



Era of austerity is over says Labour

BY NICK CLARK

LOCAL DEMOCRACY
REPORTING SERVICE

Newham's next budget will mark a "turning point" away from austerity, says deputy mayor and finance chief Zulfiqar Ali.

He told Council leaders at the Cabinet meeting on 8 January that increased government funding meant the Council would be "moving from austerity to stability".

However the draft budget still includes more than £101 million worth of spending cuts and "savings" over the next three years. And the mayor, Rokhsana Fiaz, warned that the increased funding was "not a licence to spend".

Council leaders had been considering asking the government for exceptional financial support last year and faced "difficult decisions" to plug a predicted £53m fund-

ing gap in the 2026/27 financial year.

Newham has the highest number of people in temporary housing in England – more than 7,500 households – costing the Council some £100 million a year.

However, the Council says changes to how the government allocates funding mean it is set to receive £30m more in April than it expected.

The government's fair funding review adjusted council funding based on up-to-date population data and ways of measuring deprivation that take greater account of housing costs.

Cllr Ali said the changes "mark a turning point for the Council and the people that we serve".

However, the budget proposals still include £16.8m worth of new "savings" to be made in the financial year starting in April.

These include closing at least one children's centre site and merging children's centres with family hubs, to save £1m.

The Council is also considering cutting Council Tax discounts to the poorest households, from 80 to 70 percent.

Other proposals include moving to fortnightly waste collections and increasing the prices of parking fees and permits.

These will come on top of £25m worth of "savings" for 2026 already approved in previous spending plans. The Council aims to cut £15m from temporary accommodation costs.

Mayor Fiaz said the increased funding could even leave the Council with "surplus" funds in 2027 and 2028. This was "not a licence to spend," she said. "That money needs to be banked. It needs to be held back."

The final budget will be voted on at a meeting of all councillors on 26 February.

Disconnected and delusional say opposition parties

Newham Green Party naturally welcomes more funds coming towards the Council, but we should be clear that this is being done out of necessity due to the dire state of the Council's finances. Describing this as an "end to austerity" is an admission that the Labour administration has been implementing an austerity agenda locally, with cuts to essential services. It is also a delusional description of the situation on the ground. There continues to be discussions of the Labour administration cutting everything from libraries to

lollipop ladies, and people across Newham are still feeling the weight of austerity in their pockets.

Newham has the highest rate of homelessness in the entire country. We have parents skipping meals and people queueing up at food banks. A real end to austerity requires mass investment in our communities, our youth, and our housing infrastructure funded not by more taxes on the working class as is happening under Labour, but by taxes on the super rich.

Councillor Areeq Chowdhury
Green Party candidate for Mayor of Newham

Claims that austerity is over in Newham are deeply disconnected from the daily reality faced by thousands of our residents. Food banks remain overstretched, families are struggling to pay energy bills, and too many people are living with the constant anxiety of whether they can keep a roof over their heads. If austerity had truly ended, we would not see rising homelessness, growing reliance on emergency support, or community organisations stepping in where public services are falling short.

Only an out of touch Labour administration could have the temerity to declare victory while residents continue to feel the sharp edge of hardship. Extra money from central government may ease some pressures on paper, but it has not translated into real relief for ordinary people in Newham.

Until residents can live with dignity, security and access to properly funded services, it is misleading and complacent to suggest that austerity is over. The Council should be honest about the scale of the challenge rather than offering comforting headlines that do not match lived experience.

Councillor Mehmood Mirza
Leader of Newham Independents Group and mayoral candidate

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Saving Newham libraries

See page 3

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Editor

Jean Gray

Arts and Culture Editor and Chief Reporter

Neandra Etienne

Designer

Mary Schrider

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Good and bad news for the Council reports Nick Clark, Local Democracy Reporting Service

Newham child care is 'outstanding' says OFSTED

Newham Mayor Rokhsana Fiaz says she is "over the moon" after the Ofsted watchdog graded the town hall's children's services "outstanding".

Ofsted inspectors gave Newham Council's children's services – which look after and monitor children needing protection or care – a clean sheet in a report published on 12 January.

Responding to the report, Labour mayor Fiaz said: "I am over the moon that we have achieved outstanding across all areas of the Ofsted inspection for our children's services, the first time ever that Newham Council has met the coveted Ofsted gold standard.

"It's a testament to our enduring commitment for Newham to be the best place for children and young people."

Ofsted previously rated the Council's children's services "inadequate" in 2014, upgrading this to "good" in 2019.

However, an inspection in November 2025 found them to be "outstanding" in all four areas that Ofsted examines.

The report said Council leaders had "continued to build on the strengths seen at the last inspection, securing further improvements in the quality of services".

In an almost entirely positive report, Ofsted said that finding sufficient placements for children "continues to be a challenge" for the Council.

However, it said the Council had "acted to strengthen provision" including by investing in its own care homes. Labour Councillor Sarah Ruiz, responsible for children's services, said the grading was "a testament to every member of staff who continues to put our children and young people at the heart of everything we do in Newham".



Dismay over criticism of adult social care

Adult social care "requires improvement", says the independent Care Quality Commission (CQC) in a report on Newham Council's social care service in December.

Labour councillor Rita Chadha – responsible for social care – said it was "exceptionally important" that the Council "own this report warts and all", but that the Council was in "ongoing discussions" about the rating, which was just one mark away from being "good".

She noted that the CQC report also found that people's experiences with the Council's social care services were "mainly positive" but it found that

some unpaid carers – those who look after friends or family – "weren't always sure who to contact or what support was available to them".

The report also said there wasn't "sufficient care provision" for people with "complex learning disabilities, mental health needs or advanced dementia".

The CQC gave the Council a grade of 62 out of 100, meaning it "requires improvement". A grade of 63 would have been enough to describe the service as "good".

At the Council's health and adult social care scrutiny commission meeting on 13 January Labour councillor Ann

Easter said she was "so disappointed to see the comments of the Commission around the unpaid carers".

Fiona Connolly, the Council's director of adults and health said: "We value unpaid carers so much because of the work that they do and the support that they give their loved ones."

"There's good support for carers but it's about communication, it's about making sure carers are aware of what is available for them." Connolly said the Council's survey scores were "vastly different" to those recorded in the previous year and the Council would "continue to improve our ratings".

HAVE YOUR SAY: LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Repeated ticket trouble for disabled driver

I am a Blue Badge holder and use a mobility vehicle taxed in the disabled tax class. My vehicle has previously been recognised by the Council for lawful access to High Street North in East Ham which is essential for me to access everyday services such as my bank, post office, food shopping, and local businesses.

Despite this, I have now received more than nine Penalty Charge Notices in circumstances where:

- My Blue Badge was valid
- The badge was correctly displayed
- The vehicle was used for my benefit as the disabled badge holder

Signage clearly states that Blue Badge holders are exempt.

This is not an isolated issue. I experienced similar problems previously with my former mobility vehicle, which were only resolved after I made a formal complaint and the Council corrected its records as well as approaching my MP.

In addition, other family members and friends who are also disabled Blue Badge holders have experienced the same pattern of enforcement in the same area (High Street North), suggesting this may be a broader systemic issue rather than an individual error.

What is particularly concerning is that the Council continues to issue PCNs while relying on rear-facing

editor@newhamvoices.co.uk

images only, meaning there is no attempt to check whether a Blue Badge is displayed on the dashboard. This issue has been raised previously, yet no changes appear to have been made.

As a disabled person, I should not have to repeatedly appeal penalties simply to maintain lawful access to my local high street. The ongoing enforcement has caused me significant distress and anxiety and has left me feeling targeted and harassed.

I am concerned that this treatment may be inconsistent with the Council's duties under the Equality Act 2010, particularly the duty to avoid discrimination arising from disability and to make reasonable adjustments.

– Shilpa Patel, East Ham

Why we need our libraries

SHOFA MIAH

Community momentum to defend Newham's award-winning library service continues to build following the Stand Up for Newham Libraries meeting, held on Sunday 18 January at The Old Spotted Dog Ground in Forest Gate.

Residents, families, campaigners, and local groups gathered to voice concern over previously signalled plans that could see the library budget reduced by up to 50 percent from £3.2 million to £1.6 million. Despite worry in the room, the overwhelming spirit was one of unity, hope and belief in a positive community-led outcome.

Among the speakers was Bobby Seagull, author, educator, and long-standing Newham library advocate. Bobby, who received an MBE in the New Year's honours for his work to promote libraries, reminded people that libraries are "warm, welcoming places where people connect, move, learn and belong," warning that large cuts risk "taking away safe spaces, opportunities, and community lifelines".

“

The library is a safe space where I can do my school homework and exam revision. It gives me digital access that I don't always have at home.

- Abdullah, 17 (Student)

He added, "I'm honoured to receive an MBE for services to public libraries, but it means little if I can't help protect them here in Newham." He described once visiting his local library simply to borrow books, only to find a lively Zumba class inside, a space buzzing with community life."

Newham's ten libraries support more than 134,000 registered users and see 1.3 million annual visits, with 38,000



Image ©Save Newham Libraries

“

I don't have many family members, and the library is where I come to, to socialise and keep up to date with the fast-developing world. The staff are friendly and help me to understand how computers work. I can speak to people, and it stops loneliness from taking over. I would be isolated without the library services.

