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## CAIRNGORMS NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY

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### FOR DECISION

**Title: REVIEW OF CNPA SUPPORT FOR RANGER SERVICES**

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#### **Purpose**

To review CNPA's support for ranger services in order to enhance delivery of National Park Partnership Plan priorities.

#### **Recommendations**

**That the Board agrees:**

- I. That CNPA's support for ranger services follows the principles below:**
  - a) We continue to condition our grant support so that Ranger Services operate to the National Ranger Policy developed by SNH and CNP Ranger Framework**
  - b) We continue our partnership approach targeting our grant support for ranger services to deliver elements of Active Cairngorms, Cairngorms Nature, Learning and Inclusion programmes.**
  - c) We continue to recognise and value the inputs of ranger managers to the partnership and celebrate the effectiveness of locally managed services supporting both National Park aims and local outputs.**
  - d) We look to increase the provision of rangers in the western Cairngorms to allow for increasing visitor numbers, increasing residents and our commitments to conserve and enhance the natural heritage.**
  - e) We work to maintain the provision of rangers in eastern Cairngorms looking for opportunities to make that provision more effective.**
  - f) We work to further improve collaboration and professionalism amongst all the ranger services.**

- 2. To reallocate the grant currently paid to Highland Council and Aberdeenshire Council amounting to £11,000 per service from April 2016 towards development of a volunteer ranger network.**

## **Executive Summary**

Ranger Services are a key means of delivering National Park Partnership Plan priorities, particularly in engaging visitors and delivering Cairngorms Nature and Active Cairngorms priorities. The Cairngorms Ranger Framework approved by the Board in 2011 remains an appropriate basis for CNPA support, and looking ahead we identify the need to find ways to enhance provision of ranger services. We identify two principle means to enhance provision: establishing new estate based partnerships and developing a volunteer ranger network. Tight financial constraints mean we are unable to progress these at scale immediately, but we are able to reallocate funding within the current grant budget to begin establishment of a volunteer ranger service.

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## REVIEW OF CNPA SUPPORT FOR RANGER SERVICES – FOR DECISION

### Strategic Context

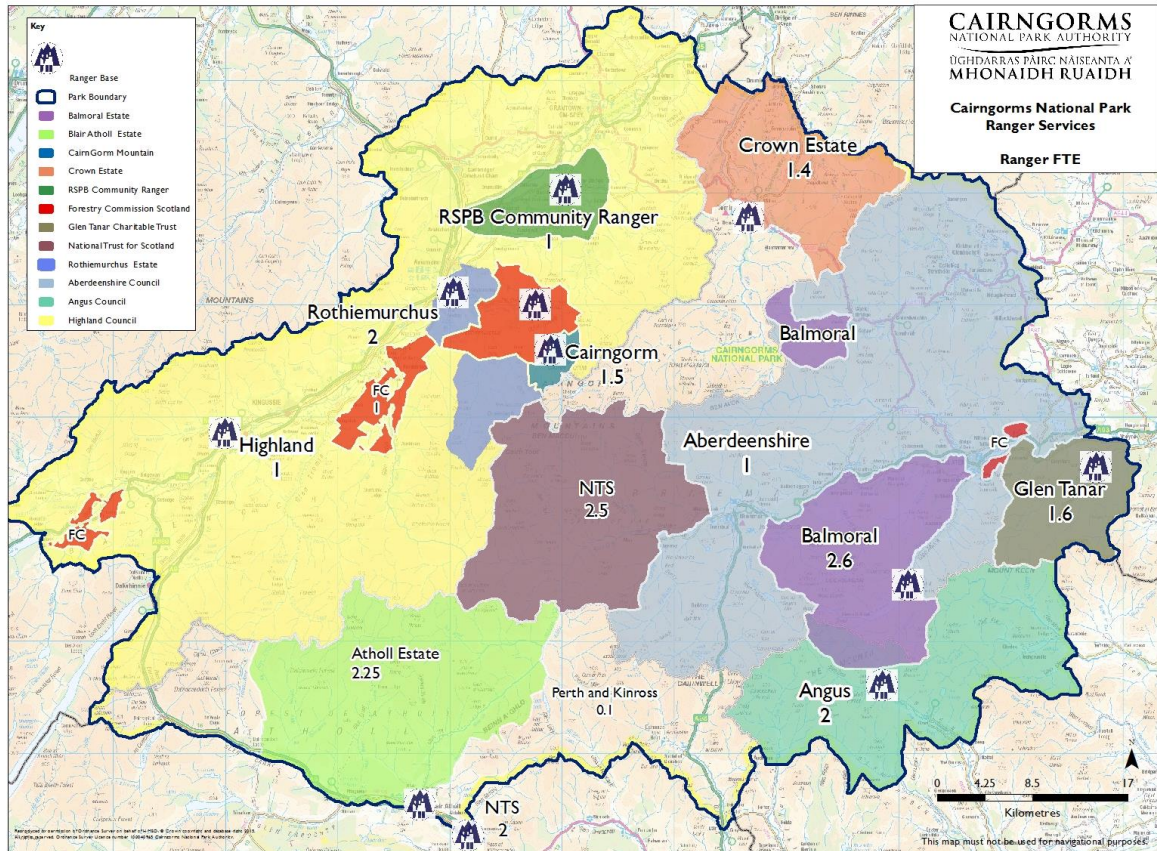
1. Our role in supporting ranger services was most recently ratified in January 2011 when the Board approved the *Cairngorms National Park Ranger Framework* which sets out the way we work with partners.
2. We operate to National Ranger Policy as set by Scottish Natural Heritage. The National Ranger Aims are:
  - a) To ensure a warm welcome and provide support to help people enjoy the outdoors;
  - b) To increase awareness, understanding, care and responsible use of the natural and cultural heritage; and
  - c) To support the sustainable management and use of the outdoors to meet a range of social, economic and environmental objectives.
3. The *Partnership Framework for Ranger Services in the Park* sets out the vision for Ranger Services as:

