

Brighton & Hove City Council

Culture, Heritage, Sport, Tourism & Economic Development Committee

Agenda Item 9

Subject: Seasonal Lifeguard Service 2023

Date of meeting: 15 June 2023

Report of: Executive Director Economy, Environment and Culture

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Tourism & 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 extending the Brighton and Hove Beach Lifeguard Service from seven beaches to ten to provide additional lifeguard cover during the busiest weeks of the summer season, including the school holidays starting at the end of July 2023.
- 1.2 The service was reduced for the start of the 2023 summer season following a saving of £0.1m in the service budget from April 2023. To extend the service, additional qualified staff will need to be recruited, tested and trained to ensure that a safe service is delivered. In total, an extra 15 seasonal lifeguards will be required on duty each day to extend the service to all of the beaches that were lifeguarded over the summer of 2022. This is expected to cost up to an additional net £0.093m.

2. Recommendations

That the committee:

- 2.1 Agrees to extend the seasonal lifeguard service to a further three beaches, as outlined in para 4.5 as soon as practicably possible. This is subject to the recruitment and availability of qualified and appropriately trained staff.
- 2.2 Notes the risk-based approach to prioritising the beaches which will have lifeguard stations during the recruitment of additional qualified and trained staff.
- 2.3 Notes the additional financial requirement of net £0.093m to extend the service after budget savings already taken. For 2023/24 financial year this will be covered by service efficiencies across the seafront budget.

3. Context and background information

- 3.1 Lifeguards are stationed on Brighton and Hove beaches from the end of May until the end of the school holidays at the start of September each year. They 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. Whilst lifeguards play an important role in protecting beachgoers, there is no statutory duty for the Council to provide this service.
- 3.2 Over the past few years, the lifeguard service has been adapted to respond to the pandemic and new ways of working. This has involved redistribution of resources to manage new rescue and staff welfare protocols as well as reflecting the increase in visitor numbers and incidents. As a result, there has been an incremental increase in costs to run the service.
- 3.3 The lifeguard service budget was reduced by £0.1m for 2023/24. In March 2023 the Tourism, Equalities, Communities and Culture Committee agreed a reduced service running from 27 May 2023 that aligned with the smaller budget. As part of the 2023/24 budget setting process an additional one-off £0.06m budget amendment was made available across the Lifeguard Service, Volk's Railway and Visit Brighton.
- 3.4 An intensive period of recruitment, testing, and induction took place between February and May to ensure skilled lifeguards were in place to start delivering the service from 27 May 2023. They are equipped with the full range of first responder tools and rescue kit, working as a team in conjunction with seafront co-ordinators and the wider Seafront Team to prevent incidents and save lives.
- 3.5 Based on an assessment of risk, including visitor numbers, hazards and previous incidents, lifeguards are now stationed until 3 September 2023 at:
- West Street,
 - Palace Pier West,
 - Palace Pier East, and
 - King Alfred.
- 3.6 Additional lifeguard stations are planned on the following beaches from 22 July to 3 September, to provide further cover during the busy school holidays:
- Saltdean,
 - West Pier/Bandstand, and
 - Hove Lawns.
- 3.7 The overall number of lifeguarded beaches has been reduced from ten in 2022 to seven for the 2023 season. Lifeguards have been deployed with the aim of delivering a reduced service well, rather than stretching limited resources across all beaches. This is to ensure a safe, well-managed service is delivered using sufficient levels of cover to protect beach goers, mitigate the number of major incidents, manage high stress situations, and prioritise staff welfare.

3.8 Beaches currently without lifeguards for the 2023 season include Rottingdean; Dukes Mound/Black Rock; and West Hove/Lagoon. If incidents occur on beaches without lifeguards, a member of the lifeguard team will respond if it is practical to do so and does not reduce the levels of safe cover on lifeguarded beaches. Other responders, including the patrol boat, seafront coordinators, and/or seafront officers, as well as partner, emergency service agencies may be called on to deal with the incident. To facilitate a prompt and efficient response, rescue equipment is stored in containers located on non-lifeguarded beaches, should the need to respond arise.

4. Extending the service during the 2023 season

4.1 To extend the current service during the busiest part of the season and cover all previously lifeguarded beaches (ten in total), an additional 15 lifeguards are required on duty each day. This includes provision for additional lifeguards at existing stations to provide greater levels of contingency cover in instances where staffing levels are depleted, e.g. because of absence, major incidents or other extreme circumstances.

4.2 If all 15 lifeguard posts are filled and the service is extended to cover ten beaches from the start of the peak season in July, this will cost the service an anticipated additional £0.153m. Utilising some of the one-off budget amendment and phasing the opening of beaches as the resources become available reduces the additional cost in 2023/24 to up to £0.093m.

4.3 The location and number of lifeguards on the city's beaches follows a risk-based approach. Each beach is designated a risk rating based on a number of key factors:

- 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 Lifeguard resources have been prioritised for the 2023 season on the higher risk beaches and deployed in a way that ensures there are enough lifeguards on duty to safely supervise beach and water users swimming in designated bathing zones. In extreme circumstances, for example overcrowding, extreme weather, or high levels of staff absence, it may be necessary to withdraw lifeguards from a beach because it is no longer possible to operate the service safely.

