

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 Council is asked to RESOLVE that:

- 1) 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. The three-member wards constructed from the Borough Wards of**

- Astwood Bank & Feckenham and Webheath & Callow Hill suggested name of Redditch South**
- North and Winyates suggested name of Redditch North**

The five two-member wards to keep the current Borough Ward names.

- 2) Authority be delegated to the Chief Executive to finalise the submission to the Government to consider as part of the Structural Changes Order for North Worcestershire in respect of the ward pattern for Redditch**

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 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 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 a two unitary proposal for Worcestershire submitted by Bromsgrove District Council, Malvern Hills District Council, Redditch Borough Council, Worcester City Council and Wychavon District Council.
- 2.4 A letter dated 20th July 2026 to Chief Executives of the Worcestershire Councils from the MHCLG confirmed that *“the new unitary councils, and the number of councillors that will represent them, are to be:”*

Name of new council	Area covered (if needed)	Number of councillors
North Worcestershire Council	Bromsgrove, Redditch, Wyre Forest	54
South Worcestershire Council	Malvern Hills, Worcester, Wychavon	60

- 2.5 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.

- 2.6 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 was 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.
- 2.7 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.

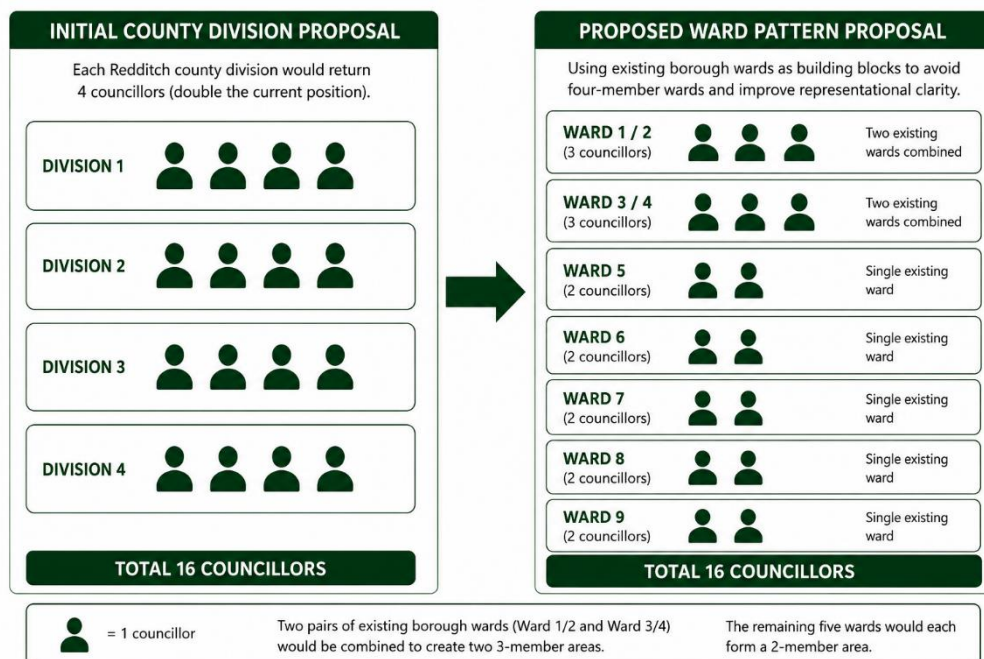
3. OPERATIONAL ISSUES

- 3.1 Officers discussed their concerns of wards returning four members with representatives from MHCLG. It was confirmed that MHCLG did not ask for detailed warding as part of the original LGR proposals and therefore it was not necessary to link anything in those documents. MHCLG also confirmed that changes can be made in respect of the draft SCO whilst it is being developed. 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 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%. Whilst electoral equality is seen as a more secondary matter, lower variances are however preferable where this can be accommodated.
- 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. At the Informal Working Group meeting held on 30th July 2026, following the 16th July 2026 announcement, group members were asked if they were content for Redditch to determine warding arrangements for its own area. Whilst there was a general consensus Bromsgrove and Wyre Forest representatives specifically reaffirmed they were content with the approach noting that they were to make up the other parts of the North Worcestershire Authority.
- 3.7 Redditch Borough Council Group Leaders met on 2nd July 2026 and agreed a meeting of the Electoral Matters Committee, to consider options and recommend a warding pattern for the new Redditch Electoral Area of the new authority to Council.
- 3.8 Officers produced a briefing note and 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. All Members were invited to complete the questionnaire, and 16 returns were received made up from 7 Labour, 6 Reform UK and 3 Conservative (59% of all Councillors).

- 3.9 The Electoral Matters Committee, at its meeting on 30th July 2026, considered the questionnaire results and decided, following a vote, the ward pattern to recommend to Council. This is 'Scenario 1' included within Appendix 1. Its decision took account of Members views on community links and cohesion (as expressed through the questionnaire) and during the Committee's discussion it was determined that this option provided the most balanced electoral representation and the greatest level of electoral equality. The Committee also suggested names for the newly combined wards as provided in the Recommendations above. Although the formal minutes of the meeting are not yet available, key points of the meeting are recorded in Appendix 2 (to follow).

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 2026 to help inform the creation of the SCO.

- 6.2 This deadline was confirmed in the letter dated 20th July 2026 mentioned in paragraph 2.4 and noted: *“Thank you for confirming your preferred warding arrangements, based on county divisions other than for Redditch where you have agreed you would prefer to use district wards. We would be grateful if you could provide us with your suggested detailed interim warding arrangements for each of the new councils for inclusion in the Order.”*

Relevant Council Priority

- 6.3 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

- 6.4 There are no direct climate change implications arising from this report.

Equalities and Diversity Implications

- 6.5 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 polling place review by the Electoral Matters Committee).

Community Impact Implications

- 6.6 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 imposed.

8. APPENDICES and BACKGROUND PAPERS

Appendices

Appendix 1 - Electoral Variances for Interim Ward Proposals
Appendix 2 - Key points and Recommendations from Electoral Matters Meeting Committee held 30th July 2026 (to follow)

Background Papers

‘Proposed Changes for future Wards Within the Redditch Electoral Area’, report to the Electoral Matters Committee meeting held on 30th July 2026 (including a copy of the questionnaire, a briefing note to elected Members and the responses received from elected Members).