

Who is Natalie Elphicke – is Labour’s newest defector really a good fit?

Natalie Elphicke created chaos and confusion across the Commons at last week’s PMQs, after she took a right-turn at the despatch box and sat down behind Labour leader Keir Starmer. This shock move makes her the third MP to defect from the Conservatives to the Labour party, after Dan Poulter just 11 days earlier and Christian Wakeford in 2022. But who is Labour’s newest MP, and why is her defection causing so much controversy.



[Image: The Independent / Natalie Elphicke addresses audience at Labour’s border security speech]

With a background in housing finance and policy development, and a law degree from the University of Kent, Elphicke is the chief executive of the privately funded Housing and Finance Institute, set up in 2015 during the Cameron-Clegg coalition. She was seen as a clear choice for this role, after authoring a 2010 report for the Conservative ‘Policy Exchange’ think-tank, titled, “Housing People; Financing Housing”, and then going on to lead the Conservative Policy Forum when it was launched a year later.

Elphicke’s then-husband, Charlie, served as the MP for Dover for nine years, from 2010-2019, before having the whip withdrawn after he was charged with three counts of sexual assault. However, this isn’t the first time he’d been caught up in controversy, previously losing the whip in 2017, after two sexual harassment claims emerged from within his own staff. It was reinstated prior to the December 2018 confidence vote in the then-PM Theresa May. He was later found guilty of all three counts in 2020, resulting in a two-year custodial sentence, as well as a payment of

£35,000. He went on to serve just half of his sentence at an open prison in Gloucestershire, having been released in September 2021. After failing to appeal his convictions in March 2021, it is reported that Natalie decided to end the marriage.



[IMAGE: Sky News / Charlie Elphicke (left) pictured with ex-wife Natalie Elphicke (right)]

Following her ex-husband's suspension in 2019, Elphicke stood as the Conservative candidate for his seat in Dover, and was the only name on the ballot for the internal candidate elections. She then went on to retain the seat in the 2019 election, with a majority of 12,278. Following the election, she remained as the Conservative MP for Dover until last Wednesday, May 8th, when she defected to Labour just moments before the start of PMQs.

In the immediate aftermath of her defection, there was evident shock from both sides of the house, as well as journalists across the country, clearly showing that any defection discussions had been entirely between the most senior Labour frontbenchers and Elphicke herself. Those across all sides of the political spectrum have expressed confusion, citing Elphicke's hard-right stance on social issues and immigration, and her previous outspoken discontent with the Labour party. Furthermore, Elphicke made headlines in 2020, after Marcus Rashford famously missed the 'winning penalty' in the UEFA Euro Final. Private messages were leaked to the press, where she expressed beliefs that Rashford "should have spent more time perfecting his game and less time playing politics", in reference to his free school meals campaign efforts. Shadow Chancellor Rachel Reeves, who now has to work closely with Elphicke, responded at the time by telling her to "fuck off".

Labour MPs have been quick to condemn Elphicke's decision to join the man she calls "Sir Softie" on the Labour benches. Labour backbencher, Mick Whitley described the defection as "outrageous", claiming Elphicke doesn't share the

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“values of the Labour movement”. Meanwhile, Rosie Duffield, who has worked closely with Elphicke on regional issues, and also been quick to vocally disagree with Starmer in recent months, has said she was “really confused” by the event. Seemingly further stoking the growing fire, a Labour spokesperson refused to say that Labour would turn away hypothetical defections from right-wing figures such as Nigel Farage and Jacob Rees-Mogg, instead saying, “we have conversations with all sorts of people who want to come and support the party”.

Attacks haven't just come from the Labour benches either, Conservative MPs have also been quick to express their disapproval. Despite being a close ally to the Leader of the House Penny Mordaunt, and even supporting her 2022 leadership bid, the Conservative frontbencher was quick to raise Elphicke's defection in the commons, quipping “can I reassure [Mr Liddell-Grainger] that I am not about to defect to the opposition benches. They wouldn't be interested in me, I'm too left-wing”. Not only is she critical of her former colleague, but like many other Conservatives, she's also called out Starmer's acceptance of hard-right Elphicke into the party, with many Conservatives suggesting it proves that Starmer is too indecisive about his own party's stance.



[IMAGE: iNews / Penny Mordaunt speaking at the despatch box]

Elphicke aside, Starmer's choice to allow a defector who is openly not left-wing, and openly doesn't agree with Labour policy, may be having an opposite effect to that which he intended. In a bid to show Labour to be a broad church, and a place for anybody, some would argue that all he's actually done is consolidate his anti-Tory stance, and his party's current position as a protest vote. Those on the left have been critical of Labour's lack of commitment to policy, clearly wanting to be able to vote for something more than just an anti-Tory party, evidenced by the stark rise in popularity Labour leadership saw when they announced plans to nationalise rail last month.

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With Green Party membership increasing quite rapidly over the last few weeks, it seems possible that the Labour leadership are jeopardising voters further to the left of the party, in a bid to try and gain those close to the centre; but, on the run up to a general election, some would argue that's a dangerous game to be playing,