



Electoral Matters Committee

Tue 21 Oct 2025
6.30 pm

Oakenshaw Community Centre,
Castleditch Lane, B98 7YB

If you have any queries on this Agenda please contact
Jo Gresham

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GUIDANCE ON FACE-TO-FACE MEETINGS

Please note that this is a public meeting.

If you have any questions regarding the agenda or attached papers, please do not hesitate to contact the officer named above.

Notes:

Although this is a public meeting, there are circumstances when Council might have to move into closed session to consider exempt or confidential information. For agenda items that are exempt, the public are excluded.

Electoral Matters

Tuesday, 21st October, 2025

6.30 pm

Oakenshaw Community Centre

Agenda

Membership:

Cllrs:	William Boyd (Chair)	Sid Khan
	James Fardoe	Brandon Clayton
	(Vice-Chair)	Sachin Mathur
	Matthew Dormer	

1. Apologies for absence and named substitutes

2. Declarations of Interest

To invite Councillors to declare any Disclosable Pecuniary Interests or Other Disclosable Interests they may have in items on the agenda, and to confirm the nature of those interests.

3. Minutes of the Last Meeting (Pages 5 - 8)

4. Local Government Reorganisation: Future Local Governance in Redditch (Pages 9 - 22)

5. Electoral Pilot for May 2026 Elections (Pages 23 - 32)

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Electoral Matters Committee

Wednesday, 26th February,
2025

MINUTES

Present:

Councillor Joe Baker (Chair), Councillor James Fardoe (Vice-Chair) and Councillors Brandon Clayton, Sachin Mathur and Rita Rogers

Officers:

Darren Whitney

Democratic Services Officers:

Joanne Gresham

10. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND NAMED SUBSTITUTES

There were no apologies for absence.

11. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

12. MINUTES OF THE LAST MEETING

The minutes of the meeting held on 7th December were submitted for Members' consideration.

RESOLVED that

the minutes of the meeting held on 7th December 2025 be approved as a true and accurate record.

13. REVIEW OF POLLING PLACE FOR POLLING DISTRICT HOD - WIREHILL

The Committee considered a report in respect of the review of the Polling Place for Polling District HOD – Wirehill. It was explained that Members had previously considered this matter on 7th November 2024 (as detailed at Electoral Matters Committee Minute

Chair

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Number 8/24). At this meeting, it was agreed that a consultation be undertaken to ascertain where electors from the polling district would prefer to vote in the future.

Members were informed that following that meeting, a survey letter had been sent out to all households within the polling district. Of the letters that were sent out, there were sixty-seven responses received in total which equated to a response rate of 18.7 per cent. It was noted that thirty-nine of these responses wished to remain voting at Atworth Close, thirteen were content to vote at Grangers Lane and fifteen responses used an absent vote. Members expressed their disappointment that the response rate had been so low.

It was reported that the Returning Officer had considered the electors' responses and Members were advised that given these responses, the most appropriate way forward seemed to be to site the polling place where the majority of responses from electors had identified. This was to remain voting at Atworth Close.

Members discussed the options going forward and some stated that although Atworth Close had been where the electors indicated would be preferable, it would result in using a portable polling station, which was not ideal and something that the Council tried to avoid. Some Members explained that they thought that the site at Grangers Lane was preferable. However, it was noted that this was also a portable polling station and much further for some electors to access, being further away than the average polling station site within the Borough.

Members were keen to allow all electors the opportunity to vote in elections and did not want to disenfranchise those who wished to take part in the process. However, it seemed clear that there had been a most preferred option identified following the consultation.

It was queried whether there were any access issues if the polling station was located in Atworth Close as the use of a ramp was highlighted within the report. Officers confirmed that there had been no issues highlighted when the site was used previously. Officers stated that whatever was decided by the Committee, this polling

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place would remain under review depending on any areas of concern highlighted in the future.

On being put to the vote it was

RESOLVED that

that the Committee note the contents of the report and that the Polling Place for HOD – Wirehill be located at the Atworth Close location.

The Meeting commenced at 5.03 pm
and closed at 5.15 pm

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Local Government Reorganisation: Future Local Governance in Redditch

Relevant Portfolio Holder	Councillor Jane Spilsbury, Portfolio Holder for Performance, Engagement and Governance
Portfolio Holder Consulted	Yes
Relevant Assistant Director	Claire Felton, Assistant Director of Legal, Democratic and Procurement Services
Report Author	Melissa Bassett Job Title: Senior Electoral Services Officer Email: melissa.bassett@bromsgroveandredditch.gov.uk Contact Tel: 01527 587014
Wards Affected	All
Ward Councillor(s) consulted	N/A
Relevant Council Priority	All
Non-Key Decision	
If you have any questions about this report, please contact the report author in advance of the meeting.	

