

CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY

Mayor Rokhsana Fiaz OBE
Annual Council Meeting Speech
22nd May 2025

Hello and a warm welcome to Councillors, Officers, and guests – you are all esteemed guests in my eyes; and a special welcome to two of our three MPs: Uma Karaman and James Asker to this evening's event.

I'm particularly pleased to welcome you all to this year's Annual Council Meeting – because it's taking place in the heart of Custom House.

Here at one of my favourite places in our borough: our Shipman Youth Zone.

As some of you will know, I used to be a councillor in Custom House ward, and during my 4-years serving this hardworking and diverse community, I learnt so much.

Including the value of strong ties and deep bonds amongst people from all backgrounds.

The people of Custom House, inspired me then as they do now – along with all the people of this wonderful borough that has always been my home.

Those 4-years representing Custom House ward showed me the true spirit of community through the best of times and the worst.

A neighbourhood of people that came together to support each other despite the daily challenges they faced in their lives.

When I stepped into Shipman Youth Zone some 11-years ago now; I discovered a place of optimism, energy and support.

For our young people who didn't necessarily have the positive life chances that others kids from wealthier places had.

That's why with purpose and heart, I have been pursuing our agenda of building a fairer Newham ever since I became the Mayor of the place that I love.

I want a borough where opportunity thrives – and where opportunity is for all.

That's why holding this meeting at Shipman tonight isn't a coincidence – it's an intentional choice.

I want more of our Council meetings to take us into the heart of our communities, and for us to be amongst our residents across all our neighbourhoods.

Because it's where in these spaces of our residents' daily lives, we truly see what they experience and how we are inspired to deliver for them.

Annual Council Meetings are often the chance to reflect on the year just gone, but I want look ahead as we accelerate changes at the Council to make real the Opportunity Newham we are building for everyone – even in these hard, complex and challenging times.

Firstly, I want to take a moment to sincerely thank Cllr Rohima Rahman for service as Chair of Council over the past two years. It's been a genuine partnership of friends and a pleasure working with you.

As it has been, working with Cllr Anthony McAlmont in his past role as Chair of Overview and Scrutiny.

Your commitment to good governance and transparency has been appreciated because all of us in positions of influence and power are accountable.

And I look forward to working with the new Chair of Overview and Scrutiny in the year ahead.

Of course, my congratulations to Cllr Rohit Dasgupta as the new Chair of Council and Newham's First Citizen – in its 60th birthday year.

I know that he will be a passionate advocate in his new role; working with deputy Chair of Council, Cllr Imam Haque, to promote fairness, equality and justice in our borough.

Friends, this past year has tested us.

But it has also shown our strength.

Our Council has been operating in a period of intense financial challenge and complexity at a time of national change.

With a new Labour government coming in last July and supporting Councils like Newham.

The housing crisis and spiralling demand for temporary accommodation, as well as rising social care costs which has forced councils across the country to make hard decisions and difficult choices about what to spend our money on to achieve the impact and outcomes we want to see.

But hear me: we are making tangible difference to thousands of our residents lives – across the year. And each and every single day.

Just look around us.

This carbon neutral and modular built Youth Zone is a first; and also a testament to the ambition we have for our young people – and the investment we're making in their future and in them.

Across the borough, we've protected access to youth services, created more apprenticeships, and helped more young people into training and jobs.

That's part of the reason why, today, East Ham and Stratford are now ranked first and second nationally for social mobility, and why all three of our parliamentary constituencies sit in the national top 20. And I look forward to working with working with our three committed parliamentarians to keep it that way.

Our education results are also a source of real pride.

With 96% of Newham schools rated Good or Outstanding by Ofsted - down to the incredible work of our teachers, governors, and families – we know education doesn't stop at 18.

Here in Newham, our adult education offer is also stronger than ever. Our Newham Learning and Skills was rated 'Good' by Ofsted last month – a great achievement, and one that reflects our determination to equip every resident with the skills and support to thrive, at any age.

And even amidst national housing pressures, Newham is building.

We are currently 4th in the country for new home starts, helping meet the urgent need for genuinely affordable, high-quality housing our people can afford.

But we also know that delivery is not enough if we're not delivering well.

