

UPDATE ABOUT CORONAVIRUS (COVID-19):

953 PEOPLE IN NEWHAM WITH COVID-19, POVERTY MATTERS AND WHAT THE COUNCIL IS DOING ABOUT ROGUE BUSINESSES FLOUTING THE RULES ON OUR HIGH STREETS

FROM MAYOR ROKHSANA FIAZ

4TH MAY 2020

Dear Newham Resident,

Our reaction to figures on the impact of Covid-19 in the most deprived areas, which was released by the Office for National Statistics (ONS) on Friday, revealing that Newham as the hardest hit borough in London, England and Wales; is rightly causing heartache, worry and anger across all our communities.

Heartache for those that have died, worry for those that may become susceptible to the deadly impact of Covid-19 – alongside frustration and anger at those residents and businesses in Newham who aren't following the lockdown restrictions in place, putting us all at risk.

Examining the impact of deprivation on the Covid-19 mortality rates between the 1st March and 17th April 2020, the ONS looked at the 20,283 people whose deaths were registered by then, and where Covid-19 was listed on the death certificate. That's the seven-week period before and after lockdown measures were put in place by the government.

The ONS analysis, once they 'age-standardised' the data, showed that London suffered over 50 percent more than any other region in the country, over the seven-week period analysed. So 11 out of 33 local authorities in London *had* the highest Covid-19 mortality rates, with Newham at the top with 144.3 deaths per 100,000 population, followed by Brent (141.5) and then Hackney (127.4).

Rightly, residents are all asking what's going on, why this is happening and what the Council is doing about it. In summary, it's complex, and below is some explanation and an example of what we are doing to tackle breaches of the restrictions in place by working closely with the police.

Firstly, for a *really long time* Newham has been in the top ten local authorities in the country with the highest levels of multiple-deprivation. In other words, we have amongst the highest levels of poverty and inequality including in health.

In our borough, levels of cardiovascular disease, diabetes and other underlying issues such as asthma caused by toxic air quality, are very high which greatly affects mortality rates of our residents. We also know that the health inequalities are not uniform across ethnic groups, and there are specific health issues that particularly affect different groups. Given that COVID19 mortality seems to be associated with underlying health issues, this is one explanation that it might lead to higher death rates in areas such as Newham because of the long-standing

health inequality 'profile' of the borough. You can read more scientific expert reaction to the ONS data and links to poverty and inequality here: <https://tinyurl.com/tsnhjy9>.

There are also a range of other factors that come into play too. For example, Professor Dave Gordon, Director of the Townsend Centre for International Poverty Research at the University of Bristol says that people in poorer areas are more likely to get a Covid-19 infection because:

- They are more likely to be key workers (for example, care assistants, shop assistants, building workers, bus drivers, delivery drivers) so they are more likely to come into contact with infected people than their peers in richer areas who may be able to work from their homes;
- Many key worker jobs are low paid and therefore these key workers often live in deprived areas;
- People in deprived areas are more likely to have to rely on public transport than people in richer areas and thus come into contact with infectious people;
- They are also more likely to have worse internet connections and not be able to afford the premium on grocery home delivery services so will need to go out to shop for food more often than people in richer areas;
- Deprived areas tend to have higher population densities than richer areas therefore people in these areas are more likely to have contact with an infected person when they leave their homes for exercise, medical care, food shopping;
- The higher the population density the more difficult maintaining social distancing is likely to be.

That's why our approach to addressing health inequalities in Newham, including the impact of Covid-19, is driven by understanding why these differences exist so that we can take the necessary action required; working closely with all our health partners, including Barts NHS Trust, Newham CCG and the seven care homes in the borough as well as the police.

Since being elected the Mayor of Newham two-years ago, the Council has embarked on an agenda of addressing poverty and inequality in the borough because we want to eradicate many factors affecting the life chances of our residents, including poor housing and income inequality. For example we've done research that shows that up to 36,000 of our residents are not being paid even the basic minimum wage, much less the London Living Wage, pointing to exploitation of our most vulnerable residents and a sign of modern day slavery in Newham.

