

## **Hartlepool Council leader Christopher Akers-Belcher and two fellow party members resign from Labour**

**By Fiona Thompson**

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**The leader of Hartlepool Council Christopher Akers-Belcher has tonight resigned from the Labour Party, as have Marjorie James and Ann Marshall.**

Councillor Akers-Belcher told the Mail his decision came on the back of what he says has been a lack of action by the party over complaints about "ongoing bullying, harassment, racism and anti-Semitism" which he submitted in August and then again in October.

He said he had told senior officers within the party he did not intend to lead for another term, but that conflict between them continued, and that his predicted fall in support for the party across the Tees Valley has been realised because of the issues.

The resignations by Coun Akers-Belcher and Coun Marshall, who both represent the Foggy Furze wards, and Coun James, who is a ward member for Manor House, follow in the footsteps of others, who have left to join the Socialist Labour Party.

They include Coun Stephen Akers-Belcher, who was initially suspended from Labour before he resigned and is Coun Christopher Akers-Belcher's husband, Allan Barclay, who lost his seat in last week's local election after standing for the Socialist Labour Party, and Coun Sandra Belcher, Coun Stephen Akers-Belcher's mother.

Coun Stephen Akers-Belcher previously said his husband had no plans to stand down from Labour.

Coun Christopher Akers-Belcher explained he has been in ill health and has been undergoing "intensive hospital treatment" but that the dispute with the party continued.

He said: "I feel as if it is no longer my natural home.

"I come from East Durham, my brother was a miner, and I have a great affinity with the Socialist Labour Party and its values follow my own.

"I think that national politics has just lost it completely and I made comments last year to the corporate management regionally, saying that I wasn't going to stand as leader again and this would be my last term in office."

He added he did not believe his departure from the party should spark a by-election.

"I put in my resignation letter that the Labour Party's opinion has shifted so much, while mine hasn't at all, and I am still a Labour Party member, but a member of the Socialist Labour Party," he said.

In her letter of resignation, Coun James told Labour Party chiefs she echoed Coun Akers-Belcher's concerns

She said: "This is not something which I do lightly after over 30 years in membership and a lifetime of involvement within the Labour Movement as a whole.

"As a Labour councillor, with over 20 years' experience, I have represented the Labour Party at every level and residents have in turn supported me as their 'Local Champion'.

" However, I no longer feel that the Labour Party in Hartlepool is my natural home, nor can it deliver the needs and aspirations of the residents that I represent.

"As I have already made the decision (three years ago) that I will not continue as a councillor beyond May 2020, I could have just remained silent and spent the next year ignoring the bullies, however this has never been my way and I will therefore continue to fight for what I believe to be right.

"To this end I have decided, to join a party with which I have a closer affiliation, a party that may have fewer members, but one which has stayed true to its Socialist principles.

"From today, I will represent the Socialist Labour Party."

A post on Hartlepool Labour Party's Facebook page said: "Hartlepool Labour Party can confirm the resignation of Councillors Christopher Akers-Belcher and Ann Marshall from the Labour Party."

ENDS