

Transcript of Agenda Item 3

Question and Answer Session – London Fire and Emergency Planning Authority

Roger Evans AM (Chairman): We will move on to Item 3, which is the main business of the day, the question and answer session. I welcome James Cleverly AM, the Chairman of the London Fire and Emergency Planning Authority (LFEPA) and Ron Dobson, the Commissioner for Fire and Emergency Planning.

Can I invite you make a short opening statement before we move on to the questions which have been tabled?

Ron Dobson CBE QFSM (Commissioner for Fire and Emergency Planning): First of all, thank you very much, Members, and thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today. I will be brief but there are some things that I would just like to bring Members' attention to.

Since I was last here in December 2013, it has been a very busy and challenging but ultimately successful 11 months for the brigade. To begin with, it is timely for me to share an update on how we managed during the Fire Brigades Union's (FBU) 47th period of strike action, which lasted for 96 hours over the recent weekend and finished at 6.00pm yesterday evening. This obviously covered the period up to Bonfire Night this evening, which is traditionally quite a busy weekend for the London Fire Brigade (LFB), but it is a time when we normally increase our public safety messages and ask people to take extra care due to bonfire and firework associated risks. This year we tried very hard to ensure the public were aware of the strike and I am pleased to share that a number of partners, including London councils and local authorities, helped us to spread that message and it appears the message did get through.

During the strike, we received 2,302 999 calls to our control room and our emergency fire crew attended 218 incidents. These ranged from releasing people who were trapped as a result of road traffic collisions to attending building fires. One such incident occurred yesterday when a contingency crew wearing breathing apparatus rescued a man from a smoke-filled ground-floor flat in Highgate. The man was initially treated on the scene by the London Ambulance Service (LAS) and was then taken to hospital where, I am pleased to say, he is doing well. I have said many times before that I would always prefer to have our professional firefighters providing our emergency service to London, but I am pleased to be able to report that our contingency crews again worked effectively during this extended period of action.

Moving on to some more positive things and moving over to our performance particularly, during the last year our firefighters have completed 86,500 home fire safety visits, which is some 13,500 more than the target, and I am very pleased with that. Our fire safety campaigns are continuing to contribute to our success in reducing deaths and injuries caused by fire. In fact, the fire and rescue service demand in London has continued to fall with all incidents down by 12%, larger or primary fires down by 14% and smaller or secondary fires down by 30 per cent.

The launch of our Know the Plan campaign during this year sought to make sure landlords and housing providers act on their fire safety responsibilities. Working in collaboration with a variety of partners, including local authorities and housing providers, we have raised awareness about the importance of fire safety for people living in high-rise and other purpose-built buildings. The Know the Plan campaign follows recommendations from the Coroner following the inquest into the 2009 Lakanal House fire where, sadly, six people lost their lives.

We are continuing to work to reduce fires in care homes, hostels and sheltered accommodation and have seen a downward trend in primary fires in non-domestic premises subject to legal fire safety regulations. Most recently, we have used our successful prosecution of a residential care home provider to highlight the importance of such bodies carrying out full fire risk assessments and following those assessments up with all the fire safety actions identified.

In July, we announced the winners of our £180,000 funding competition, held to encourage housing providers to install lifesaving sprinklers. The competition was launched after we revealed that we deal with more than ten fires a week in London's care homes and sheltered accommodation.

As for operational matters, I am pleased to report our continued good performance. Our response times across London remain on target, with an average attendance of less than six minutes for a first fire engine to arrive at an incident and less than eight minutes for a second to arrive at an incident when it is needed.

Earlier this year, the United Kingdom (UK) experienced the wettest winter since records began in 1910 and a combination of exceptional rainfall, strong winds and high tides meant that wide areas of the UK were affected by flooding, causing major disruption to people, their homes and businesses. For nearly three weeks, the LFB provided assistance to Cornwall, Oxfordshire, Berkshire and Surrey Fire and Rescue Services, while at the time dealing with major and protracted floods, particularly in Croydon at the Kenley Water Treatment Works.

In August, the threat level from international terrorism was, of course, raised to 'severe'. All I would like to say on this point is that we are very much part of London's preparedness to respond to a whole range of potential threats and we continue to work very closely with our London Resilience partners. Earlier in April, I am proud to say, the Brigade led one of the largest and most comprehensive training exercises to test local and national response to an air crash. Over 220 emergency service personnel took part, including the Metropolitan Police Service, the LAS and City Airport.

Finally, the training of our staff remains a priority. In April, I am pleased to say we opened the first of two brand new state-of-the-art multimillion-pound training centres for London firefighters in Beckton. The second venue commenced training at Park Royal in October and I am proud to say that together these two training facilities provide world-class state-of-the-art training for London's firefighters.

I should mention that we did open a new fire station in West Norwood on 30 October and that will be officially opened later in November. We are looking forward over the next 12 months to the opening of nine new fire stations as part of a £51.5 million private finance initiative. The first of these is planned to open in Mitcham before Christmas.

I could go on with so much that has happened or is planned, including an introduction this year of professional new work wear uniforms for firefighters, our trials with zero-emission blue-light vehicles, our installation of electric vehicle charging points at fire stations and our ongoing work to look after the health and wellbeing of existing staff, as well as recruiting new staff to reflect the community we are here to serve - but I am sure Assembly Members are keen to ask questions and I will stop there. Thank you.

Roger Evans AM (Chairman): Thank you, Commissioner, for that comprehensive update on what has happened in the last year. Does anyone wish to ask supplementary questions? The tabled questions are probably broad enough for us to cover anywhere you would want to go. Therefore, with permission, I will begin with the tabled questions.

2014/4104 - Future Operational Cuts

Stephen Knight

How soon do you believe it will be necessary to start planning further operational cuts to London's fire brigade?

James Cleverly AM (Chairman, London Fire and Emergency Planning Authority): The planning process for the forthcoming financial year - which is, I take it, what you imply - will follow a very similar timescale to that which we normally go through. I have the dates here which I can run through if you wish, but it pretty much mirrors what we have done in previous years.

Stephen Knight AM: James, perhaps if I can help you, my question was really aimed at the longer-term issues rather than at the year ahead. It is really getting at when you envisage the next Sixth London Safety Plan (LSP6) round, if you like, of operational changes of the sort of scale that we saw in the Fifth London Safety Plan (LSP5).

James Cleverly AM (Chairman, London Fire and Emergency Planning Authority): Obviously, LSP5 has only recently been introduced and it is a couple of years for LSP5.

We do not have a formal date for LSP6. I am uncomfortable accepting the premise of your question that there will be 'operational cuts'. The LFB has remained, in my mind, the best fire and rescue service in the world because of its willingness and ability to adapt. The Commissioner has already mentioned the introduction of firefighters' work wear. That followed fairly soon after the introduction a year or so back of new-generation personal protective equipment. We have had the opening of the fire station in Harold Hill a couple of years ago.

The fire brigade will change and in LSP6, when it comes through, there will be some big questions that need to be asked in terms of the nature of our primary response vehicles and how we deploy the use of digital communications into the vehicles. There are some big questions that need to be asked. The answers to those questions may - may - mean that we look at delivering our fire and rescue provision for London in a fundamentally different way. It might not. I do not really want to second-guess what it might be.

Stephen Knight AM: Clearly, we are talking about significant reductions in funding over the next few years. You might not want to use the word 'cuts' but, in reality, that is what we are talking about. A reduced number of fire engines and fire stations is the likelihood. Indeed, we have all seen LSP5. However you might want to describe it, most people will say that there were significant cuts to fire engine numbers and fire stations. Whether you believe they are justifiable or not, there is a reduction in the number of units, if you like, that you can deploy.

James Cleverly AM (Chairman, London Fire and Emergency Planning Authority): I take your broader point that we are almost certainly going to see, at best, a zero increase and quite possibly a reduction in funding, irrespective of the outcome of the next general election. Therefore, it is fair to say that we are looking at what a reduction in funding might look like. However, to automatically assume or to imply that a funding reduction would mean just a net reduction in the capability or the output of the LFB is erroneous. That is unfair --

Stephen Knight AM: That is a slightly different question.

James Cleverly AM (Chairman, London Fire and Emergency Planning Authority): -- because, actually, there may be some fundamental changes in the way the LFB does its work. If that is the case, it may well be possible to put more firefighting asset actually on the ground.

Stephen Knight AM: James, there was a bit of a dispute at the last Authority meeting about what commitment the Mayor had given in terms of future funding represented, whether he had guaranteed the Fire Brigade budget in real terms or in cash terms in the medium term. What is your understanding of the Mayor's commitment in terms of fire funding?

James Cleverly AM (Chairman, London Fire and Emergency Planning Authority): My understanding is that it was quite explicit that he has promised to protect us from any major frontline realignment. The commitment was an output commitment. It was to protect us from having to do a major frontline realignment over the period of time that he is the Mayor.

Stephen Knight AM: In terms of the budget, he has not given a commitment beyond this year?

James Cleverly AM (Chairman, London Fire and Emergency Planning Authority): No, his commitment was explicit. He is going to protect us from the need to make a major frontline realignment. The way that has been read is in financial terms and he has given us a degree of financial certainty that the Fire Authority has never had before. It has given us a little bit of breathing space in terms of the full implementation of LSP5 and the resolution of the current period of industrial dispute, but it was never tied to a specific figure.

