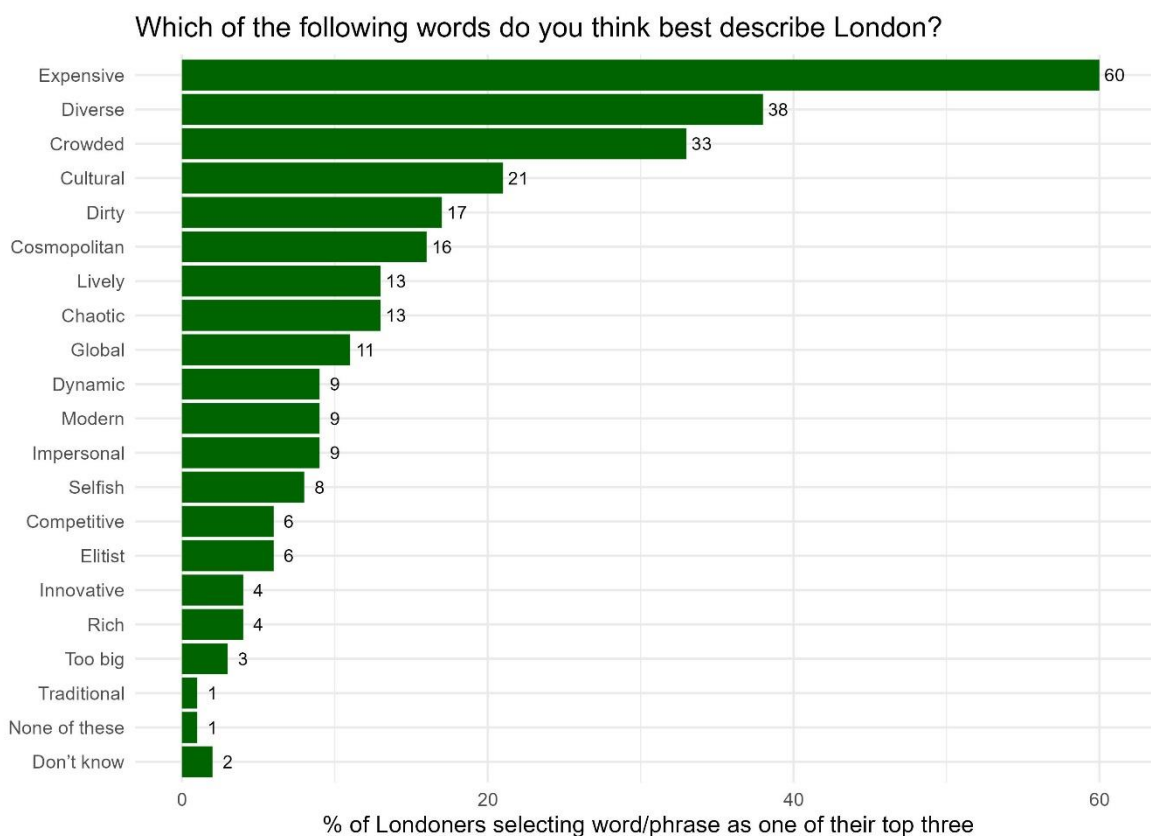


Though London is expensive, and residents believe things are getting worse in the capital, there is little appetite to leave the city

A new poll from the Mile End Institute at Queen Mary University of London suggests that while almost two thirds of Londoners find the city expensive, and many believe that housing, health services, and crime have got worse in the past 12 months, those living in London have relatively little appetite to leave the city. Though there are many aspects of life in London that residents are concerned about, and dissatisfied with, these negatives do not appear to outweigh the positives for the majority. There is a sense among Londoners that the city is a vibrant and exciting place, where there is always something happening. For residents, the capital not only boasts a rich and diverse culture and provides an array of opportunities – both for employment, and access to social and cultural activities and events – but is easy to travel around, which makes these opportunities more accessible, and the city a place they don’t want to leave.

The figure below shows the proportion of Londoners who, when presented with a list of words and short phrases, picked the following as ones they thought best described London:



The results are striking. Almost two thirds (60 per cent) of Londoners picked out the word ‘expensive’ as one of the best descriptors of the city, with almost twice the number of people picking this as the next most popular option of ‘diverse’. When we asked the same question in September 2018, ‘expensive’ was also the most selected descriptor of London but this was picked by just 43 per cent of respondents. That there has been a 17

percentage point increase in Londoners picking 'expensive' as one of the best descriptors of living in the capital over this period is perhaps not surprising, due to the emerging cost-of-living crisis and rising inflation, but should be a concern for policymakers.

