

Living and Working in

London

6TH
EDITION



The best-selling, most accurate and most frequently
updated book about living in London

Graeme Chesters & David Hampshire

Living & Working in **LONDON**

• A Survival Handbook •



Graeme Chesters & David Hampshire



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What Readers and Reviewers Have Said About Survival Books:

"If I were to move to France, I would like David Hampshire to be with me, holding my hand every step of the way. This being impractical, I would have to settle for second best and take his books with me instead!"

Living France

"We would like to congratulate you on this work: it is really super! We hand it out to our expatriates and they read it with great interest and pleasure."

ICI (Switzerland) AG

"I found this a wonderful book crammed with facts and figures, with a straightforward approach to the problems and pitfalls you are likely to encounter. The whole laced with humour and a thorough understanding of what's involved. Gets my vote!"

Reader (Amazon)

"Get hold of David Hampshire's book for its sheer knowledge, straightforwardness and insights to the Spanish character and do yourself a favour!"

Living Spain

"Rarely has a 'survival guide' contained such useful advice – This book dispels doubts for first time travellers, yet is also useful for seasoned globetrotters – In a word, if you're planning to move to the US or go there for a long term stay, then buy this book both for general reading and as a ready reference."

American Citizens Abroad

"It's everything you always wanted to ask but didn't for fear of the contemptuous put down – The best English language guide – Its pages are stuffed with practical information on everyday subjects and are designed to complement the traditional guidebook."

Swiss News

"A must for all future expats. I invested in several books but this is the only one you need.

Every issue and concern is covered, every daft question you have but are frightened to ask is answered honestly without pulling any punches.

Highly recommended."

Reader (Amazon)

"Let's say it at once. David Hampshire's *Living and Working in France* is the best handbook ever produced for visitors and foreign residents in this country; indeed, my discussion with locals showed that it has much to teach even those born and bred in l'Hexagone. It is Hampshire's meticulous detail which lifts his work way beyond the range of other books with similar titles. This book is absolutely indispensable."

The Riviera Reporter

"Covers every conceivable question that might be asked concerning everyday life – I know of no other book that could take the place of this one."

France in Print

"It was definitely money well spent."

Reader (Amazon)

"The ultimate reference book – Every conceivable subject imaginable is exhaustively explained in simple terms – An excellent introduction to fully enjoy all that this fine country has to offer and save time and money in the process."

American Club of Zurich

Important Note

London is a huge city with many faces, numerous ethnic groups, religions and customs, added to which the UK has continuously changing rules, regulations, interest rates and prices. We cannot recommend too strongly that you check with an official and reliable source (not always the same) before making any major decisions or taking an irreversible course of action. However, don't believe everything you're told or read – even, dare we say it, herein!

Useful addresses, websites and references to other sources of information have been included throughout the book and in **Appendices A to C** to help you obtain further information and verify details with official sources. Important points have been emphasised in **bold print**, some of which it would be expensive, or even dangerous, to disregard. Ignore them at your peril or cost.

Note

Unless specifically stated, the reference to any company, organisation or product in this book doesn't constitute an endorsement or recommendation. None of the businesses, products or individuals listed have paid to be mentioned.

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Authors' Notes

- ◆ References are made in this book to the European Union (EU), which comprises Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Cyprus, the Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, the Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden and the UK. The European Economic Area (EEA) includes the EU countries plus the European Free Trade Association (EFTA) countries of Iceland, Liechtenstein and Norway – plus Switzerland (which is a member of EFTA but not the EEA).
- ◆ Times are shown using **am** (ante meridiem) for before noon and **pm** (post meridiem) for after noon. All times are local – you should check the time difference when making international telephone calls (see **Time Difference** on page 286).
- ◆ Unless otherwise stated, prices shown usually include Value Added Tax (VAT) and should be taken as estimates only, although they were mostly correct at the time of publication.
- ◆ His/he/him also means hers/she/her (please forgive me ladies). This is done to make life easier for both the reader and the authors, and isn't intended to be sexist.
- ◆ All spelling is (or should be) British English and not American English. American English equivalents are shown in brackets where these differ significantly from British English words.
- ◆ The word 'London' has been omitted from London addresses in this book and goes before the postcode when addressing letters.
- ◆ Warnings and important points are shown in **bold type**.
- ◆ The following symbols are used in this book: ☎ (telephone), 📠 (fax), 🌐 (internet) and ✉ (email).
- ◆ Lists of **Useful Addresses**, **Further Reading** and **Useful Websites** are contained in **Appendices A, B and C** respectively.
- ◆ For those unfamiliar with the imperial system of Weights and Measures, conversion tables (imperial/metric) are included in **Appendix D**.
- ◆ Useful tables are included in **Appendix E**.
- ◆ A map of London's 32 boroughs and the City of London is shown inside the front cover, and a map of the London underground network inside the back cover.



