

## CAIRNGORMS NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY

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### FOR DECISION

**Title:**                    **Developing Park-wide Ranger Service Provision**

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### **Purpose**

The purpose of this paper is to report on the progress made to date in developing a Park-wide approach to ranger services in the National Park. Endorsement is also sought for a proposal to investigate the full implications for two specific options concerning changes to the way in which rangers are managed in the Park. If the recommendations are accepted a further Board paper will be required to provide the basis for decisions.

### **Recommendations**

The Board is invited to:

- Note the work that has been undertaken to date
- Endorse the general principles that have been developed for provision of a Park-wide approach to ranger services; and
- Agree that NPA staff should investigate the full implications of delivering Options 3 and 5 as described in this paper and report back to the Board with recommendations.

### **Executive Summary**

Since February 2004 staff have been working with ranger services and key stakeholders to look at ways in which we can deliver a more effective Park-wide ranger service. The paper reports on progress and seeks guidance on the options for change which will be developed into fully appraised proposals.

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## Developing Park-wide Ranger Service Provision

### Background

1. In 2003 it was identified that one of CNPA's early actions should be to consider how ranger services are organised in the National Park. A small Working Group of officers and Board members met between February and September 2004 with the aim:  
*"To formulate, agree and then implement with partners arrangements for the provision of a cohesive Cairngorms National Park-wide approach to ranger services, which meets the requirements of the Cairngorms National Park aims."*
2. CNPA staff have now met individually with representatives of all 13 ranger services in the Park, and with relevant groups as follows:
  - Ranger Service Managers - the people who directly manage each service;
  - Scottish Countryside Rangers Association (SCRA) - the rangers themselves;
  - Scottish Natural Heritage - providers of grant aid to most services;
  - Visitor Services, Information and Tourism (ViSIT) Advisory Forum;
  - Association of Cairngorm Community Councils.
3. Staff have also reviewed the audit work undertaken by the Cairngorms Partnership's Cairngorms Rangers Group and a university student's postgraduate thesis, "An Evaluation of the Availability and Accessibility of Ranger Services in the Cairngorms" (University of Aberdeen, 2002).
4. **Annex 1** contains a summary of the issues identified as a result of this work. The main points raised during the meetings with relevant groups are summarised in **Annex 2**.

### Policy Context

5. The original statutory basis for rangers employed in the public sector is the Countryside Scotland (Act) 1967 as amended by the Countryside (Scotland) Act 1981. Rangers employed within the context of this legislation can act to secure compliance with byelaws on behalf of a local authority.
6. Neither the National Parks (Scotland) Act 2000 nor The Cairngorms National Park Designation Order 2003 specifically requires CNPA to employ rangers. However, "...a National Park Authority may appoint such other employees on such terms and conditions as it may determine". A National Park Authority may, with Minister's approval, require "...a local authority any part of whose area is within the National Park to make a scheme for transfer of employees of the local authority to a National Park Authority or another local authority". So we have the ability to employ rangers and the potential to transfer existing rangers from a local authority within the Park if we so wish.
7. The legislation also allows us to provide grant aid and to enter into management agreements "with any person having an interest in land".

8. The Land Reform (Scotland) Act 2003 allows the CNPA, as an access authority, to appoint rangers to assist in undertaking its duties and powers. This act defines rangers' roles with specific reference to the exercise and management of access rights, and widens rangers' powers to enter land.
9. SNH has a national role in developing policy for ranger services. This policy is set out in two publications: Rangers in Scotland: Policy Statement and Operational Guidance (both 1997). SNH is planning to undertake a significant review of policy in relation to ranger services within the next two years and CNPA will be involved as a consultee. All ranger services that receive support from SNH have four Essential Aims:
  - a) To ensure a welcome for visitors to the countryside through contributing to well managed informal recreation facilities and access to the countryside, and providing good information
  - b) To mediate between public use of land and water and other rural land uses including conservation of the natural heritage
  - c) To promote awareness and understanding of the countryside and, through this, encourage its responsible use; and
  - d) To care for and enhance Scotland's natural heritage enjoyed by visitors
10. The goals in CNPA's Corporate Plan do not specifically refer to ranger services but rather to the services they provide for visitors, land managers and communities. There is currently no funding provision identified for directly employing or supporting ranger services. The Plan does identify a small sum of money which could assist with funding Angus Glens Ranger Service as an interim measure due to the imminent end of European funding. The Plan commits CNPA to provide a pan-Park coordination and support service and to develop a strategy for delivery of ranger services.
11. There are three emerging pieces of work that will, in time, have a direct influence on ranger services and what they do in the Park:
  - The Sustainable Tourism Strategy and Action Plan - this identifies a very strong role for rangers in the Park in relation to visitor management.
  - The Outdoor Access Strategy - this will determine how we fulfil our function as access authority. The Access audit is now nearing completion and the strategy will be finalised in 2005 with advice from the Local Outdoor Access Forum.
  - The Interpretation Strategy - which commenced the visit from Prof. Sam Ham (September 2004) and which is due for completion in Spring 2005.
12. Other strategic work which is to be undertaken by the Park Authority on the natural and cultural heritage, on integrated land management and on community development will also be relevant in guiding the work of ranger services. In time all of these will of course be drawn together in the National Park Plan

