



PRESS RELEASE

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BORIS JOHNSON: THE COST OF LIVINGSTONE

It is time for a Mayor who puts the needs of Londoners first

Conservative Candidate for Mayor of London, Boris Johnson, today set out to Londoners the cost of Mayor Livingstone. In his speech, Boris Johnson said:

The moment I really thought that the current Mayor of London was out of touch with life in this city the moment I decided he'd lost the plot was when he last week offered an explanation for why his senior adviser on race and policing was using council accommodation.

It was because he was on "a fairly low income" at the time he qualified for a council home.

That turned out to mean £40,000 a year double the income of half Londoners.

What on earth could he mean by "fairly low"?

Ah - it turned out that it was "fairly low" in comparison to Mr Jasper's salary for the last four years which has been close to £120,000 per year while he has been using council accommodation that might have been given to one of the hundreds of thousands of poverty-stricken Londoners who are currently on the waiting list.

In his arrogance, his denial his refusal to understand what Londoners resent about his regime he reminds me of Marie Antoinette so perhaps it might be a good idea if we focussed on what life is like for those who do not receive grace and favour accommodation from the Labour

mayor.

Let's imagine that you are not in the position of Mr Lee Jasper being paid over £2000 a week and paying only £90 a week for accommodation.

If you are trying to get on the housing ladder you face not a ladder but a sheer unscalable Everest of a £250,000 average cost.

A summit made yet more unattainable by the £7,600 slapped on top by Gordon Brown in stamp duty compared to £1,230 when Livingstone first took office.

And if you are renting privately you are paying an average of £843 a month while council tenants across London faced sharp increases in their rents last year of an average £18 a month.

Londoners on low incomes are coping with huge increases in the cost of essentials –

- the price of bread rose by 14 per cent

- the price of eggs by 30.3 per cent

- the price of butter by 36.2 per cent

- and the price of heating oil and other domestic fuel is up by 42.6 per cent.

And all the while council tax has been going up.

It is 20 per cent more than when the Mayor was last elected in 2004, very largely because London does not get the funding we need from Central government.

London is the motor of the British economy.

With only 12 per cent of the population, we account for 19 per cent of GDP - and that means we make a massive net contribution to the Exchequer of £17.8 billion.

And what do we get in exchange, from this Scottish Chancellor and his Scottish Prime Minister?

I will tell you what we get. We get ripped off.

We have four of the poorest boroughs in the UK. We have appalling rates of child poverty.

We are expected to live in the second most expensive city on earth and yet this year 29 of the 32 London councils received settlements from the government that were "on the floor" - that is, below the rate of inflation.

Which in turn means that those boroughs will have less to spend, in real terms, on London's citizens than they did last year.

That means cuts in everything from mental health provision to preserving our green spaces.

Londoners are getting a raw deal, and the real disgrace is that it has been left to the individual boroughs to make this point to Gordon Brown.

Where is the Labour Mayor, Mr Livingstone?

Have you heard him utter a peep of protest?

Me neither.

He is happy to offer his musings about the glories of the Bolivarian republic of Venezuela, but he does nothing to champion London's councils or Londoners.

And instead of doing anything to tackle the cost of living, he adds daily to the cost of Livingstone.

In 2001 the average band D property owner paid £122 to the Mayor's office while the equivalent figure is £311 to day.

The cost of a single Tube cash fare in Livingstone's London is £4 - three times the European average.

Not content with taking £330 million from Londoners last year, for the privilege of driving through their capital.

And not content with the most draconian fining regime in the West, he is now clobbering the motorist again with a £25 charge that he himself admits is environmentally worthless and will do nothing to alleviate congestion.

And what do we get for it?

We get incompetence, mismanagement and waste.

The cost of a tube ticket may have risen by 166 per cent but signal failures and delays have risen as well.

And it is still a matter of wonderment that after five years of operation, an astonishing 65 per cent of congestion charge revenues goes to the contractors who are running it and hardly anything on improving the roads.

But then this is a man who happily wasted £34 million on the development of the West London tram.

He appears to have no grip whatever on costs at Transport for London and you know time after time Labour ministers stand up and say that I want to cut transport and police.

They know it is a lie.

But I do want that money more sensibly spent and Londoners deserve to know why at the last count there are 232 officials at TFL currently earning more than £100,000 a year, when there were at the last count only 43 on that kind of money in the Home Office and only seven in the Treasury.