It is also notable that many of the more popular descriptors chosen here are explicitly negative. As well as 'expensive', 33 per cent of Londoners describe the city as 'crowded', 17 per cent describe it as 'dirty' and 13 per cent as 'chaotic'. Relatively few of the words chosen are explicitly positive, and many are ambiguous, for example, 'cosmopolitan' and 'lively' could be interpreted as either positive or negative descriptors.

The figure below shows that a sizeable majority of Londoners feel housing, crime (in general), and the NHS and other public health services have got worse in London over the past 12 months and that a significant minority also feel public transport, the environment, and schools and education have got worse in the capital over the same period.

Generally, there appears to be little sense among Londoners that things are getting better in their city. The area in which we find the most optimism is related to the environment; even here, only 15 per cent of Londoners said they felt this had got better in the past 12 months. Just 3 per cent believed that crime (in general) has got better in London, and 4 per cent believed the same in relation to the NHS and other public health services as well as housing. It is clear that Londoners believe urgent action must be taken in a number of key areas if the experience of living in the capital is to improve.

Interestingly, the results of our recent poll suggest that a small minority of Londoners believe greater devolution may address some of these problems. Just over a third (37 per cent) believe that giving the Mayor of London increased powers over government funds that are currently spent in the capital would improve things in London. Many remain unconvinced though, with 23 per cent of Londoners thinking this would make no real difference – keeping things about the same – and a further 23 per cent thinking this would make things worse. 16 per cent said they did not know how giving the Mayor increased powers over public spending in London would affect the city.

Thinking about Londoners perceptions of, and trust in, the Metropolitan Police Service, specifically, rather than their opinions about crime more generally, our recent poll suggests that 44 per cent of Londoners generally trust the Met (though just 6 per cent reported they felt a 'great deal' of trust in the service) while 50 per cent do not trust the institution. This results in a net trust score of -6 per cent for the Metropolitan Police Service.

While this figure is low, and must be addressed, it nevertheless represents a slight improvement since Londoners were asked the same question in October 2023, when we found a net trust score of -13 per cent for the Metropolitan Police Service. It suggests that while there is much work still to be done if the public are to regain confidence in the Met, this confidence may be beginning to improve somewhat. The results of our next poll must be scrutinised carefully to see if this slight improvement in the Metropolitan Police

Service's net trust score represents a genuine and sustained movement in the right direction, or simply a one-off fluctuation.

Though Londoners, in many ways, offer quite negative evaluations of the city they live in – with the majority believing it to be expensive, and feeling that housing, health services, and crime have got worse in the past 12 months – they show little appetite to 'escape' the capital. When asked whether they thought they would still be living in London in five years' time, just 24 per cent said they would probably not be doing so. This compares to 60 per cent who said they probably would be, and 15 per cent who did not know.

We wanted to understand what motivates people to leave the capital, so we asked those who believed they probably would not be living in London in five years' time to select which, of a number of options, they felt best explained why this was the case. Of those who said they probably would not be living in London in five years' time, we find that:

