

London Assembly (Mayor's Question Time) – 21 October 2015

Transcript of Agenda Item 5 – Questions to the Mayor

We are going to section 5, questions for the Mayor, but before we start I will just say to Members that I have grouped the four questions that relate to the Volkswagen (VW) scandal. How we are going to do this is the first question will be put by Assembly Member Jones and she will get an answer to her question and we will carry that through similarly with Assembly Member Knight, Assembly Member Qureshi and Assembly Member Cleverly. After those four Members have asked their questions and have had answers, then I will open it up for follow-up questions from other Members.

2015/3201 - Public health implications of VW scandal

Jenny Jones AM

It has become apparent that VW and possibly other car manufacturers have deliberately and cynically deceived the public and regulators about the levels of emissions from their vehicles, irrespective of the public health implications. Bearing in mind your responsibilities to meet legal limit values for local air pollutants, what specific actions are you taking as Mayor?

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): Thank you very much, Jenny. I am going to take all the answers together, if that is --

Jenny Jones AM: No.

Jennette Arnold OBE AM (Chair): I have just said the total opposite.

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): You want me to answer each question?

Jennette Arnold OBE AM (Chair): I said you will answer each question.

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): Sorry. In that case, I will answer each question individually. Forgive me.

On the public health implications of the VW scandal - which is what you are asking about particularly, Jenny - we are going to continue to implement the most far-reaching programme of air quality improvement measures in the world with the Ultra Low Emission Zone (ULEZ), which will reduce nitrogen oxides (NO_x) by 49%, particulate matter less than 10 microns in diameter (PM_{10s}) and particulate matter less than 2.5 microns in diameter (PM_{2.5s}) by 64% and carbon dioxide (CO₂) by 15% in central London just in the next five years. Included in this package are lots of plans about no new diesel taxis, zero-emission vehicles in the centre of town, ultra-low emission buses and so on and so forth.

The anxiety - and this may anticipate future questions - that people have is about the Euro 6 diesel standards for vehicles. The question that everybody may legitimately ask is, "Given what has happened with the Euro 4 and Euro 5 standards, which turned out to be fictitious and defective and are not delivering what they claimed, what confidence can we place in the Euro 6 diesel standards?" For heavy goods vehicles (HGVs), they seem to be working. There is more doubt, frankly, about the Euro 6 diesel performance for light vehicles and cars.

Just to give you the response that we have had so far in City Hall, when we modelled the ULEZ --

Jenny Jones AM: Mr Mayor, I have to stop you because you are answering a question I have not asked.

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): Can I just finish and get to the point? When we modelled the ULEZ --

Jenny Jones AM: Mr Mayor, you are answering a question I have not asked.

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): You asked about the health impacts and our objective is to respond to --

Jenny Jones AM: Yes. Now I want to ask you another question. What is the scale of the problem here in London? Have you made any assessment of that?

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): We do not have any new assessment of the scale of the health threat, but Murad [Murad Qureshi AM] and others have campaigned for a long time on this and you will be familiar with the scale of the early mortality that results from poor air quality in London.

Jenny Jones AM: You do not know the size of the problem?

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): We have no evidence - there is no scientific evidence that I know of - that the extra release of pollutants implied by the VW scandal has led to or is leading to greater mortality. There is no evidence that I know of for that, although I will be happy to get back to you on that.

Jenny Jones AM: The Government has a watchdog called the Vehicle Certification Agency and that has been tasked to retest all of these vehicles. However, there is a big problem with this because it gets a lot of funding from vehicle manufacturers. I just wonder if you are as dubious as I am about whether or not they are going to be effective and -- I do not want to say 'honest' but you know what I mean.

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): Yes.

Jenny Jones AM: In fact, they have failed to expose the defeat device in spite of the fact that diesel vehicles are something like 50% of our motor fleet. Do you have much confidence in the Vehicle Certification Agency?

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): All I can say, Jenny, is that you are right to be suspicious. All we can say is that other manufacturers than VW have confirmed that they do not have defeat devices on their vehicles and, clearly, that is something that I am sure is being actively investigated. That is the information we have at the moment.

Jenny Jones AM: Do you think it is worth carrying out your own independent tests in some way so that we can actually check these vehicles? There are a substantial number in London.

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): It is up to authorities in this country. Indeed, as far as I can remember, under the European Union (EU) homologation principles for vehicles, once a vehicle has been

tested for emissions in one part of the Community, it is deemed good for the whole of the Community. That is, to the best of my knowledge, how it works. Clearly, there has been a major failure here with VW. We do test the buses that go on our roads and --

Jenny Jones AM: You could test --

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): I would just make one point to you that perhaps might cheer up some members of the audience. Getting back to your point about health impacts, irrespective of the VW scandal, which is very serious, it is still the case that emissions of these pollutants have come down and, in many London hotspots, in the measured emissions - indeed, in some of the most notorious hotspots for poor air quality - we are seeing improvements as a result of new technology.

Jenny Jones AM: Mr Mayor, you are notoriously bad on facts and so forgive me if I do not accept that.

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): I am so sorry but that is pot/kettle. Hello.

Jenny Jones AM: Mr Mayor, the fact is that Euro 6 [vehicles] are going to be in your ULEZ and are going to be at the moment exempt. What I am suggesting is that they should not be exempt.

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): I understand that.

Jenny Jones AM: Actually, if you do not test them independently, then we cannot guarantee that they are as clean as they should be for your ULEZ. You want that to work, do you not?

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): We do. I wondered why you were trying to interrupt me when I was coming to that very point. It was because you wanted to make it a bit later on yourself!

It is perfectly true that this is now the question for us: does the Euro 6 diesel test really deliver the results that we want? What we have done is to bake into the ULEZ predictions --

Jenny Jones AM: No, that is not good enough, though. We do not want the dirty air. We do not want you to say, "It will all be all right because we have a margin of error for filthy air". We want you to say, "The air will be cleaner".

Jennette Arnold OBE AM (Chair): OK, Assembly Member Jones, you talked about --

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): I am very happy to say --

Jennette Arnold OBE AM (Chair): Excuse me. Just a minute. You talked about the public health implications.

Jenny Jones AM: Yes, dirty air.

Jennette Arnold OBE AM (Chair): Have you finished on the public health implications?

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): Jenny wants me to say something and so I am going to say it.

Jenny Jones AM: No, it is all about the public health implications. It is about the dirty air from these vehicles.

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): Jenny wants me to say that the air will be cleaner. The air will be cleaner, Jenny. It has got cleaner and it will get cleaner still thanks to the ULEZ and the issue --

Jenny Jones AM: Not as clean as it could be if you independently tested some of these vehicles so that we could be sure that your ULEZ will actually work for Londoners.

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): I know that you are a passionate supporter of the single market and the principles of the EU --

Jenny Jones AM: Dodgy facts, Mr Mayor.

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): -- and under basic EU law, *Cassis de Dijon* and other cases, a vehicle having been homologated for use in one EU country must be --

Jenny Jones AM: You are repeating yourself, Mr Mayor. That is not a valuable use of my time.

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): It is an important principle, which the Green Party, to the best of my knowledge, actively supports.

2015/3178 - Volkswagen emissions scandal

Stephen Knight AM

How many vehicles fitted with so-called 'defeat devices' - software designed to manipulate emissions test results - are operating on London's roads?

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): Thank you, Stephen, very much. Your question, which I hope I have not answered, is about how many vehicles with the defeat device are operating on London's roads.

Stephen Knight AM: Yes. Do you have an estimate for the number in London?

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): I can give you the estimate for the United Kingdom (UK) --

Stephen Knight AM: I know the estimate for the UK. It has been published. It is 1.2 million.

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): Yes, it is 1.2 million. I do not have an estimate for London but London has --

Stephen Knight AM: You do not have one, OK. Do you have an estimate or a concrete figure, Mr Mayor, for the number of Transport for London (TfL) licensed minicabs that are currently on our streets and have a defeat device in them?

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): No, I do not.

Stephen Knight AM: You do not?

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): I do not, but I would be happy --

Stephen Knight AM: Do you have an estimate for the number of the GLA's own fleet within the Metropolitan Police Service (MPS), the Fire Brigade or any other parts? Do you have an estimate for the number of those vehicles with defeat devices?

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): I would be happy to supply you with those figures if they are available and if it is practically useful to supply you with those.

Stephen Knight AM: You do not have the figures. You see, these defeat devices are, if you like, just one rather extreme example of what the motor manufacturers have been doing for years and we have known that, effectively, the real-world emissions of these vehicles are not what they are supposed to be. We have known this for many years. You asked the question yourself, Mr Mayor, about what confidence we can have in these Euro 6 standards, which you have put confidence in through badging them as ultra-low emission.

The reality is that we have independent testing in real-life usage of Euro 6 vehicles that are being sold today and we know that they have on average more emissions than they are supposed to. The highest Euro 6 diesel car that was tested, an Audi, was 22 times more than the emissions limit it was supposed to be meeting. Only one in ten of these Euro 6 cars actually meet the standards. We know they are not clean. We certainly know they are not ultra-low emission. Yet you have created a threshold for your so-called ULEZ, which says that Euro 6 is an ultra-low emission vehicle.

Mr Mayor, is it not time to be honest and say that Euro 6 cars, as they stand today, before the real-world emissions introduced in a couple of years' time, are not ultra-clean and will not be admitted?

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): I could see my Deputy Mayor for the Environment up there looking deeply depressing as you were speaking because what you were saying is not true, unfortunately.

What we have decided to do with the ULEZ is, because of our experience with Euro 4 and 5, to say that we are not going to look at the test track figures. We are going to look at the real-world driving emissions and bake those into our calculations about what the ULEZ will achieve.

Stephen Knight AM: In that case, why are you allowing Euro 6 diesels in?

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): With those in mind, do not forget what I said earlier on to Jenny [Jenny Jones AM]. The ULEZ will really achieve massive reductions: a 49% reduction in NO_x and a 64% in PM_{10s} --

Stephen Knight AM: These are just modelled figures, Mr Mayor. These are modelled figures for what might happen in five years' time. The reality is that we know that these vehicles, which are on the road today and are Euro 6 cars that you can buy today, are not ultra-low emission vehicles. Yet you are telling people who go to a forecourt to buy a car today that if they buy one of these dirty diesel cars they will be able to drive in the ULEZ in five years' time free of charge. That is the wrong signal, is it not, because we know they are dirty?

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): No, hang on a moment. Actually, they are considerably cleaner than previous diesel vehicles --

Stephen Knight AM: They are five times dirtier than they should be.

Jennette Arnold OBE AM (Chair): Assembly Member Knight, you must give the Mayor a chance to answer.

Stephen Knight AM: I apologise, Chair.

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): They are considerably cleaner than other vehicles. I have laboriously tried to explain both to you and to Jenny [Jenny Jones AM] that we have built into our calculations for the impact of the Euro 6 diesel engines that they will lead to a reduction in NOx -- thank you so much. That is superb.

Jennette Arnold OBE AM (Chair): That is so inappropriate.

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): I am just refuelling with a refreshing draught of diesel. They will reduce emissions of all kinds very considerably and, indeed, CO₂ as well. All Liberal Democrats, it seems to me --

Tony Arbour AM (Deputy Chairman): And there are not many of them!

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): -- have their own defeat device programmed into them --

Stephen Knight AM: Mr Mayor, with respect, your line of argument here --

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): -- as we saw.

Stephen Knight AM: -- is that Euro 6 cars are cleaner and that therefore the ULEZ will be cleaner.

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): I congratulate you on the defeat device you have managed to install into the --

Stephen Knight AM: Mr Mayor, you have not badged your initiative as a 'slightly cleaner' emission zone. You have badged it as an 'ultra-low' emission zone. By badging it like that, people have an expectation that there are not going to be 'slightly cleaner' diesels driving in it but there are going to be 'ultra-low emission vehicles. Euro 6 [vehicles] are not, as they stand today, ultra-low emission vehicles. We know that and you know that, Mr Mayor, do you not? To badge them is just dishonest to the public and is sending the wrong signals to people on the forecourts today choosing what car to buy.

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): People on the forecourts today can see very clearly what is going on with the diesel market, but we remain of the view that the Euro 6 engines are working well with the HGVs and on the light vehicles --

Stephen Knight AM: We are talking about cars, Mr Mayor. Will you at least review this decision about Euro 6 diesels entering the ULEZ? I can promise you, Mr Mayor, that if you do not, your successor will; they will have to. Will you please just give a commitment to review this decision?

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): That is a matter for him or her, but that is the position as it stands, Stephen. Our calculations, based on real-world driving experience, are that there will be very significant reductions in emissions of all kinds and --

Stephen Knight AM: Will you rebadge the ULEZ as a 'slightly lower' emission zone rather than an 'ultra-low' emission zone, then, Mr Mayor?

