

# Harrow

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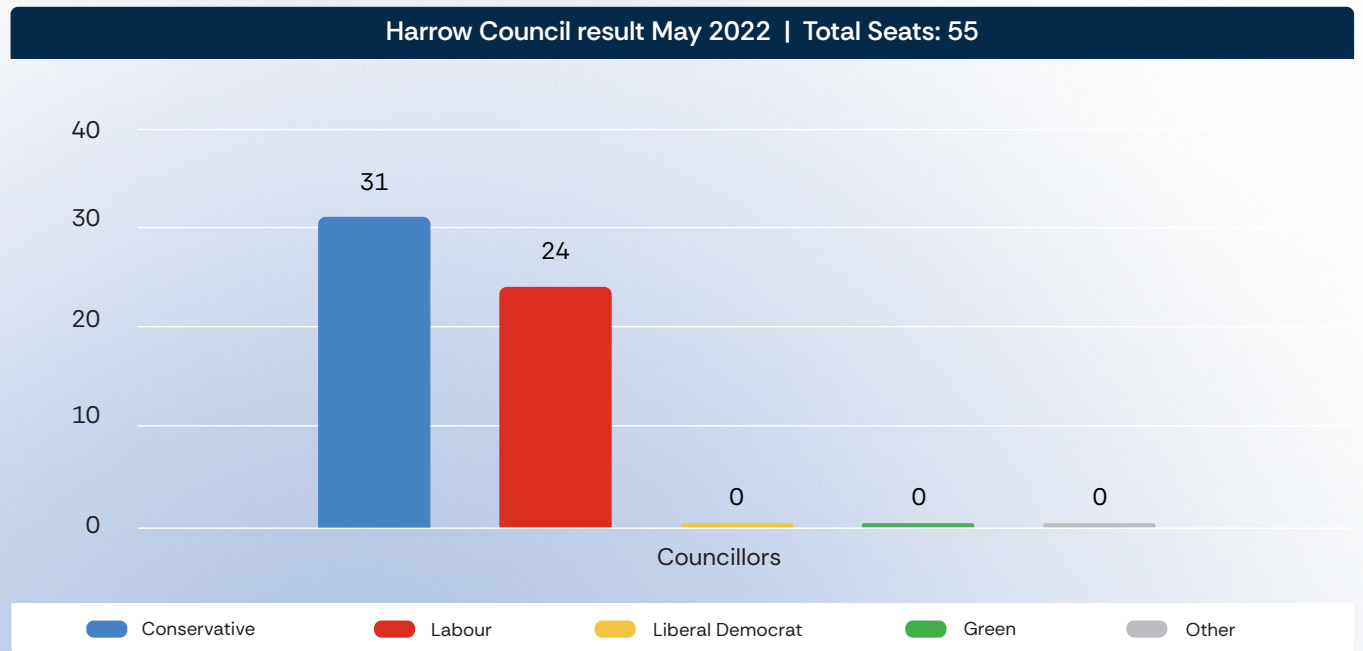
# Since 2022

## Conservative Defence

Labour won three prestigious boroughs from the Conservatives in 2022, but some of the shine was knocked off as the Tories made progress elsewhere. Capturing Harrow gave them their biggest boost and it followed three successive Labour wins in the borough.

Unlike past Harrow administrations, the current one has been stable. The sole councillor to abandon a party group was a Labour member, who had the whip removed in May 2023, and not a single by-election has taken place.

Harrow does not look very conducive to incursions by Reform UK. The Labour vote might be more susceptible to challenges by other parties. All of this points to a likely Tory hold, though Harrow can be unpredictable.



# Local landscape

For a borough that might be thought rather quiet, Harrow has seen some of Greater London's more substantial social changes over the past 15 years. The last Census recorded a population increase of 9.3 per cent since 2011, which was bigger than the London average. Its median age went up to 38, which is nearer to that of England than that of London. The big jump was in the 35 to 49 age bracket, while the number between 20 and 24 fell. According to the latest estimate, there are now close to 275,000 residents of Harrow.

The borough has also seen England's largest decrease in the rate of households owning the home in which they lived, along with Watford and Redbridge. It still stands at 60 per cent, which is high for London, but private renting has increased to 30 per cent. At just 10 per cent, Harrow's social housing stock proportion is among London's lowest.

With its famous public school connection and northern border with Hertfordshire, it is tempting to assume that Harrow is deeply and conventionally English. In fact, it is profoundly multiethnic, multinational and multicultural. Most people there describe themselves as British and a few per cent as English, adding up to about two thirds in all. At the same time, more call themselves Asian than call themselves white.

Harrow Council elections since 2002						
Year	Con	Lab	LD	UKIP/Ref	Green	Other
2002	29	31	3	-	-	-
2006	38	24	1	-	-	-
2010	27	34	1	-	-	-
2014	26	34	1	-	-	1
2018	28	35	-	-	-	2
2022	31	24	-	-	-	-

Roughly a third say they are Christian, around a quarter say they are Hindu and some 16 per cent say they are Muslim. It is the most religiously diverse local authority area in the UK. Fewer than half of Harrow residents who responded to the last Census said they were born in England. Ten percent gave their birthplace as India,

followed by eight per cent who were born in Romania. Kenya and Sri Lanka took fourth and fifth places in this list. Harrow also hosts the country's largest concentration of Tamils.