1. RECOMMENDATIONS**Members are asked to RECOMMEND**

- 1) One of the following options, as detailed in this report, to ensure robust neighbourhood governance arrangements following Local Government Reorganisation:**
 - i) OPTION 1: That officers be instructed to take no further action at this stage to provide for future local neighbourhood governance arrangements in the Borough; or**
 - ii) OPTION 2: That officers be instructed to 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; or**
 - iii) OPTION 3: That officers be instructed to proceed with a Community Governance Review for the unparished areas of the Borough. This process be initiated in accordance with the timetable set out in Appendix 1 and a further report on the outcomes of the process be presented to Council on this subject in due course.**

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Members are also asked to RESOLVE to NOTE: -

- 2) the matters set out in this report relating to Local Government Reorganisation and future neighbourhood governance arrangements for Redditch Borough Council; and**
- 3) that should members endorse option 3 recommendation 1(iii), this would have financial implications for the Council and therefore a further report detailing the revenue implications of a Community Governance Review would need to be considered at a later date.**

2. BACKGROUND

- 2.1 In December 2024 the Government published the English Devolution White Paper which confirmed the Government's intention to restructure local government in England, particularly in two-tier areas, through the creation of new unitary authorities.
- 2.2 Redditch Borough Council is currently working alongside Bromsgrove, Malvern Hills, Worcester City and Wychavon District Councils to prepare and submit a final proposal for local government reorganisation in November 2025. This submission will propose the creation of two unitary councils covering the north and south of Worcestershire.
- 2.3 Worcestershire County Council and Wyre Forest District Council are also preparing final submissions, which will propose the establishment of a single unitary authority for the whole of Worcestershire.
- 2.4 At this stage, it is not known what the final structure for Worcestershire will be. Following statutory consultation, and subject to parliamentary approval, ministers are expected to decide which proposal will be approved and implemented and may make modifications as a result of consultation. On the current indicative timetable, a decision will be announced in early summer 2026.
- 2.5 In addition to Local Government Reorganisation, the Government's English Devolution White Paper also references neighbourhood governance arrangements in local areas.
- 2.6 Regardless of which Local Government Reorganisation proposal is approved, there will be a need for significant structural changes in the Borough, including neighbourhood governance arrangements. Members are therefore invited to consider what local neighbourhood governance arrangements may be most appropriate for the Borough in order to maintain civic identity and ensure effective community-level

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representation within any future unitary authority. Consideration of these issues may also strengthen the Council's case in the proposals submitted to Government.

- 2.7 The Government defines a neighbourhood area as 'any area of specified description that falls within the authority's area'. Throughout this report, the terms *neighbourhood governance* and *local governance* are therefore used interchangeably.

3. OPERATIONAL ISSUES

Neighbourhood Area Committees (Corresponds with Option 1)

- 3.1 It should be noted that one of the elements that the Government is considering in the establishment of new unitary authorities is how to provide for community level representation. The English Devolution and Community Empowerment Bill, currently before Parliament, introduces a new duty on local authorities to put in place "appropriate arrangements" for effective neighbourhood governance.
- 3.2 The detail of how neighbourhood governance will operate is not prescribed in the Bill itself but is expected to be set through secondary legislation. In a Ministerial Statement issued by the then Minister for State for Local Government and English Devolution (Jim McMahon MP) on 3rd June 2025 the Government set out a broad approach as follows: -

"Local Government Reorganisation should facilitate better and sustained community engagement, and I welcome the steps areas are taking to consider how to maintain strong community voice. A simplified and standardised system of local area-working and governance is needed, and Neighbourhood Area Committees, led by frontline ward councillors, are the best route to achieve this. Neighbourhood Area Committees support local authorities to deliver their commitments to community partnership-working at a neighbourhood level. There are also opportunities to bring in other service providers into broader membership of Neighbourhood Area Committees, for instance town or parish councillors where they exist, and co-opted members from other local community organisations. This allows for the benefit of structural efficiencies from Local Government Reorganisation while deepening localism and engagement across every community."

- 3.3 The Government's vision therefore is for Neighbourhood Area Committees or forums, to be established by the new unitary authority, with the purpose of strengthening local representation and community

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engagement. It should be noted that the decision about establishing Neighbourhood Area Committees would be made by the future unitary authority rather than by Redditch Borough Council.

- 3.4 The definition and interpretation of “appropriate arrangements”, and how this relates to Neighbourhood Area Committees is currently unclear. However, it is expected that Neighbourhood Area Committees could provide a structured forum for Councillors to engage with local communities and consider local priorities. Depending on the scope of delegation from the unitary council, their role could include:

- Providing a forum for discussion of issues affecting the local area.
- Making recommendations to the unitary authority on matters of local concern.
- Exercising delegated decision-making powers where these are granted.
- Managing small budgets to support local services or community projects.
- Strengthening the link between communities and the unitary authority to ensure that local voices are heard.