Beefeaters, Tower of London

Introduction

London is one of the world's great cities, but it can be a confusing and daunting place for newcomers – it isn't only vast and labyrinthine, but also bureaucratic. However, fear not, whether you're already living or working in London or just thinking about it – this book is just what you need. Forget about those glossy guide books, excellent though they are for tourists; ***Living and Working in London*** was written especially with you in mind and is worth its weight in wheels. This 6th edition has been completely updated and revised.

General information isn't difficult to find in the UK; however, reliable and up-to-date information specifically intended for newcomers living or working in London isn't so easy to find. Our aim in publishing this book was to help fill this void and provide the practical information necessary for a relatively trouble-free life. You may have visited London as a tourist, but living and working there is a different matter altogether. Adjusting to a different environment and culture and making a home in any foreign city can be a traumatic and stressful experience – and London is no exception.

Living and Working in London is a comprehensive handbook on a wide range of everyday subjects and represents the most up-to-date source of general information available to foreigners in London. It isn't, however, simply a monologue of dry facts and figures, but a practical and entertaining look at life. (Our sister publication, ***Living and Working in Britain***, contains comprehensive information regarding a wealth of subjects applicable both to London and the rest of the UK.)

Adapting to life in London is a continuous process and this book will reduce your novice phase, minimise the frustrations and help you make informed decisions and related judgements, instead of uneducated guesses and costly mistakes. **Most important of all, it will help save you time, trouble and money, and repay your investment many times over.**

Although you may find some of the information a bit daunting, don't be discouraged – most problems occur only once and fade into insignificance after a short period (as you face the next half dozen!). However, although expatriate 'Londoners' may occasionally complain about bankers, lawyers, politicians, traffic wardens and the weather, most love living there. A period spent in London is a wonderful way to enrich your life, broaden your horizons, make friends and, with any luck (and some hard work), make your fortune. We trust this book will help you avoid the pitfalls of life in London and smooth your way to a happy and rewarding future in your new home.

Good luck!

Graeme Chesters & David Hampshire

January 2012



London Eye & the River Thames

1.

WELCOME TO LONDON

London is one of the world's great cities and Europe's largest; Greater London covers over 610mi² (1,580km²) and has a population of around 7.9m. It's Britain's seat of government; the home of the British Royal Family; the UK's commercial, cultural and sporting centre; Europe's leading financial market; the 'capital' of the English-speaking world; and a world leader in architecture, art, fashion, food, music, publishing, film and television. It's home to the European headquarters of over a third of the world's largest companies and over two-thirds of *Fortune's* Global 500 companies have chosen London as their centre of operations.

London is also Europe's most racially and culturally diverse city, and one of the most cosmopolitan in the world; one in three Londoners (over 2.5m people) were born outside the UK and between them they speak over 300 languages. Greater London is home to almost half of the ethnic minority population of the UK, who hail from all corners of the globe, particularly Europe and the Commonwealth countries of Africa, Asia and the West Indies; the city has some 60 foreign communities of over 10,000 people born outside the UK. To add to this cultural potpourri, a phenomenal 30m visitors (it's the world's leading tourism destination) swell London's population each year, not to mention the hundreds of thousands of commuters who flock there daily from the surrounding (home) counties and further afield to work.

London is the UK's main employment centre, with a huge variety of job opportunities, although unemployment is high in some boroughs. However, in common with most capital cities, the cost of living is high – property in particular is among the most expensive in the world – although higher salaries compensate to some extent. Like all large cities, London displays stark contrasts of wealth and poverty, and few places offer so endless opportunities to make or lose your fortune.

London's failings include pollution, an over-burdened public transport system (although much improved in recent years), traffic congestion, substandard housing and homelessness, over-crowding, high crime (in some areas) and racial tension. However, it's the people – the good, the bad and the ugly – who make London what it is and give the city its unique character. Although the British can be infuriating at times, they'll invariably charm and delight you with their sense of humour and idiosyncrasies.

The sheer size of London can be daunting – it isn't only vast and labyrinthine, but also chaotic. Central London was originally an assortment of villages and some 250 years ago there were wide spaces between them, although today they've merged into an almost seamless metropolis. The surrounding areas of London developed mainly in the Victorian period, when the 'suburbs' were at least partly planned. Outer London has more open space and the population density is generally below 2,750 people per mi² (7,000 per km²) – half of what it is in the city centre.

Any attempt to divide London into manageable and comprehensible pieces can be only partially successful. The task is made more difficult by the overlap between the various artificial divisions that have been created over the years – geographical,

cultural, historical, administrative and postal. A customary dividing line is the River Thames, which flows from west to east through London's centre. There's widespread belief that the areas north of the river are more pleasant than those to the south, just as it's generally believed that the West End is superior to the East End, but these generalisations often don't stand up when you look at areas in more detail.

