

London Assembly (Mayor's Question Time) – 13 July 2011

Transcript: Mayor's Oral Update

Jennette Arnold (Chair): Let us go to questions to the Mayor. Mr Mayor, can I ask you to provide us with an oral update. I wanted to keep that within five minutes..

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Yes.

Jennette Arnold (Chair): I want you to cover, of course, the matters that have occurred since the publication of the report. You have also received a formal letter from me regarding the matters that are shown on the paper in front of Members and you have also had a request from the Liberal Democrat Group and also the Green Group.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Thank you very much, Jennette. I will try to be as speedy as I can, and I am sure you will chair this meeting with your normal Olympian impartiality..

I want to begin by saying that we launched Team London this month and I think it was a fantastically successful launch. We have secured £5.4 million of funding for 10,000 volunteers, including volunteers to support youth groups, adult mentors for the Scouts, Cubs, the Guides and other such groups, and of course people who are going to go to schools and read to children who need help with their literacy and volunteers who want to plant trees in our green spaces, and indeed in our less green spaces. I think Team London is a fantastic initiative. It is attracting a lot of support and interest, particularly from people who feel they could not get involved in the Olympics, in the Olympic volunteering. They were not able to get onto the London Organising Committee for the Olympic Games (LOCOG) volunteers or indeed onto the highly successful London Ambassador Scheme. I am very pleased with that launch.

We are continuing to fight the impacts of the recession. We have expanded greatly the apprenticeship programme. We are now up to 28,000 apprentices that we are supporting. We have defied the sceptics, some of whom are sitting around this horseshoe. We have begun work on the cable car and the Arab Festival has been launched with great international acclaim and a great deal of media coverage. Does anybody know what the Arab Festival is called?

Murad Qureshi (AM): Shubbak.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Shubbak. Thank you, Murad, very good; paying attention! I am delighted.

You have asked me to comment on two mayoral advisers, whose pay has been increased and that is to reflect their greatly expanded role. As everybody knows, the Greater London Authority (GLA) has taken on a lot of responsibility, particularly in matters of housing. We have taken on the functions of the London Homes and Communities Agency (HCA) and Munira Mirza [Mayoral Adviser on Culture and Youth] is now acting as my general adviser on all youth matters, and so her responsibilities have also very considerably increased. That change of course comes in the context of overall cuts in the

salaries bill here in City Hall, which you will appreciate. There has been an overall reduction in the amount of money we are paying; there has been an overall reduction in headcount and it is because of the economies we are able to achieve that we have frozen the precept in London year after year after year and actually achieved a real terms cut of 10%.

On phone hacking, very quickly, as I think you alluded to in your Tweet this morning, which I have not had the honour of seeing yet, Jennette - I am not on your Tweet list - the position has obviously changed very substantially since we last discussed this matter around this horseshoe. Indeed I think I said at the time that it might well change. Certain sections of the media have plainly been engaged in practices that are nauseating and indefensible and have rightly been condemned across the political spectrum. The consequences of their misdeeds are of course now playing out in Parliament and elsewhere.

In my view three things need to happen and they need to happen speedily: 1) Operation Weeting needs to be pursued thoroughly to the very, very end of those inquiries, wherever they may lead, without fear or favour. I have a great deal of confidence, by the way, in Sue Akers [Deputy Assistant Commissioner, Metropolitan Police Service] to conduct that inquiry. 2) There needs to be a full independent inquiry into this element of police collusion, bribe taking and so on and so forth. That needs to be done by the Independent Police Complaints Commission (IPCC). As you would expect, I have had conversations with Deborah Glass [IPCC Deputy Chair and Commissioner for London] about her plans and I have a lot of respect for the IPCC, its credentials, its clarity, its ferocity in pursuing this kind of thing to the logical conclusion, wherever it may lead, and that must also happen. 3) I have been saying this for months now: there needs to be a full inquiry, a full resolution before the eyes of the entire British public about the methods and practices of the entire media. I am very glad that it has been decided that there should be a judge-led inquiry. That seems to me a wholly rightful development.

Let me just say that I think a free press is a great thing. Ever since 1702, when the *Daily Courant* was founded in this City, London has benefited from an exuberant, dynamic, irreverent, sometimes anarchic media. It is a wonderful thing to have. What you cannot have is a media that systematically breaks the law and intrudes in a sickening way on the privacy of individuals. Insofar as that has happened it must be established exactly what has happened and we must make sure that it never happens again.

Jennette Arnold (Chair): Thank you. If we can stay with that area that you just finished on - phone hacking - and can I take questions in sections. I have Assembly Member Duvall. Is your question about that? Thank you.

Len Duvall (AM): I have a series of questions, Chair. Was it extraordinary or unwise to make those comments that you did make back in September 2010?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): If you remember the context then, this was at a time when, to the best of my knowledge and to the best of the knowledge of the police and the Crown Prosecuting Service (CPS) there was nothing new in the allegations. What I think I was reflecting was my sense of amazement - and this is why I used the word 'codswallop' - that the Labour Party seemed to be making such a big thing about this, when they had been in power for a long time, during the period when all this was going on, after the phone hacking thing was exposed and actually did not see fit in

that epoch to get quite as indignant as they subsequently became, when the papers concerned switched their support, and they lost the election and so on and so forth.

I have to say that was how it seemed to me at the time. I will stress that I think it is a fair person who remembers what I said, and will also remember that at the end of my dialogue, as it was with Joanne [McCartney] I said, "Let us be clear, if there are new salient facts that are brought into the public domain about this that actually serve to make a difference to the balance of the evidence, and to convince the police that they really need to take further steps, then I am sure they are doing to do". At that stage I was fully prepared to accept that there could be new facts that would come into the public domain that would force me to change my position. Of course horrible new facts have come into the public domain and I think that the police are now right to be pursuing these allegations with the maximum vigour.

