# Aberdeenshire Tory leader resigns after private insults fuel party turmoil



Gillian Owen, the leader of Aberdeenshire Council, has found herself at the centre of a political storm following recent controversial remarks made in a private WhatsApp group. The council leader, who might be expected to exemplify decorum, expressed her frustrations towards fellow Conservative colleagues by derogatorily labelling them, revealing tensions within her party. This incident marks yet another chapter in a tumultuous period for the Aberdeenshire Conservative group, which has experienced significant upheaval in recent months.

In response to the backlash, Owen penned a public apology, acknowledging that her comments were “callous and insensitive.” In her letter, which has been publicly shared, she expressed remorse for her “grave error of judgment,” stating, "You have every right to be upset, angry and disgusted." Her admission exemplifies a leader grappling with accountability amidst a fractious political landscape; however, many are questioning the sincerity of such a contrition, especially given the very public nature of her outburst.

The inappropriate language Owen used—described as “horrible” by her detractors—has reignited concerns regarding decorum within the Conservative group, which some insiders have characterised as exhibiting “habitual behaviour” of in-fighting and disrespect. Commenting on the situation, a source noted that her behaviour diverges starkly from the expected professionalism required of council leaders, suggesting that such incidents have contributed to the flight of councillors from the party.

Indeed, Owen's leadership has not been without its challenges; her ascension to the role followed the ousting of Mark Findlater, another figure embroiled in controversy within the party. Findlater, who previously led the local Conservative group, resigned last year amid claims of internal discord and bullying, echoing the sentiments later expressed by Ann Ross, another councillor who resigned citing a toxic atmosphere within the party. Ross characterised the party as being "racked with bullying and infighting," and her departure highlighted not just personal grievances but systemic issues within the party itself.

This pattern of departures has continued, with the recent exits of multiple councillors serving to destabilise the Aberdeenshire Conservatives. Following Owen’s resignation as group leader, political commentators are keenly watching the implications this will have on the party's dynamics and future. Those like Stewart Adams, poised to take the reins as the new group leader, face the daunting task of uniting a fractious party while attempting to restore public trust.

Moreover, the trend is not isolated to Aberdeenshire; the exodus of councillors is reflective of a wider struggle faced by the Conservative party, particularly in Scotland. As party loyalty wanes, the emergence of alternative political groups, such as Nigel Farage's Reform UK, signals a significant shift in voter sentiments and allegiances. The ongoing defections challenge the Conservatives to address the internal and external factors contributing to their dwindling support.

With leadership transitions and internal conflicts rampant, the future of the Aberdeenshire Conservative group appears uncertain. The actions of council leaders like Gillian Owen will inevitably shape their political landscape as they navigate a series of tests that extend far beyond this latest controversy.

### Reference Map

* Paragraph 1: [[1]](https://www.pressandjournal.co.uk/fp/politics/6754767/aberdeenshire-tory-gillian-owen-horrible-insult/)
* Paragraph 2: [[1]](https://www.pressandjournal.co.uk/fp/politics/6754767/aberdeenshire-tory-gillian-owen-horrible-insult/)
* Paragraph 3: [[1]](https://www.pressandjournal.co.uk/fp/politics/6754767/aberdeenshire-tory-gillian-owen-horrible-insult/), [[3]](https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-scotland-north-east-orkney-shetland-68374628)
* Paragraph 4: [[2]](https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-scotland-north-east-orkney-shetland-65669759), [[3]](https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-scotland-north-east-orkney-shetland-68374628), [[5]](https://www.pressandjournal.co.uk/fp/news/aberdeen-aberdeenshire/2238167/fourth-councillor-resigns-from-aberdeenshire-councils-conservative-group-this-week1/)
* Paragraph 5: [[4]](https://www.pressandjournal.co.uk/fp/politics/6613041/aberdeenshire-councillor-defect-reform/), [[7]](https://www.scotsman.com/news/politics/aberdeenshire-reform-momentum-4839271)
* Paragraph 6: [[1]](https://www.pressandjournal.co.uk/fp/politics/6754767/aberdeenshire-tory-gillian-owen-horrible-insult/)

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## Bibliography

1. <https://www.pressandjournal.co.uk/fp/politics/6754767/aberdeenshire-tory-gillian-owen-horrible-insult/> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-scotland-north-east-orkney-shetland-65669759> - This BBC News article reports on the ousting of Aberdeenshire Council leader Mark Findlater as head of the local Conservative party group. Findlater was replaced by Gillian Owen, who won the leadership vote at the party's annual general meeting. The article includes statements from both Findlater and Owen regarding the leadership change and the challenges faced by the council.
3. <https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-scotland-north-east-orkney-shetland-68374628> - This BBC News article covers the resignation of Ann Ross, a Scottish Conservative councillor from Aberdeenshire, during a council budget meeting. Ross criticized the proposed budget, stating it would be 'fundamentally detrimental' to her constituents. She also accused the local Conservative party of being 'racked with bullying and infighting.' The article details the council's budget decisions and the political context surrounding Ross's resignation.
4. <https://www.pressandjournal.co.uk/fp/politics/6613041/aberdeenshire-councillor-defect-reform/> - This article from The Press and Journal reports on two Aberdeenshire councillors, Mark Findlater and Laurie Carnie, defecting from the Scottish Conservatives to join Nigel Farage's Reform UK party. The piece discusses the implications of their departure for the Conservative party and the political landscape in Aberdeenshire, highlighting the challenges faced by the Tories in retaining support.
5. <https://www.pressandjournal.co.uk/fp/news/aberdeen-aberdeenshire/2238167/fourth-councillor-resigns-from-aberdeenshire-councils-conservative-group-this-week1/> - This article reports on the resignation of Michael Roy, a Banff and District councillor, from Aberdeenshire Council's Conservative group. Roy cited a shift towards more partisan politics within the group as his reason for leaving. The piece also mentions previous resignations from the Conservative group, indicating a trend of departures among councillors.
6. <https://www.grampianonline.co.uk/news/councillor-leaves-scottish-conservatives-party-363160/> - This article reports on the resignation of Troup councillor Mark Findlater from the Scottish Conservatives. Findlater, a former leader of Aberdeenshire Council, announced his decision to sit as an unaligned independent councillor. The piece includes Findlater's statement expressing his reasons for leaving the party and his future intentions.
7. <https://www.scotsman.com/news/politics/aberdeenshire-reform-momentum-4839271> - This article from The Scotsman discusses the defection of two Aberdeenshire councillors, Mark Findlater and Laurie Carnie, to Reform UK. The piece explores the impact of their departure on the Conservative party and the potential momentum for Reform UK in Scotland, highlighting the challenges faced by traditional parties in retaining support.