

CABINET



Report subject	Two Riversmeet Studios
Meeting date	14 January 2026
Status	Public Report
Executive summary	<p>The report details the feasibility and financial considerations for capital borrowing to fund a two-storey extension to Two Riversmeet Leisure Centre (2RM) to address the identified need for dedicated studio space in Christchurch. The investment aims to enhance the centres health and fitness offer, increase membership and income whilst supporting community wellbeing and aligning with the Councils corporate strategy.</p>
Recommendations	<p>It is RECOMMENDED that Cabinet recommends to Council to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Agree to option 2 approving the building of a two-storey facility extension at Two Riversmeet Leisure Centre (2RM) creating two brand new multi-use studios costing £1.8m, subject to planning permission. b. Notes the detail in the financial and legal implications. c. Delegates to the Director of Commercial Operations in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Destination, Leisure and Commercial Operations, the implementation of this decision. <p>It is RECOMMENDED that Audit and Governance Committee recommend to Council:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> d. Approval of an increase in the authorised borrowing limit of the Council to accommodate the £1.8m financing for the extension at Two Riversmeet Leisure Centre proposal.
Reason for recommendations	<p>Enhancing 2RM Leisure Centre with dedicated studio space will allow for the centre under BCP Leisure to grow and develop enhancing the financial position by giving a fresh dedicated offer within Christchurch. The project aligns with the corporate strategy ensuring people can be active and healthy maximising opportunities for our communities.</p>

Portfolio Holder(s):	Councillor Richard Herrett – Portfolio Holder for Destination, Leisure & Commercial Operations
Corporate Director	Glynn Barton – Chief Operations Officer
Report Authors	Amanda Barrie – Director of Commercial Operations Helen Wildman – Head of Leisure & Events Tom Powell – Leisure, Development & Partnership Manager
Wards	Christchurch Town
Classification	For Decision

Background

1. Two Riversmeet Leisure Centre (2RM) is one of ten BCP Council owned leisure centres and the only one located in Christchurch. Five of these are currently being operated in house as BCP Leisure.
2. 2RM is a multi-regional and national award-winning facility which is performing in the higher quartile against national competitors.
3. 2RM currently has no purpose-built studio facilities, which means the existing exercise class provision is restricted to using the sports hall and squash courts.
4. The Built Facilities review undertaken in 2022 was commissioned to identify needs, gaps and opportunities for sports provision across the BCP Council conurbation in order to inform the local plan. This identified 2RM as a key strategic leisure asset and that Christchurch required additional studio provision to meet the needs of residents.
5. An independent strategic leisure review was undertaken on 2RM in 2022 and identified the need for a dedicated studio noting the highest priority is to enhance the health and fitness offer. This is the main income generator and there is latent demand for improved facilities.
6. Sport England's Active Lives survey shows a significant uptake in exercise classes, with a 1.6% increase in participation year-on-year, confirming strong demand for studio-based activities (EMD UK, 2025).
7. A wider piece of work is currently underway with a Leisure Centre transformation across all of the 5 internally run leisure sites to be presented to Cabinet later in 2026 in a future paper considering key investment.

Options Appraisal

Option 1 – Do nothing

8. The option of do nothing will continue to run services at 2RM Leisure Centre through a mix of sports hall use and classes within the one area.

9. Whilst this still provides an acceptable offer for the leisure centre, it does not enable growth of membership or ability to utilise the service to aid retention and develop an inclusive timetable offer for the community.
10. The do nothing option does not promote active living or access to leisure.
11. Financially, the do nothing option does not allow for additional income to support the MTFP and has the potential to increases the financial pressure due to reduced members retention.
12. Significant resource would be required to develop strategies to match the potential income generation the new studio spaces would help deliver therefore the do nothing option has been discounted.

Option 2 – Take forward business case with £1.8m capital borrowing

13. The image below shows the proposed location for the two storey studios which would each measure 150m² and allow for between 30-40 capacity within a class for each of the two studios.

Image 1



14. The current class timetable and function hire is unable to be developed due to limited space within the current centre footprint. Whilst the existing sports hall offers the ability for classes, it prevents multiple use and a more diverse timetable to support wider community use and different fitness styles. Parties and private hire have the potential for expansion should there be more space to do so.
15. Dedicated studio space will provide members with a purpose-built environment for classes and support where we have introduced programmes such as Les Mills in the correct setting.
16. Group Exercise is one of the vital elements to a leisure membership and the quality of the timetable has an impact on retention of members. Ensuring 2RM has the space and ability to offer a wide variety of classes and timetables will assist in keeping retention high and therefore grow the service.
17. Income linked to the investment has been calculated on uplifts in membership and casual pay as you go class bookings alongside external facility hire, increased sports hall usage, holiday clubs and secondary income.

18. An 18% uplift in membership sales has been used in the calculations. UK Active 2025 reports an average annual membership growth of 6.1% across the sector without investment and therefore a realistic target with increased capacity and investment within the centre.
19. The financial assessment can be found in appendix 1 and details inclusion of a sinking fund to ensure any investment does not then put pressure on the MTFP further down the line in terms of maintenance.
20. Preplanning advice has been undertaken to inform a future planning application.
21. The proposed timeline, subject to planning permission, would be to begin construction from September 2026 aiming for a practical completion of July 2027.