Len Duvall (AM): Do you think they could have done that at the time in light of what has come to light and some of the information? Of course it has been disputed that there was information that indicated the scale of what was going on; it just was not believed. You indicated yourself you did not believe it at time.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): As I understand what has happened it is that the company concerned has in the last six or seven months or so started putting new information into the public domain, I think at the instigation of the lawyers it has retained, has dramatically changed the understanding and the complexion of these allegations. That, it seems to me, is the salient difference that I alluded to.

Len Duvall (AM): Could you tell us what contact took place between you and your officials - as in officials on the eighth floor - with Andy Coulson [former Editor of the *News of the World*] on 31 July 2009? That was at the time of the John Yates' [Assistant Commissioner, Metropolitan Police Service (MPS)] statement, which must be quite fresh in your mind. Vaguely, what sort of contact may have taken place? It may be that you will put in writing what contact took place.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): You want to know what contact took place in July 2009?

Len Duvall (AM): July 2009, when John Yates made his statement around not reopening in terms of the inquiry; the famous nine hours. Just to help you further, I think on the same day that he made that statement you attended a News International event.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): One obvious point: I have not discussed phone hacking with News International or with Coulson. This is something that I do not think would have been appropriate for me to discuss. For the avoidance of doubt, let me say that. I do not quite know what you are trying to establish about contacts that took place between the eighth floor and Andy Coulson. Andy Coulson was at the time the Government's press person, I think, and it may be that contacts took place about any number of things. I do not know.

Len Duvall (AM): Maybe you could provide that in writing for me.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I will happy to try to oblige you there, but I do not quite know what pot of gold you think there is at the end of this rainbow.

Len Duvall (AM): Thank you. Can I just ask about hacking of phones. During your time when you were Chair of the MPA, I suppose really since you have been Mayor, when did you become aware that the police officers had had their phones hacked? I think Yates has gone public. Paddick [Brian Paddick, former Deputy Assistant Commissioner, MPS] - I am not sure whether he was a police officer or a celebrity - I think he was not sure at the time of those issues. When were you aware of senior officers being hacked?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Len, I honestly cannot remember when the stories emerged.

Len Duvall (AM): Did you learn that from the police or from the media?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Insofar as I learned about police officers being hacked I am almost certain I would have learned it from the media.

Len Duvall (AM): It is a pretty serious thing, senior police officers having their phones hacked. Were you not surprised when you saw that in the media, that there appeared to be no investigation or charges brought against any individuals, yet it appears to have happened?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): As I say, I do not recollect exactly when these revelations emerged or exactly in what context they emerged. You will have to help me with the timetable here, Len. I do not remember when the news of the alleged hacking of police mobiles took place. What I do remember is gaining the very strong impression - which I relayed to you last year - that the reason it was decided to discontinue the investigation was that there was nothing new. The stories, I think it was in the *Guardian* and the *New York Times*, which John Yates looked at, did not actually contain any kind of smoking gun; there was nothing to take forward.

Len Duvall (AM): When were you told, and who informed you, that you had been hacked?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): As I said in answer to Joanne last year, this was something that kindly an officer, whose name I cannot remember, rang to inform me in about 2006.

Len Duvall (AM): 2006. Were you asked by the police to give evidence in terms of pursuing an investigation into your hacking? Were you offered that choice?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I will be absolutely clear. I said, "Look, I don't particularly want to be involved in some court case. This is something I find deeply irritating and unpleasant". This is what I said in the initial conversation, "If you actually need me to help mount a prosecution, if I'm indispensable and there is no way of doing it except with my evidence then of course I'll do it, but if you don't need me and you've got enough stuff to go ahead with your prosecution then I'm content with that".

Len Duvall (AM): Forgive me, Mr Mayor, but I think because of the circumstances we are in, why did you take that stance?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Because I had no particular desire to get involved in a court case that revolved around some extremely unpleasant interference in my private life. Will that do?

Len Duvall (AM): With that knowledge that you had in 2006, and then it goes back to the various times since you have been Mayor, since you were for a short period Chair of the Metropolitan Police Authority (MPA), you had a victim's insight into someone who has been hacked. What assurances, what questions did you ask the police at various times that stories were appearing in the media, "How big was this? What was going on?" On what occasions did you ask that question and use that inside knowledge of being a victim?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): There is no particular inside knowledge that goes with being a victim. All you are told is that your phone was hacked. There is no particular mystique about this. What I was told by John Yates was that there was nothing new in the reports that he was asked to look into. That was my position and that seemed to be the right line to take until, of course, as I predicted might happen, new facts came into the public domain.

Len Duvall (AM): Do you not feel from your own personal circumstances that you may well have been compromised and that a charge could be laid before you by others that you took your personal decision not to pursue the court case or support that unless the police told you they were, that you have almost colluded in narrowing down the investigation? Is that not a fair statement that someone may conclude?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): No, that is complete nonsense because I said very clearly to the police and they had plenty to go on. They said they did not need me. They did not require me. I have been perfectly open about the fact that I was hacked, haven't I? I said, "Fine, if you think you can secure these prosecutions without my evidence then go ahead and do it". To put it another way around, I notice that plenty of people have gone to News International, not these former members of the Government, and actually got money, as far as I understand it, from News International for I do not know quite what. I did not want to be in a position where I was asking for money in some way, which again might compromise my position.