- 3.5 These Committees would not be statutory councils in their own right and would not have the ability to raise a precept. Their effectiveness would depend on the powers, responsibilities and resources delegated to them by the unitary authority.

- 3.6 In summary, Neighbourhood Area Committees are expected to provide the main mechanism for community-level governance within the new unitary structure. However, their powers would depend on delegation from the unitary authority, as well as the contents of any secondary legislation provided by Government. The arrangements described in this section of the report are those which would come into place following Local Government Re-organisation if Members chose to take no further action in accordance with Recommendation 1(i).

Charter Trustees (Option 2)

- 3.7 Members may wish to consider whether additional local governance arrangements are needed to ensure continuity of civic identity and/or representation in the Borough following Vestment Day for the new unitary authority. In addition to Neighbourhood Area Committees, the option of appointing Charter Trustees could also be considered. While Neighbourhood Area Committees are intended to provide a mechanism for localised governance within the unitary structure, Charter Trustees could operate in parallel to ensure that the civic and ceremonial

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traditions of the Borough are maintained where no parish or town council currently exists.

- 3.8 Charter Trustees can be put in place when a Borough or District with historic civic functions is abolished and there is no parish or town council to take them on. They are provided for in legislation and allow those civic traditions to continue through a group of councillors drawn from the area concerned.
- 3.9 The role of Charter Trustees is to safeguard civic and ceremonial traditions, such as the mayoralty, regalia, and historic property. These responsibilities are ceremonial in nature and do not extend to wider service delivery or community governance. It should also be noted that Charter Trustees are unable to own land or buildings.
- 3.10 Membership would usually consist of councillors of the principal authority representing wards, or divisions that make up the unparished area of the former Borough. The Trustees must elect a Mayor and Deputy Mayor annually and have the ability to raise a modest precept to cover civic expenses.
- 3.11 To explore this option further, consideration would need to be given to which civic and ceremonial functions, property and regalia should be transferred to the Charter Trustees upon the dissolution of the Borough Council.
- 3.12 Taken together, Government plans for Neighbourhood Area Committees alongside Charter Trustees may provide sufficient arrangements for local governance in the Borough, particularly in preserving both area-level governance and civic identity. This approach follows wider Government sentiment for reorganisation and would be consistent with the Council's wider position in supporting proposals for two unitary authorities in Worcestershire, which seek to balance effective strategic governance with meaningful local accountability.
- 3.13 Further work would have to be carried out by officers to bring a full report to Council on the details of appointing Charter Trustees, including the process to be followed and seeking authorisation to set up a budget to cover the anticipated costs. Members are referred to Recommendation 1(ii) which details the actions required should this option be selected.

Parish / Town Councils (Option 3)

- 3.14 If Members wish to consider arrangements that provide a broader role in local governance, the alternative would be to consider commencing a Community Governance Review (CGR) to explore the creation of

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parish councils. Parish and town councils are the most local tier of government in England. Legally, there is no difference between a parish council and a town council. Both are corporate bodies created under the Local Government Act 1972 with the same statutory powers and duties. The distinction is simply that a parish council may, by resolution, choose to call itself a town council and adopt the style of town Mayor.

- 3.15 Parish councils have a range of powers to provide and maintain local facilities and services. These can include allotments, parks and open spaces, cemeteries, bus shelters, community centres and events. They have the power to raise their own funding through a precept as part of council tax and must operate within the same financial and audit framework as other local authorities.
- 3.16 While parish councils can own property and employ staff, they must remain financially sustainable. Any transfer of assets or responsibilities from a principal authority must therefore be supported by an appropriate level of resources to ensure the new council can meet its obligations.
- 3.17 It should be noted that there is no requirement for any area to be parished. In many urban areas, local governance is provided entirely by the principal authority without parish councils. Where parish or town councils are created, they take on responsibility for certain local matters and operate as an additional tier of governance within the area.
- 3.18 The statutory process by which new parish/town councils can be created is a via a CGR.

Community Governance Reviews (Option 3)

- 3.19 A CGR is the statutory process by which a principal council can review and, if appropriate, establish or amend parish governance arrangements. The process is governed by the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007 and associated guidance.
- 3.20 A CGR can consider a range of options, including:
- The creation of new parishes and parish or town councils
 - The alteration or abolition of existing parishes
 - Changes to the name of a parish
 - Alterations to parish boundaries
 - Changes to the electoral arrangements of a parish, including the number of councillors and the warding of the parish.
- 3.21 Redditch Borough is currently unparished in its entirety, apart from Feckenham parish, located in the south of the Borough. A CGR would

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therefore provide the Council with the opportunity to consider whether new parish councils should be established in other parts of the Borough, including the potential creation of a Redditch Town Council.