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): No.

Stephen Knight AM: That is the truth, is it not? We want honesty in politics.

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): I really think you need to look at the estimates of TfL. They are very conservative and they think they will be able to reduce PM₁₀s and PM_{2.5}s very significantly by 64% and NOx by 49%. That is good going. I am not saying we are all the way there and a lot of people are going to be moving towards plug-in hybrids. I saw an absolutely amazing series of cars in Japan. They are now on the market. They will be coming down within people's price range.

Stephen Knight AM: Thank you, Mr Mayor. I am out of time.

Jennette Arnold OBE AM (Chair): Thank you for that, Mr Mayor. That was a sterling effort, Assembly Member Knight.

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): Who said she was impartial?

Jennette Arnold OBE AM (Chair): You have to admire someone who holds on to a question.

2015/3319 - Dieselgate

Murad Qureshi AM

With the full implications of the dieselgate scandal now becoming clear, what steps will you take to protect Londoners' health?

Murad Qureshi AM: Mayor, you do not need to repeat yourself.

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): Can I just ask you to take into account the answers that I have already given, Murad?

Murad Qureshi AM: Yes. Thank you. Mr Mayor, we well know this is a silent killer. It puts the fatalities of cyclists and pedestrians into a context and the real parallel is with smoking as a public issue. Also, similarly, the cigarette companies were in denial for many decades about the ill-health and actually withheld information. Now we have a similar issue here, clearly, with car manufacturers and I think a lot more will be revealed beyond VW.

I just want to come back to one of the responses you gave to my colleagues. Given what has been said about Euro 6 diesels and the whole premise of your testing regime, does it not make the ULEZ proposal null and void?

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): No --

Murad Qureshi AM: Any future Mayor would have to seriously look at alternative proposals.

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): To Euro 6 diesel? I want you to know, Murad, and Stephen [Stephen Knight AM], too, and Jenny [Jenny Jones AM]; be in no doubt that I have interrogated our people long and hard about Euro 6 diesel standards because your suspicions will be shared by many people and, indeed, are shared by me. The assurances I have are that they do, even in real-world driving conditions, supply this level of improvement in air quality.

Because I can see that there is very considerable public concern about this, what I will undertake to the Assembly is that I will take steps to see if there is some economical way that we can satisfy ourselves further on this point.

Murad Qureshi AM: OK. That is good.

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): If we are not satisfied further on this point, then quite humbly and respectfully I will come back to the Assembly and explain where we have got to. I do understand people's concerns about this and it is, in my view, entirely legitimate. We have been diddled about Euro 4 and 5. They were meant to provide the results in NO_x, which they just did not. It is one of the reasons - in fact, it is the main reason, frankly - why London has the exceedances that it does. Suspicions here are not by any means foolish and we will do whatever we can to allay them.

Murad Qureshi AM: OK. That is useful. Just coming to a further point one of my previous colleagues mentioned, yes, it does need to be independently verified. I do not think the public has faith in the industry testing itself. It actually needs academic rigor and I would like to see King's College and that ilk doing that. I know they may not be too popular with the mayoralty, but if you are going to get some kudos --

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): No, that is not true. We have used King's College.

Murad Qureshi AM: OK. King's College, given the work that it has done particularly in London, has the type of people we need to give us that rigor and reassurance that Londoners want about the vehicles passing through their neighbourhoods. That is a suggestion. I hope you will take that on board.

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): Yes, I take that on board. I will propose to write to the Assembly, to the Environment Committee and to you about what further steps we are going to take to satisfy ourselves about Euro 6 --

Murad Qureshi AM: Yes, that is good. Can I just come back to your comments you made at your party conference? This is where you said one thing here and you said another to another audience, dare I say.

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): I hope plenty of Londoners were listening.

Murad Qureshi AM: You suggested that the reductions in NO_x and particulates were such, 20% and 15%, but those were based on computer modelling, no different to the VW figures. I do not want to suggest that you are VW executive here, but there is a difference between that and the concentration levels, which are what academics and monitoring stations use to measure, as well as Europe. Why do you not use those figures?

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): That is interesting but even you would concede - and you have campaigned on this for a long time - that even at the monitoring stations now we have had some very encouraging readings. Yes, it is not good everywhere and I am going to admit that. It is certainly not good around Heathrow and it would be catastrophic to go for a third runway there because of the air quality problems we have there. However, you are seeing some areas where the exceedances are coming down. That is because of technological improvements that we are driving forward and we are going to continue to do that.

Murad Qureshi AM: OK, but just a suggestion: you need to come to neighbourhoods like Marylebone that have been the most affected and residents are doing it themselves now. That is where the monitoring is probably going to go.

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): Certainly.

2015/3280 - Diesel Emissions

Roger Evans AM (on behalf of James Cleverly AM MP)

Following the Volkswagen emissions scandal, what mitigation arrangements would you expect to see for the affected vehicles and what improvements would you expect to London's air quality as a result of this?

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): Roger, the mitigation measures I would expect to see are putting in new vehicle catalytic converters and new exhaust systems so that we get rid of these pollutants. What I want us to do, as you know, is to move to a zero-emission environment in the centre of the city. That is why we are going for the ULEZ.

I particularly want to encourage electric vehicles and plug-in hybrids because they are the way forward. I drove a hydrogen vehicle, which was fantastic. The trouble with a hydrogen vehicle is that it costs £66,000 just for a saloon car. For the foreseeable future, they are likely to be out of people's reach, but plug-in hybrids with range extenders are going to start coming into the mass market and will really make a difference to people's choices.

Roger Evans AM: Do you think that it might be a good opportunity for VW to atone for its deceitful behaviour by perhaps providing a substantial contribution to your diesel scrappage scheme?

Jennette Arnold OBE AM (Chair): No.

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): That is a very interesting idea. I do not know whether VW will have much left by the end of this to pay, but let us see. Quite how, legally or morally, I could enforce such a fine on VW from my vantage point in London I am not sure, but it is certainly worth exploring. It might be better to try to shame or guilt them out in some way to pay for measures to improve clean air in London in some way; more cycling, for instance, with a VW cycle hire scheme to get people out of VWs.

Jenny Jones: That is just more advertising for them!

Roger Evans AM: Whilst we are on the subject of fines, do you think it is time for us to revisit this fine that the EU has been threatening to impose on London for air quality given that it has been certifying vehicles for us to use that are unsuitable?

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): That is completely the point and, once again, you have hit the nail on the head. Roger is right. He is totally and utterly right. You understand the paradox at the heart of all of this. It is because of the failure of the EU's Euro 4 and 5 standards that we are in a position where we have these exceedances and then it has the audacity to propose a fine on us because of the defectiveness of its standards. You have put your finger on the problem.

Richard Tracey AM: Mr Mayor, you were talking about various measures that could be taken, perhaps, to cut down on pollution apart from the measures to do with the vehicles themselves. Could I ask about perhaps various devices in planning? In other words, in my constituency in Putney High Street we have a particular problem with pollution.

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): Yes, you do, absolutely.

Richard Tracey AM: It is a canyon-like street and any of the pollutants just cannot get away. Surely it does not help if planners and architect build buildings that are considerable in mass and really do not help the bad air to get away.

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): Yes. It is also the case, obviously, that when people go too high or build structures with too cliff-like faces, they create wind tunnels and you get a Chicago type of environment. That is also unpleasant and I do not want to see that, either. Therefore, it is certainly the case that you have to take all such considerations into account in planning.

I thought you were going to make a point about construction equipment, which is often very polluting. We have just brought in new standards for construction equipment in London. Non-mobile construction equipment is often churning out a lot of emissions.

Richard Tracey AM: Thank you.

2015/3313 - George Osborne's 'Devolution Revolution'

Len Duvall AM

What will you do to ensure the Chancellor's recent proposals for devolution of business rates do not result in London suffering ever-increasing inequalities?

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): The Chancellor's excellent proposals for the devolution of business rates should be welcomed by this place. We all campaigned on Tony Travers's [Chair, London Finance Commission] and the London Finance Commission's report. Everybody thought that was a good idea. We now have the first serious fruits of that labour in the form of the devolution of business rates to London government.

Now, clearly, what we want to see is those business rates used to address long-term funding in this city for long-term infrastructure projects in such a way as to tackle inequalities by improving our transport networks, by allowing us to invest in housing that our city needs and by making sure that London is properly and stably financed. That is the key thing about the fiscal devolution agenda. It means that

you do not have to keep going back to beg for funding for housing or transport. You know that you have a stream against which you can borrow.

Len Duvall AM: Thank you, Mr Mayor. You probably will not see the fruits of this proposal, but you will play a key role in the negotiations around how it works and the detail of it. In the sense of the smoothing out and equalisation between, probably, inner and outer, what role do you think you will play in the negotiations about this institution and future mayoralties or do you think that is best left to the Government?

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): No. Do not forget that of the £26 billion raised in business rates in this country, a huge proportion comes from London anyway. Of that, an absolutely colossal quantity comes from the Central Activity Zone and from Westminster in particular. You are looking at huge inequality in the generation of business rates and it is up to government at all levels to use those funds sensibly to address the issues of the entire city.

You are right that this is something that will be for negotiation, but what the Government wants to see from London - both boroughs and the mayoralty - is a mechanism by which that business rate income can be fairly and properly awarded to promote the interests of the entire city. That is what we have to work towards.

Len Duvall AM: You do see a role for the mayoralty in that equalisation across London and also in some of that expenditure that the business rate devolution would be spent on?

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): I certainly do. I do not see how it would be possible to do it without the mayoralty, myself. Yes, I certainly do.

Len Duvall AM: In that sense, you have given us a flavour that you think housing and transport are maybe areas of interest that we would like to see that money spent on as it comes down. At the moment, with the existing 50% that is given to local government and to this Authority - we have about a 20% stake - what sort of percentage do you think we should have, bearing in mind the severe pressures we might be facing in transport and other areas that you have highlighted in your budget guidance?

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): Look, Len, I understand where you are going with this, but this is something that is obviously going to be a subject of detailed negotiations between us and the boroughs on how precisely to make it work in a way that really carries the confidence of everybody. There is a deal to be done, but this is probably not the place to get into the details.

One of the successes that we have had in the last few years has been the congress system of bringing the boroughs together with the mayoralty with the City Charter, which has actually been extremely beneficial. I have regular meetings with London borough leaders and there is very little friction between us and the boroughs and I am sure we can find --

Len Duvall AM: Mr Mayor, there will be tensions, but the boroughs need flexibility because of the cuts that are being imposed by this Government. We have a problem with inner and outer. Outer is actually supporting the economy because that is where the residents come and they work in some of these business districts that we have. That is the first tension, the extra tension with the flexibility that boroughs need.

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): That is absolutely true.

Len Duvall AM: However, you have existing tension between transport grant cuts that we are going to see, probably the most significant we have ever seen in terms of keeping this show on the road and contributing to the business of UK plc.

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

Len Duvall AM: You cannot just brush these aside.

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): I am not at all.

Len Duvall AM: We have 30-odd London boroughs versus a strategic authority. What is your leadership? What is the solution? What do you think is the best deal for both parties? Are we going to have vetoes by individual boroughs over infrastructure projects?

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): No.

Len Duvall AM: What is the bottom line here? That is what we need to hear, not maybe some of the detailed issues. Where are you coming from? You are doing the negotiations for the future of London and this Authority.

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): There are a couple of things there. The first is that the negotiations on the Comprehensive Spending Review (CSR) are certainly being led by me and by my team. Of course, the boroughs are fighting their corner for their support from the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG), as you would expect. I am fighting their corner, too. I am fighting London's corner. There is, as you rightly say, an argument or a discussion that is going on about funding for police, funding for housing and funding for transport, amongst other things. Funding for air quality also; we want £143 million to help us improve air quality. There are all sorts of things on our agenda and a very big negotiation now going on.

Separate to that, there is a discussion, obviously, to be had about the architecture of the governance of London under the circumstances in which London has greater fiscal devolution. It is really important that the Treasury is reassured that we are serious, that we can make it work together, that we have systems to, as you rightly say, resolve disputes between us and that there is an agreement about how the cake should be managed and who has a say over what.

I will not pretend to you that that is necessarily going to be easy, but my impression from talking to borough leaders is that they are well on for it and they understand what is necessary. They would much rather meet that challenge, take the money devolved to London and work together to spend it in the interests of Londoners than to keep having to go back to the Treasury and beg every time.

2015/3279 - Business rate reforms

Gareth Bacon AM

Does the Mayor welcome the Chancellor's decision to devolve business rates to local councils? Do you think the GLA should receive a portion of London's business rates?

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): Yes, Gareth, I do. I thank you and the GLA Conservatives --.

Tony Arbour AM (Deputy Chairman): For everything!

Gareth Bacon AM: Thank you very much.

