

# MDA No.: 1777

## Title: *A London for Every Child: Reversing the City's Declining Child Population Report*

### 1. Executive Summary

1.1 At the Economy, Culture and Skills Committee meetings on 14 October and 13 November 2025, the Committee resolved that:

*Authority be delegated to the Chair, in consultation with party Group Lead Members, to agree any output arising from the discussion.*

1.2 Following consultation with party Group Lead Members, the Chair of the Economy, Culture and Skills Committee agreed the Committee's report, *A London for Every Child: Reversing the City's Declining Child Population*, as attached at **Appendix 1**.

### 2. Decision

2.1 **That the Chair, following consultation with the party Group Lead Members, agrees the report, *A London for Every Child: Reversing the City's Declining Child Population*, as attached at Appendix 1.**

#### Assembly Member

I confirm that I do not have any disclosable pecuniary interests in the proposed decision and take the decision in compliance with the Code of Conduct for elected Members of the Authority.

The above request has my approval.

**Signature:**



**Printed Name:**

Hina Bokhari OBE AM, Chair of the Economy, Culture and Skills Committee

**Date:**

2 March 2026

### 3. Decision by an Assembly Member under Delegated Authority

#### Background and proposed next steps:

- 3.1 The terms of reference for this investigation were agreed by the Chair, in consultation with relevant party Lead Group Members and Deputy Chair, on 1 August 2025 under the standing authority granted to Chairs of Committees and Sub-Committees. Officers confirm that the report falls within these terms of reference.
- 3.2 The exercise of delegated authority approving the report will be formally noted at the Economy, Culture and Skills Committee's next appropriate meeting.

#### Confirmation that appropriate delegated authority exists for this decision:

Signature (Committee Services): *Sal Fazal*

Printed Name: Saleha Fazal

Date: 25 February 2026

#### Financial Implications: NOT REQUIRED

Note: Finance comments and signature are required only where there are financial implications arising or the potential for financial implications.

Signature (Finance): Not Required

Printed Name:

Date:

#### Legal Implications:

The Chair of the Economy, Culture and Skills Committee has the power to make the decision set out in this report.

Signature (Legal): 

Printed Name: Rory McKenna, Monitoring Officer

Date: 2 March 2026

Email: [rory.mckenna@london.gov.uk](mailto:rory.mckenna@london.gov.uk)

#### Supporting Detail / List of Consultees:

- Alessandro Georgiou AM,
- Alex Wilson AM,
- Zack Polanski AM, and
- Anne Clarke AM.

#### 4. Public Access to Information

- 4.1 Information in this form (Part 1) is subject to the FoIA, or the EIR and will be made available on the GLA Website, usually within one working day of approval.
- 4.2 If immediate publication risks compromising the implementation of the decision (for example, to complete a procurement process), it can be deferred until a specific date. Deferral periods should be kept to the shortest length strictly necessary.
- 4.3 **Note:** this form (Part 1) will either be published within one working day after it has been approved or on the defer date.

##### Part 1 - Deferral:

Is the publication of Part 1 of this approval to be deferred? NO

If yes, until what date:

##### Part 2 – Sensitive Information:

Only the facts or advice that would be exempt from disclosure under FoIA or EIR should be included in the separate Part 2 form, together with the legal rationale for non-publication.

Is there a part 2 form? NO

---

#### Lead Officer / Author

Signature: *James Cotter*

Printed Name: James Cotter

Job Title: Research Analyst

Date: 25 February 2026

#### Countersigned by Executive Director:

Signature: *Helen Ewen*

Printed Name: Helen Ewen, Executive Director of Assembly Secretariat

Date: 2 March 2026

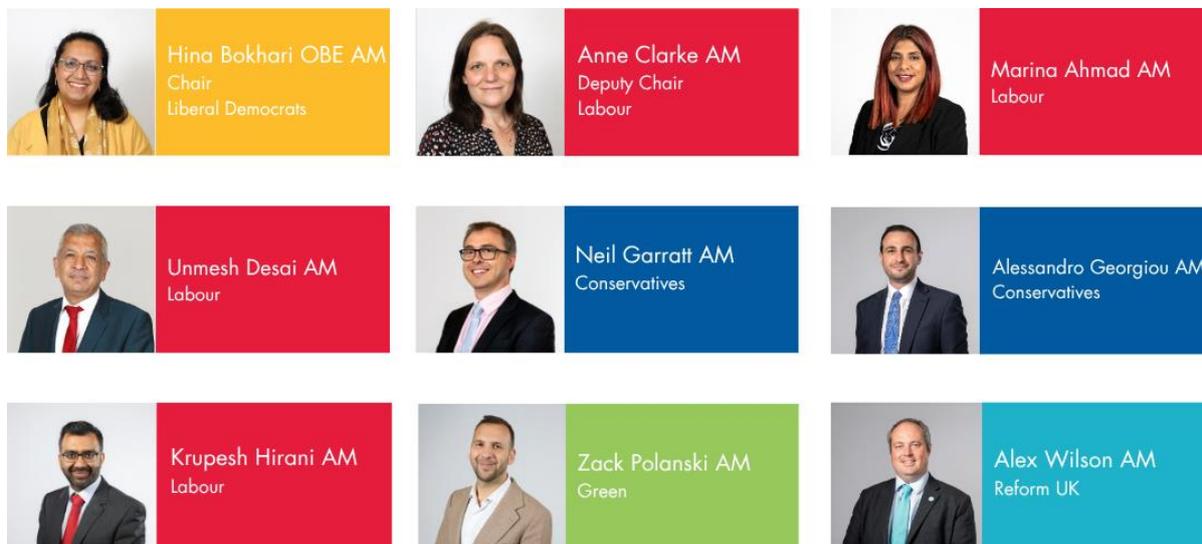
# A London for every child: Reversing the city's declining child population

Economy, Culture and Skills Committee

March 2026



## Economy, Culture and Skills Committee



The Economy, Culture and Skills Committee examines and reports on matters relating to economic development, culture, skills, sport and tourism in London, and leads on scrutiny of any actions or decisions taken by the Mayor in these areas. To read more about our work, [please visit our website](#).

### Contact us

**Tim Gallagher**

Senior Policy Adviser

[Tim.Gallagher@london.gov.uk](mailto:Tim.Gallagher@london.gov.uk)

**James Cotter**

Research Analyst

[James.Cotter@london.gov.uk](mailto:James.Cotter@london.gov.uk)

**Anthony Smyth**

External Communications Officer

[Anthony.Smyth@london.gov.uk](mailto:Anthony.Smyth@london.gov.uk)

**Saleha Fazal**

Committee Services Officer

[Saleha.Fazal@london.gov.uk](mailto:Saleha.Fazal@london.gov.uk)

# Contents

|  |    |
|--|----|
| Foreword.....  | 2  |
| Executive Summary .....                                      | 4  |
| Recommendations.....   | 6  |
| Chapter one: London’s changing demographics.....             | 8  |
| London’s child population.....                               | 8  |
| Birth and fertility rates .....                              | 9  |
| Migration .....  | 12 |
| Future projections.....                                      | 14 |
| Chapter two: Is London a child-friendly city?.....           | 16 |
| What do Londoners think? .....                               | 17 |
| Drivers of a declining child population .....                | 19 |
| Chapter three: Impacts of a declining child population ..... | 28 |
| Schools.....   | 28 |
| Other impacts on public services and the economy.....        | 36 |
| Chapter four: Making London a child-friendly city.....       | 38 |
| Policy coordination .....                                    | 38 |
| Child-friendly city recognition.....                         | 39 |
| Housing and the London Plan.....                             | 41 |
| Childcare .....  | 42 |
| Built environment and play .....                             | 43 |
| Play Sufficiency Action Plan.....                            | 45 |
| Committee Activity.....                                      | 47 |
| Investigation aims and objectives.....                       | 47 |
| Evidence gathering .....                                     | 47 |
| Other formats and languages .....                            | 49 |

## Foreword



**Hina Bokhari OBE AM**  
**Chair of the Economy, Culture and Skills Committee**

Imagine a city where children and families can truly thrive. A city where schools not only serve as places of learning, but as vibrant and bustling hubs of their local communities, where children and parents connect, share experiences, and support the local economy. A city where families can find homes that meet their needs, and where children can easily access safe, high-quality spaces to play, socialise, and develop. Imagine all of this in London.

London is currently facing a significant demographic challenge. The number of children living in the capital has fallen faster than anywhere else in the UK since the early 2010s, with the decline particularly pronounced in Inner London. Falling birth and fertility rates, combined with rising domestic migration out of the city, help explain this trend. With the highest housing and childcare costs in the country, raising a family in London is simply out of reach for many. Those who do stay often encounter neighbourhoods that are not designed with children in mind, or systems and attitudes that make family life more difficult than it should be.

Yet the presence of children is one of the strongest indicators of a healthy and well-functioning city. We cannot allow London to become a place where only a small number of families can afford to live and even fewer can manage to enjoy a good quality of life. Children and young people are essential to London's vibrancy as a global city. Providing the conditions for them to flourish as they grow up and choose to remain here as adults is essential to the city's long-term economic, social, and cultural dynamism, which further benefits the rest of the country.

In this investigation, the London Assembly Economy, Culture and Skills Committee examined the trends shaping the city's child population, the underlying causes, and the consequences for schools and other public services. Our goal throughout was to identify practical steps the Mayor of London could take to help make London a more child-friendly city.

We heard that falling pupil numbers are placing real pressures on London's schools. As enrolments decline, so too does funding, which makes already tight budgets even harder to manage. This can mean that school leaders are forced to make difficult decisions, including reducing the extracurricular activities that enrich pupils' experiences or cutting back on essential supports for children with special educational needs and disabilities.

To respond to these challenges, London needs better coordination of pupil place planning. We recommend that the Mayor shares data and expertise with London's local authorities, nearby education authorities, the Department for Education, and London Councils to support this. To help future-proof London's education system, it is also important that the Mayor provides boroughs with the relevant data and expertise to make informed decisions on how to use vacant school premises should pupil numbers rise again.

While some of the factors driving demographic change are systemic and evident on a national – and even international – scale, the Mayor can take actions to make London a welcoming city for families. This must start with improving coordination across distinct yet related policy areas such as housing, childcare, schools, and the built environment. To focus this effort, we call on the Mayor to designate a London Children's Ambassador and identify the steps required for London to be recognised globally as a UNICEF Child-Friendly City.

Families with children often cannot find a suitably sized home in London and are either forced to move to a different part of the city or out of the capital altogether. The publication of the Draft London Plan later this year offers a golden opportunity for the Mayor to include specific requirements for family-sized homes. As well as having enough space inside their homes, children need to have access to high-quality outdoor play space. We therefore recommend that the Mayor supports boroughs by developing a map of play spaces across London and leading the creation of a London Play Sufficiency Action Plan. We believe London should be ambitious and aspire to be the best city in the UK for children's play.

Given current trends, we urgently need to act to ensure that London is a city where families can – and want to – stay. As someone who is raising her own children in this city and has taught in London's primary schools for over 20 years, I want London's future to be one in which children are at its centre. So that young people feel they have the choice to live in this city and raise their own families here one day. The recommendations in this report set out a path for the Mayor to make London a place where children and their parents can live happy, healthy, and fulfilling lives. By pursuing these recommendations, we believe it is possible to strengthen not only the prospects of the youngest Londoners, but the future of the city itself.

In short, a child-friendly city is a friendly city for all.

## Executive Summary

### London is facing a significant demographic challenge

After a decade of rapid growth in the 2000s, the number of children living in London has declined at a faster rate than elsewhere in the UK since the early 2010s. This is primarily due to a decrease in birth and fertility rates and an increase in domestic migration out of the capital, and the effects are particularly pronounced in Inner London. Although these trends are not unique to London, a considerable number of prospective parents may feel forced to leave the capital to raise children or else not have children at all, rather than this being their choice.

The London Assembly Economy, Culture and Skills Committee set out to investigate current and projected trends in London's child population, including how these differ between Inner and Outer London. We wanted to understand the underlying causes and examine the impacts on the capital's public services, particularly its schools. We aimed to identify actions the Mayor of London could take to mitigate the impacts and make the capital more child-friendly.

### What are the drivers of a declining child population in London?

Families in London face serious financial and practical barriers. The cost of renting or buying a home is out of reach for many and is increasingly driving people away from the capital. London has the highest nursery costs in England, and Government support does not fully cover the costs of childcare. For families who stay, neighbourhoods in London do not always meet their needs, both in terms of the built environment and the attitudes they face from neighbours and bureaucratic structures.

### What impact is this having on schools and what can be done?

The declining number of children is already affecting schools. Schools with falling roll numbers are facing increasing financial pressure since their funding is provided on a per-pupil basis. This is borne out in the rising number of schools that have closed or merged in London in recent years. For schools that remain open, attempts to balance their budgets can affect curricula, extracurricular opportunities, and special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) provision.

Falling pupil numbers put significant pressures on London's school system, and these cannot be managed by boroughs acting alone. Although the Greater London Authority (GLA) does not have formal powers over school provision, the Mayor of London can support local authorities to make evidence-based decisions by sharing relevant data and expertise:

- **Sharing data and expertise to support pupil place planning:** The Mayor should make data and expertise available to London's local authorities, nearby education authorities, the Department for Education, and London Councils to support evidence-based decisions in school place planning.
- **Supporting evidence-based decisions on the use of school buildings:** London's school system could be future-proofed by keeping some educational sites in use and

available for a time when they may be needed again. If a former school can continue to be used for education or related purposes, this delivers more for the community than letting it be redeveloped and buying other sites for nursery places, specialist SEND facilities, additional play space, 16-19 education, adult education, or other uses. We call on the Mayor to make relevant data and expertise available to London's local authorities to support evidence-based decisions on the optimal use of vacant school premises.

### **How can we make London a child-friendly city?**

We want London to be a city where children, young people, and their families can thrive and flourish. Our city should be one where they can grow up living happy and healthy lives and stay to contribute to the city's social and economic development. Even though many of the drivers of London's declining child population may be systemic, child-friendly policies can make a difference to the decisions of prospective parents if they see that the city is a welcoming place for children. We call on the Mayor of London to act in the following areas:

- **Policy coordination:** Improving London's child-friendliness across distinct yet related policy areas will require effective coordination, which is currently lacking. To strengthen coordination, the Mayor should designate a London Children's Ambassador who ensures that child-friendliness is considered across all GLA policy areas, including by providing input to statutory strategies, mayoral mandates, and delivery plans.
- **Child-friendly city recognition:** Becoming an officially recognised child-friendly city would incentivise policy decisions that improve the lives of children and enhance London's appeal for families. The Mayor can achieve this by identifying the steps required for London to become a UNICEF Child Friendly City and pursuing actions that will enable this to happen, including by building partnerships with key stakeholders.
- **Housing:** There is currently a lack of suitably sized family homes being developed in London. To address this, the Mayor should use his statutory powers to include specific requirements for homes suitable for children in the next London Plan, while providing sufficient flexibility for local authorities to take local circumstances into account.
- **Built environment and play:** Children's play space is increasingly being squeezed out of new housing developments in London. To support boroughs in fulfilling their responsibilities to ensure sufficient space for play and informal recreation under the London Plan, the Mayor should develop a map of all the play spaces in London.
- **Play sufficiency:** London should be a national leader on play sufficiency and take active steps to assess, improve, and protect children's opportunities for play. To achieve this, the Mayor should work with the proposed London Children's Ambassador and London's local authorities to develop a London Play Sufficiency Action Plan.

## Recommendations

### Recommendation 1

The Mayor should make data and expertise available to London's local authorities, nearby education authorities, the Department for Education, and London Councils to support evidence-based decisions in school place planning. The Mayor should commit to making this information and expertise available in a usable form for relevant bodies in time for the 2026-27 academic year.

---

### Recommendation 2

The Mayor should make relevant data and expertise available to London's local authorities to support evidence-based decisions on the optimal use of vacant school premises. This includes the GLA's demographic forecasts, pupil number projections, and good practices from local authorities that have successfully repurposed school premises. The Mayor should commit to making this data and expertise available in a suitable format and at a time useful for the authorities considering how to reuse a school building prior to the 2026-27 academic year.

---

### Recommendation 3

The Mayor should designate a London Children's Ambassador within the GLA who will improve coordination across policy areas to make London a child-friendly city. The London Children's Ambassador should ensure that child-friendliness is considered across all areas of GLA policy, including by providing input to the Mayor's statutory strategies, mayoral mandates, and delivery plans. The London Children's Ambassador should be designated through a transparent process and be in place by the end of 2026.

---

### Recommendation 4

London should seek to become a UNICEF Child Friendly City. The Mayor should identify the steps required for London to achieve this recognition and pursue actions that enable him to do so. This will involve working closely with London's 33 local authorities and building partnerships with key stakeholders in civil society, the private sector, academia, media, and children's organisations. The Mayor should commit by June 2026 to pursuing this recognition for London.

---

### Recommendation 5

The Mayor should include specific requirements for homes suitable for children across all types of tenure in the next London Plan. These requirements should be included in the draft London Plan, which is due to be published in 2026.

---

### Recommendation 6

The GLA should develop a map of all the spaces in London that children and young people can access for play and informal recreation. This would help boroughs identify where they have a deficit or surplus of provision and support cross-borough collaboration. An online interactive

version of the map would also help families with children identify opportunities for play and informal recreation across London. The Mayor should start to consult with boroughs on the production of this map by June 2026, and it should be completed by March 2027.

---

### **Recommendation 7**

The Mayor should work with the proposed London Children's Ambassador and London's local authorities to develop a London Play Sufficiency Action Plan. This would involve conducting research on children's opportunities for play across the city and developing strategic priorities that would embed play sufficiency considerations in decision-making across London. The Mayor should commit to developing a Play Sufficiency Action Plan by June 2026 and research should begin by January 2027, with a view to finalising a publicly accessible Action Plan by September 2027.