GREATER LONDON AUTHORITY (GLA)

The Greater London Authority (GLA) was formed in 2000 to govern London and replaced the Greater London Council (GLC), which was abolished in 1986. It's the London-wide body responsible for coordinating the boroughs (see below), strategic planning, and operating some of Greater London's services such as the Metropolitan Police Service (note: the City of London has its own police force), the London Fire Service and public transport. The GLA consists of the Mayor of London (Boris Johnson, elected in 2008) and the London

Assembly, who are elected by Londoners every four years (the next elections are due in 2012).

When the GLC was abolished, most of its functions were taken over by the London boroughs, while others became the responsibility of joint-boards and other unelected bodies. The boroughs thus enjoyed a high degree of autonomy and although they lost some of their powers when the GLA was formed, they still retain many responsibilities which they didn't have under the GLC.

The Greater London Authority's site (www.london.gov.uk) provides information about the 14 constituencies (see below), and the UpMyStreet Solutions site (www.upmystreet.com), run in conjunction with Thomson Directories, is a mine of information about each postal area.

CONSTITUENCIES

The creation of the GLA grouped the boroughs (see below) into 14 constituencies (listed below). There are other more or less arbitrary divisions: 16 health authority areas, five police regions, four ambulance service zones and three fire brigade sectors.

Greater London Authority Constituencies

Constituency

Barnet and Camden
 Bexley and Bromley
 Brent and Harrow
 City and East London
 Croydon and Sutton
 Ealing and Hillingdon
 Enfield and Haringey
 Greenwich and Lewisham
 Havering and Redbridge
 Lambeth and Southwark
 Merton and Wandsworth
 North East
 South West
 West Central

Boroughs

Barnet, Camden
 Bexley, Bromley
 Brent, Harrow
 Barking and Dagenham, City of London, Newham, Tower Hamlets
 Croydon, Sutton
 Ealing, Hillingdon
 Enfield, Haringey
 Greenwich, Lewisham
 Havering, Redbridge
 Lambeth, Southwark
 Merton, Wandsworth
 Hammersmith and Fulham, Kensington and Chelsea, Westminster
 Hounslow, Kingston upon Thames, Richmond upon Thames

Officially, each borough is also divided into 'wards' (an administrative district of a parliamentary constituency), although most residents don't know their ward names. Most people refer instead to districts, which in some cases don't appear on maps, but which are either named after places long since swallowed by the outward sprawl of the city or derive from contemporary 'estate agent speak' (e.g. 'Blythe Village' and 'Brackenbury Village' in the borough of Hammersmith & Fulham and 'Limehouse Village' in Docklands). In many cases, these districts straddle borough or county boundaries.

POSTCODES

The most perplexing of London's various partitions is its division into postal areas, each with a different 'postcode' (the equivalent of US zip codes) that seldom bears any relationship to counties, boroughs or districts.

The postcode is the most important part of any address when sending mail, which, together with the house number, uniquely identifies an individual building or dwelling.

The system was designed at a time when the official London boundary was restricted to the square mile of the City of London. The area has continually expanded over the centuries and in 1965, when Greater London was created – its boundaries extended far beyond the London postal districts. The boroughs with a London postal district are shown in the table below.

Areas in central London (an area stretching in some areas to the borders of Greater London) have postcodes beginning with W (for