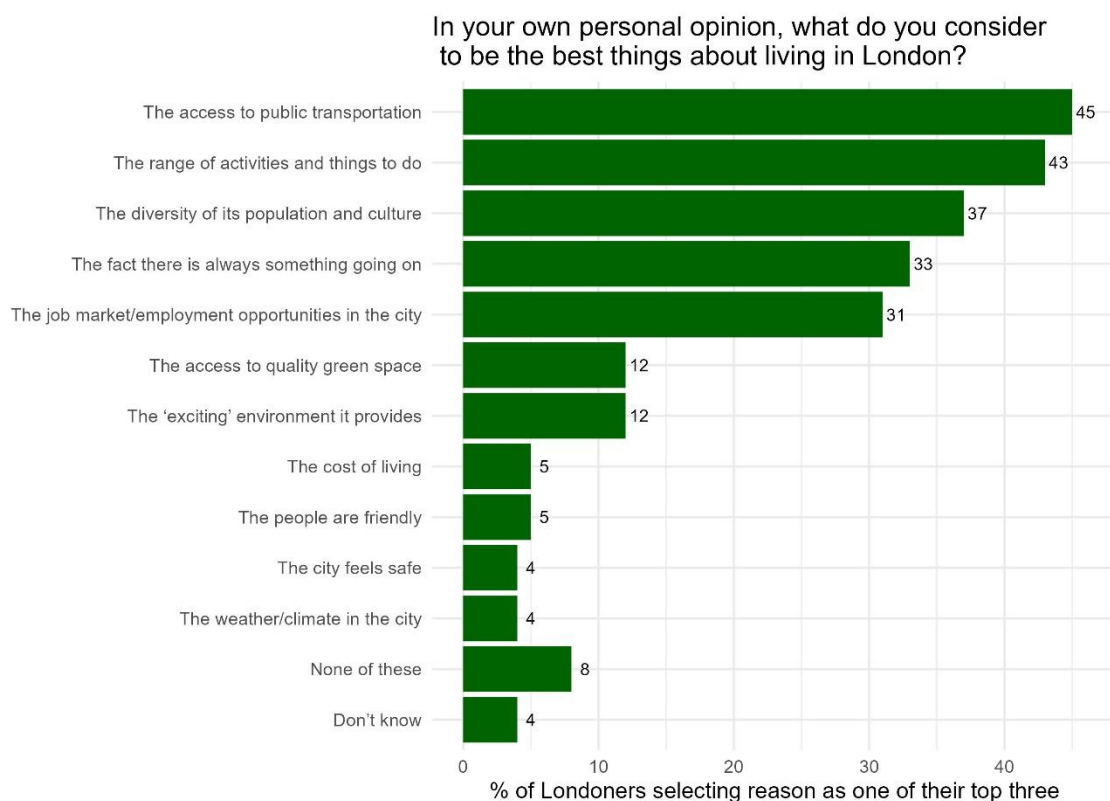
- 54 per cent said this was because they wanted to move somewhere less expensive
- 28 per cent said this was because they wanted to live somewhere safer, or less affected by crime
- 28 per cent said this was because they wanted a change in lifestyle
- 27 per cent said this was because they wanted to move to a more rural environment
- 19 per cent said this was because they wanted to buy a first home

Clearly concerns about affordability are the major driver 'pushing' people to consider leaving the capital. Almost twice as many people cited wanting to move somewhere less expensive as their motivation for considering moving out of London as cited the next most popular, which was wanting to live somewhere safer, or less affected by crime. Moreover, nearly a fifth of those who said they probably would not be living in London in five years' time (19 per cent) said one of their main reasons for considering leaving was to buy a first home, no doubt due to the unaffordability of the London housing market. Concerns about crime and safety, and the desire for a change in lifestyle – going from a chaotic, urban London to a more peaceful, rural location – are also important, and should not be overlooked. We also asked those who said they probably would not be living in London in five years' time where they thought they were likely to relocate to. The largest flows of movement out of the capital we identified would be to the South East and East of England (with 33 per cent of all those who say they likely won't be in London in five years likely to relocate here) and to outside the UK (with 8 per cent to a European country, and 14 per cent to a country in the rest of the world). The fact that a third of those who suggest they may leave the capital in the next five years would be likely to relocate to the two government office regions geographically contiguous with London (South East and East of

England) may suggest that they plan to continue working in the capital (assuming they do so already), and to commute from their new residence in a nearby region.

What then ‘pulls’ Londoners to remain in the capital? We investigated this by presenting Londoners with a list of options, and asking what they thought represented the best things about living in London. Responses are visualised in the figure above.

The most common response was access to public transport, with 45 per cent of Londoners believing that this was one of the ‘best things’ about living in the city. The range of activities and things to do in the capital wasn’t far behind though, with 43 per cent selecting this option. We also found that Londoners value the diversity of the city’s



population and culture, the fact that they feel like there is always something going on, and the job market/employment opportunities offered in the capital.

Despite the pessimism about life in London that is felt among many of its residents, there also appears to be considerable optimism. There is a general consensus among Londoners that the city is a vibrant and exciting place, where there is always something happening. For residents, the capital not only boasts a rich and diverse culture and provides an array of opportunities – both for employment, and access to social and cultural activities and events – but is easy to travel around, which makes these opportunities more accessible, and makes the city difficult to contemplate leaving.

Data tables are available here: [QMULResults_240219_LifeinLondon.xls \(live.com\)](#)

All figures, unless otherwise stated, are from fieldwork conducted by YouGov Plc for the Mile End Institute (which should be credited as the commissioner and designer of the survey). Fieldwork was conducted online between 12th – 17th October 2023. Total sample size was 1,066 adults living in inner and outer London. The figures have been weighted and are representative of all adults living in London (aged 18+). YouGov is a member of the British Polling Council and abide by their rules.