---

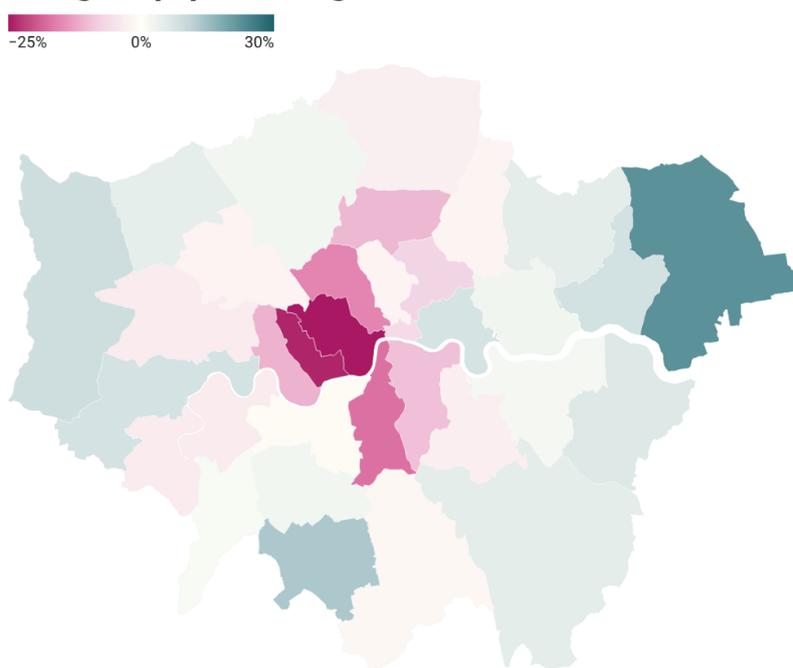
## Chapter one: London’s changing demographics

### London’s child population

London is facing a significant demographic challenge. After a decade of rapid growth in the 2000s, the number of children living in London has since gone into decline at a faster rate than elsewhere in the UK since the early 2010s.<sup>1</sup> This has given rise to concerns that London – and particularly Inner London – could become a “child-free area”.<sup>2</sup>

Between 2013 and 2023, London’s population of 0 to 9 year-olds decreased by 99,100, despite the overall population of the capital increasing by 506,000 during the same period.<sup>3</sup> This decline has been sharper in Inner London than Outer London. Data from the 2011 and 2021 censuses show that while most Inner London boroughs saw decreases in the number of children aged 0-10 during this period, some Outer London boroughs experienced either an increase or remained stable.<sup>4</sup> This is illustrated in Figure 1.

**Figure 1: Change in population aged 0-10 between 2011 and 2021 censuses<sup>5</sup>**



Map: London Assembly Research Unit • Source: Department for Education • Map data: © Crown copyright and database right 2018 • Created with Datawrapper

Source: Map produced by the London Assembly Research Unit based on ONS data

<sup>1</sup> London Assembly Economy, Culture and Skills Committee, Informal briefing from GLA City Intelligence, 14 October 2025.

<sup>2</sup> Centre for London (2022), [‘Is inner London becoming a ‘child-free area’?’](#).

<sup>3</sup> Trust for London (2025), [‘The age distribution of the population’](#).

<sup>4</sup> GLA City Intelligence (2024), [London’s population of young children – current and future](#), p. 37.

<sup>5</sup> ONS (2025), ‘Mid-2011 to mid-2024 detailed time series edition of this dataset’, [Estimates of the population for England and Wales](#), sheet MYEB1.

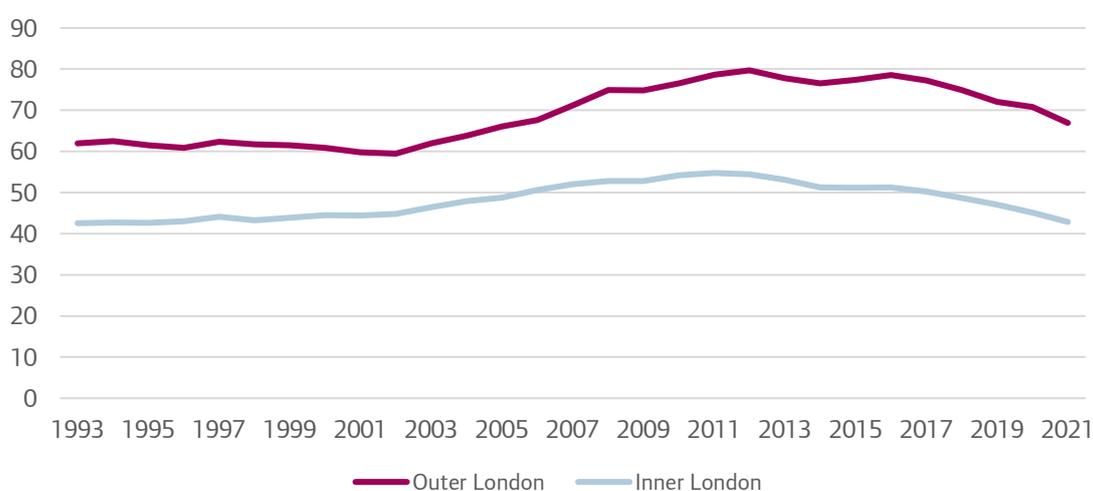
In contrast with the notable reduction in the number of children and young people in London between 2011 and 2021, the number of people in the 40-64 age group increased during the same period.<sup>6</sup> The number of 55 to 59 year-olds in Inner London grew by more than 45 per cent, including by around 60 per cent in Southwark, Lewisham, and Lambeth.<sup>7</sup> As a result, recent analysis by the Resolution Foundation concludes that London is “the only major city in Britain that’s getting older”.<sup>8</sup> However, there are still proportionately fewer older people living in London than in the rest of the country. 9.5 per cent of people in Inner London and 13.8 per cent in Outer London are over the age of 65, compared to 19.9 per cent in the rest of England.<sup>9</sup>

## Birth and fertility rates

### Birth rates

A key factor influencing the number of children in London are birth rates. As Figure 2 shows, there was an increase in births in Inner and Outer London in the 2000s, reaching a peak of nearly 135,000 in 2012. Since then, birth rates have fallen steadily, other than a brief rise in 2016, and this has occurred in both Inner and Outer London.<sup>10</sup> In the decade to 2025, annual births have fallen by around 20 per cent.<sup>11</sup> In 2025, birth rates in Outer London were around 10 per cent above the England average, compared with 10 per cent below the England average in Inner London.<sup>12</sup>

**Figure 2: Annual births in London (thousands), 1993-2021<sup>13</sup>**



Source: Graph produced by the London Assembly Research Unit using ONS data

<sup>6</sup> GLA City Intelligence (2024), *London’s population of young children – current and future*, p. 41.

<sup>7</sup> OnLondon (2022), ‘Richard Brown: What has the 2021 census told us about London so far?’.

<sup>8</sup> Resolution Foundation (2025), ‘A baby bust and Brexit mean that London is the only major city in Britain that’s getting older’.

<sup>9</sup> Trust for London (2025), ‘The age distribution of the population’ (accessed 4 December 2025).

<sup>10</sup> GLA City Intelligence (2024), *London’s population of young children – current and future*, p. 11.

<sup>11</sup> London Assembly Economy, Culture and Skills Committee, Informal briefing from GLA City Intelligence, 14 October 2025.

<sup>12</sup> London Assembly Economy, Culture and Skills Committee, Informal briefing from GLA City Intelligence, 14 October 2025.

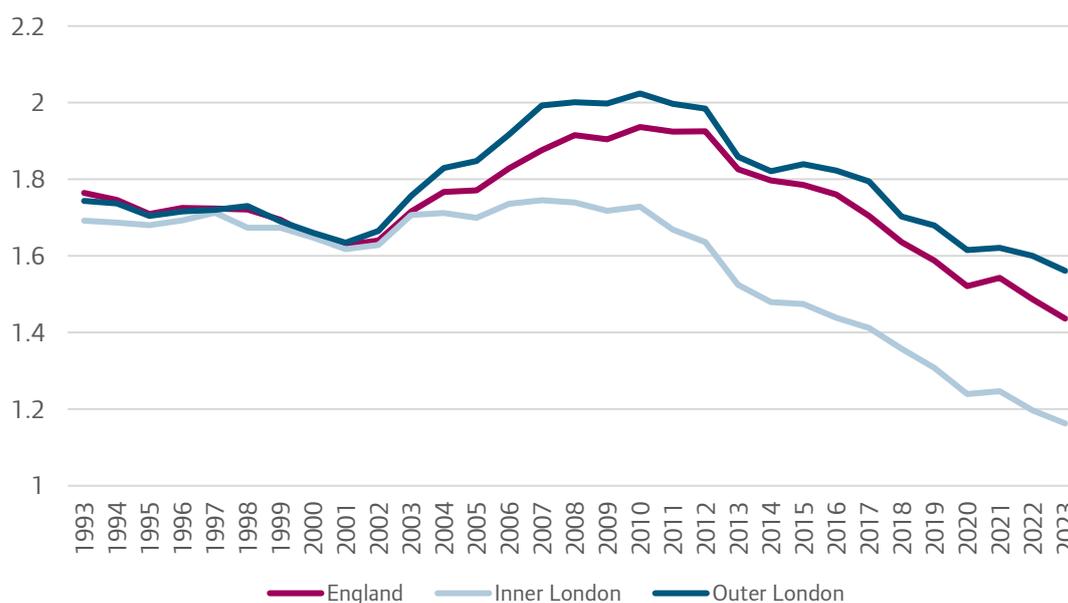
<sup>13</sup> ONS (2023), ‘Numbers of live births by local authority and MSOA, England and Wales: mid-year 1992 to mid-year 2021’.

### Fertility rates

Birth rates are affected by both the number of potential mothers and fertility rates, which are defined as the number of children born per woman of childbearing age (between 15 and 44 years).<sup>14</sup> The decrease in London’s birth rate has occurred despite there being an increase in the number of women of childbearing age living in London.<sup>15</sup> This implies that the decrease in the number of births in London since 2012 is due to women having fewer children on average.<sup>16</sup> In other words, London is experiencing a declining fertility rate.

Declining fertility rates are not unique to London. In recent years, there has been a fall in fertility rates across England and Wales and in many other comparable countries. The total fertility rate (TFR)<sup>17</sup> in England and Wales in 2024 was 1.41 births per woman, the lowest on record.<sup>18</sup> The global TFR in 2024 was 2.2 births per woman on average, down from around 5 in the 1960s and 3.3 in 1990.<sup>19</sup> According to the United Nations, this decline is expected to continue, although its timing differs substantially across countries and regions.<sup>20</sup> For the population size to remain the same without positive net migration, the TFR needs to be around 2.1 children per woman, which is known as the replacement level.<sup>21</sup>

**Figure 3: Total Fertility Rate in Inner and Outer London and England, 1993-2023<sup>22</sup>**



Source: Graph produced by the London Assembly Research Unit based on data analysis by GLA City Intelligence

<sup>14</sup> ONS (2024), [‘How is the fertility rate changing in England and Wales?’](#).

<sup>15</sup> GLA City Intelligence (2024), [London’s population of young children – current and future](#), p. 12.

<sup>16</sup> GLA City Intelligence (2024), [London’s population of young children – current and future](#), p. 12.

<sup>17</sup> The total fertility rate (TFR) is defined by the ONS as “the average number of live children a group of women would have if they experienced the age-specific fertility rates for the calendar year in question throughout their childbearing lifespan.” ONS (2025), [‘Births in England and Wales: 2024 \(refreshed populations\)’](#).

<sup>18</sup> ONS (2025), [‘Births in England and Wales: 2024 \(refreshed populations\)’](#).

<sup>19</sup> United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (2025), [World Fertility 2024, p. VII](#).

<sup>20</sup> United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (2025), [World Fertility 2024, p. VII](#).

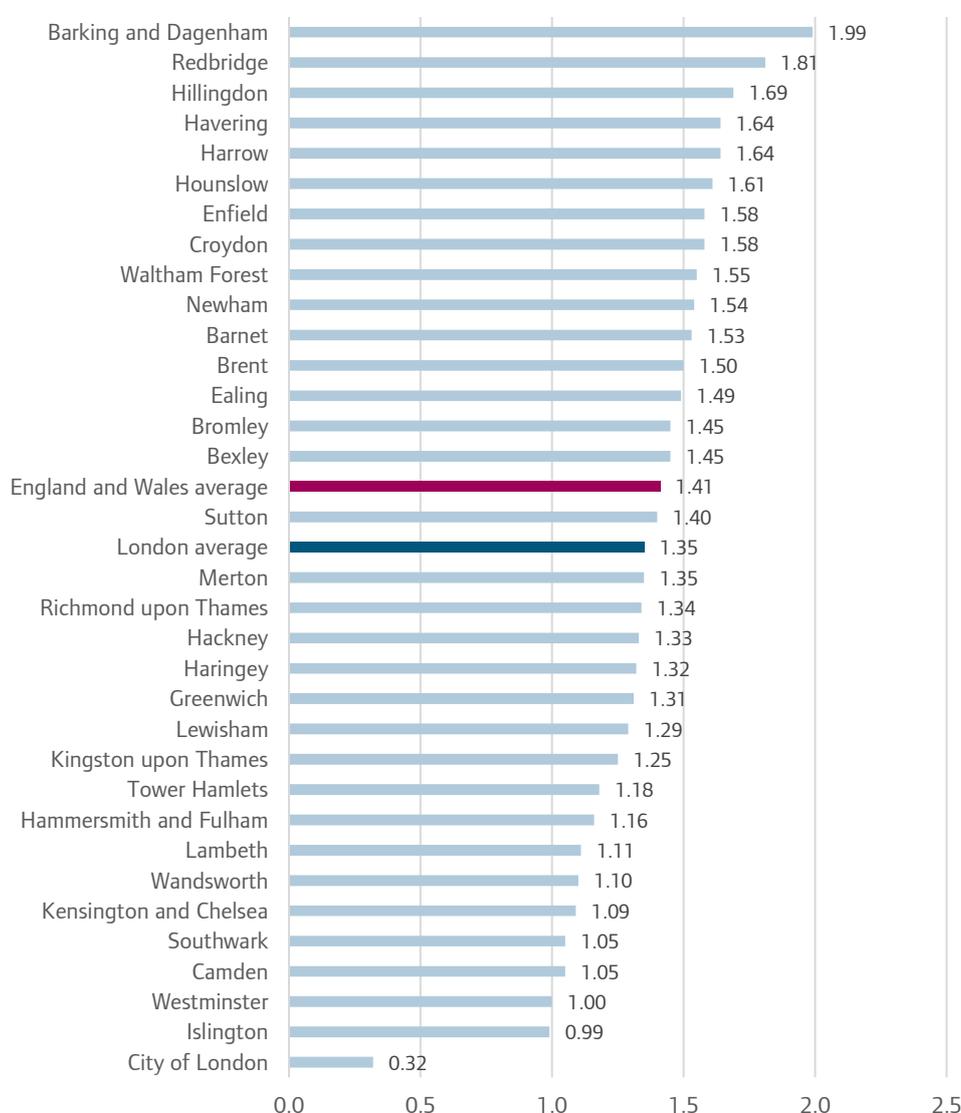
<sup>21</sup> ONS (2024), [‘How is the fertility rate changing in England and Wales?’](#).

<sup>22</sup> GLA City Intelligence (2025), [‘Annual estimates of total fertility rates, from 1993 to 2023’](#).

The TFR in Outer London broadly corresponds with that of England. However, as Figure 3 shows, the fall in the TFR in Inner London has been considerably sharper than in the rest of England and Wales. Although London saw an increase in the TFR from 1.33 in 2023 to 1.35 in 2024, this remains below than the national average of 1.41.<sup>23</sup>

There is considerable variation in fertility rates across London boroughs. As Figure 4 highlights, the TFR is particularly low in some Inner London boroughs. In 2024, other than the City of London, Islington had the lowest fertility rate at 0.99 children per woman, followed by Westminster at 1 and Southwark and Camden at 1.05. Barking and Dagenham had the highest fertility rate at 1.99 children per women, followed by Redbridge at 1.81.<sup>24</sup>

**Figure 4: Total Fertility Rate by London borough, 2024<sup>25</sup>**



Source: Graph produced by the London Assembly Research Unit using ONS data

<sup>23</sup> ONS (2025), [‘Births in England and Wales: 2024 \(refreshed populations\)’](#).

<sup>24</sup> ONS (2025), [‘Births in England and Wales: birth registrations \(2024 edition\)’](#).

<sup>25</sup> ONS (2025), [‘Births in England and Wales: birth registrations \(2024 edition\)’](#).

### **Postponement of fertility**

Evidence suggests that young people in London are now waiting until later in life to have their first child. In 2024, London had the highest average age (32.5 years) of mothers having children across England and Wales, where the average age was 31 years.<sup>26</sup> Academic research has associated the decisions of parents to postpone having children until later in life with social factors including expanding education, rising income, the rise of gender equality, female labour force participation, consumerism, urbanisation, globalisation, and modern contraception.<sup>27</sup>

During our investigation, Dr Bernice Kuang (Research Fellow in Demography, University of Southampton) explained how delayed fertility can be influenced by factors such as a longer time spent in education. This is related to a longer transition to adulthood, which means it takes longer “to establish yourself in your career, to buy a house, [and] to leave the parental home.”<sup>28</sup> She commented that increased economic precarity and uncertainty over finances may also add to people’s reluctance to start a family. Finally, she highlighted the role played by younger people’s changing priorities for what they would like to do before they start a family, such as travel, leisure, or spending time alone with their partner.<sup>29</sup>

### **Migration**

Domestic migration is a further key factor influencing the number of children in London. People moving out of Inner London or out of London altogether to start a family is not a new phenomenon. Analysis by GLA City Intelligence notes that historically, “there has been a pattern for young adults to move to London for education and work; and later, to move outward from central London to start families, or with young children.”<sup>30</sup> However, evidence suggests that the trend of people leaving London to start families has increased in recent years.

To understand how domestic migration influences the number of children in London, it is helpful to disaggregate migration flows by age group. Figure 5 shows that there has been a steady net inflow to London of those aged 18-24 over the last two decades. This contrasts with a consistent net outflow from London to other parts of the UK for all other age groups. During the same period, the age group most likely to be parents of young children, those aged 25-44, shows the greatest variability in net flow. Net outflow for this group has consistently increased since the 2008 financial crash, with a peak in 2021 due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Since 2022, net outflow for this group has returned to its long-term trend. The net outflow of this age group has exceeded all other age groups since 2016.<sup>31</sup>

---

<sup>26</sup> ONS (2025), '[Births in England and Wales: 2024 \(refreshed populations\)](#)'.

<sup>27</sup> Basten, S., et al. (2021), '[Future Fertility in Low Fertility Countries](#)', *Vienna Institute of Demography Working Papers*, pp. 1-137.

