

CAIRNGORMS NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY

FOR DECISION

Title: **Transfer of Grant Aid Function for Ranger Services in the National Park**

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Purpose

This paper summarises the work that has been undertaken to date on the development of a coordinated approach to ranger services and seeks specific approval for Cairngorms National Park Authority to take on the role of providing grants for ranger services from Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH).

Recommendations

It is recommended that the Board:

- a) **approve the transfer of the grant-aid function for ranger services from SNH to the Cairngorms National Park Authority, subject to any settlement not reducing the overall level of public support for ranger services in the National Park, and final approval by the Finance Committee.**

Executive Summary

This paper summarises the work to date on the development of a coordinated approach to ranger services in the National Park and outlines the work currently undertaken by ranger services. The paper also summarises the current SNH ranger policy review, and identifies the costs associated with the CNPA taking on the function from SNH or providing discretionary grant aid within the National Park. The implications of taking on the discretionary grant are discussed. The paper recommends that the Board confirm their lead role in coordinating rangers in the National Park and approve the transfer of grant-aid function from SNH.

TRANSFER OF GRANT AID FUNCTION FOR RANGER SERVICES IN THE NATIONAL PARK – FOR DECISION

Background

1. There are 12 ranger services operating within the Cairngorms National Park that are either fully or partly supported by public funds. Four of these services are supported and managed by private estates, one by National Trust for Scotland and one by a community group, Explore Abernethy. Collectively these services employ some 24.5 full time equivalent rangers within the National Park. Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH) provide discretionary ranger grant to seven services, and support the service at Mar Lodge through a national agreement with National Trust for Scotland. CNPA and SNH both part fund Speyside Way Ranger Service and Rothiemurchus Ranger Service through management agreements. Highlands and Islands Enterprise (Cairngorm Ranger Service) and Forestry Commission Scotland wholly fund ranger services operating on land that they own.
2. The work undertaken to date on developing a coordinated approach to ranger services in the National Park is covered in **Annex 1**.

Rangers in the Cairngorms National Park

3. Ranger services operate throughout the National Park. They are practical people who help visitors and communities to better understand and enjoy the countryside responsibly. They help land managers and other countryside workers get the most from visitors and communities. Their new overall aims of ranger services, as defined by SNH, are summarised in paragraph 8.
4. The current work of rangers in the National Park helps to improve opportunities for outdoor access, increase understanding and awareness of the countryside, conserve and enhance the area and help make tourism businesses more sustainable. All of these are Priorities for Action in the National Park Plan.
5. However, the work programmes of rangers within the National Park are currently coordinated by an intricate series of funding agreements and management arrangements that largely focus on the needs of each service and the area of land over which they operate. The mechanisms to encourage services to take a National Park perspective are complex and indirect. Currently, there are no simple ways, at a National Park level, to fill gaps in ranger provision or reduce duplication. Rangers themselves appear to have little sense of being part of a National Park.
6. The Board recognised that Park-wide coordination would be best facilitated by a single public body taking the lead and that the most practical and efficient step toward achieving this was for CNPA to take on the role of providing discretionary grant for ranger services in the National Park. In moving towards this position the Board also recognised the need to maintain the valuable partnerships that currently

deliver ranger services and particularly those in the non-public sector where the work of rangers needs to produce some benefits for the land manager.