Stephen Knight AM: Nevertheless, it is true to say that the word there is 'major' realignment because you are still as an Authority facing having to find savings of £10 million plus over the next two years.

I wonder if I could turn to Ron now. It is Ron and not 'Rob', as your nametag says...

Ron Dobson CBE QFSM (Commissioner for Fire and Emergency Planning): Yes. I have not changed my name.

Caroline Pidgeon MBE AM: It is embarrassing.

Stephen Knight AM: Apologies on behalf of the London Assembly for getting your name wrong, Ron.

Given the timeframe that it takes to develop a London Safety Plan (LSP) - and we know the time it took to develop LSP5 - and given that certainly beyond the 2016 budget year there is no guarantee and I guess the working assumption amongst senior officers must be that there could be serious funding shortfalls beyond that, when do you think from an officer perspective work is going to have to start to developing options?

Ron Dobson CBE QFSM (Commissioner for Fire and Emergency Planning): In terms of any major frontline realignment, that work would need to start sometime next year, probably early next year.

The other side which is important to recognise is that there are a lot of other challenges coming through the fire and rescue service which are going to impact on the cost of the service overall. One of those is the challenge we received from the Sir Ken Knight review [*Facing the Future*] last year and certainly from statements made by Government ministers since questioning why the LFB does not have retained firefighters, for example. Retaining firefighters in London is not something that I support personally, but it is something probably we are going to have to look at in the next period.

The other thing is that there is an awful lot of change going on in the service nationally around the way we deal with fires and the way we respond to fires. Some fire and rescue authorities are looking at very different technologies, based largely upon the fact that the number of fires in London and across the whole country is reducing and, therefore, the amount of opportunity for our firefighters to get experience is reducing and people are looking at other ways of actually responding. We are already looking at that because it is a commitment in LSP5 anyway to look at smaller vehicles and new technologies which we will be doing and they will have an impact on the costs of the fire and rescue service as well.

Stephen Knight AM: Thanks for that. I have only a couple minutes left and I will just probe you on a couple of things there. You referred to early next year work would start on looking at potential major realignments. Did you mean the calendar year or the financial year?

Ron Dobson CBE QFSM (Commissioner for Fire and Emergency Planning): No, what I meant was looking at and analysing all the figures we have in terms of our performance and making sure that we still have adequate cover and the right cover that we are looking for. I am hoping there will not be any major frontline realignment. We certainly will need to start planning for the year after sometime soon, but we do not know what the budget is going to be for that year yet. Obviously, our planning has to be a balance between operational risk as we assess it and the money available to the service.

Stephen Knight AM: In your view, is planning going to have to happen before the 2016/17 year? In other words, before the next mayoral election, are officers going to have to start planning the next round of significant realignment?

Ron Dobson CBE QFSM (Commissioner for Fire and Emergency Planning): We will certainly have to start thinking about LSP6 next year.

Stephen Knight AM: OK. That is very helpful. As part of that, do you think there are likely to be options around part-time retained firefighters for the first time serving in London?

Ron Dobson CBE QFSM (Commissioner for Fire and Emergency Planning): Personally, I do not support that. I do not think a retained firefighter system in the traditional sense would work for London for a variety of reasons which would take quite a long time to explain, but I genuinely do not believe that. However, we will need to look at other types of shift patterns that we might be interested in and that might save money and also make sure we can continue to deliver service in the right way that risk.

Stephen Knight AM: You used the term 'retained' earlier and I just wondered what you mean by that if it is not part-time.

Ron Dobson CBE QFSM (Commissioner for Fire and Emergency Planning): Generally, retained firefighters are those staff that have other jobs and attend a fire station for three hours one night a week to do training and respond on a pager when there is an incident. Personally, I do not think that would work for London. We have looked at it before and we could not make it work. I do not think it would work because of the risk in London and the fact that it reduces our flexibility. Therefore, I do not think that is the right way.

Stephen Knight AM: Apologies, but I am running out of time. You did say that you saw a role for retained and I just wondered what you meant by that.

Ron Dobson CBE QFSM (Commissioner for Fire and Emergency Planning): Sorry, I did not. I said I do not see a role for retained.

Stephen Knight AM: You do not see a role for retained?

Ron Dobson CBE QFSM (Commissioner for Fire and Emergency Planning): No, but I do see a role possibly for looking at alternate shift patterns but for full-time firefighters rather than retained firefighters.

Stephen Knight AM: OK. Thank you very much.

2014/4107 - Fire and Emergency Planning Provision

[Fiona Twycross](#)

Given the effects of LFEPA budgets since the Mayor was first elected in 2008, what impact will your 2015/16 budget have on fire and emergency planning in the capital?

Fiona Twycross AM: We want to go for a little bit of a broader discussion about the budget implications, but I would like to add to what Stephen Knight has said and just mention that I feel quite strongly that Boris Johnson [Mayor of London], when he was talking about ring-fencing the budget, was using weasel words and that people would then have expected there not to be any cuts to the fire service at all. Stephen Knight has covered this.

What I am quite interested in, looking at it a bit closer, is what sometime next year the possible major realignments might be. Whether you see this being something that would come from Government, given that nationally we are seeing quite a lot of cuts to fire services around the UK, and what actual control we will have from the Fire Authority's point of view and what pressures we will have on our budget in our potential realignment from a national perspective.

Ron Dobson CBE QFSM (Commissioner for Fire and Emergency Planning): If I can start, then, in terms of the protection we have, the Mayor's statement was quite clear that he is protecting us from changes to Government funding for those two years. That does not mean that we have protection from all funding changes in terms of inflation and other things, but we are certainly protected from Government funding. We have seen that in next year's budget already.

In starting to plan for LSP6, I certainly will not come at it from the premise of trying to engineer or looking for a major frontline operational realignment. That is not where I will start. What I will be doing is starting to look at our performance as we are at the moment; the cover we provide; the sorts of risks that we are planning for and whether there are new risks to London that we should be planning for, and trying to come forward with a plan that has the best operational cover for those risks. That is where I will be starting from and that work, because it is very detailed and takes time, we will need to start looking at next year.

However, in terms of what the actual proposals will be, that will be a reflection once we do know what the budget is and once we do know what the risks are. I certainly will not start from the premise of, "There will be a major realignment", because I prefer to think there will not be.

Fiona Twycross AM: OK. You will be aware that we have been provided with the data around the broad attendance times, which unfortunately we had only a couple of days to look at and we have not gone into a

huge amount of depth. However, just on a top-level early analysis of it - and it is something we would want to look at in much more detail at the next Fire Authority meeting - we have noted that response times have gone up in 372 wards in London, which are over half the wards in London. We are quite concerned about that. Actually, 23 wards appear to have had an increase in the first engine arriving of over a minute, which in terms of a fire spreading is significant.

I just wondered in that context what assurances you could give Londoners that there will not be further changes that will impact on those attendance times in the next year.

Ron Dobson CBE QFSM (Commissioner for Fire and Emergency Planning): First of all, the data that has been provided, as you quite rightly say, you have not had a lot of time to look at but we are preparing a full report for the Fire Authority at the end of November.

Fiona Twycross AM: Good. Thank you.

Ron Dobson CBE QFSM (Commissioner for Fire and Emergency Planning): It will be much more detailed and it will have a full analysis from us.

From my initial look at the data that we have, firstly, I am encouraged that it is largely within predictions, although there are some outliers in that in terms in particular of wards that are not performing as we would hope. At borough level, the Brigade is currently performing slightly better than was predicted. Still, that was a very limited period of time. However, in those wards where we do see performance where attendance has increased, what we are doing is we are keeping a very close eye on that and seeing what we can do to try to address it.

The warning that needs to be placed on all that data, though, is that we do still have currently, unfortunately, 13 appliances additionally out of service for the emergency fire crew and, also, we have some fire stations where the pumps and appliances are not at their stations. Take Old Kent Road, for example. Old Kent Road's fire engines are not at their station. That obviously impacts as well in terms of their local areas. Therefore, at the moment, the data is obviously accurate but it needs to be taken with a slight health warning.

Overall, I am encouraged that the Brigade is performing largely as we thought, but I am obviously very concerned about those areas where the attendance times have gone up in those particular wards. We are looking at those very closely and we will provide a lot more information, hopefully, for the report in November.

Fiona Twycross AM: OK. Thank you.

Valerie Shawcross CBE AM: Good morning. Just on a very specific issue, I was quite alarmed to see that the LFB may well have to pick up some of the bill for the additional pension costs for retained firefighters. I know this is a complex issue and it relates to an employment tribunal and I think we all agree that retained firefighters deserve a fair deal. However, it seems to me that the idea that the LFB ought to be paying the back pensions of retained firefighters when the London Fire Authority has never employed any retained firefighters, ever, does seem to be wholly unreasonable.

What progress has been made in persuading the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) that to burden London taxpayers with the costs of rural firefighters is unreasonable and what impact is this likely to be making on our budgets for the next decade or so?

James Cleverly AM (Chairman, London Fire and Emergency Planning Authority): You have made a very good point and I would like to put on record, actually, the cross-party support that I had in negotiating with the Department. Assembly Member Twycross and Peter Truesdale, when he was Leader of the Liberal Democrat group on the Fire Authority, joined me in a delegation to speak directly to the former Fire Minister and we made very much that case. It is probably fair to say that it was not the most successful negotiation that I have ever conducted with the Government. It was quite firm on this one.

