

Good evening everyone,

When I first stood to be your Mayor in 2018, it was because I believed deeply in the people of this borough - in their resilience, their creativity, their right to be heard.

I stood because I wanted to help build a council that was rooted in fairness and transparency - one that stood up for its residents, tackled inequality head-on, and never settled for the way things had always been done.

It's part of what *Building a Fairer Newham* was built on.

And over the past years, we've driven forward that vision together.

We've made real changes that matter - introducing participatory budgeting through People Powered Places so residents can decide where £1.6m pounds can go, embedding community wealth-building into how we spend and invest, and putting social justice at the heart of everything we do.

Through *Building a Fairer Newham*, we laid the foundations of a more equal, more caring borough - and now we are building on those foundations with the next phase of our work: Opportunity Newham.

Fairness is not just about removing barriers. It's about actively opening doors - to jobs, to homes, to education, to a better life.

And Opportunity Newham is our borough-wide mission to ensure every resident - no matter their background, postcode or past - can access the opportunities that this borough is creating.

It's about delivery. It's about equity. And it's about results.

There is no denying that our borough is changing.

Regeneration is accelerating across it.

From North to South, East to West, we're seeing investment, innovation, and renewal.

Our cultural and creative sectors are booming.

Partnerships with universities like UCL, UAL, and UEL are building skills and pathways into future industries.

And our borough is fast becoming the undeniable hub for London's creatives.

However, whilst this investment is fantastic and a testament to the work being undertaken by this administration - I want to be clear: the opportunities created by the growth of our borough mean nothing if our residents do not feel the benefits.

It must mean decent homes, good jobs, safe streets, better schools, cleaner air, and accessible public services - for everyone, not just a few.

That is the test of our success - and the standard we will continue to hold ourselves to.

And we are proud of our progress so far.

- Since 2018, we've grown our Healthy Schools programme from zero to over 90 schools - driving better nutrition, higher attendance, increasing social mobility and better outcomes for our young people.
- This year we've risen six places in the Healthy Streets Scorecard, making Newham one of London's most improved boroughs for active, safe travel.
- We've strengthened local enforcement, tackled anti-social behaviour, redesigned our public spaces for health and dignity, and empowered residents to shape the future of their neighbourhoods.
- We're delivering thousands of new homes, with major projects like Manor Road, Carpenters Estate, and Beckton Riverside in the pipeline.
- We're continuing to campaign for investment into Stratford Station and the DLR extension to Beckton. While simultaneously delivering active travel routes, improving the Lea River links, and progressing our bridges programme. Newham is already well connected but there is more to do.
- We're also investing £60 million into our high streets - restoring heritage buildings, creating healthy streets, and commissioning public art that celebrates our communities

However, transforming our borough also requires a willingness to be accountable.

And that's exactly what we've done in response to the Best Value Notice issued in May.

You will see that an item on this is scheduled for later in the meeting.

But I would like to make a few comments first.

When issued, we accepted the Best Value notice immediately - because accountability is not something we avoid; it's something we own.

Prior to the notice we held a LGA Corporate Peer Challenge last year to review how we function and deliver.

That work is now guiding our comprehensive response – supported by the Transformation and Improvement Board that was formed last April.

We are working closely with the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government to demonstrate how we are meeting the requirements, rebuilding trust, raising standards and delivering lasting improvement.

However, this is not just about leadership in the council chamber.

It's about collective responsibility – from Executive Members and Scrutiny Chairs, to councillors, and every council officer.

Every one of us has a stake in delivering Best Value for our residents.

Because residents deserve more than apologies – they deserve results.

This work – this focus, transparency, and drive for improvement – is not happening in the background. It is central to *Opportunity Newham*.

We are making sure every pound we spend works for our people. Every service we deliver is accountable to those who use it. And every issue is met not with excuses, but action.

It is about building a council fit for the decades to come.

That's why, central to opportunity Newham, is the promise to ensure every resident has the skills necessary to harness the digital future.

That's why, in the past year alone:

- Nearly 2,000 residents have participated in digital and AI training
- Young people from Newham have built apps, debated tech ethics, and represented the borough internationally
- Hundreds of women and girls have been empowered into STEM careers
- And our small businesses are using AI to innovate, grow, and serve the community better

Just last week, we welcomed Deputy Mayor of London for business, Howard Dawber, to Newham for London Data Week -

showcasing how digital inclusion and data innovation are driving local equity and opportunity.

It is why we've designated a new Newham Data Corridor - from Canning Town to the Royal Docks – where infrastructure, skills and enterprise come together to create future-facing, community-powered growth.

A 2021 study projected that Newham's data economy could deliver 5,500 new jobs and more than £100 million to the local economy by 2035.

We are not just preparing residents for the future - we are building the future with them.

And we're doing it while never losing focus on what makes a borough liveable: clean streets, safe neighbourhoods, strong public services, and a council that delivers.

Progress does not happen by chance.

It happens because we set a clear mission, stay focused, and hold ourselves to the highest standards.

And so our priorities remain unchanged:

- Supporting our most vulnerable
- Keeping our streets safe and clean
- Creating pathways for young people into education and good jobs
- Ensuring growth is done *with* the community, not *to* it

- Delivering more safe and affordable homes
- And making every pound of public money work as hard as the people we serve

Opportunity Newham is not just a programme or a policy - it's a mission.

A mission rooted in the belief that no matter your starting point in life, you deserve dignity, security, and the opportunity to thrive.

To every resident listening – this is your council.

It's is for the teenager wondering what comes next after school.

It's for the parent looking to return to work.

It's for the older resident who wants to age in a safe, clean, welcoming neighbourhood.

And it's for everyone who calls Newham home.