

London Decides

Borough Elections Guide, 2026

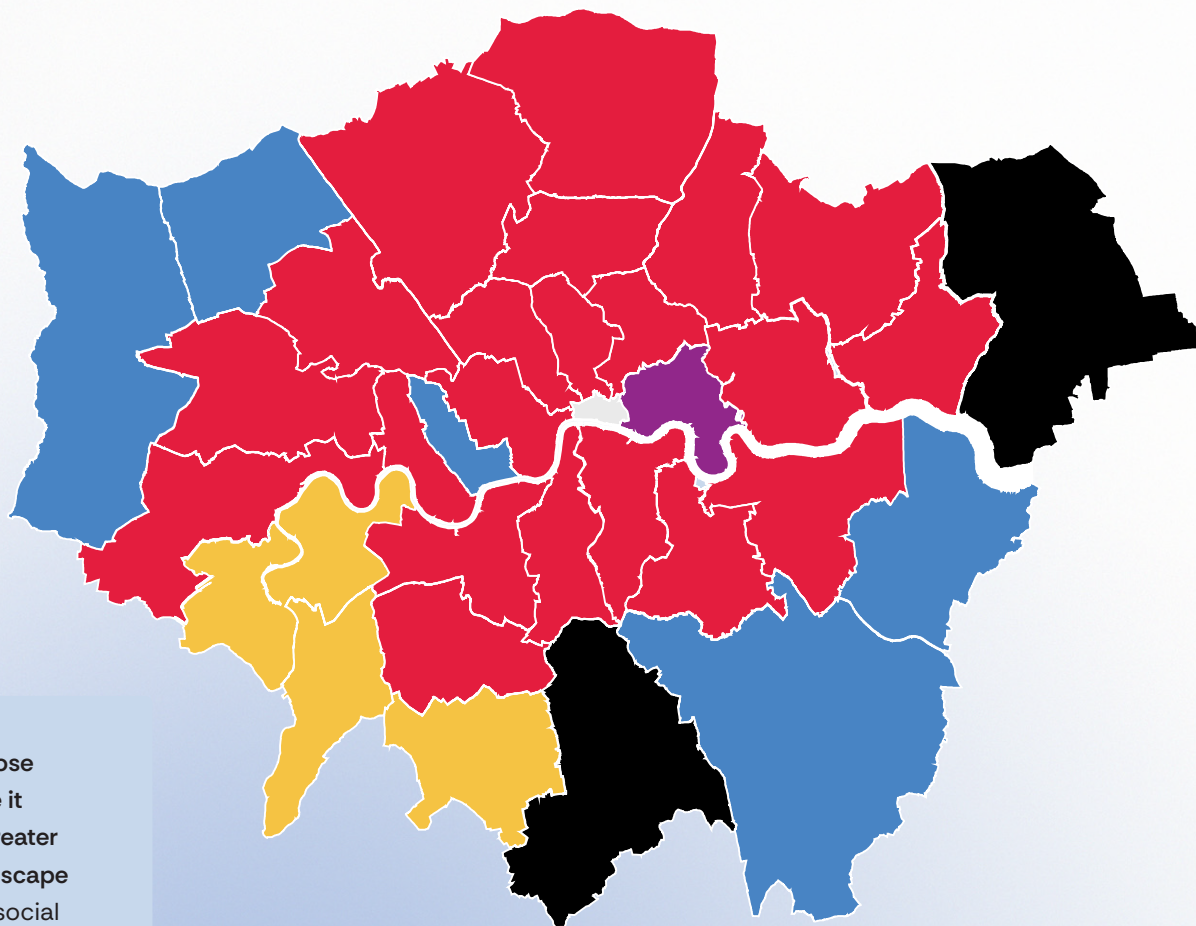
| BY LEWIS BASTON AND DAVE HILL

Introduction

In May 2022, the political map of Greater London's boroughs turned still redder. Labour won 1,156 of the capital's 1,817 council seats, an even larger proportion, at 63.6 per cent, than in 2018, even though its overall vote share was slightly down. The Conservatives, by contrast, slid to just 404 seats – less than a quarter of the total and not much more than a quarter of the vote share. Most of the other 257 seats were captured by the Liberal Democrats. With one exception, blue joined yellow in occupying only fractions of the capital's fringes. A local party ousted Labour in the East End but, overall, Labour's domination of the capital was confirmed.

Four years and one general election later, a status quo that had been solidifying since 2010 looks certain to be radically disturbed.

➤ The purpose of this guide is to direct readers in fine detail to those parts of the city where turbulence will occur, who is likely to create it and to what effect, while also pointing out that in some parts of Greater London's 606 square miles few, if any, tremors in the electoral landscape will be felt. Every ward is examined along with broader electoral, social and demographic trends. We doubt you'll find a more comprehensive preview of the capital's local government democratic contests.



Council Elections 2022

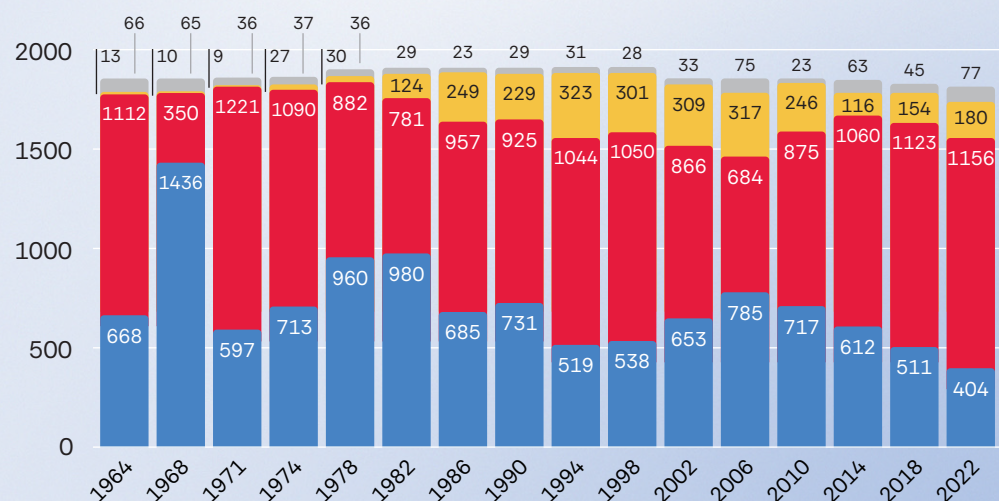
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Introduction

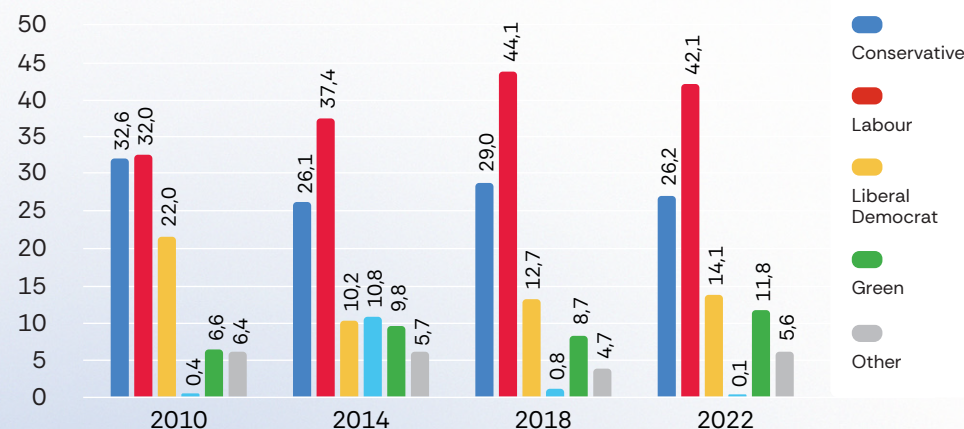
The big picture tells us that the unpopularity of the national government will mean a major collapse in support for Labour in every borough, resulting in it losing control of a dozen or more of the 21 where it currently has majorities. The Green Party, previously a marginal threat, has become its biggest challenger and harbours hopes of storming Labour fortresses.

New local parties, Left-aligned Independent groups and Residents' Association candidates have been increasingly showing that they can make a big mark too (the triumph of the Aspire party in Tower Hamlets in 2022 was the first time any other than the old biggest three had won an overall majority in borough elections history). Their proliferation is a big reason why the total number of candidates across all 32 boroughs this year is getting on for 9,000. In 2022, it was 6,191.

London borough councillors elected for each party since 1964



Percentage vote share in London borough elections since 2010



But it isn't only Labour whose London strongholds are besieged. Reform UK, the long-time leader of national opinion polls, isn't popular in the capital as a whole. Even so, it is menacing the Tories in boroughs previously assumed to be safe for them and also pitching in some areas to voters disillusioned with Labour. Only the Lib Dems, the smallest of what we used to call the three "main parties", can feel secure in their redoubts, and even they might be a bit nervous about one of them.

This fragmenting political landscape will manifest itself in lots of different ways on 7 May. Turnout will, as ever, be crucial to results, and this year could see very different levels of enthusiasm for different parties. In 2022, with Boris Johnson and "Partygate" dragging the Conservatives' reputation down, a lot of their supporters stayed at home. Some might do the same again. And Labour could have a bigger problem in that regard.

Introduction

By contrast, admirers of the Greens and Reform, sometimes termed “insurgent”, could be highly motivated, in the first case to register their anger with Labour, in the second, as in the 2016 EU referendum, to register their contempt for everyone else. In 2022, 35.5 per cent of the just over six million Londoners eligible to vote did so. Will that figure be higher or lower this year?

Predicting how all of these factors will play out is a perilous business. It seems fairly safe, though, to expect around one third of the boroughs to be under new political leadership after 7 May, another third to see no change (though in some cases with previous majorities slashed) and up to 12 – conceivably even more – ending up under No Overall Control.

It’s not impossible that Labour could end up in full control of only five boroughs, the same as the Conservatives now. They could lose around half of their London seats, half of their share of the Londonwide vote and all three of the directly elected mayoralties they won in 2022. For their part, the Tories could plausibly

lose as many councils as they win, a net gain of nil when in the past they’d have expected a healthy swing their way. Might they end up with fewer than 400 seats this time, breaking their own record? Don’t rule it out. The Lib Dem councils look very or fairly safe, but the Greens and Reform could make history by winning boroughs for the first time. The party politics of the “Labour city” of recent years could be utterly transformed.

Such an upheaval might be seen as healthy, a desirable shaking-up and clearing out of an established order that, in many boroughs, has seen Labour face little or, in some cases, literally no Town Hall opposition. It might equally be seen as a recipe for incompetence and chaos, as inexperienced politicians, some of them suddenly in senior positions, learn the hard way that making manifesto pledges is one thing, putting them into effect is something else. No Overall Control negotiations could be protracted and their outcomes, fragile. Callow or unstable administrations can have unhappy implications for the delivery of services and for partnerships with local businesses, voluntary groups, the development

industry and the public sector – and hence for local people.

All of that acknowledged, the creation of a whole new London local government mosaic, with tiles of many hues scattered across its famously diverse terrain, would reveal in richer detail than before just how various Londoners are and the array of different things they want from democracy and politicians. Perspectives and shades of opinion that might have been masked by the hegemony of two big parties and one smaller one look set to be revealed, sometimes in ways that may surprise.

One of the goals of this guide is to tell in fine demographic, economic and cultural detail stories about small parts of London and the Londoners who live in them that serve as broad predictors of political preferences but also reveal the complexities and fascinations of an extraordinary global city. Its length is that of a book. Hopefully, you will find it a good read.

Note on sources

The authors have drawn on past borough election results going back to the very first in 1964, all of which are available from the London Datastore maintained by the Greater London Authority. The 2021 Census and its 2011 predecessor have provided invaluable information about the social, employment, ethnic and housing mixes of individual electoral

wards, and GLA statisticians have published them on comparable ward boundaries. We are grateful to Adam Gray for sharing his work on boundary changes and by-elections. Trust for London’s poverty profile data has been an important source too.

Introduction

Given the unpredictability of many of this year's results, it's a relief to compilers of election guides that there are no ward boundary changes to cope with this year. Also unchanged are the rules about who is eligible to vote: broadly, over-18s who are British, Irish, Commonwealth or "qualifying" EU citizens, or EU citizens with "retained rights" following their divorce from, or the death or departure of, their sponsoring family member.

However, these will be the first borough elections at which voters will be required to produce approved forms of identification at polling stations (Londoners have already had to do this twice since 2022, first when voting for their Mayor and London Assembly members in May 2024 and then in the general election held the following July). And a few other things will be different from 2022.

One is that the five mayoral elections – in Croydon, Hackney, Lewisham, Newham and Tower Hamlets – will be First Past The Post races this time. The restoration of the Supplementary Vote system that has previously given Londoners in those boroughs the freedom of a first and a second preference vote is a parliamentary work in progress, but has yet to become law, still less put into effect.

Another change, more uneven but implemented in many boroughs, is the scheduling of vote-counting. Traditional

late Thursday night or Friday small hours declarations of results have gone out of style. Instead, a majority of the 32 boroughs won't start their counting until the Friday morning this year, and most of those with Mayors will do a separate, second shift on the Saturday.

The prospective high electoral drama will unfold against the more mundane and worrying backdrop of London local government finances as the responsibilities shouldered by many individual councils grow.

A concerted cross-party effort meant the government's Fair Funding Review did not turn out as badly for some boroughs as they had feared, and several have emerged in better shape. But even though nearly all the boroughs have increased their Council Tax levels this year by the maximum amount allowed, the high and rising costs of providing social care for adults and children, and of supporting homeless households, remain punishing. Eight boroughs – Barnet, Croydon, Haringey, Havering, Hillingdon, Lambeth, Redbridge and Waltham Forest – have been allowed "exceptional financial support" in order to help them make ends meet.

Administrations of whichever party will hope voters will judge them according to how well they have discharged their core responsibilities, along with their stewardship of housing and development and their delivery of street

cleaning and rubbish collection services. Individual councillors will hope to be rewarded for their diligence in attending to residents' casework, be it pressing for action on fly-tipping and other antisocial behaviour or listening to complaints about road management measures and school closures. But all will be resigned to knowing that many Londoners will vote entirely or in part to "send a message" to national parties about the economy, the NHS, immigration or Gaza – matters over which London's councils and councillors have little or no control.

That's politics, and so on. But whatever the outcomes of this year's borough elections and whatever voters' motivations, the resulting spread of preferences will shed light on the concerns, hopes and convictions of around two million Londoners. Politicians of whatever stripe should take careful note.



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APRIL 2026

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Barking & Dagenham



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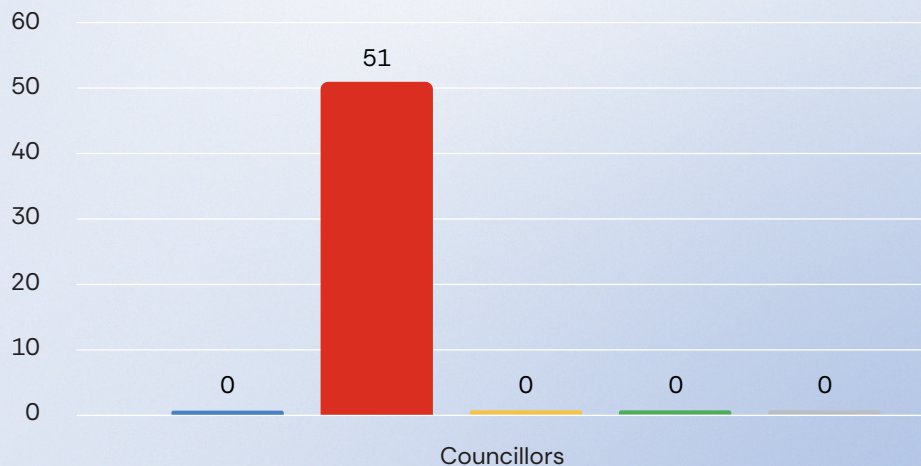
Since 2022

Labour Defence

Labour won every single seat on Barking & Dagenham Council in 2022. No change there. The party had done the same in every set of full council elections since 2010. This time, though, Reform UK fancies its chance of knocking holes in the defences of London's longest-established "one party state". The Greens are sniffing opportunities, too. How far might either of them get?

Reform's optimism relies on precedent and demographics: the extreme far-Right British National Party sent a nasty shock through the whole political system in 2006 when it won 12 seats in Barking & Dagenham and formed the opposition group, and in 2014, Nigel Farage's UK Independence Party at its strongest won no seats but was runner-up in several places. Population trends have worked against nationalist politics, but Reform's is a bigger and broader proposition than what has come before.

Barking & Dagenham Council result May 2022 | Total seats: 51



Conservative Labour Liberal Democrat Green Other

By-elections since May 2022

31 MARCH 2023	HEATH	LAB HOLD
15 SEPTEMBER 2023	MAYESBROOK	LAB HOLD
28 NOVEMBER 2024	VILLAGE (TWO SEATS)	LAB HOLD (BOTH SEATS)
28 NOVEMBER 2024	NORTHBURY	LAB HOLD
20 FEBRUARY 2025	WHALEBONE	LAB HOLD
31 JULY 2025	THAMES VIEW	LAB HOLD

Labour has held all seven seats contested in by-elections since 2022, but with some big vote share losses. Reform has fought only the most recent of them, finishing ahead of the Tories but behind the Greens. However, for the full elections the party is running a full slate of candidates in all 19 wards.

In September, the Greens picked up three defectors from the originally 51-strong full house Labour group and will hope to make in-roads among the borough's newbuild communities and Muslim residents. But they and Reform may lack Labour's ground level organisation and campaigner numbers. The incumbent party, under new leadership since autumn 2024, says it has maintained the revived community contacts that helped it see off the BNP. There will surely be Labour losses this time. But how many?

Local landscape

It is hard to overstate the scale and effects of social change in this outer east London borough in recent decades as old industries have gone, new people have moved in and the council has grappled with enormous challenges. Unease and resentment combined in familiar, depressing ways to give the BNP its Town Hall presence, the task made easier by the staleness and complacency of the Labour establishment of that time.

Recovery followed. Fuelled from 2014 by the energy and vision of its leader, Darren Rodwell, ambitious housing, education and industrial investment programmes have unfolded in a part of London that in many ways resembled places elsewhere in the country labelled “left behind”. Rodwell stepped down soon after the general election, his hopes of representing Barking as an MP ruined at the eleventh hour by local and media enemies and by malicious allegations which turned out to be unfounded.

Rodwell’s successor and political contemporary, Dominic Twomey, inherited a very long-term work in progress. Barking & Dagenham’s population has grown rapidly – by nearly 18 per cent between the last two Censuses, 10 percent higher than the London average. Its White British percentage dropped from 58.3 to 44.9 per cent during the same period while that of its Asian community, most of it Muslim, rose from 15.9 per cent to 25.9. Meanwhile, new homes have continued to be built, especially in

and around Barking, schools have improved and a film production studio has come on stream. Twomey has not, though, inherited the monolithic electoral security Labour has enjoyed for the past 16 years.

The party locally seems cautiously optimistic about its chances, though it sees anger and apathy as twin dangers for as long as Labour misfires nationally. Over 80,000 votes were cast in the borough in May 2022. Nearly 80 per cent of them – 64,034, to be exact – were for Labour. The incumbents calculate that there might be around 12,000 Reform UK admirers in Barking & Dagenham, most of them switching away from the Conservatives, some of them from Labour and some of them residents who usually don’t vote but might be stirred by Nigel Farage’s anti-establishment pitch, as occurred with the EU referendum.

If that assessment is correct, given that each elector can vote for two or three candidates, depending on the ward, Reform could attract around 30,000 votes in the borough. Should the party achieve that, and Labour’s share falls by about 50 per cent, the new councillor line-up could look very different from that of 2022.

The size of any enduring latent support for a nationalist offer of some kind will be a key determinant of how high the Reform tide rises. Turnout in Barking & Dagenham in 2022 was, at just 24.5 per cent, the lowest in all of

London. In 2014, with UKIP in contention, it was 36.5 per cent. For the 2016 EU Referendum it was 63.8 per cent and the borough voted 62 per cent in favour of breaking ties with Europe.

But Reform will have to do more than just appear on ballot papers. The party’s local chairman is Ben Suter, a former Conservative who was one of his now-former party’s candidates in the Village ward by-election as recently as November 2024.

The full Reform slate is strikingly, and perhaps counter-intuitively, ethnically and culturally diverse. Close to half of its 51 candidates do not have White British backgrounds, with people of Romanian heritage well-represented. Before Suter’s defection and elevation, Reform’s leading light in Barking & Dagenham was Lewis Holmes, who contested last summer’s by-election in Thames View ward. Labour defended the seat there successfully and the Greens came a good second, indicating that there is potential for them in some of Barking & Dagenham’s newer communities.

Significantly, Holmes’s third place put him ahead of the experienced local Conservative Andrew Boff, a sometimes-prominent member of the London Assembly. That was a bad omen for the Tories, but the run-up to the by-election had some unwelcome longer-term implications for both Holmes and Reform.

Local landscape

It emerged that Holmes had shared social media posts by so-called Tommy Robinson and other extreme far-Right figures and agreed with Great Yarmouth MP Rupert Lowe that a “credible alternative” to Reform, from which he had lately been removed, was needed. He had also described Barking as “a nasty, disgusting place surrounded by Pakistani rape gangs”. Holmes’s own departure from Reform eventually followed, and he has lately posed for a photo in front of a street poster of Lowe promoting his new political party Restore Britain, which advocates “re-migration” and mass deportations.

Holmes will be seeking election in the Eastbrook & Rush Green ward, running as an Independent. Restore isn’t standing council candidates anywhere outside Great Yarmouth, but Holmes is plainly animated by its spirit. One of his opponents will be Suter. Eastbrook & Rush Green is a Reform target. Now there’s a result to look out for.

Reform’s local campaign message is not about immigration, as its national one frequently is. Rather, it is that Labour has neglected communities and that it represents, in Suter’s words, “our last chance to save our borough” and “take back” its future. The party will also depend on the national government’s unpopularity, any perceptions that a lack of challenge has made the local Labour administration complacent and a healthy turnout

by the borough’s still substantial older, white, less highly educated population.

Labour will hope that a combination of traditional loyalties, shifting demographics, its campaign “ground

war” – it says its teams knock on 800 doors a month – will neutralise much of this, but is also mindful that the Greens’ stance on Gaza will strike a chord with some of the roughly 25 per cent of the borough’s 230,000 residents who are Muslim, as it has elsewhere.

Barking & Dagenham Council elections since 2002

Year	Con	Lab	LD	UKIP/Ref	Green	Other
2002	2	42	3	-	-	4
2006	1	38	-	-	-	12
2010	-	51	-	-	-	-
2014	-	51	-	-	-	-
2018	-	51	-	-	-	-
2022	-	51	-	-	-	-

 BARKING & DAGENHAM

Electoral prospects

Despite its reputation improving of late, Barking & Dagenham hasn't fully shaken off its image as run down and reactionary. This conceals its growing geographical and social variety and the progress that has been made, all of which will influence its political complexion. To get the measure of the contests in individual wards, it helps to sub-divide them into five groups.

Barking Town

14 seats

These wards are the “old town” of Barking in the west of the borough, adjoining East Ham and Ilford. Abbey and Northbury are the most central and have inner-London and commuting demographics. They have continued to become more ethnically diverse, but their pace of change is slower than in the rest of the borough because they were already multi-ethnic.

Ward-level results (2022)	Councillors 2022			Vote share percentage 2022				
	1	2	3	Con	Lab	LD	Green	Other
Abbey	Lab	Lab	x	14.9	65.9	-	19.2	-
Eastbury	Lab	Lab	Lab	25.7	74.3	-	-	-
Gascoigne	Lab	Lab	Lab	17.5	73.0	-	-	9.5
Longbridge	Lab	Lab	Lab	32.8	56.6	10.6	-	-
Northbury	Lab	Lab	Lab	17.9	69.9	-	12.2	-

The town wards in general have a large and established Muslim population ranging from 24 per cent in Eastbury to 52 per cent in Longbridge. Eastbury and Gascoigne have large social housing sectors while Northbury has been augmented by new mixed high-density development.

This urban quality meant the town of Barking was the weakest area for the BNP in 2006. They did not contest most of the wards there and won only one seat. That was in Eastbury, which straddles the border between Barking and Becontree. It is likely to be the weakest part of the borough for Reform too. Labour held Northbury quite convincingly against split opposition in the November 2024 by-election there.

Barking Riverside

5 seats

This area is separated from the rest of Barking by the A13 trunk road and is of more recent vintage. Both wards contain parts of the 1950s Thames View estate and the recent and continuing Barking Riverside development. Since 2022 it has been served by the new Barking Riverside station at the end of the Suffragette Overground line.

Ward-level results (2022)	Councillors 2022			Vote share percentage 2022				
	1	2	3	Con	Lab	LD	Green	Other
Barking Riverside	Lab	Lab	Lab	22.1	61.9	-	-	16.0
Thames View	Lab	Lab	x	26.0	65.8	-	-	8.2

Riverside is a working-class multi-ethnic community with a large African representation and an infusion of younger people. Thames View is the most social-renting ward in the borough (44 per cent). Barking Riverside has the most degree-holders (also 44 per cent).

Both the Greens and Reform did well in the July 2025 Thames View by-election, although Labour held on with a much-reduced vote share. It may be a three-cornered battle in May 2026.

Becontree

13 seats

These wards are mostly in the Barking constituency for parliamentary purposes, although several are split between that seat and Dagenham & Rainham next-door. They are part of the huge and historic interwar Becontree public housing development, making their heritage different from that of Barking town. The wards went through rapid demographic transitions between the Censuses of 2011 and 2021. The 26.1 percentage point fall in the proportion of the population in Mayesbrook ticking the White British box was the greatest of any in London.

On the basis of the 2022 results this is an extremely safe Labour area. The party secured a vote share of over 70 per cent against feeble opposition that did not field a full slate in any ward. Six seats were effectively guaranteed even as nominations closed.

But in 2006, this was the section of the borough where the BNP was strongest. All eight candidates they put

Ward-level results (2022)	Councillors 2022			Vote share percentage 2022				
	1	2	3	Con	Lab	LD	Green	Other
Alibon	Lab	Lab	x	29.4	70.6	-	-	-
Becontree	Lab	Lab	x	23.9	76.1	-	-	-
Goresbrook	Lab	Lab	Lab	29.7	70.3	-	-	-
Mayesbrook	Lab	Lab	Lab	30.7	69.3	-	-	-
Parsloes	Lab	Lab	Lab	28.4	71.6	-	-	-

forward were elected and received an average over 40 per cent of the votes where they stood (which did not include Becontree ward). Turnout was in the low twenties four years ago. But in 2006 when the BNP broke through it was 39 per cent and in UKIP's peak year of 2014 it was 35 per cent. Subsequent demographic change might have reduced it, but the contrasts nonetheless suggest a dormant market for a nationalist Right party.

In 2014, Parsloes was UKIP's best ward in the borough (38 per cent) followed by Alibon (37 per cent). In the 2021 election for Mayor of London, Conservative Shaun Bailey carried four of the five wards, with Becontree again the exception. Reform will surely have hopes in these wards and Labour's campaigning efforts will have to be running in top gear.

North Dagenham

13 seats

This area is the north of the Becontree estate plus some adjoining places – Chadwell Heath and the rather smaller Rush Green – which are to some extent departures from generalisations about Dagenham by being historically owner-occupied or middle-class.

Ward-level results (2022)	Councillors 2022			Vote share percentage 2022				
	1	2	3	Con	Lab	LD	Green	Other
Chadwell Heath	Lab	Lab	Lab	29.1	70.9	-	-	-
Eastbrook & Rush Green	Lab	Lab	x	35.0	52.5	-	-	12.5
Heath	Lab	Lab	x	26.4	73.6	-	-	-
Valence	Lab	Lab	Lab	28.6	71.4	-	-	-
Whalebone	Lab	Lab	Lab	30.6	69.4	-	-	-

Rush Green is basically a part of Romford, which mostly lies across the border in Havering. Chadwell Heath and Whalebone are on the Elizabeth line and becoming more attractive to commuters. The proportion of White British residents crashed by around 20 percentage points between 2011 and 2021, although it remains

comparatively high and Eastbrook & Rush Green is the only ward in the borough where it was over 50 per cent in 2021.

Other than there, the Labour majorities in 2022 were mountainous, although this was often because of lack of

competition rather than monolithic support. In 2006, the Labour line held reasonably well in Chadwell Heath but a BNP councillor was elected in Eastbrook and two got in in Valence. In the Bailey versus Khan mayoral election of 2021, all of the margins were close except for Eastbrook, where Bailey was well ahead.

South Dagenham

6 seats

This section contains the original village of Dagenham, part of the Becontree estate and the industrial area down to Dagenham Dock. While Labour majorities have traditionally been large, if on low turnouts, there is clearly potential for a challenge from the Right if serious campaigning takes place.

Ward-level results (2022)	Councillors 2022			Vote share percentage 2022				
	1	2	3	Con	Lab	LD	Green	Other
Beam	Lab	Lab	Lab	33.2	66.8	-	-	-
Village	Lab	Lab	Lab	21.3	78.7	-	-	-

This was most recently demonstrated in the double by-election in Village ward in November 2024 where, in the absence of a Reform candidate, there was a 21.5 per cent swing to the Conservatives (though splashy swings are not unusual in by-elections in these parts).



BARKING & DAGENHAM

What to watch for

Assuming, perhaps riskily, that Reform won't do any business in Barking (Town or Riverside), they have a big mountain to climb to win the 26 seats they need for a majority. Even so, it is definitely a borough to keep an eye on.

Barnet



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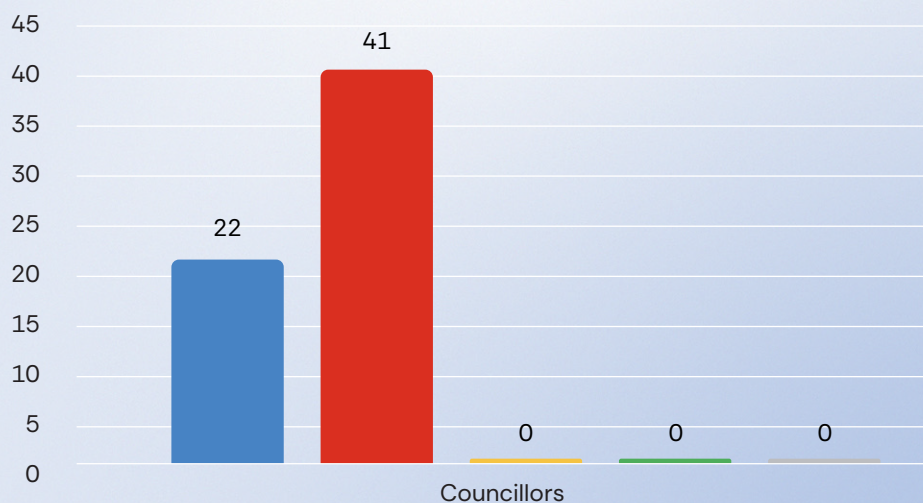
Since 2022

Labour Defence

Labour took sole control of Barnet for the first time in the borough's history in 2022 and by a tidy margin, having come close to winning in 2018. The Conservatives will have big hopes of normal service resuming after 7 May.

However, as with most of the boroughs in 2026, no outcome can be taken for granted. By-elections since 2022 have revealed significant support for Reform UK, and this has mostly hampered the Tories. Moreover, Barnet produced London's first Reform councillor when one of the Conservatives changed sides. Another, a former council leader, followed before resigning from the council, leaving his seat vacant. He was later appointed leader of Reform in Wales.

Barnet Council result May 2022 | Total seats: 63



Conservative Labour Liberal Democrat Green Other

By-elections since May 2022

16 FEBRUARY 2023 GOLDERS GREEN CON HOLD

04 JULY 2024 BARNET VALE LAB HOLD

13 FEBRUARY 2025 BURNT OAK LAB HOLD

6 MARCH 2025 FINCHLEY CHURCH END CON HOLD

15 MAY 2025 WHETSTONE LAB HOLD

30 OCTOBER 2025 HENDON CON HOLD

The number of Labour councillors has fallen only by one since 2022, from 41 of the borough's 63 seats to 40. The councillor in question was suspended in early 2023 and has this year defected to the Greens. The Tories have dropped from 22 to 19, their third loss being a councillor who was ejected from the group for failing to attend meetings. Reform still has its solitary seat for now.

Not all of Reform's support has come at the Tories' expense, with Labour also losing out in some areas. This underlines still further that the old, two-party political pendulum no longer swings like it did. Labour will hope the local Reform vote will help them to survive a Tory comeback by splitting the Right vote, but its 19-seat margin of victory last time looks in some peril.

Local landscape

Barnet is large and varied borough, stretching from the northern edge of Hampstead Heath in the south where it meets Camden to its villagey and rural north, where it meets Hertfordshire. In between lie the towns of Hendon, Finchley, Chipping Barnet, Golders Green and Edgware, busy roads such as the North Circular and the A41, and the Brent Cross shopping centre.

As well as being one of the larger boroughs geographically, Barnet is London's second most populous, after Croydon. The 2021 Census found that its population had also been growing fast, up by a striking 9.2 per cent compared with 2011. London's as a whole had gone up by 7.7 per cent. By 2024, local estimates suggest that Barnet's had soared past 400,000.

The Census also found that much of the borough's growth had been among middle-aged people, especially in the 50 to 64 age group, where numbers had risen by 22.3 per cent. The percentage saying they had retired had gone up by nearly 15 per cent. By contrast, the number of Barnet residents aged between 25 and 34 had, despite the overall increase, actually fallen.

Barnet's people on the whole are a well-educated bunch in high status employment. Almost half have a degree or equivalent and 40-odd per cent are in senior job roles or professional occupations. Around one third of Barnet residents own their homes outright and a slightly smaller proportion have mortgages. Private renters far outnumber council or housing association tenants who account for only about 15 percent of Barnet residents.

Labour's big win four years ago had been coming for a while. In 2014, they won 30 of the 63 seats to the Conservatives' 32 and the Lib Dems' one, and by the end of that term Barnet had slipped into No Overall Control. But Labour lost ground in 2018 (Con 38, Lab 25) a slide widely attributed to Jeremy Corbyn being Labour's national leader. Corbyn's prominent support for Palestine and antipathy to Israel, together with the taint of antisemitism around Labour at that time, alienated many Jewish voters in particular.

Barnet is, like London as a whole, is religiously diverse, with over a third of its residents Christian according to the 2021 Census, followed by 14.5 per cent who

were Jewish, just over 12 per cent Muslim and small percentages of Hindus and Buddhists. About 20 per cent said they had no religion – a low figure in London terms. Barnet famously contains the largest number of Jews of any local authority in England and Wales – 56,616 as of 2021 – twice as many as in the runner-up, the whole of Greater Manchester.

A gauge of the mood of Jewish voters was provided in October, in Hendon ward, when a significant by-election took place. Shimon Ryde, making a Conservative comeback after leaving the group over a personal matter in 2021 when he represented Childs Hill ward, held the seat for the Tories by a comfortable margin.

Local landscape

But Reform UK’s Yosef David, who finished second, took a substantial 30.2 per cent vote share. It was only the second time Reform had passed the 30 per cent mark in a London borough by-election. The swing from Labour to the Conservatives was only six per cent – barely enough to turn Barnet’s most marginal wards their way on 7 May.

Earlier in the year, Labour held a seat in their stronghold Burnt Oak ward, the contest brought about by the ignominious resignation of the Barnet Labour group’s cabinet member for finance. The party’s vote share was down by a third, but a split on the Right saw them comfortably home. The Tory portion was reduced a tiny bit and Reform’s candidate took 18.4, showing it can have an impact in some working-class Labour areas.

Soon after, in the safely Tory Finchley Church End, Labour did quite well in finishing second, but Reform won 11 per cent. Then, in May 2025, Labour was pleased to retain a seat in Whetstone, one of Barnet’s marginals. Again, the Tories were hit by switchers to Reform, whose candidate took a 20.5 per cent vote share compared with the Conservatives’ 28.4.

The traditionally biggest parties have been in contention to win Barnet for more than ten years, but must now overcome new problems. For the Tories must contend with competition from Reform, which has a candidate for every seat. The Lib Dems and the Greens will be looking to chip away at Labour from below. It could be very close indeed.

Barnet Council elections since 2002						
Year	Con	Lab	LD	UKIP/Ref	Green	Other
2002	33	24	6	-	-	-
2006	37	20	6	-	-	-
2010	39	21	3	-	-	-
2014	32	30	1	-	-	-
2018	38	25	-	-	-	-
2022	22	41	-	-	-	-



 BARNET

Electoral prospects

Labour won all three Barnet parliamentary seats in 2024, a complete turnaround from the elections from 2010 to 2019 when all were won by Tories. But other than in Hornsey & Friern Barnet, which is dominated by wards from Haringey, the margins of victory were relatively small: in Hendon, Labour won by only 15 votes, the closest margin in the country.

The council's three-member wards have around 12,000 electors in each, with variety and complexity in all. Let us attempt a typology of Barnet wards based on their political and demographic characteristics.

'Council estate' wards

7 seats

Like other outer London boroughs, Barnet has several large council-built estates, some of which are big enough to be the predominant element in a ward. There are three where this applies, although in each of them the Right to Buy and private development since the estate was built mean that the social renting proportion is now below 50 per cent.

Burnt Oak (33 per cent social renting in 2021) in the east of the borough is dominated by Watling, the daddy of Barnet's estates. It was developed by the London County Council (LCC) next to a then-new Underground line in the 1920s as a cottage estate – a public sector version of the "Metro-land" sprouting across Middlesex at the time.

Colindale North, the creation of the boundary changes that took effect in 2022, is a two-seat ward next-door to Burnt Oak, but smaller and more concentrated (42 per cent social renting). It is largely filled by the 1970s Grahame Park estate built by Barnet and the Greater London Council (GLC) on the site of the Hendon airfield, next to the M1.

Ward-level results (2022)	Councillors 2022			Vote share percentage 2022				
	1	2	3	Con	Lab	LD	Green	Other
Burnt Oak	Lab	Lab	Lab	23.0	63.0	-	14.0	-
Colindale North	Lab	Lab	x	19.1	62.2	-	9.5	9.2
Underhill	Lab	Lab	x	30.0	52.4	5.6	8.5	3.5

The third ward, Underhill, another two-seater (25 per cent social rent), mixes the south part of suburban High Barnet with the 1960s Dollis Valley estate developed by Barnet. Despite being a Conservative-dominated council, it has historically built a lot of council homes.

These three wards form the traditional core of the Labour vote in Barnet: the Watling area has voted Labour continuously since the 1920s, Colindale since 1971, if not always by large margins. Underhill (and its predecessor ward Arkley) has been more marginal, though it hasn't elected Conservatives since 2010.

These are exactly the sort of wards where Labour might face a serious challenge from Reform. Farage's party's 18.4 per cent in the Burnt Oak by-election came before its surge in the national polls. However, both Burnt Oak and Colindale North are highly diverse (White British populations, 23 per cent and 19 per cent respectively) which may put a ceiling on Reform. Underhill is significantly whiter.

Labour's vulnerability to Reform in hitherto strong wards complicates the battle for control of Barnet. It is quite possible that Labour might defend most of their marginal wards successfully but still lose control thanks to losses here.

South West Barnet

8 seats

South of the main council estates there is a band of territory between the borough's western boundary (running for the most part down the A5 road) and the A41 through Hendon. This is traditionally one of the more working-class and industrial parts of a mostly suburban borough, with Barnet's largest South Asian community. In most elections its wards have favoured Labour.

West Hendon had been a solid Labour ward for many years until a Conservative gain was made in 2018 – the standout result of the Tory success in Barnet that year against the backdrop of Corbyn's Labour leadership. But this was short-lived, as boundary changes removed their best area, Shirehall Park, in advance of the 2022 elections.

A common feature of these wards is recent large-scale redevelopment and population growth: Colindale South is a mixture of the Colindale Gardens area on land released by rebuilding the Metropolitan Police's Peel Centre and older suburbia; West Hendon's estates have been

Ward-level results (2022)	Councillors 2022			Vote share percentage 2022				
	1	2	3	Con	Lab	LD	Green	Other
Colindale South	Lab	Lab	Lab	26.1	60.3	-	13.6	-
Cricklewood	Lab	Lab	x	20.2	63.5	6.2	10.1	-
West Hendon	Lab	Lab	Lab	24.5	47.3	16.9	11.3	-

controversially redeveloped; and Cricklewood is changing rapidly thanks to the Brent Cross West development. These add ethnically diverse younger voters, meaning a bit of a shift to the Left.

On the other hand, Colindale South and West Hendon adjoin the Hindu block of north Brent (they were both nine per cent Hindu in 2021) and might feel the ripples of trends in the wider London Hindu vote, which has been moving towards the Tories.

The Conservatives might stand a chance in Colindale South if the Left vote splits, but the area should produce a Labour plurality even in a poor year for the party. Labour's formidable vote-getter Anne Clarke (also a London Assembly member since 2021) represents Cricklewood, a ward created in the 2022 boundary changes.

Jewish Barnet

21 seats

These wards are defined by the percentage of the population identifying its religion as Jewish accounting for 20 per cent or more of the total in the 2021 Census. The only non-Barnet wards in London to match it reflect the presence of the Ultra-Orthodox community in north Hackney and adjoining parts of Haringey. The measure is a low-end number for Jewish identification as the community is larger than religious belief, and some Jews are reluctant to declare it on a Census form.

The wards with large Jewish populations are the foundation for the Conservatives in Barnet, with 18 of their 22-strong council delegation elected in 2022 representing such areas (and three more from Totteridge & Woodside ward, which falls just below the 20 per cent threshold). They have subsequently lost three: the one who didn't attend meetings became an Independent; another, Mark Shooter, is the one who became Reform's first London councillor; and the third, Dan Thomas, is the ex-leader turned Reformer who's moved to Wales.

Ward-level results (2022)	Councillors 2022			Vote share percentage 2022				
	1	2	3	Con	Lab	LD	Green	Other
Childs Hill	Lab	Lab	Lab	35.8	42.0	12.4	9.7	-
Edgware	Con	Con	Con	54.5	27.8	-	9.4	8.4
Edgwarebury	Con	Con	x	47.5	44.6	-	7.8	-
Finchley Church End	Con	Con	Con	41.8	24.8	25.5	8.6	-
Garden Suburb	Con	Con	x	46.1	23.6	13.7	9.0	7.6
Golders Green	Con	Con	x	65.8	19.2	5.3	6.2	3.4
Hendon	Con	Con	Con	50.2	24.9	5.2	8.5	11.2
Mill Hill	Con	Con	Con	39.9	30.5	14.8	9.3	5.5

Jewish Barnet

21 seats

Golders Green, Hendon and Edgware are the most loyally Conservative wards, and also tend to conservatism in religious terms. Although, for obvious reasons, populist right-wing politics is often a turn-off for British Jews, it may be that Reform has found a channel into conservative parts of the community, as shown by their 30 per cent in the Hendon by-election.

Garden Suburb is very high-status (65 per cent with degrees) and therefore unusual in still being a safe Conservative ward. One suspects that eventually it and Finchley Church End (where Labour did surprisingly

well in the March 2025 by-election) will leave the blue column, but that moment will be delayed by vote-splitting on the centre and Left and the Labour government's unpopularity.

There are three wards that were fairly close in 2022. Labour got within 42 votes in Edgwarebury and 218 in Mill Hill. Edgwarebury was a stretch target that contained parts of the old Hale ward, which could vote Labour for the right candidate in the right year, but Mill Hill was more of a surprise.

The other is Childs Hill, which includes a chunk of the town centre of Golders Green and some estates to the west (it is a transitional area between Jewish suburbia and working-class south west Barnet). Labour won there in 2022 despite losing their best area – and Clarke – to Cricklewood in the boundary changes. The ward has a Lib Dem history, though this appears dormant. It will surely be a Conservative target.

South East Barnet

11 seats

The south east of the borough is the most metropolitan corner of Barnet, similar to Highgate and Muswell Hill across the borough boundary in Haringey. Other than Church End, Finchley is now predominantly Labour and Friern Barnet has rapidly converged to this status.

The potential threat to Labour here is if the Greens or Lib Dems make a serious effort to target any of the wards. The latter had a go at West Finchley in 2022, but only achieved a distant second place. Labour's vote will be less solid in 2026, but even so the dynamics are different in a borough where politics is basically a two-party contest between Labour and the Conservatives than in liberal-left inner boroughs.

Ward-level results (2022)	Councillors 2022			Vote share percentage 2022				
	1	2	3	Con	Lab	LD	Green	Other
East Finchley	Lab	Lab	Lab	12.8	59.4	16.1	11.7	-
Friern Barnet	Lab	Lab	Lab	21.7	59.7	7.3	11.3	-
West Finchley	Lab	Lab	Lab	18.3	46.9	19.0	10.4	5.4
Woodhouse	Lab	Lab	x	26.3	53.7	8.9	11.1	-

North East Barnet – Chipping Barnet

16 seats

The territory along the upper reaches of the Barnet branch of the Northern Line, and the main line out of King's Cross, is where Barnet elections are won and lost. Labour's breakthrough majority in Barnet was mostly achieved in these pleasant suburban wards. In the 2018 election the Tories won 12 seats to Labour's 3, but in 2022 it swung round to 12 Labour and 4 Tories – the extra councillor arising from new boundaries.

This area comprises the bulk of the Chipping Barnet constituency (Underhill and Edgwarebury are also included in that seat). The housing is mostly owner-occupied Victorian and interwar suburbia, with very little social housing (only High Barnet ward scrapes above 10 per cent social renting). There are some pockets of considerable wealth in Totteridge in particular, but the general atmosphere is of relatively comfortably-off educated professional families.

Ward-level results (2022)	Councillors 2022			Vote share percentage 2022				
	1	2	3	Con	Lab	LD	Green	Other
Barnet Vale	Lab	Con	Lab	37.4	37.5	11.5	13.6	-
Brunswick Park	Lab	Lab	Lab	37.3	46.5	5.6	10.6	-
East Barnet	Lab	Lab	Lab	38.2	44.9	5.4	11.4	-
High Barnet	Lab	Lab	x	35.3	48.7	4.7	8.5	2.8
Totteridge & Woodside	Con	Con	Con	43.4	30.5	11.8	9.7	4.5
Whetstone	Lab	Lab	x	37.3	49.8	-	12.9	-

North East Barnet – Chipping Barnet

16 seats

In contemporary London this often means increasing diversity, and that is the case in Chipping Barnet. The White British population is still around half but falling: it dropped by more than 10 per cent over the 2011–21 period in Barnet Vale, East Barnet, High Barnet and Whetstone. The newcomers come from a wide range of ethnic and religious backgrounds, without any one community dominating.

Such change has certainly helped shift these wards to the Left, but that is far from the whole story – as in Southgate just across the borough boundary the sort of educated professional people who have always lived here

have been increasingly alienated from the Conservatives. Although the Jewish population is a lot smaller than it is in the centre of the borough, it is large by national standards and Corbyn's travails over anti-Semitism may have helped the Tories survive in 2018.

Totteridge & Woodside is the most Conservative of these wards, although the party's winning margin in 2022 was unimpressive for such an affluent place. As their rather similar election results in 2022 suggest, many of these wards are much of a muchness and more likely to move together (or not) as a clump than to split their favours.

Labour is probably in better shape to defend the Chipping Barnet marginals than many apparently safer wards. Demographically, these are places where Reform is unlikely to challenge for a seat, but where they will still take a crucial lump out of the Conservative vote, while Labour is less threatened from the left flank than in more metropolitan wards. This is how it played out in the Whetstone by-election.



BARNET

What to watch for

The Conservatives will work hard to reassert the status quo in what had been one of their flagship London boroughs, but Reform seems likely to make their comeback harder. Labour looks sure to sustain losses, but stands a chance of surviving.

Bexley



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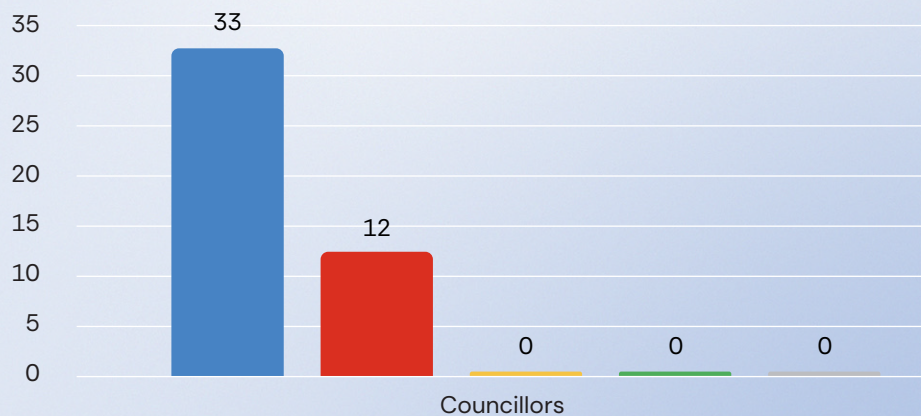
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Since 2022

Conservative Defence

Interviewed in November, just before stepping down after 17 years as Bexley's leader, Teresa O'Neill expressed confidence that local voters recognised how well Conservatives have run their borough for two decades and would accordingly keep voting for her party. But when Nigel Farage boasted soon after that Reform UK "will win boroughs in London" everyone knew Bexley was on his list. It could hardly be riper for conquest.

Bexley Council result May 2022 | Total seats: 45



Conservative Labour Liberal Democrat Green Other

In 2022, Bexley Tories withstood the second largest Conservative-to-Labour swing in London (after Barnet) to secure their party's biggest London vote share and lose only one seat, winning 33 to Labour's 12. Even though three of those Tories now sit as Independents, the council superficially looks solidly theirs.

But in 2014 Farage's UKIP took more than 20 per cent of the borough's popular vote and won three seats. Even the British National Party nudged into double figures in some wards. In the 2016 EU Referendum, Bexley was one of London's five Leave-voting boroughs. And in the 2024 general election, Reform made ominous impacts in the three local parliamentary seats.

By-elections since May 2022

17 OCTOBER 2024

BELVEDERE

LAB HOLD

Labour's vote too is susceptible to Reform: the sole Bexley by-election since 2022 resulted in a Labour hold but with a sharply reduced share as Reform's rose by even more and that of the Tories barely changed. Conservatives have been worrying about a Reform challenge in Bexley since even before Farage made a comeback as its leader. They must be very worried now.

Local landscape

With its high rate of home-ownership, a population whose average age is closer to England's than to London's, its history of giving houseroom to the nationalist Right and its long border with Reform-run Kent, Bexley looks a natural next stage of Reform's advance in the south east of England.

Geographically, Tory strength is concentrated in the centre and south, the parts furthest from its Thames waterfront and areas becoming settled by young and liberal-minded professionals. They are drawn by relatively low London house prices and the Abbey Wood spur of the Elizabeth line, through which Bexley's boundary with Greenwich literally runs. There, Labour has its redoubt. All points below that red band are solid blue.

In 2022, Labour got a very small reward for taking 41 per cent of the popular vote with a high-ish swing. That was because the party polled a steady 30–40 per cent across a lot of wards while the Conservatives got around 50 per cent. It was more fortunate in the 2024 general election, when Labour's Dan Francis surprisingly gained the Bexleyheath & Crayford parliamentary seat. Such luck is unlikely to be repeated on 7 May.

Bexley has a strong sense of borough autonomy and, much like Bromley, its bigger Tory neighbour, has form for seeking to thwart the will of Londonwide government, notably when it comes to roads. It was the principal borough opponent of Ken Livingstone's unrealised plan for a Thames Gateway road bridge, even though it would have linked Newham to the north with Greenwich to Bexley's immediate west, rather than with Bexley directly. The objection was to the risk of more through-traffic and congestion.

Much more recently, Bexley was among the four Conservative boroughs – the others were Bromley, Hillingdon and Harrow – which, along with Surrey County Council, sought without success to thwart through the courts Sir Sadiq Khan's expansion of the Ultra-Low Emission Zone to all of Greater London. Bexley has stuck to its line that the expansion wasn't really about air quality at all.

The Tories have had no truck either with traffic-reduction policies such as the Low Traffic Neighbourhoods. Despite now being served by a Superloop bus service, Bexley

is not abundant in public transport. When it comes to motorists, the borough tends to look after its own.

O'Neill took pride in her administration's careful housekeeping, helping it to limit Council Tax increases and ultimately avoid becoming one of the string of boroughs that has received extra help with its finances from national government. Tree-planting, recycling, new libraries and children's services rated "outstanding" by Ofsted were among the policy achievements she most prized.

The borough has been criticised by opponents for dragging its feet on homebuilding, especially the cheaper kinds. Its housing strategy signals caution and conservation, protesting readiness to help London "grow sustainably" while continuing to "respect the borough's overall character and identity".

There have been two significant estate regeneration projects and Bexley has backed the renewal of the huge postwar Thamesmead estate, part of which lies in its territory. That includes an extension of the Docklands

Local landscape

Light Railway south of the Thames beyond the recently-approved one into next-door Greenwich, which would take the line to Belvedere. At the same time, City Hall has lately overruled Bexley's objections to a tall residential tower near Abbey Wood.

O'Neill will stand down as a councillor this time and concentrate solely on her work in the House of Lords, to which she was elevated in November 2022. Her successor as Bexley leader, David Leaf, has to win a big battle if Bexley is to stay in Conservative hands. Nationalist Right leanings have endured in this 72 per cent white borough and can be traced back to a notorious BNP bookshop in Welling that opened in 1989 and was a beacon for racist unrest until its closure by the council in 1995.

What would a Reform administration bring to Bexley Council that isn't already being supplied? It is parsimonious to a fault, competent, takes care of its roads and appears to run good services. The Civic Halls in Bexleyheath at the borough's heart have been blessed with many years of consistency, nurtured by a personal touch. Leaf has shown no inclination to dismantle the machine O'Neill built.

Reform's Bexley leader, Tom Bright, has been applauding Reform flagship Kent County Council's "balanced budget" – complete with a Council Tax rise of 3.99 per cent they'd promised wouldn't happen – cheering on high-profile defectors from the Tories and chiming in with

Farage's "lawless London" narrative. His programme for improving Bexley's local government is less discernible. Maybe the incoming Reform tide will be so strong that this won't matter.

Bexley Council elections since 2002						
Year	Con	Lab	LD	UKIP/Ref	Green	Other
2002	30	32	1	-	-	-
2006	54	9	-	-	-	-
2010	52	11	-	-	-	-
2014	45	15	-	3	-	-
2018	34	11	-	-	-	-
2022	33	12	-	-	-	-

 BEXLEY

Electoral prospects

Broadly, Bexley gets more affluent the further you travel from north to south, and this is reflected in electoral behaviour. There is a knot of Labour wards in the north along the Thames, then some marginal territory and then safe Conservative wards.



Erith

10 seats

These four wards along the borough's Thames shore are Bexley's most Labour area. They are different from the rest of the borough in their class and ethnic composition – the only wards in Bexley where white British Londoners are in the minority, although they are the largest single community and the proportion is still much higher than is found in most of inner London and several affluent suburbs.

Ward-level results (2022)	Councillors 2022			Vote share percentage 2022				
	1	2	3	Con	Lab	LD	Green	Other
Belvedere	Lab	Lab	Lab	31.4	54.1	-	14.5	-
Erith	Lab	Lab	x	30.9	69.1	-	-	-
Slade Green & Northend	Lab	Lab	x	37.6	62.4	-	-	-
Thamesmead East	Lab	Lab	Lab	22.2	69.6	8.2	-	-

The principal minority is black African, as it is in much of south east London. Slade Green, Thamesmead and Erith have high proportions of social housing. All but Slade Green & Northend ward are in Labour's fairly safe Erith & Thamesmead parliamentary constituency.

Reform poses a threat to Labour's position in these wards, with the possible exception of Thamesmead East. Erith is quite a traditional working-class area like those in Kent which went massively for Reform in 2025.

There is a persistent Conservative vote, over 30 per cent in 2022, which may well collapse to Reform. Turnout is also habitually low and the wards are not vigorously contested, which means there is a pool of low-engagement voters of the sort who can be mobilised by Reform. The party won 17 per cent in the Belvedere by-election, which came before their big surge in 2025, and UKIP at its 2014 peak polled 29 per cent in predecessor wards Belvedere, Erith and Lesnes Abbey.

Bexleyheath

13 seats

Demographically, the mix of 80 per cent owner occupied, 70 per cent white British and only around 30 per cent with degree-level qualifications has been a recipe for Conservatism even if, or perhaps especially if, these suburbs are less plush than those to the south in Sidcup or Bromley.

