

MINUTES

Present:

Councillor Joanna Kane (Mayor), Councillor David Munro (Deputy Mayor) and Councillors Juliet Barker Smith, William Boyd, Brandon Clayton, Claire Davies, Matthew Dormer, James Fardoe, Andrew Fry, Bill Hartnett, Sharon Harvey, Chris Holz, Wanda King, Gary Slim, Monica Stringfellow, Craig Warhurst, Ian Woodall and Paul Wren

Officers:

Claire Felton, Debra Goodall, John Leach and Guy Revans

Democratic Services Officers:

Jess Bayley-Hill

44. WELCOME

The Mayor welcomed all those present to the meeting.

45. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received on behalf of Councillors Joe Baker, Juma Begum, Sid Khan, Alan Mason, Sachin Mathur, Gemma Monaco, Rita Rogers, Jen Snape and Jane Spilsbury.

46. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

47. MINUTES

RESOLVED that

the minutes of the meetings of the Council held on 4th September and 15th September 2025 be approved as a true and correct record and signed by the Mayor.

48. ANNOUNCEMENTS

The following announcements were made at the meeting.

Chair

a) The Mayor's Announcements

The Mayor advised that she had circulated a list of civic engagements that she had attended between September and November 2025 (Appendix 1).

Council was advised that Remembrance Sunday commemorations had recently taken place in Redditch town centre and Astwood Bank. The Royal British Legion was thanked for organising the commemorations and the local community and elected Members were thanked for attending these events. The Mayor also thanked the Deputy Mayor for attending three engagements on her behalf during this period.

b) The Leader's Announcements

The Leader thanked all those Members who had supported the letter she had sent to the West Mercia Police and Crime Commissioner (PCC) regarding a police desk for Redditch. A response had been received from the PCC which indicated that the force did not have the resources to address this request. However, the Leader advised that she would continue to highlight the need for a police desk in Redditch moving forward.

c) The Chief Executive's Announcements

The Chief Executive confirmed that he had no announcements to make on this occasion.

49. LOCAL GOVERNMENT RE-ORGANISATION: TRANSFORMING WORCESTERSHIRE LOCAL GOVERNMENT THAT WORKS FOR PEOPLE, POWERED BY PLACE AND BUILT FOR THE FUTURE - THE NORTH AND SOUTH LOCAL GOVERNMENT RE-ORGANISATION PROPOSAL FOR WORCESTERSHIRE

The Leader presented the Local Government Re-organisation: Transforming Worcestershire - Local Government that works for people, powered by place and built for the future - The North and South Local Government Re-Organisation Proposal for Worcestershire report for Members' consideration.

In presenting the report, she thanked the Chief Executives of Redditch Borough, Bromsgrove District, Malvern Hills District, Worcester City District and Wychavon District Councils for their hard work on the report. The Leader also thanked the other Leaders of these authorities for working with her and Redditch Borough Council on the report and proposals.

Members were informed that the purpose of the report was to provide to Council a proposal to be submitted to Government by 28th November 2025 for Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) in Worcestershire. This followed the extraordinary meeting of Council on 4th September 2025 where Members had supported the development of a North and South Unitary Council model based at the time on what was termed Option B – which comprised of either entirely separate Councils or a shared service model.

Working with KPMG, which had subsequently been commissioned, and Mutual Ventures, which developed proposals beyond the options appraisal, Redditch Borough, Bromsgrove District, Malvern Hills District, Worcester City and Wychavon District Councils had been working together to produce a proposal that best met the Government's six criteria for LGR based on a North and South Worcestershire footprint as directed by Members. The North would consist of Redditch Borough, Bromsgrove District and Wyre Forest District and the South would consist of Malvern Hills District, Worcester City and Wychavon District.

The North and South LGR proposal for Worcestershire had been included at Appendix 1 of the LGR report to Council and was entitled "Transforming Worcestershire: Local government that works for people, powered by place and built for the future." This was the only Worcestershire LGR proposal that had been informed by the views of local people from across the whole of Worcestershire following the "Shape Worcestershire" survey that was supported by all six District Councils in the County. The Leader reminded Members that Criteria 4 of the Government's specific requirements for LGR stated:

"Proposals should show how Councils in the area have sought to work together in coming to a view that meets local needs and is informed by local views."

Not only had local people's views been taken into account in this proposal, all Members across the five commissioning Councils had been given opportunity to further shape the two unitary Councils proposal for Worcestershire. This approach recognised the democratic mandate of Councillors as representatives of their communities and the very people who received Council services. Further to this, key stakeholders, such as partners in the health sector, police, fire and rescue authority, business and voluntary and community sectors, including Town and Parish Councils, had also been asked for their views. The output of all this work was a proposal for Worcestershire that was a product of true collaboration.

