Shareholders Committee

Tuesday, 31st March, 2026

MINUTES

Present:

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

Also Present:

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

Officers:

Ruth Bamford and Julie Lorraine

Principal Democratic Services Officer:

Jess Bayley-Hill

15. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND NAMED SUBSTITUTES

There were no apologies for absence received from Committee members.

An apology for absence was received from Councillor Craig Warhurst, 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 in the Council's constitution.

16. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor Jane Spilsbury declared an other disclosable interest in all the items on the agenda as her son worked for Rubicon Leisure Limited. She remained present during consideration of each item of business and voted thereon.

17. SUPPORT FOR THE COUNCIL

The Interim Section 151 Officer presented a report on the subject of support provided by the Council to Rubicon Leisure Limited.

The Committee was advised that Rubicon Leisure Limited had submitted bids for capital funding which had been considered as part of the authority's budget setting process. All of these bids had been agreed.

The Interim Section 151 Officer had been meeting with the Council's accountants, Ernst & Young, regarding the accounts. A position statement in respect of Rubicon Leisure Limited was expected shortly.

There had been a number of historic issues for the Council in respect of VAT receipts, which had had implications for Rubicon Leisure Limited because both the authority and the company used the same finance system. Discussions had been held with HMRC and the Council was due to receive £20 million in VAT returns.

There were due to be changes to personnel at a senior level within the Council's Financial Services team. A new permanent Section 151 Officer was scheduled to commence employment with the authorities on 13th April 2026. The Assistant Director of Finance and Customer Services was already serving as a Deputy Section 151 Officer. The Interim Section 151 Officer had also appointed two further Deputy Section 151 Officers at the Council.

Work had been ongoing to review the Tech1 financial system that was used by the Council. Two modules in this system were due to be switched off. In addition, action was being taken to address issues remaining within the system.

Following the presentation of the report, Members discussed a number of points in detail:

- The work of the project team for the finance system and the extent to which the external supplier was involved in the work of this project team. Members were advised that there was a specialist providing support to an internal working group.
- The extent to which the choice of one Unitary Authority for Worcestershire rather than two would impact on Rubicon Leisure Limited. Members were informed that this would have limited impact: depending on the Government's decision, Council staff would either transfer to one or two authorities and the new Unitary Council would consider its contractual obligations, including to Rubicon Leisure Limited and the assets the company managed on behalf of the Council.
- The risks associated with the Council's finance system and whether these should be included on the corporate risk register.
- The investments that had been listed in the report, which included repairs and investment in services.

RESOLVED to note

the position in terms of:

a) the budget and MTFP position for 2026/27 to 2028/29;
b) the closure of the 2023/24 Accounts and 2024/25 Accounts;
c) the update on VAT;
d) the stabilisation of the Council's finance service; and
e) the update on Technology One ledger system.

18. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

RESOLVED that

the minutes of the meeting of the Shareholders Committee held on 1st December 2025 be approved as a true and correct record and signed by the Chair.

19. 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. 20 – Rubicon Business Plan 2026/27**
- **Minute Item No. 21 – Rubicon Budget Report 2026/27**
- **Minute Item No. 22 – Quarter 3 Performance Monitoring Report 2025/26**

20. RUBICON BUSINESS PLAN 2026/27

The Managing Director of Rubicon Leisure Limited presented the Business Plan 2026/27 for the Committee's consideration.

Members were asked to note that the Rubicon Board had already considered and endorsed the content of the business plan. However, approval was required from the Shareholders Committee in line with reserved matters in the Articles of the company.

The overarching mission of Rubicon Leisure Limited remained to inspire communities to live healthier and happier lives. This was supported by five key objectives and themes, underpinned by service plans. The themes were consistent with those included in the previous year's plan and would support a trajectory of growth.

Rubicon Leisure Limited aimed to deliver a robust and sustainable business plan whilst meeting the needs of communities.

In terms of Rubicon Leisure Limited's staff, the company was working with Redditch Business Improvement District (BID) on a number of training programmes that would support staff development.

A range of events and activities had been and would continue to be delivered at venues operated by the company.

Forge Mill Needle Museum had performed really well during the 2025/26 financial year. It was anticipated that works on the water wheel at the mill would be completed by the summer of 2026.

Once the report had been presented, Members discussed the following points in detail:

- The contributions made by staff and volunteers at Rubicon Leisure Limited in 2025/26. Members thanked them for their hard work.
- The progress that had been made with the works on the water wheel at Forge Mill Needle Museum. Members welcomed news that these works would be completed soon.
- The growth in services that had been delivered by Rubicon Leisure Limited.
- The links between the themes and objectives detailed in the company's business plan and the priorities included in the Council's Plan. Members welcomed these synergies and suggested that this could be highlighted more explicitly within the business plan in future.
- The extent to which Rubicon Leisure Limited was applying for grant funding available from external bodies.
- The opportunities available for Rubicon Leisure Limited to contribute to tackling health inequalities in the Borough. Clarification was provided that the company worked closely with Redditch District Collaborative.
- The commitment that the company was demonstrating to its staff through investment in training and development opportunities. Members welcomed this commitment.

RESOLVED that

the Rubicon Leisure Annual Business Plan 2026/27 be approved.

(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)).

21. RUBICON BUDGET REPORT 2026/27

The Managing Director of Rubicon Leisure Limited presented the company's Budget Report 2026/27.

Once the report had been presented, Members discussed the following points:

- The fact that Rubicon Leisure Limited had been established by the Council to make a positive contribution to the health and wellbeing of the local community.
- The impact that conflict in the Middle East could have on financial costs and supplies, including for Rubicon Leisure Limited.
- The action that could be taken to attract more visitors to Forge Mill Needle Museum. Members were informed that the museum was performing really well.
- The investment that the Council had agreed to make in upgrading the changing facilities for customers of 'dry' fitness services and equipment at the Abbey Stadium.
- The impact that access to public transport in the Borough might have on the number of visitors using services provided by Rubicon Leisure Limited.
- The value for money that the Council received, in terms of services delivered by Rubicon Leisure Limited.
- The fact that Rubicon Leisure Limited delivered services and operated facilities as required by the Council.

RESOLVED that

the Rubicon Leisure Budget Report 2026/27, and its underlying assumptions be approved.

(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)).

22. QUARTER 3 PERFORMANCE MONITORING REPORT 2025/26

The Managing Director of Rubicon Leisure Limited presented the company's performance monitoring report for quarter 3 of the 2025/26 financial year.

Performance had been good during the quarter.

The company had had £500,000 Council funding from the capital programme for 2026/27 which was to be invested in facilities.

Consideration was given to the feedback that had been received from customers during consultation exercises. Members welcomed the positive feedback that had been received and the fact that this exceeded the industry standard.

RESOLVED that

the report be noted.

(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)).

The Meeting commenced at 6.30 pm
and closed at 7.52 pm