

Electoral Matters Committee

Thursday, 30th July, 2026

MINUTES

Present:

Councillor Matthew Dormer (Chair), Councillor Susan Eacock (Vice-Chair) and Councillors William Boyd, James Fardoe and Jen Snape

Officers:

Melissa Bassett, John Leach and Darren Whitney

Democratic Services Officers:

Eve Davies

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND NAMED SUBSTITUTES

There were no apologies for absence.

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no Declarations of Interest.

3. MINUTES OF THE MEETINGS OF THE ELECTORAL MATTERS COMMITTEE HELD ON 21ST OCTOBER AND 18TH DECEMBER 2025

The minutes from the meetings held on 21st October and 18th December 2025 were submitted for Members' approval.

RESOLVED that

the minutes of the Electoral Matters Committee meetings held on 21st October 2025 and 18th December 2025 be approved as a true and accurate record.

4. PROPOSED CHANGES FOR FUTURE WARDS WITHIN THE REDDITCH ELECTORAL AREA

The Electoral Services Manager presented a report regarding proposed changes for future wards within the Redditch electoral area.

Chair

Members were advised that the original interim plan Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) submission to Government had stated that the existing County Council divisions could be retained, with the number of elected members simply being doubled for each ward. Since that submission had been made, it had been confirmed that Worcestershire would be divided into two unitary authorities, with Redditch forming part of the proposed North Worcestershire unitary authority comprising fifty-four members.

It was explained that, in the rest of the county, the existing County Council divisions were represented by a single member and therefore doubling representation would result in two-member wards. In Redditch, however, the current County Council divisions were already represented by two members and, if the original approach/interim plan were retained, this would result in four-member wards.

Members were informed that four-member wards would present a number of challenges, particularly when conducting elections. It was noted that such arrangements could dilute accountability and reduce clarity of representation for electors. Whilst four-member wards were legally permissible, officers advised that they were not aware of councils with such wards in England. Furthermore, the Local Government Boundary Commission for England generally recommended a maximum of three members per ward, and the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) was following this guidance when developing arrangements for new unitary authorities.

Officers reported that discussions had taken place with MHCLG regarding alternative warding arrangements. MHCLG had advised that any different arrangements should use existing electoral areas, such as current District or Borough wards, parish areas or county electoral divisions. As Redditch contained only one parish, Feckenham Parish, officers considered the use of the existing Borough Council ward boundaries to be the most practical and sensible approach.

The Committee was advised that it was important to have regard to the existing proposal of sixteen members for Redditch as an important principle.

A detailed analysis had subsequently been undertaken to identify warding arrangements that would retain sixteen members for Redditch. Officers advised that the only viable arrangement identified comprised seven wards in total, consisting of five two-member wards and two three-member wards. Whilst testing various scenarios, it had been noted that electoral variances increased under the proposed arrangements. However, MHCLG had indicated that a greater degree of electoral variance would be acceptable as an interim arrangement where necessary to achieve the best overall outcome.

Members were informed that the proposed seven-ward model had been considered by the Informal Working Group on LGR in Worcestershire on 1st July 2026, where it had received support. The proposal had also been considered at a meeting of Redditch Borough Council Group Leaders on 2nd July 2026, who had agreed that the matter should be referred to the Electoral Matters Committee and subsequently to Council on 10th August 2026. The Committee noted that the timescale for consideration was limited due to MHCLG requiring comments to be submitted by 17th August 2026, as confirmed in correspondence issued to Chief Executives on 20th July 2026.

The Chief Executive advised that a second meeting of the Informal Working Group on LGR had taken place earlier that day. The Leader of Redditch Borough Council had been in attendance, alongside Leaders from across Worcestershire. Members were informed that the Group had reviewed its earlier position in light of the now-confirmed outcome of the reorganisation process. It was noted that representatives from Bromsgrove and Wyre Forest District Councils had expressed support for the proposed approach, which was important to understand given the outcome of the LGR process would now lead to a North Worcestershire unitary council that would consist of Bromsgrove and Wyre Forest as well as Redditch.

