

PE1678/I

Scottish Natural Heritage submission of 27 February 2018

Our statutory purpose

Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH) is a non-departmental public body (NDPB) funded by the Scottish Government through Grant-in-Aid. We are the Scottish Government's advisers on issues relating to nature and landscape. Our statutory purpose is to:

- secure the conservation and enhancement of nature and landscapes;
- foster understanding and facilitate their enjoyment of them; and,
- advise on their sustainable use and management.

Scotland's nature and landscapes are recognised internationally, and this natural capital plays an important role in supporting economic growth, improving people's health and wellbeing, adapting to climate change and strengthening communities. We work with partners both nationally and locally to maintain and enhance these assets and to improve the public benefits generated from their sustainable use, both now and in the future.

SNH's role in relation to countryside rangers

SNH inherited the functions of the former Countryside Commission for Scotland relating to countryside rangers. The statutory purposes of rangers are set out in the Countryside (Scotland) Act 1967, as amended in 1981, and grant support for rangers is provided under Section 9 of the Natural Heritage (Scotland) Act 1991.

Prior to 2008 a proportion of most ranger posts were supported by SNH grant aid. Following the 2009 Local Government Finance Distribution Review, SNH funding to local authority ranger services was integrated into their main settlement from the Scottish Government.

SNH and its predecessor organisation has traditionally set the strategic context for countryside rangers in Scotland, including the development of national policy statements. The most recent - [Rangers in Scotland](#) 2008 - was agreed by the SNH Board in March 2008 (see SNH SNH/08/1/3). This statement was prepared with close involvement of a number of key stakeholders including COSLA and SCRA, both of whom were represented on the steering group for the process. Two stakeholder events were also held which were well attended by individual ranger services.

Scottish Government decisions on changes to the funding arrangements for local authority rangers had been made during the course of the preparation of the new policy. The Board paper notes that the production of the statement was supported by key partners as a way of "providing leadership and direction for rangering in Scotland, and helping to raise its profile and illustrate the valuable role it can play" in delivering a wide range of benefits for people and nature. Specifically, the new statement was also intended to

- help to inform the development of outcome agreements between national and local government;

- provide the framework for SNH's future engagement with rangering; and
- allow for the further development and implementation of SNH's approach to funding of non-local authority Ranger Services.

SNH's continuing support for ranger services has contributed across each of the strategic actions in [Rangers in Scotland](#) e.g.

1. better local and national reporting and promotion of the benefits provided by ranger services and the contribution these make to Government policies;
2. greater recognition of the value and important contribution of ranger services by employers, key partner organisations and the public;
3. longer-term planning, management and funding for ranger services by employers;
4. support for the specific activities, projects and initiatives of ranger services from a range of funding partners; and
5. the continued development of a committed, competent and skilled ranger workforce.

We are members of the Ranger Development Partnership* which last met in March 2017. SNH contributes to the biennial Ranger Rendezvous, an event to bring Scottish rangers together for updates and skills development; at the 2016 event we ran a session about the natural health service. We also support Ranger Managers Forum meetings; the most recent one was in 2013.

Since the position statement was finalised, we have prepared two national reports on the work of Scottish rangers, the last one in 2012: <https://www.nature.scot/snh-ranger-services-scotland-achievements-glance>. We encouraged all ranger services to contribute to this, but uptake was low, especially from local authority ranger services. We continue to gather this information from all the ranger services we grant aid. The Ranger Development Partnership is hoping to refresh the reporting framework and again encourage all ranger services to contribute.

SNH reviewed our funding of ranger services in 2016/17. Our declining budget means that we are in the position of being able to provide core funding for a small number of rangers in community and private ranger services, including Rum, Foula, Tiree, Mull and Iona, North Harris, Sanday, Knoydart, Fair Isle, Finlaystone, Hopetoun House, Buccleuch Bowhill, Buccleuch Drumlanrig, Kelburn, Hoddon & Kinmount and Penicuik House Preservation Trust.

In providing three year funding for these ranger services, SNH has ensured that they actively focus on Scottish Government priorities, to achieve the best for the people and nature of Scotland within the scarce resources available. We have required them to:

- *proactively encourage new audiences from SNH target groups including people experiencing disadvantage or social exclusion*
- *contribute to wider rural development and the community empowerment agenda*
- *actively seek alternative funding sources & consider different funding models*

- *actively review & update their activities to keep pace with relevant changes & evolving Scottish priorities.*

We have also funded new project activity by ranger services which we do not core fund, with examples including work with Dundee City Council Ranger Service on developing Dundee's natural health service and the National Trust for Scotland outreach programme delivered through its relatively new community rangers.

SNH does not currently grant aid SCRA, though we have supported particular projects in the past - including the SCRA Junior Ranger Toolkit and the SCRA Continuing Professional Development programme (Scottish Ranger Award). SCRA will attend the SNH/Young Scot *Year of Young People* Parliamentary Reception in March 2018 to promote the Junior Ranger programme.

**Ranger Development Partnership members: Scottish Countryside Rangers' Association, SNH, National Trust for Scotland, Cairngorms National Park Authority, Loch Lomond and the Trossachs National Park Authority, Historic Environment Scotland, a local authority ranger service representative and a regional park ranger service representative.*

SNH's view on the petition

SNH considers that well trained and resourced ranger services are a key resource for helping to deliver a wide range of benefits for people and nature. We should also be proud of the international standing that Scotland's ranger services have developed since the first services were established over 40 years ago.

We are fully aware of the concerns of SCRA regarding loss of ranger posts and the perceived 'watering down' of the ranger brand. Our previous Chairman, Ian Ross, met with SCRA on 3 August 2016 to discuss various topics including:

- the actual and potential roles of SCRA and countryside rangers, including meeting policy objectives for health & well-being, biodiversity, outdoor learning and community engagement, and;
- an increasing lack of recognition of the value of rangers, and of the term Countryside Ranger.

A meeting with the SNH Chair, Mike Cantlay and SCRA is currently being planned.

SNH does not monitor ranger numbers in Scotland, including which services wear the national ranger logo; that is collated by SCRA. However SNH is aware from anecdotal evidence that ranger numbers, particularly in local authorities, are decreasing. It is for individual local authorities to make decisions on whether to fund ranger posts in the context of other funding priorities and budgetary pressures. Nevertheless, we do strongly believe that ranger services are of great value in delivering Scottish Government priorities for people and nature, and do not always receive the recognition or support that they deserve.

We will continue to keep our support for ranger services under review in light of the conclusions of this petition and also the forthcoming publication of our new corporate plan - "Connecting People with Nature".