

MINUTES

Present:

Councillor Joanna Kane (Mayor) and Councillors Juliet Barker Smith, William Boyd, Brandon Clayton, Claire Davies, Matthew Dormer, Sharon Harvey, Gemma Monaco, Rita Rogers, Jen Snape, Monica Stringfellow, Craig Warhurst and Ian Woodall

Officers:

Hannah Corredor, Claire Felton, Debra Goodall, John Leach, Guy Revans and Darren Whitney

Democratic Services Officers:

Jess Bayley-Hill and Eve Davies

56. WELCOME

The Mayor welcomed all those present to the meeting.

(In accordance with paragraph 4.2 of the Access to Information Rules, at Part 7 in the Council's constitution, this extraordinary meeting of Council was convened in exceptional circumstances by the Chief Executive, following consultation with the Mayor, with less than five clear working days' notice having been given. The exceptional circumstances were the inclement weather arising from Storm Goretti which resulted in the need to postpone the Extraordinary Council meeting that had been scheduled to take place on 8th January 2026 and the fact that the Council needed to provide a response to the Government in respect of Minute Item No. 60 – Local Government Reorganisation: Postponement of the May 2026 Borough Elections – by the Government's deadline of 15th January 2026.)

57. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received on behalf of Councillors Joe Baker, Juma Begum, Andrew Fry, Bill Hartnett, Chris Holz, Sid Khan, Alan Mason, David Munro, Sachin Mathur, Gary Slim, Jane Spilsbury and Paul Wren.

Chair

58. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

A non-registerable interest was declared by Councillor Claire Davies in respect of Minute Item No. 60 – Local Government Reorganisation: Postponement of May 2026 Borough Elections - due to the fact that her current term of office was due to end in May 2026. She expressed disappointment that she would be unable to take part in the proceedings. However, she left the room once the declaration had been made and took no part in debating the remaining items on the agenda nor vote thereon.

During consideration of this item, clarification was requested as to why Members whose term of office was due to end in May 2026 had been advised, in advance of the meeting, that they had a non-registerable interest in respect of Minute Item No. 60, which had resulted in those Members not attending the meeting. Officers explained that external legal advice had been obtained in respect of this matter and had been shared with the Councillors who had a term of office that was due to end in May 2026. On the basis of this advice, those Councillors had chosen not to attend the meeting.

59. MINUTES

RESOLVED that

the minutes of the meeting of the Council held on 17th November 2025 be approved as a true and correct record and signed by the Mayor.

60. LOCAL GOVERNMENT REORGANISATION: POSTPONEMENT OF MAY 2026 BOROUGH ELECTIONS

The Leader presented a report on the subject of Local Government Reorganisation: Postponement of May 2026 Borough Elections.

Members were informed that the Leader had received a letter from the Minister for Local Government and Homelessness in late December 2025 in respect of the local elections due to take place in May 2026. The letter requested feedback from Council as to whether it was felt that the scheduled local elections in Redditch should go ahead in May 2026, in the context of Local Government Reorganisation and the potential for elections to divert resources from work on this process. The Government had set a deadline of Thursday 15th January 2026 for Councils to respond to the letter detailing their position in relation to local elections.

Council was reminded that Local Government Reorganisation continued to progress, including in Worcestershire. In line with the timetable for Local Government Reorganisation, there were due to

be shadow elections in May 2027 and local elections in 2028 to the new unitary authority(ies) for Worcestershire.

In considering the matter, Members were asked to note that Redditch Borough Council was the only local authority in Worcestershire that was scheduled to hold local elections in May 2026. There were nine Councillors at the Council who had a term of office that was due to end in May 2026. Due to the boundary review that had occurred in Redditch in recent years, there had been all out elections in May 2024 and as such those nine Councillors had so far only served two years, rather than the standard four-year term of office.

The financial implications involved in holding the local elections in May 2026 had been considered when the report was prepared for the consideration of Council. Officers were advising that the local elections in May 2026, should they go ahead, would cost £192,000. Members were advised that if the local elections were postponed, these financial costs could be allocated to supporting separate work on Local Government Reorganisation. Council was also asked to consider whether a financial cost of £192,000 would be a justifiable use of public money at a time when the Council was shortly no longer due to exist and any Councillors elected in May 2026 would have a limited period of time allocated to serve at the authority.

Reference was made to ongoing work on Local Government Reorganisation and Members were reminded that a survey of the local population had resulted in the public revealing a preference for two unitary authorities for the north and south of Worcestershire, although there was also an alternative proposal for one unitary Council in the county. The suggestion was made that the Council should be dedicating time and resources to facilitating arrangements that would enable a smooth transition to the new unitary authority(ies) in the future. Alongside this work, key Council services needed to continue to be delivered as effectively and efficiently as possible.

There were a number of important milestones that Members were asked to note in respect of Local Government Reorganisation. Whilst the Government was not due to announce which option for Local Government Reorganisation in Worcestershire would be successful until July 2026, the Council needed to work with partner organisations in the meantime on the scope of Local Government Reorganisation and outlining the next steps for action. Councils in Worcestershire would need to work together on data integration, implementation strategies and project planning. In addition, devolution at a regional level still needed to be reviewed and proposals would need to be put forward.

In this context, the Leader proposed that a letter should be sent to the Government requesting that the local elections due to take place in the Borough in May 2026 should be postponed and that authority should be delegated to the Chief Executive to submit the Council's views in respect of this matter by the Government's deadline of 15th January 2026.

The recommendations were proposed by Councillor Sharon Harvey and seconded by Councillor Jen Snape.