My position - and in fact our collective position - very much reflected the point that you have made. We do not have, and we never have had, and we have no plans to have retained firefighters in London and it seemed a bit of a perverse situation that we were then going to be asked to contribute to this additional financial burden. That was very much our position.

The Government's position, which I understand if not necessarily agree with, was that there are a number of funding formulas which are allocated across the UK fire and rescue service and are not necessarily allocated proportionally as to which fire and rescue services do or do not have it in particular proportions. The Government's position was to be careful what you wish for because, if we want to unpick and go down to that level of granularity, it may well be that there is funding that we receive which is cross-sector but we would lose out on.

I am sympathetic to that and actually, until we start getting a more accurate breakdown of what that retained firefighter pension liability will be, I am keeping my powder slightly dry. It is one of these things. If it turns out that we have a small proportion, it might just be better that we swallow that. If it looks unfairly large, it may well be worth having a bit more of a battle about revisiting some of these funding formulas.

However, I think you and I are probably on the same page on this. It is not great news at the moment, but I will keep Members informed and I will keep pushing on it.

Valerie Shawcross CBE AM: Thank you very much, James. It does sound like the DCLG issued a bit of a veiled threat there and --

James Cleverly AM (Chairman, London Fire and Emergency Planning Authority): What is the phrase: "you could say that; I could not possibly comment".

Valerie Shawcross CBE AM: -- you can rely on having continuing cross-party support because it does seem to be perverse and unreasonable.

James Cleverly AM (Chairman, London Fire and Emergency Planning Authority): Yes. I do genuinely appreciate the cross-party support we have had.

Valerie Shawcross CBE AM: Thank you.

John Biggs AM: I wanted to explore further questions about the cost pressures within the budget. On the face of it, the Mayor is giving a guarantee about levels of funding. There is £389 million this year, £382 million next year and £382 million the year after that. He is also giving some assurances about compensating for further cuts in core grants. If the core grant goes down, the amount from City Hall goes up. He is also giving some advice and nudging you to do things by flogging buildings and cushioning your capital budgets and he has been very friendly and helpful in that regard.

However, there are a number of pressures. Recently, we heard about the pressures from the costs of strike action, which obviously does have a fairly significant cost for the Authority of several millions of pounds this year. Unless the matters are resolved, you should assume in future years similar amounts of money. There are staffing costs because the number of staff you have anticipated having has not reduced at the level you anticipated and, therefore, there are several millions extra in the budget. How are you cushioned on those pressures?

James Cleverly AM (Chairman, London Fire and Emergency Planning Authority): We have lobbied both the Mayor and central Government - again, cross-party lobbying - to get financial support for the impact of the industrial action. The department has made it very clear that the expectation is that all fire authorities have to cover that from their core budgets. It made it very clear there will not be any additional support from that.

The industrial action may well have an impact. Obviously, you will have seen that the Commissioner put forward a recommendation that we move to non-acceptance of partial performance. That was voted down by Authority Members and the Mayor is currently considering his response to that decision. The most recent nature of the strike action has meant that that particular issue to a large extent has become obsolete. I sincerely hope that we do not see any more strike action.

John Biggs AM: Obviously. Let us focus on the money side of things, please.

James Cleverly AM (Chairman, London Fire and Emergency Planning Authority): On the money side of things, if the strike action continues, we will need to look at finding a way to make it less expensive for the Authority and hence my recommendation to the Mayor would be to --

John Biggs AM: Will the Mayor bail you out if that happens?

James Cleverly AM (Chairman, London Fire and Emergency Planning Authority): No.

John Biggs AM: The Mayor has told you to fund it within your own resources?

James Cleverly AM (Chairman, London Fire and Emergency Planning Authority): The Mayor has told us to fund it within our own budgets. My strong recommendation to the Mayor is that we no longer accept partial performance because it will be financially untenable for the Fire Authority if the industrial action continues and if it reverts to the short periods of strikes we have had before.

John Biggs AM: OK. What about the other substantial current issue about budgeted staff members and numbers of staff?

James Cleverly AM (Chairman, London Fire and Emergency Planning Authority): Obviously, there was a delay in the implementation of LSP5 which was unfortunate and that has had a knock-on effect because we could not start the rebalancing of staffing numbers until LSP5 was formally implemented. The delay in the implementation has had a knock-on effect. That will ultimately work its way through the system.

John Biggs AM: It is another £4 million or £5 million, I think. How is that funded?

James Cleverly AM (Chairman, London Fire and Emergency Planning Authority): That, again, we will need to work out. We currently have a budget gap, which is unfortunate. The Resource Committee is

investigating ways of addressing that. I am not willing to second-guess the outcome of the Committee's work, but it will not be easy and we will keep looking at operational savings. We also will look at other revenue streams and we are investigating how we can better use our own resources, whether it is the mobilising centre or other things, to get a small amount of revenue coming in.

John Biggs AM: If we move swiftly on to the question of reserves, I have three tiny supplementaries here and the first is on reserves - which are at the level the Financial Officer views as being prudent and so there is not a bucket of extra reserves you can use. You are nodding in agreement with that.

James Cleverly AM (Chairman, London Fire and Emergency Planning Authority): Yes. I would feel uncomfortable dipping down into the reserves. We do not know where the industrial action is going at the moment and I would feel very uncomfortable committing to the reserves at this point.

John Biggs AM: OK. The second question, then, is about inflation and how you are managing that. Obviously, inflation is not a single number everywhere you go. There are different pressures in different places and you are budgeting to absorb that through additional savings. What is the quantum of that?

James Cleverly AM (Chairman, London Fire and Emergency Planning Authority): You are right. The plans that have been brought forward by Sue Budden [Director of Finance and Contractual Services, LFEPA] have inflation as one of the financial pressures that we are looking to absorb. We are not stripping that out. That is just one of the things that we will have to consider when we are looking at the additional savings proposals that we brought through the Committee and then ultimately to the Authority.

John Biggs AM: I guess I would argue that those are examples of why the Mayor's guarantee is somewhat less rosy than it might appear.

The final question, then, which is more significant, is that we have a Mayor who is here only about half a day a week; I slightly exaggerate. He has a foot halfway out the door into his new job and he is making promises which take him up to Election Day 2016. Clearly, a prudent Fire Authority - and maybe this is a message to the Commissioner - has to budget for the future as well. We are not living in the healthiest of financial climates in terms of funding for fire services. You do need to anticipate and plan for further savings. How are you managing that?

Ron Dobson CBE QFSM (Commissioner for Fire and Emergency Planning): As I said previously, we are looking at all of our budgets and there is a report being released today.

John Biggs AM: OK. You are looking at it?

Ron Dobson CBE QFSM (Commissioner for Fire and Emergency Planning): Yes.

John Biggs AM: What is the headline figure? You are talking about another 5% or 10% cut. Boris Johnson [Mayor of London] pretends to hold back the tide until 2016 and then what happens?

Ron Dobson CBE QFSM (Commissioner for Fire and Emergency Planning): At the moment, we are looking at options that we may be able to look at for savings in the future. As I said earlier, I do not start from the premise of a major frontline realignment because I would hope we would not need to do that. I am looking at various ways in which we might be able to reduce the costs for the Authority in the future, but I do not have a target to look for at the moment.

John Biggs AM: I would argue that the Mayor is being somewhat disingenuous in cushioning you, allegedly, with a figure when we all know that future pressures require you to budget somewhat differently and to have a campaigning stance which is somewhat different from that.

James Cleverly AM (Chairman, London Fire and Emergency Planning Authority): The point to note is that this is the first time ever that the London Fire Authority has had anything like an idea of what its multiyear budget may be. You are completely right to highlight the fact that there will be financial pressures over which we do not have full control, but that has always been the case. What the case has never been before is that we have had anything like an explicit figure to work around and that does give us a degree of headroom. It is not to say it will be an easy process because it will not, but it does give us a degree of certainty, more than we have ever had before. Normally, it is only about this time in the year that we get an explicit set of figures for the start of the next financial year. It is typically the end of the calendar year. We are in an infinitely better position in terms of what we know for certain than we have ever been in the past, but there will be difficult decisions to make.

John Biggs AM: I can see you are a glass-half-full man.

James Cleverly AM (Chairman, London Fire and Emergency Planning Authority): I will put that on my curriculum vitae.

Navin Shah AM: James, as everyone knows, London is facing a steep rise in its population for decades to come. If due to these demographic changes further fire services are required and having presided over extensive cuts, how do you think you will manage to improve and enhance fire services to meet those demographic challenges?

James Cleverly AM (Chairman, London Fire and Emergency Planning Authority): One of the advantages of demographic increase is that the tax base increases. There are more people paying into the system and it would be unrealistic to assume that we would have an increase in population and everything else would remain the same. I would hope that as the economy picks up, as the Government's long-term economic plan starts to have the desired impact and as the UK economy improves, London's economy will improve and the tax take will improve. It may well be that the financial pressures that public services in London see, improve at some point in the future. I would hope that that will be the case.

Even if that is not the case, one of the things we have absolutely seen is that an increase in population does not correlate to an increase in fire demand. London's population has been increasing over the last decade and over the same period of time we have seen a reduction in our core volumes. There is not a correlation between the two.