Summary of financial implications

22. The financial appraisal assumes £255,000 additional income per annum which assuming an annual 2% inflationary price increase will result in a total additional income of £6.3 million over 20 years.
23. Additional operating costs and major repairs are calculated to be in the region of £47,000 per annum, also using 2% inflationary increase totalling £1.16 million over the 20 year life of this project
24. The borrowing costs calculated using 5.5% BCP low risk interest rate will be £186,782 per annum, a total of £3.7 million over 20 years.
25. The net surplus over the 20 year period is estimated to be £1.4 million or an average of £30,000 per annum in the first 3 years of opening increasing to £46,000 per annum with inflationary price increases.

Risks

26. The additional activity may not be as high as estimated, the model shows an annual initial surplus of £30,000 per annum therefore there is a tolerance level of nearly 12% on the assumed £255,000 income per annum before the scheme runs into deficit. Over the lifetime of the scheme, the tolerance level increases to 22% due to inflationary increases affecting income and expenditure, but fixed borrowing costs.
27. Further tolerance level within the council budgets overall, may be provided by any additional car parking income.
28. Interest rates variability may increase the cost of borrowing, the prevailing PWLB rate of 11 December 2025 is 5.88%, this would increase the cost of borrowing by £7,000 per annum reducing the initial annual average surplus to £23,000 per annum.

VAT Implications

29. Following the 2023 change in the VAT legislation, sports and leisure services provided by local authorities are no longer treated as exempt activities. Instead, they are classified as statutory non-business services. This means that the partial exemption no longer applies when investing into leisure centres. Additionally, 2RM Leisure Centre is opted to tax which means that any hire income not directly relating to sporting activities is subject to VAT at standard rate.
30. Based on the type of projected income streams following the completion of the new extension, none of the activities would be treated as exempt for VAT purposes. As a

result, all VAT incurred on the capital project will be fully reclaimable (subject to normal VAT rules, e.g. procurement by BCP and invoice addressed to the Council).

31. The table below details the overview of the capital investment and income generation

Table 1

Key Financial data - over 20 years	
Capital Outlay	£000 1,779
Financial Viability	
New income over 20 years	(6,320)
New operational expenses over 20 years	917
Sinking fund for major repairs	248
Borrowing Requirement (repaid over 20 years asset useful life)	1,779
Interest on prudential borrowing (@ 5.5% over 20 years)	1,957
Net 20 year surplus	(1,419)
Projected Cashflow Summary	
Cumulative surplus over 3 year MTFP (2026/27 to 2028/29)	(89)
Cumulative surplus years 4 - 20 (2026/27 to 2041/42)	(1,330)
Net 20 year surplus (including Risk Premium)	(1,419)
Average surplus per annum - first 3 years (5.5% low risk interest rate)	(30)
Average surplus per annum - first 10 years (5.5% low risk interest rate)	(46)
Average surplus per annum - first 3 years (5.58% prevailing interest rate 11/12/25)	(23)
Average surplus per annum - first 10 years (5.58% prevailing interest rate 11/12/25)	(39)

Summary of legal implications

32. It remains necessary to comply with all relevant procurement requirements, including BCP Council's Financial Regulations and the Public Contracts Regulations 2015 and the Procurement Act 2023 (where applicable) for any other aspects of the works that are to be carried out by third parties under contract and purchase of equipment and/or materials.

33. In addition, it is necessary to comply with all requirements in respect of subsidy control, planning, Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL), any leases, property, Land Registry, land ownership, any contracts, funding conditions, funding applications, borrowing, capital borrowing, BCP Council's Constitution (including the Financial Regulations), [requirements of full Council], where applicable.

Summary of human resources implications

34. The staffing structure in terms of building management is already in place within the Leisure Centre and therefore will not require dedicated staff in addition to the duty management of the site.

35. Staffing requirements for classes are on a timetable basis with a mixture of casual and contracted staff undertaking these.

Summary of sustainability impact

36. The planning application will consider biodiversity, and the proposed timeline takes into account environmental factors such as nesting season between March and August.
37. During the construction phase best practice measures will be incorporated to sort and reuse materials generated by the demolition of the existing buildings/hardstanding etc, and where practicable new materials will be sourced locally.
38. The building will seek an improvement in the Fabric Energy Efficiency Standard over and above current Building Regulations. This measure will achieve a permanent improvement in Energy efficiency way beyond the life of any renewable energy source.
39. Overall, with the considered approach by the design team and client, the proposals will meet the requirements of Sustainability, as required and in accordance with paragraph 39 of the council's Local List of Requirements for planning applications.

Summary of public health implications

40. Taking forward option 2 will provide the opportunities for increased fitness and activity amongst residents and allow for development of class timetables to support a wide variety of classes for different abilities better delivering for community needs.
41. A wider choice and ability for specialist programmes will support the growth of the GP referral scheme and the transition of members from the referral into membership.

Summary of equality implications

42. An EIA conversation has been undertaken and reviewed by the Equality team.
43. Additional timetabling will allow greater consideration for the physical health, mental health, rehabilitation, early intervention, child and adult education, special educational needs, accessible needs, inclusivity and culture focused services.

Summary of risk assessment

Risk	Level	Mitigation
Financial – overspend or not meeting income targets	Medium	Project board to monitor financial reporting throughout work including the pre work on sales and marketing plan
Reputational – planning permission	Low	Pre-planning advice has been sort and recommendations taken forward ahead of planning application
Compliance	Low	A detailed project plan and project board will have governance and oversight on project to ensure compliance

Background papers

Built Facilities Assessment

Appendices

Appendix 1 – Financial assessment

Appendix 2 – Feasibility report (exempt)