Len Duvall (AM): Did you not want to bring people to justice that had done wrong? You expressed outrage about being hacked and yet you seem to have taken the view, "I do not wish to pursue it". People are going to lean to a view that throughout, and including your statement at the time in September 2010, that actually --

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Oh come on.

Len Duvall (AM): No, one of the charges, a very serious charge against the police, and the evidence given yesterday before the Home Affairs Select Committee, is they narrowed down the investigation. Were you compromised by the information that News International may have had on you, and did you at any time give an indication of narrowing down the investigation?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): No, come on. Honestly, I think you have to do better than that, Len. No. What I said very clearly was, "If you need me I'm there, I will help prosecute whoever needs to be prosecuted; if you don't need me then that's fine too". That was my position. Quite frankly, why on earth should I go through some court case, which would inevitably have involved them going over all the pathetic so-called revelations that the *News of the World* had done. Why should I, when the police were absolutely clear to me that they had abundant evidence that would enable them to secure a prosecution?

Jennette Arnold (Chair): OK. You have made that point. I want to move on now.

Joanne McCartney (AM): Perhaps, Mr Mayor, to bring people to justice, and if you had done that perhaps you would have done this a little sooner.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I just think that is a completely objectionable and ludicrous thing to say.

Joanne McCartney (AM): Can I move on a little bit. In September last year, when I asked you about what conversations you had had about the phone hacking allegations, you said that you were completely satisfied with the police investigation. You then accused me of being part of a political hatchet job. You said I was making a song and dance about nothing and that the whole thing was codswallop.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): OK, you have to forgive me --

Joanne McCartney (AM): Do you regret that assessment now?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I direct you, Joanne, to the remarks I made at the end of our dialogue, which I began with. I said that if new facts came into the public domain then obviously it would be up to the police to investigate and to bring the culprits to justice. I said I had every confidence the police would do that and would come to the right conclusion. That is what happened.

Joanne McCartney (AM): Yes, Mr Mayor, that was quite a lengthy conversation we had. For most of it you dismissed my concerns out of hand. As I say, other Members of this Assembly, Dee [Dee Doocey], Jenny Jones and myself, had actually been asking question of this for over a year before. Can I ask you again, in September you told me that you had had no conversations with the police about phone hacking allegations? I asked you repeatedly and you said, and I am quoting, "I do not think I actually had any conversation. I certainly do not recall any specific briefing on this.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): There was not.

Joanne McCartney (AM): You said, "I certainly do not think I had any conversations with members from the MPS about this". Was that correct at the time?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): No. My memory was faulty there. What actually happened was that I did not have any specific briefings about it. There was not a briefing that was dedicated to phone hacking, but certainly what happened was, I think at the end of discussions about counter terrorism with John Yates - and that is what John Yates is there to do, and I think does a very good job, by the way, because I know that some people are trying to call that into question; I think he does a first rate job in keeping London safe.

At the end of those conversations he did briefly allude to phone hacking and I formed the strong impression that there was nothing new in those allegations and that is what I said. That was the basis on which I was operating. It was not just me. To be fair, it was Len, the CPS, everybody thought that there was nothing new in this. That was why I suspected, and that was why I used the language that I did, all the indignation about this was a little bit confected. It was a bit peculiar that the Labour Party had suddenly discovered outrage at Rupert Murdoch [Chairman and CEO of News Corporation] and

News International, when they had spent so many years sucking up to him. Not just the Government, but parts of this administration of City Hall as well. I thought it was a little bit hypocritical. That is what I thought. I think there are aspects of what is going on at the moment that are outstandingly hypocritical.

Joanne McCartney (AM): Mr Mayor, as I have said, there have been Members of this Assembly that have been asking questions and raising concerns long before you made those comments.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): In that case, Joanne, I pay tribute to your superior insight but the information I had from the police - all the evidence and information I had - was that there was nothing new. I, therefore, drew the conclusion that this was a little bit of a hubbub that was being drummed up in order to embarrass the Government.

Joanne McCartney (AM): Thank you. Can I say, there was not just Labour politicians, there had been a cross-party committee - the House of Commons Culture, Media and Sport Select Committee - that had raised these issues and had been very critical of the MPS investigation as well. Do you think it is good enough that, as you were Chair of the Metropolitan Police Association (MPA) at the time, you were satisfied with John Yates briefly alluding at the end of a briefing to you and you asking no further questions?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I do not believe that is a fair reflection of what happened.

Joanne McCartney (AM): That is what you said: "Briefly alluded".

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I think there were at least a couple of occasions when we briefly discussed it and I got a very quick answer. There is no point in wasting time. We were fighting terror in this capital. We are going to discuss knife crime. We are doing all sorts of things to reduce crime. Those are the issues that I was spending most of the time discussing with John Yates. I think Londoners actually would expect me to do that.

Joanne McCartney (AM): OK. Can I ask, you are now calling, as I called for last week, for a wholly independent inquiry into the inappropriate payments --

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I called for it three months ago at least, so I beat you there, Joanne.

Joanne McCartney (AM): -- and investigation into MPS officers being on the payroll of News International. Is that correct: wholly independent, taken out of the MPS's hands?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): What is happening, and I think you have to be very clear about this --

Joanne McCartney (AM): That was quite an oversight, but are you calling for the investigation to be taken out of the MPS's hands?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I am sorry, I misunderstood you. No, what I want is I want the IPCC to have full oversight and control and to be able to call all the evidence that they need. Having talked to Deborah Glass and with everything that we know about the IPCC and, as I say, their tenacity

in dealing with these issues, I am content that that is the right way forward. After all, this is one of those problems that presents a danger of an infinite regress. If you say, "OK, the IPCC can't be trusted to do it and you need to get an external police force to do it", which is one suggestion that I have heard, then the question arises, "Well which external police force?" and, "How can you be absolutely certain that you won't get an external police force that is populated by buddies of the people who they are investigating?" You are in danger of disappearing frankly up your own fundament. I think you need to rely on the IPCC. They have done a very good job in the past and they will get to the bottom of this collusion and the bribe taking, if indeed it existed.