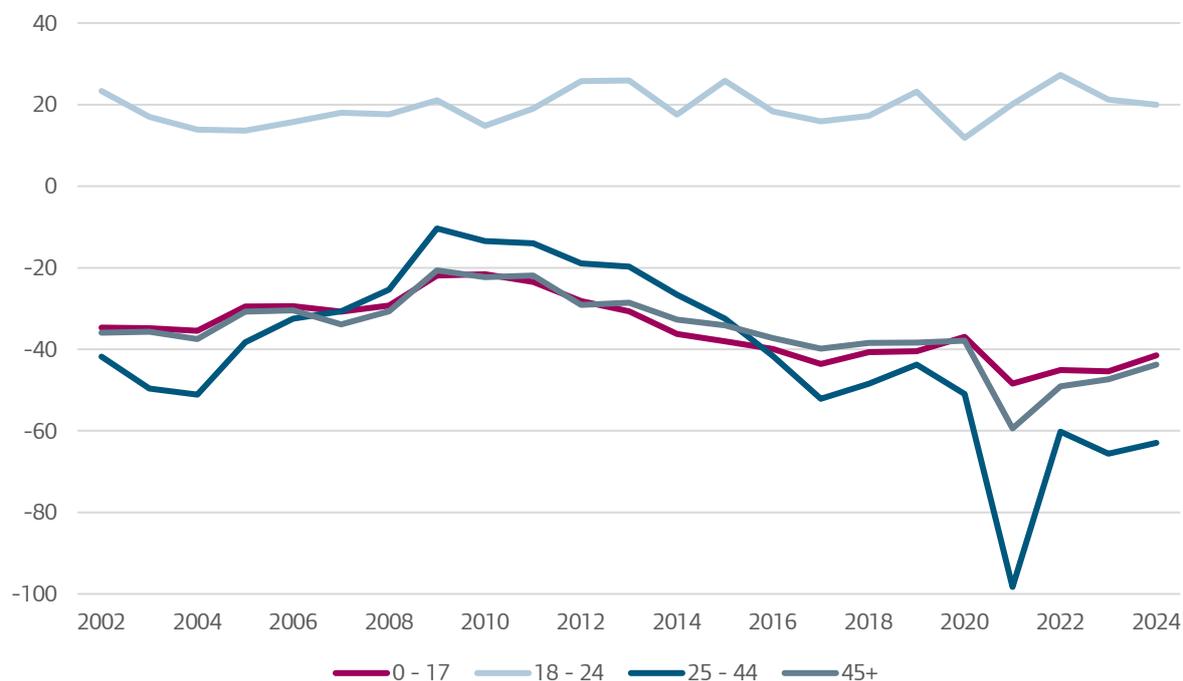
<sup>28</sup> London Assembly Economy, Culture and Skills Committee, [Transcript](#), 14 October 2025, p. 3.

<sup>29</sup> London Assembly Economy, Culture and Skills Committee, [Transcript](#), 14 October 2025, p. 3.

<sup>30</sup> GLA City Intelligence (2024), [London's population of young children – current and future](#), p. 26.

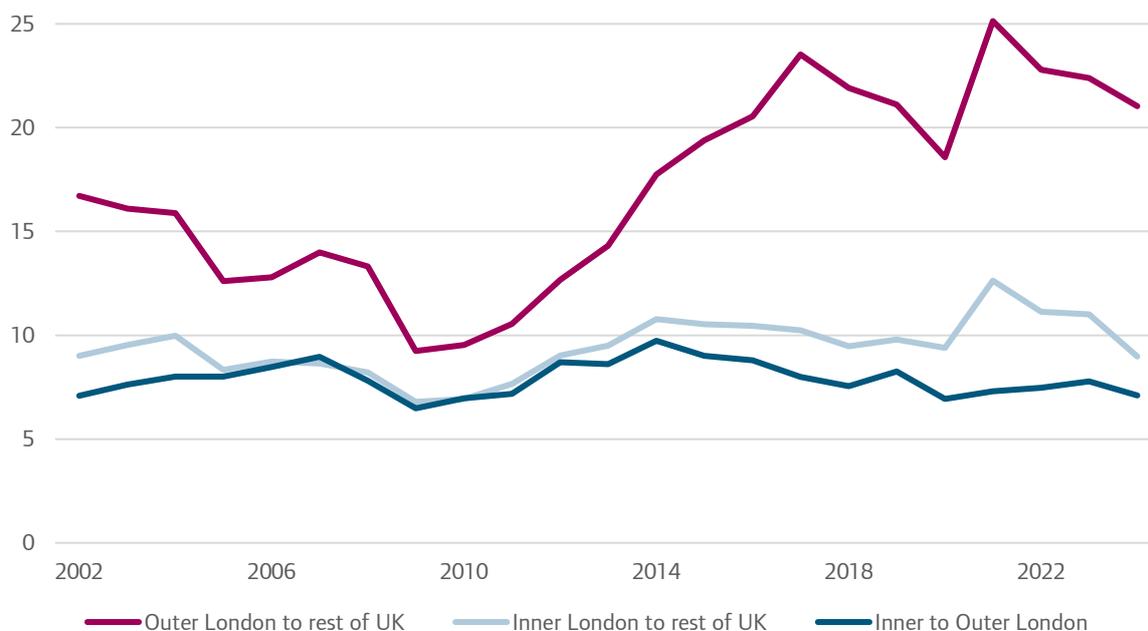
<sup>31</sup> GLA City Intelligence (2024), [London's population of young children – current and future](#), p. 28.

**Figure 5: London’s net domestic migration flows by age group, from year ending June 2002 to year ending June 2024 (annual flow in thousands)<sup>32</sup>**



Source: Graph produced by the London Assembly Research Unit based on data analysis by GLA City Intelligence

**Figure 6: London’s net domestic migration flows by flow path, among children 0-10, from year ending June 2002 to year ending June 2024 (annual flow in thousands)<sup>33</sup>**



Source: Graph produced by the London Assembly Research Unit based on data analysis by GLA City Intelligence

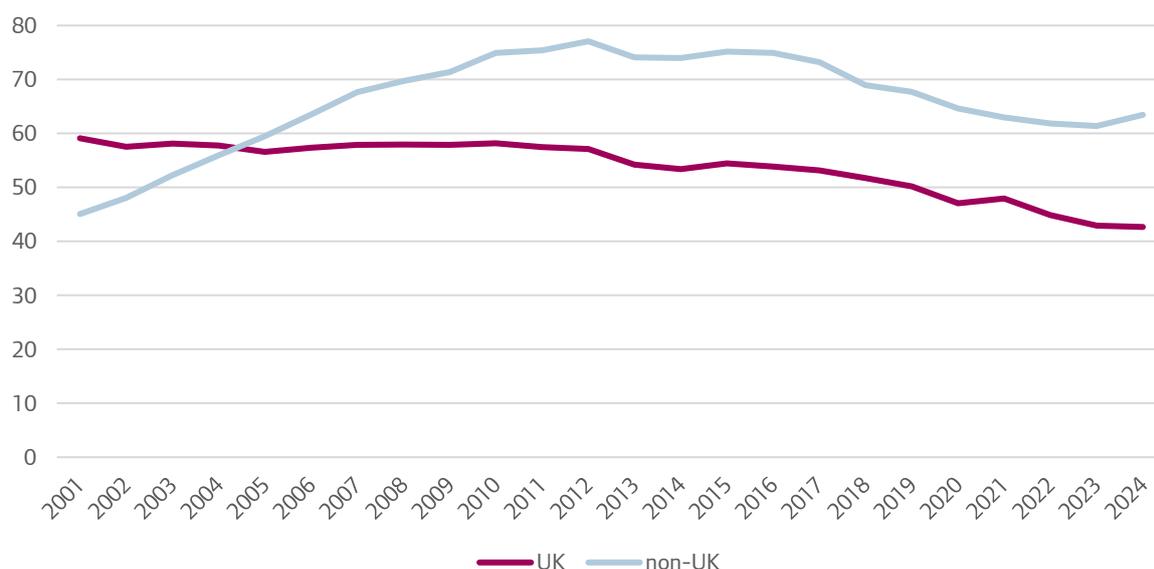
<sup>32</sup> ONS (2025), 'Internal migration in England and Wales', data analysis provided by GLA City Intelligence.

<sup>33</sup> GLA City Intelligence (2025), [Modelled population backseries](#), File: '2002 to 2024 full\_series\_lad.rds'.

We can better understand the influence of domestic migration patterns by distinguishing between migration from Inner and Outer London. Figure 6 shows that there has been a steady net outflow of children aged 0-10 from Inner London to Outer London over the last two decades (at around 7,000 per year). Similarly, the net outflow from Inner London to the rest of the UK has remained relatively stable at around 10,000 children per year. In contrast, the net outflow from Outer London to the rest of the UK more than doubled from about 10,000 in 2010 to over 20,000 in 2016 and has since remained above this higher level.<sup>34</sup> Analysis by City Intelligence suggests that people moving out of London are primarily settling in other large cities in the UK or close to London in the commuter belt.<sup>35</sup> Therefore, many of these people may still work in London and continue to travel to London for professional or leisure reasons.

Despite increased international migration in recent years, evidence suggests that this has not a significant effect on birth rates. As Figure 7 illustrates, the elevated birth rates in London in the 2000s were partly driven by migration and the higher rate of births to mothers born outside the UK relative to those born in the UK. However, since 2012, the number of births to non-UK born mothers has fallen in a broadly similar pattern to births to UK-born mothers.<sup>36</sup>

**Figure 7: Births in London by mother’s country of birth, 2001 to 2024 (thousands)<sup>37</sup>**



Source: Graph produced by the London Assembly Research Unit based on data analysis by GLA City Intelligence

### Future projections

London’s declining birth and fertility rates mean that the fall in the number of children living in the capital will likely continue in future. The GLA produces annually updated population projections based on a range of migration, fertility, and mortality assumptions. Although these

<sup>34</sup> GLA City Intelligence (2024), [London’s population of young children – current and future](#), p. 29.

<sup>35</sup> GLA City Intelligence (2023), [‘Domestic Migration, London statistics’](#), *Domestic Migration*.

<sup>36</sup> London Assembly Economy, Culture and Skills Committee, Informal briefing from GLA City Intelligence, 14 October 2025. GLA City Intelligence (2025), [‘Births by Mother’s Country of Birth in London, 2001-2024’](#).

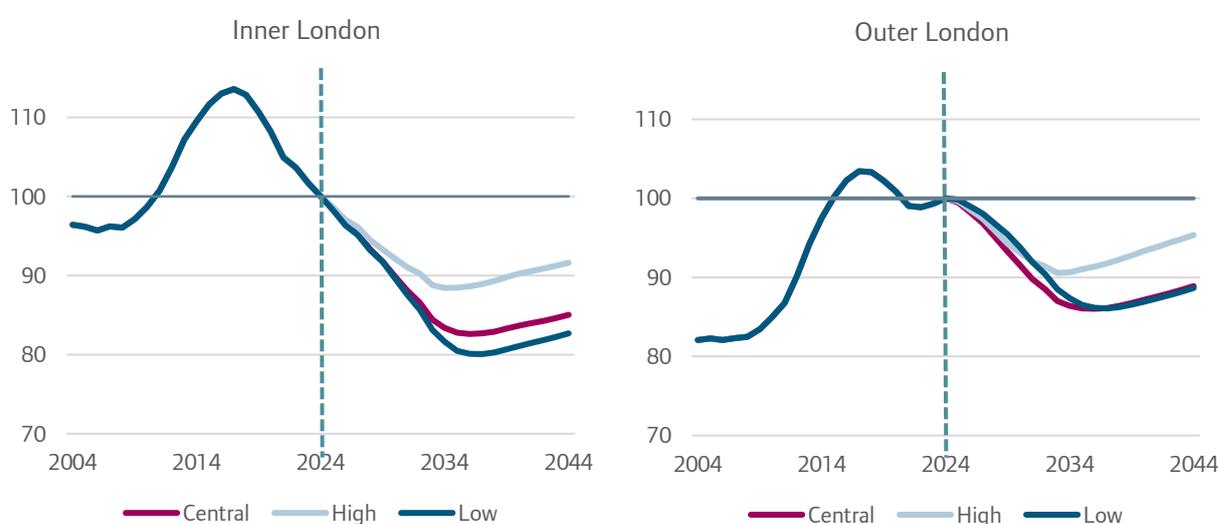
<sup>37</sup> GLA City Intelligence (2025), [‘Births by Mother’s Country of Birth in London, 2001-2024’](#).

project that London’s total population will continue to rise over the next twenty years, the child population in both Inner and Outer London will remain below the 2024 level until at least 2044 (see Figure 8). The number of children aged 5-10 is projected to decline until around 2034, when it is expected to rebound but remain below 2024 levels. It follows that the population aged 11-15 will likely increase a few years later from the late 2030s onwards.<sup>38</sup> If these projections come to pass, this will have significant impacts on schools and other public services in London. These impacts are discussed in further detail later in the report.

**Figure 8: Projections of London’s child population, indexed<sup>39</sup>**

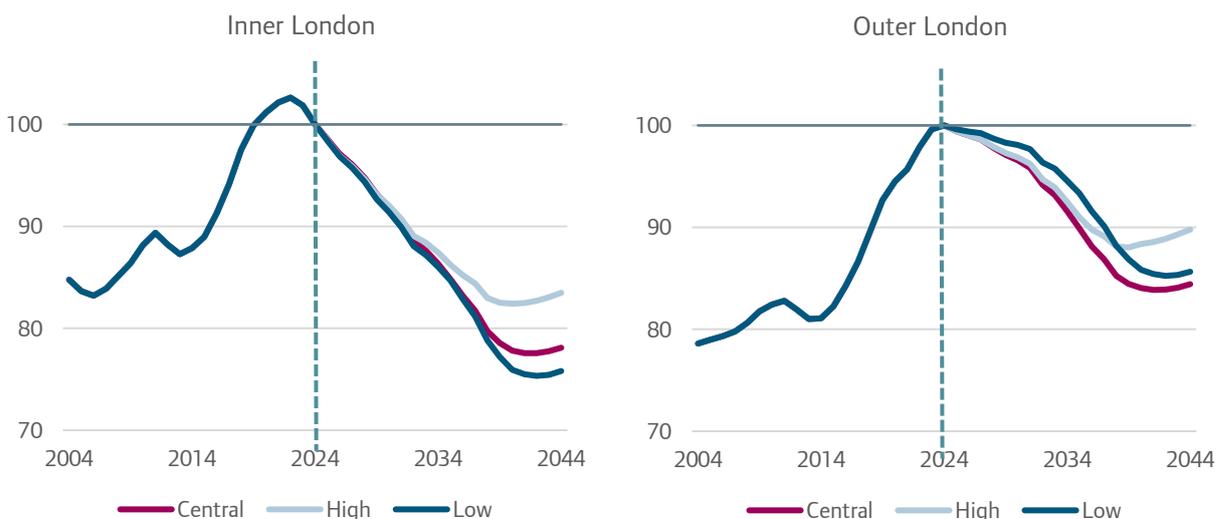
**Population age 5 to 10 – indexed**

100 = 2024 population



**Population age 11 to 15 – indexed**

100 = 2024 population



Source: Graphs produced by the London Assembly Research Unit based on data analysis by GLA City Intelligence

<sup>38</sup> GLA City Intelligence (2025), '2024-based research outputs', Demographic projections – research outputs.

<sup>39</sup> GLA City Intelligence (2025), '2024-based research outputs', Demographic projections – research outputs.

## Chapter two: Is London a child-friendly city?

To understand the potential drivers of London's declining child population, we wanted to understand whether London is seen as a child-friendly city. Contributors to our investigation mentioned several factors that make London an attractive city for families with children. These include ample access to green space compared with other European capitals, free transport for under-11s, and the city's cultural offering, including free museums.<sup>40</sup>

Referencing recent research on families and young people who have moved out of London due to being homeless or at risk of homelessness, Katherine Hill (Strategic Programme Manager, 4in10) noted that people are attracted to London's diversity and, even if they leave, they will continue to be drawn back.<sup>41</sup>

---

*"A lot of people, even when they have been placed all over, over time will make their way back and a lot of that is to do with London's diversity. They feel they can be from lots of different communities, and they can find a place here and feel comfortable here."<sup>42</sup>*

### **Katherine Hill, Strategic Programme Manager, 4in10**

---

We invited Londoners to share their experience of raising children and their reasons for staying, leaving, or considering leaving London.<sup>43</sup> When asked about their reasons for planning to stay, respondents most often cited work-related factors, including the wide range of job opportunities in London and the ability to commute with relative ease. Others emphasised the importance of being close to friends and family, having children in stable schools, and the availability of green space.<sup>44</sup>

“ Access to incredible cultural events and green spaces plays a significant role. As a multicultural family, the diversity of London is crucial for us. ”

“ We have a close support network nearby including parents, siblings and friends. Also, the schools are very good. ”

---

<sup>40</sup> London Assembly Economy, Culture and Skills Committee, [Transcript](#), 14 October 2025, p. 21 & [Transcript, Panel 2](#), 13 November 2025, p. 1.

<sup>41</sup> London Assembly Economy, Culture and Skills Committee, [Transcript](#), 14 October 2025, p. 21.

<sup>42</sup> London Assembly Economy, Culture and Skills Committee, [Transcript](#), 14 October 2025, p. 21.

<sup>43</sup> The total number of respondents was 85. The respondents to this online form were self-selected. The respondents cannot be considered representative of the London population. The results should therefore be treated with caution. The findings provide the Committee with an overall impression of Londoners' experiences but should not be considered a precise reflection of these. The full results and further details on the methodology and limitations can be found [here](#).

<sup>44</sup> London Assembly Research Unit (2025), [Key findings from Economy, Culture & Skills Committee call for evidence – online form](#).

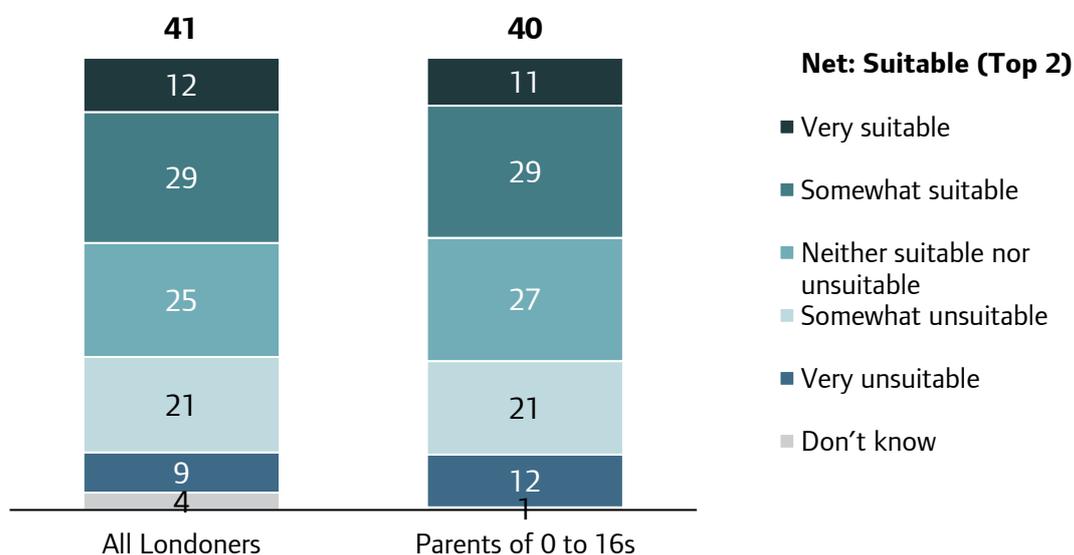
“Closeness to work, galleries, great transport links, parks, cinema, restaurants and all on offer. If it had a beach as well it would be perfect.”

