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## **Labour splits up local party after dispute over bullying**

By Lucy Fisher, Michael Savage

The largest local Labour party in Britain has been ordered to split into three and its chairman has been expelled following claims of bullying and intimidation.

Brighton and Hove district party was suspended by Labour's national executive committee (NEC) in July after allegations of abusive behaviour at its annual general meeting.

Furious exchanges were said to have taken place and it was claimed that venue staff had been spat at, although supporters of Jeremy Corbyn said that the accusations were unfounded.

The disputes panel of the NEC decided this week that the party should organise as three separate constituency branches. The so-called city region party was one of the few branches that had comprised more than one seat.

Having ballooned in size since the general election, the branch boasts more than 8,000 members, according to a senior party insider who said that its break-up into smaller units was a matter of practicality because it had become unmanageable.

However, centrist Labour members told *The Times* that the move also had the effect of neutralising alleged plans by the hard left to deselect the area's only Labour MP, the moderate Peter Kyle. By splitting the party into three, members in Brighton Pavilion, the seat that has traditionally been more left-wing, would not be able to push for the deselection of Mr Kyle, who represents Hove & Portslade.

Labour's NEC has expelled Mark Sandell, a pro-Corbyn left-wing activist who was briefly elected chairman of the district party earlier this year. Fifteen local members have been suspended.

Mr Sandell said: "My expulsion is another desperate manoeuvre by those in the Labour Party who have lost the political argument against Corbyn and want to silence the majority of Labour members."

He was secretly filmed by a Channel 4 Dispatches programme telling hardleft activists that Mr Kyle, the MP, had "every good reason to feel nervous", as well as discussing handing out redundancy notices to MPs.

He said that the local party was "now being run by the old executive committee, which is mostly made up of those who lost democratic elections so badly".

Lloyd Russell-Moyle, acting chairman of the local party and a local councillor, told the BBC: "It's not about getting rid of bad apples. It is about making sure that we are a party fit to work for our city and our country."

A spokeswoman for Labour said that it did not comment on individual expulsions.

It is understood that the central Labour Party is also investigating Wallasey and Liverpool Riverside constituency parties. The NEC disputes that its panel discussed the branches, alongside Brighton & Hove, at a meeting on Tuesday. The Times reported last month that hard-left activists in Liverpool Riverside had developed a strategy to try to oust the MP Louise Ellman.

Meanwhile, an internal Labour investigation into Wallasey constituency Labour Party found that its MP, Angela Eagle, had suffered homophobic abuse and intimidation from members in the constituency.

The report also ruled it "highly likely" that a brick hurled through her constituency office window was linked to her leadership challenge against Mr Corbyn. Her office had to endure "abusive and intimidating" phone calls. Hundreds of "abusive, homophobic and frightening messages" were said to have been sent by Labour members to the MP.