

Brighton & Hove City Council

Tourism, Equalities, Communities and Culture Committee

Agenda Item 64

Subject: Lifeguard Service 2023

Date of meeting: 9 March 2023

Report of: Executive Director Economy, Environment and Culture

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Tourism and Sport
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Ward(s) affected: All

For general release

1. Purpose of the report and policy context

- 1.1 This report outlines the proposed approach to delivering a beach Lifeguard Service on Brighton & Hove's beaches during the 2023 summer season (May-September) and takes account of the decision at Budget Council on 23 February 2023 to reduce the service budget by £100,000.
- 1.2 The proposal is to have four main lifeguard stations operating during the summer season with an additional three during the six-week school holidays. This is predicated on robust beach risk assessments that identify the environmental, physical and human hazards along the coastline and plan appropriate mitigating actions in line with available resources. The location and nature of any additional lifeguard stations, for part or all of the season, will follow the same risk-based approach.
- 1.3 The service arrangements for 2023 will be interim as options for a longer-term, sustainable delivery model are designed. An initial indication of the Royal National Lifeboat Institution (RNLI) delivery model, as a possible alternative option, is included in this report for reference. A report on the options for longer-term provision of a Lifeguard Service will be brought to a future committee meeting for decision.

2. Recommendations

That the committee:

- 2.1 Note the risk-based approach to prioritising the beaches that will have lifeguard stations for the 2023 summer season (May – September).
- 2.2 Agree to focus core lifeguard resources on four beaches during the 2023 season, as outlined in para 4.2, based on the findings and control measures identified through the beach risk assessment process.

- 2.3 Agree that additional lifeguards during the six-week school holiday period will be stationed on three further beach areas, as outlined in para 4.5, following the same risk-based approach.
- 2.4 Agree to progress a review of options for the longer-term delivery of a sustainable Lifeguard Service, including options to increase funding through sponsorship and/or for the RNLI to deliver the service on the Council's behalf.

3. Context and background information

- 3.1 Lifeguards patrol Brighton & Hove's beaches from the end of May until the end of the school holidays in September. During the six-week school summer holiday period additional lifeguards are employed to help manage the large influx of visitors to the beach and bathers in the sea. The service also has a boat and quad bikes to support patrols.
- 3.2 Lifeguards not only act as first responders to incidents in the sea, but also provide preventative safety advice and first aid, as well as helping to find lost children, provision of tourist information and enforcement of byelaws. Since the Covid-19 pandemic numbers of visitors to the beach have increased and a wider range of activities are undertaken both in the water and on land. During the 2022 season an estimated 750,000 people used the lifeguarded beaches and 143,000 went in the water¹. The Lifeguard service:
- Provided more than 70,000 preventative actions by issuing advice via the lifeguard tower public address system.
 - Helped reunite 171 missing people.
 - Tackled 81 incidents of anti-social behaviour and abuse.
 - Handled 11 mental health incidents.
 - Responded to 92 major and non-life-threatening incidents.
 - Saved 40 lives.
- 3.3 Whilst lifeguards play an important role in protecting beachgoers, there is no statutory duty for the Council to provide this service.
- 3.4 The Lifeguard Service currently operates from 10 designated beach areas along the city's 13km of coastline from Saltdean to Hove Lagoon during May to September. Red and yellow flags on the beaches highlight the designated swim areas that are supervised by lifeguards. Swim buoys are located in the water in a box formation to define a swim zone. Seven of the beaches have lifeguard stations throughout the summer season with an additional three beaches lifeguarded during the school holidays.
- 3.5 At the Budget Council meeting on 23 February 2023 Councillors agreed to remove £100,000 from the service budget. As a result of this decision the number of lifeguard stations operated during the summer season will be reduced for the service to operate within budget. To ensure there is a robust,

¹ Estimates taken by Lifeguards for beach and water users between their flags during operational hours. These figures will not include people using the promenade or non-lifeguarded beach areas.

risk-based approach to this reduction officers have reviewed the risks to beachgoers using industry-standard assessments and guidance. These identify the environmental, human and physical hazards present on the seafront and consider what mitigating actions can be taken to reduce the risks to beach and sea users.

- 3.6 Budget Council also agreed an amendment to allocate £60,000 on a one-off basis towards maintaining tourism facilities, including the Lifeguard Service. The Executive Director Environment, Economy and Culture has the delegated authority to apply this to services and it will be used to support additional risk mitigation and safety measures along the city's seafront during 2023. The core focus will remain on resourcing those beaches with the greatest number of visitors, hazards, and incidents. This will assist with the transition to a longer-term, more sustainable model to be developed during the year and introduced from 2024.

