

Committee(s)	Dated:
Port Health and Environmental Services Committee	14 November 2023
Subject: 51 st City of London Thames Fishery Research Experiment	Public
Which outcomes in the City Corporation's Corporate Plan does this proposal aim to impact directly?	4, 11
Does this proposal require extra revenue and/or capital spending?	Y
If so, how much?	£4,800
What is the source of Funding?	£4,800 City's Cash Grant
Has this Funding Source been agreed with the Chamberlain's Department?	Y
Report of: Bob Roberts, Interim Executive Director, Environment	For Decision
Report author: Gavin Stedman, Port Health & Public Protection Director	

Summary

This report informs your Committee of the outcome of the 51st City of London Thames Fishery Research Experiment which took place on Saturday 14 October 2023 along the foreshore of the River Thames, at Denton, Gravesend.

In support of the Experiment's focus on promoting conservation, improvements to the angling methodology and scoring system were implemented this year to attempt to reduce fish mortality.

This report also sets out options for the 52nd Experiment in 2024 for your consideration.

Recommendations

Members are asked to:

- Approve the recommended option (a): to proceed with the 52nd City of London Thames Fishery Research Experiment in 2024 in its existing format and scale, accepting the higher cost to the local risk budget.
- Review and approve the grant from City's Cash to partially fund the 2024 Experiment.

Main Report

Background

1. The City of London Thames Fishery Research Experiment has been held annually since 1973. The Experiment takes the form of an angling competition, in which more than 80 anglers from eight adult teams and three youth teams take part.

2. The objective of the Experiment is to establish the environmental condition of the Thames through the variety, number and size of fish species caught using traditional methods. The scoring system rates the catch according to scarcity and significance in the context of a cleaner river.
3. The Experiment encourages sustainability and conservation. The rules comply with guidance issued by the Angling Trust and stewards oversee the anglers to make sure the rules are followed. Participants are advised about the proper handling of fish to minimise mortality, and all young and undersize fish are returned to the river immediately once they have been recorded.
4. The results provide valuable data and information to organisations such as the Environment Agency, the PLA and members of the river community.
5. As one of the oldest 'citizen science' projects, the Experiment has the unique advantage of linking the river's recreational anglers and the wider community whilst encouraging sustainability and conservation. It is also an opportunity for the younger participants to learn from experienced anglers and be encouraged to develop a long-term interest in fishing and marine conservation.

Current Position

6. On Saturday 14 October 2023, 63 adult anglers representing eight teams competed for the Lady Howard Trophy which was awarded to the team with the highest score. Additionally, twelve school-aged anglers, including a team from the City of London School for Girls, competed for the PLA-sponsored Schools' Trophy. All competing teams are listed in the summary of results provided at Appendix A.
7. Prizes were also awarded for the largest/best fish and for the best individual catch by an adult and by a member of a school team. In addition, the angler with the most diverse overall catch 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. Competitors and guests then gathered in a marquee for lunch and the presentation of awards. Commemorative badges were presented to all newcomers by your Chairman, Mary Durcan, who also hosted the event.
9. Principal VIPs / guests were:
 - Alderwoman and Sheriff Dame Susan Langley and Mr Gary Langley
 - Policy Chairman, Deputy Chris Hayward
 - Sir David Howard and Lady Valerie Howard
 - Deputy Mayor of Gravesham, Cllr Daniel King
 - Tom Flood CBE, Walbrook Warden of the Worshipful Company of Water Conservators

Other guests included:

- Members of the Port Health and Environmental Services Committee
- Representatives of:
 - The Fishmongers' Company
 - The Honourable The Irish Society
 - The Environment Agency
 - Port of London Authority
 - The Thames Estuary Partnership
 - Institute of Fisheries Management

Results

10. 167 fish of seven species were caught this year.

2023 Results			
Species	Number Caught	Maximum Size	Minimum Size
Bass	32	49cm	7cm
Dogfish	1	56cm	-
Eel	10	66cm	30cm
Flounder	8	30cm	13cm
Plaice	1	32cm	-
Pouting	103	25cm	11cm
Whiting	12	32cm	12cm

11. Results data for the past 10 years is provided at Appendix B to this report.

Improvements to reduce fish mortality

12. In order to reduce fish mortality, particularly that of whiting which is a more fragile species, the Experiment's angling methodology and scoring system were amended this year. Improvements included:

- An updated 'fish handling code of practice' which all anglers undertook to comply with.
- A reduction in the number of points awarded for whiting, and an increase in points awarded for rarer species. This was intended to incentivise anglers to target species differently.
- To minimise the handling of fish, and the length of time that they were out of the water, the size of whiting was estimated rather than each fish being measured manually.

13. You will note from Appendix B that between 2015 and 2022, whiting was the most frequently caught species. In 2023 only 12 whiting were caught, which suggests that the improvements have had the intended effect of reducing the impact on this sensitive species. In 2014 (when flounder were the most caught species) there were more whiting caught (19) representing 16% of the entire catch that day, compared to 7% of the catch for this year's Experiment.

However, temperature and environmental conditions also have an impact on the presence of species in the river. Subjectively, there was less mortality witnessed this year than in previous years.

