City of London Corporation Committee Report

Committee(s): Port Health and Environmental Services Committee	**Dated:** 21/07/2026
Subject: City of London Thames Fishery Research Experiment	**Public report:** For Decision
This proposal: • **delivers Corporate Plan 2024-29 outcomes**	• Leading Sustainable Environment • Diverse Engaged Communities
Does this proposal require extra revenue and/or capital spending?	Yes
If so, how much?	£4,800
What is the source of Funding?	City's Estate Grant
Has this Funding Source been agreed with the Chamberlain's Department?	Yes
Report of:	Katie Stewart, Executive Director Environment
Report author:	Gavin Stedman, Environment Department

Summary

This report presents a summary of the 53rd City of London Thames Fishery Research Experiment, which was held on 4 October 2025 and received positive feedback from participants and guests. To develop a more scientific and collaborative approach to the Experiment, the City partnered with the University of Essex and University Centre Sparsholt, who linked the Experiment into their ongoing research programmes. Students collected fish samples to study the impacts of river pollution on fish health and survival. Though few fish were caught, researchers found the work valuable and plan to participate again in 2026. A summary of the students' findings is included in the appendices.

Anglers continued to be instrumental in seeking opportunities to further improve the competition's methodology and promote sustainable angling techniques. They were again proactive in supporting the involvement of young anglers, encouraging their interest in marine conservation. Feedback from the angling community is included within this report.

This report also provides details of the 54th Experiment, to be held on 10 October 2026. Your Committee is asked to approve the annual grant of £4,800 from the City's Estate fund to partially finance the 54th Experiment.

Recommendations

Members are asked to review and approve the grant of £4,800 from the City's Estate to partially fund the 54th City of London Thames Fishery Research Experiment, which will take place on 10 October 2026.

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, the results of which form a survey of the numbers and species of fish present in the river during a four-hour period each year. It is organised by the City, with the support of the angling community and organisations such as the Thames Angling Preservation Society, the Environment Agency and the Port of London Authority (PLA), with whom the results are shared.

2. The Experiment encourages sustainability and conservation. The competition rules comply with advice and guidance issued by the Angling Trust and participants are advised about the proper handling of fish to minimise mortality. All young and undersize fish are returned to the river immediately once they have been recorded.

3. As a long running 'citizen science' project, the Experiment has the unique advantage of linking the river's recreational angling community, and local communities, with sustainability and conservation. It is also an opportunity for younger participants to learn from experienced anglers and be encouraged to develop a long-term interest in fishing and marine conservation.

4. We now hold 53 years' worth of valuable data on the numbers and species of fish present at the time of each Experiment. However, collection of associated environmental data has been limited and somewhat sporadic over the life of the Experiment and, prior to 2025, more detailed and scientific analysis of the results had never been undertaken.

5. Since 2024, we have made improvements to strengthen the scientific nature of the Experiment, introducing a process to collect water temperature and salinity readings. In 2025, we partnered with the University of Essex and University Centre Sparsholt who linked the Experiment to their ongoing research into river pollution and fish health, supporting a shared goal of better understanding the biodiversity and health of the River Thames.

Current Position

6. On Saturday, 4 October 2025, 73 anglers, representing 11 teams, participated in an angling competition over a period of four hours, catching a total of 50 fish

consisting of 5 species. Anglers competed for a range of team and individual prizes, including those sponsored by the PLA; The Fishmongers' Company; and the Worshipful Company of Water Conservators. Details of the competing teams and winners are provided at Appendix A.

7. For comparison, the data from the last 15 years is provided at Appendix B.

8. Researchers and students from the University of Essex and University Centre Sparsholt also attended, collecting samples of fish caught for scientific analysis to inform their ongoing research studies into the impact of river pollution on fish health and growth. The research projects and sampling methodology were fully approved by the Ethics Board of each university.

9. In total, 8 bass specimen and 12 flounder were retained, in accordance with a dispensation granted by the Kent and Essex Inshore Fisheries and Conservation Authority (IFCA). To further promote sustainability, the number of fish taken was minimised by the students from each university sharing the specimen; each taking the parts required for their own study. A summary of each study and results is provided at Appendices C and D.

10. The City's collaboration with the universities proved mutually beneficial, providing valuable data for the researchers and enabling the City to start to compile a more extensive dataset. It was also positively received by the anglers who are keen to contribute to research which will support marine conservation, rather than simply taking part in a competition.

