

Classification: Open	Decision Type: Key
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Report to:	Cabinet	Date: 11 February 2026
Subject:	Leisure Services – investment and commercialisation approach	
Report of	Cabinet Member for Adult Care, Health and Public Service Reform	

1.0 SUMMARY

This report presents a proposed strategic approach for the Council’s leisure services in the context of the wider 2026/27 budget-setting process with the Council needing to reduce its significant budget funding gap. The report outlines the rationale for protecting, modernising, and commercialising leisure services recognising their core contribution to physical and mental health, community cohesion, and wider public health outcomes.

Following public consultation, and reflecting feedback that residents strongly value the borough’s leisure offer but understand the need to modernise and generate income, a strategy is proposed that:

- Invests in essential repair and maintenance (R&M) across the estate, namely Ramsbottom and Castle Leisure to ensure safe, high-quality, reliable services;
- Pursues commercialisation measures to reduce the leisure subsidy over the medium term;
- Protects all existing sites and swimming provision, recognising that statutory swimming sufficiency can be achieved across two facilities but that maintaining the broader offer aligns strongly with the Council’s Health and Wellbeing strategy.

The report describes the proposals, summarises consultation findings, and sets out the next steps for implementation and monitoring.

2.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

Cabinet is asked to:

1. Approve enabling repair and maintenance investment totalling £4.5million across Ramsbottom (£1 million) and Castle Leisure Centre (£3.5 million), ensuring facilities remain safe, operational, and capable of supporting enhanced commercial activity.

2. Approve the implementation plan for repairs, commercialisation, and opening of the Radcliffe leisure offer within the new Radcliffe Hub.
3. Approve the commercialisation programme, including pricing changes (including a 10% increase per year over 3 years), enhanced income-generation activity, and service modernisation.
4. Note that performance and income will be monitored quarterly through the Council's financial reporting cycle, with a commitment to bring a further Cabinet report should targets not be achieved with alternative proposals.
5. Note the consultation outcomes.

Reasons for recommendation(s)

1. To maintain safe, legally compliant facilities, to protect valued public health assets and to unlock commercial potential.
2. To deliver required savings while protecting services, to reflect consultation feedback and to improve long term sustainability of the leisure offer.
3. To ensure robust financial oversight, provide transparency and accountability and allow for reconsideration of options should income not materialise as planned.
4. To demonstrate decisions have been informed by feedback along with openness and transparency.
5. Enables an organised timely delivery programme, supports a coordinated transition linked to Radcliffe and ensures service can meet revenue targets.

Alternative options considered and rejected

1. Reduce the estate - (e.g., close one site) to achieve savings through reduced operating costs. It was clear through the consultation that it was important to the public to retain all sites and commercialise.
2. Do nothing – This would make achieving the savings unattainable.

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Background

3.0 BACKGROUND

3.1 Financial context

The Council has needed to identify savings to reduce the budget funding gap and requirement for reserves to support the 2026/27 budget. This has required all services to review expenditure and identify opportunities for efficiency and greater financial sustainability. Leisure services are non-statutory (save for requirement for statutory swimming lessons); however, they play a foundational role in the Council's prevention and public health strategies, supporting physical activity, community wellbeing, tackling health inequalities, and reducing medium-to-longer-term demand on statutory health and care services.

3.2 Strength of the leisure offer

The borough's leisure facilities are well-used and strongly valued. They provide a diverse public-facing offer including swimming, fitness, classes, children's activities, community programmes, targeted health interventions, and specialist public health programmes. The forthcoming Radcliffe Hub a high-quality, modern and purpose-built leisure facility presents a unique opportunity to energise the leisure offer further and generate excitement among residents, signalling a modern and ambitious approach to community health.

3.3 Savings requirement and the role of leisure

Proposals to reduce the leisure subsidy by £500,000 by 28/29 were included within the early 2026/27 savings options included in the December Cabinet budget report. While swimming sufficiency is a statutory requirement, this duty can be satisfied across two sites. In addition, the current estate requires significant investment simply to maintain safety and customer expectations.

3.4 Consultation

Consultation took place 14 December 2025 – 19 January 2026 as part of the Council's proposed 26/27 budget options. In addition, pre-decision engagement was carried out with stakeholders, leisure members, staff, and relevant national bodies.

Feedback included (as summarised;)

- Mixed response to leisure subsidy question with the majority not in favour of reducing the overall leisure budget;
- Recognition that modernisation and commercialisation offer opportunities to sustain services;
- Acceptance of fair price increases where they are linked to visible value improvements;
- Strong emphasis on improving facilities, communications, accessibility and safety.

This feedback strongly supports the recommended approach: invest, modernise, commercialise, and retain facilities.

3.4 Proposed approach

Guided by consultation feedback, where residents expressed a clear preference to retain sites, modernise facilities, and commercialise operations and informed by a desire to sustain the leisure offer, the recommended approach is to:

- Pursue commercialisation, enabling income growth;
- Implement essential repair & maintenance works, ensuring safety and enabling commercial potential, while managing expectations that this is repair work rather than full refurbishment
- Retain all existing sites in line with consultation feedback

4.0 Proposals

4.1 Commercialisation

The commercialisation strategy includes:

- Pricing changes: a proposed 10% fees and charges increase for 3 years (inclusive of inflationary rises), linked to visible site improvements and stronger value propositions, reflecting consultation feedback. This will equate to a monthly price increase for members from £32.50 in 25/26, to £35.75 in 26/27 to £39.33 in 27/28 to £43.26 in 28/29. This increase in fees and charges will generate an additional £188k per year to support the required savings.
- New income streams: expanded programming, targeted memberships, hireable spaces, and explore the potential partnerships. This is projected to generate an additional income in the region of in £15k per year.
- Improved marketing and communications to promote quality, convenience, and community value.
- Enhanced operational efficiency including digital improvements, class optimisation, and better utilisation of off-peak capacity.