Despite these positive aspects, families with children in London face significant financial and practical challenges. These include the availability and affordability of housing, childcare, and child-friendly neighbourhoods that allow children and families to thrive. As Katherine Hill commented, people have long “left the city for the leafier suburbs, perhaps to raise children.”<sup>45</sup> However, she added that we now need to question “whether that is a matter of choice, or whether people are feeling that they are being forced to leave, possibly where they would have preferred to stay”.<sup>46</sup>

### What do Londoners think?

We conducted a representative survey of Londoners to better understand their views on London’s suitability as a place to raise children.<sup>47</sup> The results suggest that four in ten Londoners (41 per cent) consider the city to be a suitable place to raise children. In contrast, almost a third (30 per cent) consider it to be unsuitable. When we consider only the responses from parents of children aged 0 to 16, the results remain broadly similar. The results are illustrated in Figure 9.

**Figure 9: Londoners’ views on London’s suitability for children<sup>48</sup>**



Source: GLA City Intelligence

<sup>45</sup> London Assembly Economy, Culture and Skills Committee, [Transcript](#), 14 October 2025, p. 1.

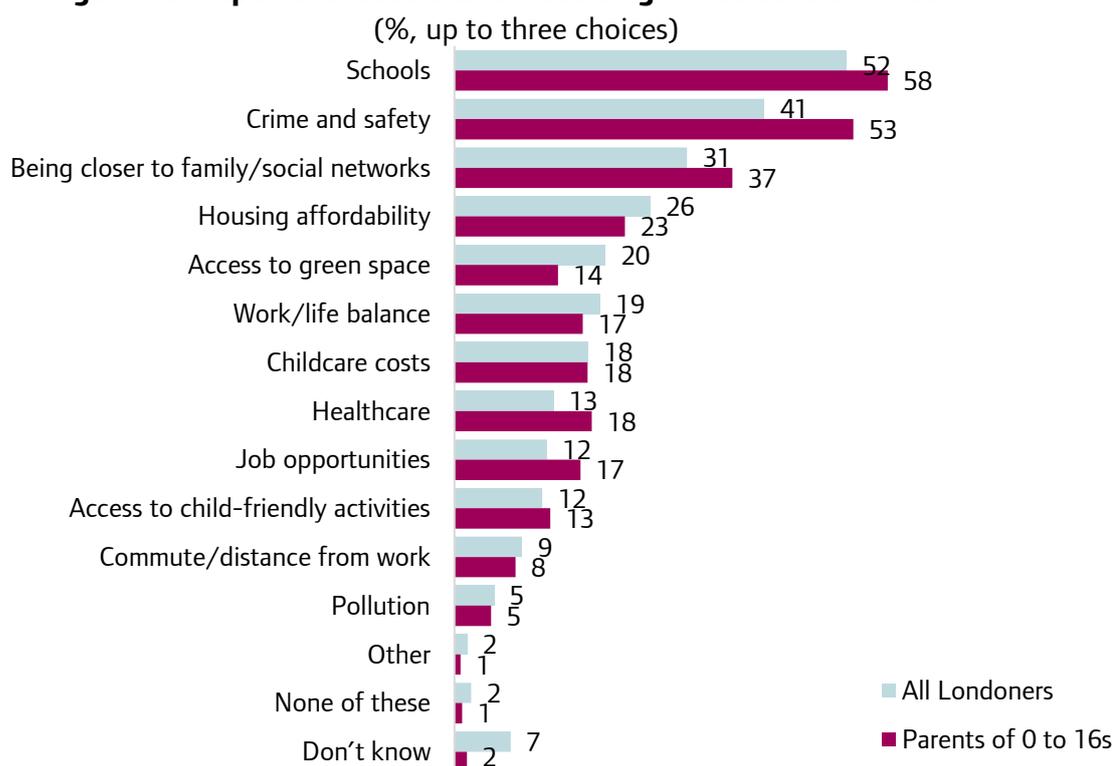
<sup>46</sup> London Assembly Economy, Culture and Skills Committee, [Transcript](#), 14 October 2025, p. 1.

<sup>47</sup> GLA City Intelligence (2025), [London Assembly Children in London Polling – October 2025](#). The survey was conducted by YouGov for the GLA between 17 October and 3 November 2025, with a response of 1,416 London residents aged 18+. Respondents completed the survey online from an email link. The figures have been weighted to be representative of all London adults.

<sup>48</sup> GLA City Intelligence (2025), [London Assembly Children in London Polling – October 2025](#). Question: “How suitable do you think London is as a place to raise children?”

When asked what factors are most important when deciding where to raise children, both Londoners generally and current parents reported schools, crime and safety, and nearby family and social networks as the most common important factors they would consider. Current parents of children aged 0 to 16 were more likely to consider these as important factors than other Londoners. These results and other considerations that are important for Londoners, are shown in Figure 10.

**Figure 10: Important factors when deciding where to raise children<sup>49</sup>**



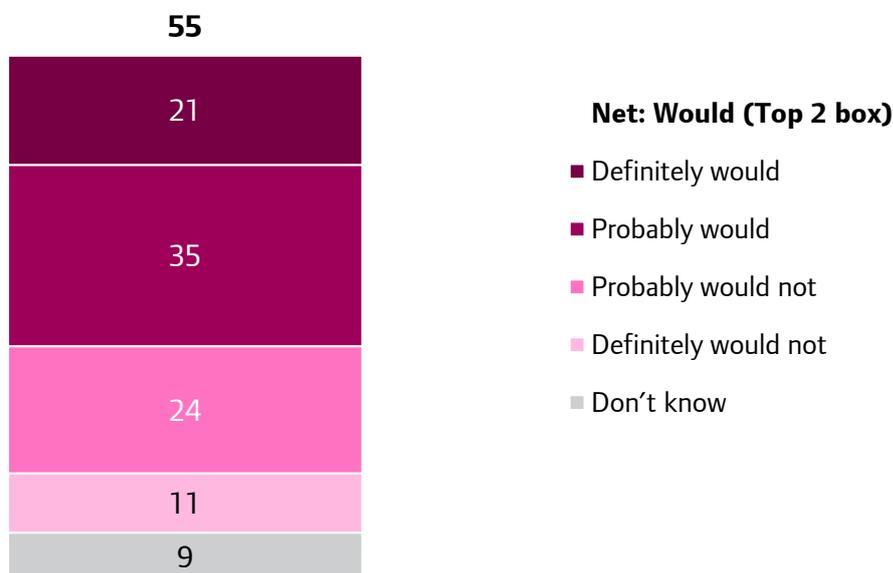
Source: GLA City Intelligence

We asked Londoners about their intentions to have children in future. Of those aged between 18 and 50 who do not currently have children, four in ten (39 per cent) plan to have them in future. These are almost evenly split between those who state they ‘definitely’ and ‘probably’ will have children. Of the Londoners planning to have children in future, we asked whether they would want to raise them in London. Over half (55 per cent) say that they would either ‘definitely’ or ‘probably’ raise their children in London, compared with 35 per cent who would not (see Figure 11). Of parents currently raising children in London, three quarters (73 per cent) plan to continue raising them here, compared with 21 per cent who do not.<sup>50</sup>

<sup>49</sup> GLA City Intelligence (2025), [London Assembly Children in London Polling – October 2025](#). Question: “What factors, if any, do you think are most important when deciding where to raise children? Select up to three options.”

<sup>50</sup> GLA City Intelligence (2025), [London Assembly Children in London Polling – October 2025](#). Question: “If you do have children in the future, do you think you would or would not raise them in London? / Thinking about the child(ren) in your household aged 0-16, do you expect to continue raising them in London until they reach 18?”

**Figure 11: Intentions to raise future children in London<sup>51</sup>**  
 (% of non-parents aged 18 to 50 planning to have children)



Source: GLA City Intelligence

These results present a puzzle: since more people think London is a suitable place to raise children than do not, why is London’s child population declining? To understand this, we wanted to further investigate potential drivers of this trend.

### Drivers of a declining child population

Although declining fertility rates are not unique to London, and people are having fewer children across the country and in other comparable countries, these trends are particularly striking in London. We heard multiple explanations for why people are choosing to raise fewer children in London compared to elsewhere. These including the cost and availability of housing, childcare, and the availability of child-friendly neighbourhoods.

#### Housing

We found that the availability and affordability of suitable housing are key factors in the decision to have children in London. The lack of affordable housing is particularly pronounced in Inner London.<sup>52</sup> Over the last decade, house prices in London have increased faster than earnings, and less than half of London households own their home, compared with around two-thirds in all other UK regions.<sup>53</sup> In September 2025, the average price of a home in London was £556,000, compared with the England average of £293,000.<sup>54</sup> Affordability is also a key issue

<sup>51</sup> GLA City Intelligence (2025), [London Assembly Children in London Polling – October 2025](#). Question: “If you do have children in the future, do you think you would or would not raise them in London? / Thinking about the child(ren) in your household aged 0-16, do you expect to continue raising them in London until they reach 18?”

<sup>52</sup> See: Centre for London (2022), [‘Is inner London becoming a ‘child-free area’?’](#) and GLA City Intelligence (2024), [London’s population of young children – current and future](#), p. 4.

<sup>53</sup> GLA City Intelligence (2024), [London’s population of young children – current and future](#), pp. 51-52.

<sup>54</sup> HM Land Registry (2025), [‘UK House Price Index for September 2025’](#).

for renters, since London has a larger private rental sector than other UK region and the highest average rent in the country. In October 2025, the average monthly rent in London (£2,265) was 60 per cent higher than in England as a whole (£1,416).<sup>55</sup> When we asked Londoners about the main reasons they might consider leaving the capital, respondents most often cited housing pressures, including the high cost of buying or renting. Some examples of the responses we received include the following:<sup>56</sup>

“*The cost of housing means my home is not big enough for my small family and our quality of life is relatively poor as a result, especially considering we are a two-parent family with reasonably good incomes.*”

“*London house prices and rents are too high for anyone I know to contemplate having children. Several long-term couples I know are still flat sharing with strangers because they can't afford a property of their own, despite both working and earning decent salaries.*”

Many young people understandably want to own their own home before having their first child, but this is out of reach for most Londoners. In 2024, the median home in London cost 11.1 times the median salary, compared with 7.7 times across England.<sup>57</sup> The Office for National Statistics considers anything above five times annual income to be unaffordable. In its submission to our call for evidence, the G15, which comprises London's leading housing associations, stated that housing costs “have consistently outpaced wages and welfare support, making London fundamentally unaffordable for many families who would otherwise choose to stay in the city.”<sup>58</sup> For those who stay in London, Susie Dye noted that unaffordable housing results in suppressed households, where “young adults [are] still living with their parents because they cannot get that first home”.<sup>59</sup> Ultimately, this will impact whether many young Londoners feel in a position to raise children in the city.

The high cost of housing is also a major driver of poverty in London. Katherine Hill (Strategic Programme Manager, 4in10) observed that “people simply cannot afford to bring up their children” in most Inner London boroughs and that they are “faced with the choice of not having any children or moving out to have them.”<sup>60</sup> Echoing this point, Susie Dye emphasised: “If you cannot find somewhere stable and affordable to make a home and bring up a family, then either you delay that or you move away.”<sup>61</sup>

<sup>55</sup> ONS (2025), [‘Private rent and house prices, UK: November 2025’](#).

<sup>56</sup> London Assembly Research Unit (2025), [Key findings from Economy, Culture & Skills Committee call for evidence – online form](#).

<sup>57</sup> ONS (2025), [‘Housing affordability in England and Wales: 2024’](#).

<sup>58</sup> Written evidence submitted by the G15 [CL001], p. 6.

<sup>59</sup> London Assembly Economy, Culture and Skills Committee, [Transcript](#), 14 October 2025, p. 21.

<sup>60</sup> London Assembly Economy, Culture and Skills Committee, [Transcript](#), 14 October 2025, p. 5.

<sup>61</sup> London Assembly Economy, Culture and Skills Committee, [Transcript](#), 14 October 2025, p. 8.

Alongside affordability, the shortage of family-sized homes in both the social and private sectors is making London increasingly unviable for families with children. However, data from the 2021 census shows that homes in London have fewer bedrooms on average than elsewhere in the country, with just 47 per cent of London homes having three or more bedrooms, compared with 63 per cent in the rest of England.<sup>62</sup> Between 2016 and 2025, under the GLA's Affordable Homes Programme, the vast majority (78 per cent) of homes delivered were 1 or 2 bed homes. 19 per cent of homes had 3 bedrooms and just 3 per cent had 4 or more bedrooms. This represents just 11 per cent of the need for 3 bed homes and 8 per cent of the need for homes with 4 beds or more, based on the GLA's Strategic Housing Market Assessment.<sup>63</sup> The G15 noted in its response to our call for evidence that this "lack of appropriate housing is likely to influence families leaving London or deciding against having more children."<sup>64</sup> When we asked Londoners about the main reasons they might consider leaving the capital, several cited the lack of space in housing as a major reason for them considering leaving London. Some of the responses we received included the following:<sup>65</sup>

“ Living expenses are too high and the space is very limited in a house. We believe that our children will have more freedom to grow in an environment with more space and as parents, to cut down the living cost. ”

“ Lack of space, we need a house and garden. All of which are unaffordable in London. Only flats seem to be built. ”

---

*“Ultimately, a family or a couple who want to have a child do require more space than simply a couple and the difficulty of moving, how few new homes there are being built, and the scleroticism of London's housing market are the biggest factors that make it not a family-friendly city.”<sup>66</sup>*

**Phoebe Arslanagić-Little, Co-Director of the Boom Campaign and Head of New Deal for Parents, Onward UK**

---

We are concerned that even where family-sized homes are built, families with children are not able to access them. Susie Dye claimed that data suggests that family-sized homes in London are being occupied by shared tenants, particularly young professionals without children.

---

<sup>62</sup> ONS (2023), Census 2021, '[Number of Bedrooms](#)'.

<sup>63</sup> London Assembly Research Unit (2025), [Affordable Housing Monitor 2025](#), p. 14.

<sup>64</sup> Written evidence submitted by the G15 [[CL001](#)], p. 6.

<sup>65</sup> London Assembly Research Unit (2025), [Key findings from Economy, Culture & Skills Committee call for evidence – online form](#).

<sup>66</sup> London Assembly Economy, Culture and Skills Committee, [Transcript, Panel 2](#), 13 November 2025, p. 1.

A further negative effect of the lack of suitably sized homes for families is overcrowding. In its submission to our call for evidence, the G15 stated that London has the highest levels of overcrowding in England. It noted that many families “are raising children in homes that are too small, with little prospect of moving to a larger property.”<sup>67</sup> The G15 referenced research conducted by one of its members in 2022, which found that of families with one child, 34 per cent live in overcrowded conditions in London, compared with 12 per cent outside the capital.<sup>68</sup> This provides strong evidence of unsuitable housing conditions for families in London.

### **Childcare**

The cost of childcare is a significant barrier for families in London. This is an issue the Committee previously investigated in our 2024 report, *Early years childcare in London*.<sup>69</sup> Inner London has the highest nursery costs in England, followed by Outer London.<sup>70</sup> In 2025, the weekly price for a full-time nursery place for a child aged under two was 34 per cent higher in Inner London (£319.24) than the England average (£238.95) after working parent entitlements are taken into account.<sup>71</sup> Centre for London partly attributes the declining number of children in Inner London to childcare costs, alongside housing costs.<sup>72</sup>

---

*“It is very clear that the costs [of childcare] in London are extremely high, and lots of people talk in terms of it equalling a second mortgage or those sorts of figures.”<sup>73</sup>*

### **Katherine Hill, Strategic Programme Manager, 4in10**

---

In September 2025, the Government expanded its offering of free childcare for working parents. The expansion, first announced under the previous Conservative Government, means that working parents can get 30 hours of free childcare per week for 38 weeks of the year for children aged 9 months to 4 years old.<sup>74</sup> We asked contributors to our investigation for their views on this policy. While they welcomed the increased funding, they expressed concerns that the hourly rate provided by the Government does not meet the costs of providing childcare in London. Katherine Hill outlined that this “means that there are additional fees that people have to pay, and it becomes very quickly very unaffordable to a lot of people, despite the generosity of the offer.”<sup>75</sup> Dr Bernice Kuang claimed that to offset the shortfall in Government funding, childcare providers charge more to parents who do not qualify for Government support.<sup>76</sup> She

---

<sup>67</sup> Written evidence submitted by the G15 [[CL001](#)], p. 6.

<sup>68</sup> Written evidence submitted by the G15 [[CL001](#)], p. 6.

<sup>69</sup> London Assembly Economy, Culture and Skills Committee (2024), [Early years childcare in London](#).

<sup>70</sup> Coram Family and Childcare (2025), [Childcare Survey 2025](#), p. 16.

<sup>71</sup> Coram Family and Childcare (2025), [Childcare Survey 2025](#), p. 16.

<sup>72</sup> Centre for London (2022), [‘Is inner London becoming a ‘child-free area’?’](#).

<sup>73</sup> London Assembly Economy, Culture and Skills Committee, [Transcript](#), 14 October 2025, p. 7.

<sup>74</sup> UK Government (n.d.), [‘Free Childcare for Working Parents’](#) (accessed 5 December 2025).

<sup>75</sup> London Assembly Economy, Culture and Skills Committee, [Transcript](#), 14 October 2025, p. 9.

<sup>76</sup> London Assembly Economy, Culture and Skills Committee, [Transcript](#), 14 October 2025, pp. 9-10.

added: “Parents of infants pay extremely high rates to subsidise the shortfall from the Government reimbursement, and if in that first year you are paying so much for childcare, do you want to stay in the city? Maybe not.”<sup>77</sup>

The high costs of childcare in London affect families at both the lower and higher ends of the income scale. The Committee’s 2024 report on early years childcare found that families on higher incomes in London spend a higher proportion of their incomes on childcare than parents in other parts of the country.<sup>78</sup> Phoebe Arslanagić-Little contended that parents who are ineligible for the Government’s free childcare offer, for example, because one or both parents earn over £100,000 per year, are more likely to cite childcare costs as the reason for not having more than one child or delaying having children. She added: “there is a group of people who are higher-earning and often people in London who have moved away from family support, who are not necessarily born and bred in London, for whom childcare pressure can be very, very severe.”<sup>79</sup> Dr Bernice Kuang has previously argued that lower-income couples need “financial support and affordable childcare”, while higher-income couples “need policies [that] make it easier for working people to balance childcare and, say, school pick-up, with their jobs”.<sup>80</sup>

Alongside affordability, a shortage of suitable childcare options can be a significant barrier for families with young children in London. Inner London has the lowest levels of childcare provision in England for two year-olds who are entitled to the Government’s offer of 15 hours of free childcare a week for disadvantaged families (55 per cent). It also has the lowest level of provision for the Government’s offer of 15 hours of free childcare a week for all three to four year-olds (55 per cent). This compares with an average level of provision for both of these offers of free childcare of 80 per cent across England as a whole.<sup>81</sup> Katherine Hill commented that in some parts of London, it is becoming increasingly difficult to find a childcare place, and that a declining child population could further weaken the incentives for childcare providers to deliver affordable childcare in certain areas.<sup>82</sup>

### **Child-friendly neighbourhoods**

Our investigation found that the built environment has a significant impact on a city’s child-friendliness. Dinah Bornat (Director, ZCD Architects) told us that the effect of the built environment on families with children is “profound but really quite ignored.”<sup>83</sup> There is significant evidence that the built environment impacts the quality of life of families in cities, which influences whether they choose to stay. Tim Gill (Independent Researcher, Writer and Consultant on Childhood) explained that “neighbourhoods that are compact, green and easy to get around” positively impact children’s health and wellbeing.<sup>84</sup> Dinah Bornat and Tim Gill previously contributed to a report by the Town and Country Planning Association (TCPA),

<sup>77</sup> London Assembly Economy, Culture and Skills Committee, [Transcript](#), 14 October 2025, pp. 9-10.