- 3.22 The Council has discretion over the scope and terms of reference of a CGR, provided that it has regard to the need to ensure that community governance within the area reflects the identities and interests of local communities and is effective and convenient.
- 3.23 Once commenced, a CGR must usually be completed within 12 months. An indicative timetable, as well as some further information on the stages required when conducting a CGR, has been provided in Appendix 1. The timetable ensures adequate timing for robust consultation on draft recommendations.
- 3.24 The outcome is not predetermined: a review may recommend the creation of new parish/town councils but may also conclude that no changes are required.
- 3.25 Undertaking a CGR would have financial implications. Costs are likely to arise from consultation, engagement and publication requirements, as well as officer time. It should also be recognised that the process would require a significant allocation of officer resources, which may have an impact on wider Local Government Reorganisation workflows.
- 3.26 In addition, the statutory requirement for robust recommendations, supported by consultation and evidence, means that work on a CGR would need to commence immediately if Redditch Borough Council wished to see the process through to its completion within the available timeframe.
- 3.27 Should it be decided that Redditch Borough Council does not wish to commence a CGR at this stage, this would not prevent any future unitary authority from carrying out a review in due course, including consideration of parishing currently unparished areas.
- 3.28 There is also the potential that a petition could be received calling for Redditch Borough Council, or a future unitary authority, to undertake a CGR in Redditch. Should this occur, and should the petition be in receipt of signatures from at least 7.5 per cent of local electors (where there are more than 2,500 electors), then the relevant Council would then need to undertake that CGR.

Conclusion

- 3.29 In considering the options, Members should note that some form of neighbourhood governance will be a requirement under forthcoming

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legislation, most likely taking the form of Neighbourhood Area Committees. This approach, alongside Charter Trustees, would align closely with the Government's plans for neighbourhood governance while also supporting the Council's wider submission for two unitary authorities in Worcestershire. In addition, this would also place less demand on resources when taking into consideration the wider requirements of planning for local government reorganisation. Although CGRs remain an option for creating parish or town councils, the timing, scope and resources of such a process would also need to be considered.

4. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 4.1 The full financial implications of the options outlined in this report cannot be fully determined at this stage. More detailed work would be required once the preferred approach is agreed, particularly in relation to consultation requirements and the scope of any new governance arrangements.
- 4.2 It is, however, possible to identify some relative differences in costs between the options:

Option 1 - Neighbourhood Committees

These are expected to be established by the new unitary authority as part of its statutory duties under forthcoming legislation. Costs would therefore be met corporately within the new authority's governance structure.

Option 2 - Charter Trustees

The costs associated with Charter Trustees would be minimal, limited to the administration of civic and ceremonial functions and covered by a modest amount charged to the principal council. Any work undertaken to appoint Charter Trustees and assign assets would be looked at as part of the wider workflows for Local Government Reorganisation.

Option 3 - Community Governance Review

The CGR process would be significantly more resource-intensive. Costs would depend on the level of public consultation undertaken, but could include publication and engagement expenses, as well as officer time and potentially the involvement of external organisations such as the County Association of Local Councils (CALC). Should new parish or town councils be established as a result, they would be required to raise their own funds through a precept on the areas concerned, and a substantial amount of work would be needed to assess the financial viability of any potential services and assets given to any newly created parish councils.

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- 4.3 Members should therefore note that the most immediate and material costs would arise from undertaking a CGR, while the costs associated with Charter Trustees are expected to be minimal in comparison.
- 4.4 Should members agree that option 3 (CGR) is the preferred option, it should be noted that this would have financial implications for the Council and a further report requesting additional funding would need to be prepared for members consideration. It is not possible at this stage to clarify what those financial costs would be, as this would be dependant on the Terms of Reference for any CGR undertaken and the manner of consultation.

5. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 The existing legislation which enables Local Government Reorganisations to be implemented is the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007. As referenced in this report, new proposed legislation, namely the English Devolution and Community Empowerment Bill 2025 ("the Bill") was published in July 2025 and is currently being considered by Parliament. It is not known what the timetable will be for the new Bill to become law.
- 5.2 The Bill sets out various additional matters which will enable the current Local Government Reorganisation to be implemented. The Bill also covers other aspects such as the creation of Strategic Authorities. Section 58 of the Bill has the sub-heading "Local authorities: effective neighbourhood governance" and subsection (1) states: -

"Local authorities in England must make appropriate arrangements to secure the effective governance of any area of a specified description that falls within the authority's area (a "neighbourhood area")."

- 5.3 The right for a Borough to establish Charter Trustees upon its dissolution was set out in the Local Government Act 1972. Other relevant provisions are included in the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007 and the Charter Trustee Regulations 2009.
- 5.4 As noted above there is a set process in place for CGRs which is governed by the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007 and associated legislation.

