

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

**LOCKDOWN EASES BUT WE NEED TO KEEP SAFE. AND THE ECONOMY PLUMMETS,  
MEANING MORE JOBS LOST AND LIVELIHOODS AT STAKE.**

**FROM MAYOR ROKHSANA FIAZ  
FRIDAY 3<sup>RD</sup> JULY 2020**

Dear Newham Resident,

From tomorrow we can get a long overdue haircut, grab a drink in a pub or bar, and catch a film at the cinema or a bite to eat in a restaurant, providing they keep to Covid-19 secure guidelines. Whatever it is you are planning to do, please put your safety and that of others, above everything else.

Restrictions are being lifted and we will be helping our businesses get back on their feet, but I urge caution about rushing back because of the vulnerabilities of residents in Newham – and because we can't risk a second wave of coronavirus.

This pandemic isn't over. England's deputy chief medical adviser has already repeated that a second wave of the coronavirus epidemic in England is 'quite a possibility' and can't be ruled out. The threat remains substantial. Look at Leicester, which has been forced back into lockdown following a renewed spike in infection rates and the city recording ten per cent of all new cases in the country.

Government data tells us that up to yesterday Newham has had 1,257 confirmed cases of coronavirus in hospitals and the wider community, from a population of 353,134 – that's 357 cases per 100,000 people. Sadly, until 19 June there had been 304 coronavirus-related deaths. Significantly, of all deaths reported between 29 February and 16 June, almost four in ten involved the deadly virus. I offer sympathy and condolences to all families affected.

Just like Newham, Leicester is a diverse community experiencing deprivation and over-crowded housing. What that city is going through is a stark reminder that some communities are far more vulnerable to this infection than others. I have repeatedly warned that Newham is disproportionately vulnerable to the worst and most devastating effects of the virus. So I say again, it's absolutely vital that we all take responsibility for staying safe and protecting the people around us.

The experience of going out will be very different from what it was before. Please act sensibly and respectfully, ensuring all the rules are followed, and look after our amazing borough. Before you set out from home, check you can get into the pub, bar or venue you plan to visit. Some venues are booking only. Others will have limited space and queuing, and some may not be open at all.

Maintain a two-metre distance from others wherever possible. Wear a face covering if you can't stay a safe distance from others. Wash your hands regularly and carry hand sanitiser with you. Avoid public transport if possible. If you have to use it, you must wear a face covering, and avoid the busiest times and busiest stations. If you or someone in your household feels unwell, stay at home. If you have Covid-19 symptoms, get a test by calling 119 or visit <https://nhs.uk/coronavirus>.

From this week all councils have been required to publish their outbreak management plans, which sets out what will happen in the instance of a local outbreak of Covid-19 and which could see schools, businesses or workplaces closed and local lockdowns enforced if infection rates continue to spike. In Newham we have deliberately framed our plan as a Covid-19 management plan with a focus on prevention. It is a dynamic document that will evolve as we continue to work with settings and communities and learn from our response to emerging incidents. You can see it at <https://www.newham.gov.uk/coronavirus-covid-19/covid-19-management-plan/1>.

Earlier this week, the Government also announced that it will be mandatory for pupils to return to school from September, and that it will take 'specific action' if schools did not comply with the new guidelines and open in the autumn. While also announcing that a full curriculum will return and that exams will be expected to take place in summer 2021, there were minimal requirements published by the Department for Education for schools to implement. With primary and secondary schools needing to divide pupils into 'bubbles' of entire classes or year groups, there is little requirement for social distancing measures within schools, with much of the advice left to school leaders to interpret, including recommendations about staggering school start and finish times, break times within school hours, and hygiene routines. This is worrying.

We plan to work with our parents and schools through this guidance to inform a Newham response, because we don't know what the Covid-19 situation will be in two months' time, or for that matter for the foreseeable future as we'll be living with the virus for a long time. So we'll be reviewing the guidance before establishing how practically this will work in Newham, because we take our public health responsibility very seriously, and the safety and well-being of Newham's children, their families, and the teachers and support staff. So keep an eye out for more details in the coming weeks.