<sup>78</sup> London Assembly Economy, Culture and Skills Committee (2024), [Early years childcare in London](#).

<sup>79</sup> London Assembly Economy, Culture and Skills Committee, [Transcript, Panel 2](#), 13 November 2025, p. 5.

<sup>80</sup> Cocco, F., White, E. and Gross, A. (2022), ['Baby bust: Can policymakers boost dwindling world fertility rates?'](#), *Financial Times*, 20 April 2022.

<sup>81</sup> Coram Family and Childcare (2025), [Childcare Survey 2025](#), pp. 25-26.

<sup>82</sup> London Assembly Economy, Culture and Skills Committee, [Transcript](#), 14 October 2025, p. 9.

<sup>83</sup> London Assembly Economy, Culture and Skills Committee, [Transcript, Panel 2](#), 13 November 2025, p. 10.

<sup>84</sup> London Assembly Economy, Culture and Skills Committee, [Transcript, Panel 2](#), 13 November 2025, p. 12.

which argues that the planning system shapes “the places where children and young people grow up, live, play, move and age” and that these places are “key to whether or not children, young people and their care-givers can lead healthy lives and make healthy choices.”<sup>85</sup>

We heard from several Londoners who cited issues related to the built environment, including noise, air pollution, and access to green space as factors that would influence their decision to leave London:<sup>86</sup>

“ I want cleaner air, more green space, better schools and safe environment for [my children] once they are starting to go out alone. ”

“ I am also concerned about the levels of noise and air pollution in the area of East London where I live, and how these affect my child. ”

“ I want to cycle around with my children and I want them to be free from the dangers of air pollution. ”

Our investigation highlighted concerns that London’s built environment does not adequately consider the needs of families with children. Susie Dye told us that “there is a risk that the built environment bakes in the lack of children, that homes are built for high-income households who may not have children.”<sup>87</sup> Dinah Bornat explained that while the planning system aims to be participatory, the demands on parents of young children mean they are often unable to fully participate in consultations on the design of new buildings. As a result, their needs can be under-represented.<sup>88</sup>

---

*“If you have small children, you have other priorities and 5pm/6pm in the evening is not a time you are going to be pushing your pushchair round to a community hall to give advice on what you think is needed in the local area.”<sup>89</sup>*

**Dinah Bornat, Director, ZCD Architects**

---

<sup>85</sup> TCPA (2024), [Raising the healthiest generation in history: why it matters where children and young people live](#), p. 17.

<sup>86</sup> London Assembly Research Unit (2025), [Key findings from Economy, Culture & Skills Committee call for evidence – online form](#).

<sup>87</sup> London Assembly Economy, Culture and Skills Committee, [Transcript](#), 14 October 2025, p. 13.

<sup>88</sup> London Assembly Economy, Culture and Skills Committee, [Transcript, Panel 2](#), 13 November 2025, p. 10.

<sup>89</sup> London Assembly Economy, Culture and Skills Committee, [Transcript, Panel 2](#), 13 November 2025, p. 10.

The design of new housing developments in London is increasingly neglecting the need for children to play. Susie Dye commented that developers “are building upwards, but not thinking about where kids will play.”<sup>90</sup> She drew our attention to research conducted by the London Housing Panel on community groups living in new build high rise developments, which found that: “Participants’ experience of high-rise new build was that it lacked adequate communal and play spaces.”<sup>91</sup> Paul Lindley OBE (Social Campaigner, Author and Chair, Raising the Nation Play Commission) highlighted that “one in five families in London does not have a [private or shared] garden”,<sup>92</sup> which is the highest percentage of any region in Great Britain.<sup>93</sup>

Given the importance of access to parks and playgrounds for children’s play and leisure, we were concerned to hear that these facilities are at risk due to the funding pressures faced by London’s councils. Dr Bernice Kuang argued that such “third spaces and affordable facilities for families and children are especially important for lower-income families who maybe have smaller housing and then really need that public space.”<sup>94</sup> Katherine Hill argued that since services such as parks, playgrounds, and youth services are provided on a non-statutory basis by local authorities, the funding pressures faced by London’s councils mean that these are the services “most at risk, and where they still exist at all, local government [will be] forced to implement further cuts to those.”<sup>95</sup> She added that if these facilities are removed, this may create a “vicious cycle” whereby it will become increasingly challenging to attract families to live in London.<sup>96</sup>

### **Attitudes towards play**

Our investigation found that how families experience their neighbourhood is not only a matter of bricks and mortar, but also the attitudes they face, including from neighbours and bureaucratic structures. The Raising the Nation Play Commission, chaired by Paul Lindley, found that a “growing culture of hostility towards play has [...] become a significant and growing barrier to play.”<sup>97</sup> It cites the example of ‘No Ball Games’ signs, which it claims do not have a legal basis and “send a clear signal that children are not welcome.”<sup>98</sup> In London alone, there are over 7,000 ‘No Ball Games’ signs.<sup>99</sup> These signs contribute to a culture described by Tim Gill in which “lots of families feel there is nobody on their side and that the bureaucracy is all in favour of the people who basically seem to want children out of sight.”<sup>100</sup> We received written evidence from two parents with lived experience of negative attitudes towards their children playing in their housing developments. Their accounts are summarised below.

---

<sup>90</sup> London Assembly Economy, Culture and Skills Committee, [Transcript](#), 14 October 2025, p. 13.

<sup>91</sup> London Housing Panel, [London Housing Panel Community Conversations: FINDINGS Report](#), p. 15.

<sup>92</sup> London Assembly Economy, Culture and Skills Committee, [Transcript, Panel 2](#), 13 November 2025, p. 16.

<sup>93</sup> ONS (2020), [‘One in eight British households has no garden’](#).

<sup>94</sup> London Assembly Economy, Culture and Skills Committee, [Transcript](#), 14 October 2025, p. 13.

<sup>95</sup> London Assembly Economy, Culture and Skills Committee, [Transcript](#), 14 October 2025, p. 14.

<sup>96</sup> London Assembly Economy, Culture and Skills Committee, [Transcript](#), 14 October 2025, p. 14.

<sup>97</sup> Raising the Nation Play Commission (2025), [Everything to Play For: A Plan to Ensure Every Child in England Can Play](#), p. 10.

<sup>98</sup> Raising the Nation Play Commission (2025), [Everything to Play For: A Plan to Ensure Every Child in England Can Play](#), p. 10.

<sup>99</sup> London Sport (n.d.), [‘London Needs More Ball Games’](#) (accessed 5 December 2025).

<sup>100</sup> London Assembly Economy, Culture and Skills Committee, [Transcript, Panel 2](#), 13 November 2025, p. 13.

## **Attitudes towards children's play faced by families in London**

### **No Ball Games signs in West London:**

One parent in West London explained how her family was partly drawn to their current development because of the communal garden it offered, adding that "having a safe play space directly outside our home has made daily family life more manageable".<sup>101</sup> However, in April 2024, she explained that her "children's everyday freedom to play in our community came to an end, when Estate Management installed *No Ball Games* signs around our communal garden space, without notice, consultation, or explanation."<sup>102</sup> Her husband's immediate reaction was: "our children are no longer welcome here, maybe it's time for us to consider moving".<sup>103</sup>

Although the communal garden is designated as playable space within the planning approvals for the development, in line with London Plan guidance, this has never been communicated to residents.<sup>104</sup> Despite taking multiple steps to work towards a resolution, including by engaging with the housing provider, escalating the issue through the provider's formal complaints process and the Housing Ombudsman, and engaging with neighbours and Ealing Council, the 'No Ball Games' signs remain, and a new sign has recently been added stipulating curfews and compulsory adult supervision.<sup>105</sup>

The parent explained that this reflects the fact that "no statutory duty exists for housing providers to protect or enable children's everyday play where they live."<sup>106</sup> She added that "this means estate management decisions prioritise complaints and risk-avoidance over children's wellbeing, social development and family life – even where space has been designed and approved for play."<sup>107</sup> She concluded that "without protected space for children to play where they live, everyday family life becomes harder than it needs to be, and ongoing tensions have, at times, made my husband and I question whether we can continue raising our children here."<sup>108</sup>

### **Planning and development management issues in Inner London:**

One parent in Inner London explained to us that after moving into a development that she believed would be family-friendly, hers is one of only two families with children left in the development, which is made up of over 80 properties. She explained that the development "is now entirely made up of *pied a terres* [homes that are only used by their owners occasionally], short term lets or sharing young professionals."<sup>109</sup> She added that it "has no sense of neighbourhood or community as it is a very transient place where people come and go."<sup>110</sup> The parent expressed the view that the management company prioritises the needs and interests of residents without children, which has resulted in the families with children feeling unwelcome.

<sup>101</sup> Written evidence submitted by a Parent and Resident in West London [CL003], p. 42.

<sup>102</sup> Written evidence submitted by a Parent and Resident in West London [CL003], p. 42.

<sup>103</sup> Written evidence submitted by a Parent and Resident in West London [CL003], p. 42.

<sup>104</sup> Written evidence submitted by a Parent and Resident in West London [CL003], p. 42.

<sup>105</sup> Written evidence submitted by a Parent and Resident in West London [CL003], pp. 42–43.

<sup>106</sup> Written evidence submitted by a Parent and Resident in West London [CL003], p. 43.

<sup>107</sup> Written evidence submitted by a Parent and Resident in West London [CL003], p. 43.

<sup>108</sup> Written evidence submitted by a Parent and Resident in West London [CL003], p. 43.

<sup>109</sup> Written evidence submitted by a Parent in an Inner London development [CL002], p. 8.

<sup>110</sup> Written evidence submitted by a Parent in an Inner London development [CL002], p. 8.

According to the parent, this is demonstrated in letters sent from the management company to residents, which have treated children's play "as a form of anti-social behaviour".<sup>111</sup>

These examples highlight that the decisions of parents to stay in a city are likely influenced by how family-friendly they feel their environment is. This is related to many factors, including attitudes towards children but also the services available to families. If prospective parents do not feel supported to have children in their neighbourhoods, they will likely decide to move.

---

<sup>111</sup> Written evidence submitted by a Parent in an Inner London development [[CL002](#)], p. 17.

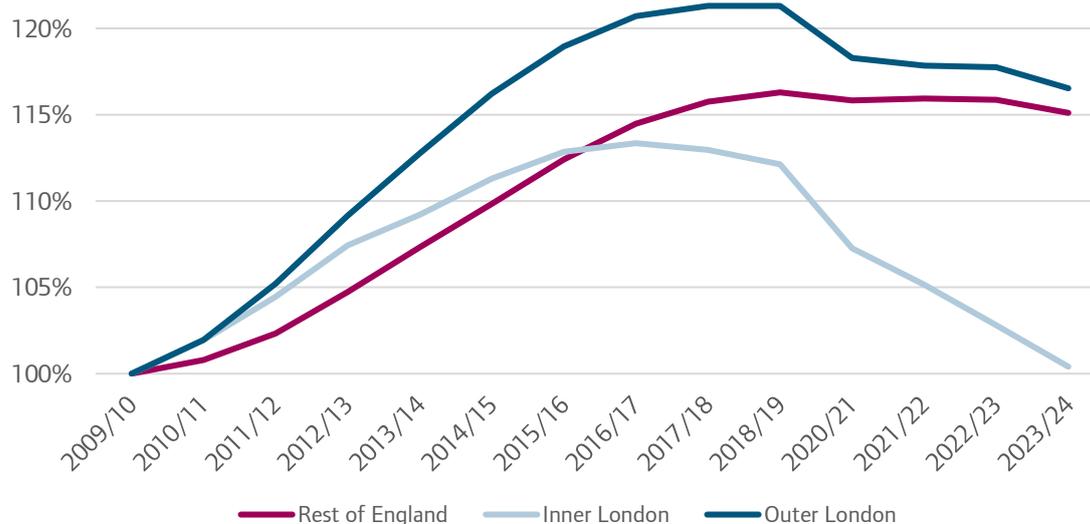
## Chapter three: Impacts of a declining child population

### Schools

#### Pupil numbers

The most obvious impact of London’s declining child population is on schools. According to recent analysis by the Education Policy Institute, primary school pupil numbers peaked nationally in 2018-19 at around 4.5 million, while in London they had already reached their highest point one year earlier in 2017-18 at just over 700,000. Since peaking, the national primary pupil population has fallen by nearly 2 per cent, while the London primary pupil population has fallen by 6.25 per cent.<sup>112</sup>

**Figure 12: Indexed number of state-funded full-time primary school pupils by location, academic years 2009-10 to 2023-24<sup>113</sup>**



Source: Graph produced by the London Assembly Research Unit using Department for Education data

The reduction in the number of primary school children in London in recent years has been particularly acute in Inner London. As Figure 12 depicts, the total number of children in state-funded primary schools in Inner London has been falling continuously since its peak in 2016, while the decline in Outer London was less steep and numbers in the rest of England have remained relatively stable.<sup>114</sup> The Education Policy Institute has found that between 2020-21

<sup>112</sup> Education Policy Institute (2025), [‘So Long, London – An analysis of London primary pupil movements’](#).

<sup>113</sup> Department for Education (2025), [‘Academic year 2023/24: School capacity’](#).

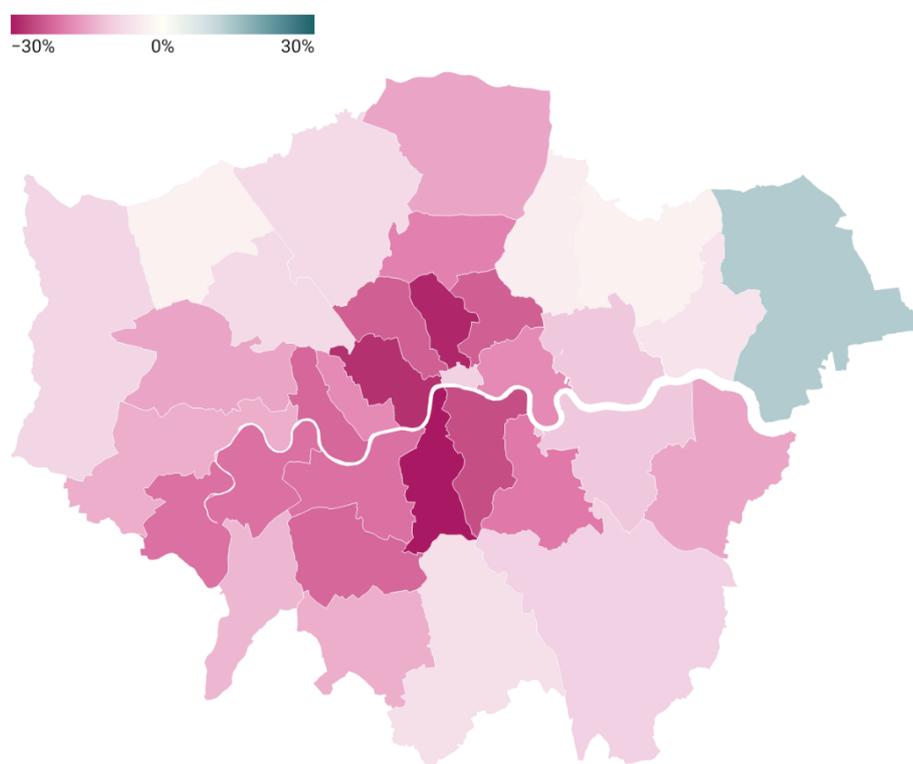
<sup>114</sup> GLA City Intelligence (2024), [London’s population of young children – current and future](#), p. 6.

and 2024-25, nine of the ten local authorities in England that recorded the largest declines in primary school pupil numbers were in London, with eight of these being in Inner London.<sup>115</sup>

There is evidence that declining roll numbers in London are being affected by families with children deciding to leave London. The Education Policy Institute has found that around 17 per cent (17,500) of primary pupils starting reception in 2012-13 left London by Year 6. For pupils starting reception in 2017-18, this figure increased to 20 per cent (20,000) by the time they reached Year 6. Similar large changes in pupil movements are not seen elsewhere in England.<sup>116</sup>

Managing London’s excess school capacity will prove challenging in the coming decade and beyond. By 2028-29, the Education Policy Institute forecasts that the number of primary school pupils in London will drop significantly compared with a decade earlier. Figure 13 highlights that these falls will be most pronounced in Inner London boroughs.<sup>117</sup>

**Figure 13: Forecast percentage change in primary school pupil numbers by London local authority between 2018-19 and 2028-29<sup>118</sup>**



Map: London Assembly Research Unit • Source: Education Policy Institute analysis of Department for Education data • Map data: © Crown copyright and database right 2018 • Created with Datawrapper

Source: Map reproduced by the London Assembly Research Unit based on analysis of Department for Education data by the Education Policy Institute

<sup>115</sup> In order of largest to smallest decline in pupil numbers, these are: Westminster, Lambeth, Southwark, Hackney, Camden, Hammersmith and Fulham, Islington, Merton, and Wandsworth. Education Policy Institute (2025), [‘So Long, London – An analysis of London primary pupil movements’](#).

<sup>116</sup> Education Policy Institute (2025), [‘So Long, London – An analysis of London primary pupil movements’](#).

<sup>117</sup> Education Policy Institute (2025), [‘So Long, London – An analysis of London primary pupil movements’](#).

<sup>118</sup> Education Policy Institute (2025), [‘So Long, London – An analysis of London primary pupil movements’](#).