- Mr. Noor 71 (Senior citizen)

children taking part in the summer reading challenge.

But beyond books, community members emphasised that libraries are essential for digital access. Many residents rely on library computers and wi-fi because they lack internet at home. Campaigners stressed that digital support is important, including help navigating online systems, CV writing, job searches, and benefit applications. This prevents isolation and is increasingly a lifeline in a borough where digital exclusion remains high.

A library staff member, who has worked across branches for more than a decade, shared her fears: "We give everything to this community, but with the cuts hanging over us, many of us worry about losing our jobs. It's frightening to think of unemployment

after years of service. We love what we do, and the community relies on us."

Residents also highlighted that Newham's libraries are cherished spaces that honour the Borough's cultural richness and diversity. From major faith celebrations such as Diwali, Eid, Ramadan, Christmas, Chinese New Year, and Easter, to a wide range of diversity and inclusion calendar events.

On 8 January, during a Cabinet meeting held at East Ham Town Hall, Newham Council confirmed that there are no planned closures of any of the Borough's ten libraries.

The announcement was made by Councillor Zulfiqar Ali, Cabinet Member for Finance and Resources, who explained that higher-than-expected central government funding had helped avert the most severe savings scenarios.

will find its way into people's homes across the country. This is a huge achievement and fulfills one of my creative goals.

@elhaam.sahebdin



Dates for the Ramadan diary

ELHAAM SAHEBDIN

The Date Project is a UK-based, volunteer-driven initiative that sells boxes of Medjool dates during Ramadan to raise funds for humanitarian causes. A simple purchase provides support for food, water, education, and aid for people in need globally, with a focus on regions like Palestine, Syria, and Yemen.

It began in 2015 and has grown into a large movement. All 100 percent of its profits fund charitable partners like One Nation, providing essentials and

supporting community projects.

I entered their art competition last year where the winner would have their design/art reproduced on one of the tins with The Date Project. These tins have been a family favourite nationally. It has become a tradition over the last few years to share these tins with family and friends leading up to the sacred month of Ramadan.

They are the perfect gift to every family – providing dates to break our fast with, as well as a donation to charity. As Ramadan begins this month, I'm amazed that my work

He noted that although the Library Review includes a £1.6 million savings target, the final level of savings will be determined through the review process and statutory public consultation.

“

I visit the library with my three young children. We have access to resources and activities. It's one of the few places I can rely on without cost. I also get to meet other parents, and it helps my mental health and wellbeing.

- Elena 32 (Mother)

A full Library Strategy is scheduled to go before Cabinet in March. While this update has been welcomed by residents and campaigners, many remain cautious and continue to call for long-term protections to safeguard staff jobs, essential services, and community access.

Across Newham, one message is shared; Libraries strengthen the community, and residents are united in working towards a future where these essential services remain protected. With so many people depending on them every day, it is clear just how important the library network is to the borough. As the review continues, the community will be watching closely, hopeful that the outcome reflects the true value these spaces bring to everyone.

Poetry in Mind

A Valentine's Day poem by
Zhenreenah Muhxinga

Valentine's Whisper

In the quiet spaces where your heartbeat rests
Soul finds home, my love confessed
Your smile, a bright flame that lights my way
Soft as dawn at break of day
Your touch speaks truths no words could say
A tender promise, here to stay
In every glance, in every sigh
A love that lifts me, without a cry
If time should pause and stars grow dim
My heart would still choose you to the brim
This Valentine, and all life through
I give my heart, completely, to you
Be mine, be my Valentine!

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'I was a scapegoat', says Councillor let down over Newham's housing crisis

AIDAN WHITE

An independent inquiry into Newham's role as a landlord released last month indicates how council leaders were in the dark over a catastrophic situation that led to a crushing rebuke from the government's housing regulator.

The probe, carried out by lawyers Capstick, says information on housing operations was sometimes unreliable. Councillors responsible for housing did not have the full facts about the crisis.

Councillor Shaban Mohammed who resigned as a Cabinet member and Council lead on housing, says he was let down by Council officers and made a scapegoat for the crisis.

Paul Martin, Newham's Chief Executive since last year, took note of Councillor Mohammed's complaint at a top-level meeting on 27 January where he acknowledged that Newham's housing failures were operational and not political.

Newham was the first Borough in the country to be

awarded the lowest possible grading by the new social housing regulator after an inspection revealed the Council had 9,000 overdue fire safety actions and two-fifths of its homes had not had electrical condition tests for more than a decade.

Councillor Mohammed, who represents Canning Town North where he was born and grew up, was the only person made accountable, even though, as he told *Newham Voices* in an exclusive interview, the Council leadership was kept in the dark by council officers.

In fact, shortly after the storm broke a number of council chiefs quit to take up new jobs.

Councillor Mohammed said: "Not one person in senior management put their hands up to take responsibility for what were clear operational and management issues which we did not have information about. It feels more and more apparent that I was made a scapegoat."

The Capstick report examined the oversight of Newham's housing service in the months



leading up to and after the Regulator of Social Housing's inspection in 2024, which led to the C4 grading

and concluded that there had been "very serious failings" in Newham, which required "fundamental changes".

Councillor Mohammed (pictured above) says the Council could have avoided the crisis by admitting the problems in advance and referring themselves to the regulator. In those circumstances the lowest grading would have been avoided.

He said that the affair had a serious impact on him personally,

including affecting his mental health. "It's been draining, my health has been affected. I feel badly let down," he said. "Particularly as over the years I have built up good relationships with residents in the Borough."

Although a resignation was unavoidable, Councillor John Gray, his predecessor as Council lead on housing, agrees that Councillor Mohammed was let down by Council officers.

He said Shaban Mohammed was left with little choice but to resign. "Even if it's not your fault, you have to take the blame, that's the responsibility of the position you hold."

He said: "I understand why he feels he was let down. Unfortunately there was a culture in which people preferred to bury bad news rather than open up and take responsibility."

Looking to the future Shaban Mohammed says: "We have to make sure that this never happens again. There needs to be more effective monitoring and more access to reliable information. The housing service needs to be constantly reviewed."

John Gray agrees. "The Capstick report did pull its punches, but now we have no choice but to be a compliant landlord and officers must be more accountable. We have to make sure there is no infighting between councillors and officers."

Murders on your doorstep

LORRAINE TAPPER

Forest Gate is described as a vibrant and diverse East London neighbourhood, but who would have thought that it could also be the location for a myriad of detective stories?

Derek Smith did.

Before writing novels Derek wrote stage plays for radio and TV. He had some success with this.

He has lived in Newham since 1976 when he became Writer in Residence at the Soap Box Theatre writing plays for children and adults.

In the mid '80s Derek transitioned to writing novels but he discovered this was very different from writing plays. In 1985/86 he attended a short story writing course at City Lit in Holborn which enhanced his skills and knowledge about short story writing.

Armed with his newly developed writing skills Derek wrote his first novel in 1987



for young adults called *Hard Cash*. The journey from writing to publishing the book took a few years as it was rejected under its original title *Rich Kids*. Derek solicited an honest review from an 11 year old. It led to the book getting published in 1991.

Derek was fortunate enough to have the book read on BBC Radio by Tony Robinson. He went on to write nine more books for children and young adults before graduating to adult fiction.

Derek moved to Forest Gate in 1988, the location that became the inspiration for the *Jack of All Trades* series of books. The first book in the series was written in 2013. Each book title in the series starts with the protagonist Jack and are standalone and can be read in any order you choose.

Jack is a sleuth who lives and works from Forest Gate. Three of the first four books were set in locations outside Forest Gate, with the other set in Plaistow. From then on all of the other books are Forest Gate based. Derek decides on the locations based on his personal experiences so the latest book *Jack and the Vandals* is set four days before the Forest Gate Festival inspired by his work as Treasurer of the Festival.

Currently there are 16 books in the series and copies are available in all of the libraries in the Borough.

www.dereksmithwriter.com

for vulnerable residents and commissioning external surveyors to bring gas and electric appliances, water hygiene and asbestos detection up to required standards.

In addition the campaign against deadly mould in homes has received a boost with the implementation of new laws to combat untreated dampness. These rules set out mandatory schedules for completion of remedial work. The new rules – dubbed Awab's Law – follow the tragic death of a two-year toddler called Awab who died in a home which was affected by dangerous levels of mould.

'Voluntary undertaking' to improve housing

PETER LANDMAN

Newham continues to make progress towards better performance in its housing services.

The Council plans to make a Voluntary Undertaking with the Social Housing Regulator to follow a "Compliance Recovery Action Plan", putting co-operation with the Regulator on a more systematic and formal footing.

The Council's housing services have already made a series of improvements setting up housing management boards, putting in place special fire prevention packages

Parents' fury over Manor Park school shutdown

AIDAN WHITE

Parents at strike-hit Little Ilford School in Manor Park have expressed anger and frustration over teacher strikes in January.

They say that the strikes damage their children's preparation for crucial exams in May.

One parent of a Year 11 child at the school, and speaking on behalf of a number of parents, told *Newham Voices*: "We were shocked to receive this news just before Christmas. There are a lot of angry and frustrated parents who are concerned about the impact of the strikes."

"It is completely understandable that teachers are worried about the workload, but the school should open, especially for Year 11 pupils who face major exams."