The other thing that we have shown is that it is not just about the size of the Brigade. It is not just about doing more. It is about working smarter. I am very proud of the fact - and this is not me claiming credit for this because it was under both Assembly Member Coleman and Assembly Member Shawcross [former Chairs, LFEPA] - that the move towards proactive work for the Fire Brigade and fire prevention work has had a massive impact.

In terms of moving forward, however, the fact that this protracted industrial action has meant that we have had a number of our fire appliances taken out of service for almost a year now really does not help me. It really does not help me. When I negotiate with politicians - and I know when the Commissioner has

conversations with civil servants, not wanting to put words in his mouth - the fact that the figures we are producing here are at or about our predicted figures in LSP5, despite the fact that we have 13 appliances off the run for contingency cover, makes it really difficult for me to fight our corner as hard as I would like. The obvious question is, "You are doing OK with those 13 pumps off the run and that would save you quite a lot of money", and it makes it a lot harder for me to negotiate.

My strong argument would be that the quicker we can resolve this industrial action and get these pumps back on the run, the better. If you have any sway with your friends and colleagues in the FBU, I would strongly advise that you remind them of that.

Navin Shah AM: James, I have two concerns here. One is that not only do we have something like a 25% population increase projected over roughly 20 years, but we also have some of the evidence which Fiona [Twycross] has just mentioned of having closed fire stations. There is already slippage in terms of not meeting LSP5 target times for attendance.

James Cleverly AM (Chairman, London Fire and Emergency Planning Authority): Sorry, that is not what the figures show.

Navin Shah AM: Certainly, some of those figures would indicate that. I know that LSP5 and the modelling do mention that there will not be an increase in fires or that we should be able to cope based on those figures. I am not convinced that given the high-density high-rise buildings not only in inner London but right across in outer London boroughs that we will have, that there will not be a demand on increased services. The question is how you will meet that, given the kinds of cuts that are being implemented in the fire service.

James Cleverly AM (Chairman, London Fire and Emergency Planning Authority): I do not agree with the premise behind the question. You are making assertions about the effect of LSP5 which are not borne out by the facts. The modelled predictions by the team at Union Street [London Fire Brigade headquarters] closely match and they were never meant to be an absolute ward-by-ward, street-by-street, minute-by-minute prediction. It was a trend prediction. Actually, what we have seen is that 14 fire appliances came out because of LSP5 and an additional 13 - almost twice as many as predicted by the modelling data - are off the run compared with prior to LSP5, yet we are still performing at or about the predictions for LSP5. Therefore, I fundamentally disagree with the premise of the question.

The broader question is about trends over the next 20 years. As I say, if the economy picks up, as I hope it will do, and if the tax base increases in London, projecting out to what might happen in 20 years' time is very difficult because technology might change dramatically. Again, you make an assertion which is not borne out by the facts that high-rise buildings are inherently less safe than low-rise buildings. That is not borne out by the facts; particularly with modern high-rise buildings. We look at the fantastic preventative work that our fire officers did in the design inception of the Shard, for example, and I know a number of us have visited the Shard. It is that kind of preventative work built into the fabric of the building that makes high-rise buildings infinitely safer than they ever were. Therefore, I cannot agree with either part of your question.

Broadly, however, we will respond. Harold Hill Fire Station opened because, midway through the Fourth London Safety Plan (LSP4), it was identified that there was a need for a point of presence in that northeast part of London. Even during LSPs, there is a degree of flex. Over the 20-year time horizon that you are discussing, we would expect to see three or four revisions of the LSP. They will flex and adapt to meet the needs of London. We are never going to put forward a position where the LFB is incapable of providing the

excellent fire and rescue service for Londoners that we have a moral and statutory responsibility to deliver. It just will not happen.

Navin Shah AM: Thank you.

Andrew Dismore AM: I want to ask you about the emergency fire crew contract. It is a clear example of market failure, is it not?

James Cleverly AM (Chairman, London Fire and Emergency Planning Authority): No.

Andrew Dismore AM: Let us look at it. You had only one bid. If we go back to the previous contract with AssetCo, which I think Brian Coleman [former Chairman, LFEPA] had, it went bust and collapsed. That was another market failure. Here we have a position with only one bidder. Although it was advertised in the *European Journal*, two or three companies expressed interest but did not bid in the end. We have had to spend £4 million on this per year, plus two one-off payments of £200,000 every other year, plus back pay of £500,000. They have us over a barrel, do they not?

James Cleverly AM (Chairman, London Fire and Emergency Planning Authority): No.

Andrew Dismore AM: Look at it. We are required by law to provide this service by a certain date. There is only one contractor. They have us over a barrel because they know they are the only bidder. They can charge what they want and we in the end are stuck because of market failure and because there is only one bidder.

James Cleverly AM (Chairman, London Fire and Emergency Planning Authority): Is there a question?

Andrew Dismore AM: Yes.

James Cleverly AM (Chairman, London Fire and Emergency Planning Authority): What is it?

Andrew Dismore AM: Comment.

James Cleverly AM (Chairman, London Fire and Emergency Planning Authority): Sorry. I do not agree with you. Pointing at that contract and saying it is a market failure is like pointing at an aeroplane and saying it is a gravitational failure. It is not. That is not the case. The fact of the matter is we put this out to contract and we had only one bidder. Actually, the very difficult nature of the provision meant that it was never going to be something that we were going to get lots of bidders for. I would like to have seen more bidders go through to the final round.

However, actually, far from being a market failure, the relationship we have had with the provider of that emergency contract has been very good. It is a commercial organisation. It needs to make money. That is fair enough. They have actually proven themselves to be very flexible. There are plenty of occasions when they could have interpreted the contract much more strictly than they have done and the performance of the Emergency Fire Crew Capability (EFCC) crews has been as or better than expected in all cases.

I do not agree that it is a market failure. I do not agree that we are over a barrel. Had it been the case that we believed that provision was just not cost-effective in absolute terms, we would have come up with a fundamentally different method of provision. What that would have been I do not want to speculate on here, but the simple fact of the matter is that if it did not work for us we would have done something else.

Andrew Dismore AM: That is the point, is it not? We had a deadline we had to meet. We had to provide a service. This was the only option on the table. No other proposals were put forward.

James Cleverly AM (Chairman, London Fire and Emergency Planning Authority): That is not a market failure. That is just a feature.

Andrew Dismore AM: It is a market failure if you get only one bid. It is not like an aeroplane. The fact is that if we want to buy new fire appliances – although we are going to have to go through with the Babcock contract now – half a dozen companies may well tender to provide those and then we can have a proper competition between them on price and quality. There is no option to have any competition on price or quality because they have us over a barrel because they are the only bidder and because there was a legislative deadline we had to meet. To my mind, it is market failure when only one company puts forward a bid and it is a take-it-or-leave-it bid in the end. You can negotiate around the edges, but in the end we are stuffed.

James Cleverly AM (Chairman, London Fire and Emergency Planning Authority): I do not agree. You keep making these statements of your personal opinion in the guise of questions and I do not agree with you.

Fiona Twycross AM: I just wanted to talk a little bit more about the cost of the strike, which you raised. In terms of the current wave of strikes, would you agree with me that the approach taken by the Fire Minister in private, in public and in writing suggesting that a new deal was on the table has been extremely unhelpful and prolonged the strike action and the cost of the strike action?

James Cleverly AM (Chairman, London Fire and Emergency Planning Authority): Again, no.

Fiona Twycross AM: You think that you can suggest to a union that they do not take strike action because something new is going to be on the table. Then, at the moment the pension regulations are just about to be laid before Parliament, can turn around and say, “There is nothing new”, on a day that in Wales with the same – I hate the term – ‘cost envelope’ you can come up with a better deal in another part of the country – it is an issue around devolution. You can turn around to a trade union, which you have been telling for the past few weeks and months, “Do not go on strike because we are going to come up with something new”, and then you can expect a trade union to turn around and say, “All right, then. We won’t”?

James Cleverly AM (Chairman, London Fire and Emergency Planning Authority): My understanding – and obviously I was not privy to the conversations – was that the current Fire Minister said to the union exactly what the previous Fire Minister said, which was, “Every time you go on strike midway through negotiations, you make it harder for the department to get concessions from Treasury. You going on strike is counterproductive to getting a good deal for your firefighters”. That is the message that Brandon [Lewis MP, Minister of State for Housing and Planning, Department for Communities and Local Government and former Fire Minister] put forward and my understanding is that that is pretty much the same message that Penny [Mordaunt MP, Parliamentary Under-Secretary, Department for Communities and Local Government and Fire Minister] put forward. When she stepped in as the new Fire Minister – and again, this is my understanding and I am getting this second-hand – she had conversations with the national representatives of the FBU and she said, “I will do what I can. I will go and negotiate. I will see what I can get”. She would not – because she would not have been in the position to – have made an explicit promise that a better deal was on the table. From my understanding, she did make a commitment to go back to Treasury to see what could be achieved.

The timescale has always been explicit. I have known what the timescale for the pension changes needed to be because I worked back from 1 April next year when they have to be implemented. The timescale is explicit. If the Union is now claiming that it was caught out because of a surprise timescale, it is disingenuous because everyone has known when the deadline needed to be.

