

Electoral Matters Committee

30th July 2026

Proposed Changes for Future Wards within the Redditch Electoral Area

Relevant Portfolio Holder	Councillor Craig Warhurst Portfolio Holder for Finance and Governance
Portfolio Holder Consulted	Yes
Relevant Assistant Director	Claire Felton, Assistant Director of Legal, Democratic and Procurement Services
Report Author Darren Whitney	Job Title: Electoral Services Manager Contact email: darren.whitney@bromsgroveandredditch.gov.uk Contact Tel: 01527 881650
Wards Affected	All
Ward Councillor(s) consulted	All
Relevant Council Priority	High quality services and supported governance
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 is asked to NOTE:

- 1) The results of the Redditch warding arrangements for interim unitary arrangements questionnaire.**

The Electoral Matters Committee is asked to RECOMMEND that:-

- 2) an updated ward pattern for Redditch be submitted to the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government to be included in the unitary authority's Structural Changes Order based on two three-member wards and five two-member wards, including ward names (as specified by the Electoral Matters Committee).**

2. BACKGROUND

- 2.1** Early on in the Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) process the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) asked for local authorities to include their suggestions for ward arrangements in their interim plans which had to be submitted by 21st March 2025. In Worcestershire, under either a single county unitary model for local government or a two unitary authority model, the initial

Electoral Matters Committee

30th July 2026

response put forward was that the current county divisions could be retained and the number of members to be elected could be doubled for each ward.

- 2.2 On 19th May 2026, MHCLG wrote to local authorities in Worcestershire asking for their views on the Structural Changes Order (SCO). As part of their correspondence MHCLG stated, *“With regard to your suggested warding arrangements, these can be based on any combination of existing wards, divisions and parish boundaries. We understand there may be significant work compiling this, and that you may wish to wait until after a decision on which proposal is to be implemented to finalise this work. We will need any further information on warding by 17 August and would appreciate receiving it before this date wherever possible.”*
- 2.3 It was proposed in Worcestershire that the initial Council size would either comprise of 114 Councillors for a single unitary authority or 54 (North Worcestershire) and 60 (South Worcestershire) in the case of two unitary authorities. It is now known that on 16th July 2026 the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government confirmed that he had decided to move forward with the implementation of the two unitary proposal for Worcestershire submitted by Bromsgrove District Council, Malvern Hills District Council, Redditch Borough Council, Worcester City Council and Wychavon District Council. These new councils will comprise the current areas of: Bromsgrove District Council, Redditch Borough Council and Wyre Forest District Council (referred to in the proposals as ‘North Worcestershire’) and Malvern Hills District Council, Worcester City Council and Wychavon District Council (referred to in the proposals as ‘South Worcestershire’). There is no suggestion to change the numbers of elected Members representing the North Worcestershire Authority.
- 2.4 In the original proposals, the suggestion was that each current county division return twice the number of councillors for the new Council or Councils. This would mean all divisions apart from the Redditch electoral area would return two Councillors. Redditch divisions, in this scenario, would return four Councillors, a total of sixteen Members.
- 2.5 With the opportunity to provide feedback to MHCLG mentioned in paragraph 2.2, officers in Redditch cited concerns regarding four Member wards in the electoral area for Redditch within the new unitary authority. This is based on the complication of holding a principal election with four seats in each ward, the dilution of accountability and reducing representational clarity for residents.

