

Lewisham

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Since 2022

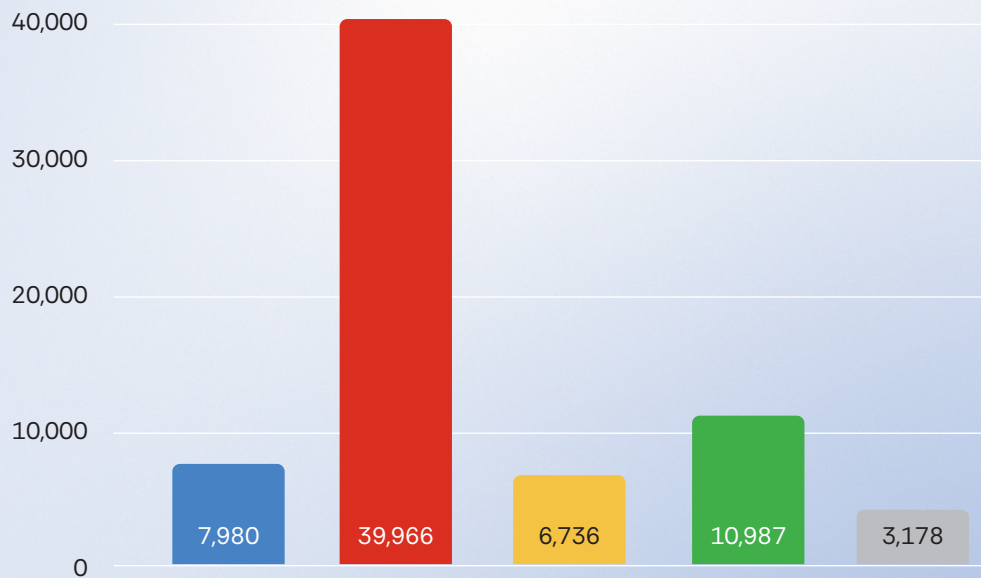
Labour Defence

No ifs, no buts: the south London borough remained a one-party state in 2022, with Labour winning the mayoralty and all 54 council seats. The mayoral triumph was so vast there was no need for second preference votes to be counted as Labour's candidate took 58 per cent of the first preferences, making him impossible to overhaul.

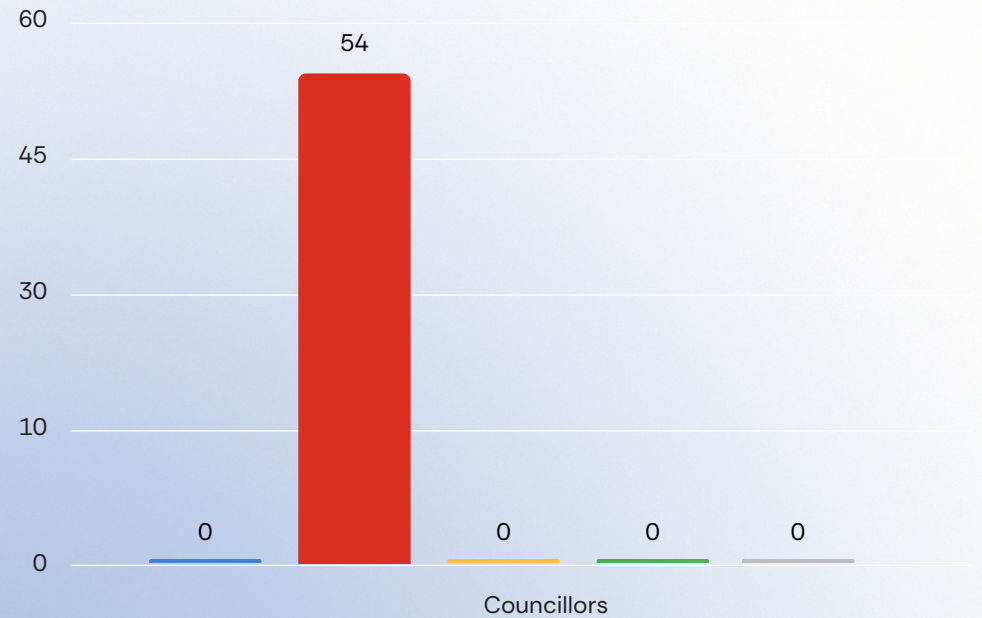
Labour also piled up 55 per cent of the councillor popular vote, sweeping the borough's 19 wards with a bit to spare in nearly every case.