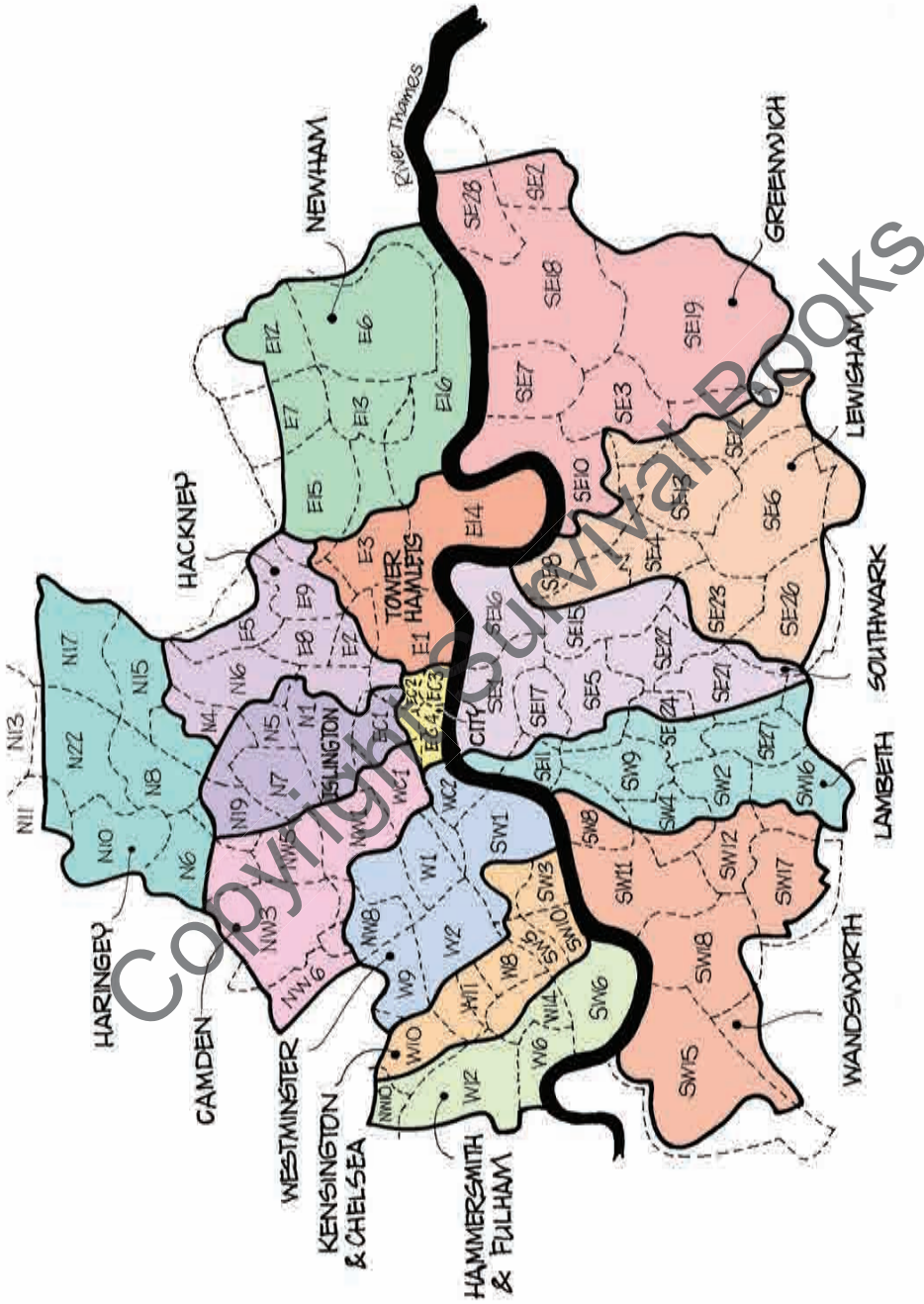


west), NW (northwest), N (north), E (east), SE (southeast) and SW (south-west) – there are no NE or S postcodes, which were abolished between 1866 and 1868. Areas in outer London have codes relating to the nearest town where there's a main sorting office, which is in some cases a 'borough' town (e.g. BR for Bromley, CR for Croydon, EN for Enfield, HA for Harrow, KT for Kingston and SM for Sutton – although there's no M in Sutton!) and in other