Electoral Matters Committee

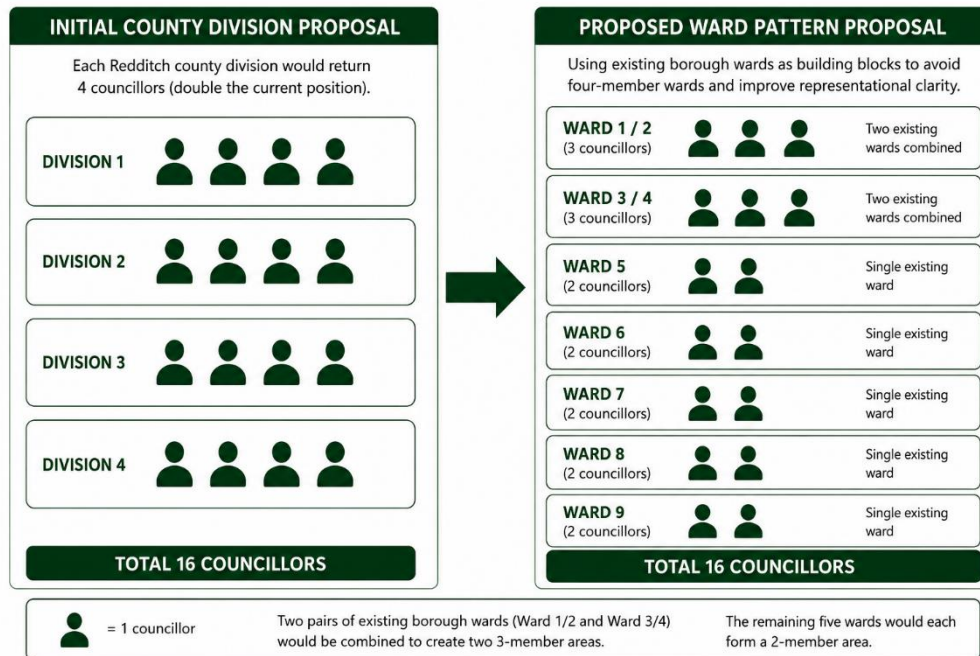
30th July 2026

- 2.6 Although there is no legislative upper limit on the number of Councillors who may represent a ward or electoral division, the Local Government Boundary Commission for England (LGBCE) guidance states that divisions/wards returning more than three Councillors can dilute accountability to the electorate. The Commission will not normally recommend a principal ward area with more than three members unless there is compelling evidence to support it. Its guidance also provides that, for authorities holding whole-Council elections, electoral arrangements may be based on a combination of single, two and three-member wards. It is important to note that the MHCLG follows LGBCE guidance as far as possible when developing the interim electoral arrangements for new unitary authorities.

3. OPERATIONAL ISSUES

- 3.1 Officers discussed their concerns of wards returning four members with representatives from MHCLG and it was confirmed that they didn't ask for detailed warding as part of the original LGR proposals and therefore it was not necessary to link anything in those documents and that changes can be made in respect of the SCO for the new authority. Officers were reminded by MHCLG that ministers will decide the final Council size and that MHCLG are seeking local suggestions for the SCO in terms of warding. However, any different arrangements should use existing electoral areas, which may include current District or Borough wards, parish areas or county electoral divisions.
- 3.2 As there is only one parish within the Redditch electoral area, and officers were not proposing any change to the overall number of Councillors to be returned, the alternative approach was to consider the use of existing Borough wards as the basis for the interim warding arrangements. Maintaining the existing allocation of sixteen Councillors for the Redditch electoral area was considered important, as changing the number of Councillors for Redditch would go beyond a local refinement to the warding pattern and could have wider implications for the overall Council size and distribution of Councillors across Worcestershire.
- 3.3 The analysis showed that, in order to retain sixteen Councillors for the Redditch electoral area, the only viable arrangement would be to create seven wards: five two-member wards and two three-member wards.

Figure 1



As can be seen from figure 1 above, the ward patterning would involve combining two current Borough wards to create each three-member ward.

- 3.4 This approach was discussed with both the MHCLG and the LGBCE before taking any further action, both were content with the approach and the LGBCE expanded on the position regarding use of wards to create ward patterns: *“In our guidance to councils on developing warding patterns, we do advise against recommending any four-member electoral areas.”* They followed up with the fact MHCLG has adopted this guidance too and stated: *“It would certainly be appropriate to use Redditch borough wards as building blocks. In other LGR areas some councils have used wards as building blocks as a baseline, instead of electoral divisions, and so there is precedent for that approach. There are also instances where there has been a combined proposal using both wards and divisions as building blocks, so a Worcestershire approach along these lines should also fall within the guidance and be consistent with what we have seen elsewhere in the country.”*
- 3.5 Officers tested some scenarios and did note that electoral variances did have a greater divergence than the original divisional proposal including up to 19% so the LGBCE were asked for their comments on divergence. The LGBCE replied: *“that kind of electoral equality is not a*

Electoral Matters Committee

30th July 2026

major concern at this stage and you should feel comfortable going ahead with the ward building blocks in Redditch” noting that their official guidance to Councils undergoing unitarisation states “when developing interim warding arrangements, councils are unlikely to be able practically to adhere to all the criteria we follow when conducting an electoral review.” The LGBCE further commented that this appeared to be “a clear example of where effective & accountable local government takes priority over perfect electoral equality.” Additionally, it was also noted that, in previous cases of unitarisation, interim arrangements have had variances in the range of 20-30% away from the average. Members may be interested to know that the new North Yorkshire Council had two divisions with a variance of more than 30% and 57% of divisions had a variance of more than 10%.

