
CAIRNGORMS NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY

DRAFT MINUTES OF THE BOARD MEETING **held via LifeSize Video Conferencing** **on Friday 22nd January 2021 at 10.00**

PRESENT

Xander McDade (Convener)	Eleanor Mackintosh
Carolyn Caddick (Deputy Convener)	Willie McKenna
Peter Argyle	Ian McLaren
Geva Blackett	Dr Fiona McLean
Deirdre Falconer	William Munro
Pippa Hadley	Anne Rae Macdonald
Janet Hunter	Dr Gaener Rodger
John Kirk	Derek Ross
John Latham	Judith Webb
Douglas McAdam	

In Attendance:

Grant Moir, Chief Executive,
David Cameron, Director of Corporate Services
Pete Mayhew, Director of Conservation and Visitor Services
Murray Ferguson, Director of Planning & Rural Development
Pete Crane, Head of Visitor Services
Oliver Davies, Head of Communications & Engagement
Alix Harkness, Clerk to the Board

Apologies:

Welcome and Introduction

1. Xander McDade, the Convener, welcomed everyone to the special meeting of the Park Board and noted there were no apologies.

Matters arising

2. There were no matters arising.

Declarations of Interest

3. Declarations of interest were invited. There were no interests declared.

2021/22 Budget: Ranger Services (Paper 1)

4. Grant Moir, CEO and David Cameron, Director of Corporate Services presented Paper 1 which seeks the Board approval to establish a Seasonal Ranger Service for the 2021 calendar year. He explained that this is a stage point decision within the wider service development and 2021/22 budget process, required at this point in time to facilitate development of a core service capacity in time for the anticipated commencement of the visitor management season at end March / early April 2021.
5. The Board considered the detail in the Paper and discussions took place around the following:
 - a) Several members spoke in support the introduction of Kickstart rangers and particularly starting them on the living wage rather than minimum wage. It was considered crucial that we do that and support it. The member did have concerns about the impact on the budget, and noted the need to ensure we've got a plan in place if we don't get financial settlement that we are hoping which would have a serious impact on other projects.
 - b) A member commented the organisation is going to be under a huge amount of stress as we come into the season in terms of our infrastructure. The member believed the proposals have got an educational benefit as well, not only in terms of the Kickstart placements for young people and getting young people involved in working in the Park, but also in terms of what the Rangers can offer in terms of education to people coming to park for the first time. The member believed the proposal represents money well spent and is wholly in favour of this paper.
 - c) A member commented they support this and the continued investment in a ranger service in the Park area. In regards to this specific proposal the member had a few queries/concerns: the first is around the finances, we've only really seen headline figures no detailed costs, £0.25 million is quite lot of money; the actual gross FTE cost on an annual basis equivalent would be nearly £40k for these positions, which seem expensive. The member indicated this level of spend merited an options paper of how this resource could be delivered and asked what options had been considered in arriving at the recommendation. The CEO responded that this is a cost-effective approach for what we are doing within the Park. Two key things in this regard. Firstly, the flexibility in deployment of a Park Authority Ranger Service is crucial, and it is only by employing rangers that you can have that flexibility as they are the only Rangers

that can work across landholdings, which is key for what we are doing. Secondly, the CEO reported the costs are broadly comparative: in effect we are looking at a post which we rota on evenings and weekends incorporating allowances within the salary at a BI grade which is similar grade as other ranger services at other National Parks across the UK. The CEO also advised that having CNPA presence on the ground is very crucial as a Park Authority. We have a mixed model already within the National Park, we give grant funding to Rothiemurchus Estate, Atholl Estate, Balmoral Estate, Glen Tanar Estate, Angus Alive (who run the Rangers in the Glen Doll area) and to the RSPB Community Ranger in Nethybridge. It's the complementarity between the estate based ranger services and the flexibility of the CNPA ranger based service that is absolutely crucial to effective overall deployment and it's that combination that makes this the best way forward for the Park Authority. The CEO reiterated that we will be working closely with ranger services and with other people to review how this all works. As things stand, it is crucial to have CNPA Ranger presence within the Park. The member agreed that we need a mixed model, and it would be helpful to understand what the investment is at the moment, where it is going into estate based rangers and working with local authorities. The Director of Corporate Services referred to the estimated cost per FTE ranger and confirmed this was estimated as £38,000 for directly employed rangers, compared with a benchmark cost of £36,000 including VAT for contracted estate based rangers: therefore not a significantly wide gap in terms of cost while it was best value on which the Authority was expected to make such service decisions. The Director also highlighted that the direct employment of rangers was also crucial to enable the employment of Kickstart rangers which members had commented on very positively, as we needed rangers in our employment to support and manage these young people. The Convener confirmed the plan to continue to review how this is working, as the Authority did last year on operations through the season, ensuring that we are getting value for money across all the different ranger provision.

