Committee(s)	Dated:
Port Health and Environmental Services Committee	26 November 2019
Subject: 49th City of London Thames Fishery Research Experiment	**Public**
Report of: Director of Markets and Consumer Protection	**For Decision**
Report author: Gavin Stedman, Port Health & Public Protection Director	

Summary

The purpose of this report is to inform your Committee of the outcome of the 47th City of London Thames Fishery Research Experiment which took place on Saturday 12 October 2019 along the foreshore of the River Thames, downriver from the Port Health Lower Thames Office in Denton, Gravesend.

Recommendation(s)

Members are asked to:

- Note the content of this report;
- Review and approve the grant of £5,460 from City's Cash to partially fund the 2020 event;
- Approve the 48th City of London Thames Fishery Research Experiment to take place in 2020 (date to be confirmed).

Main Report

Background

1. The Thames Fishery Research Experiment, which was first held in 1973, is an annual angling event held along the foreshore of the River Thames, one and a half miles downriver from the Port Health River Divisional Office in Denton, Gravesend.

2. Your Committee has a long association with this event which is organised in collaboration with the Thames Angling Preservation Society and the Environment Agency. Financial contributions were received this year from The Fishmongers' Company; the Port of London Authority (PLA) which supports the Schools' Trophy; Thames Water; and DP World Ltd. The Water Conservators' Company again donated a prize for the Biodiversity Award.

3. The objective of the Experiment is to establish the environmental condition of the Thames through the number and size of fish species in evidence. Judging is based on the greatest variety of fish caught and a scoring system which rates fish according to scarcity and significance in the context of a cleaner river.

4. The Experiment encourages sustainability and conservation through the rules of the competition which require young and undersize fish to be returned immediately to the river once recorded.

5. The results of the Experiment provide valuable data to the Environment Agency, Thames Angling Preservation Society and members of the river community. It has the unique advantage of linking the recreational angling sector with conservation and scientific study. The event also encourages young people to take part in angling and develop an awareness and interest in the environmental condition of our rivers.

Current Position

6. On Saturday 12 October 2019, 64 adult anglers representing eight teams competed for the Lady Howard Trophy which was awarded to the team with the highest score. Additionally, school teams consisting of pupils from the City of London School for Girls and Gravesend Grammar School competed for the PLA-sponsored Schools' Trophy. Details of all the competing teams are shown in the summary of results provided in the Appendix to this report.

7. Prizes were also awarded for the largest/best fish and the best individual catch by an adult and by a member of a school team. In addition, the angler with the overall catch judged to most demonstrate the continuing health and improvement of the River Thames was presented with the Biodiversity Award, which is sponsored by the Worshipful Company of Water Conservators.

8. Fishing took place between 09:00 and 13:00 and was followed by judging of the largest/best fish by the Thames Angling Preservation Society and The Fishmongers' Company. Competitors and guests then gathered in a marquee for lunch and the presentation of awards by esteemed guests. Commemorative badges were presented to all newcomers by your Chairman.

9. The event was attended by:
   - Alderman Sir Andrew Parmley
   - Alderman and Sheriff Professor Michael Mainelli
   - Sheriff Christopher Hayward
   - Chairman of Policy and Resources Committee, Deputy Catherine McGuinness
   - Sir David and Lady Valerie Howard
   - The Mayor and Mayoress of Gravesham, Cllr Gurdip Ram Bungar and Mrs Nanjo Kaur Bungar
   - Mr Mark Lane, Master of the Worshipful Company of Water Conservators
   - Members of the Port Health and Environmental Services Committee

Results

10. 375 fish of 7 species were caught this year, 320 more than the previous year's total of 55 fish. The number of species represented in the catch was also higher than last year's 6 species.

11. Details of the fish caught were recorded by stewards and points were awarded based on the recognised scoring system.

Number Caught	Species	Minimum Size		Maximum Size	
		cm	inches	cm	inches
187	Whiting	11	4.3	36	14.2
128	Pouting	12	4.7	33	13.0
35	Flounder	12	4.7	34	13.4
8	Eel	16	6.3	43	16.9
6	Bass	20	7.9	32	12.6
6	Sole	12	4.7	34	13.4
5	Crab	3	1.2	11	4.3

Feedback from stakeholders

12. Representatives of the Institute of Fisheries Management and the recreational angling community have provided feedback on the Thames Fishery Research Experiment and its results. They acknowledge its importance in terms of providing valuable information about the environmental condition of the River Thames and in supporting river users.

The Institute of Fisheries Management

13. In 1992, the Environment Agency devised the modern Thames estuary fish survey programme, which became the national role model to meet the requirements of the Water Framework Directive. Historic data sets are invaluable in the context of understanding how fish ecology functions in highly dynamic places such as estuaries.

14. Before that work began, the only historic data sets that existed in the Thames were from power station intakes, most now closed. The Thames Fishery Research Experiment, with its long and consistent history back to 1973, stood out as a best practice example.

15. The Institute promotes and encourages more sustainable fisheries management. This has to be based upon a sound evidence base. Estuaries are some of the most productive ecosystems on the planet, supporting major marine fish nursery grounds as well as acting as vital migration corridors for a broad range of life stages and species. However, they are also highly dynamic, with most fish moving continuously in response to rapidly changing flows, salinity, temperature and their own seasonal rhythms. Long term data sets are

vital to our growing understanding. The Thames Fishery Research Experiment remains a best practice example for others to follow.