- 3.6 A paper was taken to the Informal Working Group on Local Government Reorganisation in Worcestershire (which consists of the Leaders of Worcestershire councils and LGR Portfolio Holders) on 1st July 2026. At this meeting members of the group supported a seven ward solution for the Redditch Electoral Area and it was noted that Redditch Borough Council would want to consider the new ward patterns.
- 3.7 Redditch Borough Council Group Leaders met on 2nd July and agreed a meeting of this Committee. It has subsequently been agreed that an extraordinary Council meeting will be held on 10th August to consider ward patterning in the Redditch Electoral Area.
- 3.8 Officers produced a short questionnaire for all members of the Council so they could have a say on which wards they felt have the best community cohesion and community links to help identify the warding pattern of the Redditch Electoral Area for the shadow authority. A copy of the questionnaire and the relevant briefing note can be found in Appendix 1. Due to the timing of the deadline for responses to the questionnaire and also the deadline for publication of the agenda for the Electoral Matters Committee meeting, the results of this questionnaire, as detailed in Appendix 2, will be published in a supplementary pack for this meeting.
- 3.9 Members of the Committee are asked to consider the results of the questionnaire and to decide on a ward pattern to recommend to Council based on strong community links and effective community cohesion. The Committee may also want to suggest a name for the combined wards.
- 3.10 As described in the questionnaire briefing note, community cohesion can include:

Electoral Matters Committee

30th July 2026

- shared shops, local centres or high streets;
- shared schools, health facilities, community buildings, parks or leisure facilities;
- similar housing, development patterns or socio-economic characteristics;
- shared transport links, main roads, walking routes or bus routes;
- recognised local identities or neighbourhood names;
- existing links between residents, community groups, voluntary organisations or local services;
- clear physical boundaries, such as main roads, open space, railway lines or natural boundaries; and
- whether residents are likely to see the areas as linked communities.

4. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 4.1 There are no additional costs at this stage.

5. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 The Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007 provides for the Secretary of State to issue invitations to Councils for unitary proposals.
- 5.2 Section 7 of the 2007 Act gives the Secretary of State power to make an SCO with or without modification.
- 5.3 The SCO will include provision for electoral arrangements including the number of Members of the unitary authority, the number and boundaries of electoral areas for the purpose of elections of Councillors to it and the number of Councillors to be returned by each electoral area.

6. OTHER - IMPLICATIONS

Local Government Reorganisation

- 6.1 The proposal arises directly from Local Government Reorganisation as amended ward patterning for the Redditch Electoral Area will be forwarded to MHCLG, before their deadline of 17th August to help inform the creation of the SCO.

Relevant Council Priority

Electoral Matters Committee

30th July 2026

- 6.2 The proposals detailed in this report, relate to 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.

Equalities and Diversity Implications

- 6.4 There are no equalities and diversity implications for this report as access to polling stations within the electoral area would remain the same (unless changed under a review by this Committee).

Community Impact Implications

- 6.5 There are no direct community safety or health and wellbeing implications.

7. RISK MANAGEMENT

- 7.1 As Ministers have the final decision on warding, if an indication from the Council on ward patterning isn't made a less favourable pattern might be chosen.

8. APPENDICES and BACKGROUND PAPERS

- Appendix 1 – Copy of questionnaire and briefing note to Elected Members
- Appendix 2 – Results of questionnaire (to follow)

Electoral Matters Committee

30th July 2026

9. REPORT SIGN OFF

Department	Name and Job Title	Date
Portfolio Holder	Councillor Craig Warhurst	
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	
Legal Services	Nicola Cummings, Principal Solicitor - Governance	14/07/26