14. A further advantage realised was greater collaboration between team captains who were able to pool their wealth of knowledge and experience to fully consider and suggest the solutions and improvements. They will be reviewing the benefits seen and have already suggested further improvements for future years, should your Committee approve the continuation of the Experiment.

Feedback from stakeholders

15. Positive feedback was received from the participating anglers and guests. Stakeholders continue to acknowledge the importance of the Experiment in terms of providing information about the condition of the river Thames and in supporting river users, as well as the reliable historical data set that has been accumulated over the past 51 years.

The recreational angling community

16. The angling community's representative has commented as follows:
17. Prior to this year's Experiment, anglers were consulted to suggest some changes in angling techniques to help reduce fish mortality. The agreed changes were implemented and were deemed a success, with all but a handful of fish being safely returned to the water.
18. Unexpectedly, only 12 whiting were recorded from a total of 167 fish. This is thought to be due to excess fresh water flowing from up-river and higher water temperatures.
19. It was encouraging to see 32 juvenile bass recorded, including a fine adult specimen of 49cm. The river serves as an important nursery for young bass and this is a good sign for the current UK-wide recovery plan.
20. The southern North Sea has seen an explosion in the pouting population this year and this was also reflected in the Experiment with 103 fish being recorded, by far the dominant species.
21. Three full teams of four junior anglers took part again this year with each team having a volunteer coach. Additionally, a specialist casting coach gave each junior a short one-to-one session on the art of casting. This was very well received and strengthened understanding of the importance of proper fish handling techniques and conservation.

Financial summary

22. The total cost of this year's event was £12,426.92.
23. Funding was provided through a grant of £4,800 from City's Cash. We also received financial contributions of £250 from the Port of London Authority; £1,000 from the Thames Angling Preservation Society and £100 from a private donor. Several other organisations were approached with a request for funding, but they were unable to contribute.
24. The remaining cost to the local risk budget was, therefore, £6,276.92.

Options

25. Over the past 51 years, the Thames Fishery Research Experiment has become a highly regarded event which brings together individuals and groups with an interest in the river Thames. It is one of the longest running 'citizen science' projects, producing a reliable historical scientific data set which is valued by stakeholders.
26. Despite financial contributions from some partner organisations, approximately half of the cost is charged to the local risk budget and this amount is likely to increase year on year. When deciding whether to approve the Experiment in 2024, your Committee is asked to consider whether the benefits of the event outweigh the rising costs, therefore a number of delivery options have been prepared:
 - a) Proceed with the 52nd City of London Thames Fishery Research Experiment in its existing format and scale. That is, with a full complement of anglers and guests, a full sit-down meal and presentation ceremony in a marquee for up to 150 people. This would involve accepting the cost to the local risk budget. **Recommended**
 - b) Proceed with the 52nd City of London Thames Fishery Research Experiment on a reduced scale, comprising the experiment only. This would be similar to the arrangements in 2020 whereby only anglers, stewards and a few key guests attend. Simple catering would be provided, but no formal sit-down meal. This option would reduce costs and have the advantage of being able to select angling times based upon optimal tidal conditions. However, it would remove the 'community', collaborative element of the day and may reduce the likelihood of receiving practical support and financial contributions from partner organisations. **Not Recommended.**
 - c) Do not continue to hold the City of London Thames Fishery Research Experiment, leaving 2023's 51st anniversary event as the final occurrence. **Not Recommended.**

Proposals

27. Option a) is recommended as a way to proceed with the 52nd Thames Fishery Research Experiment in 2024. This option does impact on the local risk budget, and the other options may need to be reconsidered in future years.
28. 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.
29. Should you choose to proceed with the 52nd Experiment, you are also required to review and approve the annual grant from City's Cash to deliver the Experiment. The amount of the proposed grant for the Fishing Experiment in 2024/25 is £4,800.

Corporate & Strategic Implications

30. **Strategic implications** - The City of London Thames Fishery Research Experiment supports the aims and outcomes of the City's Corporate Plan 2018-23, particularly:
 - 4a. *Bring individuals and communities together to share experiences and promote wellbeing, mutual respect and tolerance.*
 - 11a. *Provide a clean environment and drive down the negative effects of our own activities.*
 - 11c. *Provide environmental stewardship and advocacy, in use of resources, emissions, conservation, greening, biodiversity and access to nature.*
31. **Financial implications** – The Experiment is partly funded by a grant from City's Cash and from financial contributions made by partner organisations. The balance is paid from the local risk budget. Financial implications are balanced against the non-financial benefits when deciding whether to proceed with the 52nd Experiment and the format it will take.
32. **Climate implications** - The City of London Thames Fishery Research Experiment encourages sustainability and conservation. It is one of the oldest 'citizen science' projects and encourages young people to become involved in conservation of the river Thames.

Conclusion

33. The 51st City of London Thames Fishery Research Experiment was a successful event which was well supported and enjoyed by all who took part. Additional measures were introduced this year to reduce fish mortality, which appear to have been successful. Further improvements have been suggested for future years, should your Committee approve the continuation of the Experiment.
34. The Experiment itself again provided valuable data and information to associated organisations and the recreational angling community.

Appendices

- Appendix A – Summary of results
- Appendix B – Results data 2014-2023

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