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): Cheers. I do not know why there is not more cheering when I mention the GLA Conservatives for all the support that you have given for the cause of fiscal devolution. Thank you. You have been indispensable to this movement. We are seeing some progress now with the wonderful announcement by George Osborne, the Chancellor, devolving business rates to local government. Now is the time to show we can do it well and then let us hope that we get further devolution.

Gareth Bacon AM: Thank you very much, Mr Mayor. On that subject, whilst the devolution of business rates to local government is potentially very exciting, one of the other fiscal measures that we are looking for devolution of is stamp duty. I know that is something that you are particularly keen on.

Research by my office has shown that the £4.2 billion that London raises in stamp duty if devolved to London could generate housebuilding of a further 22,000 homes per year every year thereafter. Is that a figure that you recognise, Mr Mayor, and do you think the stamp duty should also be devolved by central Government?

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): I do think it should be so devolved and I congratulate you on the campaign you have been running on that.

The trouble is that we have done very well with business rates but I just have to be realistic about the temperament of the Treasury. It sees stamp duty in London as an enormous cash cow, as indeed it is. It is apprehensive about giving up the receipts from stamp duty to London. We will get there in the end but, as I was saying to Len [Duvall AM], who asked a very apposite question, we need to show that we can make the whole governance work. We have to show that London government is grownup and is able to take these funds and use them wisely in the interests of the entire city.

Gareth Bacon AM: I accept that it cannot be done overnight, Mr Mayor, but could I urge you, with the good contacts that you have with the Treasury, to keep this at the forefront of the Chancellor's mind as you move from this place back down the river [to the House of Commons]?

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): I shall, of course, Gareth.

Gareth Bacon AM: Thank you.

2015/3316 - Options for the MPS

Joanne McCartney AM

Do you agree with the Commissioner that in the next round of spending cuts faced by the MPS 'all the options on the list are unattractive'?

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): The Commissioner is absolutely right, as a public servant of huge importance in our city, to make his anxieties plain when he has them. I do not want to see

anything like the cuts that some have suggested. I do not think that those are necessary and I do not think that they will happen. I do not think that we need to have cuts of some of the numbers I have seen; 8,000 officers or 5,000 officers or anything like that. Indeed, I want to keep officer numbers high, as I have said repeatedly.

When I say that, I do not think this is a fetishistic thing to say. I do not think that wanting lots of police on the streets of London is in any way eccentric. We have a massively growing city. You repeatedly ask me about visibility of police in your constituency. You are right to do so. We want to build confidence. Confidence is not low but could be higher. We want to see higher public confidence in policing in London and we want to keep crime coming down. We have considerable challenges in our city and a growing, young, highly diverse population with many social problems. It would be very foolish, in my view, to cut London policing too far.

I would just remind people that we have cut police budgets from £3.6 billion when I took over to about £3.1 billion now per year. We have sold 120 buildings. We have closed 70 police stations. Just in the last year, we have seen 2,800 back-room staff go and loads of Police Community Support Officers (PCSOs), unfortunately, have gone. Therefore, we have made the savings. No one could look at the MPS and say that we have been idle. We have been hard as nails on the budgets and have really tried to drive them down, but Bernard [Hogan-Howe, Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis] is right to say that there is a limit to what can be achieved.

Joanne McCartney AM: Thank you. I am going to ask you what you think the limit is shortly. However, it looks like now, from the figures that are being talked about with changes to the police formula and a 20% cut over the next spending review, that we are looking at approximately £1 billion of further cuts. The Commissioner was saying that that looks like it is the best-case scenario not the worst-case and that, if cuts go further, then that would decimate the MPS. He has warned quite clearly that with the scale of cuts we are looking at a return to 1970s-style funding and he has talked about up to 8,000 police officers having to be taken off our streets.

You have said that you do not believe that that level of cut is going to take place. What do you know that the Commissioner and we do not know is happening? Do you have some different information?

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): No. What everybody would understand is that we have the CSR coming up on the 25th of next month. We have a negotiation going on and a conversation about how to fund London properly.

Basically, Joanne, as I am sure you appreciate - and you had it right just now - there are two things happening at once: there is a proposed change to the funding formula, which in my view would severely disadvantage London --

Joanne McCartney AM: Yes, indeed.

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): There is also the CSR round of cuts that affect the Home Office and all police forces in Britain. Those two things are coming together for us now in London. The impact of the funding formula has not been properly thought through at all. It seems to move around all over the place. One minute they are deciding to disadvantage one area --

Joanne McCartney AM: Mr Mayor, last year I asked if you would judicially review the Government on this because other Police and Crime Commissioners (PCCs) across the country were thinking of doing so.

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): On the formula?

Joanne McCartney AM: I understand that your Deputy Mayor for Policing and Crime is taking legal advice at the moment. Is that something you would be up for in the interests of Londoners?

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): I am not going to go any further than what the Deputy Mayor has already said on that. As you can imagine, temperamentally, I do not believe in wasting huge sums of taxpayers' money on top-quality silks [Queen's Counsel] for cases that very often do not achieve very much and are, basically, political. We can make our case in other ways --

Joanne McCartney AM: It is a legal argument, not political.

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): -- but you can take it that that option is not off the table.

Joanne McCartney AM: Thank you. The Commissioner has already said in an interview in the *Standard* where he set out the concerns. The same night he gave that interview to the *Evening Standard*, he was in my borough speaking at a public meeting where he said those exact concerns. He has talked about cuts to dedicated officers in London's schools and neighbourhood policing having fewer officers. He said it will get 'pretty twitchy' in terms of coverage of London. In terms of responses to non-emergencies, he said it would get slower. He said risky things will be done less well. He warned that, with the reduction in officers, he doubted the ability of London to react as it should do to future riots or a marauding terrorist attack. Do you share his concerns?

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): As I said earlier on, I do not think that it will come to anything like that, but it is entirely right that a leading public servant in this city should be able to give his professional view about the impact of cuts that, frankly, go too far. It is important that that message should be heard. However, I stress that we are really engaged in the negotiation now, which is by no means at an end.

Joanne McCartney AM: It seems to me that if you are lobbying on behalf of London and your professional Commissioner of Police is setting out what he believes will happen, yet you as the Mayor of London are publicly saying that you think that, whilst he is saying something sensible, you do not necessarily agree with it. That sends very mixed messages to the Government, do you not think?

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): No, on the contrary, what I am saying is that Bernard [Sir Bernard Hogan-Howe, Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis] is right to sound the alarm and right to be very frank with the Government about what is going on. It is our job now collectively to make sure that the Government understands that and that we deliver an outcome that protects Londoners, that keeps numbers high and that keeps crime coming down. That is the objective of the negotiations.

Joanne McCartney AM: The Commissioner has said that he is not a man to shroud-wave. You are not suggesting he is shroud-waving in this circumstance, are you?

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): No, I did not say that at all.

Joanne McCartney AM: Thank you.

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

Caroline Pidgeon MBE AM: Thank you. We have heard outlined this morning the potential dire budget cuts that the MPS is going to have to make and savings of £800 million or potentially more over the next few years. The Commissioner has said this could mean 8,000 police officers – that is one in four – police off our streets. We also know that the MPS is considering cutting the 1,000 PCSOs in our neighbourhoods.

Given that we have already seen a dramatic decrease in PCSOs and we see a police force potentially stretched, what assurances can you give Londoners that you not only value but are still committed to neighbourhood policing?

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): We still have Safer Neighbourhood Teams (SNTs) in every ward in London. We still have crime coming down. We have put 2,600 more police constables (PCs) into neighbourhoods. Although we all value and love PCSOs, most members of the public given the choice would say that they would rather see a warranted officer on the streets if possible and so that is a good thing. The proof of the pudding is in the eating. We are seeing crime coming down and --

Caroline Pidgeon MBE AM: I asked if you are still committed to neighbourhood policing.

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): Yes.

Caroline Pidgeon MBE AM: In the past, you have absolutely said that if you invest in neighbourhood policing, you can begin to win the war on crime, even in tough economic times. Do you still stand by that?

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): Yes, I do.

Caroline Pidgeon MBE AM: Fantastic.

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): It was a great tribute to the MPS that during the worst recession for 50 years crime continued to fall in London. There were many factors, but one of them was good neighbourhood policing.

Caroline Pidgeon MBE AM: One of the issues around the budget is that the MPS is spending money in areas where perhaps you need to look to recoup some of that money. Policing of football matches is around £4 million a year. We know Julian Assange [Editor-in-Chief, *WikiLeaks*] has cost over £11 million. What are you trying to do to recoup some of these costs to help with the budget crisis that the MPS is facing?

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): It is absurd. In areas of expenditure like Julian Assange – or however you pronounce it – it is absurd that he should have cost the MPS £12.6 million to police that showboating --

Caroline Pidgeon MBE AM: Are you trying to recoup some of these costs from football matches as well?

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): As you know, there is the capital city funding that we get from the Home Office and it is important that we are recompensed for that sort of activity. There are many pressures on the MPS's budget and staff from all sorts of national operations, some of which are

entirely historic and are about hacking, child abuse or whatever. Of course these are all very important, but they are not helping with frontline policing. It is important that the MPS should be properly compensated for that.

Caroline Pidgeon MBE AM: Let us move on, then, Mr Mayor. You are clearly making representations there. I have calculated that if you freeze council tax instead of cutting it over the next two years, you could raise an additional £135 million that you could put towards policing. If you are really committed to neighbourhood policing, you could consider raising council tax by 1.9%, just below that referendum threshold. Over two years that would cost Londoners 47 pence a month and you would raise an additional £165 million towards policing.

If you really are committed to neighbourhood policing and to keeping police numbers up - and I have heard that commitment you have today - will you consider freezing or slightly increasing council tax next year in order to protect our frontline police officers?

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): I am delighted that you wanted me to stay around for another two years or so, Caroline. That was not your position in the last mayoral election, I seem to remember. I will consider that. I will consider it. I have to say that there are alternatives to putting up council tax, which went up 153% under the last mayoralty and became a very serious --

Caroline Pidgeon MBE AM: You will consider that if you think police numbers are that under threat. Is that what you are saying today?

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): I am not disposed to do that, put it that way.

Caroline Pidgeon MBE AM: You have written to the Home Secretary about the funding formula changes. In that letter you stressed that her funding formula proposal may prevent you from delivering your manifesto commitment on council tax, which was to cut it. If you put to Londoners, "It will cost you 47 pence a month but I will be able to keep police numbers up", it might be an option that Londoners would welcome.

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): Let me tell you. At the moment, Londoners already for policing pay roughly double in their council tax what the people in Birmingham pay. If you are asking me to keep whacking up council tax when what we need is proper funding for London, then you need to go back to the drawing board.

Caroline Pidgeon MBE AM: It is both. I have said that it is both and that you may need to consider it as a short-term measure.

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): You need to go back to the drawing board and you need to think about it. You should be campaigning for proper funding for policing in London and not taking the money off Londoners when they already contribute much more for policing than in many other cities in this country.

Caroline Pidgeon MBE AM: I absolutely am but what I am saying to you is that if it comes to it and if we are in this hard place, will you consider putting up council tax or at least freezing it? You have said you will.

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): You have heard my answer.

Caroline Pidgeon MBE AM: Yes. Thank you very much indeed.

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

Andrew Dismore AM: Residents in Hampstead, where there has been a number of particularly vicious and terrifying robberies recently, want to crowdsource three extra police officers for their area on the basis of a buy-one-get-one-free deal. Do you agree with the Camden Borough Commander that it would not set a good precedent and the MPS should not entertain it or do you agree with Zac Goldsmith [Member of Parliament for Richmond Park and Mayoral candidate], who says he has no objection to the idea?

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): The objective I have is to make sure that we have properly funded policing for London and to get a good deal from the Treasury to make good use of the council tax that we are able to levy and to keep bringing burglary, robbery and other crimes down across the city.

Andrew Dismore AM: I see you have not answered the question as to whether you think it is a good idea or not. Does this not show that even in relatively affluent areas people have little confidence in the strength of the police as a result of your cuts to SNTs and police station closures to the extent that they are prepared to go to such lengths to raise the money themselves --

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): I am not aware of --

Andrew Dismore AM: -- let me finish the question - to restore the SNTs to the original numbers and the way they used to be before you cut them? Do you not think it is a bit sad that people, I suspect, in Conservative-voting areas think that way?

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): They certainly did not vote for you!

Andrew Dismore AM: I did win the election by a substantial majority, as you know.

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): You did jolly well. Seriously, I will look at the proposal that you are discussing. I have no knowledge of the idea that you are proposing for crowdsourcing. I am not instinctively attracted to it. Let us study it. What I want is to see proper funding for police and I want to see confidence in those neighbourhoods come up.