### **Current Provision of Ranger Services in the Park**

13. The current position is complex. There are 13 ranger services currently operating within the Park employing some 26 full-time equivalent staff. All of the services but

one are publicly funded in some way. There are a total of eight different public bodies directly involved in funding or management. The Park Authority currently has almost no influence over the work that is undertaken by ranger services in the Park.

14. Other countryside workers provide services that, from time to time, fall within the remit of a ranger. However, in this review we have restricted our discussion to those services that call themselves “ranger services” because:
  - a) ranger services are generally funded and/or managed by a public body; and
  - b) restricting discussion to these services makes the subject more manageable.
  
15. Beyond SNH’s 1997 Policy Statement there is no standard definition of what constitutes a ranger service in the Park. There is no standard job description or conditions of work in the Park. There are no common standards. Most of the services are broadly delivering the four ranger service aims as described in paragraph 9. There is generally a good degree of “fit” between the national aims of ranger services and the National Park aims as illustrated in **Table 1**. The level of fit could be improved by adding in “the cultural heritage” to the second and fourth ranger service aim.

**Table 1: Illustration of the degree of “fit” between national ranger service aims and National Park aims (More crosses indicate a higher degree of “fit”)**

	To conserve and enhance natural and “ heritage	To promote sustainable use of natural resources	To promote understanding and enjoyment of the special qualities by public	To promote sustainable economic & social development of area's communities
To ensure a welcome for visitors to the countryside	-	<b>XX</b>	<b>XXX</b>	<b>XX</b>
To mediate between public use of land and water and other rural land users	<b>XX</b>	<b>XX</b>	<b>XX</b>	<b>XX</b>
To promote awareness and understanding of the countryside	<b>XX</b>	<b>XX</b>	<b>XXX</b>	<b>XX</b>
To care for and enhance Scotland's natural heritage, enjoyed by visitors.	<b>XXX</b>	<b>XX</b>	<b>X</b>	<b>X</b>

16. There are broadly three types of ranger service in the Park as defined by the area of ground that they cover:
  - a) Estate or site-based Ranger Services: Nine of the Services work on a defined geographic area that corresponds to one land management/ownership unit, usually an estate boundary
  - b) Area-wide Ranger Services: Three Services operate across a wider area, sometimes corresponding to a local authority area. In Aberdeenshire and Highland Council areas these Services manage particular sites within their area but also cover the intervening ground in some way. The Angus Glens Ranger Service is largely devoted to a relatively small area at the head of Glen Doll/Clova and receives funding from SNH and FCS to carry out particular duties on the National Nature Reserve and the forestry estate there.
  - c) Community-based Ranger Service: One Service operates at community level, based in and working immediately around Nethy Bridge and with strong community input for six months per annum (Explore Abernethy Ranger Service).
17. Work programmes, methods of delivery and client groups vary considerably between services. However, within the context of the four ranger service aims, all services in the Park deliver services for the benefit of three principal customer groups:
  - a) visitors
  - b) land managers
  - c) local communities
18. Current funding arrangements are extremely complex. Mechanisms used include grant aid and associated conditions and management agreements. However, the part-funding and/or management of six ranger services by private or charitable sources and of one by a community group is an excellent example of public-private partnership. Many National Park Authorities elsewhere in the UK would probably find this to be an extremely attractive situation but one which would be hard for them to reach.
19. Management structures and lines of communication are specific to each service. At a Park wide level lines of communications are lengthy. For example, within SNH there are at least seven different staff who act as contact points for existing grant aided services. This makes communication with and between services difficult.