Labour's vote share in 2022 was respectable, considering, although it was boosted by the two-party nature of the contest. Northumberland Heath is closer to Labour's Erith redoubt and in demographic terms between the two poles, so its voting pattern – a split result in 2018 and Labour's sole Bexley gain in 2022 – is not surprising.

The same demographics that have made Conservative Bexleyheath resistant to Labour make it extremely vulnerable to Reform. UKIP polled around 30 per cent there in 2014 and elected single councillors in two wards. It would not be surprising if Reform swept the board here.

Ward-level results (2022)	Councillors 2022			Vote share percentage 2022				
	1	2	3	Con	Lab	LD	Green	Other
Barnehurst	Con	Con	x	58.7	41.3	-	-	-
Bexleyheath	Con	Con	Con	52.0	37.6	10.5	-	-
Crook Log	Con	Con	Con	50.4	35.3	14.3	-	-
Northumberland Heath	Lab	Lab	x	41.8	49.2	9.0	-	-
West Heath	Con	Con	Con	58.0	42.0	-	-	-

Crayford

3 seats

Crayford stands a little geographically apart from the built-up area of Bexleyheath but it has a seamless border with Dartford to the east.

It used to be a reasonably reliable Labour ward but swung to the Right in 2006 and did not quite come back in 2022. It must be a probable for Reform. UKIP did not contest it in 2014, but 17 per cent voted BNP in that year.

Ward-level results (2022)	Councillors 2022			Vote share percentage 2022				
	1	2	3	Con	Lab	LD	Green	Other
Crayford	Con	Con	Con	53.7	46.3	-	-	-

Welling

6 seats

The Welling area is in the Old Bexley & Sidcup parliamentary seat but it is north of the A2, unlike most of the constituency. Labour has sometimes been able to win the East Wickham ward but not for the past few elections. They fell 41 votes short of a seat in 2022.

The BNP history here, mentioned above, has been reflected at the ballot box. In 2009 the extreme Right party finished eight votes short of winning an East Wickham seat in a local by-election. They were still polling nine per cent in 2014, alongside a UKIP share of 29 per cent. Welling is changing, in that the white British proportion of the population fell by 16 percentage points in 2011-21 and is now only 62 per cent, which is low for Bexley.

Ward-level results (2022)	Councillors 2022			Vote share percentage 2022				
	1	2	3	Con	Lab	LD	Green	Other
East Wickham	Con	Con	Con	43.9	38.1	12.0	-	6.0
Falconwood & Welling	Con	Con	Con	47.0	33.8	-	13.2	6.0

Sidcup

13 seats

This group of wards is in the southern part of Bexley, the suburban area lying between the A2 and A20 arterial roads that link London and Kent. Most of it would identify as Sidcup, although St Mary's & St James ward is Old Bexley.

The Sidcup ward is actually the least typical, in that it is only 64 per cent owner-occupied while the other wards are around 80 per cent, but there is not much variety in voting behaviour. Even at Labour's 2002 peak, when they won control of the council by a single seat, they only had two councillors from this group of wards.

Sidcup's affluent residents tend to be managers and tradespeople rather than professionals. As with Bexleyheath, the social make-up suggests strong Reform potential.

Ward-level results (2022)	Councillors 2022			Vote share percentage 2022				
	1	2	3	Con	Lab	LD	Green	Other
Blackfen & Lamorbey	Con	Con	Con	49.1	30.8	12.6	-	7.6
Blendon & Penhill	Con	Con	Con	53.4	29.7	10.2	-	6.6
Longlands	Con	Con	x	51.0	36.6	12.4	-	-
St Mary's & St James	Con	Con	x	51.9	30.6	11.3	-	6.2
Sidcup	Con	Con	Con	47.9	30.7	12.0	-	9.5



BEXLEY

What to watch for

Bexley is, or should be, Reform's number one target in London. The party will confound expectations should it fail to take it.

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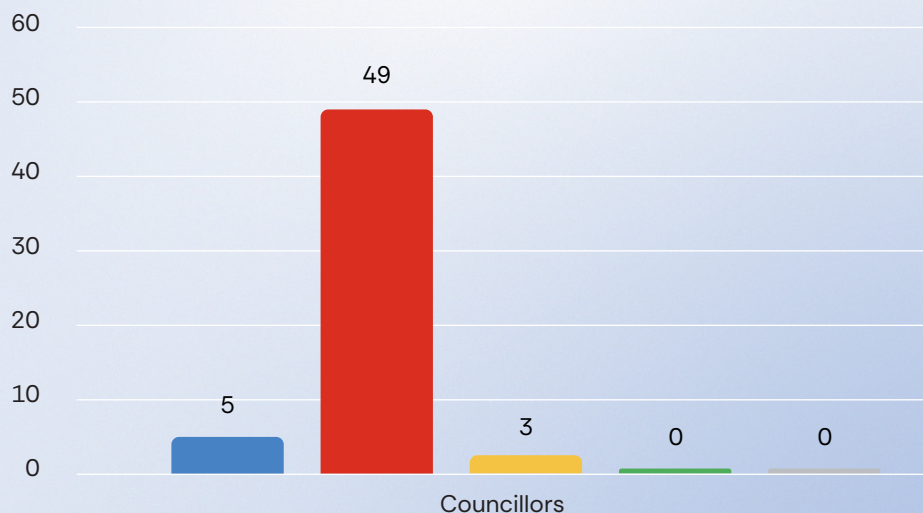
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Since 2022

Labour Defence

Brent was one of the eight boroughs where Labour lost ground to the Conservatives in 2022. The three per cent swing was nowhere near big enough to prevent Labour winning 49 of the 57 council seats, but it helped the Tories take five – more than they had won in 2018 when, pre-boundary changes, there had been 63 seats to contest. The Liberal Democrats, too, improved their position with a three-seat haul. This fraying of the Labour fabric could well become bigger and broader.

Brent Council result May 2022 | Total seats: 57



Conservative Labour Liberal Democrat Green Other

By-elections since May 2022

04 JULY 2024

QUEENS PARK

LAB HOLD

18 FEBRUARY 2025

ALPERTON

LIB DEM HOLD

There have been two by-elections in Brent in the past four years. The first, held on general election day 2024, resulted in a diminished Labour hold. The second, which took place last February, provided qualified clues about what might happen this May: a solid Lib Dem hold, a big Labour loss of vote share and the Conservatives, though third, improving since 2022 and comfortably ahead of Reform UK.

The Tories will hope to build on their strengths in the borough. The Lib Dems will surely want to be seen as the natural alternative for local voters fed up with Labour, as they have been in Brent in the past.

Labour has lost eight of its 2022 councillor intake including, in December, five to the Greens, four of whom had been deselected by their now former party. Labour had already lost one of its group members to the Tories – also following deselection – and another who has been an Independent since June when she was placed under “administration suspension” from the party. The eighth to go left in March to become the first and, so far, only London councillor to sit as a member of Your Party. He isn’t seeking re-election. The extent to which these changes of allegiance reflect Brent public opinion will be revealed soon enough.

Local landscape

Brent stretches from the topmost tips of Westminster and Kensington & Chelsea in the south to a long border with Harrow in the north and offers all the variety that contrast might suggest. Within its border lie Wembley Stadium, Neasden's celebrated Swaminarayan Hindu temple, Willesden, Harlesden, parts of Kilburn, Queen's Park, the Park Royal commercial estate and the Welsh Harp reservoir.

As with other "middle London" boroughs, Brent, which takes its name from the river of that name, doesn't lend itself to easy definition, being both urban and suburban and with some of its settlements and features straddling borough boundaries.

Brent provides its own version of London's complexity and diversity. Its 2026 election results will do the same. It is a radial slice of inner north west London, a complex and sometimes chaotic metropolitan mixture of ethnic, religious, social and local communities chopped up – but also united – by railways and major roads.

The current council has made housebuilding a big priority, and not without reason. The last Census showed that an above London average rise in population – up by 9.2 per cent to nearly 340,000 – had been accompanied by falls in the percentages of home owners and social renters while private renting had gone up.

To address that recipe for homelessness and insecurity, the council has energetically pursued homebuilding programmes in partnership with the Mayor of London and others, as well as investing its own money. In May 2023, Sir Sadiq Khan visited a new development in Stonebridge to highlight his contribution to council home building in the capital.

Brent has also made headlines for its decision last year to twin with the occupied West Bank city of Nablus. Butt explained that this did not represent "support for any political group or administration" there but instead reflected "Brent's humanitarian values and a desire to connect with ordinary people in another part of the

world". He also assured residents that acknowledged the "pain and trauma" experienced by Jews following "the horrific terrorist attacks committed by Hamas", but the move was controversial with some.

Brent's ethnicity breakdown at the last Census showed Londoners describing themselves as black to account for 17.5 per cent and those identifying as Asian and as white at around a third each. This mix contains the highest proportion of Irish people of any local authority in Great Britain and the largest number of Brazilians, along with Romanians, Poles and Somalis. In terms of religion, Christians formed a plurality at around 38 per cent, followed by Muslims (21 per cent and rising) and Hindus (15.6 per cent and falling).

Historically, political control of Brent has mostly fluctuated between Labour and No Overall Control, with the Conservatives providing a hung council leader from 1990 until 1996 and a Lib Dem taking the same role from 2006 until 2010. That year marked the start of a

Local landscape

sustained period of Labour stewardship, for all but the first two years under Muhammed Butt.

The likely erosion of Labour support this time may take different forms in different parts of the borough. The Conservative pick-up in 2022 probably owed much to the solidifying of Hindu Londoners' support for the party, part of a well-established national trend. The Tories' seats are all in the north of the borough, where it holds hands with Tory Harrow. They will hope to build from there.

The current Lib Dem seats are in the west. The party was delighted to hold one in Alperton ward in last February's by-election, one of the two it won in the three-seat ward four years ago (Labour won the other). Their vote share was up. So was the Conservatives'. Labour's wasn't. The troubling backdrop to the contest is that it followed the resignation of the Lib Dem councillor who had represented Alperton since 2020, overhauling Labour in a previous by-election. He withdrew from electoral politics partly on police advice following the release of a man who had been jailed for stalking him.

The Tories finished well ahead of Reform in that by-election, confirming that this super-diverse borough is not natural Farage country. The Greens didn't field a

candidate, but in May could provide the stiffest test of Labour in several wards. Green candidates were runners-up behind winning Labour slates in six of them last time. In every case they finished a long way behind, but vote

Brent Council elections since 2002

Year	Con	Lab	LD	UKIP/Ref	Green	Other
2002	19	35	9	-	-	-
2006	15	21	27	-	-	-
2010	6	40	17	-	-	-
2014	6	56	1	-	-	-
2018	3	60	-	-	-	-
2022	5	49	3	-	-	-

 BRENT

Electoral prospects

Labour faces challenges from a number of directions in Brent – the Conservatives in the north, the Lib Dems and Greens elsewhere. They might be victims of an effective pincer movement. But it is also possible that the other parties might fumble what seems like a golden opportunity.

The parliamentary boundary commissioners have struggled with Brent's geography and there have been major changes in the last two reviews. Here, we attempt to divide it up into local groupings that make some sense politically, socially and geographically.

Kilburn

8 seats

This area was formerly (2010-24) in the Hampstead & Kilburn constituency and adjoins Camden and Westminster. It was absurd even in 1888 for this built-up inner London area to be excluded from the London County Council's domain, a situation which was rectified in 1965.

The demographics of this corner are very middle-class metropolitan liberal, while the rest of the borough's main quality is its diversity. This is the whitest part of Brent – Brondesbury Park and Queens Park are the only wards with a white majority – and the most educated, as the same two wards are also over 50 per cent educated to degree level. Kilburn is more working-class thanks to a high proportion of social housing (41 per cent). Queens

Ward-level results (2022)	Councillors 2022			Vote share percentage 2022				
	1	2	3	Con	Lab	LD	Green	Other
Brondesbury Park	Lab	Lab	x	24.5	50.9	8.9	15.7	-
Kilburn	Lab	Lab	Lab	9.5	57.7	10.1	19.3	3.5
Queens Park	Lab	Lab	Lab	11.5	54.5	14.8	19.1	-

Park is the most irreligious (33 per cent) corner of a borough whose population is particularly inclined to express one of several religions.

Politically, these wards have not been guaranteed for Labour. In 2018, Brondesbury Park was a Labour gain from the Conservatives, who had in turn gained it from the Lib Dems in 2014. In Labour's bad year, 2006, only

one Labour councillor was elected in this area, in Kilburn ward.

One possibility is that the Lib Dems and Greens trip over each other when targeting the seats. They have Lib Dem histories but are potentially fertile Green territories. The ex-Labour Green councillor in Brondesbury Park is fighting the seat again under her new colours.

Willesden

8 seats

Willesden and its surroundings is traditionally a diverse area, to the extent that “Other White” was its largest ethnic category in the 2021 Census, although it accounts for only around 25 per cent of the population.

Ward-level results (2022)	Councillors 2022			Vote share percentage 2022				
	1	2	3	Con	Lab	LD	Green	Other
Cricklewood & Mapesbury	Lab	Lab	x	14.1	52.9	12.0	14.7	6.3
Dollis Hill	Lab	Lab	Lab	15.1	58.7	14.9	11.3	-
Willesden Green	Lab	Lab	Lab	12.6	54.6	12.9	19.9	-

London as a world city, a city of immigration from everywhere, is nowhere more apparent than on the streets of Brent where the Home Office’s “Go Home” vans trundled in 2013. Of these three wards, Dollis Hill sticks out a bit as having the second-largest Muslim population (36 per cent) in Brent.

Like the wards to its south, the Willesden area returned a Lib Dem majority in 2006 but the Greens may now fancy their chances.

Harlesden

9 seats

Harlesden has one of London's longer-established black communities, Caribbean at its core but now increasingly of African origin. There is some gentrification creeping in, particularly at its Kensal Green end.

Ward-level results (2022)

	Councillors 2022			Vote share percentage 2022				
	1	2	3	Con	Lab	LD	Green	Other
Harlesden & Kensal Green	Lab	Lab	Lab	9.5	56.4	8.6	18.0	7.5
Roundwood	Lab	Lab	Lab	13.1	70.4	-	16.5	-
Stonebridge	Lab	Lab	Lab	14.3	70.2	-	15.5	-

Stonebridge has a history of deprivation and the tenth highest proportion of social housing (56 per cent) of any London ward. Despite containing Britain's largest Hindu temple, it is one of the least Hindu wards in Brent (five per cent).

The three predecessor wards stuck with Labour in 2006 and while the Greens have some potential in Harlesden & Kensal Green it is hard to see a viable challenge to Labour.

West Wembley and Sudbury

8 seats

This is the area to the west of the main line out of Euston as it goes through Wembley, adjoining the borough boundary with Ealing. Politically, it is notable in being the original base of the Liberals and their successor the Lib Dems in Brent.

Ward-level results (2022)	Councillors 2022			Vote share percentage 2022				
	1	2	3	Con	Lab	LD	Green	Other
Alperton	LD	Lab	LD	12.7	42.3	45.0	-	-
Sudbury	LD	Lab	x	11.2	45.0	43.8	-	-
Wembley Central	Lab	Lab	Lab	22.8	60.3	17.0	-	-

The other factor in these wards is social. Wembley Central and Alperton are the two most Hindu wards in London and Sudbury is in the top ten. The Hindu vote in general swung to the Tories in the borough elections of 2022 and in the general election of 2024, but in Brent it was mainly in the better-off wards to the north of the

borough, rather than these more deprived areas with – at the Alperton end – a background of manufacturing industry. The Lib Dems have the established local presence but it is possible to see the Tory vote increasing in 2026, as it did in the February 2025 Alperton by-election.

East Wembley

7 seats

This area – broadly Wembley between Wembley Central and Wembley Park, including the stadium and complex – has seen a lot of recent development concentrated in what is now Wembley Park ward (a new creation in 2022). Wembley Hill and Tokyngton are areas of plurality (43 per cent) South Asian ethnicity, mostly Indian, although split nearly evenly between Hindus and Muslims.

Wembley Park is effectively a new high-rise community, young, educated and hyper-diverse. It has the highest rate of private renting (62 per cent) and of flat dwelling

Ward-level results (2022)

	Councillors 2022			Vote share percentage 2022				
	1	2	3	Con	Lab	LD	Green	Other
Tokyngton	Lab	Lab	x	24.0	57.7	6.0	12.4	-
Wembley Hill	Lab	Lab	Lab	38.2	45.6	7.7	8.5	-
Wembley Park	Lab	Lab	x	19.7	63.2	17.1	-	-

(99 per cent) of any ward in London. Neighbourhoods like this that have seen high population growth (such as Newham's Stratford Olympic Park and Croydon's Fairfield) seem to have an affinity with the Greens. The party's campaign here will be helped by having an ex-Labour councillor in place and defending the seat.

The boundary changes in this area in 2022 were radical, so comparisons with the past are difficult. But the Conservatives did well in Wembley Hill despite unpromising demographics and a bad national climate. Whether that was an exceptional campaign or whether battle can be renewed in 2026 is as yet unclear.

North Wembley

10 seats

Three of the four wards form Brent's border with Harrow. The other, Preston, is part of the same suburban block that sprawls between several railway lines – Lioness, Metropolitan and Jubilee. The three Harrow border wards are all majority owner-occupied, the Metro-land of family houses with gardens that was a 1930s suburban ideal and is still attractive to people of all ethnicities.

Like Harrow, these wards are home to many affluent Hindu families (Kenton and Queensbury 30 per cent Hindu, the other wards a little less). For a while, Labour's gains at national and local level had seemed inexorable. But the Tories made a slight comeback in 2022, gaining a couple of seats in Queensbury in an echo of what happened in the adjoining Harrow wards.

Ward-level results (2022)	Councillors 2022			Vote share percentage 2022				
	1	2	3	Con	Lab	LD	Green	Other
Kenton	Con	Con	Con	48.2	36.6	6.6	8.5	-
Northwick Park	Lab	Lab	x	34.6	56.5	8.9	-	-
Preston	Lab	Lab	x	31.4	52.9	4.9	6.9	4.0
Queensbury	Con	Con	Lab	47.0	43.5	6.6	-	2.9

Brent West, despite the canny attention to local detail and community interests that has kept Barry Gardiner representing this area for Labour in parliament since he gained it on a huge swing in 1997, swung towards the Tories in 2024. The Conservatives will be looking to

establish themselves as a serious presence on Brent Council for the first time since 2010, and these wards will be key to that effort.

North East Brent

7 seats

This area is north east of Wembley, including part of the border with Barnet and suburban areas around Fryent Country Park. It is hyper-diverse rather than part of the Hindu suburban block.

It was still capable of sustaining a significant Tory minority in the 2022 elections, which might give them some hope for this time.

Ward-level results (2022)	Councillors 2022			Vote share percentage 2022				
	1	2	3	Con	Lab	LD	Green	Other
Barnhill	Lab	Lab	x	30.7	57.3	-	12.0	-
Kingsbury	Lab	Lab	x	29.1	53.6	7.5	9.8	-
Welsh Harp	Lab	Lab	Lab	24.9	51.2	9.6	11.7	2.7



BRENT

What to watch for

Will the Tories be undermined by vote losses to Reform? Will the Lib Dems, Greens and others divide the metropolitan progressive vote, letting Labour through? No other party stands a chance of forming a majority in this complex borough. If it doesn't, piecing together an alternative administration in a hung council situation could prove difficult.

Bromley



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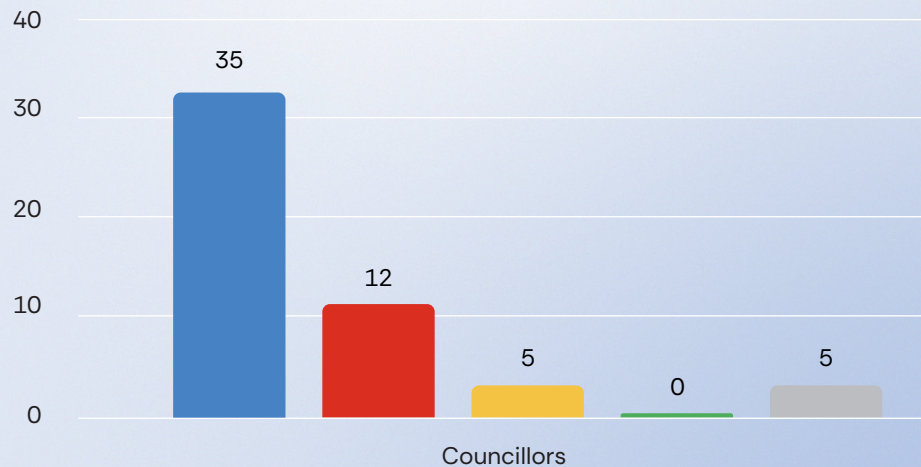
Since 2022

Conservative Defence

In 2022, the Conservatives' habitual huge majority was substantially eroded as Labour, the Liberal Democrats and local Independents made gains mostly in the north of the borough. The Tories won 36 seats out of 58, three times as many as Labour in second place but with their margin of victory reduced to 14. And now comes the threat from Reform UK.

Bromley looks like promising territory for them. It was not one of the five boroughs that voted Leave in the 2016 EU Referendum, but it was only 51 per cent Remain. UKIP at its strongest in 2014 won two Bromley seats. Nigel Farage has a house in a Bromley village. And Reform won its first ever London council seat there at a by-election last summer (as distinct from having councillors defect to them from other parties).

Bromley Council result May 2022 | Total seats: 58



Conservative Labour Liberal Democrat Green Other

By-elections since May 2022

07 DECEMBER 2023	HAYES AND CONEY HALL	CON HOLD
02 MAY 2024	SHORTLANDS AND PARK LANGLEY	CON HOLD
24 JULY 2025	BROMLEY COMMON AND HOLWOOD	REFORM GAIN FROM CON

Since May 2022, the Conservative majority has shrunk to just eight. In addition to that by-election loss, the Tories have suffered two defections to the populist Right party. Another of their councillors died in December and his seat will remain vacant until 7 May. The Tories have, though, recruited an erstwhile Independent. Meanwhile, the 12-strong Labour group elected in 2022 sustained a loss when, in November, one of their number resigned and became an Independent instead.

The current councillor line-up is therefore: Conservative 33, Labour 11, Libs Dems five, Independents five, Reform three and one seat unoccupied. All sorts of permutations appear possible on 7 May. A shake of the kaleidoscope looks probable.

Local landscape

With its very True Blue history and lingering urges to secede from Greater London and join Kent, London's geographically largest borough has long projected Conservative vibes, stoutly and stubbornly suburban. Only once in its electoral history has it produced anything other than a Tory triumph. That was in 1998, when it came under No Overall Control, and even in that year the Tories won the largest number of seats, with the Lib Dems three behind.

The median age of Bromley residents is 41 and rising, making it, jointly with Richmond, London's oldest borough. Unusually for London, its age profile is also slightly higher than that of England as a whole, largely due to its 50 to 64 group growing significantly. Ethnically, Bromley is very much a white borough, with 76.5 per cent of residents describing themselves as such in the 2021 Census. Almost 90 per cent aligned themselves with at least one UK national identity (British only, English only, Wales and British only etcetera...).

It has, at 68.5 per cent, a very high rate of home ownership. Around half of it is designated Green Belt,

embracing part of the North Downs. Swathes of its 58 square miles are covered by the detached and semi-detached family houses of areas such as Keston, Eden Park and Chislehurst. The towns of Orpington and Bromley itself are firmly Kent-ish middle-class.

This is the heart of the heart-shaped borough Reform believes it can invade. Its historic first incursion took place in July 2025, when Alan Cook, won a seat for Bromley Common & Holwood ward, defeating the Conservative defender by 181 votes (and by a vote share of 34 per cent to 29) despite Kemi Badenoch making a polling day appearance.

Cook had had a recent spell in Badenoch's party, before despairing of what he termed its "global socialist view" coming before the national one. Within a month, backed by Farage, he was calling for Bromley to break away from Greater London.

This placed him in a long-running Bromley tradition. The borough has long rebelled against Londonwide layers of government. In 1983, it made a successful legal challenge

to the Greater London Council's Fares Fair policy, which subsidised large reductions in public transport fares through an increase in what we used to call "the rates". It was also one of the boroughs that tried (unsuccessfully) to block via the courts the expansion of the London-wide of the Greater London Authority's Ultra-Low Emission Zone. Biggin Hill in the south of the borough, with its Battle of Britain associations, was a hotbed of anti-ULEZ criminality.

Cook said he'd "pushed over the first Tory domino", a claim that sounded less hubristic later in the year when the two defectors from the Tories joined him to create the Reform council group.

Local landscape

How strongly is the wind blowing in Reform's favour? On the strength of that July win, not overwhelmingly or decisively. In other words, the Conservatives should not be written off. And maybe they can take encouragement from holding their seat in the earlier by-election in next-door Hayes & Coney Hall ward, even as the steep decline in Conservative national popularity was underway.

Another thing to keep in mind about Bromley is that it is a bit more socially varied than it looks at first glance, and increasingly so. It shares a border with Sevenoaks to the south but also a long border with Lewisham in the north. Famously, it at one point intersects with three other boroughs at the same point: Croydon and two more inner London authority areas, those of Lambeth and Southwark.

A steady increase in Labour's representation since 2014 can probably be attributed to influxes of Left-leaning, young and diverse households in Crystal Palace and Penge. Bromley's white population, though still very much a majority, decreased by 7.8 per cent between 2011 and 2021. During the same period, the small Asian and black percentages ticked up.

Bromley Council elections since 2002

Year	Con	Lab	LD	UKIP/Ref	Green	Other
2002	41	6	13	-	-	-
2006	49	4	7	-	-	-
2010	53	3	4	-	-	-
2014	51	7	-	-	-	2
2018	50	8	-	-	-	2
2022	36	12	5	-	-	5

 BROMLEY

Electoral prospects

In 2022, it was possible to joke about Labour winning Bromley, while noting that it might only be a matter of time. Labour's current unpopularity undermines that caveat, and locally the Lib Dems have not rekindled their old strength. It's going to be mostly a Right-on-Right election. Where that will leave either option is hard to say with certainty. Bromley's wards divide into several groups, defined by geography and by demographic and political trends.

The metropolitan corner

8 seats

Bromley has always had an inner London zone with more metropolitan characteristics than the rest of the borough. Penge has a London (SE20) rather than Kent postcode, and was in the old County of London from 1888 until 1900 before returning from Kent to the embrace of County Hall with the reorganisation of London government in 1965. The corner of the borough near Crystal Palace – hence Crystal Palace & Anerley ward – has an Overground station and trams run through Clock House. The Lib Dems used to do well in these parts.

Ward-level results (2022)	Councillors 2022			Vote share percentage 2022				
	1	2	3	Con	Lab	LD	Green	Other
Clock House	Lab	Lab	Lab	19.7	65.9	14.4	-	-
Crystal Palace & Anerley	Lab	Lab	x	10.9	60.8	8.2	20.1	-
Penge & Cator	Lab	Lab	Lab	11.6	57.2	7.6	23.5	-

This area has become increasingly like core London over the past 20 years, with more young people, renters, graduates, ethnic diversity and independent coffee shops – the whole package. This has been reflected in its voting behaviour. It swung by 14.4 per cent towards Labour between the elections of 2002 and 2018, and although boundary changes cloud the comparison it took another jump to the Left in 2022. The Greens came second in two out of three wards that year.

The metropolitan corner is probably sufficiently liberal that a well-organised Green campaign could win a seat or two, although they would be lucky to achieve the sort of turnover in their favour that seems possible for them in some inner boroughs.

Central Bromley and Beckenham

14 seats

Bromley Town covers the town centre including its two stations and areas on either side of the A21 road and has a more typically London demographic than Bromley further out, making it fruitful for the Lib Dems four years ago. Suburban Kelsey & Eden Park, by contrast, recorded a full house of three for the Tories, with Labour not too far behind.

The area has followed the trend of a lot of built-up outer London town centres that are well-connected to the centre by public transport. They become younger, more educated, more diverse and are also where councils tend to want to put new, high-density developments. This has happened in Beckenham and the core of Bromley, creating potential for a centre-left party to gain seats from the Conservatives.

Ward-level results (2022)	Councillors 2022			Vote share percentage 2022				
	1	2	3	Con	Lab	LD	Green	Other
Beckenham Town & Copers Cope	LD	Con	LD	32.0	24.9	32.9	10.1	-
Bromley Town	LD	LD	LD	31.9	15.5	41.2	11.3	-
Kelsey & Eden Park	Con	Con	Con	45.1	38.2	14.4	-	2.3
Plaistow	Lab	Lab	x	37.8	42.4	8.8	8.7	2.2
Shortlands & Park Langley	Con	Con	Con	45.3	30.3	21.1	-	3.3

The Lib Dems translated this into seats in 2022 and stand a good chance of consolidating in 2026. Labour led the challenge in the three more residential wards in this block. In Kelsey & Eden Park and in Shortlands & Park Langley they made progress, though not enough to win.

Plaistow (not to be confused with the place in Newham) is an interesting ward, containing part of the

Downham estate, location of the infamous “class wall” that separated it from privately developed Alexandra Crescent from 1926 until 1950. Labour gained it in 2022 following boundary changes but it is, unlike the rest of this group, potentially vulnerable to Reform as well as to the Tories in 2026.

Bromley suburbs

15 seats

The Conservative vote fell sharply in most of these five wards in 2022, but other than in Chislehurst, where the localist Chislehurst Matters Independents (CMI in the table below) stormed to victory, there was no challenge strong enough to defeat them.

The Labour share of the vote has trended slowly upward over time, suggesting that the same forces that have been working on closer-in wards are being felt in this lush suburbia. But whatever the long-term future, 2026 is not going to be the year Labour breaks through.

Alan Cook won the Bromley Common & Holwood by-election with 34 per cent of the vote, leaving the beaten Conservative with 29 per cent. UKIP got around 20 per cent in all these wards in 2014, suggesting a reasonable

Ward-level results (2022)	Councillors 2022			Vote share percentage 2022				
	1	2	3	Con	Lab	LD	Green	Other
Bickley & Sundridge	Con	Con	Con	47.9	21.6	16.4	14.1	-
Bromley Common & Holwood	Con	Con	Con	42.2	27.3	15.1	15.4	-
Chislehurst	CHM	CHM	CHM	30.2	9.5	5.2	-	55.0
Hayes & Coney Hall	Con	Con	Con	44.6	23.8	12.8	18.7	-
West Wickham	Con	Con	Con	45.2	24.9	11.7	15.5	2.7

foundation for a Reform vote. One of the defectors from the Tories who joined Cook in Reform had been elected for Bickley & Sundridge.

Other than in Chislehurst, the contests look like being between Reform and the Conservatives, though note the 18.7 per cent the Greens got in Hayes & Coney Hall.

Bickley & Sundridge is probably the least favourable for Reform because of its relatively diverse and educated demographics, although we shall see what impact an incumbent councillor might have. The Conservatives were defeated but not blown away in the by-election, suggesting that the results in these wards could include some split verdicts.

Orpington

10 seats

Orpington was the scene of a famous Liberal Party by-election victory in 1962 and the Liberal tradition continued for a long time. They ran the Tories close in 2001, but declined rapidly after that, losing most of their seats in 2002. Sporadic efforts at revival have not produced the desired results, although the Lib Dem vote is still above what might be expected from an area with Orpington's demographics.

Ward-level results (2022)	Councillors 2022			Vote share percentage 2022				
	1	2	3	Con	Lab	LD	Green	Other
Chelsfield	Con	Con	x	48.9	14.5	24.0	12.7	-
Farnborough & Crofton	Con	Con	Con	50.7	18.8	18.7	11.8	-
Orpington	Con	Con	x	48.4	21.4	30.1	-	-
Petts Wood & Knoll	Con	Con	Con	55.4	20.2	24.4	-	-

It is older, whiter and less educated than most of London suburbia, characteristics that have predicted Conservative support in the past but more recently point to potential for Reform. The latter polled 19 per cent in the Orpington parliamentary constituency in 2024, and in 2014 UKIP won 28 per cent in Chelsfield and around 20 per cent elsewhere.

The Orpington wards are the most attractive targets for Reform other than the "council estate" wards. But it is possible that a Lib Dem or two might slip through against a divided right-wing vote.

The ‘council estate’ wards

8 seats

Judging by their demographic and social background and bearing in mind the contours of UKIP support in 2014, the Bromley wards most likely to vote Reform are the ones based on the large “out-estates” built by London councils in the mid-20th Century and settled by white working-class people.

Stretching the definition slightly to include privately developed lower cost housing alongside the estates in the Cray valley, they are Mottingham (two seats), St Mary Cray (three seats) and St Paul’s Cray (three seats).

There are examples of these in several outer London boroughs: see also Barnet, Croydon, Havering, Redbridge, Sutton and Merton and the intriguing parallels in their electoral histories. These were formerly Labour

Ward-level results (2022)	Councillors 2022			Vote share percentage 2022				
	1	2	3	Con	Lab	LD	Green	Other
Mottingham	Con	Con	x	41.1	34.4	9.4	10.5	5.6
St Mary Cray	Con	Con	Con	47.1	40.6	12.3	-	-
St Paul’s Cray	Lab	Con	Lab	36.1	37.4	10.0	-	16.4

strongholds but their solidarity started weakening a long time ago under the impact of the Right to Buy. This was particularly attractive to residents of these estates, which were often just public-sector versions of the property-owning dream of Metro-land suburbia.

The demographics of the estate wards have changed somewhat in the last decade, making their reputation as white enclaves increasingly inaccurate. But by London standards they have older, whiter, less highly-educated and more car-owning populations. This puts them squarely in the Reform target zone.

UKIP polled 26.6 per cent across the equivalent wards in 2014 and won two seats. If Swanley, just across the county boundary in Kent, voted 42 per cent for Reform in the 2025 county council elections, can the Crays not be expected to do likewise in 2026?

It is probable, therefore, that Reform will gain all eight seats in this category. That would be six gains from the Conservatives and two from Labour. If Reform lets any of them slip, though, they will be falling well short of their ambitions.

The rural fringe

3 seats

Bromley has more genuinely rural territory within its borders than any other borough. Much of the acreage is in the single-member Darwin ward which covers the village of Downe, home of Nigel Farage. Biggin Hill is a small free-standing town with two councillors.

You might think that this little corner of rural England would be loyal to the Conservatives. You would be wrong. The Tories could only rely on Biggin Hill between gaining it from the Lib Dems in 2006 and losing it to the two ex-Tory incumbents who stood as Independents in 2018 following a messy selection process.

Ward-level results (2022)

Biggin Hill

Darwin

Councillors 2022

1

2

3

BHI

BHI

x

Con

x

x

Vote share percentage 2022

Con

Lab

LD

Green

Other

36.0

8.9

10.0

-

45.1

56.6

10.0

7.9

5.5

20.1

The Biggin Hill Independents (BHI in the table) held on comfortably in the 2022 elections, but it is one of their number who has since switched to the Tories. The other one is not defending her seat. Darwin ward has remained Conservative.

The rural wards gave UKIP their highest vote shares in Bromley in 2014 – 34.1 per cent in Darwin, 32.2 per cent in Biggin Hill – and they are demographically suitable for Reform.



BROMLEY

What to watch for

The Conservatives will be lucky to still have majority control of Bromley after 7 May, although, one way or another, they might still end up forming a minority administration.

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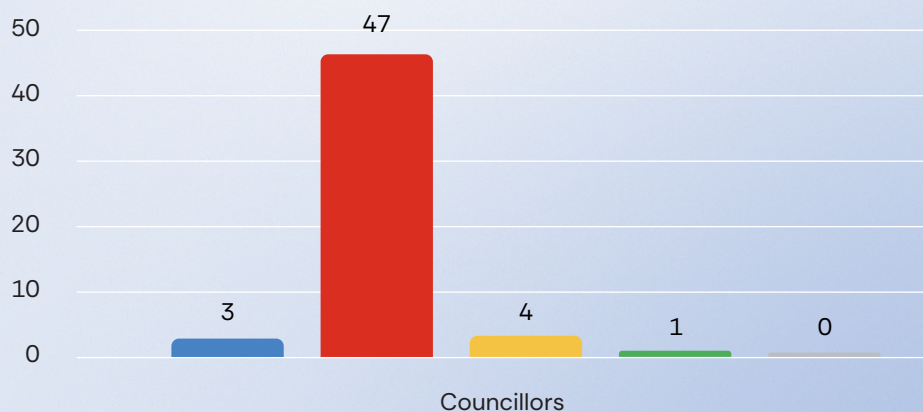
Since 2022

Labour Defence

There have been eight by-elections in Camden since Labour amassed the latest in its succession of big majorities four years ago. Each has been revealing in its own way, but the most recent was spectacularly so. It wasn't a surprise that the Liberal Democrats captured a seat in West Hampstead ward from Labour last summer, but the size of their victory despite Labour making a determined defence showed the potential for a major shift in the political composition of the Town Hall. It also showed how that shift might turn out to be limited.

Camden is a good example of how a flight from Labour in two different directions could, paradoxically, help Labour survive, for the Greens, too, will be fishing in the pool of disillusion. They were squeezed in that West Hampstead contest, but in November 2023 executed a signature hold of the single seat they won in 2022 after Siân Berry, at that time London's best-known Green, vacated it to concentrate on winning a parliamentary seat in Brighton.

Camden Council result May 2022 | Total seats: 55



Conservative Labour Liberal Democrat Green Other

By-elections since May 2022

07 JULY 2022	HAMPSTEAD TOWN	LD GAIN FROM LAB
01 JUNE 2023	SOUTH HAMPSTEAD	LAB HOLD
30 NOVEMBER 2023	HIGHGATE	GREEN HOLD
02 MAY 2024	FROGNAL	CON HOLD
05 SEPTEMBER 2024	CAMDEN SQUARE	LAB HOLD
05 SEPTEMBER 2024	KENTISH TOWN SOUTH	LAB HOLD
05 SEPTEMBER 2024	KILBURN	LAB HOLD
08 AUGUST 2025	WEST HAMPSTEAD	LD GAIN FROM LAB (CON)

Despite the high number of mid-term contests, Labour's overall position on the council has not been much reduced. The party won 47 of Camden's 55 seats last time, compared to the Lib Dems' four, the Conservatives' three and the Greens' one. It still holds 45 and there have been no defections (or from any of the other parties). The Tories will hope to improve a bit, but seem unlikely to threaten much, just as Reform seems unlikely to menace them in these parts. A key dynamic will be ward-level splits between Green and Lib Dem support and whether Labour's is resilient enough against that backdrop for its candidates to hold on to besieged seats.

Local landscape

London contrasts don't come much sharper than those in Camden. It contains part of the West End and has some of the highest property prices in London. Yet it also has a poverty rate of 42 per cent, the capital's joint highest. It is home to London's Knowledge Quarter, a cluster of historic universities and cutting-edge life science research and global tech firms, but it is one of the boroughs that has seen its younger population fall a lot in recent years, leading to primary school mergers and closures as demand for places has fallen.

Camden contains three of London's major railway stations – King's Cross, Euston and St Pancras – as well as the British Library. Yet many of its residents, including some living within a stone's throw of those places, lead lives limited by a matrix of disadvantage, poor health and inequality. A fifth of Camden's areas are among England's 20 per cent most deprived.

The borough's contrasts are geographical too, taking in the timeless Hampstead Heath (owned and managed by the City of London), the huge and widely-praised King's Cross regeneration scheme, several historic parks, including Regent's, the British Museum, and the damaging unfinished business of the HS2 route and station, which

the council wants to lead to completion. At its southern end, it touches the Square Mile.

In policy terms, an administration led since 2024 by Richard Olszewski, who succeeded the House of Common-bound Georgia Gould, has been keen on greening, consolidating and developing traffic-reduction measures from Red Lion Square to Tottenham Court Road.

Growing challenges include a rise in the borough's older population. This forms part of a Londonwide trend, which inner boroughs such as Camden have lately joined – perhaps in part because neighbourhood improvements have made staying put more appealing to those with options than joining the drift to the suburbs and beyond.

The Care Quality Commission assessed the council's adult social provision as "outstanding" last year. Its children's social care has been similarly praised by Ofsted. The Social Housing Regulator has been less impressed by the borough's performance on fire safety, though Camden is far from alone in being rebuked over housing services.

Labour has dominated Camden Town Hall politics for almost all of the borough's history. Could other parties make a better job of capitalising on the strengths and dealing with its difficulties? Will Camden's voters give them the chance?

The Lib Dems seem set to advance further. The Greens will have high hopes in certain wards, but are standing no candidates in two, apparently giving way to those of the Camden People's Alliance, which describes itself as arising from the 2024 general election campaign of Independent candidate Andrew Feinstein. He finished second in Sir Keir Starmer's constituency with 19 per cent of the vote.

Camden Conservatives, so liberal they put out a leaflet in 2022 celebrating the fall of Boris Johnson, might benefit from the centre-Left vote splitting. On the other hand, Labour councillors are well dug-in and as councils go – these things are relative – Camden is well-regarded.

Local landscape

Labour has won all but two elections since Camden was created: the Conservatives prevailed at their historic high point of 1968, and in 2006 the Lib Dems formed the largest party group.

Labour's other by-election loss since 2022, also to the Lib Dems, came in the very first by-election of the term, demonstrating local Lib Dems' latent strength.

Camden Council elections since 2002						
Year	Con	Lab	LD	UKIP/Ref	Green	Other
2002	11	35	8	-	-	-
2006	14	18	20	-	2	-
2010	10	30	13	-	1	-
2014	12	40	1	-	1	-
2018	7	43	3	-	1	-
2022	3	47	4	-	1	-



Electoral prospects

Camden is a multi-faceted borough where Labour usually manages both to get a majority from its solid wards and add some representation from others that are more marginal. May 2022 produced a peak result for the party – it even got a toehold in Hampstead Town – but it is sure to suffer losses this time round, adding to the two already incurred in by-elections. It's all about how many.

There is local intelligence that the Green and Lib Dem campaign teams are sticking to their respective strongest areas, meaning voters are receiving only one message about who is best placed to be Labour rather finding themselves having to choose between two.

West Hampstead

12 seats

These wards lie between the borough border on the A5 (Kilburn High Road) and the A41 trunk road (Finchley Road). They are legitimately Hampstead, being part of the old Metropolitan borough, though nearly all are in NW6 with only small areas in NW8 and NW3.

Demographically, Kilburn is out of step with the other three in having a high proportion (42 per cent) of social housing and a relatively working-class population. The rest are among London's most highly-educated areas: two thirds of their residents have degrees and there is a large professional, private renting and public transport-using population.

Fortune Green and West Hampstead are the original centre of Camden Lib Dem activity. The party first won Fortune Green in 1986 and have had at least one councillor there ever since, most notably the redoubtable Flick Rea who represented it from the start until she

Ward-level results (2022)

	Councillors 2022			Vote share percentage 2022				
	1	2	3	Con	Lab	LD	Green	Other
Fortune Green	LD	Lab	Lab	12.2	45.5	42.3	-	-
Kilburn	Lab	Lab	Lab	17.6	68.2	14.2	-	-
South Hampstead	Lab	Lab	Lab	31.7	54.6	13.7	-	-
West Hampstead	Lab	Lab	Lab	16.4	46.1	37.5	-	-

handed over the reins to a Lib Dem colleague in a 2021 by-election.

Fortune Green has been Richard Olszewski's ward since 2014, although this time he is contesting the safer harbour of Holborn & Covent Garden. The Lib Dems resoundingly re-established their presence in West Hampstead in August last year. They must fancy their chances of getting six out of six in 2026.

South Hampstead, though, has remained a Labour versus Conservative contest. Labour held a seat here, though not very gloriously, in a 2023 by-election. Kilburn went Lib Dem in their peak year of 2006, but it looks a tough nut to crack for them or the Greens (who did not contest any of these promising seats in 2022).

Hampstead

10 seats

Hampstead largely deserves its reputation as an enclave of affluent liberal-Left intellectuals, but its council representation is politically variegated and likely to remain so. These wards can vote Conservative in the right circumstances – the party polled 42 per cent of the vote in Hampstead & Kilburn in the 2015 general election – but the party as it was under Boris Johnson in 2022 and under Kemi Badenoch now is not the sort that appeals here.

Ward-level results (2022)	Councillors 2022			Vote share percentage 2022				
	1	2	3	Con	Lab	LD	Green	Other
Belsize	LD	LD	LD	33.6	21.5	44.9	-	-
Frognal	Con	Con	x	47.5	24.7	13.4	14.5	-
Gospel Oak	Lab	Lab	Lab	15.7	66.0	15.2	-	3.1
Hampstead Town	Con	Lab	x	39.4	39.9	20.8	-	-

Camden Conservatives have been reduced to a single stronghold, wealthy Frognal, which should ensure the continuing presence of Tories in the council chamber. The Lib Dems have consolidated in Belsize and also seem likely to win in Hampstead Town. The seat they gained there in July 2022 by-election resulted from the Labour

winner of the preceding May being so alarmed by his victory that he quickly stood down. Labour lost Gospel Oak to the Conservatives in 2006 (launching the career of shadow home secretary Chris Philp), but this ward with a large 1960s council estate now seems safe for them.

Kentish Town and Highgate

8 seats

Before he moved to Downing Street, Sir Keir Starmer’s home was in Kentish Town North. It formed part of a pattern: the social history of north London and of the Labour Party can be traced by looking at the Camden neighbourhoods of Labour leaders. Hugh Gaitskell lived in Frognal, Michael Foot near South End Green in Hampstead and Ed Miliband in Dartmouth Park in the lower slopes of Highgate (his brother David resided in Primrose Hill).

Although eminent, Starmer was not unusual in being a professional who bought a house there when it was more affordable and has seen it escalate in value. Like much

Ward-level results (2022)	Councillors 2022			Vote share percentage 2022				
	1	2	3	Con	Lab	LD	Green	Other
Highgate	Green	Lab	Lab	10.7	46.3	5.0	38.3	-
Kentish Town North	Lab	Lab	x	5.9	56.3	7.1	26.5	-
Kentish Town South	Lab	Lab	Lab	8.2	60.7	6.8	19.9	4.3

of inner London, these wards – Highgate included – combine ethnic diversity, high proportions of people with degrees and large amounts of social housing.

This mixture has resulted in strong Labour loyalties in recent local and mayoral elections, although margins slipped a lot in the 2024 general election. The Greens

have had a presence in Highgate since 2006 and maintained it with aplomb in the 2023 by-election, though Labour has remained in the picture. The Greens came second in the September 2024 by-election in Kentish Town South.

Camden Town

16 seats

Camden Town gave the first part of its name to the newly created borough in the 1960s. It was reasonably central geographically, though very much in the former borough of St Pancras. The town centre is one of London's top tourist attractions and the residents of the area are an inner London mixture of class, ethnicity and housing tenure.

The southern two wards, Regent's Park and St Pancras & Somers Town, are among the 23 (out of 692) in London with a social housing majority and the latter is the second-most Bangladeshi ward outside Tower Hamlets and Newham. It is also the most deprived ward in the borough, but London's demographics create paradoxes – the ward also has a higher proportion of people educated to degree level than anywhere in suburban Bexley.

Regent's Park ward, as well as being the most scarred by the construction of HS2, contains communities from across the world: there are not many places where a Greece versus Portugal football match will have

Ward-level results (2022)	Councillors 2022			Vote share percentage 2022				
	1	2	3	Con	Lab	LD	Green	Other
Camden Square	Lab	Lab	x	9.7	76.6	13.7	-	-
Camden Town	Lab	Lab	x	10.6	62.4	8.0	19.0	-
Haverstock	Lab	Lab	Lab	9.9	48.1	12.1	21.3	8.5
Primrose Hill	Lab	Lab	Lab	25.2	37.6	11.3	17.0	8.9
Regent's Park	Lab	Lab	Lab	14.5	57.3	8.1	15.9	4.3
St Pancras & Somers Town	Lab	Lab	Lab	11.4	71.3	9.0	-	8.2

supporters of both sides waving flags in the streets. Residents have been united in recent local and mayoral elections in support of the Labour Party, though that changed with the 2024 general election. Starmer's vote in Holborn & St Pancras dropped steeply as votes flowed to a Corbynite Independent. In the September 2024 Camden Square by-election there was a large drop in the Labour vote and a left-wing Independent came second.

Primrose Hill, an affluent and attractive enclave, was linked to Camden Town under previous boundaries but

is now combined with a Hampstead area along Adelaide Road (albeit one of the more council estate parts of Hampstead). The ward could go Conservative in a good year for that party or in a bad one for Labour if the vote was split several ways.

But, in general, these wards are either genuinely safe for Labour or potential contests between Labour and forces to its Left – the Greens or in the case of St Pancras & Somers Town, the Camden People's Alliance.

South Camden

9 seats

“South of the Euston Road” has always been its own world in Camden politics. It is the borough’s slice of central London, containing the old borough of Holborn and much of legal London, as well as Bloomsbury with its academic and literary associations. The ward grouping now reaches to the far side of Euston Road because King’s Cross ward extends up to the large redeveloped area north of the station (and anomalously takes in the small Barker Drive estate in Camden Town).

Ward-level results (2022)	Councillors 2022			Vote share percentage 2022				
	1	2	3	Con	Lab	LD	Green	Other
Bloomsbury	Lab	Lab	Lab	17.6	66.4	16.0	-	-
Holborn & Covent Garden	Lab	Lab	Lab	13.7	67.9	10.1	-	8.3
King’s Cross	Lab	Lab	Lab	10.9	60.1	9.0	19.9	-

Most of the people living among the grand institutions rent their housing either from social or private landlords. According to the last Census, the population fell rather sharply between 2011 and 2021 but this may be misleading to a degree because Covid-19 meant that people with two homes were not in their town flats when the Census was taken. Holborn & Covent Garden is 45 per cent social renting. King’s Cross has student accommodation. University College and the hospital are

in Bloomsbury. The Conservatives used to be competitive in Bloomsbury, but their vote there has collapsed.

The ward to watch is probably King’s Cross. The Greens appeared to be potential winners there, given its favourable composition of young people, students and inhabitants of the new developments, but have given way to the Camden People’s Alliance, which will hope to appeal to the same group of voters.



CAMDEN

What to watch for

To lose control of Camden, Labour would need to suffer a net loss of 19 seats compared to 2022. Six seem likely to go to the Lib Dems and maybe two to the Greens. If the Conservatives get lucky, they might win six. Could more than those 14 slip away? It looks touch and go. If Labour's majority evaporates, what then? Constructing an administration without them could be tricky. A Labour minority might still end up governing, even if its setback is severe.

Croydon



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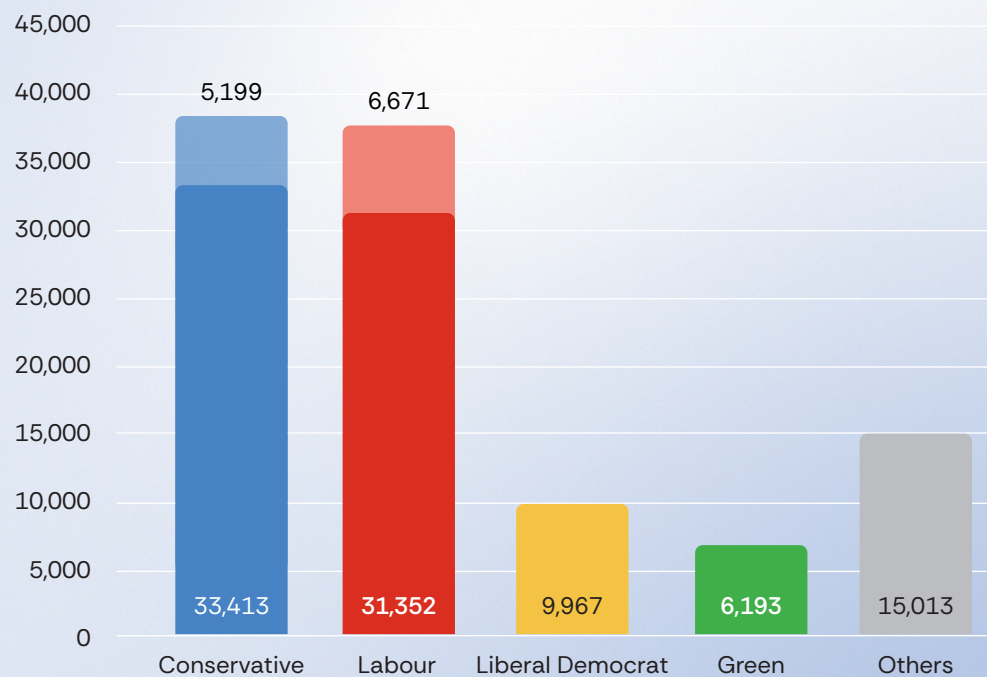
Since 2022

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?

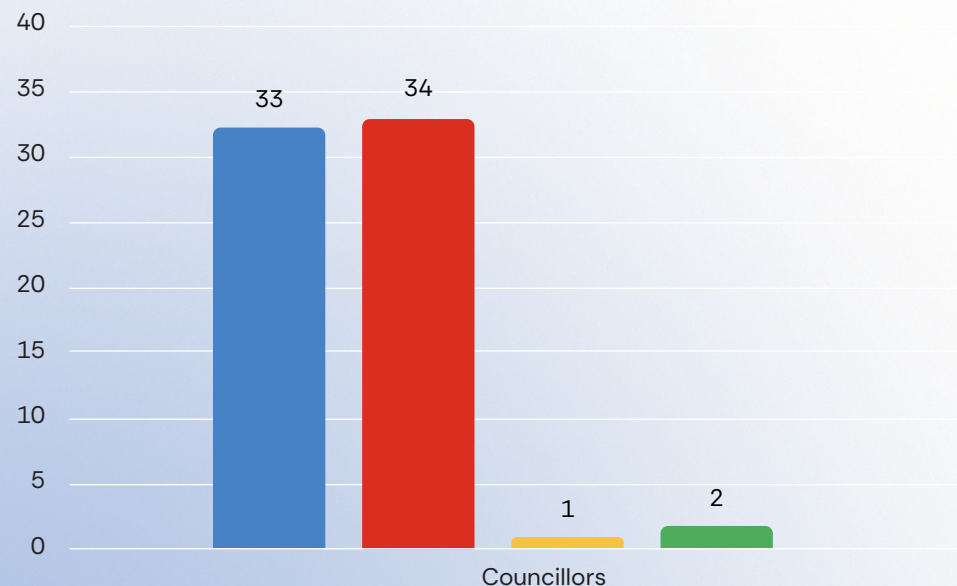
The short and incomplete answer was the Mayor, Jason Perry, who defeated his Labour rival by a very slender margin – less than one per cent after second preferences narrowed an already narrow gap. The Mayor and Cabinet local government model places executive power in those posts. In the words of Croydon's 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



Conservative second preference votes Labour second preference votes

Croydon Council result May 2022 | Total seats: 70



Conservative Labour Liberal Democrat Green Others

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.



CROYDON

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.

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

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

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	-



CROYDON

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.

Ealing

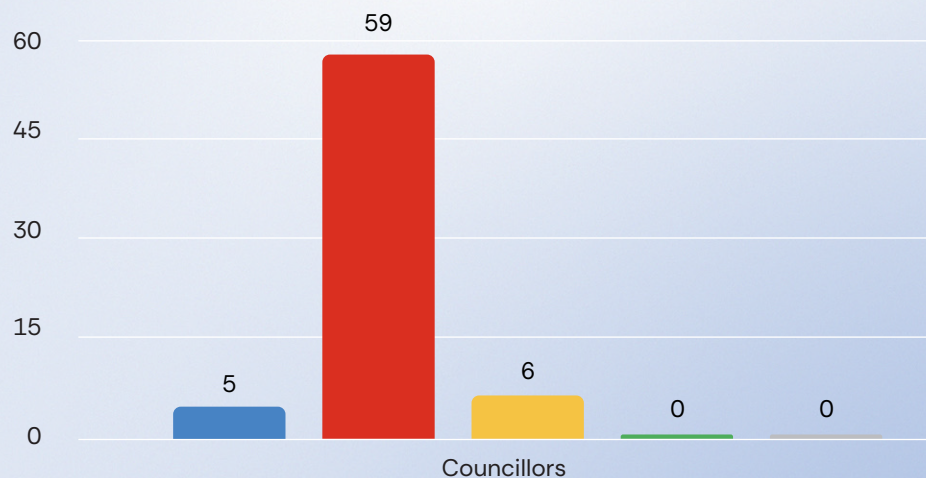
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Since 2022

Labour Defence

Ealing's political complexion used to change like the nation's, but since 2010 it has got redder and redder. Labour won a lion's share 59 of its 70 seats four years ago, leaving the Liberal Democrats (six) and the Conservatives (five) to console themselves with crumbs.