The school wrote to par-



ents on the day before the Christmas break announcing that the school would be closed to most students because of strike action by staff on 8, 13, 14, 20, 21 and 22 January.

"It is understandable teachers are worried about the workload, but the school should open, especially for Year 11 pupils who face major exams."

The strikes were called by the National Education Union after their staff members at the school voted for industrial action over "unacceptable workloads" and a breach of the agreement covering teachers' pay and conditions.

The school told shocked parents: "We will not have sufficient personnel to safely supervise the student body on these days. Consequently, the school will be closed to the majority of students."

Head teacher Andrew Finn also told parents he was "currently in negotiations with the NEU to find a resolution to this dispute," but on 7 January he wrote again to parents confirming the strike was going ahead and that the school would only open for "vulnerable children."

Parents were told that remote learning for children affected would be organised and special arrangements for childcare assistance was offered.

Little Ilford is one of Newham's largest secondary schools with 1700 pupils, almost half of them entitled to free school meals.

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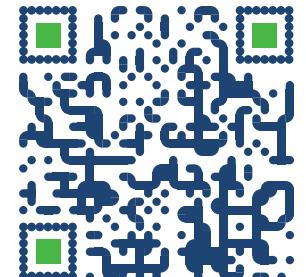
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A welcoming place to connect, belong and thrive. At The Foundry, every young person under the age of 18 can enjoy a free, freshly prepared meal in a safe, warm and inclusive environment. We believe that access to good food, shared spaces and positive connections plays a vital role in helping people take part, feel supported and thrive.

Through our **Free Youth Impact Meals**, young people are offered freshly made pasta with tomato sauce, seasonal vegetables and parmesan cheese. These meals support young people through:

- Good food, nutrition and education
- Community support and connection

The offer is open to under-18s visiting The Foundry, whether they are attending activities, visiting with family members, or coming as part of a school or community group.

SUPPORTING YOUNG PEOPLE THROUGH ACTIVITY

Supporting young people at The Foundry goes beyond food. The site also hosts **free football sessions through Premier League Kicks, delivered three evenings a week**, offering young people safe, structured and positive activity in the evenings. These sessions provide opportunities to be active, build friendships and access mentoring and wider support pathways.

Food is at the heart of The Foundry, but it is only one part of a wider offer designed to support the local community. Situated in the heart of east London, The Foundry is a £5 million redevelopment project created to provide an inclusive, high-quality community hub where people of all ages can connect, learn and thrive.

E6 KITCHEN POWERED BY BEYOND FOOD

The building is home to the E6 Kitchen powered by Beyond Food, a welcoming space open for all ages throughout the week to local residents and visitors. It offers a place to drop in for a morning coffee, meet informally or spend time between activities. **On Friday lunchtime the kitchen serves a traditional Pie and Mash**, providing a familiar and accessible option rooted in local culture and heritage.



Alongside meal provision, food education sessions are delivered to help young people build confidence, skills and knowledge around nutrition, wellbeing and healthy choices. We also have rooms for private dining with personalised menus.



A COMMUNITY HUB WITH A STRONG LEGACY

Inspired by the legacy of **Thames Ironworks FC**, the original identity of West Ham United, The Foundry builds on a proud east London heritage. Its mission is to forge stronger futures by creating opportunities, supporting pathways and changing lives.

This is more than a venue; The West Ham United Foundation is a catalyst for change, building on a legacy of engaging over **60,000 people** annually and addressing some of the most pressing challenges facing local communities.

Over the next five years, the £5 million redevelopment is projected to generate more than **£75 million in social return on investment (SROI)** through community delivery across more than **35 programmes and initiatives**.



DESIGNED FOR LOCAL PEOPLE

The Foundry has been designed to meet the needs of local residents while also offering a flexible, professional environment for learning, collaboration and community activity. Located in one of the UK's most diverse and dynamic areas, it brings together delivery, partnership and place under one roof, supporting people at every stage of life.

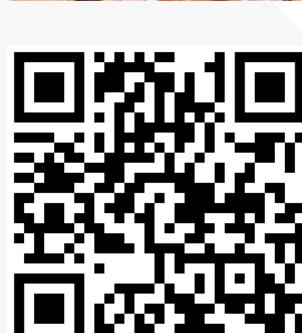
The building is home to a wide range of activity, including youth development, education and employability programmes, health and wellbeing initiatives, disability sport, women and girls' sessions, volunteering and social action. It also operates as a venue that schools, community organisations and businesses can use to host events, meetings and shared initiatives that benefit the wider community. We even have celebrity guests visit from time to time.

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Residents welcome Peace Garden decision

BOBBY WAZZO

Forest Gate residents have welcomed Newham Council's decision to reject plans to build over Hari's Garden of Peace, which serves the Olive Garden restaurant in Katherine Road.

The Monega Area Residents Association have been oppos-

ing development of the site since in 2016 after the failure to replace a felled tree (covered by a protection order) followed by the first of many failed planning applications to build over the courtyard garden... exactly where the tree had stood.

Since then application after application has been successfully challenged by res-

idents, who have been supported by East Ham MP Sir Stephen Timms, GLA Member Unmesh Desai, and a raft of ex-councillors.

"We have challenged many claims and statements on these proposals, based fairly on planning legislation, Council and national policies and guidelines, and were the only people positioned to enlighten Council planners about inconsistencies in the proposals," said Bob Rush, Chairman of the Monega Residents Association.

"The system is wrong when local people have to raise tens of thousands of pounds themselves to counter multi millionaire property companies and their endless consultants studies and drawings."

For the third time in ten years, the developer has now gone to the Appeals Officer to try to overturn the Council and community's long standing position.

Meanwhile, the restaurant building and garden courtyard is being refurbished, set for re-opening with community led initiatives planned for later this year.



Peace at last? A ceremony at the garden in November

Royal treat for trailblazer Myla

Myla Murphy, aged ten, had taken time to pick out a dress, practise her curtsey and generally live days feeling like she was in a fairy tale. She was on the way to visit Her Majesty The Queen. When she emerged from Clarence House, it was, she said, the best day of her life.

Few children could be more deserving of this extraordinary Christmas treat than Myla, who travelled to Clarence House with her mum and her Roald Dahl Nurse Holly Killick from The Royal London in Hackney.

The Queen is the Royal Patron of Roald Dahl's Marvellous Children's Charity which is on a mission to ensure every seriously ill child like Myla has a Roald Dahl Nurse to help them and their parents or carers co-ordinate and navigate the most complicated healthcare journeys while dealing with caring for the most serious of illnesses at home.

Myla, who lives in Newham, has a very rare genetic condition called MIRAGE



Syndrome. She is under the care of more than 12 consultants at The Royal London and Great Ormond Street Hospital.

Myla fell ill as a tiny baby. We were told others who have it often sadly don't survive past their fifth birthday, often as a result of infections due to related immune system dysfunction" said her mother Michelle." With Myla now ten, we are seen as trail blazers in the condition and helping grow and understanding of it," explains Michelle.

To find out more about Roald Dahl's Marvellous Children's Charity and the work it does visit www.roalddahlcharity.org

Co-op bids to restore voice for local Labour

RICHARD STUBBS

In early January an unusual meeting took place at St John's Church on Stratford Broadway. The meeting could see the revival of local democracy in Newham's Labour Party which has been closed for business for five years.

Organised by secretary Cllr. Alan Griffiths, the meeting was the AGM of Newham Co-operative Party (NCP) which hasn't met for years. I helped set up the first housing co-operative in Newham in 1975 and I have been active in co-operatives ever since, and still live in a housing co-op. I was Chair of Newham Co-operative Party from 1996-2002.

There are currently 135 members including 43 councillors, two of our MPs and our Mayor. The Co-op Party has a proud history in the area. Eighty years ago the London Co-operative Society

had 832,670 members, the largest co-operative society in Britain with its headquarters in Stratford.

The Labour-Co-operative electoral agreement, first signed in 1927, is a formal pact in which these two legally separate parties agreed not to stand candidates against each other, but to field joint Labour and Co-operative candidates.

This is still important because Newham's two constituency Labour parties (CLPs) in East Ham and West Ham, were suspended in March 2021, after Labour's London Region reported irregularities in membership recruitment.

This means local Labour members cannot meet, elect officers or vote on parliamentary candidates, effectively shutting down Labour Party democracy in Newham. The new Stratford and Bow CLP was suspended from birth in 2024.

The Co-operative Party is technically unaffected by

these suspensions which explains why it can function. Only two people present, myself and my partner, are not Labour members. The meeting started by electing a Chair for NCP, Councillor. Blossom Young. "Co-operation is about power," she said, "who holds it, how it's shared, and how we use it to improve people's

lives." She was also appointed as one of NCPs delegates to the London Co-operative Party Council.

The NCP is now campaigning for the resurrection of the Newham CLPs and wants to see this happen before the local elections in May. It is obviously feeling optimistic because it proceeded

to appoint delegates to East Ham, West Ham and Beckton, and Stratford and Bow CLPs.

As someone who has been actively involved in co-operatives for over 50 years I wish them success in both restoring democracy to the local Labour Party and supporting co-operative initiatives in Newham.

Labour boroughs will oppose changes to Freedom Pass

Labour councils across London have announced they will oppose any changes to the Freedom Pass scheme that would restrict eligibility or reduce the range of trans-

port services offered to older people who use the pass.

