

Barking & Dagenham

01

SINCE 2022 08

02

LOCAL LANDSCAPE 09

03

ELECTORAL PROSPECTS 11

- ↗ BARKING TOWN 12
- ↗ BARKING RIVERSIDE 13
- ↗ BECONTREE 14
- ↗ NORTH DAGENHAM 15
- ↗ SOUTH DAGENHAM 16

04

WHAT TO WATCH FOR 17

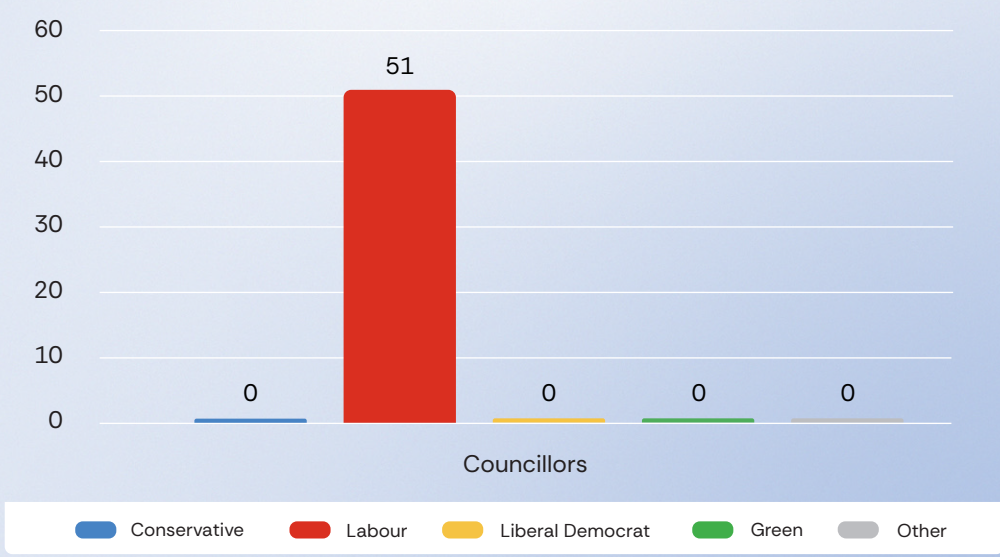
Since 2022

Labour Defence

Labour won every single seat on Barking & Dagenham Council in 2022. No change there. The party had done the same in every set of full council elections since 2010. This time, though, Reform UK fancies its chance of knocking holes in the defences of London’s longest-established “one party state”. The Greens are sniffing opportunities, too. How far might either of them get?

Reform’s optimism relies on precedent and demographics: the extreme far-Right British National Party sent a nasty shock through the whole political system in 2006 when it won 12 seats in Barking & Dagenham and formed the opposition group, and in 2014, Nigel Farage’s UK Independence Party at its strongest won no seats but was runner-up in several places. Population trends have worked against nationalist politics, but Reform’s is a bigger and broader proposition than what has come before.

Barking & Dagenham Council result May 2022 | Total seats: 51



By-elections since May 2022

| | | |
|-------------------|---------------------|-----------------------|
| 31 MARCH 2023 | HEATH | LAB HOLD |
| 15 SEPTEMBER 2023 | MAYESBROOK | LAB HOLD |
| 28 NOVEMBER 2024 | VILLAGE (TWO SEATS) | LAB HOLD (BOTH SEATS) |
| 28 NOVEMBER 2024 | NORTHBURY | LAB HOLD |
| 20 FEBRUARY 2025 | WHALEBONE | LAB HOLD |
| 31 JULY 2025 | THAMES VIEW | LAB HOLD |

Labour has held all seven seats contested in by-elections since 2022, but with some big vote share losses. Reform has fought only the most recent of them, finishing ahead of the Tories but behind the Greens. However, for the full elections the party is running a full slate of candidates in all 19 wards.

In September, the Greens picked up three defectors from the originally 51-strong full house Labour group and will hope to make in-roads among the borough’s newbuild communities and Muslim residents. But they and Reform may lack Labour’s ground level organisation and campaigner numbers. The incumbent party, under new leadership since autumn 2024, says it has maintained the revived community contacts that helped it see off the BNP. There will surely be Labour losses this time. But how many?

Local landscape

It is hard to overstate the scale and effects of social change in this outer east London borough in recent decades as old industries have gone, new people have moved in and the council has grappled with enormous challenges. Unease and resentment combined in familiar, depressing ways to give the BNP its Town Hall presence, the task made easier by the staleness and complacency of the Labour establishment of that time.

