

Croydon

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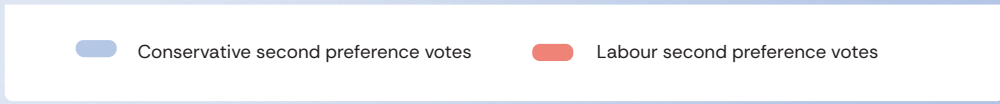
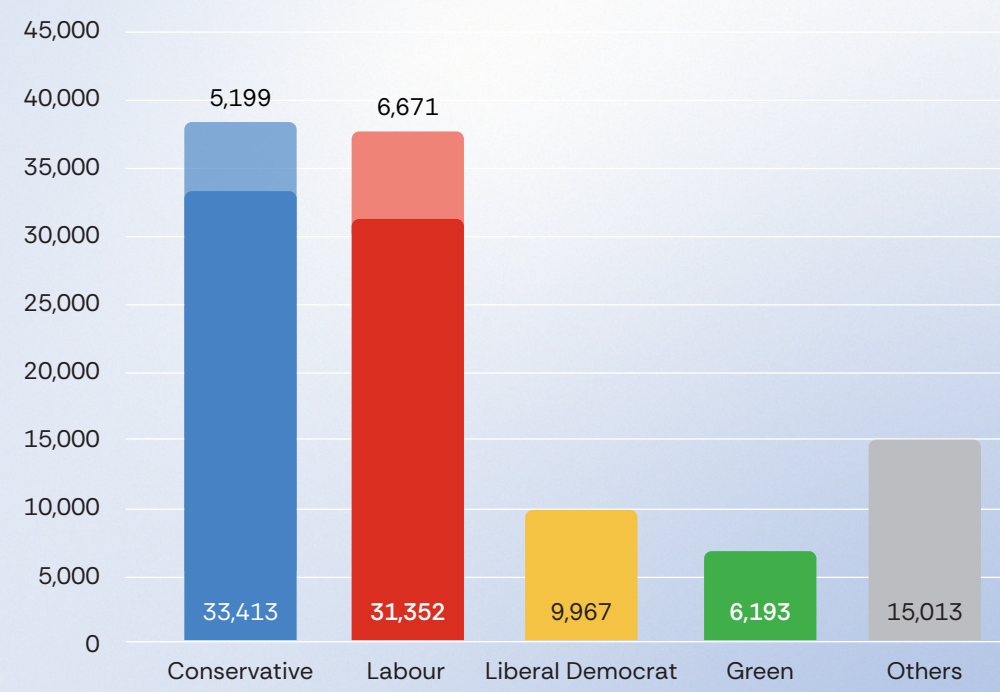
Since 2022

No Overall Control

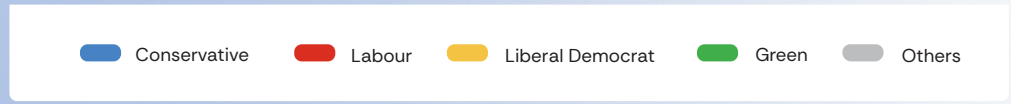
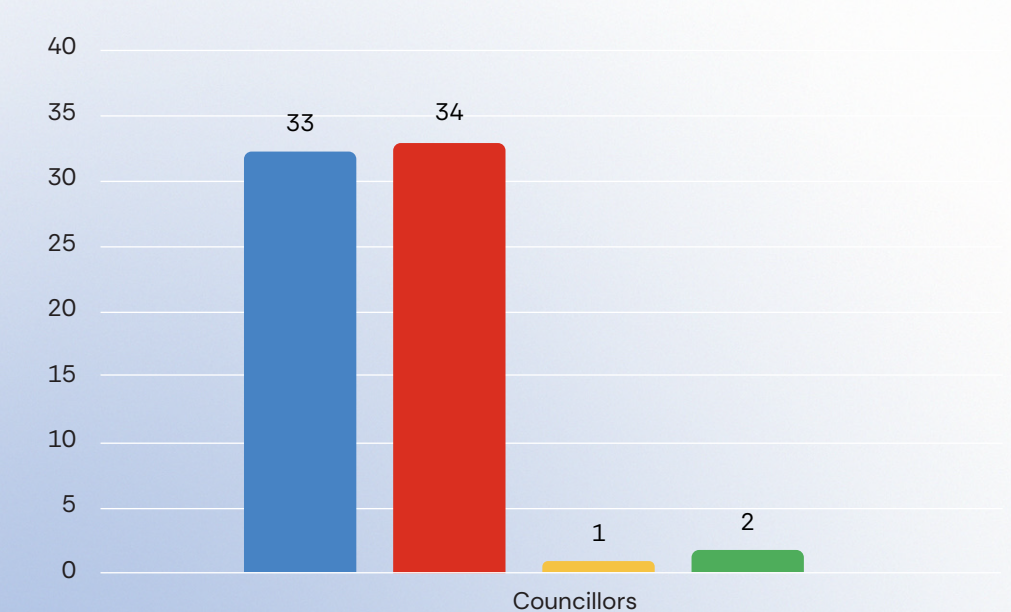
The 2022 Croydon result created flurries of uncertainty. The borough’s inaugural contest for a directly elected Mayor produced a Conservative victor. And yet, despite a 5.1 per cent swing against it, Labour won the largest number of the 70 council seats – 34, one more than the Tories, with the Greens taking two and the Liberal Democrats, one. Who, exactly, would be in charge?

