

Hackney

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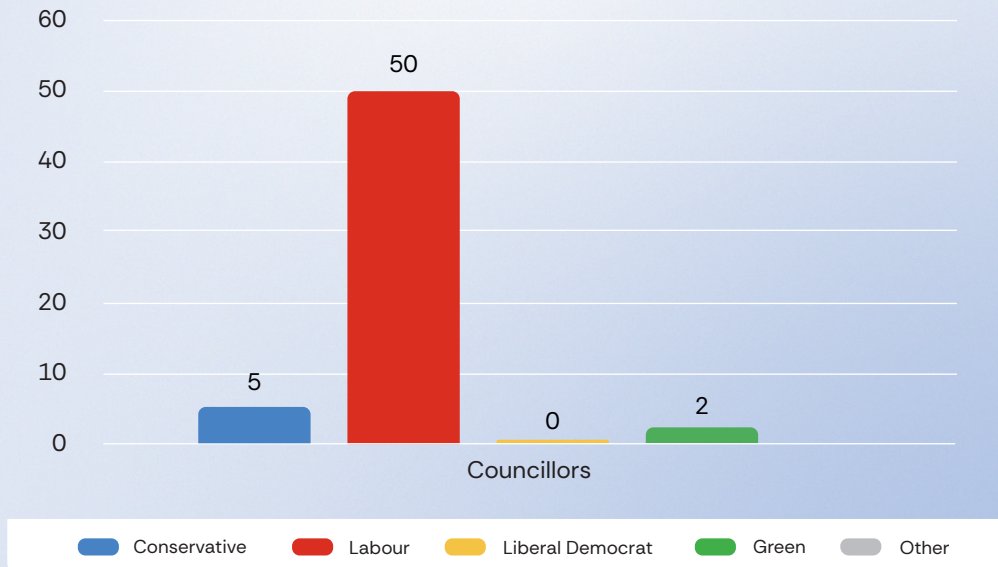
Since 2022

Labour Defence

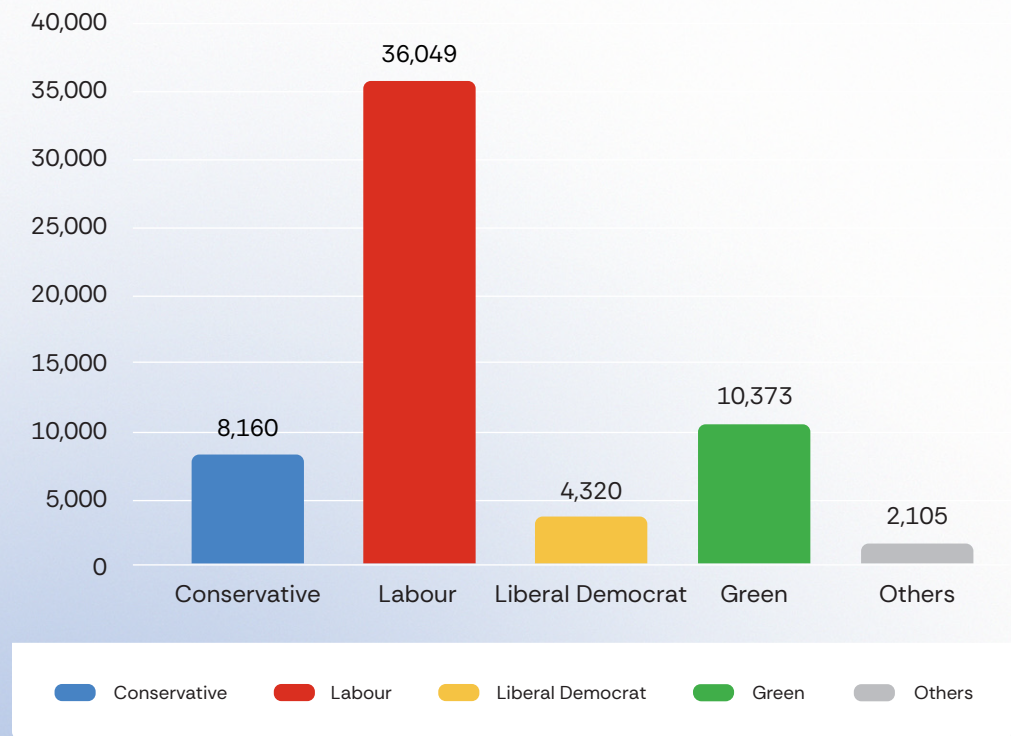
Hackney has been a Labour stronghold since today's boroughs were invented, except for mishaps in 1968, when it went Conservative, and 1998, when it went to No Overall Control. Throughout this century it has been domination as usual, with the party amassing huge majorities, including four years ago.

