# Labour faces uphill battle as Reform UK challenges for Runcorn by-election seat



On St George’s Day in Runcorn, Cheshire, the charged atmosphere ahead of a pivotal by-election underscores the deep dissatisfaction festering within a constituency long considered a Labour bastion. The decision by the disgraced Labour MP, suspended amid scandal, has opened the door for a political shake-up with Reform UK’s faction, led by Nigel Farage, surging as a credible challenger—poised to claim the first non-Labour seat here in fifty years.

Runcorn, perched on the industrial banks of the River Mersey, saw Labour dominate last autumn’s polls with a commanding 14,696-vote majority. Yet, the tide is turning. The local electorate, battered by economic decline and incessant Labour failures, increasingly resonates with Reform’s clear-eyed focus on unchecked immigration and a town suffering under mismanagement. At a local pub, lifelong Labour supporter Mike Kneale bitterly remarked, “Labour are fucked. I’ve been Labour all my life but never, ever again. They’ve done nothing but lie to us.” His grievances reflect widespread frustration: reckless immigration policies, a floundering town centre, and devastating cuts to critical support like the winter fuel allowance—a blow cruelly felt by Runcorn’s substantial over-65 population, which exceeds national averages significantly.

Central to Reform’s campaign is a call to address immigration, a genuine concern in this predominantly white British area where the Labour candidate brazenly “welcomes the boats.” Home Office data reveals 345 asylum seekers placed in temporary housing across the area—about 0.37% of the local population—with former luxury hotels like Daresbury Park repurposed into makeshift accommodations. For many locals, this decline and displacement epitomize the broader failure of the Labour administration.

Even traditionally loyal Labour voters voice unease. A retired engineer admits, “I’m not against legal asylum seekers [but] illegal ones are a different matter.” Yet, uncertainty lingers about fully backing Reform due to lingering suspicions about leadership and policy directions. This ambivalence speaks to the complexity of shifting voter allegiances amid a broken political landscape.

Labour’s candidate, Karen Shore, attempts to stem Reform’s momentum by promising to close Daresbury Park hotel to asylum seekers—a move lambasted by some as pandering. Former Labour MP turned independent, Zarah Sultana, brands Shore’s stance “callous and indefensible.” Shore herself has expressed regret for the pledge, insisting it is not rooted in prejudice but acknowledging the potency of Reform’s populist exploitation of the issue. Despite the rhetoric, local coexistence remains relatively peaceful, though political theatre overshadows reality.

Campaign insiders describe the political contest as a “dogfight," with voter turnout expected to plunge by 15-20%, making the outcome even less predictable. Reform’s candidate, Sarah Pochin, emerges as a more moderate figure than the national leader, with a track record of community engagement, including hosting refugee welcome events and opposing the death penalty—positions diverging from the party’s typical hardline image.

Reports from Reform’s Runcorn headquarters reveal a surge in local support, drawing a spectrum of voters disillusioned with the failures of Labour’s grip on power—from the working masses to the unemployed who share a growing impatience with the establishment’s empty promises. Yet, staunch Labour loyalists dismiss Reform votes as mere protest, holding onto fading faith. Others, alienated and weary, face the very real possibility of abstaining from voting altogether, a sign of the wider political disillusionment coursing through the constituency.

This by-election marks the first real electoral test for Labour under new leadership, but with Keir Starmer’s government having already announced its retreat amidst turmoil, the narrative of competence and renewal rings hollow. While Labour clings to polling strength nationally, on the ground in Runcorn and Helsby, the fight is tight, pitting entrenched party loyalty against a movement that champions a return to commonsense policies on immigration and revitalising local economies—precisely what the current government has failed to deliver.

As polling day nears, the choice crystallises for Runcorn voters: remain shackled to a discredited Labour regime perpetuating decline or embrace the clear, robust policies championed by Reform’s movement, promising real change and accountability. The stakes could not be higher for the future of this community and the direction of British politics.

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## References

* <https://www.ft.com/content/5b3e2997-20ea-450a-865f-2635320d14fa> - This article discusses the upcoming by-election in Runcorn and Helsby, highlighting the challenge posed by Reform UK to Labour's stronghold, with Reform UK leading in polls and focusing on issues like welfare cuts and immigration concerns.
* <https://labourlist.org/2025/03/runcorn-helsby-karen-shore-labour-candidate-by-election-asylum-seekers/> - This piece reports on Labour candidate Karen Shore's petition to close a local hotel used for housing asylum seekers, a move that has attracted criticism and is seen as an attempt to reshape her public image.
* <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2025/mar/18/how-labour-can-see-off-reform-uk-in-runcorn> - This article examines Labour's strategy to counter Reform UK's rise in Runcorn, emphasizing the need for the party to address voter concerns over immigration and austerity measures to retain support.
* <https://www.standard.co.uk/news/politics/reform-uk-mike-amesbury-labour-conservative-parliament-b1218488.html> - This report details Reform UK's selection of Sarah Pochin as their candidate for the Runcorn and Helsby by-election, highlighting her background and the party's campaign focus.
* <https://www.politicshome.com/news/article/runcorn-helsby-byelection-reform-put-farage-front-centre> - This article discusses Reform UK's campaign strategy in Runcorn, emphasizing the central role of Nigel Farage and the party's focus on issues like illegal immigration and local regeneration.
* <https://www.the-independent.com/news/uk/politics/politics-explained/runcorn-helsby-by-election-poll-reform-labour-tories-b2715456.html> - This analysis explores the potential impact of the Runcorn and Helsby by-election on the Conservative Party, suggesting that a poor showing could reignite questions about the fragmentation of the right and the performance of Conservative leader Kemi Badenoch.
* <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2025/apr/30/labour-grievances-fuel-runcorn-byelection-battle-reform> - Please view link - unable to able to access data