6. OTHER - IMPLICATIONS**Local Government Reorganisation**

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- 6.1 The options set out in this report all arise directly from the context of Local Government Reorganisation. Neighbourhood Area Committees are expected to form part of the statutory governance arrangements under forthcoming legislation, while the appointment of Charter Trustees and/or the creation of parish or town councils would provide additional mechanisms to maintain local identity and representation.
- 6.2 The implications of each option for LGR, including their alignment with Government expectations and the Council's wider submission for two unitary authorities, are considered in Section 2 of this report. Options in that strategic context should be considered when determining further work.

Relevant Council Priority

- 6.3 Work on local neighbourhood governance arrangements supports all of the Council's current priorities.

Climate Change Implications

- 6.4 There are no direct climate change implications arising from this report.

Equalities and Diversity Implications

- 6.5 There are no equalities implications directly arising from this report. Any consultation undertaken as part of a CGR would need to be inclusive and accessible to all communities.

7. RISK MANAGEMENT

- 7.1 The principal risk relates to the allocation of resources to governance arrangements during a period of wider Local Government Reorganisation. CGRs in particular would require significant officer time and financial resources.
- 7.2 A further risk is that the Council's approach to neighbourhood governance could conflict with, or be perceived as inconsistent with, the proposals the authority submits to Government on unitary reorganisation. Care will therefore be needed to ensure that any decisions taken locally are aligned with the wider submission.
- 7.3 Financial risks arise from the relative costs of the options. A CGR would be considerably more expensive than appointing Charter Trustees, depending on the scope of consultation and potential involvement of external consultants. It should also be recognised that the outcome of a CGR is not predetermined. The review may ultimately recommend no

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change, which could raise questions about the value of the resources invested.

- 7.4 Finally, there are risks linked to public engagement. A CGR requires extensive consultation, which may create expectations within communities that new governance arrangements will follow. Managing those expectations will be an important part of the process.

8. APPENDICES and BACKGROUND PAPERS

Appendices

Appendix 1 – Community Governance Review: Process and Indicative Timetable

Background Papers

The English Devolution and Community Empowerment Bill:

<https://bills.parliament.uk/bills/4002>

Communities and Local Government and The Local Government Boundary Commission for England: Guidance for principal councils on undertaking community governance reviews, March 2010.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/community-governance-reviews-guidance>

[Ministerial Statement made by Jim McMahon](#)

[Minister of State for Local Government and English Devolution dated 03 June 2025](#)

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-statements/detail/2025-06-03/hcws676>

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9. REPORT SIGN OFF

Department	Name and Job Title	Date
Portfolio Holder	Cllr Jane Spilsbury, Portfolio Holder for Performance, Engagement and Governance	10/10/2025
Financial Services	Debra Goodall	10/10/2025
Legal Services	Nicola Cummings	06/10/2025
Policy Team (if equalities implications apply)	N/A	N/A
Climate Change Team (if climate change implications apply)	N/A	N/A

Appendix 1 – Community Governance Review: Process and Indicative Timetable

The table below sets out the key stages of a Community Governance Review (CGR), the main actions required at each stage, and an indicative timetable if a review were to commence in late 2025.

Stage	Key Actions	Indicative Timing (if commenced late 2025)
Decision to Commence & Terms of Reference	- Resolution to conduct a CGR. - Draft and approve Terms of Reference (ToR), including scope, purpose, issues, area maps, and timetable. - Publish ToR (this formally starts the review).	Q4 2025 – Q1 2026
Information Gathering & Preparation	- Gather baseline electorate data (current and forecast over 5 years). - Collate community assets, services, and local identity evidence. - Identify existing representation and governance structures. - Establish cross-service project team (legal, electoral, comms, planning, GIS, finance, etc.). - Prepare budget and resources for consultation.	Q1–Q2 2026
Initial Consultation	Statutory duty to consult local electors, other councils, and interested bodies (businesses, residents' associations, voluntary groups, schools, health organisations, etc.). - Publicise widely and provide accessible methods of response. - Analyse submissions and identify key themes.	Q1–Q2 2026
Draft Recommendations	Formulate draft proposals, taking into account consultation responses, electorate data, and statutory criteria (effectiveness, convenience, community identity). - Decide whether to propose creating new parish/town councils, altering boundaries, or making no changes. Several different proposals can be put forward at draft recommendation stage.	Q3 2026

	- Include proposed electoral arrangements (councillor numbers, wards, election cycle). - Publish draft recommendations with supporting evidence.	
Second Consultation	- Undertake further statutory consultation on draft recommendations. - Allow longer period than first consultation. - Notify County Council. - Re-contact stakeholders who responded to the first consultation. - Collate and analyse feedback.	Q3–Q4 2026
Final Recommendations	- Prepare final report including electorate figures, governance options, consultation outcomes, and reasons for decisions. - Demonstrate compliance with guidance etc. - Publish final recommendations and notify interested parties. - Identify any related alterations.	Q4 2026
Reorganisation Order	- Council makes a Reorganisation Order to bring recommendations into effect. - Order must specify area, new governance structures, transitional provisions, and arrangements for assets, staff, and finances. - Effective from 1 April in year of next elections.	Q1 2027 (Order effective 1 April)
Implementation & Operation	- New parish/town councils assume responsibilities. - Precept set to fund activities. - First elections held - Interim arrangements possible (e.g. appointing principal councillors to oversee initial setup).	May 2027 elections