Dee Doocey (Deputy Chair): Mr Mayor, do you share my concern that the senior officer looking at this review, or reviewing the case, spent just eight hours reviewing 11,000 pages of potential evidence, which included the shocking details of hacking? Do you share my astonishment that the MPS are now blaming the *News of the World* for not co-operating with their inquiry, when wrongdoers seldom hold their hands up and say, "It was me, guv, let me show you how I did it"? Do you agree that if the evidence had been properly sifted through originally, the MPS could have obtained warrants to search computers and financial records and so saved the families of people who were hacked the trauma of having all of this played out in press?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Yes. I think to be honest there is something in what you say, Dee. I think that John Yates would be the first to accept that there were real failings in the way that the information was handled and the detail with which it was sifted. I think I have heard him speak about the number of bin bags that he personally did not go through, and all that kind of thing. It does not matter. Clearly someone should have gone through them; someone should have drawn the logical conclusions. On the other hand, I do think there is also some strength in the point that News International had not been forthcoming with information in a timely way. They really ought to have been producing this stuff much, much earlier. It is a shame and a disgrace that that did not happen.

Dee Doocey (Deputy Chair): OK. I welcome the fact that you are now taking this very seriously indeed. I would just like to ask you about the full inquiry, that you have referred to, that is looking into police collusion that the IPCC are going to manage. I wondered if you had changed the scope of the inquiry in the last few days because in the last week Deborah Glass' office confirmed that they were not actually doing an inquiry. What they were doing is they were overseeing the police's own inquiry. Actually what they were doing is that the police were going to report to them once a week on the progress that they were making on looking into this and that Deborah Glass' IPCC and the MPS were going to work very closely in harmony.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Yes.

Dee Doocey (Deputy Chair): That is somewhat different to you saying that the IPCC were going to have a full investigation and would be able to call evidence and presumably papers.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I understand the point that you are making. What Deborah Glass has said is that she expects to be given full access to any material obtained or generated by the inquiry, as she requests, and that she will be able to impose on the inquiry any reasonable requirements as to the conduct of the investigation as she thinks necessary. Obviously this is something that is incredibly important. We must be confident that the IPCC has full powers to get to the bottom of this. I think that she does. I am happy that she does. I have experience of Deborah Glass. I have had dealings with her because when I was a Member of Parliament (MP) she

was responsible for an inquiry into the Highmoor shootings that she conducted. I thought that they did a remarkable job. It was thorough, it was ferocious and they really held the police to account.

Dee Doocey (Deputy Chair): Mr Mayor, I am sorry to interrupt you, I absolutely --

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I am just giving you grounds for my thinking that the IPCC represents the best way forward.

Dee Doocey (Deputy Chair): I too share your view that the IPCC are very good. What I am asking you is are they conducting a fully independent inquiry, or are they helping and overseeing the police's own inquiry? I just want to know which of those two.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): It is more the second.

Dee Doocey (Deputy Chair): The second. Thank you. That is fine.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): As far as I understand matters, you do not have IPCC agents themselves going around interviewing and trawling. What you have is then capable of summoning any evidence is being obtained and of overseeing absolutely everything as it happens.

Dee Doocey (Deputy Chair): Thank you.

Andrew Boff (AM): I hope you will agree with me that it is very important that it is the duty of this Assembly to ensure that the Mayoralty cannot be compromised by any accusations of bias or undue influence. Bearing in mind when these events took place, can I ask for the Mayor to look into the meetings that the previous Mayor had with News International? In addition to the one that has been documented with James Murdoch [Chairman and CEO of News Corporation Europe and Asia]?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Is this the previous Mayor, the guy who has been popping up attacking me for having meetings with journalists?

Andrew Boff (AM): I was not aware. Did he comment? Could perhaps we look into any minutes of such meetings with the previous Mayor? Put those into the public domain. Could you also, Mr Mayor, look into any contracts that may have been entered into by the previous Mayor with companies --

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Contracts? Involving taxpayers' money?

Andrew Boff (AM): Yes, with companies controlled by the Murdoch dynasty, which I believe were substantial, including that with Freud Communications.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): You are joking!

Andrew Boff (AM): I understand, and I only have this by rumour, that this could amount to much more than £1 million of GLA taxpayers' money. I think it is important --

[Overspeaking.]

Jennette Arnold (Chair): No, a Member is speaking. Can he finish. He is going to get to the end of his question sometime this morning.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Now, now - impartial.

Andrew Boff (AM): I do think it is important, Mr Mayor, that the public at this particular time should have that information laid in front of them. Because I think, in the words of Len Duvall, that for someone to have a meeting with James Murdoch, for example, two months after some of his staff were locked up, was extraordinarily unwise. I would ask you to provide me with that information. I would be grateful.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I would be happy to furnish such information if we can get hold of it from the previous Mayor. I think it would be unbelievable and monstrously hypocritical, would it not, if the previous Mayor, having broken bread with the hirelings and indeed the leaders of Rupert Murdoch's group were then to attack any other person for doing so and doing his job and trying to explain to people who are responsible for the media industry what we are doing in London and why we care about it and why it matters. Would it not be an unbelievably opportunistic thing to do?

Jennette Arnold (Chair): OK, Mr Mayor --

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I will try. I am interested in --

Andrew Boff (AM): I am hoping it is --

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Or dishonest.

