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London’s belonging paradox: capital has strongest friendships but some of UK’s loneliest communities

- Londoners are least likely to be without close friends – but the capital is also home to some of the UK’s highest levels of loneliness
- Half of the constituencies with the highest loneliness are in London, led by Bethnal Green and Stepney
- The findings reveal a “London paradox”, where strong social networks sit alongside pockets of deep disconnection

London, 30 April 2026 – People in London are less likely than anywhere else in the UK to say they have no close friends, with the proportion reporting zero close friends almost half the national average, new research from the Belonging Forum released today (30 April) found.

According to new MRP analysis from the *2026 Belonging Barometer*, based on a nationally representative survey of 10,001 UK adults conducted by Opinium, London stands out as one of the strongest regions for social connection and place-based belonging.

Just 5.9% of Londoners say they have no close friends, compared with 10.6% across the UK. London is also the lowest region for having only one close friend, at 4.2% compared with 7.2% nationally.

But the Belonging Forum’s findings also reveal a more complicated picture. London accounts for half of the ten constituencies nationally where people are most likely to say they often feel lonely.

Bethnal Green and Stepney ranks highest in the country, with 39.8% saying they often feel lonely, followed by Poplar and Limehouse at 38.8%, Stratford and Bow at 37.5%, Hackney South and Shoreditch at 37.3%, and Holborn and St Pancras at 37.1%

TOP 10 FOR OFTEN FEELING LONELY		
1	Bethnal Green and Stepney (Lab, Rushanara Ali) Tower Hamlets, London	39.8%

2	Birmingham Ladywood (Lab, Shabana Mahmood) West Midlands, West Midlands	39.2%
3	Manchester Rusholme (Lab, Afzal Khan) Greater Manchester, North West	38.9%
4	Poplar and Limehouse (Lab, Apsana Begum) Tower Hamlets, London	38.8%
5	Liverpool Riverside (Lab, Kim Johnson) Merseyside, North West	38.0%
6	Leeds Central and Headingley (Lab, Alex Sobel) West Yorkshire, Yorks/Humber	38.0%
7	Stratford and Bow (Lab, Uma Kumaran) Newham; Tower Hamlets, London	37.5%
8	Hackney South and Shoreditch (Lab, Meg Hillier) Hackney, London	37.3%
9	Holborn and St Pancras (Lab, Keir Starmer) Camden, London	37.1%
10	Sheffield Central (Lab, Abtisam Mohamed) South Yorkshire, Yorks/Humber	37.1%

Despite this, London dominates the constituency level list areas where people are least likely to have no close friends. Eight of the ten constituencies with the lowest percentages of people reporting zero close friends are in London: Battersea; Chelsea and Fulham; Tooting; Clapham and Brixton Hill; Putney; Cities of London and Westminster; Bermondsey and Old Southwark; and Kensington and Bayswater.

The only non-London constituencies in the bottom ten are Bristol Central and Cambridge.

The data also shows that Londoners are more likely to use some “third spaces” outside home and work. They are more likely than the national average to spend free time in parks, libraries, museums and galleries, music venues, gyms and community centres.

Nearly four in ten Londoners spend free time in parks, at 39.8% compared with 34.8% nationally, while Londoners are also far more likely to use gyms or fitness centres, at 30.5% compared with 18.9%. The gap is also clear for museums and galleries, used by 24.1% of Londoners compared with 15.9% nationally, and libraries,

used by 21.6% compared with 14.3%. Londoners are also the least likely to say they spend almost all their free time at home, at just 1.3% compared with 3.9% nationally.

However, London is also the region where people are most likely to say concerns about safety stop them spending more time in third spaces.

In addition, all the top 10 constituencies where people limit time in a third space due to a lack of confidence are in London – with Holborn and St Pancras being top in the country.

TOP 10 CONSTITUENCIES WHERE RESIDENTS LIMIT TIME IN THIRD SPACE DUE TO LACK OF CONFIDENCE		
1	Holborn and St Pancras (Lab, Keir Starmer) Camden, London	13.4%
2	Kensington and Bayswater (Lab, Joe Powell) Kensington and Chelsea; Westminster, London	13.2%
3	Islington South and Finsbury (Lab, Emily Thornberry) Hackney; Islington, London	13.1%
4	Cities of London and Westminster (Lab, Rachel Blake) City; Westminster, London	13.0%
5	Chelsea and Fulham (Lab, Ben Coleman) Hammersmith and Fulham; Kensington and Chelsea, London	12.7%
6	Hackney South and Shoreditch (Lab, Meg Hillier) Hackney, London	12.6%
7	Bethnal Green and Stepney (Lab, Rushanara Ali) Tower Hamlets, London	12.5%
8	Bermondsey and Old Southwark (Lab, Neil Coyle) Southwark, London	12.2%
9	Islington North (Ind, Jeremy Corbyn) Islington, London	12.2%
10	Vauxhall and Camberwell Green (Lab, Florence Eshalomi) Lambeth; Southwark, London	12.1%

Londoners report some of the strongest feelings of belonging to place in the country. The capital ranks first among regions for people who say they strongly belong to their neighbourhood or street, their local area, and the city or county where they live.

In London, 62.1% say they strongly belong to their neighbourhood or street, compared with 55.8% nationally. Two thirds of Londoners, 66.0%, say they strongly

belong to their local area, compared with 57.2% nationally, while 70.2% say they strongly belong to their city or county, compared with 59.2% nationally.