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Electoral Pilot for May 2026 Elections

Relevant Portfolio Holder	Councillor Jane Spilsbury Portfolio Holder for Performance, Engagement and Governance
Portfolio Holder Consulted	Yes
Relevant Assistant Director	Claire Felton, Assistant Director of Legal, Democratic and Procurement Services
Report Author Darren Whitney	Job Title: Electoral Services Manager Contact email: darren.whitney@bromsgroveandredditch.gov.uk Contact Tel: 01527 881650
Wards Affected	All
Ward Councillor(s) consulted	N/A
Relevant Council Priority	
Non-Key Decision	
If you have any questions about this report, please contact the report author in advance of the meeting.	

1. RECOMMENDATIONS**The Electoral Matters Committee RESOLVE that:-**

- 1) A letter be sent to the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) endorsing 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.**

2. BACKGROUND

- 2.1 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 has changed in the way voting is carried out since the Ballot Act 1872 and that it is necessary to explore ways to make voting in person more efficient, convenient and better aligned with the electorate of today.

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2.2 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 5pm on 15 September 2025 which was later amended to 22 September 2025.

2.3 The four core areas that MHCLG wished to pilot were:

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

Local authorities were allowed to consider a mixture of the above approaches or suggest their own, however MHCLG were not accepting proposals for online or electronic voting.

2.4 The overarching objectives of the pilots were to:

- improve voter convenience and satisfaction;
- advance accessibility and inclusive participation; and
- assess feasibility and deliver cost-effective, resilient and secure voting.

3. OPERATIONAL ISSUES

3.1 Officers studied the prospectus and decided 2026 would be an ideal year to test some of the methods in the prospectus that would be most suited to Redditch Borough as a forward thinking council. It was agreed with the Chief Executive and the Group Leaders that Redditch Borough Council apply for early voting and the use of voting hubs.

3.2 The full application, which was sent to MHCLG before the deadline, can be found in Appendix 1 but to summarise the application the proposed pilot is to offer the electorate the option of early voting at designated hubs across Redditch Borough.

The application is asking MHCLG to consider the following as part of the pilot:

- **Early voting period:** from Saturday 2 May 2026 through to Wednesday 6 May 2026. Hours of poll would need to be confirmed but early considerations are 8am-7pm, with an earlier finish of 5pm on the day before actual polling day.

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- **Voting hubs:** one hub 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.
- **Access:** all polling station electors (those without absent votes) within the Borough would be able to cast their vote at any hub.
- **Technology:** use of electronic polling station registers to support the administration of early voting and ensure real-time accuracy across hubs.

Polling day on Thursday 7 May would be as normal with all usual polling stations open and only electors that normally vote in those would be allowed to do so.

3.3 The purpose of the pilot will be to:

- Understand how electors use early voting, including the reasons for and timing of their participation.
- Explore the impact of early voting on convenience, accessibility, and overall participation.
- Test the use of electronic administration in managing the poll effectively across multiple venues.

This will be measured through a number of methods, including surveys and daily statistics on turnout in association with the Electoral Commission.

3.4 Before the pilot can go ahead, the MHCLG require Council support. This Committee, on behalf of the Council, are able to make the decision to formally endorse the pilot application, however due to the tight timetable there was not time to convene a meeting before the application closing date. So that an application could be made the proposed pilot was discussed individually with the two Group Leaders and both were supportive of the idea.

3.5 As there is support from the Group Leaders and senior management it is recommended that the Committee support the pilot application.

3.6 If the Committee endorses the proposal and the Minister with responsibility for elections approves the pilot application, a full delivery plan will be developed.

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- 3.7 It is recommended that, should the pilot proceed, a working group be established, made up of Members of this Committee, other Elected Members that express an interest and relevant officers. The main purpose of the working group would be the decision on where voting hubs are located.
- 3.8 This is similar to work the Committee does on polling place reviews and the work completed by the group that dealt with the Redditch Electoral Review for the Local Government Boundary Commission for England.

4. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 4.1 Under paragraph 3.4 of the prospectus the MHCLG confirm that funding of additional costs for running the pilot would be covered by them.

5. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 Once approved a statutory order would be drawn up by the Secretary of State to allow the pilot to go ahead. This would modify existing legislation to allow for the changes that the pilot would create.
- 5.2 MHCLG state that they would intend that the order would be in place by January 2026.