Ealing Council result May 2022 | Total seats: 70



Conservative Labour Liberal Democrat Green Other

The former deprived the latter of one of theirs in an October 2024 by-election. On the same day, Labour retained two of its seats, sustaining a vote share drop in only one of them. In November, a Labour councillor decided to become an Independent and in February, a long-serving Labour councillor died, leaving her seat vacant for the time being. Nothing else has altered since May 2022. Unlike most Labour-run boroughs, the "Queen of the Suburbs" appears fairly serene.

By-elections since May 2022

10 OCTOBER 2024	HANGER HILL	LD GAIN FROM CON
10 OCTOBER 2024	NORTHOLT MANDEVILLE	LAB HOLD
10 OCTOBER 2024	SOUTH ACTON	LAB HOLD

Reform UK and the Greens will hope to increase their vote, though, and the latter stand a chance of winning seats, but Ealing isn't a big target for either. Any erosion of this particular red wall seems likely to be limited and perhaps counterbalanced by a general further fraying of Tory support in the few parts of the borough where the party is still in the game.

Local landscape

Ealing is shaped like an open-mouthed, short-legged dog trotting west from Hammersmith to Hillingdon. In political terms, its scarlet coat is disrupted only by a splash of different colours towards its tail. It hasn't always been this way: the Conservatives have come out on top in five of the 16 full sets of elections held in Ealing's history, including as recently as 2006. But larger London trends have overwhelmed them.

The borough contains seven distinct towns. At its eastern end is Acton, a mostly residential place which includes the 2,000-home, 1960s-built South Acton estate, currently going through a large and lengthy regeneration that began at the end of the last century. Acton is highly and historically multicultural, with Polish, Irish and Japanese in its mix.

The Ealing metropolitan centre contains a Central line western terminus and platforms for the very old District line and the very new Elizabeth line as well as the Civic Centre, the Broadway shopping centre, the Questors Theatre and the modern version of the Ealing film studios where, for decades, cinematic, often famously comedic, depictions of London and England were produced.

Ealing Council elections since 2002						
Year	Con	Lab	LD	UKIP/Ref	Green	Other
2002	17	48	4	-	-	-
2006	37	29	3	-	-	-
2010	24	40	5	-	-	-
2014	12	53	4	-	-	-
2018	8	57	4	-	-	-
2022	5	59	6	-	-	-

Much of the north of Ealing is a mix of public and private housing strung along the A40 and the Great Western railway line. Perivale is synonymous with an Art Deco architecture icon, the former Hoover Factory, now a branch of Tesco. Leafy Greenford contains a stretch of

the Grand Union Canal, which has a new, mixed-use waterside development. To the north west, Northolt contains an RAF base and a noted memorial to Polish airmen who fought for Britain in the Second World War. It pokes its wet nose into the side of Hillingdon next door.

Local landscape

Further south, Hanwell, replete with parks, lies to central Ealing's west. To Hanwell's west, the River Brent creates a line between it and the seventh town, Southall, known for its large South Asian community and, historically, for violent street battles between anti-racism demonstrators and the National Front and the police in the 1970s. A growing percentage of Ealing residents report their country of birth as India (8.7 per cent at the last Census).

A variegated borough, then, where Labour's London voter coalition has become formidable. You have to remind yourself that the old Greenford and Northolt wards voted Leave in the 2016 Referendum and others were only marginally for Remain. Ealing's politics tend to be temperate, though. The popularity of Conservatism has receded in parallel with that party's embrace of nationalist populism. Twenty-five Ealing Community Independent Party candidates will run in eleven wards, making the familiar hard Left pledges to end "austerity, cuts and privatisation", to disinvest from pension

funds that might have connections with Israel and simultaneously to resist "overdevelopment" and get more social housing built. There is no pact with the Greens, which means they will be vying with them to take Labour votes.

Under Peter Mason, the council's leader since he successfully challenged his predecessor in 2021, Ealing has won praise from the Local Government Association for an effective and collaborative approach. Mason inherited considerable public opposition to a radical pandemic-period Low Traffic Neighbourhood and cycle lane programme and similar dissent against plans for high-rise housing, seen by critics as being at odds with local character.

A determined "Stop The Towers" movement has campaigned against new high-rise dwellings, reportedly supported by environmental activists and Greens. There have been setbacks and the borough, like most others, has been falling short of its London plan housing targets.

But not by all that much. And Ealing has lately seen more affordable homes started than any other borough as supply across the capital has slumped.

Mason has long been mindful that changing work habits, hurried along by Covid, have had implications for Ealing. A Local Plan commitment to "sustainable polycentrism" is being pursued through a blend of community development approaches, combining new housing, workspace and a "20-minute neighbourhood" approach to local travel and provision of amenities. In population terms, Ealing has been growing a little faster and a little older than the London average. It is a borough in transition, seemingly managing the tensions that come with it expertly.

 EALING

Electoral prospects

As with every other borough, Labour will face pressure from several directions. However, there is no one party with enough of a base or sufficient potential for growth likely to threaten the party's large majority. The interest in Ealing concerns which of Labour's rivals will make the largest inroads into its majority, and where. To assess that, it is helpful to split the borough's 24 wards into five groups.

Acton

12 seats

Acton was absorbed into the borough of Ealing in 1965 but still retains a sense of being a bit different. While Ealing is suburban, Acton is an urban landscape of Victorian terraces and 20th Century council estates. It is crisscrossed by mainline, Overground and Underground lines and there is new high-density development in South Acton and North Acton - the high rise “Manhacton” - in particular. It has a diverse population.

Ward-level results (2022)	Councillors 2022			Vote share percentage 2022				
	1	2	3	Con	Lab	LD	Green	Other
East Acton	Lab	Lab	Lab	17.9	50.1	7.6	16.4	8.0
North Acton	Lab	Lab	Lab	18.6	44.5	10.7	18.1	8.1
South Acton	Lab	Lab	Lab	14.9	48.8	9.9	20.3	6.1
Southfield	LD	LD	LD	16.2	20.2	47.4	16.2	-

The southernmost ward, Southfield, is a bit different. It adjoins Chiswick and is mostly filled by the highly attractive model estate, Bedford Park. It is also a liberal intellectual enclave, with graduates accounting for 66 per cent of its residents.

Acton well in the 2024 by-election. The Conservatives won six seats out of 12 in 2006, but seem out of the running now. The Greens might hold out some hopes, though the Ealing Community Independents have three candidates in South Acton.

Electoral behaviour can be read off from the social composition – three Labour wards and Lib Dem Southfield, all of them pretty safe. Labour held South

Ealing Central

9 seats

These wards are in the centre and east of Ealing, forming part of the Ealing Central & Acton parliamentary constituency. They are the plushest suburban wards and, not coincidentally, the least Labour part of Ealing. The entire Conservative group comes from here. They held all the seats in Ealing Broadway in 2022, but by an unimpressive margin.

Ward-level results (2022)	Councillors 2022			Vote share percentage 2022				
	1	2	3	Con	Lab	LD	Green	Other
Ealing Broadway	Con	Con	Con	36.9	28.0	15.2	19.9	-
Ealing Common	LD	LD	Lab	18.4	28.4	35.3	16.1	1.8
Hanger Hill	LD	Con	Con	31.7	23.6	31.4	13.4	-

The Lib Dems won a seat in Hanger Hill on a huge swing in 2022 and continued to advance by gaining another seat there in the 2024 by-election. Ealing Common was split three ways between Conservative, Labour and veteran

(since 2002) Lib Dem Jon Ball, but the Tories lost their seat to the Lib Dems in 2022. It seems likely that Sir Ed Davey's party will advance further in 2026.

Hanwell and West Ealing

15 seats

There is a range of different sorts of neighbourhoods within this block of wards, from council-built estates to suburban avenues to terraces of commuting professionals. All of them are majority white, two of them – Walpole and Northfield, to the south west of central Ealing – by large margins.

There was a Labour wipe-out in 2022, but that was not a typical result and the Conservatives remained competitive in the three closest to central Ealing. Although the trends are against them, local activism and a split left-of-centre vote, with Ealing Community Independents running in Pitshanger (one) and Northfield (two), might see them revive. Hanwell Broadway, on the other hand, could see a Green challenge to Labour.

Ward-level results (2022)	Councillors 2022			Vote share percentage 2022				
	1	2	3	Con	Lab	LD	Green	Other
Hanwell Broadway	Lab	Lab	Lab	17.5	41.7	12.0	28.8	-
North Hanwell	Lab	Lab	Lab	18.6	48.3	10.5	19.1	3.5
Northfield	Lab	Lab	Lab	32.1	41.7	11.6	14.5	-
Pitshanger	Lab	Lab	Lab	27.7	38.1	16.2	16.1	1.9
Walpole	Lab	Lab	Lab	27.5	41.2	17.8	13.5	-

Southall

16 seats

Southall, like Acton, became part of the borough of Ealing in 1965 but has a distinctive identity. It is famed as a centre of British Asian (particularly Indian) culture. The last Census found that over 60 per cent of the populations of the three core Southall wards - Broadway, Green and West - are of South Asian heritage while White British accounted for below three percent, the smallest in London. The other three Southall wards are over 40 per cent South Asian.

The predominant religion is Sikh, although there are significant Hindu and Muslim communities. In built environment terms, central Southall is mostly Victorian terraces, but further out there are suburban avenues and council estates (the latter particularly in Norwood Green).

Ward-level results (2022)	Councillors 2022			Vote share percentage 2022				
	1	2	3	Con	Lab	LD	Green	Other
Dormers Wells	Lab	Lab	Lab	15.1	58.4	7.2	9.1	10.2
Lady Margaret	Lab	Lab	Lab	17.6	62.1	7.6	12.7	-
Norwood Green	Lab	Lab	Lab	13.4	64.4	5.7	12.9	3.6
Southall Broadway	Lab	Lab	x	20.6	59.6	5.6	7.0	7.2
Southall Green	Lab	Lab	Lab	16.6	68.1	3.8	6.1	5.4
Southall West	Lab	Lab	x	17.9	58.1	4.2	7.5	12.3

Southall has been a rock for Labour candidates in most recent elections, remaining solid even at Labour's nadir in 2006. However, the party's vote shares dipped somewhat in 2022 from the stratospheric levels of 2014 and 2018, and the Conservative share twitched up a bit, perhaps echoing what was happening in wealthier Hindu communities in Harrow and Brent.

An end to Southall's Labour era seems unlikely, but the right Tory or Independent candidates might be able to make a dent. Green candidates are thin on the ground here, but Ealing Community Independents are standing for every seat in all of these wards except Lady Margaret. Council leader Peter Mason is defending Southall Green.

Northolt, Greenford and Perivale

18 seats

The inter-war suburbs along the A40 north of central Ealing used to have a mixture of white working-class and middle-class residents, but they are now only around 40 per cent white (and 20 per cent White British). They are, though, still fairly working-class by comparison with central and west Ealing or Acton.

Labour has enjoyed a monopoly since 2014, but the wards used to be marginals and might now qualify for that description again. The party's winning margins in 2022 were comfortable but in Central Greenford and Perivale, not overwhelming. Ealing Community Independents have two candidates in Greenford Broadway and one in Perivale. Meanwhile, this might be one of the more Reform-friendly bits of a generally hostile borough, though it is hard to see them winning a seat.

Ward-level results (2022)	Councillors 2022			Vote share percentage 2022				
	1	2	3	Con	Lab	LD	Green	Other
Central Greenford	Lab	Lab	Lab	25.9	49.5	9.4	12.1	3.1
Greenford Broadway	Lab	Lab	Lab	21.4	55.9	6.9	11.8	4.0
North Greenford	Lab	Lab	Lab	22.6	53.8	11.0	12.6	-
Northolt Mandeville	Lab	Lab	Lab	24.8	56.0	6.3	12.8	-
Northolt West End	Lab	Lab	Lab	17.3	62.2	7.8	12.8	-
Perivale	Lab	Lab	Lab	27.7	51.3	7.3	11.0	2.7



EALING

What to watch for

Ealing is likely to produce one of Labour's better results. There is not the same potential for the Greens, Lib Dems or Independent Left candidates as in many inner London boroughs. Neither is it far enough out nor demographically conducive to a major swing to the Right. Labour's majority will surely be reduced, but the well-organised local party should withstand that.

Enfield



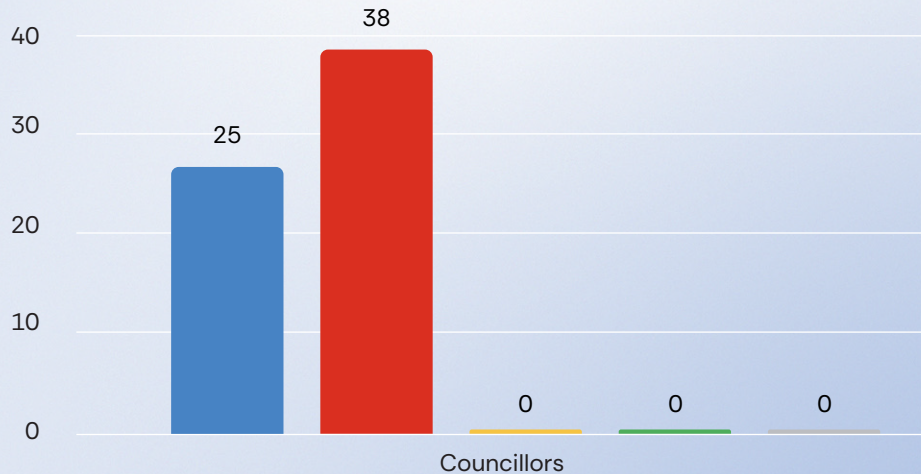
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Since 2022

Labour Defence

They didn't win, but in 2022 Enfield's Conservatives achieved their party's second biggest swing from Labour in the capital and closed the gap on them, securing 25 of the borough's 63 seats compared to Labour's 38. Other parties were barely in contention. The Tories are now thirsting to capture London's northernmost borough for the first time since 2006.

Enfield Council result May 2022 | Total seats: 63



Conservative Labour Liberal Democrat Green Other

By-elections since May 2022

20 APRIL 2023

BULLSMOOR

LAB HOLD

28 NOVEMBER 2024

JUBILEE

LAB HOLD

Only two by-elections have taken place, producing two Labour holds but with reduced margins. But a great deal else has changed, including the leader of the council. And Labour will start this year's race with an advantage of only ten, as three of their 2022 intake now sit as Independents: one after being deselected and two under clouds. Like almost everywhere else, Enfield's electoral battleground is harder to read than before and the outcome could be finely-balanced.

Local landscape

A sign at Crews Hill station in the north of Enfield directs passengers to trains to London, as if, psychologically at least, it doesn't think it is part of the capital. And to be fair, it serves an area that is replete with garden centres – once described as “Britain's horticultural mile” – and the line's next northbound stop is a village in Hertfordshire.

That's one aspect of Enfield. Others include Edmonton, a town of tower blocks in the south east of the borough that starts just south of the North Circular Road, Southgate, a 1930s suburb with Tube station designs to match, and rural Cockfosters at the end of the Piccadilly line.

Around one third of Enfield residents defined themselves at the last Census as White British, with Black African and Black Caribbean chosen by more than five per cent in each case. Enfield is, though, perhaps more noted for those who identify as Turkish, Turkish Cypriot or Kurdish (over nine per cent collectively in 2021) and for those of Greek or Greek Cypriot heritage (over four per cent). A quarter of all Turkish Cypriots in England and Wales live in Enfield, as do almost a quarter of all Greek Cypriots. Enfield also has the fifth highest Somali population.

Enfield Council elections since 2002

Year	Con	Lab	LD	UKIP/Ref	Green	Other
2002	39	24	-	-	-	-
2006	34	27	-	-	-	-
2010	27	36	-	-	-	-
2014	22	41	-	-	-	-
2018	17	46	-	-	-	-
2022	25	38	-	-	-	-

It is a prosperous borough in many parts, but poor in others: its overall poverty rate of 32 per cent is in the top half of the borough league table and nearly 21 per cent of its people receive out of work benefits.

Local landscape

Politically, Enfield has become a borough of two halves, with the east and the south (where Enfield meets Haringey) coloured red on the 2022 results map, and the west, north and most of the centre, blue. In line with the London trend, it got redder and redder from 2010, when the last Tory term came to an end. But that went into reverse four years ago, as the Conservatives gained eight seats at Labour's expense with a swing in their favour of 5.3 per cent. Only Barking & Dagenham saw a bigger switch from "Lab" to "Con". Surely, they will finish the job this time. Maybe. But not so fast.

The Labour administration has been troubled by controversy, disruption and scandal. Council leader Ergin Erbil, who took over from Nesil Caliskan in September 2024 after she became MP for Barking, inherited ongoing ructions about Low Traffic Neighbourhoods (LTNs), the large and largely stalled Meridian Water regeneration project and, most of all, the council's plans for the development of local Green Belt land for housing – plans Sir Sadiq Khan at first opposed.

That difference of opinion has been superseded by subsequent events as London's housing supply pipeline has dried up. Not only is Khan now exploring Green Belt development, the government has selected Crews Hill

and the nearby area known as Chase Park as one of its first-choice sites for a New Town. If Green Belt building was a hot Enfield topic before, it is an even hotter one now.

Labour has hardly been helped by the circumstances surrounding two of the three councillors it has lost. One was suspended after it emerged that he was the subject of a police investigation. He continues to sit as an Independent. The other was the borough's civic mayor, who had to stand down in August after he was sanctioned for bringing his office into disrepute by using his position to support visa applications for family and friends. He has since complied with a conduct committee order to make a written apology, but he remains an Independent councillor.

None of this has done wonders for Labour's chances. However, the path to a Conservative majority is not straightforward. Some hefty Labour margins will have to be erased and the Tories' task will be made no easier by Reform coming at them from the Right with a full slate of candidates.

Conservative group leader Alessandro Georgiou said in an interview with the Enfield Dispatch newspaper last

June that "Enfield is not a Reformy place" and that if Nigel Farage's party thought it could make gains there it needed its head examined. However, Georgiou has been positioning himself as a fervent grassroots nationalist, including in his other job as a member of the London Assembly. A self-described "mate" of former London Mayor candidate and fellow Tory Assembly member, Susan Hall, he, like Reform UK deputy leader Richard Tice, has revived the insult "Commie" to describe Sir Keir Starmer and defended Tice's party against accusations that it is dangerously right wing.

Displaying considerable ambition, he has even sought to portray the September 2025 "Unite the Kingdom" march through central London, led by far-Right agitator Tommy Robinson, as a glorious demonstration of multi-ethnic unity under the national flag. He has also vowed to do away with local LTNs, despite a recent court ruling relating to Tower Hamlets suggesting doing so might not be straightforward.

Erbil and Georgiou have indulged in impolite social media exchanges, yet have some things in common. Both were born at the local Chase Farm Hospital and grew up in Edmonton. Now, both must maximise support from local residents if they are to win on 7 May.

 ENFIELD

Electoral prospects

The Conservatives need a net gain of seven seats to win a majority on Enfield Council for the first time since 2006. They look on course for two, but after that it gets difficult. Careful targeting could get them over the line, but there is a lot that can go wrong. Reform could take several seats and a share of the right-wing vote in other areas.

Edmonton

15 seats

Edmonton is in the south east of the borough, bordering Tottenham and sharing many of its features. It is an established, highly diverse area. The highest White British proportion in any ward is Jubilee's 20 per cent. There are large black communities of various origins and, like much of Enfield, many people of Cypriot origin. The Muslim share is 25-31 per cent.

Ward-level results (2022)	Councillors 2022			Vote share percentage 2022				
	1	2	3	Con	Lab	LD	Green	Other
Edmonton Green	Lab	Lab	Lab	11.7	52.1	3.9	9.8	22.5
Haselbury	Lab	Lab	Lab	20.0	55.9	8.1	16.0	-
Jubilee	Lab	Lab	Lab	22.5	54.9	6.7	11.0	5.0
Lower Edmonton	Lab	Lab	Lab	17.6	63.4	7.1	11.9	-
Upper Edmonton	Lab	Lab	Lab	15.7	68.3	6.0	10.0	-

Labour is very strong in these wards. The Conservatives got one councillor elected in Jubilee in 2002 and 2006, but other than that Labour has had a monopoly on representation in this block. The Tories are not completely down and out in Jubilee (they had an 11-point swing in their favour in the November 2024 by-

election), and candidates of the Jeremy Corbyn-backed Enfield Community Independents are contesting all five wards, stressing their desire to unseat the council leader in Edmonton Green. But even in a bad year for Labour, such as this one, most of these wards look safe for them.

Winchmore Hill

9 seats

The four wards of the Edmonton & Winchmore Hill parliamentary constituency that lie west of the A10 arterial road are rather different from the core of Edmonton to the east. These are white majority, owner-occupied suburbia with very little social housing.

Labour councillors were elected in some of these wards under their old boundaries – Bush Hill Park in 2014 and Winchmore Hill in 2014 and 2018 – but the Tories have achieved strong swings and, other than in the newly-drawn Labour marginal of Highfield, they had decent majorities in three of the four wards in 2022. Highfield looks their best bet for seat gains this time.

Ward-level results (2022)	Councillors 2022			Vote share percentage 2022				
	1	2	3	Con	Lab	LD	Green	Other
Bush Hill Park	Con	Con	Con	48.2	28.0	9.7	12.5	1.7
Grange Park	Con	Con	x	54.4	23.3	10.7	11.6	-
Highfield	Lab	Lab	x	36.0	41.6	12.1	10.3	-
Winchmore Hill	Con	Con	x	48.9	26.2	12.2	12.7	-

Palmers Green

8 seats

This is the south-western corner of Enfield, an inner suburb either side of the non-dualled stretch of the North Circular Road. That grimy stretch is unrepresentative as these are generally pleasant suburbs, from Bowes's neat terraces to the urban parks of Arnos Grove. They resemble middle-class inner London areas like Wood Green in Haringey, just across the border, in being highly diverse and mainly split between owner occupation and private renting. Bowes and Palmers Green are very high in the Other White Census category, reflecting the Cypriot influence there.

Ward-level results (2022)	Councillors 2022			Vote share percentage 2022				
	1	2	3	Con	Lab	LD	Green	Other
Arnos Grove	Con	Con	x	42.9	30.3	16.0	10.7	-
Bowes	Lab	Lab	x	31.1	47.1	8.9	12.8	-
New Southgate	Lab	Lab	x	27.4	49.7	9.5	13.4	-
Palmers Green	Lab	Lab	x	27.0	48.3	12.4	10.9	1.5

On the face of it, this social composition seems unlikely to produce a viable Conservative vote. The wards look like the sort of places where Labour has been on top but is now threatened by the Greens. However, the local politics of Enfield in 2022 produced some decent Tory results: Arnos Grove was a gain (the predecessor ward

Southgate Green was all Labour in 2018) and they did well to get within 20 percentage points in Bowes. The Tories might have hopes of making more progress in 2026 if Labour falls further and the centre-left vote becomes more split.

Southgate

7 seats

These suburbs at the north end of the Piccadilly line returned seven out of seven Conservative councillors in 2022, though Labour had won two out of three in Southgate at the Conservatives' 2018 nadir.

Parts of Cockfosters are quite posh, particularly Hadley Wood off to the north west of the main body of the ward, and the others are affluent and pleasant, a continuation of the suburban belt in Barnet.

The Enfield wards were a bit more Conservative than their Barnet neighbours in the 2022 elections. They do not seem the most likely to be receptive to Reform, so are likely to stay Tory in 2026, although the Greens will be wishing to build on their respectable 2022 Southgate ward result.

Ward-level results (2022)	Councillors 2022			Vote share percentage 2022				
	1	2	3	Con	Lab	LD	Green	Other
Cockfosters	Con	Con	x	56.1	24.1	9.2	10.6	-
Oakwood	Con	Con	x	49.4	28.6	10.5	11.5	-
Southgate	Con	Con	Con	39.8	29.1	7.1	23.9	-

East Enfield

12 seats

Enfield, the town rather than the borough, is rather abruptly divided between east and west. The lower-lying eastern land between the A10 and the River Lea is a working-class area with a manufacturing tradition, although the Enfield Lock gun factory is now a residential development. The White British proportion of the population fell steeply between 2011 and 2021 (around 12 percentage points) and all the wards are now ethnically diverse, with both black and South Asian communities.

Ward-level results (2022)	Councillors 2022			Vote share percentage 2022				
	1	2	3	Con	Lab	LD	Green	Other
Brimsdown	Lab	Lab	Lab	24.7	55.5	6.2	11.4	2.2
Bullsmoor	Lab	Lab	x	29.7	50.7	7.8	9.8	2.0
Carterhatch	Lab	Lab	x	22.7	61.4	6.0	9.9	-
Enfield Lock	Lab	Lab	Lab	24.8	52.9	9.0	13.3	-
Ponders End	Lab	Lab	x	24.9	56.3	8.6	10.2	-

East Enfield usually votes Labour. The Conservatives have had representation there in their better years, but social change may have put them beyond their reach. Ponders End, adjoining Edmonton, and Carterhatch, with its high proportion of social housing, had large Labour majorities in 2022, which was not a very good Labour year in Enfield.

Another element in the northernmost wards – Brimsdown, Bullsmoor and Enfield Lock – is that they are potentially the sort of places where Reform could secure a respectable share of the vote. UKIP got 18 per cent there in 2014. It seems possible that Labour would survive another downward lurch in vote share, but also possible that they could lose to either the Tories or Reform.

Enfield Town

12 seats

The west side of Enfield town is the more middle-class part, clustered around its old church and a rather cosy Overground terminus. The most desirable neighbourhoods are in the Ridgeway ward, furthest west. It, Town and Whitewebbs are the only three wards in Enfield where a majority of the population in the 2021 Census defined itself as White British.

Ward-level results (2022)	Councillors 2022			Vote share percentage 2022				
	1	2	3	Con	Lab	LD	Green	Other
Ridgeway	Con	Con	Con	53.0	21.4	9.3	14.5	1.9
Southbury	Lab	Lab	Lab	31.3	45.0	7.5	13.7	2.6
Town	Con	Con	Con	42.5	30.3	9.0	18.3	-
Whitewebbs	Con	Con	Con	38.2	26.6	21.7	11.8	-

Enfield town is predominantly a comfortable area on the edge of the metropolis with, for London, high levels of car ownership and only average numbers of degree-holders. Southbury is demographically a bit different, an area characterised by a transition from working-class east Enfield. The Crews Hill and Chase Farm New Town developments would fall mostly within the Whitewebbs and Ridgeway wards respectively.

After 2018 it looked as if politics and demography might be shifting Enfield town inexorably to Labour. But the Conservatives managed a partial fightback in 2022, winning Whitewebbs whose predecessor ward, Chase, had returned three Labour councillors in 2018. They also trimmed the Labour majority right down in Southbury. However, in 2026 the Tories might be vulnerable to Reform here too – UKIP polled 17–18 per cent in the wards in this area they fought in 2014.



ENFIELD

What to watch for

The Conservatives could just get over the majority line, but plenty could go wrong: they are still running up a down escalator in terms of demographics and face competition from Reform, which could take several Enfield seats. With Labour likely to slide, a hung council and a Conservative administration governing with the permission of Reform seems like a feasible outcome.

Greenwich

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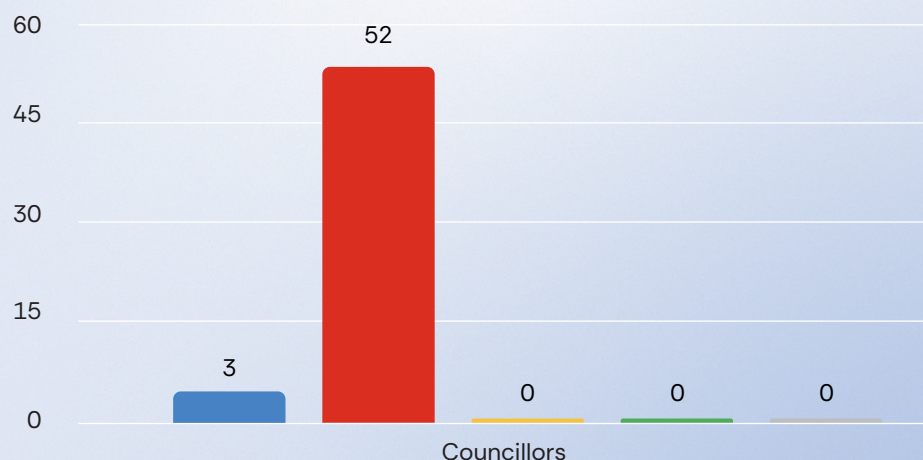
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Since 2022

Labour Defence

Labour forever, except in the Conservatives' glory year of 1968, Greenwich came within three seats of giving the party a full house in 2022, winning 52 seats to the Tories' three. It was the latter's lowest score in the borough's history and their vote share was just 23 per cent compared with Labour's 58. Of the other parties, only the Greens made it into double figures.

Greenwich Council result May 2022 | Total seats: 55



Conservative Labour Liberal Democrat Green Other

By-elections since May 2022

13 JUNE 2024 MOTTINGHAM, COLDHARBOUR & NEW ELTHAM CON HOLD

17 OCTOBER 2024 ELTHAM TOWN & AVERY HILL CON GAIN FROM LAB

14 NOVEMBER 2024 SHOOTERS HILL LAB HOLD

19 DECEMBER 2024 WEST THAMESMEAD LAB HOLD

26 JUNE 2025 SHOOTERS HILL GREEN GAIN FROM LAB

How much might the picture change this time? There have been a couple of by-election reverses for Labour, with one seat lost to the Conservatives and another to the Greens, though the party has held a couple of others. The Tories have retained one.

Labour's numbers have been further depleted by two of their group opting to become Independents, though reportedly only after being deselected. One has since joined the Greens. The conditions don't seem to exist for a spectacular Labour collapse, so the main interest lies in which parties make gains, where and why.

Local landscape

Greenwich stretches from its long, curving Thames riverfront in the north down to Eltham in the south. It shares borders with inner city Lewisham to the west, thoroughly suburban Bromley to the south and a very long one with equally resolutely Outer London Bexley to the east.

These neighbours indicate the profound sense in which Greenwich straddles Inner London and those parts of the metropolis where feelings of connection to the capital can be far more ambivalent. As if to underline this, it is sometimes defined as an Inner London borough and sometimes as an Outer London one: the London Government Act of 1963, which created the boroughs, placed it in Inner London; the Office for National Statistics defines it as an Outer London borough (and, unlike the Act, calls Newham and Haringey Inner London areas).

Consistent with this, Greenwich encompasses many geographical and cultural variations. Woolwich, where the Town Hall and council offices are, can feel a bit like a northern town that has somehow drifted up the estuary. Its history, like those of industrial towns elsewhere that were early adopters of the Labour cause, is defined by a skilled, unionised working-class population employed by large companies – in Woolwich’s case the dockyard and the historic Woolwich Arsenal.

Greenwich Council elections since 2002						
Year	Con	Lab	LD	UKIP/Ref	Green	Other
2002	9	38	4	-	-	-
2006	13	36	2	-	-	-
2010	11	40	-	-	-	-
2014	8	43	-	-	-	-
2018	9	42	-	-	-	-
2022	3	52	-	-	-	-

Other parts of the borough range from the green lungs of Greenwich Park and Blackheath – famous for their views across the capital and as the starting place for the London Marathon – to Greenwich town centre, with its village and open market, to the O2 Arena, to the restored

Cutty Sark, to the estates and other residential quarters of Kidbrooke, Charlton, and Shooters Hill, to the town centre of Eltham and to Plumstead and Abbey Wood, the latter opened up by the arrival of the Elizabeth line.

Local landscape

Greenwich's international claim to fame is being the location of Prime Meridian, the line of longitude on which all Coordinated Universal Time is based, marked by the Greenwich Observatory. In that sense too, Greenwich sits across a borderline, in its case between global east and west.

The council has experienced very little of the turbulence that has hit a lot of other strongly Labour boroughs in the past. It has been keen on redevelopment, both of ex-industrial land and council housing that fell into disrepair and disrepute, such as the Ferrier estate in Kidbrooke.

The huge redevelopment of the Greenwich Peninsula has not been without controversy or opposition, but is still just about ongoing.

The borough has received a large if, some might say, overdue boost in the form of the government backing for a long asked-for extension of the Dockland Light Railway under the river into Thamesmead, where the huge regeneration of a large postwar housing scheme has long been underway. It will be the vital infrastructure underpinning the planned New Town in the area.

Labour's big win in 2022 did not generate universal gratitude for the Labour group leader of the time from within his own ranks. Danny Thorpe, who grew up on the Kidbrooke estate, was narrowly ousted by challenger Anthony Okereke, a councillor since 2018. He is particularly proud of the borough's handling of its responsibilities for its homeless. The borough's biggest new social housing development has been shortlisted for a Royal Institute of British Architects award. Okereke's administration will have things to boast about. Its opponents have got their work cut out.



GREENWICH

Electoral prospects

Greenwich's varied political terrain can best be understood by breaking down its 23 electoral wards into five geographical sub-categories.

Greenwich

13 seats

Greenwich town contains most of the features for which the Royal Borough is well-known to the outsider – the Meridian, the Cutty Sark, the University and the O2 Arena at the end of the Peninsula. These wards, except for Peninsula, are to the west of the A102 Blackwall Tunnel Approach road. For all the pageantry, Greenwich is a lot like the rest of inner London in being a mixture of ethnicities, tenure and social status. It is, Peninsula aside, a bit more white and White British than usual and it has a high proportion of graduates (somewhat contrary to its white working-class reputation).

The areas around Blackheath and Greenwich Park have long been favoured by professional middle-class Londoners. The population has grown substantially with new development in several wards. Peninsula added over 7,000 residents in 2011–21, and East Greenwich (nearly 5,000) and Greenwich Creekside (3,500) have also seen major change.

Ward-level results (2022)	Councillors 2022			Vote share percentage 2022				
	1	2	3	Con	Lab	LD	Green	Other
Blackheath Westcombe	Lab	Lab	Lab	26.5	46.1	11.0	14.3	2.0
East Greenwich	Lab	Lab	Lab	11.8	46.2	2.0	40.0	-
Greenwich Creekside	Lab	Lab	x	12.6	55.6	13.1	18.6	-
Greenwich Park	Lab	Lab	x	12.1	49.4	9.6	28.9	-
Greenwich Peninsula	Lab	Lab	Lab	15.5	51.1	15.0	16.0	2.4

Politically, Greenwich is Labour but not monolithically so. The Conservatives were represented in Blackheath Westcombe all the way through from 2002 to 2022 when Labour finally overcame the personal vote for Tory incumbent Geoff Brighty.

He is still active locally (he chairs the Westcombe Society) and is bidding to regain the seat this time. In the other wards, the Greens are more of a threat. They were only 68 votes off in East Greenwich in 2022.

Charlton

6 seats

Charlton is the intermediate territory between Greenwich and Woolwich. As with much of Greenwich it is whiter than most comparable neighbourhoods in London but still fairly diverse. It is attractive for professional commuters, though they are a minority.

Ward-level results (2022)	Councillors 2022			Vote share percentage 2022				
	1	2	3	Con	Lab	LD	Green	Other
Charlton Hornfair	Lab	Lab	x	17.0	59.4	8.7	14.9	-
Charlton Village & Riverside	Lab	Lab	x	12.3	62.4	8.0	17.2	-
Kidbrooke Park	Lab	Lab	x	20.8	50.3	8.6	15.3	5.0

Charlton Village & Riverside is the second most social renting ward in Greenwich (42 per cent, after Thamesmead Moorings). Politically, Charlton has been solidly Labour for a long time. The Conservatives won narrowly there in 1968, their landslide year, but it has

been all Labour since 1971. Charlton Hornfair will be defended by incumbent Lakshan Saldin, the councillor elected there for Labour in 2022 before sitting for a while as an Independent and then joining the Greens.

Woolwich

15 seats

Woolwich is a traditional Labour stronghold, particularly associated with the Co-operative movement. Its council first went Labour in 1903. Woolwich has experienced deindustrialisation with the closure of the Royal Arsenal in 1994 and the loss of associated ordnance factories.

The barracks is due to close in 2028. The Arsenal has been redeveloped for mixed use and a new commuting population has been attracted to Woolwich by the Elizabeth line and DLR. Woolwich in general has a high proportion of social housing and an unusual ethnic make-up. Thanks to its association with the army, there is a large Nepalese community in Woolwich and Plumstead.

With a couple of exceptions, it is hard to see where a challenge to Labour might emerge. The Greens won Shooters Hill, one of Woolwich's more suburban wards, in the June 2025 by-election, though they were helped by local issues that might not be quite as hot anymore. Woolwich Arsenal holds some potential for the Greens as well. It is less promising for the Tories, but that hasn't deterred one Hugh O'Leary from standing in their name. He, by the way, is the husband of former Prime Minister Liz Truss.

Ward-level results (2022)	Councillors 2022			Vote share percentage 2022				
	1	2	3	Con	Lab	LD	Green	Other
Plumstead & Glyndon	Lab	Lab	Lab	13.3	65.7	8.2	12.8	-
Plumstead Common	Lab	Lab	Lab	16.6	58.0	9.2	16.2	-
Shooters Hill	Lab	Lab	x	13.8	59.0	8.9	15.4	2.9
Woolwich Arsenal	Lab	Lab	Lab	10.5	50.6	12.8	19.8	6.3
Woolwich Common	Lab	Lab	x	15.5	70.3	14.3	-	-
Woolwich Dockyard	Lab	Lab	x	17.1	70.9	12.0	-	-

Thamesmead

7 seats

Greenwich's share of the old, regenerating Thamesmead estate is solidly Labour with some disobliging demographics for challengers – a high share of social renting, a large black population, a medium-sized proportion of graduates.

The Lib Dems did respectably in a by-election in West Thamesmead in December 2024 thanks to local issues and they may yet advance. There are not many alternative targets for them in Greenwich, so it would make sense for them to concentrate their efforts there.

Ward-level results (2022)	Councillors 2022			Vote share percentage 2022				
	1	2	3	Con	Lab	LD	Green	Other
Abbey Wood	Lab	Lab	Lab	16.9	63.0	6.8	13.3	-
Thamesmead Moorings	Lab	Lab	x	18.5	71.0	10.5	-	-
West Thamesmead	Lab	Lab	x	14.0	61.4	8.9	15.7	-

Eltham

14 seats

Eltham is the suburb located – if you're travelling out from central London – around where the A2 and the A20 start being serious trunk roads and diverge from each other. For these purposes we are including some smaller areas, such as Kidbrooke Village and Middle Park, that border Lewisham.

Eltham is a traditional parliamentary marginal gained by Labour's Clive Efford in 1997 and held ever since, not because of demographic change but through a personal vote and strong organisation.

At local level, the Conservatives have been a dwindling force in Eltham and had a shocking set of elections in 2022, but they clung on and remain viable in the eastern three wards at least. They did well in the two by-elections in split wards in 2024, holding Mottingham, Coldharbour & New Eltham – it's the name of just one ward in a borough where many have ridiculously long names – and gaining a seat from Labour in Eltham Town & Avery Hill.

However, the Conservatives will have to defend hard against Reform, because their vote has come from the

Ward-level results (2022)	Councillors 2022			Vote share percentage 2022				
	1	2	3	Con	Lab	LD	Green	Other
Eltham Page	Lab	Lab	x	23.2	46.6	8.0	11.3	10.9
Eltham Park & Progress	Lab	Lab	x	36.0	44.3	5.6	11.7	2.4
Eltham Town & Avery Hill	Lab	Lab	Con	36.8	40.0	7.1	12.6	3.6
Kidbrooke Village & Sutcliffe	Lab	Lab	x	16.3	52.2	11.6	19.9	-
Middle Park & Horn Park	Lab	Lab	x	22.3	58.4	8.5	10.8	-
Mottingham, Coldharbour & New Eltham	Lab	Con	Con	43.5	43.5	9.5	-	3.5

same sort of social base that has supported it over the border in Bexley, which Reform expects to win.

UKIP polled 20 to 24 per cent across this area at their high point in 2014. By London standards, Eltham has a white, car-driving and non-graduate population. All the wards except Kidbrooke Village & Sutcliffe are majority White British.

The western wards of Eltham have more social housing (40 per cent in Eltham Page and Middle Park & Horn Park) or new development (Kidbrooke Village & Sutcliffe) and look rather safer for Labour, though a very high Reform tide might get this far into inner London.



GREENWICH

What to watch for

Labour has been formidably strong in Greenwich throughout the borough's history, making it arguably more faithful to the party than any other except Newham and Barking & Dagenham. Of the three, Greenwich looks the most probable Labour hold in 2026. It is too inner urban, except in Eltham, to be good ground for Reform, and not Muslim or liberal enough outside a few enclaves for the Labour vote to collapse to the Left.

Hackney

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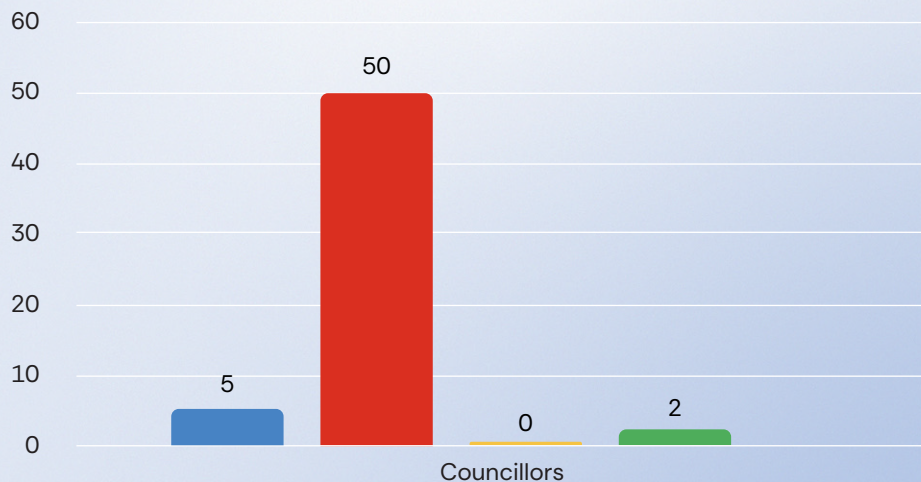
Since 2022

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.

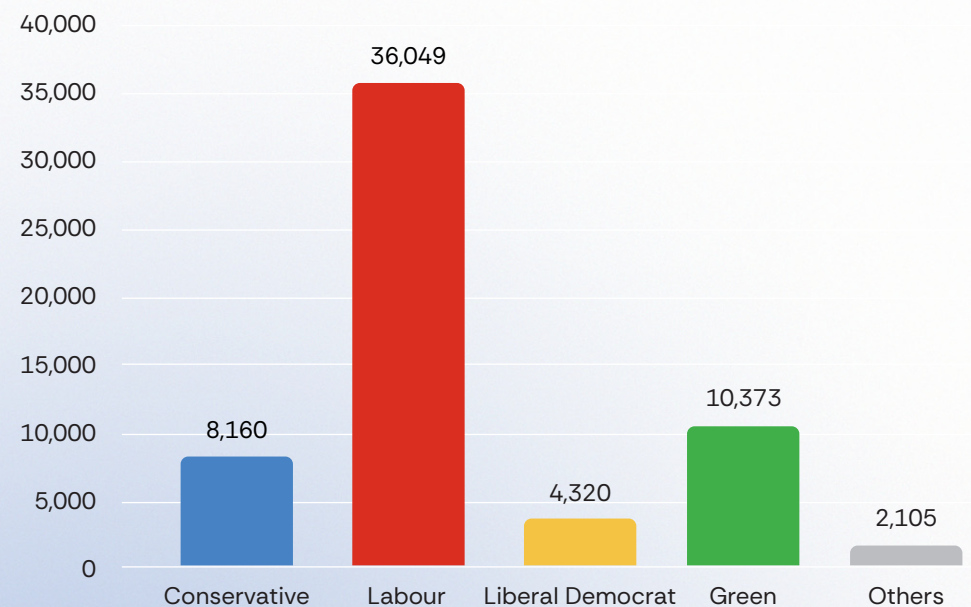
Labour has also won the local mayoralty every time it's been contested, starting from 2002. Their candidate romped home four years ago, taking 59.1 per cent of first preference votes under the Supplementary Vote system and therefore making second preferences beside the point.

Hackney Council result May 2022 | Total seats: 57



Conservative Labour Liberal Democrat Green Other

Hackney mayoral election result 2022



Conservative Labour Liberal Democrat Green Others

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.

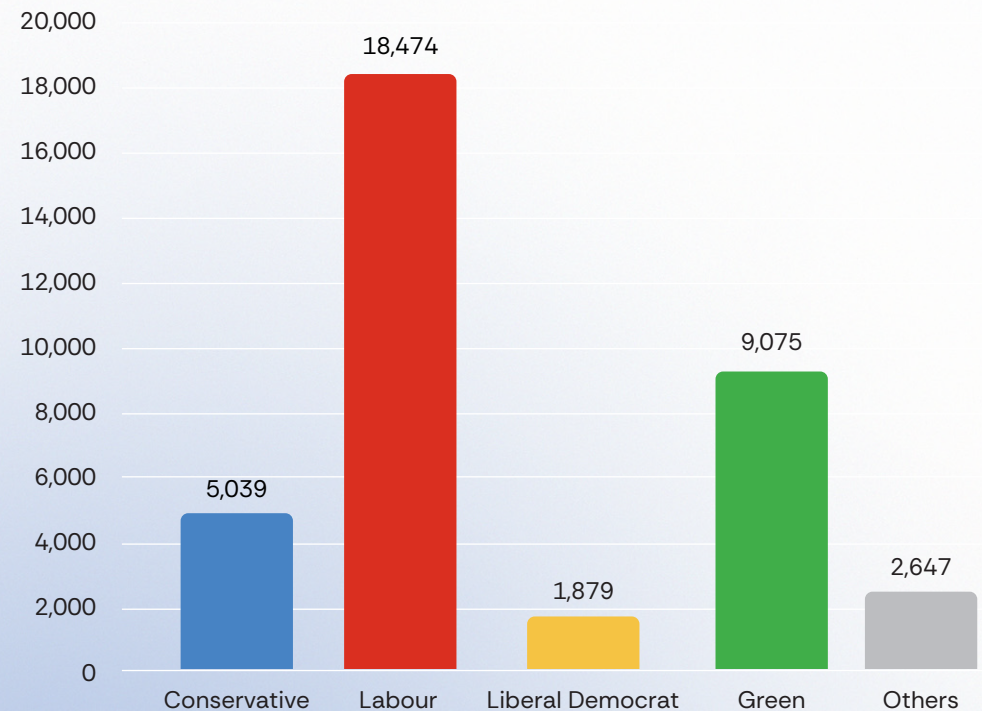
By-elections since May 2022

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 refurb 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.

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

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.

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.

Hammersmith & Fulham



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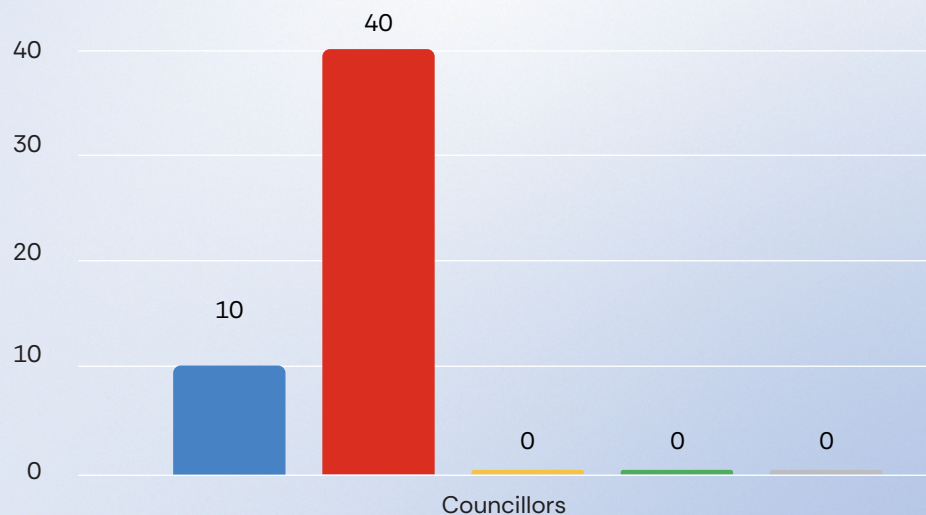
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Since 2022

Labour Defence

Labour's most recent large winning margin underlined yet again how far the Conservatives have fallen in this borough since the days when David Cameron called it his favourite council and Boris Johnson was the last Tory administration's big chum in City Hall. They seem never to have recovered from the shock of losing power in 2014. Can they prune or overcome Labour's 40-10 seat advantage of four years ago?

Hammersmith & Fulham Council result May 2022 | Total seats: 50



Conservative Labour Liberal Democrat Green Other

Three by-elections, all since the general election, have seen two Labour holds with reduced vote shares in the region of 20 per cent and a more solid Tory hold. But there's been no sign in these results of a consistent swing towards the Tories. They were even pipped for second place in one of them by Reform, whose candidates have got more than ten per cent in each of the trio of contests. Other parties have yet to make such inroads.

Labour lost one of its 2022 intake in 2023 – he resigned from the party after being suspended – and two more switched to the Greens last summer. Otherwise, they are intact and looking difficult to beat.

By-elections since May 2022

20 FEBRUARY 2025 HAMMERSMITH BROADWAY LAB HOLD

20 FEBRUARY 2025 LILLIE LAB HOLD

03 JULY 2025 FULHAM TOWN CON HOLD

Local landscape

Covering 6.3 square miles, Hammersmith & Fulham is one of the smallest local authority areas in England. Home to about 188,000 people, it is also one of the most densely populated, despite the growth in absolute numbers slowing. It crams a lot into a small space.

At the borough's southern end, where it meets the north bank of one of the big curves of the Thames, Fulham provides a classic early case of London gentrification. Tight terraces that had been home to workers in old industries were bought up and done up by the professional classes during the 1980s.

That riverfront end also takes in Parsons Green and the Hurlingham private members club and gives access to Wandsworth via Putney Bridge and Wandsworth Bridge. Fulham Football Club, the Premier League's quaintest, looks out across the water too, including, every spring, at the Oxford–Cambridge boat race passing by. In this territory, we find surviving Conservative support.

Move north, perhaps up Fulham Palace Road or North End Road, and you're into the more mixed areas of Barons Court, West Kensington and Hammersmith, all strung along a section of the A4 Great West Road that cuts through the borough on its east–west axis. On the west side, where the river forms another part of the

Hammersmith & Fulham Council elections since 2002						
Year	Con	Lab	LD	UKIP/Ref	Green	Other
2002	18	28	-	-	-	-
2006	33	13	-	-	-	-
2010	31	15	-	-	-	-
2014	20	26	-	-	-	-
2018	11	35	-	-	-	-
2022	10	40	-	-	-	-

borough border, find the Riverside Studios culture venue adjacent to Hammersmith Bridge. On the east we find Chelsea Football Club and half of the huge Earl's Court redevelopment scheme, which aims to fill the space left vacant by the demolition of the famous exhibition centre

of that name under a previous, failed project (the other half is in Kensington & Chelsea next door).

Local landscape

Keep going, and Shepherd's Bush offers a century-old street market, a much newer Westfield mall and the borough's third famous football club, Queens Park Rangers. White City takes its name from the plaster used in the construction of the pavilions of a separate exhibition site in the early 1900s. A White City Stadium built at the same time hosted the 1908 Olympics. It was demolished in the 1980s and, until recently, the BBC filled the space. Eventually, you come to a piece of the A40 Westway and then the open space of Wormwood Scrubs, a name also attached to a local prison.

The borough's housing is split roughly three ways between social rented, owner occupied and private rented, with the latter on the rise. It is notably expensive. International companies such as Disney and L'Oreal have their UK headquarters in Hammersmith, demonstrating that parts of Hammersmith & Fulham aren't far from the West End. It is cosmopolitan too, with 46 per cent of its residents born overseas – high even by London standards. To the familiar London mix can be added thousands from Italy, France, Spain and the United States. This is not a Brexit borough.

Council leader Stephen Cowan has cemented Labour's position with a single-minded view of what is wanted by his blend of residents. He has declared "ruthless financial efficiency" as a core value and boasts one of the lowest Council Tax bills in the country while giving four out of ten households some form of discount. This year, it's going up by 4.99 per cent, though the borough chose not to take advantage of the "fair funding" dispensation bestowed on it (and four other boroughs) by the government to go above that figure if it wished.

There was an early, wary stance towards the development sector, contrasting starkly with the eager overtures of the Tories Labour replaced. Cowan has, though, been more positive towards the current Earls Court scheme, having fought its predecessor. Its objectives are consistent with the council's industrial strategy, Upstream London, launched in 2017, which seeks investment in new technologies, including in the White City complex.

The councillor who was suspended by Labour and then resigned from the party had been accused of sharing

antisemitic content online. He strongly denied the charge, though local media reported a number of such cases on his Twitter feed, along with endorsements of homophobic views, Covid conspiracy theories and more.

The two who left to join the Greens in July 2025 complained that Sir Keir Starmer had moved the Labour Party to the Right and claimed that the local party would not tolerate debate or criticism and left local residents ignored. In 2022, the Greens attracted over 10 per cent of the vote in the two wards they've come to represent, but there's a lot of catching up to do in both and neither of the defectors is defending their seat.

Hammersmith & Fulham is a good example of a part of London where Conservatism triumphed for a couple of terms early this century, but has since become far less attractive to a range of residents in parallel with its embrace of populist themes that alienate some who would once have been natural Tory supporters. Labour has taken full advantage.

 HAMMERSMITH & FULHAM

Electoral prospects

Although Hammersmith & Fulham has been a mainstay of two-party politics – the last time any other candidates were elected was a couple of Lib Dems in 1994 – it cannot be entirely insulated against the collapse of the Labour–Conservative duopoly. We can expect a bit of splintering and a sharp drop from the combined vote of 81 per cent Labour (with 54 per cent) and the Conservatives (with 27 percent) received in 2022. But other parties may still struggle to win seats.

Shepherd's Bush

15 seats

Shepherd's Bush is a strongly and reliably Labour area. Even at Labour's low point in 2006 the Conservatives barely made any inroads. The sole Tory candidate to win a seat that year got home by just four votes, in Shepherd's Bush Green (which had different boundaries at that time). In 2022, voting in these wards was nearly monolithic. There were none where an opponent came within 40 points of the Labour slate.

Ward-level results (2022)	Councillors 2022			Vote share percentage 2022				
	1	2	3	Con	Lab	LD	Green	Other
College Park & Old Oak	Lab	Lab	Lab	14.4	72.0	13.7	-	-
Coningham	Lab	Lab	Lab	12.9	60.2	7.3	19.7	-
Shepherd's Bush Green	Lab	Lab	x	14.2	70.5	15.3	-	-
Wendell Park	Lab	Lab	x	19.8	62.6	17.6	-	-
White City	Lab	Lab	Lab	9.9	63.3	10.5	16.2	-
Wormholt	Lab	Lab	x	14.9	60.7	9.5	15.0	-

Most of these wards have a large amount of social housing, particularly College Park & Old Oak (51 per cent) and White City (47 per cent). There are large new commercial and residential developments underway in several parts of the area – around Old Oak in the far north, White City and Shepherd's Bush – but these have so far not altered the political balance.

Even if Labour sheds a lot of support in 2026, it is hard to see where an opposition candidate could get much traction. The Greens might be able to get a decent percentage in White City – their target ward in the borough – or Shepherd's Bush Green on the general principle that they do well in newly-created communities and that these wards have relatively large Muslim communities (25 and 18 per cent respectively) for the borough.

Hammersmith

9 seats

Hammersmith looks almost as massively Labour as Shepherd's Bush on the basis of the last couple of rounds of local elections, but there is more variety beneath the surface. The Conservatives have won a predecessor version of Ravenscourt Park as recently as 2014 and Fulham Reach in 2010, but their support has been reduced in affluent, cosmopolitan, rather liberal wards like these by Brexit and populism.

Ward-level results (2022)	Councillors 2022			Vote share percentage 2022				
	1	2	3	Con	Lab	LD	Green	Other
Fulham Reach	Lab	Lab	Lab	24.8	63.3	11.9	-	-
Grove	Lab	Lab	x	16.7	66.4	16.6	-	-
Hammersmith Broadway	Lab	Lab	x	18.0	72.7	9.3	-	-
Ravenscourt	Lab	Lab	x	23.0	53.5	10.8	12.6	-

The Labour administration, particularly in the form of its low tax policy, has offered a political approach that goes down well in these areas. But it is still astonishing that wards as plush as Ravenscourt and Grove (which contains the self-styled Brackenbury Village) have returned huge Labour majorities.

Will they survive the ill winds of 2026? The Greens were not geared up to contest the wards in 2022 and it is

not a target seat. There might also be a market for the Lib Dems, but Labour is well organised.

The centre-left block is strong enough in these wards to survive a bit of vote-splitting. Labour comfortably defended its seat in Hammersmith Broadway in the February 2025 by-election, which was notable for a split anti-Labour vote and Reform achieving its first London by-election second place.

