

Shareholders Committee

Monday, 1st December,
2025

MINUTES

Present:

Councillor Sharon Harvey (Chair), Councillor Ian Woodall (Vice-Chair) and Councillors Juliet Barker Smith, Bill Hartnett and Jane Spilsbury

Officers:

Debra Goodall

Guests:

Ben Clawson-Chan (Managing Director, Rubicon Leisure Limited)

Democratic Services Officers:

Jess Bayley-Hill and Eve Davies

8. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND NAMED SUBSTITUTES

Apologies were received on behalf of Councillor Matthew Dormer who had been invited to attend the meeting in his capacity as a group leader, in line with the terms of reference for the Committee, although he was not a member of the Committee.

9. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor Jane Spilsbury declared a registerable interest in respect of Minute Item No. 10 - Rubicon Leisure Council Funding and Support. She informed Members that her son was employed by Rubicon Leisure Limited.

10. RUBICON LEISURE COUNCIL FUNDING AND SUPPORT

The Assistant Director of Finance and Customer Services presented the report on Council Funding and Support for Rubicon Leisure.

Chair

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In doing so, Members were updated on the Medium-Term Financial Plan, 2023/24 and 2024/25 annual accounts, stabilisation of the Council's Finance service and TechOne recovery.

Members were informed that the Council was progressing through the 2026/27 budget setting process, which involved consultation with Councillors, including through the Scrutiny process. Any relevant actions from the Chancellor's autumn budget on 26th November 2025 would be factored in as well as the provisional Local Government Settlement which was due to be announced before Christmas. Following this, the Council was due to set its annual budget for 2026/27 at its meeting scheduled for 23rd February 2026.

As part of the budget setting process, a significant number of Capital bids relating to Rubicon Leisure Limited had been included. A number of these bids were initiated by Rubicon Leisure Limited with the aim to increase revenue while other bids were related to the maintenance of Council-owned assets. The Capital bids totalled approximately £4.4 million. It was highlighted that the Council was currently considering the bids, but it was not possible to say whether they would be affordable at this point.

It was confirmed that the Council had published all the outstanding statements of accounts. The draft 2023/24 accounts had been published and were being audited by Ernst and Young (EY), the newly appointed external auditors for the Council. It was expected that the accounts would receive a disclaimed opinion from EY.

It was reported that the 2024/25 accounts had also been published in a draft format in compliance with the June 2025 deadline. It was anticipated that EY would complete their audit with the issuance of an opinion by the statutory backstop date of 27th February 2026. Members were advised it was expected that those accounts would also be disclaimed. A value for money assessment was ongoing.

The Council was up to date in terms of VAT returns. Engagement had been carried out with external tax consultants to assist with returns and review any historic issues. Members were reassured that ongoing dialogue with HM Revenue and Customs (HMRC) was continuing regarding any outstanding historical problems.

The Finance Stabilisation programme was reported to be underway. Interim resources had successfully been recruited into key roles

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within the Finance team to resolve immediate pressures. The process had been initiated to evaluate posts for permanent team members, such as a Financial Services Manager.

In terms of support for Rubicon Leisure Limited, conversations had taken place regarding an additional resource with a small element of the role to assist with Spadesbourne in Bromsgrove. It was hoped this would ease pressures and an appointment would be made during the current financial year.

An update was provided on the TechOne system. Members were informed that there had been a full review of the system and the results from a health check had been received. It was confirmed that the Council would move forward with the re-installation of parts of the system that had not been in use.

It was noted that there were challenges when the system had originally been installed but functionality was now much better. The Council would look forward in terms of re-installation with a fully resourced plan; this would incorporate the unique requirements that Rubicon Leisure Limited had. It was confirmed that a Project Manager would be appointed to ensure the appropriate resources were in place. Input would also be sought from those who would be using the system as well as the incorporation of lessons learned from the previous installation of the system.

Members were advised that a further update was due to be provided at the following Shareholders Committee meeting.

In discussing the item, Members commented on the following points:

- Members queried whether a test run of the TechOne system could be completed as part of the project management process before it was rolled out to service users and staff. Officers confirmed that the new elements of the system would run concurrently with the old system before moving forward. Members were reassured that if concerns were raised that the new system was not operational, officers would advise that the full re-instatement should not go ahead. Members further queried how long the systems would be running simultaneously to ensure the new system was performing properly. Officers advised that the time

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period would be set out in advance as well as the key criteria for measuring performance.

- Queries were raised around the costs involved in re-installation of parts of the TechOne system and what the Council would be expected to pay. It was confirmed that a meeting with TechOne was scheduled to be held on the following day, 2nd December 2025, and clarity would be sought around resourcing. Officers advised the expectation was that TechOne would meet the required costs. However, the Council would be liable for some of the costs, including funding a Project Manager and back filling staff in the Finance team.
- Members asked how the Capital bids would be assessed as the Council did not have the funds to grant all the bids that had been applied for. Officers informed Members that the Capital bids received from Rubicon Leisure Limited had been prioritised accordingly by the relevant service areas, and Health and Safety had also been taken into consideration. It was confirmed that the successful bids were scheduled to be announced after Christmas.
- A query was raised about the impact of the delays with TechOne on Rubicon Leisure Limited as a commercial business. It was clarified that Rubicon Leisure Limited was currently having to use their own income reports for financial management and didn't always have access to accurate information through TechOne. It was noted that the current situation was impacting on Rubicon Leisure Limited's resources as they were having to manually process data which was not time efficient.

