Redditch Borough Council
Working together for our communities

Council

Monday, 10th August, 2026

MINUTES

Present:

Councillor Susan Eacock (Mayor), Councillor James Aston (Deputy Mayor), and Councillors Juliet Barker Smith, Roger Bennett, William Boyd, Brandon Clayton, Matthew Dormer, James Fardoe, Simon Farmer, Andrew Fry, Joanna Kane, Wanda King, Nicola Lloyd, David Meredith, Gemma Monaco, Ashley Monk, Nic Pioli, Rita Rogers, Gary Slim, Jane Spilsbury, Monica Stringfellow and Ian Woodall

Officers:

Melissa Bassett, Nicola Cummings, Claire Felton, John Leach, Becky Talbot and Darren Whitney

Principal Democratic Services Officer:

Jess Bayley-Hill

31. WELCOME

The Mayor welcomed all those present to the meeting.

At the start of the meeting, the Mayor led Members in paying tribute to former MP and former MEP, Ann Widdecombe, who had sadly been murdered since the previous Council meeting, by observing a minute’s silence.

32. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received on behalf of Councillors Joe Baker, Bill Hartnett, Sharon Harvey, Jen Snape and Craig Warhurst.

33. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

34. MINUTES

The minutes of the Council meeting held on 29th June 2026 were submitted. Clarification was provided that the minutes were considered for accuracy only.

Chair

RESOLVED that

the minutes of the meeting of the Council held on 29th June 2026 be approved as a true and correct record and signed by the Mayor.

35. FUTURE WARDS WITHIN THE REDDITCH ELECTORAL AREA

The Leader presented a report on the subject of future wards within the Redditch electoral area for Members' consideration.

Council was advised that the report had been prepared in order to meet a timescale set by the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG), which required a response in respect of Redditch ward patterning by 17th August 2026. A report on this subject had previously been prepared and considered at a meeting of the Electoral Matters Committee held on 30th July 2026, which had been chaired by the Leader.

Members were reminded that Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) would result in Redditch Borough Council becoming a part of a new unitary Council for North Worcestershire. Subject to legislation, this was expected to be an authority made up of 54 members, including 16 Councillors representing the current electoral area of Redditch.

In the original LGR submission, it had been put forward that the numbers of Councillors should be doubled in each county division to create the new unitary wards. The arrangement worked in most of Worcestershire but in Redditch it would mean four-member wards across the area. This would cause problems both electorally and in terms of representation. There would be a dilution of accountability and reduced representational clarity for residents. In addition, this would generate difficulties in terms of holding a principal election.

Officers had asked the opinion of both MHCLG and the Local Government Boundary Commission for England (LGBCE) about this matter. Whilst the Commission had explained that it could not formally comment on authorities until they were operational, they did confirm that the LGBCE would not create four-member wards under normal circumstances. MHCLG had responded to explain that they were content to allow Redditch Borough Council to review ward patterning using existing Borough ward boundaries rather than county divisions. The number of seats for the Redditch electoral area were to remain at 16.

In reviewing arrangements, it was concluded that the only viable ward patterning for Redditch would be to have seven wards. Five wards would remain as they were but represented by two rather than three Members. The other four existing wards would be combined to make two new wards, each represented by three Members. This approach had been endorsed by the Informal Working Group on LGR in Worcestershire and by Redditch Borough Council's Group Leaders. Group Leaders further agreed that elected Members should have a chance to comment on the matter. Consequently, the subject was scheduled for the consideration of the Electoral Matters Committee and then referred on to Council, for a decision on a submission to MHCLG.

Prior to the Electoral Matters Committee meeting, a questionnaire had been circulated to Members seeking their preferred ward combinations and the reasons for their preferences. Sixteen responses were received within the specified timeframe. Based on these responses, six viable scenarios, derived from the four most favoured ward combinations, were developed and presented to the Electoral Matters Committee. Following discussions, the Committee had agreed to recommend to Council scenario one.