It was reported that Group Leaders had also agreed to circulate a short questionnaire to all Members seeking views on which wards would be most suitable to form the proposed three-member wards. Sixteen responses had been received, and the comments and analysis had been included within the supplementary papers circulated for the meeting.

Members were informed that several potential ward combinations had been assessed, with particular regard being given to community links and local identity. Six scenarios were presented to Members, with officers advising that scenario one provided the strongest performance in terms of electoral variance, whilst scenario six had performed least favourably.

Following the presentation of the report, Members discussed the various warding scenarios that had been developed and considered the relative merits of each proposal.

Some Members expressed support for scenario one, which proposed the first three-member ward as Astwood Bank and Feckenham with Webheath and Callow Hill and the second ward as North with Winyates. It was noted that this scenario provided the strongest outcome in terms of electoral equality and maintained the lowest electoral variances. It was suggested that keeping variances as low as possible would support fair and effective democratic representation, whereas the alternative scenarios resulted in significantly higher electorates per Councillor.

Other Members raised concerns regarding some of the proposed ward combinations within scenario one, particularly the grouping of Astwood Bank and Feckenham with Webheath and Callow Hill. It was argued that these areas did not share strong community links and that the ward would cover a very large geographical area. Members also noted that ongoing housing developments could significantly alter electorate numbers in the future.

An alternative view was presented in support of scenario six. Members advocating this option highlighted the common characteristics shared by Batchley and Brockhill ward and Central ward, particularly their links to the town centre and ongoing regeneration activity. It was also noted that Woodrow and Greenlands areas were jointly benefiting from Government neighbourhood improvement funding, and it was argued that these areas shared stronger community connections than some of the ward combinations proposed in other scenarios.

During the debate, Members acknowledged the challenges of accommodating all established communities within a warding pattern that retained the required allocation of sixteen Councillors. It was recognised that some existing wards contained communities

with differing characteristics and that achieving a perfect fit would be difficult within the constraints imposed by the reorganisation proposals.

Questions were raised regarding the extent to which the proposed arrangements might influence future boundary reviews. Officers advised that any future reviews would begin afresh and would not be bound by the interim warding arrangements proposed as part of LGR. Members were further advised that a future review of the North Worcestershire unitary authority could consider cross-boundary issues and a different allocation of Councillors.

Members also sought clarification regarding the next stages of the process and were advised that whatever recommendation was agreed by the Committee would be referred to Full Council for consideration. Any proposal approved by Council would then be submitted to Government for final determination.

Following the debate, a proposal was put forward to recommend scenario one. Upon being put to the vote, the recommendation was carried.

The Committee then considered the naming of the two proposed three-member wards. Members discussed a number of possible approaches, including naming wards after prominent local areas. However, support was expressed for a simpler geographical naming convention. Following consideration, Members agreed that the two three-member wards should be named Redditch North and Redditch South, reflecting their geographical locations within the Borough.

NOTED

- 1) The results of the Redditch warding arrangements for interim unitary arrangements questionnaire.**

RECOMMENDED that

- 2) 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, as set out below:**

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Two-member wards -

- **Batchley and Brockhill**
- **Central**
- **Greenlands and Lakeside**
- **Headless Cross and Oakenshaw**
- **Matchborough and Woodrow**

Three-member wards -

- **Astwood Bank and Feckenham with Webheath and Callow Hill**
- **North with Winyates**

3) The two three-member wards be named Redditch South and Redditch North respectively.

- 5. TO CONSIDER ANY URGENT BUSINESS, DETAILS OF WHICH HAVE BEEN NOTIFIED TO THE ASSISTANT DIRECTOR OF LEGAL, DEMOCRATIC AND PROCUREMENT SERVICES PRIOR TO THE COMMENCEMENT OF THE MEETING AND WHICH THE CHAIR, BY REASON OF SPECIAL CIRCUMSTANCES, CONSIDERS TO BE OF SO URGENT A NATURE THAT IT CANNOT WAIT UNTIL THE NEXT MEETING**

There was no urgent business on this occasion.

The Meeting commenced at 5.30 pm
and closed at 5.56 pm