***A high profile network of Cairngorms' rangers connecting people with an outstanding National Park. They work collaboratively to provide an innovative, inspirational and professional service. They are committed to enhancing public enjoyment, understanding and care of the outdoors, focused on maintaining the quality and relevance of their work and recognised, valued and supported by their employers, other related professions and the public.***

4. Ranger Services are key to the National Park; they:
  - a) are the 'front line' countryside visitor management service providing a welcome to visitors;
  - b) have a major role in delivering Active Cairngorms, Cairngorms Nature and Education programmes;
  - c) support the Park Authority in its statutory duty as an Access Authority;
  - d) support land managers in the effective management of estates with large visitor numbers.
5. There are currently 14 ranger services operating in the National Park, 9 of which receive funding from the CNPA. The majority of these services were in existence prior to designation of the National Park. Each service is managed and funded by a

range of partners including local authorities, private estates and NGO's. Map 1 illustrates where Ranger Services are operating in Cairngorms National Park.

**Map 1- Ranger coverage in the National Park**



## Reasons for the Review

6. We have reviewed the current role and distribution of Ranger Services in the Park because there have been significant changes since the current structure was agreed including:
  - a) increasing numbers of residents and visitors, greater promotion and accessibility of the area (forthcoming A9 dualling and rail improvements), and changing recreational patterns;
  - b) development of new strategies which require Ranger Services for delivery;
  - c) Cairngorms Nature (inc. Capercaillie Framework);
  - d) Active Cairngorms;
  - e) expansion of vulnerable (to fire) forest resource and the clear evidence of inadvertent wildlife disturbance indicating a greater need for resource protection; and
  - f) declining public sector funding and 'standstill' in grant support since 2009.

## Summary of Findings

7. The review identified that:
  - a) Existing Ranger Managers welcome the partnership approach and support for the delivery of Ranger Services;
  - b) Ranger Services work well together and see themselves as part of a Cairngorms family of Ranger Services;
  - c) The estate-based services are located at key visitor destinations and continue to be a very cost effective model for delivering the service;
  - d) That the level of grant has not kept pace with inflation or real costs meaning that in the long term Ranger Services are on a less sustainable footing.
8. We also found good evidence of the value of rangers to visitors: people counters and estate estimates indicate that sites covered by ranger services get in excess of 2 million visits per year. The fact that 97% of visitors feel that the National 'Park is well managed and cared for' (2015 Visitor Survey) along with a similar range of high scores for countryside provisions is a clear indicator that rangers are helping to provide outstanding opportunities for visitors.
9. The planned increase in residents (developments at Kingussie, An Camus Mor, Boat of Garten and Carr-bridge), improved access (A9 dualling and railway improvements), major tourism developments (Cairngorm Mountain and Aviemore Highland Resort), clear recommendations in the Capercaillie Framework, together with a reduction by one ranger in the Highland Council Service all indicate that there are too few rangers in the western Cairngorms. In the eastern Cairngorms, evidence indicates the current level of provision is about right.

## Key Issues

10. Consideration of the findings of the review leads to the following issues that need to be addressed:
  - a) consider the issue of declining real terms grant support;
  - b) we want to increase the ranger provision in western Cairngorms;
  - c) provision in eastern Cairngorms needs to be sustained; and
  - d) the estate-based services are an effective model for delivering the service and where there is an identifiable need we should look to support new services on this model.
11. In summary, the review confirms that the existing Cairngorms National Park Ranger Framework agreed by the Board in 2011 remains relevant and our partnership model remains an effective approach. However, we need to look for ways to increase the level of provision and flexibility of deployment, recognising financial constraints mean

our options for change are limited. Consideration of any changes to the level of grant can only be considered once future CNPA budgets are known and will be considered through the normal business planning process.