4. Interim arrangements for the Lifeguard Service in 2023

- 4.1 To ensure a Lifeguard Service is in operation for the 2023 summer season recruitment to the seasonal seafront coordinator and experienced lifeguard posts has already begun. This is because an intensive period of recruitment, testing and training is required for skilled staff to be in place and ready to deliver the service from 25 May 2023.

- 4.2 As well as ensuring all other possible measures are planned and put in place to protect beachgoers during the busy summer season, it is proposed to focus the available lifeguard resources on the following beach areas between May and September 2023:

- **West Street / Seafront Office** (This location in 2022 had 34% of beach and water users, 40% of preventative advice issued, 23% of missing people, 27% of major and non-life-threatening incidents)
- **Palace Pier West** (This location in 2022 had 11% of beach and water users, 6% of preventative advice issued, 8% of missing people, 18% of major and non-life-threatening incidents)
- **Palace Pier East** (This location in 2022 had 24% of beach and water users, 24% of preventative advice issued, 8% of missing people, 17% of major and non-life-threatening incidents)
- **King Alfred** (This location in 2022 had 8% of beach and water users, 5% of preventative advice issued, 1% of missing people, 7% of major and non-life-threatening incidents)

- 4.3 These beaches have been identified as the highest risk based on several key factors in the beach risk assessments:

- Number of beachgoers during the summer season
- Number of water users during the summer season
- Location of previously recorded major and non-life-threatening incidents
- Type of incidents that occur and likely activities of beachgoers
- Presence of physical hazards, e.g. groynes and steep slopes

- Surf conditions, including rip currents
 - Lone working and staff welfare
- 4.4 The lifeguards stationed on these beaches will continue to be qualified, trained, and physically capable individuals. They will be equipped with the full range of first responder tools and rescue kit, working as a team in conjunction with lifeguard co-ordinators and Seafront Team to prevent incidents and save lives.
- 4.5 Additional lifeguard stations during the six-week school summer holiday period will be stationed on the next highest risk stretches of coastline, following the same approach outlined above and taking into consideration infrastructure to support rapid response. The following beaches have also been assessed as a medium – high risk by the RNLI in previous years:
- **Saltdean** (This location had c. 20,000 visitors during the 2022 school holidays)
 - **West Pier / Bandstand** (This location had c. 28,000 visitors during the 2022 school holidays)
 - **Hove Lawns** (This location had c. 20,000 visitors during the 2022 school holidays)
- 4.6 Other measures will be in place to ensure beach visitors are aware of hazards and to further mitigate the likelihood or impact of incidents occurring (outlined in Appendix 1).

5. Analysis and consideration of alternative options

- 5.1 Options for the ongoing provision of a Lifeguard Service on the city's beaches will be developed throughout 2023, with a view to reshaping the service for summer 2024. A more sustainable delivery model is required to operate within the service budget and all options will be explored. This will include the potential for lifeguard station sponsorship to provide an income stream and/or the service being delivered under contract with the charity Royal National Lifeboat Institution (RNLI) who provide both lifeboat search and rescue services and seasonal lifeguard services.
- 5.2 An initial assessment of the option to work in partnership with the RNLI to deliver the service indicates that the cost could be similar for the Council, and there would still be a need to resize the service to operate within the revised budget. The Institution already provides a Lifeguard Service on 145 beaches across the UK and Channel Islands, including neighbouring West and East Sussex and similar resorts such as Bournemouth. The RNLI also delivers an on-call 24/7 lifeboat search and rescue service along the Sussex coastline from Brighton.
- 5.3 The RNLI operates a joint funding arrangement for their Lifeguard Service. The service would continue to be delivered by paid lifeguards and the Council's contribution would be expected to cover 100% of the lifeguard salaries. The Institution would cover the costs to deliver training, provide safety equipment, and supervise and manage the service. They would

require a seafront site to operate their support centre from and would seek permission to fundraise and promote the RNLI on the city's beaches during the summer season. There would continue to be equipment, training and maintenance costs for the Council to run the Seafront Office all-year-round alongside the Lifeguard Service.

- 5.4 If the RNLI were to provide a Lifeguard Service on Brighton and Hove's beaches, they have indicated that the 2023 season would provide a useful period to plan and mobilise a team for 2024. However, there is not enough time for the RNLI to mobilise in 2023. Any change in service would draw on the knowledge and expertise of the Seafront Officers who have a comprehensive understanding of the city's unique beach environment. There would also need to be clarity on the respective responsibilities of the Institution and the Seafront Team, so that an effective working relationship and consistent all-year-round seafront service prevails.