Ms Mordaunt, as the Fire Minister, I know, had conversations with Treasury. However, Brandon [Lewis], the previous Fire Minister, before he left said, "Financially speaking, I really do think this is the best deal that we are going to get". No one should be surprised that she came back and said, "There is nothing more. I have asked and there is nothing more in the cupboard".

You mentioned Wales. With regard to Wales, Northern Ireland and Scotland, they have no extra money. The money for that future pension liability will have to come out of the budget for the fire and rescue services in the future. The only way I can see they square that circle is by reducing pumps, stations and firefighters. There is no extra money. They are robbing themselves from the future to try to make this industrial relations problem go away and I think that is the wrong answer.

Fiona Twycross AM: A week before the announcement was made I was at a meeting - and I think the Commissioner was there as well - where she indicated quite clearly that she thought a deal was going to take place. I can see why the FBU and firefighters, given that she had been writing open letters to them for some time, actually believed that there was something else coming forward. The approach that was taken in terms of suggesting that something new was coming forward, which I firmly believe was the case, has been extremely unhelpful in terms of prolonging the strike, in fact, and escalating it. As we have seen, we have had four days of industrial action over the weekend. I would argue that the FBU tried its hardest to negotiate on this and it is quite a big step for a union to say, "We are not to take industrial action". They suspended the strike action as a result of the requests made by the Minister and I think they were strung along for two months. Their members feel genuinely no other reason that they can be heard by Government.

Far from telling us to talk to the FBU, it would be really helpful if you went back to your colleagues in Government and said, "Look, please can you look to see if you can find some compromise on this?" Clearly, there is something in the deals that have been offered in other parts of the UK that those governments feel is possible for them to meet. You could see whether the Government in Westminster can do something similar, rather than having a situation in which it appears that they are just trying to face up to the unions as part of a bigger agenda somehow, and also come up with some money to help us address issues here in London in terms of costs rather than us having to go down the route of not accepting partial performance, which, as you will be aware, we think is putting financial interests over the safety of Londoners.

James Cleverly AM (Chairman, London Fire and Emergency Planning Authority): I am unsure what other option you think the Fire Minister could have taken. She entered into negotiations with the unions. The unions have painted themselves into a bit of a corner. They so vilified the previous Fire Minister and made it very difficult for them even to be seen to be negotiating. They took the change of Fire Minister as an opportunity - rightly so - to have a new relationship with Government.

The Fire Minister was also keen to press the reset button on the relationship and she promised the only thing she could promise, which was that she would talk to Government and she would talk to Treasury to see what deal could be done. She would not have and did not promise there would be a better deal on the table. If people want to interpret her attempts to get a better deal --

Fiona Twycross AM: If she knew there was no better deal available, then I do not personally see why she was offering that.

James Cleverly AM (Chairman, London Fire and Emergency Planning Authority): That is the point I am going to come on to. If she had sat down in that negotiation and said, "I am not even going to talk to Treasury about a better deal", what response do you think the FBU would have come up with then? She promised what she could promise: that she would attempt to get a better deal. Otherwise, all she would have done is at the start of that relationship just said, "I am not even going to ask". Imagine the message that would have come out from the FBU: "The new Fire Minister is not even going to ask". She did what she could. She asked.

Treasury made it quite clear, just as it was made clear to Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, "There is no extra money. If you want to cut a local arrangement, it is fine, but there is no extra money. You will have to make up that future pension liability from the future fire budget. There is no additional money for those deals that have been cut", which means that the only way that they can make up that financial difference is by reducing frontline delivery of fire and rescue services. It is the only way I can see they could do it.

Fiona Twycross AM: It cannot possibly have taken her two months to find out from Treasury that there was no extra money and to string the unions along for two months while she was apparently trying to talk to them. I cannot believe in the circumstances that it would have taken her two months to be told by Treasury that there is no extra money if that is the case. It was disingenuous and led to a situation in which the strike will escalate.

All I am saying is it would be really helpful if we did not escalate it further in London for the sake of financial considerations to stop partial performance. I just do not think that is helpful.

James Cleverly AM (Chairman, London Fire and Emergency Planning Authority): The choice of escalating, de-escalating or cancelling the strike action sits with one organisation and one organisation alone and that is the FBU.

Fiona Twycross AM: No, it sits also with the Government. There are two people in negotiations.

James Cleverly AM (Chairman, London Fire and Emergency Planning Authority): No. No, it does not take two. It takes two to negotiate. The decision about industrial action sits wholly and solely with the national executive of the FBU, no one else.

Fiona Twycross AM: The Government cannot have been in any doubt as to what was going to happen when it turned around and said there was nothing extra, three days before the pension regulations were laid.

James Cleverly AM (Chairman, London Fire and Emergency Planning Authority): The decision about the strike action is not made by Government. It is not made by fire authorities. It is not made by a chief fire officer. It is made by the FBU. You can try to do a bit of 'blamestorming' and say, "It is the Government's fault" or, "It is our fault" or, "It is their fault". The only organisation that can decide whether to go on strike or to not go on strike is the FBU and that is a fact.

Fiona Twycross AM: Given that there are better deals being offered in Wales, Northern Ireland and Scotland --

James Cleverly AM (Chairman, London Fire and Emergency Planning Authority): Not from Government there are not. The deal from Government to Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland is the same deal to us, which is that there is no extra money.

Fiona Twycross AM: The devolved administrations have managed to find a way forward and I will leave it at that.

James Cleverly AM (Chairman, London Fire and Emergency Planning Authority): I will answer the implicit question in that final statement. The point that you are making is that there is something that central Government can do to match the offers in Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland.

Fiona Twycross AM: There is.

James Cleverly AM (Chairman, London Fire and Emergency Planning Authority): There is not because central Government has given no extra resources to Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland. The deals they have struck are local deals, not national deals. They are local deals. The only way they can fund those arrangements is from the future regional fire and rescue service.

Len Duvall AM: In future budgetary decision-making, do you think - and I am still not clear about the motivation - that the Mayor seeking from Government to pack LFEPA, really, given the local election results, in terms of future decisions is right?

James Cleverly AM (Chairman, London Fire and Emergency Planning Authority): Yes.

Len Duvall AM: Why?

James Cleverly AM (Chairman, London Fire and Emergency Planning Authority): It is his functional body. It is the Mayor's functional body. Take a situation like the DCLG. If you were to say, "If most councils in the UK are Labour-run councils, the DCLG should be a Labour-run department irrespective of the national Government", we would think that ridiculous. The national Government runs the departments of the national Government and we would expect it to do so. The logic that the Mayor should not have control of the Fire Authority just because most London boroughs are Labour-run boroughs is --

Len Duvall AM: He does have control, does he not, by Mayoral Direction?

James Cleverly AM (Chairman, London Fire and Emergency Planning Authority): He does, absolutely. However, actually, it is messy and untidy. As we saw with the implementation of LSP5, it causes costs and it causes delay.

Also, the really important thing is there is a massive democratic deficit. The Mayor will be held responsible - and rightly so - for decisions that he has made on fire issues and a whole load of other issues. That is how democracy is meant to work. If he does not have control of his own Fire Authority, how can he be held responsible for the decisions of one of his own functional bodies?

Len Duvall AM: Therefore, he can ignore the results of local elections being the basis of making up the Fire Authority? We still have a Fire Authority. We could end up with the Mayor or a future Mayor putting unelected people on it.

James Cleverly AM (Chairman, London Fire and Emergency Planning Authority): There are already unelected people on it.

Len Duvall AM: Even more so. They could have a majority over the elected and --

James Cleverly AM (Chairman, London Fire and Emergency Planning Authority): They are elected to something else. I have been elected to the committee of my old boys' rugby club. Does that mean I automatically should be able to sit on the Fire Authority as an unelected person?

Len Duvall AM: On your arguments about Mayoral Directions being messy, what is messy? What is the issue? The Mayor has complete control. If ever you were looking for where the control over the Fire Authority and this functional body is, it is a Mayoral Direction. You cannot be any clearer than that. Why go down this road of packing it out and stifling debate and possibly future budgetary issues at the Fire Authority, not in this place but at the Fire Authority? Why would you do that?

James Cleverly AM (Chairman, London Fire and Emergency Planning Authority): You have answered your own question. The Mayoral Direction makes it clear that the Mayor has control of the Fire Authority. Actually, that being the case, I do not see what your concern is about the Mayor appointing to the Fire Authority people that he wants. In terms of debate and pushback, I sat on the board of the London Development Agency (LDA) from 2008 until it was dissolved. There was cross-party --

Len Duvall AM: It was a local authority --

James Cleverly AM (Chairman, London Fire and Emergency Planning Authority): No, hang on. Let me finish. There was cross-party representation. There was a member of the Trades Union Congress on the agency.

Len Duvall AM: They were a quango. You are not a quango. You are a local authority by another name, a single-purpose local authority under a different jurisdiction.

James Cleverly AM (Chairman, London Fire and Emergency Planning Authority): There is no logic to why there is an automatic right of people elected to different authorities to sit on that Authority.

Len Duvall AM: I am not opposed to change. The Mayor's Office for Policing and Crime option on the table could have been further explored. There are some weaknesses with it in that sense, but why stifle? Why change the issues around democratic practices and the voice? That is what I do not understand.

James Cleverly AM (Chairman, London Fire and Emergency Planning Authority): OK. I was trying to be euphemistic.

