

PE1678/AA

Petitioner submission of 11 March 2019

In this submission SCRA sets out our aspirations for the outcome of the Petitions process and notes the continuing threat to Ranger posts across all employing sectors.

SCRA seeks support from the Government to establish a working group to establish the facts behind the significant decline in Ranger Service posts; to review and update the strategic framework in support of the network of Ranger Services in Scotland and make recommendations to secure the future funding of Ranger Services in Scotland.

Progress in addressing the issues behind the Petition

Following hearings by the Petitions Committee on 1st February 2018 and 25th October 2018, our Association has carried out a number of actions in support of the Petitions process.

- March 21st 2018. Met with Francesca Osowska, Chief Executive Officer, Scottish Natural Heritage.
- Submitted a survey of all of Scotland's Ranger Services detailing the number of posts lost since 2008 and the current employer profile of the remaining services. A summary of Ranger activity in education, health, community and environment was also submitted.
- Prepared questions for consideration by the Petitions Committee prior to the hearing on 25th October 2018 when Scottish Natural Heritage were called to give evidence.
- January 14th 2019. Met with Mike Cantlay, Chair of Scottish Natural Heritage to discuss the issues behind the petition and agree future partnership working.
- January 29th 2019. Contributed to the meeting of the Ranger Development Partnership, convened by Scottish Natural Heritage and attended by senior representatives of Ranger employers across Scotland.

Purpose and remit of a government working group

- To analyse the full benefits of the national network of 90 Ranger Services.
- To identify sustainable funding models.
- To identify actions to reverse the haemorrhage of Ranger posts.
- To engage with Ranger employers and establish a national reporting regime linked to government priorities and ensure accountability in the use of public funds.

Government Working Group, Scottish Natural Heritage or Ranger Development Partnership?

A Government working group would be in a position to make an assessment of policies pursued by Scottish Natural Heritage, which have marginalised their statutory duties in relation to Ranger Services in Scotland and challenge the statements given in evidence to the Parliamentary Petitions Committee during the 25th October 2018 hearing.

For these reasons SCRA does not believe that Scottish Natural Heritage would be a suitable agency to lead a government working group and the purpose of the group would be better served if an alternative was identified.

The Ranger Development Partnership, (RDP), although made up of representatives of Ranger employers, does not carry sufficient authority and lacks the clear leadership required to look objectively at the various issues.

The RDP has failed to secure sufficient local government representation and has never successfully engaged with COSLA. Local Authorities are still a major employer of Rangers, representing almost 50% of the total.

We believe a Government working group can secure appropriate levels of accountability from government agencies, e.g. Historic Environment Scotland, from NGO's e.g. National Trust for Scotland, and from community based services in receipt of public funds through Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH).

In making recommendations on the future of Ranger Services in Scotland a new policy statement would reflect the future priorities of the government and secure the relevance of our national network in continuing to deliver a world class service appropriate to the needs of Scotland's people and our precious environment.

Update from the survey findings

Threats to the national network of Ranger Services continue to have a detrimental effect locally and nationally.

The recent round of local authority budget plans for 2019/20 saw more Ranger posts deleted from the staffing complement of their employers. The trend of not filling any vacant posts continues.

These decisions have a damaging and disproportionate effect on the small teams that Rangers commonly work in and impact on the viability of the remaining posts. This is happening at a time when there is increasing evidence of the benefits to public health and well-being of engaging with outdoor activities.

Both Historic Environment Scotland and the National Trust for Scotland have engaged in re-branding exercises for their staff which have removed the national Ranger badge from their uniform and in some cases changed their job title to generic titles such as "visitor services assistant". These are very regrettable and, in our view, ill-considered changes. However, many of these staff will still perform duties similar to that of a Ranger, and for that reason, these agencies should be included in the review.

Matters of concern.

