

London Assembly Mayor's Question Time – Thursday 20 June 2019

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

Jennette Arnold OBE AM (Chair): The Mayor will now provide an oral update of up to five minutes in length on matters occurring since the publication of his report. Assembly Members have submitted several requests for topics for inclusion within the update and those details were provided to you, Mayor. Over to you, Mr Mayor.

Sadiq Khan (Mayor of London): Good morning, Chair. Can I associate myself fully with the comments you made in your opening about various matters.

Chair, London has suffered five terrible homicides over the last week. Every single death as a result of violent crime like this is an utter tragedy, leaving lives destroyed, families heartbroken and communities reeling. Several arrests have now been made following these horrific attacks and some charges have been brought too, and our under-resourced and overstretched police are working around the clock to keep Londoners safe.

As Mayor, I am determined to tackle this problem head-on with a relentless focus on both arresting violent offenders and tackling the root causes. There is no getting away from the fact that this has been made far worse by the Government's huge cuts to the police and preventative services like youth services, local councils and charities across our city. Cuts really do have consequences, something now finally even the Government and the Conservative leadership candidates admit. We will continue to do all we can in London, but the new Prime Minister (PM), whoever that may be, must act and do the right thing by properly funding our police and preventative services.

Today is Clean Air Day and I am pleased to take this opportunity to announce new plans for London's biggest ever car-free day. This will take place on Sunday, 22 September 2019, and will include 20 kilometres of closed roads around Tower Bridge, London Bridge and much of the City of London. Our aim is to give Londoners and visitors the opportunity to reimagine their city without any cars and to enable them to enjoy free events on streets across the capital. This will be a great opportunity for Londoners to leave their cars behind and to explore London by foot, bike or public transport.

Chair, since we last met I have been working on a number of strategies and initiatives to improve the lives of Londoners. This includes investing £6 million in 15 new projects to tackle air pollution and climate change, and setting out plans for a major expansion of London's electric vehicle charging network.

I would like to end my opening remarks by paying tribute to the London Fire Commissioner, Dany Cotton [QFSM], who has today announced her retirement after 32 years of service at the London Fire Brigade (LFB) and as London's Fire Commissioner. Dany is a true role model who has broken down barriers for women in London and inspired people who would not otherwise have considered being firefighters to join the Fire Brigade. I wish her the very best in retirement when she leaves the Brigade next year [2020].

Chair, I have also been asked, as you mentioned, for three separate oral updates. The first one is on Hammersmith Bridge. Yes, we will want to meet with the Government on this. The ongoing technical work to understand options and potential costs includes analysing the detailed inspections and surveys that have been taking place to understand the bridge's condition. Understanding this information is vital to help establish the best repair option. This work is nearly complete. Both Transport for London (TfL) and the London Borough of

Hammersmith and Fulham expect to have a better idea of costs and timeframes for the chosen repair option in August [2019]. I will also be seeking to make cross-party representations to the Government at that time. As well as working with Hammersmith and Fulham, TfL is working closely with Richmond Council and I hope that this kind of joint approach will ultimately be beneficial for the residents of west London, who, understandably, want to see the bridge open again. TfL, Richmond, and Hammersmith and Fulham appeared together at a public meeting last night to answer questions from residents. TfL is looking to arrange further sessions in the coming months so that the local community is kept fully informed as the plans for repairing the bridge are finalised.

TfL is continuing to invite feedback from passengers about the changes that it has made to the local bus network in response to the closure. It is carefully monitoring the situation and reviewing the feedback it has received to help decide whether further changes are needed. It has already introduced more buses on route 33 in response to its monitoring and comments received.

The second question, Chair, is from you about violent crime. These homicides in London are heart-breaking. Every life lost to violent crime is a tragedy and even more keenly felt when it is a young person. Every death is one too many.

In response to these homicides, our under-resourced and overstretched police have been working incredibly hard. As always, I have been in contact with the Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis [Cressida Dick CBE QPM] and her Deputy [Sir Stephen House QPM] and the Metropolitan Police Service (MPS) has increased the coverage of the City Hall-funded Violent Crime Task Force in targeted areas across London. Officers from across the boroughs, supported by colleagues from specialist units, also undertook high-visibility patrols to prevent further violence and to provide reassurance to the communities in those areas.