Jennette Arnold (Chair): Mr Mayor, can we move on?

Andrew Boff (AM): He is answering my question.

Jennette Arnold (Chair): He has answered the question. He is going to supply the information.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I am interested in these contracts. Is there any more information about these contracts?

Len Duvall (AM): Point of information chair.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Who has a financial relationship?

Jennette Arnold (Chair): Will you wait, Mr Duvall, until the Member has finished. You cannot interrupt a Member like this.

Andrew Boff (AM): I am not sure, Mr Mayor, but I think the contract includes a jolly to China that the previous Mayor had embarked upon.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Which way around was the contract? Was this GLA taxpayers' money being paid to the Murdoch dynasty?

Andrew Boff (AM): As I understand it, yes.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): How much? That is unbelievable.

Andrew Boff (AM): I think the --

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Is that the thing I terminated as soon as I got in?

Len Duvall (AM): It is not true.

Jennette Arnold (Chair): It is not for you to answer. Mr Boff, have you finished your questions to the Mayor?

Andrew Boff (AM): I don't know. Do you think I have finished, Mr Mayor?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I think you have opened a very fruitful avenue of inquiry.

Jennette Arnold (Chair): That information will be supplied to you and the rest of the Assembly Members. Mr Boff, you mentioned Mr Duvall and so is there a point of clarification you wish to make?

Len Duvall (AM): Point of information, Chair. No money from this organisation to the knowledge that Freud Communication is not part News International and to my knowledge no money has been paid to News International. It is an untruth. It is untrue.

Jennette Arnold (Chair): Excuse me, Members, if you keep on referring to each other and then that Member has the right for a personal explanation then that is where we are going to go.

Mr Duvall, you have to limit yourself to the personal explanation about the point that referred to you, not the former Mayor.

Len Duvall (AM): Chair, I was not referring to the former Mayor, I was referring to an untruth that News International had been paid a large sum of money, Matthew Freud Communication --

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I do not think that is what was said.

Len Duvall (AM): I think you said it, Mr Mayor. You said it, you implied it, Freud --

Jennette Arnold (Chair): OK, let us move on.

Len Duvall (AM): Can I seek an assurance from you, Chair, that any information provided by the former Mayor, the one that they are so interested in asking questions of, maybe the former Mayor should be sitting there, not this joker, that we also receive a list of his meetings that he has had with News International, including his lunch?

Jennette Arnold (Chair): No, OK. Let us move on.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Well, all I can say --

Jennette Arnold (Chair): Assembly Member Johnson.

Darren Johnson (AM): Are we moving on to the next area?

Jennette Arnold (Chair): Your question please. Are you on phone hacking or not?

Darren Johnson (AM): I will briefly ask a question and then I want to come back later on the pay issue.

Jennette Arnold (Chair): Yes, that is fine.

Darren Johnson (AM): The comments you made back in September, that this is a load of codswallop cooked up by the Labour Party, to be so accepting of the police's position that there was no substantial evidence and to make such a statement like that, it did show an extraordinary lack of judgement on your part.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): No, on the contrary. We were having a long discussion about things that are of huge importance to the future of the City, mainly counterterrorism. All the information I had, as I have explained at length now to this Assembly, was that there was nothing new in the so-called revelations in the *New York Times* and the *Guardian*. That is why it seemed to me that to describe it in whatever language I used was a perfectly fair reflection of what was going on. As I said, and I repeat to you, Darren, I did leave the very, very important caveat that if new facts emerged into the public domain then obviously it will be up to the police to take account of those and to draw the necessary conclusion. That is exactly what has happened.

Darren Johnson (AM): You do not think you need to reflect on the things that you tell this Assembly at Mayor's Question Time?

Darren Johnson (AM): As I say, I certainly think that if you look back at the information that we had then, and this was information that was informing the views, not just of me but of Len, of the CPS, of everybody who was involved in it, it looked to people involved in the matter as though there was nothing new. That is what informed my views.

Brian Coleman (AM): Mr Mayor, can you accept that those of us who have been the victims of the *News of the World* feel extremely disappointed with the MPS response on this whole issue? Mr Mayor, as someone who sat through a recording of yesterday's Select Committee's hearing and was frankly horrified by a number of the performances, will you accept that with the exception of, I have to say, an outstandingly excellent performance from Sue Akers - a Barnet girl - frankly the rest of them you would not buy a used car from?

Will you accept that Mr John Yates has, as they call it in the business, 'previous form' on this? I refer to the endless media leaks which came out of his inquiry into the cash-for-honours, where there were almost weekly updates in the Sunday newspapers on what was allegedly going on with his inquiry. Will you now accept that it is time for Mr Yates to depart off into the sunset, because, whatever his previous distinguished work, Londoners cannot expect to have confidence in a senior office who gave that performance yesterday? Will you further accept that it was this Assembly, and many colleagues

sitting around this table who first highlighted the failings of the previous MPS Commissioner? It is probably this Assembly's job to highlight the failures of this officer as well, and that John Yates is now a lame duck police officer and should retire.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I hear what you say, Brian, and obviously I respect your feelings, particularly since you were yourself a victim of phone hacking or subterfuge by the *News of the World*. I have to say I do not know the details.

I just want to go back to what I said initially, which is that I do believe that John Yates is doing an excellent job in counterterrorism. That is what he is there to do. It is very, very important for London that he does that, and it is widely acknowledged that he had led his team very, very well and continues to allow our City to be remarkably vigilant.

