bit. I do not know if you are aware that a Freedom of Information request has revealed that in Wandsworth alone over 2,000 families will be hit by the bedroom tax but there are only ten two- or one-bedroom properties available to people who want or need to now downsize. I met a woman on the doorstep in Wandsworth who has actually been on a waiting list to downsize for three years and has now lost hope that she will be able to move to a smaller property, so she is facing cuts to her limited income of £15 a week, £60 a month or £720 a year that she simply cannot afford. So what would you say to a woman in that position?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Obviously, there are going to be hard cases and that is why we did campaign and as soon as this sort of stuff started to come out we did campaign for funds for London to smooth the transition. It is absolutely vital. Any benefit reform produces immediate social dislocation and it always produces hard cases and you have to make sure that you have funds to help. We have a £25 million for London boroughs to help with some of these cases and an expected £115 million over the next two years.

What I cannot sit here and tell you, Fiona, is that a change like this will have no impact at all. Of course it will have an impact. The question is whether it is in the end aimed at producing greater fairness. Is it trying to allocate this public good in a more equitable way?

Fiona Twycross (AM): Can you confirm to the Assembly whether you think the under-occupation penalty will achieve its stated goal?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I certainly think that it will help to address that basic inequity and our job is to smooth out the rough edges. Where it is causing real hardship, then clearly the local council using the funds that we have secured will have to step in.

Fiona Twycross (Deputy Chair): OK. Thank you.

Andrew Boff (AM): Mr Mayor, do you think the people who are paying the real bedroom tax are the 391,000 children who are growing up in overcrowded accommodation in London?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I do not look at this as a tax. As I say, I think what the Government is trying to do is to iron out what is clearly an imbalance and an inequality in the current system. The point that you make about overcrowding is absolutely right.

Andrew Boff (AM): Do you think those children would appreciate the fact that homes are being occupied so somebody can have a spare room to store the treadmill they should never have bought rather than being used as bedroom accommodation? May I also point out, Mr Mayor, of those 391,000 (possibly 24% of young people in London) growing up in overcrowded conditions, a disproportionate amount are in Tower Hamlets, Newham and Barking and Dagenham. Does it not make you question Members' commitments to resolving overcrowding when they come through with questions like the one you have just answered?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I think that the problem of overcrowding is fundamentally not so much going to be addressed by this reform, right though it is. It is going to be addressed by building more homes and that is what we have to do. We are going to come on to what London and the country needs to do about that, but I think so far the record of the GLA has actually been very creditable. We have built a record number.

Andrew Boff (AM): If this was a tax on the poor, Mr Mayor, would you think that the Labour Party would have introduced that same thing themselves?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Listen. It is the fate of opposition to oppose things that they would inevitably have done when they were in power. That applies across the board.

Andrew Boff (AM): It is just that I am reminded, Mr Mayor, that in 2007 the Labour Government introduced exactly the same principle for the London Housing Allowance for those people that are placed in private accommodation. Apparently to apply that to social housing is a social evil, but when they do it, it is a good thing.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Do not forget that Labour was committed before the last election to reforms of housing benefit themselves. I seem to remember reforms that now in opposition they hotly oppose. You cannot account for 'oppositionitis'. It is their constitutional function and duty to be incoherent. That is the way they are.

Andrew Boff (AM): Thank you, Mr Mayor. Thank you very much.

1779/2013 - Tube strikes

Richard Tracey

How many Tube strikes would have gone ahead over the last eight years if strikes ballots had had a threshold of 50%+1 of all eligible union members in order to be passed?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Thank you very much, Dick. I am grateful to you for your report into this. You ask how many strikes would have gone ahead if there had been a 50%+1 threshold of all eligible union members in order to be passed.

I think this is capable of being construed in two ways, what you are asking, because there are basically two ways you could do this. You could either have a threshold which was 50% of all those balloted so that no strike could be called unless 50% of those balloted participated in the ballot, so you would have a turnout threshold. Or you could say that no strike could be called unless 50% of the relevant membership voted in favour of the action, which you will appreciate is an even tougher criterion. That is I think the one that you favour, though the one that we have proposed is the more moderate approach, the first one I mentioned.

Actually, it turns out that over the last eight years there would be precious little difference between the two outcomes because, if you had had 50%+1 of those who balloted voting yes and if that had been the rule for the last eight years, there would have only been three strikes on London Underground (LU). Had you had the slightly weaker or slightly more moderate proposal that we have been proposing, you would have only had four strikes, so the actual effective difference between the two ways of doing it does not seem on this analysis to be very significant.

Richard Tracey (AM): You are right. We have been inclined towards the stronger threshold. Are you aware that from polling of Londoners nearly 60% believe that it is too easy for Tube strikes to happen and a very small percentage, I think less than 15%, think that it is too difficult? So there is a desire amongst Londoners that the legislation should certainly be strengthened. I believe it has been costed. It is a little while since it was costed. £15 million a day, apparently, it costs the London economy and that is very serious. Quite honestly, Mr Mayor, you should be taking that very seriously yourself. Londoners expect you to.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): They are right and I am grateful to you for the support that you have given, Dick, on this. This is something we have made repeated representations to Government about since 2008. We obviously did not get anywhere with Labour, as it happens, but we had high hopes that the Coalition would take this up. It has not been possible to persuade the Government to go even for the moderate proposal, the 50% turnout threshold, that we have. I think it is entirely reasonable. Why should a strike go ahead which massively inconveniences Londoners and costs millions of pounds, as you say, when the question has attracted votes from fewer than 50% of the relevant workforce? They cannot even be bothered to take part and very often that is because of a reluctance to be seen to be voting against strike action and a certain culture of not wanting to ruffle the features of the trade unions and so on and so forth. I think that is wrong. There should be a very clear threshold so that strikes cannot go ahead unless at least 50% of the relevant body of the workforce has actually participated in the strike ballot. Otherwise, you are inconveniencing Londoners. You are doing huge damage to the London economy or potentially considerable damage to the London economy on the say-so of a relatively tiny proportion of the workforce.

Richard Tracey (AM): Yes. Of course, not only Londoners themselves but the business organisations like the Confederation of British Industry (CBI) and so on also believe that it is quite crazy. There have been occasions when a small number of members of one of the transport unions actually voted but then an even smaller number actually supported the strike, so it can be that perhaps less than 20% of the membership of the union then brings London Underground to a halt.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Yes, or 15%. It can be 10%. That is completely crazy. What you have is a straight majority of those who actually bothered to vote. If you have a tiny proportion that has bothered to vote, you are getting strikes called on a relatively small proportion of the workforce. I do not think that is the right way forward. We have made this case repeatedly to government at all levels. Occasionally we have heard some favourable mutterings from the oracle but nothing has ever really been produced. It is very frustrating. I will not hide it from you.

Richard Tracey (AM): So do you agree that this is the sort of thing that the Government ought to be tackling rather than some of the other things which they have been which rather frustrate the British public, let alone the London public?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I think it would be a very good thing if it was tackled. It would be immensely popular and I do not know why it is not done. It seems to me to be just. Also, it is fundamentally unfair on the huge majority of the transport workers in these cases who either have not participated and have then found that they have to lose their income for the day because there is a strike or actually actively oppose it and find that they have to lose their income, so I think it would be a reasonable reform that would protect large numbers of the workforce who are being effectively coerced into strike action by a minority and by the activism of the unions. I would like to see the Government get on with it.

Richard Tracey (AM): Thank you.

1743/2013 - Sanction detection rate

Tony Arbour

Why is London's sanction detection rate so much lower than the national sanction detection rate?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Yes. Tony, thank you very much. Your question is a good one because the sanction detection rate in London is frankly lower than other parts of the country and it is too low. There are particular reasons obviously that we can give for that problem. There are targets now to increase sanction detection rates through all the seven key MOPAC crimes. The only point I would make in mitigation - and I think it is a most important point - is that in spite of this, crime continues to fall and has fallen very substantially in the last four or five years. Just in the last year alone it has gone down by about 5.5% of total notifiable offences. That is a tribute to the work of the Metropolitan Police Service.

Tony Arbour (AM): Thank you for that. I would not want to belittle the police in reducing the number of crimes, but I should draw your attention to the fact that that is the number of reported crimes. It may well be that the victims of crime, knowing that the chances of their crime being solved and the criminals being brought to justice is so small, will say, "What is the point in me reporting this crime?" Moreover, the entire situation is exacerbated by the fact that in this figure for sanction detections, one quarter of all of those are dealt with simply by way of caution. Under those circumstances, I suppose, it is no surprise that there is the lowest rate of victim satisfaction in the Metropolitan Police Service, far lower than elsewhere in the country. This leads to demoralisation, I would suggest to you, amongst those people who have crimes committed against them and even against the police who have taken the trouble to bring people to justice and are simply dismissed in this way.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Yes. You have campaigned consistently, Tony, against cautions and against a general culture of decriminalising crime or however you want to put it. You are completely right. The number of cautions since I have been around has come down consistently and significantly over 2008-2012. There has been a 23% reduction in the number of cautions issued. I hear what you say about maybe the police simply are not reporting all this. I look also at the figures for fear of crime and confidence and those also show considerable improvements. So I have to say I do not dismiss the data that the Metropolitan Police Service is providing. It is not just happening in London. Let us be clear, crime is falling. Throughout the country and indeed throughout much of the Western world crime is coming down, though not everywhere. It is striking that London is doing considerably better than some other directly comparable cities. There are many causes for this but you cannot rule out and you should never minimise the results of good, strong neighbourhood policing and a visible presence by the Metropolitan Police Service. I think it does pay off and it has been paying off.

Tony Arbour (AM): I do not resile from any of that, but I would simply say to you that you are making the mistake which is often made in discussing this matter in discussing the total number of crimes, total number of cautions, total number of sanctions. If you look at it on a

percentage basis, the figure I have given you should really give you pause for thought. Of this depressingly low level of detections, one quarter of those is only dealt with by way of caution.