However, we know that enforcement is only part of the picture. That is why I am investing over £7 million into our new Violence Reduction Unit, funding £45 million of activity and services for young Londoners, and delivering services across the capital to support those who wish to turn away from violence to be able to do so.

These latest homicides are a sobering reminder of why we must never be complacent in the face of violence. Even as the MPS reports reducing levels of violence, with the number of victims of knife crime aged under 25 down by 20% over the last year and homicides down by 30%, I am determined to continue to do everything in my power to prevent more Londoners becoming victims of violent crime.

The final question, Chair, by way of a request for an oral update is from Assembly Member Russell. I am truly disappointed that the Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea has announced its opposition to TfL's proposals for the Wood Lane-to-Notting Hill Gate walking and cycling scheme. What is particularly concerning - and frankly remarkable - is that this was done whilst the consultation was still open, a consultation the borough was actively inviting people to have their say on. The Council has made a mockery of the whole process. The scheme was developed in partnership with the borough, which controls roads along part of the route. TfL was happy for Kensington and Chelsea to take a neutral stance when the plans were published and for them to form a position, having considered consultation feedback. TfL was and still is willing to consider design changes to address key concerns. TfL has received more than 5,000 responses to the consultation and many of these views are being ignored by the borough. Kensington and Chelsea cannot claim to have listened to residents when the consultation has not even finished, nor can it claim to have properly assessed the scheme given the design process has yet to be completed.

These roads are unsafe for pedestrians, cyclists and drivers. There have been 293 collisions over the last three years over the route, 65 on Holland Park Avenue alone, with the vast majority of serious injuries to cyclists and pedestrians. None of these casualties are acceptable. In my view, it is not an option to stand by and do nothing. TfL's plans would make it easier to cross busy roads with 15 new pedestrian crossings in locations where people actually want to cross and a segregated space for people to cycle safely. The borough's own Local Implementation Plan aims to encourage more trips by walking, cycling and public transport and fewer by private car. Kensington and Chelsea now needs to set out how it plans to deliver safer streets and more attractive neighbourhoods.

Jennette Arnold OBE AM (Chair): Thank you for much in that update, Mr Mayor. I am just going to see if there are any responses from Members who put in a matter for you and I will then go on to picking up the announcement of the retirement of the Fire Commissioner.

Mr Mayor, can I just come back to you about my update? I want to thank you for meeting the elected councillors yesterday from a group of about 10 schools representing 4,200 children. They had done some work in preparation to coming here to City Hall to see us. They did a word cloud and the biggest space taken out by that word cloud was about crime, feeling unsafe and wanting to be able to walk on their streets.

Will you really hear what I am saying and will you look to see if there is any more that you can do about reassurance, particularly in those areas where we have seen such a lot of crisis at the moment? There is no reply. I just wanted to forward that on to you because we sometimes miss the need to do more about reassuring our residents and reminding them that London is a safe city, their city, and they really cannot give up the streets to criminals. I hope you have taken that on board.

Can I call Caroline Russell AM? Do you want to come back to anything you have just heard?

Caroline Russell AM: No.

Jennette Arnold OBE AM (Chair): No, you do not. I know Assembly Member Devenish does.

Tony Devenish AM: Thank you, Chair. Good morning, Mr Mayor. On Hammersmith Bridge, I appreciate there is lots of work going on, but for two and a half months it has been shut. You have basically said this morning that it will be four months before we have a way forward. This is a really key bridge. Can we try to bring that date forward so that we will be able to know what needs to be done? This is the number-one issue for my residents.

Sadiq Khan (Mayor of London): I bet it is. I can give you the commitment that TfL and the Council are going as fast they can. I will reflect back to them your comments that if they can go even faster you would appreciate that. The key things to do the work in relation to what proposals and options there are going forward with a cost as well, but I hear you loud and clear and I will pass that on.

Tony Devenish AM: Thank you. You mentioned Clean Air Day today, which I totally support. You appreciate that the additional traffic congestion on this route will be damaging air quality on both sides of the bridge. What work have you have done on that and how can you mitigate that in the meantime?

Sadiq Khan (Mayor of London): What you are referring to is displacement. A lot of traffic is being displaced, but also some of the buses that were crossing that bridge are now not being used by the passengers and they are using other forms to get from one side to the other. TfL is monitoring the displacement that has

taken place since the bridge was closed. You will be aware and you have made representations in relation to bus routes and making sure they are fit for purpose.

