

STEPHEN TIMMS MP

Working hard for East Ham



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Out and About (04/11/10)

Roshonara Choudhry of East Ham stabbed me twice in my surgery at Beckton Globe on 14 May. Now her trial is over – she has been sentenced to life imprisonment, minimum term 15 years – I simply wanted to express thanks for all the support I have received in Newham over the past six months.

My assistant Andrew Bazeley bravely and cleverly prised the knife out of Roshonara's hand. Security guard Faisal Butt wrestled her away. Community safety officer Lisa Jones – joking that she had left Newham Parks Constabulary for a quieter life – laid me on the floor and stopped the bleeding. I have had a lot of support from local police, co-ordinated by PC Tracy Gunn, and officers at Scotland Yard have kept me well informed of developments. Nigel Tai, who operated a couple of hours after the stabbing, and nursing staff at London Hospital took very good care of me.

About 2000 people contacted me in the days after the attack. I was particularly grateful to those – Christians, Muslims and others – who told me they were praying for me, for a speedy recovery. Many have stopped in the street to wish me well. I have felt very well supported right across the community. To everyone in Newham, thank you.

From Monday to Thursday, parliamentary work keeps me in Westminster. I spend almost every Friday in Newham. Fridays are always interesting.

On Friday 22 October I visited Anchor House, opposite Rathbone Market in Canning Town. It used to be a seaman's hostel. When I married in Plaistow in 1986, it was the only place we could find locally for visiting relatives to stay. Today it provides housing and work training for people without homes, and is starting to win prestigious awards for its achievements. The Director is Keith Fennett, a senior officer at Newham Council when I was Council Leader. I have just agreed to be a patron.

Next that day I met Leezac Robinson, founder of "The People's Republic Film Society" (TPRFS). He is campaigning for the old North Woolwich railway station to become a community arts centre. The station was a great railway museum – opened by the Queen Mother just after I was elected a Councillor in 1984 – but it closed through lack of funds. It is a very attractive building, and I support Leezac's campaign.

That evening, I went to a meeting of over 100 people from local mosques in Katherine Road, convened by the Indian Muslim Federation. The last Government set up the British Hajj delegation. This comprised a dozen UK doctors – volunteers whose expenses were met by the Government – plus a team of diplomats, supporting 25,000 British pilgrims in Mecca for the annual pilgrimage. The delegation was led by Lord Adam Patel, who was at the meeting. He reported that the new Government has slashed the delegation. This year, no UK doctors will go. I promised to write to the Foreign Office to pass on the meeting's deep concern.

Another interesting Friday in Newham.