I wonder if I could go off on a related tack to this. The new Commissioner [of the Police of the Metropolis, Sir Bernard Hogan-Howe] has made great play of the fact that victims of crime are offered a visit by a police officer who will come around and will discuss with them the way their crime is being dealt with if a person wants that. There are small county constabularies in this country (and this is a matter I have raised with you before) using what is called Track My Crime where what happens is you report a crime as a victim, you are given your crime number and you can tap into the constabulary's database and find out what progress is going on. One of the things which most annoys people is they report a crime and the thing has gone into some sort of abyss.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Yes, nothing happens and then someone rings up and says it has been solved two years later.

Tony Arbour (AM): I would suggest to you that one way in which you can perhaps raise people's confidence in the fact that the police are actually doing something is to tap into this system. It might even have the merit in addition of being cheaper than sending a policeman around to the house. You just tap into the thing and it would go on. I would ask you please to lean on your office, on Mr Greenhalgh [Stephen, Deputy Mayor for Policing and Crime] on this one and say that this is a solution which should be zeroed on. It would do you a lot of good but, more importantly, it would do the victims of crime a lot of good.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Your labours have not been in vain. Thank you for what you have said because Track My Crime is indeed being taken up by MOPAC. We are actively looking at how to implement it and give Londoners exactly that confidence and opportunity to see what is happening.

Tony Arbour (AM): We heard it here first.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): You heard it here first.

Len Duvall (AM): Mr Mayor, it is even worse than that and I am grateful for Tony Arbour and Conservative colleagues bringing this question to the table. It is even worse than that and I will just go back to Track My Crime. What will happen is, when you go and track your crime, 44% of people are saying there is no crime being investigated because it has been screened out. There is another side of the argument and that is screening out crime being carried out by the Metropolitan Police Service. So, on 5 May, the *Sunday Times* - one of your best friend's newspapers, Mr Mayor - reported that the Metropolitan Police Service screen out more than 44% of their offences. So, if you then look at the sanction detection rate and look at the crimes they are investigating, it is even worse than, Mr Mayor, you are saying it is.

Of those screened out crimes, which should be a concern for us all, are assaults causing injury, 6,892 offences not followed up with any investigation. Of course, Mr Mayor, one of the things that would be of concern to you is 3% of sexual offences, 207 (not rape because rape or

murder is not screened out), were screened out. This is potentially open to abuse but, even more so, the majority of thefts are not being investigated properly other than by this screening out process. Also increasingly worrying under your watch, Mr Mayor, not only am I going to have fire appliances coming late to any arson attack if I happen to be a victim of that, but 45% of arson attacks are screened out and not investigated.

So the question to you, Mr Mayor, is why is the Metropolitan Police Service screening out the highest proportion of offences compared to other forces in England and Wales and we still have a lower sanction detection rate, and then what are the steps you are going to take? Do you not think you should be reviewing your policing plan and being a bit more hard in terms of these issues that we are tackling at the moment?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I understand why the focus is on issues like the screening out and sanction detection rates and the level of cautions now because actually the key figures are very positive and very encouraging for what the Metropolitan Police Service is doing. I do not think there is any evidence that screening out is taking place at any higher level than it was in the past. There is no evidence that this has been going up. It is always the case that when a victim is unable or unwilling to provide details or there is no corroborating evidence or whatever, then a case will not be proceeded with. That has always been the case. There was a particularly troubling business with the Sapphire Unit in Southwark, as Members of the Assembly will recall. That was addressed speedily in a ruthless way. That did require proper attention.

I cannot do better than to tell you that MOPAC has set the Metropolitan Police Service some very challenging targets of a 20% reduction in crime. They are now on target to achieve that. I mentioned international comparators just now. London is now one of the safest big cities in the world. That is a tribute to the work of the Metropolitan Police Service. You sort of interjected just now when I talked about neighbourhood policing. Actually, London is unlike any other city in Britain in that we are hiring more police officers. We are hiring 5,000 police officers over the next few years and there is a huge opportunity for employment in that service.

Kit Malthouse (AM): Mr Mayor, while I applaud my colleagues' endeavours over cautions and looking at Metropolitan Police Service data over the last few years. Would you also agree with me that while it is dangerous to talk in absolute numbers, it is often dangerous to talk in average percentages and that actually there may be characteristics of London which mean that an average percentage sanction detection rate is also deceptive? For instance, Mr Mayor, if you looked at homicide as a crime, I think you would find that the Metropolitan Police Service's sanction detection rate is well up into the 90s. There are other areas where the Metropolitan Police Service excels in the work that it does and is the world standard in terms of detection.

Would you also agree that there are characteristics in London that lead to a lower average that may also be deceptive? For instance, the Metropolitan Police Service has national responsibilities that it undertakes and crimes that take place in other parts of the country are reported in London and counted in the Metropolitan Police Service figures. I will give you a high-profile example at the moment: the Savile investigation. These are offences that were committed across the entire nation, not just in London, and will count in the Metropolitan

Police Service's sanction detection numbers. Similarly, any crimes reported under counterterrorism would count in the Metropolitan Police Service's figures and any other national response, not least fraud and cybercrime where the Metropolitan Police Service leads nationally, will also be reported in London and counted in our numbers. It might be worth breaking out the various sanction detection rates across crime types to see what the true picture actually is.

There are also, obviously, I hope you will agree, the large number of visitors that we have, people who come and are sadly subject to crime but then return to their country and therefore cannot give further evidence that may be required in the investigation of a crime and may also result in no further action on crimes because tourists just simply are not here, having had their phone taken.

I guess my question is would you agree that it is deceptive to deal in an average percentage across such a huge organisation with national responsibilities and a massive number of visitors to a city?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Yes. You have made some very good points there. What you say about homicide is certainly right and it bears repeating. London is now one of the safest big cities in the world. If you look at our homicide rate by comparison even with supposedly peaceful looking places on the European continent, we are doing very well, certainly by comparison with New York. That is a tribute to the work of the Metropolitan Police Service. The sanction detection rate in that category of crime is very impressive.

If you look at, for instance, theft from the person, however, there Tony's ire would be excited because the figures are not brilliant. They have a sanction detection rate of 2.7% on theft from the person. That clearly needs to improve and there is a target for improving it. By the way, that is caused very largely by one of the particular difficulties we have now with a secondary trade, as it were, in stolen mobile phone gizmos particularly from one particular company and that is one of the things that we are trying to tackle. The general thrust of what you are saying is absolutely correct.

What it should not allow us to do is to go easy on the Metropolitan Police Service in catching criminals. A sanction detection rate, by the way, for those who do not know what a sanction detection rate is, is how many times you actually get the people whodunit and bring them to justice. That is the key thing. We want that to go up.

Kit Malthouse (AM): Would you also agree with me that sanction detection rate targets can be a very dangerous thing to pursue? Certainly when sanction detection rates became a priority target under the previous national Government, there were quite a lot of unintended consequences driven by that target because it is very easy for the police to go for the easy crimes --

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Round up the usual suspects?

Kit Malthouse (AM): -- round up the usual suspects and go for sanction detection and up their rate. So we used to find, if you remember, Mr Mayor, that things would be deemed to be a crime that were not previously a crime. A police officer would be called to a school, for instance, where there might have been a playground fight. That would be deemed to be an assault. Those two young people would get a criminal record. That was an easy sanction detection and diverting the police towards dealing with that I guess low-level antisocial behaviour in place of the tougher stuff would be a consequence of targeting entirely on sanction detection.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I think that is a valid point. Len is interjecting that that is what they are doing now, they are screening things out, they are skewing the figures. I do not accept this, Len. I am about to say something I hope you will find favourable. I want to have a proper look at this. I think what we will do is we will get MOPAC to make a proper assessment of whether screening out is increasing and whether your charge against the police can really be sustained and let us have some real evidence on this. I do not think it is true. What Kit [Malthouse] says is right. There are particular circumstances in London which means the sanction detection rate is chronically low and always will be lower than other parts of the country. If Len is really onto something in saying that screening out is now being used as a tool to manage crime figures, then we need to be onto that. I have not seen the evidence for it yet but my undertaking to the Assembly now is I will use MOPAC to get to the bottom of it.

1388/2013 - Rents

Tom Copley

How much more is the average Londoner paying in private sector rent at the beginning of 2013 compared to a year earlier?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Thanks, Tom. There is no good news here at all because there is no question that the rents in London are a by-product of the buoyancy of the London market and the shortage of housing and they are going up. Rents rose on average 10% last year and that followed on, as you know, to big increases of 12% in 2006, 12% in 2007. There has been a real increase in the cost of rent in our city. We are working very hard to try to address some of the impact of this, principally by building more homes. That, as I say, is the single best thing you can do.

Tom Copley (AM): Thank you, Mr Mayor, and indeed median rents according to the Valuation Office increased by 9% in 2012 and 12% in 2011. The actual cash figure is quite shocking. The average rent went up £99 a month, we calculate, which is £1,188 a year. That is of course more than your monthly net income if you are on the minimum wage, so essentially you are paying more than a month of your wages extra in rent in a year. So would you say that London rent inflation is out of control?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): What I would certainly say is that our housing economy is changing very fast and we need to look at what is happening with real energy and ambition. Owner-occupation has now fallen below 50% for the first time in decades, perhaps for as long as anybody can remember. The shape of the London housing market is people are increasingly

using private rent. The question is what we do to control the rise in private rents. Do you impose rent controls of the kind that they have in New York or not? The evidence from New York is really not encouraging.

Tom Copley (AM): You present a false choice, if I may interject, Mr Mayor, because of course there is not just the question of carrying on as we are at the moment or adopting New York-style rent controls. There are many different versions of rent stabilisation, as perhaps we should call it, many different versions around the world. In fact, indeed, in Germany where 60% of Germans live in the private rented sector, they have regulated rent. So it is a serious question because you always talk about supply and I think everyone here agrees that ultimately and certainly in the long term supply is key. Of course it does take a long time to deliver the amount of housing that would be needed to stabilise rents. In the absence of any rent controls, how long would you say it would take before we have enough new housing to reduce rent inflation?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I think you are right to focus on supply. Actually, in Germany, the interesting thing is that they do not have a shortage of supply. They have had a history, as you know, of rented accommodation in that country. They have a very different approach to the market from us. The problem we have in Britain and particularly in London is the cost of new housing caused by all sorts of factors.

