

UPDATE ABOUT CORONAVIRUS (COVID-19)

**16,509 COVID-19 DEATHS IN THE UK, NHS & CARE WORKERS STILL WAITING FOR PPE,
OVER 144,000 BUSINESSES APPLY FOR 'FURLOUGH' SCHEME
AND THE GOVERNMENT HAS TO BE HELD TO ACCOUNT**

FROM MAYOR ROKHSANA FIAZ

20 APRIL 2020

Dear Newham Resident,

Today marks the start of 'Lockdown Britain' week 5 and at the Downing Street press briefing earlier this afternoon, the government revealed that hospital deaths from Covid-19 now stands 16,509 people, up by 449 from the day before.

While the government stated that today's death rates represents the lowest increase of coronavirus deaths in two weeks, all of us know that the numbers will be higher, because the daily figures published by the government don't take into account deaths that have occurred in the community, including in care homes.

It's also important to be cautious as there is often a drop in the figures due to a lag in reporting and testing over the weekend. Professor Yvonne Doyle, Medical Director and Director of Health Protection for Public Health England, admitted at today's press briefing that hospital data doesn't tell the whole story (though '90 percent of deaths occur in hospital') as the 'pattern' is different in different parts of the country.

The number of Health and Care staff who have died has risen to 100 as concerns about personal protective equipment (PPE) intensifies, with NHS staff threatening to stop working as the promised PPE supplies announced last Friday still haven't arrived.

Tomorrow, we'll be getting the latest weekly figures of Covid-19 related deaths from the Office for National Statistics which will reveal a more accurate picture from last week (it's always a week behind); and closer to home those infected with the virus in London stands at 21,654, of which 862 are residents from Newham. The national figure is 124,743.

Behind these numbers, there is so much pain, heartache and disruption being caused by coronavirus. It's why I can't emphasise enough to everyone in our borough to please follow the restrictions in place. #StayAtHome for the safety of you, your loved ones, your friends, your neighbours, nurses and care-workers - and everyone in Newham.

It's not the time to relax and allow complacency: we know that coronavirus is capable of returning in waves; scientists are still understanding its impact on humans; we don't have a vaccine, nor do we have the infrastructure for community testing

and trace sourcing in place. That's why we must continue to practise social distancing, hygiene and avoid all but essential travel (especially on public transport).

Today the government's "furlough" scheme went live, with over 140,000 firms applying. The scheme, which some are suggesting will cost the government some £4.2bn, is designed to allow employers to continue to pay laid off staff 80 per cent of their wages (plus any national insurance and pension contributions) up to £2,500 a month, to stop redundancies and protect jobs. If you are a Newham business, please visit our website at <https://bit.ly/2XQrgXt> to find out more, alongside the full range of support available to help you through this crisis.

Many Newham businesses have already contacted our Covid-19 business support team, and over £28.5 million worth of support grants (from the Small Business Grant and Retail, Hospitality and Leisure Grant) have been processed by the council, supporting 1,899 local businesses and protecting jobs.

Finally, some residents have asked me why I am challenging the government at a time of national crisis. It's a natural question to ask, and this is why: it's important that I hold the government to account (along with other local government leaders and parliamentarians); because the decisions it makes and the actions it takes - or doesn't take - limits the ability of the council to protect and support Newham residents. It's also important that we learn the lessons now, to delay the spread of the virus and reduce the number of people that die.

A number of Sunday newspapers revealed the scale of misjudgements made by the UK government after the first Covid-19 outbreaks in Wuhan, China back in January this year; suggesting that some 5 weeks of action to prevent the spread of the virus was missed. As The Guardian states, in an article published on Sunday which you can read here <https://tinyurl.com/y7ps5sjd>: 'when the investigations into the UK's response to Covid-19 come to be written, there is widespread recognition among experts that this lack of long-term strategic planning will be at the centre of it.'

It's why on Saturday, I posted an explanation about why I am holding the government to account which you can read below. In the meantime please stay safe.