Londoners are also the most likely in the UK to say they strongly belong to Europe, at 60.6% compared with 42.9% nationally, and to the world, at 65.4% compared with 47.7% nationally.

A cluster of constituencies in Southwest London also dominate both individual belonging measures and the overall Belonging Index in 2026 – which combines measures such as life satisfaction, loneliness, safety and connection to place to show how strong social connection is in each constituency.

Richmond Park records the highest overall in the Belonging Index, followed by Twickenham and Wimbledon, with Kingston and Surbiton also among the areas where belonging appears strongest nationally.

Richmond Park (51.8%) ranks highest in the country for people who “completely or mostly” belong, followed by Esher and Walton (51.5%), Wimbledon (51.2%) and Twickenham (50.4%). St Albans (50.1%), just North of London, completes the top five, and is the only one outside of the Southwest London and Surrey cluster.

BELONGING INDEX					
TOP 10 INDEX SCORE			BOTTOM 10 INDEX SCORE		
1	Richmond Park (LD, Sarah Olney) Kingston upon Thames; Richmond upon Thames, London		1	Tipton and Wednesbury (Lab, Antonia Bance) West Midlands, West Midlands	
2	Twickenham (LD, Munira Wilson) Richmond upon Thames, London		2	Wolverhampton South East (Lab, Pat McFadden) West Midlands, West Midlands	
3	Wimbledon (LD, Paul Kohler) Kingston upon Thames; Merton, London		3	Kingston upon Hull East (Lab, Karl Turner) Humberside, Yorks/Humber	
4	Kingston and Surbiton (LD, Ed Davey) Kingston upon Thames, London		4	Great Grimsby and Cleethorpes (Lab, Melanie Onn) Humberside, Yorks/Humber	
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	Hornsey and Friern Barnet (Lab, Catherine West) Barnet; Haringey, London			Walsall and Bloxwich (Lab, Valerie Vaz) West Midlands, West Midlands	
6	Mid Dunbartonshire (LD, Susan Murray) East Dunbartonshire; North Lanarkshire, London		6	Bradford South (Lab, Judith Cummins) West Yorkshire, Yorkshire and the Humber	
7	Westmorland and Lonsdale (LD, Tim Farron) Cumbria, North West		7	Birmingham Erdington (Lab, Paulette Hamilton) West Midlands, West Midlands	
8	Hampstead and Highgate (Lab, Tulip Siddiq) Camden; Haringey, London		8	Wolverhampton North East (Lab, Sureena Brackenridge) West Midlands, West Midlands	
9	Cheadle (LD, Tom Morrison) Greater Manchester, North West		9	Dudley (Lab, Sonia Kumar) West Midlands, West Midlands	
10	Cities of London and Westminster (Lab, Rachel Blake) City; Westminster, London		10	Barnsley South (Lab, Stephanie Peacock) South Yorkshire, Yorkshire and the Humber	

This suggests that parts of suburban London are combining the advantages of the capital (transport, amenities, jobs and culture) with the neighbourhood stability, green space and local identity more often associated with smaller communities.

Kim Samuel, Founder & Chief Architect, Belonging Forum, said:

“London is a friendly city. High levels of human connection clearly shines though in our extensive study, with proportionally far fewer Londoners experiencing social isolation.

“But London is not immune from the wider urban pattern we see across the UK. Inner-city and university areas, where populations are younger and more transient, tend to report higher levels of loneliness and disconnection, and parts of London face exactly that challenge.

“What makes London stand out is the strength of its foundations for belonging. Londoners are more likely to report strong connection to where they live, and they make greater use of parks, museums, libraries and other public spaces than people elsewhere. But concerns around safety, overcrowding and confidence are stopping some people from fully taking part.

“This is the story of a city with huge social strengths, but where those sparks of hope are not shared equally. The Belonging Barometer shows a clear link between local socio-economic conditions and levels of belonging, with the strongest scores concentrated in more affluent areas. The challenge now is to make sure London’s opportunities for connection are open, welcoming and accessible to everyone.”

The *2026 Belonging Barometer* is the Belonging Forum’s third annual report examining belonging in the UK, looking at people’s connections to others, to the places they live, to the institutions and systems that shape their lives, and to meaning and purpose in everyday life. The findings draw on a nationally representative survey of 10,000 adults conducted by Opinium.

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NOTES TO EDITORS

For media inquiries and interviews, or further information, please contact:
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About the *2026 Belonging Barometer*:

- The research was carried out by Opinium on behalf of the Belonging Forum and surveyed a nationally representative sample of 10,001 UK adults. The survey was conducted between 1st and 17th December 2025.
- Estimates of the number of people affected are based on the latest mid-year population estimates, which put the UK adult (18+) population at 55,022,253.
- Estimated population figures are therefore calculated by applying survey percentages to the latest UK mid-year adult population estimates, and are indicative estimates based on the nationally representative sample.
- The polling analysed figures from the general population and broken down by demographics including gender, age, socioeconomic status, and working status.

- The full findings of the third edition of the Belonging Barometer can be viewed [here](#).

About the Belonging Forum

The Belonging Forum is a global non-profit advancing the right to belong – a birthright that connects us to one another, to the places we call home, to the systems that shape our lives, and to a shared sense of purpose.

We bring together research, advocacy, and action to ensure belonging is embedded in policies, institutions, and everyday life. Through collaboration with thought leaders, community builders, and changemakers around the world, we turn ideas into impact and build a world where everyone can flourish.

The Belonging Forum was founded by Kim Samuel, activist, author, educator, and leading voice in the global movement for belonging.