West Kensington

9 seats

The wards between Hammersmith Broadway and Kensington proper, served by Barons Court and West Kensington stations (and Shepherd's Bush just off to the north), are the traditional high-swing marginal territory of closely-fought Hammersmith & Fulham elections.

The predecessor wards were all Conservative in 2006 and only one Labour councillor was elected in 2010. The scale of the Conservative collapse – and the Labour ascendancy – is apparent from the blowout margins Labour enjoyed in 2022. Only in Brook Green, now the nearest thing to a marginal in the north of the borough, was Labour's lead a bit less than 30 points.

The key demographic facts about these wards are that they have large numbers of young professionals of

Ward-level results (2022)	Councillors 2022			Vote share percentage 2022				
	1	2	3	Con	Lab	LD	Green	Other
Addison	Lab	Lab	x	14.9	70.4	14.7	-	-
Avonmore	Lab	Lab	x	23.1	61.4	15.5	-	-
Brook Green	Lab	Lab	x	30.3	57.0	12.7	-	-
West Kensington	Lab	Lab	Lab	20.3	64.4	12.8	-	2.5

diverse backgrounds renting their homes and a reasonable-sized (21–33 per cent) social rented sector that provides a solid anchor for a Labour vote.

The estate demolition plans backed by the Conservatives under the abandoned Earls Court regeneration scheme were an issue in 2014. Also, these wards are home to many EU nationals. Much of the Census's "Other White" population of 26–30 per cent will be in this category, with settled immigration status granting local election voting rights.

To win, the Conservatives need sufficient strength among Generation Rent. For a while in the past, they had it: they won nine seats to Labour's none in 2006, eight to Labour's one in 2010 and still got three out of the nine in 2014, when they lost control of the council. Their hopes this time depend on the centre-left vote fragmenting in Brook Green and letting them in. Winning in the other wards from Labour looks like a stretch for anyone unless the Greens really get their act together.

West Fulham

8 seats

West Fulham has always been the Conservatives' best area in Hammersmith & Fulham, although even there their vote shares and leads worn thin in 2022.

Ward-level results (2022)	Councillors 2022			Vote share percentage 2022				
	1	2	3	Con	Lab	LD	Green	Other
Fulham Town	Con	Con	x	45.9	27.6	26.6	-	-
Munster	Con	Con	Con	42.4	31.9	25.8	-	-
Palace & Hurlingham	Con	Con	Con	44.1	23.7	14.3	13.4	4.5

The area, mostly terraced Victorian housing with the occasional private mansion block, has long since gentrified and has a very high proportion of professional and managerial workers (55–57 per cent).

It differs from West Kensington or East Fulham by being wealthier and in having a larger settled rich population of

owner-occupiers and much less social housing. The Lib Dems made an effort in two of the wards in 2022, but did not make any headway in the July 2025 by-Fulham Town election. This is very much not Reform territory.

East Fulham

9 seats

With the exception of Parsons Green & Sandford, stretched along New King's Road almost like a corridor of affluence between Chelsea and Fulham, these wards are more of a mixture than those in the west. They have a lot more social housing (29-38 per cent) and a White British plurality rather than an outright majority.

Ward-level results (2022)	Councillors 2022			Vote share percentage 2022				
	1	2	3	Con	Lab	LD	Green	Other
Lillie	Lab	Lab	x	25.3	63.5	11.2	-	-
Parsons Green & Sandford	Con	Con	x	55.0	29.3	15.7	-	-
Sands End	Lab	Lab	Lab	39.4	49.8	10.8	-	-
Walham Green	Lab	Lab	x	26.6	52.9	10.2	10.3	-

This area is, like West Kensington to the north, traditionally marginal. The Conservatives won everything in 2006 and 2010, albeit on more favourable boundaries. But the combination of social housing, ethnic diversity and young professional renters has given Labour a decisive advantage in recent elections.

Sands End, which combines the elite Imperial Wharf development with more traditional terraces and estates, is a marginal. The Conservatives held the ward even when

they lost the council in 2014. Labour won in 2018 and 2022 but by much less florid margins than in Hammersmith or West Kensington. It will be a Tory target in 2026.

The Conservatives did well in the February 2025 by-election in Lillie, gaining a 14 per cent swing. This might suggest that the Fulham wards – and maybe Avonmore and Brook Green – could swing back a long way, and with a more fragmented centre-Left vote that might be enough for the Tories to pick off a seat or two.



HAMMERSMITH & FULHAM

What to watch for

Although a marginal borough in the past, the Conservatives would have to cut deep into some large Labour majorities even to come close, and these metropolitan liberal areas seem unlikely to give them the chance unless there is a collapse in turnout on the other side.

Haringey

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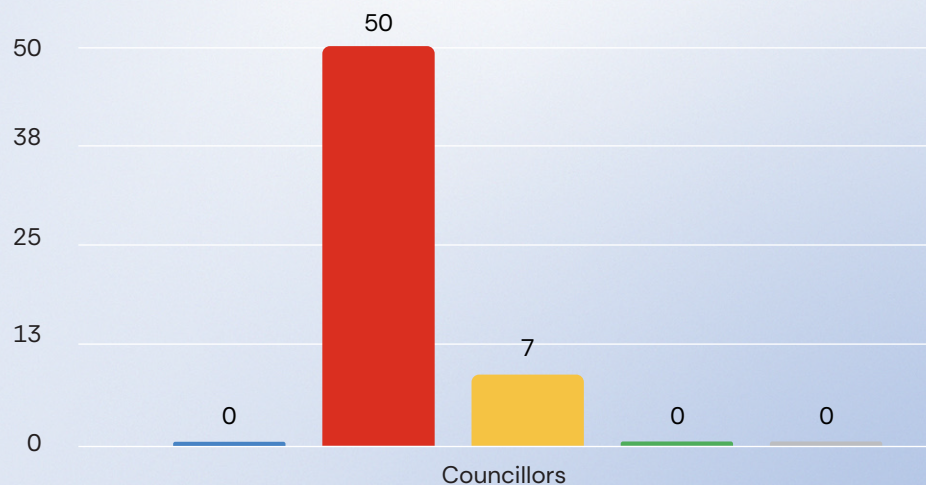
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Since 2022

Labour Defence

Labour strengthened its already dominant position in 2022, taking its total up to 50 seats under new ward boundaries and leaving the Liberal Democrats to console themselves with the remaining seven. No other party attracted even 10 per cent of the popular vote, let alone any seats. As with other Labour strongholds, interest this year lies in the potential for serious challenges to the status quo and where they might come from.

Haringey Council result May 2022 | Total seats: 57



Conservative Labour Liberal Democrat Green Other

There have been six by-elections in Haringey since May four years ago. Labour successfully defended the first five without great drama. But the most recent, held in April 2025 and the only such contest to take place since the general election, saw them turfed out of a St Ann's seat by the Greens. The latter already had substantial support in the ward, but their margin of victory was big. For Labour, it was a worrying straw in the wind.

By-elections since May 2022

09 MARCH 2023	TOTTENHAM HALE	LAB HOLD
29 JUNE 2023	HERMITAGE AND GARDENS	LAB HOLD
04 OCTOBER 2023	SOUTH TOTTENHAM	LAB HOLD
04 OCTOBER 2023	WHITE HART LANE	LAB HOLD
04 JULY 2024	HORNSEY	LAB HOLD
10 APRIL 2025	ST ANN'S	GREEN GAIN FROM LAB

There have been defections from Labour too, some of them significant: the victor of St Ann's joined three others in a breakaway Green Socialist Alliance group formed in 2023. Two others sit as Independents, one after deciding to leave Labour, the other after being expelled. A cabinet member resigned from his job and his seat in January, leaving a vacancy. Labour is now down to 43 seats. Will the shrinkage continue? If so, by how much?

Local landscape

Haringey is sometimes designated part of Inner London and sometimes part of Outer London: the Local Government Act 1963 that created London's boroughs does not deem it "Inner" as it didn't form part of the old County of London; the Office for National Statistics, however, does.

The wide variations in Haringey's character reflect this ambiguity. Its eleven square miles encompass very affluent higher ground areas to the west, such as Highgate, Crouch End and Muswell Hill, and also Alexandra Palace, a historic culture venue whose grounds once contained a horseracing course and which, in 1936, became the original base for the BBC's then brand-new television service.

Haringey has been unusual among London boroughs in seeing slower recent population growth than England as whole. The average age of its people has increased a bit faster than London's and, at 36, is a little higher than the London average too. Over 260,000 people live there.

The east side of the borough, pretty much literally on the wrong side of the main line railway tracks that link King's Cross station and Edinburgh, bisecting Haringey along the way, comprises the Wood Green commercial centre and Tottenham and its environs, one of the capital's

Haringey Council elections since 2002						
Year	Con	Lab	LD	UKIP/Ref	Green	Other
2002	-	42	15	-	-	-
2006	-	30	27	-	-	-
2010	-	34	23	-	-	-
2014	-	48	9	-	-	-
2018	-	42	15	-	-	-
2022	-	50	7	-	-	-

poorest places and sadly as closely linked in some minds with rioting and crime as with Tottenham Hotspur Football Club. The council says nearly 14 per cent of Tottenham residents endure fuel poverty and there are high levels of Universal Credit claimants. In the Tottenham

parliamentary seat, more than 10 per cent of people have no academic qualifications.

Local landscape

The borough's geographical divide tends to be mirrored politically, with the east forming a Labour bedrock and the west being more fruitful to varying degrees for the Lib Dems.

The current Labour administration has been less obviously tempestuous than what some termed the nation's first "Corbyn Council", elected in 2018 following a ruthless pre-ballot deselection campaign by Momentum activists and others.

Since then, some of the ideologues have gone and others have engaged with the practicalities, partnerships and compromises that are integral to getting things done in local government. New housing has been built with City Hall support on a former hospital site, most of it "affordable". A big regeneration project on the High Road is slowly moving towards fruition, despite some determined far-Left opposition. A revived "Latin Village" has been created at Seven Sisters, thanks largely to the commitment of Transport for London, which owns most of the land there, and a spirit of collaboration that

enabled something hopeful to happen after the site became a stuck "anti-gentrification" cause célèbre.

Even so, most of the departures from the Labour group have been of a very Haringey type. The first one went at the end of 2022, a Momentumite expelled from the party for saying a rabbi had been paid for criticising Jeremy Corbyn. The Momentum faction had a prior history of wrangling over definitions of antisemitism. Both Haringey's leader Peray Ahmet and the Lib Dem group urged the culprit to resign from the council, without success.

Three more went in the autumn of 2023, citing the national leadership's stance on Gaza. It was they who dubbed themselves the Green Socialist Alliance and saw their number rise to four at Labour's expense thanks to the St Ann's by-election result.

A fifth followed after the general election, in November 2025, saying she was unhappy with Labour over climate policies, immigration, benefits, trans rights and more.

She has continued to serve as an Independent, having already decided to stand down in 2026.

The Lib Dem septet, meanwhile, has carried on, seemingly unfractured and no doubt hoping to profit from local disapproval of the Labour national government, though the Greens will compete with them for that same windfall in parts of the west of the borough. The Lib Dems have criticised Labour's financial management, notably its need to make cuts and depend on "exceptional financial support" from the government in order to get its last two budgets to add up.

Matters would have been worse but for a boost for Haringey from the government's Fair Funding Review. Ahmet has expressed gratitude for that, but warned that "rapidly increasing demand and costs for key services" mean that "extreme budget pressures" will continue.

 HARINGEY

Electoral prospects

The solidity of Labour support on the Tottenham side of Haringey has kept the party in the majority since the borough was formed, except for 1968–71. The Lib Dems came close to a majority in 2006 by winning all the seats west of the railway line and only just falling short in three border wards on the east side. They should make some gains in the split west side this time, as should the Greens in one or two other places.

Muswell Hill and Highgate

10 seats

Haringey's section of Highgate village and the pleasant suburbs among the woodlands and parks to its north and east sit with Hampstead and East Finchley in the heart of north London's affluent liberal residential belt. All the wards are majority owner-occupied with very little social housing. All are majority White British. All have high proportions of residents with degree-level education. These things particularly apply to Highgate ward, which is part of the Camden-based Hampstead & Highgate constituency.

Fortis Green, bordering Barnet, is nine per cent Jewish by religion and all the wards have significant Jewish communities, mostly drawn from the same liberal established background as in Finchley. The wards skew heavily liberal-left. The Tories topped 10 per cent only in Highgate in 2022. They lost most of these seats in 1994 and were eliminated from their last stronghold, a Highgate seat, in 2002.

Ward-level results (2022)	Councillors 2022			Vote share percentage 2022				
	1	2	3	Con	Lab	LD	Green	Other
Alexandra Park	Lab	LD	x	6.1	39.1	38.3	15.8	-
Fortis Green	LD	Lab	Lab	6.6	37.0	38.0	18.4	-
Highgate	LD	LD	LD	11.2	29.8	38.3	20.6	-
Muswell Hill	LD	Lab	x	7.7	34.1	41.6	16.5	-

The Lib Dems have taken up the mantle of opposition to Labour in western Haringey, and remain strong in this core territory. They won eight out of 12 seats (on the previous ward boundaries) even in mid-coalition 2014, and 12 out of 12 in 2018. The 2022 elections were very good for Labour here. It won four seats to the Lib Dems' six, shared representation in three of the wards and fell only 81 votes short of taking a seat in Highgate.

Turnout in these wards in 2022 was particularly high (although lower than it was in 2018). Labour's vote is likely to fall back with the Lib Dems the default beneficiaries, although the Greens had a respectable vote in 2022.

Crouch End

9 seats

The three other wards west of the main railway line are similar to those of Muswell Hill in being mainly inhabited by educated liberal professionals. But they differ in having more rented (private and social) housing and a younger, more mobile population. The flavour of the locality emerges from the Census finding that Stroud Green is the most atheist ward (51 per cent) in London, with Crouch End not far behind.

Ward-level results (2022)	Councillors 2022			Vote share percentage 2022				
	1	2	3	Con	Lab	LD	Green	Other
Crouch End	Lab	Lab	LD	5.0	39.1	35.0	20.9	-
Hornsey	Lab	Lab	Lab	6.5	63.6	15.1	14.8	-
Stroud Green	Lab	Lab	Lab	2.9	45.4	27.4	23.1	-

At their peak, the Lib Dems dominated this area but they lost eight of the nine seats in 2014. They regained two in Crouch End in 2018 but lost them again in 2022. Labour held Hornsey in the by-election held on general election

day, with the Greens finishing in second place with 25 per cent. The contests here are likely to be between three varieties of centre-left candidate.

Wood Green

8 seats

Wood Green is in the north-centre of Haringey on the Piccadilly Line. Unlike the wards to the west, it is a thoroughly diverse slice of London. Its most prominent local community is Cypriot: the Cypriot Centre opened in Woodside ward in 1979, a co-operative endeavour by both Greek Cypriots and Turkish Cypriots.

Ward-level results (2022)	Councillors 2022			Vote share percentage 2022				
	1	2	3	Con	Lab	LD	Green	Other
Bounds Green	Lab	Lab	x	7.3	54.0	23.0	15.8	-
Noel Park	Lab	Lab	Lab	11.8	68.4	19.8	-	-
Woodside	Lab	Lab	Lab	9.6	57.2	12.5	20.6	-

Although Wood Green was previously part of the Hornsey & Wood Green constituency that the Lib Dems won in 2005 and 2010, it was the weakest part of the seat for them.

At their local election high point in 2006 they won four of the (then) nine seats but lost them in 2010 to Labour, which has since consolidated its position.

North Tottenham

9 seats

North Tottenham is the main “council estate” area of Haringey with social housing accounting for 40 per cent of households across the area. It is also, particularly Bruce Castle and Northumberland Park, an area with a high proportion of black residents. The former is in the top 20 of London wards for Black Caribbean ethnicity (13.4 per cent). In contrast to the fortress of atheism in the west of Haringey, this is an area where both Christianity (nearly 50 per cent) and Islam (20 per cent) are strong.

It is a mainly working-class area with few managerial and professional types. Tottenham Hotspur, incidentally, play in Northumberland Park ward rather than White Hart Lane.

Politically, this is a very solid Labour area. Other parties have failed to mount an effective challenge since 1986

Ward-level results (2022)	Councillors 2022			Vote share percentage 2022				
	1	2	3	Con	Lab	LD	Green	Other
Bruce Castle	Lab	Lab	Lab	9.9	68.0	6.2	15.9	-
Northumberland Park	Lab	Lab	Lab	9.4	70.9	7.0	12.7	-
White Hart Lane	Lab	Lab	Lab	11.6	58.6	8.5	-	21.2

and 1990, when a backlash against social change and the late Bernie Grant’s leadership of the council enabled Conservatives to win seats in White Hart Lane. Labour successfully defended a seat there in the October 2023 by-election. It is still the most marginal of these wards, but that is not saying much.

There looks to be an electoral arrangement between the Greens and candidates of the Haringey Socialist Alliance (HSA) for Bruce Castle and Northumberland Park. In both, the HSA is standing two candidates and the Greens, one.

Central Tottenham

9 seats

The band of three wards in the centre of Tottenham has been solidly Labour except in the Conservative landslide of 1968. They are highly diverse in social, housing and ethnic terms, but politically pretty united in most elections.

Ward-level results (2022)	Councillors 2022			Vote share percentage 2022				
	1	2	3	Con	Lab	LD	Green	Other
Tottenham Central	Lab	Lab	Lab	7.7	61.9	8.3	22.1	-
Tottenham Hale	Lab	Lab	Lab	8.4	67.7	7.9	16.0	-
West Green	Lab	Lab	Lab	10.2	78.1	11.7	-	-

The majority rent their homes from private or social landlords. Tottenham Hale has seen major transformations in recent years as high-density housing has sprouted around the station there.

There is some potential for the Greens here and they polled respectably in Tottenham Central in 2022, but

it will take either effective targeting or a general and massive Labour collapse for anything to change around here. The deal between the Greens and the HSA struck for two of the North Tottenham wards also applies to West Green.

South Tottenham

12 seats

South Tottenham is a diverse strip of territory along the boundary with Hackney and shares many features with the north of that borough. Stamford Hill's Chasidic Jewish community, very distinct from the established and mainly middle-class Jewish community around Fortis Green, extends into the South Tottenham and Seven Sisters wards.

Ward-level results (2022)	Councillors 2022			Vote share percentage 2022				
	1	2	3	Con	Lab	LD	Green	Other
Harringay	Lab	Lab	Lab	3.7	42.9	24.6	20.1	8.8
Hermitage & Gardens	Lab	Lab	x	6.7	66.0	7.6	19.6	-
St Ann's	Lab	Lab	x	-	53.3	6.9	39.8	-
Seven Sisters	Lab	Lab	x	9.2	65.4	5.3	20.1	-
South Tottenham	Lab	Lab	Lab	14.7	64.0	5.2	16.2	-

Labour did well in the by-election in South Tottenham in October 2023. The Conservative allegiances south of the borough boundary do not seem to extend into Haringey. Harringay ward is mostly the "ladder" of parallel terraces north of Finsbury Park and is 50 per cent private rented, a youthful place for early career professionals.

The Lib Dems have had seats in Harringay in the past and achieved a reasonable second place in 2022, but St Ann's is the most competitive ward. It was a target for the Greens in 2022 and their gain from Labour in the in the April 2025 by-election was convincing. They should take the other St Ann's seat in 2026 but would need a big swing to break through in the other wards.



HARINGEY

What to watch for

As in many boroughs where Labour has a large majority, the question is whether a generalised collapse will see Green and other candidates winning without making much effort on the ground, or whether seats will be determined by targeting. As the 2006 elections showed, it is difficult to dislodge Labour in Haringey even when the party is struggling nationally.

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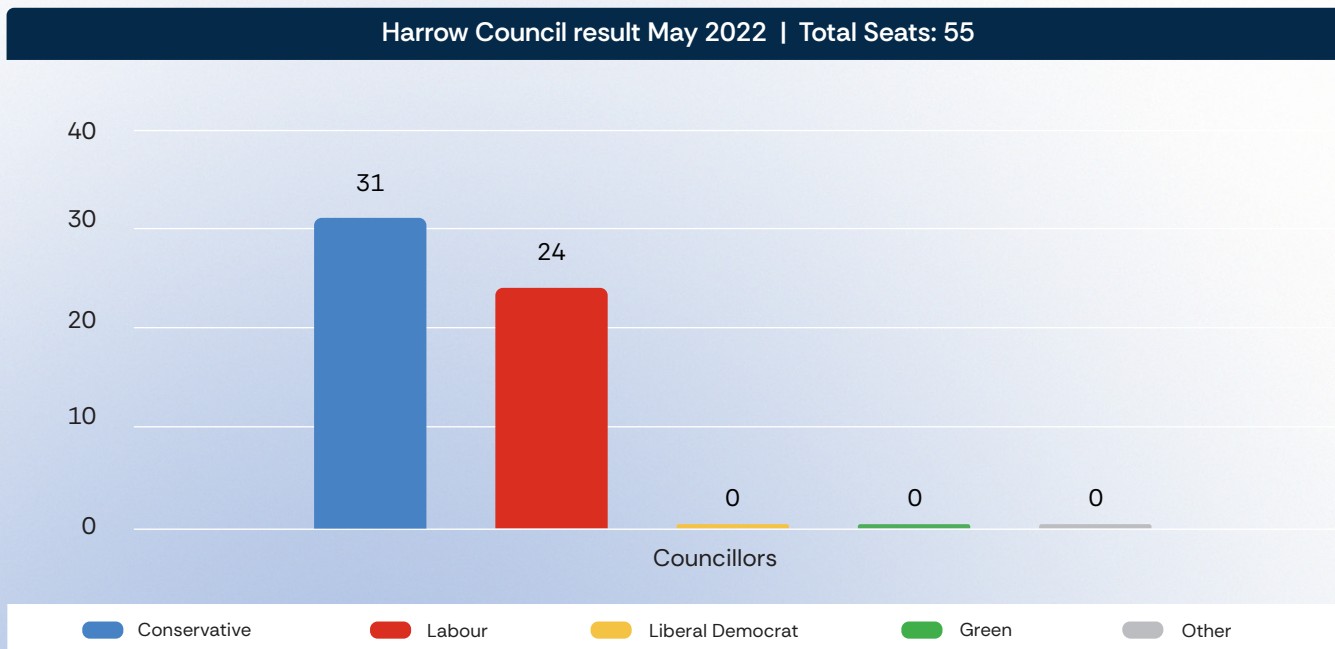
Since 2022

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.

 HARROW

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.

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.

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	-	-

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.



HARROW

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.

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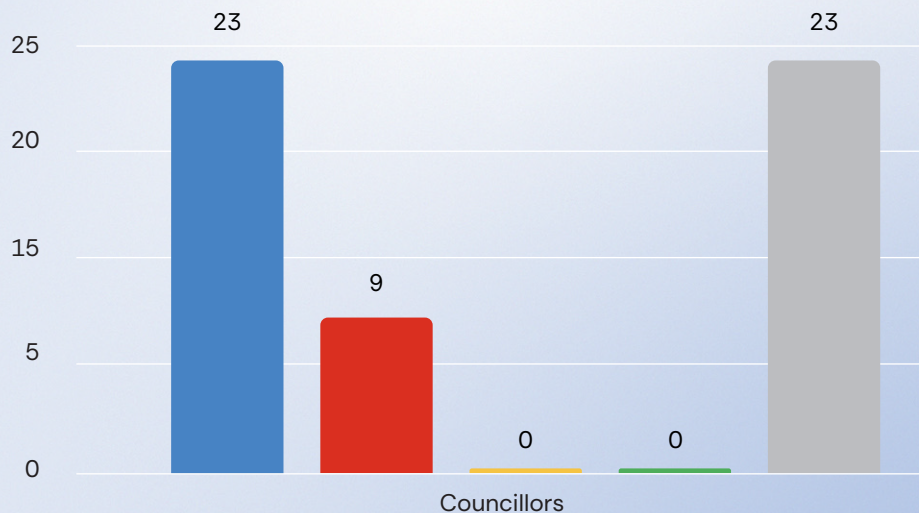
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Since 2022

No Overall Control

The local politics of Havering are novel on a heroic scale, baffling to outsiders and probably to some insiders too. Seen in isolation, the 2022 result was quirky. Seen in historical context it was routine – a No Overall Control outcome with Conservative and Residents’ Association candidates taking the lion’s share of seats between them.

Havering Council result May 2022 | Total seats: 55



Conservative Labour Liberal Democrat Green Other

By-elections since May 2022

10 AUGUST 2023

UPMINSTER

HRA HOLD

There was a difference, though: this time, the bulk of the Residents’ Association councillors agreed to work together as a Havering Residents’ Association (HRA) group and formed a partnership with Labour to run the council. Ray Morgon, a Residents’ Association councillor for 20 years, took the helm of this arrangement. It was undisturbed by the sole by-election in the borough since 2022, but lasted only until June 2024.

Since then, the HRA group has continued as a minority administration, but Morgon has announced he will be standing down and a fandango of affiliation changes – documented in filigree detail below – has continued, some of them in pre-emptive response to an expected assault by Reform UK.

The 55 Havering councillors are now aligned as follows: HRA 25, up five since 2022; Conservatives 14, down seven; Labour eight, down one; East Havering Residents’ Group, three; Reform, three; Residents’ Association Independent Group, two. It still adds up to 55, but in a very different way from how things started. The Havering kaleidoscope will now be shaken up again.

Local landscape

Alight at the Elizabeth line station in Romford and the feel of the streets is like much of inner London – busy, cosmopolitan, connected. That’s one part of Havering’s 43 square miles. It isn’t typical. More than half of the borough is designated Green Belt and a small portion of it lies beyond the M25. In Harold Hill, as David Attenborough has recently confirmed, wild deer roam the streets by night, occasionally feasting on front garden flowers.

Havering is one of the bigger boroughs geographically and the second least densely populated (after Bromley). The average age of its residents is higher than that of Greater London but, unlike that of the city as a whole, has been coming down. It borders Essex on three sides, and a belief that it properly belongs in that county informs some of its distinctive politics.

No Overall Control has been Havering’s default elections outcome from the start – ten of the 16 so far have turned out that way – though the components of its deadlocks have shifted over time. In 1964, when the very first elections took place, Labour emerged as the biggest party. It won outright in 1971 and often beat the Conservatives right up until the end of the 1990s. After that, the tables turned.

Havering Council elections since 2002						
Year	Con	Lab	LD	UKIP/Ref	Green	Other
2002	26	9	1	-	-	18
2006	34	2	1	-	-	17
2010	33	5	-	-	-	16
2014	22	1	-	7	-	24
2018	25	5	-	-	-	24
2022	23	9	-	-	-	23

Residents’ Association councillors had always been in the NOC mix and since 2014 they’ve been vying with the Tories for supremacy. They didn’t overtake in 2022 in terms of seats, but the 7.6 per cent swing in their favour was one of London’s biggest.

The other significant development was a greater readiness among these hyperlocal politicians to venture beyond their wards and find borough-wide common ground. Not all of them joined in: the three victors in the Harold Wood ward, members of a registered party

Local landscape

called Harold Wood Hill Park Residents' Association, opted out and, just to make things that bit clearer, called themselves the East Haverling Residents' group on the council, an entity that has existed since 2014. Another Residents' Association councillor, representing Cranham ward, chose to maintain full independence.

Still, the other 19 banded together and joined with the nine Labour councillors to outnumber the 23 Tories. All settled, then? Not quite.

- In July 2022, three Tories defected to the HRA.
- In February 2024, another Tory made the same journey.
- Also in February 2024, a Tory travelled in the opposite direction and joined the Independent Residents' Association councillor to form a team of two (the Residents' Association Independent group).
- In May 2024, three more Tories joined the HRA. So did a Labour councillor.

By the time the HRA-Labour coalition came to a disputatious end, there were 26 members of the HRA group, 16 Conservatives and eight Labour councillors. Plus there were two separate Residents' Association groups, one of three and one of two. But that was not the end.

In July 2024, one of the HRA recruits from the Tories changed his mind and became a Conservative again. Then, drama of dramas, in October 2025, Tory group leader and London Assembly member for Haverling & Redbridge, Keith Prince, threw in his lot with Reform. In February, two more Haverling Tory councillors did the same. Unsurprisingly, Nigel Farage has named Haverling as one of his party's London targets.

Ray Morgon's decision to step down seems unmysterious. He's now been a councillor for 24 years, he's 65 years old, he's had problems with his health and he's decided that enough is enough. It's been a tough

tenure at the top: Haverling's finances have been under severe strain and Morgon, unconstrained by national party lines, has been upfront about it. He and Labour saw themselves as more outward-looking than previous, Conservative-led, Haverling Councils had been, ready and willing to engage with Transport for London and City Hall. They contrasted this with what they saw as a hangdog attitude from the Tories.

Some local politicians would do things very differently, given the chance. Reform's growing profile in the borough has been further boosted by Romford MP and arch Brexit-backer Andrew Rosindell joining Nigel Farage's party and promising Haverling a referendum on leaving Greater London – teasingly dubbed a "Hexit" by some – if his new leader becomes Prime Minister. "We are not east London," he declared, "we are Essex." Not yet, they aren't. And maybe most of them don't want to be. May could provide a litmus test.

 HAVERING

Electoral prospects

The 2026 elections in Havering will be about the balance between local and national factors. The strength of Residents' Associations in the borough has long been remarkable. That said, the outcomes of council elections held outside London last year suggested that local precedent might not count for much in the face of a large and fairly uniform wave of support for Reform. Despite its singular voting habits, will that now happen in Havering?



North Romford

8 seats

Havering-atte-Bower is the small village that gave the borough its name, but most of this area is privately developed inter-war (and a bit of post-war) semi-detached suburbia. Over 40 per cent of households have two or more cars, which is rare even for affluent areas of outer London – and north Romford isn't all that affluent. This is the sort of area where the ULEZ expansion was bitterly resisted and Sadiq Khan's ratings are radioactive (he polled 15 per cent of the vote in the mayoral election of 2021 compared to 68 per cent for his Conservative opponent Shaun Bailey).

In general, owner-occupied suburbs in the Romford constituency vote Conservative in local elections and those in Hornchurch & Upminster vote for the Residents' Associations.

Labour used to be competitive in Mawneys in particular, but has faded. In the 2022 local elections the Residents'

Ward-level results (2022)	Councillors 2022			Vote share percentage 2022				
	1	2	3	Con	Lab	LD	Green	Other
Havering-atte-Bower	Con	Con	Con	43.8	25.0	-	-	31.2
Marshalls & Rise Park	Con	Con	Con	51.1	12.9	-	-	36.0
Mawneys	Con	Con	Con	47.1	19.1	2.6	-	31.2

Associations mounted a challenge to the Tories. They fell somewhat short, but three of the Tory councillors who've since left the party group to join the HRA came from these wards – one from Havering-atte-Bower, two from Marshalls & Rise Park.

Rosindell's defection to Reform has disorganised the hitherto effective Conservative machine. The Tories even had to cope with him attempting to use their headquarters, named Margaret Thatcher House, for

constituency work after his defection. They had to go to court to persuade him that Leave Means Leave. But even though the White British proportion of the population in this area fell from around 85 per cent in 2011 to 67 per cent in 2021, the demographics still suggest that voters in these wards will follow their MP.

Romford Town

14 seats

Television crews are fond of visiting Romford Market for Right-populist vox pops that supposedly represent England, yet the town centre itself is the part of the borough that has most in common politically and demographically with the rest of London. It has the lowest proportion of White British residents in Havering, as well as the most renters and the highest proportion with degrees, according to the 2021 Census.

It saw a dramatic ethnic transition in 2011–21, with the White British proportion falling by over 20 points. The drop in Rush Green & Crowlands was, at 25 per cent, the second sharpest in all of Greater London. The presence of its Elizabeth line station will surely tie Romford town closer to the metropolis and attract high density development.

However, for now, central Romford leans to the Right even though Labour won a seat in St Alban's ward, the area to

Ward-level results (2022)	Councillors 2022			Vote share percentage 2022				
	1	2	3	Con	Lab	LD	Green	Other
Hylands & Harrow Lodge	HRA	HRA	Con	32.4	16.1	-	12.0	39.5
Rush Green & Crowlands	Con	Con	Con	45.7	37.2	-	-	17.2
St Alban's	Con	Lab	x	44.9	41.6	-	-	13.5
St Edward's	Con	Con	Con	40.5	23.4	4.2	8.3	23.6
Squirrels Heath	Con	Con	Con	51.5	17.1	4.3	-	27.1

the south of Romford station, in 2022. It was Sadiq Khan's best bit of Havering in 2021, although he still won only 25 per cent of the vote. Romford's demographics are not yet liberal enough to resist the incoming Reform tide. One of the Rush Green & Crowlands councillors who won as a Tory is among those who has already jumped ship.

Included in this group of wards are two more traditional suburban areas to the east of Romford town – Hylands & Harrow Lodge to the south-east and Squirrels Heath

by Gidea Park station. The former saw HRA gains from the Conservatives in 2022, the only such councillors from wards that are part of the Romford constituency.

They were joined by the surviving Conservative councillor, who then defected to the HRA in 2024. Squirrels Heath was solidly, sometimes overwhelmingly, Conservative for decades. However, two incumbent councillors have switched to Reform, one of them being Keith Prince.

Harold Hill and Harold Wood

9 seats

The Harold Hill neighbourhood, containing the wards of Gooshays and Heaton, is one of outer London's most distinctive – a large, postwar, council-built estate that is effectively a small New Town. It was created in the 1940s and 1950s by the London County Council so that East Enders could move away from cramped or bombed inner city housing into a planned, green environment. The homes were – and are – attractive and spacious.

In recent decades there has been social change. The Right to Buy was trialled there in the early 1970s by the Conservative-controlled Greater London Council before being unveiled at national level. As a result, the proportion of social renting residents has dropped to 36 per cent (though it is still the largest in Havering) and Harold Hill is just about majority owner-occupied. Between 2011 and 2021 the overall population rose and the White British share of the population dropped steeply – down 19 percentage points – as it has in most of Havering, though it is still a majority.

Ward-level results (2022)	Councillors 2022			Vote share percentage 2022				
	1	2	3	Con	Lab	LD	Green	Other
Gooshays	Lab	Lab	Lab	27.7	40.7	-	9.9	21.7
Heaton	Lab	Lab	Lab	29.1	52.1	-	-	18.8
Harold Wood	HWR	HWR	HWR	19.4	25.8	5.1	-	49.7

Harold Hill voted Labour by massive margins for its first few decades. In the 1971 borough elections, the only year Labour has won a majority in Havering, it returned 8,300 Labour votes to just 800 for the Conservatives. It long remained solid for Labour, even in bad years such as 1982. But it went wrong for the party in 2006 when the Conservatives gained four seats and the British National Party picked up one. Labour struggled after that. Former Upminster Labour MP (1997–2001) Keith Darvill, a key figure in the 2022 to 2024 coalition administration, has represented Heaton since 2002, a lonely business in

2006–10 and 2014–18. He is standing down at these elections. The UK Independence Party won five seats out of six at its 2014 high point. Labour recovered strongly in 2022 to win all six, but without re-establishing its past dominance.

Despite its similar name, Harold Wood is a separate community from Harold Hill but is grouped with it here for geographical reasons, as it too lies off the A12 between Romford and Brentwood and is part of the Hornchurch & Upminster constituency. It is one of Havering's more

Harold Hill and Harold Wood

9 seats

middle-class areas and traditionally owner-occupied. Once a Conservative-Liberal Democrat marginal ward, it began to change when a Residents' Association candidate won a seat in 2010. He was joined by two colleagues in 2014 and the ward hasn't changed hands since.

Residents' Association candidates have stood in Harold Hill too, but not taken root electorally – the current HRA councillor for Gooshays is the defector from Labour. With low turnout in Harold Hill in 2022 (24 per cent) and a

history of populist-Right voting, it would be surprising if Reform failed to bulldoze everyone else this time. Among the 20 candidates for the three Gooshays seats is Keith Prince. He has relocated from Squirrels Heath, which he represented during the previous council term.

The outcome looks less definite in Harold Wood, due to higher turnout (36 per cent in 2022), greater numbers in professional-managerial occupations and non-HRA Resident incumbents who can do local populism. But still the odds must favour Reform.

North Hornchurch

7 seats

Hornchurch is a long, thin settlement stretching north east to south west and split between two parliamentary constituencies. The three wards discussed here are in Hornchurch & Upminster. St Andrew's and Hacton form the centre of Hornchurch, lying to either side of the District line station. The church of St Andrew, from which one of them (self-evidently) takes its name, actually has horns on it. In housing tenure terms, the two wards are overwhelmingly owner-occupied (nearly 90 per cent in Emerson Park) and white (although Emerson Park has an affluent community of Indian origin).

Ward-level results (2022)	Councillors 2022			Vote share percentage 2022				
	1	2	3	Con	Lab	LD	Green	Other
Emerson Park	HRA	HRA	x	31.5	12.6	2.1	-	53.8
Hacton	HRA	HRA	x	13.3	9.5	-	-	77.2
St Andrew's	HRA	HRA	HRA	16.7	12.5	-	6.8	64.1

In local politics, the HRA won every North Hornchurch seat in 2022. Hacton has always been a Residents' Association stronghold, but St Andrew's has been contested between them and the Tories, and Emerson Park used to be strong for the Conservatives (though it elected a UKIP councillor in 2014).

The HRA won large majorities in 2022, but running the council has been stressful and works against the sort of very local politics that Residents' Associations members excel at. It goes somewhat against the grain for wards that are otherwise attracted to the populist Right to sustain a centrist council administration. Reform will fancy their chances.

Upminster

6 seats

Upminster, at the eastern terminus of the District line, has a legendary status similar to Cockfosters as a place more spoken of than visited. When you are there, you can feel the influence of London fading away to a far greater degree than when in Romford. It is a quiet place, almost village-like, and yet an affluent suburb with Havering's highest proportion of professional-managerial residents.

Ward-level results (2022)	Councillors 2022			Vote share percentage 2022				
	1	2	3	Con	Lab	LD	Green	Other
Cranham	HRA	HRA	HRA	12.0	8.9	2.2	7.1	69.9
Upminster	HRA	HRA	HRA	16.7	9.2	-	8.1	66.1

Its population is more White British than almost anywhere else in London, and it changed less than the rest of Havering between the last two Censuses. The Upminster ward extends to a small rural area around North Ockendon, which is the piece of Havering that lies beyond the M25.

Upminster and Cranham have long histories of Residents' Association dominance, although not always unity – it was two of the Cranham councillors who formed the council's Residents' Association Independent Group in 2024. But if a Reform wave rolls in, even these representatives might be swept away.

South Hornchurch and Rainham

10 seats

South Hornchurch, which lies between the Rivers Beam and Ingrebourne and Rainham to the south-east, by the Thames is, like Harold Hill, one of the more working-class parts of Havering, with relatively few professional and managerial workers. Beam Park is one-third social housing. These four wards are part of the Dagenham & Rainham constituency, the only one in London where Reform was a plausible challenger to Labour at the time of the 2024 general election.

Ward-level results (2022)	Councillors 2022			Vote share percentage 2022				
	1	2	3	Con	Lab	LD	Green	Other
Beam Park	Lab	Lab	x	8.4	47.6	-	2.7	41.1
Elm Park	HRA	HRA	HRA	11.6	15.9	-	6.0	66.5
Rainham & Wennington	Con	Con	Con	38.7	24.8	-	7.1	29.4
South Hornchurch	HRA	HRA	x	22.9	28.5	-	5.0	43.6

Electorally, south Hornchurch has been a mess, with the Conservatives, Labour, UKIP and the Residents' Associations trading seats here and there in different elections. Labour did well to win the new Beam Park ward in 2022, but the Conservatives had an exceptional result in Rainham & Wennington. They won all three seats from the Residents' Associations, who had represented the ward since gaining it from Labour in 2002.

The winners were the only three Conservative councillors elected outside the Romford constituency, though it was they who defected en bloc to the HRA in September 2022 (including the one later returned to the Tories). With the possible exception of Elm Park, fighting off Reform here could be tough.



HAVERING

What to watch for

The Residents' Associations may seem to have a firm grip on much of Havering, but how resilient will they be? And even if support for them holds up, there is a route for Reform to win a majority by simply sweeping aside Labour and the Conservatives alike.

Hillingdon

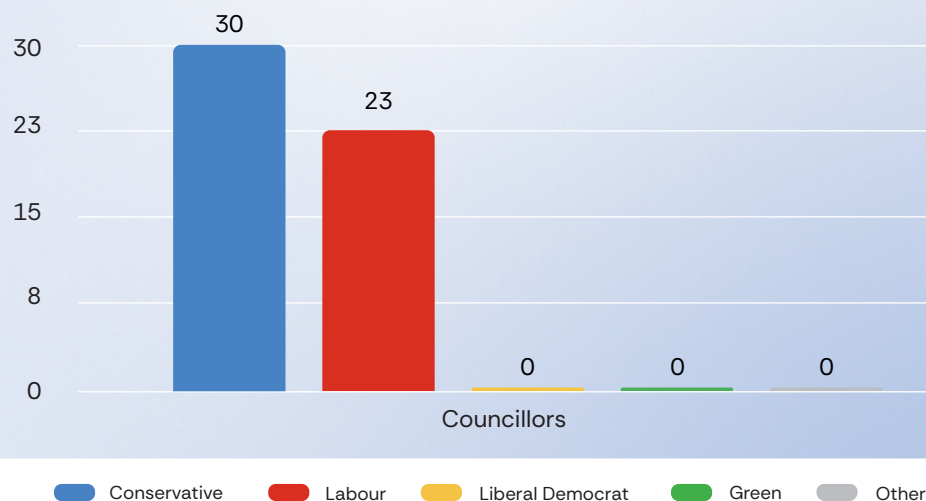
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Since 2022

Conservative Defence

The gap narrowed, but remained reluctant to close. Labour picked up seats, even though the number contested had fallen by 12 compared with 2018, but Hillingdon stayed doggedly blue. Conventionally, the Conservatives would consolidate this time, given Labour's national unpopularity. But these are not conventional times.

Hillingdon Council result May 2022 | Total seats: 53



By-elections since May 2022

02 MAY 2025

HILLINGDON EAST

CON HOLD

The Tories will enter the elections with the same number of councillors as they started with in May 2022. They've gained one thanks to recruiting a Labour councillor – albeit one who'd been suspended then deselected – but also lost one, who resigned from the council earlier this year, leaving his seat vacant.

Labour, by contrast, has had a turbulent time, beginning just a month after the 2022 vote when one of their number was suspended after past online activity was discovered. Three years later, the leader of the Labour group was deselected along with two colleagues, and another resigned from the party. These five have formed the Hayes Independent Party group, representing wards in that part of the borough. A sixth member of the 2022 Labour intake now sits as a Green. The Labour group has therefore shrunk from 23 to 16.

Amid all this, just one by-election has taken place, resulting in a Conservative hold with a small but, for them, heartening swing from Labour. But with Reform likely to disturb the old two-party balance, they might need a few more of those if they are to again win a majority.

Local landscape

The northern two-thirds of Hillingdon are habitually dominated by the Conservatives and rest of it by Labour, with a few variable spaces near the middle. Tory strongholds above the M40 contain villages and greenery, sometimes a stone's throw from Bucks or Herts, and Ruislip Lido, a 60-acre lake with a beach. In the south, the town of Hayes has been represented in parliament as part of the Hayes & Harlington constituency by Labour Left stalwart and sometimes rebel John McDonnell since 1997.

The borough's biggest town is Uxbridge, noted for its Charles Holden-designed London Underground station, terminus of branches of the Piccadilly and Metropolitan lines, and for the Battle of Britain Bunker, from which crucial RAF operations were conducted during World War 2. The Uxbridge & South Ruislip constituency has more recently found fame as the last parliamentary resting place of Boris Johnson and for the by-election that followed his resignation, won narrowly by the Tories after a campaign focused on the Mayor of London's then impending expansion of his Ultra-Low Emission Zone.

Hillingdon Council elections since 2002						
Year	Con	Lab	LD	UKIP/Ref	Green	Other
2002	31	27	7	-	-	-
2006	45	18	2	-	-	-
2010	46	18	-	-	-	-
2014	42	23	-	-	-	-
2018	44	21	-	-	-	-
2022	30	23	-	-	-	-

Labour later captured the seat at the general election, though not by a big margin, perhaps reflecting the resilience of Conservative support among voters in much of this part of outer London. Demographic changes that would normally be expected to help Labour haven't really moved the dial. In the 2021 Census, slightly fewer

than half of Hillingdon residents described themselves as white, a drop from 60 per cent in 2011, while those saying they were Asian reached one third of the total. During the same period, the proportion of homes that were privately rented grew a lot too, rising to over a quarter.

Local landscape

In other ways, though, Hillingdon has retained what might be termed a Conservative character: over half of its homes are owner-occupied and it has the highest level of car ownership of all the boroughs, with almost 80 per cent of households having access to at least one car or van.

Both the current Conservative administration and the Labour opposition have faced significant difficulties during the past four years.

The Tories have had to cope with budgetary problems, and Hillingdon is now one of the eight boroughs in receipt of “exceptional financial support” from the government. Last summer, the council leadership, backed by Kemi Badenoch, blamed the problems on rising homelessness

costs caused by the government’s approach to asylum-seekers, but its own chief financial officer had previously criticised an embedded culture of “optimism bias” in which overspending had become acceptable.

Labour’s troubles began with the suspension of a newly-elected councillor after it emerged that she had previously backed opponents of Haringey Council adopting the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance definition of antisemitism and had a history of support for figures within Labour accused of antisemitism going back several years.

The oddest loss came in October 2025, after a councillor was accused of working with Reform UK, a charge he denied. He joined the Greens after a spell as an

Independent. Perhaps the most difficult disruption had already come in June, when group leader Peter Curling and a senior colleague were deselected. They left the party complaining that it was no longer the one they had joined. Curling now leads the Hayes Independent Party group and is among those of its members defending their seats under their new banner in 2026.

Disappointment with Labour will affect how Hillingdon residents vote, though there will also be local disillusion with Conservatism. Reform UK will be keen to capitalise. The colouration of Hillingdon’s electoral map may soon become more varied.

 HILLINGDON

Electoral prospects

Hillingdon is hard to divide up into chunks that make geographical sense, mostly because it is an aggregation of a lot of towns and villages that have sprawled together. The new wards created in 2022 in the centre of the borough don't help, although the Local Government Boundary Commission for England did some good work in Hayes.



Hayes

13 seats

Hayes is a multicultural working-class outer London town with an illustrious industrial history including the headquarters and production plant of EMI records and the home of Nestlé, where instant coffee was invented in the 1930s. It has a large South Asian population, mostly of Indian origin, with Muslims, Hindus and Sikhs all well-represented. The White British proportion of the population exceeds 25 per cent only in Charville ward to the west of Hayes on the road to Uxbridge.

This block of wards lies to the north of the Great Western railway line, stretching up as far as Hillingdon's section of the town of Yeading, which straddles the border with Ealing. In the south, at Hayes Town, the Elizabeth line has transformed a dowdy minor stop into an impressive station plugged into fast trains through central London. Hayes is an Opportunity Area in the Mayor's London Plan, with 4,000 new homes projected. There are new blocks of flats along the canal.

Ward-level results (2022)	Councillors 2022			Vote share percentage 2022				
	1	2	3	Con	Lab	LD	Green	Other
Belmore	Lab	Lab	Lab	24.1	68.5	-	7.4	-
Charville	Lab	Con	x	49.7	50.3	-	-	-
Hayes Town	Lab	Lab	Lab	19.6	72.2	-	-	8.3
Wood End	Lab	Lab	Lab	26.8	62.0	7.1	-	4.1
Yeading	Lab	Lab	x	30.5	69.5	-	-	-

Charville ward is a perennial marginal which split its favours in 2022 between what we used to call the two main parties. The rest of Hayes has voted solidly Labour since 1986. In 2022, this was by very large margins. The Labour percentages were augmented by the lack of rival candidates. The only complete slates were for Labour and the Conservatives, and Charville and Yeading were completely straight fights.

However, four of the councillors elected here for Labour became Hayes Independent Party members. Hayes Town is the ward of Peter Curling and one of his group colleagues, while another represents Belmore. All three are defending their seats and the local party has fielded candidates for all but one those available in this group of wards. Labour faces its most serious challenge here for decades. Reform might even slip through the middle if the Left vote is split enough.

Harlington and West Drayton

8 seats

These wards are the bits of the Hayes & Harlington parliamentary seat lying south of the Great Western railway line. Pinkwell ward contains Harlington School, and there is a separate settlement of Harlington which is one of the Heathrow Villages, along with Harmondsworth, Sipson and Hillingdon's part of Cranford. West Drayton is the next station along on the Elizabeth line heading towards Reading.

This area is dominated physically and economically by Heathrow Airport. It has given the area some unusual demographics, including the presence of several communities of diverse refugee origin and others still in the asylum system. It also creates local political issues, such as the third runway plan which would see most of the Heathrow Villages between the M4 and the airport bulldozed.

Ward-level results (2022)	Councillors 2022			Vote share percentage 2022				
	1	2	3	Con	Lab	LD	Green	Other
Heathrow Villages	Lab	Lab	x	38.0	54.2	-	7.8	-
Pinkwell	Lab	Lab	Lab	23.0	77.0	-	-	-
West Drayton	Lab	Lab	Lab	35.8	53.1	-	7.1	4.1

Pinkwell is solidly Labour and Heathrow Villages usually is, though it sometimes goes its own way on local issues. West Drayton is marginal. The Conservatives lost the ward's three seats to Labour one by one in the elections of 2010, 2014 and 2018. West Drayton is in rapid demographic change, with the White British proportion falling 20 percentage points between 2011 and 2021, but this does not translate automatically into support for

different political parties. In a Leave-voting, car-owning area there may be potential for Reform. West Drayton was UKIP's second-best ward in Hillingdon (24 per cent) in 2014.

Uxbridge

8 seats

Uxbridge is the “capital” of Hillingdon, in that the borough headquarters are there and it is the main service and shopping centre. But it is only one of several towns and villages that straggle together at the western edge of London. This subgroup of wards is based on the older settlements to the south of Uxbridge centre.

Ward-level results (2022)	Councillors 2022			Vote share percentage 2022				
	1	2	3	Con	Lab	LD	Green	Other
Colham & Cowley	Con	Con	Con	45.2	37.1	-	7.2	10.5
Uxbridge	Con	Lab	Con	45.1	41.5	-	9.3	3.3
Yiewsley	Lab	Lab	x	37.4	54.4	-	8.2	-

Brunel University is in the Colham & Cowley ward and both it and Uxbridge ward have substantial numbers of full-time students (20 per cent and 24 per cent respectively). It is a more White British area (40 per cent) than Hayes, but there is much less owner-occupying than in the suburban wards to the north of Hillingdon.

These social characteristics suggest political marginality, and that is accurate. Labour gained Yiewsley on a high

swing in 2022, picked off a seat in Uxbridge and fell short in Colham & Cowley. But the Conservative defence in these wards was crucial for retaining control of the borough. There is potential for both Reform and the Greens to break into this historically two-party area, although the ex-Labour Green incumbent won't be defending his seat.

Hillingdon and Ickenham

8 seats

These wards are to the north and east of Uxbridge town centre. They are more traditional, owner-occupied interwar Metro-land suburbia than those to the south, with Ickenham & South Harefield being the most upmarket (46 per cent professional/managerial). Rates of car ownership are particularly high, which helps explain the Conservative hold in the Uxbridge & South Ruislip parliamentary by-election.

Ward-level results (2022)	Councillors 2022			Vote share percentage 2022				
	1	2	3	Con	Lab	LD	Green	Other
Hillingdon East	Con	Con	Con	58.5	34.9	-	-	6.7
Hillingdon West	Con	Con	x	54.4	35.4	-	10.1	-
Ickenham & South Harefield	Con	Con	Con	56.3	21.6	-	22.1	-

Ickenham has been long been a very safe Conservative ward, but Hillingdon proper has a marginal history. Hillingdon East used to elect Labour and Liberal Democrat councillors and even an Independent Socialist, but the Conservatives ejected the last Lib Dem in 2010 and the main threat in 2026 probably comes from Reform.

The Hillingdon West vote has been postponed due to the death of one of the Reform candidates. It will now take place on 18 June and might be crucial in determining the balance of power.

Northwood

5 seats

Northwood is the poshest part of Hillingdon, its prosperous suburban avenues crossing the border with South West Hertfordshire as the Metropolitan line clatters between Northwood and Moor Park. Northwood (55 per cent) and Northwood Hills (46 per cent) are the two Hillingdon wards with the highest proportions of graduates and, unlike some graduate-heavy wards closer to central London, this is not because the population is particularly young.

Like in Harrow and parts of Brent, this suburban idyll is attracting prosperous middle-class residents of Asian heritage and becoming increasingly diverse. As in much of Hillingdon, their religious affiliations are variously Muslim, Hindu and Sikh. Also, as in most of Hillingdon, demographic change has not resulted in much political change. Class and income are the predominant factors,

Ward-level results (2022)	Councillors 2022			Vote share percentage 2022				
	1	2	3	Con	Lab	LD	Green	Other
Harefield Village	Con	x	x	56.9	11.0	-	32.1	-
Northwood	Con	Con	x	61.1	13.9	17.2	7.8	-
Northwood Hills	Con	Con	x	54.7	23.0	11.9	10.4	-

although credit is due to Hillingdon Conservatives for adapting with enthusiasm to social change.

Harefield is a rather insular village that gives the impression of not particularly liking the fact that it is in London. It used to be the basis of a marginal ward which Labour gained in a famous by-election in 1993 that

flipped control of Hillingdon from 35–34 Conservative to 35–34 Labour. But since then, it has undergone a long-term swing to the Right. UKIP polled 27 per cent there in 2014 and the National Front got 24 per cent in 2006. Northwood seems safe enough for the Tories but Harefield Village looks like a Reform target.

Ruislip

11 seats

John Betjeman’s poem *Middlesex*, published in 1954, is a hymn of regret for the county that disappeared under concrete, brick and lawn in the interwar period. He contrasts the modernity of the “red electric train” at Ruislip Gardens with the small remnants of the lost rural county on “the outskirt’s edges” that keep the memory of the pre-suburban county alive. Some of the surviving hedges and woodlands can be seen from a steam train that runs around Ruislip Lido today, but it is otherwise surrounded by comfortable suburbs.

Ward-level results (2022)	Councillors 2022			Vote share percentage 2022				
	1	2	3	Con	Lab	LD	Green	Other
Eastcote	Con	Con	Con	58.9	21.8	9.7	8.4	1.3
Ruislip	Con	Con	Con	62.3	17.7	10.8	9.3	-
Ruislip Manor	Con	Con	x	59.8	24.2	8.2	7.9	-
South Ruislip	Con	Con	x	56.9	27.7	-	8.2	7.2

The Ruislip wards are heavily owner-occupied (68–76 per cent), a bit more so than Northwood, although they have somewhat fewer graduates. The northern two (Eastcote and Ruislip) are in the Conservative-held Ruislip, Northwood & Pinner parliamentary seat, and the southern two (Ruislip Manor and South Ruislip) are in shakily Labour Uxbridge & South Ruislip.

The Conservatives secured large majorities in all four Ruislip wards in 2022. Going back, Labour used to be able to win the South Ruislip wards in a good year such as 1994, and the Lib Dems won in Ruislip Manor for a while. However, UKIP managed 16–20 per cent in 2014 and Reform might stand a chance in South Ruislip in particular.



HILLINGDON

What to watch for

The options for Hillingdon boil down to a Conservative hold or No Overall Control with the Conservatives the largest party. It would take only a four-seat loss to deprive the Tories of the majority they have had since 2006. But they could compensate for any Reform inroads, probably concentrated on the western fringe of the borough, by making gains from Labour elsewhere.

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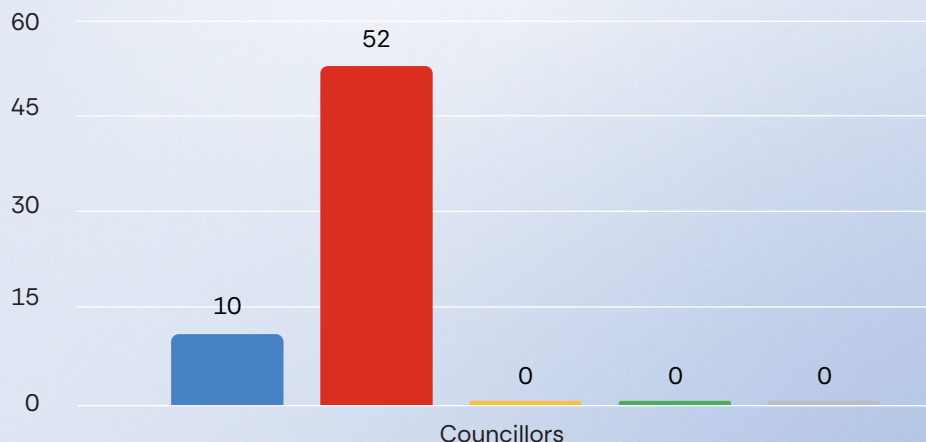
Since 2022

Labour Defence

Labour's win by a large margin over the Conservatives last time, with no other party winning a seat, feels like a long time ago when compared with the range of affiliations Hounslow councillors now have – and the current line-up tells only part of the story of how that came to be.

