

Electoral Matters Committee

Tuesday, 21st October,
2025

MINUTES

Present:

Councillor William Boyd (Chair), Councillor James Fardoe (Vice-Chair)
and Councillors Juma Begum and Sid Khan

Also Present:

Councillors J. Barker Smith, C. Davies, A. Fry, B. Hartnett, S. Harvey, J.
Kane, D. Munroe, R. Rogers, J. Spilsbury, M. Stringfellow and I. Woodall.

Officers:

Melissa Bassett, Claire Felton and Darren Whitney

Democratic Services Officers:

Jo Gresham

14. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND NAMED SUBSTITUTES

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Mathur with
Councillor Begum as named substitute.

15. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no Declarations of Interest.

16. MINUTES OF THE LAST MEETING

The minutes from the meeting held on 26th February 2025 were
submitted for Members approval.

RESOLVED that

The minutes from the meeting held on 26th February 2025 be
approved as a true and accurate record.

Chair

17. LOCAL GOVERNMENT REORGANISATION: FUTURE LOCAL GOVERNANCE IN REDDITCH

The Senior Electoral Services Officer presented the Local Government Reorganisation: Future Local Governance in Redditch report for Members' consideration.

In doing so the following was highlighted:

- As a result of the current Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) there needed to be significant structure changes in the Borough, which included neighbourhood governance arrangements. The report contained three options for future governance structures in terms of maintaining civic identity and to ensure effective community governance for the future. It was noted that at this time, the outcome for the future governance arrangements for Worcestershire were still unknown and whether the structure for governance would be one unitary authority or two unitary authorities for Worcestershire; one in the North and one in the South.
- There were touchstones to be considered as part of the review process. A Council must have regard to the specific needs of the areas to ensure that community/local governance was satisfied following LGR and therefore it was imperative that the outcomes reflected the identity and interests of the community and were effective and convenient.
- There were three options for consideration by Members.

These were as follows:

- Neighbourhood Area Committees (NAC) – it was the vision of the Government that Neighbourhood Area Committees or forums be established by the new unitary authority (whichever model was decided upon). These would cover large areas and would be expected to provide the main mechanism and localised governance for communities.
- Charter Trustees – This option dealt with civic identity in the Borough following Vestment Day for the new

authority. This option would ensure the safeguarding of the civic and ceremonial traditions within an area including regalia, mayoralty and historic property. However, it was noted that Charter Trustees were not permitted to own land or buildings.

- Committee Governance Review – This was a long and complex process which considered the unparished areas of the Borough in order to look to establish Parish Councils. Members were informed that Parish Councils had a wide range of powers and responsibilities including allotments, parks and open spaces. They were also permitted to raise their own funding through a precept and operated under the same financial and audit framework as Local Authorities.

Following the consideration of the report, Members and those Members who were observing the meeting were invited to speak by the Chair. The areas of discussion were as follows:

- If NACs were to be introduced this would provide more power for local people as the governance would be more localised and at grass roots. Some Members felt it was difficult to see if this type of governance would be appropriate as a decision had not been made in terms of the structure of the unitary Local Authority in the future as part of LGR. However, it was noted that these had been implemented in other areas with limited success. There were also queries raised regarding powers and discretion around funding or grants if NACs were implemented in the future.
- Members were keen to retain the identity and civic pride of Redditch including the Mayoral position. Redditch had a number of key assets that were important to residents living in the Borough which included Forge Mill, Bordesley Abbey and the Redditch Palace Theatre. Members felt it was extremely important that these be retained for the future. Members also queried what the future would

be for Rubicon Leisure Limited. It was noted that all these areas were complex and needed to be considered carefully within the context of LGR.