Recovery followed. Fuelled from 2014 by the energy and vision of its leader, Darren Rodwell, ambitious housing, education and industrial investment programmes have unfolded in a part of London that in many ways resembled places elsewhere in the country labelled “left behind”. Rodwell stepped down soon after the general election, his hopes of representing Barking as an MP ruined at the eleventh hour by local and media enemies and by malicious allegations which turned out to be unfounded.

Rodwell’s successor and political contemporary, Dominic Twomey, inherited a very long-term work in progress. Barking & Dagenham’s population has grown rapidly – by nearly 18 per cent between the last two Censuses, 10 percent higher than the London average. Its White British percentage dropped from 58.3 to 44.9 per cent during the same period while that of its Asian community, most of it Muslim, rose from 15.9 per cent to 25.9. Meanwhile, new homes have continued to be built, especially in

and around Barking, schools have improved and a film production studio has come on stream. Twomey has not, though, inherited the monolithic electoral security Labour has enjoyed for the past 16 years.

The party locally seems cautiously optimistic about its chances, though it sees anger and apathy as twin dangers for as long as Labour misfires nationally. Over 80,000 votes were cast in the borough in May 2022. Nearly 80 per cent of them – 64,034, to be exact – were for Labour. The incumbents calculate that there might be around 12,000 Reform UK admirers in Barking & Dagenham, most of them switching away from the Conservatives, some of them from Labour and some of them residents who usually don’t vote but might be stirred by Nigel Farage’s anti-establishment pitch, as occurred with the EU referendum.

If that assessment is correct, given that each elector can vote for two or three candidates, depending on the ward, Reform could attract around 30,000 votes in the borough. Should the party achieve that, and Labour’s share falls by about 50 per cent, the new councillor line-up could look very different from that of 2022.

The size of any enduring latent support for a nationalist offer of some kind will be a key determinant of how high the Reform tide rises. Turnout in Barking & Dagenham in 2022 was, at just 24.5 per cent, the lowest in all of

London. In 2014, with UKIP in contention, it was 36.5 per cent. For the 2016 EU Referendum it was 63.8 per cent and the borough voted 62 per cent in favour of breaking ties with Europe.

But Reform will have to do more than just appear on ballot papers. The party’s local chairman is Ben Suter, a former Conservative who was one of his now-former party’s candidates in the Village ward by-election as recently as November 2024.

The full Reform slate is strikingly, and perhaps counter-intuitively, ethnically and culturally diverse. Close to half of its 51 candidates do not have White British backgrounds, with people of Romanian heritage well-represented. Before Suter’s defection and elevation, Reform’s leading light in Barking & Dagenham was Lewis Holmes, who contested last summer’s by-election in Thames View ward. Labour defended the seat there successfully and the Greens came a good second, indicating that there is potential for them in some of Barking & Dagenham’s newer communities.

Significantly, Holmes’s third place put him ahead of the experienced local Conservative Andrew Boff, a sometimes-prominent member of the London Assembly. That was a bad omen for the Tories, but the run-up to the by-election had some unwelcome longer-term implications for both Holmes and Reform.

Local landscape

It emerged that Holmes had shared social media posts by so-called Tommy Robinson and other extreme far-Right figures and agreed with Great Yarmouth MP Rupert Lowe that a “credible alternative” to Reform, from which he had lately been removed, was needed. He had also described Barking as “a nasty, disgusting place surrounded by Pakistani rape gangs”. Holmes’s own departure from Reform eventually followed, and he has lately posed for a photo in front of a street poster of Lowe promoting his new political party Restore Britain, which advocates “re-migration” and mass deportations.

Holmes will be seeking election in the Eastbrook & Rush Green ward, running as an Independent. Restore isn’t standing council candidates anywhere outside Great Yarmouth, but Holmes is plainly animated by its spirit. One of his opponents will be Suter. Eastbrook & Rush Green is a Reform target. Now there’s a result to look out for.

Reform’s local campaign message is not about immigration, as its national one frequently is. Rather, it is that Labour has neglected communities and that it represents, in Suter’s words, “our last chance to save our borough” and “take back” its future. The party will also depend on the national government’s unpopularity, any perceptions that a lack of challenge has made the local Labour administration complacent and a healthy turnout


by the borough’s still substantial older, white, less highly educated population.