Len Duvall AM: Could I just ask a final question?

James Cleverly AM (Chairman, London Fire and Emergency Planning Authority): No, I will answer that question. I was trying to be euphemistic about it but I will be explicit. I will be explicit about this.

LSP5 was the tipping point for this because it came clear - because I know - that the minute that members realised that there was not going to be a Conservative majority on LFEPA, there were conversations about what a Mayoral Direction would look like and the implications of a Mayoral Direction. From the day after the

elections in 2012, it was clear that members of the Fire Authority were going to force the Mayor to use the power of direction because it was obvious that difficult decisions were going to be made.

However, it also became clear that a number of members explicitly tried to delay the difficult decisions about LSP5 to get them as close as possible to the local government elections in 2014 in a very cynical political manoeuvre to make sure the Mayor had to make these difficult decisions that impacted on local communities. They knew that ultimately those decisions were going to be made. The fact that no proposal came from the Fire Authority other than LSP5, which matched the Mayor's budget requirement, none whatsoever, in my mind was an absolute indicator that there was a cynical ploy to make the difficult decisions as close to the local elections as possible. It is not about trying to make the right decisions. It is about trying to force the Mayor to make the difficult decisions in the most politically opportunistic way.

I apologise. I did not want to have to go down this route, but the simple fact of the matter is that what it showed is that a number of members of the Authority regarded their position on the Authority primarily as a party political vehicle rather than for the good governance of the LFB.

Caroline Pidgeon MBE AM: Disgraceful.

James Cleverly AM (Chairman, London Fire and Emergency Planning Authority): Prove me wrong.

Len Duvall AM: I am surprised.

James Cleverly AM (Chairman, London Fire and Emergency Planning Authority): Really?

Roger Evans AM (Chairman): Assembly Member Twycross has a point of order.

Fiona Twycross AM: Point of --

Len Duvall AM: I am surprised because if you were in a different position --

Roger Evans AM (Chairman): Len, can I just --

Len Duvall AM: If you were in a different position --

Roger Evans AM (Chairman): Do not fight each other. Do you want to go, Len, or should I take Fiona?

Jennette Arnold OBE AM (Deputy Chair): Point of order, Chair.

Fiona Twycross AM: You can do a point of order if you like, but it is just nonsense. It is an absolute conspiracy theory and nonsense.

Roger Evans AM (Chairman): That is not a point of order.

Fiona Twycross AM: It is a point.

Len Duvall AM: Politics and debate mean people take different positions and tactics. Packing a committee in any way to stifle those issues when you have a process to override that committee just seems slightly in bad

taste in terms of some of the issues. I have been in this Chamber and have been on the other end of some of those tactics you have described as well. Quite honestly, I do not understand.

We are running out of time now, are we not? We are still waiting for the Government to decide the course of action and whether to support you. In the event that that does not arrive - I think you have a deadline of November - what is the course of action that you are going to take to extend those members of the Fire Authority? What is the plan B?

James Cleverly AM (Chairman, London Fire and Emergency Planning Authority): You are asking me about the Mayor's decision. I will remind Members that every single member of the Fire Authority is appointed by the Mayor. I have been on record from day one saying that the current structure of the Fire Authority is not the most appropriate. A number of members confuse or fundamentally misunderstand their role on the Authority. A number of times I have heard people describe themselves as 'opposition members' of the Fire Authority and a number of times members of the Fire Authority describe themselves as 'scrutinising' the Mayor on the Fire Authority. Members fundamentally do not understand their role on the Fire Authority. Unfortunately, Londoners do not understand the role of the members of the Fire Authority. My view is that this needs clarity. It needs to be much more explicit about where the executive decision-making lies and where the scrutiny of those decisions lies.

The change of composition to LFEPA is not the perfect solution. As the Mayor said in his letter to the DCLG, he regards it as an interim solution upon moving to something much cleaner, as recommended by the Labour-chaired Communities and Local Government (CLG) Select Committee, which highlighted the fact that LFEPA's current structure is flawed. I agree with Labour in this regard: LFEPA does need reform. If that does not go through, then we will continue and I will certainly continue doing the best job I can to ensure that the Commissioner and his team continue to provide the excellent fire and rescue service for London that Londoners deserve.

Len Duvall AM: Thank you.

Andrew Dismore AM: That is the most bizarre conspiracy theory I have ever heard, verging on the United States blowing up the Twin Towers themselves.

What I wanted to ask Ron about, actually, was an issue which I put to James [Cleverly] at the last Fire Authority meeting on industrial relations training. We know from the answers there that senior officers only get half a day's industrial relations training. Do you think industrial relations in the fire service are good and well received all around and are operating as they should be?

Ron Dobson CBE QFSM (Commissioner for Fire and Emergency Planning): No, I do not. Unfortunately, we have a very longstanding dispute at a national level at the moment, which is completely tainting industrial relations across the board and is, not surprisingly, going into other areas and disrupting relations there as well.

In London, industrial relations could be better. We are still trying very hard to improve that, in fact, we have had some quite successful negotiations at the national joint secretaries' level over the last month or so and we are starting to resolve some of the issues that have been outstanding for some time. I genuinely do wish we could have better industrial relations in the LFB and in the Service generally.

Andrew Dismore AM: One of my concerns is that obviously it is a uniformed, disciplined service and we do not have industrial relations as a mandatory part of the training course. The answer we had before was that training is provided to officers with an identified need in this area, which seems to me to be something of a euphemism for 'people who might not know how to manage their staff very well'. Do you think there is an argument to say that senior management should have a mandatory element in their training, rather more than half a day? The Union gives their most junior union reps a three-day training course. Why is the senior management not given the same?

Ron Dobson CBE QFSM (Commissioner for Fire and Emergency Planning): I am not trying to argue in any way that the amount of industrial relations training we provide at the moment is sufficient because, probably, we can always do more. However, for staff and managers generally, we provide an awful lot of management training and a lot of the things that they do as good management are actually also good industrial relations. Apart from what we do in general management training, we are looking very specifically at industrial relations training as a particular area and seeing what we can do to try to increase that because, probably, we do need to provide more.

Andrew Dismore AM: Thank you.

2014/4105 - The Impact of the Fifth London Safety Plan

[Andrew Boff](#)

The final version of LSP5 was approved by LFEPA on 12 September 2013. Since its implementation, what impact has this integrated risk management plan had on the Authority's delivery of its three key strategic aims of prevention, protection and response?

Ron Dobson CBE QFSM (Commissioner for Fire and Emergency Planning): In terms of prevention, we have been able to increase the targeting of our fire safety work. At the moment, we have about 50 commitments in the LSP, all designed to target towards our three key aims. We have currently signed off on about ten of those already and the others are all making good progress, too. We focus very much on providing interventions in terms of prevention with the right type of inspections, at the right times, at the right places and cutting the target on those areas where the risk is highest.

In terms of protection, we have a very well-trained and expert fire engineering department that continues to work very closely with all major developers across London in terms of the infrastructure as it develops. Also, more often now we actually have fire safety officers embedded within local projects to ensure that fire safety is integral to the development.

On response, as I have already said, our response times since the implementation of LSP5 are within the targets that we set ourselves. We monitor those very closely. Overall, as I said earlier, the number of fire deaths in London, the number of fires generally and the number of fire injuries is continuing to decrease.

I am very confident that the LSP is already having a positive impact on our three key aims and I am confident that it will continue to do so throughout the lifetime of the plan.

Andrew Boff AM: Thank you, Commissioner. There have been recent reports in the media referencing official figures that suggest that the modelling used for LSP5 has actually been quite pessimistic. There were some allusions to the figures earlier. Despite the fact that you have had to keep to one side 13 appliances

because of the threat of industrial action, actually, you have been able to beat all of these predictions. Is that correct? Is that a correct sum-up of the situation?

Ron Dobson CBE QFSM (Commissioner for Fire and Emergency Planning): It is. During the consultation on LSP5, I did - very often, actually - make the point that we were keen in our predictions to be on the pessimistic side and we were not trying to make things look better than perhaps they would be. From the evidence and the information that we have so far - and as I said, there is going to be a full report going to the Authority in November - I am very encouraged that the modelling in most areas, not all areas but most areas, is proving that the actual performance is better than the modelling was.

Andrew Boff AM: OK. Should the threat of industrial action be removed, what effect will those 13 appliances have on the current system? What effect do you think it will have on your performance?

Ron Dobson CBE QFSM (Commissioner for Fire and Emergency Planning): The analysis we have so far is that putting those 13 appliances back would have a small impact on attendance times but it would be small. The main impact would be that it would enable us to do more community fire safety work. Although we are above the target at the moment, it would enable us to do more work in that area from fire stations.

Andrew Boff AM: Of course, the community fire safety work has made one of the largest contributions to the historic reduction, surely, in the number of fire incidents.

Ron Dobson CBE QFSM (Commissioner for Fire and Emergency Planning): There is absolutely no doubt that across the country and in London in particular, our very proactive approach towards community safety and public education since around 2000 has had the most significant impact in terms of risk and fire deaths of anything we have ever done.

Andrew Boff AM: There would be fairly substantial benefits from a removal of the threat of industrial action?

Ron Dobson CBE QFSM (Commissioner for Fire and Emergency Planning): Absolutely.