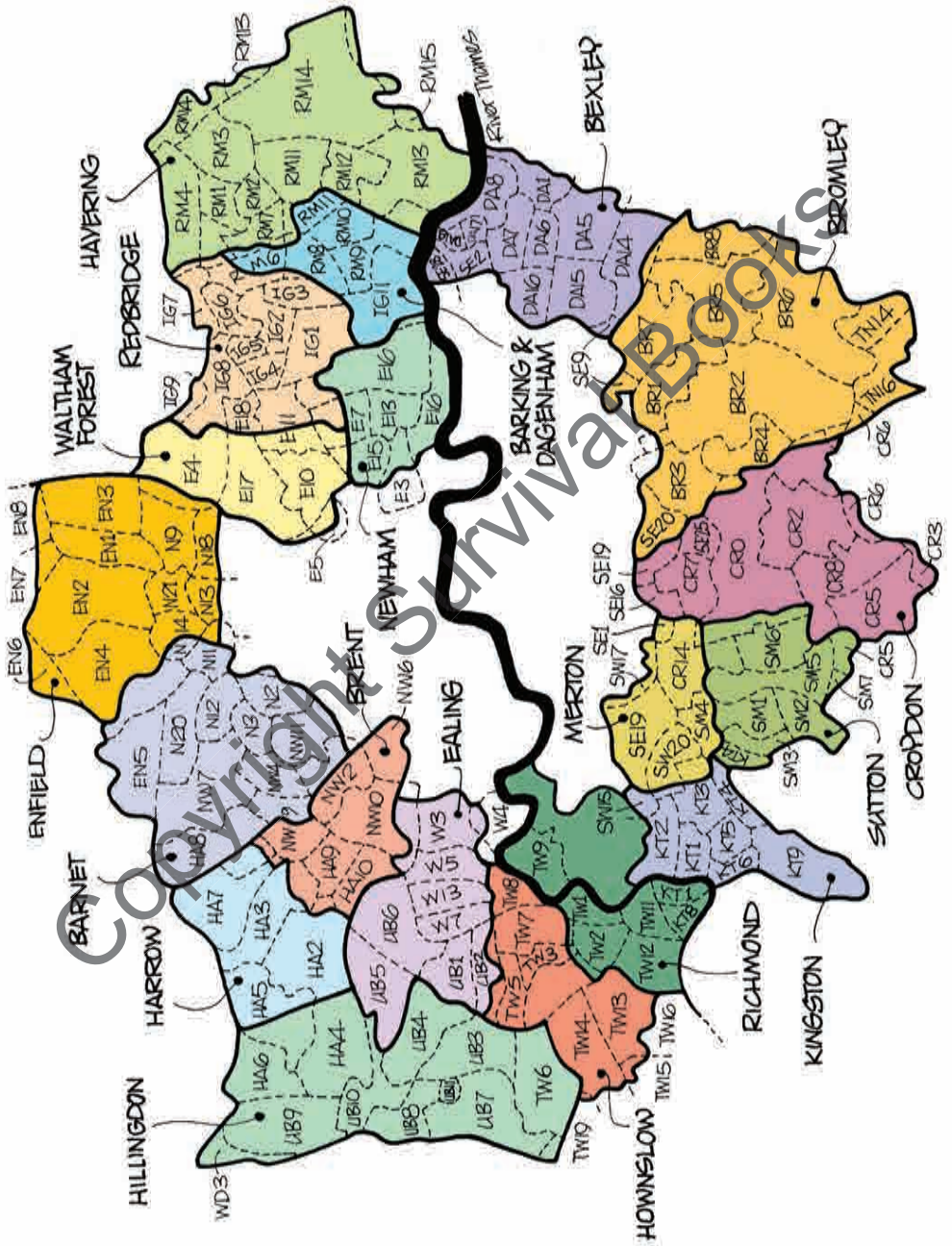
London Postcode Areas

Included	Boroughs
Entirely	City of London, Camden, Hammersmith & Fulham, Haringey, Islington, Kensington & Chelsea, Lambeth, Southwark, Tower Hamlets, Wandsworth, Westminster
Mostly	Greenwich, Lewisham, Newham, Waltham Forest
Partly	Barnet, Bexley, Brent, Bromley, Croydon, Ealing, Enfield, Harrow, Hounslow, Kingston upon Thames, Merton, Redbridge, Richmond upon Thames
Excluded	Barking & Dagenham, Havering, Hillingdon, Sutton

Inner London Postcodes



Outer London Postcodes



cases isn't (e.g. DA for Dagenham in Bexley, IG for Ilford in Redbridge, RM for Romford in Havering, TW for Twickenham in Richmond and UB for Uxbridge in Hillingdon).

As if all this weren't confusing enough, the numbers following the initial letter or letters of postcodes can also be misleading. Originally, the system was based on the initial letter of each sub-district in the alphabet; a district beginning with the letter 'A' was given the number 1 and so on. Many people erroneously believe that the numbers indicate the distance from the centre of London, whereby logically the lowest numbers would be nearest the centre and the highest furthest out, which isn't usually the case. The most central districts were allocated a '1' (W1, N1, SW1, etc.) but after that the numbers were allocated in alphabetical order, so SW2 is Brixton, SW3 Chelsea, SW4 Clapham, SW5 Earls Court, and so on.

To further complicate matters, between 1968 and 1971, some 'central' London postcodes were subdivided to create new, smaller postcode districts, and gained an extra letter, e.g. part of W1 became W1H. These letters have changed in recent years – no doubt making life easier for the Post Office but costing London residents and businesses millions of pounds (in stationery costs, etc.). Postcodes have also been 'extended' with an additional digit and two letters (separated from the first 3 or 4 'digit' postcode by a space) – which are all unique and together with the house number identify an individual address.

You can find the postcode for any UK address via the Royal Mail website (www2.postcode.royalmail.com/postcode-finder), which also contains a map showing the location (you can also display and print a map by entering the address or postcode on the Bing (www.bing.com/maps) or Streetmap (www.streetmap.co.uk) websites). Note that the word 'London' has been omitted from London addresses in this book and goes before the postcode when addressing letters.

SURVIVAL TIP

House prices in London are mainly defined by location and some people are willing to pay above the odds to acquire a home with a desirable postcode, which can inflate or reduce the value of a property.