Cllr Claire Holland, Leader of London Councils Labour Group, said:

"We know the Freedom Pass is a vital lifeline for our

older residents and we must defend it. Labour councils will oppose any changes that would see restrictions placed on who can use it and which modes of transport it applies to."



OUT AND ABOUT IN NEWHAM

Our Chief reporter Neandra Etienne on events that reflect culture, history and heritage in Newham

THEATRE

Darcy Tosun has received a Go Live Theatre's Best Child Performance nomination at the WhatsOnStage awards 2026.

Darcy, who lives in Newham, is nominated for his role in *The Land of the Living* at the National Theatre.

The winner will be revealed at the WhatsOnStage Awards on 8 March

[@darcy.tosun](https://www.instagram.com/darcy.tosun)

ART

Tower Gallery is accepting submissions from women artists living, working or studying in Newham, or with a close connection to the Borough, and any woman artist who has shown with them in the past, for their upcoming exhibition *Women by Women*.

To apply, email towergallerye13@gmail.com for more information. Closing date is 17 February at 10 pm.

Artists are also invited to send their proposals for a new large-scale mural or wall-based artwork outside **Thames Barrier Park**.

Artists will be expected to engage with the local community and park-users to design and deliver the artwork.

Deadline for applications is 4 February, 10am royaldocks.london

MUSIC



Grammy nominated singer **Tiana Major 9**, from Newham, is releasing a new album titled November Scorpio on 13 February.

[@TianaMajor9](https://www.instagram.com/TianaMajor9)

Newham Poetry Group and Newham-based poet Deborah Collins will be performing at the *Love Music Hate Racism* event United by Sound presented by Newham Stand Up To Racism.

Donations are welcome. All proceeds help support ongoing anti-racist and community organising work in Newham.

6 February, 7pm – 11.30pm, Ex-Services Social Club, Leytonstone

[@newham_stand_up_to_racism](https://www.instagram.com/@newham_stand_up_to_racism)

EXHIBITION

In Shape art exhibition, which explores the world of shapes and colours, features current UEL students from various courses, alumni, external creatives and international artists and craftmakers.

Free tickets are available from Eventbrite

Runs 14 – 21 February.

My story proves it's never too late

LORRAINE TAPPER

An unfamiliar voice was asking me who is the Queen of England? Who is the Prime Minister? Where do you live? I could answer the first two but not the third. I was confused.

That was the last thing I remembered until I woke up in a hospital ward in November 2014 to discover I had suffered a TIA – a mini stroke. My left arm and leg were paralysed. Thankfully it was temporary.

Friends who visited me told me I nearly died. Twice!

I had two weeks in hospital to reflect on my life and what I wanted to do with it.

I had been given another opportunity to take advantage of opportunities that were offered to me. I realised that tomorrow wasn't promised.

After a few months of recovery I saw a flyer in Forest Gate Library advertising Free Art Classes for the over 50s. I was 59 and always envied artists and believed this wasn't something I was good at. I went to

Opening evening 17 February, 4.30 – 8.30pm.

Between People Gallery, AVA Building Docklands Campus, University Way

[@between.people.25](https://www.instagram.com/@between.people.25)

TV

US drama Bel-Air's final season starring **Jimmy Akingbola** and **Caroline Chikezie**, both from Newham, has received seven 2026 NAACP Image Awards nominations.

Voting is open until 13 February.

The 57th NAACP Image Awards take place on 28 February

[@jimmyakingbola](https://www.instagram.com/@jimmyakingbola)

VALENTINE'S DAY

The Lover's Passion Valentine's Day dance featuring Lovers Rock, Raregrooves, 80s Soul and Revival

14 February, 7pm 'till late, £5 on the door, Chandos Community Centre E15 1DZ

[@chandoscommunitycentre](https://www.instagram.com/@chandoscommunitycentre)

BBC's **Ashley J**, who was born and attended schools in Newham, and DJ B-Radz are hosting the interactive comedy show *Lovers and Friends*.

Jade Hackett is choreographing and also performing in a duet that debuted at Wretch 32s concert at the National Theatre last October.



Ashley J ©Mark McGee Photography

Jade has worked in Newham teaching dance to young people at Forest Gate Youth Centre and co-hosted Newham summer shows with Ashely J and DJ B-Radz.

13 February, Doors open 7.15pm show starts 7.35pm, Rich Mix Shoreditch

[richmix.org.uk](https://www.richmix.org.uk)

LIBRARIES

National Storytelling Week early years library adventures for babies, toddlers and under-5s includes themed story-time plus engaging activities that take place from 3 to 8 February.

Free tickets are available from Newham libraries Eventbrite [x.com/NewhamLibraries](https://www.eventbrite.co.uk/com/NewhamLibraries)

All events are subject to change. Please email your event details and news to neandra.etienne@newhamvoices.co.uk

A free light art experience for all

ZHENREENAH MUHXINGA

This month Culture Within Newham will transform Queen's Square on Green Street into a world of light and imagination.

At the centre of the experience is Luma, a mesmerising soft-robotic creation by Air Giants. Towering, graceful and lit from within, Luma is a nine-metre long snail who responds gently to the people around her, inviting play and connection.

There will also be a whimsical garden of six interac-

tive plant sculptures, each standing 2.5 metres tall.

Across five days residents, families, and traders are invited to explore, play and encounter art in a space they know and love. All experiences are free and open to everyone, just turn up!

Green Street Glow Garden celebrates Newham's creativity and vibrancy, bringing a fun, interactive moment to connect with art directly into a local public space.

12-16 February | 3-7pm
Queen's Square, Green Street, E13 9JJ



I might see you there!

Science and Innovation is theme for LGBT+ History Month 2026

Newham Council has announced its LGBT+ History Month programme, running throughout February, with the national theme 'Science and Innovation'.

The month-long programme features a mix of talks, workshops, markets, performances, poetry, exhibitions and youth-led activity across the Borough. Together, these events explore how the LGBTQ+ community has shaped and continue to shape culture in Newham and beyond.

The programme launches on Sunday 1 February with a Flag Raising at East Ham Town Hall,

Jonny Woo, image
©Martine Charalambou



followed by a light lunch and a talk by Abi Young on *Queer Ecology*. This opening event sets the tone for the month, reimagining how queerness exists within nature and celebrating diversity across all life forms.

The Shocking Pink Pound Market is coming to Woodgrange Market on 14 and 21 February, showcasing LGBTQ+ makers and entrepreneurs. The programme also includes theatre and performance, with excerpts from *Silvertown*, a new play by Jonny Woo (pictured), exploring gay life in the Royal Docks in the late 1960s.

An exhibition *Care, Campaign, Create: Remembering Our LGBT+ Communities* will be on display across Newham Libraries throughout February, highlighting the vital organisations and grassroots activism that supported LGBTQ+ communities in the 1980s.

Additional events including a film screening, activities for young people curated by *Come As You Are* and a celebratory finale event will be announced on the website.

For full details and updates, visit: newhamlgbthistory.org

Preserving community stories

BE MANZINI

Writers, lyricists and performers from across Newham gathered to prepare submissions for

Barz And Stanzas Soundscape, (BASS), the latest phase of the Newham Poetry Prize, celebrating the Borough's voices by setting selected poems and lyrics to original music.



As someone who lives and works in Newham, it was a privilege to lead the Writing and Editing Mastery workshop. Mayor of Newham, Rokhsana Fiaz paid a visit and spoke about her love for the Borough and the importance of poetry in preserving its stories.

In addition to my session, Eklipse's performance and recording workshop and Shadé Joseph's exploration of sound and poetry created a rich, inspiring flow across the day.

Keep an eye out for the listening party to celebrate the project and its release in March. Those interested can follow Newham Poetry Prize on eventbrite, instagram or email newhampoetryprize@gmail.com to be added to the mailing list.

Cooking up creativity for 2026

FARZANA RAHMAN

Sukunarani Supramaniam's baking wellbeing project at Green Street Library has become a warm and welcoming space for connection, creativity, and care in Newham.

As part of the People Power Places Project 2021-2025 initiative, the project brings local residents together through the simple joy of baking, encouraging conversation, shared skills, and emotional well-being. The smell of fresh bakes and the relaxed atmosphere help break down barriers, cre-

ating a sense of belonging for people of all ages and backgrounds.

The project was also celebrated during the ONLS Forest Gate event, where community-led activities highlighted the power of local action and collaboration. As the New Year approaches in Newham, Sukhun's work reflects the borough's spirit of resilience and togetherness. It shows how small, thoughtful projects can have a big impact, supporting mental health, strengthening neighbourhood ties, and offering hope



and positivity as the community steps into a new year together.

Book early for Newham Citizen Science Fair

Readers are invited to join a day of discovery, creativity and community learning that's fun for all the family. The free annual fair will take place from 11:00am to 5:00pm on

28 March 2026 at the University of East London's Royal Docks Centre for Sustainability, a five-minute walk from Cyprus DLR station. To register visit: bit.ly/3ZcyFyt

Caribbean grocery store loss

ZHENREENAH MUHXINGA

The community of Queen's Market in Green Street marked the end of an era with the passing of Michael Biggs an owner of B&M Foods, a grocery shop that served the Caribbean community and wider Newham area for more than six decades.