These declines will be felt first in reception classes. London Councils forecasts an average decrease in demand of 2.5 per cent for reception places between 2025-26 and 2029-30.<sup>119</sup> Inner London boroughs are projected to see a 6.2 per cent reduction in reception pupil numbers on average, compared with an average expected fall of 1.0 per cent in Outer London.<sup>120</sup>

London's declining number of primary school-aged children will begin to impact secondary schools in the coming years. London Councils forecasts that between 2025-26 and 2029-30, most London boroughs will experience an average drop in demand for Year 7 places of 3.8 per cent. Again, the declines are expected to be higher in Inner London boroughs (7.2 per cent) than in Outer London boroughs (2.5 per cent).<sup>121</sup>

### **Impacts on school funding**

A reduction in the child population has significant implications for school budgets and their financial viability. Schools are primarily funded through a Department for Education grant, which is provided on a per-pupil basis. As Jon Andrews (Head of Analysis and Director for School System and Performance, Education Policy Institute) explained: "Where pupil numbers fall, their funding falls, but they quite often have to deliver the same services."<sup>122</sup>

The drop in funding due to declining roll numbers comes on top of significant financial pressures already faced by schools. Lucy Heller (Chief Executive, Ark) explained that school budgets "have seen a real-terms fall over the last decade, and primary schools are particularly under pressure."<sup>123</sup> Cllr Ian Edwards (Executive Member for Children and Young People, London Councils) stated that declining roll numbers mean that "the income for a school is falling at a faster rate than their costs, and that is pushing more schools into deficit, and it is depleting reserves."<sup>124</sup> Research by London Councils found that a majority of all local authority-maintained schools in London in 2024-25 were either in deficit or had surplus balances equating to less than 8 per cent of their budgets, which is approximately equivalent to one month of operating costs.<sup>125</sup> London Councils outlines that while falling rolls are "a major factor driving schools into deficit",<sup>126</sup> other factors also play a role such as rising costs due to inflation, reliance on agency staff due to teaching and support staff shortages, and a significant pay award for staff.<sup>127</sup> London Councils also notes that "although student numbers are falling, demand for additional support continues to rise", including an "increased need for mental health provision, higher levels of school avoidance and persistent absence, and growing rates of SEND."<sup>128</sup>

---

<sup>119</sup> London Councils (2026), [Managing school rolls and maintaining educational standards in London](#), p. 10.

<sup>120</sup> London Councils (2026), [Managing school rolls and maintaining educational standards in London](#), p. 10.

<sup>121</sup> London Councils (2026), [Managing school rolls and maintaining educational standards in London](#), p. 11.

<sup>122</sup> London Assembly Economy, Culture and Skills Committee, [Transcript, Panel 1](#), 13 November 2025, p. 1.

<sup>123</sup> London Assembly Economy, Culture and Skills Committee, [Transcript, Panel 1](#), 13 November 2025, p. 2.

<sup>124</sup> London Assembly Economy, Culture and Skills Committee, [Transcript, Panel 1](#), 13 November 2025, p. 5.

<sup>125</sup> London Councils (2026), [Managing school rolls and maintaining educational standards in London](#), p. 14.

<sup>126</sup> London Councils (2026), [Managing school rolls and maintaining educational standards in London](#), p. 15.

<sup>127</sup> London Councils (2026), [Managing school rolls and maintaining educational standards in London](#), p. 15.

<sup>128</sup> London Councils (2026), [Managing school rolls and maintaining educational standards in London](#), p. 17.

We found that the impact of declining funding on schools depends on a range of factors, including school size, type, stage, pupils' educational needs, levels of disadvantage, and schools' financial reserves.

- **School size:** Cllr Ian Edwards commented that it is easier to downscale in a larger primary school with two forms of entry “without the dramatic impact of a closure of a single-form entry school”.<sup>129</sup> He suggested that small schools are more common in parts of Inner London, and these are particularly vulnerable.<sup>130</sup> Jon Andrews described how a fall in pupil numbers in a larger secondary school will not be felt as starkly as in a small, one-form entry primary school, where it will be far more challenging to adapt.<sup>131</sup>
- **School type:** We heard that different school types can handle drops in pupil numbers differently. Lucy Heller explained that academies are generally funded on a lagged basis, whereby funding in the current year is based on pupil numbers in the previous year, which provides them with “a cushion if their numbers are falling.”<sup>132</sup>
- **Levels of disadvantage:** We heard that schools in less advantaged communities could be disproportionately affected by falling pupil numbers. Katherine Hill contended that since the pupil premium grant<sup>133</sup> is allocated on a per capita basis, declining roll numbers could result in “an even greater loss of funds” to schools that have previously received a higher proportion of this funding.<sup>134</sup>
- **Financial reserves:** Schools with healthier reserves may be able to use these to smooth the transition to reduced roll numbers. Cllr Ian Edwards commented that schools with healthy reserves “are able to withstand the pressure for a period of time, and should numbers recover, they may be able to smooth their way forward.”<sup>135</sup>

### **Impact on standards and performance**

Since school costs are largely fixed, attempts to balance budgets can affect curriculum range, extracurricular opportunities, and SEND provision. Jon Andrews explained that schools “cannot necessarily cut teachers and so on in the same way that pupil numbers fall.”<sup>136</sup> London Councils highlights that since most of a school's budget is spent on staff, there are not many other costs that can be cut before schools have to reduce their workforce.<sup>137</sup>

---

<sup>129</sup> London Assembly Economy, Culture and Skills Committee, [Transcript, Panel 1](#), 13 November 2025, p. 1.

<sup>130</sup> London Assembly Economy, Culture and Skills Committee, [Transcript, Panel 1](#), 13 November 2025, p. 2.

<sup>131</sup> London Assembly Economy, Culture and Skills Committee, [Transcript, Panel 1](#), 13 November 2025, p. 13.

<sup>132</sup> London Assembly Economy, Culture and Skills Committee, [Transcript, Panel 1](#), 13 November 2025, p. 8.

<sup>133</sup> The pupil premium grant provides funding to improve educational outcomes for disadvantaged pupils in state-funded schools in England. For more information, see: UK Government (2025), ‘[Pupil premium: overview](#)’.

<sup>134</sup> London Assembly Economy, Culture and Skills Committee, [Transcript](#), 14 October 2025, p. 12.

<sup>135</sup> London Assembly Economy, Culture and Skills Committee, [Transcript, Panel 1](#), 13 November 2025, p. 5.

<sup>136</sup> London Assembly Economy, Culture and Skills Committee, [Transcript, Panel 1](#), 13 November 2025, p. 1.

<sup>137</sup> London Councils (2026), [Managing school rolls and maintaining educational standards in London](#), pp. 16-17.

---

*“We would not see standards per se dropping, but [the] curriculum range could be reduced, reducing opportunities. We could see the cutback of opportunities for extracurricular activity. We might even see some money that should be spent on special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) and higher-needs pupils being used to support schools to maintain their general level of education, and that, of course, will impact upon the chances of those children with Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCPs).”<sup>138</sup>*

### **Cllr Ian Edwards, Executive Member for Children and Young People, London Councils**

---

As well as the direct impact of declining roll numbers on funding, we found that there may also be indirect impacts on standards and performance. Katherine Hill argued that schools with declining roll numbers could face issues recruiting teachers who may be concerned about potential school closures. She claimed that since there is high demand for teachers, they “are not going to be attracted to those schools where there are falling roll numbers.”<sup>139</sup>

#### **School closures**

One of the most concerning impacts of declining pupil numbers in London is school closures. Recently, there have been increasing reports of primary schools having to close or merge due to the London's declining child population.<sup>140</sup> Although most closures or mergers have taken place in Inner London, some schools are also due to close in Outer London.<sup>141</sup>

To better understand the extent of school closures in London, we sent Freedom of Information (FOI) requests to London's local authorities to identify the number of school closures and mergers in London since 2018-19 and the reasons for these. We contacted all 33 local authorities in London and received 31 responses.<sup>142</sup> The results are summarised below.

Between 2018-19 and 2025-26, almost two thirds (63 per cent) of current or proposed closures and mergers occurred in Inner London boroughs. The remaining 37 per cent were in Outer London. Harrow had the highest number of reported school closures and mergers since 2018-19 at 15, followed by Westminster City at 11. The City of London, Hammersmith and Fulham, Richmond upon Thames, Sutton, and Waltham Forest all reported having no closures or mergers during this period. The most commonly cited reason for the closure or merger of schools with a

---

<sup>138</sup> London Assembly Economy, Culture and Skills Committee, [Transcript, Panel 1](#), 13 November 2025, p. 2.

<sup>139</sup> London Assembly Economy, Culture and Skills Committee, [Transcript](#), 14 October 2025, p. 11.

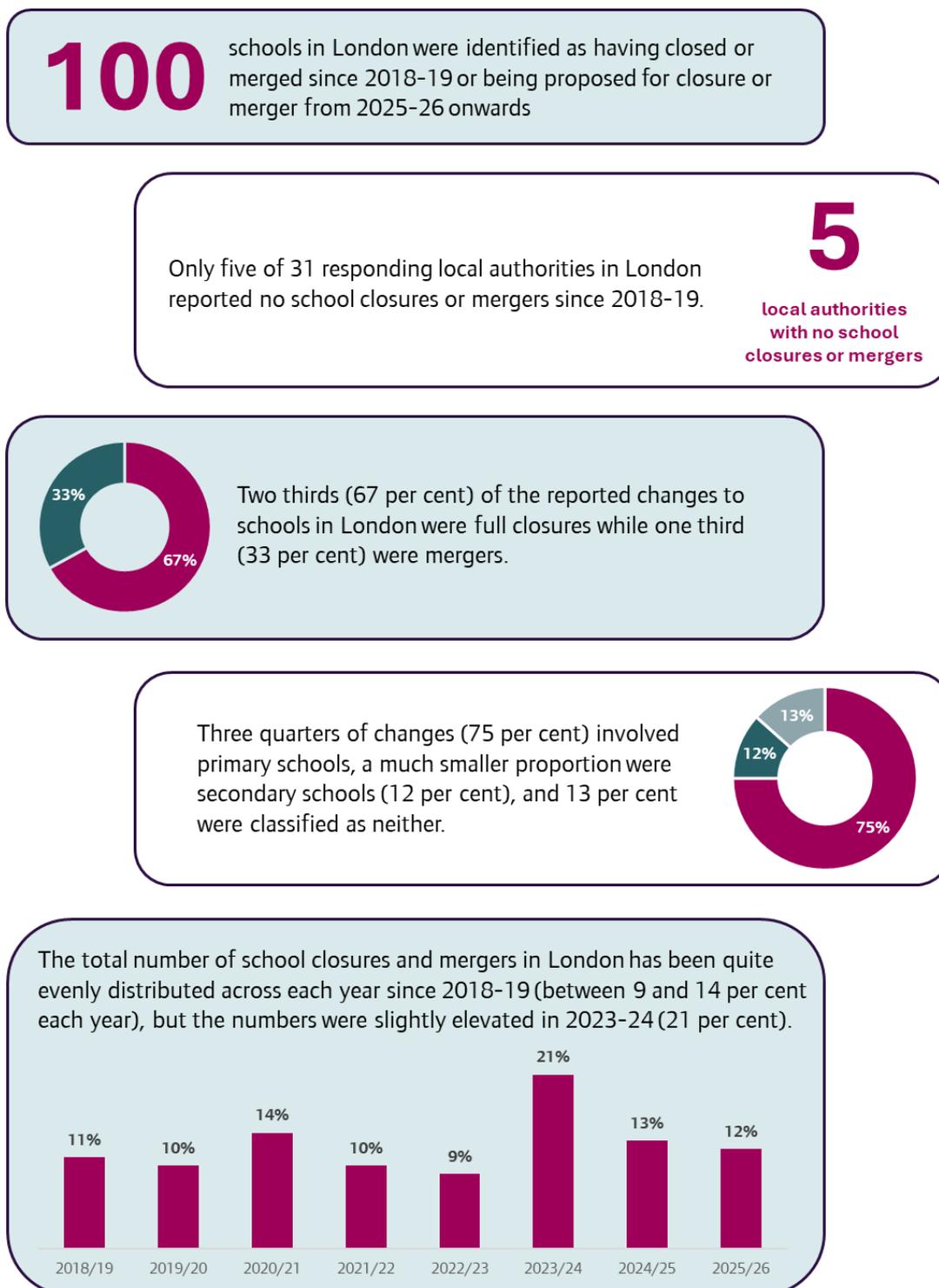
<sup>140</sup> Foster, A. and Mercer, K. (2025), ['Two more schools to close amid birth-rate decline'](#), *BBC News*, 25 April 2025; Warren, J. (2025), ['Decline in London school pupil numbers to continue'](#), *BBC News*, 18 February 2025.

<sup>141</sup> Phillips, J. (2025), ['Primary schools could begin to shut in outer London boroughs amid exodus of families, campaigner warns'](#), *The Standard*, 7 May 2025; Phillips, J. and Ambrose, C. (2025), ['Interactive map shows the 34 London schools facing closure or merger - is your area affected?'](#), *The Standard*, 22 July 2025.

<sup>142</sup> London Assembly Research Unit (2025), [Key findings from Economy, Culture & Skills Committee FOI requests](#).

London local authority was “declining pupil numbers” or “unsustainable levels of surplus places”, often leading to schools becoming financially unsustainable.<sup>143</sup>

**Figure 14: Summary of FOI requests on school closures and mergers in London<sup>144</sup>**



<sup>143</sup> London Assembly Research Unit (2025), [Key findings from Economy, Culture & Skills Committee FOI requests](#).

<sup>144</sup> London Assembly Research Unit (2025), [Key findings from Economy, Culture & Skills Committee FOI requests](#).

We also considered analysis from other sources to understand the extent of school closures and mergers in London. Other sources have estimated different numbers of school closures, based on the methodology and data sources used. London Councils has estimated that between 2019 and summer 2025, there were approximately 90 school closures or mergers in London as a result of reduced demand, and further closures are expected in the coming years.<sup>145</sup>

### **Looking ahead: Sharing data and expertise to support pupil place planning**

Falling pupil numbers put significant pressures on the school system, and these cannot be managed by boroughs acting alone. Cllr Ian Edwards explained that local authorities are “responsible for balancing the demand and supply for school places”,<sup>146</sup> but this task is complicated by the “the disparate nature of the education establishment.”<sup>147</sup> He argued that since academies are “not required to engage with the local authorities”, the state-maintained sector becomes the “primary shock absorber” when reductions, closures, or mergers are required.<sup>148</sup> Responding to this point, Lucy Heller noted that while academy trusts “are just as anxious to have the conversation about how we sensibly consolidate demand”, local authorities have been “reluctant to close [schools] where there is clear economic pressure to do so.”<sup>149</sup> This underscores issues faced in the coordination between local authorities and academy trusts.

Currently, poor coordination between local authorities and academy trusts is resulting in inefficient and inequitable outcomes. The National Foundation for Educational Research observes that “[m]aintained schools and academies are not always treated the same in admissions allocations” and that there is “some evidence that when pupil numbers fall, they fall more in LA-maintained schools than academies in the same area.”<sup>150</sup> Lucy Heller described the situation as a “game of chicken”,<sup>151</sup> with schools and trusts acting defensively to protect their rolls and income. She cited the example of academy trusts expanding places in boroughs where demand is falling, which negatively impacts schools in the state-maintained sector.<sup>152</sup> Cllr Ian Edwards also highlighted “protectionism”, including resistance to cost-saving measures such as merging infant and junior schools.<sup>153</sup> Jon Andrews acknowledged that while improved coordination between local authorities and academy trusts is essential, it is “not unreasonable for an individual school to want to protect itself.”<sup>154</sup>

We heard calls for greater coordination of pupil place planning at the pan-London level to address these challenges. Lucy Heller argued in favour of a “coordinated discussion about where pupil places are needed and forcing people to work together on that.”<sup>155</sup> She stressed

---

<sup>145</sup> London Councils (2026), [Managing school rolls and maintaining educational standards in London](#), p. 5.

<sup>146</sup> London Assembly Economy, Culture and Skills Committee, [Transcript, Panel 1](#), 13 November 2025, p. 1.

<sup>147</sup> London Assembly Economy, Culture and Skills Committee, [Transcript, Panel 1](#), 13 November 2025, p. 1.

<sup>148</sup> London Assembly Economy, Culture and Skills Committee, [Transcript, Panel 1](#), 13 November 2025, p. 1.

<sup>149</sup> London Assembly Economy, Culture and Skills Committee, [Transcript, Panel 1](#), 13 November 2025, p. 2.

<sup>150</sup> National Foundation for Educational Research (2024), [Fewer pupils, more unfilled places, increasing deficits: What can be done?](#).

<sup>151</sup> London Assembly Economy, Culture and Skills Committee, [Transcript, Panel 1](#), 13 November 2025, p. 2.

<sup>152</sup> London Assembly Economy, Culture and Skills Committee, [Transcript, Panel 1](#), 13 November 2025, p. 4.

<sup>153</sup> London Assembly Economy, Culture and Skills Committee, [Transcript, Panel 1](#), 13 November 2025, p. 4.

<sup>154</sup> London Assembly Economy, Culture and Skills Committee, [Transcript, Panel 1](#), 13 November 2025, p. 15.

<sup>155</sup> London Assembly Economy, Culture and Skills Committee, [Transcript, Panel 1](#), 13 November 2025, p. 8.

that this “definitely needs to be broader than the local authority” and that it should be “across London”.<sup>156</sup> While she claimed that this coordination would need to be “tough-minded”, she also acknowledged that there would be a need to balance efficiency with local provision, particularly at the primary level, where “it is important that [schools are] serving a community.”<sup>157</sup>

Improved coordination between local authorities themselves is also essential. Cllr Ian Edwards acknowledged that the sharing of pupil data between local authorities in London “has not been good enough up until now.” Although he noted that this has “improved remarkably”, he explained that there is still no common mechanism to exchange pupil data across local authorities. Given that families in London understandably move freely between local authority boundaries, a pan-London approach is necessary to address these gaps.

The GLA conducts forecasts of London’s demographics, pupil numbers, expected changes in the quantity and types of housing, planning, and other information that can support the bodies responsible for pupil place planning.

## **Recommendation 1**

The Mayor should make data and expertise available to London’s local authorities, nearby education authorities, the Department for Education, and London Councils to support evidence-based decisions in school place planning. The Mayor should commit to making this information and expertise available in a usable form for relevant bodies in time for the 2026-27 academic year.

---

### **Looking ahead: Supporting evidence-based decisions on the use of school buildings**

Although current projections suggest that London’s child population will continue to decline for at least the next decade, it is unclear whether this decline will be permanent. During our investigation, Lucy Heller expressed the hope that the current decline will be a “cyclical rather than a permanent condition”.<sup>158</sup> London Councils highlights that the capital’s birth rate has “fluctuated over time, and the city may once again become a more popular place to raise a family”.<sup>159</sup> As a result, policy decisions should consider how to adapt in a scenario where the child population – and therefore, demand for school places – may increase again in future.