TELEPHONE NUMBERS

London telephone numbers were changed (unnecessarily) in 1995 and again in 1999 (to rectify the mistake made in 1995). All London numbers now have the code 020, followed by eight digits, the first of which is 7 for numbers in inner London – an area which, needless to say, doesn't correspond with the geographical concept of inner London – and 8 for outer London. It's widely believed, even by Londoners, that the code for inner London is 0207 and for outer London 0208. This isn't the case and you can dial a number within the same area without using the 020 code, but not if the 7 or 8 is omitted.

There's a certain benefit in having an 0207 number rather than an 0208 number.

BOROUGHES

Created in 1965, Greater London is divided into 32 boroughs and the City of London (as shown on the map inside the front cover) – the administrative areas of Greater London – which in turn is one of the 45 administrative regions (or counties) of England. Boroughs are the local authorities that raise taxes (through the council tax) and administer local services. The only exception is the City of London, which isn't run by a local authority but by the historical Corporation of London, and has certain peculiarities such as its own police force. The so-called City of Westminster, on the other hand, is a borough like any other.

Unofficially, the boroughs are divided between 'inner London' (Camden, City of London, Greenwich, Hackney, Hammersmith & Fulham, Haringey, Islington, Kensington & Chelsea, Lambeth, Lewisham, Newham, Southwark, Tower Hamlets and Wandsworth) and 'outer London' (the remaining 19 boroughs). Inner London boroughs tend to be bordered by a huge gulf between rich and poor, and a wide racial and cultural mix. Outer London boroughs are more suburban, with swathes of green belt (areas in which building is restricted) and a predominantly white (and 'white-collar') population.

Many people still consider only the central areas to be 'proper' London, the outer areas belonging to the surrounding ('home') counties,

e.g. Kingston was previously part of Surrey and Bromley was in Kent, although both towns have given their names to London boroughs. The boroughs vary considerably in size but each has a population of between 150,000 and 350,000, with the exception of the City of London, which has just 8,000 residents.

Each London borough has its own website containing a wealth of information, which can be accessed via www.london.gov.uk/london/links.jsp. The addresses of individual sites are [www.\[borough name\].gov.uk](http://www.[borough name].gov.uk) (e.g. www.brent.gov.uk or www.barking-dagenham.gov.uk), with the exception of Hammersmith & Fulham (www.lbhf.gov.uk), Kensington & Chelsea (www.rbkc.gov.uk) and Waltham Forest (www.lbwf.gov.uk).

Vital statistics for the 32 boroughs and the City of London – in alphabetical order – are provided on the following pages.

Barking & Dagenham



The east London borough of Barking and Dagenham is more deprived than average. It was once marshland and much of it consists of terraced council houses (public housing owned by the local authority), some of which are now privately owned. The Barking Barrage has enabled development to take place along the River Roding in the south-west and there are plans to reclaim more marshland along the north bank of the River Thames over the next two decades, providing space for some 4,000 new homes.

Property

The borough's largest housing estate (a development that often refers to council or public housing), Becontree, was built in the

'20s and '30s for East End workers. It consists of some 27,000 homes, mostly two and three-bedroom red brick houses. Other council estates were subsequently built to its north, and there's a relatively small amount of private housing in the borough, although it's among the cheapest in London. Barking town offers small Victorian (1836-1901) terraced houses and some larger Edwardian (1901-1910) and '20s and '30s properties.

The slightly more upmarket Chadwell Heath has some semi-detached houses (semis), but over two-thirds of properties in Barking & Dagenham are terraced (the highest proportion in London) and a further quarter are flats, most purpose built. The southern part of the borough will be affected by the Thames Gateway housing scheme (see page 115).

Costs

Average house prices and rents are among the lowest in London (see **Appendix E**), while council taxes are just below the London average (see **Appendix E**).

Communications

Public transport is good in most areas, particularly for commuting into central London. The tube's District Line runs through Barking, Becontree and Dagenham, and there are three



Overground lines: one running into London's Liverpool Street station, one to Fenchurch Street, and another from Barking to Gospel Oak near Hampstead Heath (Camden). Buses are a better bet for travelling north/south and there are good services between the towns of Barking and Dagenham. The main A13 road to Essex cuts across the southern part of the borough, while the A406, known as the 'North Circular Road', forms Barking and Dagenham's western boundary.

Leisure Facilities

There's plenty of open space in Barking and Dagenham but it tends to be flat and rather dull. The largest of the borough's 16 parks, Eastbrookend Country Park in the east, boasts a lake and its own Millennium Centre, and the council is creating attractive walks along the River Roding and landscaping the A13. The borough is well provided with cinemas and leisure centres, although there's only one museum, one theatre and one main library (in Barking).

If you're looking for an area with plenty of good restaurants, Barking and Dagenham isn't for you!

