

Kingston upon Thames

01

SINCE 2022 234

02

LOCAL LANDSCAPE 235

03

ELECTORAL PROSPECTS 237

- ↗ NORTH KINGSTON 238
- ↗ CENTRAL KINGSTON 239
- ↗ MALDEN 240
- ↗ SURBITON 241
- ↗ TOLWORTH 242
- ↗ CHESSINGTON 243

04

WHAT TO WATCH FOR 244

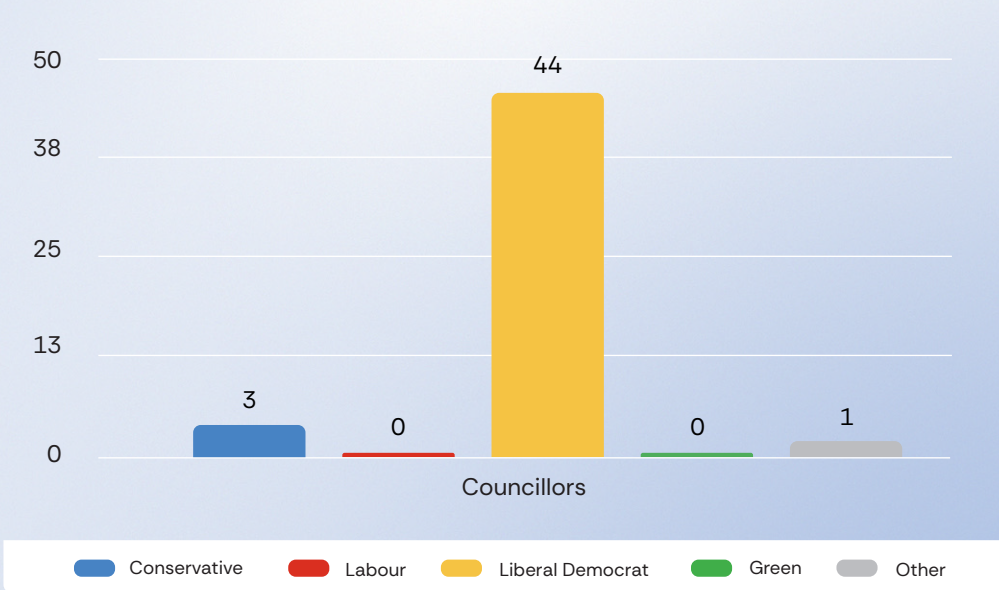
Since 2022

Liberal Democrat Defence

The Conservative retreat here continued in 2022 at a slower rate than it had in 2018, but there wasn't much ground left to lose. It seems amazing that in 2014 the Tories took control of the council from the Liberal Democrats, winning an eight-seat majority. Eight years on, they were reduced to a three-seat opposition as the Lib Dems piled up 41 and a lone Independent made up the numbers.

By November 2023, things had got even worse for the Conservatives: an earlier by-election win for another Independent had been at the Lib Dems' expense, but when one of the Tories' own councillors switched to the Independent cause, they found themselves outnumbered by three to two. The Kingston Independent Residents Group (KIRG) replaced them as Kingston's principal opposition and has remained so.

Kingston upon Thames Council result May 2022 | Total seats: 48



One other councillor, elected as a Lib Dem, left the party in August 2024 and has been sitting as an Independent separately. It means the current party line-up is: Lib Dem 39; KIRG three; Conservatives two; Independents one. Can the big yellow balloon be deflated?

By-elections since May 2022

10 NOVEMBER 2022	GREEN LANE AND ST JAMES	KIRG GAIN FROM LD
04 JULY 2024	HOOK AND CHESSINGTON NORTH	LD HOLD

Local landscape

The Royal Borough Kingston upon Thames, to give its full name, is the oldest of the four royal boroughs in England (two of the other three, Greenwich and Kensington & Chelsea, are in London too). Such a title was first confirmed on the settlement of Kingston – which means royal manor – by King John in 1200. It was confirmed by George V in 1927, by which time the name had been affixed to a local government urban district. In 1965, just after today’s London borough was created, Queen Elizabeth II renewed the royal charter, enabling the word “royal” to be included in its name. Its local authority, though, is called Kingston upon Thames London Borough Council or, in everyday practice just Kingston Council (which is perhaps just as well).