SNH Ranger Policy Review

7. Since the last Board meeting SNH has started to develop a new policy on ranger services that represents the first detailed review of rangers in Scotland in a decade and this impacts on our work in the National Park. SNH has looked afresh at the role of rangers, the aim of ranger services, SNH objectives and the overall approach to funding.
8. In summary, SNH continue to see a strong role for rangers in delivering National policy in the countryside and in connecting people with places. The draft Policy suggests that their new aims should be:
 - 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.
9. The largest single change proposed in the draft policy is that discretionary grant for rangers should be linked to outputs and outcomes. Again this links directly with the role of rangers in the National Park delivering actions in the Park Plan that assist in meeting wider outcomes. However, current spending reviews combined with change in policy are likely to place pressure on SNH's ability to maintain ranger grants at current levels. Therefore, SNH's desire to continue to see strong ranger services is likely to require new ways of working and potentially more support from partners if it is to be realised. The uncertainty about future funding, and the prospect that ranger funding will be linked to wider set of outcomes, has raised concerns over the viability of ranger services with some managers, especially in local authorities.
10. SNH very much value the strong partnership working arrangements and recognise the need to develop new partnerships, particularly beyond the public sector. SNH explicitly recognise the input in time and money made by ranger managers and the need for rangers to undertake work that directly benefits the manager, as well as public sector funders. It is notable that public-private partnership underling ranger services is particularly strong in the Cairngorms National Park: the non-public sector rangers that are supported by SNH within the National Park make up 21% of the total for Scotland (while the total number of rangers in the National Park directly supported by SNH grant is only 5% of the national total).
11. CNPA responded to two phases of the consultation, in general welcoming the proposals. The response was previously circulated to Board members. There is a great deal of synergy with the new approach that is proposed nationally and that which we wish to adopt within the Cairngorms National Park. SNH now need to

refine the draft policy in the light of the consultation and this is likely to be agreed in early 2008.

Transfer of Funding Role

12. The Board has approved in principle the transfer of the grant-aid function for ranger services in the National Park from SNH to CNPA, subject to further consideration of detailed matters. SNH have now confirmed that they are prepared to consider the transfer of the grant function to CNPA but that this would need to take account of the outcome of SNH's current ranger policy review, to be finalised in early 2008. The sum of money involved, based on current rates of grant and at prices for 2007/2008 is around £110,000, managed using 21 days of Area Officer time (six different staff members), at a cost of £3,250. This grant supports the employment of 10.5 fte rangers. **Annex 2** provides the detail of this current funding position.
13. SNH have not found it easy to separate the day to day administration or policy development costs. As these figures are likely to be very modest indeed and SNH will still require to undertake them in relation to other tasks, it is not advisable to pursue the matter.
14. Taking on this discretionary grant role would enable CNPA to directly influence the work programmes of nine of the 12 publicly supported ranger services, aligning these programmes more closely to the National Park Plan. Currently, CNPA has direct influence with three services, at Rothiemurchus, Angus Glens and on the Speyside Way. This would simplify public sector input to ranger services within the National Park and strengthen the role of CNPA.
15. If the transfer of funding role is agreed SNH, quite understandably, want to see rangers continuing to deliver some outputs that directly assist their area of interest, for example work associated with National Nature Reserves. In general terms this to be appears entirely compatible with the National Park Plan.
16. If agreed, it is anticipated that the transfer of the grant function would take place during 2008/09 with CNPA negotiating work programmes with ranger managers in autumn 2008 for the following years.
17. If agreed the work of administering the ranger service grant would be led by staff within Visitor Services and Recreation Group. There requires to be some internal discussion about staffing levels that can be addressed though discussions about the Corporate Plan.

Implications of Transferring Funding

18. The implications for the specific services are summarised in **Annex 3**. We consider that all the practical concerns expressed by ranger managers can be addressed with the exception of guaranteeing discretionary funding at the current level. This will depend on the outcome of the SNH policy and is covered in the recommendation below.
19. The implications for the National Park are that, for the first time since designation, one public agency (CNPA) will be able to effectively coordinate ranger services to meet the needs of their employers and the needs of the National Park as defined by the Park Plan. Within the National Park the funding and management arrangements for ranger services will be simplified. It will be easier to identify and fill gaps in provision at a Park-wide level, reduce overlaps and improve the overall quality of the service provided. We will continue the current partnership approach that works so well at a local level and we will work to enhance the ability of rangers to place their work in the context of the whole National Park. We will encourage rangers, visitors, communities and land managers to see rangers as being a key part of the National Park.
20. The output of 24.5 FTE better coordinated rangers towards delivering the aims of the National Park has huge potential to help achieve the 25 year vision of a 'world-class National Park – an outstanding environment in which the natural and cultural resources are cared for by the people who live there and visit.' By confirming our intention to take on the lead public sector role in coordinating rangers, and providing discretionary grant, CNPA will be seen as providing strong, positive leadership and commitment to the work of ranger services at a time of uncertainty.