In addition to considering a scenario to recommend to MHCLG, Council was being asked to consider delegating authority to the Chief Executive to finalise the submission to Government. However, Members were asked to note that a decision taken by Council would not guarantee that those ward arrangements would be used for the May 2027 shadow elections, as the final decision rested with Ministerial agreement at MHCLG, not with the Council. The final ward patterning would be published as part of the Structural Changes Order.
Members were also asked to note that these ward arrangements were intended to be interim. Once the new unitary authority was established and operational, the LGBCE would undertake a full electoral review of the entire unitary area, which might result in further changes to ward boundaries and representation.

On the basis of the discussions held at the Electoral Matters Committee meeting and the content of the report on the subject, the following resolutions were proposed by Councillor Matthew Dormer:

1) "An updated ward pattern for Redditch be submitted to the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government to be included in the unitary authority's Structural Changes Order based on two three-member wards and five two-member wards. The three-member wards constructed from the Borough Wards of

   - Astwood Bank and Feckenham and Webheath and Callow Hill - suggested name of Redditch South
   - North and Winyates - suggested name of Redditch North

The five two-member wards to keep the current Borough Ward names.

2) Authority be delegated to the Chief Executive to finalise the submission to the Government to consider as part of the Structural Changes Order for North Worcestershire in respect of the ward pattern for Redditch."

The resolutions were proposed by Councillor Dormer and seconded by Councillor Brandon Clayton.

Following the presentation of the report and resolutions, an amendment was proposed by Councillor Nic Pioli to the wording of the first resolution. This amended the resolutions as follows:

1) "An updated ward pattern for Redditch be submitted to the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government to be included in the unitary authority's Structural Changes Order based on two three-member wards and five two-member wards. The three-member wards constructed from the Borough Wards of

- *Batchley and Brockhill with Central – suggested name of Redditch Central West*
- *Greenlands and Lakeside with Matchborough and Woodrow – suggested name of Redditch Central East*

The five two-member wards to keep the current Borough Ward names.

2) Authority be delegated to the Chief Executive to finalise the submission to the Government to consider as part of the Structural Changes Order for North Worcestershire in respect of the ward pattern for Redditch."

The amendment was proposed by Councillor Pioli and seconded by Councillor Roger Bennett.

In proposing the amendment, Councillor Pioli explained that he was largely supportive of the resolutions. However, he suggested that the combination of wards proposed in scenario six would be more appropriate for Redditch than the ward combinations that had been recommended by the Electoral Matters Committee based on scenario one. This was due to a range of factors including:

- The suggestion that scenario six would be more beneficial from a climate change perspective than Scenario one, as the ward combinations would not cover such a wide geographic area as the combined Astwood Bank and Feckenham and Webheath and Callow Hill wards.

- The need to take into account the practical ability of residents and Councillors to travel around a ward. Members were asked to note that there were presently dual carriageways and other urban design features that created tangible pedestrian barriers between the current North and Winyates wards.
- The existing transport and pedestrian links between Batchley and Brockhill and Central wards.
- Social and economic characteristics in the different wards and the impact that this could have on the suitability of different permutations of combined wards. The suggestion was made that there were greater similarities between the local demographic characteristics of residents living in Batchley and Brockhill and Central wards than between residents living in Astwood Bank and Feckenham and Webheath and Callow Hill wards. In addition, the suggestion was made that there were similarly enhanced links between Greenlands and Lakeside and Matchborough and Woodrow wards as a result of the Pride in Place initiative.
- Housing development considerations. Whilst future development in Brockhill had been highlighted in the report, other forthcoming housing developments in impacted wards, including North, Winyates and Webheath and Callow Hill, were not referenced. It was suggested that this should have been considered as the developments would impact on infrastructure requirements and residential demand within local communities.