And why exactly £3.5 million was paid out in bonuses to these officials when key performance targets were missed?

And why the Mayor and his chums are jetting off to Caracas and Cuba at a cost of £36,000 when the rest of us are enduring the nightmare of the Tube?

And of course he is too arrogant to tell us because he thinks he is simply untouchable, because he thinks that this City is his to govern as he likes, and that our money is his to spend as he pleases.

This is a Mayor who paid Bob Kiley £3200 per day to twiddle his thumbs or as Mr Kiley put it himself:

"If you ask me what I actually do to earn my consultancy, I'd have to tell you, in all honesty, not much."

And there he spoke for many people currently employed by the Labour Mayor.

With a record like this it is terrifying that he is one of the chief gatekeepers for the taxpayers' contribution to the Olympics.

When you look at eight years of mismanagement of the Tube,

- the chronic strikes

- the collapse of Metronet, which he partly engineered in his ideological warfare against the contractors.

It is barefaced cheek for this serial incompetent to say that he and he alone is capable of overseeing the Crossrail project.

And that is why it is time for a new approach from the government and from the Mayoralty, to make life easier for Londoners and to widen prosperity, and to improve the quality of our lives.

This Wednesday I would like to see Alistair Darling reverse Gordon Brown's plans to increase the tax rate for small companies.

I want to see him rethink his disastrous plan to hit the so-called non-doms which is driving so many highly skilled individuals and investors out of the capital.

The Chancellor needs to guarantee that all planned Tube improvements will go ahead, in spite of the Metronet collapse.

And the government must ensure that Network Rail and the Train Operating Companies make increasing the capacity of London's trains their first priority.

And we need to do more to help first time buyers to get on the property ladder.

London's level of owner occupation is the lowest in the whole country and a full ten per cent lower than that of the next lowest region, the North east.

And that is why it is time for Alistair Darling to follow the lead of the Conservative Party and raise the stamp duty threshold for first time buyers to at least £250,000.

And it is time for the government to get serious about reducing child poverty and the shameful health inequalities of this city.

After eight years of a Labour Mayor and ten years of a Labour Government a child born in Haringey is three times more likely to die at birth than a child born in Richmond.

And if you travel eight stops on the Jubilee line from Westminster to Canning Town - the average life expectancy of the surrounding communities declines by eight years.

And that is why I have proposed that we ring-fence spending on public health so that we end the injustice by which Kensington and Chelsea spends £21.26 per head on such programmes and Tower Hamlets only £5.87 per head.

And let me tell you what else I will do, as Mayor so that we bring an end to this era of waste and sleaze.

I will institute proper oversight of the next generation of Tube contracts so that the failures of Metronet are not repeated and we get the Tube upgrades we deserve.

And simply by reducing the rate of increase in Transport for London's non-recruitment publicity budget:

We can double the size of the safer transport teams

We can put an extra 440 PCSOs on the rowdier bus routes.

And by beefing up the powers of the Revenue Protection Inspectors, we can put an end to the epidemic of fare evasion that is costing Londoners £47 million a year - even on the Mayor's grossly optimistic figures.

And across the board we will be reallocating mayoral spending so as to improve the lives of Londoners.

We will spend less on the Mayor's personal media and marketing team and use the savings to pay for four rape crisis centres across the city.

I am going to reduce TFL's spending on management consultants and pay for free travel for injured veterans, more secure cycle parking, and more officers to crack down on illegal minicabs.

And we will introduce proper financial controls - so that we are not relying on Mayor Livingstone and Tessa Jowell to keep a lid on the Olympics.

And I will clean up the chaos of the London Development Agency by insisting on proper transparency for Mayoral advisers and proper democratic scrutiny of LDA spending.

We cannot go on like this. We are not getting value from either the Labour Government or the Labour Mayor.

I will scrap the Londoner, the Mayor's ludicrous Pyongyang-style newspaper.

I will curtail the Mayor's embassies and other vainglorious foreign policy ventures.

And above all I will end the cosy conspiracy of silence between the Labour Mayor and the Labour Government - whereby underfunding of London's councils seems to meet the tacit approval of City Hall.

It is time to speak out for a fair deal for London.

It is time for a mayor who puts the needs of Londoners first.

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