Since then, four councillors have defected to the Greens, though three by-elections, the most recent on general election day, have seen comfortable Labour holds.

Lewisham mayoral election result 2022



Lewisham Council result May 2022 | Total seats: 54



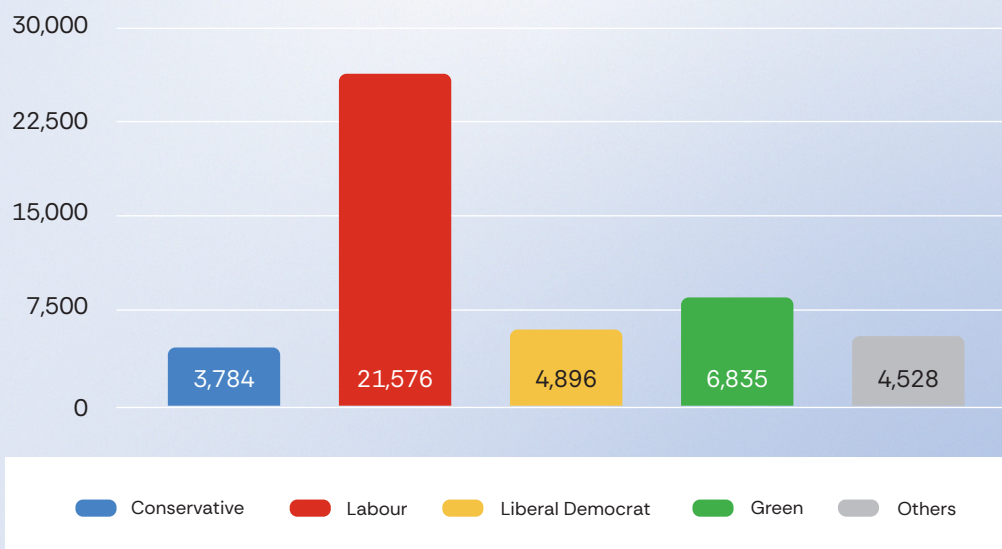
Conservative Labour Liberal Democrat Green Others

Lewisham’s biggest electoral event since May 2022 happened in March 2024, when Brenda Dacres became the borough’s new Mayor at a by-election. Damien Egan, who had romped home two years earlier, had resigned in order to run for a parliamentary seat. Dacres didn’t win quite as easily as Egan had, but still received more than half the votes under the newly-imposed first past the post system.

The runner-up was the Green candidate, whose party won council seats in Lewisham in the early elections of this century, although the Liberal Democrats were more successful during those years.

How far will Labour’s defences be breached in 2026? Who by?

Lewisham mayoral by-election March 2024



By-elections since May 2022

09 NOVEMBER 2023	DEPTFORD	LAB HOLD
02 MAY 2024	DEPTFORD	LAB HOLD
04 JULY 2024	BLACKHEATH	LAB HOLD

Local landscape

To track the history of Lewisham, both distant and modern, there is logic in beginning at the borough's northern end and heading south. Deptford, on the south bank of the Thames, was home to the very first royal dockyard, founded by Henry VIII in 1513. It remained a naval base where ships were both built and serviced until its final closure in 1869. Deptford remained industrial for decades after the docks closed, but, like other working-class parts of London dependent on the river, it went into decline. Today, Deptford, again in line with London patterns elsewhere, is undergoing a recovery, showing all the vanguard symptoms of gentrification as the area transforms again.