- d) A member agreed with earlier comment that we are going to find ourselves under enormous pressure again this summer. The CNPA Rangers worked well last year but they couldn't be everywhere all the time and referred to ideas suggested by the SLE paper. The member felt this would be a good opportunity to put some funding into training people working on ground, so that we can find a way of everybody working together. The CEO responded that discussions are already underway: in effect, all land managers with estate based ranger services are involved in visitor management groups and we will be working with them closely over the next few months on the back of whatever the decision we make today and to prepare on the lead up to Easter. There will be lots of ongoing work with Estates to make sure we have got the right approach for the summer and not just around the ranger services but also

around infrastructure, transport, traffic and all the other things we need to put in place and on communications. Rangers remain vital as ultimately, we are trying to get as much resources as we can in the right places in the Park for this coming summer.

- e) A member echoed the need for this proposal, and for visitor management gains and the importance of the educational benefit of this. The member noted the paper understandably is a stage point, establishing the ranger service for this season, and there's a limit at what could be achieved at this stage. The member confirmed their desire at the end of the season to see a review to bring to the table more of that background information that we would want to see for longer term decision making. While being keen to embed this ranger service in our activities going forward, there is a need to have that information and the details to make all the right decisions to ensure we do have a permanent ranger service going forward.

The member assuming an Equalities Impact Assessment (EQIA) will be done for this, and wished to emphasise the significance of equalities training for our rangers noting our Equalities Panel would be keen to support if in need of any advice for this. The Director of Corporate Services confirmed the processes and procedures which we will be using are already equality impact assessed: all of our recruitment processes are already assessed and other strands of our employment processes are also equality assessed. The Director confirmed the Authority will be drawing up the EQIA of the delivery of our seasonal ranger service.

- f) A member agreed that it would have been good to have a different options paper. They indicated they have done a bit of research on what rangers elsewhere are getting paid which ranges from £19k- £25k, and struggled with how we get to pay rangers £36k a year, with concerns about the budget as the result of that. The CEO clarified we are not paying that to seasonal rangers: the salary will be £16,999 pro rata – pay is £27k for full year, at BI grade which takes into account working evenings and weekends. Other cost is oncosts such as employers' national insurance and estimated pension contributions so that is not paid to the individual. The CEO reflected the Director of Corporate Services previous response that this broadly comparable to other ranger services that operate. The CEO also reflected his view that it is a good thing that we are paying a good wage to people who are doing important work out in the Park. The Director of Corporate Services also reflected the Board needed to consider, in the current economic climate and in seeking to secure an effective ranger service, which organisations would be willing to take on the potential employment risks of additional staff and whether these could be guaranteed to be in the right areas of the Cairngorms where people would need to be deployed. The member asked whether the Authority might employ more part time ranger posts, so that the park is not paying national insurance

contributions on jobs and open up the flexibility for people who have another job or have home commitments. The Director of Corporate Services responded that as part of our equalities considerations we always offer job share or part-time working opportunities for recruitment opportunities, while our national insurance costs were estimated over a range of contracts. He also reflected the potential management and rota issues over the employment of a very large number of part time posts.