In seconding the amendment, Councillor Bennett commented that he was in support of scenario six because he felt it would result in less carbon emissions than scenario one and would help to address increasing demand arising from planned housing development. Members were advised that as a local Councillor representing the current Astwood Bank and Feckenham ward, Councillor Bennett regularly attended Feckenham Parish Council meetings which also generated demand for support. He expressed concerns that combining the Astwood Bank and Feckenham ward with the Webheath and Callow Hill ward would raise demand further to an unsustainable level, particularly given the planned development in Webheath. Members were also asked to note that residents living in Astwood Bank and Feckenham respectively already regarded their communities as being distinct from one another and the addition of Webheath and Callow Hill would potentially further impact on community cohesion at the local level.

Members subsequently discussed the matter in detail and in doing so commented on the following:

- The locations of various housing developments and the extent to which new houses would be situated outside the current boundaries of Redditch Borough, in Bromsgrove District and Stratford-on-Avon District respectively. Members highlighted that some properties would be built in the Borough and other houses would be built outside the Borough.
- The timescales for housing development under the Local Plan and the extent to which many of the local developments that were anticipated were likely to impact on local populations prior to the LGBCE undertaking a review of ward boundaries for the new unitary authority.
- The term 'variance' and what this referred to in the context of ward patterning. Officers clarified that this referred to the average number of electors per Councillor and the variance from that average number.
- The different variance levels for the wards proposed in scenarios one and six respectively. Members noted that the variances for scenario one were the lowest of those scenarios that had been identified whilst the variances for scenario six were the highest.
- The extent to which there would be a rise in carbon emissions arising from travel over longer distances if the current Astwood Bank and Feckenham and Webheath and Callow Hill wards were combined. Some Members commented that residents would not be impacted as they would be able to continue to use polling stations in the same locations as at present during elections and only the three Councillors would need to travel across longer distances, which it was suggested would have a negligible impact on carbon emissions.
- The physical barriers between North and Winyates wards and the existence of arrangements whereby dual carriageways already cut through existing wards.
- The higher levels of deprivation in Batchley and Brockhill and Central wards, compared to Astwood Bank and Feckenham and Webheath and Callow Hill wards, and the demand that this could create for support from Members. Concerns were raised by some Members that combining the Batchley and Brockhill and Central wards could generate a significant level of demand from the three Councillors representing the ward which could be difficult to manage.
- The geographic distance covered by a combined ward for Astwood Bank and Feckenham and Webheath and Callow Hill, should this be introduced, and the difficulties that Councillors representing such a ward might experience when seeking to travel around the ward.
- The geographic distance that would be covered by a combined Greenlands and Lakeside and Matchborough and Woodrow ward and the similar difficulties that would be

experienced by Councillors representing the ward when travelling around the ward.
- The existing community and public transport links between the current Batchley and Brockhill and Central wards.
- The extent to which Redditch Members might be able to influence the LGBCE's considerations in respect of any future boundary review for the North Worcestershire Council through proposals on ward patterning put forward at this stage.
- The likely levels of population growth in the current Astwood Bank and Feckenham, Batchley and Brockhill, Central and Webhealth and Callow Hill wards respectively and the potential value in comparing projected figures when identifying the most appropriate scenario moving forward.
- The levels of casework received by Members and the extent to which a choice of preferred scenario could be made based on the distribution of casework.
- The increase in casework that would be experienced by all Councillors serving on the North Worcestershire Council, compared to Members serving on the current District and County Councils.
- The extent to which the Greenlands and Lakeside and Matchborough and Woodrow wards might work well together as a combined ward due to the physical design and urban composition of these wards.
- The need to achieve community cohesion in final ward patterning arrangements.
- The number of Councillors who had responded to the questionnaire that had been circulated by officers and the reasons why some Members had not responded.

Clarification was provided that the only change proposed to the resolutions detailed in the papers was in respect of the appropriate scenario to adopt in order to combine four existing Borough wards into two wards under the new unitary authority that would be represented by three Members. This provided Members with two options:

- Ward patterning arrangements based on scenario one.
- Ward patterning arrangements based on scenario six.

On being put to the vote 12 Members voted in favour of scenario six and 10 Members voted in favour or scenario one. The vote in respect of scenario six was therefore carried.