Nothing changed until March 2024 when a long-serving Labour councillor defected to the Workers Party of Britain. Then, within a year or so, Labour had picked up two more councillors from the Tories, but lost a seat to an Independent in a by-election – the only one of six such contests in the past four years where the party has failed to defend successfully.

Hounslow Council result May 2022 | Total seats: 62



Conservative Labour Liberal Democrat Green Other

By-elections since May 2022

08 MARCH 2023	HESTON WEST	LAB HOLD
02 MAY 2024	BRENTFORD WEST	LAB HOLD
04 JUNE 2024	HANWORTH VILLAGE	LAB HOLD
06 MARCH 2025	BRENTFORD EAST	LAB HOLD
06 MARCH 2025	SYON & BRENTFORD LOCK	IND GAIN FROM LAB
21 AUGUST 2025	CRANFORD	LAB HOLD

November 2025 was a particularly exciting month: it saw one Labour councillor join the Tories, three more go Independent and one join the Greens; it saw the Workers Party convert change allegiance again, joining the Independent group; it saw one of the ex-Labour Independents resign from the council, leaving his seat vacant; and it saw the death of a long-serving Tory councillor, creating another vacancy.

A second Labour councillor joined the Tories in January, thereby levelling up the earlier traffic in the opposite direction. But then, when candidate nominations were published in early April, it turned out that another Labour councillor, who had been deselected, had joined Reform. That meant Labour was down from its original 52 councillors to 42. The Tories were still on 10, there were six Independents, the single Green and now the late convert to Reform. In all, 12 Hounslow councillors of the 62 elected in May 2022 have abandoned their original party. The extent to which the current configuration reflects the sentiments of Hounslow residents will emerge in due course.

Local landscape

Snaking all the way from an outer edge of Hammersmith & Fulham to a border beside Spelthorne in Surrey, the borough of Hounslow encompasses five quite different towns – Brentford, Isleworth, Feltham, Hounslow itself and Chiswick, only the last of which has a London postcode. Part of the borough's southside ends at the north bank of the Thames and the rest alongside Richmond. To its north lies Ealing, to its west, Hillingdon. Heathrow airport falls just within the territory of the latter next-door neighbour, but that doesn't lessen its economic importance to Hounslow. At the same time, about a quarter of the borough's 21.6 square miles is parkland, and includes Gunnersbury Park, Osterley Park and Syon House.

At the last Census, 44 per cent of Hounslow's 300,000 residents described themselves as white, of which about two-thirds or 82,000 were UK white and the rest, about 40,000, "other" white. Around 61,000 identified as

Indian and 17,000 as Pakistani. Nearly 200 languages are spoken by borough residents, including Romanian and Urdu, though English is the first language of 72 per cent. Hounslow is, in short, varied and variegated in a whole range of ways.

It has, nonetheless, consistently favoured Labour through this century, except for the party's bad election year of 2006 and even then it won more seats than any other. Labour's survival hopes this time depend significantly on opposition to it being uneven and undersized.

Local landscape

Labour has lost vote share in every one of its five winning by-elections since May 2022. Ironically, its sole defeat, in Syon & Brentford Lock ward in March 2025, saw its smallest fall in support. The winner by 12 votes was a former Labour councillor, political consultant Theo Dennison, who had represented the previous Syon ward. The Brentford East by-election held on the same day was noteworthy for Reform finishing second to Labour, polling 22 per cent – their best in a London by-election up to that point, albeit turnout was a very low 15 per cent.

The large number of councillors to abandon Labour in Hounslow in an assortment of ways does not point to a united local party. That wouldn't bode well for the campaign. Neither will the revelation that, last year, a member of the Labour group parked his Lamborghini in a disabled bay. Despite that, he is standing again. Another worry for Hounslow Labour is that there are signs that local Hindus in line with an established, nationwide trend, have been leaning more towards the Conservatives. All that said, the Labour edifice is still formidable. Hounslow's response to that could be as diverse and therefore diluted as the borough itself.

Hounslow Council elections since 2002						
Year	Con	Lab	LD	UKIP/Ref	Green	Other
2002	15	36	5	-	-	4
2006	23	24	5	-	-	8
2010	25	35	-	-	-	-
2014	11	49	-	-	-	-
2018	9	51	-	-	-	-
2022	10	52	-	-	-	-

 HOUNSLOW

Electoral prospects

Although Hounslow looks like one of Labour's less difficult defences in 2026, support could flow away from it in various directions, depending on the social characteristics of wards. At the same time, Conservatives could be at risk in areas they currently hold that look receptive to Reform.

Chiswick

9 seats

Chiswick is the small, innermost point of Hounslow, the stretch of the A4 through the Hogarth Roundabout to the start of the M4. It is part of a genteel middle-class district that straddles Hounslow's borders with Hammersmith & Fulham (Ravenscourt) and Ealing (Southfield).

The three Chiswick wards are majority professional-managerial. Homefields and Riverside, at 54 per cent, are more upper middle-class by this measure than all but two wards of Kensington & Chelsea. All three are over 60 per cent graduate. Homefields and Riverside are majority owner-occupied while Gunnersbury has a large private rented component (38 per cent). Chiswick, in a word, is posh.

Ward-level results (2022)

	Councillors 2022			Vote share percentage 2022				
	1	2	3	Con	Lab	LD	Green	Other
Chiswick Gunnersbury	Con	Con	Con	41.6	36.3	22.1	-	-
Chiswick Homefields	Con	Con	Con	43.4	29.6	14.7	12.2	-
Chiswick Riverside	Con	Con	Lab	36.4	32.9	15.8	14.9	-

Labour and the Lib Dems have won wards like this in other boroughs, and Chiswick must have voted Labour in the last three general elections, but only Amy Croft (now ceremonial Mayor of Hounslow) was elected for Labour there in 2022.

Chiswick's loyalty to the Conservatives at council level must come from community politics – a sense that the Tories operate in the council chamber mostly as the Chiswick Party and protect its interests in a borough whose political centre of gravity is further west. They are well dug-in and should ride out the 2026 elections.

Brentford & Isleworth

13 seats

Brentford is an older town where the River Brent and the Grand Union Canal join the River Thames. The 1930s shaped this area's landscape with the industrial Golden Mile and the suburban development around Osterley. The 1960s modified it with the M4 Elevated Section flying over the Brentford streets. This is the easternmost part of the Office for National Statistics' Slough and Heathrow Travel To Work Area (TTWA), so in one economic sense it is outside London's orbit.

The Brentford and Isleworth wards are less professional-managerial middle-class than Chiswick – 40 per cent rather than 50 per cent – but more so than the rest of Hounslow to their west. There is significant social housing in several wards, particularly Brentford East (43 per cent).

Labour won every seat here in the 2018 and 2022 elections, but before that the Conservatives were usually on top in Osterley and Spring Grove, and it is still their

Ward-level results (2022)	Councillors 2022			Vote share percentage 2022				
	1	2	3	Con	Lab	LD	Green	Other
Brentford East	Lab	Lab	x	17.9	62.9	-	19.1	-
Brentford West	Lab	Lab	x	17.5	50.1	-	22.6	9.8
Isleworth	Lab	Lab	Lab	15.4	47.6	19.3	17.7	-
Osterley & Spring Grove	Lab	Lab	Lab	26.0	45.8	14.1	14.1	-
Syon & Brentford Lock	Lab	Lab	Lab	15.2	35.6	9.7	17.1	22.4

best target in the centre of the borough. In 2006, the last time Labour lost control of Hounslow, Independent community candidates won the old Syon and Isleworth. An independent presence in Syon was re-established with Theo Dennison's win in the March 2025 by-election.

Other than in Brentford East, Labour's 2022 shares were not overwhelming. The party therefore faces challenges from several directions: Dennison and any allies he might

recruit, Greens, Conservatives and even Reform, who put down a marker in the Brentford East by-election.

As in a lot of London, the question is whether Labour can prevail against divided opposition despite falling support, or whether they are caught in a pincer movement as different parties target different wards.

Hounslow

14 seats

As anyone who has taken the Piccadilly line to Heathrow can testify, there is a lot of Hounslow. The town itself is the geographical and administrative centre of the borough. It has been a Mayoral Housing Zone since 2015, and new homes have appeared among the terraces of the older town and the interwar suburban avenues. All the wards except Hounslow South saw significant population growth between 2011 and 2021.

Hounslow as whole has a strongly South Asian character and was one of the earliest places in London to have a large community of Indian origin. Central, Heath and West wards are majority Asian and East is not far short. There are slightly more Muslims than Hindus, although both faiths are at around 20 per cent and even here the plurality faith is Christian.

There are only six wards in London with a higher proportion of private renters than Hounslow Central's 56 per cent and those are either new-build communities or wealthy areas of Westminster. Hounslow South, abutting

Ward-level results (2022)	Councillors 2022			Vote share percentage 2022				
	1	2	3	Con	Lab	LD	Green	Other
Hounslow Central	Lab	Lab	Lab	27.0	55.0	-	18.0	-
Hounslow East	Lab	Lab	x	30.9	51.0	-	18.1	-
Hounslow Heath	Lab	Lab	Lab	20.8	49.3	15.5	14.3	-
Hounslow South	Lab	Lab	Lab	23.2	48.3	12.4	16.1	-
Hounslow West	Lab	Lab	Lab	20.0	53.4	13.3	13.2	-

Twickenham, is a bit different, being mostly white and owner-occupied.

Politically, the Hounslow town wards favour Labour and have done for a long time, except for South which has a marginal history. Labour gained all three seats in 2014. But although South seemed to still be moving Labour's way in 2022, the majorities in the other wards could have

been bigger. The Conservatives breaking 30 per cent in the new Hounslow East ward was a surprise.

Hounslow town has largely been spared the borough's political party musical chairs act, with only one councillor (for Hounslow Heath) going from Labour to Independent. But the 2026 results could be messy.

Heston

12 seats

The Heston wards are in the north west of the borough, lying between Hounslow town and Southall. They resemble both areas in their social and ethnic composition and – usually – their electoral behaviour.

Heston was one of many parts of outer London to be built in the interwar period, the suburban avenues providing low-cost owner-occupied homes for commuters and workers in the new industries that were springing up.

Heathrow Airport's proximity has meant that, for London, the proportion of people in routine employment is high. Heston proper is still more owner-occupied than Hounslow town, although Cranford has a significant amount of social housing. All the wards are majority-Asian. Heston is one of the centres of London's Sikh community (24 per cent), although it has a mixture of religions.

Ward-level results (2022)	Councillors 2022			Vote share percentage 2022				
	1	2	3	Con	Lab	LD	Green	Other
Cranford	Lab	Lab	Lab	18.6	53.3	-	14.5	13.6
Heston Central	Lab	Lab	Lab	16.6	55.1	13.8	14.5	-
Heston East	Lab	Lab	Lab	28.1	57.9	-	14.1	-
Heston West	Lab	Lab	Lab	19.7	64.2	-	16.1	-

Heston has been solidly Labour in recent borough elections – the last time a Conservative won in the area was 1990. But there are cracks in the party's hegemony. Labour has lost five councillors here through defections.

The Conservatives polled 29 per cent, not that far behind Labour's 41 per cent, in the August 2025 Cranford by-election, a sign of local trouble for Labour as well as the shifting Hindu vote. Reform polled 17 per cent.

The latter party's recent recruit from Labour, Bandra Chopra, is standing in Heston East. Her competition will not include Umesh Kumar, who was officially "validly nominated" to stand there for the Lib Dems, but also, coincidentally, for Reform in Chopra's current ward, Hounslow West. The upshot is that he is no longer nominated in either.

Feltham, Bedfont & Hanworth

14 seats

Feltham, including the adjacent smaller neighbourhoods of Bedfont and Hanworth, is the part of Hounslow to the south west of the River Crane, between Heathrow and Kempton Park near the start of the M3. It has historically been the white working-class end of the borough, and to some extent that still holds.

The ward average of 32 per cent graduates is the lowest among the sub-areas of Hounslow, and 26 per cent of residents live in social housing. Comparison of the 2011 and 2021 Censuses in most of Hounslow shows only gradual or even slight ethnic population change, but in these five wards there was been a sharp fall in the White British proportion – it fell by between 14 percentage points in Feltham West and 18 in Hanworth Park. Even so, four out of five wards are majority white, Feltham North being the exception.

The minority population is diverse and more Muslim than Hindu. Feltham used to be more reliably Labour than it is now, with Feltham North even electing three Labour councillors in the 1968 Tory wipeout. But it has been marginal for 20 years. When Labour lost its majority

Ward-level results (2022)	Councillors 2022			Vote share percentage 2022				
	1	2	3	Con	Lab	LD	Green	Other
Bedfont	Lab	Lab	Lab	34.9	51.9	-	13.2	-
Feltham North	Lab	Con	Lab	42.3	42.8	-	14.9	-
Feltham West	Lab	Lab	Lab	31.8	52.1	-	16.1	-
Hanworth Park	Lab	Lab	x	30.6	43.6	12.2	13.7	-
Hanworth Village	Lab	Lab	Con	38.9	43.9	-	17.2	-

in Hounslow in 2006, there were eight Conservative councillors here, four Lib Dems, two Labour and an Independent. UKIP polled well in this area at its high point in 2014, ranging from 25 per cent in Hanworth to 32 per cent in Feltham West, where their candidate was incumbent ex-Tory candidate Colin Botterill.

In the great Hounslow seat swap, the Conservative councillor for Feltham North was the one who defected

to Labour in May 2024, but two of those who left Labour to go Independent were elected for these wards too (one in Bedfont, one in Feltham West). The UKIP vote in 2014 – even if Feltham was a lot whiter than it is now – and the low proportion of graduates suggest that Reform has potential in Feltham, but the party would have to overtake the local Conservatives who have done well to remain as viable as they are.



HOUNSLOW

What to watch for

Labour has to lose a lot of seats to lose control of Hounslow – 21 of those it won in May 2022. There is probably no one party that can overhaul them. Defeat would entail Reform knocking out multiple seats in Feltham, the Tories doing some serious business in Heston and maybe Osterley & Spring Grove, and Greens and Independents making progress in Brentford and perhaps Hounslow town. Even if all that happens the chances of a coherent non-Labour administration emerging seem remote: rough-edged Feltham Reformers and smooth Chiswick liberal Tories are not an obviously natural mix.

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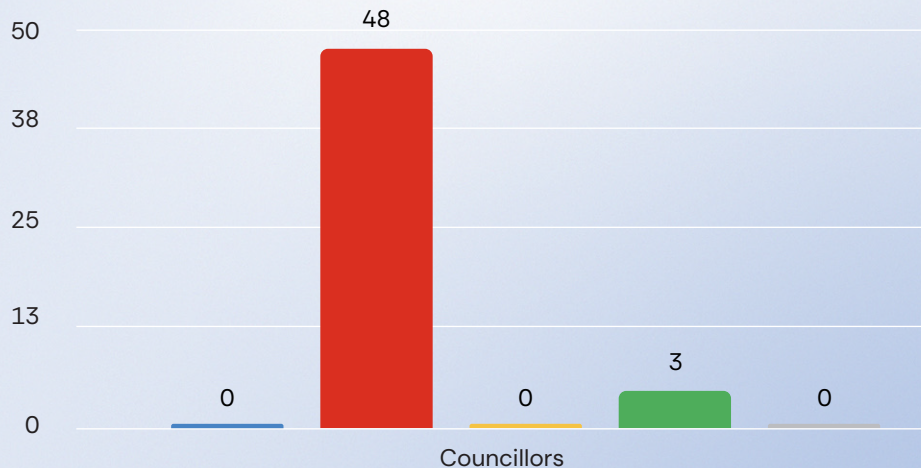
Since 2022

Labour Defence

Labour has dominated Islington since 2014. The Liberal Democrats have disappeared from the scoreboard and only the Greens have mustered a seat or three to prevent Labour sweeping the field. The past few years, though, have seen significant action off the local authority pitch, leading to fractures in the Labour edifice that may foreshadow a different council chamber mix this time round.

Some of this, of course, is to do with local MP Jeremy Corbyn, his ejection from the parliamentary Labour Party in 2023 and his subsequent retention of his Islington North constituency as an Independent at the 2024 general election.

Islington Council result May 2022 | Total seats: 51



Conservative Labour Liberal Democrat Green Other

By-elections since May 2022

02 MAY 2024	HILLRISE	LAB HOLD
15 AUGUST 2024	HILLRISE	LAB HOLD
28 NOVEMBER 2024	JUNCTION	LAB HOLD

Four Labour councillors sympathetic to Corbyn and unhappy with Labour's direction under Sir Keir Starmer resigned from the party in instalments between March 2023 and July 2024 to sit instead as Independents. They and the Greens combined to form a seven-strong opposition group, though no comparable arrangement appears to have been made for this year's elections. The other big change has been at the top, with council leader Kaya Comer-Schwarz leaving in October 2024 to become Sir Sadiq Khan's Deputy Mayor for Policing and Crime. She was succeeded by Una O'Halloran.

There have been three by-elections, the most recent to fill Comer-Schwartz's vacated seat. Labour held it with a reduced vote share, pursued by an Independent backed by the Town Hall Independents. Before that, in August 2024, Labour (again with an Independent as runner-up) successfully defended a seat that had been successfully defended by a different Labour candidate in May 2024, only for him to resign 69 days later. In a recent court appearance, he pleaded not guilty to charges of blackmail. Upheaval and mishaps have not, then, been in short supply in Islington Labour circles and the party is down from 48 seats out of 51 to 44. But opponents still have a mountain to climb if they are to dismantle the party's majority.

Local landscape

The rise in the 1990s of an Islington stereotype involving sun-dried tomatoes, lashings of New Labour and metropolitan elitism at scale obscured the other part of the borough's social profile, which was proletarian and poor. That hasn't gone away. Over 40 per cent of Islington's housing is for social rent. This is one of London's highest proportions, as is its 43 per cent child poverty rate.

It has also, like so much of inner London in particular, become unaffordable for would-be first-time buyers and for private renters. Those able to buy paid an average of £619,000 for an Islington home, according to provisional Office for National Statistics figures for December. The average for London was £440,000. Private rents in Islington averaged £2,682 a month. Unsurprisingly, home ownership in the borough has been inching down towards 25 per cent while private renting has been climbing towards one third.

Islington is also distinguished by being the second smallest London borough geographically (after Kensington & Chelsea), covering 5.74 square miles, and its second most densely populated (after Tower Hamlets) with about 39,000 people per square mile. Its overall population stood at around 223,000 as of mid-2024.

Islington Council elections since 2002						
Year	Con	Lab	LD	UKIP/Ref	Green	Other
2002	-	10	38	-	-	-
2006	-	23	24	-	1	-
2010	-	35	13	-	-	-
2014	-	47	-	-	1	-
2018	-	47	-	-	1	-
2022	-	48	-	-	3	-

That number has been rising, though more slowly than across London as a whole. The borough's average age has risen and its birthrate has fallen to become one of London's lowest. Like other inner London boroughs, it has closed or merged a number of primary schools in recent years, as demand for places has lessened.

Labour has won 12 of the 16 full Islington Council elections held since the very first in 1964. It formed a one-party state there after three of the first four, the exception being a spectacular Conservative triumph in that party's golden year of 1968. Since then, though, the Tories have won just three seats in full borough elections in Islington, the most recent way back in 1994.

Local landscape

Centre ground parties have been Labour's principal challengers since the early 1980s, when the elegant Canonbury Square was conspicuously festooned with banners favouring the newly-formed Social Democratic Party. In 1986, the SDP-Liberal Alliance won 16 Islington seats. The two parties merged in 1988 and the resulting Liberal Democrats established themselves as Labour's leading local threat. This resulted in No Overall Control outcomes in 1998 and 2006 and a decisive Lib Dem majority in 2002, but the orange party has been seatless since 2014, seemingly consigned to Islingtonians' electoral naughty step for joining the coalition national government in 2010.

Will the Greens now emulate past Lib Dem insurrections? There was a 5.4 per cent swing from Labour in their favour in 2022, they attracted 22.4 per cent of the popular vote and their three-seat haul – all won in the affluent Highbury ward – was their best yet. Their longest-serving councillor, Caroline Russell, who first won a seat in 2014, is standing down this time (though she will continue to serve on the London Assembly). Expectations that Islington would be a powerhouse of Your Party, the entity formed by Corbyn and Coventry South MP Zarah Sultana, have not been fulfilled due to well-documented personal and organisational turbulence at the top.

However, nine candidates will offer very Corbynite left-wing policies as Islington Community Independents standing in six wards. They include two of the current councillors who've left Labour. The Greens have put up full slates of candidates against them.

 ISLINGTON

Electoral prospects

For the most part, Islington's wards are surprisingly politically homogeneous. There are only two (Highbury and St Mary's & St James') where Labour scored significantly below 50 per cent last time and none where it topped 66 per cent.

This might reflect Islington's patchwork of wealth, poverty, education and ethnicity also being pretty uniform. No ward contains less than Highbury's 29 per cent social housing and none has fewer than Caledonian's 49 per cent graduates. Both of these figures are high by most comparisons – in a majority of outer boroughs there will only be one or two particularly posh or particularly council estate wards that reach either proportion.

All the wards are 30–49 per cent White British in Census terms and with a highly diverse range of minority communities rather than concentrations of one or another in different places.

Finsbury

6 seats

There are two Islington wards that fall wholly within London's inner ring road, between the Angel and the City. This area approximates the old borough of Finsbury. East to west, it roughly covers the space between Old Street and Farringdon stations. North to south, it lies between those of Barbican and Angel.

Ward-level results (2022)	Councillors 2022			Vote share percentage 2022				
	1	2	3	Con	Lab	LD	Green	Other
Bunhill	Lab	Lab	Lab	16.8	56.0	11.2	14.0	2.0
Clerkenwell	Lab	Lab	Lab	15.9	50.2	17.1	16.9	-

It used to be a working-class quarter of central London although, being within walking distance of the City and the legal quarter, its housing has long been settled by the upper middle classes. The populations of Bunhill and Clerkenwell are 19 per cent full-time student and 55 per cent graduate, making this a particularly educated corner of central London, thanks in part to the presence of City University.

The wards were won by the Lib Dems in their better election years, even in the close-run 2006, but they've been all-Labour since 2014. Each ward has provided a defector from Labour to the Corbynite Independents.

Bourgeois Islington

12 seats

This area is based around the roads radiating northwards from Angel – Essex Road, Upper Street and Liverpool Road. When people invoke the Islington cliché of wealthy latte-sipping liberals living in beautiful Georgian or Victorian terraces, it is this cluster of wards they have in mind. Around 50 per cent of residents are professional-managerial and nearly 60 per cent are graduates. Former prime ministers Tony Blair and Boris Johnson have lived in these parts.

Ward-level results (2022)	Councillors 2022			Vote share percentage 2022				
	1	2	3	Con	Lab	LD	Green	Other
Barnsbury	Lab	Lab	Lab	17.0	51.7	13.6	17.7	-
Canonbury	Lab	Lab	Lab	18.2	50.2	14.9	16.7	-
St Mary's & St James'	Lab	Lab	Lab	14.7	40.3	31.8	13.2	-
St Peter's & Canalside	Lab	Lab	Lab	21.9	49.2	14.8	14.0	-

But that is not the whole story. Forty per cent of households are in social rent homes and there are struggling families and communities amid the wealth.

Islingtonians' voting behaviour is strikingly similar whatever their social station, but it is worth noting Labour's share being lower in these most middle-class

wards than in more working-class areas. The party has lost these wards to the Lib Dems in the past, and the latter fell only 111 votes short of winning a seat in St Mary's & St James' in 2022. Labour majorities in the other wards were flattered by a split opposition, including the Islington Conservatives' best showings.

West Islington

9 seats

Lying within Emily Thornberry's Islington South & Finsbury constituency, this is the less middle-class section of the core of Islington. It stretches from King's Cross past Pentonville prison and up to the corner of Holloway.

Ward-level results (2022)	Councillors 2022			Vote share percentage 2022				
	1	2	3	Con	Lab	LD	Green	Other
Caledonian	Lab	Lab	Lab	12.1	65.7	8.6	13.7	-
Holloway	Lab	Lab	Lab	8.9	62.5	9.4	16.1	3.1
Laycock	Lab	Lab	Lab	13.3	57.4	11.1	18.2	-

Caledonian is the most working-class, ethnically mixed and socially-housed ward in the borough. However, this being Islington, no ward is a monoculture and there are a lot of professional and middle-class people in the mix too, particularly now at the King's Cross end.

Labour's majorities in these seats in 2022 were large. The Lib Dems have gained seats at their past high tides, but Labour won all of them at the close election of 2006 and has held them ever since. They seem better-fortified than other areas, although one councillor in Laycock ward, near Highbury & Islington station, has gone over to the Corbynite Independents.

Highbury

9 seats

These wards are at the eastern end of the highly compact constituency of Islington North. They sit between central Islington and Stoke Newington in Hackney, and are in many ways similar to both those areas. The professional-managerial element is very large (46 to 56 per cent, Highbury's being the largest in the borough) and Arsenal and Highbury are the Islington wards with the lowest proportions of social housing.

Ward-level results (2022)	Councillors 2022			Vote share percentage 2022				
	1	2	3	Con	Lab	LD	Green	Other
Arsenal	Lab	Lab	Lab	9.3	53.1	12.3	22.4	2.9
Highbury	Green	Green	Green	8.8	34.8	10.9	46.2	-
Mildmay	Lab	Lab	Lab	10.5	59.2	10.5	19.7	-

Highbury has the highest owner-occupation rate (40 per cent). Arsenal has seen new development and an increase in population. It contains both the old Arsenal Football Club stadium site and its new Emirates home and is the only ward in London named after a football team.

Highbury has been the part of Islington that has resisted Labour the most. The former Highbury East ward was held by the Lib Dems before 2014, when Russell won there for the first time for Greens, becoming the borough's only non-Labour councillor in that year. She repeated the feat in 2018 and was joined by two Green colleagues in the newly-created Highbury ward in 2022.

Finsbury Park

6 seats

The two wards around the Seven Sisters Road as it passes through Holloway and Finsbury Park toward Haringey differ sharply from the parody Islington. They seem working-class and highly diverse. Finsbury Park is Islington's most Muslim ward (21 per cent). But, just as there is a lot of social housing around Upper Street, there are a lot of middle-class professionals in the terraced streets, even though they are less grand than those of Barnsbury. One example in Tollington ward is called Corbyn Street.

Ward-level results (2022)

	Councillors 2022			Vote share percentage 2022				
	1	2	3	Con	Lab	LD	Green	Other
Finsbury Park	Lab	Lab	Lab	5.4	62.1	6.4	17.2	9.0
Tollington	Lab	Lab	Lab	6.2	61.3	7.6	24.9	-

These have always tended to be among the most Labour-leaning wards in Islington, and they have stuck with the party even when it has had losses borough-wide. But 2026 might see the biggest challenge to those

enduring loyalties if the Greens and Left Independents can get their acts together. The Independents already have a seat Finsbury Park thanks to a defection, the only one in Corbyn's Islington North constituency.

Archway

9 seats

None of Islington is suburban, exactly, but this section in the north-west is where the streets start sloping upwards and there are more trees on them. Hillrise ward, on the borders of Crouch End, is well-named and Junction is at the edge of Highgate.

Ward-level results (2022)	Councillors 2022			Vote share percentage 2022				
	1	2	3	Con	Lab	LD	Green	Other
Hillrise	Lab	Lab	Lab	6.5	64.9	9.1	19.4	-
Junction	Lab	Lab	Lab	8.3	65.7	6.6	19.5	-
Tufnell Park	Lab	Lab	Lab	4.9	49.7	5.2	40.4	-

All three by-elections since 2022 have taken place in this corner of the borough. Labour held Hillrise comfortably at the first time of asking in May 2024, but the electorate gave a less emphatic welcome to the winning candidate's short-order successor in August.

The Corbyn-aligned Independents who finished second in the latter contest and the later one for a Junction

seat won 24 and 28 per cent of the vote respectively. That was not enough to seriously threaten Labour, but the government has since become a lot less popular and the left of Labour sector may be better organised now. There seems to be potential for them: the Greens targeted Tufnell Park in 2022 and were just 124 votes short of winning a seat.



ISLINGTON

What to watch for

The Islington prognosis depends heavily on borough-wide factors. Can the Corbynites and Greens organise a campaign on a big enough scale? If they can, the council's composition could swing strongly in their direction due to most of the wards being rather alike. If they can't, Labour should prevail as usual.

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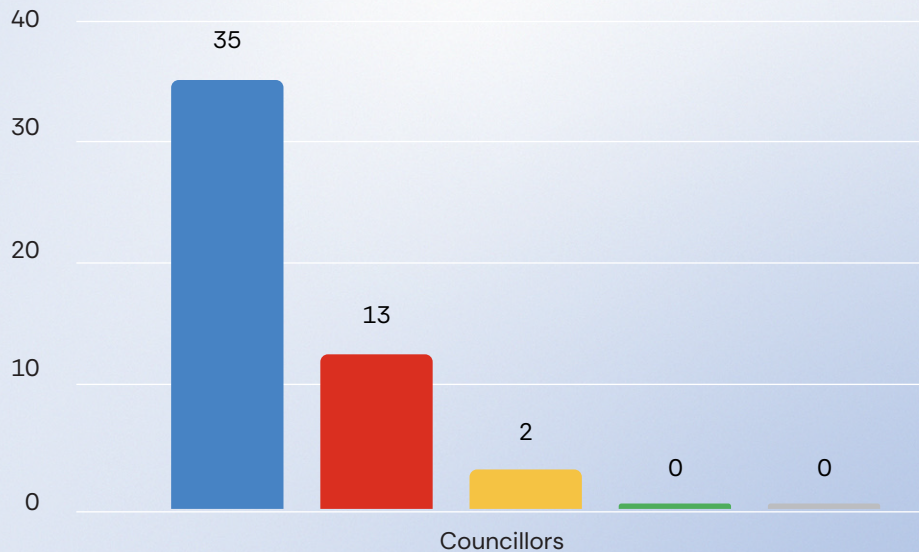
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Since 2022

Conservative Defence

The political colouring of the Royal Borough of Kensington & Chelsea has long been a model of consistency. The base and most of the upright of its inverted capital "L" shape has been blue through thick and thin, and the tip predominantly red. In 2022, there were no boundary changes from 2018 and very little changing of the guard.

Kensington & Chelsea Council result May 2022 | Total seats: 50



Conservative Labour Liberal Democrat Green Other

By-elections since May 2022

02 MAY 2024

NORLAND

CON HOLD

The Tories took 35 seats out of 50, losing one to the Liberal Democrats who thereby doubled up to two, while Labour stayed unchanged on 13. The Conservative vote share loss was a quite modest 3.7 per cent against the backdrop of a Conservative national government in trouble. It was pretty much business as usual.

There has been one by-election, held shortly before the general election, which resulted in a Conservative hold. There have been six defections from Labour in a vivid assortment of directions. The first to go joined the Tories. The next joined the Greens. Three others have incrementally formed a leftist Independents' group. The sixth now sits for the Advance Party, which is to the right of Reform UK.

That leaves the RBKC line-up as we approach this year's elections as follows: Conservatives 36; Labour seven; Independents three; Lib Dems two; Green one; Advance one. That's an exotic combination for a borough that's been so stable politically. Counter to the London trend, there's a good chance it will revert to being less so after 7 May.

Local landscape

Covering just 4.6 square miles, Kensington & Chelsea is the smallest borough geographically and also home to the fewest people – 147,000 and falling, though still enough to make it one of the most densely populated parts of the UK. It is also ageing rapidly: the Council estimates that the number of residents who are 65 or older will increase by 40 per cent over the next 20 years. Kensington & Chelsea is distinctive, too, in being simultaneously the location of the electoral ward with the highest concentration of social housing anywhere in the capital and of some of the most expensive real estate on Planet Earth.

Its Labour-leaning northern peak, which bumps up against Brent, is where its poorer people mostly live in homes built in the 1960s and 1970s, replacing bomb-damaged, run-down Victorian dwellings on a large scale. It is here that we find the awful shell of Grenfell Tower.

Another sort of housing scandal is part of an earlier history of this part of London. The name Peter Rachman remains synonymous with slum landlordism and the pitiless exploitation and intimidation of tenants in the 1950s and early 1960s. His territory was Notting Hill, a name that has acquired many, often quite different, associations down the decades.

Kensington & Chelsea Council elections since 2002						
Year	Con	Lab	LD	UKIP/Ref	Green	Other
2002	42	12	-	-	-	-
2006	45	9	-	-	-	-
2010	43	9	2	-	-	-
2014	37	12	1	-	-	-
2018	36	13	1	-	-	-
2022	35	13	2	-	-	-

One, contemporaneous with Rachmanism, is the “race riot” of 1958, involving Caribbean immigrants, new to the area, responding to attacks by Teddy Boys and far-Right groups, a period enshrined in Colin McInnes’s 1959 novel *Absolute Beginners*. From those ashes rose Europe’s biggest street carnival, still with us today. Later, came

gentrification on a stellar scale, ringing social changes captured in Alan Hollinghurst’s 2004 novel *The Line of Beauty*, a tale of sexuality, class and politics in Margaret Thatcher’s Britain, and mirrored in Richard Curtis’s eponymous 1999 romcom, complete with scenes from the famous Portobello Road.

Local landscape

The RBKC cultural mix also takes in part of historically bohemian Earl's Court and The Boltons, a stratospherically expensive street and garden square that inspired an "imaginary memoir" by Paul Theroux. There are brutalist architecture favourites in the form of the Trellick Tower in the north and the Worlds End estate in the south, where RBKC meets the Thames.

The place is nothing if not rich in culture and contrasts. In terms of political control, though, it has been eternally Conservative blue.

Some anticipated a post-Grenfell backlash in 2018. They were disappointed. Since that cruel disaster, the council has been utterly made over. Its leader, Elizabeth Campbell, at the helm since the month after the tower burned, has established herself as an example of Conservative stability and moderation as her party has moved towards the radical Right – she's a supporter of the recently launched Tory centrist group, Prosper UK –

and could be forgiven for taking a certain pleasure in her local Labour opposition line-up fraying.

This has been a mixture of the predictable, the novel and the strange. Emma Dent Coad, who unexpectedly became the MP for the old Kensington seat in 2017 (lasting until 2019) was always a likely early deserter, jumping ship to go Independent in May 2023, the month Jeremy Corbyn was suspended by Labour. Two others went later that year, unhappy with Labour's stance on Gaza and more, one to be an Independent, the other to be Green.

The fourth was the convert to Conservatism. The fifth was thrown out after repeated breaches of the councillor code of conduct, including re-tweeting insults about refugees and Muslims. She's now aligned with Elon Musk. The sixth and last departed in disputed circumstances last autumn, with Labour claiming he'd been deselected

and the councillor himself saying he'd already left to join the Greens, though he wasn't actually sitting as one for reasons he reportedly was unable to divulge. He's been an Independent ever since. The Tory boat has not been rocked.

 KENSINGTON & CHELSEA

Electoral prospects

There is some scope for greater disruption of the usual Conservative–Labour balance in 2026, but the highly uneven distribution of RBKC housing types and residents’ prosperity leaves limited scope for change. The 18 wards break down into five illustrative groups.

North Kensington

7 seats

These three wards are at the northern tip of the borough, separated from the rest by the elevated Westway. Dalgarno and Golborne are home to very distinctive communities: the latter has the highest proportion of residents housed in the social rented sector (67 per cent) of any ward in London and the former is not far behind.

Some of this housing is council-built, such as the estate around the Trellick Tower, but a lot is from other kinds of social housing providers, such as trusts. North Kensington is traditionally one of London's most diverse areas – long-famous as a place where early immigrants from the Caribbean settled – and the social housing there means its character has been maintained. St Helen's ward is a

Ward-level results (2022)	Councillors 2022			Vote share percentage 2022				
	1	2	3	Con	Lab	LD	Green	Other
Dalgarno	Lab	Lab	x	20.2	58.2	10.9	-	10.7
Golborne	Lab	Lab	Lab	19.6	70.1	10.3	-	-
St Helen's	Lab	Lab	x	34.4	51.1	9.4	-	5.1

bit different and more middle-class – a Conservative topped the poll there in 2014 – although it too has a lot of social housing (46 per cent).

Labour returned seven councillors out of seven in this area in 2018 and 2022, but three have them have now gone, each in a different direction.

The Advance UK convert is defending her Dalgarno seat as an Independent. The newcomer to the Greens is defending her Golborne seat and stands a chance. Dent Coad, another Golborne representative, is standing down. Several others elected in this part of the borough in 2022 are changing wards.

Notting Hill

10 seats

Notting Hill – defined here as the areas between Notting Hill Gate and the Westway – has been one of London’s most socially and politically divided neighbourhoods for decades. The ward boundaries mark an approximate separation between wealthy Notting Hill, where sleek crescents and squares distinguish the Norland and Pembridge wards, and its grittier side to the north in Notting Dale and Colville.

Ward-level results (2022)	Councillors 2022			Vote share percentage 2022				
	1	2	3	Con	Lab	LD	Green	Other
Colville	Lab	Lab	Lab	25.3	60.1	14.6	-	-
Norland	Con	Con	x	48.8	20.6	10.2	20.4	-
Notting Dale	Lab	Lab	Lab	18.7	71.0	10.3	-	-
Pembridge	Con	Con	x	41.1	27.4	31.5	-	-

Notting Dale resembles the wards north of the Westway in being overwhelmingly (66 per cent) social housing. These homes include the Lancaster West estate, where the ruins of Grenfell Tower still stand. Colville is a fascinating jumble of overcrowded rented housing and glamorous flats. It’s where the Notting Hill movie was filmed, and where Nicolas Roeg made Performance, released in 1970.

The northern two wards are very Labour. Their electors are more faithful than their recent representatives, half of whom have left since 2022. The party’s vote could tumble in these parts, but it is hard to see anyone else putting a winning coalition together. Pembridge and Norland are a bit of a frontier area, with the Conservatives winning though not overwhelmingly. These wards are generally low-swing, always just out of reach for Labour, as shown by Norland in the May 2024 by-election.

Kensington

12 seats

These wards lie either side of Kensington High Street – Campden and Holland to the north, Abingdon and Queen's Gate to the south. Holland has a faint trace of the mixture of wealth and poverty found in the Notting Hill wards, but the accent is on the well-off and socially advantaged.

Ward-level results (2022)	Councillors 2022			Vote share percentage 2022				
	1	2	3	Con	Lab	LD	Green	Other
Abingdon	Con	Con	Con	59.2	21.5	19.3	-	-
Campden	Con	Con	Con	51.4	18.2	16.0	14.4	-
Holland	Con	Con	Con	53.1	35.3	11.6	-	-
Queen's Gate	Con	Con	Con	53.5	15.8	30.7	-	-

Campden and Holland are more made up of owner-occupied houses than the southern wards, which run to exclusive rented flats in mansion blocks. Labour performed impressively in Holland in 2018 and 2022 without coming close to victory, rather as in Norland and

Pembridge. A single Lib Dem candidate made Queen's Gate as competitive as it has ever been. This is not Reform territory, so it looks likely that the Conservatives will continue to have a monopoly.

South Kensington

9 seats

This is the west of the borough between Cromwell Road and Fulham Road, arranged around the Earl's Court, Gloucester Road and West Brompton stations. It is also split between the two local parliamentary constituencies (Redcliffe is in Chelsea & Fulham, the others are in Kensington & Bayswater).

The wards in this densely built-up area of terraces and mansion blocks are socially distinctive. They account for three of the four in London with the Census's highest "Other White" shares of their populations, Redcliffe having the very highest at 45 per cent. The other member of the top four is nearby Queen's Gate ward.

Ward-level results (2022)	Councillors 2022			Vote share percentage 2022				
	1	2	3	Con	Lab	LD	Green	Other
Courtfield	Con	Con	Con	50.1	13.5	36.4	-	-
Earl's Court	LD	LD	Con	31.5	19.0	39.6	9.9	-
Redcliffe	Con	Con	Con	47.7	20.9	31.4	-	-

Much of this is due to European Union nationals with settled status. They have voting rights in local elections and their presence informed the Lib Dems targeting these wards and getting respectable results in 2022. Linda Wade has represented Earl's Court since a by-election in September 2010.

Whether her party can improve on its 2022 performance, back when the wounds of Brexit were fresh in this prosperous, educated and pro-European part of London, is perhaps questionable, although the Conservatives might slip back a bit as well.

Chelsea

12 seats

Three of these wards are in the Chelsea & Fulham constituency along with Redcliffe, but the strongly Conservative area of Brompton and Hans Town around Harrod's is in the Kensington & Bayswater seat. Since 2024, for the first time in its history, the whole of the Royal Borough of Kensington & Chelsea has Labour MPs.

Ward-level results (2022)	Councillors 2022			Vote share percentage 2022				
	1	2	3	Con	Lab	LD	Green	Other
Brompton & Hans Town	Con	Con	Con	66.6	17.4	16.1	-	-
Chelsea Riverside	Con	Con	Con	40.4	32.5	27.1	-	-
Royal Hospital	Con	Con	Con	69.0	15.2	27.1	-	-
Stanley	Con	Con	Con	57.7	23.1	19.2	-	-

Chelsea is the weaker part of the highly marginal Chelsea & Fulham for Labour, with only the World's End estate and perhaps Lots Road in the Chelsea Riverside ward being strong territory. Riverside aside, this section of Chelsea is unbendingly Tory, partly because the permanent, wealthy owner-occupiers and long-term tenants are more likely to be on the electoral register than the cosmopolitan and transient residents.

The 2021 Census recorded a steep drop in population, but this may have largely reflected second homeowners being out of London during the pandemic. There is very little chance of the Conservatives being displaced except in Riverside in a good Labour year, which 2026 is not.



KENSINGTON & CHELSEA

What to watch for

The Conservatives have a solid grip in Kensington & Chelsea. Labour has its knot of wards in the north of the borough, but there are no real marginals where the two parties directly confront each other. Labour's main task will be recovering the seats it has lost because of defections. The Conservatives may look vulnerable to the Lib Dems in the south-west of the borough based on results in 2022, but they would have to lose a net 10 seats overall to be deprived of their majority. This seems highly unlikely to happen.

Kingston upon Thames



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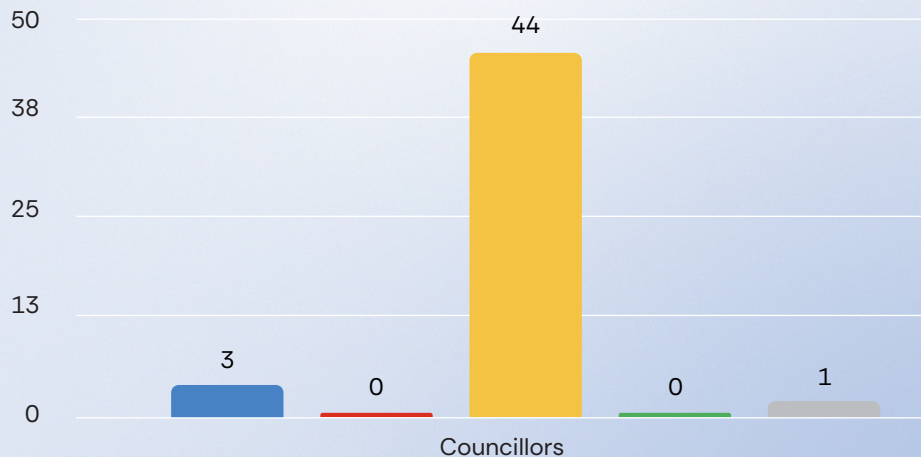
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Since 2022

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.

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



Conservative Labour Liberal Democrat Green Other

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.

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 Dem 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-

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.

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	-

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.

Lambeth



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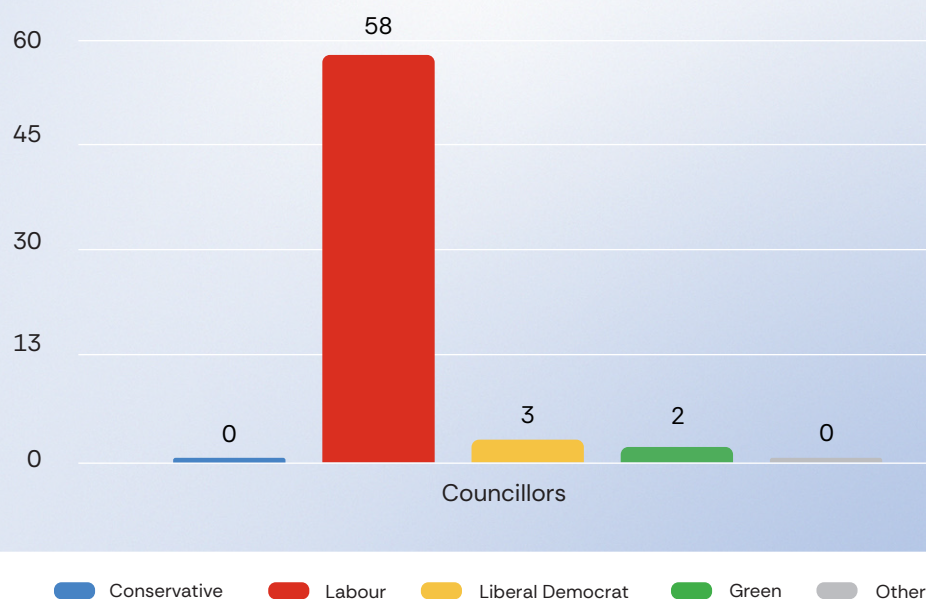
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Since 2022

Labour Defence

The Greens lost ground in Lambeth last time round, dropping from five seats won in 2018 to two. The Liberal Democrats did better, winning three seats. The Conservatives were wiped out and Labour's victory was monumental, with 58 triumphs out of 63. The question this time, as in other inner London Labour controlled boroughs, is how much more damage a resurgent Greens might inflict on Labour than they have achieved before.

Lambeth Council result May 2022 | Total seats: 63



Some of the five by-elections held since May 2022 have been instructive. A comfortable Labour hold in autumn 2023 was followed by two more on general election day, though one of them saw a big drop in vote share as locals made known their annoyance with a newly-installed Low Traffic Neighbourhood. A second by-election took place in one of the same wards two months later, due to an incumbent becoming an MP. Labour's defence that time was far easier. But the most recent by-election, held in May 2025 – also caused by a Labour councillor ascending to the Commons – saw the Greens knock Labour out. The swing wasn't huge but, from Labour's point of view, perhaps ominous.

By-elections since May 2022

05 OCTOBER 2023	VAUXHALL	LAB HOLD
02 MAY 2024	KNIGHT'S HILL	LAB HOLD
02 MAY 2024	STREATHAM COMMON & VALE	LAB HOLD
04 JULY 2024	STREATHAM COMMON & VALE	LAB HOLD
01 MAY 2025	HERNE HILL & LOUGHBOROUGH JUNCTION	GREEN GAIN FROM LAB

The Greens have also picked up a defector from Labour. So have the Lib Dems, taking both parties' totals up to four. Labour lost another councillor last July after criminal charges were brought against him. He became an Independent. Labour, then, was down from 58 to 54 out of 63 as the formal campaigning period began. Don't expect it to go back up.

Local landscape

Lambeth stretches southwards from a slanting Thames waterfront studded with major cultural attractions through a succession of progressively more suburban neighbourhoods such as Streatham and west Dulwich before coming to a halt at its border with Croydon and Outer London. It is linked to the north side of the river by Hungerford rail bridge, the Golden Jubilee pedestrian bridges that flank it (often known as the Hungerford foot bridges) and by four famous road bridges: Waterloo, Lambeth, Vauxhall and Westminster, the last of which ushers you towards Parliament Square.

The borough is served by the Northern and Victoria London Underground lines, the latter terminating at Brixton in the heart of Lambeth with its famous market and imposing Town Hall. Lambeth in the 1980s was marked by political and social turbulence. These were profound, yet also masked the borough’s more tranquil and harmonious characteristics. Like other inner London boroughs, Lambeth has seen rapid gentrification during this century with a variety of effects, including protests against it.

Politically, Labour has dominated Lambeth for most of this century, and increasingly so since 2014. The exception was 2002, which saw a Lib Dem–Conservative coalition emerge from a No Overall Control result.

Lambeth Council elections since 2002						
Year	Con	Lab	LD	UKIP/Ref	Green	Other
2002	7	28	28	-	-	-
2006	6	39	17	-	1	-
2010	4	44	15	-	-	-
2014	3	59	-	-	1	-
2018	1	57	-	-	5	-
2022	-	58	3	-	2	-

The council has been led since 2021 by Claire Holland, who in 2024 was elected chair of London Councils, the influential cross-party body that represents all of the capital’s local authorities. Holland has been a keen advocate of Low Traffic Neighbourhoods and “active travel” policies, some of which have encountered resistance both from the public and the law: in June 2025, the High Court ordered the council to immediately remove an LTN in West Dulwich after concluding that it hadn’t been implemented correctly. Holland, however, remains committed to this direction of transport travel,

arguing that it contributes to her wider pro-growth and pro-development objectives for the borough.

Electorally, she and Labour now face a major challenge from the Greens, who have made small inroads in every full set of elections since 2014 and will be hoping for much bigger ones this time – perhaps even a majority. Most of Labour’s Lambeth heartland has much the same social mix and political orientation. It looks like a solid wall, but if one part of it can crumble, so can many others.



Electoral prospects

A lot of Lambeth wards generated similar electoral patterns in 2022: Labour won something like 55 to 60 per cent of the vote with the Greens in distant second places, around 35 to 40 points behind. On the face of it, such seats are safe for Labour. But a 20 per cent swing from Labour to Green would make all of them close contests, with the Greens having the edge.

A very rough projection of ward results on that basis yields 18 Labour councillors, 39 Green and six Lib Dems. In other words, a Green-led council with a comfortable majority secured with a smaller movement away from Labour than the party achieved to win the Gorton & Denton by-election.



North Lambeth

8 seats

Lambeth is one of a number of boroughs formed on a radial pattern – a pie slice with the narrow bit near central London and the wide crust out in the suburbs. The thin end of the wedge is the area around Waterloo, Vauxhall and Kennington stations.

Vauxhall has been massively redeveloped in recent years. The top of Wandsworth Road has become a gleaming cluster of high-rises, part of the wider Nine Elms area. Vauxhall's population grew by 3,000 between 2011 and 2021 and will have continued to rise rapidly, with 95 per cent of residents living in flats. But that ward and its neighbours have established communities as well, both of the professional middle classes, who have long cherished the Georgian streets of Kennington, and occupants of council estates. Kennington is 48 per cent social renting, Waterloo & South Bank 36 per cent.

Ward-level results (2022)	Councillors 2022			Vote share percentage 2022				
	1	2	3	Con	Lab	LD	Green	Other
Kennington	Lab	Lab	Lab	10.3	56.1	10.7	22.9	-
Vauxhall	Lab	Lab	Lab	15.8	55.7	11.8	16.8	-
Waterloo & South Bank	Lab	Lab	x	10.7	41.7	36.7	10.8	-

This area has a fascinating history of competition between Labour and the Lib Dems (and their forerunners) going back to the 1920s. Bishop's ward (the predecessor to Waterloo & South Bank, named for Lambeth Palace) and Prince's (Kennington/Vauxhall) were the first Lambeth wards where the SDP-Liberal Alliance broke through in the 1980s, although Labour gained Prince's in 2006 and Bishop's in 2014.

In 2022 the Lib Dems concentrated their campaign in Waterloo & South Bank but fell 67 votes short of winning a seat. They did respectably in the Vauxhall by-election of October 2023, taking a 28 per cent share to Labour's 42, although they might have to tussle with the Greens for the anti-Labour mantle in 2026.

Stockwell

10 seats

Stockwell is an inner-city area between Brixton and Vauxhall. For our purposes it includes Myatt's Fields (which is arguably north Brixton) and Oval. It is a densely populated area with a high proportion of social housing stretching from the estates off Wandsworth Road in the west to the 1970s Myatt's Fields estate in the east. It also has strong transport links and an attraction for young professionals – a typical inner London mosaic.

Ward-level results (2022)	Councillors 2022			Vote share percentage 2022				
	1	2	3	Con	Lab	LD	Green	Other
Myatt's Fields	Lab	Lab	x	8.5	62.7	9.2	19.7	-
Oval	Lab	Lab	Lab	11.8	57.2	13.2	17.8	-
Stockwell East	Lab	Lab	x	12.3	52.9	13.9	21.0	-
Stockwell West & Larkhall	Lab	Lab	Lab	10.5	59.6	9.7	17.3	2.8

Stockwell has tended to return Labour councillors, but with less solidity than Brixton in years when Labour is not winning a borough-wide landslide. The Lib Dems have been the main challengers and won Oval and Stockwell wards in 2002, but were wiped out in 2014 and have struggled to come back. Their November 2025 defector from Labour represents Stockwell East.

Brixton

14 seats

Brixton is known for its long-established black community and its Caribbean presence since 1948 is recognised in the name of the Brixton Windrush ward (essentially Brixton Central). But Brixton is also an example of the difference between London and cities in the United States – nowhere is equivalent to the “ghetto” or single-community neighbourhoods to be found there.

The Nazi terrorist who bombed Brixton in 1999 confessed he was surprised there were so many white people there. Brixton is now 51 per cent white and 30 per cent black according to the 2021 Census, with a high proportion of people who described themselves as being of mixed race. The proportion of professional and managerial workers has risen too. Brixton remains both a centre of black London and a home for people of all ethnicities.

The Brixton wards have, with one exception, been the most loyal part of Lambeth for Labour.

Ward-level results (2022)	Councillors 2022			Vote share percentage 2022				
	1	2	3	Con	Lab	LD	Green	Other
Brixton Acre Lane	Lab	Lab	Lab	10.4	54.9	8.4	19.5	6.9
Brixton North	Lab	Lab	Lab	7.7	65.2	6.6	20.5	-
Brixton Rush Common	Lab	Lab	Lab	6.5	60.5	8.2	24.7	-
Brixton Windrush	Lab	Lab	x	5.4	62.3	5.9	26.4	-
Herne Hill & Loughborough Junction	Lab	Lab	Lab	5.4	51.4	4.2	37.5	1.5

Radical ward boundary changes make comparisons over time problematic, but from majority social housing Brixton North to the more middle-class Acre Lane and Rush Common they have long Labour histories. In the past, Brixton has stuck with Labour when the party has been having a bad time, as in 1994 and 2002.

However, the 2026 elections could provide a stiff test of that loyalty. The Greens could capitalise on local and national disillusion with Labour among Brixton’s left-wing

residents. They have long been a force in the Herne Hill & Loughborough Junction ward area –essentially a long name for Brixton East, which is why it belongs with this group geographically – winning a seat in its predecessor Herne Hill ward in both 2006 and 2018. That is why their May 2025 by-election win was not quite the shock it was portrayed as. Note too that the swing against Labour was relatively small at a time when the national government was very unpopular. The Greens could do very well in the Brixton wards, yet some Labour councillors might survive.

Clapham

10 seats

The wards around Clapham Common on both the Lambeth and Wandsworth sides form one of London's concentrations of the highly educated professional classes. Clapham Common & Abbeville is the sixth most professional-managerial ward anywhere in the city, rivalling Hampstead. Clapham Town is a bit more mixed but still has elite demographics. However, a lot of this consists of the precarious middle-class, renters rather than homeowners.

Clapham East, on the Brixton side of the High Road, sees another step down the social ladder. Clapham Park is based around a large council-built estate to the south east of the rest of Clapham on the border with Brixton Hill. Local issues range from large-scale estate regeneration to the interests of the yuppie – if we still use that word – nightlife strip along Abbeville Road.

The hypothetical man on the Clapham omnibus was always supposed to be a model of common sense.

Ward-level results (2022)	Councillors 2022			Vote share percentage 2022				
	1	2	3	Con	Lab	LD	Green	Other
Clapham Common & Abbeville	LD	Lab	x	25.6	32.2	33.0	8.3	0.8
Clapham East	Lab	Lab	x	10.3	55.7	11.4	20.8	1.7
Clapham Park	Lab	Lab	Lab	11.4	60.2	8.8	19.5	-
Clapham Town	Lab	Lab	Lab	27.5	44.8	11.5	16.2	-

If that can be equated with London's recent centre-Left consensus, the political choices of the people of Clapham can be said to have reflected it. Whatever, it has led to the Conservatives' elimination from Lambeth Council. They won just one seat in 2018, in the old Clapham Common ward. In 2022, they won none.