Yesterday we heard from Robert Jenrick, Secretary of State at the Ministry of Housing, Local Government and Communities, about how much money is being given to local authorities to fill the hole created in council budgets by loss of income, and extra expenditure incurred to support residents through this crisis.

A further £500 million has been awarded to be shared by all. While anything we get is welcome, it will never be enough and will fall well short of what is needed. It's another sticking plaster solution to a gaping wound. We are looking closely at the announcement as we finalise our assessment of the impact of Covid-19 on the Council's finances, with reports being published next week for Cabinet and Full Council meetings later this month, which you'll be able to find on the Council website.

It's already been estimated by London Councils, the umbrella body for local authorities in the Capital, that Covid-19 will cost London boroughs £1.8 billion in 2020/21, equating to £700 million in extra spending and £1.1 billion in lost taxes and other income. The Government needs to wake up and fully appreciate the scale of what we are grappling with, especially as the Covid-19 health emergency won't be over anytime soon. What is clear from the concerns being raised by councils across the country is that the impact on Council Tax and Business Rates alone could cause major budget issues next year if there isn't further and significant Government support.

Already some councils are saying that they face becoming bankrupt. While Newham isn't one of those, we can't be complacent and that's why also later this month, we will be publishing our Covid-19 recovery plan. At its heart will be making changes where required to our Community Wealth Building and inclusive economy strategies so that we can deal with the economic impact that the virus has had on Newham during this time and in the months and years ahead.

But three things will be central to our approach going forward, building on what we started when I stepped into office back in May 2018. The first is the absolute prominence of public health in everything we do; the second is bringing out more explicitly our work in tackling inequality – and that means race equality – in Newham, where 73 per cent of our residents are from Black, Asian and Ethnic Minority communities. And the third is maintaining our commitment to tackling Climate Emergency. Next week, we'll also be publishing three important reports reflecting our on-going commitment to achieving a carbon neutral position in the Council by 2030 and Carbon Zero by 2050: our Climate Emergency Annual Report, our response to the Climate Change Citizen Assembly held earlier this year; and our Climate Emergency Action Plan.

I know that the economic impact on Newham will be great, as already nearly half of our residents – some 48 per cent - are living in poverty after housing costs are taken into account, which is almost double the national level. Newham's children are especially affected, as 67 per cent of them are living in households in poverty - which is double the number of children living in poverty across the UK when housing costs are taken into account.

On Tuesday, the Prime Minister heralded a 'New Deal' for the UK economy, with the announcement of a £5 billion infrastructure programme to support the rebooting of the UK economy and help with Covid-19 recovery. He referenced the famed post-depression rebuilding programme initiated by the former American President Franklin Delano Roosevelt in the last century as he evoked the idea of a grand plan to help Britain out of the catastrophic recession facing it, but it's a drop in the ocean of what will be required to build back Britain from the impact of Covid-19.

Let's be clear about the prognosis for the UK economy. In June, the Organisation for Economic Co-Operation and Development (OECD) stated that the economic impacts of Covid-19 will be *'dire everywhere'*, with recovery being *'slow and the crisis will have long lasting effects, disproportionately affecting the most vulnerable'* – specifically low-paid workers and young people. The OECD also highlighted that the UK will suffer the worst damage of any country in the developed world, with a slump in national income of some 11.5 per cent – higher than France, Italy, Spain, Germany and the US - rising to 14 per cent if the UK was required to implement a second lockdown nationally.

On Monday, data from the Office for National Statistics (ONS), showed that the UK economy has been hit by Covid-19 more severely than initially anticipated, contracting by 2.2 per cent in the first quarter of 2020, with gross domestic product (GDP) falling by 6.9 per cent in March alone; exposing that the UK is facing its deepest recession in a generation. Two weeks ago, the ONS published its 'flash estimate' for April, which showed that in the first full month of lockdown, the economy shrank by 20.4 per cent – the biggest drop since records began in 1997. The Bank of England has already estimated that UK GDP could contract by 25 per cent in the second quarter, with unemployment more than doubling - triggering what's expected to be the most damaging recession in this country in more than 300 years.