The proposal included a pledge that should this proposal be accepted by Government and delivered then: -

- a) Public services would shift from crisis to prevention
- b) Communities would feel more connected and empowered
- c) Local services would respond faster to everyday issues
- d) Vulnerable adults would live healthier, happier, and safer lives
- e) Children and families would be supported to stay together
- f) Young people would have better access to skills and jobs
- g) Better housing would support healthier lives
- h) People and businesses would benefit from stronger local economies

The Leader commented that the case for two Councils in Worcestershire was clear. The North and South model:

- Supported long-term financial sustainability through prevention-led reform and neighbourhood-based services. Members were asked to note that for every £1 spent on prevention £3.17 was saved on adult social care. The North and South unitary model would save approximately £9 million a year whilst delivering services people wanted, as opposed to perhaps saving more money but delivering services people did not want through a remote, large, digital-by-default, one-size-fits-all Council.
- Reflected the strong and consistent preference of residents, staff, and partners across the county. This corresponded with the views of the 62.5 per cent of people who took part in the Shape Worcestershire survey who stated a preference for a North and South model. That survey showed more residents believed two Unitary Councils would better improve services, support local identity and strengthen community engagement. In contrast, the one-unitary model was seen as remote, less representative and more likely to dilute local priorities.
- Delivered stronger local accountability and decision-making, with Councillors closer to the communities they served. This proposal for Worcestershire would better help keep democracy alive in the County.
- Enabled tailored service delivery and planning that responded to the distinct needs of North and South Worcestershire.
- Embraced the opportunity for genuine transformation. Members were informed that this was the only option shaped by genuine engagement, backed by evidence, both qualitative and quantitative, and designed to deliver better outcomes for Worcestershire.

The resolutions were proposed by Councillor Sharon Harvey and seconded by Councillor Bill Hartnett.

In seconding the resolutions, Councillor Hartnett commented that Members had been fully engaged throughout the process of

developing proposals for LGR in Worcestershire. This had included a number of Member Briefings and he thanked Members for attending these sessions.

It was noted that the report, although detailed, had been drafted in plain English, clearly setting out the reasons why the North and South Unitary Councils option would be best for the Borough. The final decision in respect of LGR in Worcestershire would be taken by the Government, rather than by local Councils. However the content of the report would help to inform that decision-making.

In considering the content of the report, Members were asked to note that the two unitary Councils proposed reflected recognition of the differences between the rural South of the county and the more urban North. Furthermore, Members were asked to note that if the Government's Fair Funding Review resulted in changes to funding for local government, focusing on deprivation, then Redditch would be in a better financial position in a North and South model of Unitary Councils.

Concerns were raised that in a single Unitary Councils for Worcestershire, Redditch's assets could be placed at risk. In particular, concerns were raised about the potential for the Council housing stock, valued at approximately £330 million, to be sold in order to address budget gaps in local government in Worcestershire. The suggestion was made that this would disproportionately impact on vulnerable residents living in the Borough, given that Redditch Borough Council was the only authority in Worcestershire that still retained a housing stock.

Following the presentation of the report, Members discussed a number of points in detail:

- The need for a range of factors, not just financial savings, to be taken into account when considering the most appropriate model of LGR for Worcestershire.
- The inclusion of prudent and realistic cost saving assumptions in the report relating to the two Unitary Authorities model.
- The fact that the report provided one model of LGR for Members to consider, rather than separate B1 and B2 models, as referenced in the report that was considered at the extraordinary Council meeting held on 4th September 2025.
- The considerable concerns that Members had about the potential for Redditch Borough Council's housing stock to be sold should the Government approve the One Worcestershire model and the impact that this would have on the people of Redditch.

- The potential value arising from supporting a North and South model of Unitary Councils, in terms of protecting the Borough's assets.
- The conversations that Members had held with residents regarding LGR and the overwhelming support expressed by local residents in favour of the North and South Unitary Authorities model as opposed to a single Unitary Authority for Worcestershire.
- The extent to which people wanted LGR. Some Members expressed their disappointment that Redditch Borough Council would cease to exist after 2028.
- The risk that local identity would be lost as a result of unitarisation, regardless of the final model of LGR that was adopted.
- The locations in which Council and Committee meetings would be held for either a single or two Unitary Councils in Worcestershire and the extent to which it was likely that any meetings would be held in Redditch. Members were informed that no decisions had been made on this subject to date, although it was noted that the Town Hall was in the process of being refurbished and there was the possibility that meetings could be held in the upgraded civic suite.
- The potential for services to be shared between the North and South Unitary Councils, under the proposals, and how this would work for statutory services such as Adult Social Care and education.
- The benefits arising from LGR and the introduction of Unitary Authorities in terms of preventative action that could enhance health outcomes and community safety.
- The financial savings that had been reported in papers relating to the alternative One Worcestershire model of LGR and the extent to which these figures were accurate.
- The fact that data underpinning the financial estimates for One Worcestershire had not been shared by Worcestershire County Council with the District Councils in Worcestershire. Members expressed their disappointment that this data had not been shared with the District Councils.
- The savings in respect of middle management costs reported in the report relating to the One Worcestershire model. Members commented that it was unclear whether this had taken into account the significant number of shared service arrangements in place between District Councils in the county.
- The wages that would be paid to staff employed by the future Unitary Authority(ies) in Worcestershire and whether the One Worcestershire model had been based on assumptions that some staff would be paid less than the minimum wage.
- The extent to which pension costs for staff under the One Worcestershire model might have been over inflated.