TfL is also speaking to Wandsworth Council. I mentioned Richmond, and Hammersmith and Fulham, but other councils further away from the bridge are also affected and you are right to remind me - and TfL knows this, by the way - of the impact of displacement. They will continue to monitor it. If, for example, last night's public meeting leads to further good ideas, TfL can follow up and will do so. You have heard from my answer TfL's receptiveness to further public sessions because often the best ideas come from the residents, who know their community the best.

Tony Devenish AM: OK. Thank you for that. On your other update on the Royal Borough [of Kensington and Chelsea], I was at the public meeting, the largest public meeting on this cycle highway that I have been to in my entire time as an Assembly Member or indeed a councillor. I do not want to be rude about TfL but it has this scheme wrong. The Royal Borough is not anti-cycling. It really wants to work with TfL to come up with new scheme.

I would urge you, please, to go back to TfL and to work with the Royal Borough. It is very keen to have more cycling and safe cycling in the Borough, but literally 99% of the people in the room were vehemently against this scheme.

Sadiq Khan (Mayor of London): Chair, I find it astonishing that the Assembly Member, halfway through a consultation process, would pull the rug from the process being completed. What about those who responded who did not come to the meeting? What about those who have been the victims of being run over by a car, either pedestrians or cyclists, who did not come to the meeting? The whole point of the consultation is to hear all the views and then form a view. It is astonishing, frankly, for the Council to pull the rug during the consultation. Lots of money has been spent. Lots of time has been spent. You would have thought that a sensible council would want to hear all the views and then reach a view. I find it remarkable, frankly speaking, and that is not a compliment.

Tony Devenish AM: OK. They are an amazing Council and I hope you will work with them and I will leave it there.

Jennette Arnold OBE AM (Chair): OK, we are going to stay with the same subject and I am going to bring in Assembly Member Arbour.

Tony Arbour AM (Deputy Chairman): Thank you very much. Mr Mayor, no doubt you are aware that in 2011 when the Hammersmith flyover failed, the thing was fixed within six months. It was seen as a matter of supreme importance and TfL fixed it and there was a sense of urgency.

There is a feeling amongst the locals - and locals, as you rightly say, not just in Richmond and Hammersmith but Hounslow as well and indeed Wandsworth - that there does need to be firm action of the type that was taken when the flyover was fixed. They fear that improving the bus routes is simply a sticking-plaster.

I have attended two public meetings on the matter and you have mentioned taking suggestions from local residents. The most popular suggestion from the residents at the public meetings that I have attended is that in the short term a Bailey bridge should be erected on the site. Can I ask, please, that you direct TfL to take that proposal seriously? I formed the opinion at the public meeting that TfL thought that maybe this was a bit frivolous.

Sadiq Khan (Mayor of London): Chair, the Assembly Member's idea was one I also suggested and so it cannot be frivolous.

Tony Arbour AM (Deputy Chairman): Good.

Sadiq Khan (Mayor of London): In the experience I had, which was just from a previous life as a Transport Minister when we had the floods a few years back, the Army went in and built a temporary bridge, which enabled residents get from one side to another during the floods.

TfL is exploring that. The lay response I have received - and they will be exploring this further - is that it is an issue of land availability on both sides of the river. Can I reassure you? That is not a frivolous idea but there are challenges in relation to land acquisition. All good ideas will be followed up. I sincerely meant what I said. Good ideas from the residents will be pursued. Often residents have the best ideas. I am told there are challenges with the land, but that is being looked into.

Tony Arbour AM (Deputy Chairman): Thank you very much.

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

Andrew Dismore AM: Thank you, Chair. As you know, Mr Mayor, the murder on Tuesday evening was in my constituency in Barnet. I would like to thank you for the explanation of what you and the MPS are doing despite the overstretched resources.

The Member of Parliament for Chipping Barnet [The Rt Hon Theresa Villiers MP] has called for more police officers and obviously we would like to see those, but would you encourage her to start lobbying the Government to reverse the cuts for which she voted when she was in Cabinet to enable the MPS to be properly funded to provide those extra police officers?

Sadiq Khan (Mayor of London): I will try to be respectful. I have been saying since I first became Mayor that we are facing the consequences of eight years of cuts now, six years when I first became Mayor. Many members - particularly of the Conservative Party - said I was wrong to raise the issue of us being starved of resources from central Government.