- g) A member commented that this proposal is vital for our 2021 visitor management approach, and that it was great to see park rangers out and about with the park logo as it's good for the impact of the Authority to be seen. While we often having a key enabling function, a lot of the visitors will only see the rangers. The member reflected that points were well made about FTE costing, but we always offer flexible working patterns which is good for equalities and good for people in the Park generally who have more than one job but can flex. The flexible recruitment will give us that opportunity regardless of any saving we make on national insurance. The member reiterated the wider value of a review of the mixed model including the contribution of and support for other ranger services at the end of the season. An early review of any lessons learned from last season would be particularly helpful. The member asked whether there are any national networks to learn from while supporting the notion that wider communications were vital to successful work in this area. The CEO responded that there is a UK National Parks ranger network and within Scotland there is the Scotland Countryside Rangers Association (SCRA). Within the CNP we have a ranger get together once a year, a lot of networking things happen at UK, Scottish and CNP level. The CEO reminded members that staff produced the end of season review, and have previously done papers on rangers. The CEO stated that he would aim to bring an overview of ranger services with the budget paper in March. The Head of Visitor Services added the annual national ranger gathering is being held virtually on Thursday 28th January. The Convener summarised that it would be useful to have a paper brought to Board in March: members want to understand essentially how our different types of rangers in the Park work together.
- h) A member welcomed bringing forward a seasonal ranger service and regarding the budget, felt the Authority has no choice but to do this: if presented with a list of options and implications for top slicing the budget, this would come out as top priority. The member stated a view that this is a great news story if we agree it, while in terms of publicity stated it's really important we don't forget the estate based rangers that are out and about all year and that we get good coverage of the work they do as well as the seasonal rangers. The Convener agreed this would come out on top as priority and expressed his view that it is vital that we do approve this today.

- i) A member agreed that this is a top priority for the Park, supporting the visitor management. The member liked the mixed model that we have in the National Park of the seasonal, volunteer, grant-in-aid and other organisational rangers to see them visibly across the National Park. Having National Park rangers is key to how we support visitor management. The members agreed a review would be useful in learning how to help us embed and develop the service going forward particularly given potential it as something that we have forever going forward in the Park.
- j) A member agreed this is a good opportunity to make public aware of the valuable contribution of the Authority and shows good collaboration between land managers and CNPA. The member sought clarification around the age eligibility for the Kickstart rangers given our rangers potentially deal with conflict, so there is an increase element of management there. The CEO confirmed there was an age range of 18-24 and people must be on universal credit to be eligible. The CEO confirmed there will be management implications associated with employing young people through Kickstart. He noted all think it is a positive thing to do, and we are one of the 12 National Parks doing it.
- k) A member sought clarity in terms of what the Board is being asked to approve today, referring to 6b) in the paper where there is mention of determining the full permanent and seasonal ranger compliment, and noting discussion and some support for having a wider a review. The CEO confirmed seasonal rangers will be employed on a 7 month contract. The proposal is to look at Scottish Government budget outcome next week for the Park Authority and take forward the budget proposal on the 12th March which may include permanent ranger proposals depending on funding allocations in response to bids made.
- l) A member responded that they are fully supportive of it, noting when we looked at this as a Board back in November the board totally agreed to progress it for 2021. The pay scale seems fine, reasonable and proper, it's not the job of the Board to set the pay scale - that's an operational issue, happy to leave that to our officers to do in the appropriate way. The member noted the 2020 season was an incredibly difficult and challenging one. The seasonal rangers did a huge amount of work to prevent problems getting worse than they did. The member stated 2021 is going to be very pressured as well; we need to be ready for that; we need to get the rangers in place quickly; and we need to get ready to cope with what is going to be a very tough season. We need to review it as we go and no doubt the positive dialogue with other land management estates, local authorities, and other ranger services that having been taking place will continue to take place. The member commended the Kickstart proposal highlighting a lot of work has gone in to get us into this position: it is a very good thing and commend the work

done on this to get us involved in the programme. The member stated their support of paper

