

UPDATE ABOUT CORONAVIRUS (COVID-19):

NEW POWERS FOR COUNCILS TO MANAGE LOCAL OUTBREAKS AS PM ANNOUNCES BACK TO NORMAL AND CHIEF SCIENTIFIC ADVISOR WARNS OF WINTER RISKS

**FROM MAYOR FIAZ
FRIDAY 17 JULY 2020**

Dear Newham Resident,

Today, at a Downing Street briefing the Prime Minister announced that from tomorrow 'upper tier' councils in England, that's unitary authorities like Newham and county councils, will be given new powers to help contain local Covid-19 outbreaks to close premises, shut outdoor spaces and stop specific events. Additionally, Councils can also make a request to the government to use powers under the Coronavirus Act 2020 to close schools or limit their ability to set year groups attendance but only if there was a clear case for doing so.

While the government will be issuing further guidance soon on 'essential infrastructure' which won't be within the scope of the new Council powers announced today; it will publish further guidance next week to allow it to intervene in local areas by issuing stay-at-home orders, limiting the numbers at gatherings and preventing travel between different areas.

Today's announcement is very significant, as it increases the direct powers available to local authorities to close premises directly and no longer having to seek approval from a magistrates court. However, it is also clear that these powers will need to be used with discretion, based on advice given by the local Director of Public Health with any local decision needing to be reviewed every 7 days.

The announcement today puts the onus on Councils and its local health partners to respond to any serious and imminent threat to public health to control the transmission of Covid-19 in a local area working with as Public Health England (PHE). In Newham, this is overseen by our Health and Wellbeing Board which is responsible for implementation of our local outbreak management strategy published on the 30th June. We'll of course be examining these new powers in detail; and in the coming week we'll be issuing further information.

It also means that all of us here in Newham, will need to play our part in reducing the risks of local outbreaks in our borough. Keep up with social distancing, wash your hands regularly, follow all the public health guidance and keep wearing masks when you are traveling on public transport. I know that wearing face masks and coverings in shops will become mandatory from the 24th July, but please start doing so as soon as possible.

The Prime Minister also announced another raft of relaxations to lockdown today, in what he described as a 'more significant return to normality'. From the 1st August he's encouraging people to return to work, rather than work from home, and for all of us to start using public transport. Additionally, more leisure venues including bowling, casinos and some theatres will be able to open from August; and wedding receptions for up to 30 people will be allowed as well. August will also see the launch of some pilot plans to allow large gatherings in sports stadiums, with a view to more reopening in the autumn.

The Prime Minister is aiming for a return to 'normal life' by Christmas, but I would urge caution. Earlier this week, the Health Secretary confirmed that there have been over 100 local Covid-19 outbreaks emerging every week in England since the easing of lockdown restrictions and data released today shows today shows 1,700 people in England are still getting infected each day.

Even England's chief scientific adviser, Sir Patrick Vallance, warned that the country could need another national lockdown this winter just hours after the Downing Street statement. At a committee hearing in the House of Lords, he said: *'As you release measure, it is inevitable as you get more contacts, that you will see more cases. Come winter, the challenges will be very much greater and of course there is a risk that this could need national measures.* Meanwhile, Professor Chris Whitty, the chief medical officer, said that the challenges of Covid-19 will be 'very much greater' in the winter because the season 'benefits' the virus; and that we may need to revisit lockdown as we head into winter - with a potential need for different measures, for different seasons.

My very real concern is that all this apparently conflicting advice is simply too confusing, and will lead to a kind of Covid-19 fatigue, where people begin to ignore the fact the virus is very much still with us.

The latest figures from PHE show at least 45,233 people have died having tested positive for Covid-19 including 114 new deaths in the last 24-hours. But, the true figure is likely much higher taking into account people who have died with suspected cases, or as a result of the pandemic stretching health services. UK excess deaths, considered the most reliable measure of an illness's true death toll, are in the region of 65,000 since the start of the pandemic.

It's been a busy week at the Council. On Tuesday I chaired our fifth Cabinet meeting held under Covid-19 crisis conditions, and last night was our first ever Full Council meeting via Zoom. A report about finance in the light of the Covid-19 crisis revealed the impact dealing with coronavirus has had so far. It is estimated that a combination of lost income and extra expenditure to support residents during the crisis has cost almost £61m so far.

To date Newham has received three funding allocations from national Government of £10.6m, £9.7m and £4m – which was announced just yesterday. This still falls significantly short of the money that the Council needs. That is why I continue to demand that the Government gives us more money through a Covid-19 Deprivation Premium to reflect the disproportionate impact the virus has had on our borough.

Funding needs to properly reflect the scale of the challenges we face to tackle the significant impact coronavirus has had and will continue to have on us, especially given the real possibility of a second wave within months. We have more furloughed residents than anywhere else in London, the highest increase in unemployment, and the largest number of young people who will feel the economic impact the most. Added to this is the corrosive impact of austerity over the past ten years which has entrenched inequality. Paying for the economic impact of Covid-19 cannot be carried by our people.

That's why next Wednesday, I'll be launching Newham's Covid-19 Recovery Plan, which will be making changes where required to our existing Community Wealth Building and inclusive economy strategies so that we can deal with the economic impact that the virus will have on Newham's economy for a long time ahead. As our country continues to grapple with the challenges and impact of Covid-19 in ways that are wholly unprecedented, I know that the economic impact of the pandemic on Newham is going to be significant. Most recently, government data shows that Newham has the highest number of furloughed workers of any local authority in the London, with 50,000 jobs at stake.

As part of the event next Wednesday, and built into our ambitious Covid-19 Recovery Strategy, I'll also be announcing the launch the Royal Docks Enterprise Zone's £13 million Good Growth Fund, available to support innovative and transformational projects in Newham's Royal Docks – including those being driven by local businesses, organisations and residents.

This week, we also launched our Climate Emergency Action Plan, to roll out an exciting range of schemes over the coming year as we build on progress since last April when we declared a Climate Emergency to become carbon neutral by 2030 and carbon zero by 2050. The Covid-19 pandemic has reinforced the need to clean up our air and create safer environments with more space provided for people to walk and cycle.

In what has been an extraordinary and tumultuous academic year, schools finally broke up for the summer this week. I would like to take this opportunity to thank all our teachers, and school staff for their valiant service and hard work during this unprecedented crisis. Over the summer, Newham Council is partnering with a range of partners working with children and young people to offer a raft of activities across the borough.

There'll be an exciting and varied programme of activities, events and opportunities, for all age groups and abilities, seven days a week. **Beginning on 21 July**, they will take place at parks, other open spaces, the docks area, all in a safe, socially-distanced way, as well as virtual online spaces. All sessions will follow the Government guidelines on social distancing where required. Keep your eyes on the Newham Council website for the latest details.

Finally enjoy the weekend, and please do it safely.

Best wishes,

Rokhsana Fiaz OBE
Mayor of Newham