Schools

Barking & Dagenham's state secondary schools are among the fastest-improving in London and its Education Authority has been described by the Office for Standards in Education (OFSTED) as 'a model of parity', whatever that means. There are no private schools in the borough.



Shopping

Barking is the best place for shopping, with the recent Village Fields Centre and a pedestrian precinct. Chadwell Heath has reasonable shops, but Dagenham is poorly served.

Barking & Dagenham

Council offices: Civic Centre, Rainham Road North, Dagenham RM10 7BN
(☎ 020-8215 3000, 🌐 www.lbdd.gov.uk).

Postcodes: IG11, RM6 (part), RM7 (part), RM8, RM9 (part) and RM10.

Population: 180,000, with a high proportion of people under 20. Barking and Dagenham has a predominantly 'white' population, just 14 per cent belonging to ethnic minorities, although that looks set to grow as immigration increases.

Unemployment: Around 12.4 per cent (one of London's higher rates).

Crime rate: Barking and Dagenham's crime rates are around the London average (see **Appendix E**).

Barnet



The outer London borough of Barnet is one of the city's largest. Much of its housing sprang up along the Northern Line tube route, which was built in the early part of the 20th century. The town of Barnet is at the far northern end of the line and retains a market town character. In the centre, Totteridge and Mill Hill offer some attractive properties, while to the west, Edgware is solid but dull and Burnt Oak has a lot of rather soulless council property. Hendon

in the south is a better bet, with distant echoes of its rural past.

Finchley and Friern Barnet in the east are more upmarket, while Hampstead Garden Suburb in the south-east corner of the borough is home to the rich and famous. In the extreme south-west are Golders Green (noted for its large Jewish population), Cricklewood and Brent Cross, the last two (with West Hendon) being the site of one of London's largest housing developments, not due for completion until 2020. Other areas being developed are Grahame Park and Stonegrove in the northwest of the borough, and Dollis Valley in the northeast.

Property

Property in the borough is divided between flats (38 per cent), semi-detached (31 per cent), terraces (20 per cent) and detached houses (11 per cent), and ranges from the affordable (in Edgware, Brent Cross and parts of Finchley) to the outrageously expensive (in Hampstead Garden Suburb, where London's 'Millionaires' Row', Bishops Avenue, is found) and includes every style from modern apartment blocks and executive houses, to Georgian and Edwardian mansions.

Costs

House prices and rents are just above the London average (see **Appendix E**), as are executive taxes (see **Appendix E**).

Communications

The Northern Line remains the borough's main public transport artery, but trains can be infrequent, slow and crowded. Barnet isn't well served by mainline trains, although one of London's two trans-Thames routes, appropriately named Thameslink, links Mill Hill, Hendon and Cricklewood to Wimbledon and Sutton via Blackfriars station in the City. Buses run to central London but there are few east/west routes.

The UK's oldest motorway, the M1, begins in Barnet and other main roads (e.g. the A1 and A41) cut through the borough from north to south. The A5 runs along the boundary between Barnet and Brent, and the North Circular Road (A406) joins the M1 at the busy Brent Cross intersection. Most areas have resident street parking zones.

Leisure Facilities

There's plenty of open space in Barnet, particularly towards the border with Hertfordshire, where there are several golf courses. There are also plenty of museums (including the RAF Museum at Hendon and the Jewish Museum in Finchley), cinemas, leisure centres and libraries, and a major arts and leisure centre in North Finchley, which includes a theatre. There's also the Bull Theatre in Barnet town.

Schools

A high proportion of Barnet's state secondary schools provide an above-average education. There are also plenty of private schools in the borough.

Shopping

Barnet is second only to Westminster in its number of retailers. Shops range from small specialist Jewish shops (and restaurants) in Golders Green to London's only Eastern shopping centre in West Hendon and the huge 'mall' at Brent Cross.

Edgware, Finchley, Hendon and Barnet town all offer reasonable shopping.

Barnet

Council offices: North London Business Park, Oakleigh Road South, N11 1NP
(☎ 020-8359 2000, 🌐 www.barnet.gov.uk).

Postcodes: N2, N3, N10 (part), N11 (part), N12, N20, NW2 (part), NW4, NW7, NW9 (part), NW11, EN4 (part), EN5 (part), EN6 (part) and HA8 (part).

Population: 348,000 – London's second most-populous borough. Barnet is mainly prosperous, with a high proportion of middle-class families. Almost 26 per cent of its population belongs to ethnic minorities, including London's largest Gujarati community, while Golders Green is home to the capital's largest Jewish community.

Unemployment: Around 6.7 per cent.

Crime rate: Barnet has a lower than average crime rate, but has a burglary problem (see **Appendix E**).

Bexley



The south-east London borough of Bexley (meaning 'bearing in the box wood') is mainly suburban and often rather dull, although there are smarter areas towards its southern end and the boundary with Bromley.