To answer your question about how long it will take to address that problem and how long it will take to build the homes Londoners need, I think it will take at least ten years. We have to be realistic about this. It will take a long time before we have built enough homes to alleviate the pressure that our city faces. I want to be optimistic here because we can do it and if the Treasury would give us greater powers over some of the public land that is available in London, if we were able to use that land to build homes for the people of this city and people who need to live here, you would not only drive the London economy but you would start to address that problem.

Tom Copley (AM): There is I think almost a rare consensus over a lot of these issues to do with the supply of housing in London and the powers that London potentially needs to deliver them. I want to bring you back because you say it could take potentially ten years. In the meantime, you being against any form of rent regulation, are we going to have to endure constant rent increases of the likes that we have seen recently every year? Is that what we are going to have to control?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I am not going to sit here and pretend to you that I can wave a magic wand and introduce rent controls in circumstances of very constrained supply already. That is the problem we have. If you introduce rent controls in a rental market where the supply is already so constrained, the risk is that you will simply drive out potential providers and that you will introduce distortions into the sector that are not actually in the interests of those who are facing the problem.

Tom Copley (AM): I think you are presenting a false choice between the status quo and only one very rigid form of rent control that you always refer to.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I think I have tried to say that the German model does not apply to us, either. The German model is irrelevant to our concerns. It is the cost and the scarcity that is the problem. The only way to address that is to build more.

Tom Copley (AM): Could I perhaps approach this from a different perspective? Of course, rents have a real impact on the London economy and for every 1% increase in rent, that takes £130 million out of the pocket of Londoners to spend in our economy. In two thirds of London boroughs, Londoners are spending more than 50% of their income in rent. The CBI says that the cost of housing has now risen to third on the list of barriers to business investing in London. To what extent do you think that the rise in rents is damaging London's economy?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I think that rents and the scarcity of housing generally, as the CBI recently said, are now becoming a major cause of economic inefficiency in our city. I would agree with you about that. Tom, we are doing absolutely everything. We have the London Rental Standard which is being increasingly taken up by landlords. We have 13,000 now subscribing to that standard. That is one way of making sure that landlords behave themselves and do not gouge their tenants. We do not have the statutory powers anyway in the city to impose rent controls of the kind that I think under any model you would want.

The second and more profound objection is that I am not convinced that it would be the right thing for the market. In New York they are moving away from rent controls because of the distortions they introduce. They are now trying to get rid of them. In Germany they have no constraints on supply as it is.

Tom Copley (AM): I would love to go into further detail over the Rental Standard. However, I am out of time, so I will leave it there.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): You are always at liberty, Tom, if you have a brilliant proposal for a rent control standard that does not constrain supply, then give it --

Darren Johnson (Chair): We are not leaving this because we are going to bring in Assembly Member Twycross anyway. Thank you.

Fiona Twycross (AM): Thank you. Is London now simply unaffordable?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): No. That is too broad and sweeping a statement. Plainly for many people who have historic rights to social homes in London it remains -- do not forget that 30% of the housing stock in central London is social housing. There is still a ready supply of affordable accommodation and we are building much more. I am not going to deny that there is a problem but there is also a massive opportunity. If you build more homes in London, you get the economy moving faster than by almost any other means.

Fiona Twycross (Deputy Chair): OK. I disagree with one of your underlying tenets. There is quite strong evidence that London is increasingly unaffordable and as a result we are seeing movement of significant numbers of low-income families. I do not know if you are aware of the

data published by the charity Crisis which shows that the number of local housing allowance claimants is increasing dramatically in some outer London boroughs and falling in some inner London boroughs. For example, in Barnet the number of people claiming the local housing allowance has risen by 45%, in Enfield 29% and in Kingston 29%, while in the City of London claims have fallen by 33%, in Kensington and Chelsea 21% and in Westminster 20%. You said quite clearly:

"On my watch, you are not going to see thousands of families evicted from the place where they have put down roots. This is not what Londoners want to see, it is not what we are going to accept."

This is exactly what we are seeing. The statistics paint quite a bleak picture for a large number of families. Is mass movement of low-income households now what you think Londoners should accept?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Fiona, I have to look at your statistics. The best of the evidence I have seen is that we are not yet seeing what I called "Kosovo-style movements" of people across the capital to elsewhere. That is not yet happening. We did get funds to mitigate those impacts. Inevitably, there will be movements. In any year under any circumstances, there are movements of families across London.

Fiona Twycross (Deputy Chair): Not of this scale. I will send you the figures and hopefully you will look into it but we have already seen quite significant movements. Thank you.

Darren Johnson (Chair): If you can just briefly respond to that?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Obviously there will be hard cases, as I was saying to John [Biggs AM] earlier on. You cannot fight every single impact or effect of long-overdue reforms of housing benefit. It had spiralled to £21-22 billion. Labour was absolutely committed to reforming housing benefit, just as much as the incoming Government was. There is an injustice that has to be addressed. Why one set of people should be state subsidised to live in one part of town that was completely out of reach for many, many other hardworking families?

Fiona Twycross (AM): Movement of families is not the answer, thank you, Mayor. Thank you, Chair.

1389/2013 - Stalled schemes

Nicky Gavron

There are 170,000 homes across London that have planning permission but are stalled. Now that the government has made it even easier to drop affordable housing requirements from developers, how many of these schemes will be able to go ahead?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Thanks, Nicky. There are, you say, 170,000 that have planning permission that are stalled, actually the *Barriers to Housing Delivery* report that the

GLA commissioned, I think, suggests that there are 210,000 residential units across the capital, which have planning consent and which have not been started. Your real question is: is there any more that we could do to allow these developers, or potential builders, to escape their obligations to build more affordable housing under Section 106 in order to let the thing actually go ahead.

Nicky Gavron (AM): Actually no, my question says is it going to make it easier now that the Government is allowing renegotiations of these requirements, so that they can be, well, unblocked, really.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): There are two points. We in the GLA, and I think we secured this as part of the legislation, the Government has made a requirement that we, I, will be informed of all applications where a review of Section 106 affordable housing requirements are being undertaken. If a developer decides to reduce the quotient of affordable housing in order to get the thing off the rocks, they have to square it with us. Now what will my attitude be? It will depend on the business case. It will depend on what the toolkit says and whether it is going to happen or not. In the end, I would rather see a lower percentage of something rather than 100% of nothing, if you see what I mean.

Nicky Gavron (AM): Yes. I understand that but on the whole you agree. I gave you a written question in March and you said that you thought it would ensure that stalled schemes move forward. In this report you mention, and you are quite right it is around 210,000/211,000 stalled homes, so it is larger than we thought, but interestingly that report says that 177,000 stalled homes are on large sites, ie there are 250 to 10,000, which is very interesting, I think. They are not the little sites.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Sorry, Nicky, when you say it is interesting, what is your thought there?

Nicky Gavron (AM): A lot of these homes are on large sites, which we will come to in a minute. In that report you mentioned, which was done a few months ago, it does not identify affordable housing requirements, or Section 106, as being a barrier. I am just wondering why you are talking about that at all.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): You asked the question. Your question say, "Now that the government has made it even easier to drop affordable housing requirements ..." I have to answer your question. You cannot blame me for trying to answer your question.

Nicky Gavron (AM): Exactly, yes, but you are talking about it ensuring these schemes move forward. I want to suggest to you that affordable housing is not actually the problem. Just hear this from one of those very major housing developers on one of those large schemes, and this is what they say, "Across the Group we are focussing on maximising value rather than driving volume". What they are doing then is rationing supply, and this is right across the board with these large developers. They are rationing supply to drive up prices and drive down volume. In fact, they are land banking. What I want to put to you is, on the basis of that report

about large schemes, and on the basis of these being driven by large developers who are trying to drive down volume, do you agree that land banking is a problem?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I think it is pernicious and I gave a speech, I do not think you were there, where I said that we would be prepared to use compulsory purchase order (CPO) powers.

Nicky Gavron (AM): That is good, right.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I mean that, because I do think that to constrict supply in order to push up prices by land banking is plainly against the economic interest of this city. We need to be absolutely clear that that is not going on, where it is demonstrably. I know you love it. The more tyrannical I am the more you love it. I do mean it because I think it is a problem.

Nicky Gavron (AM): Yes. I am very, very glad to hear that now. The point I am trying to make is the majority of these homes, 177,000, are large schemes. Large land developers land banking. There are hundreds of thousands of Londoners on waiting lists, nearly 1 million actually. You have 177,000 homes --

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): 210,000.

Nicky Gavron (AM): -- sitting there and they could anyway go ahead without renegotiating the affordable housing requirements. What we are looking at is another giveaway to the big guys. We are looking at their profits going up and affordable housing going down. What we need is to get these schemes moving without forfeiting the affordable housing. I want to ask you how are you going to do that and by when?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): As I say, I think it is better to have a percentage of something than 100% of nothing. I would rather see these schemes go ahead with some affordable housing than simply not go ahead at all and that is why I have said what I said. By the way do not forget, viewers who have not been tuning in for the last four or five years, may want to be reminded that we have built a record number of affordable homes in the last five years and we are on target to do even better.

Nicky Gavron (AM): Boris, you are missing a point.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I think it is relevant to considerations that we are incredibly active and dynamic in building more affordable homes and if you constantly deny that that will ever happen.

Nicky Gavron (AM): Boris, the point is they will not build, even if you give them this giveaway of saying, "Don't put any affordable housing" you just put their value up they are not going to build. You are going to have to do naming and shaming, CPOing, lobbying the Government, changing your own planning rules. You have got to do something, 177,000 homes, large developers sitting there and they could be used.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): They could be. I am all in favour of using the CPO powers, I have said that. In the end we have to respect property rights in this country to a certain degree. We do not live in a Stalinist system, Nicky, much though you may wish we did. Private property is what it is. I cannot take it off people willy-nilly. This is not Zimbabwe, or whatever. Where there are clear cases of land banking, where people could go ahead with developments it would be massively to the benefit of this city. Not just social homes of one kind and another, but homes for private rent of a kind that Tom Copley [AM] has been talking about. All those things need to happen and they need to happen fast. That is why I said what I have said about CPO powers.

Nicky Gavron (AM): Yes, but not at the expense of affordable housing.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Not necessarily, no.

Darren Johnson (Chair): Thank you. Assembly Member Arbour.

