

Electoral Matters Committee

21 October 2025

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
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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