The recreational angling community

16. A well selected tide and no significant rain during the fishing times meant the experiment ran smoothly. Anglers were able to reach the water with a relatively short cast for the duration and the Environment Agency team greatly assisted by marking the fishing zones to allow plenty of space.

17. The dominant species was again Whiting but less so compared to previous years. Good numbers of Pouting between 17cm and 19cm were landed, measured and returned. These made up over one third of the total catch of 375 fish: a good sign from a species that has been low in numbers for some time. With the changeover from Summer to Winter species well underway, it was good to see Bass, Eels and Sole included in the seven species landed during the event.

18. There have been a few surprises thrown up by the river and across the estuary over the last 12 months. Apart from the well-publicised visits from Beluga and Pilot Whales, Anchovies were reported by anglers as a by-catch. A few Ballan Wrasse were reported from Southend Pier and we are now seeing Juvenile Squid, so tiny they must be spawning in the river.

19. There are a few sizable Plaice around and further out in the estuary, large female Tope to 60lb have been landed, tagged and released. Vast beds of King Ragworm have colonised the mud flats opposite Southchurch, something not seen since the 1980's.

20. The team from the City of London School for Girls team delivered a second consecutive win landing 19 fish and demonstrating how much they have learned from their volunteer coaches, year on year. Young people are key to the future of, not just angling, but also educating us as to the health of this great river. Some of the angling teams have offered to help coach and provide bait/tackle to an additional school team should a future opportunity arise.

21. Our policy of catching fish, improving handling skills, temporarily keeping them in a bucket and returning them gently to the water is paying off. Whiting, in particular, are a fragile fish. However, there has been a clear reduction in mortality rate since this policy was introduced and this gives a much improved perception of using angling as a method of recording fish life.

Financial summary

22. Funding was provided through a grant of £5,460 from City's Cash, together with contributions of £750 from The Fishmongers' company; £225 from the Port of London Authority; £500 from Thames Water; and £350 from DP World Ltd.

23. The total cost of this year's event was £9,305 and the projected cost to my local risk budget is therefore £2,020. The cost this year was £1,169 less than in 2018;

this was largely due to additional expenditure in 2018 to replenish our stock of commemorative badges. These figures do not include staff costs or use of in-house resources.

Proposals

24. The March 2016 Policy and Resources Committee agreed the transfer of funding commitments from Finance Grants Sub Committee to the relevant Committees for ongoing administration.

25. As a result of this transfer, your Committee is required to review and approve the annual grant from City's Cash (which will be £5,460 in 2020/21) to deliver the Thames Fishery Research Experiment.

26. I recommend that your Committee approves the continuation of funding from City's Cash towards this event, which provides valuable scientific information and supports the angling community, so that the 48th City of London Thames Fishery Research Experiment may take place in 2020 (date to be confirmed).

Corporate & Strategic Implications

27. The City of London Thames Fishery Research Experiment encourages sustainability and conservation through the rules of the competition which require young and undersize fish to be returned immediately to the river once recorded. Eels are not permitted to be taken away from the riverside due to the low numbers in the Thames and, in accordance with Marine Management Organisation rules, each angler may retain only one bass.

28. The continued support of your Committee has demonstrated the City's commitment to supporting communities.

Conclusion

29. The 2019 City of London Thames Fishery Research Experiment was a successful event which was well supported and received by Members and guests. It again provided valuable data and information to associated organisations and the recreational angling community.

Appendices

- Appendix – Summary of Results

Gavin Stedman
Port Health & Public Protection Director
Department of Markets and Consumer Protection
T: 020 7332 3438
E: gavin.stedman@cityoflondon.gov.uk

Appendix

47th City of London Thames Fishery Research Experiment
Summary of Results

Lady Howard Trophy

Place	Team	Fish Caught	Points
1	Essex County Angling Team	75	385
2	Kent Angling Team	67	355
3	Public Services Angling Team	52	310
4	Charles Stanley Angling Team	48	255
5	PLA Angling Team	37	235
6	Thamesiders Angling Team	32	160
7	City of London Invitation Angling Team	26	135
8	Port Health & Environmental Services Committee Team	9	33

School's Trophy

Place	Team	Fish Caught	Points
1	City of London School for Girls	19	105
2	Gravesend Grammar School	10	47

Adult Individual Competition

Place	Team	Fish Caught	Points
1	Essex County Angling Team	27	145
2	Kent Angling Team	17	95
3	Public Services Angling Team	18	90

Student Individual Competition

Place	Team	Fish Caught	Points
1	City of London School for Girls	14	75
2	Gravesend Grammar School	6	27
3	City of London School for Girls	2	15

Biodiversity Award

The catch, which in the judges' opinion, best demonstrated the continuing health and improvement of the River Thames was awarded to a member of the PLA Angling Team (3 Flounder, 3 Pouting, 2 Whiting,1 Bass, 1 Sole and 1 Eel).

The Fishmongers' Cup

The best single fish was judged to have been a 34cm Flounder caught by a member of the Kent Angling Team.