On the matter of his relations, or any other police officer's relations, with the media, this is now something everybody understands that is of the acutest sensitivity. It is something that Operation Weeting is designed to get to the bottom of, and of course it is something that the IPCC will be investigating. Furthermore, if what you say is correct about the leaks in respect of the cash-for-honours investigation, then I would imagine that that would be exactly the kind of area that the judge-led inquiry will want to examine. I can well imagine that all police officers who are accused of leaking information will be summoned before that inquiry.

Brian Coleman (AM): Mr Mayor, I am less worried about police officers going through the media. I am more worried about this particular officer's failure to detect what has turned out to be one of the biggest scandals in the last ten years, when he reviewed the case. I am not sure that Londoners can have confidence in a senior police officer who somehow misses what was frankly probably glaringly obvious to most people that there was more to the *News of the World* scandal than originally met the eye. Including you claim yourself quite rightly that you thought there was more to it than originally met the eye.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): As I said to Dee, I think John Yates would be the first to put his hands up and accept that there were failings in his handling of it and that it is regrettable that the matter was not pursued more vigorously then. All I can say in respect to my own position is I had to go on the advice that I was given. It is not the role of the Mayor, by the way, to direct police operations or police investigations and we should be absolutely clear about that.

Brian Coleman (AM): It is the role of the Mayor to hold senior officers to account, just as you quite rightly and properly held the former MPS Commissioner to account.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I understand what you are saying, Brian. I have to take a judgement on the balance of the case and I believe that John Yates is doing a very important and effective job in leading the struggle against terror in this City and, in my view, it is vital that he is allowed to continue to do that, though obviously I accept fully what you say about the need to investigate the allegations that you have made about leaking and so on and so forth.

Richard Tracey (AM): Mr Mayor, if we could just go back some minutes, you were being criticised in a relatively diffuse way.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I do not think I was being criticised.

Richard Tracey (AM): I heard it as criticism, Mr Mayor.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I do not. I think they were being very supportive.

Richard Tracey (AM): By Len Duvall. I just want to put this point to you. Len Duvall was of course the Chairman of the MPA for some time. Indeed, even at the beginning of your Mayoralty. I think at that time the two of you, you as Mayor and Len Duvall as Chairman of the MPA, were briefed by the police about the status of the investigations into phone hacking. You were told, I gather, that they had trawled all the material in some detail and that they had successfully prosecuted the guilty parties. Then apparently Len Duvall spoke on the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) London saying that the police said there was nothing more to investigate. So why is he going on at you now this morning about this?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): You could only speculate, Dick that perhaps it is because we face the hard necessity of an electoral timetable. There it is: it looks as though there is some sort of politics to be made out of this. That may be one motivation. I do not believe there is any politics to be made out of this. I think we are all together in wanting to get to the bottom of it. Everybody was under the impression back then, when I said what I did to this Assembly. Certainly that was the information I was given and that was the information Len was given that there was nothing new in the allegations. That was why we responded as we did. That was why the police as a whole responded as they did. It has now become clear that very, very sad sickening things were happening at the instigation of journalists in the *News of the World* and perhaps other papers - that all now needs to be resolved.

By the way, it is not just News International. Let us be absolutely clear, these are not the only newspapers that have been involved in this kind of behaviour. If we are going to have an investigation into blagging and all that kind of thing then frankly the entire great and good of Fleet Street are going to have to come and account for what has been happening in their industry during the last ten years.

Richard Tracey (AM): I absolutely agree with you. Talking about disgusting behaviour, it was back in 2003 when the then Rebekah Wade, now Rebekah Brooks, told the Labour Government that the newspaper she worked for had paid police officers for information. Let us just look at the date again, 2003: a Labour Government, a Labour Mayor here in City Hall, why was there not a major inquiry done then by the MPA Chairman or the chap that was before him, Lord Harris I think he is called, and indeed by the Labour Government? Why not then? That was surely a point for investigation.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Self evidently because the chief policy of the Labour Party was to lick the boots of News International. That was what the name of the game was. Not only that, but even after this guy Mulcaire was arrested it was thought appropriate for my predecessor to have a series of lunches or whatever with executives from News International. I think it was thought appropriate for a very substantial financial arrangement to be entered into between this place and members of the Murdoch dynasty, to put it mildly. I think all those facts are germane if people are going to start throwing mud around. I think it was very, very regrettable that that decision was taken.

Jennette Arnold (Chair): OK.

Richard Tracey (AM): Finally, if I may, Madam Chair, I have one more question.

Jennette Arnold (Chair): OK.

Richard Tracey (AM): Thank you very much. Talking about boot licking and News International, or perhaps a bit of the reverse of it, do you know there have been 26 bylined articles in News International newspapers since the hacking scandal broke in July 2009? In the autumn and winter of 2009/10 the same byline writer has appeared every few weeks in News International journals. The byline, Mr Mayor, is Ken Livingstone [former Mayor of London].

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): You are joking!

Richard Tracey (AM): No.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I sincerely hope no payment was received. It would be unbelievable, would it not, if cash actually went from agencies of the Murdoch empire into the pockets? Do you think that could have happened?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): That would be a truly stunning development.

James Cleverly (AM): There seems to be a lot of confusion about who was responsible for asking who, what and when, so I would just like to double-check in my own mind the chronology of this exactly. When this story broke and arrests were being made, Mr Mayor, who was the incumbent of the position of Mayor of London?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I think I have already given the answer to that, James. What I really feel is it is important for people who do my job to talk to journalists and talk to proprietors and to talk to people involved in explaining to Londoners what is going on in our city. That was the purpose of my meetings with News International. I am sure that was the purpose of the previous Mayor in speaking to News International.

