

Mayor of London and London Assembly elections 2021 guide



**Updated March 2021
by Rodney Coker**

Mayor of London and London Assembly elections 2021 guide

The contest to be Mayor of London is just one of many elections to take place on Thursday 6 May 2021. On the same day, 25 London Assembly members will be elected. For many Londoners, this election is crucial as it can help bring about the change they want to see in London. Here is a brief guide about the London Mayoral and London Assembly election outlining their responsibilities, powers and the key issues that will determine the election.

What am I voting for?

The Greater London Authority (GLA) is the regional governance body charged with jurisdiction over the City of London and Greater London. The Authority consists of two directly elected branches: the executive Mayor of London and the 25-member London assembly that fulfils the checks-and-balances role of the mayor. Both are elected every four years. The most recent elections took place on Thursday 5 May 2016.

History

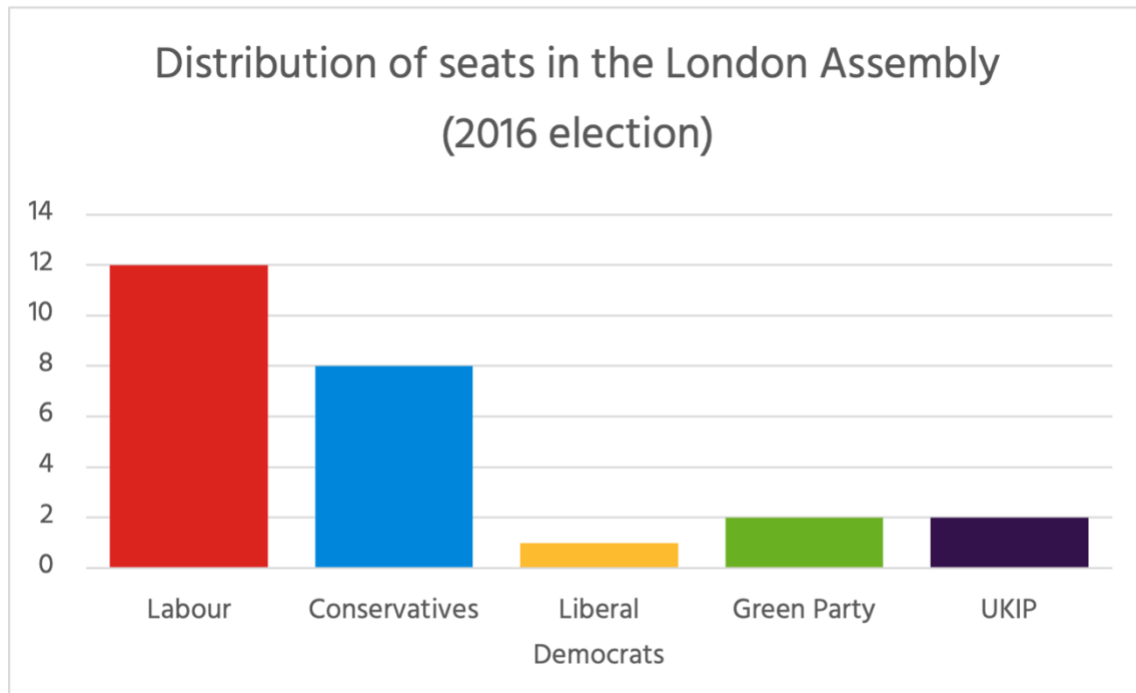
The GLA was originally proposed by the Labour Party in 1997, which outlined a desire for an executive mayor and small assembly that would be responsible for providing scrutiny. A referendum took place on 7 May 1998, resulting in an overwhelming 'yes' vote. The first elections were held in 2000 and resulted in Ken Livingstone, standing as an independent, being elected mayor and four parties achieving representation in the Assembly.

What happened at the last election?

In 2016, the incumbent mayor, Boris Johnson (Conservative), stood down after two terms in office. Zac Goldsmith (Conservative) and Sadiq

Mayor of London and London Assembly elections 2021 guide

Khan (Labour) were the two leading candidates. Khan received 44.2% of the first-round preference vote and Goldsmith 35%. Once the second and final rounds' preference votes were counted, Sadiq Khan emerged as the winner with 56.8% of the vote.



How does the voting work?

Assembly Members

The London Assembly is elected by the Additional Member System (AMS). There are 14 single-member constituencies and 11 additional member or 'top-up' seats for the whole of Greater London. Voters have one vote for the constituency member and one vote for the 'top-up' seats. The 'top-up' seats are allocated on the basis of the top-up votes cast, but this takes into account constituency seats won by the relevant party. Hence, overall party strength in the Assembly is proportional to the top up votes cast. In the London Assembly, parties must win at least 50% of the top-up vote to be entitled to a seat.

Mayoral candidates

The mayor is elected by the Supplementary Vote (SV) system. There are two columns on a ballot paper. Voters can mark an X in the first column for their first-choice candidate and another X in the second column for their second choice. A candidate who receives more than 50% of the first preference votes on the first count is elected.

If no candidate reaches 50% in the first round, the two candidates with the highest number of votes are retained. The ballot papers showing a first preference for eliminated candidates are checked for their second preference. Any second preference votes for the two remaining candidates are then added to the candidates' first preference votes. The candidate with the most votes then wins.

What are the powers and functions of the Mayor of London and the Assembly?

The Mayor of London has a duty to produce statutory strategies relating to:

- housing,
- environment,
- business,
- economy,
- culture,
- health,
- transport
- policing.

