



On 7 May 2026, more than 1800 councillors – and five mayors – will be elected across 32 London boroughs. Polls suggest that a splintering of the vote could lead to the capital’s political map being radically reshaped.

For businesses, trying to understand what this uncertain outlook means and how it affects their operations in practice is a significant challenge.

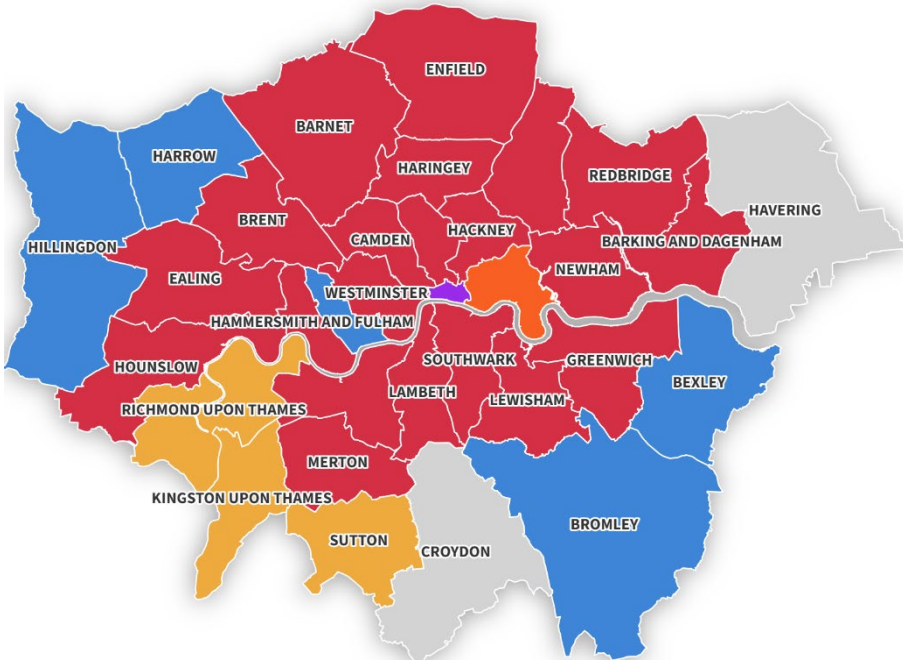
This high-level briefing sets out some of the key issues to consider in the round when it comes to preparing for the changes that may follow polling day.

## What to expect?

At a headline level, the 2022 local elections saw almost no change across London compared with 2018. In both elections, Labour and the Lib Dems won control of 21 and three councils respectively. The Conservatives’ total dipped from seven to five councils.

This relative stability masked significant changes. Perhaps the most obvious one was a local party, Aspire, winning both the mayoralty and council in Tower Hamlets. Labour took control of Westminster for the first time while the Conservatives won the new Croydon mayoralty – effectively the political leader – but failed to secure a council seat majority.

## 2022 election



	Councils	Councillors
<b>Labour</b>	21	1,156
<b>Conservative</b>	5	404
<b>Lib Dem</b>	3	180
<b>Aspire</b>	1	24
<b>Others</b>	0	35
<b>Green</b>	0	18

*\*Havering and Croydon: no overall control, run by minority administrations*

Polls suggest 2026 will see more radical changes across London. Reform UK and the Greens look set to make inroads in parts of the capital, with political fragmentation creating the conditions for the rise of five (or six if Aspire is counted) party politics in the city. That is before the impact of independent candidates is taken into account.

This splintering of the vote could, in turn, lead to the winner of wards being decided by the narrowest of margins. It could also lead to more boroughs being under no overall control immediately after 7 May as parties fail to establish a clear majority.

## What does it mean for business?

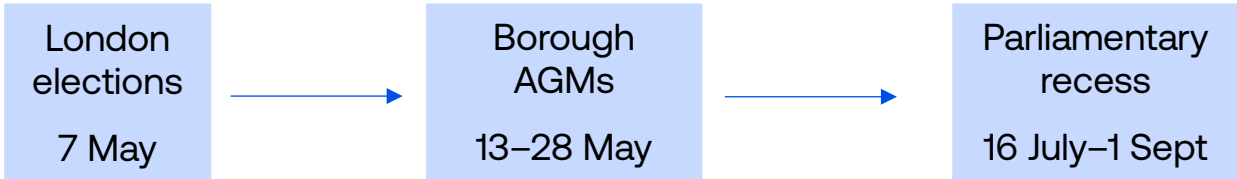
Regardless of whether individual boroughs change control or not, the post-election period will be a moment of flux. A new intake of councillors will be taking up their posts, the composition of key committees will change, and fresh political dynamics will come to the fore.

There is a high likelihood that a significant number of people will be elected as councillors for the first time. Depending on results and circumstances, a newly elected councillor could even end up as a leader in some boroughs. Many of these individuals will be unfamiliar with how everything works in local government and may also lack an understanding of the big, overarching challenges London faces.

There is also the prospect of a number of boroughs being under no overall control. In recent London local elections this has been a relatively rare outcome but in 2006 a total of eight councils were left with no single party in overall control.