Actually, I do not think that you are quite accurate in what you say about that area. Burglary has come down considerably across London and that is a testament to the efforts of the police and something that they can be proud of.

Andrew Dismore AM: You say that, Mr Mayor, but if you read the *Ham & High* - and I am sure your press team do - you will have seen on the front page this proposal several weeks running. You will have seen Zac Goldsmith thinking it was a good idea and the Borough Commander saying it was not. You will have seen the reports of some of these violence offences week after week reported in the *Ham & High*. People in this area are being particularly targeted because the criminals apparently think that the people there are somewhat better off.

Do you not think it is sad that people in this sort of area do not have the confidence in you to properly fund the police?

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): I do not know who you are talking about, but as I said --

Andrew Dismore AM: I can tell you who I am talking about. I am talking about the Chair of the Safer Neighbourhood Panel in the Fitzjohns area, who happens to be the Chair of the Conservative Party in that ward.

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): I am more than happy to look at the gentleman's proposal --

Andrew Dismore AM: It is a lady, actually.

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): -- I am sorry, the lady's proposal and to study it. As I said, the better solution would be to make sure that the whole of London is properly policed, as it is, and to keep crime coming down. You have to --

Andrew Dismore AM: You are sitting on the fence on their proposal. You are trying to dodge and duck the fact that this area is very upset about the lack of policing as a result of your cuts. You are not going to promise them to restore those cuts, are you?

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): What I have said is that we are going to keep police numbers high and keep crime coming down across London.

Andrew Dismore AM: You have not.

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): Unfortunately, you have the advantage on me of much closer study of the *Ham & High* in the last few weeks than I have been able to conduct and I apologise for that.

Andrew Dismore AM: Maybe read the *Camden New Journal* because it is there as well.

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): And the *Camden New Journal*. You must forgive me. Unaccountably, that has eluded my grasp in the last few weeks. I will look at it. I will study the proposals. If there is any sense in them and if the lady you mentioned has a good idea, then we are always open to good ideas.

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): At the moment, I would prefer to keep investing in policing in London and to keep crime coming down.

Andrew Dismore AM: You will overrule the Borough Commander, then?

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): I will have a look at the proposals. That is what I said, Andrew. That was in a fit of uncharacteristic generosity towards you. I will look at what you have to say.

Jennette Arnold OBE AM (Chair): Assembly Member O'Connell?

Steve O'Connell AM: Thank you. To get back to the strategic as opposed to the particular, Mr Mayor, it is really good to have this debate this morning. We need to reinforce the fact that over the last few years the transition - particularly of neighbourhood policing, and despite some concerns about the changes in the numbers of the teams - has been a success. Crime has gone down in the neighbourhoods and we have seen extra officers in the neighbourhoods. This is with the transition from one-two-three to one-and-one.

I would speak to support some of the comments earlier. The work that you have done has been a success story within the neighbourhoods and elsewhere, but that is now threatened by this grim combination of the change in the formula and the Government cuts. It is important and it is reassuring for everyone around the horseshoe today to hear that you and the Deputy Mayor for Policing and Crime will be using all resources to plead London's case. We need a fair funding deal for our police to maintain the good record that we have from your offices and you will get support particularly from me and from this side.

However, I would reinforce that, as Caroline [Caroline Pidgeon MBE AM] says, in the neighbourhoods the PCSOs are valued. We now have a model that works, which is a minimum of one and one, more so in 100 different wards, supported by a larger team behind. That is a model that has been successful and I would urge you to support that model and let it continue.

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): Absolutely, Steve, and I thank you for all the work that you have done on that over many years in Croydon and also for your personal family commitment to --

Steve O'Connell AM: He has left the specials now.

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): Why has he left?

Steve O'Connell AM: He was a special, not a PCSO. Having said that --

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): Has he left? We need a recruit. Why has he not joined the force?

Steve O'Connell AM: Often young people move into specials and they do the job and work for two years and then move on.

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): All right. Thanks for what he did, anyway.

Steve O'Connell AM: It is reassuring - getting away from the particular and back to the strategic - and it is important that we hear today that you will use your best lobbying resources to get a fair deal for London's policing.

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): Thank you. I am fortified by the Assembly in that quest.

2015/3301 - Starter Homes

Steve O'Connell AM

How will you be taking forward the Government's recent announcement to enable the delivery of Starter Homes in London?

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): Thanks very much, Steve. The Starter Homes initiative that the Government has proposed is potentially very exciting. There is a lot of detail to be worked out. We want to see loads more homes of all tenures in London, particularly part-buy/part-rent proposals. Let us see how we can make this really work for London. It is potentially very exciting, but there will be arguments and discussions to be had about how to continue to deliver loads of new homes for people in this city.

Steve O'Connell AM: Thank you, Mr Mayor. Again, around this horseshoe, we would all agree that we need more homes for Londoners of all tenures and an increase in affordable home. This project is particularly aimed, I believe, at the first-time buyer market and is aimed at those under 40 years to purchase a home with a minimum 20% discount.

What I am interested in is the London context because, for young people or young couples to get on the housing ladder, it is very difficult throughout the country but particularly in London. I am interested, really, in your thoughts around how you will be instructing your planning colleagues in your work around the London Plan and how they will particularly grasp the opportunities that this initiative will give us in this building to support young Londoners getting on the property ladder.

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): You are right. The key thing is to recognise the extreme difficulty of getting a mortgage and getting a deposit with the cost of homes in London. That is why I stressed at the outset the importance of the part-buy/part-rent schemes that we are doing. With a deposit of £5,000 or up to £13,000 on a joint income of £37,000, it starts to be doable for loads of families in this city. That is the model that we should be really expanding and allowing them to staircase upwards.

If the price of some of the Starter Homes is capped at £450,000, it is already a pretty pricy home for many people in this city. You would need an income of maybe £195,000 or whatever to be within a sniff of getting that. That is very high.

There are plenty of models that we need to work on and I want to stress the importance for London of part-buy/part-rent schemes.

Steve O'Connell AM: Thank you. I agree completely. Sometimes if you scan the *Evening Standard* or other papers around the prices of the new apartments - and I know Tom [Tom Copley AM] is particularly strong on this - some of the prices are just jaw-dropping and are completely of the range of many young couples. Any scheme - and this is one - that can help a young couple to get on the property ladder and purchase a property for around £100,000 or whatever is to be welcomed. Thank you for your support and please --

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): £100,000 is very cheap.

Steve O'Connell AM: Yes, but this is the point is making, Mr Mayor.

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): I would have to say, Steve, that if you have to find a flat for £100,000, you are really pushing it in London. I do not know where you are going to find that.

Steve O'Connell AM: I am saying, Mr Mayor, that that is an aspiration.

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): That would require a catastrophic fall in property values across this city.

Steve O'Connell AM: Mr Mayor, not necessarily. I am focusing very much on outer London and often there are areas that will lend themselves to more realistic pricing. We must be practical, Mr Mayor. Thank you very much, Chair.

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

Richard Tracey AM: Thank you, Madam Chair. Mr Mayor, do you remember that when you first became Mayor --

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): I do. It was a glorious day.

Richard Tracey AM: -- I introduced you to the excellent Wandsworth Council Hidden Homes scheme?

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): I do. The 'hobbit homes'.

Richard Tracey AM: You visited one.

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): Yes, we did that together. Yes, that is right.

Richard Tracey AM: Is that not something that should be promoted to the Government further?

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): Yes. It is a great idea. What Dick is talking about is finding lots of unconsidered spaces --

Richard Tracey AM: Yes, garages, drying areas --

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): That is right; fallow areas where you can just shove a home in a sort of troglodytic way. That is all fantastic and we should definitely be doing that. Wandsworth did a great job on that. However, there are still huge amounts of brownfield sites in London where you could build fantastic homes with great room standards and great spaces. We should be doing that as well.

Richard Tracey AM: I agree. The other thing I wanted to ask you was about the TfL policy just literally in the last couple of days released for 10,000 homes on TfL land, which it is proposing. Are you aware that many of those are going to be in particular Starter Homes? Do you know what the structure of that is?

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): I cannot give you the breakdown. I would be happy to give that. We want a good mixture of tenures.

Jennette Arnold OBE AM (Chair): Thank you.

2015/3315 - Housing

Tom Copley AM

Is a voluntary Right to Buy scheme that does not ring-fence money raised from council housing sales in London acceptable?

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): Tom, thank you very much for this question, which is extremely timely. The answer is that I am going to continue to make the points that I made to you back in May when this whole conversation began: I support the policy; I support Right to Buy. There were some parts of the Labour Party before the election that supported it. It is now no longer the Labour Party policy, but certainly Ed Balls [former Secretary of State for Children, Schools and Families] thought it was the right thing to do to give people the chance to own their own home. It is fantastically important to people and it is always people who do own their own home who tell other people that they cannot. It is a real shame. Right to Buy is great.

Also, there is a case for disposing of some very high-value council stock and using the funds to build new homes, but that should be done within London. That is where the housing crisis is in this country; it is in London. In my view, it is absolutely crazy to be using cash generated from the sale of homes in London to build new homes in other cities where, to be frank, whatever other difficulties they may have, they do not have a housing shortage. We have a colossal housing shortage in London and that is where the homes need to be built.

Tom Copley AM: Good. I am glad you say that, if this scheme does go ahead, the funds should stay in London. Indeed, it is one of your stated red lines. However, neither the draft Bill nor the National Housing Federation agreement underpinning the extension of Right to Buy meets this red line, do they?

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): They do not as drafted; that is absolutely true, but they do not exclude it, either. We will need to continue to find ways. In May I gave you four conditions.

Tom Copley AM: You did.

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): Additional housing supply in London, increases to buy affordable homes, making sure that the receipts from sales in London are ring-fenced to fund additional housing supply in the capital and no loss of London's socioeconomic mix.

Tom Copley AM: Your team has forecast that up to 4,500 council homes could be sold each year in London because of this policy. Would you regard it as acceptable for a single pound of money raised by selling social housing in London to be spent in other parts of the country where there is no housing crisis?

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): I want to see the cash that is generated in London used to build homes in London. As I say, it seems to me eccentric to use those funds to build homes in places where there is not the same shortage.

Tom Copley AM: Given that this is the Housing and Planning Bill at the moment as it stands, if it is not amended in Parliament to create a London ring-fence, will you vote against it?

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): That is what they call a hypothetical question. Let us see where we get to with this Bill.

Tom Copley AM: We are entitled to ask hypothetical questions. I do not think it is beyond you, Mr Mayor, to envisage a situation where the Government decides to proceed as it has set out at the moment without amending the Bill. Let us just say that this is the final Bill in its third reading and it is in this form and there is no ring-fence. Will you vote against it? Will you, Mayor Boris Johnson, ask Boris Johnson MP to vote against this Bill?

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): They are indistinguishable; they are one in the same. We are *homoiousios* and *homoousios*. We are of the same substance, coeternal, consubstantial; there is absolutely no difference.

Tom Copley AM: That sounds absolutely terrifying! Come on, Mr Mayor. Send the message to George Osborne [Chancellor of the Exchequer]. Sit there now and say, "Come on, George. If you proceed as you are proceeding at the moment, I will vote against this Bill". Come on, Mr Mayor.

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): I love the Assembly because you have all sorts of messages you want me to send to George today about --

Tom Copley AM: Absolutely.

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): You want me to toughen up the emission standards, you want more money for policing and --

Tom Copley AM: I am asking you about housing, Mr Mayor. Come on.

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): -- you want a ring-fence for London housing --

Tom Copley AM: Come on. Sit there now and say, "George Osborne, if you do not ring-fence London, I am going to vote against it". Come on, Mr Mayor. Stand up for Londoners.

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): Let us see where we get to. I do not envisage the grisly hypothesis that you do with your usual gloomadon-popping, Labour way do. You are inclined to anticipate disaster. I do not think it will be as bad as all that. We will come up with a good solution --

Tom Copley AM: We are paid to anticipate disaster, Mr Mayor.

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): No, you are not.

Tom Copley AM: I will leave it there. Thank you.

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): No, you are not. You are paid to represent your constituents and that sort of thing.

Jennette Arnold OBE AM (Chair): Thank you. Let us move on now. We welcome to the first Mayor's Question Time (MQT) Assembly Member Badenoch.

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): Hooray. Yes. I want to welcome you, Kemi, very much to this Chamber and I am sure you will serve here with great distinction and for a long time, I hope.

Kemi Badenoch AM: Thank you.

2015/3281 - Anti-gentrification protests

Kemi Badenoch AM

Hundreds of protestors attacked the Cereal Killer Café in Shoreditch in September as part of an anti-gentrification protest. What preparations have the Metropolitan Police Service made for future such protests, especially in circumstances where the organisers may not make them aware of its planning?