Two things are noteworthy. One, those now standing to be the Conservative candidate for Mayor are now talking about more resources for our police. Also, those running to be the next PM are now talking about the fact that we have been starved of the resources and the consequences. I am pleased they have realised that cuts have consequences. It is no consolation, though, for those grieving families, no consolation for those who are victims of crime. We need urgently for the next PM to reverse the cuts made by this PM and the PM before her.

Andrew Dismore AM: Thank you.

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

Unmesh Desai AM: Thank you, Chair. Good morning, Mr Mayor. I want to come to the issue of the violence that we have seen over the weekend. Two of the five deaths that you talked about were in my constituency and I wrote to the Borough Commanders in Newham and Tower Hamlets yesterday. I was at a meeting in Mile

End recently after yet another death, attended by some 300 people, where I spoke and Mayor John Biggs [Mayor of Tower Hamlets] spoke. I talked about the public health approach and I talked about the cuts, but people were angry. They are frustrated. They appreciate what is being done, but they want more action and they want it now.

What message have you got to give to not just my constituents but to Londoners about what more can be done? I know you have the Violent Crime Task Force and so on but what more can be done, particularly with summer coming up?

Sadiq Khan (Mayor of London): Firstly, we have to understand that, rightly, Londoners are angry and scared. They have every reason to be because we have seen over the last five years a massive increase in violent crime across the country. We are seeing a stabilisation and the MPS has some good news - and I mentioned that in my answer - in relation to the reduction by 20% in knife injuries for under-25s and also homicides down by 30% in the last year. It is not good enough. If you have lost a loved one, the fact it is going down is no consolation.

We have to make sure we are persuasive in getting the Government to reverse the cuts it has made. We are now recruiting more officers than we have any time in the last few years. We may have just gone over 30,000. There is some confirmation required because officers leave as well. It is good that it is going the right way. The pipeline of new police officers is going the right way.

However, for us to have a transformative change, we need the next PM to reverse the £1 billion cuts that were made over the last eight years. We have lost more than 3,500 police officers, more than 3,500 Community Support Officers and thousands of police staff. Police stations have closed down. Front counters have closed down. Cuts have consequences.

Jennette Arnold OBE AM (Chair): Thank you. Then, Mr Mayor, let us go on to the announcement that you made about the retirement of the Fire Commissioner, Dany Cotton [QFSM]. Mr Mayor, can I start by just making a personal statement. It has been my pleasure to meet and to receive reports from the Fire Commissioner. For me, she is one of the most impressive public servants that I have met in my 30 years in public and political life. I will be speaking with Group Leaders to see how we can show our appreciation of her service to London.

It is not on your Group time because I do have this standing order that I can just ask Group Leaders or anyone else if they wish to make any comments following the Mayor's announcement. Can I take Assembly Member Dismore first?

Andrew Dismore AM: Thank you, Chair. On behalf of the Fire and Resilience Committee, which I chair, could we thank Dany Cotton for the immense dedication she has shown to keeping our city safe. During recent years we have seen some significant challenges for the LFB because of budgetary pressures, not least but most notably after the Grenfell Tower fire, the attacks on London Bridge and so on. There have been undoubtedly some very tough operational decisions she has had to take and our job has been to scrutinise those on the Committee, but we are clear that Dany has done a fantastic job in protecting Londoners and in supporting her firefighters and has shown brilliant leadership during some very difficult times. We wish her well in her retirement next year.

Jennette Arnold OBE AM (Chair): Thank you very much. Assembly Member Bacon?

Gareth Bacon AM: Thank you, Chair. I first got to know Dany Cotton when I joined the London Fire and Emergency Planning Authority back in 2010, but I got to know her quite well after I took over as Chairman of the Authority a few years later. Indeed, I sat on the appointment panel, along with Assembly Member Dismore and Assembly Member Twycross, back in 2016 when she was appointed.

It is fair to say that Dany has been a truly mould-breaking officer. She joined the LFB back in 1988. The fire service has long been regarded as a bastion of maleness, but back in the 1980s it was even more so than it is today. Her even joining the Fire Brigade back in 1988 was a remarkable thing to do. To have risen right to the very top of it to become the senior advisor in the entire country throughout her career and to do that based entirely, I have to say, on merit is more remarkable still. She is truly one of the trailblazers in London's public life and indeed in the country's public life. The ending of her career is something that I reflect on with a certain amount of sadness but gratitude, too, to have known and worked with her over a period of time. She has been an exceptional public servant to London and a credit to the LFB.