With the Streatham and Norwood seats that used to be their suburban strongholds now well beyond their reach, Tory hopes will be focused on the two Clapham wards

where they polled more than a quarter of the vote last time. But the Lib Dems have a base in their strongest one and the Greens will be competing for high-earning young renters.

Streatham

12 seats

This is a suburban area lying either side of the A23 as it passes between Brixton and Thornton Heath. Its peculiarity within Lambeth is (except for Streatham Hill East) its low proportion of social housing in a borough that otherwise has a lot of council estates. Its residential properties range from mansion blocks in the north, to subdivided suburban villas, to the terraces of Streatham Vale.

Ward-level results (2022)	Councillors 2022			Vote share percentage 2022				
	1	2	3	Con	Lab	LD	Green	Other
Streatham Common & Vale	Lab	Lab	Lab	16.1	57.5	11.4	15.0	-
Streatham Hill East	Lab	Lab	x	13.9	56.7	9.1	20.3	-
Streatham Hill West & Thornton	LD	LD	x	6.5	40.4	42.9	10.2	-
Streatham St Leonard's	Green	Green	Lab	8.8	39.6	6.2	45.4	-
Streatham Wells	Lab	Lab	x	9.4	48.6	25.2	14.9	-

Streatham has been the basis of a Labour parliamentary seat, sometimes with mountainous majorities, since 1992. Yet it is also the part of Lambeth that has given most consistent support to non-Labour council candidates.

In the 1994–2014 period the Lib Dems had a strong presence on the council thanks to usually winning three

of the four core wards of Streatham at that time. Streatham Common & Vale ward, in the far south of Streatham where it meets Merton and Croydon, is usually the safest bit for Labour. It is the most Muslim ward in Lambeth, though that group only accounts for 13 per cent.

Streatham

12 seats

The former Thornton ward, predecessor to Streatham Hill West & Thornton where Streatham shades into Clapham, has often been competitive between Labour and the Lib Dems. The latter did well to win both seats in 2022. It has a very high proportion of graduates (68 per cent) and, for Lambeth, white people (71 per cent).

St Leonard's, the area around Streatham station and the complicated road junction sending cars up suburban avenues, is an interesting microcosm of how certain parts of inner suburban London have evolved politically. It used to be extremely Conservative back in the days when Cynthia Payne became famous for running a brothel on Ambleside Avenue, voting 61 per cent for the Tory slate in 1982.

But the Conservative vote, weakening for a while, collapsed in 1998, as the Lib Dems won the old St Leonard's ward and the Tories came in third. In 2006, they finished fourth despite a generally reasonable London-wide showing. The coalition-era Lib Dems crashed to defeat in 2014, losing all their Lambeth seats, but the winners in St Leonard's were two Labour candidates and one Green.

The Greens won all three seats in 2018, but it was split two Green and one Labour in 2022. The Tories took just nine per cent of the vote. The Labour councillor defected to the Greens in August 2025 after being in disciplinary trouble over his vote on a Green motion about Gaza.

Norwood

9 seats

Norwood is a vaguely defined area spanning the border between Lambeth and Croydon. These four wards stretch from Tulse Hill (St Martin's) uphill towards the corner at Crystal Palace where Lambeth meets Croydon, Bromley and the southern tip of Southwark. West Norwood station is in Knight's Hill ward. There are large council estates in Gypsy Hill and St Martin's wards, and fewer graduates and young professionals than in the rest of Lambeth.

Ward-level results (2022)	Councillors 2022			Vote share percentage 2022				
	1	2	3	Con	Lab	LD	Green	Other
Gypsy Hill	Lab	Lab	x	6.0	48.6	2.6	42.7	-
Knight's Hill	Lab	Lab	Lab	9.6	63.0	6.8	20.5	-
St Martin's	Lab	Lab	x	10.8	58.9	9.7	20.6	-
West Dulwich	Lab	Lab	x	19.6	51.6	9.9	18.8	-

Norwood like Streatham is an example of the long-term decline of the Conservatives in most of inner London. Thurlow Park, the predecessor to West Dulwich, had been a safe Conservative ward until Labour suddenly gained a seat in 2010 and then wiped them out in 2014.

Gypsy Hill was usually a Conservative ward until Labour gained all three seats in 2010. The Greens entered the picture when their candidate ran Labour close in a June 2016 by-election and won a seat in 2018. Labour regained the seat in 2022 after a close contest.



LAMBETH

What to watch for

The electoral system means that, unless some meticulous targeting goes on, Lambeth is a cliff-edge borough. Labour can afford to lose a lot of popularity and still retain a strong council majority. But if the swing against the party is large enough and uniform, a lot of seats will fall and the Greens will be the beneficiaries.

Lewisham



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Since 2022

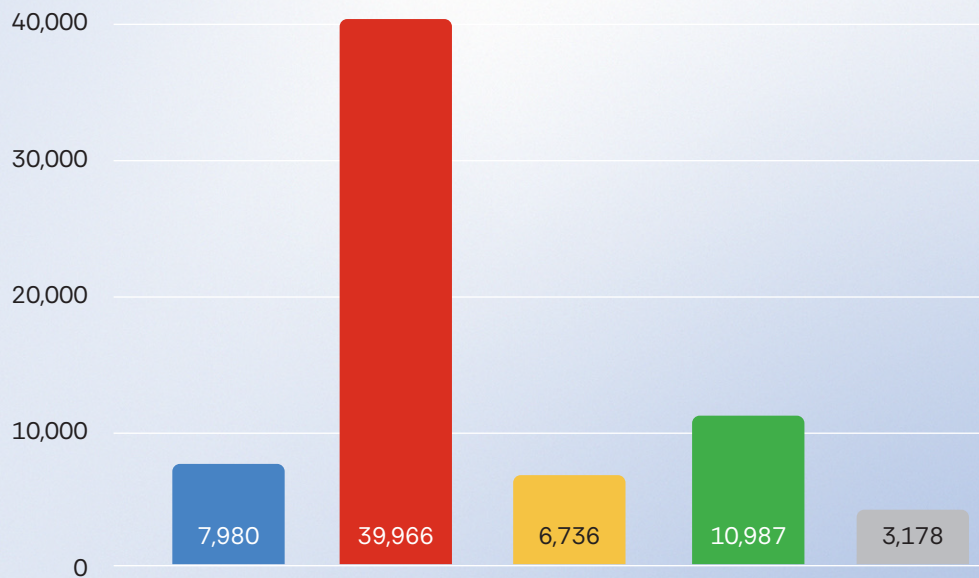
Labour Defence

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.

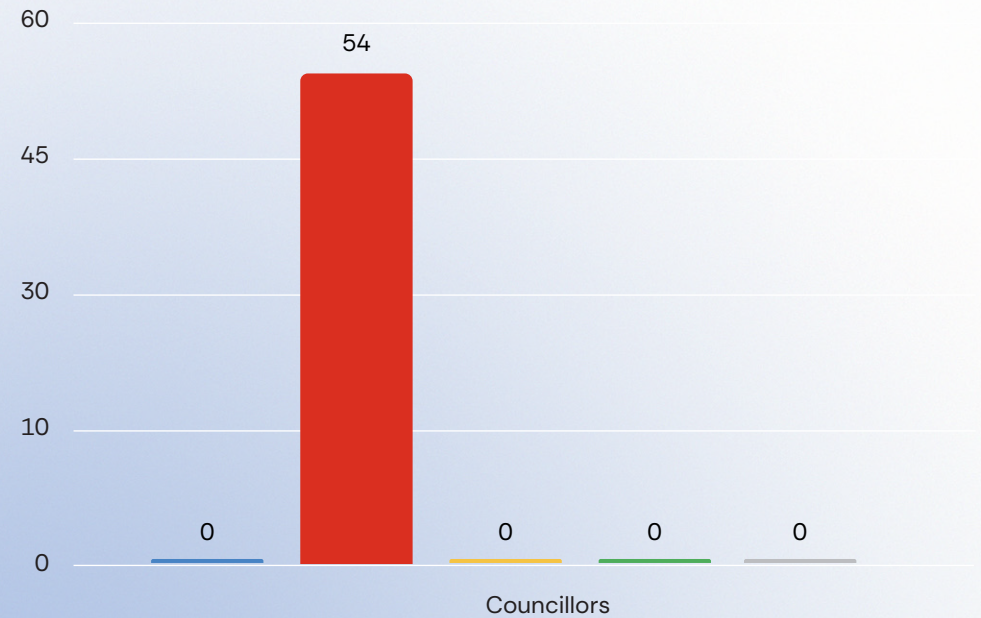
Labour also piled up 55 per cent of the councillor popular vote, sweeping the borough's 19 wards with a bit to spare in nearly every case.

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



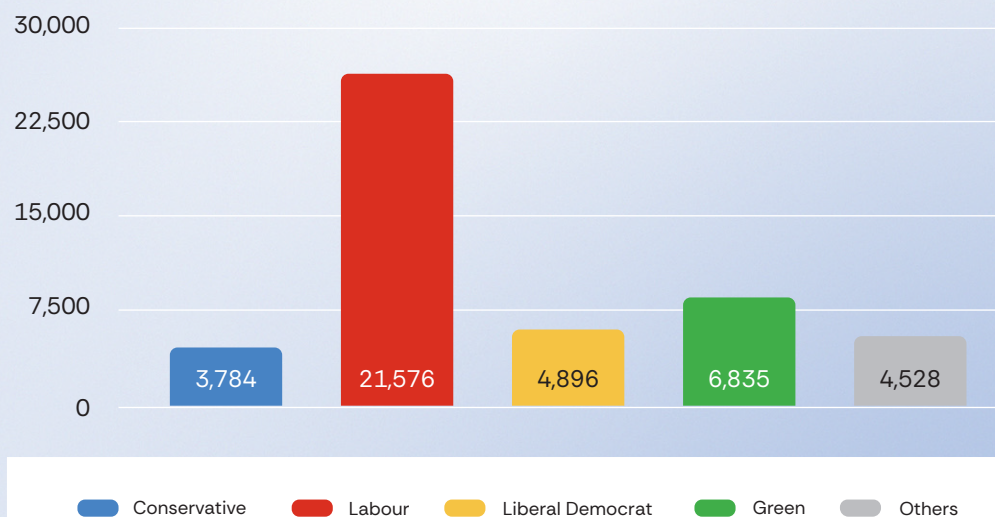
Lewisham Council result May 2022 | Total seats: 54



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.

Lewisham mayoral by-election March 2024



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?

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.

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.

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	-

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.

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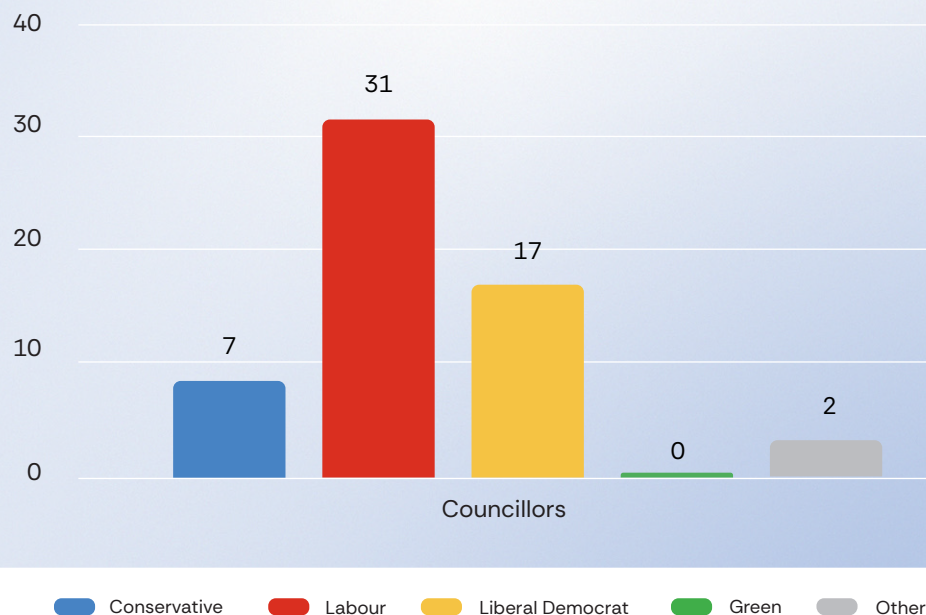
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Since 2022

Labour Defence

Labour held on to Merton council in 2022 but with a reduced majority of 31 out of 57. A threat emerged from a new quarter, namely the Liberal Democrats, who won a record 17 seats. They gained several seats from Labour although the Conservatives were the bigger losers, a pattern that continued in local parliamentary contests in 2024.

Merton Council result May 2022 | Total seats: 63



The Tories took seven and Residents' Association candidates mopped up the rest, as they have in a particular ward ever since a by-election in 1986 – a distinctive feature of a south London borough whose general political complexion in recent times has been half pretty continuously red and half subject to change from blue to yellow, although there were Lib-Con, Lab-Con and Lab-Lib split seats four years ago.

There have been two by-elections since May 2022, both held on general election day, both resulting in Labour holds by reduced majorities and both seeing the Greens finish second – a possible portent for May 2026. Labour has, though, lost one councillor who resigned from the party in January 2024 having been suspended after making social media comments about the Israel-Gaza war. She has continued as an Independent. The Lib Dems lost one councillor to a resignation in January, leaving a vacancy.

That means the party strengths as the election approaches are: Labour 30, Lib Dems 16, Conservatives seven, Merton Park residents two, other Independents, one. The Lib Dems will have high hopes of seeing Labour's majority go, but might not be able to make it happen on their own.

By-elections since May 2022

04 JULY 2024	FIGGE'S MARSH	LAB HOLD
04 JULY 2024	ST HELIER	LAB HOLD

Local landscape

Merton fits into outer south London like an obliging jigsaw piece, wedged between Kington, Sutton, Croydon, Lambeth, Wandsworth and Richmond. Historically part of Surrey, its name was chosen as a compromise after the former municipal boroughs of Mitcham and Wimbledon couldn't agree on what it should be called. It is a borough not given to drawing attention to itself, yet it has distinctive social, cultural and political characteristics.

Wimbledon is world renowned for hosting the grand slam tennis tournament of the same name. Morden, at the deepest, darkest southern end of the Northern line, boasts both Merton Civic Centre, a curvaceous modernist achievement built in 1962, and, a short walk away, the vast Baitul Futuh mosque, completed in 2003. Merton has many parks, among them Mitcham Common, Wimbledon Common and the much smaller Wandle Park, past which the river of that name, a Thames tributary, meanders.

Merton has one of the lowest borough poverty rates, bettered only by Richmond and Bromley, and fewer people sleeping rough or in temporary accommodation than most of London. Its population growth has lately matched the London average while its median age, at 35, is a little higher (and, like London's in general, rising).

Ethnically, it is 60 per cent white and about 19 per cent Asian. Christianity is by far the most commonly-

Merton Council elections since 2002						
Year	Con	Lab	LD	UKIP/Ref	Green	Other
2002	25	32	-	-	-	3
2006	30	27	-	-	-	3
2010	27	28	2	-	-	3
2014	20	36	1	-	-	3
2018	17	34	6	-	-	3
2022	7	31	17	-	-	2

observed religion (47 per cent as reported at the last Census), followed by Islam at 10 per cent and Hinduism at six per cent.

And politically? It switched at intervals between Labour, the Conservatives and No Overall Control until 2014, when the Tories' tide began going out and the Lib Dems progressed towards replacing them as Labour's biggest challenger, achieving that in 2022.

Ross Garrod is the council's current leader, and he looks pretty secure in his Longthornton ward. The Lib Dem opposition is led by Anthony Fairclough, whose group also contains Wimbledon MP Paul Kohler and London Assembly member Hina Bokhari. Merton is distinguished, too, by the long-time presence of Merton Park Residents' Association councillors, of whom more below.

 MERTON

Electoral prospects

Merton elections are fought according to a strange pattern. Labour has had a lock on 27 seats in the east of the borough, comprising the bulk of the Mitcham & Morden parliamentary constituency. Merton Park is safe for the Residents. In a 57-seat council, this combined block of seats has made it impossible for another party to acquire a majority even if they win everything else, as the Conservatives did in 2006.

Conversely, Labour's path to a majority only requires winning two seats from the rest of the borough. The party has a high floor and a low ceiling. The Lib Dems will again be their main challengers this time, though the Greens might fancy their chances in some wards too.

Uphill Wimbledon

11 seats

Wimbledon is one of London's most middle-class districts, part of a belt of attractive and expensive areas that have long been drawn to the Lib Dems or their Liberal Party ancestors: Richmond since the 1970s, Kingston since the 1990s. The 2022 local elections saw the Lib Dem tide wash over Wimbledon too, and even more emphatically in the 2024 general election.

Ward-level results (2022)	Councillors 2022			Vote share percentage 2022				
	1	2	3	Con	Lab	LD	Green	Other
Hillside	LD	Con	x	40.2	19.0	40.9	-	-
Raynes Park	LD	LD	LD	30.1	17.0	42.8	10.1	-
Village	Con	Con	Con	47.3	11.7	30.3	10.8	-
Wimbledon Park	LD	LD	LD	27.7	18.9	37.5	15.9	-

As in the other areas of London, traditional Conservative voters were alienated by Brexit, Boris Johnson and Liz Truss. Theresa May might be held in better regard by them, perhaps in part because from 1986 to 1994 she was a councillor in Durnsford ward, the predecessor to Wimbledon Park.

There are distinctions to be made within Wimbledon. Broadly, if you turn right as you come out of the station and start climbing the hill, you are also ascending a social

gradient towards the most prosperous, old money parts of the suburb around the common. This area always used to be the heart of the Conservative vote, but it has collapsed quite abruptly. The swing in 2022 from Conservative to Lib Dem in was enormous – about 20 per cent overall. The Lib Dems won Raynes Park and Wimbledon Park having finished third and fourth in 2018. They will be looking to sweep out the remaining Tories in 2026.

Downhill Wimbledon

8 seats

The part of Wimbledon to the left of the railway line is on many indicators pretty much as middle-class as the uphill portion. The difference is that there are more young professionals commuting from these more tightly-packed streets and rather more of a tradition of left-liberal voting.

Ward-level results (2022)	Councillors 2022			Vote share percentage 2022				
	1	2	3	Con	Lab	LD	Green	Other
Abbey	LD	Lab	LD	24.0	31.5	33.5	10.9	-
Wandle	LD	Lab	x	22.9	34.1	33.2	9.7	-
Wimbledon Town & Dundonald	LD	LD	LD	22.9	13.0	52.0	12.1	-

The 2021 election for Mayor of London (unfortunately details have not been published for 2024) is something of a litmus test. While Conservative Shaun Bailey carried all but one of the uphill wards, Labour's Sadiq Khan won the downhill wards fairly comfortably.

In recent local elections this area has produced some confusing three-way marginal contests.

Boundary changes cloud the picture, but it looks as if the same 20 per cent swing from Conservative to Lib Dem as occurred in uphill Wimbledon took place here between 2018 and 2022, with Labour losing a little ground but remaining in the game in Abbey (the area around South Wimbledon Northern Line station) and the new ward of Wandle. The Lib Dems will hope to win those two seats in 2026.

Merton and Morden

11 seats

The middle territory between Wimbledon and Mitcham is a patchwork of suburban developments amid playing fields and parks. Two wards (Merton Park and West Barnes) are in the Wimbledon constituency, the others are in Mitcham & Morden.

The distinctive feature of the area within Merton is the high rate of owner occupation: over 70 per cent in all the wards, more than in the most affluent areas of Wimbledon village. The proportion of graduates is lower than in Wimbledon and the electorate is older, particularly in the Tudor-styled Lower Morden ward.

Ward-level results (2022)	Councillors 2022			Vote share percentage 2022				
	1	2	3	Con	Lab	LD	Green	Other
Cannon Hill	LD	Con	Con	32.3	27.0	32.6	8.1	-
Lower Morden	Lab	Lab	Con	40.0	43.7	6.0	10.3	-
Merton Park	MPIR	MPIR	x	11.1	17.5	7.6	5.6	58.2
West Barnes	LD	LD	LD	28.4	18.7	41.1	11.8	-

West Barnes, adjoining Kingston, has a longer history of Lib Dem activity than the rest of Wimbledon. Merton Park has been represented by Merton Park Residents Association councillors since 1990 after one triumphed in a by-election the previous year. They were originally formed in order to oppose a local road extension.

The other two wards are a bit weird politically: Cannon Hill, a three-way marginal, saw a Labour clean sweep in 2014, but a Con-Lib Dem split in 2022; Lower Morden was a Labour gain in 2018 but one seat went to the Tories in 2022. Lower Morden might be a point of entry for Reform – UKIP polled 20 per cent there in 2014.

Mitcham

15 seats

These five wards encompass, approximately, the town of Mitcham, which, like Wimbledon, was a suburb of London long before it was officially absorbed in 1965. Mitcham claims to be home to the world's oldest cricket club. The game was being played on the green there in 1707, and possibly earlier.

A man called William Figge owned land in the area in the 14th Century. Mitcham was also a centre of lavender growing, which like cricket and Mr Figge, is commemorated in a ward name. In a 1923 by-election, it became the first suburban constituency ever won by Labour.

Mitcham's town centre is divided between Cricket Green and Figge's Marsh, the latter area better connected since the opening of Mitcham Eastfields station. Longthornton and Pollards Hill are in the east and somewhat in the orbit of Croydon. Although there are some differences between the wards – Lavender Fields has more middle-

Ward-level results (2022)	Councillors 2022			Vote share percentage 2022				
	1	2	3	Con	Lab	LD	Green	Other
Cricket Green	Lab	Lab	Lab	14.0	66.6	6.2	10.2	3.0
Figge's Marsh	Lab	Lab	Lab	10.6	72.7	4.8	8.6	3.3
Lavender Fields	Lab	Lab	Lab	15.6	62.1	7.5	14.8	-
Longthornton	Lab	Lab	Lab	16.2	63.8	7.6	12.4	-
Pollards Hill	Lab	Lab	Lab	14.3	74.1	4.5	7.0	-

class commuters, Pollards Hill and Cricket Green have large council estates – they are uniformly diverse and working-class. The South Asian population is high by south London standards.

Labour has monopolised the Mitcham wards ever since gaining the last seat in Longthornton in 1998. In 2022, they had enormous majorities in all of them. This is a block of some of the safest Labour seats in London. Part of the reason is demographic, but much of it is to do with

the formidable electoral machine developed by Siobhain and Margaret McDonagh in the Mitcham & Morden constituency.

Merton Labour is simply very good at election campaigning, at least in the eastern section of the borough. None of these wards look good demographically for anyone else, so barring freak waves and sudden, effective targeting, Mitcham looks likely to be a rare solid area for London Labour.

South Tooting

6 seats

The communities here would probably not answer to “south Tooting”, but the Tooting railway station is here and both wards, Colliers Wood in particular, are continuations of inner London – urban rather than suburban.

Ward-level results (2022)	Councillors 2022			Vote share percentage 2022				
	1	2	3	Con	Lab	LD	Green	Other
Colliers Wood	Lab	Lab	Lab	11.9	55.5	8.1	24.5	-
Graveney	Lab	Lab	Lab	11.7	68.9	5.6	13.9	-

The proportion of graduates and professionals is higher than it is in Mitcham or St Helier, but lower than across the border in Wandsworth. Graveney is Merton’s most Asian ward (26 per cent), more so than any of the wards in Tooting proper.

Both wards have been Labour since 1986. The Greens achieved a decent second place in Colliers Wood in 2022 and it looks like their best target in the borough.

St Helier

6 seats

The St Helier estate was built by London County Council between 1928 and 1936 on Garden City principles. It is the second largest of the “out-estates” after Becontree in Dagenham and spans the boundary of Merton and Sutton, with two wards in each borough.

Like the other out-estates it is well-planned and still a generally attractive place to live. The north end of it is near Morden at the end of the Northern line, but the station buildings are just across the line in Merton Park ward. The Right to Buy proved popular and the social renting proportion is down to only 29 per cent in St Helier and 23 per cent in Ravensbury.

Ward-level results (2022)	Councillors 2022			Vote share percentage 2022				
	1	2	3	Con	Lab	LD	Green	Other
Ravensbury	Lab	Lab	Lab	15.8	63.7	7.6	12.9	-
St Helier	Lab	Lab	Lab	19.4	59.7	6.4	14.5	-

The Labour majorities in the 2022 election look just as safe as those in Mitcham, but in other types of elections there have been hints of vulnerability. In the 2021 London Mayor election, Sadiq Khan beat Shaun Bailey by only four points in this section, compared to 17 points in Mitcham proper and 27 in “south Tooting”. UKIP polled 21 per cent in St Helier in 2014 – their best ward in

Mitcham – and almost as much in Ravensbury. However, the Greens attracted 22 per cent and came second to Labour in a by-election in St Helier held on the same day as the general election.



MERTON

What to watch for

The Lib Dems have overrun the Conservative wards in Wimbledon and could wipe them out of that constituency this time, but to gain a council majority looks a stretch. One can see them getting 25 seats, but to win outright they need to pick up four from wards in Mitcham & Morden where they had single-digit percentages in 2022. More likely, perhaps, is the Greens knocking out one or more Labour wards, and they and the Merton Park Residents permitting a Lib Dem minority administration. Otherwise, it's Labour again.

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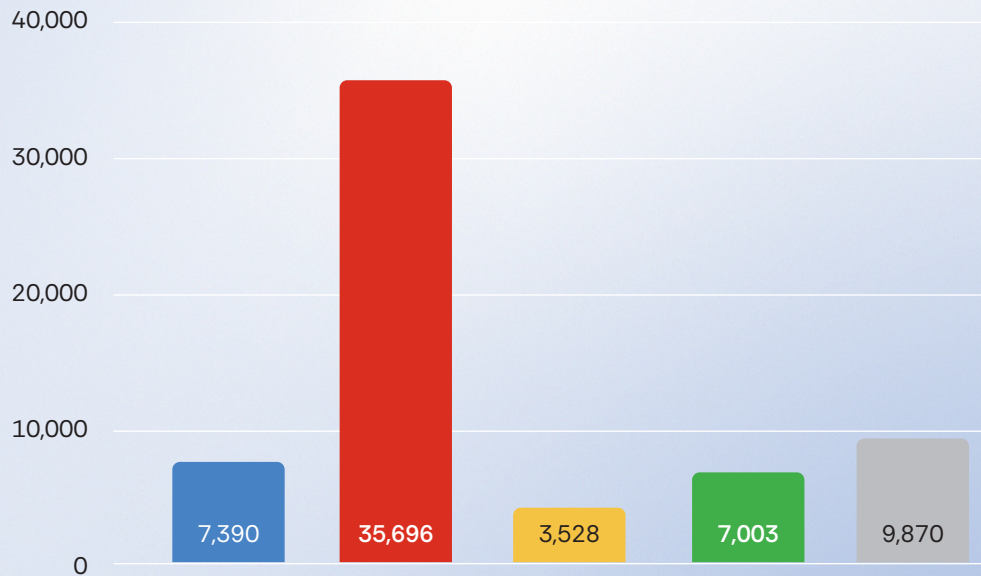
Since 2022

Labour Defence

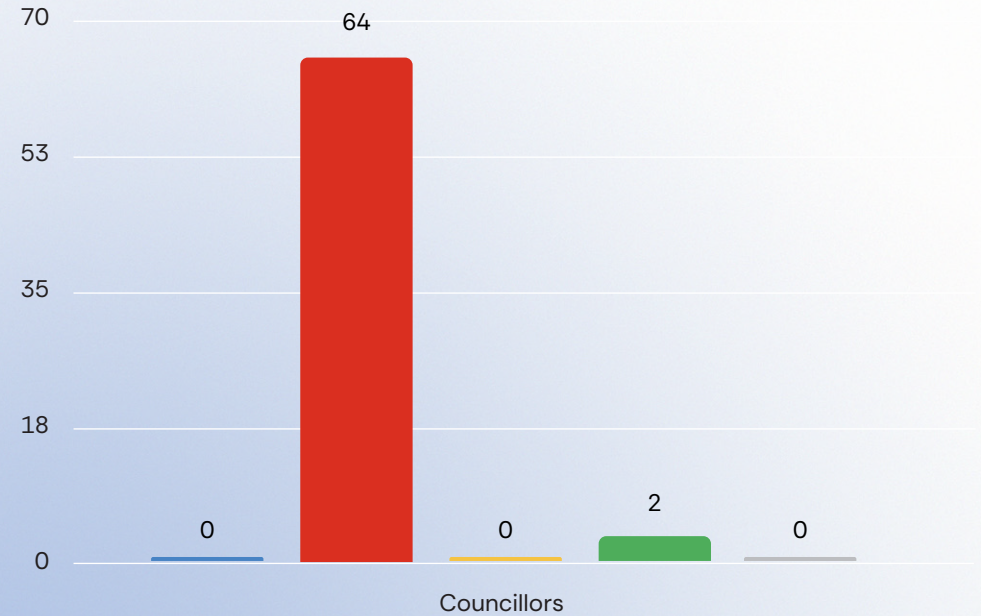
If a big Labour fortress tumbles this time, the loudest noise might come from Newham. No other party has ever got close to winning a council majority. The Newham mayoralty, introduced in 2002, has been Labour's by landslides every time. In 2022, the party's candidate won without second preference votes needing to be counted as she was the first choice of more than half of Newham's voters.

The fact that two of the 66 councillors elected were not from Labour was a break with recent precedent – in 2018, 2014 and 2010, Labour won every single Newham seat.

Newham mayoral election result 2022



Newham Council result May 2022 | Total seats: 54



Conservative Labour Liberal Democrat Green Others

It was the Greens who made that little dent in Labour's edifice and they will hope to make a bigger one this time. But they won't be the biggest force of change. The first Mayor of Newham, Sir Robin Wales, was firmly opposed to what he called "community politics". He kept a wary eye on Tower Hamlets to his immediate west, where local parties, fuelled by local Muslim Londoners' support, were showing they could beat Labour.

They are now doing it in Newham too: Labour has successfully defended in five of the eight by-elections held since 2022, but local Independents have made gains at its expense in the other three. The Newham Independents, as they are now formally known, are making a big push to win the mayoralty and many more council seats.

Labour has come down from 64 councillors elected in May 2022 to 56 today. As well as the three by-election losses, there has been a defection to the Greens (bringing their tally of councillors up to three) two defections to the Newham Independents and one to standalone Independent status.

Rokhsana Fiaz, Newham's Mayor since 2018, will not be standing again. Forhad Hussein is Labour's candidate this time. Newham Independents leader Mehmood Mirza is his party's challenger. Can Labour's defences hold?

By-elections since May 2022

13 JULY 2023	BOLEYN	NEWHAM IND GAIN FROM LAB
13 JULY 2023	WALL END	LAB HOLD
23 NOVEMBER 2023	PLAISTOW NORTH	NEWHAM IND GAIN FROM LAB
04 JULY 2024	FOREST GATE NORTH	LAB HOLD
04 JULY 2024	MARYLAND	LAB HOLD
18 JULY 2024	MARYLAND	LAB HOLD
18 JULY 2024	LITTLE ILFORD	LAB HOLD
18 SEPTEMBER 2025	PLAISTOW SOUTH	NEWHAM IND GAIN FROM LAB

Local landscape

Newham’s decades of de-industrialisation have been likened to those that devastated Liverpool. The comparison demonstrates the scale of the recovery required in a borough that has also experienced enormous demographic change and churn. Constructing a new economy and social structures from that vista of decline has been no small task.

The borough where the East End and the inner edge of outer London meet and merge had around 308,000 inhabitants in 2011, according to the Census of that year. Ten years later, the figure had topped 350,000. The latest estimate puts it at nearly 375,000. Newham also has the second-lowest median age of all London boroughs. Over 42 per cent of residents categorise themselves as Asian, followed by around 31 per cent who identify as white and around 18 per cent as black. Its biggest religious group are Christians, with Muslims close behind, both accounting for a bit more than a third.

Opposition to Labour this century has, until lately, been sporadic, small and inconsistent. The leader of the Christian Peoples Alliance won a seat in 2002 and was joined on the opposition benches four years later by two CPA colleagues and three representatives of the Respect party. That was that until the Greens’ brace of victories last time.

But this appearance of rock solidity has concealed a seething political undergrowth. Labour’s constituency

Newham Council elections since 2002						
Year	Con	Lab	LD	UKIP/Ref	Green	Other
2002	-	59	-	-	-	1
2006	-	54	-	-	-	6
2010	-	60	-	-	-	-
2014	-	60	-	-	-	-
2018	-	60	-	-	-	-
2022	-	64	-	-	2	-

parties have been suspended for years amid talk of feuds and entryism. In 2021, a referendum was held to determine whether the mayoral model of local government should continue or be replaced. This honoured a Fiaz election pledge. Voters decided to retain the system.

The Newham Independents Party struck its first by-election blow in July 2023 when Mirza scored a surprise,

enormous triumph in Boleyn ward, formerly home to West Ham United’s stadium. Significantly, that was before the start of the Israel-Gaza war. Already, the party was tapping in to disillusion with Labour over issues such as crime, housing, the cost of living and measures to reduce or further regulate private motor vehicle use. Cars and vans are important to many working-class east London Muslims for family and work-related reasons. Bicycles and Low Traffic Neighbourhoods, less so.

Local landscape

Any Labour hopes that announcing Fiaz's departure would dampen support for its new rival were quickly dashed when the Newham Independents candidate crushed Labour's in the Plaistow South by-election of 18 September last year. Labour's vote share dropped by a queasy 34 percentage points.

The Green mayoral candidate is Areeq Chowdhury, the councillor who switched from Labour in July 2024. He was unhappy with its stance on Gaza and more. Reform UK has added to the drama: in March, ex-Mayor Wales was announced as the party's Director of London Government and a fellow defector from Newham Labour, former councillor Clive Furness, as its 2026 mayoral candidate.

What will it take to blow Labour's big house down? The party has deep roots and has not alienated every voter group. Hussein is pitching to supporters it has lost by promising to roll back some of Fiaz's greener transport measures. Mirza's base looks substantial and his party is contesting every council seat, but his appeal might not stretch beyond it. The Greens, too, have a candidate for every council seat, which gives voters fed up with Labour an alternative option for expressing their displeasure. Paradoxically, this might work in Labour's favour. Newham could be a nail-biter.

 NEWHAM

Electoral prospects

The history of massive Labour dominance in Newham elections, and the prospect of a wave election washing away the previous landmarks, means that there is little point in trying to distinguish between most Newham wards on grounds of marginality. Previous elections give some clues about Green potential, but can tell us little about the prospects for a new challenger party.

A broad view is that a high Independents tide could see them win the mayoralty and a council majority. A lower one would see the Greens winning the backing of the newer Newham communities in the Stratford and Royal Docks wards, with Labour holding wards in Canning Town and some of Forest Gate, the Newham Independents taking most of the seats in the North East and battling it out with Labour in East Ham and Plaistow.

Stratford

5 seats

The Stratford Olympic Park ward is essentially a new community. Its resident population rose from 59 people in 2011 to 11,830 in 2021. The development is mixed: 24 per cent are social renters but over half rent privately, an unusual pattern outside central London. Seventy per cent have degree-level education, again a very high proportion. Stratford ward has an older community, but it too has seen massive development, the High Street flanked with new and old tower blocks.

Ward-level results (2022)

	Councillors 2022			Vote share percentage 2022				
	1	2	3	Con	Lab	LD	Green	Other
Stratford	Lab	Lab	Lab	10.5	54.5	14.2	20.8	-
Stratford Olympic Park	Green	Green	x	4.2	33.7	9.4	51.6	1.0

The Greens broke Labour's monopoly (since 2010) of Newham Council seats by successfully appealing to the new Olympic Park residents. Completely new London neighbourhoods form their own political identities and the Greens have a certain appeal in several of them. Both of the Stratford wards have more Green target voters than do most in Newham.

Forest Gate

10 seats

These wards in the north of the borough have been, alongside Stratford, part of the Stratford & Bow constituency for parliamentary purposes since the 2024 boundary changes. They were all strongly Labour in 2022, but the party needs to worry about at least a couple of them.

The Muslim proportion of the population is very high in Green Street West (52 per cent) and Forest Gate South (41 per cent). In the other two wards it is 25–28 per cent, which is high by most standards but usual for Newham.

The area is not one of the borough's "council estate" neighbourhoods, as most of the housing is in terraces built for the more prosperous workers of West Ham's late-Victorian industries and is now either owner-occupied or rented out on the private market.

Ward-level results (2022)	Councillors 2022			Vote share percentage 2022				
	1	2	3	Con	Lab	LD	Green	Other
Forest Gate North	Lab	Lab	x	10.9	60.8	9.3	19.0	-
Forest Gate South	Lab	Lab	Lab	11.7	58.6	11.0	18.6	-
Green Street West	Lab	Lab	Lab	15.1	70.7	-	14.1	-
Maryland	Lab	Lab	x	9.6	59.3	10.2	16.0	4.9

The supply of cheap traditional housing was one of the factors that drew postwar immigrant communities to the northern ward of what, since 1965, has been Newham. It isn't much gentrified, and the 2021 Census found it to have low proportions of graduates and professionals, although that may change as Maryland and Forest Gate have been plugged into the Elizabeth line.

In the 2006 elections Respect won Green Street West and came close in Forest Gate South. Labour held the other two wards, Maryland and Forest Gate North, in by-elections held on the same day as the general election, but things have changed since then.

Plaistow-West Ham

12 seats

This block of wards is the heart of West Ham, lying either side of Plaistow station on the District line and served at its edges by the West Ham and Abbey Road stations on other lines. It is divided by the elevated Greenway, which follows the course of Joseph Bazalgette's Northern Outfall Sewer, one of London's great Victorian public works, and lies between the redevelopment areas of Stratford and the Royal Docks. Its population totals were stable between 2011 and 2021 despite the wider borough's massive increase.

West Ham is a Labour stronghold of formidable longevity. Labour had uninterrupted control of West Ham County Borough from 1919 onwards and then throughout the history of the borough of Newham that took over in 1965. This block of wards is the central stronghold in the fortress.

Ward-level results (2022)	Councillors 2022			Vote share percentage 2022				
	1	2	3	Con	Lab	LD	Green	Other
Plaistow North	Lab	Lab	Lab	15.9	67.8	-	16.3	-
Plaistow South	Lab	Lab	Lab	15.7	57.0	12.1	15.2	-
Plaistow West & Canning Town East	Lab	Lab	Lab	12.2	58.3	10.7	12.3	6.5
West Ham	Lab	Lab	Lab	11.7	61.8	9.9	16.8	-

It is therefore ominous for Labour that two of its by-election losses to the Newham Independents have been in Plaistow North (November 2023) and then Plaistow South (September 2025).

Plaistow North had the most promising demographics for the new party, being 42 per cent Muslim, but the electoral challenge obviously runs deeper. These are mixed communities, both ethnically and socially, but mostly working-class (fewer residents have degrees than average, for instance).

Canning Town

9 seats

Canning Town is another very traditionally Labour area. Keir Hardie was first elected for a parliamentary seat around here in 1892. By Newham standards, the proportion of South Asian Londoners is relatively low and the white and black populations are correspondingly larger.

True to its working-class heritage, Canning Town presents an industrial face to the traveller along the A13 and to arrivals at its ingenious double-deck Jubilee line and Docklands Light Railway station. But the area is changing. Hallsville Quarter, beside the station, will become a new “Town Centre” with 1,100 mixed-tenure housing units.

Ward-level results (2022)	Councillors 2022			Vote share percentage 2022				
	1	2	3	Con	Lab	LD	Green	Other
Canning Town North	Lab	Lab	Lab	8.7	56.7	-	13.2	21.5
Canning Town South	Lab	Lab	Lab	11.3	53.7	-	13.9	21.2
Custom House	Lab	Lab	Lab	14.5	52.5	11.8	14.2	7.0

The three wards taken together have already added 6,000 new residents between 2011 and 2021. Canning Town South saw a sharp increase in the proportion of professional and managerial workers living in the ward.

It is also the area of Newham with the largest proportion of social housing, particularly in Canning Town North. The relatively large vote share for “Others” in 2022 comprised Independents and the Christian People’s Alliance. All told, Canning Town looks to be one of the harder areas for Labour’s challengers to penetrate.

Royal Docks

7 seats

The south of the borough around the Royal Docks is home not only to the main offices of Newham Council but also the Mayor of London's City Hall, London City Airport and the ExCel centre. It is a residential area too and has added population since the Docklands redevelopment started in the 1980s. And it is still growing – Royal Victoria ward added 7,714 residents between 2011 and 2021.

Ward-level results (2022)	Councillors 2022			Vote share percentage 2022				
	1	2	3	Con	Lab	LD	Green	Other
Beckton	Lab	Lab	Lab	15.1	47.8	-	31.8	5.3
Royal Albert	Lab	Lab	x	14.9	58.4	8.2	14.8	3.6
Royal Victoria	Lab	Lab	x	18.8	47.7	12.1	21.4	-

The Royal Albert and Beckton wards have 35 per cent and 37 per cent social housing, and some of the new development has been aimed at working-class communities. Royal Victoria is a bit different, with more classic young professional demographics including a very high private rented proportion, at 55 per cent.

The Greens did respectably in Beckton in 2022 and they rather than the Newham Independents are likely to be the main opposition to Labour here. There is some potential for the populist Right too. These wards are white by Newham standards (45 per cent or so, including 20 per cent white British) and have veered that way on occasion in the past, though surely not by enough to win.

East Ham (South)

12 seats

East Ham's Labour history is only slightly weaker than West Ham's, and in recent decades the area has sometimes returned formidably large Labour percentages in local and parliamentary elections. Part of the reason for its solidity is its large community of South Asian origin, which means that these wards are plurality-Muslim (around 40 per cent).

The first by-election blow to Labour's hegemony, weakened in 2022, came with Mehmood Mirza's win in Boleyn in July 2023 – before Gaza and the General Election, as noted above. The Newham Independents will fancy their chances of adding the other two Boleyn seats and breaking through in the other East Ham wards.

Ward-level results (2022)	Councillors 2022			Vote share percentage 2022				
	1	2	3	Con	Lab	LD	Green	Other
Boleyn	Lab	Lab	Lab	16.7	59.7	-	17.8	5.8
East Ham	Lab	Lab	Lab	22.3	63.4	-	14.3	-
East Ham South	Lab	Lab	Lab	14.7	67.9	-	12.8	4.6
Wall End	Lab	Lab	Lab	13.0	50.6	-	8.8	27.6

East Ham (North) and Manor Park

11 seats

The north east corner of Newham, separated from the rest of East Ham by the District Line, has continued changing since then. All four wards are majority-Muslim and Plashet has the lowest White British proportion in London (four per cent) other than three wards in Ealing's Southall town centre.

Ward-level results (2022)	Councillors 2022			Vote share percentage 2022				
	1	2	3	Con	Lab	LD	Green	Other
Green Street East	Lab	Lab	Lab	15.2	65.8	-	13.1	5.9
Little Ilford	Lab	Lab	Lab	9.3	53.6	11.2	6.2	19.7
Manor Park	Lab	Lab	Lab	13.4	68.0	7.6	11.0	-
Plashet	Lab	Lab	x	18.5	42.4	-	7.9	31.2

These Newham wards have been solidly Labour for years, although a straw in the wind was Mirza winning over 900 votes running as an Independent in Plashet in 2022. There will no doubt be a challenge from the Newham Independents in all of these wards.

Historical footnote

A long time ago – in 1994 to be precise – one of the authors, covering the Newham North East by-election, asked a Labour volunteer, an older white lady with a strong working-class London accent, whether there was much racism in the area. Her reply was, “If you were a racist, you wouldn’t live round ‘ere.”



NEWHAM

What to watch for

For the first time ever, Newham is a key borough to watch. Local issues and Labour's national problems with Muslim and liberal voters have laid the groundwork for a potentially historic result at local Mayoral and councillor level.

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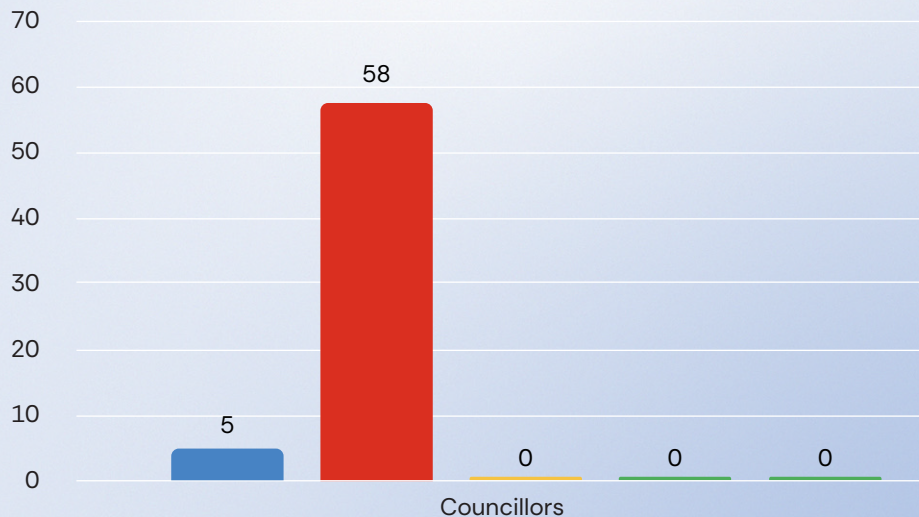
Since 2022

Labour Defence

Labour's huge win in 2022 was the continuation of a steep upward trend for the party. The Conservatives were driven back to just three wards in the north of the borough, and in two of those they had to share the seats with Labour. The party hasn't won a majority in Redbridge since 2006, despite its being largely suburban in character and sharing a long border with Essex. It is, though, the measure of the peril Labour faces that the scoreboard for 2026 seems bound to look very different.

The three by-elections held in Redbridge during the past 18 months have revealed some of the ways the anti-Labour winds are blowing.

Redbridge Council result May 2022 | Total seats: 63



Conservative Labour Liberal Democrat Green Other

By-elections since May 2022

14 NOVEMBER 2024

WANSTEAD PARK

LAB HOLD

27 MARCH 2025

MAYFIELD

ILFORD IND GAIN FROM LAB

01 MAY 2025

HAINAULT

LAB HOLD

The first, in November 2024, saw a comfortable Labour hold with a diminished margin, though nothing too alarming for the party at that time. But in March 2025, a candidate running as an Ilford Independent blasted them out of a seat in Mayfield ward with a huge 45-point swing. The winning candidate sits as an Ilford Independent but has been campaigning for the Redbridge Independents party, which is expected to make a big challenge for council seats. The most recent by-election saw Labour cling on by a single vote thanks to a much bigger right-wing bloc being split three different ways.

Labour's ranks have also been depleted by three resignations (one of those councillors has since resigned from the council too, leaving a pre-elections vacancy). For a while, this meant there were four Independent councillors including the Ilford one, though they never formed a single group and would not, in any case, have outnumbered the Conservatives, who have endured as the five-member opposition. They, along with Reform UK, the Greens and Redbridge Independents, will be hoping to profit from Labour's problems. Let the fragmentation games begin.

Local landscape

Stretching from the busy town of Ilford in the south to leafy villages in the north, Redbridge is a borough of deep contrasts. It has an array of suburbs along with forests and parks, which between them cover a quarter of its geographical area.

Redbridge has seen spectacular demographic changes this century, both in size and composition. Over 320,000 people live there, compared with around 280,000 as recently as 2011. The South Asian population has boomed, partly through outward migration from inner London, following a long-established pattern. Getting on for a third of its people are Muslim, slightly more than are Christian.

The borough has been opened up by the advent of the Elizabeth line, which has three stops in it, at Ilford, Goodmayes and Seven Kings – four if you count Chadwell Heath, which straddles the border with Barking

& Dagenham. The latest London Plan monitoring report shows Redbridge had one of the higher numbers of new housing starts in 2023–24.

All of this has paralleled and perhaps contributed to Labour's rise and rise, which can be traced back to the elections of 2010. The Conservatives won the most seats in the No Overall Control outcome of that year, but Labour picked up seven and ran them close. In 2014, Labour overthrew the Con-Lib coalition that had been running the show to take majority control of the borough for the first time in its history. For the next two full sets of elections, the only way was up. But now Labour must brace itself for abandonment on a large scale.

The Redbridge Independents, a party registered with the Electoral Commission in March 2024, poses a major threat in several wards. It is altogether contesting 15 of the 22, with full slates in all but one. The party has

received the endorsement of Jeremy Corbyn and aligned itself with Your Party. It is campaigning on foreign policy issues (Gaza and Iran) and trying to tap into disquiet about healthcare and crime. It is also demanding more social housing while at the same time opposing the redevelopment of a Tesco site in Goodmayes, which would produce 1,280 more homes, 35 per cent of them affordable.

The winner of the Mayfield by-election will have been helped to her huge win by the context in which the contest took place. It was required because former Redbridge leader Jas Athwal, elected as MP for Ilford South in July 2024, had stood down from the council. Before that, soon after he entered the Commons, it was disclosed that he owned 15 rental properties, some of them infested with ants and mould.

Local landscape

The backdrop to Labour’s subsequent single-vote hold in Hainault was even grimmer from a Labour point of view – one of its councillors had resigned following his arrest for indecent exposure (he later received a suspended prison sentence).

The runner-up was a well-known local Independent candidate offering Reform-like nostalgia. The actual Reform candidate came third and the Tory, fourth. Between them, this trio got over 1,000 votes more than the Labour winner. No wonder Reform will hope to break through in northern parts of the borough where the British National Party won a seat in 2006 and Nigel Farage’s UKIP got significant vote shares in 2014.

Redbridge Council elections since 2002						
Year	Con	Lab	LD	UKIP/Ref	Green	Other
2002	33	21	9	-	-	-
2006	34	19	9	-	-	1
2010	30	26	7	-	-	-
2014	25	35	3	-	-	-
2018	12	51	-	-	-	-
2022	5	58	-	-	-	-



Electoral prospects

Labour's massive majority looks at serious risk in 2026 with threats of different kinds from several directions. Groups of wards in different parts of Redbridge will be battlegrounds on which the party will face quite different challengers.

Woodford Green

8 seats

Woodford, lying north of the North Circular, is a pleasant suburban area bordering on Epping Forest that becomes more affluent the closer it is to Essex. Monkams has, for London, a high proportion of households in detached houses (32 per cent) which gives a flavour of this very plush outer suburb. Although Redbridge's demographic trends are apparent here, these are still the most White British wards in the borough at 46 to 55 per cent.

Woodford is traditionally the most Conservative part of Redbridge. But even here the rising Labour tide made the Tories a minority party in 2022. Labour went from winning just one seat in 2018 to winning five, gaining two seats in both Bridge and Churchfields. Monkams stayed Tory, but there was a hefty pro-Labour swing of 11 per cent.

Ward-level results (2022)	Councillors 2022			Vote share percentage 2022				
	1	2	3	Con	Lab	LD	Green	Other
Bridge	Lab	Lab	Con	33.3	37.0	7.9	14.7	7.1
Churchfields	Lab	Lab	Lab	33.7	42.8	16.3	7.1	-
Monkams	Con	Con	x	58.6	30.7	10.7	-	-

However, that trend could be about to end. A clue lies in the general election result in the parliamentary seat covering this area, Chingford & Woodford Green. It would have gone from Conservative to Labour in 2024, but for the anti-Conservative vote being split by an Independent who had originally been Labour's candidate but was deselected at the last minute.

She has lately given her backing to an organisation called Chingford & Woodford Green Community Independents. Members of it are contesting Churchfields ward (as well as two wards in neighbouring Waltham Forest), though

they are listed on the ballot paper simply as Independent candidates. There are no candidates for the Greens or the Redbridge Independents in this ward (the Redbridge Independents aren't contesting any of this group of three). If the Independents are recognised and embraced as alternatives to Labour for Left-leaning voters there, the red tide might again ebb to the Tories' benefit.

Historical footnote

Lewis Baston's late father-in-law was elected as a Conservative councillor in the Woodford area in 1974, receiving over 3,000 votes.

Wanstead

8 seats

Wanstead is in the west of Redbridge and somewhat separate from the rest of it. Similarly, the South Woodford ward is carved off from the rest of Woodford by a very wide stretch of the North Circular near the complex junction where it meets the M11. This area is well-served by Central line stations and, possibly as a result, is a popular part of Redbridge for professionals and graduates.

It has more metropolitan demographics than most of the borough and is diverse rather than particularly Asian (18 per cent) or Muslim (14 per cent). It also has the highest proportion of atheists (29 per cent) in a borough where faith is held strongly.

Ward-level results (2022)	Councillors 2022			Vote share percentage 2022				
	1	2	3	Con	Lab	LD	Green	Other
South Woodford	Lab	Lab	Lab	36.2	44.9	9.2	9.7	-
Wanstead Park	Lab	Lab	x	18.6	53.2	8.8	19.4	-
Wanstead Village	Lab	Lab	Lab	22.5	47.5	19.9	10.1	-

The Wanstead & Woodford constituency that existed before 1997 was firmly Conservative, but this area is now part of a safely Labour combination with Leyton. Wanstead Park is quite Labour, as the party’s pretty untroubled November 2024 defence of a seat there showed. The other two wards were marginal at their creation: in 2018, Labour’s majority for the third

seat in Wanstead Village was only 10 votes and the Conservatives won two of the three in South Woodford. But the Tories dropped away in 2022, winning nothing in South Woodford and falling well behind in Wanstead Village.

Gants Hill

12 seats

Three of the four wards in this group converge at the roundabout at Gants Hill, with its Moscow-style Central line station underneath. This area is in the Ilford North parliamentary constituency, though Cranbrook and Valentines were in Ilford South until the 2024 boundary changes.

In the postwar period there was a large migration of East End Jews to the suburbs of north Ilford, taking institutions as well as people outwards. For example, the Stepney Green Jewish School moved to Ilford in 1970. By the 1970s there were 30,000 Jews in Redbridge and the community was concentrated around Gants Hill.

But London demographics do not stay still and the Jews have largely moved on, some to Chigwell and Loughton across the border in Essex, some to Barnet or Hertsmere. Clayhall and Barkingside are now five per cent Jewish, 20 per cent Hindu and 35 per cent Muslim as another generation of people with immigrant origins becomes wealthier and moves to the suburbs.

Ward-level results (2022)	Councillors 2022			Vote share percentage 2022				
	1	2	3	Con	Lab	LD	Green	Other
Barkingside	Lab	Lab	Lab	37.4	44.4	9.1	-	9.0
Clayhall	Lab	Lab	Lab	36.2	52.8	11.0	-	-
Cranbrook	Lab	Lab	Lab	28.7	59.7	-	-	11.7
Valentines	Lab	Lab	Lab	21.5	67.2	-	-	11.3

As the demography has shifted, so has electoral behaviour. Jewish Gants Hill leaned towards the Conservatives back in the day (although possibly by less than comparable well-off suburbs in 1974) but in the 2010s the area swung strongly to Labour. In 2014, when Labour first won a majority in Redbridge, this area was split six-six between them and the Conservatives, but Labour swept the board in 2018.

There was, however, hardly any swing from Conservative to Labour between 2018 and 2022, and the 2024 Ilford North parliamentary election, which almost saw

the defeat of a senior Labour national figure, Wes Streeting, suggests that Labour's coalition is fragmenting. Conservative, Labour and Redbridge Independent candidates all have a chance of winning here. In Clayhall ward there are two candidates running under the banner Redbridge Matters: Independent Voice for Change, which could be a complicating factor.

Fullwell and Hainault

12 seats

The outer suburbs of north Ilford along the Hainault loop of the Central line are (with Chadwell) the part of Redbridge where demographic change was fastest between 2011 and 2021. The White British share of the population in Fairlop fell by 22 percentage points during that period (only six London wards had steeper falls).

Three of the wards are traditional owner occupied inter and post-war developments, a mixture of terraces in the cases of Aldborough and Fairlop and semi-detached in the case of Fullwell. Hainault contains one of the London County Council's cottage estates which rehoused people from east London when it was built between 1947 and 1953.

In local elections at least – the general election in 2024 was a bit different – the demographic change has had

Ward-level results (2022)	Councillors 2022			Vote share percentage 2022				
	1	2	3	Con	Lab	LD	Green	Other
Aldborough	Lab	Lab	Lab	34.7	50.7	7.2	-	8.1
Fairlop	Con	Con	Lab	47.2	43.3	9.5	-	-
Fullwell	Lab	Lab	Lab	40.9	59.1	-	-	-
Hainault	Lab	Lab	Lab	43.8	49.0	-	-	7.2

a muted political effect. The area has shifted to Labour, but Fairlop, for instance, was two Conservative, one Labour in 1998 and again in 2022. The Tories retained a viable overall vote share – enough to nurture thoughts of recovery in a bad year for Labour when the anti-Tory vote could be split.