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): The anti-gentrification protest, so-called - I do not know what the hell were protesting about and nor do they, frankly - was disgraceful. I went down to the café in question quite soon afterwards and had some breakfast there.

Mayor John Biggs AM: What did you have? Tell us.

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): It was Coco Pops or something like that. I do not know what it was. It was Fruit Loops or something like that. I am not sure what it was. It was delicious and very healthy.

Look, this is a very serious issue. Be in no doubt: what you have with these types of anti-gentrification protests is people who are really protesting against the same sorts of people whom they once were themselves. They are themselves bourgeois, lefty, nose-ringed yuppies who have gone into these areas and taken them over and suddenly see other bourgeois types arriving and simply cannot stand the fact that they are no longer pioneers. They adopt this ghastly ethic of 'Corbynista' revolt, name-calling, damaging premises and all the rest of it. It is totally unfair and it is threatening.

To answer your question, the MPS has made all sorts of preparations - as you can imagine - for future protests of one type or another. There is a strategy to deal with such disorder. The Public Order and Resources Command, SCO22, is working with Tower Hamlets and we have a strategy for engaging with people who want to protest through the police's Communities Together Strategic Engagement Team (CTSET). This is a public service message to all crusty demonstrators of one kind or another. If you are a crusty and you are proposing to have a fatuous demonstration about something that has got on your nerves, then what you have to do is notify the police six days before the event occurs of the date and the time and the proposed route and the police will look after you. The police will make sure that this event goes off peacefully and you are able to get your point of view across. If people break the law in the way that these people did, we will come down very hard. We have closed-circuit television (CCTV) of those individuals.

Kemi Badenoch AM: Thank you, Mr Mayor. The protesters were not actually from Tower Hamlets. It was organised by an anarchists group called Class War and they drew scum on walls, they smashed estate agents' windows, they burnt an effigy of a policeman and - most offensive to the Muslim and Jewish residents in Tower Hamlets - they were carrying pigs' heads. These protests are just a cover for organised crime and violence, are they not? If so, why do we think that they will notify us before they go on and do whatever criminal damage they want to do?

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): I quite agree with you. All I am saying is that I am really giving my message to all those who are law-abiding and who want to distinguish themselves from this type of thuggery. People who do behave like that and who do damage premises of good law-abiding businesses trying to bring jobs and progress to the area should be arrested and properly punished.

Kemi Badenoch AM: I appreciate that there is a right to protest, but an officer was assaulted during this protest and this comes alongside an officer recently being stabbed at Notting Hill Carnival and another officer shot in Hackney a couple of weeks ago. In that situation where the officer was stabbed, the individual only received a six-month sentence.

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): I agree.

Kemi Badenoch AM: What more can we do to ensure that those who attack our police officers receive the most stringent of sentences?

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): I agree totally with you about that sentence for the stabbing of the police officer at the Notting Hill Carnival. That is why we set up the Mayor's Office for Policing and Crime (MOPAC) Sentencing Unit and they have looked at it or they are looking at it now. We will be writing to the Justice Secretary or the MOPAC Sentencing Unit will be writing to the Justice Secretary, I imagine.

Kemi Badenoch AM: Thank you. My last question is about justice being seen to be done. We had similar behaviour during the 2011 riots and most culprits were arrested and given various sentences, but that demographic was young, relatively working class and poor and had a high proportion of ethnic minorities. These Class War anarchists are white and middle class.

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): Absolutely right.

Kemi Badenoch AM: Why is it that they can get away with that criminal damage that young black people doing exactly the same thing get strict sentences for?

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): Kemi, if they are getting away with it then they should not and they should have their --

Kemi Badenoch AM: What are you going to do about it, Mr Mayor?

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): I want to see them arrested and we have CCTV of them and I want to see them brought to justice.

Kemi Badenoch AM: Thank you.

2015/3318 - Cuts of staffing in TfL Stations

Valerie Shawcross CBE AM

Has the increase in fare evasion undermined your case to cut staff at TfL operated stations?

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): Thank you, Val. You speak of an increase in fare evasion and that is not in fact the case. As you may know, on the bus network fare evasion was 3.5%. Listen to this. The bus fare evasion was 3.5% in the era of the bendy-bus. It is now down to 1.1%.

Valerie Shawcross CBE AM: Chair, if I may, the question is specifically about the Tube network.

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): On the Tube, if I may --

Valerie Shawcross CBE AM: The Mayor is answering a question on the bus. Can I have 30 seconds back?

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): -- the figure that you have quoted is not accurate since it refers to the figures before the penalty fares and the revenue collected at gates is taken into account. Fare evasion is running at about 2% across the network. Obviously we want to see continued reductions in fare evasion, but I am very pleased to say that crime is now at its lowest ever level on the Tube. It is down on the buses by 48%, it is down on the Tube by 42% and it is the safest tube network in Europe.

Valerie Shawcross CBE AM: Thank you, Mr Mayor. The fact is that if you look at TfL figures, although the other modes are doing quite well in reducing fare evasion, as you say, fare evasion on the Tube cost about £20 million in 2010/11 according to TfL's own figures and according to TfL's own figures it is now up to £61 million on the Tube. Therefore, there has been something like a 200% increase in fare evasion in the Tube while there has been an increase of only about 30% in passengers. If you --

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): You say only an increase of 30% in passengers? I would not use the word 'only'.

Valerie Shawcross CBE AM: I have not finished my question, Mr Mayor. I appreciate that your tactic with me is always to try to waste my time, but Londoners will want to know if you are going through a staffing cuts programme, as you are, which is cutting 950 staff out of our Underground stations and has massively increased the number of Tube stations with only one member of staff on them to 125 stations. That is to save £50 million.

Why are you doing so little to address this issue of £61 million being lost on the network? The figures we have show that there were a lot of stations where the gate lines had been left open because of a lack of staffing. There were a number of stations where over 50% of the time the gate line was left open. Do you not think you need to review the staffing levels?

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): No. We have increased the staffing levels across the network, the visible staffing. There is now a 30% increase in the number of staff visible and available to help across the network. Just to get these figures about evasion across, the latest information is that the net revenue loss for February 2015 was 1.34% of revenue and that compares to 1.27% of revenue in May 2008. It is basically flat --

Valerie Shawcross CBE AM: Mr Mayor, the only figures we have --

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): -- at a time of massive increase in both customer numbers and revenue.

Valerie Shawcross CBE AM: Mr Mayor, any figures we throw at you we always source from TfL. Londoners will tell you that the stations in outer London in particular very often have gate lines left open and that is something from people's experience. All I am asking you to do is to review the Fit for the Future programme and see if you have the right number of staff in stations.

Just quickly, Mr Mayor, the proposal that is now working through to put visitor centres giving information and ticket facilities in major stations in London was quite welcome. However, it is not clear to me why you have left out London Bridge and Waterloo, which is London's busiest station, as well as places like Charing Cross and Stratford. Why will you not review the Fit for the Future programme to see if it is actually fit for function?

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): OK. Look, on the gate lines thing, I saw your press release and I am concerned that people should not just be wandering through. I have given you the figures for the revenue losses that we have. I will have a word with London Underground (LU) about station gates being left open.

Valerie Shawcross CBE AM: How about a review?

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): We are seeing huge increases in ridership at a time when people are increasingly using contactless payment systems. We are now running the biggest cashless payment system anywhere in the world in TfL. It is an incredible triumph. People are using their bank cards and I think they can now use their mobile phones as well. It is a huge step forward and technology has allowed this to happen. Technology has liberated lots of staff from --

Valerie Shawcross CBE AM: From their jobs.

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): -- behind the plate glass. Indeed, yes. Absolutely, it has liberated them. You put it in a sarcastic way, but that is true. It has made it possible for people to stop doing jobs that were not suitable for a 21st-century Tube network and to find employment helping the customers, helping the passengers on the platforms and doing other things. That is the way forward for our Tube.

Valerie Shawcross CBE AM: Thank you, Mr Mayor.

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): I just want to say one more conciliatory thing to Val, which is that you asked about the tourist information centres at the big stations. I will look into that. I cannot give you the answer now but I will find out what we are doing at London Bridge and those other ones you mentioned.

Valerie Shawcross CBE AM: Thank you.

Jennette Arnold OBE AM (Chair): OK. Before I take the two follow-up questions on this, can we welcome Manorside Primary School from Barnet to the Chamber? Welcome. With your colour you have cheered us up. Can I call Assembly Member Shah.

Navin Shah AM: Mr Mayor, I want to raise issues about disabilities access, particularly related to closure of lifts. Between 2013 and 2014 LU lift closures went up by a staggering 50%. Between January and August this year lifts were closed 27 times due to a lack of trained and licensed staff.

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): Is this at one particular station or just across the network?

Navin Shah AM: No, this is across London. You had 50% of lifts not being accessible during 2013 and 2014 and between January and August you had 27 incidents when due to lack of trained and licensed

staff they were not available to operate them. How many LU staff are licensed to operate these lifts and how many are you planning to train this year?

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): I am afraid I cannot give you a top-of-the-head figure for the number of LU staff who are licensed to operate lifts, Navin, but I am very happy to get back to you.

Navin Shah AM: Are you able to give me a figure for 950 staff that you plan to cut? How many of those are trained to operate --

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): As you know, we have made substantial reductions --

Navin Shah AM: Can I have that as well, please?

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): What we have done is made substantial reductions in the number of people who are trapped behind plate glass and therefore are unable to get out and operate lifts in the way that we would both like. We have 30% more staff on the concourses and on platforms able to interact directly with customers, many of whom perhaps need help with the lifts.

Navin Shah AM: Mr Mayor, the concern I have is that, as you have heard, there are some 125 stations with one staff member at certain times. Given the staggering lift closures that we have come across and that the figures indicate, it obviously does not bode well for disabled passengers and disabled commuters. Will you make a commitment to ensure that all staff working at our Tube stations are trained and licensed to operate the lifts?

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): As I say, I cannot give you the figures or the numbers or the proportion. I would be very surprised if people were not trained to operate a lift, but I would be very happy, Navin, to revert to you as soon as I can with that detail.

Navin Shah AM: I want you to give a commitment that you will ensure that the staff working at all those Tube stations are actually trained as they are required to. Are you able to give that commitment?

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): Let me first, if I may, satisfy myself about what that training involves. It seems to me at first blush that operating a lift is surely a very simple thing. I do not understand fully why you need a licence to operate a lift, but I realise I am not acquainted with the detail on this and I will have to get back to you, Navin, about that. If you perhaps give me some notice of that, I would be happy to fill you in.

Navin Shah AM: You see, Mr Mayor, it is extremely worrying that you seem to be intent on leaving my constituents - and outer London Tube stations have been flagged up - in Brent and Harrow --

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): Sorry, there is not a question. You have not put down a question. If you had asked a question about lifts, I am sure we could have got you the detail.

Navin Shah AM: Yes. We have issues whereby there are no ticket offices left open, they are left with less staff, lifts are not working, barriers are constantly open and fare evasion is also shockingly high.

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

Navin Shah AM: Why are you trying to destroy the Tube service and the train service that we have now?

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): Really, that is complete rubbish. If you look at ridership, even Val [Valerie Shawcross CBE AM] was good enough to say that you have ridership on the Tube 30% more than it was when I became Mayor, customer satisfaction levels are at an all-time high and we have the safest tube network anywhere in Europe. You are now far less likely to be a victim of crime on the Tube than you were when I was elected and I am very proud of that.

Navin Shah AM: Thank you, Mr Mayor.

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): That is partly because --

Navin Shah AM: Chair, I have finished my question.

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): -- we have staff out from behind old-fashioned --

Navin Shah AM: Can you stop the clock, please?

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): -- plate glass, when Labour would love to keep people doing --

Jennette Arnold OBE AM (Chair): No, we will not stop it. You will get an answer.

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): -- pointlessly wasting their time. We have actually had the guts to take a difficult decision and to modernise the Tube, which you guys always shirked and failed to do.

Jennette Arnold OBE AM (Chair): OK. Assembly Member Tracey?

Richard Tracey AM: Thank you. Mr Mayor, I travel regularly through some of these major stations that Val [Valerie Shawcross CBE AM] has mentioned - Waterloo, London Bridge, Victoria - and some have visitor centres, others do not. However, what I do see is a lot of TfL staff out on the concourse being helpful and indeed checking the barriers to make sure that people can use them or are using them properly.

In the programme of modernisation that TfL has initiated, one station in my constituency, Morden, is in line for pretty considerable regeneration and modernisation. Surely at a station like that and many others out in the suburbs TfL can put in perhaps more sophisticated barriers but, equally, more of the staff that have taken out of the ticket offices to assist in the way that is being requested.