Tony Arbour (AM): A simple way of dealing with the problem, Mr Mayor, would be that you impose a condition, and indeed local boroughs imposed a condition which said, that the "Development hereby approved shall be completed by ..." Currently planning consents say, "Development must be commenced by ...". You will be able to deal with the problem of land banking if the simple condition, as I have expressed, were to be put in. You may like to think that perhaps that could go into the next London Government Act, but clearly that would deal with the problem at a stroke.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Yes. There are other reasons. There was a huge credit crunch. Many of these developers were effectively underwater. Do not forget that the banks that supported them were effectively underwater. They were in very difficult positions for a very long time, thanks to the disastrous financial policies of the last Labour Government, which are worth remembering. What I am trying to get at is that the reasons not all schemes have not got ahead are not just to do with the greed of developers, there are a plethora of reasons, but where there is land banking, where there is that kind of evasion, I think it should be stamped out.

Darren Johnson (Chair): Thank you. Assembly Member Malthouse?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I am being heckled again by my friend here [John Biggs AM] who is talking about my tax-dodging friends, when he supported a well-known candidate at the last Mayoral election, whose tax affairs I think did not --

Darren Johnson (Chair): The rule on heckling is no heckling unless it is quick and witty in a natural break that does not speak over another member. We are moving on now to Assembly Member Malthouse.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): You cannot say that. That is ridiculous. Quick and witty heckling?

Kit Malthouse (AM): Mr Mayor, do you think there may be a case to be made that all the impositions that are now being placed on developers from the Social Housing Requirement Section 106, stamp duty, corporation tax, all the rest of it, that this is all adding up to quite a large bill that may well be chocking off development in London rather than easing it?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I think as I was saying to Nicky [Gavron AM] just now, there are lots of reasons why developments have not gone ahead, but I have said what I have said about CPO powers.

Kit Malthouse (AM): Given the acute crisis, which I think you recognise, in London, do you think there might be a policy objective that could be achieved by having some kind of easing of some of those, or indeed a window of opportunity where this often spurs activity? Where you create a window where there is some flexibility on the combination of factors that weigh on developers that might spur some starts?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): The best single thing you can do is to de-risk the development by effectively putting in the land. That is what we are proposing to do with the London Housing Bank and that is what I would like to do with all the land that is owned by the various state bodies in the city, and that is the opportunity to get things moving.

1390/2013 – Challenges to the Metropolitan Police Service **Joanne McCartney**

Are you confident that the Metropolitan Police Service will be able to cope with the current challenges that they face?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Thanks, Len. Yes, I am confident that the Metropolitan Police Service can meet the challenges that it faces. As I said just now overall crime is down 5.5% from last year. That means that we are on course to see the 20% reduction over four years in the seven neighbourhood crime types. Those are down, by the way, 6.5%, so they are doing even better than the overall rate.

Len Duvall (AM): In September 2012, you said, “I think it is important to keep police numbers high”. A lot of people say numbers do not matter. I think they do matter. I think it is important we keep them around 32,000. Why then do you think they are important to keep those police numbers high?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): It is an incredibly important question, because there is a controversy about this and actually other Members of the Assembly have taken me to task by saying, “Why do you have this arbitrary figure of 32,000? Surely you should listen to the police who say the numbers are not necessarily so important”. I remember when I arrived to talk to senior officers at the Metropolitan Police Service in 2008, one of the first conversations I had with Martin Tiplady, who was then Director of Human Resources, was that we did not need to be so focussed necessarily on numbers. I have thought about it deeply. I think that actually it is my job as the elected representative to make sure that we do focus, not just on reducing

crime, but also on numbers. Because, as I think you were hinting at just now, it is vital that you have large numbers of police out on the street where the public can see them. So although numbers are now down from where they were and where I would like them to be they are rising, and they will rise by, as I say, another 2,600 into the neighbourhoods by 2016. They will get up to around 32,000 by that time and I think that is a good thing. It means London is actually going through one of the biggest expansions in police numbers that we have seen. We will be at around 26,000 police constables. It has never been as high as that before.

Len Duvall (AM): Mr Mayor, we can debate some of those issues, I am not sure about your expansion issues, but since May 2010 we have lost now, according to your figures, and Metropolitan Police Service figures, MOPAC figures, whatever you want to call them, whatever is there in the domain, 3,000 Police Officers and almost 2,000 Police Community Support Officers (PCSOs). Some of those are in the boroughs, some of those will come out of other specialist services and some of those will be some of our most experienced uniformed staff. We should say, yes your goal is to get to that in three years' time but we are talking about what is happening now to the police service and the pressures they are facing now, and there is a thing called police numbers and there is actual police officers recruited and operational, in that sense. Are you not concerned about the police's ability to cope?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Obviously I am always concerned that the police should have the best support possible, the best financial and political support that I can give them, and we do. That is why it is so important to make the case to Government for the funding that we need to keep numbers high. I think it is common ground basically around here that numbers are a factor and numbers objectively matter per se. That is why we are recruiting 5,000 in the current period and there will be nearly 1,000 more by August. As I said, on the 2011 figures, which are the relevant comparative figures, because I think as you said yourself just now the 2010 figures contain lots of officers on borough strength who have now been allocated elsewhere, so that was not the relevant comparator. On the 2011 figures there will be 2,600 more in the neighbourhood, so I think about 1,100 more on borough strength. London, in that respect is unlike any other metropolitan area in any other big city in Britain. We are actually recruiting more officers.

Len Duvall (AM): I think time is still out whether it is increased capacity, but it is less people delivering the same tasks. Crimes might be going down but earlier on we have already worked out that performance, with some qualification, as one of the colleagues said earlier on, can be questioned around what is going on in the Metropolitan Police Service and the pressures they face.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Yes.

Len Duvall (AM): Let us go to Operation Yewtree then. In terms of questions to the Police and Crime Committee the Deputy Commissioner [Craig Mackey] says, "There's no problem about capacity, we've got access to thousands of detectives" ho, ho, ho, "and we're OK". On 11 May 2013, it was reported that seven agency workers from Reed Specialist Recruitment, were recruited to add to the 27 officers working on Yewtree. These are agency workers who are former Police Officers. Who knew? They might have been officers that the Metropolitan

Police Service has just let go, are now being re-employed back into the Metropolitan Police Service to work on that specific operation, important investigation I think you would say, into alleged sexual crimes, Jimmy Savile and others. Despite what the police gave in terms of assurance the Police and Crime Panel, are you not concerned that that those issues are coming through? When, in your conversations with Sir Bernard Hogan-Howe and his senior management team, was there any discussion with you about the move to this type of work about agency workers being introduced to an operational environment? I suppose can we question whether it is good value or not, while we are watching that, but also about accountability for mistakes and some of those issues that may come on in the future? What conversations have you had?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I think those are all serious points and have I received general assurances, as we all have, that there is adequate strength and resource to cope with the incredible pressures that the Metropolitan Police Service faces to deal with issues that are of national concern.

On your specific question about the role of Reed Agency workers to supplement the Yewtree, the Savile inquiry, and whether they have been drawn from recently ex-police officers, I mean that is something we need to get to the bottom of. I cannot give you an answer now. Again, I will undertake to make sure that MOPAC looks carefully at the issue, the particular pressures that are being caused by these national investigations. The best of my information at the moment is that they are coping very well, clearly the Metropolitan Police Service is best placed to deal with this kind of thing, but it helps us in the argument to Government for funding. It is absolutely absurd that what is effectively a police force fulfilling a national function should not be properly funded. We will be making that case consistently over the next few years.

Len Duvall (AM): Do you not find it amazing that a senior Police Officer, I am quite supportive of that Police Officer, but can say something to an official body but actually the actions of an organisation is doing something different around that? It is assurances we have got the capacity to do this, we can do this and then find out later on --

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): This is Craig [Mackey]?

Len Duvall (AM): Yes. Does that not really worry you in some ways?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Len, before I --

Len Duvall (AM): No, it is not meant to be a critical comment.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): No, I know what you are saying, but can we just dig into this because the truth is I do not know the answer? I do not know exactly how many Reed Agency workers have been employed on Yew Tree, it is the first I have --

Len Duvall (AM): Seven.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Let us dig into the question and see what answers we can get for you.

Len Duvall (AM): OK, let us turn very quickly then to water cannon then, Mr Mayor. It is really about the form of debate and the issues of when we stopped policing by consent and those conversations. You, in the past, Mr Mayor have said you believe it is an option for discussion to be held in reserve, and I think you have made your position clear about water cannon.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Oh, water cannon, yes.

Len Duvall (AM): Yes, so in public order in terms of those issues. We already know from Police Officers in the past saying this is not the wonder tool to control, right, so it is an option. It may not be appropriate for use on our streets if there was a public order issue. What I cannot understand in the nature of the debate is how come this has dribbled out in bits and pieces. Why have you not led the debate around the conversation about public order policing in terms of Londoner's trust and confidence in London and about the need for it, or not? Is there not, in the back of the minds, that we are really resorting to these issues because we have not got enough police officers to do riot training so you are using the resulting technology rather than increasing numbers?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): No, I do not think that is right, Len. I really do not think that is right. I think that there is a great deal of confidence about riot training, a great deal of confidence now about how the Metropolitan Police Service would respond in the event of any disturbances of this kind in 2011. I think huge lessons were learnt. I think possibly, if I had to explain it, and perhaps we do need a wider debate about some of these things, but what I would say, I do not think the Metropolitan Police Service wants to be in any position. I do not want to be in any position ever again where people say, "Well why don't you have access to this or that tool?" As it happens, water cannon, I do not think it is remotely likely to deploy it. I think what Sir Bernard Hogan-Howe is saying the option should at least be there and I think the public will be reassured by the idea that the option is at least there.

Len Duvall (AM): Shouldn't you be leading the debate then to get the conversation out into the open and for a proper discussion to take place about the pros and cons but also about the honesty of the effectiveness of this tool?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Well, yes.

Len Duvall (AM): I think it can be effective in some places, it might not be effective in others, but do you not think that is your role as Police Commissioner?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I think that is very fair. It is, and I think it is good that we are having this discussion now, because that is after all the function of this body. I do think that there is a case for the Metropolitan Police Service to have the option of using that tool. I do not myself. I know that Bernard shares his view. I do not believe that it is very likely at all that the Metropolitan Police Service will be called upon to use it, but I think what most

members of the public would rather feel is that it is there in reserve in the very unlikely event that it might be of benefit in controlling certain situations. I think the chances of that happening are very remote.