Recommendation

21. As indicated previously SNH are nearing completion of new policy on ranger services which will also address future SNH grant support for rangers. Prior to this policy announcement, and an indication of their own funding settlement, SNH are reluctant to agree a final transfer of funds. Conversely, we would not wish to take on the management and delivery of a funding position that is markedly worse than the current position.
22. **It is recommended that the Board:**
 - a) **approve the transfer of the grant-aid function for ranger services from SNH to the Cairngorms National Park Authority, subject to any settlement not reducing overall level of public support for ranger services in the National Park, and final approval by the Finance Committee.**

Consultation

23. In developing this paper consultation has taken place with SNH, the three local authority ranger managers and the Estate Manager at Mar Lodge. Other ranger managers and SCRA have been involved at previous stages in the process.

Policy Context

Delivering Sustainability

24. The recommendations made are designed to coordinate more effectively the work of ranger services for the benefit of the whole Park. We consider that this coordinated approach will be more effective in terms of economic, social and environmental sustainability than the current rather fragmented arrangements.

Delivering a Park for All

25. The recommendations would, if approved, help ensure that each of the ranger services works in alignment with the five Guiding Principles in the Park Plan. Rangers through their high level of contact with the public have an especially important role to play in "Social Justice (a National Park for All)" and "People participating in the Park".

Delivering Economy, Effectiveness and Efficiency

26. The recommendation would, if approved, incur no additional public sector spend. The result should be the development of a coordinated approach to ranger services that will make the delivery of key priorities in the National Park Plan more effective and efficient.

Implications

Financial Implications

27. There are no immediate direct financial consequences arising from the paper. The financial implications for the CNPA would depend on the final settlement with SNH to be approved by Finance Committee. If agreed the transfer would be added to our annual settlement from the Scottish Government commencing 1 April 2009.

Presentational and Stakeholder Implications

28. As with previous work on rangers we need to ensure that rangers, ranger service managers and other stakeholders are informed of progress and changes well in advance enactment.
29. As indicated previously the SNH ranger review is causing some uncertainty amongst rangers and ranger service managers. This is further exacerbated within the National Park by the lack of clarity in the role played by CNPA. For the benefit of all involved the position needs to be resolved as soon as possible after SNH announce the new national ranger policy.

Next Steps

30. The immediate next step would be to communicate the decision to SNH, ranger service managers. The Rangers can be updated on progress at the annual ranger event on 12 December. Then, once the new SNH policy position is clear a detailed proposal can be presented to Finance Committee at the earliest possible time.
31. We will report back to the Board in autumn 2008 on progress made in all areas of work with ranger services.

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Annex 1 - Summary of Work Undertaken Since 2004

32. The National Park Plan (2007) contains the development of a coordinated approach to the management of ranger services as part of the Priority for Action on Raising Awareness and Understanding of the National Park:
“Develop a cohesive approach to management of ranger services that meets needs of visitors, land managers and communities and of the National Park.”
33. A working group comprising CNPA Board members and officers, and officers of Scottish Natural Heritage met regularly until January 2006 to advise on this work. During this period CNPA officers also met regularly with both ranger service managers and with the rangers themselves through the Scottish Countryside Rangers Association (SCRA). An issues paper was circulated to the Board and various Advisory Forums and then a Decision Paper was presented to the Board in March 2005. The Board agreed a number of principles that should guide future work in this area and decided to focus attention on three specific options for changing the management arrangements:
- a) That CNPA should influence ranger services’ work programmes through liaison with SNH and coordinate other services through concordats and service level agreements ;
 - b) That CNPA take on the funding role of SNH and coordinate other services through concordats and service level agreements; or
 - c) That CNPA should move to directly employ and manage those rangers that are currently employed by local authorities.
34. It should be noted that the Board explicitly rejected the ‘no change’ option as it was considered that some significant modifications required to meet the needs of the National Park. The Board also ruled out a potential option that CNPA should move to directly employ and manage all rangers in the Park as this would not present good value for money, nor sit well with the partnership approach that had proved successful over many years.
35. CNPA then commissioned work evaluate these options for change. This work was undertaken with advice from a small group comprising ranger managers, a representative of SNH and SCRA. The Group was chaired by Richard Stroud (Board member). Peter Scott Planning Services completed their study in January 2006 (copies of the full report are available on request).
36. Following informal Board discussion sessions, the Board agreed, in March 2007, a vision for ranger services in the National Park:
‘Our vision for ranger services in the National Park is that collectively they provide a highly visible, effective, customer-focussed overall service for the National Park, managed as part of a public-private partnership of affiliated ranger services, that helps to ensure that the Cairngorms becomes a world-class National Park’.