Labour will hope that a combination of traditional loyalties, shifting demographics, its campaign “ground

war” – it says its teams knock on 800 doors a month – will neutralise much of this, but is also mindful that the Greens’ stance on Gaza will strike a chord with some of the roughly 25 per cent of the borough’s 230,000 residents who are Muslim, as it has elsewhere.

Barking & Dagenham Council elections since 2002

| Year | Con | Lab | LD | UKIP/Ref | Green | Other |
|------|-----|-----|----|----------|-------|-------|
| 2002 | 2 | 42 | 3 | - | - | 4 |
| 2006 | 1 | 38 | - | - | - | 12 |
| 2010 | - | 51 | - | - | - | - |
| 2014 | - | 51 | - | - | - | - |
| 2018 | - | 51 | - | - | - | - |
| 2022 | - | 51 | - | - | - | - |

 BARKING & DAGENHAM

Electoral prospects

Despite its reputation improving of late, Barking & Dagenham hasn't fully shaken off its image as run down and reactionary. This conceals its growing geographical and social variety and the progress that has been made, all of which will influence its political complexion. To get the measure of the contests in individual wards, it helps to sub-divide them into five groups.

Barking Town

14 seats

These wards are the “old town” of Barking in the west of the borough, adjoining East Ham and Ilford. Abbey and Northbury are the most central and have inner-London and commuting demographics. They have continued to become more ethnically diverse, but their pace of change is slower than in the rest of the borough because they were already multi-ethnic.

| Ward-level results (2022) | Councillors 2022 | | | Vote share percentage 2022 | | | | |
|---------------------------|------------------|-----|-----|----------------------------|------|------|-------|-------|
| | 1 | 2 | 3 | Con | Lab | LD | Green | Other |
| Abbey | Lab | Lab | x | 14.9 | 65.9 | - | 19.2 | - |
| Eastbury | Lab | Lab | Lab | 25.7 | 74.3 | - | - | - |
| Gascoigne | Lab | Lab | Lab | 17.5 | 73.0 | - | - | 9.5 |
| Longbridge | Lab | Lab | Lab | 32.8 | 56.6 | 10.6 | - | - |
| Northbury | Lab | Lab | Lab | 17.9 | 69.9 | - | 12.2 | - |

The town wards in general have a large and established Muslim population ranging from 24 per cent in Eastbury to 52 per cent in Longbridge. Eastbury and Gascoigne have large social housing sectors while Northbury has been augmented by new mixed high-density development.

This urban quality meant the town of Barking was the weakest area for the BNP in 2006. They did not contest most of the wards there and won only one seat. That was in Eastbury, which straddles the border between Barking and Becontree. It is likely to be the weakest part of the borough for Reform too. Labour held Northbury quite convincingly against split opposition in the November 2024 by-election there.

Barking Riverside

5 seats

This area is separated from the rest of Barking by the A13 trunk road and is of more recent vintage. Both wards contain parts of the 1950s Thames View estate and the recent and continuing Barking Riverside development. Since 2022 it has been served by the new Barking Riverside station at the end of the Suffragette Overground line.

| Ward-level results (2022) | Councillors 2022 | | | Vote share percentage 2022 | | | | |
|---------------------------|------------------|-----|-----|----------------------------|------|----|-------|-------|
| | 1 | 2 | 3 | Con | Lab | LD | Green | Other |
| Barking Riverside | Lab | Lab | Lab | 22.1 | 61.9 | - | - | 16.0 |
| Thames View | Lab | Lab | x | 26.0 | 65.8 | - | - | 8.2 |

Riverside is a working-class multi-ethnic community with a large African representation and an infusion of younger people. Thames View is the most social-renting ward in the borough (44 per cent). Barking Riverside has the most degree-holders (also 44 per cent).

Both the Greens and Reform did well in the July 2025 Thames View by-election, although Labour held on with a much-reduced vote share. It may be a three-cornered battle in May 2026.

Becontree

13 seats

These wards are mostly in the Barking constituency for parliamentary purposes, although several are split between that seat and Dagenham & Rainham next-door. They are part of the huge and historic interwar Becontree public housing development, making their heritage different from that of Barking town. The wards went through rapid demographic transitions between the Censuses of 2011 and 2021. The 26.1 percentage point fall in the proportion of the population in Mayesbrook ticking the White British box was the greatest of any in London.

On the basis of the 2022 results this is an extremely safe Labour area. The party secured a vote share of over 70 per cent against feeble opposition that did not field a full slate in any ward. Six seats were effectively guaranteed even as nominations closed.