Labour has also won the local mayoralty every time it's been contested, starting from 2002. Their candidate romped home four years ago, taking 59.1 per cent of first preference votes under the Supplementary Vote system and therefore making second preferences beside the point.

Hackney Council result May 2022 | Total seats: 57



Hackney mayoral election result 2022



This time could be very different. Although Labour has successfully defended six seats in ward by-elections in the past four years, and although one of its two losses (to a Conservative) arose amid very specific local circumstances, the other loss – incurred after the general election in 2024 – reflected the growing popularity in the borough of the Greens.

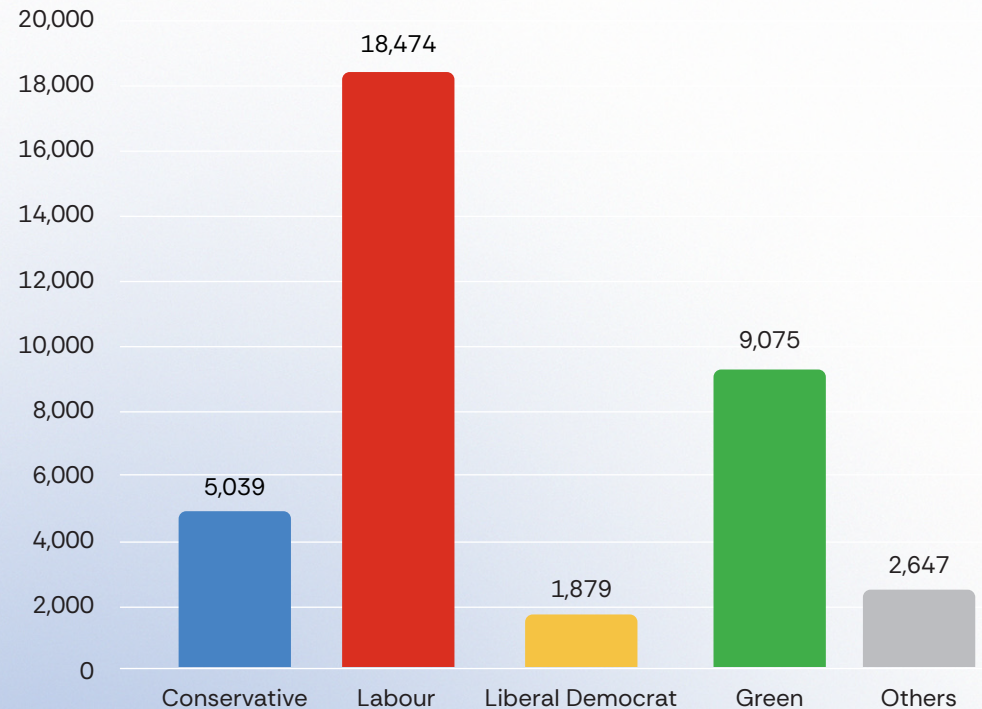
By-elections since May 2022

07 JULY 2022	DE BEAUVOIR	LAB HOLD
18 JANUARY 2024	CAZENOVE	CON HOLD
02 MAY 2024	DE BEAUVOIR	LAB HOLD
02 MAY 2024	HOXTON EAST AND SHOREDITCH	LAB HOLD
13 JUNE 2024	HOXTON WEST	LAB HOLD
04 JULY 2024	CAZENOVE	LAB HOLD
12 SEPTEMBER 2024	LONDON FIELDS	LAB HOLD
12 SEPTEMBER 2024	STOKE NEWINGTON	GREEN GAIN FROM LAB

Before that, in October 2023, a low-turnout mayoral by-election saw Labour’s Caroline Woodley hold with ease under the newly-imposed First Past The Post system, though there was a significant swing in favour of Green candidate Zoë Garbett, who had also run in 2022 and is doing so again this time.