Last year's C4 rating from the Regulator of Social Housing made it clear that our housing services were not meeting the standards our residents rightly expect.

We accepted that judgment.

And we responded with our Housing Services Improvement Plan – a clear, accountable roadmap for how we'll deliver safer, better housing services for 16,000 tenants and leaseholders.

This is about rebuilding trust, and we won't stop until we get it right.

Alongside these changes, we are driving inclusive growth – not just for growth's sake, but for community benefit.

Earlier this week, we welcomed the announcement of a landmark partnership between Lendlease and the Crown Estate, who will, in partnership with the council, deliver 6,300 new homes in Silvertown and more than 1.6 million square feet of new commercial space at Stratford Cross.

That is £4 billion in investment – and it is a powerful vote of confidence in Newham and its future.

But inward investment for growth in Newham must be inclusive; to deliver benefits for our people, and protect our planet.

That's why we are focused on making sure local residents can access genuinely affordable homes, skill programmes and good jobs; and enjoy vibrant neighbourhoods that serve our diverse communities with an array of opportunities for everyone.

This is what inclusive growth looks like – and it is central to our vision for a Fairer Newham.

Despite delivery, we must also recognise that there is further to go with our mission to reform the council.

Earlier this month, the Council received a Best Value Notice from the Government.

We recognise the seriousness of this notice, and we are determined to do what's needed to meet and exceed the expectations set out.

This is about doing right by our residents.

And while over the last year, we've made real progress, we must continue to ramp this up at scale.

That's why we've bolstered the role of the Transformation and Improvement Board, and I now attend personally to ensure direct accountability and pace.

And we've brought in external expertise, including Sir Steve Bullock, the former Mayor of Lewisham, who brings a wealth of experience and challenge to this work.

Over the next year we will continue to work closely with the government to ensure accountability and transparency in everything we do.

So, what does the year ahead hold?

It's going to be all about delivering for our people and our communities and delivering Opportunity Newham:

- Supporting the most vulnerable
- Keeping our public spaces safe, clean and cared for
- Helping young people into education, training and jobs
- Delivering safe, affordable housing
- And making sure every pound we spend delivers value for residents

Every part of the organisation will be focused on this mission.

Commitment. Delivery. And impact.

That's why I'll be making the following Executive arrangements for the 2025 / 26 Municipal Year:

Mayor Rokhsana Fiaz OBE Portfolio lead for Inclusive Economy, Strategic Housing Delivery and Culture	Supported on Inclusive Economy by: Cllr John Whitworth
Cllr Amar Virdee* Statutory Deputy Mayor and Cabinet Member for Housing Needs, Homelessness and Private Rented Sector, and Community Safety	
Cllr Zulfiqar Ali* Deputy Mayor and Cabinet Member for Finance and Resources, and Environment	Supported by: Cllr Miraj Patel Deputy Cabinet Member for Environment
Cllr Sarah Ruiz* Deputy Mayor and Cabinet Member for Children Services and Education, and Sustainable Transport	Supported by: Cllr John Morris Deputy Cabinet Member for Highways and Sustainable Transport
Cllr Neil Wilson Cabinet Member for Health and Adults Social Care	Supported by: Cllr Mumtaz Khan Deputy Cabinet Member for Health and Adult Social Care
Cllr Charlene McLean Cabinet Member for Resident Engagement and Resident Experience	
Cllr Blossom Young Cabinet Member for Council Housing Improvements	
Cllr John Whitworth	

Cabinet Member for Air Quality and Climate Emergency
Cllr Rita Chadha Cabinet Member for Transformation

I will be making further announcements in due course.

These changes reflect our drive to lead with clarity, purpose, and accountability.

As always, our work will continue to be underpinned by our guiding vision: Building a Fairer Newham – where every person, in every neighbourhood, has a stake and a say.

To every resident, councillor, and officer: thank you.

Thank you for your resilience, your ideas, your challenge, and your belief in what we can achieve together.

I love this borough.

I love its people. I love its energy. I love its unstoppable spirit.

And I will never stop fighting for it.

Together, we are Building a Fairer Newham. Creating Opportunity Everywhere.

And Opportunity Newham is happening and is here now.