Lewisham widens from its narrow top. Below Deptford and New Cross, home of Goldsmiths, University of London (formerly Goldsmiths College) come residential Crofton Park and Brockley to the west and, to their east, Lewisham town centre, which is linked to the Thames by Deptford Creek and the River Ravensbourne, which flows through the rest of the borough. The Ravensbourne has its own Lewisham tributary, the River Quaggy.

The longer of the two branches of the Docklands Light Railway serving south London terminates at Lewisham, just inside Zone 2. Leafy Ladywell is to its south, followed by Catford, where Lewisham Town Hall is located.

Lewisham Council elections since 2002							
Year	Con	Lab	LD	UKIP/Ref	Green	Other	
2002	2	45	4	-	1	2	
2006	3	26	17	-	6	2	
2010	2	39	12	-	1	-	
2014	-	53	-	-	1	-	
2018	-	54	-	-	-	-	
2022	-	54	-	-	-	-	

The fat end of the borough also contains the Forest Hill, Hither Green, Bellingham and Downham suburban neighbourhoods, plus the majority of Beckenham Place Park (though Beckenham itself is in adjoining Bromley).

Lewisham's population has been rising faster than the London average rate and has now exceeded 300,000. It is among the top five per cent most densely populated local authority areas in England. Its ethnic breakdown, according to the last Census, was 51 per cent white, 27 per cent black and nine per cent Asian. More than 40 per

cent of its people declared themselves to be Christian, slightly less than 40 per cent said they had no religion.

Politically, the borough has been red-washed since 2018. Its Mayor from the inaugural mayoral election in 2002 for four terms was Sir Steve Bullock, a working-class Yorkshireman who had been a policy adviser to Ken Livingstone when he led the Greater London Council in the 1980s and later chaired Lewisham's local NHS trust. Vastly experienced, he was also housing lead for London Councils.

Local landscape

The mayoral contest in 2026 looks likely to be closer than any Bullock took part in, including in 2006 when he won with room to spare, even though the council went to No Overall Control. Dacres will not be standing again, having been made a life peer. Labour's candidate this time, selected in January, is Amanda De Ryk who is descended from Ukrainian refugees. Some local activists thought her a stronger candidate than Dacres when selecting for the mayoral by-election.

The Greens are fielding one of the councillors who joined them from Labour. Liam Shrivastava, who changed sides last July, has promised to "stand up to developers", a stance that might have populist appeal. The other defector made her move in March 2025, having been suspended by Labour in late 2023, reportedly for activities relating to Palestine. She was later reinstated but left Labour on general election day and sat as an Independent for a while before joining the Greens. Jamaica-born Sylbourne Sydial will seek the mayoralty for the Tories, majoring on fly-tipping and crime.

 LEWISHAM

Electoral prospects

Lewisham has been one of Labour's most steadfast boroughs, failing to give the party a council majority only in 1968 and 2006, when Labour still won the mayoralty. The non-Labour councillor majority that year was from a patchwork of different parties. This time, the contests for both the mayoralty and the largest number of council seats will be between Labour and the Greens.

Deptford

8 seats

Deptford is the innermost corner of Lewisham, and these three wards form a thin corridor to the Thames between Southwark and Greenwich. It has a literary history, often reflected in ward names. Those for Christopher Marlowe and Samuel Pepys have gone, but that of John Evelyn remains.

Deptford is an inner-city area shot through by railway lines, including the one that carried London's first passenger service which, from 1838, ran between London Bridge and Greenwich. For a long time, the river frontage in Evelyn ward was industrial, but it has recently been redeveloped with high density flats. As a result, it gained nearly 4,000 residents between 2011 and 2021.