Labour’s councillor numbers have also been depleted by defections. In May 2024, three broke away to form what is now called the Hackney Independent Socialist Collective (HISC) group. In March, two deselected councillors left Labour too, one to sit as an Independent, the other to join the Greens. In all, therefore, Labour is down from 50 councillors in May 2022 to 43 now. Meanwhile, the Conservatives have gone up to six and the Greens to four.

Hackney mayoral by-election November 2023



It is no surprise that Hackney is the Greens’ top target for 2026. Garbett already has a council seat and is a member of the London Assembly, where she sits alongside the party’s national leader – and fellow Hackney resident – Zack Polanski. An electoral alliance with the HISC has been established and a doorstep ground war has long been underway. The Greens are upbeat insurgents, though Labour’s local roots run deep. Hackney will reveal how high in London the Green star has risen.

Local landscape

Hackney's late 20th Century association with crime and decline was already being rivalled at the time as affluence spread eastwards across the border with Islington. Comedian Alexei Sayle had been doing sketches about Stoke Newington since the early 1980s, mocking middle-class radicals for knitting their own yoghurt. Next-door Dalston followed suit, the word "fashionable" becoming almost an unofficial prefix.

Something similar occurred at the borough's southern tip, where Shoreditch meets the Square Mile. An area emptied of its old industries after being pummelled in the Blitz filled up with "City fringe" bars and restaurants, media and communications firms and development hybrids of refurbishments and newbuilds. Next-door Hoxton was described by Charles Booth in 1902 as populated by "a considerable admixture of the very poor and vicious". In the 1970s it was synonymous with National Front skinheads. Not anymore.

But there are other Hackneys too. Its relative poverty rate is mid-table in London terms at 28 per cent, but that encompasses no fewer than 45 per cent of its children. Its housing tenure breakdown hasn't changed much of late, with more than 40 per cent of its dwellings for social rent and about a quarter privately owned.

That said, the proportion of its housing that is owner-occupied went up fractionally between the Censuses

of 2011 and 2021, against the London trend, despite market prices continuing to rise: first-time buyers pay an average of over £550,000, private renters more than £2,500 per month.

With a population that has grown past the quarter of a million mark, Hackney is the third most densely populated local authority area in London and in England as a whole (Tower Hamlets and Islington are first and second). However, its population growth has become slower than the London average and that of England, too.

At the same time, its median age went up to 32. A fall in birthrates has contributed to some painful primary school mergers and closures and much political campaigning about housing by the Hackney Left, though demographic change on the age axis will also have been affected by older residents not moving out to the suburbs and beyond in the numbers they once did. For many of its middle-class residents, Hackney has become a nicer place to live since they bought and did up their Victorian terraces in the 1980s and 1990s, when London house prices were a small fraction of what they are now.

Hackney is profoundly multi-ethnic and multi-faith and also pretty atheist. Over 36 per cent told the last Census they have no religion. Close to 31 per cent identified as Christian. Muslims came next on 13.3 per cent (slightly lower than in 2011) followed by Jews (6.7 per cent) who

mostly live in a group of regularly Tory-voting wards in the north of the borough, coinciding with the with famous ultra-orthodox Charedi community, Europe's biggest.

Hackney's population growth has slowed a bit in London terms. Its median age is the capital's second lowest although, at 32, it has got higher. There are a fewer people in their twenties and early thirties than there were, as well as fewer under-10s.

Concern about these demographic shifts has further fuelled anger about gentrification and populist objections to it, passions the Greens are keen to tap into – one of their council candidates has called for an end to all homebuilding in the borough except by the council itself.

Labour took a big jolt in September 2023 when Philip Glanville, its Mayor since 2016, resigned following the emergence of a photograph showing him at a party with a Labour councillor he had earlier learned had been arrested. Woodley won the November mayoral by-election with nearly 50 per cent of the vote, though it was down by 9.5 per cent compared with Glanville's 2022 margin.