But in 2006, this was the section of the borough where the BNP was strongest. All eight candidates they put

| Ward-level results (2022) | Councillors 2022 | | | Vote share percentage 2022 | | | | |
|---------------------------|------------------|-----|-----|----------------------------|------|----|-------|-------|
| | 1 | 2 | 3 | Con | Lab | LD | Green | Other |
| Alibon | Lab | Lab | x | 29.4 | 70.6 | - | - | - |
| Becontree | Lab | Lab | x | 23.9 | 76.1 | - | - | - |
| Goresbrook | Lab | Lab | Lab | 29.7 | 70.3 | - | - | - |
| Mayesbrook | Lab | Lab | Lab | 30.7 | 69.3 | - | - | - |
| Parsloes | Lab | Lab | Lab | 28.4 | 71.6 | - | - | - |

forward were elected and received an average over 40 per cent of the votes where they stood (which did not include Becontree ward). Turnout was in the low twenties four years ago. But in 2006 when the BNP broke through it was 39 per cent and in UKIP's peak year of 2014 it was 35 per cent. Subsequent demographic change might have reduced it, but the contrasts nonetheless suggest a dormant market for a nationalist Right party.

In 2014, Parsloes was UKIP's best ward in the borough (38 per cent) followed by Alibon (37 per cent). In the 2021 election for Mayor of London, Conservative Shaun Bailey carried four of the five wards, with Becontree again the exception. Reform will surely have hopes in these wards and Labour's campaigning efforts will have to be running in top gear.

North Dagenham

13 seats

This area is the north of the Becontree estate plus some adjoining places – Chadwell Heath and the rather smaller Rush Green – which are to some extent departures from generalisations about Dagenham by being historically owner-occupied or middle-class.

| Ward-level results (2022) | Councillors 2022 | | | Vote share percentage 2022 | | | | |
|---------------------------|------------------|-----|-----|----------------------------|------|----|-------|-------|
| | 1 | 2 | 3 | Con | Lab | LD | Green | Other |
| Chadwell Heath | Lab | Lab | Lab | 29.1 | 70.9 | - | - | - |
| Eastbrook & Rush Green | Lab | Lab | x | 35.0 | 52.5 | - | - | 12.5 |
| Heath | Lab | Lab | x | 26.4 | 73.6 | - | - | - |
| Valence | Lab | Lab | Lab | 28.6 | 71.4 | - | - | - |
| Whalebone | Lab | Lab | Lab | 30.6 | 69.4 | - | - | - |

Rush Green is basically a part of Romford, which mostly lies across the border in Havering. Chadwell Heath and Whalebone are on the Elizabeth line and becoming more attractive to commuters. The proportion of White British residents crashed by around 20 percentage points between 2011 and 2021, although it remains

comparatively high and Eastbrook & Rush Green is the only ward in the borough where it was over 50 per cent in 2021.

Other than there, the Labour majorities in 2022 were mountainous, although this was often because of lack of

competition rather than monolithic support. In 2006, the Labour line held reasonably well in Chadwell Heath but a BNP councillor was elected in Eastbrook and two got in in Valence. In the Bailey versus Khan mayoral election of 2021, all of the margins were close except for Eastbrook, where Bailey was well ahead.

South Dagenham

6 seats

This section contains the original village of Dagenham, part of the Becontree estate and the industrial area down to Dagenham Dock. While Labour majorities have traditionally been large, if on low turnouts, there is clearly potential for a challenge from the Right if serious campaigning takes place.

| Ward-level results (2022) | Councillors 2022 | | | Vote share percentage 2022 | | | | |
|---------------------------|------------------|-----|-----|----------------------------|------|----|-------|-------|
| | 1 | 2 | 3 | Con | Lab | LD | Green | Other |
| Beam | Lab | Lab | Lab | 33.2 | 66.8 | - | - | - |
| Village | Lab | Lab | Lab | 21.3 | 78.7 | - | - | - |

This was most recently demonstrated in the double by-election in Village ward in November 2024 where, in the absence of a Reform candidate, there was a 21.5 per cent swing to the Conservatives (though splashy swings are not unusual in by-elections in these parts).



BARKING & DAGENHAM

What to watch for

Assuming, perhaps riskily, that Reform won't do any business in Barking (Town or Riverside), they have a big mountain to climb to win the 26 seats they need for a majority. Even so, it is definitely a borough to keep an eye on.