

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

**NHS NIGHTINGALE OPENS IN NEWHAM ON A DAY MIXED EMOTIONS  
AS CONFIRMED CASES RISE TO 409, TWO NURSES DIE  
AND WE MAKE SURE WE KEEP THE COUNCIL RUNNING THROUGH THIS CRISIS**

**FROM MAYOR ROKHSANA FIAZ**

**3 April 2020**

Dear Newham Resident,

It has been a day of mixed emotions and stark reminders as Public Health England recorded 409 confirmed cases of the virus confirmed in Newham, that's another 39 since yesterday, and nationally there have now been 684 deaths.

The hardest news today was hearing about the tragic deaths of two young NHS nurses – who passed away having contracted the virus in the course of their duty. It reminds us all of the sacrifice and dedication of our NHS heroes, and of all our key workers, in helping us all get through this crisis.

It made my attendance at the opening of the extraordinary NHS Nightingale Hospital this morning all the more poignant, as it's a testament to our incredible ability as a nation to rally in a crisis.

Located at the Excel Centre in the Royal Docks, in Newham, it was built by the army and opened via Skype by His Royal Highness the Prince of Wales. I was able to see for myself the titanic amount of work that's gone into creating a fully equipped specialist 4000-bed facility in just nine days.

I felt a real sense of pride that this Hospital, which will save thousands of lives, has found a home in our borough, despite recognising the need for this very special hospital is born of the ongoing tragedy, which is daily enveloping lives.

In the face of coronavirus, we are having to change how we run things at the Council. Today there was a historic moment for Newham Council as a special session of Cabinet was convened over Skype, and shared with residents via Facebook. At the meeting we announced some of the plans we have in place to protect residents and vital services.

During this special cabinet meeting, we passed a set of measures that will ease the financial strain on our poorest residents, while supporting threatened small businesses, and protecting our most critical services.

To support our most financially vulnerable residents, we are using £2.7 million from a government hardship fund to support residents already identified as financially insecure, by completely cutting or reducing the amount of Council Tax they pay. In Newham, that means 20,000 households will see any immediate financial benefit.

Some people have called on us to go further in cancelling Council tax bills, but it is imperative at this time of crisis that the council has the funds it needs to meet its obligations to provide vital services. So we are asking those of you who are in a position to pay, to continue your contributions so we can defend the services we need more than ever.

One of the biggest challenges facing all local authorities is to make sure the most vital services continue at a time when new demands on us, created by the virus, coincide with pressures on staffing levels and resources.

We are working with all local authorities, especially here in London, to make sure we are in a position to provide and accept mutual aid, so when we or our neighbours are struggling in particular areas, there are plans in place to step in to fill the gaps.

Our first priority is to ensure the safety of residents, and staff, and we have had to comply with the new laws brought in to support the “lock-down” imposed by the government, to try to slow down the spread of the virus.

This has had a significant impact on some council services, and the Cabinet papers outline how each service area is affected.

Sadly, some council functions like running libraries, leisure centres, citizens' assemblies, and marriage ceremonies have been completely suspended to support social distancing. Vital services like waste collection have been pared back to make sure public health is protected and rubbish collections continue.

Among the measures confirmed by our Special Cabinet were packages to support small businesses in the borough, particularly those in the leisure, retail and hospitality sector (including pubs), and nurseries who will be given 100 per cent relief from paying business rates.

The total package of support to local businesses is estimated to be worth £70 million and is in line with our Community Wealth Building aspirations, which seek as a priority to defend our residents' jobs, incomes and livelihoods.

Finally, as we approach another weekend under Covid-lockdown, the forecasters tell us the weather will be fine. Believe me I understand that after weeks shut inside, some may feel the urge to go outside, meet our friends, and regain a feeling of normality. But please don't.

If you feel tempted to break the rules, I beg you to remember those two young nurses, who went to work and lost their lives, so you and yours could stay at home and stay well.

So stay safe, follow the rules, protect yourselves and each other, and be kind.

**Best wishes,**

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

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

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