## Recommendation

12. Before considering next steps in the short-term, we consider it is useful to agree a set of principles that build on work previously agreed to guide further development of ranger services in the National Park:
13. **We recommend that the Board agree that CNPA support for ranger services follows the principles below:**
  - a) **We continue to condition our grant support so that Ranger Services operate to the National Ranger Policy developed by SNH and CNP Ranger Framework**
  - b) **We continue our partnership approach targeting our grant support for ranger services to deliver elements of Active Cairngorms, Cairngorms Nature, Learning and Inclusion programmes.**
  - c) **We continue to recognise and value the inputs of ranger managers to the partnership and celebrate the effectiveness of locally managed services supporting both National Park aims and local outputs.**
  - d) **We look to increase the provision of rangers in the western Cairngorms to allow for increasing visitor numbers, resident population and our commitments to conserve and enhance the natural heritage.**
  - e) **We work to maintain the provision of rangers in eastern Cairngorms looking for opportunities to make that provision more effective.**
  - f) **We work to further improve collaboration and professionalism amongst all the ranger services.**

## Next steps in meeting future needs

14. Maintaining and if possible expanding the coverage of rangers is challenging with public sector funding declining. The only ways we can see of making a difference are through:
  - a) better targeted use of existing funding;
  - b) reallocation of other resources;
  - c) identification of new funds – most likely third party grants.
15. The commitment and continued support from land managers for rangers together with the outstanding results from the visitor survey and the low level of access issues reaching CNPA all demonstrate the value of site based rangers at key countryside

visitor destinations. We therefore identify two ways in which we can seek to enhance ranger service delivery:

- a) where visitor pressures coincide with a willing land manager we would like the flexibility to support new 'estate based' services in line with our current partnership model;
- b) to develop a volunteer ranger network to support the work of the existing services.

16. The ambition to develop volunteering to support nature and outdoor access is identified in the National Park Partnership Plan (work package 10c) and establishing a volunteer ranger service will be a big step in delivering this. Experience in other National Parks, notably Loch Lomond and Trossachs, demonstrates the ability of volunteers to deliver additional work to great effect. Experience also indicates that effective volunteering can only be developed with professional support and Annex 1 outlines the cost of a volunteer ranger co-ordinator.
17. We consider that volunteering has good potential to receive grant support particularly for the aspects of volunteer development and training.
18. Faced with the challenge of needing to sustain and enhance a provision within existing budgets we have looked to the areas where we could better target existing funds. We do not consider that cutting the grant rate across the board to site-based services is a viable option, it would likely result in a loss of service levels across the Park exacerbating issues identified in the review. We do however consider that the grants currently paid to Highland and Aberdeenshire Councils (£11,000 each) could be reallocated more effectively towards setting up a volunteer ranger network.
19. In both cases our current grant supports 1 FTE post which covers a broad area within each local authority. We have held discussions with both Authorities, through the review and in relation to the specific proposal to withdraw funds. While any withdrawal of grant risks a short term reduction of service coverage, we anticipate both authorities will continue to deliver a similar level of provision in the short term. In the longer term, reinvestment in a volunteer network will enhance the provision in both local authority areas. The risk register at Annex 2 considers the risks associated with the proposed reallocation of grant.
20. We propose to use the £22,000 grant reallocation as a core funding contribution from CNPA against which we will seek match funding to establish a volunteer ranger co-ordinator post. Initial discussions with LEADER indicate a good potential fit with Local Development Strategy priorities.

21. At present we do not have the funding flexibility to consider establishing new estate-based partnerships in addition to establishing a volunteer ranger network. We will though look to take opportunities where they arise including options for third party grant funding. Any consideration of wider reallocation of CNPA resources will be considered through the normal business planning process.

## Recommendation

22. **We recommend that the Board agrees to reallocate the grant currently paid to Highland Council and Aberdeenshire Council amounting to £11,000 per service from April 2016 towards development of a volunteer ranger network.**

## Strategic Risk Management

23. Withdrawal of the current grant funding to Highland Council and Aberdeenshire Council may have an implication for the delivery of Ranger Services in the Park and an effect on partnership working (see Annex 2). We anticipate these Ranger Services will continue to be part of the Cairngorms family of Ranger Services. Nevertheless we consider potential budget cuts, out with of CNPA control, present the greatest risk to the future of these Services as evidenced by the loss of one Highland Council Ranger in 2014.
24. Despite the risks we consider that the flexibility to use this funding to establish a volunteer ranger network offers better long term value for money and sustainability. If we do not take this opportunity to begin the establishment of a volunteer ranger network now, then we are likely to find ourselves facing the same issues growing over the coming years, still without the capacity to address them or expand the ranger service.

