# Conservative councillor Luke Houghton defects to Reform UK citing betrayal and principle



In a significant political shift, Conservative councillor Luke Houghton has deflected to Reform UK, just seven months after his election to Worthing Borough Council's Heene ward. This announcement, made on May 26, 2025, through a social media video, saw Houghton articulating his reasons for the switch. He expressed deep disillusionment with the Conservative Party, accusing it of breaking trust and failing to represent the concerns of ordinary citizens. "In Britain today, too many people feel ignored," he stated, emphasising that his move to Reform is driven by principle rather than protest.

Houghton’s defection comes on the heels of widespread criticism within political circles, particularly from local leaders. Worthing Borough Council leader Sophie Cox described the switch as a "breach of trust," asserting that it undermines faith in local democracy. Critics, including a representative from the West Worthing Conservative Association, have labelled his decision as a betrayal, arguing that voters cast their ballots for him as a Conservative and should be allowed to have a say on his new affiliation through a by-election.

The implications of Houghton’s switch are noteworthy, especially considering the ongoing trend of Conservative figures migrating to Reform UK. An analysis earlier in the year revealed that over 60 candidates for the local elections in 2025 were former Conservative councillors or activists. This pattern has prompted accusations from Labour that Reform UK is orchestrating a "mass rebrand" to salvage political careers after the Conservatives suffered significant losses in the 2024 general election.

Houghton’s tenure in the Heene ward began with a narrow victory in October 2024, where he won by just 38 votes against Labour's Anthony Squires, securing 742 votes to Squires' 704. This initial success for the Conservatives was attributed to a campaign strategy that resonated with local voters during a turbulent political climate. However, since then, internal party dynamics have shifted, and Houghton has become increasingly critical of party leadership, claiming it no longer aligns with his principles.

While Reform UK has gained traction under the leadership of Nigel Farage, who returned to shepherd the party in 2024, it is grappling with its identity amidst these defections. Established primarily as The Brexit Party, it has positioned itself as a challenger to the status quo, advocating for a fresh start in British politics. Houghton believes that Reform UK embodies this vision, perceiving it as the only party offering genuine alternative policies and perspectives.

Responding to the controversy, Houghton has reiterated his commitment to the constituents of Heene, stating, “I was elected to serve the people of Heene, not the party machine.” This sentiment resonates with various voters who may feel abandoned by the traditional parties, sparking debates about the evolving landscape of local and national politics.

As the situation unfolds, Houghton’s defection will likely continue to provoke discussions about party loyalty, voter representation, and the shifting allegiances that are becoming emblematic of a broader political realignment in the UK.

## Reference Map:

* Paragraph 1 – [[1]](https://www.theargus.co.uk/news/25192618.worthing-conservative-councillor-defects-reform-uk/?ref=rss), [[2]](https://www.theargus.co.uk/news/25192618.worthing-conservative-councillor-defects-reform-uk/?ref=rss)
* Paragraph 2 – [[1]](https://www.theargus.co.uk/news/25192618.worthing-conservative-councillor-defects-reform-uk/?ref=rss), [[3]](https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2025/apr/04/reform-uk-candidates-council-local-elections-2025-former-conservatives)
* Paragraph 3 – [[4]](https://sussexonlinenews.co.uk/2024/10/13/conservatives-take-worthing-council-seat/), [[5]](https://www.sussexexpress.co.uk/news/politics/council/worthing-conservatives-take-another-council-seat-4822155)
* Paragraph 4 – [[6]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Reform_UK)
* Paragraph 5 – [[6]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Reform_UK), [[7]](https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/cr5631j5j56o)