On behalf of the Conservative Group, I would like to add my thanks and appreciation for all that she has done. There will be time, I am sure, to speak to her privately and also to do this again in another forum, but for the moment I would like to thank her very much and to wish her a long and happy retirement because she deserves it. Thank you, Chair.

Jennette Arnold OBE AM (Chair): Thank you very much. I call upon Assembly Member Russell to stand and give her contribution.

Caroline Russell AM: Thank you, Chair. I just want to very briefly express the thanks of the Green Group to Dany Cotton for 32 years working to keep Londoners safe. In particular, her campaign about firefighting sexism has been brilliant and it has encouraged more and more young women to see that being a firefighter is something that could be a career for them. That is a true legacy and I just want to thank Dany for that.

Jennette Arnold OBE AM (Chair): I am calling on Assembly Member Pidgeon to stand for her contribution.

Caroline Pidgeon MBE AM: Thank you very much. I have to say that Dany Cotton's appointment, along with Cressida Dick's [Cressida Dick CBE QPM, Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis], I personally have found truly inspiring, leading the fire service and MPS, very male environments, and doing it so well and with such skill. For me, Dany's role, not only her 32 years of public service that we have heard about, shows there are no barriers to where women can work, the roles they can do and the leadership roles they can play. She really is a role model for the next generation, the children in schools who come home talking about these roles that they can do, and for all of us as well to know that there are no barriers.

I am so sad to hear this news. The first I heard was when the Mayor mentioned this and I really hope that part of Dany's legacy will be that all parts of the Greater London Authority will continue to ensure that women are in leadership roles throughout our organisations. I hope we do have some sort of personal event to celebrate Dany's work. Thank you.

Jennette Arnold OBE AM (Chair): OK. Thank you. Can I call upon Assembly Member Kurten to stand for his contribution?

David Kurten AM: Thank you. I absolutely agree with all the sentiments that have just been expressed about Dany Cotton. She has been a public servant here for London for 32 years. I have known her for only a couple of years because I am new to the Assembly, but her knowledge of London and her knowledge of the

Fire Brigade and what needs to be done is absolutely impeccable. She has always been able to answer any question that I have asked her in the Fire [and Resilience] Committee in a very knowledgeable and very kind way. I wish her very well in her retirement. Thank you.

Jennette Arnold OBE AM (Chair): Thank you very much. Can I call upon Assembly Member Twycross to stand for her contribution?

Fiona Twycross AM: Thank you. I just wanted to add a couple of words on behalf of the Labour Group. My colleague Assembly Member Duvall has also reminded me to mention that I am Deputy Mayor for Fire and Resilience as well and have worked very closely with Dany, as others have, in her current role and in her previous roles.

I want to echo what others have said. Like the Mayor and like those who have spoken previously, I want to thank Dany for her remarkable service over the last 32 years. As Assembly Member Bacon said, she has been an exceptional public servant and I am sure she will appreciate the fact that this is something that we can have cross-party agreement on in this Chamber. She is an inspiring leader of the Brigade and has changed both the LFB and the fire sector across the United Kingdom for the better both by being a strong role model for other female firefighters and to women considering a career in the Fire Brigade and by highlighting issues around mental health in the aftermath of the Grenfell Tower fire.

It is sometimes a bit flippant to say it, but actually Dany will be a really hard act to follow. She is loved by her firefighters, who see her as a firefighter's firefighter, which is about the biggest compliment a firefighter can give a Commissioner. She is also respected for her professionalism and the tough decisions she has had to make and for the way in which she supported the Brigade through the most difficult of times.

I was once told the main goal of any job you are given should be to leave the place in a better state than when you started. Dany does this and leaves a strong legacy for her successor to carry on the work she started. London and Londoners and all of us here owe her a huge debt of gratitude and I am sure she will be hugely appreciative of everything everybody has said here today. Thank you.

Jennette Arnold OBE AM (Chair): Thank you very much. I will follow up the statement I made earlier about finding an appropriate gathering so that all Members can add their congratulations to her and their thanks.