Deptford went through some tough times in the 1970s and 1980s, but it is on the up now. It is inhabited by

Ward-level results (2022)	Councillors 2022			Vote share percentage 2022				
	1	2	3	Con	Lab	LD	Green	Other
Deptford	Lab	Lab	Lab	7.1	53.5	6.4	21.4	11.6
Evelyn	Lab	Lab	Lab	10.2	56.6	9.0	19.2	5.0
New Cross Gate	Lab	Lab	x	6.6	57.1	6.2	23.5	6.6

a London mixture of social tenants (42 per cent) and ethnicities, with a large black community (36 per cent). There is a student presence too, as Goldsmiths is nearby. The proportion of professional-managerial workers rose steeply (by 11 percentage points) in both Deptford and Evelyn wards between the last two Censuses.

Deptford has been safely Labour for decades, even when the rest of Lewisham has been Tory. The Greens polled respectably in 2022, but came nowhere near winning.

They currently have two councillors representing these wards – one in New Cross Gate, one in Evelyn – but they are among the defectors from Labour mentioned above. Meanwhile, Labour has achieved two convincing by-election holds in Deptford ward. The party has deep roots here.

Central Lewisham

14 seats

These wards are in the Lewisham North parliamentary constituency, successor to the old Deptford seat, and are linked by the A2 and the railway line between Nunhead (just across the border in Southwark) and Blackheath. They were mostly developed as Victorian middle-class villa suburbs.

Like Deptford, they have an inner London social mix, but with the accent more on white middle-class graduate professionals. Lewisham town centre has been transformed by new high-rise development, producing a 4,000 increase in population between 2011 and 2021 in Lewisham Central. The ward now has the highest (61 per cent) proportion of graduates in the borough.

Ward-level results (2022)	Councillors 2022			Vote share percentage 2022				
	1	2	3	Con	Lab	LD	Green	Other
Blackheath	Lab	Lab	Lab	12.0	43.4	29.8	14.8	-
Brockley	Lab	Lab	Lab	6.2	56.2	7.4	27.0	3.1
Ladywell	Lab	Lab	Lab	6.1	47.2	4.9	41.9	-
Lewisham Central	Lab	Lab	x	9.6	51.1	11.3	27.9	-
Telegraph Hill	Lab	Lab	Lab	2.7	59.9	7.9	29.4	-

Labour has won everything here in the last two elections, but during its weaker periods representation has been variegated. This was where the Lewisham Greens had their greatest but transitory successes, winning all three seats in both Brockley and Ladywell in 2006 and retaining one of the Brockley trio until 2018.

The party targeted Ladywell in 2022 and their lead candidate came within 120 votes of winning a seat,

the nearest anyone got to breaking Labour's monopoly. Blackheath has a Lib Dem history and was their best ward in 2022, although the Greens took second place in the July 2024 by-election. Telegraph Hill used to elect minor left-wing parties. If Lewisham Labour has a bad result in 2026, it will be very apparent here.

Forest Hill

12 seats

These are suburbs along a branch of the Windrush Line on the way from New Cross towards West Croydon. Many of Lewisham’s wards have similar demographic and political characteristics – high proportions of graduates, young people, social tenants and black Londoners. The mixture varies a bit between wards, but the voting patterns in 2022 were eerily similar across most of the borough.

Ward-level results (2022)	Councillors 2022			Vote share percentage 2022				
	1	2	3	Con	Lab	LD	Green	Other
Crofton Park	Lab	Lab	Lab	7.4	54.7	8.8	29.1	-
Forest Hill	Lab	Lab	Lab	10.4	53.3	12.7	23.5	-
Perry Vale	Lab	Lab	Lab	9.8	55.4	10.0	24.8	-
Sydenham	Lab	Lab	Lab	12.2	52.0	10.7	25.1	-

Nowhere was this more the case than in the four wards that are included in the Lewisham West & East Dulwich parliamentary constituency, where the results were only a statistical twitch away from each other.

When Labour lost their majority in the 2006 elections – the only time since 1968 that this has happened – they retained three wards here and lost only Forest Hill itself to the Lib Dems. The Greens were the principal competition in 2022, but they were a long way behind.