Andrew Boff AM: I know we alluded to it earlier and I did not quite get Mr Cleverly's response to the impact that the delay in implementing LSP5 has had on the Authority's finances. I do not know if you gave a cash figure on that or not?

James Cleverly AM (Chairman, London Fire and Emergency Planning Authority): I am a little bit uncomfortable giving an explicit cash figure because the way these costs are distributed within the Authority is embedded in a number of elements. Obviously, there are some explicit costs like the cost of defending the legal action, the judicial review and the cost of taking legal advice. Those are some direct costs.

Obviously, the original recommendation for the method of consultation was that the consultation would be focused on the boroughs that were impacted by the changes. It was decided through LSP5 that every single borough, irrespective of its impact, should have a consultation. When you are sitting in Newham Town Hall with six people - three of whom are FBU reps, two local media and one local resident now famous within the Fire Authority, Reg from Newham, you cannot help but think that we could have run that whole process much more financially efficiently. Plus, as I say, the rather cynical delay imposed during the implementation of LSP5 meant that the savings that it was at least partially designed to accrue were also delayed. Some of the savings

which we had hoped would have fallen into the previous financial year could not start being realised until this financial year.

In totality, I would expect we are talking about some low millions. I am uncomfortable giving an explicit figure because, as I say, those bits of money are tied up in a number of different budget lines.

Andrew Boff AM: Bearing in mind an intervention earlier regarding the organisation of LFEPA, have you been alerted to or do you expect any proposal from London Councils to take over the running of LFEPA?

James Cleverly AM (Chairman, London Fire and Emergency Planning Authority): I have not. I am no longer surprised that the pattern tends to be that people criticise the plan that gets put on the table but they provide no alternative plan and then they criticise the implementation of the only plan that is available. I now take that to be 'the pattern' and I would understand that if the tables were turned. It is rather seductive to be able to shout from the side-lines knowing that there is no risk that you are actually going to have to put your boots on and play on the field, if I can stretch the rugby analogy to its breaking point.

Andrew Boff AM: It is probably a bit too far, actually, for me. Thank you very much, Mr Cleverly. Thank you, Commissioner.

Len Duvall AM: In terms of LSP5, you said we would do some ongoing monitoring post those decisions. You will recall on 23 February 2014 there was a fatality on what can only be described as the Woolwich Ground - that might not be right - when we removed an appliance from the area. In the subsequent fatal fire review, there were a number of issues in terms of the cause of the fire. At the time, there was a technical failure that contributed to that.

In light of the recent information that we have now supplied around the implications of LSP5 and issues for wards, the three wards on the Woolwich Ground are all above six minutes with some varying from 30 seconds to 1 minute and 15 seconds. They are pretty substantial in terms of tackling fires and the time that people get.

Will you look at that fire review and see if there anything from this new data from LSP5 that you have provided can add to that learning? Will you also have a discussion around what we said would do, where we would find these gaps and see what else can be done to minimise potential fatalities like the one that occurred? I am not saying it is not but we now have this new information. You said that you would review issues after LSP5. There is a technical issue but there is something in this fatality that actually questions whether this person should have lost his life or not and the response times for people getting there following the technical hitch in terms of attendance. Could you review this particular issue and could you write to me? There may well be some learning lessons for the Fire Authority itself.

Ron Dobson CBE QFSM (Commissioner for Fire and Emergency Planning): The particular fire death that you mentioned, Mr Duvall, I remember very clearly, actually. There were some very technical issues which I explained to you at the time around that.

All of the attendance times at ward level are under permanent review. We are looking at those areas where we do have extended attendance times, as we noticed in the data, and what we can do about that. One of the things particularly we are doing about that is a lot more fire safety intervention. It was a relief to some extent - but obviously a very sad thing when a person died - that the outcome of the inquest was that the attendance time did not actually impact on it.

Nonetheless, I am very happy to write to you with more information around that. It will probably be after the Authority meeting at the end of November, if that is okay, because members are going to get a very detailed update generally and I will write to you specifically after that, if that is OK.

Len Duvall AM: Thank you very much.

Fiona Twycross AM: I just wanted to go back to a point raised by Assembly Member Boff - even though he is obviously no longer in the room - just to say that the data we have looked at, as I said earlier, shows that over half of the wards in London have seen an increase in the time it has taken the first fire engine to reach an incident and this does appear to be in part due to the additional appliances being out of operation between the strike periods. Commissioner, I know that you have been in discussions with the FBU about trying to find a resolution and to actually get the appliances back, which is very welcome.

I am concerned, however, that some Conservative Members may have wrongly interpreted the lack of disaster in the interim period as a reason not to return the fire engines. I would argue that on an initial view the data shows that the lack of disaster is down more to luck than to lack of necessity. I just wanted to get assurances that there were no firm plans to permanently remove these fire engines.

James Cleverly AM (Chairman, London Fire and Emergency Planning Authority): Again, I do not agree with the premise of the question. The LFB does not base any of its decisions on the expectation of luck. During this period, we have had a number of things which have had a very significant impact on these figures. Although you say half of the wards in London have seen an increase, in some of those wards the increase was very modest and in almost all cases they are at or near the modelled increases that we were explicit about. We were explicit the whole of the way through the LSP5 consultation that this would have a very modest slowing-down of our response time. The modelling has been shown to be accurate by circumstance. That is the first point.

The second point is that, as you say, we have had these 13 appliances throughout the whole of LSP5 that have been taken off the run to support the EFCC crews. You have said there have been no disasters. There have been no big headline-grabbing disasters, but let us not forget that shortly after the implementation of LSP5 we saw one of the most extended periods of Fire Brigade deployment at the Kenley Water Works. For a very extended period of time, we had fire appliances either at the Water Works, off the run travelling to or from the Water Works or delayed going back on the run when they returned because of sodden kit and that kind of stuff. We should not underestimate the impact that the February flooding had on the number of fire appliances available for emergency response in London. Whilst it was not a disaster in the loss-of-life and headline-grabbing sense, thankfully, it was a major Fire Brigade deployment. Implying that somehow we have just been lucky because nothing difficult has happened is factually wrong. We had a massively draining deployment. Also, on a parochial level we had a significant deployment in Bromley in Sparrows Den because of flooding and we also had the Waste 4 Fuel sites, which were a very large drain.

Therefore, these figures - and they are early figures, as the Commissioner said - are set against a period of industrial action and two very significant ongoing periods of deployment. To say we have been lucky is factually wrong.

Fiona Twycross AM: Setting aside the difference in how we might describe the situation, have you had any firm indications that we are going to be expected to lose the appliances?

James Cleverly AM (Chairman, London Fire and Emergency Planning Authority): No, because the only organisation that can make a decision about putting those appliances permanently back or not permanently back is the Fire Authority. As I say, it makes it harder for me to fight the LFB's corner financially with Government when, despite those very demanding longstanding deployments at the beginning of this period of reporting and the fact that we have had industrial action, actually the figures are pretty much what we predicted for LSP5. It makes it very difficult.

Fiona Twycross AM: You are not going to give me a clear answer on that.

James Cleverly AM (Chairman, London Fire and Emergency Planning Authority): No, I have given you a clear answer. It will be the Fire Authority's decision.

Fiona Twycross AM: Can I just ask one more question very quickly?

James Cleverly AM (Chairman, London Fire and Emergency Planning Authority): Of course you can.

Fiona Twycross AM: It is on a completely different subject and relates to equalities. Are you committing to signing the LFB up to Stonewall (a Lesbian, Gay and Bisexual charity) so that we can get back our position as a top --

James Cleverly AM (Chairman, London Fire and Emergency Planning Authority): Yes.

Fiona Twycross AM: We are definitely going to do that?

James Cleverly AM (Chairman, London Fire and Emergency Planning Authority): Yes.

Fiona Twycross AM: OK. Great. Thank you.

2014/4106 - Carbon Neutral Fire Service

[Jenny Jones](#)

Will you set a target for the London Fire Brigade to become a carbon neutral service?

Jenny Jones AM: By the way, what I mean by 'carbon neutral services' is not zero emission. It is carbon neutral in the sense that you can have one area that is carbon positive but another that is carbon negative.

James Cleverly AM (Chairman, London Fire and Emergency Planning Authority): We have looked at this. We have decided to do the rather more hair shirt way of going carbon neutral. Rather than just doing everything the way we would do it normally and just chucking some money at a tree-planting scheme and saying, "There you go. That is our carbon offsetting", we have decided to go down the tougher but we corporately think the more sustainable route, which is actually looking at the use of zero tailpipe emissions vehicles. We have been trialling that with some of the smaller vehicles in the fleet and the Commissioner and I have discussed - but I would not want to set any hares running because it is at a very early stage in the discussions - what an electric primary pumping appliance might look like or what the cost implications and operational implications are. We are looking at that.

I am very proud to say that we are rolling out electric vehicle charging points on a number of the fire station forecourts, one of the big advantages of the major refurbishment programme that we have had across a number of our fire stations. Although this was not a significant driver, the fact that LSP5 removed some of our oldest fire stations from our property portfolio has meant that some of those buildings which were never designed with energy efficiency in mind have gone and some of the older buildings are being refurbished. Our property portfolio will have a massive shift in the right direction.