The town of Kingston upon Thames itself is in the north west of the borough, where the river forms its boundary with Richmond. It was built at what, back in the 12th Century, was the next crossing point upstream from London Bridge. A market was established there accordingly. To its east is the town of New Malden, part of which falls into Merton, and to its south lies Surbiton, setting of the 1970s sitcom *The Good Life* (actually filmed in Northwood, Hillingdon), a popular depiction of suburban “dropping out” and bourgeois snobbery.

Kingston upon Thames Council elections since 2002						
Year	Con	Lab	LD	UKIP/Ref	Green	Other
2002	15	3	30	-	-	-
2006	21	2	25	-	-	-
2010	21	-	27	-	-	-
2014	28	2	18	-	-	-
2018	9	-	39	-	-	-
2022	3	-	44	-	-	1

Tolworth stands at the point where Kingston starts to narrow into its long, trailing tip, which protrudes, proboscis-like, from Greater London’s southwest corner as if sniffing the surrounding Surrey air. Remarkably, Kingston town remained the headquarters of Surrey County Council until 2020, decades after the London boroughs were created.

Kingston used to be a see-saw borough, closely contested by blue and yellow interests from 1986 until 1998 including spells under No Overall Control. But this century it has been a Lib Dom domain except for 2014, when the whole country went off them. Since then, it has been downhill all the way for the Tories.

Local landscape

Their relegation to third place in the council chamber pecking order during this term has been caused by the rise of those Kingston Independents, an interesting combination of characters.

Their May 2022 winner, James Giles, co-founded the KIRG as a political party in 2017 and first won a council seat in 2018. Since then, as well as doing the same in 2022, he has worked as George Galloway's campaign chief for two parliamentary by-elections, stood in Birmingham as a "pro-Palestine" candidate for Galloway's Workers Party at the general election, advised members of the parliamentary Independent Alliance group of MPs and is now reportedly the chief of staff of one of them.

Giles also managed to fit in running the November 2022 Kingston Council by-election campaign, held in his own ward, Green Lane & St James, and won by his grandmother, Yvonne Tracey, in a manner some thought divisive and malign.

The Conservative who defected to the KIRG and thereby transformed it into the official opposition was Jamal Chohan, elected for Tudor ward in 2022. He reportedly jumped ship after losing the Tory whip following the circulation of an email regarding support for a ceasefire in Gaza. The Tory group said Chohan hadn't actually been a member of the party since 2020.

Some mystery also surrounds the Independent, Kamala Kugan, who represents Coombe Vale ward and left the Lib Dems in August 2024. According to the council's website, she isn't a member of the KIRG, yet she appears on its 2026 campaign literature, which boasts that the party has "led a call for Kingston's pension fund to divest from companies complicit in human rights abuses and the arms trade", and "called for a freeze on Council rents" as well as opposing increases in car parking charges.

While all this has been going on, the Lib Dem administration has been levying the highest Council

Tax in London – £2,100 a year for a Band D dwelling – a record that prompted criticism from one of the surviving pair of Tory councillors, who also (like the KIRG) highlighted car parking charges. "The Conservative family is alive and kicking," he insisted in an article for Conservative Home.

Council leader Andreas Kirsch, who last year welcomed a long-awaited start on a new leisure centre and this year has been pleased to see the rejection of a planning application for 600 homes to replace three redundant gasholders, hailed 2025 a "year of delivery", including the borough's children's services being judged "outstanding" by Ofsted. He will be hoping Kingston voters agree.

 KINGSTON UPON THAMES

Electoral prospects

Kingston is among the boroughs that looks least likely to see a change of control in May, but other parties, from the Tories to the KIRG, will hope to make some inroads.

