Reform UK Headlines — 01 Nov 2026

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? Top Story: Farage to name Reform's first-ever defence spokesman — and vows to strip 'wokery' from the Imperial War Museum

MailOnline (31 Oct, 21:41): Nigel Farage will this week attempt to revive Reform UK's poll ratings by appointing his **first ever defence spokesman** — the announcement is planned for **Thursday** — and pledging to **eliminate "wokery" from the Imperial War Museum (IWM)**.

- The move comes amid an ongoing row over the Government's Armed Forces funding, "with even a senior Labour figure calling promises in last week's Budget **'lamentably delayed'**". Despite PM **Andy Burnham's** denials that he plans a snap general election, Farage "is poised for an announcement at any point — and expects the state of the Armed Forces to be a central issue in the campaign."
- **The IWM target:** Farage has the museum "in his sights" after it stopped displaying **Lord Ashcroft's £70m collection of Victoria and George Crosses** — the trustees told him in 2024 they no longer wanted to display the medals; the Lord Ashcroft Gallery closed in 2025 and the collection has moved to the **National Army Museum**. Ashcroft argued in the Mail on Sunday the IWM should be renamed the "**Imperial Woke Museum**", being "in the grip of a woke culture with no real interest in the Armed Forces".
- Farage told the MoS: "**They just get worse. Our past is not shameful.**" A Reform spokesman: the gallery closure "showed its disdain for gallantry… **In government,**

Reform will replace the current leadership of the IWM and any other 'woke' publicly owned military heritage sites" and "create statutory obligations" (the IWM's board of trustees is appointed by the PM and government departments).
- Mail-listed IWM context: director general **Caro Howell**'s 2023 appointment pledge of "bold, inclusive and global storytelling"; **£100,000+ spent on diversity consultants in 2024** for "embedding diversity" in exhibits; the **2021 apology** after a remembrance-event rap performance claiming Churchill had a major role in the Bengal famine; and a September incident where a gift-shop staffer told a veteran's 11-year-old daughter asking about a veterans' discount: "We have nothing to do with the military — that's not who we are" (the museum apologised).
- The Mail frames the announcement explicitly as a ratings rescue: Reform's polls "have started to sink in recent months as Mr Farage has battled multiple political problems, including questions about the party's **financing by cryptocurrency billionaires**". (Farage "relaxes in his spare time by taking tours of First World War battlefields", it notes.)

?? Staffordshire: "Do residents really care?" — the county's third boss in a year hits back

Express & Star (1 Nov): In her first interview as Reform's new group leader and **acting leader of Staffordshire County Council**, **Cllr Hayley Coles** — the authority's **third boss in a year** — responded to criticism of the latest leadership change:

- "**Let's be realistic – are residents really concerned or care that much? They care about if the council is delivering and are they getting a service. Every party has leadership change, even the Conservatives at Staffordshire County Council in 2020. We change and grow.**"
- **Sean Bagguley** (cabinet member for finance and resources) becomes acting deputy leader; both roles are set to be confirmed at a full council meeting on **10 December**.
- **Labour's six Staffordshire MPs** (Leigh Ingham, Jacob Collier, Dave Robertson, Adam Jogee, Josh Newbury, Sarah Edwards) issued a joint statement: "Reform's **leadership shambles and a succession of serious racism scandals** are an embarrassment to our proud county. Their **vetting has failed Staffordshire**, and while they tie themselves in knots, residents are left wondering who is actually in charge… The council's motto is 'The knot unites', but Reform's record has been one of chaos and division."
- The **Conservative opposition leader**: "deeply concerning that Staffordshire County Council — one of the largest local authorities in the country — is now onto its **fourth Reform UK leader in a year and a half**."
- The turnover recap: **Martin Murray** (stepped down this week, leader for less than a year, days after his membership was revoked over racism allegations) succeeded **Ian Cooper**

(kicked out of the party at the end of 2025 after failing to disclose a social media account and facing allegations over racist posts); **Chris Large** had been due to take over in early 2026 but stood down days after the announcement over a family bereavement, having previously faced allegations that a TikTok account bearing his name made or endorsed racist comments (he denied personal responsibility and condemned the activity).

? Sunderland: Lib Dems slam £7.5k sending officials to Reform and Labour conferences

Sunderland Echo (31 Oct): Opposition Lib Dem councillors are calling on **Sunderland City Council's Reform UK leadership** to ban public money being used to send council staff to party political events, after figures showed **£7,468.30 of taxpayers' cash** was spent sending chief executive **Patrick Melia** and director of strategy and corporate affairs **Jill Laverick** to the **Reform UK conference in Birmingham** and the **Labour conference in Liverpool** in September.

- Lib Dem **Cllr Stephen O'Brien**, who uncovered the figures: "It is a **disgrace** that senior council staff, who are meant to be **politically neutral**, are attending party political events and are charging council tax payers through the nose... If political lobbying for the council needs to happen at these events, this should be done by Labour and Reform politicians in the city, at their own expense. At a time when the council is **cutting services and hiking council tax**, it is truly beyond belief that thousands are being **spaffed up the wall**... It simply cannot be defended."
- Breakdown (per the Lib Dems): £1,342 accommodation, £879.20 travel, £257.10 miscellaneous (taxis, food), and **£4,990 for conference entry itself**.
- The council defended the spending: engaging with partners "is an important part of ensuring Sunderland's voice is heard... help build new business relationships... part of the bigger picture in securing investment and funding."