The Greens are going big on anger about Gaza, the same issue that inflamed the three HISC councillors, who left Labour saying they could no longer campaign for a party which "nationally refuses to call out the genocide in Gaza".

Local landscape

An electoral pact with the Greens soon took shape. The simultaneous by-elections in the Stoke Newington and London Fields wards in September 2024 saw the Greens making way for a socialist Independent in the latter, and the reverse applying in the former. Labour held London Fields without much trouble, even though the previous incumbent had resigned after being charged with two sexual assaults. But the Greens secured a 19 per cent swing to from them to Labour to win by 308 votes with a 53 per cent share.

The Greens’ deal with the HISC does not come without risks: electoral pacts can be hard to organise even when, like the Liberals and the SDP in 1982, the parties to them broadly agree with each other. And London Labour has already seized on one HISC candidate, a hardcore Corbynite, opining on social media that the Hamas attack on Israel in October 2023 should be understood “as an act of armed resistance, not terrorism”.

Labour has otherwise held on in by-elections, the other exception being in Cazenove ward in January 2024, when a popular local Jewish candidate, Ian Sharer, who had previously been both a Labour and Lib Dem councillor, won easily after Labour’s candidate was embroiled in a trans rights row and disowned by her party. The Greens were a long way back in third, and the same applied in another Cazenove contest six months later.

Hackney Council elections since 2002						
Year	Con	Lab	LD	UKIP/Ref	Green	Other
2002	9	45	3	-	-	-
2006	9	44	3	-	1	-
2010	4	50	3	-	-	-
2014	4	50	3	-	-	-
2018	5	52	-	-	-	-
2022	5	50	-	-	2	-

That time, though, Labour just about hung on with the Tory candidate a close second.

Hackney wards with lots of Jewish Londoners do not look promising for the Greens, though Garbett has reportedly been wooing a community among which

there is frustration with the council over planning rules restricting house extensions. And many wards in the centre and east of the borough could be ready to send the government the proverbial message. The Greens have a lot of ground to make up in Hackney, but it would be rash to rule out big swings in their favour.

 HACKNEY

Electoral prospects

Many of Hackney's wards are similar demographically, and that has been reflected in their political preferences. Labour was absolutely dominant in 2018 and enjoyed large leads over second-placed Greens in 2022, despite some slippage in vote share. But that very uniformity suggests there will be a broad move towards the non-Labour Left. The Greens are standing 50 candidates in alliance with six from the HISC, who include the three ex-Labour incumbents. It is a question of how high the tide rises.

Stamford Hill

8 seats

All Hackney’s Conservative councillors come from this relatively small area, while the party’s vote is derisory in the rest of the borough. The Charedi community is still a minority of the electorate in these wards, but it has high turnout and a tendency to vote on very local and personal grounds. The Conservatives have had strong majorities there in recent elections, although there has been more variety in the past: in the 1980s, legendary community leader Rabbi Pinter sat as a Labour councillor and maintained good relations with Labour figures until he died in 2020.

Ward-level results (2022)	Councillors 2022			Vote share percentage 2022				
	1	2	3	Con	Lab	LD	Green	Other
Cazenove	Lab	Lab	Lab	6.8	45.6	34.7	10.7	2.2
Springfield	Con	Con	Con	58.7	32.5	1.8	7.1	-
Stamford Hill West	Con	Con	x	59.0	34.3	1.8	4.9	-

Cazenove ward is on the edge of Stamford Hill in terms of demographics – 24 per cent Jewish in 2021 – and politically. Labour gained all three seats from the Lib Dems in 2018. The Lib Dems were still not far behind in 2022, but that was due largely a personal vote for Sharer, who was one of their candidates at that time.

was brought about by Woodley stepping down as a councillor for the ward after becoming Mayor. The Tories could not repeat the gain in the second Cazenove by-election, held in July 2024, but they ran Labour close and have a reasonable chance of wins in May. Sharer, still with the Tories, is to defend his seat.