The short and incomplete answer was the Mayor, Jason Perry, who defeated his Labour rival by a very slender margin – less than one per cent after second preferences narrowed an already narrow gap. The Mayor and Cabinet local government model places executive power in those posts. In the words of Croydon’s constitution, the Mayor “is the primary decision maker”. He also gets a vote as a councillor, levelling things up a bit in the Town Hall chamber. Even so, Perry has been leading a Conservative minority administration under No Overall Control.

Croydon Mayoral election result 2022



Croydon Council result May 2022 | Total seats: 70



His win followed a period of financial crisis at the council under Labour which saw it forced to seek extra help from national government. Those problems have not gone away – Perry too has needed a Whitehall bail out.

There have been four by-elections in Croydon this term. The first, just to add to the confusion, was brought about by Perry’s mayoral win: having won a council seat on the same day, his new top job meant he had to resign from it immediately.

A Tory hold swiftly ensued and there have been two more such results since, along with one hold for Labour two months before the general election. There have been no defections. But any appearance of political stability despite the untidy outcome of 2022 could be shattered by the next set of results.

By-elections since May 2022

07 JULY 2022	SOUTH CROYDON	CON HOLD
03 NOVEMBER 2022	SELSDON VALE & FORESTDALE	CON HOLD
02 MAY 2024	PARK HILL & WHITGIFT	CON HOLD
02 MAY 2024	WOODSIDE	LAB HOLD

Local landscape

The spatial geography of Croydon ranges from built-up urban areas, through shades of deep suburbia, to outlying municipal estates, to wary Surrey fringe redoubts. Its social geography largely reflects this. Croydon strikingly encapsulates a transition from the outer edge of the inner city to village outskirts. It is one of the bigger boroughs geographically, and the biggest of all in population terms, containing around 410,000 people.

Croydon has seen substantial changes to its character and to its image this century. In popular culture it was long associated with the sitcom Terry and June, whose middle-aged protagonists led middle-of-the road lives in Purley. In 1987, at the end of its long run, the show was summarised by a critic as “Macmillanite”.

That comfy image took a knock in 2011. Croydon town centre saw some of the worst of the London Riots, resulting in the destruction by fire of a generations-old furniture store. More recently, it has been associated with a high number of crimes of violence, including some particularly distressing killings of young people.

Croydon Council elections since 2002

Year	Con	Lab	LD	UKIP/Ref	Green	Other
2002	32	37	1	-	-	-
2006	43	27	-	-	-	-
2010	37	33	-	-	-	-
2014	30	40	-	-	-	-
2018	29	41	-	-	-	-
2022	33	34	1	-	2	-

Local landscape

Both Mayor Perry and Sir Sadiq Khan's Violence Reduction Unit have made the parts of the borough most affected a priority for action.