# Local landscape

These distinctive demographics fill 19.5 square miles of classic Metro-land space, opened up by the Metropolitan Railway – now the London Underground’s Metropolitan line – between the wars. Its principal settlements are Stanmore, terminus of the Jubilee line and home to many Jewish Londoners; the suburban spread of Pinner in the north west next to Hillingdon; Wealdstone, a commercial district at the centre; and, biggest of all, the town of Harrow itself, built at the bottom of the hill from which Harrow-on-the-Hill station takes its name. Nearly three-quarters of Harrow households have access to at least one car.

Conservatives dominated the authority for the first 34 years of its existence. There were two No Overall

Control outcomes during that time, but also a grand-slam, 56-seat, one party state majority in 1968. Not until 1998 did Labour get a chance to boss the place. Then came another wait until 2010, though the administration crumbled before completing its four-year term, enabling Tory Susan Hall to lead a minority replacement for eight months.

Hall took the unusual step of abolishing the post of chief executive, seemingly believing her experience running a hair salon meant she didn’t need such support. Still a councillor for Hatch End ward – and defending it this time – she has since become better known as her party’s defeated candidate for Mayor of London two years ago and now, in her role as the Tory London Assembly group

leader, for her embrace of a strident social media Right-populism.

The council’s current leader is Paul Osborn. Under his leadership, a Local Government Association peer challenge report found Harrow to have developed “fresh impetus and energy” as it moved into new offices and praised it as a “good partner” to local police and the care system and as a champion of a “customer first” approach. Osborn will hope residents are grateful.

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# Electoral prospects

Harrow can be a hard borough to call: Labour did not expect to win it in 2010 and worried unnecessarily about losing it in 2014 and 2018; the Conservative win last time took some by surprise. All that said, the Tories seem to have the more accommodating path forward this time. Having achieved domination in the Harrow East parliamentary seat, they can think about targeting wards in its Labour-held Harrow West neighbour.

# Pinner

8 seats

The three wards in the suburban north-west of Harrow are traditionally the most desirable and high-status part of the borough. They have its highest proportions of professional-managerial workers. In political terms, they have been solidly Conservative for decades. However, the Tory vote share in these wards slid in the 2022 election, even as the party gained control of the borough.

Ward-level results (2022)	Councillors 2022			Vote share percentage 2022				
	1	2	3	Con	Lab	LD	Green	Other
Hatch End	Con	Con	x	47.2	21.9	12.4	12.1	6.4
Pinner	Con	Con	Con	45.1	26.0	15.1	13.9	-
Pinner South	Con	Con	Con	41.3	27.5	15.7	13.6	2.0

They could still afford to lose a bit of support in these wards. Even Pinner South, which saw the smallest winning Conservative distance in 2022, can't really be considered marginal. But in the longer term, the Tory grip on the area is loosening.

The reasons are that these wards are graduate-heavy and have seen Harrow's biggest drops in the White British share of its population. The Hindu presence has increased considerably, and although the prosperous Hindu middle-classes here tend to vote Tory, at the moment they do so by less overwhelming margins than their White British counterparts have done.

# South Harrow

7 seats

South Harrow, the south-west corner of the borough, has, along with the town centre, tended to be one of the more reliable areas for Labour. It adjoins South Ruislip in Hillingdon, which has trended Tory, and Northolt in Ealing, which has stuck with Labour.

Ward-level results (2022)	Councillors 2022			Vote share percentage 2022				
	1	2	3	Con	Lab	LD	Green	Other
Rayners Lane	Lab	Con	x	29.1	36.9	17.0	5.7	11.3
Roxbourne	Lab	Lab	x	31.5	61.1	7.4	-	-
Roxeth	Lab	Lab	Lab	33.9	52.1	-	14.0	-

Roxbourne is Harrow’s “council estate ward” with 31 per cent in social housing. Rayners Lane is Harrow’s most Hindu ward (40 per cent). The area swung to the Conservatives in 2022, though incumbent councillor Krishna Suresh, who is standing again, had a personal

vote which kept one of the Rayners Lane seats with Labour. In the other wards the 2018-22 swing was larger, but Labour’s starting point was stronger so they stayed reasonably safe. A mainly two-party battle will resume in 2026.

# West Harrow

9 seats

The wards around the edge of Harrow town centre are, West Harrow ward aside, marginal territory. The Conservatives won the second seat in the newly created North Harrow ward by only five votes in 2022 and closed the gap in Harrow on the Hill to only 52.