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): Yes. There is always scope for new technology to help with the barriers. I am interested in what Val [Valerie Shawcross CBE AM] has said about barriers. I am reassured by the statistics I have seen from TfL about fare evasion. We are seeing very little attrition of our revenue, basically the same levels for a long time, and customer satisfaction is the acid test and it is very high. It is an incredible thing that in spite of the huge extra numbers on the Tube people are still pretty satisfied with the service. If you think about what is coming down the track, you have a question about this later on, but the investments we are going to see - which we will protect, Len [Len Duvall

AM] - will deliver unbelievable changes to the Piccadilly and further changes to the Jubilee. It is going to be unbelievable with the improvements that people are going to see.

Richard Tracey AM: Good news. Thank you.

Roger Evans AM: In Havering and Redbridge we are now experiencing TfL management of the railway line that is going to become Crossrail. It runs in to Liverpool Street. It is quite interesting because we are seeing a lot more of a proactive attitude on the part of the staff there than there was before TfL took over. For example, we have very crowded trains and what they do now in the morning is they stand next to the trains and tell the passengers to move down inside the cars, which no one did on that service before. However, it is unusual in my experience.

Would you be able to get that sort of proactive approach applied on LU and the rest of our network? There is something in it and that interaction with the passengers is useful.

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): I do not know whether you go on the Tube a lot, Roger, but it is the most common injunction that you hear to move down inside the cars. I do not know whether if anybody would agree with me. It is something that our staff do the whole time. TfL staff will be very grateful for what you said about the benign impact that they have on outer London rail services and we hope we are going to see a lot more of that, obviously.

Sorry, forgive me, but my friend [Mayor John Biggs AM] was paying a tribute to Bob Crow [former General Secretary of the National Union of Rail, Maritime and Transport Workers] while you were talking. I could not hear your question.

2015/3314 - Voter Registration

Onkar Sahota AM

Have you had any discussions with the Greater London Returning Officer about steps being taken to inform Londoners of the Government's changes to Voter Registration?

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): Yes. Thanks, Onkar. It is very important to tackle voter registration fraud and that is what the Government has been trying to do and it has been moving away from the system of the head-of-household approach to individual voter registration, which is clearly less susceptible to some of the types of misbehaviour that we have seen in some elections. That should be completed by December of this year and I hope very much that the electoral registration offices and the Government is getting the message out that that is how it is happening and that is how it is to be done.

Dr Onkar Sahota AM: I presume that your answer is that you have had no discussions yourself. My question was: have you had discussions?

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): No. I have not had discussions with the --

Jennette Arnold OBE AM (Chair): Greater London Returning Officer (GLRO).

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): The GLRO is Jeff [Jeff Jacobs, GLA Head of Paid Service] --

Jennette Arnold OBE AM (Chair): Yes.

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): -- to the best of my knowledge. I have not specifically discussed this with Jeff but I am told that his team are working with the boroughs and the Electoral Commission to deliver a targeted and effective voter information campaign so everyone understands how they have to register ahead of the May 2016 election.

As you would expect, because you want it to be politically neutral, it is the Electoral Commission that will inform Londoners, interact with Londoners and maximise voter registration.

Dr Onkar Sahota AM: I am glad you say that. The Electoral Commission recommended that the transition to individual electoral registration should be up to 1 December 2016 and the Government brought it forward to 1 December 2015. In fact Phil Thompson, the Head of Research at the Electoral Commission, has said:

"We are disappointed with this decision. We made a clear recommendation it should remain as 1 December 2016. The consequence of moving this forward will be that 250,000 people will fall to the electoral register in London."

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): Why is that? Why can they not register themselves?

Dr Onkar Sahota AM: They are not aware of this phasing out and no one is bringing this to attention. That is why I am concerned about the fact. Why has the Government moved it forward? What is the reason behind it? What are we doing about it - what are you as Mayor doing about it - to make sure that 250,000 do not fall off the electoral register? That is why I asked the question.

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): What we are trying to do is avoid a situation in which heads of households have been known to fill in perhaps slightly more generously or imaginatively the names of the people who form the complement of the household and that is true --

Dr Onkar Sahota AM: You said that the Electoral Commission was an independent body.

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): It is true and I will not say that it has entirely been to the benefit of the Labour Party but it is possible that it has been a factor.

Dr Onkar Sahota AM: This is supposition.

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): Irrespective of whichever political party --

Jennette Arnold OBE AM (Chair): No. Can I get us back to the question?

Dr Onkar Sahota AM: Yes, the question was, Mr Mayor --

Jennette Arnold OBE AM (Chair): No. Assembly Members --

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): We are trying to avoid voter fraud.

Jennette Arnold OBE AM (Chair): No, it is not voter fraud. The question is quite clear and you have answered it. The question asked whether or not you had had any discussions with the GLRO about steps being taken, and you clearly said, no, you have not.

Can I have a follow-up to that? It is not in this place that the Mayor is to take questions on particular Government plans as it is and we know that the GLRO is Jeff Jacobs where Members can put questions to their leaders to the GLRO? Can I have a follow-up question to the answer?

Dr Onkar Sahota AM: OK, Mr Mayor, given that 250,000 people will be falling off the electoral register and there is a mayoral election next year alone --

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): Why is that? I do not understand why that is the case.

Dr Onkar Sahota AM: This is the estimate of the Electoral Commission. Given that this will happen and we have a mayoral election next year, what steps are you taking as Mayor of London to make sure that this impact is reduced?

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): As the Chair has just said, it is open to all of us to talk to Jeff as the GLRO. Nobody wants people to fall off the electoral roll and he is going to be working with the Electoral Commission to have a targeted voter registration campaign before May 2016 so that the people you are worried about and everybody who might conceivably not be aware of the changes has the chance to register themselves and not be just inscribed on a household list truly or falsely by someone other than themselves. That is a reasonable way to treat adult voters in this country.

Jennette Arnold OBE AM (Chair): Can I suggest to Dr Sahota that what we can do is refer this question for follow-up from the GLRO at the proper meeting place if that is OK with you?

Dr Onkar Sahota AM: Thank you.

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

James Cleverly AM MP: Madam Chair, thank you. The phrase keeps being used that 250,000 people are coming off the electoral register. Can you just confirm that the figure that is being bandied about is a reference to 250,000 registrations, a number of whom may be either fraudulent registrations or in many cases duplicate registrations, and that particularly with London having a large student population, many of those students will be registered in their family homes outside of London where they are registered and historically are sometimes also registered at the institutions of higher education where they are studying? The number of registrations is not necessarily the same as the number of people.

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): James, that is entirely right. What the intention of this reform is to avoid any kind of abuse and avoid any kind of undermining of the confidence in our electoral system. It is a bit odd, frankly, that I am getting heckled from my right by somebody who is the beneficiary of the scrupulousness with which the electoral rules were applied in Tower Hamlets and who first failed to get elected, I seem to remember, because of abuse of that electoral system. It is paradoxical that he should now be seeking to deprive others of the type of proper practice in the conduct of elections from which he benefitted himself.

James Cleverly AM MP: Mr Mayor, I appreciate Dr Sahota making reference to the Electoral Commission but that was the same Electoral Commission that extended the voter registration period right up until very much the eleventh hour in the lead up to the 2012 elections. If you remember, at that point there were voters who, because of the difficulty of a Returning Officer administering those late registrations, were being turned away from polling booths. There were polling booths that had run

out of ballot papers and a Committee of this Assembly quizzed the Electoral Commission about that policy because of the chaos.

While we should all listen to their advice carefully, I do not feel any of us feel that we should be dictated to by them.

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): If I may say so, that is pretty wise stuff. What I want to see is elections in this city conducted fairly and freely and without abuse. I do think it odd, James, that --

Jennette Arnold OBE AM (Chair): No, sorry, Mr Mayor --

Tom Copley AM: That is total rubbish --

Jennette Arnold OBE AM (Chair): Excuse me, Mr Copley.

Tom Copley AM: Extension of franchise --

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): Here they are. They are hoping to perpetuate corrupt systems --

Jennette Arnold OBE AM (Chair): Members, you are near to an adjournment, which will mean a longer meeting. Can I just make a ruling here that we move on. This issue is clearly the remit of the GLRO. I have said that for any issues that you want to follow up there is a forum where Members through their leaders can put questions on this.

Assembly Member Biggs, you indicated what?

Mayor John Biggs AM: It was a point of personal explanation, Chair.

Jennette Arnold OBE AM (Chair): Please stand and give us this personal explanation.

Mayor John Biggs AM: OK. I was named by reference and I was heckling; it is true. I was named by reference --

Jennette Arnold OBE AM (Chair): Please stop.

Mayor John Biggs AM: It is the case that there was electoral fraud in Tower Hamlets and I am very clear about that. I am not convinced that individual electoral registration is the solution to that. More to the point, the Mayor were he able to answer this question would need to address the very real concerns that there is a party political opportunism in bringing forward these dates by a year which is designed to suppress the electoral --

Jennette Arnold OBE AM (Chair): No, you have gone past the point of personal explanation. Thank you.

Mayor John Biggs AM: OK. There is another point to it as well, Chair, which you would not like me to make.

Jennette Arnold OBE AM (Chair): OK, thank you. Let us move on to the next question.

2015/3310 - School Applications on Metropolitan Open Land

Tony Arbour AM

Do you consider it acceptable for Metropolitan Open Land to be marketed as suitable sites for new schools?

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): Thank you very much, Tony. We are generally very much opposed to the building on or the loss of Metropolitan Open Land (MOL) and we fight it time after time. I do allow it in exceptional circumstances particularly when it comes to building schools because typically you have a school that has premises that are completely out of date and they want to swap over, restore playing fields on the existing site of the school and move on to a patch of not very attractive or interesting MOL and do something that is approved by Sport England that the council wants and is desperately needed for the provision of school places in London.

We are going to need 30,000 more places for schools by 2016 and we need to find space for them. We do sometimes take account of the exceptional need and the exceptional circumstances caused by the shortage of school places and we allow schools to be built there as indeed sometimes happens, I believe, within your own borough.

Tony Arbour AM: Indeed, Mr Mayor. In the circumstances you have laid out nobody would object if it is open land adjacent to a school and leads to a replacement of playing fields, but this particular proposal which has given rise to this question is in the London Borough of Hounslow, which I also represent. Residents there are very angry because the architects for this particular scheme of which you and Sir Edward [Lister, Chief of Staff and Deputy Mayor for Policy and Planning] have had the details have claimed - and this really is the point that I want to take up with you - that Hounslow has more than its 'quota' of open land. There is more open land per resident in Hounslow than the average in Greater London and the inference is that Hounslow therefore can afford to give up MOL.

The first question I want to ask you is: would you disabuse anybody who comes to you seeking to build anything on MOL no matter how meritorious it would be to say to them, "It is not acceptable to build on MOL because you had exceeded your 'quota'"?

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): You will have to forgive me, Tony. I am not sure at what stage these applications have reached and whether they are likely to happen. Have I seen these things?

Tony Arbour AM: Yes, you have. I am not asking you to comment on the particular application. I am asking you to comment on the view which has been expressed by the architects to say that it is OK to build --

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): No, that is obviously not right. There can be no doctrine of excessive open land. MOL is MOL and it should be protected as far as is reasonably possible. All the cases I have seen have been very much along the lines that I have described. I do not allow schools to be built, let alone homes, on genuinely green verdant open land.

Tony Arbour AM: As a rider to that, and I expected and I am pleased to get that particular response to the question, it has also been suggested that MOL is an easy target on the basis that it is much easier and cheaper to develop on MOL. Therefore, MOL comes under greater pressure than it otherwise might

have done. I wonder if again simply, really, I suppose, to have written into the record of this meeting that that is not an acceptable reason for building on MOL.

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): Yes, absolutely. I will have you know that the most applications I have seen for this kind of building on the green spaces of outer London comes from Conservative boroughs and I have to say no.

Tony Arbour AM: Good, excellent. Thank you, Mr Mayor.

2015/3290 - Transport Planning for 2030

Richard Tracey AM

Other than the building of Crossrail 2, how will TfL seek to ensure that London's transport can cope with a population of 10 million people by 2030?

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): Thank you very much, Dick. As we have been saying earlier on, there has been a huge amount done. The Victoria Line and the Jubilee Line trains are now going to go up a frequency of 36 trains per hour as against about 27 trains per hour when I started, which is an incredible increase in the number of trains and the volume of people that we can carry. London Overground is going up to five-car trains and we are increasing the frequency there. We are doing huge capacity upgrades at Victoria and Bank, colossal projects. I mentioned earlier on what is happening on the Piccadilly Line and the further Jubilee Line upgrades.