- As part of the LGR process, it was necessary for Councils to present a financially stable and resilient proposal. Therefore, it was key that Members provided a clear instruction on the way forward for the Borough including the future of assets owned and maintained by the Borough.
- If Option three (CGR) was agreed as the preferred option by Members, there would need to be a robust public consultation strategy in order for residents to understand the process and what the outcomes for this might be in order to avoid any mixed messages and confusion for residents. This would also need to include consultation with local groups in Redditch, and the costs required to undertake such a review and the resources needed as part of a review on this scale. Members queried whether if Option three was not agreed at this meeting, would there be an opportunity to investigate this at a later date. It was confirmed that this would be possible however due to the length of time this kind of review would take, Officers would need to commence such review as early as possible in readiness for the implementation of LGR in May 2028.
- Members were concerned that if the currently unparished areas within the Borough were made into had parishes there would be extra financial implications for the residents as a result of the payment of precepts. It was noted that this would put further strain on some residents who already experienced pressures due to the current cost of living.
- The uncertainty of the structure of local Government at present. Central Government aimed to streamline the current structure of local government and the Council's proposal for LGR due to be submitted in November 2025 was robust. Therefore, this was not the appropriate time to implement a CGR process.

Members expressed that it was important to keep options open for the future depending on what the outcomes of LGR were. This would enable the Council to take the most appropriate next steps with a clear position.

Following the detailed discussions Members felt that the best option for the Council at the current time was to explore Option two (Charter Trustees).

Therefore, on being put to the vote it was

RESOLVED that officers explore in more detail the option of appointing “Charter Trustees” for the Borough and that a further report, including costings and a timetable for appointing Charter Trustees, be presented to Council in due course.

[Following consideration of this item there was an adjournment between 19:50 and 19:57].

18. ELECTORAL PILOT FOR MAY 2026 ELECTIONS

The Electoral Services Manager presented the Electoral Pilot for May 2026 Elections report for Members’ consideration. In doing so, Members were informed that in August 2025 the Ministry of Housing Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) published a prospectus on Flexible Voting Pilots 2026 under the Government’s Electoral Modernisation banner. It noted that little had changed in the way that voting was carried out since the Ballot Act 1872 and that it was necessary to explore ways to make voting in person more efficient, convenient and better aligned with the electorate of today.

The MHCLG invited local authorities due to hold elections in May 2026 to make formal applications to pilot flexible voting options. The deadline for applications was 15th September 2025 which was later amended to 22nd September 2025.

There were several areas that MHCLG wished to pilot. These were:

- a. Voting at any polling station;
- b. Voting Hubs;
- c. Mobile polling stations; and
- d. Early in-person voting.

Local authorities were allowed to consider a mixture of the above approaches or suggest their own, however MHCLG would not consider proposals for online or electronic voting. Following discussions with the Chief Executive and Group Leaders it was agreed that Redditch Borough Council would apply for early voting and the use of voting hubs. These proposals were explained to Members, and it was noted that the early voting period was proposed from Saturday 2nd May 2026 through to Wednesday 6th May 2026. Hours of poll were still to be determined but early considerations were 8am-7pm, with an earlier finish of 5pm on the day before actual polling day. In terms of Voting Hubs, it was noted that the proposals were that one hub be situated in a location of high footfall (e.g. the Kingfisher Shopping Centre or Abbey Stadium Leisure Centre), supplemented by up to four further hubs in other parts of the Borough. There would be real time electronic registers available during this process that provided real time accuracy.

Officers proposed that should the pilot scheme proceed then a Working Group be established, with Members of the Electoral Matters Committee, along with other Elected Members that expressed an interest and relevant officers. The main purpose of the Working Group would be the decision on where voting hubs were to be located.

Members were informed that there was no cost to the Council, and that the pilot scheme would be funded by the MHCLG.

Following the presentation of the report, Members expressed that this was an exciting pilot which would encourage voting and greater engagement in the democratic process for the residents of Redditch.

The number of voting hubs across the Borough was raised by Members. Officers explained that there was no limit to the number

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of voting hubs by MCHLG. However, it was important to ensure that the correct number be established for this pilot. The Working Group would be key in ascertaining the correct number and locations along with looking at any risks, such as suppliers for the hubs and ICT stability throughout the voting period. This would include the availability of manual registers and ballot boxes alongside the proposed electronic systems. It was further explained that these voting hubs were not designed to replace usual polling stations and that the communications of the pilot would ensure that there would be no confusion in terms of both the voting hubs and the usual polling stations.

RESOLVED that:-

- 1) A letter be sent to the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) to endorse the proposal for the Council to take part in the pilot of early voting at designated hubs; and**
- 2) Subject to the success of the application detailed at recommendation 1 above, a Working Group be established to consider and recommend locations to use for the voting hubs.**

The Meeting commenced at 6.30 pm
and closed at 8.15 pm