### **Issues Relating to the Role of the Cairngorms National Park Authority**

20. As the access authority we have a duty to uphold access rights and promote the Scottish Outdoor Access Code to land managers and visitors. In all other authorities, except Argyll and Bute, rangers will be used as one of the mechanisms to fulfil these duties because of their knowledge and expertise in this area. CNPA currently has no mechanism for deploying rangers in this way.
21. CNPA is the lead agency to ensure coordinated delivery of the Sustainable Tourism Strategy and Action Plan. CNPA also have a key role in ensuring that the Local Biodiversity Action Plan and the John Muir Award are delivered across the Park. This is also likely to be the case for the emerging strategies on Outdoor Access and Interpretation. Rangers have key roles to play in delivering this work. There is no

clear mechanism at present, other than through preparation and implementation of the National Park Plan, to ensure that ranger services play an appropriate role in implementing these strategies. In the meantime, we endeavour to encourage input from ranger services by working directly with them and SNH, but this is labour intensive and co-ordination is difficult.

22. It is clear that there are a number of key pieces of work that require to be undertaken in the Park where we are the lead body, and will rely on the work of the ranger services to deliver outputs. Our principal mechanism for ensuring delivery at present is through the Park Plan process. However, this process will not be fully effective for some time yet.
23. Stakeholder consultation clearly identified that we have a lead role to play in developing a more effective ranger provision in the Park and that a more strategic approach was needed. (see Annex 2).

### **Recommendation**

24. **The Board are invited to note the work that has been undertaken to date.**

### **Principles for Park-wide Ranger Provision**

25. On the basis of the work described above it would be helpful to get a broad steer from the Board about how to progress future work. It is suggested that the following principles be endorsed.
  - a) The existing Ranger Services in the Cairngorms do much valuable work but there is a need to ensure that they are working in the best interests of the Park in a way that collectively achieves the Park aims in a coordinated way. The Park Authority has a key role in ensuring that this takes place. CNPA should consider options for changes and position itself so as to have more direct influence over the activities of ranger services in the Park.
  - b) The existing mix of private and public sector funding and management has considerable strengths and should not be lost. Any changes required should be introduced gradually, in a considered fashion, over a number of years and in a way that simplifies arrangements rather than adding additional bureaucracy.
  - c) The four aims of ranger services (as described in paragraph 9) should be adopted for the services within the Park with the addition of the words “and cultural heritage” to the second and fourth aims.
  - d) Rangers should continue to service the needs of three principal customer groups: visitors, land managers and local communities. Where possible links with local communities should be strengthened.
  - e) The principal Park-wide strategies that will influence the work of ranger services over the next three years are the Sustainable Tourism Strategy, the Outdoor Access Strategy and Interpretation Strategy. The work of rangers will also be important in delivering the Local Biodiversity Action Plan and in promoting the adoption of the John Muir Award.
  - f) The work of ranger services should be regularly evaluated to ensure that it is effectively and efficiently meeting agreed outputs and contributes to the Park aims.

- g) The Park Authority should not consider applications for funding new ranger services until an overall ranger strategy for the Park has been agreed.
- h) Rangers should be clearly identifiable to the public and be conspicuously linked to the National Park in some way.
- i) Rangers should continue to have a strong local presence and be dispersed throughout the National Park.
- j) Ranger policy within the National Park should continue to have strong linkages with national policy and practice for countryside rangers in Scotland.
- k) As part of implementing necessary changes a concise Ranger Service Strategy should be prepared for approval by the Board. In the meantime CNPA staff should continue to provide support and coordination functions and liaise closely with existing ranger service managers and with rangers through their professional association.

### Recommendation

26. **That Board endorse the general principles which will help deliver effective Park-wide ranger service provision.**

### Options for Change

27. Building on the above principles it is useful to consider the range of options for changes that could be considered. Staff have already discussed the following broad options for change with ranger managers, SCRA and SNH:

	<b>Options for Change</b>
Option 1	No change: CNPA leave existing funding and management structures in place while adding value through networking opportunities and providing project funding associated with Ranger Services' work.
Option 2	CNPA influence Ranger Services' work programmes through liaison with SNH and coordinate other Services through concordats and service level agreements.
Option 3	CNPA take on the funding role of SNH and coordinate other Services through concordats and service level agreements.
Option 4	CNPA employ all Rangers directly, providing one Ranger Service for the National Park.
Option 5	CNPA directly employ the rangers that are currently employed by local authorities.