In seconding the proposals, Councillor Snape commented that she had been heartened by the level of public interest that had been apparent in respect of the local elections in the build up to the meeting. Members of the public who had attended a protest prior to the Council meeting were also thanked for expressing their views on the subject.

In considering the proposals detailed in the report, Members were asked to note that circumstances at Redditch Borough Council differed from Worcestershire County Council which had requested a postponement to their local elections in May 2025. Unlike the County Councillors who had served four years by 2025, the Redditch Councillors due for election in May 2026 would have served a two-year term. The full Council meeting in Redditch had provided an opportunity for the subject to be debated in detail in an open and transparent manner.

Concerns were raised that local elections in May 2026 would entail use of valuable resources, including officer time, that could be dedicated to Local Government Reorganisation. A lot of work would need to take place over the following months in preparation for Local Government Reorganisation and the Council needed to focus on completing these tasks effectively. The suggestion was made that by postponing the election, the Council would ensure that experienced Members who were knowledgeable about Local Government Reorganisation could progress with work on this matter. Council was also asked to note that the Councillors continuing in these roles would be doing so due to a sense of civic duty.

Once the report had been presented, Members discussed the content of the report and the potential to request a postponement to the local elections in detail and in doing so commented on the following matters:

- The fact that no decision had been made by the Government yet in respect of Local Government Reorganisation in Worcestershire.

- The timetable for Local Government Reorganisation in Worcestershire.
- The view was expressed by a Member that it had not yet been confirmed that Worcestershire would be included in the next round of Local Government Reorganisation.
- The arrangements by which Redditch Borough Council shared many services with Bromsgrove District Council which was not due to hold elections in May 2026. The suggestion was made that this would make it more likely that the Elections team at the Council would have capacity to facilitate elections in Redditch in May 2026.
- The request that Worcestershire County Council had submitted in 2025 to postpone their local elections and the fact that this request had not been successful.
- The different circumstances under which Worcestershire County Council had requested a postponement of their local elections, which had occurred in a context in which a request had been made for Worcestershire to be included in the first tranche of Local Government Reorganisation.
- The extent to which the postponement of local elections would undermine the democratic mandate of the Council.
- The need for local elections to only be postponed in exceptional circumstances.
- The reason why members of the public had not been provided with an opportunity to address the Council meeting. Clarification was provided that in line with procedural rule 22.2, there was no opportunity for the public to address Members at an extraordinary meeting of Council.
- The views that had been expressed by members of the public both on social media and during the protest held prior to the meeting.
- The strength of feeling in the local community that had been demonstrated by the public protest that had occurred outside the meeting venue prior to the start of the meeting.
- The extent to which it was likely that local elections would be postponed in May 2027 when shadow elections were also due to take place.
- The fact that it was an honour to serve as a Borough Councillor.
- The reasons why a meeting of Council had not been convened to take place at an earlier date, given that the letter from the Minister for Local Government and Homelessness had been received by the Leader before Christmas.
- The tasks that would already have been completed by officers in preparation for the local elections in May 2026 and the fact that there would have been financial costs attached to this work. In response to questions on this subject, the Chief Executive confirmed that preliminary work had already commenced as part of preparations for the local elections.

- The previous opportunities that the Council had had to move to a system of elections every four years and the fact that the Council had decided to retain a system of elections by thirds.
- The fact that the Councillors who had a term of office that was due to end in May 2026 had been aware that they had been elected to serve for a period of two years only.
- The typographical error in the report which referred to local elections in May 2024 taking place a year ago when in fact this should have referred to those elections taking place two years ago.
- The recent decision made at a meeting of the Electoral Matters Committee where Members had agreed that the Council should submit a request to the Government to participate in a local election pilot in 2026. The suggestion was made that work on this proposal would have been wasted if the local elections were postponed.
- The funding that the Government would have provided to the Council to subsidise the costs involved in delivering the pilot scheme.
- The fact that there were 63 Councils in a similar position to Redditch Borough Council across the country. It was noted that many of these Councils had chosen not to request a postponement to their local elections.
- The various administrations in place at the Councils that had requested a postponement to local elections at their local authority.
- The need for action to be taken by the Council to protect the Borough's assets in advance of Local Government Reorganisation.
- The extent to which Members wanted Local Government Reorganisation to occur in Redditch.
- The fact that a budget had already been allocated by the Council to pay for this election.
- The representations that had been received by the Government from a number of other Councils involved in Local Government Reorganisation about the impact that local elections could have on the timetable for reorganisation.

(An adjournment of the meeting occurred between 20.40 and 21.18. During the adjournment, Councillor Ian Woodall left the meeting and he took no further part in the debate nor did he vote thereon.)

At the end of the debate, a recorded vote was requested in accordance with Council Procedure Rule 17.5 in respect of the second and third recommendations that were proposed at the meeting.

Members voting FOR the resolutions:

Councillors Juliet Barker Smith, William Boyd, Sharon Harvey, Rita Rogers, Jen Snape and Monica Stringfellow (6).

Members voting AGAINST the resolutions:

Councillors Brandon Clayton, Matthew Dormer, Gemma Monaco and Craig Warhurst (4).

Members who voted to ABSTAIN:

No Councillors (0).

Therefore, on being put to the vote the resolutions were carried.

RESOLVED

- 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 the following option:

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) 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.

(Prior to consideration of this item, Councillor Claire Davies declared an other registerable interest as her term of office was due to end in May 2026. She left the meeting prior to consideration of this item and took no part in the debate nor vote thereon.)

61. URGENT BUSINESS - GENERAL (IF ANY)

There was no urgent business for consideration on this occasion.