

**PE1678/K**

Scottish Land and Estates submission of 28 February 2018

We have read the report of the Public Petitions Committee meeting on 1<sup>st</sup> February 2018 and thank the Committee for the opportunity to respond to the petition submitted by Robert Reid on behalf of the Scottish Countryside Rangers Association.

Scottish Land & Estates (SLE) recognise and value the important contribution countryside rangers make, particularly in terms of connecting visitors and locals alike to enjoy Scotland's great outdoors. Responsible for a variety of activities, ranger services deliver multiple benefits for both the public and for land managers.

Ranger services are clearly a well-established and important part of Scotland's outdoor access, countryside and heritage infrastructure playing an integral role in promoting the Scottish Outdoor Access Code and in raising awareness and encouraging appreciation of the scenery, wildlife and heritage of an area to visitors and the local community.

Many SLE members have established their own private countryside ranger services. These well-respected services often cover both the local management of the estate whilst also providing a wide range of activities and in-depth knowledge of the area helping to enhance visitor experience. The key duties of these services make them an invaluable resource to both the visitor services function and to the wider estate. Across many estates ranger teams are actively engaged in not only maintenance and conservation works but also in education and local community engagement. Ranger services undoubtedly play an integral role in delivering a wide range of benefits and it is clear where there are well-established and fully supported ranger services, that these services are delivering the core aims of the Rangers in Scotland 2008 Framework. It therefore seems imprudent that a framework which is already delivering is not fully implemented and supported to ensure its successful wide scale delivery.

Our main concern is around the future funding of countryside ranger services. SLE is concerned by the reduction in grant support made over the last decade and the damaging impact this is having on both the funding of existing ranger posts and on the opportunities to develop new posts.

While some SLE members ranger services are privately funded, others receive support from Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH) to help deliver natural heritage outputs. However, reductions in funding support for ranger services has seen some estates lose funding for entire posts. In some instances, this has resulted in some estates losing up to 1.5 posts. The consequences of estates being unable to secure funding for ranger services has in some instances resulted in the inability for estates to provide services which could have delivered a range of benefits for local communities, education provision and biodiversity.

The current funding scheme is in place until next year (2019) however no-one is clear what will happen after that and there is every likelihood that a further round of funding cuts may be made.

While SLE recognise current budgetary pressures we would encourage a solution to be found that supports and grows ranger services in Scotland. If ranger posts

continue to be lost at the current rate SLE has serious concerns about the implications this will have on the key services currently being delivered not least the important interface role rangers play between landowners and the visiting public – a good ranger service is key to not only enhancing the recreational experience for visitors but is often necessary in helping landowners manage additional numbers.

SLE supports the proposed implementation of the 2008 Strategic Framework for the network of Countryside Ranger Services. The Government's priorities of improving wellbeing and reducing health and social inequalities rely heavily on enabling more people to enjoy the outdoors and gain all the benefits that brings, which means investment in access management through the provision of a well-structured and well-supported ranger service is a crucial foundation for achieving these outcomes.

I hope that these remarks are useful.