

London Assembly (Mayor's Question Time) - 22 October 2014

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

Roger Evans AM (Chairman): Now it is time for the Mayor to provide an oral update of up to five minutes. Mr Mayor, I understand that we have asked you to talk about preparations for Ebola.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Thank you very much. That is right. There was only one request for an oral update from the Assembly, Roger. However, very quickly, loads of things are happening since we have last met. Obviously, we had the Africa on the Square Festival just recently and we are looking forward to Diwali. Sorry, we have had Diwali. We have had a parade of kids already to mark Diwali and we are looking forward to further such celebrations.

On 10 October we had a launch of more cash for the grassroots sports scheme. This, as you know, has about 250,000 people doing all manner of physical jerks across London since the Olympics and it is being taken up actively across the city.

We are seeing loads of homes built across London, as everybody can see from the skyline.

One thing that is worth pointing out that is of real interest and importance to our city is the decline in the number of people not in education, employment or training (NEETs) with absolutely extraordinary figures. We are seeing the lowest rate of NEETs of any region in the United Kingdom (UK). It is now 11.7% compared to 18.2%, for instance, in the North East and that is a considerable fall in the number of people not in education, employment or training. There was also a huge fall in people claiming Jobseeker's Allowance (JSA). There are very encouraging things happening in the London economy.

You have asked for an update on Ebola, Andrew [Andrew Boff, AM], and all I can say is that the situation is pretty much unchanged since we last had a meeting of the advisory group on 9 October. We had a meeting yesterday, as you may know, with all the emergency services and London Resilience and so forth. My view is still pretty much that it remains a very serious threat and there is a likelihood that at some stage this country will see some cases. I cannot say how many. I do not think it is likely to be very many. However, at the moment we are continuing to prove fortunate. The countries that are doing outstandingly well, obviously, at the moment are Nigeria and Senegal, which have declared themselves Ebola-free recently. That is a great credit to them and it shows what you can do with effective healthcare management.

That concludes my report, Roger.

Roger Evans AM (Chairman): Thank you. I will take supplementary questions on the Mayor's report.

Andrew Boff AM: Thank you, Mr Mayor, for that update on the preparations for Ebola. I am assuming, therefore, that there are protocols that are now in place that will come into play upon the identification of the first Ebola victim within London?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Yes.

Andrew Boff AM: I do not think it is inevitable, but it is highly possible --

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): No, it is highly possible.

Andrew Boff AM: -- that it could happen in London. I just want the assurance and I think Londoners would want the assurance that the plans are in place should that eventuality come to pass.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Of course. The National Health Service (NHS) has looked at all its contingency measures, at the bed space available and how we would handle such cases.

As you know, as the public will know and as everybody knows, there are steps being taken now at ports and airports to screen and to try to detect Ebola in a practical way. It is not, obviously, reasonable to try to take blood tests from everybody coming from that part of the world, but passengers at Heathrow - which has received the vast bulk of passengers from Liberia, Sierra Leone and Guinea - are having their temperature taken. They are completing a questionnaire about their recent travel, their current health and that kind of thing. The same thing is going into Gatwick today and will also be introduced on the Eurostar next week.

Your point about the preparations here is well taken and I am assured that we are doing everything that is necessary.

Andrew Boff AM: Thank you, sir.

Roger Evans AM (Chairman): We will move on to the questions which have been tabled.