- The financial costs associated with frontline service delivery and whether this had been taken into account in the papers underpinning the One Worcestershire model.
- The assumptions made in the One Worcestershire model in respect of the reduction in frontline staff numbers and whether this was over optimistic.
- The overall redundancy costs that might need to be paid to staff as a result of LGR and whether these were accurate in the One Worcestershire report.

In concluding their discussions, Members highlighted that it was important to note that there was unanimity in the chamber regarding the proposals and the most appropriate model of LGR for Redditch.

RESOLVED

- 1) **that the matters set out in the Local Government Reorganisation Transforming Worcestershire proposal; Local Government that works for people, powered by place and built for the future - The north and south Local Government Re-Organisation Proposal be noted;**
- 2) **to adopt the Local Government Reorganisation Transforming Worcestershire proposal; Local government that works for people, powered by place and built for the future - the north and south Local Government Re-Organisation Proposal for Worcestershire, as the Council's final submission to the Ministry of Housing Communities and Local Government ("MHCLG") on the issue of Local Government Re-organisation; and**
- 3) **that authority be delegated to the Chief Executive and the Assistant Director of Legal Democratic and Procurement Services to make any final amendments to the report following consultation with the Leader and thereafter to submit the document to the MHCLG by the deadline of Friday 28th November 2025.**

50. WAIVER OF THE SIX MONTH COUNCILLOR ATTENDANCE RULE

The Leader presented a report requesting a waiver on the six-month Councillor attendance rule, whereby each Councillor was required to attend at least one meeting every six months, for Councillor Alan Mason.

Members were informed that unfortunately, Councillor Mason had experienced poor health in recent months which had prevented him from attending Council and Committee meetings. It was hoped that

his health would improve to enable him to attend meetings prior to the end of his current term of office in May 2026. However, the waiver would extend the period of time in which he would not be required to attend meetings.

The request was discussed and during the debate, some Members raised concerns about Councillors continuing in roles where they were unable to attend meetings. However, it was noted that there were a number of ways in which Councillors could support their communities, with attendance at Council and Committee meetings forming only part of the role. Indeed, Members were advised that Councillor Mason had been working on casework. The suggestion was made that it would be helpful if Councils could enable Members to attend meetings in a variety of accessible ways, rather than requiring attendance in person only, as this would assist Councillors with different health conditions and personal commitments and support greater diversity in democratic representation within local government. However, such flexibility would require primary legislation.

RESOLVED that

in accordance with Section 85 of the Local Government Act 1972, Council approve Councillor Alan Mason's non-attendance at meetings until 7th May 2026 on the grounds of continued ill health and that the Council's best wishes be conveyed to him.

51. QUESTIONS ON NOTICE (PROCEDURE RULE 9)

There were no Questions on Notice for consideration on this occasion.

52. MOTIONS ON NOTICE (PROCEDURE RULE 11)

There were no Motions on Notice on this occasion.

53. EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

Medium-Term Financial Plan Budget Update and Consultation Report 2026-27 to 2028-29 - Business Rates Pool

The Portfolio Holder for Finance presented the Medium-Term Financial Plan Budget Update and Consultation Report 2026-27 to 2028-29 - Business Rates Pool report for Members' consideration.

Council was informed that, under the Local Government and Finance Act 2012, Councils could enter into business rates pools. The Government's deadline for Councils to submit proposals to

enter a business rates pool for 2026/27 was 24th November 2025. Councils could only enter a business rates pool if the authority would be no worse off financially as a consequence of joining a pool. The Council had previously taken part in the Herefordshire and Worcestershire Business Rates Pool so a decision to join on this occasion would ensure continuity.

In discussing this matter, Members noted that the report had been pre-scrutinised at a meeting of the Budget Scrutiny Working Group held earlier in the month when Members had supported the proposal to join the pool.

RESOLVED that

the minutes of the Executive Committee meeting held on 6th November 2025 be approved and all recommendations adopted.

54. URGENT BUSINESS - RECORD OF DECISIONS

Members were informed that there had been one urgent decision taken since the previous meeting of Council in respect of the appointment of the Assistant Director of Finance and Customer Services as the acting Section 151 Officer for the Council.

55. URGENT BUSINESS - GENERAL (IF ANY)

There was no urgent business for discussion on this occasion.

The Meeting commenced at 7.00 pm
and closed at 8.00 pm