Hainault has an interesting electoral history. It was strongly Labour even in bad election years for the party until the Conservatives broke through in 2002.

This is where a BNP councillor got in in 2006. Labour recaptured it in 2014, but it has always been a battle to retain it. The single-vote Labour hold in the May 2025 by-election suggests the ward is likely to go at least partly to Reform.

Central Ilford

14 seats

Central Ilford is a strongly Asian and Muslim area, part of the band of territory also stretching through Tower Hamlets and Newham. Clementswood, a grid of terraces just south of the town centre, is one of only 11 majority-Muslim wards in London. The other three are over 40 per cent Muslim. There is considerable social and economic deprivation – Clementswood and Loxford are both among the top 14 wards in London for “long term unemployed and never worked” residents, as found by the 2021 Census.

The wards’ demographics are quite extreme in other ways too. Ilford Town, where development has added over 3,000 people between 2011 and 2021, is the sixth most private renting ward in London (57 per cent, beaten only by parts of Westminster and some other new-build wards). Mayfield has, unusually for London, a lot of bungalows.

Ward-level results (2022)	Councillors 2022			Vote share percentage 2022				
	1	2	3	Con	Lab	LD	Green	Other
Clementswood	Lab	Lab	Lab	15.8	84.2	-	-	-
Goodmayes	Lab	Lab	Lab	23.5	76.5	-	-	-
Ilford Town	Lab	Lab	x	17.8	82.2	-	-	-
Loxford	Lab	Lab	Lab	23.5	76.5	-	-	-
Mayfield	Lab	Lab	Lab	14.5	71.1	7.4	-	7.0

The central Ilford wards have been heavily Labour for decades other than Mayfield, and it last elected Conservatives in 2006. Clementswood had the highest percentage share for Labour of any ward in London. Ilford Town was in second place. There was only one other ward (Peckham in Southwark) where Labour, or any other party, topped 80 per cent.

Turnout was on the low side at around 27 per cent. But the Ilford Independent who gained a Mayfield seat so emphatically in March 2025 showed how large has been the rupture between Labour and many erstwhile Muslim supporters. What happened in Mayfield could happen in other wards too.

Seven Kings

9 seats

These wards are in a more suburban area to the north east of Ilford town centre. It is well-connected, with its Elizabeth line stations at Goodmayes and Seven Kings and the Central line stop at Newbury Park.

They share many political and social patterns with the town centre wards although, for example, the proportion of Muslims is about 10 percentage points smaller. Newbury has quite a large Hindu community (19 per cent), although there are Hindus and Sikhs throughout Ilford as well as Muslims. Chadwell has been in rapid demographic transition (it was the Redbridge ward with

Ward-level results (2022)	Councillors 2022			Vote share percentage 2022				
	1	2	3	Con	Lab	LD	Green	Other
Chadwell	Lab	Lab	Lab	25.2	58.0	-	16.8	-
Newbury	Lab	Lab	Lab	25.6	64.6	9.8	-	-
Seven Kings	Lab	Lab	Lab	15.5	55.3	-	-	29.2

the largest increase in the South Asian proportion of the population between 2011 and 2021) but the rest are established Asian areas.

These wards did not return such mountainous Labour majorities in 2022 as those of central Ilford, but they were safe enough and haven't given Labour any trouble

since it gained Chadwell from the Lib Dems in 2010. Yet the Redbridge Independents are will offer serious competition in 2026.



REDBRIDGE

What to watch for

The previously safe Labour wards in central Ilford could go to Redbridge Independents, who are also a threat in the suburban wards whose allegiance to Labour is more recent. If they fall short in those, they could nonetheless take enough of Labour's vote to let in Conservative candidates. Reform should win Hainault. Wanstead has Green potential. All told, Redbridge could end up as one of London's more chaotic hung councils.

Richmond upon Thames

Lowick x Hedry | ONLONDON
FOR THE GOOD CITY

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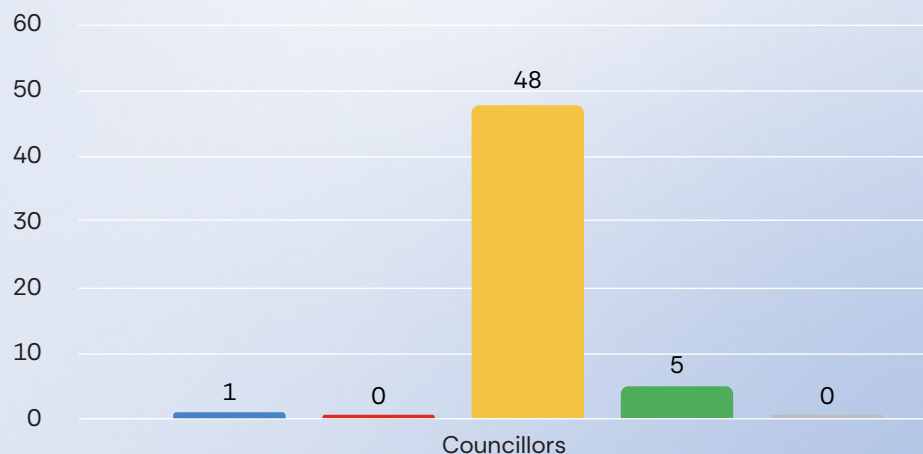
Since 2022

Liberal Democrat Defence

The removal of Conservatives from Richmond Council was completed in January 2024 when they lost a by-election caused by the passing of their one and only member. The Liberal Democrats prevailed by more than 1,000 votes, topping up the 48 seats they had won in May 2022.

That left the five-strong Green group, elected at the same time, as the sole opposition to a giant yellow wall. It was an opposition shaped and tempered by the fact that they owed their seats to some degree to electoral pacts with the Lib Dems in the six wards where they stood.

Richmond upon Thames Council result May 2022 | Total seats: 54



Conservative Labour Liberal Democrat Green Other

By-elections since May 2022

18 JANUARY 2024

HAMPTON NORTH

LIB DEM GAIN FROM CON

18 JANUARY 2024

TEDDINGTON

LIB DEM HOLD

The council line-up has not changed over the past four years, aside from that Lib Dem by-election gain. There's been one other by-election, held on the same day, which saw the Lib Dem candidate easily hold the seat, with a small increase in vote share.

Much of the interest in 2026 arises from the non-renewal of the deal between the Lib Dems and the Greens, which was first struck in 2018. Designed to lock the Conservatives out in marginal wards, its undoing might let the Tories recover from their current circumstance of having no Richmond councillors for the only time in the borough's history.

Local landscape

Sylvan, elegant, affluent and with the Thames at its most restful flowing through it, Richmond upon Thames is a borough with a prominent element of small-I liberal intellectuals and a civic-minded culture in which residents' groups, neighbourhood associations and the voluntary sector are all strong. Two-thirds of its population is White British, much higher than the London average. Almost as large a proportion have a degree (or better) and more than 70 per cent are in managerial, professional or technical occupations. According to Trust for London, Richmond has the second lowest poverty rate of any borough except, by a tiny margin, Bromley. Turnout for elections is always high.

The collapse of support for the Conservatives has coincided tellingly with the party's embrace of Brexit and an accompanying mindset that has seen it continue to adopt populist Right positions similar to those of Reform UK. The latter party and its fellow Nigel Farage-

led predecessors have made little impact in a borough where almost half of the non-British born population are from European countries according to the last Census and around ten per cent have European Union passports. Even in its best year, 2014, UKIP's candidates got less than four per cent of the total Richmond vote and came nowhere near winning in the wards they fought.

Labour, too, is marginal to these battlegrounds, finishing last in a string of wards in 2022. Their position seems unlikely to improve, raising the question of whether and how much that might assist the Greens and what the latter party's broader prospects are.

Although the Greens' pact with the Lib Dems applied to only six of Richmond's 18 electoral wards, it arguably extended to the Greens fielding no candidates in the others, thereby helping Lib Dem candidates to defeat Tories. The single Green candidates prevailed in five of

the six split slates, though in every case they finished third behind the Lib Dem pairs.

These outcomes suggest that without the pact they would have been less successful. Even if Labour supporters "go Green" in a big way this time, there aren't that many of them. Furthermore, the Greens' striking "eco-populist" shift to the Left seems unlikely to appeal as much in Richmond as it does in Hackney or Lambeth – the "Green surge" under Zack Polanski could work against them in these parts. That's paradoxical, perhaps, given that Richmond contains over 100 parks and open spaces, including three royal parks – Richmond, Bushy and Hampton Court – the London Wetland Centre and the Old Deer Park, as well as the world-famous Kew Gardens. Richmond is the only borough to have the Thames flowing through it rather than past it, and the river's presence has long been a defining influence on its character.

Local landscape

Green group leader Andrée Frieze isn't defending her seat this time, which won't help her party's chances. Neither will it having somehow failed to get its party name printed next to those of its candidates on the ballot papers in 13 of the 18 Richmond wards.

The Lib Dems, meanwhile, have grounds for feeling confident. Council leader Gareth Roberts captured the South West London Assembly seat – which covers Hounslow and Kingston as well as Richmond – from the Conservatives in 2024, a result that underlined the aversion to today's Tories in much of this sub-region of Greater London. May 2022 saw a swing from the Tories to the Lib Dems of 8.2 per cent, the second biggest in any direction of any borough. It's hard to see any outcome other than a conclusive Lib Dem hold.

Richmond upon Thames Council elections since 2002						
Year	Con	Lab	LD	UKIP/Ref	Green	Other
2002	39	-	15	-	-	-
2006	18	-	36	-	-	-
2010	30	-	24	-	-	-
2014	39	-	15	-	-	-
2018	11	-	39	-	4	-
2022	1	-	48	-	5	-

 RICHMOND UPON THAMES

Electoral prospects

Vote percentages in some wards in 2022 were misleading because of the Lib Dem-Green pact. The effect was to understate the Lib Dem share, as votes for the Green candidates were effectively votes for the Lib Dems. This made the figures for the Greens rather flattering. Note also that the demographic and electoral characters of a lot of Richmond wards are close to the borough average, meaning the contests in many areas will be similar.

Barnes

9 seats

Barnes is the easternmost part of the borough, an attractive, villagey area between the Thames and parkland bordering Putney and – across a bridge still closed to cars – Hammersmith. East Sheen and Mortlake lie between it and Richmond town.

East Sheen and Barnes are traditionally the homes of senior civil servants and other higher professionals. Mortlake used to be a bit more working-class and the Mortlake & Barnes Common ward is 17 per cent social renting.

Ward-level results (2022)	Councillors 2022			Vote share percentage 2022				
	1	2	3	Con	Lab	LD	Green	Other
Barnes	LD	LD	LD	41.8	6.4	51.8	-	-
East Sheen	LD	LD	LD	31.7	7.1	61.3	-	-
Mortlake & Barnes Common	LD	LD	Green	20.0	10.9	32.6	23.4	13.2

They are also among the more Conservative wards most of the time, even when the Lib Dems are doing well. In 2018, seven Conservatives and only two Lib Dems were elected here, though the Lib Dems and their Green ally swept the board in 2022.

Barnes remains winnable for the Tories on local issues and there is not much scope for Reform UK. But the Lib Dems should pick up the third seat in Mortlake & Barnes Common this time.

Richmond

12 seats

These four wards are on the right-hand, Surrey bank of the Thames as it flows through the borough. Ham and Petersham are separate villages on the road between Richmond and Kingston. Ham has a 1960s council estate which is in the process of redevelopment. The rest is a genteel sprawl around Richmond's town centre and Kew to the north.

The area between Richmond Park, Kew Gardens and the river is undeniably attractive, the locals are cultured and civically active, and it has long had an intellectual liberal cachet. Kew is 70 per cent graduate and, with a rate of 62 per cent, South Richmond the borough's most professional-managerial ward.

Ward-level results (2022)	Councillors 2022			Vote share percentage 2022				
	1	2	3	Con	Lab	LD	Green	Other
Ham, Petersham & Richmond Riverside	LD	LD	Green	13.2	6.5	41.8	38.5	-
Kew	LD	LD	LD	27.1	7.2	59.1	-	6.6
North Richmond	LD	LD	LD	22.7	12.9	64.5	-	-
South Richmond	LD	LD	Green	22.5	5.1	39.7	32.7	-

Kew was the first Richmond ward won by the Liberal Party, which took all three seats there in 1971. But in a good year for them the Tories can win everywhere here: they took 11 out of 12 seats in 2014, and even in 2018 they scored two out of three in South Richmond. In 2021, Tory London Mayor candidate Shaun Bailey did better than Sadiq Khan all the wards.

But the Lib Dems (the Lib Dem-Green pact in two of the four wards) swept the board in 2022 with large majorities. It would take a heavy and unexpected reverse swing for the Tories to come back, although competition between the Lib Dems and Greens this time might add an unpredictable element.

Twickenham

12 seats

Twickenham town, on the Middlesex side of the Thames, is a mirror image of Richmond just across Twickenham bridge. It has many of the same affluent middle-class social characteristics, though it's perhaps a bit younger and more precarious. South Twickenham contains the St Mary's University campus and 14 per cent of its residents are full-time students.

Ward-level results (2022)	Councillors 2022			Vote share percentage 2022				
	1	2	3	Con	Lab	LD	Green	Other
St Margaret's & North Twickenham	LD	LD	LD	15.2	9.6	66.0	-	9.1
South Twickenham	LD	LD	Green	14.8	7.7	41.3	36.2	-
Twickenham Riverside	LD	LD	LD	18.7	7.9	55.8	-	17.6
West Twickenham	LD	LD	LD	24.4	12.1	63.5	-	-

The Twickenham wards all returned enormous Lib Dem majorities in 2022, but they have marginal histories and went seven-five Conservative in 2014. In part, this reflects the history of Richmond elections sometimes involving large turnovers of seats, but also the Conservatives' abandonment of the sort of liberal

middle-class voter who traditionally supported them or would consider backing a David Cameron-era version of the party. Sadiq Khan carried all four central Twickenham wards in 2021, making an odd contrast with Richmond itself despite their general similarity.

Whitton

6 seats

Whitton and Heathfield border the town of Hounslow (Whitton was moved into the Brentford & Isleworth constituency in 2024). They are a bit different from the rest of Richmond in that, rather than being partly rented terraces and Victorian housing among parks, they are inter-war suburbs of semi-detached (55 per cent Heathfield, 49 per cent Whitton) owner-occupied housing.

Ward-level results (2022)	Councillors 2022			Vote share percentage 2022				
	1	2	3	Con	Lab	LD	Green	Other
Heathfield	LD	LD	LD	26.0	26.6	47.4	-	-
Whitton	LD	LD	LD	26.3	10.4	63.3	-	-

The influence of next-door Hounslow is apparent in that they are the most ethnically mixed wards in Richmond: Heathfield was the only ward in the borough where (just under) 50 per cent of residents were White British in 2021 and it has the most social housing in the borough (22 per cent).

returning split delegations. This was the best area in Richmond for UKIP in 2014, but it didn’t reach 20 per cent. The Lib Dems won easily in 2022. Heathfield was by far the best ward in the borough for Labour, but even with continued favourable demographic change the party is unlikely to break through.

These wards, like most in Richmond, are often close between Lib Dems and Conservatives, frequently

Hampton and Teddington

15 seats

Hampton and Teddington are the southernmost areas of Twickenham. The village of Hampton is on the edge of London and Teddington and Hampton Wick are across the river from Kingston. Teddington Lock marks the limit of the tidal Thames and the jurisdiction of the Port of London Authority. Hampton North is an anomaly within the borough. Much of it was developed in the 1970s and 1980s, a mix of social and private housing, such as the Nurserylands estate.

In 2022, three of the five wards here conformed to the Richmond pattern of big Lib Dem majorities (taking the two Lib Dem candidates and one Green as a single slate, they polled 64 per cent in Fulwell & Hampton Hill). But there have been Conservative councillors and split wards in other years.

Ward-level results (2022)	Councillors 2022			Vote share percentage 2022				
	1	2	3	Con	Lab	LD	Green	Other
Fulwell & Hampton Hill	LD	LD	Green	12.9	8.1	41.1	37.9	-
Hampton	LD	LD	LD	28.5	7.5	64.0	-	-
Hampton North	LD	LD	Con	22.9	7.4	33.7	21.9	14.2
Hampton Wick & South Teddington	LD	LD	LD	22.6	9.8	67.6	-	-
Teddington	LD	LD	LD	21.7	10.8	67.6	-	-

Teddington has a more solid Lib Dem history, dating back to 1982. Hampton North elected Richmond's only Conservative in 2022, the long-serving Geoffrey Samuel, who first won a local election in 1957 to what was then the Twickenham Municipal Borough.

His death in November 2023, aged 92, brought about the January 2024 by-election won by the Lib Dems.

It put Richmond in the same group as Barking & Dagenham, Haringey, Lambeth, Lewisham, Newham and Southwark in having no Tory councillors at all. They could squeak back, although their vote share, unusually for Richmond, might be significantly damaged by Reform competition.



RICHMOND UPON THAMES

What to watch for

The end of the Lib Dem–Green pact is probably bad news for the Greens, who will struggle to retain a presence on the council. It might enable the Conservatives to win a seat or two on a split progressive vote, though they will need to recover previous, higher-educated middle-class supporters or focus on motivational local issues to do much better than that. The Lib Dems might have no opposition at all for the next four-year term.

Southwark



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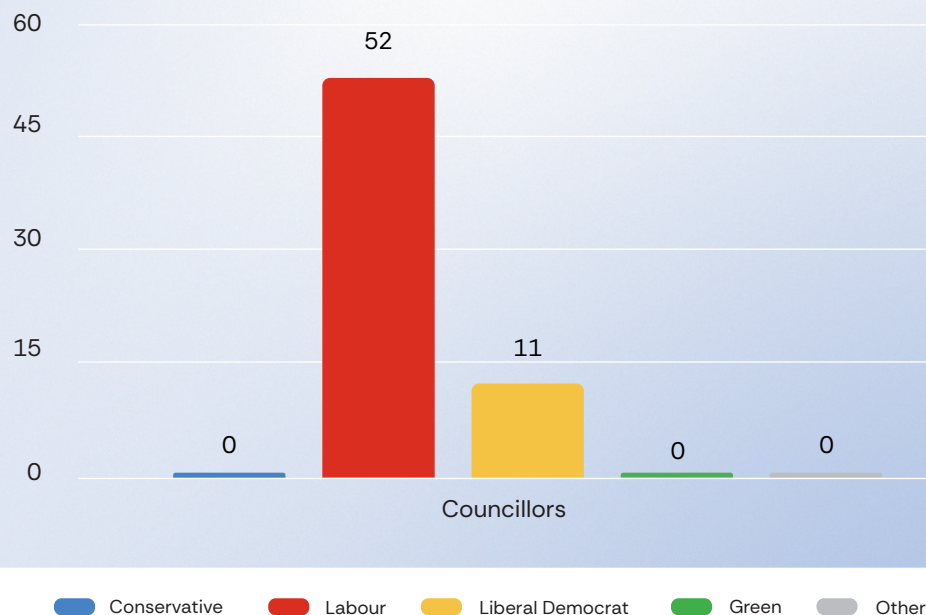
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Since 2022

Labour Defence

Labour tightened its already formidable grip on Southwark last time round, filling even more of the borough's 63 seats than in 2018 and continuing an upward trend that began in 2010. The Conservatives were again wiped off the scoreboard and the Liberal Democrats' eleven seats was their smallest yield since 1986. Labour's 52 was the party's biggest Southwark tally since 1982.

Southwark Council result May 2022 | Total seats: 63



There have been three by-elections since May 2022, each resulting in comfortable Labour holds with vote share reductions that weren't calamitous. What, then, could possibly go wrong for Labour in 2026?

By-elections since May 2022

29 JUNE 2023	NEWINGTON	LAB HOLD
04 JULY 2024	FARADAY	LAB HOLD
04 JULY 2024	RYE LANE	LAB HOLD

The answer, of course, is quite a lot – and not only because of the Labour government's unpopularity. There have been local troubles for the party too. In June 2025, the then-council leader Kieron Williams announced his resignation after five years at the helm. The knife-edge outcome of the ensuing leadership contest was overturned when it emerged that some votes had been invalid. A re-run produced a different winner, the current Southwark leader, Sarah King.

A string of Labour members then resigned, some in direct response to the leadership election mess, some citing Labour's policy direction nationally. Seven have gone altogether, four to the Greens and three to sit as Independents. All but one of the latter have joined a Green and Independent Alliance group on the council. Labour therefore enters the 2026 race with 56 councillors, while the Lib Dems are unchanged. Labour can expect to sustain more losses, this time at polling stations. How many? And to whom?

Local landscape

From its long Thames frontage across the water from the City, Southwark tapers down through the ex-industrial Bermondsey and Borough, then Elephant & Castle and Camberwell and Peckham, and finally to villagey Dulwich and its southernmost point by Crystal Palace. Like its neighbour Lambeth, it is a variegated slice of south London with a varied history. At its northern edge it is linked to the centre by no fewer than four road bridges – Blackfriars, Southwark, London and Tower – two rail bridges and the Millennium footbridge, while further south it presents a mix of gentrifying inner city, very deprived neighbourhoods, pockets of gentility and some fairly standard suburbia.

The borough has undergone dramatic post-war transformations, initially in response to bomb damage, slum housing and pollution from dirty industries and transport. That period saw large quantities of social housing built, and Southwark currently owns nearly 37,000 social rent homes, more than any other borough. That is despite the demolition of the huge Heygate estate in Elephant and Castle and the ongoing reconstruction of the Aylesbury estate, both of them cause célèbres of protest groups.

Southwark Council elections since 2002						
Year	Con	Lab	LD	UKIP/Ref	Green	Other
2002	5	28	30	-	-	-
2006	6	28	28	-	1	-
2010	3	35	25	-	-	-
2014	2	48	13	-	-	-
2018	-	49	14	-	-	-
2022	-	52	11	-	-	-

These high-profile regenerations began after Labour regained control of the council in 2010 – which it had run throughout the borough's previous history – following two terms out of power due to the Lib Dems equaling or besting them in terms of seats and forming

administrations with Conservative collaboration. Labour has also overseen the redevelopment of the Elephant and Castle shopping centre, a 1960s construction often rubbished as an eyesore that acquired a cult status as a result.

Local landscape

Despite loud criticisms of such policies, Labour's majorities kept on increasing and a programme of new affordable homebuilding has been pursued. However, housing problems have still stacked up. In November 2024, the Regulator of Social Housing found there were "serious failings" in the council's performance as a landlord, for which Williams apologised. The Lib Dems claimed their pressure over this led to Williams's departure as leader seven months later, though he had faced trouble from within as well. He stayed on as a councillor but isn't defending his seat.

In March 2024 he was challenged for the Labour group leadership by James McAsh, at that time his cabinet member for climate emergency, streets and clean air. Local media reported there had been rumours of further plotting to remove him. It was McAsh, from the Left of

the party, who "won" the first leadership election that followed Williams's departure before the outcome was declared void. In February, McAsh became the most spectacular departure from the Labour ranks by joining the Greens. He will defend his seat in Goose Green ward, where Greens and Lib Dems shared the runners-up positions in 2022, under his new party colours.

The Lib Dems, led by Victor Chamberlain, will hope to revive their fortunes in a borough which had, in Simon Hughes, a Liberal Democrat (initially Liberal Party) MP for 32 years until 2015. Their manifesto pledges to address six issues they say are residents' priorities, including opening five new youth centres, "freezing Council Tax for the poorest" and "ensuring half of all new homes built are genuinely affordable".



Electoral prospects

Labour's large majority faces a generalised challenge from the Greens and a more targeted one from the Lib Dems in areas of the borough where they've been strong in the past or have chosen to focus on this time.

Borough

8 seats

These wards form the core of “Old Southwark”, an area enshrined in the name of the parliamentary constituency Bermondsey & Old Southwark. It has a mediaeval history as a sort of shadow of the City across the river and a Victorian history of industry and slums. But there is a new Southwark as well, a place where a power station became an art gallery and a recreation of Shakespeare’s Globe Theatre appeared. It is a central London neighbourhood where council estates and expensive private developments border each other.

Borough & Bankside has the seventh largest proportion of full-time students in London (23 per cent) and the other two wards are not far behind. Taken together, this group is second only to south Camden for being a student cluster. Fifty-six per cent are educated to degree level.

Ward-level results (2022)	Councillors 2022			Vote share percentage 2022				
	1	2	3	Con	Lab	LD	Green	Other
Borough & Bankside	LD	LD	LD	9.6	32.3	54.2	-	3.9
Chaucer	Lab	Lab	Lab	8.4	54.8	16.5	20.3	-
St George’s	LD	LD	x	6.3	37.4	46.2	10.1	-

It has also been a bastion of Lib Dem support since they won both seats in the former Cathedrals ward in 1990. Like the other more middle-class Bermondsey & Old Southwark wards, it survived the coalition-era slump that cost the party most of their councillors in 2014 and the parliamentary seat the following year.

St George’s, a new ward created in 2018 following population growth, has remained more narrowly on their side. And even at their peak they never quite nailed down Chaucer. It has been solidly Labour since 2014. That said, both the Greens and the Lib Dems could pose a threat there in 2026.

Bermondsey and Rotherhithe

9 seats

Bermondsey, like many inner London neighbourhoods, has several aspects. It has been a place of breathlessly fast social change. The population is diverse, young and educated, mostly renting their flats from private or social landlords. London Bridge & West Bermondsey contains Bermondsey Street and other hipster enclaves.

North Bermondsey starts at the Shad Thames flats near Tower Bridge, a popular 1980s conversion, and continues downriver in similar vein although it also includes some more working-class areas inland around Jamaica Road and the Jubilee Line station. South Bermondsey is more solidly working-class (47 per cent social rented), as is Rotherhithe. Surrey Docks is largely 1980s (and subsequent) Docklands development along the curve of the Rotherhithe peninsula.

The council politics of Bermondsey, however, has changed in two shifts. The first was in 1986 when the

Ward-level results (2022)	Councillors 2022			Vote share percentage 2022				
	1	2	3	Con	Lab	LD	Green	Other
London Bridge & West Bermondsey	Lab	Lab	Lab	7.4	47.4	34.3	10.9	-
North Bermondsey	LD	LD	LD	9.2	29.2	45.3	16.3	-
Rotherhithe	Lab	Lab	Lab	10.5	51.3	21.4	14.4	2.4
South Bermondsey	Lab	Lab	Lab	9.8	53.0	37.1	-	-
Surrey Docks	LD	LD	LD	10.4	28.5	38.1	23.0	-

Social Democratic Party-Liberal Party Alliance broke through against Labour following its parliamentary by-election win in 1983. The second was in 2014 when the Lib Dems' popularity with urban liberals collapsed and Labour recovered a strong presence.

The most redeveloped wards, North Bermondsey and Surrey Docks, remained Lib Dem. In better contexts for

the Conservatives, Surrey Docks can opt for them, as it did in the 2021 election for Mayor of London – the only Southwark ward to do so. The Bermondsey wards and Rotherhithe remain competitive, and the Lib Dems will be looking to resume their dominance, although the Greens have been creeping up. The first defector to them from Labour represents Rotherhithe.

Walworth and Newington

9 seats

This inner London area starts at Elephant and Castle and stretches south, enclosed by Kennington Park Road, New Kent Road, Old Kent Road and Burgess Park. It is influenced by the presence of large council estates: Faraday, which contains the Aylesbury Estate, is 52 per cent social rented and Newington is 56 per cent. North Walworth includes the development that replaced the Heygate Estate and has seen its proportion of professionals rise sharply since 2011. Faraday (38 per cent) and Newington (34 per cent) have large black populations.

Ward-level results (2022)	Councillors 2022			Vote share percentage 2022				
	1	2	3	Con	Lab	LD	Green	Other
Faraday	Lab	Lab	Lab	8.8	59.4	8.2	15.5	8.2
Newington	Lab	Lab	Lab	9.0	64.7	12.1	14.2	-
North Walworth	Lab	Lab	Lab	9.4	58.7	13.0	16.3	2.6

Newington had Lib Dem councillors from 1998 until 2014, thanks to the party stepping up its activism in the ward after 1990s parliamentary boundary changes put it in their North Southwark & Bermondsey constituency. And despite receiving a low vote in 2022, they polled a reasonable 27 per cent in the June 2023 by-election.

Walworth also has some pre-2014 Lib Dem history, but Faraday has been solidly Labour. It is in seats like this that Labour might survive if the opposition vote divides between Greens and Lib Dems. The leader of the council's Green and Independent Alliance group was elected for Labour in Faraday in 2022.

Peckham and Camberwell

18 seats

Peckham ward is 47 per cent black, the highest proportion in London, and the neighbouring wards are also home to many black Londoners. Peckham more generally is a working-class area, which in inner London means multi-ethnic with a lot of council housing (58 per cent in Peckham ward, 52 per cent in Camberwell Green) but still a high proportion of graduates.

As with some other inner areas, gentrification and new development led to a fall in the proportion of black residents and a rise in (to use the Census category) White British in several wards between 2011 and 2021. Del Trotter's adoption of yuppie culture in the later episodes of the sitcom *Only Fools and Horses* was only a bit before its time.

Peckham is part of a belt of exceptionally strong Labour territory stretching across south London between Brixton and Lewisham. Its Labour loyalties have rested on what have been secure foundations of social tenants, black voters and a sprinkling of precarious young graduate professionals in private rented flats.

Ward-level results (2022)	Councillors 2022			Vote share percentage 2022				
	1	2	3	Con	Lab	LD	Green	Other
Camberwell Green	Lab	Lab	Lab	6.7	60.1	8.2	21.6	3.4
Nunhead & Queen's Road	Lab	Lab	Lab	5.4	51.4	4.8	38.5	-
Old Kent Road	Lab	Lab	Lab	9.8	59.8	9.9	17.1	3.5
Peckham	Lab	Lab	Lab	9.5	81.0	9.5	-	-
Rye Lane	Lab	Lab	Lab	7.1	59.3	8.5	21.9	3.1
St Giles	Lab	Lab	Lab	6.8	60.6	8.6	24.0	-

Even at Labour's low ebb in Southwark in 2002, the Peckham fortress held firm apart from a Lib Dem win in Livesey ward (the rough equivalent of today's Old Kent Road), which Labour regained against the national trend in 2006.

The Greens targeted rapidly gentrifying Nunhead & Queen's Road in 2022 and achieved a large increase in their vote. They were still 500 votes short, but will be

trying again. One of the Labour trio elected there in 2022 has defected to the Greens. The party also polled an impressive 32 per cent of the vote in the whitest ward in the Peckham group, Rye Lane, in the July 2024 by-election.

In the other wards, it is simply a question of whether Labour's electoral coalition fatally fragments or merely erodes.

Dulwich

13 seats

Dulwich, the southern section of Southwark, is the middle-class villa part of a traditionally working-class borough. Dulwich Village ward has some of London's most highbrow demographics – 72 per cent graduate, 63 per cent professional or managerial, 69 per cent owner-occupied, 72 per cent in houses rather than flats. It also had the highest turnout of any ward in London in 2022, at 61 per cent. The other wards are less extreme but still reflect the fact that this is a stronghold of the educated professional middle-class. There are some council housing enclaves in Champion Hill and, in particular, Dulwich Wood.

Ward-level results (2022)	Councillors 2022			Vote share percentage 2022				
	1	2	3	Con	Lab	LD	Green	Other
Champion Hill	Lab	Lab	x	7.3	61.1	11.4	20.2	-
Dulwich Hill	Lab	Lab	x	9.5	53.0	14.0	23.5	-
Dulwich Village	Lab	Lab	x	23.1	44.0	23.6	8.2	1.1
Dulwich Wood	Lab	Lab	x	22.5	55.5	9.8	12.3	-
Goose Green	Lab	Lab	Lab	6.4	50.3	17.2	17.1	9.0
Peckham Rye	Lab	Lab	x	8.2	63.4	6.5	21.9	-

Dulwich used to be Conservative and elected six Tory councillors in 2006. East Dulwich elected Lib Dems from 2002 to 2018, but Labour had monopolies in 2018 and 2022. Dulwich Village was the last ward in Southwark to elect Conservative councillors. That was in 2014. In 2022, their third-place finish was their best result in the borough.

The Greens were creeping up in Dulwich Hill in particular in 2022 and elected Jenny Jones (now a peer) in 2006 in South Camberwell, the predecessor to Champion Hill. They will probably be the main challenge to Labour in 2026. As mentioned above, James McAsh, probably the most senior Labour to Green defector in London, will defend his seat in Goose Green ward.



SOUTHWARK

What to watch for

Having a decent-sized group on the council already is advantageous for the Lib Dems, but they may find progress confined to the north of the borough. If Labour can hold steady in the centre – Peckham, Camberwell and Walworth – and lose only Nunhead & Queen’s Road, the party will have 26 seats and need only a further six from Dulwich and the north to retain a majority. Notwithstanding the challenge of the Greens, such a final result seems possible. But there are a lot of “ifs” in there.

Sutton

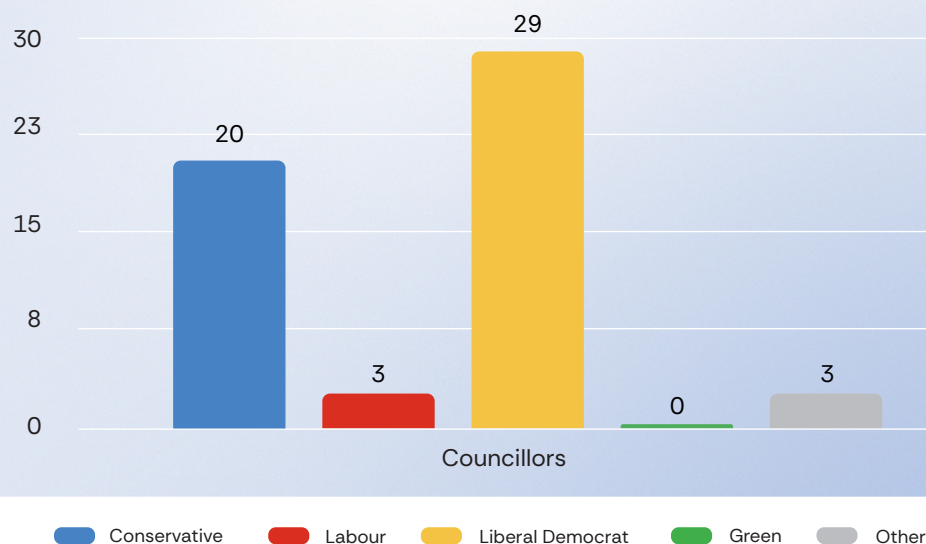
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Since 2022

Liberal Democrat Defence

The ability of the Liberal Democrats to stay in control of Sutton is one of the wonders of London politics. Each time elections approach the borough's social composition, its 2016 Leave majority and sometimes national trends seem to point to the Conservatives winning. Somehow, it never happens. Last time, though, the borough came very close to No Overall Control: Lib Dems 29, Conservatives 20, Labour three, Sutton Independent Residents three. Could the balance of power finally change this time?

Sutton Council result May 2022 | Total seats: 55



There is evidence suggesting it might not. The Tories aren't flying high anywhere just now and Reform UK sees Sutton as a place where it can make a mark from the Right. The Tories took a seat from Labour in the first by-election of the current term, but their vote share was down in a ward Reform will have its eye on. In spring 2025, the Lib Dems defended with some style two seats in different wards where Tories offered the main challenge but Reform candidates finished third. The Lib Dems would have prevailed even had all the Reform votes in those two contests gone to the Tories instead, but the outcomes showed the problem Sutton Conservatives face.

By-elections since May 2022

2 MAY 2024	ST HELIER WEST	CON GAIN FROM LAB
10 APRIL 2025	SUTTON CENTRAL	LIB DEM HOLD
22 MAY 2025	CARSHALTON SOUTH AND CLOCKHOUSE	LIB DEM HOLD

In May 2024, Ruth Dombey, who had been leader of the council since 2012 and led her party to three victories, stood down. Her successor, Barry Lewis, has lost one member of his group, who left to be a standalone Independent, separate from the established group of three Independent Residents Association councillors. Thus, the Lib Dems are defending a majority reduced to one and the Tories have inched a little closer. But fragmentation is a factor on the Right in this borough. It could be a good friend to the resilient Lib Dems.

Local landscape

Sutton is an all-suburban outer London borough, a configuration of towns, villages and residential settlements whose southern border is with Surrey. Its civic centre is in the town of Sutton itself. It also contains Cheam, Carshalton, Wallington, Beddington and mid-century developments of both privately-owned homes, such as Worcester Park, or municipal estates such as St Helier. There is a lot of green space in Sutton and it is one of four boroughs through which the River Wandle flows.

The London borough was assembled from two former municipal boroughs, Sutton & Cheam and Beddington & Wallington, and the erstwhile Carshalton urban district council, having previously been part of Surrey. Tony Travers, in his book London's Boroughs At 50, wrote: "The London border in the south of the borough was one of the most contested elements in reform of the capital's government in the early 1960s." Places such as Epsom, Banstead, Weybridge and Esher were eventually left outside the new Greater London, but it was a close thing.

Sutton has no London postcode areas, contributing to a sense of it pining for pre-Greater London days. For example, few London boroughs have grammar schools in them, but Sutton has five, the highest figure in the capital. This stems from the refusal in 1978 of a past Conservative leader of the council to quickly implement the national Labour government policy of making all secondary schools comprehensive. The change of government to a Conservative one in 1979 enabled them to stay.

Sutton Council elections since 2002						
Year	Con	Lab	LD	UKIP/Ref	Green	Other
2002	8	3	43	-	-	-
2006	22	-	32	-	-	-
2010	11	-	43	-	-	-
2014	9	-	45	-	-	-
2018	18	-	33	-	-	3
2022	20	3	29	-	-	3

The Lib Dems' stubborn hold on Sutton took root in 1986 when its forerunner, the SDP-Liberal Party Alliance, won the largest number of seats, falling just one short of a majority. Four years later, the newly-forged Lib Dems took full control and have repeated that achievement ever since, sometimes by huge margins, despite Sutton's

demographics being not as obviously Lib Dem-friendly as nearby Kingston's or Richmond's.

Some of the borough's results in recent years have been a bit counter-intuitive, too. For example, in 2018, the Conservatives made progress against the wider London

Local landscape

trend. That year also saw three Residents' Association candidates win all three seats from the Lib Dems in a ward in Beddington after running a campaign against plans to build an incinerator there. They retained their seats in a successor ward in 2022, when the Tories again swam successfully against larger political tides.

Indeed, the 2022 result was even closer than the seats tally shows: another 51 votes for the Conservatives in each of two wards and Sutton would have gone to No Overall Control. Perhaps that explains why both of the local Lib Dem MPs, Bobby Dean and Luke Taylor,

have served out their terms as councillors rather than resigning, creating the risk of by-election losses.

In 2014, though, the opposite was the case. The Lib Dems scored their biggest ever triumph, a 45–9 thrashing of the Tories. If they are feeling nervous this time, they can take comfort from that thumping outcome. It coincided with the high point of support for UKIP, whose 18 per cent share of the popular vote that year might well have harmed the Tories. Should Reform have the same effect on a bigger scale in 2026, the Lib Dems could be laughing.

 SUTTON

Electoral prospects

As a general rule, the further south you go in Sutton, the more prosperous it becomes, although there are some exceptions. There is a rough political dividing line running from north west to south east, with the Tories strongest on the Surrey side, though several wards there hang in the balance.

Cheam and Worcester Park

12 seats

These wards are to the west of the A217 road, one of London's secondary arteries running from Fulham to Gatwick Airport. Worcester Park station is at the edge of the borough, on the border with Kingston and a stone's throw from the northern tip of the Surrey district of Epsom and Ewell. Cheam has London's ninth highest proportion of detached houses (37 per cent).

Ward-level results (2022)	Councillors 2022			Vote share percentage 2022				
	1	2	3	Con	Lab	LD	Green	Other
Cheam	Con	Con	Con	45.7	11.1	30.6	12.6	-
North Cheam	Con	Con	Con	43.4	12.9	31.6	9.3	2.8
Stonecot	LD	LD	x	35.8	16.1	42.0	6.0	-
Worcester Park North	Con	Con	x	42.3	16.3	32.8	8.5	-
Worcester Park South	Con	Con	x	49.6	16.0	34.4	-	-

The Conservatives won this patch of Sutton by 10 seats to two in 2022 – as they had in 2018 on different boundaries – gaining two in Worcester Park North and losing two in Stonecot. But at the Lib Dem high tide of 2014 the balance was 10–2 the other way, with the Conservative holdouts being in Cheam. It remains marginal territory and a 10-point swing to the Lib Dems would probably be enough to win every seat, though

councillors here do seem to be rewarded with personal votes.

What about Reform? In 2014, UKIP won 14 per cent in Cheam and averaged 21 per cent in the other wards. But Reform would have to do significantly better to challenge for a seat rather than merely splitting the right-wing vote to the benefit of the Lib Dems.

Sutton

12 seats

Sutton is the largest town in the suburban agglomeration that makes up the borough to which it gives its name. There has been population growth and densification around the station, affecting Sutton Central and Sutton South wards. There are many older privately developed blocks of flats as well around the centre. These distinguish Sutton – and other outer London towns, such as central Bromley – from further-out suburbs

The old Liberal Party's first breakthrough in Sutton local elections followed the parliamentary by-election win for their candidate Graham Tope in Sutton & Cheam in 1972. Although Tope lost the seat two years later, he was elected to the council for the Sutton Central ward in May and brought five colleagues with him. By 1986 the SDP–Liberal Alliance was winning all the seats north of the railway line, although it was not until 2022 – against the trend elsewhere – that the Conservatives were eliminated from Sutton South.

Ward-level results (2022)

	Councillors 2022			Vote share percentage 2022				
	1	2	3	Con	Lab	LD	Green	Other
Belmont	Con	Con	Con	41.7	14.8	31.9	11.5	-
Sutton Central	LD	LD	LD	22.6	28.0	37.6	11.8	-
Sutton North	LD	LD	Con	36.4	15.2	37.0	10.9	-
Sutton South	LD	LD	LD	37.5	15.2	47.2	-	-
Sutton West & East Cheam	LD	LD	LD	39.7	14.3	46.0	-	-

Labour had a good go at Sutton Central in 2022, but their vote plunged in the April 2025 by-election to the benefit of the Lib Dems. Sutton North has been Lib Dem since the ward was created in 2002, although the Conservatives won a single seat there in 2006 and 2022 and it has always been marginal. It was the ward represented by Ruth Dombey.

Belmont, in the deep south of Sutton, has been all-Conservative since boundary changes in 2002, although sometimes not by huge margins. With similar areas of next-door Surrey turning Lib Dem, it might be vulnerable this time.

Carshalton

9 seats

Carshalton lies to the east of Sutton. It has a reputation for being prosperous suburbia, an older village beside a lake augmented by middle-class 19th and 20th Century development and served by two commuter stations. As with the rest of the borough, it gets more affluent the further south it goes.

Carshalton South & Clockhouse ward is the most car-owning in Sutton: 46 per cent of households have two or more of them. Clockhouse, incidentally, is a small area of Coulsdon which is otherwise across the borough boundary in Croydon. Carshalton Central is the most middle-class (professional and managerial) ward in the borough.

Ward-level results (2022)

Ward-level results (2022)	Councillors 2022			Vote share percentage 2022				
	1	2	3	Con	Lab	LD	Green	Other
Carshalton Central	LD	LD	LD	22.9	8.8	38.8	26.8	2.7
Carshalton South & Clockhouse	Con	Con	LD	43.0	7.8	39.0	10.2	-
The Wrythe	LD	LD	LD	33.6	14.7	40.0	11.7	-

The Lib Dems enjoyed a crushing win when they defended their seat in the May 2025 Carshalton South & Clockhouse by-election. The Conservatives held on to second place, but Reform was nipping at their heels. This suggests that the Lib Dems are in a good position to defeat the other two Conservatives in a ward that has given a split verdict ever since 2010.

A single Green candidate polled respectably in Carshalton Central in 2022 and The Wrythe was one of UKIP's better wards in 2014.

St Helier and Hackbridge

9 seats

The St Helier estate, one of the large “cottage” developments built by the London County Council in the inter-war period, straddles the boundary between Sutton and Merton and falls into two wards. The Sutton section is now only 39 per cent social renting due to the Right to Buy, but St Helier as a whole is still largely a white working-class area (only 28 per cent of the population are graduates, which is very low for London). Hackbridge is a development area with the high-density New Mill Quarter appearing near the station. The population there increased by over 1,800 between 2011 and 2021 and it has attracted younger commuting professionals.

Ward-level results (2022)	Councillors 2022			Vote share percentage 2022				
	1	2	3	Con	Lab	LD	Green	Other
Hackbridge	Lab	Lab	x	19.2	53.0	27.8	-	-
St Helier East	LD	LD	x	23.6	29.2	39.7	7.5	-
St Helier West	Lab	Con	Con	31.1	31.4	27.9	9.5	-

As with other outer London estates (see also Bromley, Croydon, Havering and Redbridge) the Labour vote has ebbed over time in Sutton’s part of St Helier. The party won 96 per cent of the vote in the St Helier wards in 1971, but lost to the Lib Dems in 2006 and did not get another look-in until 2022.

Labour’s success in Hackbridge last time was built partly on complaints about the council’s heating system: one of

their successful candidates was the leader of an active residents’ association. The other has had a controversial term of office and moved to southern Spain. He won’t be standing again.

Like the other outer London estates, St Helier has potential for Reform. In 2014, UKIP fell only 24 votes short of winning a seat in St Helier East’s predecessor seat, Wandle Valley.

Wallington and Beddington

12 seats

Wallington and Beddington are at the eastern end of the borough, on the road from Sutton to Croydon. Following the general rule, the areas south of the railway line are more middle-class, home-owning and Conservative than those to its north, though there is a partial exception in that the South Beddington & Roundshaw ward links a plush suburb with the somewhat isolated Roundshaw council estate on the site of the former Croydon Airport. Not many wards can boast 26 per cent detached houses and 36 per cent social housing.

Ward-level results (2022)	Councillors 2022			Vote share percentage 2022				
	1	2	3	Con	Lab	LD	Green	Other
Beddington	SIRG	SIRG	SIRG	19.1	15.9	19.0	10.6	35.4
South Beddington & Roundshaw	Con	LD	Con	39.0	12.8	37.5	6.2	4.6
Wallington North	LD	LD	LD	21.3	12.1	40.2	10.2	16.3
Wallington South	LD	LD	LD	24.5	13.6	49.3	9.0	3.5

Turnout in Roundshaw is sometimes very low, but Reform was able to energise low-propensity voters in the 2025 county council elections elsewhere in England, so they might repeat that success here.

The Lib Dems used to win the now defunct Beddington North ward until the row over the siting of an incinerator. In 2018, a trio of Independents, led by a former Lib Dem

councillor, won all the seats and retained them in the successor ward, Beddington, in 2022. However, their hold seems less secure than, say, that of counterparts in Merton who objected to a road scheme and have won every seat in their south London ward since 1990. While many Sutton wards were marginal in 2022, the largest Lib Dem majorities were in the two Wallington wards. They have been Lib Dem at every election since 1994.



SUTTON

What to watch for

Betting against the Lib Dems in Sutton has seemed an attractive proposition several times since 1990 for national or local reasons, but you would have lost your money every time. The by-elections held since 2022 have shown strong swings in their favour, as did the parliamentary elections in 2024. Might they do even better than the 45–9 majority they won in 2014?

Tower Hamlets

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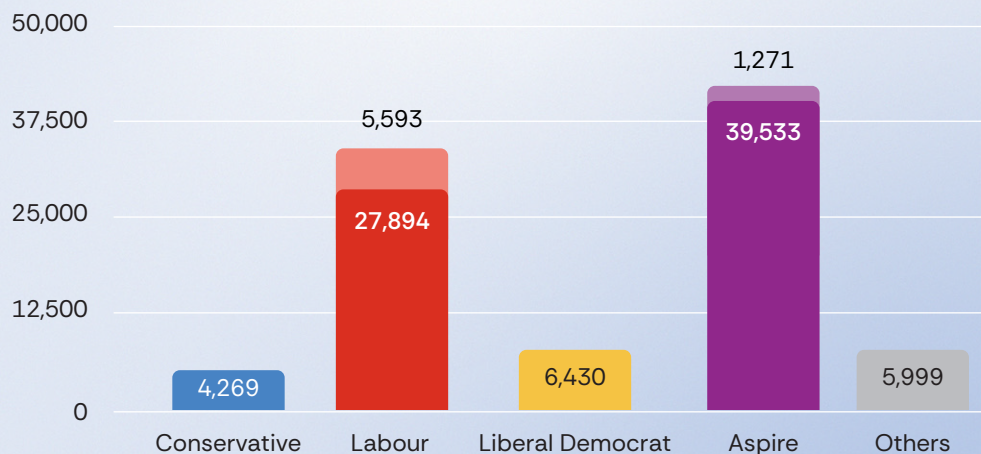
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Since 2022

Aspire Defence

Since 2010, the political story of the core East End borough has been largely about the rise, fall and rise again of Lutfur Rahman, leader of the local Aspire Party and the borough's directly elected Mayor. His clear victory in the mayoral race of 2022 – by 55 per cent to his Labour opponent's 45 per cent once second preferences were counted – came after he had completed a five-year ban on seeking political office. Rahman had won the borough's inaugural mayoral contest four years earlier as an Independent, having been dumped as Labour's candidate. Today, Aspire might claim to be the most important local party in the land.

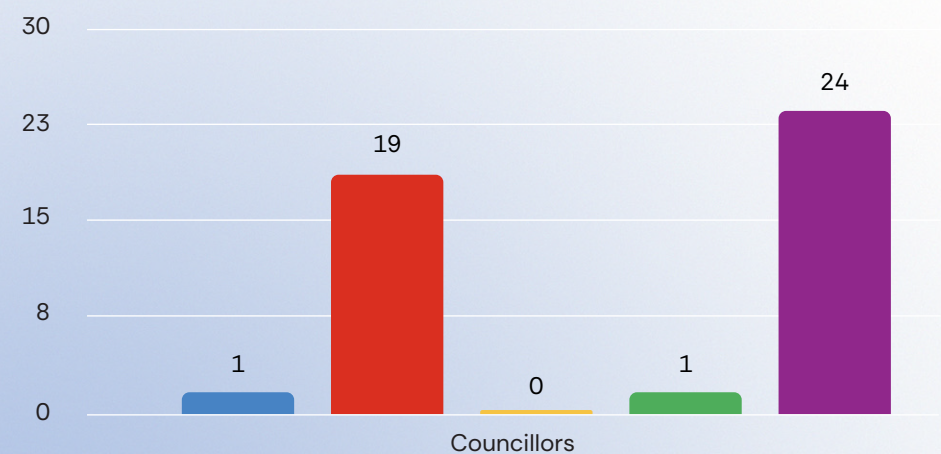
Tower Hamlets mayoral election result 2022



Labour second preference votes (red bar segment)
Aspire second preference votes (purple bar segment)

Rahman's local popularity will make it hard for Labour to win the mayoralty or a council majority, which it also lost last time round. Aspire's council seat triumph was not crushing – it won 24 seats to Labour's 19, with the Conservatives and the Greens taking one each. But Labour's current national unpopularity makes Tower Hamlets one of the boroughs least likely to change hands.

Tower Hamlets Council result May 2022 | Total seats: 45



Conservative (blue bar)
Labour (red bar)
Liberal Democrat (yellow bar)
Green (green bar)
Aspire (purple bar)

By-elections since May 2022

12 SEPTEMBER 2024

BOW EAST

LAB HOLD

That is despite the administration becoming subject to a ministerial intervention – a Best Value inspection is ongoing – and some musical chairs among the 45 councillors who took their seats last time.

There has been just one by-election, resulting in a Labour hold in which Aspire did not compete, seemingly to give the Greens, who finished second, a clear run. But Aspire has had four councillors convert to being Independents, while also picking up two from the Labour group, both of them women. Before that there had been none. Labour has seen one member of its original line-up go Independent.

The net outcome ahead of 7 May is that Aspire has dropped to 22 seats and Labour to 16. Rahman and his party won't have things all their own way, and there were several split and close-run wards last time. But they have to be favourites to prevail once more.

Local landscape

The Tower Hamlets area has an extraordinary past, a complicated present and a huge part to play in London's future with a fast-growing, youthful population.

Its character has been formed by big events and large forces — successive waves of immigration, the proximity of the Thames, the devastation caused by the Blitz and the redevelopment of former docklands into the gleaming towers of Canary Wharf.

Despite the wealth associated with the latter, Trust for London has found that Tower Hamlets has London's highest poverty rate (40 per cent), its highest child poverty rate (47 per cent) and its worst income deprivation. These social ills are at their most pronounced where the borough abuts that other crucible of London's financial power, the Square Mile. The contrast between the City and Whitechapel has always been abrupt: polite Victorian society saw the East End as a different world, the dark side of London where social reformer such as William Booth performed good works.

For generations it has accommodated refugees, Huguenots, Jews and Bengalis. It has also witnessed pivotal events in labour movement and socialist history. The 1988 match girls' strike in Bow was a workers' rights landmark. The East End is strongly associated with George Lansbury who, before he became leader of the Labour Party, fought a 1912 local by-election on the issue of female suffrage and in 1921 led the Poplar Rates Rebellion, which saw him and 29 fellow councillors jailed. This and the 1936 Battle of Cable Street in Shadwell, which saw an alliance of Irish and Jewish East Enders block a march through their area planned by Oswald Mosley's British Union of Fascists, continue to be revered by the Left.

In a sense, Rahman and Aspire are a continuation of an East End political history in which community politics in various forms have long flourished. Jewish radicals were active in the 19th Century. The initials of the former Stepney Borough Council are jokingly said

to have stood for "Sullivan Brother and Cousins" (or similar), so entrenched were Irish East Enders in the Town Hall's corridors of power. More recently, Muslim voters, predominantly Bangladeshi, contributed to George Galloway's rancorous general election win in Bethnal Green in 2005.

Most of the borough's wealth is to be found in the wards along the Thames in the former domain of the London Docklands Development Corporation (LDDC), set up in 1981 to drive the regeneration of derelict docks and abandoned warehouses. This process was already underway: redevelopment for new businesses and well-off residents took place at St Katharine Dock, right by Tower Bridge, in the early 1970s. But the LDDC was the big game-changer, leading to the Docklands Light Railway and the cluster of bank towers at Canary Wharf itself. Tower Hamlets, even by London standards, contains extremes of wealth and poverty.

Local landscape

Rahman's second mayoral win in 2014 was annulled by an election court decision that found him to have won with the help of "corrupt and illegal practices". Its findings were precise and sometimes scathing, though it was careful to point out that although it found examples of invalid votes being cast it could not be concluded from this that such votes had (or had not) been cast on a large and decisive scale, as some of Rahman's enemies had claimed. There is no question that he enjoys substantial local support.

That said, Rahman continues to be the object of media and political suspicion. Labour's "best value" intervention, formally commencing in January 2025, is but the latest of its kind. The issues raised are familiar: an inward-looking "culture of patronage" focused on maintaining political support at the expense of building partnerships for the benefit of the borough as a whole.

Not every Bangladeshi Londoner in Tower Hamlets votes for Rahman and Bangladeshi Londoners are his only voters. But a reluctance to risk alienating that core of support can be detected in, for example, his wariness of development that might be deemed gentrifying, his opposition to Low Traffic Neighbourhoods which are unpopular with supporters who rely on motor vehicles to make a living, and his indulgence of swathes of flags of Palestine being hung on Whitechapel lampposts as the Israel-Gaza war got underway. Labour's experienced Sirajul Islam will do well to unseat him.

Tower Hamlets Council elections since 2002

Year	Con	Lab	LD	UKIP/Ref	Green	Other
2002	-	35	16	-	-	12
2006	7	26	6	-	-	1
2010	8	41	1	-	-	1
2014	5	22	-	-	-	18
2018	2	42	-	-	-	1
2022	1	19	-	-	1	24

 TOWER HAMLETS

Electoral prospects

Tower Hamlets is characterised not only by the extreme contrasts between its wealthiest and poorest areas, but also by surprising variations within and between wards in different places. Voting patterns often reflect personal support for candidates. There have been many close contests between Labour and local parties, the most significant now being Aspire. Dubious tactics are not unknown.

This year sees a new addition to the array of options for voters. The Tower Hamlets Independents are contesting the mayoralty and almost every one of the borough's 45 seats, promising cleaner streets, greater financial efficiency and more affordable homes. Some Tower Hamlets residents face the longest ballot papers in London, with a choice of over 20 candidates.