Feedback from stakeholders

11. Participating anglers, guests and researchers provided positive feedback on the 2025 Experiment. Stakeholders acknowledge the Experiment's significance in evaluating the condition of the River Thames and the health of the species that live within it. The event also fosters a sense of community among river stakeholders and serves an educational purpose by involving young people.

12. The lead researcher from each of the partner academic establishments has emphasised the benefits of their participation: it is valuable for their overarching research programmes and for the dissertations of their individual students. Both intend to take part again in 2026.

13. The angling community's representative has commented as follows:

14. With the event being held in early October, sea temperatures were higher than in previous years and the catch was dominated by late summer species visiting this section of the River Thames, partly explaining the low numbers of fish caught. However, another contributing factor was the challenging weather conditions, with very strong north westerly winds affecting the fishing equipment and heavy overnight rain resulting in high levels of fresh water running downriver.

15. Despite these challenges, the anglers persevered and achieved a return of 50 fish of five species (bass, eel, flounder, pouting and sole). A highlight was the increase in European Eels caught, measured and released. Eels have been in decline for the last couple of decades and have protected status. This decline has been reflected in our past results. However, reports from around the UK suggest they are recovering and we were pleased to record 25 specimens with the largest being some 55cm in length.

16. Again, we are pleased to report that there were zero reports of fish mortality, with all but the authorised specimens being safely returned to the river.

17. This year saw the establishment of scientific research on the fish that were landed, with students from Essex University and University Centre Sparsholt collecting sample specimens for study. Our anglers have a great interest in marine conservation and sustainability and were, therefore, very pleased to have the opportunity to contribute to this important research, regarding it as a positive step forward for the Experiment and its future.

18. We continue to increase our support for young anglers from our local schools and wider community. This year, we had a full complement of 12 youth team members. A donation from the Thames Angling Preservation Society enabled the purchase of eight new sets of angling equipment for the young participants. There was also a positive response from the attending teachers, and we will explore ways of linking the Experiment results to science study in the classroom.

19. This important work with young people is starting to reap rewards: we now have two former youth team members participating in adult teams, with the potential of a further ‘promotion’ in the near future. This will help to reduce the increasing angling participant age profile and help establish succession plans for each team.

Financial Summary

20. The total cost of the 2025 event was £15,312.

21. Funding was provided through a grant of £4,800 from City’s Cash (now City’s Estate). Financial contributions were also received from the Fishmongers’ Company (£750); the PLA (£250); and the Thames Angling Preservation Society. In addition, a trophy was again donated by the Worshipful Company of Water Conservators.

22. The remaining cost to the local risk budget was £8,248.

Next steps

23. The 54th City of London Thames Fishery Research Experiment will be held on Saturday 10 October 2026. This year's event will incorporate a more informal meal to further enhance networking opportunities. Other minor adjustments will be made to ensure value for money. However, the primary objective of the Experiment itself will be preserved.

Proposal

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. Members are asked to review and approve the annual grant from City's Estate fund to deliver the Experiment. The amount of the proposed grant for the Fishing Experiment in 2026/27 is £4,800.

Corporate and strategic implications

Strategic implications - The City of London Thames Fishery Research Project supports the aims and outcomes of the City's Corporate Plan 2024-2029, particularly 'Diverse Engaged Communities' and 'Leading Sustainable Environment'.

Financial implications - The Experiment is partly funded by a grant from City's Estate 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 of the Experiment. Some changes are being introduced in 2026 to ensure better value for money.

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

The 53rd City of London Thames Fishery Research Experiment was a successful event which was well supported and valued by all who took part. Continued improvements to the angling methodology resulted in reduced fish mortality rates. In addition, partnership with two academic establishments strengthened the scientific nature of the Experiment, enhancing data collection and enabling research and analysis which will contribute to a broader understanding of the biodiversity and health of the River Thames.

The project aims to facilitate comprehensive collaboration with stakeholders, government agencies, and educational establishments, alongside the recreational angling community. This collaborative approach may bolster and guide the progress of future scientific research.

Appendices

- Appendix A: Summary of competition results and winners 2025
- Appendix B: Fishing Experiment statistics 2011-2025
- Appendix C: University of Essex Research Report
- Appendix D: University Centre Sparsholt Research Report

Contact

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