Historically, Croydon has been mostly Tory-run, with Labour not entering the winners' enclosure until 1994. Since then, it's been a swing borough and, in 2022, an inconclusive one in a novel manner.

The borough's financial troubles have remained high profile, and stem from before the pandemic. Blame for them is variously attributed to historic underfunding by central government, the performance of the last Labour administration's wholly-owned private housing company (among other investment ventures), and poor leadership and mismanagement in general. Local dismay brought about the referendum in October 2021 that led to the introduction of the mayoral system.

Extra financial support has been supplied by national government since 2020, including under Perry, who asked the Conservatives for more help in November 2022. Last summer, Labour dispatched commissioners to run the council, replacing the previous "improvement panel", notwithstanding Perry's insistence that its finances were improving and the authority was not "failing". There have been service cuts, sell-offs and a government-approved 15 per cent increase in Council Tax in 2023.

Perry's Labour challenger for the mayoralty is Rowenna Davis, already a councillor, young, energetic and historically of the Blue Labour persuasion, having written a book about it in 2011. Reform will be a factor for Labour and Conservatives alike in this election. So will the Lib Dems and the Greens, both of them hoping to lengthen the little inroads they made in 2022.

The fragmentation of voter loyalties, such a big factor in all of this year's boroughs elections, is of particular relevance to the mayoral contests under the First Past The Post rule. In Croydon, much may depend on whether Perry loses more votes to Reform in the south of the borough than Davis does to the Greens in the north.



Electoral prospects

Croydon has lately leaned towards Labour in the north (where communities secretary Steve Reed has his parliamentary seat) and towards the Conservatives in the larger but less populous Green Belted south (represented in the House of Commons by shadow home secretary Chris Philp). Its mid-section was, for successive general elections, a pivotal marginal.

The 2022 council results map mostly mirrored this divide, but the handful of ward exceptions were significant and seem sure to become more so. Like almost everywhere else in London, Croydon's ward map looks set to get messier.

Norbury and Upper Norwood

7 seats

The northernmost wards of Croydon bordering Lambeth were developed around a ridge of hills. Desirable Victorian villas looked out over London on one side and over Croydon to the Surrey hills on the other. This area, particularly Norbury Park, is still majority owner-occupied without much social renting, but in other ways it is highly diverse.

Ward-level results (2022)	Councillors 2022			Vote share percentage 2022				
	1	2	3	Con	Lab	LD	Green	Other
Crystal Palace & Upper Norwood	Lab	Lab	LD	12.7	35.3	33.0	19.0	-
Norbury & Pollards Hill	Lab	Lab	x	22.2	67.7	-	10.2	-
Norbury Park	Lab	Lab	x	30.0	47.3	9.0	10.4	3.3

The Lib Dems have often been squeezed by Croydon’s two-party politics, but they took a seat in Crystal Palace & Upper Norwood in 2022 and will hope to add the other two this time. The two Norbury wards are more Labour, although Norbury Park could help fulfil the Conservatives’ ambitions for a council majority.

Thornton Heath and north central Croydon

14 seats

The Thornton Heath wards - Bensham Manor, West Thornton and Thornton Heath itself - and the adjacent parts of Croydon town that form Broad Green and Selhurst make up one of the centres of London's black communities.

There has been a southwards drift to these suburbs from inner city Brixton, a trend also seen elsewhere. As a result, the latest Census found Thornton Heath ward to have the highest proportion of Black Caribbean residents anywhere in London at 18 per cent, these forming part of an overall 40 per cent black population. That transition had already happened by 2011, and the 2021 Census found little further change in the area's ethnic composition.

In 1982, the Conservatives won all these wards (except Thornton Heath where they stood aside for Residents' Association candidates). A measure of how things have

Ward-level results (2022)	Councillors 2022			Vote share percentage 2022				
	1	2	3	Con	Lab	LD	Green	Other
Bensham Manor	Lab	Lab	Lab	16.3	48.9	-	11.7	23.1
Broad Green	Lab	Lab	Lab	22.8	54.0	12.7	10.5	-
Selhurst	Lab	Lab	x	16.5	49.5	12.3	13.3	8.4
Thornton Heath	Lab	Lab	Lab	14.6	42.7	13.1	11.5	18.1
West Thornton	Lab	Lab	Lab	23.5	56.5	-	13.1	6.9

changed is that even in 2006, the best Tory year this century, they formed a solid Labour block.