4.2 Repair & Maintenance (R&M) Investment

Approval is sought for £4.5million of R&M investment across Castle and Ramsbottom Leisure Centres. This will:

- Address urgent condition issues;
- Ensure statutory compliance;
- Improve reliability of core assets (plant, mechanical systems, flooring, changing village condition, equipment replacement);
- Enable ancillary enhancements that support commercial activity (e.g., making spaces lettable or suitable for new programmes).

The requirement for repair and maintenance has been identified further to a survey which sets out the detail of the repairs and maintenance required (See appendix 1).

This is a repair and update programme, not a refurbishment, but will nonetheless provide noticeable improvements to reliability, safety, and customer experience. This message will need careful public communication to prevent expectation mismatch.

4.3 Monitoring & Cabinet review

Income performance will be reviewed quarterly through the Council's financial oversight process. Should income fall materially short of projections, Cabinet will be asked to reconsider options—including, if necessary, estate reduction (closure of site).

Links with the Corporate Priorities:

Please summarise how this links to the Let's Do It Strategy.

Good quality accessible leisure provision links to helping us to both achieve the best start in life for our children and opportunities to access physical activity and being safe via learning to swim. In addition, our leisure offer supports the reduction in health inequalities by offering subsidies activates for vulnerable groups.

Equality Impact and Considerations:

*Please provide an explanation of the outcome(s) of an initial or full EIA and make **specific reference regarding the protected characteristic of Looked After Children**. There must be a signed off EIA template appended with a full analysis or explanation as to why an analysis is not needed for the report to be put forward to Cabinet. Sign off to be completed by the Council's Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) Manager (contact .cawley@bury.gov.uk for advice).*

6. The Equality Impact Assessment is Appended to this report at Appendix 2.

Environmental Impact and Considerations:

*Please provide an explanation of the Environmental impact of this decision. Please include the impact on both **Carbon emissions** (contact climate@bury.gov.uk for advice) and **Biodiversity** (contact S.Tinsley@bury.gov.uk and Dennis.whittle@bury.gov.uk for advice)*

7. Improvements in Castle and Ramsbottom leisure facilities should lead to more energy efficient buildings which would lead to reduced carbon footprints and energy bills.

Assessment and Mitigation of Risk:

Risk / opportunity	Mitigation
Reduced usage through increased fee's - loss of customers to other competitors	Ongoing review of usage on a monthly basis. Ongoing benchmarking with other comparable providers. Full Communications pan required to all customers on proposals in line with terms and conditions.
Reduction of overall members - loss of customers to other competitors	Ongoing review of performance on a monthly basis and also improved communications on the wider offer.
Impact on Vulnerable Residents	Discount card available to offer discounted and targeted prices for those on eligible criteria
Reputational Impact	Promote wider offer available and comparable pricing with GM providers to show competitive pricing
Displacement of customers to accommodate repairs and maintenance	Look to schedule additional sessions for those displaced at alternative sites whilst some of the building work conducted. New HUB building opening in late 2026 so look to schedule sessions at the new site to accommodate any displacement. Sequence the work to reduce disruption to a minimum.
Impact on wider stakeholders and community clubs using leisure estate	Engagement and forward planning with all stakeholders required.

Legal Implications:

8. The Council has a duty under occupier's liability legislation and Health and Safety legislation to maintain their properties and ensure they are safe. The refurbishment of Castle Leisure Centre is for the benefit of the Council's community and visitors to the local area, which links with the Council's corporate priorities.
9. The Council has a legal right pursuant to Section 93 of the Local Government Act 2003 to increase fees and charges for leisure activities to re-coup some of the costs directly associated with providing this important but non-statutory service (i.e. known as a discretionary service).

10. The Council is obliged to ensure primary schools meet National Curriculum requirements by providing, or enabling access to, swimming instruction in Key Stage 1 or 2.
11. The Council must provide best value, pursuant to section 1 of the Local Government Act 1999 (the Act) and section 3 of at the Act sets out the general duty for a local authority to obtain best value when procuring a public contract for works, services and supplies. Any contractor appointed to carry out works must be procured in line with the Council’s contract procedure rules and relevant procurement legislation. Legal services will advise on any proposed contractual changes.

Financial Implications:

To be completed by the Council’s Section 151 Officer.

12. Approval of the recommendations will support the delivery of the £0.5m reduction in the current level of council subsidy presented to Cabinet in December budget proposals. As with all savings proposals, their delivery will be subject to monthly review and any delays or non-delivery (and any mitigations identified) will be reported to Cabinet in the quarterly finance reports and any ongoing implications considered as part of the medium term financial strategy review process.

Appendices:

Please list any appended documents (please save these as clearly labelled separate documents in the Teams folder).

Appendix 1 - Repair and Maintenance costs

Appendix 2 - Leisure EqIA Fees Feb 2026.

Background papers:

Please list any background documents to this report and include a hyperlink where possible.

December Cabinet Report 2025

Please include a glossary of terms, abbreviations and acronyms used in this report.

Term	Meaning