Ward-level results (2022)	Councillors 2022			Vote share percentage 2022				
	1	2	3	Con	Lab	LD	Green	Other
Harrow on the Hill	Lab	Lab	x	38.2	41.4	9.7	10.7	-
Headstone	Lab	Lab	Lab	27.6	38.0	7.7	10.5	16.3
North Harrow	Con	Con	x	42.2	41.3	7.2	9.3	-
West Harrow	Lab	Lab	x	27.8	47.1	11.2	13.9	-

This area shifted heavily towards Labour in the 1990s and 2000s as the demographics changed, but has moved back to competitiveness. Two-party Labour and Conservative politics might survive relatively intact here, as there seem to be no points of entry for other parties.

In a blow to the Conservatives, one of their candidates for North Harrow has been suspended by the party following the discovery that his social media activity has included comments such as urging British-born politicians of South Asian heritage to “go back to Pakistan”.

# Harrow and Wealdstone

10 seats

The core town of Harrow, between the two main railway stations, is more densely built-up and much the most private renting part of the borough. While the Hindu population is large enough to be unusual compared to other parts of London, it is a little smaller in these wards than in others. In two, Marlborough and Wealdstone North, the Muslim proportion is bigger. Greenhill had a 3,700 increase in population in 2011-21, indicating new development.

Ward-level results (2022)	Councillors 2022			Vote share percentage 2022				
	1	2	3	Con	Lab	LD	Green	Other
Greenhill	Lab	Lab	Lab	32.4	40.8	11.2	15.6	-
Marlborough	Lab	Lab	Lab	19.9	41.5	10.2	16.1	12.4
Wealdstone North	Lab	Lab	x	35.9	64.1	-	-	-
Wealdstone South	Lab	Lab	x	37.6	50.3	-	12.1	-

Labour won all the seats in these wards in 2022, but by a less than convincing margin in Greenhill in particular. Only Wealdstone North looked impressive. It could be that a splintered centre-left vote plays more of a role here than in most of Harrow, particularly as these wards are the main focus of activity for Arise Harrow, a local left-wing party endorsed by Jeremy Corbyn and Your Party.

# Stanmore

10 seats

The northern tier of wards in the Harrow East constituency, which is the safest Tory seat in the country on the basis of the 2024 general election result, form the safer Conservative areas within that seat. Stanmore and Canons have large (15-18 per cent) and rather conservative Jewish communities.

These wards were locked down for the Tories in 2018 and previous elections. That was repeated in 2022, despite a change in ethnic composition that was almost as large as in the Pinner wards. These wards might be the most susceptible to Reform, but the Harrow East Tory machine is highly effective and should fight off any challenge.

Ward-level results (2022)	Councillors 2022			Vote share percentage 2022				
	1	2	3	Con	Lab	LD	Green	Other
Belmont	Con	Con	x	56.9	25.9	-	10.3	7.0
Canons	Con	Con	x	61.1	26.4	12.5	-	-
Harrow Weald	Con	Con	Con	55.0	34.2	10.9	-	-
Stanmore	Con	Con	Con	57.6	21.4	9.2	9.4	2.5

# Kenton and Queensbury

11 seats

The south-east of Harrow is primarily interwar Metro-land owner-occupied suburbia. It has a large South Asian, mostly Hindu, community. These wards have a lower proportion of professional and managerial workers than those of the traditionally Tory suburbs to the north and west within the borough, but relatively high proportions of what are called “small employers and own account workers” and of car owners.

Ward-level results (2022)	Councillors 2022			Vote share percentage 2022				
	1	2	3	Con	Lab	LD	Green	Other
Centenary	Con	Con	Con	51.4	35.5	13.1	-	-
Edgware	Con	Con	Lab	47.3	43.1	9.6	-	-
Kenton East	Con	Con	Con	60.3	39.7	-	-	-
Kenton West	Con	Con	x	51.6	40.1	8.3	-	-

Boundary changes muddy the picture a little, but it is clear that the Conservatives’ gains in this corner of the borough were what won them control of Harrow last time. Only one seat changed hands in the rest of the borough (in Rayners Lane ward) but there were six Conservative gains in the Kenton and Queensbury areas.

Representation went from 10 Labour and one Conservative in 2014, to eight Labour and four Conservatives in 2018, to a dramatic 10 Conservatives and just one Labour in 2022. This outcome followed an against-the-trend shift of two seats to the Conservatives in Kenton East in 2018. Local MP Bob Blackman’s wife Nicola Blackman won a seat in Edgware.

The Conservatives seem unlikely to relax their grip on this territory in 2026. It is not very Reform-curious and the machine that has built Harrow East into a Tory fastness, the only constituency where they topped 50 per cent in the 2024 general election, is formidable.



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## What to watch for

The Conservative majority in Harrow is not large. A loss of only four seats would also mean losing control. But the borough is mostly a two-party contest and 2026 is not shaping up to be a good year for Labour. The move of Hindu voters towards the Conservatives has continued since 2022, as shown by the 2024 general election results in Harrow and elsewhere. The borough has sprung surprises before, but a Tory hold looks on the cards.