? Northamptonshire: Reform's £500m debt write-off bid — "very unlikely to happen"

NN Journal (31 Oct, Friday brief): After West Northants Reform leader **Cllr Mark Arnull** wrote to the government (Thu 29 Oct) asking it to review and **write off the £500m+ historic debt** sitting on the two Northamptonshire unitaries' balance sheets following the collapse of the predecessor county council, **North Northamptonshire leader Cllr Martin Griffiths** was blunt: "**We would welcome the historic write-off, but let's be honest — it is very unlikely to**

happen."

- The West unitary is paying **£10m a year in interest**, with the North likely paying a similar amount; both councils are predicting overspends and using reserves to cover deficits.
- Arnull's grievance: the Labour government has decided to give financial aid to **some Surrey councils** — assistance not given to Northants when it "hit the financial skids" in 2018 under the Conservatives.
- A reader comment on the brief took aim at both Reform leaders: "Once again the two Leaders Mark Arnull and Martin Griffiths showed very poor judgement. Dipping into reserve to save their bacon…"
- Context from the 30 Oct run: Reform itself has **added £143m to the county's debt since taking control in May 2025** while demanding Westminster cancel the legacy burden.

? Commentary: "British Fascism, Racial Nationalism and the Rise of Reform UK"

The Political Quarterly Blog (1 Nov, ~10 min read): Kian Aspinall (Postdoctoral Research Associate in Sociology, University of Cambridge) argues the scholarly study of the far right marginalises race — of **2,543 articles on populism and the far right published in 2022, "race" appears in only 11.2%, "racism" in 6.9% and "whiteness" in 0.5%**.

- His thesis: Reform organises "around **border governance, demographic anxiety, anti-'illegal' migrant 'common sense' and the restoration of 'sovereignty'**" — racial politics conducted through "**sliding signifiers**", renamed as concerns about "culture", "security" or "integration", without overt biological race language. Reform's 2024 manifesto ("Our Contract with You") — migration freeze, net-migration cap, **ECHR withdrawal**, detention of all unauthorised arrivals — is received by supporters as "a claim about the **racial composition of Britain**": "The statements of policy do not say this but the political grammar, that of racial discourse, does."
- He traces **British fascism's native roots** (Martin Pugh; the BUF's "Britain First" and empire hero-veneration of Rhodes, Raleigh and Clive) and cites Farage's GB News remarks that immigration produced "an absolutely astounding cultural change" leaving the country "unrecognisable as English".
- Notably, the piece "**resisted the temptation to discuss whether Reform can be considered a fascist party**", concluding instead: "Reform is not a symptom of policy failure nor simply the mainstreaming of British political extremities. It is a **symptom of the unresolved contradictions of a racially ordered society confronting its own decline**." — and that framing Reform as "a legitimate expression of working-class

grievance" misses what race-critical frameworks make visible.

? Notable contradictions & points of interest

- **Heritage vs the donors' gallery:** Farage's IWM crusade champions **Lord Ashcroft's** displaced medal collection while the party faces continuing scrutiny over **£72m in donations from crypto billionaires Harborne and Delo** (the Mail's own framing notes it) — heritage- politics aimed at a museum that declined one mega-donor's exhibit and courted none of the others.
- **"Every party has leadership change" — but not four in 18 months:** Coles's deflection invokes a single Tory change in 2020; the Conservative opposition leader's point is the *rate* of turnover, and every departure in the chain (Cooper, Large, Murray) has touched racism allegations — the "we change and grow" line sidesteps the vetting failure Labour's MPs name.
- **Debt write-off vs debt accumulation:** Reform's Northants leaders lobby Westminster to cancel £500m+ of legacy debt (£20m/yr interest across both unitaries) while the administration itself has added £143m since May 2025 — and Griffiths privately concedes the bailout is "very unlikely".
- **Politically neutral officers at party conferences:** Sunderland's £7.5k bill covers *both* the Reform and Labour conferences — the Lib Dem objection (neutrality of officials) cuts across parties, but it lands on the Reform leadership to ban it.

? Source Links

- MailOnline — Nigel Farage to name first defence spokesman as he goes into battle on military spending: https://www.newsnow.co.uk/A/3/1328575524
- Express & Star — 'Every party has leadership change': Interview with council's new boss: https://www.expressandstar.com/news/every-party-has-leadership-change-do-residents-care-staffordshire-county-councils-third-boss-in-a-year-on-criticism-9322034
- Sunderland Echo — Lib Dems slam £7.5k taxpayer-funded spending: https://www.sunderlandecho.com/news/people/lib-dems-slam-ps75k-taxpayer-funded-spending-9320552
- NN Journal — Friday brief: Historic debt bail out 'very unlikely to happen' says leader: https://www.newsnow.co.uk/A/3/1328545005
- The Political Quarterly Blog — British Fascism, Racial Nationalism and the Rise of Reform UK: https://www.newsnow.co.uk/A/3/1328589976
- NewsNow Reform UK topic hub: https://www.newsnow.co.uk/h/UK/Politics/Reform+UK

Compiled by Hermes daily-headlines (Reform UK topic sweep) — Sunday 01 November 2026. Five new items since the 31 October run; all fetched and extracted today (Express & Star and Sunderland Echo recovered via Playwright after National World 403s).

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