His local popularity was underlined still more strongly by his win as a Tory in the January 2024 by-election, which

Finsbury Park

4 seats

Finsbury Park is one of London’s neighbourhoods, like Highgate, Kilburn and Crystal Palace, that straddles multiple boroughs. Hackney’s section has been included in the Tottenham parliamentary constituency since 2024.

Ward-level results (2022)	Councillors 2022			Vote share percentage 2022				
	1	2	3	Con	Lab	LD	Green	Other
Brownswood	Lab	Lab	x	6.3	59.5	10.5	23.7	-
Woodberry Down	Lab	Lab	x	12.7	65.2	-	22.1	-

The two wards are both highly diverse slices of London of somewhat different characters. Woodberry Down, near Manor House station on the Piccadilly line, is the location of one of London’s largest estate regenerations. This added 3,400 residents to the ward between 2011 and 2021 and the rise is continuing, with the population there becoming more socially mixed.

The Brownswood community is less altered within a compact ward that shares borders with Islington (where Finsbury Park station is located) and Haringey (home of the actual park). It is a mixture of Victorian terraces and more recent blocks. The Greens came close to winning there in 2002, but otherwise Labour has prevailed. Woodberry Down ward was created in 2014, reflecting the near-New Town scale of the redevelopment project there.

Stoke Newington

8 seats

Stoke Newington has always been the most middle-class area of Hackney. The statistics bear this out in terms of education and owner occupation. Its local peculiarity is possibly that both Clissold and Stoke Newington are in the top 10 wards in London for atheism.

Ward-level results (2022)	Councillors 2022			Vote share percentage 2022				
	1	2	3	Con	Lab	LD	Green	Other
Clissold	Lab	Lab	Lab	4.9	47.6	9.7	20.4	17.5
Shacklewell	Lab	Lab	x	8.0	55.1	10.0	19.0	7.9
Stoke Newington	Lab	Lab	Lab	6.7	54.8	10.4	25.0	3.1

Shacklewell is a bit marginal in its affiliation to Stoke Newington or Dalston, but it is in the Hackney North & Stoke Newington parliamentary constituency, so it is grouped here accordingly.

There is clearly potential here for the Greens. They gained a couple of councillors at Labour’s low ebb in 1998 and their September 2024 by-election in Stoke Newington was striking. One of the defectors to the HISC will defend her seat in Clissold in alliance with the Greens.

Dalston

7 seats

Dalston lies west of central Hackney between Hoxton and Stoke Newington on the straight A10 road heading north from the City. It is an urban mosaic of communities.

Central Dalston has a lot of private renters (43 per cent of households) and is the ward with Hackney’s lowest proportion of social tenants (27 per cent) and its highest of graduates (66 per cent). Shacklewell to the north is more working-class, while De Beauvoir in the south west is a “villa” suburb augmented by 1950s council estates. A residents’ association was formed in 1966 and in 1971 the council declared De Beauvoir Town a conservation area. It has been a Low Traffic Neighbourhood for much longer than the term has existed: bollards closed many of its streets to through traffic in the 1970s and it is a

Ward-level results (2022)	Councillors 2022			Vote share percentage 2022				
	1	2	3	Con	Lab	LD	Green	Other
Dalston	Green	Lab	x	-	40.6	5.8	49.9	3.7
De Beauvoir	Lab	Lab	x	-	57.6	13.9	19.0	9.4
London Fields	Lab	Lab	Lab	-	63.0	15.7	21.3	-

sought-after place of quiet urban charm. Although it is part of Hackney, it has an Islington N1 postcode and is part of Emily Thornberry’s Islington South & Finsbury constituency.

Dalston ward elected Garbett at the top of the poll in 2022 and the broader Dalston area will see some of the

key Labour versus Green contests. The Greens should get both Dalston seats this time and, having run Labour close in two by-elections in De Beauvoir (July 2022 and May 2024) they will be hopeful of winning that rather genteel enclave too.