37. The Board decided in March 2007 the specific role that each type of ranger service should play in delivering the National Park Plan. Their main areas of work should be undertaking actions that assist with the following Priorities for Action:
 - a) Providing High Quality Opportunities for Outdoor Access;
 - b) Raising Understanding and Awareness of the National Park;
 - c) Conserving and Enhancing Biodiversity in Landscapes; and
 - d) Making Tourism Businesses More Sustainable.

38. The Board approved in principle the transfer of the grant-aid function for ranger services in the National Park from SNH to CNPA subject to further consideration of detailed matters.

39. The Board agreed to progress the development of a visual brand image and conditions for its use by ranger services, using the National Park brand image, in order to conspicuously link their work to the National Park. The scope of this work has been presented to the Brand Management Group and who will ensure that the outputs are consistent with current brand guidelines.

40. Since March 2007 the following activity, directly relating to the coordination of ranger services, has been undertaken:
 - a) CNPA participated in workshops discussions and responded to two stages of consultation SNH Policy review of Ranger Services in Scotland;
 - b) CNPA staff met separately with ranger service managers from Highland, Angus and Aberdeenshire Councils and National Trust for Scotland to discuss in detail the implications of the transfer of discretionary ranger grant from SNH to CNPA; and
 - c) CNPA staff met and corresponded with SNH to discuss the detail of any transfer of discretionary grant.

Annex 2: The Current Position with Rangers inside the Cairngorms National Park

Ranger Service	Employer	Rangers in the National Park	Principal Funders	SNH involvement in the Park
Rangers Services Grant Aided by SNH				
Local Authority Services				
Aberdeenshire Council Marr District (part)	Aberdeenshire Council	Senior Ranger (S, Aberdeenshire) Ranger (Marr District) 0.4 fte	Aberdeenshire Council, SNH	Annual Grant support £4,100 to Apr 2008 SNH time approx 2 days per year. Grampian lead (Kelley Miller)
Angus Council Angus Glens Ranger Service	Angus Council	Senior Ranger. Ranger 2 fte	Angus Council, SNH, FCS	Annual Grant of £23,500 to Apr 2008 T & C lead (Carolyn Deasley) – 1.5 days for Angus Glens rangers. Shona Hill 15 days p.a. Nina Turner 5 days p.a. – for Corrie Fee NNR reserve management (reserve management group meetings, monthly work programme liaison meetings with Angus Glens rangers etc.)
Highland Council Badenoch & Strathspey	Highland Council	2 Rangers (Badenoch & Strathspey – North; South) 2fte	Highland Council, SNH	Annual grant support of £20,500 to Apr 2008 SNH time approx 8 days per year. East Highland lead (Cattie Anderson)
Speyside Way Management Group (Moray Council as lead)	Moray Council	Route Manager 2 Maintenance Rangers Seasonal Ranger (all 50%) 1.5 fte (excl. maintenance)	SNH, Moray Council, Highland Council, CNPA	SNH time approx 6 days per year. Grampian lead (Kelley Miller) CNPA fund the portion of the LDR that is within the Park boundary and sit on the management group for the whole route. SNH grant support to the route and ranger service is focussed on that part of the LDR outwith the Park. SNH time is related to the LDR Management Group which covers the whole route.