I am not going to wear too many laurels on this because I know you will pull me up and say that there is a lot of work still to do. Our attitude is very much in the right place. I am going to steal the Commissioner's line but I get to do the talking first and I am going to do it anyway. Ultimately, preventing fires from happening is one of the most effective carbon-reduction activities for the LFB. I know it sounds glib but, as you can imagine, the impact of a fire - particularly some of the waste fires that we have been dealing with as well as household fires - can have an absolutely massive impact on our carbon footprint. Therefore, it is and will remain a massive priority for us. Sorry, I have stolen all your thunder.

Ron Dobson CBE QFSM (Commissioner for Fire and Emergency Planning): That is all right. Could I just add to that, in terms of a reduction in the number of fires that we get in London, I have been trying very hard both internally and externally to quantify that in terms of the carbon reduction as a result of reducing that number of fires. It has proved impossible to do so far, but I would really love to be able to do that because we would be very close to being balanced already, probably. However, that is me speculating.

The other side to it is, as the Chairman [James Cleverly] mentioned there, things like the fire at the Waste4Fuel down in Orpington recently. There is an issue nationally around the control of these sites and the Environment Agency particularly needs stronger powers than it has. That is one of the things that we have been speaking about ever since the Waste4Fuel fire has been in place. We have been leading some work nationally on behalf of the Chief Fire Officers Association (CFOA) in London. There does need to be greater regulation around those sites because they are the way of the future, but at the moment it is counterintuitive that we are actually getting more fires there.

Jenny Jones AM: Thank you. I know you are doing good work and it is interesting what you have just laid out as well. It sounds very positive.

Could I ask you to consider or to do one thing that could make quite a big difference? I think you would be a leader in many ways on this. Could you look at switching your electricity supplier to a renewable energy supplier? I do not want to name one particularly, but doing that would have quite a big impact. If you are using more electricity, it would be a very good idea.

Ron Dobson CBE QFSM (Commissioner for Fire and Emergency Planning): I can check and write back to you, Ms Jones. We certainly have used green energy suppliers previously and a lot of that was renewables. I am not sure that we are not doing that already, actually. I will come back to you.

Jenny Jones AM: It is switching to a supplier that actually generates all its electricity from solar and wind, not from nuclear. Will you let me know about that? Could you look at whether or not you could do it and let me know?

Ron Dobson CBE QFSM (Commissioner for Fire and Emergency Planning): I will.

Jenny Jones AM: OK. That is great. Let the Chairman know and then we can circulate it. Can I ask you as well on your carbon savings how close you are to achieving them? Your 32% carbon dioxide (CO₂) reduction target is by 2016. How close are you to that?

James Cleverly AM (Chairman, London Fire and Emergency Planning Authority): This is where I have to fess up a little bit. I am looking down at my briefing notes and there is a line here that says, "Currently, the London Fire Brigade (LFB) is 60% carbon neutral". I am very proud of that figure, but if you pushed me on exactly how we justify that I am going to struggle a little bit. However, it is something that we are taking very seriously.

I have just been reminded by the Commissioner that the new stations that they rolled out - Harold Hill and Ilford - both have extensive solar panelling and grey water capture and reuse. As we go through, there may well be an opportunity when we go through the disposal programme of the stations under LSP5 as we get the capital injection, some of which obviously we will want to use to modernise more of our existing fire station portfolio. It will give us a real shot in the arm and will enable us to take a real step forward on this.

Jenny Jones AM: You have 105 buildings and you have 28 with solar arrays at the moment. Is it actually finance that is stopping you doing more or is it the particular situations of the fire stations or what?

James Cleverly AM (Chairman, London Fire and Emergency Planning Authority): Partially, it is finance. There is a cost. Some of it is the fact that obviously we need to be very careful in sequencing because for some of these refurbishments - with the Old Kent Road and some others - you physically have to close the fire station for a period of time whilst you are doing the refurbishment. We have to be very careful about not creating gaps in provision. Therefore, some of it is about money, absolutely. The capital injection we will get from the disposals process will help with that.

Some if it is about sequencing and with some of our older buildings some of it is about listing, which meant that the things that we would have liked to do were just physically not possible with the buildings. Moving, on average, to younger buildings in our portfolio mix will make it easier for us to do that.

Jenny Jones AM: Is 'sequencing' planning and planning the deployment of resources?

James Cleverly AM (Chairman, London Fire and Emergency Planning Authority): No, it is more internal operational planning. For example, we cannot have the Old Kent Road closed but then also have - this is where my geography lets me down - Deptford closed at the same time because the pump from Old Kent Road would need to go there to cover the ground. We have to say, "We can do that one but, whilst we are doing that one, we cannot do any of these". It is a bit like keeping plates spinning in that regard.

Jenny Jones AM: I liked the sound of the trial of the tailpipe zero emissions. Can you tell me a little bit more about that? How many vehicles are involved? Have you bought them or are you just trying them?

Ron Dobson CBE QFSM (Commissioner for Fire and Emergency Planning): We have been trialling a range of vehicles that have zero emissions from a range of manufacturers. The trials are going really well. It is to replace a fleet of about 60 or 70 vehicles, small vehicles at the moment. They are due to be replaced in the next 18 months to two years. I am hoping that by the time we get through that replacement, all of our smaller vehicles will be zero emissions. That is going very well at the moment.

As the Chairman [James Cleverly] said, I am really keen to look at what we can do for fire engines. Sadly, the fire engine market across the country is relatively small for the amount of investment that would be required. What I have been doing recently is speaking to Transport for London (TfL) because they have hydrogen buses, electric buses and hybrid buses. If they can have buses that do that, I cannot see why I cannot have fire engines that do the same thing and we are trying to talk to them about that.

Just very briefly, if I can, the 32% reduction by 2015/16 we have already achieved. The Resources Committee on 13 November will be receiving a report in which we are proposing a further more difficult target by 2020.

Jenny Jones AM: Indeed, yes, a better target. Can you tell me as well about the charging points? Are they going into every fire station or every building?

Ron Dobson CBE QFSM (Commissioner for Fire and Emergency Planning): At the moment, we are looking to put them into 75 fire stations. We are looking at as many of those as we possibly can and not all sites lend themselves to it, but as many of those as possible will be available for public charging. Actually, we have a grant from the Government of £500,000 that we have to spend this financial year to introduce those 75 charging points. Then those charging points will be available to the public and we will get some income back from that as the public use them as well.

Jenny Jones AM: The public will not get in the way of the fire engines?

Ron Dobson CBE QFSM (Commissioner for Fire and Emergency Planning): No. That is why I said it cannot go into all fire stations, but in the majority of fire stations we can do it and they are going on forecourts and in areas of the station that do not affect the operational capability of the station.

Jenny Jones AM: Thank you.

Kit Malthouse AM: I would not exclude nuclear entirely. It is of course carbon-free, which is what we are all aiming for. There is some interesting research into thorium, which may also overcome some of the problems we have had with nuclear in the past.

I just wanted to urge you when you are looking at electric vehicles not just to consider batteries but also to look at the fuel cell. For a service like yours where instant refuelling is critical, you cannot necessarily have an appliance sitting around for six or ten hours to recharge. Of course, the hydrogen fuel cell gives you instant refuelling. We have a fleet of six buses already running along Tooley Street and the drivetrain there might be interesting and useful for you. Of course, the other thing about instant refuelling is that it allows you to refuel on the move and you could possibly have backup fuelling vehicles that would allow you to keep all the other electrical bits, pumps and all the rest of it powered off the fuel cell as well on the vehicle. I would be happy to get the Hydrogen Partnership people to talk to you about the possibilities.

James Cleverly AM (Chairman, London Fire and Emergency Planning Authority): Thank you. From my point of view --

Roger Evans AM (Chairman): Can I just stop you? I think you might want to declare an interest. You are the Chair of the Mayor's London Hydrogen Partnership.

Kit Malthouse AM: I am the Chair of the Hydrogen Partnership, yes. Sorry. Is it not on my standing declarations that I am the Chair of the Hydrogen Partnership?

Roger Evans AM (Chairman): I think everyone knows that, but some Members were keen to have it on the record.

Kit Malthouse AM: I am amazed. I talk about it so often. I thought everybody knew.

James Cleverly AM (Chairman, London Fire and Emergency Planning Authority): In my view, I am very keen - as a non-technical expert, I confess - to explore this and to explore the mix of vehicles. One of the things that is a hallmark of a major event is that you have a certain number of fire appliances and pumping appliances, but to a large extent many of the rest of the fire appliances are basically used as personnel-moving vehicles to get the people to the job. You need more people than pumps, particularly in central London. I have been talking to a number of the borough leaders in central London about looking at a smaller pumping appliance that might be better suited to the tightly congested streets in your constituency in particular. It may well be that it is easier to start off with some of those slightly smaller vehicles than the bigger wagons that are likely still to be needed in the outer London boroughs.

Kit Malthouse AM: That is probably true, although for both types of vehicle there is an issue with weight. Of course, batteries are incredibly heavy and your average battery car versus a fuel-cell car is significant. A fuel-cell car is probably half the weight of a battery car.

James Cleverly AM (Chairman, London Fire and Emergency Planning Authority): I am very open-minded about that.

Kit Malthouse AM: OK. Great.

Roger Evans AM (Chairman): All right. In that case, that concludes the question-and-answer session. Can I thank our witnesses for attending? I wish you and the Fire Brigade well for this evening, the busiest day of the year.