If similar results happen this May, it could lead to delays in forming administrations, an increased likelihood of fragile coalitions changing or collapsing mid-term, and committees and councils being more balanced – potentially giving individual councillors more sway. Building cross-party support for proposals may become even more crucial.

Amid such uncertainty, big decisions – particularly when it comes to planning committees – are likely to be delayed until after summer recess at the earliest in many boroughs.



In the event of political change at a local level, the priorities of new Borough leaders and the Greater London Authority (GLA) may diverge. For example, the Mayor recently agreed an emergency package of planning measures to accelerate housing delivery which included introducing a new fast-track route for sites delivering at least 20 per cent affordable housing. By contrast, the Green Party recently committed to setting a minimum of 50 per cent of new housing to be social rent.

This may mean that the Mayor and GLA choose to take a more hands-on approach, particularly around issues of strategic importance. The shifting political map will also affect how London Councils – the collective of local government in the capital – will be able to maintain the cross-party consensus that has generally held firm in recent decades when it comes to campaigning on the city’s priorities on the national stage.

## Key takeaways

- Expect slower decision-making post-election, especially in boroughs that end up in no overall control.
- Greater importance of cross-party engagement due to political fragmentation.
- Increased policy variability between boroughs.
- The Mayor and GLA may choose to be more interventionist, particularly on issues such as housing.

## Planning for the future

As part of business planning ahead of polling day, mapping out the impact of the local elections and any political changes that follow will be important to mitigate potential risks and opportunities – reputational, commercial or otherwise.

Key questions to consider include:

### **Have you prepped and run the scenarios...?**

1. Have you mapped your organisational footprint against any potential swing boroughs?
2. Have you reviewed the candidate list in relevant boroughs and identified potential movers and shakers in the new political landscape?
3. Have your key spokespeople and teams had a reminder about political messaging both during the pre-election period and immediately afterwards?

### **Have you assessed the risks and opportunities...?**

4. Have you taken a view on whether you want to stick your head above the parapet, and if so, on what issues?
5. Are any policies likely to change that will impact you, your supply chain or your customer base?
6. Do you have any direct contracts or funding that may be prone to change?
7. Have you thought about the opportunity to take a fresh look at any previous proposals that might now be viewed more favourably?

### **Are you ready to hit the ground running...?**

8. Have you worked out entry points for early contact, including engaging with relevant officers?
9. Have you tailored your key priorities and messages for different political parties so they are ready to go swiftly after polling day?
10. Have you considered how you can leverage third-party activity and events – including BusinessLDN – to secure engagement with key stakeholders?

## BusinessLDN and the local elections

As we head towards polling day, BusinessLDN is working to ensure members are prepared and ready to adapt to a changing political landscape. That includes providing insights before 7 May, immediately after and once the dust has settled.

This month, we have also published our [latest podcast](#) – featuring Professor John Curtice, On London’s Founder and Editor Dave Hill and Kanda Consulting’s Managing Director and Founder Karen Alcock – to provide a deeper dive into the outlook ahead of the election and what the key issues are that may shape outcomes locally.

Our programme after the local elections begins with [a briefing on 11 May](#) led by Professor Tony Travers CBE, followed by a panel session featuring City AM’s Opinion Editor Alys Denby and Hedry’s Kevin McKeever. This will provide an overview of the results plus a flash reaction of what they mean at both a London-level and nationally.

On 3 June, our [What Next for London? briefing](#) – featuring analysis from Kanda’s Consulting’s Karen Alcock, a former senior Hackney councillor – will explore what the results mean for business and their operating environment. The impact of changes in control and new coalitions being established in some boroughs on cross-cutting issues should become clearer at this point.

Alongside this, we will be relaunching our Borough Leader series in June to provide members with early opportunities to engage with key decision-makers. The impact of the elections will also be explored in a session at our [Future London](#) annual conference on 16 June, and we’ll be holding a drinks reception at the [LGA Annual Conference](#) on 7 July. At the end of the year, our Winter Parliamentary Reception will bring together members with representatives from all levels of London government.

Finally, as part of our campaigning, we’ll be sharing priority asks with elected leaders and councillors so they know what matters for businesses in London. This will include asks from our new [Growth Commission](#) as well as other major areas of work relevant to the boroughs, such as planning, infrastructure and housing.

## Our mission

AT BUSINESSLDN, OUR MISSION IS TO MAKE LONDON THE BEST CITY IN THE WORLD IN WHICH TO DO BUSINESS, WORKING WITH AND FOR THE WHOLE UK.

We work to deliver the bigger picture, campaigning to tackle today's challenges and to secure the future promise of London.

We harness the power of our members, from sectors that span the economy, to shape the future of the capital so Londoners thrive and businesses prosper. We support business to succeed—locally, nationally, globally. We link up with other cities around the UK, to ensure the capital supports a thriving country.

We campaigned for the creation of the office of London Mayor and Transport for London, for the Elizabeth Line, for congestion charging, and we incubated Teach First.

## Contact us

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