And this week, the most senior economist for the International Monetary Fund (IMF) told the Treasury Select Committee, that the Covid-19 pandemic has had a more negative impact on global activity in the first half of 2020, with projected recovery being more gradual than previously forecast and UK's recovery being more prolonged than suggested by the Bank of England.

On Tuesday, the Prime Minister admitted that the country's unemployment rate is expected to rise substantially, hitting young people particularly hard. There has already been a 70 per cent spike in Universal Credit claims in April, and more job losses will likely follow when the Government's furlough scheme is removed in October, with many companies using the programme not expected to survive.

Despite the coming catastrophe, there was no mention of extending the job retention scheme, despite increasing calls from unions, business leaders, experts, and the Mayor of London to extend the scheme into next year. More than 1 million London workers have been furloughed during the pandemic, accounting for more than 12 per cent of the national total, and Newham has the highest number in the country with 50,000 jobs at stake.

Without ongoing support, many, many in Newham on low wages will be hardest hit by redundancies. The Government must step in prevent this happening and that's why an extension to the furlough scheme is vital to protect livelihoods.

Meanwhile, as the recession looms, the UK continues to hurtle towards an apparently unstoppable no-deal Brexit; and European Londoners have just one year to apply to the EU Settlement Scheme. In Newham, there are 84,950 EU citizens who have already applied. But if you one of our residents who haven't, now is the time to do it, because Newham is your home and you are essential to the strength of our community and our local economy. That's why, earlier this week I joined some 30 charities and organisations, and the Mayor of London, in writing to the Government asking that they extend the application period in light of the serious disruption caused to the process by the Covid-19 crisis.

Monday will see an important milestone in the delivery of the manifesto commitments that I made two years ago to the people of Newham to transform Newham Council, it's governance arrangements and the involvement of residents.

When I stood to become Mayor in May 2018, I set out a bold vision for this borough to become a beacon of participatory democracy in the UK. I pledged to bring a culture of trust and openness that involves residents in our decision-making. On Monday the independent Democracy and Civic Participation Commission that I established to review how the Council works and to make recommendations about how we drive participatory democracy in Newham, will publish its report. You can join the launch at 2.30pm on Monday via [https://www.facebook.com/newhamcouncil/live\\_videos/](https://www.facebook.com/newhamcouncil/live_videos/) where members of the Commission, led by its chair Professor Nick Pearce, will outline the work that they've undertaken and the series of recommendations they've arrived at.

There is some welcome news to bring you. Following a review of operations, London's Strategic Coordination Group, the multi-agency partnership advising on much of the Capital's response to the Covid-19 pandemic, is planning to remove the temporary mortuary facility which was built on Wanstead Flats in Manor Park in March to cope with the anticipated increase in fatalities as a result of coronavirus. Work to remove the temporary structure may begin as soon as the weekend. I have asked those responsible to keep to their commitment to restore the site to how it was before. I sincerely hope that we do not have to see the like of it again.

This weekend our town halls in Stratford and East Ham are turning blue to celebrate the 72<sup>nd</sup> birthday of the National Health Service. And on Sunday evening at 5pm we are being encouraged to clap again to mark the anniversary and show our support for all the dedicated NHS workers and remember those who had lost their lives.

Next week we will also remember the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the single greatest atrocity since the Second World War took place. In July 1995 in the small town of Srebrenica in Bosnia-Herzegovina, more than 8,000 Muslim men and boys were systematically murdered because of their religion and a hatred because of who they were. Thousands of women, children and the elderly were forcibly deported.

We will be flying a Remember Srebrenica flag from our town halls to remember the victims and survivors of genocide and pledge to create a better, stronger and more cohesive society. The lesson learned from Srebrenica is that hatred and intolerance can never be left unchallenged. Only by doing so can we create a safer community for all.

If you are out this weekend, I hope you have a good time, but please continue to play your part in preventing the spread of coronavirus by social distancing and wearing face coverings when travelling. Don't put yourself in harm's way by over-indulging or by causing trouble and breaking the law. Stay safe and act responsibly.

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**