Len Duvall (AM): Also held in reserve though, Mr Mayor, would you not be concerned that some of the conversations that may have taken place in terms of if there was a managed process for this, at least conversations with Londoners about policing of London that if there was a discussion, which I find amazing it did not get more coverage, but also the possible need for firearms in public order situations was discussed at a MOPAC Challenge meeting. Has this ever been discussed with you in your role as elected Police and Crime Commissioner?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): It certainly did not happen, because I do not remember that discussion from any of the MOPAC Challenge meetings that I have chaired. I think there was one that I did not chair.

Len Duvall (AM): You still believe in the model of policing by consent?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I do, and I think that if you look at the way that the London police behave and the trust in which their role, their relations with the public, it is still the case that the public are the police and the police are the public and that is the most important thing. They are not different from us, they are not *Carabinieri*, they are a public police force who do not have a different arms status and that is very important.

Len Duvall (AM): I am told it is the Home Secretary who has sanctioned the use of water cannons on the streets of London, should that not be you?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): As you know, there is a joint approach to the police in London, for many of the national functions that we discussed earlier, and the answer is I can tell you categorically that I cannot believe for one second that any Commissioner of the Metropolitan Police Service would dream of using water cannon on the streets of London without having the sanction of the Mayor.

Len Duvall (AM): Currently, Mr Mayor, according to a letter that we are in possession of, you do not have a right, it is the Home Secretary that has that right. Maybe you ought to look into it, because I do believe you are the elected Mayor of London, you are the Police and Crime Commissioner and if there are checks and balances on the use of these tools to help effective policing then it is you and you need to take that up and you need to look into it.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Yes. I have not seen that, I do not know which letter you are talking about there.

Len Duvall (AM): It is from the Assistant Commissioner.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): To?

Len Duvall (AM): I will give you a copy. To Joanne McCartney.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): As I say, I think there is not the smallest chance of any water cannon being used on the streets of London without it being sanctioned by this place. That is completely inconceivable and I am sure Members will agree with that.

Darren Johnson (Chair): Thank you. Assembly Member Jones.

Jenny Jones (AM): You have changed your tune on the issue of water cannon, because in the past you said, "This is a great city of free speech and we do not want to see any arms race with protestors" but now you are saying you approve of using these machines.

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

Jenny Jones (AM): No, you have, because why else would you allow them to be on the streets of London?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): No, I think perhaps you were not here the last five minutes. What I said was that I was in favour of the option being held in reserve.

Jenny Jones (AM): That means you are in favour of their use.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): If you say do I approve of these things being used on the streets, that goes directly to what Len [Duvall AM] just asked me. Under any circumstances if the police wanted to use water cannon, which I think is vanishingly unlikely, but if they did they would certainly have to get the approval of the Mayor.

Jenny Jones (AM): So you are in favour of spending many millions of pounds, because they cost £1.3 million each, then there is the training for the officers, updated all the time, there is the storage there is the maintenance, storage in central London, because they are very difficult to move around. You are in favour of spending all that money but you are not in favour of using them. Have I got that right, or have I got that wrong?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Yes, I am in favour of Britain having an independent nuclear deterrent but I am not in favour of using it on Luxembourg just to show them who is boss.

Jenny Jones (AM): Mr Mayor, can you stick to water cannon? Do you not see any contradiction in wanting to have them but not being prepared to use them?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): No, I do not see any contradiction. In fact, I think the argument speaks for itself and what we want to do is make sure the police --

Jenny Jones (AM): So you are in favour of spending all the money on having them, all the training, all the storage, all the maintenance, you are in favour of spending all the money but you are not in favour of using them?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I think they would be --

Jenny Jones (AM): I am trying to get clear. What do you say?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Obviously in extraneous, I can imagine, as I think Len [Duvall AM] himself conceded, there are circumstances in which the threat or even the use of water cannon might be valuable. I think it vanishingly unlikely that we will actually deploy them, but to have that option is valuable, just as it is vanishingly unlikely that we will face a nuclear strike from North Korea.

Jenny Jones (AM): Focus on water cannon, Mr Mayor.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): You might as well have the ability to deter it in the form of a strategic nuclear weapon.

Jenny Jones (AM): Do you know that the previous chair of the Police Authority said that the truth is that water cannon do not stop a riot? So, you are spending money on something that will not work and that you will not approve, or you will approve. I still have not quite got it. You will approve it, or you will not approve it? You just want to approve the money, the spending on it, is that right?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I think there might be circumstances in which it could be used.

Jenny Jones (AM): Thank you.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): As I said, I think Kit [Malthouse AM] is certainly right.

Jenny Jones (AM): You appointed him.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I think he is certainly right that the use of water cannon will not necessarily stop --

Jenny Jones (AM): I am sorry, you are repeating yourself, Mr Mayor.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Lots of things are essential for stopping riots but it would be foolish and I think Londoners would not want us to rule out the use of such a facility.

Jenny Jones (AM): Can we stop the clock?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): It makes sense to me to give the police that option, even though I am not disposed to use it and I hope that is clear.

Darren Johnson (Chair): Thank you.

1768/2013 - Commonwealth Games 2022 (1)

Andrew Boff

What is your initial, rough estimate, of the cost to the taxpayer of hosting the 2022 Commonwealth Games?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Yes, and the answer to this, Andrew, is obviously that there has not even been a guesstimate of the cost of hosting the Commonwealth Games. Clearly it would be far, far lower than the Olympics, a tiny fraction of that, because we have all the venues already. By the way, I am pro it. I think it would be a great thing to host the Commonwealth Games 2022. It would be wonderful for London. I would support such a bid, but it is up to Commonwealth Games England to make the bid and not to us.

Andrew Boff (AM): Mr Mayor, I am for all sorts of things that I do not know the price off, and then curiously enough I change my mind when I see the tag.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): You were against the Olympics.

Andrew Boff (AM): Tessa Jowell [MP for Dulwich and West Norwood] famously said, "Had we known what we know now would we have bid for the Olympics? Almost certainly not."

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I know. Labour was against the Olympics, we rescued.

Darren Johnson (Chair): Let us not argue about the Olympics. Members, stop squabbling about the Olympics.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I am just winding them up.

Darren Johnson (Chair): Let Assembly Member Boff continue his question on the Commonwealth Games.

Andrew Boff (AM): Thank you. Mr Mayor, Tessa Jowell was for it and she thought she knew the price. You are saying you are for the Commonwealth Games and you do not know what the price is.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Yes, I am. There is a risk. Tessa did a fantastic job in getting the Games and working for the Olympics. I think she later tried to clarify what she meant. I do not think that she remotely meant to say that it was a mistake to go ahead with the Olympic Games. If she did, if it came out that way, she regretted it almost immediately. I think it was a great investment for this country and indeed for London. I think the Olympics were a wonderful thing, where we really are seeing economic benefits and impact from it.

I want to see the cost benefits for the Commonwealth Games. If we bid for it, and I hope we will, I will make sure, Andrew, that you get a rundown of what we think the economic upside would be as well as the cost.

Andrew Boff (AM): Will this rundown be one that is in public, or restricted from the public, as we had in the case of the Olympic Stadium and all the other things that took place on the Olympic site that we were not privy to

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): You will get a public account. Of course.

Andrew Boff (AM): Thank you very much, Mr Mayor.

1391/2013 - LSP5

Navin Shah

How is the public consultation for draft LSP5 progressing?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Thanks, Navin. This is actually going pretty well, I think. The consultation is extensive, there are 24 public meetings taking place across London. It is due to close, thanks to the excellent work being done by Assembly Member Cleverly the consultation is going along at a blistering pace. Some are very well attended, some less well attended but a lot of people getting their points across and the consultation is due to end on 17 June.

Navin Shah (AM): Thank you and good morning, Mr Mayor. Whilst I appreciate your response, I want to talk about the board level attendance time, sir, which has raised serious questions. London Fire Brigade's (LFB) own plan admits that there is a link between fire and deprivation. When you actually look at the figures of the 100 most deprived wards in London, 76 of them will see an increase in the time it takes for the fire engine to arrive at the incident site. Is it not scandalous that you are putting poorest Londoners at risk by promoting closure of fire stations right across London?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): It is obviously an interesting new accusation. Actually I am told that there is no evidence of a discernible pattern by area or borough and the brief that we have here from the LFEPA is just the trends of the number of fire deaths in an individual borough may vary from the London-wide trends, "Fire deaths are relatively random events, there is no discernible pattern by area or borough" is what the information is that I have.

Navin Shah (AM): Mr Mayor, obviously --

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): The key data that I think people want to focus on is overall deaths by fire were running at about 200 a year in London in the 1980s. They were about 100 a year in the 1990s and they are now down to about 50 a year. Incidents from fire have come down 18% in the last four years alone. That is due to the fantastic work of the LFB and we are supporting them in trying to get the best possible organisation of their resources to continue to fight fire and bring down deaths.

Navin Shah (AM): Mr Mayor, quite clearly you have not read your paperwork or done the research or looked at the research because these are the board level figures which come from

fire consultation documents as well as from the GLA Datastore, which clearly show what the scenario is, that deprived areas will be hit the hardest.

Mr Mayor, let me put it to you that it is, therefore, scandalous that you are cutting back the cover in London and that the poorest areas of London, of this city, will be hit the hardest. All of this you are doing so that you can put one penny of council tax back to the Londoners. You seem to be very clearly more interested in supporting and appealing to the Tory shires than protect the deprived areas and Londoners when it comes to their own safety.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Well, Navin, obviously I am used to having a bit of abuse, but my job is to promote the interest of the whole city and to make sure that the maximum possible number of Londoners receive the kind of protection and coverage that they need. What we can do with these reforms is bring another four boroughs within the minimum times, both for the first and the second appliance. Actually, in your own borough there are significant improvements. I believe that on 17 May 2013, on Friday, you launched a petition against the proposed changes against Stanmore Fire Station and you denounced what we are proposing. You went to Stanmore Fire Station, Navin, and denounced me. Actually, I think you may not have been aware that these proposals will give that fire station and additional engine and actually the proposals will improve attendance times in Harrow.