Labour's vote share fell sharply between 2018 and 2022, reflecting local issues and a trend that has seen the party shed support in its most diverse London strongholds. That said, it is hard to see where any

alternative party can break through without recruiting an already well-known local figure as a candidate. And the two-party battle for the Croydon mayoralty may encourage voters to think in a two-party fashion across the board, which would help Labour here.

Downtown Croydon

10 seats

Croydon’s high-rise town centre is in Fairfield ward, which is being redeveloped at high density. Its population increased by over 7,000 between 2011 and 2021. But Croydon town is big enough to have an “inner city” north and west - Broad Green, which is included in the Thornton Heath group of wards above - and Waddon, as well as genteel villa areas.

Ward-level results (2022)	Councillors 2022			Vote share percentage 2022				
	1	2	3	Con	Lab	LD	Green	Other
Fairfield	Green	Lab	Green	19.1	34.7	10.4	35.7	-
Park Hill & Whitgift	Con	x	x	53.7	23.5	9.3	10.6	3.0
South Croydon	Con	Con	Con	40.8	29.4	13.9	13.4	2.6
Waddon	Lab	Con	Lab	29.7	34.3	8.6	10.9	16.5

All the wards are interesting. Fairfield, like Stratford Olympic Park, demonstrated in 2022 that newbuild communities are receptive to Green Party campaigning. Waddon is a perennial and sometimes perverse marginal that flipped from Conservative to Labour in 2014 but where the Tories gained a seat in 2022. Topping the poll, 200 votes above her running mates, was Rowenna Davis.

The other two wards are Conservative but gradually swinging leftwards: the Conservative majority over

Labour fell, unusually for Croydon, between 2018 and 2022 and Labour did well in the May 2024 Park Hill & Whitgift by-election. (That contest was the first as a Lib Dem for well-known local politician Andrew Pelling, who was first elected as a Conservative in 1982 and became a Tory MP from 2005 to 2010 before going Independent and then representing Labour on the council from 2014 until February 2022, when he was barred from running for the party after criticising the council’s Labour leader).

Had it not been for Labour’s local unpopularity in Croydon, social change might have delivered them one of the seats in South Croydon ward. This is potentially another Croydon ward where the general tide is defied. Veteran (since 2002) councillor Maria Gatland is standing down. Her political CV is unusual: she was a member of the Provisional IRA in the early 1970s and but later joined the Conservatives.

Addiscombe and South Norwood

11 seats

This is the block of inner suburbs just east and north east of Croydon town centre, built alongside the railway line from East Croydon to London Bridge and served by London trams. To the north, at South Norwood and Woodside, they blend into the Thornton Heath area and have a large black population. At Addiscombe East, there is a transition to the wealthier suburbs around Shirley.

Ward-level results (2022)	Councillors 2022			Vote share percentage 2022				
	1	2	3	Con	Lab	LD	Green	Other
Addiscombe East	Con	Lab	x	41.2	36.5	11.9	10.4	-
Addiscombe West	Lab	Lab	Lab	25.5	44.1	11.5	14.1	4.7
South Norwood	Lab	Lab	Lab	14.7	46.8	10.3	13.7	14.5
Woodside	Lab	Lab	Lab	18.5	51.1	11.1	13.5	5.9

Politically, these have been Labour wards for a while, although the Conservatives won a majority back in 2006 and the creation of the Addiscombe East ward in 2018 has given them more of a chance – the ward has split its

favours between Labour and Conservative since then. In the four wards as a whole there are fewer of the young graduates and Muslims who often form the basis of an anti-Labour centre-Left vote.