There are a number of very big projects though coming down the track. Crossrail 2 is the biggest item now on London's agenda. It is accepted across London government at all levels that this is the right project for the city and it will be with the eastern boroughs a fantastic driver of growth and jobs across northeast London and across the whole of the city with 200,000 new homes, 200,000 new jobs, benefits from the Solent to the Wash from Crossrail 2, and huge improvements for rail commuters coming in from Hampshire and from the southwestern area of the city. Then there are another five big projects in addition to Crossrail 2 and new river crossings east of Silvertown. You will know about the Silvertown Tunnel, the Bakerloo Line extension into southeast London, the Southern Tramlink and the new road tunnelling schemes. The Roads Task Force is looking at two big tunnels, basically solving the problems left over by the failure to complete the Inner London Orbital in the 1960s, running east-west roughly from White City to Highbury Corner and then south of the river from Canada Water area to Clapham, providing London with a tunnelled South Circular, which is something the city has grievously lacked.

Then, of course, there is the completion of the whole Cycle Superhighway programme and I hope very much that whoever is here as Mayor - and I know Val [Shawcross CBE AM] asked a question about this last time - will drive that forward with all the urgency that the Assembly would want.

Richard Tracey AM: I do welcome what you have said. One thing I particularly want to pick up is the idea of the tunnelling because in your infrastructure plans, which were aimed particularly at 2050, you talked about this. The South Circular Road is an absolute disgrace, which should be replaced as quickly as possible by tunnels now that we have all this tunnelling expertise. The congestion on the roads in south London is really very bad. You mentioned that the Inner Orbital network was not completed in the 1960s. Surely now it is time to take this really very seriously and I hope you will urge TfL to talk to whomever your successor may be to do this.

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): Yes. I am grateful to you, Dick, for your support and your imagination on this. It is a fantastic scheme. This is something, as you can imagine, that I am discussing with the Government amongst many other things. What they say is, "London, you have to choose. What do you want? Do you want Crossrail 2 or do you want all these tunnels? What do you want?" The answer at the moment is we want Crossrail 2 but we refuse to choose. We will continue to fight for all these things. If I had to prioritise, which I always hesitate to do, I want to see Crossrail 2 first. I want to see Crossrail 2 in the ground by the end of the 2020s and, as that goes in, we should be moving forward with plans to ease congestion on the roads.

Richard Tracey AM: There is one other point I should raise and that perhaps is either some staggering of peak time travelling or the other thing which was proposed by my colleague Roger Evans two or three years ago, which was more encouragement of homeworking and, therefore, the rush-hour pressure is relieved somewhat. What do you think about doing some more on that?

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): I did that during the Olympics, I seem to remember. I gave a series of deathly announcements on the Tube, which so panicked people that they stayed away from London in huge numbers. Everybody rather blamed me for the slight air of desolation.

You have to be very careful how you do this. People generally like to be in the company of other people and one of the paradoxes of technology is that the more people communicate by gizmos and share information and meet other people and all that, actually, the more they want to see them face-to-face. We are seeing a huge increase in ridership of all kinds because people do not like sitting at home and drinking cups of coffee and going to the fridge. They want to interact and they want to gossip and that is what transport does. It is economically beneficial.

Richard Tracey AM: Some of the personal contact at rush-hour can be a bit too close for comfort!

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): Yes, but I am just describing the world as it is. Yes, some people can achieve a lot at home and you can achieve a lot on the internet now, but in the end people want a face-to-face meeting and it is indispensable.

Richard Tracey AM: Thank you.

2015/3317 - Apprenticeships

Fiona Twycross AM

Are you satisfied that apprenticeships in London are of a good enough quality?

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): Thanks, Fiona. It is very important that apprenticeships should be of a high quality and that they are inspected or there is a quality assurance system based on the common inspection framework inspected by the Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted) as well as that of the awarding organisations, which do provide some indication of the quality. There are other steps the Government is taking to protect the term 'apprenticeship' through legislation and to prevent the term from being applied to courses that do not meet the quality criteria that the Government has approved for apprenticeships. They all have to last a minimum of 12 months and deliver a recognised series of skills.

The proof of the pudding, though, in respect of all the quality control is that 80% of the apprentices we have helped into apprenticeships have gone on to get jobs and that is the real test.

Fiona Twycross AM: The real test is probably whether they get skilled jobs that pay them enough to get by.

Can I just go on to two bits about Ofsted? I was pleased you mentioned Ofsted because it is quite critical of the quality of many apprenticeships and there is a report being published this week. More than half the apprentices in your current term have actually been at the lower intermediate level equivalent to General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE) and are not providing the skills that either the apprentices or the employers need in order to give the skills that London needs and that young Londoners need in order to get the jobs in construction, in tech and creative industries that we actually need for good growth that produces well paid jobs in London.

How are you assuring that young Londoners will get advanced and higher apprenticeships? Are you focusing on quantity albeit you are failing on the quantity? Are you focusing on quantity over quality?

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): I just want to say that I agree very strongly that there should be high levels of skill particularly in the tech area, in mathematics, in coding and in all those things in which Londoners need to be able to compete, particularly with workers coming from abroad. We are seeing a pull effect of London on talent from elsewhere in the world.

I just want to drill down a little bit into your slightly snobbish differentiation between different types of jobs and different outcomes for apprenticeships. I heard Emily Thornbury, the Labour MP, the other day attacking and saying it was no good people getting jobs in McDonalds and she did not want to see apprenticeships --

Fiona Twycross AM: With respect, that is not what I was saying.

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): I hope that was not what you are saying.

Fiona Twycross AM: That is not what I am saying. What I am saying is that if somebody is branding a job that somebody else would be doing at a higher rate of pay, which counts for some of the jobs that people are getting in warehouses on the apprentice level of pay, which, as you know, is much lower than the normal level of pay, and if it is essentially the same job that is not equipping them for the type of skilled work that they would be capable of, then that is not actually an apprenticeship. Even your Government accepts that we need to do more to clamp down on apprenticeships that really are not apprenticeships. If a job is a warehouse job that is not necessarily skilled but is being paid as an apprenticeship, then that is just simply wrong.

What we are wanting is good quality apprenticeships that equip people so that they can go on to get well paid jobs, not effectively employers bypassing minimum wage legislation by paying people a lower rate.

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): By, as it were, rebranding people as apprentices.

Fiona Twycross AM: Yes, absolutely. I can send you some examples that I mentioned before.

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): I understand that. OK, I see, sorry. I was irate when I saw this thing.

Fiona Twycross AM: I accept what Emily Thornbury meant as well.

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): I was irate when I saw this point because it is so damaging to the London economy and to people's hopes. If you dismiss huge categories of employment in catering or in retail as being somehow not dignified enough and not successful, what are on earth are we saying to our young people?

Fiona Twycross AM: Can we focus on your record on apprenticeships, though? How many fake apprenticeships are included in your figures? How many apprenticeships actually are not apprenticeships?

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): I do not accept there are any fake - as you put it - apprenticeships. We have done a huge number of apprenticeships since I came in: 220,000.

Fiona Twycross AM: You have done about half of it.

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): You will appreciate, Fiona, that one of the difficulties we have had is that there has been a colossal increase in employment in London and you have people who are not in education, employment or training now down at the lowest level for 25 years. The primary success has been to get young people actually into work in a way that we have not often achieved in this city.

Fiona Twycross AM: You are failing to do that. Chair, he is not answering the question and he is failing these young people and he is failing to answer the question. We will leave it at that. Thank you.

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): The apprenticeship programme has been complementary to that but has actually produced a huge number of success stories itself.

2015/3202 - MIPIM 2015 at Olympia

Darren Johnson AM

Will the GLA's continued involvement with the MIPIM-UK property fair be to the advantage of Londoners on an average income, or to investors looking to speculate on property and avoid tax?

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): Thank you, Darren. You are inveighing, at least by implication, against the *Marche Internationale des Professionnels d'Immobilier* (MIPIM) UK property fair to be held at Earls Court Olympia. You ask whether it will be to the advantage of Londoners that this spectacle should take place. It will. I will just remind you that it will not just be London councils and London authorities that will be there. You will have representatives from every big city in this country. Manchester, Leeds and everybody will be at this property fair trying to attract investment and trying to get business for their city and that is quite proper.

Darren Johnson AM: It has to be about getting the right sort of developments and the right sort of investments.

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): What is the wrong sort?

Darren Johnson AM: Let me ask the question first and you can answer it. Using data provided to me by *Private Eye*, I have found out that since you have been Mayor overseas companies have bought property and land in London worth in the order of £100 billion and two-thirds of companies were registered in just four British tax havens. In one development you signed off in the Nine Elms regeneration area, 15% of the homes have so far been bought by overseas companies. Many other developments promoted at MIPIM see large numbers of homes bought in this way. Are you concerned about this phenomenon?

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): No, but to get back to several points, you have just referred to Battersea Nine Elms where the principal developments made the whole thing possible. It has come from Malaysia. I think that is the one you are referring to. Frankly, it has been a fantastic thing for London. How many more decades would that power station have stood vacant and idle? That whole plot of land was absolutely useless and wasted without that investment and that will bring thousands of homes and thousands of jobs. We are putting in a new Tube station. It will be an amazing thing for that part of London.

Are you seriously telling me that you are so xenophobic that you would tell those Malaysian investors to hop it because they are Malaysian? Is that really what you are saying? If so, you really need another think coming.

Darren Johnson AM: Is it xenophobic to be concerned about companies being registered through tax havens? Is that xenophobic?

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): Even if you are opposed to foreign investment, which seems to me to be eccentric, I remind you that every other city in the UK is actually going to be at MIPIM clamouring for overseas investment because they know the regeneration or impact it can have. I just remind you that it is still the case in London that overseas sales account for only 3% by volume in this city and 6.5% by value. It is a myth to say that homes are being left empty or desolate in London. The number of empty homes in London is now 1.7% of housing stock, which is the lowest on record. There is a kind of interesting anti-foreigner rhetoric of the left when it comes to housing investment. You cloak prejudice in the language of equity.

Darren Johnson AM: This is not about foreigners. There is actually a trend now of UK buyers registering as overseas companies in tax havens to avoid things like inheritance tax and avoid various taxes. That is not about xenophobia; it is about putting your housing system in place and the financial system in place that benefits London.

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): Yes. What you have actually is colossal investment in London by people from this country, from the Government and from around the world.

Darren Johnson AM: You are not concerned about people using these loopholes to avoid tax?

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): If investors persist in veiling their identity by using companies. As you know, there is the annual tax on enveloped dwellings which was applied a couple of years ago, has been raised substantially since and is now generating colossal sums in revenue for the Treasury which we can use to spend on civilised objectives for this country. It is overwhelmingly in the interests of London to remain open to investment. It would be very foolish if we were to send out a

signal to international pension funds and international investors that we do not want their money because they are foreign. What are you supposed to say to Canadian pension funds, Dutch pension funds and investments from the Gulf States that enable colossal development to go ahead in London who otherwise would have been stymied and stalled?

Jennette Arnold OBE AM (Chair): Mr Mayor, can you finish your comments, please?

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): It is a good thing for us.

Jennette Arnold OBE AM (Chair): Thank you. The Green Group is out of time.

2015/3320 - West Ham

Andrew Dismore AM

Have you published the agreement with West Ham over their use of the Olympic Stadium yet?

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): Thank you, Andrew. Yes, what we have published is everything we could publish that was not specifically impossible to publish because of commercial confidentiality. I was very happy for all the details to be made published but the legal advice from the London Legacy Development Corporation (LLDC) was very clear. There were some details about commercial arrangements that would have seriously jeopardised our ability to make good deals for the taxpayer in the future. For instance, suppose we wanted to do a ground-sharing arrangement or whatever. There are some things that I am afraid simply have to remain confidential.

Andrew Dismore AM: Let me remind you of what you said last time. You said:

"I would be perfectly happy to publish the details of this arrangement. They [ie West Ham] may be trying to take legal action. The reason we have not published the details so far is because we have only just concluded the last letting of the contracts. I am very happy to release all the details. As far as I am concerned, get it out there."

Of course, that was only after the Information Commissioner ordered you to do so. In fact, what has happened is you have not published everything, only a heavily redacted version, page after page of blanked-out text or partially blanked-out text; page after page of it.

You tried to create the impression you wanted all the details out and it was only West Ham that was not happy. In fact, it is not West Ham that is going to court to challenge it; it is you, is it not?

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): There are some details that we are not able to share. The Assembly will appreciate that. For instance, suppose we wanted to do a ground-sharing arrangement with another team at the Olympic Stadium because it is a fantastic success. It did brilliantly in the Rugby World Cup and loads of people want to be there. It is a glorious addition to the city. It would not help us, frankly, in those negotiations for all the details of our existing contractual agreements and all the financial details of our existing agreement with West Ham to be public. That is where we are.

Andrew Dismore AM: How long is this contract for?

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): I do not have the contract before me but I am very happy to share the details with you later on. I am sure there is abundant detail there but I cannot tell you that.