## Resource Implications

25. The proposals set out are within the current CNPA budget allocated to ranger service support (£179,000 in 2015/16). We anticipate being able to establish a volunteer ranger co-ordinator post using the reallocated £22,000 plus match funding and through redeployment of existing staff time. Options to further reallocate CNPA resources to enhance ranger provision beyond this will be considered through the established business planning processes, when future budgets are known.

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## Annex 1

We propose to establish a Volunteer Coordinator post to set up the first phase of a volunteer ranger service. This post could be full time or part time (3 days) depending on the scope of the post and funds available.

The key role for volunteer rangers would be to undertake activity that engages residents and visitors in the natural and cultural heritage of the Park. They would also act as local champions for volunteering, recruiting volunteers within their community to undertake environmental volunteering including practical work. The post will engage closely with the teams responsible for Cairngorms Nature and Active Cairngorms to deliver a co-ordinated approach to volunteering opportunities.

The role and function of the Volunteer Ranger Service will not undermine the existing Ranger Services; rather it will support their delivery. Much of the work undertaken by the volunteers will be supported by the existing Ranger Services. The existing Ranger Services continue to play a vital role in visitor management, delivery of park wide strategies and the junior ranger project.

The anticipated cost of a FTE volunteer co-ordinator post is £35,000 and to be effective, an operating budget of c£20,000 to cover volunteer expenses and equipment would also be required.

Annex 2

**CAIRNGORM RANGER SERVICE GRANT REALLOCATION RISK REGISTER**

ID	Risk	Type	Impact	Likelihood	Score	Controls
	<b>REPUTATIONAL</b>					
1	Misunderstanding of the future direction for Ranger Services stated aims and objectives by current partners	Rep	3	2	6	Active engagement with existing service partners via communications plan.
2	Misunderstanding of the future direction for Volunteer Ranger Services stated aims and objectives by current stakeholder and partner groups	Rep	3	3	9	Active engagement with existing partners via communications plan.
3	Missing key partners during subsequent development phases	Rep	2	3	6	Keep need, opportunities and funding options under review through ongoing engagement with partners.
4	Mixed messages given to any interested party from partners	Rep	2	4	8	Develop communications plan including frequency and method of communications in order to give consistent messages.
5	Insufficient level of appropriate communication to stakeholders and any other interested parties	Rep	3	2	6	Active and appropriate engagement via communications plan.
6	Managing expectations of all interested parties	Rep	3	3	9	Active and appropriate engagement via communications plan.
7	The need for a long term strategy and some degree of change is not understood or accepted by stakeholders	Rep	3	2	6	Active and appropriate engagement via communications plan.
8	Loss of political support - local and/or national	Rep	4	2	8	Ensure relevant councillors and Board members are briefed regularly on progress
9	<b>OPERATIONAL</b>					
10	Development of new ranger services and volunteer coordinator gets out of step with other connected work - e.g. Cairngorms Nature, Active Cairngorms	Op	2	2	4	Managed through project team approach - team members to ensure integration with other work streams and flag up potential clashes

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ID	Risk	Type	Impact	Likelihood	Score	Controls
11	Statutory requirements such as dealing with access issues are not delivered.	Op	4	2	8	Project team members to ensure integration with other work streams and flag up potential issues
12	Wider Ranger Service function not being delivered in parts of Deeside and Badenoch and Strathspey	Op	4	2	8	Project team continue to work with affected services to foster continued integration with wider Cairngorms Ranger Services work.
13	Staff time is insufficient to properly develop new Ranger Service partners or the Volunteer Coordinator	Op	2	3	6	Project board and team members to take responsibility for ensuring appropriate staff time is made available
14	Changes to staff roles during the project management process	Op	2	2	4	Minimise changes to staff team where possible and ensure relevant colleagues are briefed on regular basis.
15	<b>FINANCIAL</b>					
16	Ambitions that are unaffordable within desired timescales	Fin	4	3	12	Manage expectations and ensure regular communication with organisation boards/partners/stakeholders.
17	Ambitions that are undeliverable when constraints and detailed feasibility are considered	Fin	3	3	9	Manage expectations and ensure regular communication with organisation boards/partners/stakeholders.
18	Proposals are neither financially viable nor inherently sustainable	Fin	3	2	6	Manage expectations and ensure regular communication with organisation boards/partners/stakeholders.
19	Short-term financial constraints block delivery of the long term vision	Fin	2	2	4	Schedule delivery ambitions realistically and identify 'quick wins' and appropriate finance to deliver on these using normal budgeting processes.