RESOLVED that

the report be noted.

11. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

RESOLVED that

the minutes of the meeting of the Shareholders Committee held on 21st August 2025 be confirmed as a true and correct record and signed by the Chair.

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12. EXCLUSION OF THE PRESS AND PUBLIC

RESOLVED that:

Under S100 A (4) of the Local Government Act 1972, as amended by the Local Government (Access to Information) (Variation) Order 2006, the public be excluded from the meeting for the following matters on the grounds that they involve the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in paragraph 3 of Part 1 of Schedule 12 of the said act, as amended.

- **Minute Item No 13 – Quarter 2 Performance Monitoring Outturn Report 2025/26**

13. RUBICON LEISURE QUARTER 2 PERFORMANCE MONITORING REPORT 2025-26

The Managing Director of Rubicon Leisure Limited presented the Quarter Two Performance Monitoring Report 2025-26.

In doing so, he began by outlining the key risks that impacted on Rubicon Leisure Limited.

In discussing the risks, Members commented on the following points:

- As Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) was approaching and Rubicon Leisure Limited was an arm's length business of the Council, Members questioned whether this was on the risk register. It was confirmed that it did feature.

It was reported that Abbey Stadium was on budget for Quarter Two. Public Heath had funded support for health and fitness (H&F) vouchers to tackle obesity.

A number of Health and Well-being events had been attended to support partners including Heart of Worcestershire (HOW) College's Careers and Fresher fair, and Redditch Borough and Bromsgrove District Councils' staff events.

In discussing the update on Abbey Stadium, Members commented on the following points:

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- Members welcomed the new furniture which had been installed in the café to increase capacity. It was felt this was a positive step and further supported resident's health and wellbeing as it encouraged parents to take their children to sports clubs.
- The Holiday Activities and Food (HAF) programme was welcomed, and Members were pleased with the number of children attending.

In terms of the Arrow Valley Countryside Centre site, Members were informed that there had been an outstanding first half of the year. Food and beverage performance had been very positive.

The Committee was advised that water activities had been impacted by the bloom of blue green algae which resulted in a reduction in income for August.

Members were very pleased to hear that Arrow Valley Countryside Centre had been shortlisted for the Worcestershire Tourism Award in the category for best new tourism business.

In discussing the update on the Arrow Valley Countryside Centre, Members commented on the following points:

- Thanks were given to everyone involved in the Redditch Commonwealth Link event.
- Members raised a query regarding the sluice gate inlet being closed and the impact this had on the growth of blue green algae. It was confirmed that this would be followed up with the Council's Parks team.
- Members welcomed Rubicon Leisure Limited's partnership with HOW College and praised the team for the excellence award they received at a West Midlands Supported Internships awards event.
- A query was raised regarding work taking place with the Renew Team. The Managing Director advised that he sat on the Steering Group and that Rubicon Leisure Limited would play a part as this was a direct business objective.

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In terms of the Palace Theatre, there had been several sell out shows in Quarter Two including the Drifters, ELO Experience, the Phantom starring Lee Mead, and Jonny Cole.

It was reported that customer satisfaction (NPS) was 74 against national average of 34, and the Palace Theatre had been crowned Business of the Year at the Redditch Business Awards.

The Chair praised the diverse range of events at the theatre and the work which was being done to ensure continued success.

Pitcheroak Golf Course was reported to be up on budget and had hosted the Kingfisher Open and two junior county golf tournaments.

Members were also informed that capital works had been completed to fix a drainage issue on the second green and the refurbishment of the male changing room and toilets had been programmed.

In regard to Forge Mill Needle Museum, there had been several successful exhibitions including the Titanic: Honour and Glory Exhibition.

The events programme had been strong. The children's trail guide was launched in July 2025.

Forge Mill Needle Museum had scored an outstanding 83 on the NPS compared to an industry average of 43.

Members praised the staff for their work in improving engagement at the site.

Finally, an update on community centres was provided to Members. The Committee was informed that as a whole, they were performing on target.

RESOLVED that

the report be noted.

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[During consideration of this item, Members discussed matters that necessitated the disclosure of exempt information. It was therefore agreed to move to exclude the press and public prior to any debate on the grounds that information would be revealed that included information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the authority holding that information).]

- 14. TO CONSIDER ANY URGENT BUSINESS, DETAILS OF WHICH HAVE BEEN NOTIFIED TO THE ASSISTANT DIRECTOR OF LEGAL, DEMOCRATIC AND PROCUREMENT SERVICES PRIOR TO THE COMMENCEMENT OF THE MEETING AND WHICH THE CHAIR, BY REASON OF SPECIAL CIRCUMSTANCES, CONSIDERS TO BE OF SO URGENT A NATURE THAT IT CANNOT WAIT UNTIL THE NEXT MEETING**

There was no urgent business for consideration on this occasion.

The Meeting commenced at 6.30 pm
and closed at 7.50 pm