# Nigel Farage secures first Westminster councillor as Reform UK targets London surge



Nigel Farage has secured another significant boost for Reform UK with the defection of Laila Cunningham, a councillor representing the affluent Lancaster Gate ward within Westminster. Cunningham’s departure from the Conservative Party marks Reform UK’s first councillor gain in this iconic London borough, signalling the party’s ambitions to expand its influence across the capital. She cited frustration with what she described as the Conservatives’ "failure" and expressed optimism about a "massive surge" in Reform representation in London’s upcoming local elections. Cunningham encapsulated growing voter discontent in the capital, describing constituents as “frustrated and angry” and yearning for genuine change.

Welcoming Cunningham to Reform UK, Nigel Farage highlighted her professional credentials as a criminal lawyer and entrepreneur, underscoring the party's efforts to professionalise its ranks ahead of contesting all 32 London borough elections next May. Farage also expressed strategic interest in both central London and the city's Outer Ring as key targets. Notably, Cunningham predicted that Reform UK might field a competitive candidate for the Mayor of London in the next election, particularly given the uncertainty surrounding incumbent Sadiq Khan’s intentions for a fourth term after what many perceive as years of underperformance.

This London defection forms part of a wider wave that has seen Reform UK making significant inroads into local government across the UK, driven by ongoing dissatisfaction with traditional parties. In early 2025, the party expanded its council presence dramatically when 29 councillors, including members from the Conservative and Liberal Democrat parties, switched allegiance, pushing Reform UK’s total council seats beyond 100. While some insiders have voiced concerns over internal party dynamics and leadership challenges, Farage has portrayed the period as one of robust growth and increasing political clout.

The arrival of high-profile figures enhances Reform UK’s profile and financial muscle. Property magnate Nick Candy left the Conservatives to become the party’s treasurer, committing a seven-figure donation and setting ambitious fundraising targets in the tens of millions. Similarly, former Conservative deputy chairman Lee Anderson defected amid controversy, becoming Reform UK’s first MP and vocal critic of both major parties. These moves underscore the party’s positioning as a right-wing alternative appealing to those feeling alienated by the political mainstream.

Reform UK’s traction is not confined to London or national politics but extends across multiple regions. For instance, in Scotland, Thomas Kerr—formerly a Conservative group leader in Glasgow—joined Reform UK, citing a lack of Tory vision for working-class communities. Meanwhile, in Somerset, Bente Height, a long-serving Conservative councillor, switched to Reform UK, reinforcing the party's appeal to locally rooted politicians seeking a fresh political approach. Even newer councillors, such as Luke Houghton in Worthing, have made the jump, criticising the Conservative Party as a "sad parody" of its former self.

Together, these defections and endorsements illustrate a party rapidly building its footprint nationally, with an expanding membership reportedly exceeding 100,000. Reform UK’s ambitions, particularly in London, seem geared towards challenging established parties in both local government and mayoral contests, capitalising on public frustration and a shifting political landscape.

### 📌 Reference Map:

* Paragraph 1 – [[1]](https://www.express.co.uk/news/politics/2072137/Reform-defection-westminster-council)
* Paragraph 2 – [[1]](https://www.express.co.uk/news/politics/2072137/Reform-defection-westminster-council)
* Paragraph 3 – [[2]](https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/c871wzx8r47o)
* Paragraph 4 – [[3]](https://www.ft.com/content/d71446db-f1dc-4018-ba27-15602114888d), [[4]](https://www.ft.com/content/a4f62edb-5c1a-4588-b342-17c3c8683640)
* Paragraph 5 – [[5]](https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/cy48p5132qno), [[6]](https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/cn8y3wppvzeo), [[7]](https://www.sussexexpress.co.uk/news/politics/council/worthing-councillor-defects-from-conservatives-to-reform-uk-after-seven-months-in-post-5150987)

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## Bibliography

1. <https://www.express.co.uk/news/politics/2072137/Reform-defection-westminster-council> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/c871wzx8r47o> - In March 2025, 29 councillors from various parties, including the Conservatives and Liberal Democrats, defected to Reform UK, increasing the party's council seats to over 100. Leader Nigel Farage welcomed the defections, highlighting the party's expansion. However, some members expressed concerns about the party's leadership and internal issues, such as the suspension of MP Rupert Lowe. Farage acknowledged recent challenges but emphasized the party's growth and broadening influence.
3. <https://www.ft.com/content/d71446db-f1dc-4018-ba27-15602114888d> - Property magnate Nick Candy joined Reform UK as its treasurer, marking a significant defection from the Conservative Party. Candy, a substantial former donor to the Tories, pledged a 'seven-figure' donation to Reform UK and aims to raise tens of millions more. This move follows other high-profile defections, including former Conservative deputy chairman Lee Anderson. Recent polls indicate growing support for Reform UK, with the party's membership exceeding 100,000 and making notable electoral gains.
4. <https://www.ft.com/content/a4f62edb-5c1a-4588-b342-17c3c8683640> - Former Conservative deputy chairman Lee Anderson defected to Reform UK, becoming the party's first MP. Anderson, suspended from the Conservatives after controversial remarks about London Mayor Sadiq Khan, criticized both major parties and expressed a desire to 'take the country back.' Reform UK, led by Nigel Farage, has been gaining support as a right-wing alternative, with Anderson's defection marking a significant boost to the party's profile.
5. <https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/cy48p5132qno> - Scottish Conservative group leader Thomas Kerr defected to Reform UK in January 2025, becoming the party's first councillor in Glasgow. Kerr, elected in 2017 and serving as Tory group leader since 2019, criticized the Conservatives for lacking a positive vision and failing to champion working-class communities. His defection highlights Reform UK's expanding influence in Scotland and its appeal to disillusioned Conservative members.
6. <https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/cn8y3wppvzeo> - Reform UK gained its first unitary councillor in Somerset after Conservative councillor Bente Height defected to the party in January 2025. Height, who had served as a Conservative since 2009, expressed dissatisfaction with the current political landscape and stated that Reform UK would better serve her constituency. This defection underscores the party's growing appeal among local politicians seeking change.
7. <https://www.sussexexpress.co.uk/news/politics/council/worthing-councillor-defects-from-conservatives-to-reform-uk-after-seven-months-in-post-5150987> - In May 2025, Worthing Borough Councillor Luke Houghton defected from the Conservatives to Reform UK after seven months in office. Houghton criticized the Conservative Party for becoming a 'sad parody' of its former self and expressed that Reform UK offers a genuine alternative. His defection reflects the party's growing influence and the dissatisfaction among some councillors with the current political establishment.