Private Estate Ranger Service				
Balmoral Estate (inc. Delnadamph & Abergeldie Estate)	Balmoral Estate	Ranger (Balmoral) Ranger (Glen Mick) Stalker/pt. Ranger Seasonal Ranger 2.6 fte	Balmoral Estates, SNH (+income)	Annual grant support of £29,100 to Apr 2008 SNH time approx 2 days per year Grampian lead (Findlay Bennet).
Glen Tanar Estate	Glen Tanar Charitable Trust	Senior Ranger Ranger (part time) 1.6fte	Glen Tanar Trust, SNH (+ income)	Annual grant support to £17,900 to Apr 2008 SNH time approx 2 days per year. Grampian lead (Findlay Bennet)
Glenlivet Estate	Crown Estate	Countryside & Forest Services Manager (part) Assistant Ranger (ft summer: pt winter) 1.2 fte	Crown Estate, SNH	Annual grant support of £16,150 (whole estate) to Apr 2008 SNH time approx 2 days per year. Grampian Lead (Jennifer Heatley)
Community Ranger Service				
Explore Abernethy	Explore Abernethy	Seasonal Ranger 0.7 fte	Explore Abernethy, SNH, HC, CNPA	Annual grant support of £8,400 to Apr 2008 part of which supports a project officer and part of ranger. SNH time approx 3 days per year. East Highland lead (Keith Duncan)
Totals Grant aided Ranger Services	8 Services (or parts of)	12 Rangers		£109,650 Approximately 26.5 days related to ranger servicer management + approximately 20 days in dealing with Angus Glens Ranger Service specifically in connection with the management of Corrie Fee NNR

Other Ranger Services – not grant aided by SNH				
Cairngorm Estate 14.2 km ²	CairnGorm Mountain Ltd. for HIE	Head Ranger Ranger 2 Seasonal Rangers 3.2 fte	HIE	SNH has little involvement with this service.
Forestry Commission	Forestry Commission Scotland	Recreation Manager Recreation ranger Ranger (part-Deeside) Ranger (part-Strathdon) 2.4 fte	FCS (+ project funding)	SNH has little involvement with this service
Mar Lodge Estate 300km ²	National Trust for Scotland	Senior Ranger 2 Seasonal Rangers 2.fte	NTS, SNH (through NTS Framework Agreement)	SNH Support through management agreement to 2020 SNH time approx 4 days per year. Grampian lead (Isla Martin)
Rothiemurchus Estate 100km ²	Rothiemurchus Estate	All staff undertake some ranger functions 5fte (estimate)	Rothiemurchus Estate, CNPA (through estate Management Agreement), FCS + income	Responsibility for relationship with the estate recently transferred from SNH to CNPA.
Totals Other Ranger Services	4 ranger services	12.5 fte rangers (to nearest 0.5)		Financial support to rangers is an element of the Management Agreement on Mar Lodge and not specifically identified in that agreement. Approx SNH time 4 days.
Totals All Ranger Services	12 Services	24.5		SNH Annual Support £109,700 + an element of the Mar Lodge Management Agreement Approx SNH Annual Time commitment to Ranger management 30.5 Days