'It's absolutely right for the government to be held to account at a time of national crisis (Parliament select committees are also doing this as are local MPs). Of course, we are all in this together (and nothing that I have written contradicts that, nor have I suggested otherwise); which is why the Council are promoting all the stay at home messages and the need to adhere to restrictions.

We are working with the police on groups of people gathering because that is their role to enforce, not the council's; and making sure critical services are able to continue for Newham residents; plus establishing a #HelpNewham local hub to support the most vulnerable (working with the voluntary sector and resident volunteers to deliver food parcels, prescriptions etc). There's lots more that we are doing in response to Covid-19 in Newham which you can read here if you are at all interested: [https://www.newham.gov.uk/Pages/ServiceChild/Coronavirus-\(Covid-19\).aspx](https://www.newham.gov.uk/Pages/ServiceChild/Coronavirus-(Covid-19).aspx)

However, none of this should distract me / us from holding the government to account; and highlighting areas of weaknesses and failures - because the imperative is to save / protect lives - including the lives of Newham residents, care workers, nurses, and the elderly.

Also, all councils like Newham (where 48% of our residents live in poverty when you take into account rents and housing costs, we have high levels of inequality including in health, the worst housing crisis in the country, more children living in temporary accommodation than the entire north of England combined) absolutely need more money to deal with the impact of Covid-19 and that has to come from government (as opposed to say, increases in Council tax that hard-pressed residents will have to pay); otherwise they'll risk becoming bankrupt.

While a wide range of public services have to contend with this coronavirus emergency, emergency planning is a local council legal requirement (based on guidance from national government) and there are critical questions about how well it has been resourced over years of austerity, with £15bn of cuts to council services since 2010.

A leading emergency planning expert Mike Granatt, who was the former head of the civil contingencies secretariat, said the confused and sluggish initial response to the Grenfell disaster in 2017 demonstrated that 'emergency planning has certainly taken a hit' in the past decade. Jacqui Semple, chair of the Emergency Planning Society has also confirmed that emergency planning investment has been reduced because of austerity.

That is not a political point; that is fact. That's why council's need more money.

Finally, the government has been woefully inept on a number of fronts during this crisis which has been highlighted by scientific experts, doctors, nurses and other professional bodies, including politicians across all parties.

The basis of current emergency planning for this coronavirus pandemic is based on a 2011 document issued by the coalition government (updated in 2013 and 2014) and is solely based on influenza. Despite the fact that since 2011, we've could have learnt the lessons of:

1. MERS - Middle East respiratory syndrome
2. MERS-CoV - Middle East respiratory syndrome coronavirus
3. SARS - Severe acute respiratory syndrome

But the government at the time chose not to; but this also applies to many other governments around the world.

Most recently, it's been revealed the government was warned 3 years ago that this country would not be able to cope with a pandemic - but the advice was ignored:

<https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2020/03/28/exclusive-ministers-warned-nhs-could-not-cope-pandemic-three/>

'Despite the failings exposed by Cygnus, the government never changed its strategic roadmap for a future pandemic, with the last update carried out in 2014'.

Moreover, what appears to have compounded our current situation is the restructuring of the NHS health system which has created challenges in terms of this country's preparedness for Covid-19. Frequent changes to the NHS, which are politically driven, have led to weakened emergency preparedness structures and mechanisms for this type of virus. That's why the stay at home messages to protect the NHS was pushed by the government because they realised that the NHS would become overwhelmed leading to more deaths and why NHS Nightingale was built in Newham in 9 days).

Additionally, concerns have been raised about the emergency preparedness at local level, specifically during the alert phase of the pandemic, and in the pre-hospital response stage (i.e. possibly involving such issues as epidemiological investigation and diagnostics).

That's why I've been calling for community testing and trace sourcing; but we need the money to resource the required set up through expanding our local public health team which would work with local health partners and GPs.

All in all, we absolutely shouldn't shy away from asking hard questions, and demanding more from the government because we are all in this together to prevent the spread, reduce deaths, save lives and minimise the serious damage this pandemic will cause to everyone's livelihoods, including jobs.'

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**