

# SAVE STRATFORD CIRCUS!

In new talks between Equity and the council, Newham's Mayor, Rokhsana Fiaz:

- Refused to guarantee Council funding for professional and adult community arts.
  - Ignored proposals for a Trade Union and community conference to determine local cultural programming and funding.
- But possible concessions might have been won and we need to keep up the pressure on Newham Council
- Save Stratford Circus - stop the council cutting professional shows and jobs. Professional arts and youth services for everyone, don't cut one to pay for the other - fully fund culture for all.



## JOIN THE PROTEST: SATURDAY 16th October, 1PM THEATRE SQUARE, STRATFORD E15 1BN

### Background: Newham Council wants to cut access to art and culture

Theatre Square in Stratford is a vibrant cultural hub for east London. We believe the local community deserves the best when it comes to both professional shows and youth services.

Newham Council disagrees. Under cover of the pandemic lockdown, the mayor used legal threats to force out and close down the nationally recognised and funded arts centre at Stratford Circus.

The council has planned to tender for a new management to run it primarily as a "Youth Zone" – without the remit or funding for its previous lively range of professional arts.

This attack actually lost the borough £300,000 a year in national funding from Arts Council England - £300,000 that could have been spent on jobs and culture for a community badly hit by a pandemic.

Does the mayor think residents and workers in Newham don't deserve their own cultural spaces?

### Youth arts services need professional arts support

We all support more youth services in Newham. The real question is why the council has taken this long to invest in them!

But Stratford Circus already ran youth drama. The council could have built a youth centre in an empty retail unit with full access to Stratford Circus facilities.

Instead, the mayor is robbing Peter to pay Paul: destroying local arts jobs to (re)create a youth arts service. This is short-sighted to say the least.

As well as reducing overall employment in the borough, it robs young people of the future jobs this service would prepare them for. It also shrinks the professional talent pool that

could help run the service.

The Circus has room for both. We say Newham Council must commit to full-spectrum professional arts alongside the youth service.

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Undemocratic attacks - but steps forward

The council claims it carried out a 'consultation' before cutting Stratford Circus, but we have uncovered no evidence of that. No users or community groups knew anything about it and the council refused to answer their emails!

Meanwhile, the council did not seek any input from Equity, the performing arts union. After Equity finally got talks and explained our demands, the council broke its promise of continuing discussions - until the Mayor recently gave into our sustained pressure. The second round of talks in September were organised in a manner which was controlling and intimidating. The Mayor refused to guarantee annual funding, looking to rely instead on support provided and grants won by the future Youth Zone operator.

The Council continued to ignore our proposals for a local democratic conference to discuss arts programming.

The Mayor did concede, however, more willingness to engage with displaced organisations to find suitable venues for them - and a wider adult and professional arts provision 'attracting and facilitating professional performances and other cultural activity in the building'. This, on paper, appears to be a step forward in our campaign since the council's proposals up to this point have actually reduced arts provision especially for Newham's working class and ethnically and culturally diverse community.

Meanwhile: Blue Sky Actors - a professional theatre company for adult artists with learning disabilities who were displaced have now found a temporary home at Apple Cart Theatre in E13 plus emergency funding and will soon be back working.

This is despite the Council offering unsuitable venues. Blue Sky Actors would still like to return to their home in Stratford Circus.

#### The council can afford it!

This is a council which has actually increased its 'usable' reserves during the pandemic - to a whopping £616 million. Its balance sheet exceeds £1 billion. (Newham Audit Committee Report, 30 June 2021, para 5.1.)

Newham has just pledged £4.5 million for new youth workers. This is overdue and welcome - and shows that money is available.

We say: Newham Council must act as guarantor for fully funded professional arts alongside youth services in Theatre Square. Use reserves or borrowing if you have to - and send the bill to the U-turn Tory government!

#### Can't arts organisations move elsewhere, though?

Stratford Circus is a specially designed and outfitted facility which has entertained and educated the community for decades. Considerable capital and skilled labour have gone into establishing the Circus.

For some moving really means closing.

We say the council has a duty to defend these community investments for future generations. Arts workers have a right to make a living, and local audiences of all ages have the right to professional entertainment and community arts services.

#### What we are urging the council to do

- Newham Council owns the Stratford Circus building and is tendering for a new permanent

## WHAT CAN I DO TO HELP?

### 1 Join the protest on 16th October

Come to Theatre Square, Stratford E15 1BN, at 1pm on Saturday 16th October Transport:

- Stratford station (Central, DLR, Overground, rail, buses)
- Stratford multi-storey car park (E15 1BB, £2.30/hr)
- Stratford Westfield car parks (E20 1EJ, £3/hr)

### 2 Sign the petition.

Visit [change.org/p/save-stratford-circus](https://change.org/p/save-stratford-circus)

### 3 Send messages of protest.

Email Mayor Rokhsana Fiaz on [mayor@newham.gov.uk](mailto:mayor@newham.gov.uk), and 'Brighter Futures' lead Carleene Lee-Phakoe on [carleene.lee-phakoe@newham.gov.uk](mailto:carleene.lee-phakoe@newham.gov.uk)

management. It should make a fully functioning arts centre with a broad spectrum of professional, community and youth arts part of the official bid requirements. The council's recent documents show movement in this direction but we need to more details.

- Stop the abuse of democracy! Support a conference of local Trade Unions and community groups to determine a democratic local arts policy.

- It also has £616 million in 'usable' reserves. It should act as guarantor for full annual funding of the Circus not just the planned £270k.
- All the local arts projects displaced by the attack on Stratford Circus must also be rehomed - at the Circus where possible. We will hold the Mayor to her commitment to re-engage with rehoming Blue Sky Actors.

## WHO WE ARE

This leaflet was produced by the North and East London General Branch of Equity, the trade union for performing arts professionals.

We are seeking contact with any and all users of Stratford Circus, other trade unionists, community campaigners, and anyone interested, to join the struggle to save Stratford circus.

Following a decade of austerity and a devastating pandemic, Equity says a new model is needed for a fully inclusive arts industry with increased funding and public ownership and democratic oversight by communities and practitioners. Read more: search 'Performance for All' and 'Four Pillar Plan' at [equity.org.uk](http://equity.org.uk).

To contact us, email [north-east-london-general@equitybranches.org.uk](mailto:north-east-london-general@equitybranches.org.uk)