

## **PE1678/CC**

COSLA submission of 25 July 2019

COSLA welcomes the opportunity to respond to the Public Petitions Committee consideration of Petition PE01678.

COSLA recognises the valuable and unique contribution that Scotland's Countryside Rangers make to the protection and promotion of our natural environment for the enjoyment of individuals and communities. Local Authorities in Scotland have a long and successful track record in natural heritage management and employ a range of staff to provide opportunities to connect people with nature, including rangers. Local Government rangers deliver a wide range of benefits for the public, employers and for land managers, which include:

- Promoting health, wellbeing and environmental awareness through facilitating access, enjoyment and understanding of the outdoors;
- Strengthening communities and reducing social inequalities by engaging with residents, community groups and visitors from every age, stage and walk of life, offering a wide variety of opportunities to learn, volunteer and get involved locally, and
- Protecting and enhancing Scotland's natural and historic environment and its infrastructure.

Undoubtedly, and in common with other parts of the Local Government workforce, ranger services have been affected as a result of increasing financial constraints on Councils. We recognise that there are no easy solutions, but in a recent constructive meeting with Scottish Countryside Ranger Association (SCRA), we committed to work on a number of areas. We committed to:

- Working in partnership with SNH and SCRA on refreshing the 2008 SNH Rangers in Scotland statement to update it for 2019;
- Raise awareness of the contribution Countryside Rangers make to a number of national policy agendas such as active travel, health improvement, climate change and good placemaking;
- Consider the Countryside Ranger Service when developing an approach to Local Government Workforce Planning.

In conclusion, COSLA recognises the issues raised in the petition and are happy to work with SNH, SCRA to Scottish Government to try and find practical solutions. It is likely that COSLA's Environment and Economy Board will receive further updates on this work at a future date.

We trust you will find these comments of assistance and please do not hesitate to get in touch should you have further queries.