One way to do this is to repurpose school buildings that are not currently required for alternative temporary educational uses. This could potentially future-proof London’s school system by keeping educational sites in use and available for a time when they may be needed again. London Councils notes that these sites “can be used to deliver services such as nurseries, family hubs and special school provision, in line with local needs.”<sup>160</sup> This view was echoed by contributors to our investigation. Lucy Heller gave the example of Lambeth, which in the 1980s

---

<sup>156</sup> London Assembly Economy, Culture and Skills Committee, [Transcript, Panel 1](#), 13 November 2025, p. 16.

<sup>157</sup> London Assembly Economy, Culture and Skills Committee, [Transcript, Panel 1](#), 13 November 2025, p. 16.

<sup>158</sup> London Assembly Economy, Culture and Skills Committee, [Transcript, Panel 1](#), 13 November 2025, p. 3.

<sup>159</sup> London Councils (2026), [Managing school rolls and maintaining educational standards in London](#), p. 20.

<sup>160</sup> London Councils (2026), [Managing school rolls and maintaining educational standards in London](#), p. 20.

and 1990s, “sold a number of school sites, and then had – very expensively – to buy them back or buy sites”.<sup>161</sup> She contrasted this with the example of Southwark, saying that “where they are closing schools, they are maintaining them as education sites so they can get them back into use.”<sup>162</sup> Jon Andrews called on “local authorities, trusts and potentially the Mayor [to think] about how we use the school estate and whether there are other services that can be offered in closed schools in terms of children’s centres, family hubs and so on.”<sup>163</sup>

To ensure the financial viability of repurposing education premises, local authorities must consider the specific needs of their local communities and analyse whether it is appropriate to retain vacated school premises in educational use. In 2024, the Government announced the launch of a school-based nurseries capital grant, which will allow some primary schools to repurpose unutilised space within the school building to create or expand nursery provision.<sup>164</sup> While this offers a potential funding stream for nursery provision, the National Foundation for Educational Research outlines that schools also need to consider the net effect of repurposing facilities for nursery provision on school finances, particularly since the income from providing pre-school childcare often does not cover the costs.<sup>165</sup> In areas with declining birth rates, nursery provision may not be the optimal alternative use for school premises, but there may be unmet need in other areas such as SEND provision, family hubs, additional play space, 16-19 education, or adult education outside of school hours.

While local authorities will need to conduct further analysis and research to assess whether it is appropriate to retain vacated school premises in educational use, we believe that the Mayor can play a key role in providing data and expertise to support their decision-making. If a former school can continue to be used for education or related purposes, this delivers more for the community than letting it be redeveloped and buying other sites for nursery places, specialist SEND facilities, additional play space, 16-19 education, adult education, or other related uses.

## **Recommendation 2**

The Mayor should make relevant data and expertise available to London’s local authorities to support evidence-based decisions on the optimal use of vacant school premises. This includes the GLA’s demographic forecasts, pupil number projections, and good practices from local authorities that have successfully repurposed school premises. The Mayor should commit to making this data and expertise available in a suitable format and at a time useful for the authorities considering how to reuse a school building prior to the 2026-27 academic year.

---

## **Other impacts on public services and the economy**

Most of the evidence we received on the impact of a declining child population related to the impact on schools. However, a continued reduction in the number of children in London will

---

<sup>161</sup> London Assembly Economy, Culture and Skills Committee, [Transcript, Panel 1](#), 13 November 2025, p. 3.

<sup>162</sup> London Assembly Economy, Culture and Skills Committee, [Transcript, Panel 1](#), 13 November 2025, p. 3.

<sup>163</sup> London Assembly Economy, Culture and Skills Committee, [Transcript, Panel 1](#), 13 November 2025, p. 15.

<sup>164</sup> Department for Education (2024), '[School-based nurseries funding round to launch next month](#)'.

<sup>165</sup> National Foundation for Educational Research (2024), '[Fewer pupils, more unfilled places, increasing deficits: What can be done?](#)'.

likely have significant impacts on public services and the economy more broadly, including on maternity services, health and social care services, the composition of the workforce, and demand for certain goods and services. Some of these impacts are already being felt in London.

### **Falling demand for maternity services**

London's maternity services have already seen a fall in demand due to the declining child population. In March 2025, it was announced that the Royal Free Hospital in Camden would close its maternity unit, following a fall in the number of births in the surrounding area.<sup>166</sup> As part of the same changes announced by North Central London Integrated Care Board (ICB), Edgware birth centre in Barnet will also close, again due to a reduction in the number of babies being born there.<sup>167</sup> During our investigation, Katherine Hill observed that such closures to maternity services may have a disproportionate impact on the most marginalised Londoners.<sup>168</sup>

### **Impact on the local economy**

Families with children moving out of London will likely change the composition of the capital's workforce. The Chief Executive of housing provider Dolphin Living has outlined that "thousands of new jobs in key sectors like health, education and tourism are likely to go unfilled as median income workers are effectively priced out of the housing market and look to live and work elsewhere."<sup>169</sup>

The loss of families with children could lead to a fall in demand for goods and services that families require, which could impact the viability of the businesses that provide them. Katherine Hill outlined that families with school age children consume certain goods and services to a greater extent than other cohorts, such as cafés, play centres, and shops that stock goods for parents of young children:

*"School pick-up time at primary school is a whole different part of the local economy than the night-time economy, or workers coming to get their lunch, parents coming at pick-up, they are keeping some of those shops going, and they are increasing footfall in those areas."<sup>170</sup>*

In addition to the impact on schools, the Committee is concerned about the wider impacts on the economy and public services if the number of children in London continues to decline. In the next chapter, we explore other measures that can be introduced to make London a more child-friendly city.

---

<sup>166</sup> Campbell, D. (2025), '[London maternity unit to shut in response to steep fall in birth rate](#)', *The Guardian*, 26 March 2025.

<sup>167</sup> Campbell, D. (2025), '[London maternity unit to shut in response to steep fall in birth rate](#)', *The Guardian*, 26 March 2025.

<sup>168</sup> London Assembly Economy, Culture and Skills Committee, [Transcript](#), 14 October 2025, p. 14.

<sup>169</sup> Prynne, J. (2025), '[Almost 300,000 middle-earning key workers 'will be priced out of Inner London by 2035](#)', *The Standard*, 25 June 2025.

<sup>170</sup> London Assembly Economy, Culture and Skills Committee, [Transcript](#), 14 October 2025, p. 14.

## Chapter four: Making London a child-friendly city

To address the causes of London's declining child population and mitigate the worst impacts, we wanted to consider what should be done to make London a child-friendly city. We heard during our investigation that even though some of the drivers of London's declining child population may be systemic, policies that make it easier for people to be parents can make a difference to the decisions of prospective parents, since they will observe that their communities are a welcoming place for children.<sup>171</sup> Building on this, we should want London to be a city where children and young people can thrive and flourish, where they can grow up living happy and healthy lives and want to stay to contribute to the city's social and economic development. The remainder of the report identifies tangible actions that can be taken by the Mayor to make London a child-friendly city.

---

*"London rightly prides itself on being a very diverse city, and we would say that that diversity should cut across all parameters, including age, and London ought to be a city where you can thrive from cradle to grave."<sup>172</sup>*

**Katherine Hill, Strategic Programme Manager, 4in10**

---

### Policy coordination

A child-friendly city needs to work for families on many fronts, including housing, childcare, the built environment, and schools. During our investigation, contributors such as Tim Gill told us that in some respects, "London has done more than most big cities to become more child-friendly."<sup>173</sup> Both Tim Gill and Dinah Bornat praised the work of the former Deputy Mayor of London and former London Assembly Member, Nicky Gavron, highlighting that she "pushed and championed" policies such as Policy S4 in the London Plan.<sup>174</sup> This requires new housing developments to provide at least ten square metres of play space per child,<sup>175</sup> and they commented that it is "unique amongst big cities as being a clear, robust policy."<sup>176</sup> However, as this report highlights, families in London also face significant challenges, including a lack of family-sized homes, high childcare costs, and lacking access to green space.

Our investigation found that policy efforts in London have not gone far enough to ensure that the city works well for children and families. Tim Gill referenced the work of Brent Toderian, a former Chief Planner in Vancouver, who has spoken about three elements that are necessary for

---

<sup>171</sup> London Assembly Economy, Culture and Skills Committee, [Transcript, Panel 2](#), 13 November 2025, p. 4.

<sup>172</sup> London Assembly Economy, Culture and Skills Committee, [Transcript](#), 14 October 2025, p. 1.

<sup>173</sup> London Assembly Economy, Culture and Skills Committee, [Transcript, Panel 2](#), 13 November 2025, p. 2.

<sup>174</sup> London Assembly Economy, Culture and Skills Committee, [Transcript, Panel 2](#), 13 November 2025, p. 2.

<sup>175</sup> Mayor of London (2021), [The London Plan 2021](#), p. 227.

<sup>176</sup> London Assembly Economy, Culture and Skills Committee, [Transcript, Panel 2](#), 13 November 2025, p. 2.

a family-friendly city. These are appropriate housing, services for families such as childcare and schools, and a safe, welcoming public realm.<sup>177</sup> Tim Gill expressed the view that these areas have not been “strategically addressed effectively in London”.<sup>178</sup> The challenges discussed earlier around housing, childcare, schools, and the built environment underscore how policy in London is currently struggling to meet the needs of children and families.

Improving London's child-friendliness across distinct yet related policy areas requires effective coordination. However, during our investigation, we heard that this is currently lacking in London. Dinah Bornat argued that although “there is no one perfect city, [...] London fails to advocate for children across all of its policy thinking.”<sup>179</sup> Tim Gill commented that there “has been some backsliding and a loss of focus in the last ten to 15 years on this topic [of child-friendliness] and there is no longer a champion here in the GLA.”<sup>180</sup> We believe there should be such a champion, and this is a gap in London's governance that needs to be urgently addressed. We therefore call on the Mayor to designate a London Children's Ambassador within the GLA to improve coordination across policy areas and ensure that London is a city where families with children can thrive.

### **Recommendation 3**

The Mayor should designate a London Children's Ambassador within the GLA who will improve coordination across policy areas to make London a child-friendly city. The London Children's Ambassador should ensure that child-friendliness is considered across all areas of GLA policy, including by providing input to the Mayor's statutory strategies, mayoral mandates, and delivery plans. The London Children's Ambassador should be designated through a transparent process and be in place by the end of 2026.

---

### **Child-friendly city recognition**

A practical way to focus policy efforts on making London a child-friendly city is to pursue the UNICEF (United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund) Child-Friendly City recognition. UNICEF defines a child-friendly city as one that is “committed to fulfilling the child rights as articulated in the Convention on the Rights of the Child [...] where the voices, needs, priorities and rights of children are an integral part of public policies, programmes, and decisions. Thus, a child-friendly city is a city that is fit for all.”<sup>181</sup> During our investigation, Katherine Hill outlined that she “would strongly urge the Mayor to think about taking London forward towards that accreditation”,<sup>182</sup> which is a view shared by this Committee.

---

<sup>177</sup> London Assembly Economy, Culture and Skills Committee, [Transcript, Panel 2](#), 13 November 2025, p. 2; Roberts, D. (2018), ‘[Young families typically leave cities for the suburbs. Here's how to keep them downtown](#)’, *Vox*, 11 June 2018.

<sup>178</sup> London Assembly Economy, Culture and Skills Committee, [Transcript, Panel 2](#), 13 November 2025, p. 2.

<sup>179</sup> London Assembly Economy, Culture and Skills Committee, [Transcript, Panel 2](#), 13 November 2025, p. 2.

<sup>180</sup> London Assembly Economy, Culture and Skills Committee, [Transcript, Panel 2](#), 13 November 2025, p. 2.

<sup>181</sup> UNICEF (2022), [Guidance Note: The Child Friendly Cities Initiative](#), p. 5.

<sup>182</sup> London Assembly Economy, Culture and Skills Committee, [Transcript](#), 14 October 2025, p. 1.

Given the challenges faced by families in London, pursuing this recognition could incentivise policy decisions that would improve the lives of children in London and enhance the city's appeal for families. Achieving Child-Friendly City recognition requires cooperation and partnerships between local government and other stakeholders such as civil society organisations, the private sector, academia, media, and children and child-led organisations.<sup>183</sup> It also requires cities to develop indicators against which the progress and impact of planned goals, objectives, and activities can be monitored and evaluated.<sup>184</sup> Building partnerships and developing indicators to measure the city's progress would aid in ensuring the Mayor can be held accountable for making London more child-friendly.

London can learn from other cities such as Cardiff, which became the UK's first city to receive the UNICEF Child Friendly City recognition in 2023. Over five years, Cardiff Council cooperated with local partners to implement strategies that embed children's rights – as outlined in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child<sup>185</sup> – into how it develops policies, makes decisions, and delivers services. Cardiff prioritised six areas as part of this work: Cooperation and Leadership; Communication; Culture; Health; Family and Belonging; and Education and Learning. These priorities are now enshrined in Cardiff's Child Friendly Strategy.<sup>186</sup> Some of the measures pursued by Cardiff to receive this recognition include providing a new Family Support Gateway to ensure children and young people can access early help and support; improving access to local authority play provision for children aged 5-14; and reducing traffic on 19 streets through the city's School Streets Scheme.<sup>187</sup>

Any decision by the Mayor to pursue UNICEF Child-Friendly City recognition should complement and strengthen ongoing efforts at the local authority level. For example, the London Boroughs of Lambeth and Redbridge are already pursuing actions and building partnerships to become UNICEF Child-Friendly Communities.<sup>188</sup> By working closely with local authorities, the Mayor can play an influential role in ensuring that children's rights and needs are embedded in policy across all of London. Given that it takes between three and five years for a city to be recognised as a Child Friendly City by UNICEF,<sup>189</sup> the Mayor should commit to pursuing this recognition as a matter of priority by June 2026.

---

<sup>183</sup> UNICEF (2022), [Guidance Note: The Child Friendly Cities Initiative](#), p. 5.

<sup>184</sup> UNICEF (2022), [Guidance Note: The Child Friendly Cities Initiative](#), p. 20.

<sup>185</sup> United Nations, [General Assembly resolution 44/25 – Convention on the Rights of the Child](#), Adopted 20 November 1989.

<sup>186</sup> Child Friendly Cardiff (2018), [Child Friendly Cardiff Strategy 2018](#).

<sup>187</sup> UNICEF UK (2023), ['Celebrations in Cardiff: City becomes the UK's first UNICEF Child Friendly City'](#).

<sup>188</sup> London Borough of Lambeth (n.d.), ['About Child Friendly Lambeth'](#) (accessed 9 December 2025); London Borough of Redbridge, ['The Child Friendly Unicef Programme'](#) (accessed 9 December 2025).

<sup>189</sup> UNICEF UK (n.d.), ['Becoming a UNICEF Child Friendly City or Community'](#) (accessed 18 December 2025).

## Recommendation 4

London should seek to become a UNICEF Child Friendly City. The Mayor should identify the steps required for London to achieve this recognition and pursue actions that enable him to do so. This will involve working closely with London's 33 local authorities and building partnerships with key stakeholders in civil society, the private sector, academia, media, and children's organisations. The Mayor should commit by June 2026 to pursuing this recognition for London.

---

### Housing and the London Plan

As discussed earlier, the shortage of family-sized homes in both the social and private sectors is making London increasingly unviable for families with children. We found that there may be insufficient incentives in London to build homes that are suitably sized for families with children. Even where family-sized homes are available, families are often not able to access or afford them, and larger homes are increasingly occupied by shared tenants.

We heard clear calls for an increase to the supply of family-sized homes, particularly social and affordable homes. Susie Dye outlined that the Mayor should build more social housing and "affordable homes that mean that people can stay, can start a family, [and] can make a life here in London".<sup>190</sup> Katherine Hill described a self-fulfilling cycle whereby the declining number of children and families in London reduces the presumed demand for family-sized homes, which means that even fewer family-sized homes get built. She added that housebuilding targets should encourage the construction of larger family-sized homes, even if it is less profitable for developers.<sup>191</sup>

The London Assembly Housing Committee has recently explored how the GLA's new Social and Affordable Homes Programme could be used to deliver more family homes.<sup>192</sup> In its report published in January 2026, the Committee recommended that the GLA's 2026-36 Affordable Homes Programme should include increased funding for family-sized homes and targets for family-sized homes.<sup>193</sup>

The new London Plan, which the GLA is currently developing, presents an opportunity for the Mayor to embed new requirements for family-sized homes in London. The consultation document published in 2025, *Towards a new London Plan*, explains that the London Plan currently "leaves any family housing requirements for boroughs to set out in their local plans, taking account of local circumstances."<sup>194</sup> It sets out that a potential option for the next London Plan is to "include specific requirements for homes suitable for children and young people, including the size or number of bedrooms."<sup>195</sup> Given the evidence we have heard, we believe the GLA should include such requirements in the next London Plan.

---

<sup>190</sup> London Assembly Economy, Culture and Skills Committee, [Transcript](#), 14 October 2025, p. 16.

<sup>191</sup> London Assembly Economy, Culture and Skills Committee, [Transcript](#), 14 October 2025, p. 19.

<sup>192</sup> London Assembly Housing Committee (2025), '[The Mayor's Affordable Housing Delivery](#)'.

<sup>193</sup> London Assembly Housing Committee (2026), [Assessing delivery, challenges and opportunities of the Mayor's Affordable Homes Programme](#), pp. 16-19.

<sup>194</sup> Mayor of London (2025), [Towards a new London Plan](#), p. 54.

<sup>195</sup> Mayor of London (2025), [Towards a new London Plan](#), p. 54.

We recognise that ensuring a sufficient supply of smaller one and two-bed homes is important to relieve pressure in the market for larger family-sized homes. We also acknowledge concerns in the London Plan consultation document that introducing specific requirements for family-sized homes in the London Plan could risk disincentivising development, particularly in areas where land values and viability pressures are high.<sup>196</sup> However, evidence suggests that the current approach – leaving requirements to borough-level plans – has resulted in extremely low delivery of homes suitable for families. Without stronger policy intervention, this trend is unlikely to reverse. For this reason, the next London Plan should include requirements for family-sized homes, while ensuring sufficient flexibility for boroughs to reflect local circumstances such as housing demand and land prices.

## **Recommendation 5**

The Mayor should include specific requirements for homes suitable for children across all types of tenure in the next London Plan. These requirements should be included in the draft London Plan, which is due to be published in 2026.