Established in the 1960s, the grocery store was far more than a place to buy food. It was a cultural landmark, a space where generations found familiar flavours from home, exchanged stories, and felt a sense of belonging. The shop played a vital role in sustaining community life along Green Street.

The original owner, Isaac Biggs, a much-loved figure in the market, passed away in 2021, leaving the business in the care of his son, Michael who carried forward his father's legacy with pride.

Sadly, Michael (pictured) has also now passed away.

For many, this store represented continuity — from the Windrush generation through to today — a reminder of resilience, enterprise, and cultural pride.

Its presence helped shape the identity of Green Street Market and supported Caribbean families for decades. Just like the market around it, the grocery store has adapted to meet the needs of its customers over the years, stocking goods from the Caribbean. Breadfruit, Ackee, Jackfruit, Salt beef, Sorrel, Bun and Cheese, fresh fruit and vegetables, speciality spices,

and culturally-specific ingredients that reflect the tastes of the Caribbean diverse neighbourhood.

The shop is now in the hands of another trader, and still selling African and Caribbean foods, but its original spirit will never be forgotten.



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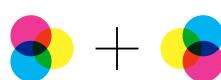
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MAYORAL ELECTION: SPECIAL FEATURE

From Red to Green: let's go

In the first in a series of profiles on the mayoral candidates for this May's elections, Jean Gray talks to Areeq Chowdhury who abandoned Labour for a Green future.

Mayoral candidate Areeq Chowdhury (pictured) is keen for *Newham Voices* readers to know that the Green Party commands support right across the Borough, unlike other opposition parties who may enjoy 'pockets' of success when the elections come in May.

The Greens announced Chowdhury's candidacy in mid-January, claiming that, having spoken to voters on the doorstep, the Mayoral role in Newham is 'winnable'.

As well as the election for Mayor, the Council's 66 seats across 24 wards come up for election on 7 May. And there is a feeling that it's all up for grabs, given that both the Greens and the Newham Independents have recently been gaining ground in Labour's stronghold, and the Labour Party has now replaced incumbent Rokhsana Fiaz with Forhad Hussein as their candidate.

"Opinion polling is looking very positive for the Greens," says Chowdhury. "We are living in an unprecedented period of fragmented politics. I think the Independents will do well in certain pockets of Newham and even Reform may do surprisingly well, but if Newham is to have a change of administration, it is only the Green Party who can actually beat Labour."

Chowdhury, currently councillor for Canning Town North, is offering voters a major shake-up at the town hall, based on three main elements of his campaign: rooting out incompetence and corruption, radical reform of the housing department, and creating the best possible environment - "clean streets and beautiful parks".

"I would expect to see major successes in these areas every day," he said.

He is scathing in his criticism of the 'incompetence' that he has encountered on Newham Council, and particularly the lack of a 'value for money' culture based on solid data at the town hall.

The son of an immigrant couple from Bangladesh, Chowdhury grew up in Manchester and studied economics and politics in Birmingham. He moved to Newham 13 years ago to pursue a career in political policy - and stayed. Interest in politics, and anti-racism in particular, was inspired by lively political discussion at home and personal experience of racism from the age of four.

At 16, full of desire to make a difference in the world, he joined the Labour Party and became a party activist for



a number of years, winning the seat in Canning Town North for Labour in 2022. But he famously crossed the floor of the Council chamber two years later and joined the Green Party. It was a tough decision and a long time coming.

"It was really, really hard," he said, describing sleepless nights, worrying about what his Labour loyalist family would make of it, and wondering what the Green Party would be like. "These are big questions."

He is sure that having two new Green Party members on the Council, Nate Higgins and Danny Keeling, both elected in 2022, was one of the main reasons he chose the Green Party after taking the decision to leave Labour. "They were everything I thought politics should be - speaking up loudly even though they were being shouted down, very much community people but also kind and welcoming."

This was very different from his experience of Labour at the time.

"When you are in a party it becomes part of your identity," he said, but becoming a father made him reassess his commitment to Labour and he was finding it more and more difficult to square party policy and actions with his own moral values: lack of support for the children of Gaza who were being killed - "ten thousand before Labour stood up for them", reports of Labour wanting to send more people

back to Bangladesh and the treatment by the Labour Party of Fazia Shaheen who was blocked from standing in Chingford and Woodford Green at the 2024 general election.

There were local issues, too. He says he was seen as disloyal because he went to talk to striking refuse workers on their picket line. "They wanted us to listen, I wanted to listen". And it was frowned upon when he supported a constituent, an elderly woman, who was fined £150 for flytipping when she fed the birds in the park.

Describing himself as 'nerdily passionate about data' and with a background in audit, he says this is what has been lacking in the current

Council leadership. It may be boring but important to ensure that 'every penny is spent efficiently'. He would want to carry out a ten-year retrospective audit to see if there are any further examples of housing fraud, after the case that came to light recently. "It was one person but there should have been checks and balances in place to ensure that this can't happen," he said.

He believes that improvements can be paid for by asking more of the wealthy, for example big companies that have moved into Newham, rather than raising taxes for the poorest. It would mean partnerships with the likes of Westfield and West Ham United, with companies moving into the area asked to give more for the community.

Everyone knows about Newham's problems but he believes it is still a great place to live.

"We are in one of the world's great capitals full of hardworking people, but you don't need to leave here to see the world, there are people already here from all over the world. I can go to Green Street and get lovely food, and there are wonderful religious communities here. People are kind, many have been through war and genocide, which makes them more caring. I am not surprised there is so much support for Palestine here."

"We should live up to our potential, to provide enough food, a roof over people's heads, clean streets, clean air, parks that are pleasant and where people feel safe. I don't accept the narrative that there's not enough money. It's not the best we can do."

Chowdhury's battle for Mayor will not be easy - he describes it as David versus Goliath and hopes that people will do more to support the Greens than simply like a social media post. "We are still small, community driven and with small donors, no millionaires. We are the party of the people".

Newham over-65s are still hard at work

Newham tops the league table for the largest number of people over 65 still working, according to a study by UK later life mortgage specialists.

Bower Home Finance researchers say the reason is that people can't afford to retire as the cost-of-living crisis sweeps the nation.

In Newham, a whacking 31.5 percent of over-65s are still working.

London boroughs dominate the list, with seven of the UK's top ten areas where people aged 65 and over are still working.

By contrast, Newcastle upon Tyne records the lowest rate, with just 3.8 percent of seniors still working.

LOCAL NOTICES

Published 30th January 2026

LICENSING ACT 2003
Application for a New Premises Licence

I/We Azak Limited T/A Kaspas Forest Gate have applied to NEWHAM COUNCIL for a premises licences for **Kaspas Forest Gate, 88 Upton Lane, London E7 9LW** so that the following licensable activities may be provided on the following days and hours:

Late night refreshments prepared and served between the hours of 23:00 – 02:00 Monday – Sunday

Newham Council's Licensing Register is kept at the office of the Licensing Team, Town Hall, 328 Barking Road, East Ham, E6 2RT (open from 10.00am to 4.00pm Monday to Friday), 020 3373 1925, where details of the application may be inspected.

Any representations against the application must be made in writing and received by the Licensing Team at the above address, by no later than the **12th February 2026**.

Individuals, businesses, and other bodies may make representations in relation to the application.

Representations must be relevant and can only be on the licensing objectives of the prevention of crime and disorder, public safety, the prevention of public nuisance, and the protection of children from harm. Copies of all representations will be sent to the applicant. Persons making representations will have to appear at the Councils' Licensing Sub-Committee.

Note: It is an offence, liable on conviction to a fine up to £5,000 for a person to knowingly or recklessly make a false statement in connection with the application.

LICENSING ACT 2003
Application for a New Premises Licence

We Pascheal's Limited have applied to NEWHAM COUNCIL for a premises licences for **17 Upton Lane, London, E7 9PA** so that the following licensable activities may be provided on the following days and hours:

Off sales only - Sale of alcohol

- Monday – Saturday 09:00 – 21:00
- Sunday 10:00 – 17:00

Newham Council's Licensing Register is kept at the office of the Licensing Team, Town Hall, 328 Barking Road, East Ham, E6 2RT (open from 10.00am to 4.00pm Monday to Friday), 020 3373 1925, where details of the application may be inspected.

Any representations against the application must be made in writing and received by the Licensing Team at the above address, by no later than the **12th February 2026**.

Individuals, businesses and other bodies may make representations in relation to the application. Representations must be relevant and can only be on the licensing objectives of the prevention of crime and disorder, public safety, the prevention of public nuisance, and the protection of children from harm. Copies of all representations will be sent to the applicant. Persons making representations will have to appear at the Councils' Licensing Sub-Committee.

Note: It is an offence, liable on conviction to a fine up to £5,000 for a person to knowingly or recklessly make a false statement in connection with the application.

LICENSING ACT 2003
Application for a New Premises Licence

We U Maxima have applied to NEWHAM COUNCIL for a premises licences for **88-90 Leytonston Road, E15 1TQ** so that the following licensable activities may be provided on the following days and hours:

Recorded music, dancing and selling alcohol

- Friday 20.00 until 02:00
- Saturday 20.00 until 02:00

Newham Council's Licensing Register is kept at the office of the Licensing Team, Town Hall, 328 Barking Road, East Ham, E6 2RT (open from 10.00am to 4.00pm Monday to Friday), 020 3373 1925, where details of the application may be inspected.