Annex 3 - Implications of Transfer of Grant Aid Function to CNPA

Local Authority Ranger Services

41. Aberdeenshire, Angus and Highland Council Ranger Services all currently receive grant aid from SNH and all operate rangers both within and outwith the National Park. As such, any transfer of grant from SNH for the rangers within the National Park is likely to present more challenges to these services than any other as each authority would be applying to both SNH and CNPA for their services.
42. While each authority had some concerns about how the funding transfer might work they were all content, in principle, with the Park Authority taking on the role. The following issues were common to all local authorities:
 - a) CNPA taking on the funding role from SNH should not in itself reduce the overall level of public support to local authorities within the Park;
 - b) CNPA grant funding requirements, reporting and timescales should match those of SNH so as not to increase the administrative burden;
 - c) Rangers need to be able to deliver outputs that benefit the both local authority and the National Park itself;
 - d) Rangers (or part posts) would primarily operate within the National Park but on occasion they may be required to work in other parts of the local authority area;
 - e) There is great potential to enhance the role of rangers in assisting tourism businesses and their visitors;
 - f) There is great potential to use the presence of the National Park to further develop the professionalism of ranger services;
 - g) There is a need to provide additional training and development activity to encourage rangers to speak with confidence about the National Park and the role of the Park Authority and partners in the management of the area; and
 - h) Clear arrangements need to be put in place about lines of communication and reporting between CNPA, ranger managers and rangers.
43. All these issues, with the exception of the first listed item, can be addressed through detailed management arrangements. However, the biggest challenge will be maintaining the existing level of grant support to services. This is dependant on the final agreement reached with SNH about the amount of funds to be transferred. This will only be known once the SNH policy review is finalised in early 2008. The recommendation below therefore includes detailed consideration of this matter by the CNPA Finance Committee in due course and an assurance that overall level of public sector support for rangers should not diminish.
44. There are specific issues to address in Angus Council where, ever since the establishment of the Angus Glens Service in April 1998, the rate of total support provided by the public sector partners (Forestry Commission Scotland, SNH and CNPA) has been higher than for other services. Initially the Cairngorms Partnership provided funding to fill a gap and, over the last few years, this gap has been filled by CNPA on an interim basis until a clear way forward has developed. In addition to

the work with visitors to this popular area, and with the land managers and communities of the Angus Glens, the ranger service also assists SNH with management of Corrie Fee NNR and FCS with management of their estate. Further detailed discussion is required between all partners to reach an agreement that maintains the equity of the standard level grant to all local authorities within the National Park but also recognises and supports the additional work undertaken.

45. In Aberdeenshire Council the current arrangements mean that the ranger service provision in the Park is provided by two staff who work both within and outwith the Park. This situation is not ideal and does not fit with aspiration that, as far possible, posts should be dedicated to the Park. Given the small amount of total ranger service time in the Park (0.4 FTE per annum) this issue is not considered to be significant at the present time.

Private estate and Community Ranger Services: Balmoral, Glen Tanar and Explore Abernethy.

46. Previous discussions with the private estate and community ranger service managers were summarised in the last Board papers and there are no outstanding issues that affect the current transfer proposal. Obviously, if the level of resources available for grant support was to be reduced then there would be significant concerns. This point is covered in the section on local authorities above and in the recommendation.

Crown Estate, Glenlivet Ranger Service

47. This is the only private sector service affected by these discussions that, in geographical operation, extends beyond the boundary of the Park. The majority of the ranger effort takes place within the Park. SNH has proposed that if the funding role transfer goes ahead, CNPA should be the lead body for all contact on ranger services with the estate. This seems sensible.

Speyside Way Ranger Service

48. The ranger service associated with management of the route is already funded by CNPA for that part of their work within the National Park and is not affected by the proposed transfer of funding role.

National Trust for Scotland

49. SNH have a management agreement with National Trust for Scotland (NTS) for Mar Lodge which covers a wide range of matters and part of this is used to fund the ranger service on the estate. Discussions with the estate manager and SNH have indicated a willingness to align their work to the delivery of the Park Plan. At the present time there is little support from any party to separate the funding for the ranger service from the other public support that is received.

Rothiemurchus Estate

50. CNPA now has an interim management agreement with the estate (to March 2008) that draws on the partnership provided by the Rothiemurchus Concordat to deliver a range of outcomes. The agreement is used to channel public support in a more joined up way in the past, for example by providing funding from CNPA and SNH

through one agreement. Discussions about future agreements are due to commence shortly. As at Mar Lodge there is little support from any party to separate the ranger service funding from the other outcomes that are to be delivered.

Other Ranger Services not currently funded by SNH

51. The services provided by Forestry Commission Scotland (FCS) and Highlands and Islands Enterprise (HIE) would not be directly affected by the transfer in funding role. FCS and HIE both operate ranger services without grant support from SNH and have already indicated a willingness to align their work towards the National Park Plan.