---

### **Childcare**

The affordability and availability of childcare are key factors that make it difficult for families to raise children in London. The Committee's 2024 report, *Early years childcare in London*,<sup>197</sup> identified that high-quality, accessible, and affordable childcare plays a key role in children's development, enables parents to participate in the workforce, and alleviates cost-of-living pressures for families. It concluded that these factors are all "essential for London's economic development and making the city a more equal and attractive place to live in."<sup>198</sup>

Investing in childcare to reduce costs and improve accessibility would likely make it more feasible and affordable to raise a family in London and improve children's outcomes. Dr Bernice Kuang observed that there is evidence "to suggest that childcare is probably the most robust factor" to encourage people to have children, since this enables people to reconcile work and family commitments across their life course.<sup>199</sup> However, she added that subsidising childcare only when children are very young is not as impactful as sustained childcare support for parents "across their working lives and children across ages".<sup>200</sup> Paul Lindley argued in favour of increased public investment in childcare, adding that "early intervention of high quality, discounted or free childcare makes the difference to that child through their entire life."<sup>201</sup>

Our investigation heard broad but not unanimous support for introducing universal free childcare in London. Katherine Hill supported "a universal childcare offer very much akin to the way that we offer education from age five", which she argued was "a universal good, both for

---

<sup>196</sup> Mayor of London (2025), [Towards a new London Plan](#), p. 54.

<sup>197</sup> London Assembly Economy, Culture and Skills Committee (2024), [Early years childcare in London](#).

<sup>198</sup> London Assembly Economy, Culture and Skills Committee (2024), [Early years childcare in London](#), p. 10.

<sup>199</sup> London Assembly Economy, Culture and Skills Committee, [Transcript](#), 14 October 2025, p. 15.

<sup>200</sup> London Assembly Economy, Culture and Skills Committee, [Transcript](#), 14 October 2025, p. 15.

<sup>201</sup> London Assembly Economy, Culture and Skills Committee, [Transcript, Panel 2](#), 13 November 2025, p. 6.

an individual and for the city and for society".<sup>202</sup> Paul Lindley argued that universal childcare would be "right at the top of things that we can do to make it affordable" for families to live in London.<sup>203</sup> Research suggests that high-quality early education programmes for disadvantaged children under the age of five can deliver a 13 per cent per annum return on investment.<sup>204</sup> Although this implies that universal childcare could deliver significant economic benefits, Phoebe Arslanagić-Little argued that while wanting "to give all children the best start in life is an extremely noble aim", the evidence of the benefits of universal childcare is "overstated".<sup>205</sup> She referenced research from a pre-kindergarten programme in Tennessee, which suggests that the benefits of early years childcare had minimal effects on long-term learning outcomes.<sup>206</sup>

However, it is important to note that Tennessee is a different case to London and the results of this study cannot be assumed to apply universally. In the UK context, a long-term study funded by the Department of Education investigated the influence of pre-school on children's academic attainment, progress, and social-behavioural outcomes, finding multiple positive effects into primary and secondary school.<sup>207</sup> The Institute for Fiscal Studies has also found that pre-school attendance delivers positive financial returns over lifetime earnings to the individual, households, and the Exchequer.<sup>208</sup> During our investigation, Phoebe Arslanagić-Little expressed doubts around the potential economic benefits and feasibility of providing universal childcare in the UK.<sup>209</sup> Given this diversity of views, we believe universal childcare warrants further investigation to identify its feasibility and consider whether it would achieve the desired effects.

## **Built environment and play**

A child-friendly built environment enables children to play and explore freely, which benefits both their development and the lives of their parents. The Town and Country Planning Association (TCPA) outlines that: "Play is an essential part of every child's life and is vital for their enjoyment of childhood as well as for their social, emotional, intellectual and physical development."<sup>210</sup> Paul Lindley drew our attention to a definition of play that is "what children and young people do when they follow their own ideas and interests, in their own way, and for their own reasons."<sup>211</sup> Tim Gill spoke about child-friendly built environments as being essential to children's "everyday freedoms".<sup>212</sup> He added that "where it is easier for children to get around on their own, parents benefit, too, because they do not have to do that job and they do

---

<sup>202</sup> London Assembly Economy, Culture and Skills Committee, [Transcript](#), 14 October 2025, p. 7.

<sup>203</sup> London Assembly Economy, Culture and Skills Committee, [Transcript, Panel 2](#), 13 November 2025, p. 6.

<sup>204</sup> García, J., Heckman, J., Ermini Leaf, D. and Prados, M. (2016), '[The Life-Cycle Benefits of an Influential Early Childhood Program](#)', *HCEO Working Paper Series*, Working Paper 2016-035.

<sup>205</sup> London Assembly Economy, Culture and Skills Committee, [Transcript, Panel 2](#), 13 November 2025, p. 6.

<sup>206</sup> Lipsey, M., Farran, D. and Durkin, K. (2018), '[Effects of the Tennessee Prekindergarten Program on children's achievement and behavior through third grade](#)', *Early Childhood Research Quarterly*, 45, pp. 155-176.

<sup>207</sup> Taggart, B., Sylva, K., Melhuish, E., Sammons, P., and Sirah, I. (2015), '[How pre-school influences children and young people's attainment and developmental outcomes over time](#)', *Research Brief*, Department for Education.

<sup>208</sup> Cattán, S., Crawford, C., and Dearden, L. (2014), '[The Economic Effects of Pre-school Education and Quality](#)', *IFS Report R99*, Institute for Fiscal Studies.

<sup>209</sup> London Assembly Economy, Culture and Skills Committee, [Transcript, Panel 2](#), 13 November 2025, p. 9.

<sup>210</sup> TCPA (2024), [Raising the healthiest generation in history: why it matters where children and young people live](#), p. 23.

<sup>211</sup> Dobson, F. (2004), [Getting Serious About Play: A review of children's play](#), p. 6.

<sup>212</sup> London Assembly Economy, Culture and Skills Committee, [Transcript, Panel 2](#), 13 November 2025, p. 12.

not have to spend the time ferrying kids here, there and everywhere.”<sup>213</sup> By providing space for children to play independently, how housing developments are designed can therefore relieve some of the pressures and demands faced by parents.

Despite its importance, the premium on space in London means that children's play can be squeezed out of new housing developments. Although the minimum requirement to provide at least ten square metres of play space per child in new developments, as set out in Policy S4 of the London Plan, may be a positive aspiration, we heard of issues with its implementation. Dinah Bornat explained that while ten square metres per child may seem like a lot, developments outside London generally provide for 25 square metres per child and the policy in the capital is already “being eroded.”<sup>214</sup> She explained that although developments should not be allowed to off-site the ten square metres of play space per child, this “is not being talked about or understood in any development proposal that [she sees] coming forward.”<sup>215</sup>

---

*“If you are a parent and you are working, you tell me where you find that time to stand and watch your child exercising for hours on end. If you can allow them to go outside, run around and kick a ball while you are making dinner or writing an email, that is the perfect family setup.”<sup>216</sup>*

### **Dinah Bornat, Director, ZCD Architects**

---

The Mayor should play a more active role in supporting London's boroughs to fulfil their responsibilities under Policy S4 of the London Plan. Under this policy, boroughs are required to prepare development plans informed by a needs assessment of children's play and informal recreation facilities. This should include an audit of existing play and informal recreation opportunities and the quantity, quality, and accessibility of provision. Importantly, the policy states that boroughs “should consider the need for cross-borough collaboration where appropriate.”<sup>217</sup> However, during our investigation, Dinah Bornat outlined that “boroughs are not producing their play strategies and thinking about cross-London spaces.”<sup>218</sup> To address this, she proposed that the GLA should produce a map of London to identify all the spaces that children and young people could use for play and informal recreation, which could “help the boroughs understand where they have a deficit and a surplus.”<sup>219</sup> We also believe such a map would help families with children identify accessible and free spaces for play and informal recreation. We call on the Mayor to begin consultations with boroughs and develop such a map as a matter of priority.

---

<sup>213</sup> London Assembly Economy, Culture and Skills Committee, [Transcript, Panel 2](#), 13 November 2025, p. 12.

<sup>214</sup> London Assembly Economy, Culture and Skills Committee, [Transcript, Panel 2](#), 13 November 2025, p. 15.

<sup>215</sup> London Assembly Economy, Culture and Skills Committee, [Transcript, Panel 2](#), 13 November 2025, p. 15.

<sup>216</sup> London Assembly Economy, Culture and Skills Committee, [Transcript, Panel 2](#), 13 November 2025, p. 15.

<sup>217</sup> Mayor of London (2021), *The London Plan 2021*, p. 227.

<sup>218</sup> London Assembly Economy, Culture and Skills Committee, [Transcript, Panel 2](#), 13 November 2025, p. 15.

<sup>219</sup> London Assembly Economy, Culture and Skills Committee, [Transcript, Panel 2](#), 13 November 2025, p. 15.

## Recommendation 6

The GLA should develop a map of all the spaces in London that children and young people can access for play and informal recreation. This would help boroughs identify where they have a deficit or surplus of provision and support cross-borough collaboration. An online interactive version of the map would also help families with children identify opportunities for play and informal recreation across London. The Mayor should start to consult with boroughs on the production of this map by June 2026, and it should be completed by March 2027.

---

### Play Sufficiency Action Plan

Protecting and promoting children’s play is key to making London a child-friendly city. Rather than being a nice-to-have, play must be an essential consideration across all areas of policy. At a national level, the Raising the Nation Play Commission, which Paul Lindley chaired, concluded that play needs to become a “political and policy priority, underpinned by national leadership, legal protections, and cultural change.”<sup>220</sup> During our investigation, he argued that decision-makers must ensure that play can happen “everywhere, and anywhere and anytime.”<sup>221</sup>

We believe that London should be a national leader on play sufficiency, which is an ongoing process of research and action that aims to assess, improve, and protect children’s opportunities for play. Unlike Scotland and Wales, England does not currently have a statutory Play Sufficiency Duty for local authorities. The Raising the Nation Play Commission recommended this be introduced in England to “require local authorities to regularly assess and secure adequate play provision, particularly in communities where access is limited.”<sup>222</sup> Despite the absence of a Play Sufficiency Duty, Leeds has demonstrated how a city can proactively lead on this by becoming the first city in England to commit to delivering an action plan.<sup>223</sup> This has led to “an ongoing process of research and action to assess, improve and protect children’s opportunities for play”, including by listening directly to children, parents, carers and frontline workers.<sup>224</sup> This is central to Leeds City Council’s ambition “to be the best city for a child to grow up in”.<sup>225</sup> We believe London should have the same level of ambition.

Learning from the example of Leeds, the Mayor and the proposed London Children’s Ambassador should work with boroughs to develop a Play Sufficiency Action Plan for London. This would require conducting research across London to understand children’s opportunities to play in their homes, neighbourhoods, and schools. This should also examine learnings and good practice from other global cities that have successfully developed child-friendly play environments. This would inform the development of strategic play priorities and an action plan

---

<sup>220</sup> Raising the Nation Play Commission (2025), [Everything to Play For: A Plan to Ensure Every Child in England Can Play](#), p. 13.

<sup>221</sup> London Assembly Economy, Culture and Skills Committee, [Transcript, Panel 2](#), 13 November 2025, p. 3.

<sup>222</sup> Raising the Nation Play Commission (2025), [Everything to Play For: A Plan to Ensure Every Child in England Can Play](#), p. 13.

<sup>223</sup> House of Commons Levelling Up, Housing and Communities Committee (2024), [‘Written Evidence Submitted by Tomas Johnson and Jennifer Rutherford \[CBE 089\]’](#).

<sup>224</sup> House of Commons Levelling Up, Housing and Communities Committee (2024), [‘Written Evidence Submitted by Tomas Johnson and Jennifer Rutherford \[CBE 089\]’](#).

<sup>225</sup> House of Commons Levelling Up, Housing and Communities Committee (2024), [‘Written Evidence Submitted by Tomas Johnson and Jennifer Rutherford \[CBE 089\]’](#).

for play across London. Like the Leeds Action Plan, this should be a living document and publicly accessible.<sup>226</sup> Although this work would be led by the GLA, strong cooperation with the boroughs would be essential for developing the action plan and implementing it at a local level.

## **Recommendation 7**

The Mayor should work with the proposed London Children’s Ambassador and London’s local authorities to develop a London Play Sufficiency Action Plan. This would involve conducting research on children’s opportunities for play across the city and developing strategic priorities that would embed play sufficiency considerations in decision-making across London. The Mayor should commit to developing a Play Sufficiency Action Plan by June 2026 and research should begin by January 2027, with a view to finalising a publicly accessible Action Plan by September 2027.

---

<sup>226</sup> Child Friendly Leeds (n.d.), [Play Sufficiency Action Plan](#) (accessed 10 December 2025).

## Committee Activity

### Investigation aims and objectives

- To investigate current and projected trends relating to birth rates and the number of children in London.
- To investigate how these trends differ in inner and outer London.
- To understand the causes of the declining number of births and young children living in London.
- To examine what a declining child population will mean for schools and other public services in London.
- To understand the immediate and medium-term economic impact of fewer families and children living in London.
- To ask whether the Mayor, local and central government should take action to address the decline in London's child population.

### Evidence gathering

We are very grateful to all who contributed to this investigation.

### Formal meetings

*Meeting 1 (14 October 2025):*

- **Susie Dye**, Grants Manager, Trust for London
- **Katherine Hill**, Strategic Programme Manager, 4in10
- **Dr Bernice Kuang**, Research Fellow in Demography, University of Southampton

*Meeting 2 (13 November 2025):*

- **Jon Andrews**, Head of Analysis and Director for School System and Performance, Education Policy Institute
- **Phoebe Arslanagic-Little**, Co-Director of the Boom Campaign and Head of New Deal for Parents, Onward UK
- **Dinah Bornat**, Director, ZCD Architects
- **Councillor Ian Edwards**, Executive Member for Children and Young People, London Councils
- **Tim Gill**, Independent Researcher, Writer and Consultant on Childhood
- **Lucy Heller**, Chief Executive, Ark
- **Paul Lindley OBE**, Social Campaigner, Author and Chair, Raising the Nation Play Commission

### Informal meeting

The Committee received an informal briefing from Ben Corr, Demography and City Modelling Manager, GLA City Intelligence on 14 October 2025.

### **Call for evidence**

The Committee opened a call for evidence from 18 September to 10 November 2025 and received submissions from the following contributors:

- G15 [[CL001](#)]
- Parent in an Inner London development [[CL002](#)]
- Parent and Resident in West London [[CL003](#)]

### **YouGov survey**

The Committee commissioned a representative survey of Londoners through the GLA City Intelligence Unit with YouGov. The survey was carried out between 17 October and 3 November 2025, with responses received from 1,416 London residents aged 18 and above. Questions in the survey focused on the suitability of London as a place to raise children, whether respondents have or intend to have children in London, and the factors that are influential in deciding where to raise children. The results and data tables can be found [here](#).

### **Additional survey of Londoners**

The Committee launch an additional online survey to hear the views of people who have moved out of London or are considering moving out of London to have children. This survey invited respondents to share their experience and the reasons for their decision. We received 85 responses in total. The respondents to this online survey were self-selected and therefore cannot be considered representative of the London population. Although the findings provide the Committee with an overall impression of Londoners' experiences, they should not be considered a precise reflection of these. The results of the online survey can be found [here](#).

### **Freedom of Information requests**

To understand the extent of school closures in London, we sent Freedom of Information (FOI) requests to London's local authorities to identify the number of school closures and mergers in London since 2018-19 and the reasons for these. We contacted all 33 local authorities in London and received 31 responses. Analysis of the FOI responses can be found [here](#).

## Other formats and languages

If you, or someone you know needs this report in large print or braille, or a copy of the summary and main findings in another language, then please call us on: 020 7983 4100 or email [assembly.translations@london.gov.uk](mailto:assembly.translations@london.gov.uk)

### Chinese

如您需要这份文件的简介的翻译本，  
请电话联系或按上面所提供的邮寄地址或  
Email 与我们联系。

### Vietnamese

Nếu ông (bà) muốn nội dung văn bản này được dịch sang tiếng Việt, xin vui lòng liên hệ với chúng tôi bằng điện thoại, thư hoặc thư điện tử theo địa chỉ ở trên.

### Greek

*Εάν επιθυμείτε περίληψη αυτού του κειμένου στην γλώσσα σας, παρακαλώ καλέστε τον αριθμό ή επικοινωνήστε μαζί μας στην ανωτέρω ταχυδρομική ή την ηλεκτρονική διεύθυνση.*

### Turkish

Bu belgenin kendi dilinize çevrilmiş bir özetini okumak isterseniz, lütfen yukarıdaki telefon numarasını arayın, veya posta ya da e-posta adresi aracılığıyla bizimle temasa geçin.

### Punjabi

ਜੇ ਤੁਸੀਂ ਇਸ ਦਸਤਾਵੇਜ਼ ਦਾ ਸੰਖੇਪ ਅਪਣੀ ਭਾਸ਼ਾ ਵਿਚ ਲੈਣਾ ਚਾਹੋ, ਤਾਂ ਕਿਰਪਾ ਕਰਕੇ ਇਸ ਨੰਬਰ 'ਤੇ ਫ਼ੋਨ ਕਰੋ ਜਾਂ ਉਪਰ ਦਿੱਤੇ ਡਾਕ ਜਾਂ ਈਮੇਲ ਪਤੇ 'ਤੇ ਸਾਨੂੰ ਸੰਪਰਕ ਕਰੋ।

### Hindi

यदि आपको इस दस्तावेज़ का सारांश अपनी भाषा में चाहिए तो उपर दिये हुए नंबर पर फोन करें या उपर दिये गये डाक पते या ई मेल पते पर हम से संपर्क करें।

### Bengali

আপনি যদি এই দলিলের একটা সারাংশ নিজের ভাষায় পেতে চান, তাহলে দয়া করে ফো করবেন অথবা উল্লেখিত ডাক ঠিকানায় বা ই-মেইল ঠিকানায় আমাদের সাথে যোগাযোগ করবেন।

### Urdu

اگر آپ کو اس دستاویز کا خلاصہ اپنی زبان میں درکار ہو تو، براہ کرم نمبر پر فون کریں یا مذکورہ بالا ڈاک کے پتے یا ای میل پتے پر ہم سے رابطہ کریں۔

### Arabic

إذا كنت أنت أو أحد معارفك بحاجة إلى هذا التقرير مطبوعاً بخط كبير أو بطريقة برايل، أو ترغب في الحصول على الملخص والنتائج الرئيسية بلغة أخرى، فيرجى التواصل معنا على: 020 7983 4100 أو عبر البريد الإلكتروني [assembly.translations@london.gov.uk](mailto:assembly.translations@london.gov.uk)

### Gujarati

જો તમારે આ દસ્તાવેજનો સાર તમારી ભાષામાં જોઈતો હોય તો ઉપર આપેલ નંબર પર ફોન કરો અથવા ઉપર આપેલ ટપાલ અથવા ઈ-મેઈલ સરનામા પર અમારો સંપર્ક કરો.

## Connect with us

### The London Assembly

City Hall  
Kamal Chunchie Way  
London E16 1ZE

Website: <https://www.london.gov.uk/who-we-are/what-london-assembly-does>

Phone: 020 7983 4000

### Follow us on social media



**LONDON**ASSEMBLY