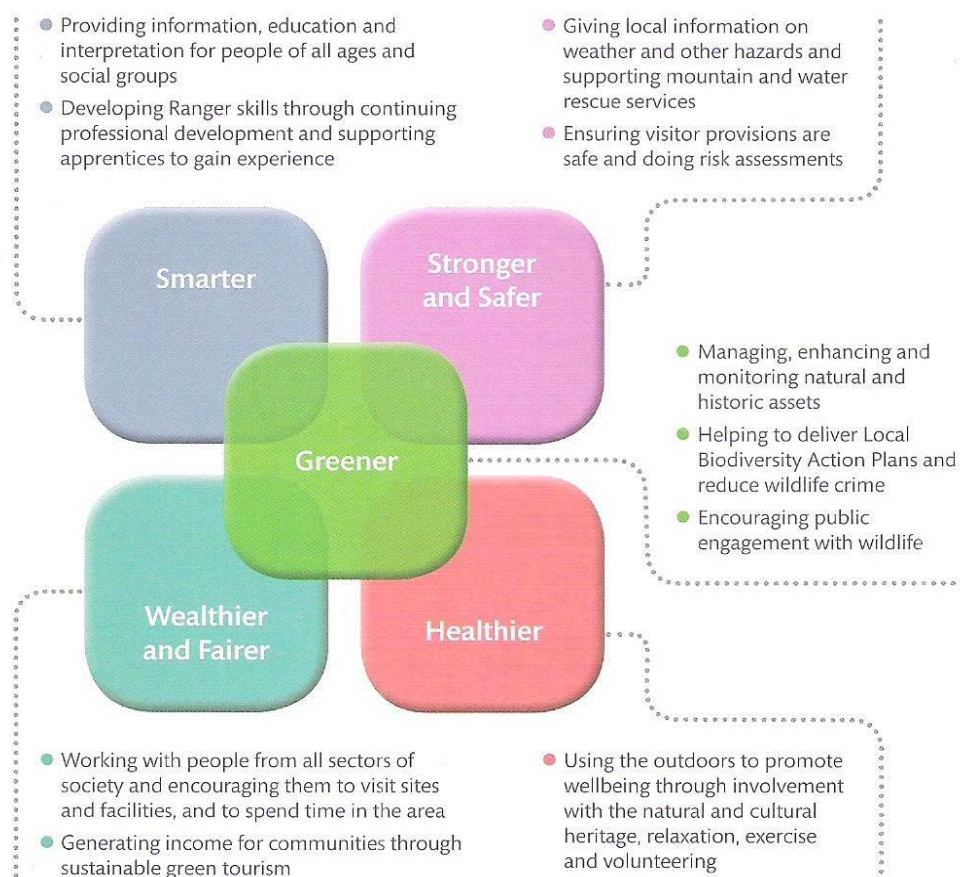
Submissions to the Petitions Committee from both SNH and the Cabinet Minister's department state that they recognise and value the work of Scotland's Countryside Rangers. We draw to the Petitions Committee's attention to the absence of any mention of Rangers/Ranger Services in SNH's new corporate plan "*Connecting people and Nature 2018-2022*", and references to Rangers are very rare on on their social media accounts.

Funding

An inconsistency exists where Government monies go directly to some employing agencies including Scottish Land and Estates, Historic Environment Scotland, Forest Enterprise Scotland and the two national parks. This arrangement contrasts markedly with the loss of ring fenced funding for Local Authorities and the withdrawal of Scottish Natural Heritage's grant aid support for NGO, private estates and community based Ranger Services.

It is in these latter sectors that job losses and adverse realignment of service have been most prevalent. SCRA notes the outcomes and delivery from these latter sectors are every bit as valid as that of the agencies that continue to receive direct funding. Both sectors deliver strongly in meeting government priorities in health, education, community and especially the environment and are worthy of a consistent national approach to their future funding.

Rangers contribute to delivering national, local and organisational priorities in the Scottish Government's National Performance Framework, Local Authority Single Outcome Agreements, and business plans.



Extract from the booklet “Scotland’s Rangers”

Produced in partnership with SNH, Forestry Commission Scotland, the National Parks Authorities, The National Trust for Scotland, Historic Scotland, SCRA and other agencies describing our common approach.

Future Opportunities

SCRA welcomes the opportunity to comment on and contribute to the consultation on the Environmental Principles and Governance in Scotland towards appropriate legislation. We hope the important role of Countryside Rangers will be recognised when this is enacted.