Shirley and Selsdon

9 seats

Shirley and Selsdon are affluent suburbs east of Croydon town centre, largely owner-occupied and white (although there is significant social housing in Shirley). They were safely Conservative in 2022 and the Tories have not been seriously challenged there, although Labour did get 38 per cent in Shirley North in 2018 and Shirley borders on areas of Bromley which have been swinging to the Left.

Ward-level results (2022)	Councillors 2022			Vote share percentage 2022				
	1	2	3	Con	Lab	LD	Green	Other
Selsdon & Addington Village	Con	Con	x	57.1	23.1	7.7	7.2	4.8
Selsdon Vale & Forestdale	Con	Con	x	67.4	16.5	-	16.1	-
Shirley North	Con	Con	Con	51.0	27.5	11.7	9.7	-
Shirley South	Con	Con	x	49.5	25.4	9.3	15.8	-

Selsdon is known, to historians and older voters, for a Conservative Shadow Cabinet meeting in 1970 that shifted to a more right-wing agenda, and its two wards – Selsdon & Addington Village and Selsdon Vale & Forestdale – would be happy with that. Whether that means they will support Reform this time remains to be seen.

New Addington

4 seats

New Addington sits apart from the rest of Croydon, a large council-built estate which is effectively a small town in its own right. Construction began in the 1930s but was interrupted by the war. Most of the development was by Croydon Council, although in many ways, including politically, New Addington resembles London County Council “out-estates” like those in Hainault and Harold Hill.

Ward-level results (2022)	Councillors 2022			Vote share percentage 2022				
	1	2	3	Con	Lab	LD	Green	Other
New Addington North	Lab	Con	x	43.6	46.5	-	10.0	-
New Addington South	Con	Con	x	49.8	39.9	-	10.3	-

The settlement lies at the end of one of the branches of the tram network. It is still largely social rented – 61 per cent in North (the fifth highest share in London) and 40 per cent in South. It has become more ethnically diverse since its days as a white working-class enclave.

New Addington was historically Labour. It was the only Croydon ward the party won in 1982 and both wards were still loyal at Labour’s recent low point in 2006. But the Tories won a seat on higher turnout in 2010 and three out of four in 2022.

As well as Labour support, there is a strain of populist nationalism in the area’s electoral history (a quarter of the vote in 2006 was for the BNP) and it was bedecked with flags in autumn 2025. Low turnout in 2022 suggests the potential for Reform to mobilise previous non-voters. It is one of that party’s more obvious target areas in all of London.

Purley and Coulsdon

15 seats

Purley and Coulsdon have long histories of being safely Conservative at all levels of election, and the Tories won a majority in all wards in both 2018 and 2022. The Lib Dems have challenged somewhat in Old Coulsdon – they won a seat there in 2002 – but the Tories have still prevailed. In the 2022 elections Sanderstead returned the second-highest Conservative share of the vote anywhere in London, runner-up only to Royal Hospital ward in Chelsea.

These are affluent and attractive suburbs, owner-occupied and more managerial than professional. The White British proportion of the population fell considerably between 2011 and 2021 (the 16 per cent fall in Coulsdon Town was the largest in Croydon) but this is not incompatible with remaining safely Tory.

Ward-level results (2022)	Councillors 2022			Vote share percentage 2022				
	1	2	3	Con	Lab	LD	Green	Other
Coulsdon Town	Con	Con	Con	51.8	18.0	20.7	9.5	-
Kenley	Con	Con	x	59.4	12.4	17.6	10.5	-
Old Coulsdon	Con	Con	x	53.2	6.0	34.5	6.3	-
Purley & Woodcote	Con	Con	Con	59.6	19.1	7.6	5.7	8.1
Purley Oaks & Riddlesdown	Con	Con	x	61.7	24.0	7.3	7.0	-
Sanderstead	Con	Con	Con	68.5	10.8	11.8	8.9	-



What to watch for

Croydon's Conservatives must hope that the electorate will be patient with them, rather than reversing 2022's swing in their favour. Their path to a council majority looks tricky, but so does Labour's, given the likelihood of losses to the Lib Dems, Greens and Reform and the limited scope for gains from the Conservatives. It might be easier for Labour to win the poisoned financial chalice of the mayoralty.