Any representations against the application must be made in writing and received by the Licensing Team at the above address, by no later than the **20th of February 2026**.

Individuals, businesses and other bodies may make representations in relation to the application. Representations must be relevant and can only be on the licensing objectives of the prevention of crime and disorder, public safety, the prevention of public nuisance, and the protection of children from harm. Copies of all representations will be sent to the applicant. Persons making representations will have to appear at the Councils' Licensing Sub-Committee.

Note: It is an offence, liable on conviction to a fine up to £5,000 for a person to knowingly or recklessly make a false statement in connection with the application.

LICENSING ACT 2003
Application for a New Premises Licence

I/We Harun or Rashid have applied to NEWHAM COUNCIL for a premises licences for **57 Leytonstone Road, London, E15 1JA** so that the following licensable activities may be provided on the following days and hours:

Provision of Late Night Refreshment

- Monday – Sunday from 11pm to 2am

Opening hours

- Monday – Sunday from 10am to 2am

Newham Council's Licensing Register is kept at the office of the Licensing Team, Town Hall, 328 Barking Road, East Ham, E6 2RT (open from 10.00am to 4.00pm Monday to Friday), 020 3373 1925, where details of the application may be inspected.

Any representations against the application must be made in writing and received by the Licensing Team at the above address, by no later than the **18th February 2026**.

Individuals, businesses and other bodies may make representations in relation to the application. Representations must be relevant and can only be on the licensing objectives of the prevention of crime and disorder, public safety, the prevention of public nuisance, and the protection of children from harm. Copies of all representations will be sent to the applicant. Persons making representations will have to appear at the Councils' Licensing Sub-Committee.

Note: It is an offence, liable on conviction to a fine up to £5,000 for a person to knowingly or recklessly make a false statement in connection with the application

LICENSING ACT 2003
Application for a Variation of a Premises Licence

We Restaurant Verde Ltd have applied to NEWHAM COUNCIL for a premises licences for **10 Woodford Road, Forest Gate, E7 0HA** so that the following licensable activities may be provided on the following days and hours:

- Update the plan of the premises.
- Extend the sale of alcohol hours Fridays and Saturdays, 22:00-00:30
- Add late night refreshment on Fridays and Saturdays, 23:00-00:30
- Add relevant entertainment Fridays and Saturdays, 23:00-00:30

Newham Council's Licensing Register is kept at the office of the Licensing Team, Town Hall, 328 Barking Road, East Ham, E6 2RT (open from 10.00am to 4.00pm Monday to Friday), 020 3373 1925, where details of the application may be inspected.

Any representations against the application must be made in writing and received by the Licensing Team at the above address, by no later than the **12th February 2026**.

Individuals, businesses and other bodies may make representations in relation to the application. Representations must be relevant and can only be on the licensing objectives of the prevention of crime and disorder, public safety, the prevention of public nuisance, and the protection of children from harm. Copies of all representations will be sent to the applicant. Persons making representations will have to appear at the Councils' Licensing Sub-Committee.

Note: It is an offence, liable on conviction to a fine up to £5,000 for a person to knowingly or recklessly make a false statement in connection with the application.

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Humanitarian drive becomes multinational

CHRIS EK

When I donated to a local Newham charity, little did I know that its founder, Shakil Malji, pictured, had turned this initiative into a multinational organisation.

Newham-born, he attended Stratford school and later set up a successful chauffeur car-hire service with luxury vehicles driving around celebrities and footballers.

The charity, Abdullah Aid, was established after a deep personal tragedy. Shakil lost his one-year-old son, Abdullah, ten years ago. To honour his son, Shakil turned his attention to helping others in need: orphans, widows, the homeless, first locally, then nationally. The Cumbria floods is one example.

Since then, as a community team effort, with helpers from all backgrounds, cultures and religions, the charity grew to assist in worldwide disaster zones, from wars to tsunamis. Shakil travelled worldwide, to over 25 countries, witnessing many difficulties endured by millions.

In 2018, he went to Indonesia to help after an earthquake. While there, a second earthquake hit, resulting in one of the biggest tsunamis worldwide. He recalls, at 4am, all the hotel guests running for their lives. Shakil was one of the lucky ones. He also went to Syria multiple times, including

after the 2023 earthquake.

Since 2019, the charity has also provided medical care, food, and clothes to Palestine. "Lives there are shattered, it is full of destruction. There is a permanent team set up there to help overcome the complex issues in providing any help", he said.

I asked how they got there. "Trucks manage to cross the borders from Jordan and Egypt." It is a constant cycle of effort to campaign and raise

further support. All from the heart of Newham.

Shakil is also a motivational speaker active on social media and has many podcast series.

A current project is *Winter Warmth Appeal*: £100 parcels consisting of food, blankets, hats, and gloves, go to seven countries where winter hits hard. Anyone wishing to contribute locally, or to any of the many countries needing support, can visit the Abdullah Aid website.



Shakil Malji



Million pound boost for Forest Lane Park

NICK CLARK

LOCAL DEMOCRACY REPORTING SERVICE

A million pound investment in improvements in Forest Lane Park has been agreed by Newham Council. Plans to refurbish the park have been boosted by a National Lottery grant of more than £900,000.

Newham Council agreed to accept the funding to help restore the park in Forest Gate and will add £173,729 from its own funds, which had been set aside in previous budgets.

The National Lottery Heritage Fund award of £904,141 to the Council is on top of an £83,000 grant it gave the Council in 2023 to help develop the Forest Lane Park restoration plans.

Plans approved by Council bosses say the work will

involve "restoring the basic infrastructure" including footpaths, signage, interpretation and street furniture and replacing or upgrading the play equipment and installing new outdoor fitness equipment.

The money will also pay for new entrances that the Council says will "help to address anti-social behaviour issues that are a significant deterrent to residents wishing to use the park".

Also to be restored will be the park's lake and dipping pond. Additionally, the money will pay for new solar-powered "listening posts". These will play oral history recordings of members of the Hibiscus Community Centre and people who gave birth at the maternity hospital that was once in the Industrial School building in the park's grounds.

COMMUNITY NEWS ROUNDUP

Musician faces sentence over road death

Award-winning musician Justin Clarke-Samuel, originally from Newham and known as Ghetts, has pleaded guilty to causing the death of Yubin Tamang by dangerous driving, a second charge of dangerous driving on the same day and two further charges. He is due to be sentenced on 12 February.

Newham winners of royal honours

David Neil Robinson has been awarded an OBE in the King's new year honours list for services to Social Innovation. He is Co-Founder, The Relationships

Project, Co-Founder, Community Links, and Co-Founder, Discover Children's Story Centre. Former Stratford East Ar-



©Neandra Etienne

tistic Director Nadia Fall has also been awarded an OBE for services to Theatre. Actor and singer Cynthia Erivo, a former Stratford East Usher, Box Office Assistant, Youth Theatre member received an MBE.

Discover Centre renewal

On 23 February Discover Children's Story Centre will close for 12 weeks while building improvement work is carried out. New spaces will also be created for play and stories. While the building is closed, there will be a little pop-up storytelling space in the Stratford Centre. The Centre will reopen in May. discover.org.uk

DLR extending

The Government has confirmed the Docklands Light Railway extension from Gallions Reach to Thamesmead via Beckton Riverside can go ahead. James Asper, MP for West Ham and Beckton, and Abena Oppong-Asare, MP for Erith and Thamesmead, said: "We're looking forward to working with all partners and the Mayor of London delivering this for our communities."

Dasgupta gets the Freedom of London

Newham Council Chair Dr Rohit K Dasgupta has received the Freedom of the City of

London for services to higher education and local politics. He was elected as the Council Chair and First Citizen of Newham in May 2025. www.instagram.com/rohitkdasgupta

Maker Club sessions restart

UEL Maker Club Take Over sessions will start again on 2 February from 5pm to 8pm at the Maker Space in Royal Docks Centre for Sustainability University Way, E16 2RD, providing a space for learning, innovation, and community connection throughout the year. www.uel.ac.uk

By Neandra Etienne



SOMETHING'S BREWING



Phil Mellows discovers some of the radical moves underway to save our hard-hit pubs



Image ©Newham Council

Pubs were once an unchanging feature of our streets. Solid, reliable places where they sold the same kind of beer to the same kind of people, where you could always find a friendly face – and occasionally a friendly fight.

Well, perhaps that's not true, it's just the way that pubs appear in our shared mythology, like *EastEnders*. Yet it's hard not to notice that the pub landscape is changing fast these

days. There are permanent closures, of course, but there is also renewal. Pubs are changing, adapting to new challenges, different customer behaviours.

Many were built, on a large scale, during the 19th Century when demand was high for beer and somewhere warm to sit. These spaces continue to cost money, in rent, in investment, in décor and furnishings, in staffing and so on. The challenge is how to work that space to maximum advantage, to

get people to fill it and pay money over the bar.

With costs rising fast, those parts of the day, or the week, when there are no customers – and a lot of licensees are choosing to open shorter hours – are a drain that endangers the business.

Entertainments and events might draw people in during the quiet times, but that itself costs money. What we're now beginning to see are more radical approaches (see Page 19 for example).

At the end of last year, Newham Council gave the go-ahead for the restoration of the Old Spotted Dog in Forest Gate, the Borough's oldest building that's not a church, which closed in 2004.

