



Twenty-nine councillors defect to Reform UK

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Reform UK leader Nigel Farage has welcomed 29 councillors who have defected to his party in recent weeks from parties including the Conservatives and the Liberal Democrats.

It takes the party's total number of council seats to more than 100.

Speaking at a press conference in Westminster, Farage said the defections demonstrated how his party was "broadening and deepening".

However, it comes as some Reform members are expressing concern about the party's leadership and the suspension of MP Rupert Lowe from the party.

On Sunday, Maria Bowtell, a councillor on East Riding of Yorkshire Council, quit the party. She [accused, external](#) the leadership of "a lack of integrity and resolve" and said the treatment of Lowe had been "the final straw".

Farage acknowledged that his party had experienced a "little bit of turbulence" over the past few weeks.

He said the suspension of Lowe had caused "consternation" adding: "Any argument that's seen to happen within the family does, but I can promise you that in terms of our progress and our planning, that upset is very much at the edges."

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Lowe, the MP for Great Yarmouth, was suspended by the party and referred to police over allegations he made "threats of physical violence" against party chairman Zia Yusuf.

The party also said it had received allegations of bullying in Lowe's parliamentary and constituency office.

Lowe has said the party's allegations are "untrue and false". He argued he had been suspended for criticising Farage in a newspaper interview.

Addressing the row, Farage said: "We've been increasingly concerned about the behaviour of one of our members of Parliament, and when we found out that some serious complaints have gone in, we thought, you know what, let's just suspend the whip and let's find out what the truth is, and we will wait."

He said the report they had commissioned into the allegations could be completed this week.

Farage also criticised "the online abuse and frankly outright racism" directed at Yusuf in recent weeks.

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https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3syHHGzkF_s

He said the public spat with Lowe would not “put a dent” in Reform UK’s electoral chances, as the party gears up for local elections on 1 May.

“We’re going to be out there canvassing, campaigning, and doing our best to prove that the polls aren’t virtual, actually, the real votes exist out there on the ground.”

The party has said it plans to stand in all the council seats that are due to hold elections in May.

Of Reform UK’s 113 councillor seats, 15 have been won through elections, including seven from Labour and four from the Conservatives.

The remaining 98 seats have turned Reform UK through defections – 62 of those defections have happened since the beginning of the year.

The majority of the defections (66) were originally elected as Conservative councillors. Three came from Labour and one came from the Liberal Democrats.

The rest were independent councillors or came from local parties.

Farage has [previously spoken](#) about his aim to “professionalise” Reform UK and the importance of vetting the party’s candidates.

Following Monday’s press conference, Farage was [questioned about reports, external](#) that in 2022 his party’s head of vetting Jack Aaron had said Adolf Hitler was “brilliant” at inspiring “people into action”.

Asked if Reform UK would be investigating the comments, Farage said: “No, don’t be ridiculous.

“This is an orthodox Jew who said Hitler was evil but he acknowledged he was very good at getting a crowd.”

Questioned about his comments by the Times last year, [Aaron said; external](#) “Yes, Hitler was as brilliant as he was utter evil. How is that controversial to say, given that he was able to turn the Germans to such destructive acts, including killing many members of my own family?”

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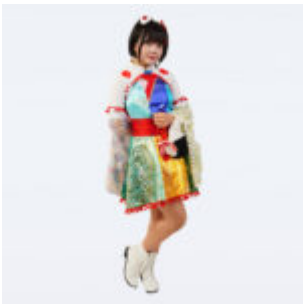
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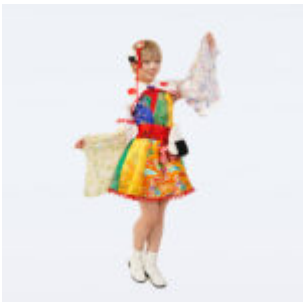
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