James Cleverly (AM): During your election campaign, did you at any point criticise the previous Mayor for having meetings with journalists of whatever news stable that may have been?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): No. What I did criticise him for, which I thought was outrageous, I totally forgot about it, not just the £3 million - I think it was more than £1 million by the way, it was the huge sums of money he used to spend because we were frustrated in getting the support from the papers that he sucked up to. He actually had his own paper, you remember. He lavished huge sums of taxpayers' money on a kind of communist free sheet that he used to publish in desperation. It was a twin-track strategy, both of which I am pleased to say we have axed.

James Cleverly (AM): Mr Mayor, the situation that we now see, where families who have lost loved ones either to criminal activity or in conflict were being hacked, and there are serious question marks hanging over the conduct potentially of police officers. These are important issues and public confidence in both those institutions needs to be restored. Do you feel that the crass and opportunistic attacks that we have seen both in the media over the last couple of days and indeed this morning on the floor of this chamber go any way to actually getting to the bottom of what happened

in those circumstances and in any way move towards getting clarity in the restoration of public confidence in these institutions?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): There are three things that need to happen: Operating Weeting needs to be pursued to its logical conclusion. The IPCC investigation needs to happen into whatever the police did and we need to have a full account of the practices and habits of the media over the last ten years. That is what needs to happen. Out of this I am sure some good will come. We may be able to curb the worst excesses of the media whilst keeping a vibrant and exuberant press in London - that is what we want.

Richard Barnes (AM): Mr Mayor, much has been made this morning by Mr Duvall and Ms McCartney as to when you were first told that your phone had been hacked and what your reaction was. Could you refresh my memory: was that in 2006?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I think it was, yes.

Richard Barnes (AM): Did you have any involvement in the administration of London politics in 2006?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I did not, no.

Richard Barnes (AM): Would it surprise you to know that I was a member of the MPA in the year 2006, indeed for the preceding six years as well, and was a member until October 2008, when you indeed took your seat on the MPA?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Of course, yes, I remember that. Thank you for the long service.

Richard Barnes (AM): Would you be surprised to learn that at no time were members of the MPA briefed by anybody about phone hacking and the serious implications of that by the then Chairman Mr Duvall?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Obviously this is all before my time, Richard, but it there was no such briefing whilst Labour was in power then that would be a very serious and surprising dereliction.

Richard Barnes (AM): Would it not be natural for somebody in 2006 who was not involved in London Government to wish to protect their family rather than pursue a court case which could have major implications for that family's private life?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): If you are asking why did I not want to, the chief explanation of course is that the police assured me that that was not necessary; they were just ringing me as a courtesy, so I said, "Oh fine".

Richard Barnes (AM): You were acting on advice and similarly you were acting on advice in September when you said this was codswallop. Would you be surprised to know that Jenny Jones in June 2011 said of the phone hacking, and she is also a member of the MPA and has been since the year 2000:

“Not something we should be spending a huge amount of time on. There are murders, abductions and rapes that these officers should be investigating. All these people have to do is not use the voicemail facility on their phone and they will never be hacked again. At a time when resources are so stretched this investigation, for me, should be pretty low on the agenda.”

Ms Jones is known for commenting on all matters criminal, civil and indeed that involves anybody in a uniform. Are you surprised that she almost shared your view and indeed laid the groundwork for you to say at the time that acting on the advice there was nothing further to gain from a further investigation?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I am sure Jenny will explain what she meant by that. What it confirms, I think, for most fair-minded people is that nobody at that time, and I am sure this is what Jenny will say, appreciated the horror of what was going on. Nobody believed for a second that people should be so callous as to hack into the voicemail of an abducted child or into the families of soldiers killed in the war in Iraq. Nobody believed that could happen. I am sure that is why Jenny spoke as she did. That was very much the context in which I was speaking to you all last year.

Richard Barnes (AM): Would it surprise you to learn that between 2006 and 2008 the then incumbent Mayor never raised this matter with the London Assembly and was indeed silent on the matter?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): As I say, I think the silence is very eloquent in that particular matter. This was a period in which there was the London paper which was important to keep on side, there were all sorts of things. There were all sorts of reasons I can imagine that it was not thought politic to kick up a fuss about it.

Richard Barnes (AM): One can only trust that he is not so crass to come out of the woodwork now because there is an election in the offing.

Mr Mayor, would you be surprised to know that the value of that series of contracts is closer to £3.5 million, than the £1 million that Andrew Boff, or indeed the £3 million that you thought?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I am surprised on that - £3.5 million of GLA money over what period?

Richard Barnes (AM): I have not got the period in front of me but I am sure your investigations will tell us.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): That is for public relations (PR) services?

Richard Barnes (AM): Indeed it was to a communications company.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): We have plenty of press and PR people in City Hall, what was the need for --

Jennette Arnold (Chair): Mr Mayor, we have already addressed this and you are going to give the Assembly the information.

Before we move on to a separate topic, I have a personal explanation from Mr Duvall, who has been mentioned by two speakers, and I also have a personal explanation from Ms Jones. Can we have that?

Len Duvall (AM): Thank you, Madam Chair. People questioned my motives in terms of my questioning and the approach that I have taken this morning, and my own actions at the time. I have been on record, and I am public about, calling for a fully independent public inquiry into the actions of the police at the time in terms of what I was told and when I was told. There are notes that may exist. They are police notes. I am quite clear and have talked to the people present in the room when I was briefed. There were also notes circulated at the MPA at the time when the matter reached the courts.

