

London Assembly Mayor's Question Time – Thursday 16 May 2019

Transcript of Item 3 – Oral Update to the Mayor's Report

Jennette Arnold OBE AM (Chair): Now we come to Item 3. This is where the Assembly receives the Mayor's report covering the period from 8 March to 2 May 2019. The Mayor is going to give us a five-minute oral update – he can take less if he wants to – on matters occurring since the publication of his report. I have already received one request for an update, which has been provided to the Mayor, from Assembly Member Boff. Over to you, Mr Mayor.

Sadiq Khan (Mayor of London): Good morning. Chair, I would like to start by paying tribute to our dear friend, Samantha Heath, who passed away recently. Sam and I were both elected to Wandsworth Council in 1994 and as an Assembly Member and an environmental campaigner Sam helped devise some of the policies we are now implementing at City Hall. I know we will all miss her dearly.

Jennette Arnold OBE AM (Chair): Thank you.

Sadiq Khan (Mayor of London): On 8 April [2019] we launched the landmark Ultra Low Emission Zone (ULEZ) to help reduce toxic air pollution and to protect Londoners' health, and I am pleased to report that the ULEZ has been a huge success in its first month. On 17 February 2017, when I announced plans to bring in the ULEZ, the percentage of vehicles driving in the central London zone that were compliant was 39%. Since 8 April this year [2019], when the ULEZ began, 74% of vehicles detected in the central zone are compliant. That means that they have met the ULEZ standards over an average 24-hour period.

Vitaly, we have recorded a large reduction in the number of older, more polluting, non-compliant vehicles, with over 9,400 fewer of these vehicles detected on average every day in April [2019] compared to March [2019]. This excludes days which were affected by disruption or unusual traffic behaviour, such as bank holidays. This is building on the success of our other measures. As a result, since February 2017 there were 36,100 fewer older, more polluting, non-compliant vehicles seen in the zone on an average day, a reduction of around 58%.

This is already translating into real-world improvements in air quality, including a reduction of approximately 20% in nitrogen dioxide roadside concentrations in central London. This shows that I was right to ignore the Conservative objections to my measures to protect lives and I would ask all Assembly Members to join me in now supporting the ULEZ for the benefit of all Londoners.

Sadiq Khan (Mayor of London): Since we last met, I have also been working --

Jennette Arnold OBE AM (Chair): Just a moment. We have a standing order query.

Gareth Bacon AM: The Mayor has, as he has done repeatedly in previous circumstances, misrepresented the Conservative Group's position on the ULEZ. We are not opposed to the ULEZ. We have said this repeatedly. There are two party papers that were published two years ago where we welcomed the ULEZ. As the Mayor well knows, the reservation we have is about bringing it in early because of the impact it will have on small businesses, but we are not opposed to the ULEZ. We were in favour of it when it was conceived by his predecessor, Boris Johnson, and we remain in favour of it now.

Jennette Arnold OBE AM (Chair): No. No, sorry, Members, please give respect to the Member. He raised a standing order query. Can I just make it clear to Members that we are going to be respectful, for the next 12 months, of each other and this body. If we are not, then we might as well just adjourn and all go off and do whatever else we think we have to do that is as important as representing London and holding the elected Mayor of London to account.

I thank Assembly Member Bacon for bringing that to our attention through proper use of a standing order. I say this to the Mayor. We have heard the Leader of the Assembly [GLA Conservatives Group] clearly say that they are in favour but they have differences. I hope that you will accept those differences and then we can move on.

Sadiq Khan (Mayor of London): Chair, I accept that the Conservatives opposed me bringing this forward to April 2019, as has just been confirmed.

Jennette Arnold OBE AM (Chair): That is right.

Sadiq Khan (Mayor of London): All the improvements I have talked about would not have happened, had I listened to their objections. It has also been agreed that they are against me extending this so those who live up to the North and South Circular can also see the benefits. I am pleased he has clarified this, Chair.

Jennette Arnold OBE AM (Chair): Thank you.

Gareth Bacon AM: There was no doubt. We have been very clear.

Jennette Arnold OBE AM (Chair): There are other ways that we can get to this, on the Environment Committee and elsewhere, and maybe a Plenary when we are dealing with papers in front of us as Members with the facts.

Sadiq Khan (Mayor of London): Chair, can I, through you, thank the Conservatives for that point of order? I hope the future ones are as helpful as that one was to me.

Since we last met, I have also been working on a number of other strategies and initiatives to improve the lives of Londoners. This includes releasing figures that show a record-breaking number of affordable homes were started with City Hall's support last year [2018/19], continuing to do everything possible to tackle violent crime, not only by cracking down on criminals but on tackling the root causes of violent crime, and continuing to stand up for the best interests of Londoners by putting pressure on the Government to give the British people the final say on Brexit. Thank you. I look forward to answering further questions this morning.

Chair, as you indicated, there has been one request for an oral update, which I will deal with now, with your permission.

Jennette Arnold OBE AM (Chair): Yes.

Sadiq Khan (Mayor of London): The oral update is requested from Assembly Member Boff on Greater London Assembly (GLA) housing figures.

14,544 affordable homes were started in London in 2018/19, more than in any year since City Hall took control of housing investment. This includes 3,991 homes at social rent levels, the most since the end of the last Labour Government's affordable housing programme. It also includes the most council homes started in

London since 1985, a tribute to the work of boroughs across London and the impact of my Building Council Homes for Londoners programme. We should not underestimate how much of an achievement this represents because supply in London and around the country has been severely affected by the Government's shambolic mishandling of Brexit, with the Bank of England now forecasting a fall in housing investment in 2019.