Navin Shah (AM): Mr Mayor, let me also tell you that in my borough of Brent, Kilburn, which is one of the most deprived wards that will be hit by the delay in fire engine response time, the fact is clearly that this is a gross neglect on your part that you are putting the risk of Londoners by closing fire stations and that is what you are doing, nothing less, nothing more than that. Thank you. I read your comments.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Navin, you can take it from me that in spite of what you have said, your own borough is actually going to get a decrease in response times - that is to the good. Yes, it is perfectly true that there will be variations across London, but the overall objective of the 5th London Safety Plan (LSP5) is to bring a wider area of the city within the minimum response times and, thereby, to keep driving down death from fires. That is the view of experienced professionals who, as I say, consecrated their lives to fighting fire in --

Darren Johnson (Chair): Thank you. There are lots of other Assembly Members want to come in on this now. Assembly Member Twycross.

Fiona Twycross (AM): Will you commit to attending the remaining consultation meetings to hear the concerns of Londoners who are seeing their fire service cut?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): No.

Fiona Twycross (AM): For example, you might like to attend tonight's meeting in Lewisham or did your reception People's Question Time in Catford at put you off?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Wild horses, Fiona, would not keep me away from Lewisham at any time. Unfortunately I cannot get along there tonight. What I can say is that

this is a serious and valid consultation. I am sure that the meeting will be excellent tonight. Loads of people want to get the points across. We are listening, and you saw from what happened with the Police and Crime Plan, which was a very good plan, we did listen, we did make some changes and if there are genuine arguments which can be put by people in Lewisham and elsewhere, where we can make tweaks that will improve coverage without frustrating the general objective then of course we will do that.

Fiona Twycross (AM): I think people are looking for a little bit more than tweaks and I think it is an indictment of your cuts and your policies that you are disowning responsibility for the consultation by not attending.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Nonsense.

Fiona Twycross (AM): If you do not believe in your own cuts enough to stand up and defend them in a public meeting, even for example at the Southwark meeting where you actually were walking up the stairs while the meeting was taking place. Why should Londoners accept them?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I do not remember a meeting that I was walking up the stair at.

Fiona Twycross (AM): I think you were walking up the stairs in the Southwark meeting last week. We were there and we could hear you walking up the stairs. I will leave it at that. Thank you.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I am everywhere. Unless I specifically tell you otherwise, Fiona, I am at all your meetings you just cannot see me.

Darren Johnson (Chair): Before we explore this too much, Assembly Member Cleverly.

James Cleverly (AM): Thank you. Mr Mayor, would you share my surprise at the tone of Councillor Shah's questions, using phrases like 'targeting' and that kind of stuff, when the actual figures are that the average response times in the wards that he is claiming are being targeted are five minutes six seconds and these appraisals will increase by just 22 seconds? Yet in the part of London where we are putting additional resources the average response time is currently six minutes 31 seconds. That is one minute 25 seconds slower than the wards which he claims are being targeted. Actually what we are doing is ensuring that Londoners, irrespective of where they are, central or outer London, get a fair and equitable service from the LFB. Actually, even post the implementation of LSP5, if it were to go through as it is currently proposed, will still see those very same inner London boroughs enjoying a faster response time than the outer London, or indeed anywhere else in the country and almost anywhere else in the world.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Yes, I think we have heard this morning already that some of these policies are really aimed at greater fairness. I think it is surprising that that should be contested. I think it is particularly surprising and paradoxical that Navin should be

campaigning against LSP5 that would actually result in an improvement in a significant part of the constituency that he represents.

Richard Tracey (AM): Mr Mayor, I have total confidence in the London Fire Commissioner [Ron Dobson] and his officers and indeed it seems to me what they are doing is very much in line with what Sir Ken Knight, a former Commissioner, was suggesting for fire services in the rest of the country.

Can I just bring you back to this matter of these public meetings? Apparently they are being held at the insistence of the Labour, Liberal Democrat and Green members of LFEPA. We had one in Wandsworth a few weeks ago, which I and various Conservatives attended, and so did the Chairman James Cleverly. The only person from any of the other parties there was Navin Shah. He was there, and all credit to him, but there was not a single Labour Councillor from Wandsworth, or anybody from the Liberal Democrats or the Green Party.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Unbelievable. Is Fiona [Twycross AM] aware of this? I mean this is unbelievable.

Richard Tracey (AM): I imagine she is - she seems to be able to quote other facts about Wandsworth. She had this morning talked to something, I cannot remember what it was. The fact is not a single one of them, other than Navin Shah himself. Last night there was one in Merton, there were only 21 people there.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Twenty-one people in Merton and Labour did not show up? That is unbelievable. Do they not care?

Richard Tracey (AM): Mr Mayor, surely there is a serious cost to all this, holding these meetings in which clearly the public are not interested, nor indeed obviously are the Labour Party or the Liberal Democrats or the Green Party, if they do not turn up.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I do think it is very odd, if what you say is true, of those parties to insist on this method of consultation and then not even take advantage of it. I do congratulate the members of the public who are going. I think it is very good. I particularly congratulate James Cleverly and the officers of the LFB, who are making the case for the LSP5. The impression I am getting, from what you are saying is actually as with the Police and Crime Plan, they are having a great deal of success and they are being very effective in getting their message across and I congratulate them on that.

Richard Tracey (AM): They are indeed. At the Wandsworth meeting there was one of the three members of Parliament, a Conservative Member of Parliament. There were two Cabinet Members from the council, one of them the Community Safety Member and various others of us, and indeed the council's LFEPA member on the platform. It just shows it is Conservatives who care about the safety of London.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Absolutely right. I think there is a general problem at the moment of rudderlessness in the Labour Party and you do notice it at all levels.

Richard Tracey (AM): Something to do with their leader I think.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Yes.

Gareth Bacon (AM): Mr Mayor, the consultation is important but there is an argument that has been done in an overkill way. I attended one in Newham. Newham is one of the boroughs where there is actually going to be a fire station closure. Only one member of the public turned up who asked three or four questions, one of which was why we had not laid on refreshments for the general public.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): What was the answer, by the way? Cost-cutting?

Gareth Bacon (AM): Cost-cutting, because we are having lots of meetings that people are not turning up to.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Very good.

Gareth Bacon (AM): I want to return to something that Navin Shah [AM] said, which is the usual punch line about the savings in the fire brigade having to be forced through by you in order to fund the 1p per day council tax cut. As we know, because we trailed over this in great detail during the budget-setting process here and also at LFEPA, the council tax cut that you announced as part of your budget earlier this year amounts to around about £9.3 million a year, and that would release the council tax freeze grants, which could go to whatever you choose. The argument from the Labour Group is that it should go towards protecting the Fire Service. That of course would realise around about £18.6 million over two years, but the fire brigade has to make savings in excess of £40 million over two years. So, I am very interested, Mr Mayor, in your views as to how £18.6 million can actually cover in excess of £40 million?

Even Andrew Dismore [AM] stopped that line before the Labour Group booted him off the Fire Authority. Do you think it is a case of Navin Shah scaremongering for political purposes or --

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Has Andrew been booted off of our authority?

Gareth Bacon (AM): Tragically he has.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): That is outrageous. Why are they picking on Dismore?

Darren Johnson (Chair): Mayor, if you can answer the question, rather than talking about Mr Dismore.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Sorry, I am momentarily overcome.

Gareth Bacon (AM): The question, Mr Mayor, is whether or not it is that Mr [Navin] Shah [AM] is incapable of adding up incorrectly or whether he is scaremongering?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Your point, Gareth, is the right one because there is no connection between these two things at all. The savings that we need could not in any way be found by jiggling around with the council tax. What we need to do is to get on with the reform that actually when you dig into it the senior officers in the LFB think that they would have to do anyway. You need to, in tough times particularly, get on with sensible reforms. This is a way of improving the allocation of resources in the LFB whilst continuing to drive down deaths from fires. That is what they want to do and let us wait to see the outcome of the consultation. Let us wait to see what happens in Lewisham. Let us take all the data, all the evidence we get. If we can make improvements to the plan, yes of course we will, but let us get on and do it.

Murad Qureshi (AM): Mr Mayor, a fire can quadruple in intensity every two minutes.

Murad Qureshi (AM): There are three particular wards where I think this is of significance. In Tachbrook, Vincent Square and Warwick Ward in the south of the City of Westminster. That is not surprising because the proposal is Westminster Fire Station will close, Knightsbridge Fire Station will close and there will be one less engine at Chelsea Fire Station. What explanation can you give to the residents that you are there to protect them at their moment of need? Is the Fire Service adequate for their purposes in central London, where there clearly is a gaping hole?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Sure. The best judgement I can rely on is that of the Fire Commissioner and his team who think that they will continue to be able to provide excellent coverage in those wards. I think the Westminster consultation has taken place, hasn't it?

Murad Qureshi (AM): No, not yet, it is on 11 June.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I am sorry. Doubtless, that will be raised there. There will be a variety of views, that argument will be put to Ron [Dobson], to James [Cleverly AM], it will be actively discussed. Let us look at the data. Let us look at how that really works and if you are right and there needs to be a modification of the LSP5 then we are of course open to it. This is a genuine consultation.

Murad Qureshi (AM): Can I also inform you, Mr Mayor, that the full Council meeting at the City of Westminster on 1 May unanimously passed a motion condemning those fire cuts. Similarly in the Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea on 6 March, Councillor Victoria Borwick actually voted for that as well. Since then we have heard the results of the impact of these cuts. I think the biggest reassurance people want is that you are not flogging off the central London fire stations because they potentially give the --

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): No, I understand. It may be that Westminster is going to be unlike some of these other consultations we have been hearing about this morning in that it will be a hotly contested interesting discussion. Let us see how that discussion goes.

Murad Qureshi (AM): Turn up on 11 June 2013 and I am sure you will get a hot reception in Pimlico.