- m) A member noted they would be very worried if this leads to special constables, and hoped that we are not travelling down that road as that leads to all sorts of problems. The member noted it was great to have young people involved in this with loss of other engagement with young people in some areas. The CEO responded that the Authority runs a travel grant scheme in the Park: £8k for travel funds for schools coming into the park, and we are planning to support that going forward. The CEO confirmed the Authority had not had any conversations about any of the rangers being special constables in the Park, and this is not something we are looking to develop. The Convener highlighted it is important to recognise the structure for our ranger service is going to be integrated with education undertaken by the Authority
- n) A member agreed it is a great idea to put in rangers, reflecting the expectation the National Park will be very busy over next few years as people won't be going abroad. The member indicated a hope for jobs going to local people and part-time too and fully endorsed the proposal. A member revisited the potential options for service delivery and whether we would be able offer them contracts as self-employed contractors? The Director of Corporate Services responded that his understanding of HMRC guidelines are around self-employed people having to demonstrate very clearly that they are working to multiple contracts, and not effectively working for a single controlling employer. Other issue if they are VAT registered, it would be a taxable supply, we would be paying 20% on top of their wage, we are not VAT registered so cannot recover this. These were further factors already considered and for members to be aware of when we get into these wider cost considerations.
- o) The Director of Corporate Services noted he had taken on board members feedback on the balance of the information in the paper, indicating it is always a balancing act to determine how much information goes into the board paper and the consequent length of the paper, and how to much draw out in when we get in to discussion and conversation.
- p) The Convener concluded there had been a good discussion about this, with a lot of differing points. Discussions had been very helpful, and although some ideas may not be taken forward it was helpful that they have been considered. The mixed economy model that we have at the National Park provides a flexible approach. The estate based ranger services know their patch well and it is, good to support that through grant-in-aid. It's also a real value of having our own directly employed rangers to deploy to hot spots, on a daily basis deploying people across the park to where they were required at that point in time. We had that flexibility last year because we were directly employing staff and having that core of directly employed people that we can deploy anywhere is essential.

The Convener summarised that he is proud of the Kickstart rangers: we can really champion this as an embodiment of what the Board long term objective in terms of supporting youth employment, working and living in the Park is all about. These are job opportunities for people who are unemployed looking for their next step and who might want to work in the outdoors. Rangers do so much, it is not just about supporting visitors it is education which is fundamental about how to treat the outdoors and how to enjoy outdoors in a responsible way.

The fact the Cairngorms proposed the Kickstart scheme for UK NP and that has been taken on by 12 other National Parks is a fantastic opportunity that has been opened up and the Convener hoped everyone will promote through their networks locally.

As a final point, the Convener noted that having a ranger service is an intrinsic part of being a National Park. How we make up that ranger service is important: a mixed economy model is best for the Cairngorms and that includes directly employed rangers even if there is slight additional cost. That premium to the Convener is worth it so that our communities can see we are directly supporting them, and that our rangers are supporting businesses, our residents and our communities. It is very important that people can see the physical embodiment of what being in a National Park is about and the benefits it can bring. The Convener remarked that the good discussion has opened up a lot of different points, and the Chief Executive has committed to bringing back further information in March as part of the budget process.

The Convener also noted this discussion has been very useful in terms for officers to understand what Board Members would like to see in future papers, and that will be a discussion for us to have afterwards to pick up on the feedback.

- q) The Convener proposed the recommendations, the Deputy Convener seconded the recommendations.

6. The Board:

- a) **Approved a commitment of £236,000 to finance a seasonal ranger service to start by 22 March 2021 and operate until 31 October 2021.**
- b) **Approved a further commitment of £3,000 to augment the Seasonal Ranger Service with five 'Kickstart' Youth Placement opportunities for young people seeking a start in this employment sector.**
- c) **Agreed that should the budget settlement communicated on 28 January show a significant reduction in the Authority's funding for the coming year – a reduction in grant in aid in excess of 5% - the management team will postpone the development of these services and bring the service initiative back as part of the full budget proposals for consideration in March.**

- d) **Noted the Kickstart commitment minimum of £3,000 may rise to £30,000: that increase if required to be confirmed as part of the main budget consideration by the Board in March.**

AOCB

7. None.

Date of Next Meeting

8. Next formal Board meeting to be held on 12 February 2021 via Lifesize video Conferencing.
9. The meeting concluded at 11.17am.