28. These options are not mutually exclusive. The complexity of the current structure suggests that a combination of options is likely to produce an effective Park-wide provision. Each Option is briefly evaluated below.
29. Option 1. The strong consensus of opinion was that the CNPA has to play a lead role in providing networking, training and setting standards. However, only one stakeholder felt that this implementing this option alone would deliver a significantly better Park-wide service.

30. Option 2 was preferred by several managers because it kept continuity of the current structure. However, seven officers of SNH work with 10 funded services within the Park over three SNH areas. Our main concern is that trying to coordinate Park-wide delivery through the existing SNH funding mechanism would add to bureaucracy, be cumbersome and ineffective.
31. Option 3 centralises the funding and management plans for ten services with the Park Authority. This would make it much easier to link the work of rangers to the Park Plan and develop consistency across the Park. However, it has resource implications for us and would require the agreement of SNH, and the transfer of grant funding to us. Both Options 2 and 3 would require CNPA to develop some form of agreement with those services that do not receive grant aid from SNH to provide overall coordination within the Park.
32. Option 4 received very little support from stakeholders. There is no mechanism for 'taking over' the services on private estates even if it were desirable to do so. This option would destroy an excellent example of public/private partnership incurring greater public expenditure with no obvious gain.
33. Option 5: The National Parks (Scotland) Act 2000 gives us, with Ministerial approval, the power to take on local authority employees. If we were to do so CNPA would have a small group of around four to five staff who could, for example, help undertake our duties as access authority. This would potentially reduce bureaucracy by unifying four services under one management structure without the complexity of multiple agreements with different public agencies. It would also provide us with a small team of staff, able to provide a flexible, responsive service across the Park. Neither Options 1, 2 or 3 give us the mechanism to deploy rangers in this way.
34. Option 5 could have significant resource implications for us in managing a widespread provision. Our current budget does not cover the cost of employing rangers. These posts are currently grant-aided by SNH and while it may be possible to take on the funding role of SNH (as suggested in Option 3), there is no clear mechanism for transfer of local authority funds. In addition we would have to consider, along with the local authorities and SNH, the consequences for the ranger services that would continue to operate in the area adjacent to the Park. All these aspects require further investigation.
35. In conclusion, either Option 3 or a combination of Option 3 and Option 5, appear to offer the most efficient and effective method of ensuring that we coordinate ranger services to deliver the aims of the Park and our duties as an access authority. Either of these would give us a degree of direct influence on ranger work programmes while retaining the diversity of provision and the benefits of public/private partnerships. They would also reduce bureaucracy and duplication. However, it would be premature to commit us to either option without a full appraisal.



**Recommendation**

36. **That the Board agree that NPA staff should investigate the full implications of delivering Options 3 and 5 as described in this paper and report back to the Board with recommendations.**
37. We expect to be able to report back to the Board with detailed appraisals in the late autumn of 2005/6. This timescale fits in with current SNH funding which runs until March 2007 for most services.

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## Summary of Issues in Developing a Park-wide Approach to Ranger Services

1. The information presented below is a summary of issues that emerged as a result of meetings with ranger services, SNH and information gathered from previous studies and reports. These issues were presented to ranger managers, rangers and SNH. There was a broad consensus that the issues presented are those affecting services across the Park.
2. We should clearly state that all employers are currently happy with the service they receive from their rangers. However, many employers are concerned that the requirements of the new access legislation will overload their staff.