Secondly, Chair, it is my right as a London Assembly Member - and I think rightly echoed by Assembly Member Coleman about what this job is. What I was seeking to do in my questioning, because that is the issue of my person explanation is this: the offence moved on. When I left the MPA it became apparent, that is the trigger of the issues, and under this Mayor's watch, not the last Mayor's watch, information came into the public domain which was not followed up. Questions need to be asked of why they were not followed up. The Mayor's personal circumstances of being a victim are very relevant to this, and understanding the motivations why he wished to not pursue it, or not be part of bringing people justice, that is why I asked those questions. It is not about elections, it is about the issue that is before us. It is a national issue, it a London issue and actually people on their watches, like I will have to account for my actions at the appropriate time, this Mayor needs to be accountable for his actions over this period of time when it moved substantially from 2006.

Jenny Jones (Chair): Thank you very much. I would like to thank the Mayor for defending me so ably - that is very kind of him. At no stage did I say that the investigation should stop. It was merely frustration that so many resources have been given to it when we are constantly told that resource is so short. Also I said at the time, when we questioned John Yates:

"I feel that decisions are taken to not widen an investigation but downstream it actually costs us more money to mop it up because things come out."

That is exactly what happened. They narrowed the first investigation down to the point when it was not done properly and that was why I spoke as I did.

Jennette Arnold (Chair): OK. I am going to take two more questions on this update. Assembly Member Biggs, do you have a question on another area?

John Biggs (AM): I think it was on Darren's question. I assume the courtesy is that he goes first.

Jennette Arnold (Chair): Thank you, always glad to see you being courteous.

Darren Johnson (AM): When is he ever anything else?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): He has been very good today. Why has he been so good today?

Jennette Arnold (Chair): Oh stop, don't. Assembly Member Johnson.

Darren Johnson (AM): Yes, thank you. This was on the issue of the pay increase for two of your mayoral advisers. Last year you felt unable to support a very modest pay rise that was supported by all four groups in the Assembly for City Hall's lowest paid staff. That would cost just £54,000 to give a very modest pay increase to all the lowest paid staff at City Hall. You did not support that, yet now you feel you can give a pay rise to two members of your team, a pay rise of £73,000 for two people.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Well, as I said earlier on, there was an increment for the low paid, there is a general context of restraint and that is the context in which we have reduced the number of posts and reduced the overall salaries bill, Darren. Both the individuals concerned have taken on increased responsibilities and it was fair to reflect that in their remuneration.

Darren Johnson (AM): So it is redundancy and pay freezes for everyone else at City Hall but huge great salary increases for your mayoral advisers?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): As I say, to be fair to me, as I recall at least one of the advisers, Munira was felt by some members to be discriminated against in the sense that she was receiving less than other members and there was some feeling that that was because she was a woman or whatever. That was the allegation that was made at the time that has now been rectified. As I say, when people take on very substantial extra responsibilities, when they are doing more it is fair to reflect that and that is why we have done what we have done and I appreciate that these are tough times and I understand the feelings that this causes, particularly in the context of widespread retrenchments across government and the reductions being made in salaries and headcount here. These are tough questions and I do think it is right that the GLA, as a whole, should be a lean strategic body rather than a big sprawling delivery agency and that is why it is right that we reduced headcount and we reduced the overall salaries bill, and that is how we have been able to --

Darren Johnson (AM): OK, but you accept then at certain times there is a need to give people an increase as you explained about your two advisers. Will you now join the Assembly in its unanimous position of recommending a modest pay increase for the lowest paid staff of City Hall, given they are effectively facing a pay cut, our lowest paid staff, because of the inflation rate, and it would cost just £54,000, actually substantially less than the £73,000 increase for your two advisers?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Listen, Darren, I hear what you say. As I recall, this was something that was proposed by the former Chief Executive, that is my memory of --

Darren Johnson (AM): He opposed it. We urged him to do it, he opposed it. We have now asked the current --

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): You opposed?

Darren Johnson (AM): He opposed the pay increase for the lowest paid staff --

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): That is exactly right.

Darren Johnson (AM): -- against the advice of the Assembly and Business and Management Administration Committee (BMAC). The new Head of Paid Service said he is committed to looking at

the Assembly's request. Will you join the Assembly now in recommending a modest pay increase that would cost just £54,000 for the whole building to actually --

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Can I say I understand the feel about this in the building, I really am aware of this issue and if the Head of Paid Service is looking at it then I will certainly discuss it with him urgently.

John Biggs (AM): Very quickly, I think Darren has asked the question very effectively. I have a little quote for you from a letter from the then Chief Executive to the Unison Branch Secretary. It says that the Mayor has indicated that he does not support Unison's proposal to pay an inflationary pay award to any staff. Would you accept that a 50% pay increase is an inflationary pay award?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): You are talking about the awards to the --

John Biggs (AM): That was in the context of the low paid staff, but would you accept a 50% pay increase is an inflationary pay award?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Well, obviously if replicated across the entire public sector it would certainly be inflationary.

John Biggs (AM): All right, so that is good.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Let me --

John Biggs (AM): Would you accept also that the way it works in the local government is that when people's jobs substantially change there is an independent appraisal of how that job has changed, it is assessed according to criteria, they say, "Goodness me, this person's responsibility has increased massively, they have got a greater burden". Was such an appraisal carried out in relation to your advisers or was it simply that they felt a bit miffed that they were paid less than their mates on the corridor?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): No. No, in both cases there was a substantial increase in responsibilities that could be readily demonstrated.

Johns Biggs (AM): Was there an independent appraisal to assess that? Did you make sure it was independently appraised and assessed?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I will have to establish whether you are right in saying we need independent assessment of that but that is something that I am sure we can readily supply.

John Biggs (AM): All right, I think the answer is no, just for the record, Chair. I think just to help you. Thank you, Chair.