6. OTHER - IMPLICATIONS**Local Government Reorganisation**

- 6.1 Participation in this pilot exercise should help to inform how elections will take place in the future.

Relevant Council Priority

- 6.2 The proposals detailed in this report, relate to the delivering quality services under the organisational priorities of high quality services and supported governance.

Climate Change Implications

- 6.3 There are no direct climate change implications arising from this report but if the pilot goes ahead there may be a reduction in direct polling station journeys.

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Equalities and Diversity Implications

- 6.4 There are no equalities implications directly arising from this report. If agreed and selected for a pilot consideration regarding accessibility to any voting hubs would need to be factored in.

7. RISK MANAGEMENT

- 7.1 As security and transparency are key to the pilot a full risk register would be drawn up if the application is successful.
- 7.2 As this is a pilot there is a risk of voter confusion. Although mitigated in the fact polling day will be held as normal work on communications will be key to reducing any confusion.
- 7.3 Hubs may not be available for the whole of the early voting period so early identification and booking of these would be essential.

8. APPENDICES and BACKGROUND PAPERS

Appendix

Appendix 1 - Submitted application for the pilot

Background Papers

Electoral Modernisation Prospectus Flexible Voting Pilots 2026

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9. REPORT SIGN OFF

Department	Name and Job Title	Date
Portfolio Holder	Councillor Jane Spilsbury	
Lead Director / Assistant Director	Claire Felton, Assistant Director of Legal, Democratic and Procurement Services	
Financial Services	Deb Goodall, Assistant Director of Financial and Customer Services	02/10/25
Legal Services	Nicola Cummings, Principal Solicitor - Governance	06/10/25

APPENDIX 1**Electoral Modernisation - Application for Flexible Voting Pilot in May 2026 -
Redditch Borough Council****Background and Proposed Pilot**

Redditch Borough has an electorate of 63,979 and elects by thirds. The Borough was designated as a New Town in 1964. Redditch town centre serves as the principal urban centre, with the Kingfisher Shopping Centre the main retail hub. Redditch centre is surrounded by smaller urban local centres with local shops and community spaces such as in Winyates Green and Matchborough. To the North of the Borough, there has been large scale development in recent years increasing the population and footfall into the centre of Town. There are rural settlements on the outskirts. The largest rural area is the parish of Feckenham, situated to the south of the authority, and is the Borough's only parish council and has 690 registered local government electors.

The May 2026 Elections have one seat being elected in each of the nine Borough Wards.

The current composition of the Council is 17 Labour, 5 Conservative, 3 Independent and 1 Green. Next May, of the nine seats to be elected, 6 are Labour, and 1 each of Conservative, Green and Independent members.

The proposed pilot is to offer the electorate the option of early voting at designated hubs across Redditch. Current discussions suggest:

- Early voting period: from Saturday 2 May 2026 through to Wednesday 6 May 2026. Hours of poll are to be confirmed. Early considerations are 8am-7pm, with an earlier finish of 5pm on the day before poll.
- Voting hubs: one hub 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.
- Access: all polling station electors (those without absent votes) within the borough would be able to cast their vote at any hub.
- Technology: use of electronic polling station registers to support the administration of early voting and ensure real-time accuracy across hubs. Our preferred supplier would be Civica as our electoral management system is Civica Xpress.

The purpose of the pilot will be to:

- Understand how electors use early voting, including the reasons for and timing of their participation.
- Explore the impact of early voting on convenience, accessibility, and overall participation.

- Test the use of electronic administration in managing the poll effectively across multiple venues.

At this stage, the details remain under development and will evolve following further discussions with MHCLG, CFH (our contracted printers), and Civica.

Council Support

The Chief Executive who is also the Returning Officer is supportive of the application. Officers have met with the Council Leader and the Leader of the Opposition are both content for this application to be made. They are all copied into this application.

The final decision rests with Council/Electoral Matters Committee and it will not be able to confirm this before the application deadline. Confirmation will be obtained as soon as possible to ensure that the pilot would be able to go ahead.

It was recognised that better access to voting is required and that this is an excellent opportunity to progress the democracy agenda. During the discussions concerns were raised on the siting of hubs of the hubs and opportunities to undermine the voting process by, for example, voting more than once.

Officers envisage that members will be fully involved in shaping the final pilot arrangements through the Electoral Matters Committee. This will include decisions on the location of early voting hubs, guided by officer recommendations, following a similar process to the current allocation of polling stations. Officers have been assured by suppliers that there are robust checks within the electronic polling station software to ensure that double voting does not occur.

Members will also be engaged in the development of the communications plan to ensure electors are fully informed of the pilot and how early voting will operate. In addition, officers would ensure members, candidates, and election agents will be fully briefed on the administration of early voting to provide clarity, maintain transparency, and build confidence in the process.

