

Local Government Reorganisation: Postponement of May 2026 Borough Elections

Relevant Portfolio Holder	Councillor Sharon Harvey, Leader and Portfolio Holder for Regeneration and Environmental Services
Portfolio Holder Consulted	Yes
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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 Council is asked to RESOLVE:

1) To NOTE the letter received by the Leader from the Government in respect of the potential postponement of local elections in May 2026;

2) To approve one of the following options:

Option A: to proceed with the scheduled local elections in May 2026; OR

Option B: to submit a request to the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government that the Borough elections due to take place in May 2026 be postponed; and

3) That were members minded to approve resolution 2 Option B above, to delegate authority to the Chief Executive, following consultation with the Leader, to submit the Council's views in relation to postponing the local elections in May 2026 in writing to the Government before the deadline of 15th January 2026.

2. BACKGROUND

- 2.1 This report asks Members to consider whether to make a request to the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (“MHCLG”) for the Borough elections due to take Council in May 2026 to be postponed. This is in the context of the ongoing work towards implementing Local Government Reorganisation (“LGR”) in Worcestershire.
- 2.2 Members will be aware that the Council’s proposals for LGR were submitted to MHCLG on 27th November. The Council has chosen to support the north and south Local Government Reorganisation Proposal for Worcestershire which would see the establishment of two unitary authorities, one in the North covering Bromsgrove, Redditch and Wyre Forest, and one in the South covering Malvern Hills, Worcester City and Wychavon. The alternative proposal that has been put forward by Worcestershire County Council and Wyre Forrest District Council is that there should be one County wide unitary authority for the whole of Worcestershire.
- 2.3 Although a decision from the MHCLG on which option will be adopted is not due to be announced until the summer of 2026, there remains much work to be done in terms of preparing for the re-organisation.
- 2.4 Based on the current timetable issued by the government, there will be all out elections to the new shadow authorities (or authority) in May 2027, with the transition to new Councils coming into effect on Vesting Day in April 2028.
- 2.5 It should be noted that no other Council in Worcestershire is due to hold local elections in May 2026 and were Redditch to hold its election it would be in respect of 9 seats. To avoid the potentially de-stabilising effect of this on the LGR process, and to maximise staff capacity and reduce expenditure, the Council could ask the Government to postpone the 2026 elections and agree to extend the term of office of the councillors who would otherwise have been subject to re-election.

3. OPERATIONAL ISSUES

- 3.1 The current round of local government re-organisation is the most far reaching that has taken place since the early 1970s. According to statistics from MHCLG, the reorganisation will affect 204 councils across 21 areas. The MHCLG recently confirmed that a number of councils affected by LGR (which did not include Redditch Borough Council) had requested that the elections due to be held in their areas in 2026 be postponed.

- 3.2 On 18th December, Alison McGovern, the Minister of State for Local Government and Homelessness, wrote to the Leaders of all 63 Councils affected by elections in May 2026 to invite them to submit their views on the potential postponement of local elections in their areas and their local capacity to deliver LGR alongside elections. The deadline for responses to be sent to the MHCLG is midnight on 15th January 2026. The following extract from the letter of 18th December summarises the concerns held by some councils of the impacts of having to hold elections in May 2026.

“We have listened to councils telling us about the constraints they are operating within, and the work that reorganisation introduces on top of existing challenges. Now that we have received all proposals, it is only right that we listen to councils who are expressing concerns about their capacity to deliver a smooth and safe transition to new councils, alongside running resource-intensive elections to councils who may be shortly abolished. We have also received representations from councils concerned about the cost to taxpayers of holding elections to councils that are proposed to shortly be abolished.”