RESOLVED that

1) **An updated ward pattern for Redditch be submitted to the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government to be included in the unitary authority's Structural**

Changes Order based on two three-member wards and five two-member wards. The three-member wards constructed from the Borough Wards of

- **Batchley and Brockhill with Central – suggested name of Redditch Central West**
- **Greenlands and Lakeside with Matchborough and Woodrow – suggested name of Redditch Central East**

The five two-member wards to keep the current Borough Ward names.

2) Authority be delegated to the Chief Executive to finalise the submission to the Government to consider as part of the Structural Changes Order for North Worcestershire in respect of the ward pattern for Redditch.

36. DESIGNATION OF THE MONITORING OFFICER FUNCTION

The Leader presented a report concerning the designation of the Monitoring Officer function at the Council.

Members were informed that the Council was required by law to designate an officer to undertake the statutory role of Monitoring Officer. The Assistant Director of Legal, Democratic and Procurement Services was currently designated as the Monitoring Officer of the Council. However, Members were asked to note that following consideration of senior leadership arrangements through the appropriate governance process, the title of the role was changing to Executive Director of Governance and Assurance. Council was therefore asked to consider transferring the statutory designation of Monitoring Officer to that new post title, to come into effect once the revised structure was implemented.

The purpose of the proposal was to ensure continuity, clarity and compliance with the Council's statutory obligations and to ensure that the Monitoring Officer designation remained attached to a role that existed within the Council's structure.

Members were asked to note that the decision had no direct financial implications in itself, as any financial considerations were addressed through the separate restructuring process. Instead, Council was invited to consider the proposal to ensure that the authority achieved good governance and statutory compliance.

Following the presentation of the report, reference was made to the meeting of the Joint Appointments Committee that had been held on 3rd August 2026 at which a report on this subject had been considered. At that meeting, Members had been advised that the position of the Assistant Director of Legal, Democratic and Procurement Services had been reassessed as an Executive Director role by both independent employment specialists and independent legal consultants respectively. As part of this review process, a job evaluation exercise had been completed by independent experts.

It was noted that the realignment of the Monitoring Officer post to Director level would enhance governance arrangements at the Council. The Monitoring Officer would also be employed at a more equivalent level to the other statutory officers: the Chief Finance Officer and the Head of Paid Service. As a consequence, the Monitoring Officer would be in a stronger position to hold the organisation to account and to ensure that governance considerations shaped Council performance and service delivery.

During consideration of this item, questions were raised as to why the role of Executive Director of Governance and Assurance had not been advertised for recruitment and whether the process that had been followed had been transparent. Clarification was provided that the focus of the report was on the assignment of the Monitoring Officer, as a statutory post, to the position of Executive Director. The Joint Appointments Committee had already considered a report on the proposals in respect of the Executive Director post. This meeting had been held in public and the decision-making process had been fully transparent. The report to Council was not designed to review the decision taken by the Joint Appointments Committee and Members were asked to note that Council had not been asked to recruit new staff.

Consideration was given to the remuneration that would be received by the postholder in the position of Executive Director of Governance and Assurance and questions were raised as to whether this would have additional financial implications for the Council. Members were informed that the post holder would receive financial remuneration as a member of staff but there were relatively limited financial implications due to the deletion of the Assistant Director of Legal, Democratic and Procurement Services role.

The recommendation was proposed by Councillor Matthew Dormer and seconded by Councillor Brandon Clayton.

RESOLVED that

the post of Executive Director of Governance and Assurance be designated as the Council's Monitoring Officer pursuant to Section 5 of the Local Government and Housing Act 1989, with

effect from the date the revised structure would be implemented.

(Prior to consideration of this item the Assistant Director of Legal, Democratic and Procurement Services left the meeting. She was therefore not present during the debate nor the vote on this item.)

37. URGENT BUSINESS - GENERAL (IF ANY)

There was no urgent business for consideration on this occasion.

The Meeting commenced at 7.00 pm
and closed at 8.11 pm