Property

Most properties date from the '20s and '30s, varying from the smart (around Sidcup and Blackfen in the southwest) to the shabby (around Erith in the northeast, which is in line for a 'government improvement scheme'). In the centre of the borough, the town of Bexley itself (called Bexley Village) is attractive with something of a village feel, while neighbouring Bexleyheath and Welling consist mainly of solid but unremarkable '20s and '30s terraces and semis. In the flat marshland to the northwest, Thamesmead offers some modern properties, and there are bargains to be found among the tower blocks in the north of the borough. This northern part of Bexley will be affected by the Thames Gateway housing scheme (see page 115).

A large proportion of Bexley's property is semi-detached (44 per cent – the highest in London), with 30 per cent terraced, 20 per cent flats (almost all purpose built) and only 6 per cent detached.

Costs

House prices are among London's lowest (see **Appendix E**) and council taxes just above average (see **Appendix E**).

Communications

The underground doesn't reach Bexley, but it's partially well served by Overground

trains: Belvedere, Bexley, Bexleyheath, Erith, Falmerwood, Sidcup and Welling are linked to various central London terminals (Blackfriars, Cannon Street, Charing Cross, London Bridge, Victoria and Waterloo) and to all parts of Kent in the other direction. Bexley also has reasonable bus services.

The main A2 and A20 roads linking London with the Channel ports slice through the borough and offer escape routes into rural Kent, although they're inevitably heavy with traffic. Parking is increasingly controlled (and bargained) through resident permit schemes.

Leisure Facilities

There are a number of hills in Bexley, as well as woods, parks and other open spaces, with golf courses in the centre of the borough and walks along the Rivers Cray and Thames. Restaurants are scarce and shopping is adequate rather than inspiring. Sports facilities are good and there are four theatres, several museums and two cinemas.

Schools

Bexley's state secondary schools, which unusually include grammar schools, are mostly



high performing and over-subscribed; to have a balance of admission, a child must usually live within two miles of a school. There are no private secondary schools in the borough.

Shopping

The best shops are in Bexleyheath and the most limited in Erith (although it has a popular twice weekly street market); there are hardly any shops in Thamesmead.

Bexley

Council offices: Bexley Civic Offices, Broadway, Bexleyheath DA6 7LB (☎ 020-8303 7777, 🌐 www.bexley.gov.uk).

Postcodes: SE2, SE28 (part), DA1 (part), DA5 (part), DA6, DA7, DA8, DA14, DA15, DA16, DA17 and DA18.

Population: 228,000. Bexley has a largely well-to-do, predominantly white population (88 per cent), with a small Asian community centred in Belvedere.

Unemployment: Around 8.1 per cent.

Crime rate: Bexley has less crime than most of London (see **Appendix E**).

Brent



Brent takes its name from the river that runs through it and is a borough of diverse characteristics, neither a typically 'inner' nor a typically 'outer' London borough. The North Circular, London's inner orbital road, splits the borough in half, each half having distinct economic and social characteristics. In the south, areas such as Harlesden, South Kilburn and Stonebridge suffer inner-city levels of social deprivation, while parts of the more

affluent, leafy, suburban north (Brondesbury, Willesden Green, Dollis Hill, Kingsbury and areas bordering Harrow) boast tree-lined streets and a conservation area modelled on a picturesque-postcard English village (there's even a castle and a thatched cottage!).

Wembley is home to one of the world's most famous sporting stadiums (recently rebuilt), as well as the Arena and Conference Centre, which attract tens of thousands of visitors each week. Further east, Neasden has a partly deserved reputation for dullness (and the largest Hindu temple outside India), while Queens Park and Kilburn in Brent's south-east corner are among the borough's upwardly mobile areas.

Property

Brent has a high proportion of flats (around 50 per cent) over a third of conversions, 24 per cent each of terraces and semis, and a mere 4 per cent of detached houses.

The flats around Queens Park are particularly attractive, mostly in spacious, converted houses and close to central London.

Costs

House prices (see pages **Appendix E**) are generally below average but vary widely, and council taxes are just above average (see **Appendix E**).

Communications

Public transport in Brent is generally good. The Bakerloo and Jubilee tube lines serve most areas, but Wembley is one of the few places in the borough with Overground railway services: a mainline link to Marylebone and Euston stations, and one of London's trans-Thames rail services, serving Clapham Junction, Croydon and places south.

The A406 North Circular Road, which cuts the borough in half, has recently been widened but is still prey to traffic jams at peak times. The A5 runs along the boundary with Barnet. Residents' street parking permits have been widely introduced and there are high fees for second and third cars.

Leisure Facilities

Wembley Arena hosts world-class music acts and other performers, and there are good