Mayor of London and London Assembly elections 2021 guide

The functions of the mayor differ depending on the policy areas. For the functional bodies, the mayor is given full authority to appoint members to boards and sets their budget and strategy. On the other end of the spectrum, for public body boards the mayor can appoint members, but they aren't given direct power over the budgets those boards control. In addition, the mayor has a duty to publish strategies intended to provide a policy direction for the public and private sector.

Whilst the Mayor of London holds all executive power in the GLA, the Assembly can prevent certain actions. The Assembly has the power to amend the mayor's annual budget or strategy on a two-thirds majority. The Assembly are tasked with holding the mayor and their advisers to account via mayoral question times, subject based scrutiny committees, taking evidence and publishing reports. In addition, they have a budget, audit, standards and confirmation hearing committee. The latter requires the Assembly to hold confirmation hearings for a number of key mayoral appointments, but they do not have the power to veto them.

The GLA have a general power of competence, which is commonly used to promote social and economic development and environmentalism in London. Through this power, mayors have routinely established initiatives. Generally, the mayor tends to increase their influence beyond their executive role and crucially provide leadership by bringing together businesses, stakeholders and civic society for initiatives that will benefit London and Londoners.

What are the big issues at this election?

Transport

For many Londoners having reliable and accessible transport is a key issue that candidates will have to address. The crippling cost of the pandemic has seen TfL face the most challenging financial crisis in its history. In the wake of the Covid pandemic, TfL's revenues have been hit hard by plummeting passenger numbers, forcing it to seek a £1.6bn emergency funding package from ministers in March 2020 and seen an extension of up to £1.8bn funding until the end of the 2020-21 financial year in March 2021.

As the Chair of Transport for London (TfL), the mayor has responsibility over public transport in London. Bus services in London are regulated, in contrast to other cities in the UK. This means the mayor has control over routes, fares, service frequency and what is the minimum performance standard. The mayor is also responsible for road networks and shares the responsibility of promoting walking and cycling with boroughs.

Delivering Crossrail

A top priority for the next mayor will be the delivering Crossrail. The new high-speed railway will run underneath central London, out from Shenfield and Abbey Wood in the east, to Heathrow and Reading in the west. Originally, the Elizabeth line was scheduled to finish in December 2018 but will be completed later this year.

Ensuring the construction, rolling stock delivery, safety testing and operational processes progress smoothly will be key in order to avoid more costs and revenue losses.

TfL funding

The funding of TfL is also a concern of the mayor and Assembly. TfL is never guaranteed to receive a direct grant from the Government to help cover day-to-day running costs. This has seen TfL having to rely heavily on fare incomes to fund operations, resulting in delayed upgrades. Discussions are also in place about reviewing the fares structure for Londoners who might struggle with its current affordability.

ULEZ extension

With transport being a significant component in plans for Net-Zero, how the mayor will tackle the climate emergency will be a significant issue in this election. Air pollution has been high on the agenda in London for some time, including with the introduction of the Ultra-Low Emission Zone. Since the introduction of ULEZ in April 2019, pollution has reduced by 36% in the zone. Later this year, there are plans to expand ULEZ from its current limit, within the congestion charge zone to include most of the capital. In the event of a new mayoral candidate being elected, considerations may be made as to whether or not they want to proceed with the extension as planned and whether a more sophisticated system is needed to charge people for pollution and congestion.

Housing

The cost of housing is a key driver of poverty in London. Many Londoners struggle to access affordable housing that provides quality and stability. Providing affordable homes and addressing the persistent problem of homelessness is an issue that mayoral candidates may hope to solve.

For people on low incomes, it is argued more social housing with manageable rents are needed as too many Londoners face the prospect of choosing between paying their rent or heating their house.

With overcrowding, evictions, rent arrears and homelessness are all on the rise, there is concern about the lack of effective regulation in the private rented sector and the poor quality of some homes in both the social and private rented sectors and how this affects the well-being of tenants.

Knife crime

London is becoming the epicentre of knife crime, with statistics showing steep rise. Whilst the numbers may shock many, behind every statistic is an individual and in recent years, London has seen young people as victims of this kind of crime.

The All-Party Parliamentary Group on Knife Crime recently determined that councils which had seen a significant reduction in youth services were more likely to experience increasing numbers of knife crime. Police numbers have also been cut, which has had an effect. In addition, the rise in knife crime has led many to call for more stop and search. However, the controversy of stop and search is based on the disproportionate number of black people affected.

The mayor has the tough job of ensuring the safety of Londoners and dealing with the complex issue of knife crime due to the range of societal and structural causes at play.

Questions for candidates

Whilst priority issues may vary, here are some questions you may choose to ask mayoral candidates standing for election.

1. How will you ensure that transport in London is fully accessible for every income, especially the lowest-income members of our community?
2. What measures will you put in place to ensure that London can be part of the journey to net-zero carbon emissions by 2050?
3. How do you intend on meeting London's housing needs?
4. What do you believe to be the most effective means of addressing the issue of knife crime?
5. What measures would you put in place to increase trust and confidence in the Metropolitan Police Service among London's black community?
6. To what extent are you concerned about the disproportionate outcomes of police powers in encounters with black Londoners?
7. What steps would you take to encourage greater ethnic diversity at the most senior officer levels within the Metropolitan Police Service?

Contact

We would like to know how this guidance was useful and what should be added or changed for future publications.

If you have questions, suggestions or comments please write to:

Joint Public Issues Team enquiries@jointpublicissues.org.uk

Article updated March 2021 by Rodney Coker