It is crucial to emphasise that to truly build all the affordable homes that Londoners need requires national Government to play its role by devolving far more funding and powers to London. We currently receive only a fraction of the funding needed, despite sending record amounts of stamp duty revenues to the Exchequer every year. The Government makes over £3 billion from London's property market every year in stamp duty but only sends around £0.7 billion back in affordable housing funding.

Andrew Boff AM: Mr Mayor, you have restated what was in your press release, that more homes were started at social rent levels than ever before. How do your 3,991 compare to the 11,329 that were started in 2010/11, the 10,663 homes that were started in 2009/10, and the 7,439 that were started in 2008/09?

Sadiq Khan (Mayor of London): Control over London's affordable housing budget was not devolved to the Mayor until 2012. Homes started in 2010/11, the year mentioned by the Assembly Member, were funded by a far larger programme that the last Labour Government introduced and the previous Mayor had no control over.

Andrew Boff AM: Mr Mayor, is that an argument for City Hall not having control of the affordable housing budget, if you are going to build less?

Sadiq Khan (Mayor of London): It is an argument for the Government investing more in affordable housing. The current Government is investing far less in affordable housing than any previous Government. In the first three years of the first term of Boris Johnson [MP], the Labour Government's money was being spent on affordable housing. Since 2012, it has been your Government that has been investing or not in London. It was also at the same time as devolution from the Homes and Communities Agency, accountable to Ministers, to a London from 2012 onwards. Since the devolution in 2012, the largest numbers of homes started was last year [2018/19], the largest number of social homes started was last year [2018/19] and the largest number of council homes started was last year [2018/19].

Andrew Boff AM: Why were you patting yourself on the back for achieving a record amount of investment from the Government?

Sadiq Khan (Mayor of London): It is a record investment since devolution to London, during this Government's time. During the last Labour Government, in 2009/10, for example, the Government was spending more than twice what this Government is spending per year in London. According to experts, we need to spend four times that to reach the level of affordable homes we need.

Andrew Boff AM: OK. Mr Mayor, of the figures that you published, the 14,544, which is once again on the very low levels on the targets you have agreed with Government in order to justify that record investment, how many of those are restarts or double-counting?

Sadiq Khan (Mayor of London): I am not sure but whatever the restarts figures is, the deal with the Government is from 2015 until 2022. If, in a previous year, the start was not completed, it goes within the 116,000 target set by the Government. There is no benefit of, in your words, 'double-counting'.

Andrew Boff AM: You do not know how many restarts?

Sadiq Khan (Mayor of London): No, because the restarts from 2015/16 and 2016/17 are still counted toward the 116,000 target. There is no benefit in double-counting.

Andrew Boff AM: You claim to have met your minimum target in 2018/19 by around 500 homes. Can you explain why 500 homes have now disappeared from the previous figure for 2016/17?

Sadiq Khan (Mayor of London): If that is the case it is because they did not complete the term of the contract, but there are two safeguards we have. One is a clawback mechanism. If, by 2022, the houses have not completed their starts, we can claw back the grant. The second is that you cannot double-count them within the 116,000 because the Government would rule them out. There is an audit process and an accounting process in alignment with Government. The good news is that there are various checks in place to avoid what you call double-counting.

Andrew Boff AM: Last time you declared figures about 10% of the starts that you claimed, the 12,000-odd starts, were restarted and double-counted into the figures. Do you anticipate a similar figure, about 10%, for this 14,544?

Sadiq Khan (Mayor of London): I expect for 2015/16 and 2016/17 there may well be some starts that were not completed, but I would not expect there to be many, if any, starts not completed from 2017/18 or 2018/19. The good news is that the Government will not give us the benefit of double-counting. The 116,000 takes into account these two years as well. You cannot benefit from your so-called double-counting.

Andrew Boff AM: You can in terms of meeting an annual target. You certainly can, by shifting it from one year to the next, which is what I suspect you have done. Are you concerned that three years into a programme and with only three years to go, only 30% of those new homes have been started?

Sadiq Khan (Mayor of London): The main reason is because of the bad years in the first two years of the programme, when the other guy was in charge. 2015/16 and 2016/17 were bad years. Roughly speaking, there were 7,000 starts in each of those years. There was a big, steep increase in 2017/18 and an even bigger increase in 2018/19. We will make up the ground lost in the first two years under the previous Mayor.

Andrew Boff AM: You agreed the 116,000 figure with the Government, did you not?

Sadiq Khan (Mayor of London): The Government included the two years under the previous Mayor.

Andrew Boff AM: But you agreed that 116,000 figure, saying you were going to deliver that.

Sadiq Khan (Mayor of London): Which included the first two years under the previous Mayor. That is one the reasons why we agreed with the Government to have targets that go up each year. For example, in 2017/18 the target was 12,500, a big increase from the 7,000 under the previous Mayor. Last year [2018/19] the target was even steeper, 14,000, and in the coming year the target is 17,000. The Government realised that there had been a lack of progress, I think, in the first two years of the programme under the previous Mayor, which is why each year there is going to be a steep increase.

Andrew Boff AM: OK. Thank you, Mr Mayor.

Jennette Arnold OBE AM (Chair): Thank you.