4.5 To mitigate the risk of this as far as possible, the service will first deploy any additional lifeguard resources to provide extra cover on the highest risk, busiest beaches, before further lifeguard stations are opened. Subsequent lifeguard stations will then be opened on the remaining beaches in the

following order of priority, based on their risk classification and minimum staffing levels:

- Dukes Mound/Black Rock
- West Hove/Lagoon
- Rottingdean

- 4.6 This approach means that the Seafront Team can mobilise additional resources effectively and extend the service in a way that is manageable and safe to operate.
- 4.7 Every lifeguard recruited must meet the swim test requirements, hold a valid UK Beach Lifeguard qualification, complete relevant employment checks, and undertake induction training before they can be stationed on a beach. This process can be fast-tracked in this instance and the service has also sourced a training provider to enable individuals to gain the requisite qualification.

5. Analysis and consideration of alternative options

- 5.1 The full cost of replicating the 2022 Lifeguard service across ten beaches (seven stations from May – September and an additional three during the school summer holidays) is £0.437m. The current operational budget is £0.218m after the £0.1m saving in 2023/24 is applied. The full cost includes employing and training seasonal lifeguards, as well as purchasing and maintaining equipment, vehicles and uniform for the team. The 2023 summer season began on 27 May so whilst it is no longer possible to fully replicate the 2022 service for this year, the proposals in this report aim to reinstate the same levels of lifeguard cover during the busiest weeks of the season.
- 5.2 Options for a more financially sustainable lifeguard service model will continue to be developed throughout 2023, with a view to implementing changes, subject to committee approval, in 2024. All options are being explored, including a strategy for fundraising and sponsorship to provide an additional income stream to support the service and/or the service being delivered under contract by another body.

6. Community engagement and consultation

- 6.1 The Seafront Team has close working relationships with the emergency services regarding incident response along the coast. Information about the revised shape of the service has been shared with key agencies in the Safety Advisory Group and operational protocols updated accordingly.
- 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. There continues to be public interest in the operation of the service because of the number of injuries and fatalities that occur each year on UK beaches.

7. Conclusion

- 7.1 The lifeguard service plays an important role in ensuring visitors to Brighton and Hove's beaches can enjoy the coastline safely. The changes to the lifeguard service for 2023 were implemented to ensure the highest risk, most busy beach areas remain supervised by qualified and trained individuals, whilst operating with a reduced service budget.
- 7.2 There is no statutory duty for the Council to deliver a lifeguard service, but the service is highly valued by the local community and visitors to the city. Lifeguards have a considerable impact on people's experience of the city's beaches, not least as first responders who save lives, but also through taking preventative action.
- 7.3 To ensure that the widest number of visitors can enjoy a safe beach and water experience, the proposal is to extend the 2023 service to include lifeguard stations on further beaches that were previously covered in 2022 during some of the busiest weeks of the summer season. This will cost the service up to an additional £0.093m and be subject to the recruitment, training and availability of additional lifeguard resources.

8. Financial implications

- 8.1 In previous years costs for providing the Lifeguard service had been above budget, but this had been mitigated from efficiencies and increased income within the seafront services budget.
- 8.2 To agree to extend the Lifeguard service from seven beaches to ten during the peak summer season is anticipated to cost an additional £0.153m assuming all resources start at the beginning of the peak season. By utilising the £0.06m one-off budget amendment allocation this reduces the additional cost in 2023/24 to a maximum net £0.093m. No budget has been identified for the remaining cost and will be treated as in-year pressure as part of the council's monthly budget monitoring process until funding is identified.
- 8.3 It should be noted to fully resource and operate the seasonal Lifeguard service as per the 2022 season would require a budget of £0.437m which would require £0.219m additional ongoing funding compared to a 2023/24 base budget of £0.218m.

Name of finance officer consulted: John Lack Date consulted: 01/06/2023

9. Legal implications

- 9.1 Section 234 Public Health Act 1936 gives local authorities a general power to provide lifesaving equipment at such places as they see fit. 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: Alice Rowland Date consulted: 05/06/2023

10. Equalities implications

- 10.1 Brighton and Hove beaches are enjoyed by people from all protected groups under the Equality Act 2010. In recent years the Council has sought to improve beach access for disabled people, having recently installed an accessible boardwalk as part of the Black Rock rejuvenation, made all terrain wheelchairs available along the seafront, and improved the number of Blue Badge parking bays along Madeira Drive. Extending the lifeguard service to include an additional station at the Dukes Mound/Black Rock beach is likely to have a positive impact on disabled beachgoers benefiting from the improved beach access.

11. Sustainability implications

- 11.1 Lifeguards help to ensure the city's beaches remain safe and clean by working within the seafront team to enforce byelaws along the coastline. Extending the lifeguard service is likely to have a positive impact on the wider beach environment.

12. Other Implications

Crime & disorder implications:

- 12.1 As part of their role, lifeguards monitor and 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. Extending the lifeguard service is likely to have a positive impact on the handling of these type of incidents along the seafront.

Public health implications:

- 12.2 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. Extending the lifeguard service will ensure a safer environment for people to undertake beach and water activities.

Supporting Documentation

1. Background documents

1. 'Lifeguard Service 2023', Tourism, Equalities, Communities and Culture Committee, 9 March 2023