Hoxton

9 seats

The far south of Hackney adjoining the City and Islington may have seen some of the more drastic changes of image of any part of London over the past few decades, but it is not wall-to-wall hipsters: over 40 per cent of households rent from social landlords and there is poverty and deprivation as well as gentrification. Another element to the locality is the student population, which averages 12 per cent across the three wards.

Ward-level results (2022)	Councillors 2022			Vote share percentage 2022				
	1	2	3	Con	Lab	LD	Green	Other
Haggerston	Lab	Lab	Lab	11.6	58.3	-	21.5	8.6
Hoxton East & Shoreditch	Lab	Lab	Lab	9.7	50.6	11.7	14.3	13.7
Hoxton West	Lab	Lab	Lab	16.4	50.6	13.2	15.9	3.9

Labour had comfortable but not overwhelming majorities in 2022 against rather scattered opposition. The southern tip of Hackney has a long history of loyalty to Labour throughout its social changes. The last time

candidates of other parties were elected was in 1998, when the Lib Dems captured Wenlock ward in Hoxton. But it will be tested as never before in 2026.

Central Hackney

12 seats

The core of Hackney has long been one of Labour’s strongest areas within the borough and indeed within inner London. The party polled over 70 per cent here in 2018 and remained dominant in 2022, despite a fall in vote share in Victoria.

Ward-level results (2022)	Councillors 2022			Vote share percentage 2022				
	1	2	3	Con	Lab	LD	Green	Other
Hackney Central	Lab	Lab	Lab	-	68.5	6.7	18.2	6.5
Hackney Wick	Lab	Lab	Lab	7.5	68.9	-	20.6	2.9
Homerton	Lab	Lab	Lab	10.2	66.7	-	23.2	-
Victoria	Lab	Lab	Lab	8.7	54.3	14.9	18.9	3.2

Other than in and around Stamford Hill, the demographic distinctions between Hackney wards can be subtle. They are all multi-ethnic and multi-religious, with a lot of young people and private and social renters.

Two members of the HISC group were elected as Labour councillors here. This is perhaps a sub-region of the borough where their candidates will have the leading role in the pact with the Greens, whose infrastructure is otherwise generally stronger.

Clapton

9 seats

These three wards are separated from central Hackney by the parliamentary boundary, which places them in Diane Abbott’s Hackney North & Stoke Newington constituency.

Two of them, Lea Bridge and King’s Park, more or less comprise Clapton. The third, Hackney Downs, does not contain the eponymous railway station but is a residential neighbourhood around Evering Road and Brooke Road as they weave unevenly between Clapton and Stoke Newington. It has come a long way since the late 1980s when it had a reputation for gangs, drugs and police corruption.

Lea Bridge is a rather middle-class ward, with the second-highest owner-occupation rate in the borough

Ward-level results (2022)	Councillors 2022			Vote share percentage 2022				
	1	2	3	Con	Lab	LD	Green	Other
Hackney Downs	Lab	Lab	Green	4.5	45.6	4.8	39.9	5.3
King’s Park	Lab	Lab	Lab	-	70.9	-	29.1	-
Lea Bridge	Lab	Lab	Lab	6.8	59.0	10.2	24.1	-

(35 per cent) after Stoke Newington. King’s Park stretches to Hackney Marshes and contains the Clapton Park and Kingsmead estates. It is majority social-renting and has the highest black proportion of the population in Hackney (34 per cent).

Hackney Downs elected a Green councillor in 2022, a departure from its previous Labour loyalties.

The Greens came reasonably close in Leabridge ward (as it was then known) in 2006 and will be hoping to challenge again this year. King’s Park has been a very safe Labour ward, to the extent that only the Greens bothered to contest it in 2022, but they are joined by the Conservatives, the Liberal Democrats and Reform this time.



HACKNEY

What to watch for

Hackney is perhaps the marquee contest between Labour and the Greens, heightened by the mayoral election there. In the red corner, a well-entrenched Labour administration that has consolidated under Caroline Woodley after scandals early in the 2022–26 term. In the green corner, a high-profile campaign led by London Assembly member Zoë Garbett hoping for support from a predominantly left-liberal electorate.

If Hackney stays Labour the party will probably confound the worst predictions about its fortunes in other boroughs too.