

London Fire Brigade Commissioner,
London Fire Brigade,
169 Union Street,
London,
SE1 0LL

29 January, 2016

An open letter to The London Fire Brigade Commissioner

The London Fire Brigade Commissioner is going to break his promise to the residents of Newham with his latest savings plans.

In 2014 we reluctantly saw the closure of Silvertown fire station. We knew it would result in a chunk of our borough losing vital emergency service cover. At the time we were promised that no further changes in the number of engines in the borough would be made.

Now he is going back on his word, less than two years later. Losing Silvertown fire station and engines from Tower Hamlets and Waltham Forest has not gone unnoticed. Newham, out of all the London boroughs, has been worst affected with the biggest increases in response times following the 2014 fire brigade cuts imposed by the Mayor of London. Response times have gone up by more than 50 per cent in parts of the borough and the six minute response time target for the first engine is missed in half of our wards. This means people are waiting for longer to be rescued from a burning building or cut out of a major car crash, situations where not just every minute, every extra second, counts.

The south and west of the borough are the worst affected, which does not bode well for the future.

Newham, like many east London boroughs, is at the forefront of London's regeneration. Since 2010 our population has increased by 32,000 and it is estimated that by 2025 a further 81,000 will live in the borough. We've already seen the fantastic transformation of Stratford, with thousands of new homes, and major events' venues including the former Olympic Stadium and the London Aquatics Centre. Canning Town already has several high rise housing blocks built and soon there will be Crossrail racing through the borough as well as acres of housing, office and retail space created along the Royal Docks.

In the past 12 months according to London Fire Brigade figures we have seen an increase in the number of call outs in the borough and with thousands more people moving in over the next decade these cuts simply put the lives of all of our residents at even greater risk. Newham's private rented sector has grown significantly over the past decade and it now makes up 40 per cent of the borough's housing. Intense

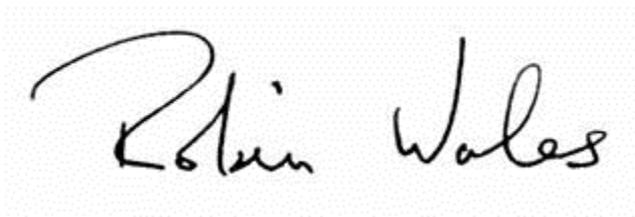
competition for cheap accommodation has meant that a significant number of landlords flout basic health and safety regulation. Sadly, research shows that people living in overcrowded shared accommodation are between six and 16 times more likely to die in a house fire. While the council works alongside the fire brigade to raise awareness of fire safety, with the brigade's resources decreasing this partnership risks falling by the wayside.

It's reckless to even consider permanently removing an engine from Stratford fire station when we know that thousands of people visit the Queen Elizabeth Olympic Park, Westfield and the ExCel Exhibition Centre daily and even more will flock to the Olympic Stadium and soon-to-be new home of West Ham United FC on major event days.

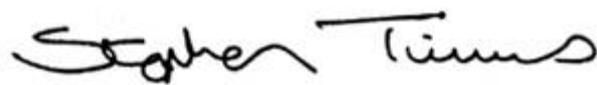
While we all need to cut our coats according to our cloth, Newham's residents have already borne the brunt of the London Fire Brigade's savings made in 2014 and government cuts since 2010 – quite simply another solution needs to be found.

As politicians representing the borough we are responding to this consultation but we are also urging Newham residents to stand up for their local fire services too and make their views known before Monday 1 February. The risks are too great for our collective voices to be ignored.

Sir Robin Wales, Mayor of Newham

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Robin Wales". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial 'R'.

Stephen Timms, MP for East Ham

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Stephen Timms". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial 'S'.

Lyn Brown, MP for West Ham

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Lyn Brown". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial 'L'.