North Kingston

9 seats

The four northernmost wards of Kingston form part of the Richmond Park parliamentary constituency (though the boundary does not contain them precisely). Canbury, the other side of the Kingston Loop railway line from the town centre, is a neighbourhood of smaller Victorian terraced houses popular with young professional commuters, while most of the rest of the area consists of suburban avenues and, in places, some very wealthy territory.

Tudor, as its name suggests, is a mock-Tudor development on the road from Kingston to Richmond. It is the ward that saw the Tories lose a councillor to the KIRG. The area has some inner London characteristics shared with Wandsworth or Wimbledon, such as a high proportion of residents with degrees and in professional-

Ward-level results (2022)	Councillors 2022			Vote share percentage 2022				
	1	2	3	Con	Lab	LD	Green	Other
Canbury Gardens	LD	LD	x	29.4	9.7	47.7	13.2	-
Coombe Hill	Con	Con	x	47.9	11.5	33.0	-	7.6
Kingston Gate	LD	LD	LD	19.2	9.7	39.8	11.6	19.7
Tudor	LD	Con	x	39.0	7.4	40.6	13.0	-

managerial occupations. It also differs in being mainly owner-occupied.

Politically, the north Kingston wards have long been the weakest section of the borough for the dominant Lib Dems. Even in the 2022 landslide, three Conservatives

survived here, The Tories will be hoping to do better in 2026, but national trends suggest they are faring worse in areas like this when the choice is between them and the Lib Dems.

Central Kingston

9 seats

Kingston has a large and historic town centre and its own inner core distinct from the suburbs around it. The university has resulted in a large (24 per cent) full-time student population in Kingston Town ward.

Ward-level results (2022)	Councillors 2022			Vote share percentage 2022				
	1	2	3	Con	Lab	LD	Green	Other
Coombe Vale	LD	LD	LD	25.8	10.4	36.5	15.7	11.7
Kingston Town	LD	LD	LD	17.0	19.8	42.8	10.1	10.3
Norbiton	LD	LD	LD	12.2	26.1	48.1	7.0	6.6

Labour has lately been squeezed out here: they last had councillors elected in the Lib Dem nadir year of 2014, in Norbiton ward, which has Kingston’s highest proportion of social housing (27 per cent). Even so, there was a respectable Labour share of the vote in 2022, and in a Labour versus Conservative context, such as the 2021 London mayoral election, all the central wards – including

Coombe Vale, despite a Conservative winning as recently as 2018 – can vote Labour.

It all means the Lib Dems should be fine in 2026 in these left-of-centre urban wards, unless perhaps the Greens target one of them.

Malden

9 seats

This area – composed of New Malden, Old Malden and Motspur Park - is the part of Kingston east of the little-known River Hogsmill, which flows into the Thames in central Kingston and mostly south of the main railway line heading to Surbiton. The constituency boundaries do not match up exactly to the ward boundaries, but most of this area was moved into the Wimbledon constituency under the 2024 boundary changes.

Ward-level results (2022)	Councillors 2022			Vote share percentage 2022				
	1	2	3	Con	Lab	LD	Green	Other
Green Lane & St James	LD	KIRG	x	12.2	10.8	39.9	-	37.1
Motspur Park & Old Malden East	LD	LD	x	35.1	12.4	43.5	9.0	-
New Malden Village	LD	LD	LD	10.9	11.6	33.5	24.0	20.0
Old Malden	LD	LD	x	35.1	10.6	47.0	7.3	-

These voters were welcomed by the Wimbledon Lib Dems and helped fuel the five-figure majority their candidate won in the general election. But in local elections, this has been one of the less reliable parts of the borough for the ruling party.

Malden has some quirky demographics for a halfway-out suburb. The main distinctive local feature is that New Malden is the centre of London’s Korean community. But it is also worth noting that Motspur Park & Old Malden

East and Old Malden are particularly heavily owner-occupied (and by people owning outright), car-owning and also lower in graduates than any other sub-section of Kingston except Chessington. In view of this, it’s not surprising that the Conservatives were viable in both wards in 2022 and perhaps can’t be ruled out this time.