Docklands

10 seats

Wealth in Tower Hamlets is concentrated in these wards, close by the loop of the Thames that is instantly familiar from the title sequence of EastEnders. Things have changed a lot since the series began in 1985. There's been continuing growth and development.

The Isle of Dogs wards – Blackwall & Cubitt Town, Canary Wharf, Island Gardens – added 14,000 residents in 2011–21 although the other two wards have been more stable. St Katharine's & Wapping – which contains the Tower of London – is the most graduate and middle-class ward in Tower Hamlets and four of the five – the odd one out is Island Gardens – are over 50 per cent professional-managerial. In that, they are unlike anywhere else in Tower Hamlets.

But although the contrast between Docklands and the rest of Tower Hamlets is sharp, it should not be overstated. The borough in general now has a lot of graduates, in keeping with having a young population, and professionals. Docklands may have fewer Muslims

Ward-level results (2022)	Councillors 2022			Vote share percentage 2022				
	1	2	3	Con	Lab	LD	Green	Other
Blackwall & Cubitt Town	Aspire	Aspire	Aspire	18.9	24.5	14.6	12.0	29.9
Canary Wharf	Aspire	Aspire	x	12.6	22.7	9.3	-	55.4
Island Gardens	Con	Lab	x	26.8	24.8	12.0	12.6	23.8
Limehouse	Lab	x	x	22.2	40.2	10.5	7.9	19.2
St Katharine's & Wapping	Lab	Lab	x	17.2	31.9	27.1	10.5	13.3

than the rest of the borough (19–26 per cent) but the proportion in every one of the five wards is above the London average.

The British National Party won its first ever council seat in a by-election Docklands – the old Millwall ward – in 1993, but Labour made a clever appeal to the “yuppie” vote with the slogan “BNP = negative equity” and regained it in 1994. They have since tended to be ahead of local parties. Conservative councillors have always been entirely confined to this area including in 2010, when they hit their peak of eight seats.

A personal vote saved their sole re-elected councillor last time. Peter Golds has been on the council since 2006, which was the first year Tories won any seats in Tower Hamlets.

He previously served in Brent and was a friend of John Major in 1960s Lambeth. Golds is again standing in Island Gardens ward and might see some colleagues returned with him this time, particularly in Canary Wharf where an ex-Tory Independent split the vote in 2022 (the same candidate is trying his hand in Blackwall & Cubitt Town this year). Labour will hope a splintered vote between the Greens and Aspire will see them through.

Whitechapel and Stepney

11 seats

These are the inner East End wards, stretching from the City borders at Aldgate along Whitechapel Road and Commercial Road.

They have a strong Asian and Muslim presence: Shadwell and Stepney Green are majority Bangladeshi by ethnicity and St Dunstan's is also majority Muslim. Shadwell is the most Muslim ward in London (60 per cent) and the other two are second and third (56 per cent). Despite its name and having Brick Lane running through it, diverse Spitafields & Banglatown ward is only the eighth most Bangladeshi ward in the borough.

More older housing survived the war in Whitechapel and Spitafields than in Stepney, which was heavily bombed then redeveloped in the 1940s and 1950s, creating a near-monopoly of council housing. St Dunstan's ward includes the large Ocean Estate. Shadwell is still majority social renting and the eastern wards of Stepney Green and St Dunstan's are nearly so.

Ward-level results (2022)	Councillors 2022			Vote share percentage 2022				
	1	2	3	Con	Lab	LD	Green	Other
St Dunstan's	Lab	Lab	x	5.0	42.3	6.6	9.2	37.1
Shadwell	Aspire	Aspire	x	3.5	18.3	30.5	5.6	42.0
Spitafields & Banglatown	Aspire	Aspire	x	4.5	40.2	6.3	7.6	41.5
Stepney Green	Aspire	Lab	x	4.5	36.1	15.4	7.0	36.9
Whitechapel	Aspire	Lab	Aspire	4.8	29.4	11.6	8.9	34.5

Politically, this is uncertain territory where allegiances are fluid and personality-based. It has swung back and forward at each election in recent years. In 2010, Labour won 10 seats and Respect won one. In 2014, the Rahman-led local party Tower Hamlets First won ten and Labour just one. In 2018, Labour went back up to

ten and the People's Alliance of Tower Hamlets (PATH), a local party formed by ex- Rahman cabinet member Rabina Khan, who contested the 2015 mayoral election re-run as an Independent in 2015, and her husband. And in 2022, Aspire outscored Labour 7-4. Khan later joined the Lib Dems, and their 2022 Shadwell vote in 2022 was for her.

Bethnal Green

8 seats

The Bethnal Green neighbourhood is the north west part of Tower Hamlets. Weavers ward is in the corner next to Shoreditch and contains the Boundary Estate, one of the first large council estates in London. Formally opened in 1900, it was built on the site of a notorious slum “rookery” called Old Nichol. The other two Bethnal Green wards are mainly residential areas either side of the Bethnal Green Central line station, stretching as far east as the Regent’s Canal.

Ward-level results (2022)	Councillors 2022			Vote share percentage 2022				
	1	2	3	Con	Lab	LD	Green	Other
Bethnal Green	Lab	Lab	Aspire	4.9	40.8	5.3	12.3	36.7
Bethnal Green West	Aspire	Aspire	Aspire	4.0	33.0	5.8	11.7	45.6
Weavers	Aspire	Lab	x	5.9	35.3	5.1	9.8	43.8

Bethnal Green’s demographic makeup is near average for Tower Hamlets: lots of socially rented housing (42 per cent), lots of Muslims (41 per cent), graduate levels a little above the London average (48 per cent). Its population, however, has increased at a much slower rate than the rest of the borough’s, reflecting the lack of opportunity for property development in this stable inner city area.

Politically, Bethnal Green has gone with the Tower Hamlets tide in the last few elections although Weavers stayed Lib Dem long after the party had faded elsewhere in the borough. Labour came out 5–3 ahead of Tower Hamlets First in 2014 and won everything in 2018, but in 2022 Aspire took the lead with five to Labour’s three. Outcomes have often been split, with councillors of different parties representing each ward.

Bow

7 seats

Bow, lying south of Victoria Park and west of Hackney Wick and the River Lea, is one of the core neighbourhoods of the East End, although the Bow Bells one tradition insists you had to be born within earshot of to be a true Cockney are in the City, not out here.

Fewer post-war council estates were built in Bow after the war than in much of the rest of the borough, meaning it has more terraced housing and more owner-occupiers than elsewhere other than St Katharine's & Wapping and Limehouse.

The two Bow wards have a higher proportion of White British residents (37–40 per cent) even than anywhere in Docklands. Bromley North is rather more like the rest of Tower Hamlets, but it is included here as it is part of

Ward-level results (2022)	Councillors 2022			Vote share percentage 2022				
	1	2	3	Con	Lab	LD	Green	Others
Bow East	Lab	Lab	Lab	5.7	47.2	8.5	16.3	22.3
Bow West	Lab	Green	x	4.5	37.4	4.8	29.2	24.2
Bromley North	Aspire	Aspire	x	5.6	35.6	6.1	9.9	43.9

the Stratford & Bow parliamentary constituency. In the alternative world of EastEnders, the Walford subdivision, which probably would usually vote Labour, is around here. On the fictional tube map, Walford East station is where Bromley-by-Bow station is in the real world. Bow has followed a distinctive course in local politics. It was the site of the initial Liberal Party breakthrough

in 1978 and remained with the Lib Dems until Labour, surprisingly, won in 2006. Since then, the two Bow wards (not Bromley North) have resisted the appeal of local parties. The Greens will be looking to build on having won a seat in Bow West in 2022. One of the current Independent councillors was elected for Aspire in Bromley North.

Poplar

9 seats

The housing in the four Poplar wards ranges from 42 to 47 per cent social rented, even though development has added 18,000 new residents to the area of various degrees of affluence occupying different types of housing. As with neighbouring Stepney, Poplar has a large Bangladeshi and Muslim community. Poplar ward itself is majority Muslim (54 per cent).

Though Stepney has swung back and forth, Labour won six seats out of nine in the previous Rahman peak year of 2014 (when the mayoral election was declared void). It went all-Labour in 2010 and 2018, but returned five Aspire candidates to Labour's four in 2022. Aspire will be hoping to consolidate this time.

Ward-level results (2022)	Councillors 2022			Vote share percentage 2022				
	1	2	3	Con	Lab	LD	Green	Others
Bromley South	Lab	Aspire	x	3.6	44.6	5.2	6.0	40.6
Lansbury	Aspire	Aspire	Aspire	6.3	30.5	8.4	9.3	45.5
Mile End	Lab	Lab	Lab	5.4	43.4	6.5	9.6	35.0
Poplar	Aspire	x	x	6.1	28.2	5.5	7.1	53.1



TOWER HAMLETS

What to watch for

Tower Hamlets sometimes ploughs its own furrow in local elections. Labour had a good year in 2022, but not in Tower Hamlets where Aspire won the first non-Labour majority since the Lib Dems did it in 1990. Might there, then, be a Labour revival against the general trend? It is more likely that Rahman will win bigger.

Waltham Forest

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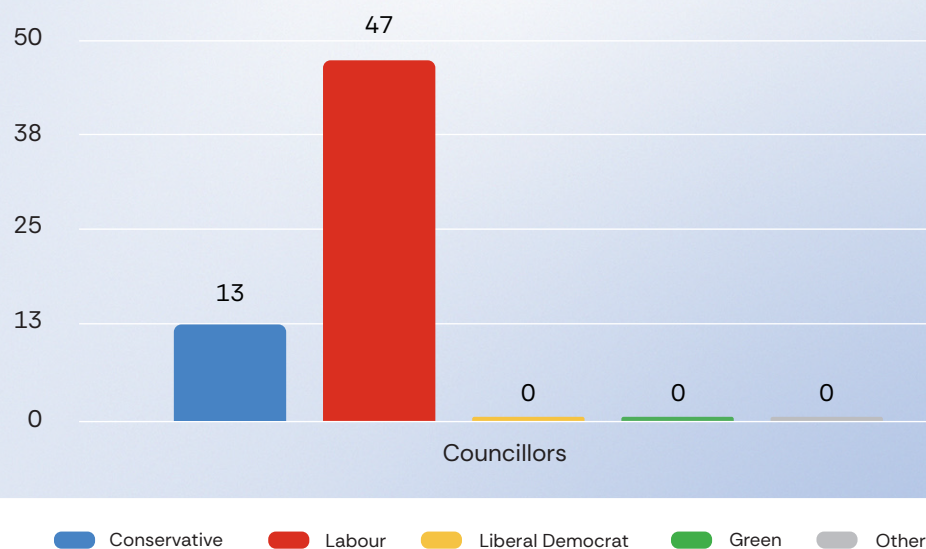
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Since 2022

Labour Defence

The elections of 2022 saw Labour put just a little more distance between itself and Conservatives. The party's 47-13 cushion was its biggest ever in the borough and was maintained at the one and only by-election to take place since.

Waltham Forest Council results May 2022 | Total seats: 60



There's been some shuffling on the benches of Waltham Forest's rightly famous modernist Town Hall, some of which might prefigure movement among the borough's voters. Three councillors who won as Tories in the same ward have joined Reform UK, the first last August, the other two in January. They represent a ward where they might now be riding the tide flowing further Right, which won't bring any comfort to the Tories.

By-elections since May 2022

26 OCTOBER 2023

HIGHAM HILL

LAB HOLD

Three councillors who won for Labour in 2022 have formed a group of Independents, but on 7 May a different entity waving an "Independents" flag could weaken Waltham Forest Labour from the Left. In addition, substantial parts of the borough could be receptive to the Greens. Waltham Forest has been an increasingly unequal Lab-Con contest since 2014. It's going to be more complicated this time.

Local landscape

Stretching from meeting points with Hackney and Newham to London's boundary with Essex, Waltham Forest is very much one of those boroughs of two halves. The split feels psychologically as well as spatially defined by the sweep of the North Circular: the part to the north has long been associated with the values as well as the physical landscapes associated with suburbia, while the rest has acquired an increasingly inner London flavour, as demographic change and gentrification have made their marks.

Recent Labour administrations have been broadly pro-development in the more urban south. New blocks of flats and bicycle lanes have proliferated, responding to and nurturing the eastward flow of young professionals for whom Hackney, like Islington before it, has become too expensive. Leyton and Leytonstone have self-satirising social media platforms, dedicated to their nascent trendiness. A new theatre has opened in Walthamstow. A branch of Gail's has arrived and thrived in Walthamstow Village. This could be rewarding territory for the Greens.

Meanwhile, the borough's north nib has largely maintained its last-century character, including politically. In a borough they are never going to win, the Conservatives have effectively been the Chingford Residents' Association. The Chingford & Woodford Green parliamentary seat has come within Labour's range, and long-term Tory incumbent Iain Duncan Smith might have been unseated in 2024, had the anti-Tory vote not been split due to a de-selected Labour candidate, Faiza Shaheen, running as an Independent.

Local landscape

At borough level, though, there hasn't been much Labour progress in these parts. The Greens aren't contesting two of the area's wards, seemingly making way for the Shaheen-backed Left Independents. Although listed simply as Independent candidates on the ballot papers, they are promoting themselves as Chingford & Woodford Green Community Independents and will probably eat into Labour's support. The real battle, though, will be between the Tories and Reform, for which Chingford looks like natural territory for Farageists.

The two-tone colouration of Waltham Forest's political map began in 2014, when the Liberal Democrat presence on the council expired. There seems little prospect of that coming back, but the Greens and Reform could give the borough's political kaleidoscope a good shake.

Waltham Forest Council elections since 2002

Year	Con	Lab	LD	UKIP/Ref	Green	Other
2002	18	29	13	-	-	-
2006	15	26	19	-	-	-
2010	18	36	6	-	-	-
2014	16	44	-	-	-	-
2018	14	46	-	-	-	-
2022	13	47	-	-	-	-

 WALTHAM FOREST

Electoral prospects

Wards that contributed 38 of the council's 60 seats voted by over 50 per cent for Labour in 2022. Meanwhile, that stubborn Conservative redoubt in the north has given the Tories between 13 and 18 councillors at every election since 1986. But 2026 could see those solid past patterns dramatically disturbed.



Chingford

14 seats

Chingford, a suburban town at the far end of a branch of the Overground's Weaver Line, is one of the places where London comes abruptly to a stop. Walk north for a minute from the station and you will enter Epping Forest. This group of wards lies to the north of the North Circular Road, which carves a wide swathe at this point on its half-circuit.

Chingford has had two Conservative leaders representing it. The first was Winston Churchill from 1940 until 1945, when it was part of the former Epping constituency. The second was Iain Duncan Smith from 2001 to 2003, who still represents the current Chingford & Woodford Green constituency.

However, the place is probably most strongly associated in political memory with Norman Tebbit, the local MP from 1970 until 1992 (for the first four years as part of Epping). The most abrasive public face of Margaret Thatcher's governments, Tebbit was known as "the Chingford skinhead". The nickname was not inappropriate, and Chingford still fits the Tebbit image.

Ward-level results (2022)	Councillors 2022			Vote share percentage 2022				
	1	2	3	Con	Lab	LD	Green	Other
Chingford Green	Con	Con	Con	51.3	22.6	9.6	13.0	3.5
Endlebury	Con	Con	x	58.7	32.9	6.1	-	2.3
Hatch Lane & Highams Park North	Con	Con	Con	43.5	36.1	-	16.3	4.1
Larkswood	Con	Con	Con	39.4	26.9	5.7	12.1	15.9
Valley	Con	Con	Lab	49.4	45.7	5.0	-	-

Although there has been ethnic change, the three northernmost wards, Chingford Green, Endlebury and Hatch Lane & Highams Park North, are still majority White British in Census terms with pleasant, largely owner-occupied housing, much of it semi-detached. The southern wards, Larkswood and Valley, have more terraces. For an area such as this, the proportions of graduates and professionals among its residents is low. There are more of each in apparently scruffier wards in Walthamstow.

In 1998 and 2022 Labour won one of the three seats in Valley ward and came close in Hatch Lane, but it has otherwise been well behind. The Chingford & Woodford Green Community Independents will squeeze the party from the Left, while Reform will take a bite out of the resilient Right vote. Reform's trio of defectors from the Tories, who all represent Hatch Lane & Highams Park North ward. Two of them are defending their seats. Tebbit, who died shortly before the first of them changed sides, was politically similar to Farage and would probably have approved.

West Walthamstow

14 seats

“Welcome to the home of people who make and create” announces a colourful mural near Blackhorse Road station. Walthamstow is proud of its artisan traditions, of being founded as a working-class suburb and of its associations with heroes of the British Left. William Morris is even commemorated in a ward name. Walthamstow West was the constituency of Clement Attlee from 1950 to 1955.

Socially, west Walthamstow is typical of a large swathe of London – plurality white but with representation from many other ethnicities, working-class but with an admixture of people from all strata of society. If someone wants to see what London is really like, they could do worse than visit here.

Ward-level results (2022)	Councillors 2022			Vote share percentage 2022				
	1	2	3	Con	Lab	LD	Green	Other
High Street	Lab	Lab	Lab	5.6	56.4	6.8	26.2	5.0
Higham Hill	Lab	Lab	Lab	4.6	59.6	8.8	21.7	5.2
Markhouse	Lab	Lab	x	8.0	71.9	13.0	-	7.0
St James	Lab	Lab	Lab	4.6	48.9	8.3	30.1	8.2
William Morris	Lab	Lab	Lab	7.0	51.7	-	27.2	7.1

The wards differ in detail – Higham Hill has the most social renters (35 per cent), Markhouse the most Muslims (36 per cent), St James the most graduates (54 per cent). High Street and St James had rapid increases in the number of professional-managerial residents between 2011 and 2021, indicating gentrification. The area is also served by the Overground’s Weaver and Suffragette lines.

Labour has not always dominated in this area. The Lib Dems were in the ascendant in Higham Hill from 1988 until 2010 and lost their last seat in High Street in 2014. The St James and William Morris wards seem obvious Green targets for 2026 and if things are very bad for Labour other wards could flip, although Labour might take comfort from its solid Higham Hill by-election hold.

East Walthamstow

12 seats

East Walthamstow is traditionally the more spacious, middle-class and suburban side of the area. Back in the day, the parliamentary constituency was sufficiently Conservative to remain so in the 1964 general election, even though Labour won a national majority.

Ward-level results (2022)	Councillors 2022			Vote share percentage 2022				
	1	2	3	Con	Lab	LD	Green	Other
Chapel End	Lab	Lab	Lab	8.5	52.8	7.8	25.5	5.4
Hale End & Highams Park South	Lab	Lab	x	24.5	49.0	4.0	7.9	14.7
Hoe Street	Lab	Lab	Lab	5.9	53.4	8.8	24.4	7.6
Upper Walthamstow	Lab	Lab	x	16.2	51.6	9.4	18.0	4.8
Wood Street	Lab	Lab	x	8.0	70.7	13.5	-	7.8

Its eastern edge in Hale End and Upper Walthamstow is adjacent to the southern arm of Epping Forest. Hale End & Highams Park South is north of the North Circular Road, largely in the Chingford & Woodford Green constituency and split between Chingford (E4) and Walthamstow (E17) postcodes.

However, there is now not much demographic or political difference between east and west in Walthamstow. The

Conservatives lost their last seats in Hale End in 2018. Chapel End flipped decisively from Lib Dem to Labour in 2010.

The new (as of 2022) Upper Walthamstow ward was as Tory a ward as could be created in that neighbourhood, but the party was still well adrift. The Greens are now Labour's main competitors there.

Leyton

9 seats

This is the area north of Leyton station on the Central Line, including the Lea Bridge ward which is historically part of Leyton but has been in Walthamstow constituency since 1997. Like Walthamstow, Leyton is an industrial and residential town that sprang up in Victorian times, a working-class suburb rather than the middle-class villa areas that were also growing around London at that time.

Leyton has long been a multi-ethnic community. It had a significant “immigrant” population in the 1960s and saw a right-wing backlash against it in a parliamentary by-election in 1965. But it is generally harmonious. In recent years there has been a counter trend in terms of ethnicity: Leyton and Walthamstow saw their proportions of White British residents rise between the 2011 and 2021 Censuses. In Grove Green it was up 6.4 percentage points, the largest increase in London except for two new-build wards elsewhere (Wembley Park and Stratford Olympic Park).

Ward-level results (2022)	Councillors 2022			Vote share percentage 2022				
	1	2	3	Con	Lab	LD	Green	Others
Grove Green	Lab	Lab	Lab	5.7	44.8	24.4	21.3	4.4
Lea Bridge	Lab	Lab	Lab	7.7	56.6	-	-	35.7
Leyton	Lab	Lab	Lab	7.6	55.6	14.7	19.5	2.7

When the Lib Dems were a force in Waltham Forest they tended to win seats patchily, often splitting ward representation with Labour and gaining and losing individual seats regardless of the overall political context. Leyton was one of their more reliable wards, but Labour swept them out in 2014.

Grove Green, easily the best ward in the borough for the Lib Dems in 2022, was not one of their stronger areas in the past, their last win being a single seat in 2002.

One of Labour’s losses to the Independents is a current councillor here.

In Lea Bridge, an Independent who scored respectably when she stood in 2022 is standing for the Green Party this time in what appears to be their top target ward.

Leytonstone

11 seats

The distinction between Leyton and Leytonstone is by no means clear, but for these purposes Leytonstone is to the south and east of Leyton proper. The section south of the Central Line, Cann Hall and Cathall, borders Newham and is the most multi-ethnic area of Waltham Forest with large black and Asian communities (although it has been becoming whiter). Both wards have around 30 per cent social housing. Forest ward, the area around Whipps Cross hospital, is Waltham Forest's most Muslim ward (36 per cent).

Ward-level results (2022)	Councillors 2022			Vote share percentage 2022				
	1	2	3	Con	Lab	LD	Green	Other
Cann Hall	Lab	Lab	Lab	8.5	57.5	10.4	20.1	3.7
Cathall	Lab	Lab	x	9.1	59.0	9.3	19.0	3.6
Forest	Lab	Lab	Lab	8.0	57.1	10.6	20.5	3.9
Leytonstone	Lab	Lab	Lab	9.4	63.5	7.0	17.9	2.1

There used to be some political distinctions between these wards: the Conservatives even won Forest in 1982 and the last Lib Dem in Cann Hall lost her seat in 2014. But the results in 2022 were all uniform and all close to what one would find in most of the borough's wards

(and across large swathes of inner and middle London). A 20 per cent swing from Labour to Green leaves them close. Much more than that would see the Greens win everything. Much less and there will be a big sigh of Labour relief and probably another majority.



WALTHAM FOREST

What to watch for

With Reform taking on Tory Chingford and Highams Park and the Greens mounting a challenge in Labour Walthamstow and Leyton, the stability – or stasis – that has characterised this borough since 2010, looks certain to be shaken. Labour could hold on, but could easily end up having to make the best of No Overall Control.

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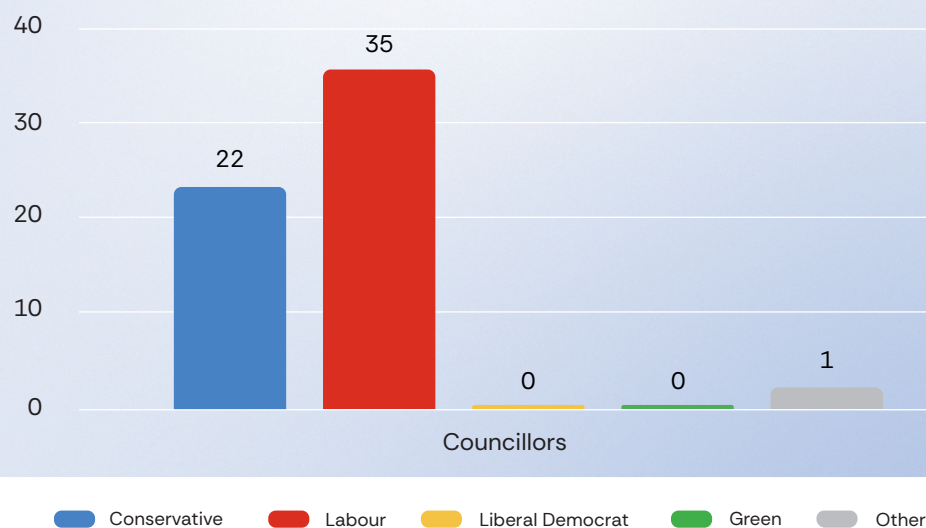
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Since 2022

Labour Defence

One more heave got Labour over the line in 2022 to win control of Wandsworth for the first time since 1978. The party, in line with the broad city-wide trend, had been edging closer since 2010 and at last the Tory beacon was extinguished. Labour won 35 seats out of 58, the Conservatives 22 and there was one Independent winner. Gallingly for Labour, though, the heaving might soon have to begin again.

Wandsworth Council results May 2022 | Total seats: 58



Too much should not be read into the two by-elections that have taken place, both of them in the first half of 2024. But neither should their outcomes be ignored. The first was a very solid Labour hold, but the second produced a Tory gain from Labour with a five per cent swing which, if replicated across the borough on 7 May, would be just enough to secure a Conservative council majority. And that was before the general election and the subsequent collapse of Labour's popularity nationally.

By-elections since May 2022

14 JULY 2022	TOOTING BROADWAY	LAB HOLD
18 JANUARY 2024	TOOTING BROADWAY	LAB HOLD
2 MAY 2024	WEST PUTNEY	CON GAIN FROM LAB

Neither of the party groups have been entirely tranquil: the Labour group (and council) leader Simon Hogg survived an internal challenge, although in contrast to most other boroughs there have been no losses to defections. The Tories lost a member to the lure of Reform UK (with his old party saying he'd been deselected) and their 2024 by-election winner sat as an Independent for a while, although he was back in the party in time to stand as a candidate in 2026. Labour will defend its majority against a determined Conservative effort.

Local landscape

Wandsworth became synonymous with the years of Conservative national triumph under Margaret Thatcher, privatising services, selling council houses, freezing Council Tax. The borough's long eastern border with "loony Left" Lambeth became a film set for Tory election propaganda, with voters being invited to compare and contrast. Throughout its years of domination, during which loss of control was only really threatened twice, the council has presided over huge transformations of the borough's built environment and its social mix. The Battersea of Nell Dunn's *Up The Junction*, a 1963 collection of short stories about the rough end of working-class life, has long gone. The famous power station, once as emblematic of London as The Shard is now, has been refashioned as a Thames waterfront mall.

But although Wandsworth has got much posher – gentrification was underway there long before the term became a boo-word – that has wholly worked to Tory advantage. It's been remarked that, over time, the borough's demographics have also become more aligned with Labour values and less so than with those of the Conservatives as they have championed Brexit and embraced Right-populism. High-earning, market-oriented, mildly liberal, higher-educated voters who had been happy with the party of Thatcher, Major and Cameron have been looking elsewhere. The Wandsworth Conservative brand was Thatcherite on tax and privatisation, but open to Europe and relaxed with a

Wandsworth Council elections since 2002						
Year	Con	Lab	LD	UKIP/Ref	Green	Other
2002	50	10	-	-	-	-
2006	51	9	-	-	-	-
2010	47	13	-	-	-	-
2014	41	19	-	-	-	-
2018	33	26	-	-	-	1
2022	22	35	-	-	-	1

diverse urban society. Wandsworth began to vote more in the way similar London boroughs did. Labour's long-awaited win in 2022 can be seen as the culmination of that trend.

Can it continue? As shown below, Wandsworth still looks highly marginal. Labour, under the leadership of Simon Hogg, has kept Council Tax as low as it can while talking

up bicycle lanes and demanding higher "affordable" homes percentages. An attempt to get the latter enshrined in its Local Plan displeased City Hall, which opposed it the grounds that in the present financial climate it would mean fewer such homes getting built, not more. But these are policy positions that hold appeal for voters on the Left. The Tories will surely hope that Labour's falling national stock will help their rise.

Local landscape

Amid all this uncertainty, there is one Wandsworth councillor seeking re-election for whom victory seems assured. Malcom Grimston of West Hill ward, born in Cleethorpes and now a nuclear power advocate based at Imperial College, first won there as a Tory in 1994 and kept doing so up to and including 2014. But in October of that year, he split with his party over the future of a library then topped the poll as an Independent in 2018 with an astonishing total of over 4,000 votes. By comparison, last time was a bit of a setback – just 3,689 residents supported him, but he still finished miles ahead of the rest. His secret is assiduous attention to casework and neighbourly cultivation of a local mailing list. Maybe others ought to follow his example.

 WANDSWORTH

Electoral prospects

There are nine Labour seats in wards where there was a split verdict in 2022 and the Tories only need a gain of eight from that starting point to get to 30, the threshold for a two-seat majority.

Putney

12 seats

Putney, a genteel suburb, is the basis of an interesting parliamentary seat that was Labour's only gain in the 2019 general election. That result was less about demographic change than about the changing relationship between the Labour and Conservative parties and their social bases.

Roehampton is to the west of Putney proper and consists mostly of the boldly modernist public housing of the Alton Estate, constructed by the London County Council in the 1950s and early 1960s amid green space on the edge of Richmond Park. It is a distinctive ward, 43 per cent social housing, working-class and, for Wandsworth, ethnically mixed. It is also 19 per cent full-time student thanks to the local university, but still the Wandsworth ward with the smallest share of graduates (40 per cent).

Ward-level results (2022)	Councillors 2022			Vote share percentage 2022				
	1	2	3	Con	Lab	LD	Green	Other
East Putney	Con	Lab	Con	41.6	37.7	9.5	11.2	-
Roehampton	Lab	Lab	Lab	31.2	49.0	8.6	8.7	2.6
Thamesfield	Con	Con	Con	43.0	33.8	13.9	9.3	-
West Putney	Lab	Lab	Con	42.0	42.3	7.2	8.4	-

The estates helped Labour win Putney back in 1964, but the positive image of Tory Wandsworth and a bit of social engineering through the Right to Buy, meant the ward was Conservative from 1998 to 2010, then split, and all-Labour from 2014. The Labour majority in 2022 was comfortable but not overwhelming and if Reform gets anywhere in Wandsworth it will be here.

The other Putney wards were solidly Conservative from 1978 until 2022, when Labour did well to split the representation 6-6. The Conservatives regained one of their West Putney losses in the May 2024 by-election.

Southfields

5 seats

These two wards are on either side of Southfields station which for a fortnight every summer becomes a riot of purple flowers and ribbons, and entrepreneurial locals selling drinks and hats for the Wimbledon tennis championship. Southfields ward, east of the tracks, is largely Wandsworth's section of "The Grid", an Edwardian suburb laid out in a pub-free lattice that spans the border with Wimbledon Park in Merton.

Parts of West Hill also look to Wimbledon and have SW19 postcodes. The ward also contains some council-built estates, although only 24 per cent of households are social renter. Former council properties are often let out in the private sector at much higher cost.

Ward-level results (2022)	Councillors 2022			Vote share percentage 2022				
	1	2	3	Con	Lab	LD	Green	Other
Southfields	Con	Con	x	43.7	40.0	7.7	8.6	-
West Hill	Ind	Lab	Con	18.5	22.7	3.3	8.2	47.2

Politically, both wards are safely Conservative in a good year for them and marginal in Labour's better ones. Labour fell only 61 votes short in Southfields in 2022, but the Left bloc vote may be split with Lib Dems and Greens this time. West Hill's marginality is somewhat disguised by the Grimston phenomenon. The Conservatives gained

a West Hill seat from Labour in 2022 by accepting that he would win and tailoring their efforts accordingly.

Wandsworth and Earlsfield

8 seats

The name of Wandsworth is more famous as that of a borough than of a neighbourhood within it near the mouth of River Wandle, although its prison (in Wandsworth Common ward) is name-checked by Squeeze in their song Cool for Cats. Its low-lying location between East Hill and West Hill explains its industrial history, but that is fading and the large brewery in its centre has been redeveloped into the Ram Quarter.

Ward-level results (2022)	Councillors 2022			Vote share percentage 2022				
	1	2	3	Con	Lab	LD	Green	Other
Wandle	Lab	Lab	x	40.0	47.3	6.0	6.7	-
Wandsworth Common	Con	Con	Con	50.4	32.8	5.1	11.7	-
Wandsworth Town	Lab	Lab	Con	39.8	42.9	7.8	9.5	-

Earlsfield to its south is divided along the main railway line, Wandle ward to the north and Wandsworth Common to the south. The Henry Prince Estate, where Sadiq Khan grew up, is in Wandle but only 18 per cent of households in these wards are renting from social landlords. As with the rest of the borough, young graduate professionals account for a major part of the population.

Electorally, Labour did well here in 2022 by splitting the area 4-4 with the Conservatives. Even so, it has shifted towards the Tories over the long term. Springfield, the predecessor to Wandsworth Common, was marginal in the 1980s. Fairfield (predecessor to Wandsworth Town) was Labour until 1990 but by 2006 the Tories were winning by 37 percentage points. Labour's seats are all marginal and the party will have to fight hard to hold them.

Tooting

13 seats

The core wards around the Broadway, plus Furzedown, are an unpretentious working-class multi-ethnic neighbourhood shading into Colliers Wood and Streatham (the Furzedown ward contains an area called Streatham Park, severed from the rest of Streatham by the new boundary in 1965). The upper two wards are influenced by Balham and share the south Battersea demographics of highly educated (70-71 per cent graduate) young professionals in rented flats. Like several other parts of London – Leyton, Brixton, Peckham – with long-established minority communities, the proportion of the White British Census category increased in the core Tooting wards between 2011 and 2021.

Ward-level results (2022)	Councillors 2022			Vote share percentage 2022				
	1	2	3	Con	Lab	LD	Green	Other
Furzedown	Lab	Lab	Lab	18.3	58.5	5.1	18.1	-
South Balham	Lab	Lab	x	36.6	45.7	5.5	12.2	-
Tooting Bec	Lab	Lab	Lab	23.2	57.0	6.3	13.5	-
Tooting Broadway	Lab	Lab	Lab	18.2	60.4	5.7	15.7	-
Trinity	Lab	Lab	x	38.0	44.2	8.6	9.2	-

Sadiq Khan represented the old Tooting ward on Wandsworth Council from 1994 to 2006 and then the Tooting constituency in parliament from 2005 to 2016. The lower wards were nailed down for Labour from 2010, but both Tooting and Furzedown wards elected Tories in

the 2000s, giving the party unfilled hopes that it might win the Tooting constituency. But the northern two wards remain marginal between Labour and the Conservatives, and the Greens might have some potential in the south.

South Battersea

7 seats

The south of Battersea covers the area sometimes called “Between the Commons” – the neighbourhoods north-east of Wandsworth Common and south-west of Clapham Common. The housing consists mostly of pleasant, even elegant, terraces. It was one of the original hearths of “gentrification” in the 1970s and the process has continued to the extent that these wards are extraordinary demographic outliers.

Ward-level results (2022)	Councillors 2022			Vote share percentage 2022				
	1	2	3	Con	Lab	LD	Green	Other
Balham	Con	Con	Lab	43.2	39.1	6.8	10.9	-
Lavender	Con	Con	x	42.2	36.6	8.2	13.0	-
Northcote	Con	Con	x	46.5	26.1	11.5	15.9	-

These are three of the top ten wards in London for the proportion of graduates (73–75 per cent). Lavender is third in London after Hampstead Town and Belsize. Northcote has the highest proportion of the upper professions (40 per cent) after the City of London. It is the most owner-occupied ward in Wandsworth (62 per cent) and the houses tend to be single-family.

Northcote, with its wealthy residents, is safely Tory but the other two were marginal in 2022 even though the new Lavender ward was not expected to be. The politics of this area in 2026 is uncertain. Labour’s vote is likely to be eroded more by the Greens than the Tories’ is by Reform. Then again, the Conservatives may find their appeal eroding because of the national party’s direction and the local party no longer benefiting from its Wandsworth incumbency.

North Battersea

13 seats

London has many areas with fascinating histories, but north Battersea's is one of the more intriguing. Railway lines carved up the wider Battersea area during the Victorian era, crossing at Falconbrook ward's Clapham Junction. The north side of the tracks became home to a working-class, unionised population which in 1892 elected one of its own, John Burns, to be its MP and also leaned Left in local elections.

Ward-level results (2022)	Councillors 2022			Vote share percentage 2022				
	1	2	3	Con	Lab	LD	Green	Other
Battersea Park	Lab	Lab	Lab	31.3	44.4	7.4	14.5	2.5
Falconbrook	Lab	Lab	x	25.2	69.6	-	-	5.2
Nine Elms	Con	Con	x	39.6	29.8	26.3	4.4	-
St Mary's	Lab	Lab	Con	39.1	42.4	8.1	10.5	-
Shaftesbury & Queenstown	Lab	Lab	Lab	26.6	45.7	10.7	16.9	-

The north of Battersea has been repeatedly developed and redeveloped. In 1903 the Latchmere Estate (in Battersea Park ward) was the first to be built by municipal direct labour. In the 1950s and 1960s more estates replaced dilapidated terraces, particularly north of the line into Waterloo. But in the 1970s and

1980s gentrification and the Right to Buy took root in the area, encouraged by Wandsworth's then-radical Conservatives. There is a reference in the 2003 film *Love Actually* to a house "at the dodgy end of Battersea" but the scene was shot in Herne Hill because by then there were no dodgy-looking terraces left.

North Battersea

13 seats

Right to Buy was less appealing on some of the larger estates: Falconbrook is still 45 per cent social housing. Yet during this century, Battersea has changed again, with ever more lavish developments creating a high-rise riverside landscape in St Mary's and Nine Elms wards.

Nine Elms is almost entirely the creation of redevelopment in the past decade, which continues at pace in the vicinity of Battersea Power Station and is served by the Northern Line extension. In 2022, the ward's first local election took place before most of the electorate had arrived. As a consequence, the two Tory winners polled just 352 and 328 votes (one of them became the defector to Reform). The ward will have bulked out a bit by now, mostly with wealthy residents.

The Conservatives gained the Battersea parliamentary seat in 1987, but it was not until 1990 that the wards (except Latchmere, precursor to Falconbrook) flipped at council level. North Battersea got safer and safer, even though Labour held the parliamentary seat from 1997 until 2010, and the Tories got within 16 votes of a seat in Latchmere in 2006. Labour's comeback began in 2014 and continued into 2022 with solid majorities in Battersea Park and Shaftesbury & Queenstown and two seats in St Mary's despite adverse boundary revisions.

Throughout more than half a century of change, there has been one constant factor. Battersea Park Labour councillor Tony Belton was first elected to the council in 1971 and has led the Labour opposition for two stretches. He will be standing again in 2026.



WANDSWORTH

What to watch for

General trends suggest Wandsworth should produce one of Labour's less bad results. The continuation of the Conservatives' low Council Tax policy, coupled with a leftward tilt on housing and services, might be popular with a discerning electorate. At national level the Tories show no sign of changing direction to make Wandsworthians like them again. Yet the Conservatives' path to victory does not look difficult in a borough where Reform will take fewer votes from them than the Greens seem likely to take from Labour.

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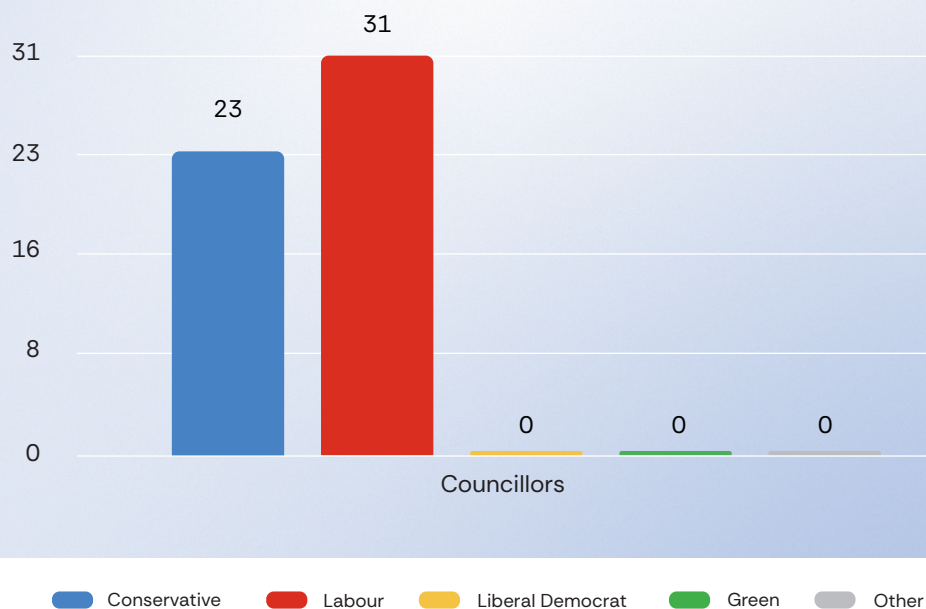
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Since 2022

Labour Defence

Labour's capture of the City of Westminster for the first time in the borough's history brought exultation for party activists, some of whom had been striving and failing to replace the Conservatives since the years of gerrymandering under Dame Shirley Porter. A swing of 4.7 per cent was enough to convert a Labour deficit of 12 seats in 2018, when 60 were up for grabs, into a winning distance of eight – 31 out of 54 against the Tories' 23 under new boundaries.

Westminster Council results May 2022 | Total seats: 54



The glow of victory, though, has been superseded by a sense of an administration under siege. A September 2024 by-election in the critical, marginal West End ward, where Labour won all three seats in 2022, saw a Conservative comeback. The same thing happened in February 2025. The following April, Tory ascendancy in West End was restored when one of Labour's winners crossed the floor, reducing the majority to just two.

By-elections since May 2022

04 JULY 2024	ABBEY ROAD	CON HOLD
19 SEPTEMBER 2024	HARROW ROAD	LAB HOLD
19 SEPTEMBER 2024	WEST END	CON GAIN FROM LAB
27 FEBRUARY 2025	VINCENT SQUARE	CON GAIN FROM LAB

Not that the Tory ship has enjoyed entirely plain sailing. In June 2025, a member of its crew leaped aboard the rival craft Reform: she has since been anointed her new party's candidate for Mayor of London in far-off 2028. Another followed in November. There have been two other by-elections, one of them producing a Tory hold, the other a Labour hold. The net outcome is that Labour currently has 28 seats, the Tories 24 and Reform two. Several Westminster wards turn on tight margins and with Reform and the Greens trying to get in on the two-party act, every vote is going to count.

Local landscape

The City of Westminster is in one sense just another of the 32 London boroughs, providing services and functioning as a democratic representative body. But in another it is a uniquely prestigious local authority whose concerns embrace places of national and international importance within its boundary. No other council has as much to do, day to day, with central government and even the royal household.

Westminster is also the location of a lot of strategic London assets that attract the attention of the Mayor of London, such as the entertainment and tourist economy of the West End. The council's perspectives on these things, like those of its residents, does not always chime with those of other levels of government. For example, in its early days the last Labour national government

and the then Conservative-controlled Westminster fell into conflict over the pedestrianisation of the north side of Trafalgar Square. The government was in favour, the council was not. Then, from 2000, the strategic role in the capital was inherited by London's first Mayor, Ken Livingstone. He too wanted pedestrianisation and his will prevailed.

There are parallels with Sadiq Khan's intervention over Oxford Street. The Labour Mayor and the Labour then-Secretary of State, Angela Rayner, announced the plan to pedestrianise it having given the Labour council very little notice and despite its having spent two years painstakingly assembling a plan for improving the Oxford Street area, without pedestrianisation, that residents, businesses and property owners, not always on the

same page, felt able to support. Senior councillors were not amused. But a section of "the nation's high street" is scheduled to go traffic free in the summer.

Westminster isn't all pomp and glamour, though. Its 210,000 people include many who are poor – its overall poverty rate is 42 per cent, higher than that of most of the boroughs, and its child poverty rate is a mid-range 36 per cent. There are working-class communities of long standing even in the wealthiest wards, and whole neighbourhoods with high levels of deprivation, notably in the north. Labour has put helping its less affluent residents at the heart of its policy programme.

Local landscape

The Tories' losing the council was predicted by some, though not all analysis took into account the distribution of political support across the wards, which tended to work against Labour: in 2018, Labour got almost as much of the popular vote as the Conservatives – 41.1 per cent compared to 42.8 – but lost by 41 seats to 19. The 2022 result was the result of shrewd campaigning, a shock win in a bedrock Tory ward, Tory voters appalled by “Partygate” staying at home and the high-profile debacle of the Marble Arch Mound, an artificial hill commissioned as a well-intended tourist attraction to draw visitors back to the West End after the pandemic that became costly embarrassment.

Circumstances this time round could hardly be more different. Current leader Adam Hug hit the ground running in 2022 with initiatives for purging Oxford Street of its dodgy “candy shops”. But he now sits on the board of Mayor Khan’s Oxford Street Development Corporation openly opposing its creation and perhaps soon to be replaced by Tory group leader Paul Swaddle.

Westminster Council elections since 2002

Year	Con	Lab	LD	UKIP/Ref	Green	Other
2002	48	12	-	-	-	-
2006	48	12	-	-	-	-
2010	48	12	-	-	-	-
2014	44	16	-	-	-	-
2018	41	19	-	-	-	-
2022	23	31	-	-	-	-

 WESTMINSTER

Electoral prospects

Westminster's wards are a collection of oddities and outliers, most of which tended to the Conservatives before 2022. It also has a bit of (hitherto) solid Labour inner-city London within its boundaries. Labour will hope its local endeavours limit the damage done by the party's national brand. The Conservatives will hope their own government's past failings and the populist posture of its current leadership don't impede their recovery. The Greens could eat into Labour's support in a way that Reform won't eat into the Tories'.

Harrow Road

9 seats

The stretch of Harrow Road from where it passes beneath the Westway to the boundary with Brent near Kensal Green Cemetery goes through a diverse working-class neighbourhood. The social housing proportion in these wards is 44-55 per cent and the White British share is 19-25 per cent.

Queen's Park ward has the distinction of being the only civil parish within London. Established in 2014, it seemed at the time to be a way of getting a measure of devolution for a Labour area in a permanently Tory borough. Much of Queen's Park consists of a Victorian cottage estate, which is why it has Westminster's highest proportion of people living in whole houses (34 per cent) rather than flats.

Ward-level results (2022)	Councillors 2022			Vote share percentage 2022				
	1	2	3	Con	Lab	LD	Green	Other
Harrow Road	Lab	Lab	Lab	17.5	72.8	9.7	-	-
Queen's Park	Lab	Lab	Lab	16.4	76.4	7.1	-	-
Westbourne	Lab	Lab	Lab	17.9	68.6	6.6	-	6.9

These wards have voted Labour at every opportunity since 1971 – Queen's Park even survived the 1968 deluge. They returned very high Labour vote shares in 2022 thanks in part to the lack of Green candidates. Council leader Adam Hug represents Westbourne.

Westminster Labour is well-organised and seems unlikely to lose any of these seats. However, the Labour share

slumped by 28 percentage points in the Harrow Road by-election (admittedly on a grim 15 per cent turnout). The beneficiaries were the Workers' Party and the Greens, who are targeting the ward this time.

Maida Vale

9 seats

These wards fall within Georgia Gould MP's Queen's Park & Maida Vale constituency and form a transitional area between the endearingly scruffy Harrow Road and the imposing but sterile blocks around Regent's Park. As with much of Westminster, nearly everyone lives in flats but the composition varies from council estates - Church Street is the sixth most social-renting ward in London, with 58 per cent of households - purpose-built mansion blocks and converted houses.

Of the three, Little Venice is the wealthiest, the canal basin being a magnet for a particularly upmarket form of gentrification. Church Street is based on the council estates and terraces around Lisson Grove, a resiliently working-class enclave on the more Tory side of the Edgware Road. It is one of the centres of London's Arab community, with a 49 per cent Muslim population.

Ward-level results (2022)	Councillors 2022			Vote share percentage 2022				
	1	2	3	Con	Lab	LD	Green	Other
Church Street	Lab	Lab	Lab	18.8	73.0	8.2	-	-
Little Venice	Con	Con	Lab	46.9	45.0	8.2	-	-
Maida Vale	Lab	Lab	Lab	30.6	61.9	7.6	-	-

Politically, Maida Vale and Little Venice fall between the hitherto Labour wards along Harrow Road and the Conservative redoubt of Marylebone. Church Street has been a loyal Labour island, although even this ward elected a Tory in a by-election in 2008. Maida Vale is another Westminster ward which was usually Labour before 1990 then voted Conservative until the 2010s.

After that, Labour won a seat in 2014, all three in 2018 and its majority in 2022 was healthy. The Conservative bid to recover Maida Vale is spearheaded by controversial former Shrewsbury MP Daniel Kawczynski.

Little Venice has seemingly shifted Right more durably. It was all-Labour in 1978 and 1986, but only one Labour candidate out of three won in 2022.

Paddington

9 seats

These three wards are basically the stretch of north Westminster between Hyde Park and the Westway (although the corner by the Brunel Estate is in Westbourne). Hyde Park includes Paddington station and the development area around the canal, with Bayswater (and Lancaster Gate which is essentially east Bayswater) to the west. Like the adjoining part of Kensington & Chelsea it is a densely populated area that veers between genteel and shabby, with wealth and poverty living in close quarters among the stucco terraces. Over 50 per cent of all households rent privately in all three. The population is transient and international, with a high proportion of EU citizens. Parties and, indeed, registration officers, often find it difficult to contact them.

Ward-level results (2022)	Councillors 2022			Vote share percentage 2022				
	1	2	3	Con	Lab	LD	Green	Other
Bayswater	Lab	Lab	Lab	32.6	57.8	9.6	-	-
Hyde Park	Lab	Lab	Lab	41.4	45.9	12.7	-	-
Lancaster Gate	Con	Lab	Lab	40.0	40.0	8.4	11.6	-

The Conservatives won every seat here from 1990 until 2018 and it produced some of their most prominent local figures – Shirley Porter in Hyde Park, Simon Milton and Robert Davis in Lancaster Gate. Bayswater was targeted in Porter’s “gerrymandering” scheme for altering the social composition of marginal wards after a close shave in 1986.

The Tory monopoly was broken when Labour gained one of the Bayswater seats in 2018 and emphatically picked up the other two last time. The other two wards joined the charge. Labour’s success in Hyde Park was arguably the most astonishing result of the entire 2022 elections. It had been a safe Conservative ward ever since the first Westminster elections in 1964 and Labour, perhaps tired of getting 15 per cent of the vote, did not contest it in 2010. But the stars aligned in 2022, helped by the

troubled mound being positioned very visibly at the corner of Hyde Park ward. One of the Labour candidates was Paul Dimoldenberg, who had been Labour group leader at the time of the Porter scandal. Winning in her old ward was revenge served cold.

The Conservatives lost their last seat in these wards when Lancaster Gate councillor Laila Cunningham defected to Reform in June 2025 and was proclaimed mayoral candidate. She won’t be defending her seat, and as this is not natural Reform territory the Conservatives must have hopes of clawing back their recent losses, particularly in Hyde Park. Labour’s 2022 miracle in these wards, as across Westminster generally, was facilitated by the Greens standing fewer candidates than before – in 2014, the last time they fielded candidates in all three, they averaged 15 per cent.

Marylebone

9 seats

This subsection of Westminster, which covers most of the pre-1965 borough of St Marylebone (Church Street and part of West End were also included), stretches north from Portman Square through residential Marylebone up past Lord's cricket ground to St John's Wood. Its reputation as a district of mansion blocks inhabited by the upper middle classes is largely justified, although there are some very expensive terraced and even detached houses at the Abbey Road end in particular

Marylebone is the ward with the highest proportion of private renting households in London – 60 per cent – other than the always anomalous Wembley Park ward in Brent. It is also the Westminster ward with the highest proportion of professionals and managers – the idle rich are not as numerous as in Knightsbridge & Belgravia. All three wards voted Conservative in 2022 as those of this area have continuously since 1964.

Ward-level results (2022)	Councillors 2022			Vote share percentage 2022				
	1	2	3	Con	Lab	LD	Green	Other
Abbey Road	Con	Con	Con	47.5	29.8	10.5	12.2	-
Marylebone	Con	Con	Con	46.5	22.8	30.6	-	-
Regent's Park	Con	Con	Con	47.3	29.2	9.9	13.6	-

The area did, however, contribute to Labour's majority in another way. Its population and registered electorate have been dropping for years. Second homes and pieds-à-terre are only intermittently occupied, and often in the name of a single individual. Mansion blocks are difficult for electoral registration officers to enumerate properly.

This means that while Paddington, Harrow Road and Maida Vale have kept the same numbers of councillors, Marylebone and Victoria have not. Compared with 1986, Labour's previous best year, this, along with a boundary change, has resulted in the number of councillors representing this part of Westminster, a fall from the earlier 14. Damien Moore, Conservative MP for Southport from 2017 until 2024, is contesting Abbey Road.

Central

9 seats

The central wards are Westminster's most anomalous. An area famous for government, entertainment, tourism, law and matters of national and international significance that generate an outsize share of GDP is less noted as a place where people live. There are residential areas tucked away amid the bustle and flats in even the most commercial areas.

West End ward covers Westminster's part of Fitzrovia, Mayfair and Soho, with its politics dominated by the concerns of the latter. St James's ward includes the Palace of Westminster, Theatreland, Charing Cross station and Buckingham Palace. Royal family members don't vote, but there are resident staff who do and their political allegiances are disputed. Guess rang from "die-hard Labour" to "more Conservative than the royals themselves". Social housing accounts for 24 per cent of households in West End and 28 per cent in St James's. Both wards are around half private rented.

Ward-level results (2022)	Councillors 2022			Vote share percentage 2022				
	1	2	3	Con	Lab	LD	Green	Other
St James's	Con	Con	Con	49.0	37.0	14.0	-	-
Vincent Square	Con	Lab	Con	46.3	43.1	10.6	-	-
West End	Lab	Lab	Lab	41.1	49.7	9.2	-	-

Vincent Square ward is a quiet corner of central London lying south-west of the Parliament. It combines several sorts of residential area – social housing at the Edwardian Millbank estate near Tate Britain and at the Grosvenor Estate, wealthy mansion blocks near Westminster Cathedral and some more recent development near Vincent Square itself. It is politically polarised and gave a split result in 2022.

Labour won four seats out of nine in 2022 but has since lost three of them – two through the West End and

Vincent Square by-elections one due to their defector to the Tories. The pedestrianisation of Oxford Street is a major issue for voters in West End.. Even at the heart of London, politics is local as well as national.

Victoria

9 seats

This is the southwestern part of Westminster, marked off by Grosvenor Place and Vauxhall Bridge Road. Knightsbridge, which forms a salient stretching west as far as the Royal Albert Hall, and Belgravia have long been wealthy, elite parts of the global capital. The concentration of international wealth and old money creates a hard-core Conservative vote, but even here London is complicated and there are poorer communities close by.

Pimlico is the raffish shadow of Belgravia, the other side of the tracks heading into Victoria. But these things are relative, and its stucco terraces would be regarded as exclusive anywhere else. The curve of the Thames, running west to east here before it takes a northward turn at Vauxhall Bridge, is where the most interesting buildings are to be found. Pimlico South combines the 1950s Churchill Gardens estate (the ward is 44 per cent social housing) with some private developments looking out on the river, the most famous being Dolphin Square where there are over 1,200 flats.

Ward-level results (2022)	Councillors 2022			Vote share percentage 2022				
	1	2	3	Con	Lab	LD	Green	Other
Knightsbridge & Belgravia	Con	Con	Con	62.0	22.4	15.6	-	-
Pimlico North	Con	Con	Con	48.4	35.8	15.8	-	-
Pimlico South	Lab	Lab	Lab	43.3	49.0	7.7	-	-

Labour did very well to win Pimlico South in 2022. Its predecessor Churchill ward was a Labour-inclined marginal (though Tory from 1990 to 2014) but boundary changes were very adverse. It will require a mighty effort to hold in 2026. The 2022 result in Pimlico North was also surprisingly close, given that the predecessor Warwick ward favoured the Conservatives by 60 per cent to 28 in 2018, though a new boundary probably helped Labour a bit by taking in the Lillington Gardens estate.

Knightsbridge & Belgravia has usually been one of the safest Conservative wards in London: the Tories got 96 per cent of the vote in the former Knightsbridge ward in 1968 and 81 per cent in today's ward in 2018. The 2022 result did not exactly make it a marginal, but it dropped from having the highest Conservative share in London in to being outside the top five.



WESTMINSTER

What to watch for

There is a feeling that Labour has done a good job in its four years and the experience of Westminster Tories in the 1990s suggests incumbents can win there despite their parties being disliked nationally. Electors in marginal wards may still bear the Tories ill-will. But the dire state of the polls, the by-election outcomes and the incursions of the Greens amount to formidable headwinds for Labour. The Tory path back to power looks quite easy.

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