This is great news, but it's not going to be just a pub. The site will also include a hotel and flats – which will subsidise a smaller pub operation, preserving only the parts of architectural value.

Over in Stratford, there are plans to revive the Builders Arms, which closed in 2020, as part of a vast complex of student accommodation. Again, the vision is much broader than a pub.

And on a smaller scale, the Britannia in Plaistow Grove is due to reopen with flats above providing a steady income.

Each of these schemes recognises that we still need pubs. And thought has gone into how a pub might be sustainable within a bigger plan for the space. Hopefully this will help to make sure we don't lose them again.

Get ready for a year of West Ham Park events

BY LYNDSAY JONES

Friends of West Ham Park

As we get into 2026, the Friends of West Ham Park are planning our programme of community events, as well as continuing to work behind the scenes on issues that affect the future management of the park.

ParkFest 25 was a great success, and we will be building on that with ParkFest 26 on Sunday 12 July. Expect local bands, stalls, a soft play area and plenty of food.

The Community Vegetable Garden will be open for visits during ParkFest. Gardening sessions open to all are held on Tuesdays 10.00–12.00, and Wednesdays 14.00–16.00. Occasional Saturday sessions will be



advertised on the garden gate and in our social media.

Walking for Health takes place every Wednesday at 11.00, meet by the Bandstand. These walks are led by Friends members, and are a great way to get some exercise, at your own pace, and meet other people.

Everyone welcome, don't worry if you are a bit slow or have some mobility issues, we are there to help.

Newham's Biggest Leaf Pile is planned for Sunday 15 November and Park in the Dark for Friday 4 December.

Keep a look out for notices on the Park Gates and in our social media as we continue to make plans. Our social pages can be found here: facebook.com/FriendsOfWestHamPark and instagram.com/fwhp_e9

People with any great ideas for events that we might be able to run, or who would like to get involved with our friendly group, please get in touch, you will be very welcome! Email us on hello@friendsofwesthampark.co.uk



Good reads in Newham

The Newham Bookshop in Barking Road tells us these are the top sellers this month:

• **Edge of Darkness**

By Vaseem Khan (local author)

• **Gloria Don't speak**

By Lucy Apps (local author)

• **The Persians**

By Sanam Mahloudji

• **One Day**

By Michael Rosen

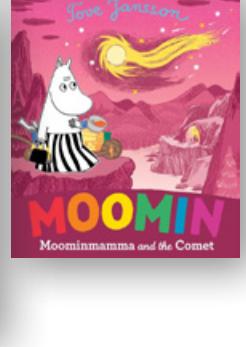
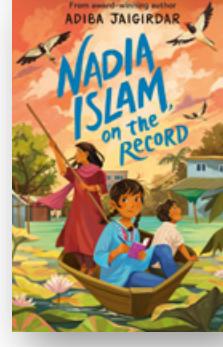
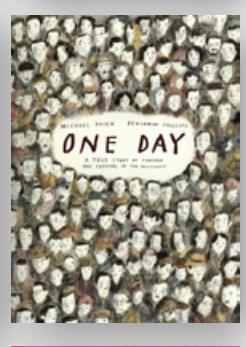
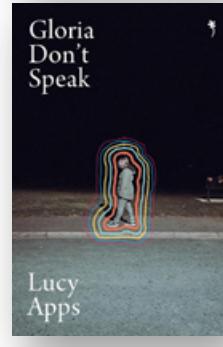
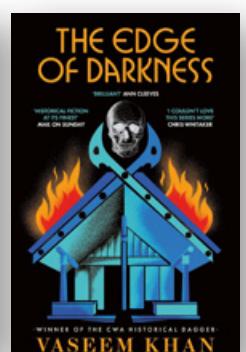
• **Moominmamma and the Comet**

By Tove Jansson

• **Nadia Islam, on the Record**

By Adiba Jaigirdar

– Compiled by David Ceen, Newham Bookshop



For full details or to request a copy, visit: newhambooks.co.uk

Inspirational Zara, aged 16, is a parliamentary leader

SHOFA MIAH

As Newham's Member of Youth Parliament (MYP), Zara Achhodi (pictured below) has become one of the Borough's most influential and visionary young leaders. Over the past year, we have seen MYP Zara represent young people with confidence, empathy, and purpose.

Whether speaking in the House of Commons about the housing crisis or engaging with activists, artists, and CEOs at the WOW Day of the Girl event, she carries a leadership presence defined by intention and authentic connection.

Yet behind the public role is a young woman still exploring who she is. MYP Zara expresses this clearly in her own words, "Am I just the Youth MP for Newham, or am I a young person still learning who she is?"

At 16, while preparing for her GCSEs, she navigates identity, culture, faith, and expectation as a young South Asian Muslim girl. She shared that she was elected with "hope, ambition and perhaps too much eagerness," and that stepping into leadership came with pressures she did not always know how to manage.

"For a long time," she said, "I asked myself whether I was defined by my achievements, or allowed to simply be human, to be seen, heard, and valued."

Representing 84,000 young people meant long hours, emotional labour, and the weight of trying to meet everyone's expectations. MYP Zara described how this affected her. "My journey has never been simple. Campaigning while trying to please everyone pushed me to my limits. I fell into a hole of constantly proving that I was 'enough,' until I realised, I

had lost myself completely."

What supported her through that period was her community. Zara speaks with deep appreciation for her teachers, Miss Teles, Miss Arshad, Mr Jeyyakumar and Mrs Feast, whose guidance never wavered. Her friends, Aisha, Zarah, and Amani, and family. They offered truth, stability and belonging. Within her family, her father's steady listening and her Dada's (Grandfather) affirmations reminded her that her worth was never tied to her title!

Her purpose as a leader is shaped by what she has lived and witnessed. As she puts it, "My manifesto was shaped by both pain and purpose. I saw how easily people are forgotten by systems meant to protect them." Her work includes volunteering at food banks, fundraising for UNICEF, Women's Aid and Forgotten Women, and supporting youth pro-

grammes empowering more than 1,000 young people to challenge injustice.

MYP Zara's faith was central to her rebuilding.

As a proud Muslim, she reflects: "My faith brought me back. Islam taught me that leadership is rooted in morals, compassion, and intention - not perfection."

Ramadan 2024 helped her reconnect with herself and reminded her that real change begins internally.

Through the Newham Youth Council, she continues advocating for equality, wellbeing, youth spaces, education, and community safety. She encourages young people aged 11-18 to get involved, reminding them that leadership is a journey, not a performance.

Her final reflection is one that will resonate with many: "I am still learning who I am, but I know now - I am enough. Rebuilding is okay."



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SPORTS SHORTS

Compiled by Neandra Etienne

Senegalese West Ham United player **El Hadji Malick Diouf** played in the Africa Cup of Nations (AFCON) final against Morocco National Football team on 18 January. Senegal won the AFCON final in extra time.

Nigeria National Football team, also known as the Super Eagles, won the bronze medal after their 4-2 win on penalties against Egypt on 17 January. Nigerian Fulham FC players Alexander Iwobi, who took a winning penalty, and Calvin Bassey both grew up in Newham.

West Ham United are scheduled to play Burton Albion FC in the Emirates FA Cup fourth round on 14 February.

West Ham United Women are through to the fifth round of the Adobe Women's FA Cup after their 3-0 win against Newcastle United on 16 January. They are scheduled to play Brighton and Hove Albion on 22 February whufc.com



El Hadji Malick Diouf
©West Ham



CCFC Women's first team ©Nick Davidson

Rio Ngumoha, from Newham, started for Liverpool in the FA Cup 3rd round on 12 January. Liverpool FC will play Brighton in the Emirates FA Cup fourth round on 14 February.

[@rio_ngumoha](https://www.instagram.com/@rio_ngumoha)

Young athletes can apply for the **GLL Sport Foundation** GSF Awards 2026.

For nearly two decades the sports programme has supported athletes with the cost of training, travel and equipment.

Applications close on 20 February gllsportfoundation.org

Stepping Stone Sports Academy offer a free first session every Monday

- Ages 4-6, 6.30pm - 7.20pm
- Ages 7-9, 7.30pm - 8.20pm

Brampton Primary School Sports Hall

steppingstonesportsacademy.com

Clapton CFC women's first team are scheduled to play a home game against Actonians Res

8 February, Old Spotted Dog Ground claptonfc.co.uk

For a limited time, parents of **A1 Judo Club** current members are invited to train free for one full month starting from 6 February. This offer is for new adult members only.

Adult beginner classes are Fridays 6-7 pm at East Ham Leisure Centre.



©A1 Judo Club

Email: info@ajjudoclub.com
ajjudo.com

London Lions are scheduled to take part in the Abu Dhabi Qualifying Tournament of the adidas NextGen Euro-League under-18 competition from 27 February to 1 March. thelondonlions.com



©Niners Winter Showcase

Dates and times of all games and events are subject to change. Please email your sports news, games and fixtures to neandra.etienne@newhamvoices.co.uk

Online piracy and abuse alert

New findings from the University of East London show that online risk-taking is widespread among young people, with behaviours such as digital piracy, accessing risky online spaces or engaging with harmful content having a high potential to lead to more serious offenses.