### Definition of a Ranger Services and links to the Park

3. There is no standard definition of what constitutes a ranger service. There is no standard job description or conditions of work. There are no common standards. If we choose to define a ranger service as those who call themselves 'rangers' there are 13 services operating wholly or partly within the National Park as follows: -
  - a) 4 local authority services
  - b) 5 services on private estates
  - c) 2 services run by Government Agencies
  - d) 1 services run by an Non-Governmental Organisation
  - e) 1 community based service
4. These 13 services employ some 26 'full time equivalent' staff.
5. All services, except Invercauld Estate Service, are linked to a public body by either funding or management (or both).
6. RSPB and SNH employ reserve managers, some of whose functions overlap with those undertaken by rangers. In terms of visitor management, it seems likely that the public would not identify a clear distinction between the role of a reserve manager and a ranger.
7. A number of countryside workers (including farmers, estate workers, foresters and community path volunteers) will also perform some duties similar to that of a ranger from time to time.
8. While there is no universal standard for rangers, 10 of the 13 services are grant-aided by SNH. These services work to four essential aims: -
  - a) Ensure a welcome for visitors to the countryside
  - b) Mediate between public use of land and water and other rural land users
  - c) To promote awareness and understanding of the countryside
  - d) Care for and enhance Scotland's natural heritage, enjoyed by visitors

SNH agree and monitor work programmes with these services and provide some training opportunities.

9. There is considerable variation in the emphasis placed on each of the four aims above by different services. Most services in the Park do most of their work under aims a) and c).
10. Eight services operate visitor centres which, due to their countryside locations, largely complement the existing network of Tourist Information Centres. The National Park Visitor Survey indicated that 26% of visitor questioned had been to a ranger base.
11. Ranger services generally work to meet the needs of three broad categories of customer. They provide services for: -
  - Visitors
  - Land managers
  - Local communities

There is some evidence that work with local communities in some parts of the Park is relatively infrequent.

12. None of the existing services are visibly or explicitly linked to the National Park or its aims (for example, through wearing a badge).

### **Management Structures and Communication**

13. Each service has developed a management structure to meet its own organisational needs. The customers described in paragraph 11 need to communicate with each individual service. There is no central contact for ranger services in the National Park.
14. Communication between services is largely informal, ad-hoc and on a pragmatic basis. There is some evidence of joint programme planning in some areas.
15. Information about the services collectively is relatively scarce. There are only a few sources of information that would allow a visitor would to find out about the ranger services in the National Park or know how to contact them.
16. As a result of work undertaken by the Cairngorms Partnership, the ranger services have come together over the last 6 years once a year to discuss issues of common concern and share information. A Directory of contact details was also produced but now requires updating.

### **Geographic Coverage**

17. Ranger services appear to have developed in a piece-meal fashion where a perceived local need and the availability of funding coincided. SNH has ensured that the services they grant aid fulfil a defined need, comply with their four essential aims for countryside rangers and that public money is put to good use to suit the specific management requirements of that area.

18. Despite the ad-hoc development, the only area that potentially has no ranger coverage is the area of Moray outwith Crown Estate ownership. However, as a result of consultation with stakeholders and drawing on previous research, coverage of ranger services is generally sparse in the following areas: -
- Western part of the Park - Laggan, Glen Truim, Tromie, Glen Feshie.
  - Parts of Aberdeenshire for example Mar and Strathdon.
  - The central Cairngorms massif, particularly Loch Avon to Ben Avon (although this area is covered to some extent by RSPB staff who provide a similar function)
  - Glen Prosen and Glen Mark and Glen Isla.
19. Invercauld Estate has said that they would be interested in formalising their service through SNH grant-aid. Glenfeshie Estate has said that they can see the need for a service in the near future.

### **Ranger Funding**

20. Funding is complex involving the eight different public bodies, five private estates, one NGO and one community group.
21. SNH is the main provider of grant aid for rangers in the Cairngorms but it currently administers grant through seven officers working out of three different area offices.
22. Calculating the amount of public funding being put into ranger services is problematic not least because of the number of organisations involved. Nevertheless, total public funding is likely to be in excess of £500,000 per annum.

### **Cairngorms National Park Authority Issues**

23. Rangers are a key tool for delivering both the duties of the National Park as an Access Authority but also many of the strategies that will form the Park Plan. However, the Park Authority has no clear way of influencing the work of individual services because of the number of partners involved in negotiations, the relatively long chains of command and the lack of incentives to encourage partnership working.
24. The aims of the Cairngorms National Park differ from the four essential aims of Rangers Services. The most obvious difference is the additional need to conserve and enhance cultural as well as natural heritage within the Park aims. However, natural and cultural history is intertwined in the Cairngorms and there are numerous examples of existing ranger services that are currently working in the area of cultural heritage.

