

**UPDATE ABOUT CORONAVIRUS (COVID-19):**

**NO RECOURSE TO PUBLIC FUNDS IMMORAL ESPECIALLY DURING COVID-19 AND  
NEWHAM HAS THE HIGHEST NUMBER OF FURLOUGHED WORKERS**

**FROM MAYOR ROKHSANA FIAZ  
19 JUNE 2020**

Dear Newham Resident,

As we come to the end of another week of the Covid-19 crisis – a week in which for the first time we could return to the shops, and in a limited way, to places of worship – we find out that following further analysis of the official figures it appears that the Government has downplayed the true picture of Covid-19 deaths.

Over a 22-day period during April, more than 1,000 people died each day than the figure being reported by the Government in its daily Downing Street briefings. This was because the Government only counted those deaths in hospitals after a Covid-19 positive test; but didn't take into account the people that died in care homes.

Today, Public Health England reported that 173 people died from Covid-19 in the past 24 hours, bringing the 'total' to 42,461. It is likely to be more. And 301,815 people have now been tested positive with the virus, with 27,387 in London. Of those, 1,011 are residents in Newham.

We also found out today, following research from Edinburgh University which hasn't been 'peer-reviewed' yet, that people of South Asian heritage or origin are the most likely group to die from Covid-19 after being admitted to hospital across the UK. Analysis of data of 30,693 people admitted to 260 hospitals found a 19 per cent increased risk of death with coronavirus for those who were South Asian compared with their white counterparts, with some 40 per cent of those having had diabetes – suggesting a significant factor increasing the risk of Covid-19 death.

There is also now overwhelming evidence that the most deprived areas of the country, like Newham, are, and will remain in the eye of the storm. We know inequality lies at the very heart of the damage that has already been done here. In the same way we registered the greatest mortality rates, though Brent has now overtaken Newham, it is very clear we are at risk of bearing the worst that the coming recession will bring.

Amongst the most at risk are our residents who are subject to the Government's 'hostile environment' policy of 'No Recourse to Public Funds' which targets who have fled to the UK to escape horrors in their own countries.

Covid-19 is having a devastating human and economic impact for many of our residents. For some the crisis has been catastrophic, but for the thousands of families and people who have no recourse to public funds – they have been disproportionately harmed.

We cannot allow them to be treated like second-class citizens, and we must continue to raise our voices in defence of their human rights during this global pandemic. That is why I have joined with local MPs and community groups, to focus campaign efforts defending the Newham residents for who the No Recourse to Public Funds condition is applied by the Government.

To be categorised as not eligible or deserving of support from the State, denies people vital financial help. Thousands of people and families with children are being forced into destitution, extreme poverty and the risks of modern-day slavery exploitation. This is utterly unacceptable, especially when many may have lost their jobs and livelihoods due to the Covid-19 crisis.

Here in Newham we are working hard to support these residents and families, but continued Government funding uncertainty means their futures appear bleak unless there is change. Our families continue to suffer, which is why we are committed to campaigning strenuously with others to demand that the Government ends this dehumanising policy. In a decent, fair and just society, there simply is no place for such treatment. That's why Newham Council will continue to take a strong stand against the hostile environment being created by polarising policies. This principle runs through our Council and in the way we deliver our services to our residents.

Current Government policies on NHS charging and data sharing will stop migrants accessing healthcare - even if they are entitled to treatment, the fear surrounding access will act as a life-threatening deterrent. In this pandemic, but also in general, we must defend and protect equal access to health care for every single member of our local community, because it will protect all of us. Government policies that overwhelmingly target those from Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic backgrounds are not only discriminatory, but immoral.

That's why I support the *Joint Council of the Welfare of Immigrants'* call to the Government to make urgent changes and ensure the safety of migrants in this coronavirus pandemic; and the Council will continue to campaign with them and others to end the No Recourse to Public Funds condition. I have already joined them by sending the Home Secretary, Priti Patel MP, a joint open letter which can be found here:

<https://www.jcwi.org.uk/Handlers/Download.ashx?IDMF=a135b52c-e9d0-469c-aad8-3dde31aec7a1>

Young footballer Marcus Rashford gave voice to millions of children across the UK who are suffering from hunger due to food poverty, when he spoke of his own experience and forced the Government to make a U-turn on free meal provision over the summer. This will make a huge difference to thousands of children in Newham. That is why the Government must to do the same with those children who are part of families who

are subject to the No Recourse to Public Funds policy. Show humanity, keep us all safe from Covid-19, and take action. Stop denying lifelines for those children and families who can't access healthcare and other vital resources, just because of their immigration status. Surely one more U-turn can't hurt the Government's credibility any further.

This week we also discovered that the top five UK constituencies for the number of furloughed workers are all in London, with West Ham at the top of the list with 29,300 affected, and East Ham in third with 24,000 affected. And according to the Department for Work and Pensions, the number of claimants for Universal Credit in Newham rose from 25,744 on April 9 to 41,933 on 14 May – a jump of 62.9%.

Newham has a workforce that is largely employed in insecure low paid jobs, so the figures that were published were no surprise, but they are an absolute worry. It's yet another illustration of the disproportionate impact that Covid-19 is having on our community, 73% of who are from Black, Asian and ethnic minorities.

It's why on Thursday evening I appeared on BBC London TV news to hammer home the message that the Government needs to step up and give us more money to be able to tackle the poverty, inequality and injustice that affects us, help people get back into work, and support those who are most in need. We are doing our bit through our commitment to community wealth building, supporting businesses to thrive and residents to gain skills and jobs, so when is the Government going to do the same? Do the right thing and show us the money.

Today we have heard that the top scientists at the Joint Biosecurity Centre have recommended the Covid-19 alert level should move from Level 4 (an epidemic is in general circulation; transmission is high or rising exponentially) to Level 3 (an epidemic is in general circulation). There has been a steady decrease in cases of people tested positive for coronavirus, but it doesn't mean the pandemic is over. The virus is still in general circulation, and localised outbreaks could occur.

This weekend will be the first full shopping weekend when the majority of non-essential retailers will be open to provide us with some opportunities for retail therapy. Follow the rules that the shops have put in place to protect you and others. Wash your hands regularly and as soon as you are back indoors. Keep at least two metres apart from anyone outside your household or not in your social "bubble". Take hand sanitiser with you when you go out in case there are no handwashing facilities. Wear a face covering when on public transport. Stay safe.

For West Ham United fans there is an important milestone tomorrow as Premier League football returns to the London Stadium as the Hammers play Wolverhampton Wanderers behind closed doors. Avoid heading to Stratford as you won't be able to get near the stadium, and in any case it's much safer at home watching it on TV or listening to the radio.

Please also take note that the weather forecast next week suggests we are in for very hot conditions – with temperatures expected to top 30 degrees by Wednesday and

Thursday. With more of us displaced from public transport, please make sure, as you travel around on foot or cycle, you are prepared. Carry water with you, make sure you have access to sun-screen, avoid travel during the warmest part of the day, and take rest stops regularly.

As you plan your weekend with your loved ones, and as we prepare for another Covid-19 focused week on Monday, please stay safe.

Best wishes

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Rokhsana Fiaz', with a stylized flourish at the end.

**Rokhsana Fiaz**  
**Mayor of Newham**

**People at the Heart**  
**of Everything We Do**