

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