Green Lane & St James is the wellspring of the KIRG. The party has some borough-wide aspirations, but seems more organised in the New Malden area than elsewhere.

Surbiton

8 seats

The 19th Century burghers of Kingston-upon-Thames decided against having the main line railway coming through the town itself. Surbiton was the result. The tracks divide this archetypal commuter suburb into two pieces: the south bank of the Thames enters London at the splendidly named Seething Wells and the low-lying terraces around the Portsmouth Road form St Mark's; Surbiton Hill and Berrylands are on the higher ground on the far side of the railway line.

Ward-level results (2022)	Councillors 2022			Vote share percentage 2022				
	1	2	3	Con	Lab	LD	Green	Other
Berrylands	LD	LD	x	27.6	10.1	49.7	8.9	3.7
St Mark's & Seething Wells	LD	LD	LD	11.8	9.5	42.2	26.4	10.2
Surbiton Hill	LD	LD	LD	19.3	11.0	52.4	10.1	7.2

All of the wards are influenced by the proximity of Surbiton station – the professional-managerial proportion is over 50 per cent. Berrylands was developed as an owner-occupied suburb in the 1930s, but both of the other wards have high proportions of private renters by outer London standards.

The Lib Dems have dominated this area in recent years and even in losing the 2014 elections they took seven out of nine seats in this area. The Greens had a serious go at St Mark's and Seething Wells in 2022 and are probably the main threat.

Tolworth

7 seats

Tolworth is an inter-war suburban area where the A3 slips the surly bonds of London and becomes a fast highway to Guildford and Portsmouth.

Alexandra ward is in north east Tolworth, and King George's & Sunray is the bit of Tolworth on the far side of the A3 beside the branch line station (the garden suburb-style Sunray estate) plus a random bit of Hook (King George's). It is middling in its social characteristics, mostly owner-occupied, majority White British, lying between Surbiton and Chessington in this respect, as well as geographically.

Tolworth ward has been one of the strongest Lib Dem areas of Kingston for a long time though, interestingly, UKIP finished second there in its good year of 2014. The old Alexandra ward (which lost the Sunray estate to the new ward in the 2022 boundary changes) was competitive between the parties and flipped to the Lib Dems in 2018. The Tories lost in both successor wards, but not by humiliating margins. Can they gain any representation, or might Reform make some progress?

Ward-level results (2022)	Councillors 2022			Vote share percentage 2022				
	1	2	3	Con	Lab	LD	Green	Other
Alexandra	LD	LD	x	34.2	10.4	45.2	10.2	-
King George's & Sunray	LD	LD	x	34.0	16.7	49.3	-	-
Tolworth	LD	LD	LD	15.9	14.9	58.0	-	11.3

Chessington

6 seats

Chessington is that dangly protrusion at the southern end of the borough. It's at the end of a branch line out of Waterloo. The Surrey traveller between Epsom and Oxshott clips across it at Malden Rushett crossroads. In its social composition, it is a bit out on a limb compared with most other Kingston wards: 69 per cent White British, 84 per cent car-owning, 73 per cent owner-occupied, but only 34 per cent with degrees.

Ward-level results (2022)	Councillors 2022			Vote share percentage 2022				
	1	2	3	Con	Lab	LD	Green	Other
Chessington South & Malden Rushett	LD	LD	LD	35.7	11.8	50.1	-	2.4
Hook & Chessington North	LD	LD	LD	29.0	14.4	53.2	-	3.4

Given the demographics, the Lib Dems have done well to maintain a firm, long-term grip on the Chessington council seats, losing only to a Conservative with a personal vote in 2010 and 2014.

But if anywhere in Kingston is going to go to Reform UK, it will probably be Chessington. It was UKIP's best area in 2014 (23 per cent) and the only one where the 2021 populist London Mayor campaign of Conservative Shaun Bailey got over 50 per cent.



KINGSTON UPON THAMES

What to watch for

The Lib Dem majority is surely not under threat, but they did so well in 2022 they might suffer slippage to several rival parties.