Interviews with convicted cybercriminals in the UK and Switzerland revealed a wide age range and different offence types, from hacking and digital fraud to sexual offences carried out online. Nearly half, 47 percent, reported engaging in illegal online behaviour early on, with many describing a gradual progression into more serious cybercrime, including identity theft, financial fraud and revenge pornography.

Several interviewees described how cybercrime emerged gradually, without a clear sense of crossing a legal boundary. One participant explained how early experimentation felt harmless at the time:

The research also reveals clear gender differences in online offending, with males more likely overall to engage in cybercrime and high-risk online behaviour.

Fight for Peace Boxer Crowned London Champion

KAYLA MARIE TROY

Newham has a new champion to celebrate as *Fight for Peace* boxer Hashim Hassan was crowned London Intermediate Champion following a standout performance at the regional championships.

Competing against the capital's top talent, Hashim displayed skill, discipline and composure from the opening bell, securing a dominant victory and another major title for team *Fight for Peace*. His performance reflected years of hard work, com-



Hashim Hassan ©Kayla Marie Troy

mitment and belief, supported by dedicated coaches and mentors.

The North Woolwich charity uses boxing and martial arts to help young people become champions in the ring and in life.

Hashim will now represent the club at the London Elite Championships in March, showcasing Newham talent on a wider stage.

Fight for Peace provides free boxing and martial arts for seven-25 year olds.

For more information visit: fightforpeace.net

Win double a welcome boost for Hammers



Pressure on head coach eases but West Ham are still in a relegation dogfight, says Mickey Ambrose



The Hammers ended their seemingly eternal 70-day wait for a Premier League victory on 17 January against Spurs and days later followed it up with an emphatic 3-1 win over Sunderland.

Suddenly, the pressure is eased on Hammers head coach Nuno Espírito Santo who endured a barren ten-match, winless run stretching back to early-November.

The turnaround is particularly sweet for Callum Wilson, the 33-year-old striker who spent the build-up to the crucial London derby against Spurs being linked with moves to Everton, Burnley, Celtic and even Saudi Arabia.

But the summer-signing from Newcastle United stepped from the bench in north London and provided a dramatic stoppage-time winner at the Tottenham Hotspur Stadium. It was his fifth goal of the campaign.

"It feels good to win in the last minute because we have been on the other side of that

so many times this season," said Nuno following the vital 2-1 victory over his former club that reduced the deficit between wobbling West Ham – sitting precariously in 18th-spot – and Premier League safety.

With Taty Castellanos – the recent £25million signing from Lazio – making way for free-transfer Wilson as the fourth official signalled six minutes of additional time at Spurs, the newly-arrived substitute was thwarted by Pedro Porro's point-blank block.

But when Scarles floated over the consequent corner, Wilson was not to be denied a second time and, reacting first in a goalmouth scramble, he bundled home the winner before surviving an anxious VAR review for a suspected offside.

We need all the players and all the options that we can possibly have," insisted Nuno cryptically side-stepping all lines of questioning surrounding Wilson's future. "We're still in the process of rebalancing the side so that we

can be stronger for the final games," concluded Nuno. "We are still in the fight and we have to believe."

The Hammers also finally overcame Queens Park Rangers (2-1) in extra-time in the FA Cup third-round the following week, the Portuguese boss made five changes and switched formation, too, as Alphonse Areola, Ollie Scarles, Tomás Soucek, Mateus Fernandes and Pablo each took their places in a 4-4-2 starting line-up.

"The win over QPR gave us all smiles and there had been a good atmosphere in training all week," revealed Nuno, who saw the Hammers take an interval lead through Crysencio Summerville's deflected 18-yarder on the quarter-hour mark.

"We started well and played some good football in the first-half. We had control and enjoyed some good combinations going forward. Our game plan was based on the way we'd finished last week and we felt our energy up-front can cause teams problems".

And as they showed in the win over Sunderland, the Hammers seem to have found some backbone. Sunderland were blown away by three goals inside the first 43 minutes at the London Stadium and were being ripped apart by Jarrod Bowen and Crysencio Summerville on the flanks both getting on the scoresheet, Summerville with a bullet header following a superb cross from Bowen, and Bowen calmly slotted home a penalty after Scarles was fouled in the box.

The intensity of West Ham's play was a joy to watch with

Bowen irrepressible on the right and Summerville provided further inspiration with that third goal in as many games. As for Mateus Fernandes, his youthful brilliance in midfield suggested that it would not be that disastrous if West Ham allow Lucas Paqueta to join Flamengo, especially if Fernandes scores like he did against Sunderland, a brilliant shot from 30 yards.

Let's hope they keep it up and climb out of relegation ASAP.

Mickey Ambrose is a former Chelsea and Charlton player who lives in Stratford.

Desi Pub heads to Newham



CHARLES BLAKE

Road) to get a Desi Pub.

Such a pub could be opening up at 344 Katherine Road, which already has a great tradition of being a community hub. Some refurbishment is already taking place there to aid negotiations on a re-launch.

Newham Council's Community Ambassador for the area, Shiraz Tohid, said he can't wait to see it happen and would be the first to 'pull a pint' to celebrate although as a Muslim he'd then have to hand the pint over to someone else! That's the humour and goodwill Newham people share, and a joyous vision of a tolerant multicultural neighbourhood....a cultural fusion....and best of luck many are saying.

Oh yes, the word Desi? Well that relates to 'home' 'belonging' a term used mainly by Indians of South Asian heritage'. It's that simple.

Cheers!

Creatives can help stop battery fires in East London

East London Waste Authority (ELWA) is inviting local artists, makers, and creative organisations to submit proposals for a bold, engaging, and educational public installation. The aim of the installation will be to 'power up' East London residents and encourage them to recycle their small electricals and batteries at dedicated recycling points, and never put them in any bin at home.

Lithium-ion batteries hidden inside small electrical devices, such as vapes, ear pods, e-scooters, or children's toys, can set fire when



compacted in waste collection vehicles and facilities. These kinds of fires have been increasing nationwide, prompting an urgent need

for more awareness of the issue amongst the public.

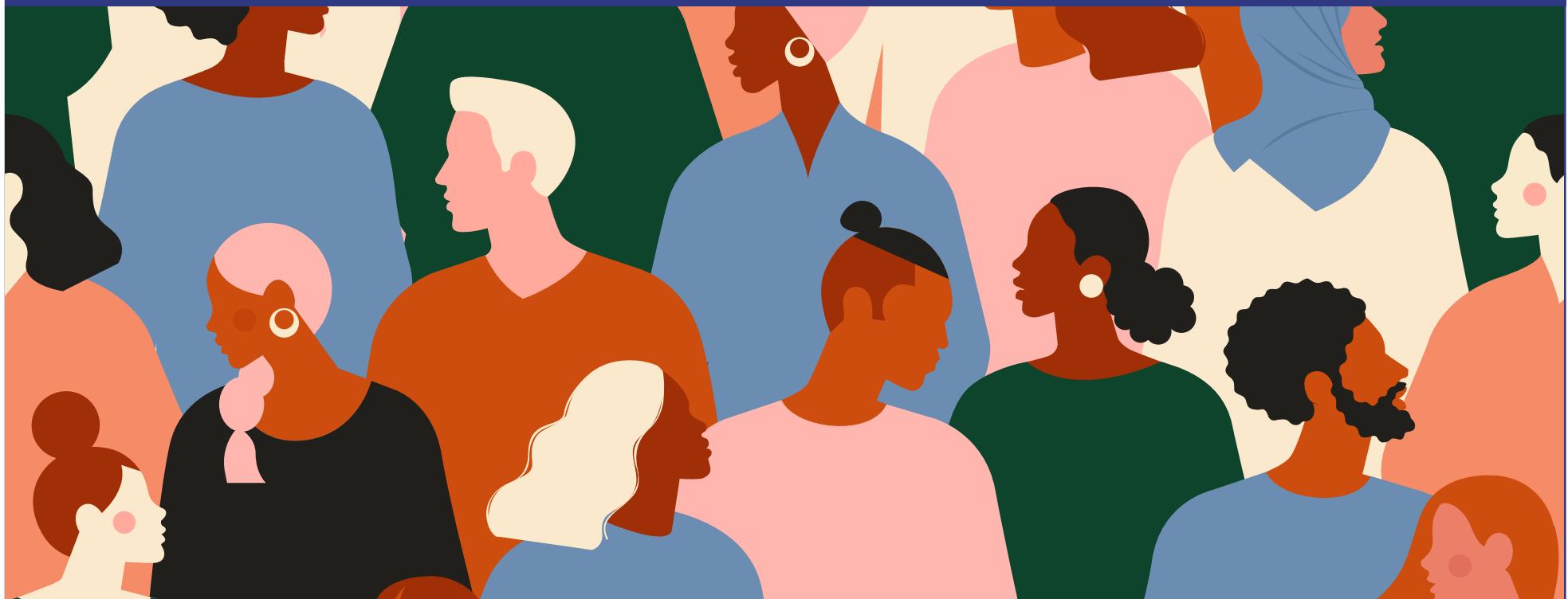
The selected designer will be commissioned by ELWA to create an eye-catching installation, which will tour the boroughs of Barking and Dagenham, Havering, Newham and Redbridge in 2026.

The new initiative sees ELWA join forces with Recycle Your Electricals "Stop Battery Fires" campaign

To learn more visit eastlondonwaste.gov.uk/batteries

The deadline for proposals is 9am on Monday 9 February.

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