6. Community engagement and consultation

- 6.1 The Seafront Team and Lifeguard Service have close working relationships with the emergency services regarding incident response on the seafront. Information about planned changes to the service will be shared and discussed with key agencies in the Safety Advisory Group.
- 6.2 A petition to stop the Lifeguard budget saving received more than 3,000 signatories prior to the Budget Council meeting on 23 February. The proposals in this report aim to prioritise the 2023 service in the highest risk, most actively used areas so that it can continue to benefit the greatest number of beachgoers.
- 6.3 Engagement with representative community groups and seafront stakeholders will be undertaken to understand the wider potential impacts of a reduced Lifeguard Service during the summer.

7. Conclusion

- 7.1 The Lifeguard Service plays an important role in ensuring visitors to Brighton & Hove's beaches can enjoy the coastline safely. However, the Council has no statutory duty to provide this service.
- 7.2 The lifeguards have a significant positive impact during the busy summer season. Service data shows that the four main beaches recommended to retain lifeguards from May to September are those that experience a high number of visitors. They are also where the Lifeguard Service takes the majority of preventative action, responds to the most incidents and handles the most cases of anti-social behaviour, missing people and byelaw enforcement.
- 7.3 Ensuring that these four main beaches and an additional three during the school holidays are covered by the Lifeguard Service in 2023 means that logistically the team can ensure the health and wellbeing needs of staff are

adequately met and that the service is operated in the most cost effective and efficient way.

8. Financial implications

- 8.1 Following the saving agreed at Budget Council on 23 February 2023 the new budget for running the Lifeguard Service is approximately £0.218m. The service will operate within the agreed budget through a focused approach as set out in the report. Any significant variations to budget will be reported as part of the council's monthly budget monitoring process.

Name of finance officer consulted: John Lack Date consulted: 23/02/23

9. Legal implications

- 9.1 There is no statutory duty to provide this service. Section 234 Public Health Act 1936 gives local authorities a general power to provide lifesaving equipment at such places as they see fit. This is discretionary and not mandatory. Sea based recreation is not currently protected by legislation and those who undertake such activity do so at their own risk. The Council can therefore, provide lifeguards but is not under a legal obligation to do so.

Name of lawyer consulted: Joanne Dunyaglo Date consulted 24/02/23

10. Equalities implications

- 10.1 Brighton & Hove beaches are enjoyed by people from all protected groups under the Equality Act 2010 and in recent years the Council has sought to improve beach access for disabled people in particular. The Lifeguard Service takes preventative action and saves lives without prejudice and therefore, a reduced number of lifeguarded beaches has the potential to impact people from all protected groups using the seafront.
- 10.2 However, a key element of the Lifeguard Service involves reuniting missing children with their families and identifying, intercepting and responding to incidents of attempted suicide or deliberate self-harm. As such, a reduction in the number of lifeguards may disproportionately impact younger children and people experiencing mental health crisis.
- 10.3 Whilst the service does not collect ethnicity data on beach visitors, data from Sport England emphasises the considerable disparity in the proportion of Black and Asian people in the UK who do not swim. Those who are also less able or confident swimmers may be further discouraged from going in the water where no lifeguards are stationed.
- 10.4 Brighton & Hove residents are also more likely to be impacted than tourists due to the frequency of their visits to the beach and because the beaches that will no longer be lifeguarded are more likely to be in residential areas, as resources focus on the busy central areas.
- 10.5 An Equality Impact Assessment is included in Appendix 2.

11. Sustainability implications

- 11.1 The Lifeguard Service maintains as low an impact on the beach environment as possible. Lifeguard stations are only set up and operate on the beach during May to September and are stored away from the seafront for the remainder of the year. The lifeguards also help to ensure the city's beaches remain a safe and clean by working with the Seafront Team to enforce byelaws along the coastline.

12. Other Implications

Crime & disorder implications:

- 12.1 As part of their role lifeguards tackle instances of anti-social behaviour and violence or aggression along the seafront. These incidents are often linked to the misuse of alcohol, drugs or as a result of poor mental health. Unfortunately, the Lifeguard Service saw a rise in anti-social behaviour and instances of abuse during the 2022 season.
- 12.2 The beach areas where the majority of these incidents were recorded in 2022 is where the Lifeguard Service will be retained during the 2023 summer season. The Seafront Team also maintains strong, direct links with the Police, Coastguard and Ambulance service, and has good working relationships with these agencies for managing these types of incidents.

Public health implications:

- 12.3 The seafront and bathing areas provide an important setting for participation in sport and physical activity with the subsequent benefit to physical and mental health, and increased wellbeing for users. The absence of lifeguards may discourage people from using those beach areas, however safe bathing zones will continue to be marked and lifeguards stationed in some of the more popular stretches of beach.

Supporting Documentation

Appendices

1. Measures to mitigate risks on Brighton & Hove beaches
2. Equality Impact Assessment