That's why we are establishing an Employment Rights Advice Unit, as part of our Community Wealth Building Strategy and Inclusive Economy plans, because there is a real danger that this group, and other low paid and front line workers, will face greater exposure to the virus, because of the financial pressure to keep working which will make it difficult to socially isolate. We also have challenges around overcrowded and inter-generational housing all of which contribute to health inequalities and risks; which we are dealing with.

More importantly, we need to make sure health funding is prioritised by the government for deprived areas, including increased funding to boost our public health work, which has been decimated over the years.

Years of cuts to public health funding have taken a toll: improvements in life expectancy have stalled, health inequalities are widening, and despite repeated promises from the government

to strengthen public health and prevention, local authority public health grants have been substantially cut over the past 7 years, with an extra £1 billion needed to restore spending to the level of 2015/16.

At the moment, the Treasury doesn't factor deprivation methodology across the board despite government asking councils to do 'whatever it takes'. If it wasn't already clear, councils like Newham urgently need more funding from the government **now** and in the future as we progress with Covid-19 'recovery'.

So when the Prime Minister announced today that plans for moving to the next phase of the pandemic will be unveiled this coming Sunday, I'll be insisting that it can't apply a one-size-fits all solution to any easing of the restrictions in place. These plans have to take account of the fact that not all communities have experienced the Covid-19 crisis in the same way. We must be given a greater say, more money and more power on how restrictions are managed and eased in Newham.

Now onto what the Council is doing to tackle those residents and businesses who are not complying with the restrictions in place. When it comes to individuals, only the police can take enforcement action under the Coronavirus Act, passed in Parliament last month. If you have any concerns, please contact the Newham Police on 101.

With businesses that are flouting the law, the Council's Trading Standards and Licensing teams, supported by the Law Enforcement Officers, operate a 7-days a week monitoring service to ensure that businesses within Newham understand how these restrictions apply to their business and to ensure high levels of compliance take place.

This work is in addition to the Licensing Enforcement work that continues to take place for licensed premises, and Council officers visit retail outlets in the borough through routine patrols of our high streets or where residents have reported concerns to the Council direct (so far there have only been 30 referrals to date). Between 27 March and 1 May 2020, Council officers have visited 470 premises and have served closure notices to 48 premises and seven fixed penalty notices (FPNs). While there are traders who are genuinely confused about whether they can or cannot operate, where officers find a deliberate trading (or significant risk to health due to a large gatherings) notices are served to compel the businesses to close. Failure to comply with this notice is a criminal offence.

There have been some premises who have tried to get round the rules by selling small amounts of food that can be lawfully sold, such as food, in an attempt to circumvent the legislation that is aimed at reducing the amount of contacts and journeys in the borough to essential ones only. We've had major issues with hairdressers and barbers trying to disguise the fact they are opening by operating with the shutters down, by appointment and access via rear entrances. There are also some Letting Agents who are working with shutters half open and by appointment in some cases. This is an area where enforcement is challenging as if no customers are found on the premises those present can claim that they are only open to 'collect' mail.

Another area that we've noticed particularly over the past week, across the borough, are those businesses that aren't supposed to be trading because of the restrictions in place which are now opening when before they were closed. This may be caused by financial pressures

on the business. The attitude of the business owners has varied but overall they have followed advice or prohibition notice when served, hence only seven FPNs have been issued to date. A few business proprietors have been abusive to officers but that is rare. This coming week, we'll be undertaking a series of enforcement operations, and if you suspect any business trading unlawfully, please email trading.standards@newham.gov.uk.

Finally, across all settings in the UK today 288 people are reported to have lost their lives in the past 24 hours. However, at the start of the 7th week of Lockdown Britain, we need to be cautious (as well as thankful) about these figures. That's because there is always low reporting over the weekend. In terms of new infections, in London there are 511 more cases in the Capital since Friday, bringing the total to 24,988 people – and of those 953 are from Newham; which 5 more since Friday.

Until we hear what the Government plans on Sunday, please keep following the rules to stop the spread of the virus in our borough. Do your bit to help all Newham resident, as we can beat Covid-19 by doing this together.

Stay safe and stay well.

Best wishes,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Rokhsana Fiaz". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

Rokhsana Fiaz
Mayor of Newham

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