

UPDATE ABOUT CORONAVIRUS (COVID-19):

**494 PEOPLE HAVE DIED FROM COVID-19 INCLUDING THE FIRST FEMALE GP, 983
NEWHAM RESIDENTS INFECTED AND RECESSION COMING**

**FROM MAYOR ROKHSANA FIAZ
13TH MAY 2020**

Dear Newham Resident,

More sad news I'm afraid. Official figures showed a further 494 people have lost their lives to Covid-19 across all settings in the past 24 hours. In London, the total number of those infected stands at 26,024 as of today; and of those, 983 are Newham residents.

Those who have died over the past day include what is believed to be the first known female GP, Poornima Nair, 56, from County Durham; and 47-year-old rail worker Belly Mujinga who contracted Covid-19 after being spat at by a passenger as she worked at London's Victoria Station. We also learnt that of all that have died so far, 144 were NHS health workers, 131 were care workers, and 50 were transport workers.

Once again, this highlights the risks facing those on the front line. My thoughts and sincere condolences go to all the families, friends and colleagues of those who have lost loved ones during this crisis so far. We'll remember them all when we clap for our key workers on the frontline tomorrow night at 8pm.

As we count the human cost of this tragedy, we are now beginning to count the economic cost. The Chancellor, Rishi Sunak, has warned it is 'very likely' that the UK is in a 'significant recession'; and in leaked papers published by the Telegraph, we are finding out about the measures the government is considering in which the burden of cost may be borne by taxpayers and ordinary workers.

The papers make clear that a decision will be made 'within weeks', and reveal that the crisis is likely to cost the government £330 billion this year and that the economy has already contracted by two per cent in the first three months of this year - the biggest fall since the financial crash of 2008. The papers also outline a series of measures, including public spending cuts and a two-year public sector pay freeze, combined with income tax rises to help 'fix' the government finances.

For local authorities like Newham, who have suffered a decade of cuts and austerity (locally some £200 million of savings had to be made in the past 10 years, with another £45 million planned over the next three-years before Covid-19 hit because the government wasn't willing to end austerity), the prospect of deeper cuts to public services will be devastating. It will lead to further reductions in living standards which

coupled with the impact of Covid-19 will be intolerable for many of our residents, many of whom are already living on the breadline.

That's why we've been demanding that councils need substantial upfront needs-based funding, including restoring cuts to crucial public health funding. In Newham, there's been a 7.5 per cent real terms cut in public health funding *before* the Covid-19 crisis in the past two years alone.

Of course, I welcome the steps Government has taken so far in giving additional money to councils through emergency Covid-19 funding to help us respond to the crisis over the past seven weeks, and money for small businesses locally. But much, much more is needed.

To date, the government has given all local councils a total of £3.2bn to meet the extra services needed to respond to the crisis so far, plus £500 million in the form of a 'hardship' fund. The chief executive of the Local Government Association estimates at least 3 to 4 times this amount will be needed.

In Newham, where we have a disproportionately negative impact and high levels of health inequalities, this shortfall will be even more pronounced. That's why I've written to the Prime Minister calling for an additional '*Covid-19 Deprivation Premium*' to those councils most affected by deprivation and the impact of Covid-19 has for those communities. Councils like Newham, who because of inequalities in health, wealth, and housing have suffered disproportionately during the crisis, should not be left out of pocket because of our efforts to protect residents.

Contrast that £3.7 billion to local government to the £330 billion of loans and guarantees that the government has made available to banks to support businesses through the lockdown. Of course, I welcome the additional help for our businesses in Newham which are struggling, including business rates relief and small business grants distributed via local authorities (in Newham that's been £85.5m and £58.7m respectively); alongside the extension of the furlough scheme until October and help for the self-employed (which reached 110,000 claims in the first four hours of going live today).

So having responded swiftly to play such a crucial role in meeting the demands of the current health emergency, local authorities need proper funding, according to need.

The response to the 2008 financial crisis, which protected the banks and big business at the expense of ordinary people's livelihoods, brought unnecessary hardship and deepening inequality to many of our communities. We cannot repeat that mistake again. Austerity did not work in the past and it will not work as a response to this crisis.

It will just put more pressure on councils and our most economically vulnerable residents and those with health conditions as well. Today, when many workers were encouraged to return to work by the government, we learnt that 8 million people in the UK with underlying health conditions such as diabetes, obesity and heart problems are more vulnerable to Covid-19. In another study, published in the Lancet today as

well, researchers said a premature return to work for this group could lead to the national death toll being pushed to 73,000 this year.

Given the prevalence of these conditions in our borough, yet again Newham could pay a disproportionate price, if the move out of lockdown is not handled with sensitivity to local conditions. That's why I've been urging people to still stay at home and avoid the daily commute to avoid the spread of the virus locally and a second Covid-19 wave in Newham.

Over the past seven weeks, the Council has pulled out the all the stops to protect the most vulnerable in our care homes and in our communities, and keep the borough going during this really challenging time. Earlier today, at a Cabinet meeting held via zoom, we discussed a paper setting out all the things that the Council has been doing in response to the crisis locally. You can read the cabinet report '**Covid-19 pandemic: report on the response of the London Borough of Newham**' here: <https://tinyurl.com/y7vcrndf>.

The report tells the story of how 4,500 council workers over the past seven weeks (and more) have been driven by an unwavering commitment to Newham residents. They've protected our elderly and vulnerable residents living in care homes; supplied personal protective equipment; supported children with special educational needs; offered youth services through digital means; been there for families with youngsters through our early year centres and nurseries; collected bins and swept the streets; stopped retailers trading illegally; and worked with resident-led mutual aid groups, faith communities and the [voluntary sector locally](#) to feed the most vulnerable residents and families in our borough.

You can also hear directly from Council officers about all the things we've put in place, by watching this powerful video from the Cabinet meeting today here: <https://tinyurl.com/y8zsj47c>.

As we progress through this new Covid-19 phase announced by the Prime Minister on Sunday night, I remind myself of how all of us are in this together, as a united community. Your health and safety will remain our top priority - and as we work through Newham's 'recovery', you'll also be at the heart of shaping our plans. It will be underpinned by an explicit commitment to tackle poverty, inequality and climate emergency so that everyone in our community can benefit, and more details of how you can get involved will be announced soon.

In the meantime, please think carefully before you change your behaviour. If you can stay at home, you should. Avoid public transport by walking or cycling, and minimise using your car to stop pollution in the air: Covid-19 impacts those with respiratory conditions more (and we have amongst the highest rates of asthma anywhere).

You must continue to practise social distancing at all times and please follow the hygiene advice of washing your hands regularly and disinfecting surfaces that you use. Keep doing what you've been doing over these past 7 weeks to protect yourself

and others by staying at home. Let's not risk a second wave of Covid-19 in Newham that could lead to more deaths.

Stay safe.

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**