Jennette Arnold OBE (AM): A couple of points. Mr Mayor, it just seems to me that you have been misled. The LSP5 is not fair and equitable, and I say this when you look at all the wards in my constituency they have all got increases on the arrival of the first appliances and De Beauvoir ward in Hackney, where we had a full assembly hall meeting, they are being asked to hold their breath for an extra three-and-a-half minutes. Can you hold your breath for three-and-a-half minutes whilst you wait for a fire engine? No you cannot. Will you be brave enough to come to the Islington consultation to hear the people and hear what they think about your proposal to close Clerkenwell Station? That meeting is next Tuesday at Islington Town Hall at 7.00pm. Will you be there?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I think it highly unlikely, Jennette, but I will have a look.

Jennette Arnold OBE (AM): You should be there. It is your home borough.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I will tell you why I will not be there, because I think what we want to have in this debate is maximum possible elucidation of the issues and the minimum possible political argy-bargy and point scoring.

Jennette Arnold OBE (AM): You could go and put your side of the argument.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I am afraid, much though I respect my political opponents, I think that they would use it as an opportunity really just to waste everybody's time. So let us concentrate on the facts, let us look at the arguments and let us hear the discussions. To get back to Navin's [Shah AM] original question, the consultation is going well and I think most people can see that the LFB is continuing to do a very good job of driving down fires. Our job is to give them the tools to do that job.

Valerie Shawcross CBE (AM): Mr Mayor, we had 150 people in this chamber from Southwick, objecting to the fire station closures. We had 200 people in the Lambeth Town Hall objecting to these fire station closures. We have seen Clapham Tories petitioning against the closure of Clapham Fire Station. Are you happy that the closures and the removals in Lambeth and Southwark will mean that one-third of those boroughs, that is 13 wards of those boroughs, will actually have an attendance time of above and well above the target time? Clapham town is going to be eight minutes attendance time. Are you happy with that? Do you support it?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Well, as I say, there is a consultation going on.

Valerie Shawcross CBE (AM): Yes, we heard that, Mr Mayor. Do you want to do this?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): If you want the same answer then ask the same question. I do think that what we need to do now is get the maximum possible discussion of the facts and I think that the Commissioner, to the best of my knowledge, is presenting a very powerful case for the reforms. If we can improve on that LSP5, if there are ways of making Londoners even safer, whilst achieving the overall objectives then obviously we should do that.

1771/2013 - Police resources

Roger Evans

My constituent recently managed to remove his DNA from the police's database after a long legal battle. How much did the Metropolitan Police Service spend on fighting cases around the retention of DNA in the last year?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Yes. Roger, thanks. I very much welcome the changes by Government, which mean that under the Protection of Freedoms Act, innocent people who have their data stored can now retrieve that DNA and I am glad that your constituent was finally able to achieve that.

Roger Evans (Deputy Chair): All right, the only problem is that my constituent had to win a legal battle against the Metropolitan Police Service to be able to achieve it, Mr Mayor. You mentioned the early deletion procedure. Why is it still such a long process; it took my constituent four years; that is hardly early.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): As I said, the new law has only just come in, so I am afraid he was not able to benefit from that legal change.

Roger Evans (Deputy Chair): Yes, I am pleased you mentioned the new law actually, Protections of Freedoms Act 2012 is a good piece of Libertarian Coalition Conservative Lib Dem legislation but it will make a difference (hopefully a positive difference) to the way the Metropolitan Police Service conduct themselves. What steps are being taken to make sure that the Metropolitan Police Service will co-operate with the DNA and fingerprint element of the Protection of Freedoms Act?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): They will be under a legal compulsion to do so, and under the Protection of Freedoms Act they will have to comply.

Roger Evans (Deputy Chair): Yes, but our experience is that it is not just going to happen unfortunately. Do you have a task force at the Metropolitan Police Service who are looking at the impact of the new law and what they need to do? Is it something that the MOPAC will be taking and interest in at a MOPAC Challenge Meeting, for example?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I am not aware of large numbers of people seeking to (perhaps they are, I just do not know) make use of the Protection of Freedoms Act and I do not know what resource the Metropolitan Police Service needs to allocate to that. I am more than happy to find out and get back to you.

Roger Evans (Deputy Chair): Yes, I do not know the numbers either, but I am sure you would agree with me, Mr Mayor, that even if it was only one it would be a priority to make sure the legislation was complied with.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Yes, as I say, the only case I am aware of is your constituent's case and obviously he has now benefited from that; I do not know whether he was

able to get his DNA back before the law came in, but people in his position now have that protection.

1290/2013 - New Bus for London - Ultra Low Emission Zone

Stephen Knight

Do you expect your New Bus for London to meet the future emission standards for vehicles entering your planned Ultra Low Emission Zone from 2020?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Yes, Stephen, this is a question about whether the New Bus, the cleanest, greenest diesel hybrid of its kind, the cleanest, greenest diesel hybrid of any kind in the world, is going to comply with the Ultra Low Emission Zone (ULEZ) and I think the blunt answer is, I wish it could, but I think it unlikely that it will be compliant by 2020, in the same way that it is going to be very difficult for heavy goods vehicles to be compliant by 2020. There are some categories of vehicle, because of the very, very heavy loads that they are obliged to carry, it is difficult (with the current technology that I can see) to imagine an electric vehicle of the kind that I think we both want to see, or a hydrogen vehicle of the kind that we would all love to see, being able to do that with the current state of technology and looking at the relative cost of those technologies.

Electric buses have made great progress; I am a great supporter of electric buses. At the moment, the electric bus that I am really interested in and that the transport service thinks has the most promise for London is a single-decker. I am not aware of a double-decker electric bus that has a realistic prospect of being on the road by 2020.

Stephen Knight (AM): So, just to clarify, you are telling us that the New Bus for London is unlikely to be eligible to operate within the ULEZ from 2020?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): No, of course it will be eligible to operate, because the ULEZ will be constructed so as to be commonsensical. In the case of vehicles, which have to carry huge weights, you may have access to technology, Stephen, with your Lib Dem labs, you may have come up with some new engine powered by cucumbers or something, but that has yet to be discovered by science, but I am not aware of it so far. Perhaps you have a policy for nuclear-powered buses but we do not have them yet.

Stephen Knight (AM): Mr Mayor, we would hope, would we not, that the standard of science and the technology will advance over the next seven years so that the standard of buses will advance over seven years, and the emission of buses, and no doubt by 2020 there will be electric vehicles available or hybrids.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): For double-deckers?

Stephen Knight (AM): I have no doubt there are already electric buses available.

Darren Johnson (Chair): No, the Member is questioning you, not the other way around.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I have answered his question.

Stephen Knight (AM): We would hope, would we not, that the standard of emissions of the generation of buses that are available in 2020 will be much cleaner than the generation of buses today. Is the difference not, with the New Bus for London, Mr Mayor, that unlike other buses, which have a five to seven-year life in London and then are moved out, the New Bus for London is supposed to be with us for 15 years because it is being bought by TfL. We are locking in today's technology for the next 15 years and we are going to be operating in 15 years' time 15-year-old diesel-powered buses within, apparently, your ULEZ. Is that really what Londoners would understand by an ULEZ?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Yes. I think Londoners are full of massive commonsense and realise that at the moment, and you may have some superior insight, as I say, you may have the technology now or can see a way forward quickly to a zero tailpipe emissions double-decker bus that can be produced at reasonable cost.

Stephen Knight (AM): So will all buses be exempt from the ULEZ; is that what you are telling us?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Sorry, could I just finish. So far TfL does not think that is likely and what we are working on at the moment are zero tailpipe single-decker buses, which show a great deal of promise, electric buses or indeed hydrogen buses. The question is going to be cost. What the New Bus for London offers is the cleanest, greenest double-decker hybrid currently in existence and that is a fantastic achievement by London and it is a fantastic thing for British technology and you should be in favour of a triumph of British technology that is generating jobs in this country and if you are seriously suggesting that the economic prospects of this city and this country are going to be advanced by endlessly buying in buses from elsewhere around the world, when we are producing in Britain, in the United Kingdom, the cleanest, greenest hybrid double-decker bus already, I think you are completely nuts, and we should be going forward with a programme for cleaner buses and that is what we are doing.

Stephen Knight (AM): Is that what you are telling us; that diesel buses will be exempt from the restrictions of the ULEZ?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Yes, the answer is, of course, but what the people of London are hearing is that the Liberal Democrat policy is to ban double-decker buses; they want to ban our red bus, I mean that is the logical conclusion of what you are saying. You want to ban double-decker buses from the streets of London by 2020. Only a Liberal Democrat could do so. It grieves me that our coalition partners could lack any sense of history, beauty, decency.

Jenny Jones (AM): Boris, can you tell us what the miles per gallon are for the New Bus?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Yes. In tests the New Bus for London has done either 12 or 11.7 miles per gallon.

Jenny Jones (AM): Thank you. Have you done on-the-road tests for it?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Yes. We have not done directly comparable figures for the road tests.

Jenny Jones (AM): Thanks very much.

Kit Malthouse (AM): Very pleased to hear you mention hydrogen because of course you may want to remind Members that we do have a zero-emission bus fleet currently running; has been running for two or three years, the RV1 that runs along Tooley Street, which is entirely powered by hydrogen fuel cells and that, I am sure you would agree with me, hydrogen technology presents a very strong prospect for the future given the load-to-power ratio that you identified as a problem with batteries. Would you join me in congratulating Aston Martin who just had a hydrogen car complete the a lap of the Nürburgring 24-hour race on, whatever it was, Tuesday to great acclaim and success.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Yes, and I think the hydrogen buses, I mean they currently cost about £1 million each, which is obviously quite a lot for a bus. I am keen to progress that technology if it can become cheaper and maybe Stephen in his labs where he is beaver away on his contraptions to have a clean, green double-decker bus will find a way, maybe table-top fusion or some such solution will be fine for the --

Darren Johnson (Chair): Thank you.

1786/2013 - Planning changes

Steve O'Connell

Will the Mayor be having any discussions with the Government regarding the proposed planning changes for household extensions?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Thanks, Steve, yes. This is a serious matter and we are aware of it, Steve, and we made strong representations to Government, as you know, and you have made vociferous interjections on this point. It is very important that we do not allow this proposed change to be abused and to become an excuse for building eyesores and garden-grabbing.