Resources and Delivery

The absence of scheduled elections in Bromsgrove in May 2026 provides the Electoral Services Team with significant additional capacity to support the delivery of the proposed pilot in Redditch. This additional resource will be supplemented by the wider staffing pool ordinarily engaged in Bromsgrove elections, ensuring that the most experienced polling and postal vote staff are available to support the administration of the May 2026 elections.

The Electoral Services Team have collectively considered piloting and are supportive of pursuing the pilot. The team view this as an exciting opportunity for professional development as well as a means of exploring innovative approaches to electoral administration. Both the Electoral Services Manager and the Senior Electoral Services Officer are aware of the additional commitments that the pilot would require and are confident in their ability to meet these demands. It should be further noted that the team also deal with Bromsgrove District Council elections and as there are not elections being held in that area in May 2026 extra resource can be focussed on the pilot.

In terms of delivery timescales, a detailed project timetable will be developed following further discussions with MHCLG, suppliers, and stakeholders. It is recognised that the statutory Order for the

pilot must be produced by January 2026, and the project plan will be structured to ensure all preparatory work and engagement is completed with this deadline in mind.

The team are committed to meeting all delivery and evaluation requirements as set out by MHCLG and will ensure that appropriate project governance, monitoring, and reporting arrangements are in place. If agreement is reached, we would be looking to gain a similar commitment from our suppliers. Early discussions with both Civica and CFH have been positive, with both keen to work with us on a pilot. We would look to engage with any identified potential early voting hubs as soon as possible. It is understood that active engagement with the Electoral Commission is required and the team had considerable experience in dealing with them at a local and national level, so are quite happy to liaise with them to meet any requirements.

Suppliers and Costs

The Electoral Services Team have already informally notified the main suppliers likely to be affected by the pilot, including our print provider CFH and Civica who provide the electoral management software, Xpress as well as their electronic polling software. They have both expressed a willingness to work with us to support delivery. Formal discussions will take place once an agreement to proceed has been reached, to ensure all technical and logistical requirements are addressed, however progress has been made on an informal level and officers are content that the early voting hubs could be delivered using these suppliers.

We intend to work closely with MHCLG to provide early indications of potential expenditure and will maintain ongoing dialogue to ensure that costs are monitored and managed throughout the project.

Communication

Initial discussions have taken place with the Council's Communications Team, who have confirmed their willingness to work with Electoral Services to design and deliver a comprehensive plan to inform electors about the pilot. We would also seek the thoughts and assistance of current members as well as candidates and agents to ensure a clear and consistent message.

The communications approach will include:

- Poll cards: clear messaging to highlight the availability of early voting and where it can be accessed.
- Active promotion: through council communication channels, local media, and community networks to maximise awareness.
- Visibility at hubs: use of promotional tools such as stickers for electors who have voted early, to raise the profile of the pilot and encourage participation.

In addition, we propose to conduct a survey of all early voters, offered in both paper and digital formats, to understand how and why electors have chosen to use early voting. This will provide valuable insights into voter behaviour, accessibility, and satisfaction, contributing directly to the evaluation of the pilot.

To ensure transparency and confidence in the process, briefing sessions will also be held for all members prior to the election timetable commencing, as well as for candidates and agents. These sessions will provide a clear overview of how early voting will be administered and offer the opportunity to address questions in advance of delivery.

Potential Risks

The proposed pilot has been designed to minimise any risk to the conduct of the poll itself. At this time, it is envisaged that polling day will continue to be administered in the current way, using paper registers and the usual network of polling stations. This ensures that the administrative changes introduced by the pilot are contained within the remit of the Electoral Services core team and a select group of staff assigned to early voting hubs.

A full risk register will be developed to identify, assess, and mitigate risks, but the main areas requiring attention at this stage include:

- Security of ballot boxes: ensuring the safe storage and transport of ballots during the early voting period.
- Reliance on technology: managing potential risks associated with electronic registers, including contingency arrangements in the event of technical failure.
- Tight turnaround for registers: ensuring that polling station registers can be produced accurately and on time following the close of early voting, with the correct markers included for those that have voted early.
- Transparency and confidence: maintaining trust in the process by ensuring that members, candidates, agents, and staff are fully informed of the pilot's administration.

Early discussions have been held on these risks, and it is felt that appropriate mitigation measures can be put in place. Security and transparency will be central to all aspects of planning and delivery. We intend to work with MHCLG to create a robust risk register.

Having read the Electoral Modernisation Prospectus – Flexible Voting Pilots 2026 issued by MHCLG, we can confirm that we feel able to demonstrate that we meet the criteria in paragraph 5.4.

We welcome any questions from yourselves regarding clarification before final submission to The Minister.

Darren Whitney
Electoral Services Manager
Application on behalf of Redditch Borough Council.

September 2025