Catford

11 seats

Lewisham is largely an inner-suburban rather than inner-city borough, and this group of seats is a mixture of Victorian and inter-war development. The internal difference is between development for owner-occupation in Catford (Rushey Green is basically central Catford) and council-built housing in Bellingham and Downham. For an inner London borough, all four wards are low in professional-managerial workers.

Ward-level results (2022)	Councillors 2022			Vote share percentage 2022				
	1	2	3	Con	Lab	LD	Green	Other
Bellingham	Lab	Lab	x	13.5	68.8	11.6	-	6.1
Catford South	Lab	Lab	Lab	12.7	50.5	26.1	9.4	1.3
Downham	Lab	Lab	Lab	21.2	56.7	10.3	11.8	-
Rushey Green	Lab	Lab	Lab	10.4	58.3	9.1	22.2	-

Catford and the wards to its south were solid parts of the Lewisham Labour monolith in 2018 and 2022 and were generally loyal even in 2006. The Lib Dems won Downham but the line held in the other wards. Catford South, the most owner-occupied ward in the borough (62 per cent) used to be won by Conservatives even in decent Labour years like 1990, but they fell short in 2006 and are now way behind. The Lib Dems provided the main opposition in 2022.

Downham in the far south of Lewisham is one of the low-rise cottage style estates built by the London County Council in the 1920s and 1930s. Unlike most of them, it was built primarily within LCC territory, but it still has some political and social similarities with the estates created further out. Downham's housing is based on whole houses (80 per cent) rather than flats to an extent that is unusual even in suburbia. The population is ethnically mixed and working-class – it has the lowest proportion of graduates in Lewisham. But the Right to Buy eroded its social renting character (now down to 37

per cent). Labour held it (as South End) even in 1968, but the Lib Dems won it in the 2000s.

It is, with Grove Park, the friendliest ward in Lewisham for the Right: Tory mayoral candidate Shaun Bailey won it in 2021 and the Tories achieved a rare second place in 2022. If Reform can win any ward in Lewisham, it will be Downham. Bellingham, which is more social rented (47 per cent) and more black (38 per cent), is more solidly Labour.

Hither Green

11 seats

These three wards are in the south-east of the borough, stretching along the railways from near the centre of Lewisham through the junction at Hither Green station to the border with Bromley and Eltham. They are a geographical grouping, with Catford part of the Lewisham East parliamentary constituency, but with internal differences.

Ward-level results (2022)	Councillors 2022			Vote share percentage 2022				
	1	2	3	Con	Lab	LD	Green	Other
Grove Park	Lab	Lab	Lab	23.3	47.6	13.3	15.8	-
Hither Green	Lab	Lab	Lab	11.2	55.4	13.6	19.8	-
Lee Green	Lab	Lab	Lab	11.6	43.6	25.8	16.7	2.3

Painting with a broad brush, Lee Green is a graduate middle-class suburb, an extension of Blackheath. Hither Green ward is a multi-ethnic working-class area and Grove Park, whiter and lower middle-class. It contains Lewisham's piece of the Mottingham estate, which straddles three boroughs.

At Labour's low ebb of 2006, under different ward boundaries, the party lost nearly everything here: the Conservatives won Grove Park and the Lib Dems won Lee Green and the predecessor wards to Hither Green, other than a single Labour survivor in Lewisham Central.

There were opposition councillors elected in 2010 too, in all the wards except Lewisham Central. But the two Grove Park Conservatives elected that year were the last Tories on the council. In 2014, Labour won everything and has done ever since, though its share of the vote in 2022 was a bit lower than elsewhere in the borough, suggesting vulnerability to the Tories or Reform in Grove Park and to the Lib Dems in Lee Green.



LEWISHAM

What to watch for

The Greens finished second to Labour in most of the borough's wards in 2022. If the expected swing in their favour is big enough and, in the case of council seats, uniform enough, they could capture the mayoralty and the large number of seats they need gain to form a majority. If it isn't, they won't.