Steve O'Connell (AM): Yes, thank you, Mr Mayor. This Government is jam-packed with good ideas about getting the economy moving, but the liberalisation of the planning system in this proposal I think we agree is ill-thought because it could, taken to the nth degree, lead to inappropriate extensions and neighbourhood tension. So, Mr Mayor, I take it that you are pleased with the success that we have had in getting the Government to reconsider its earlier proposals?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Yes, and there are going to be some changes to this, and we will monitor the whole progress of this very carefully to make sure that there is no garden-grabbing.

Steve O'Connell (AM): Yes, I mean certainly what I would ask also your support is around extending the notification period for neighbours. At the moment it is 21 days and we really want to ensure (bearing in mind this is a lighter touch in the planning arena) we would like that period extended certainly to 28 days and I would rather hope, Mr Mayor, that you could lend your support to that request.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): That sounds reasonable to me. Obviously there is a balance to be struck; people have to have a reasonable right to improve their homes, but what you cannot have is a complete annihilation of protections of the neighbourhood against excrescences and against garden-grabbing.

Steve O'Connell (AM): I think one other concern that we have is about the inability of councils to charge out the application costs to the applicant and you will know that borough councils, particularly their planning departments, are under a lot of pressure at the moment and we think that is rather inappropriate because it puts an impact on local taxpayers. So would you support us in urging that those costs can be charged out to the applicant, Mr Mayor?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): That sounds reasonable to me.

Steve O'Connell (AM): OK, thank you very much.

Andrew Boff (AM): Mr Mayor, much as I am a loyal Tory, do you not think that this policy is daft and expensive and divisive?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I certainly think it is capable of improvement and we have been arguing it, and that is the sense that we have been arguing. Actually I know that a lot of us have been making that point. You have been making that point very strongly, Andrew, and I think you are on the right lines. We want to see good development but we do not want to see the destruction of gardens and huge structures suddenly appearing all over London.

1796/2013 - Help to buy

Gareth Bacon

How will London benefit from the Help-to-Buy scheme announced by the Chancellor in March's Budget?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Gareth, thanks very much. London will benefit to the tune of half a billion in the Help-to-Buy programme and that will help many Londoners (and we discussed it endlessly this morning) to get a foot on the property ladder, which is currently inaccessible to them.

Gareth Bacon (AM): Yes, thank you, Chairman. Of course the Help-to-Buy scheme is aimed at new build, providing mortgages for new-build homes. Has your office done any kind of

analysis at this stage to show what impact this could have on the viability of construction projects in London?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): We do think it will help. It will certainly help, and apparently Barratt Homes are reporting particularly strong levels of interest and demand. Londoners will be able to buy homes up to the value of £600,000 by borrowing 20% of the value of their property interest-free for five years in return for the Government taking a stake in the equity of the property. I think this will help to get the housing market moving but we have to be realistic, Gareth, it is going to be a pretty small proportion of the total number of homes we need to supply. We need to supply hundreds of thousands of homes over the next five to ten years; that is going to be done by all the things we have been talking about, de-risking public land, getting the pension funds to invest in housing, giving London Stamp Duty Land Tax (SDLT), for instance, to spend on new housing or getting the value of SDLT to spend on new housing and so on.

Gareth Bacon (AM): Some critics of the scheme, not least the outgoing Governor of the Bank of England, feel if this scheme were prolonged for an indefinite period it would cause considerable economic problems, not least a massive housing boom that would be unsustainable. Do you agree with that? Do you agree it should be a temporary measure to provide a shot in the arm to the construction industry and also to provide people with a foothold on the ladder? If so, will you be working with the Government to make sure that there is no need to extend it?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I notice that house prices in London continue to remain extremely buoyant; they went up by 7.6% last year. I am concerned that the market is very, very strong at the moment. There is the risk in my view of a correction. I do not happen to think it will be a very severe correction because the demand is likely to remain so strong. What we certainly would not want to see is a sudden bust in asset prices of the kind that we saw in America. I think that is very unlikely and I think it is unlikely that this policy in particular will lead to that, but the crucial thing to do to manage the market is to increase supply. The problem in London and the problem in the rental market, the problem in affordable, can all be boiled down to a shortage of supply that needs to be addressed.

Gareth Bacon (AM): Thank you.

1392/2013 - SW London NHS reconfiguration

Onkar Sahota

In an open letter to the Government, Chris Grayling recently raised concerns that service reconfiguration in SW London will lead to the 'cannibalisation' of NHS services. Do you agree?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Yes, Onkar, thank you very much. This is a question about Chris Grayling's [Conservative Member of Parliament for Epsom and Ewell] concerns about his constituency, which is actually just outside London. The Clinical Commissioning Groups, the seven Clinical Commissioning Groups involved in that decision are going to be giving their views in the course of the next few weeks. There is going to be a widespread public

consultation probably in June. I think really that it would be inappropriate for me to comment on these proposals; it is up to local Health Commissioners, local commissioners of services and clinicians to decide.

Onkar Sahota (AM): Well. Mr Mayor, you have repeatedly given me this response that you believe the decision will be led by clinicians. You will know that the College of Emergency Medicine, the organisation representing Accident and Emergency (A&E) doctors, recently issued a report in which they made two key recommendations: (1) that urgent-care centres need to be established and collocated with A&E departments; and (2) that there is a significant problem with recruiting emergency doctors because the doctors are currently overworked and do not look at it as a good career progression. In London, we have got nine A&E departments closing and they are proposing to put standalone urgent care centres. Also, the evidence recently published in the *Mail on Sunday* says that there has been a 37% increase in emergency deaths in patients in Newark-on-Trent. The question is, do we wait for a firing gun in London before you intervene?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): My view is that overall there needs to be better outcomes for all Londoners and that is my job to work for that. I am concerned particularly about deaths disproportionately taking place at weekends when there is inadequate cover and I think we do need to think about reform and about ways of bringing health services closer to people.

1783/2013 - Homelessness prevention in London

Steve O'Connell

Would you agree that a lack of awareness of housing rights can be a key factor to becoming homeless and hence would you agree that, in tandem with local London Authorities, City Hall should have a duty to promote effective housing advice?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Thanks, Steve. Obviously this is an acute problem. I think I am right in saying you spent a night out on the street?

Steve O'Connell (AM): I did in Wallington. That is not the purpose of the question, but I did spend a night out to experience the traumas in Wallington.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): In Wallington, yes. At the moment, what we have is the No Second Night Out service that is there to catch people first bounce, as it were, to make sure that they do not spend more than one night out on the streets, and we have got funding into that and we are looking into whether boroughs' advice to homeless people is adequate, because there are some concerns about that at the moment, as I think you are indicating.

Steve O'Connell (AM): That is a point, I know, particularly in the Planning Committee, we are doing some work. They came along, they spoke to your strategy, particularly around no second night out, is gaining force and momentum. Certainly I think one issue is around the providing of information around homeless services and I think I have to ask you, in conjunction with the London Councils and others, to encourage that the homeless service providers ensure that there

is housing advice to get people off the street, because I think too often that advice is not freely given at the point of service, e.g. soup kitchens. Can I ask you then to urge that Ric [Richard Blakeway, Chair, London Delivery Board] particularly does some work around that to make sure that, across London, there is more information available to homeless people at point of contact so that they can see what opportunities that they particularly have?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Yes, we are concerned that some of the advice is not what it should be and certainly Ric, through the London Delivery Board, is taking that up.

Steve O'Connell (AM): I think you should, and also actually do some work with London Councils so it is a London piece so that we can actually bear down on homelessness, which is something that, with our burgeoning population, is a pressure on councils and other local authorities and hopefully everyone around this horseshoe will agree on that. So I thank you very much, Mr Mayor.

1319/2013 - Northern Ireland introduces a charge on plastic bags

Jenny Jones

In light of the Northern Ireland decision, will you call on the Government to introduce a mandatory charge on single-use bags issued by all retailers in England, and which by definition will apply to London retailers?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Yes, Jenny, as so often you are on the right path. We are looking at this very seriously. We had a meeting recently with Owen Paterson, the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, and he is very keen for us to run it. If you remember, this was a thing that London Councils wanted to do, and it all sort of ran into the sands. We are looking at what we could do to make sense of this. There are all sorts of options, including obviously a charge on plastic bags. We could do that; there may be other more technologically inventive solutions.

Jenny Jones (AM): My experience, as a Green, is generally that the technologically complex solutions do not work as well as the simple methods and other parts of Britain are doing it, but somehow England, with our Government, is choosing not to do it.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): That is because you want to punish people in some way; that is because the Greens always want to find some way of -- you hate technology.

Jenny Jones (AM): You, in your position, you could make a big difference on this and you could protect small businesses; you could bring in measures to protect small businesses, you could make a difference. You had it in your 2008 election manifesto but somehow you dropped it in 2012; I do not know if you thought it became a bad idea, I do not know, why did you drop it?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Basically, it just seemed something that we needed to deliver with the help of London Councils if we were going to make it work. We did not have the statutory power to do it on our own and it was not something that London Councils in the end

were able to get going. We are now though in discussion with the Government about ways in which we could run a pilot in this city and we are certainly looking at it.

Jenny Jones (AM): When you say, “a pilot”, how many organisations would that include?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Obviously, to work, it would have to apply to everybody who uses plastic bags.

Jenny Jones (AM): Why not just do it? Just do it. It is time to just do it like the rest of Britain.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): The rest of Britain?

Jenny Jones (AM): Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Yes, unfortunately I do not have the statutory power to do it myself. I could announce that I was banning plastic bags and unfortunately legally speaking I would be unable to enforce it.

Andrew Boff (AM): Mr Mayor, much as we all want to reduce the amount of plastic bags that there are, there is a risk that any introduction of a levy might penalise the small grocers who do not have the benefits of buying in bulk. It can be managed, but let us not have unintended consequences by this. Would it not be better for there to be a levy on packaging, which is used disproportionately by large supermarkets, whose distribution practices require excessive packaging of fresh fruit and vegetables, which the taxpayers subsidise through landfill?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Yes.

Andrew Boff (AM): Good. That is all we wanted. Thank you very much, Mr Mayor.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I am against surplus packaging too.

Darren Johnson (Chair): Thank you. That concludes the questioning; we got through all the questions on the Order Paper, so can I thank the Mayor for his answers and I thank Assembly Members for their questions today.

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