Andrew Dismore AM: There is no detail of any use to anybody who is trying to find out what has been going on here. The fact is that you are not perfectly happy to release all the details because it means you are not exposed as having given West Ham the unfair and anticompetitive advantage over all the other Premier League clubs in London and, indeed, across the country. By keeping it secret, the public will not see how West Ham will take you to the cleaners with the public's money and asset, will they?

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): No, that is complete nonsense. The Olympic Stadium is unlike --

Andrew Dismore AM: There is not a single figure in this document, not a single figure.

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): The Olympic Stadium is unlike any other Olympic stadium in the world or post-Olympic stadium in that we have delivered a long-term private sector legacy. There will be no further call on the taxpayers as a result of what we have done. We have a Premiership football team in it and I remind you --

Andrew Dismore AM: I remind you about Manchester City and the Commonwealth Games stadium where the details were available and they did not rip off the taxpayer like West Ham has here.

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): I would remind you that if you look, for instance, at the World Cup that was held in Germany, after that World Cup, when several stadiums were built or modernised, they virtually gave them away to their Bundesliga teams. We have done a very different deal, a commercial deal that will secure the future of the stadium.

Andrew Dismore AM: The football authorities in Europe are looking at state aid in relation to similar deals in Holland, are they not, and they are going to be after this one, are they not?

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): No. We are assured that there is no question of state aid here. It is a very successful deal. The stadium is fantastic. It is performing brilliantly, although the sprinklers did come on in the test match by mistake when a try was scored but that was an expression of approval. We have sorted all that out. It is now working wonderfully. As you know, the largest cantilevered roof anywhere in the world is at the Olympic Stadium. You should be proud of it, Andrew, instead of whingeing.

Jennette Arnold OBE AM (Chair): OK. Have you finished, Mr Dismore? Thank you.

2015/3286 – Urgent Tenant Repairs

Kemi Badenoch AM

Following my report, 'Renters Paradise', would you support the adoption of practical measures to improve the way that urgent repairs are dealt with for private tenants in rented properties?

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): Kemi, yes, thank you very much for your question. We have successfully lobbied the Government to include some of your recommendations in the Housing and Planning Bill. The London Rental Standard is also working well. There are several measures that we

have put in the Bill that will please you: banning orders for the worst criminal landlords; a database of rogue landlords and litigation to help local authorities with their enforcement work; extension of rent repayment orders, therefore, more criminal landlords will be forced to repay their tenants' rent; stuff to actually protect landlords in the recovery of abandoned premises allowing landlords to take them back; allowing local authorities to issue fixed penalty notices for certain offences and other improvements to the life of tenants. I hope very much you will support those measures as well.

Kemi Badenoch AM: Yes, I do. Thank you very much, Mr Mayor. It is quite a salient issue at the moment and I do not know if you saw the headline in *The Times* last Thursday about rogue landlords and keeping tenants in filthy and dangerous conditions. I know the Housing Bill will go some way to address some of those things but there are some things we can do outside regulation.

I was hoping the next time the London Rental Standard is reviewed that you would recommend an amendment that would require landlords to put in place and communicate advance arrangements; things like teams of tradesmen who can be contacted at the landlords' expense to fix emergency, dangerous conditions and perhaps a step-by-step process for letting agents to let people know, including emergency numbers, out of hours. Just small but simple effective changes that would not cost anything and do not require regulation, if you would be happy to recommend those amendments when next the Rental Standard is reviewed.

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): That is a very interesting idea. Your proposal is that landlords should be obliged, at the behest of the tenant, to contact people to fix the stuff under the terms of the Rental Standard.

Kemi Badenoch AM: There should be arrangements in place should there be perhaps heating going or hot water --

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): Yes. So your boiler goes.

Kemi Badenoch AM: This is where you should go and those people will know that this is a situation that the landlord is liable for and they can go in and fix without him knowing he is coming to do this.

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): Yes. That is in the London Rental Standard.

Kemi Badenoch AM: Not the communication of advance arrangements.

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): OK. I am very happy to work with you on this. You need to speak to Richard Blakeway [Deputy Mayor for Housing, Land and Property] and see if, at the next iteration of the London Rental Standard, we can take account of what you are saying.

Kemi Badenoch AM: Thank you.

2015/3321 - Garden Bridge

Navin Shah AM

Is it the end of the road for Garden Bridge?

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): Navin, thank you so much. No, I do not think that is true at all. It is a wonderful project and will go ahead but obviously it is up to people who support to get across the message about how it can be delivered in a way that is cost effective and that will promote all things we want to promote. It is a great cultural attraction for London.

Navin Shah AM: Mr Mayor, let me put to you some very serious issues and facts. First of all, Lambeth Council has pulled out, putting planning permission for the livelihood of this project in doubt. The legal challenges are over the handling of the procurement process and impact from that on the local communities. TfL is being accused of ignoring its own legal advice. You have senior architects in the profession who believe the proposal does not comply with the important London Plan Policies as well as they do not comply with EU procurement rules. Also, political support, in broad terms, is dwindling while costs are rocketing as you continue to underwrite millions of pounds of public money in operating costs.

Is it not, therefore, Mr Mayor, time to accept that £60 million of taxpayers' money could be far better spent in services we actually need and that, therefore, the project is better left to the private sector to fund?

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): I certainly agree that we want to see as bigger a contribution from the private sector as possible, although it is slightly odd that people who attack public investment in the Garden Bridge were the same people who started bashing me up the other day for not wanting to spend £35 million on a two-day festival of cycling for the *Tour de France*, which would have had no lasting benefit for the city or certainly nothing like the scale of the Garden Bridge. Labour needs to get its ducks in a row on the allocation of public funding. I would remind you, as I never tire of saying, that there are plenty of projects that the previous administrations spent tens of millions of pounds on that do not exist at all. The beauty of the Garden Bridge is that it will exist.

Just on your points about procurement, TfL did look very carefully into this and did an audit of the procurement processes and found no issues whatever.

Navin Shah AM: There are major issues and TfL's legal advice has not been taken on board.

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): To make a general point, it is certainly true; you mentioned architects. There are some architects who oppose the scheme because perhaps they have views about the artist in question or whatever it happens to be. If there was an ounce of intellectual honesty on the Labour side of this argument, you would admit that if this project were being proposed under a Labour mayoralty you would be clamouring for its completion. That is the reality. Everybody can see it and I am very happy with the procurement processes.

Navin Shah AM: Mr Mayor, it is not about which administration implements such a project. The fact is there are legal challenges, there are major flaws in procurement and, therefore, I believe you are wrong in pursuing this. If you insist on pushing ahead regardless, the very least you can do is to read the procurement process to allow Londoners to have confidence in the process that you term that upon.

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): As I say, Navin, you have been misinformed about the procurement process and the evidence I have is it was robust. I hope that you will enjoy the Garden Bridge when it is completed as much as everybody else in this city.

Navin Shah AM: Mr Mayor, the wheels have fallen off the wagon.

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): Off the bridge?

Navin Shah AM: You look at it but there is the fact. I hope you will not pursue it. Thank you.

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): If you want to throw the wheels off the bridge you can do that, but we have to build the bridge first.

Navin Shah AM: Mr Mayor, thank you.

Richard Tracey AM: Mr Mayor, can you tell us how far advanced the Garden Bridge project will be by next May when you leave office? Do you have any idea?

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): Obviously I hope very much that it will have made further progress. We are obviously in conversation with the various stakeholders and trying to go round and move it forward.

Richard Tracey AM: Thank you.

2015/3322 - London Living Wage

Fiona Twycross AM

Given the changes to tax credits that are due to take effect in April 2016, will the new rate of the London Living Wage take into account next year's benefit changes for working people?

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): Thank you very much, Fiona. It is a very good question and the answer is that we will not be changing the methodology to calculate the Living Wage this time round because it is very important that the process should be independent or independent of me as a politician. It calculates the income individuals will receive after taxes, benefits and tax credits for the year in which the Living Wage is set. That is how it works. That is how the calculation for 2015 will take place and that is going to be announced in the next couple of weeks --

Fiona Twycross AM: I am actually staggered. I thought you were going to say, "Yes, of course it will be."

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): If you will just allow me to complete the answer. When the changes that have been announced in the summer budget come through, those changes, along with any other changes to the tax and benefit system will, of course, be taken into account for the 2016 London Living Wage calculation.

Fiona Twycross AM: Can I just raise something quite important? Obviously these changes are likely unless people like you actually start voting against the Government. I understand you voted for the latest reading of the Welfare Bill last night. These changes are going to come in next April and, therefore, we are going to have quite a long period of time for those people who are on the Living Wage to be struggling to get by. What would you say to those people who find themselves with a shortfall because of the tax credit cuts in April and then a greater shortfall? We all know those anticipated cuts are going to come in because they are a two-phase cut.

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): Hang on. Whoa.

Fiona Twycross AM: No, those are two-phased cuts. What will you say to those people?

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): What I would say to them and to everybody who employs people in London that they should pay the London Living Wage and they should pay the rate we are about to announce, which will be a substantial increase and it will be the right rate to pay. I want firms across this city to join the 600 or so that have now signed up. We have many tens of thousands of Londoners now benefitting from the Living Wage.

Fiona Twycross AM: We can go through the list of successes --

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): You should.

Fiona Twycross AM: What steps are you taking to lobby the Chancellor to get his reforms right - as you say, they need to be amended to get them right - and to help mitigate the impact of the policy on tax credits?

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): What I am doing is campaigning, as I hope you are, for the wider take-up of the London Living Wage, which, as I say --

Fiona Twycross AM: What are you doing on tax credits? You have been publicly praised for criticising the Chancellor on it. What are you doing on tax credits?

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): I have not. I am interested in raising people's wages. If you seriously think we can go on with a system of tax credits that means that people are consistently finding themselves in the misery of having to repay the authorities for overpayment of tax credits, they are finding themselves unable to work longer per week because of the risk of --

Fiona Twycross AM: You should be ashamed of the vote of the Government last night.

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): You think it should be changed, do you? You are right.

Fiona Twycross AM: You should be ashamed of the vote of the Government last night.

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): You should be ashamed of yourself if you support a system that introduces such serious disadvantages, such cliffs and such poverty traps into people's lives.

Fiona Twycross AM: I am out of time, Chair. He is out of touch and so I effectively --

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): If it really is the policy of the Labour Party to continue with that system unreformed, then you are completely out of your minds.

Fiona Twycross AM: You are completely out of touch.

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): No, actually, it is you who are out of touch.

Jennette Arnold OBE AM (Chair): OK. Mr Mayor.

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): What I want to do is I want to raise people's wages with the London Living Wage and that is by far the best way forward.

2015/3291 - Reducing Burglary in London

Roger Evans AM

What steps are the Metropolitan Police Service taking to reduce burglary in London?

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): Thanks, Roger. Burglary is actually at its lowest level since 1974 and has come down by more than 25% since 2011/12 when we set the MOPAC 20% crime reduction target for neighbourhood offences. That means there are 24,500 fewer burglaries per year, which is an incredible achievement. Everybody who has experienced a burglary knows what a horrible crime it is. It is a shattering experience to be burgled and it is great that we are driving it down.

On Tuesday, Steve Greenhalgh, Deputy Mayor for Policing and Crime, and Helen King, Assistant Commissioner [MPS], handed out 60,000 free, smart water forensic marking kits as part of the Met Trace programme. We are rolling out this smart water stuff - I do not know if we are allowed to call it 'smart water'; that may be a trade name - and by the time we finish, one in seven London homes will have smart water products in it and will be a smart water property.

Roger Evans AM: Very good. The good news is that we have still 12 minutes to discuss burglary reduction, Mr Mayor. I can tell there is enthusiasm from colleagues for this debate to continue. Could you just reassure us, Mr Mayor, that you will not be following the urgings of Sara Thornton [Chair, National Police Chiefs' Council], who is a very senior police officer nationally?

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): No.

Roger Evans AM: She says that people who suffer burglaries may not have a visit from police officers.

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): I reject that entirely and, as you remember, Sir Bernard Hogan-Howe [Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis] made it clear that one of the things that was distinctive about his role as Commissioner was that every Londoner who experienced a crime would have personal contact with a police officer. "We will attend. We will come to see you and we will attend the crime." That is the pledge.

Roger Evans AM: OK, that sounds encouraging. I do know there have been cases where constituents of mine have suffered burglaries and have had CCTV on their premises, as a surprising number of householders do these days, but the police are sometimes reluctant to actually take footage from the CCTV and use it as evidence, which seems bizarre to me. Is that something that you could just send a signal to the MPS about? It is important that we use all the evidence that is available and that we are seen to do it if people use security footage.

Boris Johnson MP (Mayor of London): We certainly should.

Roger Evans AM: Yes, thank you.

Jennette Arnold OBE AM (Chair): Thank you, Deputy Mayor. This brings us to the end of part A.

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