## Summary of Stakeholder feedback on Issues and Options for Developing a Park-wide Approach to Ranger Services

1. The information presented below is a summary of the issues that emerged as a result of meetings held with stakeholder groups. All groups, except the Association of Community Councils were presented with a detailed issues paper, which has been summarised in Annex 1, and some suggested options for change. This information formed the basis for discussion. The Community Councils were provided with a one-page summary of the current position and asked what services they currently received from rangers and what services they might wish in the future.

### Ranger Managers and Scottish Countryside Rangers Association

2. There were few significant differences in the points raised by the ranger managers and rangers. Managers were keen to say that rangers were currently meeting the needs of their individual organisations. While grant aid was welcomed, many expressed concerns that current funding was insufficient. It was also anticipated that additional work created by the new access legislation would stretch services.
3. There was common agreement that the Cairngorms National Park Authority has a lead role to play in developing a strategic approach to ranger services across the National Park.
4. There was no consensus on the best way for the Park Authority to provide coordination. However, the sole use of either option one or four was not felt to be an effective way forward.

Option 1 No change: CNPA leave existing funding and management structures in place while adding value through networking opportunities and project funding associated with Ranger Services' work.

Option 4 CNPA employ all Rangers directly, providing one Ranger Service for the National Park.

This should come as no surprise as these are the least and most interventionist options for change. Nevertheless, it was felt by most managers that the Park Authority should continue to network with rangers and managers while developing its policy on rangers.

5. There was broad agreement that any changes will need to enable rangers to: -
  - Deliver a more coordinated Park-wide service with common standards
  - Deliver the aims of the National Park and meet the needs of their own organisation(s)
  - Deliver Park wide activity as needs require
  - Deliver a service recognisably linked to the National Park
  - Maintain diversity and be locally based

- Operate more efficiently (no increased bureaucracy).
6. Concern was expressed about the compatibility of the Park aims and the four essential aims for rangers. There was some initial misunderstanding about the application of the aims of the National Park to other public bodies. Some saw the aims as being those of the Park Authority and, therefore, not directly applicable to their organisation.

### **Scottish Natural Heritage**

7. SNH see the need for a coordinated approach to ranger services within the Park and have tasked one officer with coordinating the work of the six colleagues who currently administer ranger grants from three area offices.
8. SNH staff are receptive to looking at all options for change including the Cairngorms National Park Authority taking on the grant aiding role for rangers. It should be noted that SNH Board approval would be required for any significant changes to their current role.
9. SNH appear to have no concerns about the compatibility of the Park aims and the four essential aims of rangers.

### **Visitor Services, Information and Tourism Forum**

10. A presentation was made to the VISIT Forum. Feedback was also received through working on the Strategy and Action Plan for Sustainable Tourism. This identifies that while the current network of rangers is a strength, the lack of a ranger service that is clearly linked to the National Park is a weakness. The lack of information on rangers collectively, or how to contact them, is also considered to be negative feature of the current situation.
11. The strategy recognises the importance of ranger bases and their associated visitor facilities in delivering information and interpretation to the public. It recommends that these bases be upgraded.
12. The strategy recognises the importance to visitors of ranger events. This feedback was obtained directly from a survey of tourism enterprises. The action plan recommends that these events be better promoted.
13. The strategy also explicitly recommends that the use of rangers should be reviewed and strengthened.
14. The Sustainable tourism strategy also requires that the impact of visitors is monitored and that measures are taken to ameliorate any negative environmental impacts. Rangers currently undertake much of this monitoring and improvement works in countryside sites around the Park and they will have a key role to play in developing the strategy.

## Communities

15. The following comments represent the feedback received from representatives of five community councils at a meeting in January 2005. This process of feedback is ongoing.
16. Communities primarily see the role of rangers as:
  - Working with community groups - particularly on path networks.
  - Providing information and education services to community groups
  - Providing information for visitors
  - Providing visitor management
17. Respondents indicated that they saw the need for the Cairngorms National Park Authority to develop a consistent provision but wished to retain locally-based delivery.
18. It is interesting to note that the fourth annual gathering of Cairngorms rangers identified that the lack of community involvement by some services as weakness. Beth Wilson, in her masters thesis on rangers in the Cairngorms, also commented that some communities appeared to have little contact with their ranger service.