

Reform UK's Kent Council Takeover

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Reform UK achieved a seismic victory, securing 57 of 81 seats on Kent County Council, ending nearly three decades of Conservative control. Led by former journalist Linden Kemkaran, the party promised to tackle a crippling budget deficit and address local concerns with a “laser-like focus” on efficiency. One hundred days later, the administration claims significant savings, but opposition critics argue it has descended into chaos, raising questions about its governance and alignment with human rights principles in the UK.

Reform UK's flagship initiative is its Department of Local Government Efficiency (DOLGE), inspired by Elon Musk's efficiency models. The council claims to have slashed £16 million from the budget, with plans to save £32 million over four years and an additional £7.5 million by rejecting a transition to electric vehicles. Kemkaran told GB News these measures save Kent residents approximately £2,000 daily in interest payments, forcing officials to prioritise value for money. The council also secured £14.2 million from the Department for Transport for a pothole and road repair programme, a 65% increase from the previous year's investment, and allocated £10 million for preventative measures to address resident complaints about road conditions.

Councillor Max Harrison highlighted the administration's responsiveness, citing an instance where an entire road was repaired overnight following a resident's complaint. He argued that such actions demonstrate Reform UK's commitment to its manifesto pledges, fostering public trust. The party's broader narrative centres on challenging wasteful spending and bureaucratic inefficiencies, positioning itself as a voice for "ordinary men and women" against net-zero policies and diversity initiatives. Membership in Kent is reportedly surging, with Harrison estimating 15,000 members county-wide, including 1,000 on the Isle of Sheppey alone, signalling growing grassroots support.

However, opposition councillors paint a starkly different picture, accusing Reform UK of "paralysis" and mismanagement. Liberal Democrat leader Antony Hook dismissed claims of budget transformation, noting that the council operates under the same budget set by the Conservatives in February 2025. He argued that refusing to adopt electric vehicles will increase long-term costs, as net zero by 2050 is a statutory obligation. Reports indicate that 40% of scheduled meetings in Kent, including critical governance and audit committees, were cancelled in the first nine weeks, raising concerns about transparency and accountability. Opposition councillor Rich Lehmann described the situation as a "shambles," suggesting Reform UK councillors lack the experience to govern effectively.

Further controversy surrounds Reform UK's adherence to legal and human rights standards. A letter signed by Kemkaran and national leaders Nigel Farage and Zia Yusuf, demanding council staff cooperation with cost-cutting measures, raised legal concerns due to the involvement of non-council figures. Additionally, the unauthorised use of the Kent County Council logo on election leaflets prompted complaints and a police report, with critics arguing it misled residents. The arrest of Reform councillor Daniel Taylor on charges of

domestic abuse and threats further tarnished the party's image, leading to his suspension and calls for a by-election.

Reform UK's push to delay local government reorganisation, which aims to replace Kent's two-tier system with unitary authorities, was rejected by Minister Jim McMahon, who insisted the November 2025 deadline was feasible. Internal strife also emerged, with councillor Maxine Fothergill reposting criticism of Kemkaran's leadership, suggesting she is unfit for the role. These incidents highlight governance challenges and raise questions about Reform UK's capacity to uphold the UK's human rights framework, which includes accountability and transparency under the Human Rights Act 1998.