- 3.3 The situation in Redditch is that a third of Council seats at the authority are due to be the subject of local elections in May 2026. However, this will be following on only a year after the all-out elections which took place in 2024 as a result of ward boundary changes. This means that the 9 councillors in seats due for election will only have actually served two years in office when the next elections take place. If elections were to go ahead, the councillors elected may only serve one year, before elections to the shadow authority take place, although they would remain Borough Councillors until the authority ceases to exist in April 2028.
- 3.4 It is recognised that postponing a local election is a significant decision which should not be undertaken lightly. One of the criticisms that is often made is that councillors get an extended term in office as a result. However, in Redditch given the very recent timing of the previous elections in May 2024, it is not the case that any members would be outlasting the usual 4 year term in office.
- 3.5 Members will be aware that when multiple elections are delivered in any given year it has been possible for the cost burden associated with the administration of these elections to be shared and/or the cost burden to Redditch Borough Council in respect of the local election to be reduced as a consequence. In May 2026 this is not however the case and therefore the whole administrative costs fall to the Council. The cost to Redditch Borough Council of delivering local elections in May 2026 would be circa £192,000.

- 3.6 Members may also want to consider the potential loss of Councillors who have been following the LGR process closely and have built up a good understanding of what is involved, and whether this could have a de-stabilising effect.
- 3.7 As the Returning Officer for Redditch Borough Council, the Chief Executive is responsible for ensuring that the local elections are administered effectively. To enable this to occur, there needs to be sufficient staff resources available to facilitate all aspects of the local elections. Initial planning for the local elections in the Borough has already started. It should be noted that both the Polling Day and the election Count require resourcing which has significant associated staffing costs.
- 3.8 Elections staff who would be running the 2026 local elections are likely at the same time to also be involved in detailed work around planning for the governance arrangements of the new authority, and the setting up of elections for the shadow authority.
- 3.9 It should be noted, as Members may be aware, that at meetings of the Electoral Matters Committee held in October and December 2025, Members discussed proposals for Redditch Borough to participate in a flexible voting pilot scheme for the local elections due to take place in May 2026. Based on the decision taken by the Committee in October, a proposal was submitted to the MHCLG in autumn 2025 for Redditch Borough Council to take part in the flexible voting pilot scheme and at the time of writing the Council is awaiting a response from the Government. It should be noted that any costs associated with the pilot would be covered by the Government.
- 3.10 There are also time and resource implications arising from the election of any new Councillor. Whilst work has already started on the Members' induction and training programme for 2026/27 the requirement to induct new Councillors elected in May 2026 would coincide with a time when senior managers and staff involved in governance arrangements would be committed to work around preparations for LGR.

4. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 4.1 As detailed at paragraph 3.5, it is projected that the cost of holding the 2026 local elections in Redditch would be at least £192,000 possibly rising to £200,000. Members are asked to note that even should the local elections be postponed in May 2026 there could still be some residual costs arising from administrative tasks already undertaken and contractual costs.

5. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 The legal power to postpone a scheduled election sits with the government. If a recommendation to delay local elections in 2026 is approved, then the Secretary of State will make an order under the powers set out in Section 87(1) and (3) and Section 105(2) and (3) of the Local Government Act 2000.
- 5.2 Members are asked to note that even if the local elections in May 2026 are postponed there may still be a need to hold by-elections where the rules require.

6. OTHER - IMPLICATIONS

Local Government Reorganisation

- 6.1 The subject matter of this report links directly to LGR. The Council can make a recommendation to the MHCLG to postpone the 2026 local elections if the view is taken that the advantages of this step outweigh the disadvantages. The final decision sits with the Minister.

Relevant Council Priority

- 6.2 Any change to either a two unitary model or a single countywide model will have a potential impact on the future of the current Redditch Borough Council priorities.

Climate Change Implications

- 6.3 There are no specific climate change implications.

Equalities and Diversity Implications

- 6.4 There are no specific Equalities and Diversity implications.

7. RISK MANAGEMENT

- 7.1 There is a risk that the Council could suffer reputational damage as a result of requesting a postponement to the elections.
- 7.2 There is also a risk that the public may feel that postponing the elections would undermine local democracy.

- 7.3 However, conversely there is a risk that if the local elections were to go ahead as scheduled, this could be regarded as a profligate use of public funding at a time when the Council is shortly no longer due to exist.
- 7.4 Members may also want to consider the allocation of staff resources and the impact that this may have were the elections to proceed.

8. APPENDICES and BACKGROUND PAPERS

Appendices

Appendix 1 – Letter sent to Council Leaders by Alison McGovern,
Minister of State for Local Government and Homelessness dated 18th
December 2025