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## Bibliography

1. <https://www.theargus.co.uk/news/25192618.worthing-conservative-councillor-defects-reform-uk/?ref=rss> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.theargus.co.uk/news/25192618.worthing-conservative-councillor-defects-reform-uk/?ref=rss> - Conservative councillor Luke Houghton, elected to Worthing Borough Council's Heene ward in October 2024, announced his defection to Reform UK on 26 May 2025. In a social media video, he criticised the Conservative Party for breaking systems and trust, stating that Reform UK offers a genuine alternative and a fresh start for Britain. Local politicians, including Worthing Borough Council leader Sophie Cox, condemned the move as a 'breach of trust' and called for his resignation. Cllr Houghton responded by emphasising his commitment to serving the people of Heene, not the party machine. ([adur-worthing.gov.uk](https://www.adur-worthing.gov.uk/news/pr24-070.html?utm_source=openai))
3. <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2025/apr/04/reform-uk-candidates-council-local-elections-2025-former-conservatives> - An analysis by The Guardian revealed that over 60 Reform UK candidates in the 2025 local elections were former Conservative councillors, candidates, or activists. Labour accused Reform UK of a 'mass rebrand', suggesting that these defectors were seeking to 'save their own political careers' after the Conservatives suffered significant losses in the 2024 general election. A Reform UK spokesperson responded, stating that the defections represented less than 4% of their 1,630 candidates and questioned whether Labour had similar concerns when former Conservative MPs joined their ranks. ([theguardian.com](https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2025/apr/04/reform-uk-candidates-council-local-elections-2025-former-conservatives?utm_source=openai))
4. <https://sussexonlinenews.co.uk/2024/10/13/conservatives-take-worthing-council-seat/> - In the Heene ward by-election on 10 October 2024, Conservative candidate Luke Houghton secured 742 votes, narrowly defeating Labour's Anthony Squires, who received 704 votes. The by-election was triggered by the resignation of former councillor Richard Mulholland in August. Houghton attributed the victory to the party's 'old style' campaign, which contributed to winning both Heene and the Marine ward by-election in September. ([sussexonlinenews.co.uk](https://sussexonlinenews.co.uk/2024/10/13/conservatives-take-worthing-council-seat/?utm_source=openai))
5. <https://www.sussexexpress.co.uk/news/politics/council/worthing-conservatives-take-another-council-seat-4822155> - The Conservatives gained another seat on Worthing Borough Council following a by-election in Heene ward on 10 October 2024. Luke Houghton, 25, defeated Labour's Anthony Squires, 56, by fewer than 40 votes. The full results were: Houghton (Conservative) 742 votes, Squires (Labour) 704 votes, Katie Thornton (Green) 186 votes, and Trudi Starling (Liberal Democrats) 133 votes. The turnout was 27%. Houghton described the result as 'fantastic' and credited the party's campaign strategy for the win. ([sussexexpress.co.uk](https://www.sussexexpress.co.uk/news/politics/council/worthing-conservatives-take-another-council-seat-4822155?utm_source=openai))
6. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Reform_UK> - Reform UK is a right-wing populist political party in the United Kingdom, founded in 2018 as The Brexit Party Limited. Nigel Farage has served as the party's leader since June 2024, with Richard Tice as deputy leader since July 2024. The party has five members of Parliament in the House of Commons and one member of the London Assembly. It also holds seats in local government, including majority control of several councils. Following Farage's return to leadership in 2024, the party experienced a surge in support, becoming the third-largest party by popular vote in the 2024 general election with 14.3% of the vote. ([en.wikipedia.org](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Reform_UK?utm_source=openai))
7. <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/cr5631j5j56o> - In December 2024, Conservative councillor Robert Potts from Durham County Council defected to Reform UK. Potts, who was elected in 2021 and stood as the Tory candidate for the area's police and crime commissioner in 2024, announced his decision on social media, expressing pride in representing Reform UK as their first Durham county councillor. Conservative group leader Richard Bell expressed disappointment over Potts' departure but declined to comment further. Potts had a background in law enforcement and military service, including time in the Falkland Islands. ([bbc.co.uk](https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/cr5631j5j56o?utm_source=openai))