From mountain to sea

Aberdeenshire
COUNCIL

Aberdeenshire Council Ranger Service Strategy

2020-23

"We will protect, sustain and enhance Aberdeenshire's natural and cultural heritage so those who live, visit and work here can develop and benefit from connection to place through raising awareness, understanding and care of these resources"

The Strategy is primarily an Aberdeenshire Council working document to help manage and deliver key priorities of the Ranger Service for the next three years.

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1 Introduction

Aberdeenshire boasts some of Scotland's finest countryside and coast, a valuable mosaic of habitats with areas of national and international interest and designations. Intertwined with our valuable natural heritage is a diverse timeline of cultural heritage assets. Aberdeenshire Council Ranger Service is committed to increasing enjoyment, understanding and care of these often irreplaceable resources by and for the public.

Connecting people to place through improved engagement with our natural and cultural heritage will enable responsible use, protection and enhancement of these resources. This connection can also improve health and well-being, provide volunteering opportunities, provide learning opportunities, increase skill levels, and support regeneration and tourism.

1.1 Scope of Strategy

The Aberdeenshire Council Ranger Service Strategy provides a structured approach to service delivery for the three-year period 2020-23. The Strategy is primarily an Aberdeenshire Council working document to help manage and deliver the key priorities, aims and objectives of the Ranger Service.

The Strategy will align to the draft "Connecting people and places – a policy statement on rangering in Scotland" produced by Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH) (now known as NatureScot) published in February 2020 to update the existing 2008 SNH policy statement – Rangers in Scotland. This will enable benchmarking of our service against similar Local Authority Ranger Services and measure the impact of Ranger Services at a national level.

The work of the Ranger Service also relates to the Environment Strategy for Scotland, the Scottish Biodiversity Strategy 2004 and its supplement, the 2020 Challenge for Scotland's Biodiversity. The work of the Ranger Service in protecting and restoring our ecosystems ties to the delivery of the United Nations Decade on Ecosystem Restoration beginning in March 2021.

The Ranger Service supports the three pillars as stated within Aberdeenshire Council's Plan approved in October 2020: Our People, Our Environment and Our Economy. With the Strategic Priorities: Education; Health & Wellbeing; Resilient Communities; & Economy & Enterprise being delivered. The underlying principles of right people, right place, right time; responsible finances; economy; climate and sustainability; human rights and public protection and tackling poverty and inequalities are embedded in all elements of Ranger Service delivery.

Through the period of the Strategy there will be a requirement to consider the challenges of our changing environment and the changing needs of our diverse communities. These challenges will include not only the effects of climate change, but also how we evaluate and address the impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic. To reflect these changes and challenges, an Annual Action Plan will be prepared for each year of the Strategy period which will provide detailed actions on the delivery of the Strategy and reflect the new priorities both at a Council level and beyond, as stated within the Aberdeenshire Council Plan approved in October 2020.

1.2 Aberdeenshire Council's Vision for the Ranger Service

It is Aberdeenshire Council's vision to be the best area and the best Council in Scotland.

The draft 'Connecting people and places – a policy statement on rangering in Scotland' produced by Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH) (now known as NatureScot) has a national vision for Ranger Services in Scotland:

"Scotland has the strong, confident and committed ranger workforce it will need to connect people with places, encourage more people to enjoy Scotland's outdoors responsibly, and to take the action needed to address biodiversity loss and climate change. The ranger workforce will grow and diversify, though the core of it will be in the ranger services provided by local authorities and community bodies as well as private and third sector employers and national bodies."

Aberdeenshire Council Ranger Service integrates both of these visions into our vision statement:

"We will aim to protect, sustain and enhance Aberdeenshire's natural and cultural heritage so those who live, visit and work here can develop and benefit from connection to place through raising awareness, understanding and care of these resources."

2 Resources

Aberdeenshire Council's Ranger Service is part of the Specialist Services Team within the Planning and Environment Service, Infrastructure Services. There are six Full Time Equivalent (FTE) Rangers, one based in each administrative area. The team is line-managed by a 0.6 FTE Ranger Service Co-ordinator.

The Ranger Service has an annual budget excluding staffing costs (for 2020-21 this was initially set at £19,520) to meet transport, equipment and premises cleaning costs at Aden Country Park for delivering the work outlined within this Strategy. The Service does not charge for any of its services currently, but it does welcome donations from organisations and members of the public for the public facing work which it undertakes. The allocated staffing budget for 2020-21 is £252,309. The estimated income for the Service in 2020-21 is £100. No amount has been budgeted for any donations which the Service may receive during the Strategy period.

Looking ahead future budgets for the Ranger Service will need to take into consideration the effects of local authority expenditure in dealing with Covid-19. This Strategy has been produced with this in mind, although it is assumed in terms of the staffing budget for the Ranger Service there are no significant changes planned.

The Ranger Service has a limited staff resource and it would be impossible to deliver the aims of this Strategy in isolation. We will continue to work with other services and partners to deliver the Strategy outcomes.

Our primary partners are listed in the following table:

Table 1: Aberdeenshire Council Ranger Service Key Partners

Aberdeenshire Council Services/Teams	External Partners
Community Learning and Development	Cairngorms National Park Authority
Education and Children's Services	East Grampian Coastal Partnership
Landscape Services	Forestry and Land Scotland
Live Life Aberdeenshire	National Health Service (NHS)
Planning Environment Team, including access and natural heritage	NatureScot (formally Scottish Natural Heritage)
North East Scotland Biological Records Centre (NESBReC)	North East Scotland Biodiversity Partnership (NESBiP)
Health and Social Care Partnership	Organisations supporting vulnerable, disadvantaged or minority groups e.g. Backbone CIC, Reach Foyer
Sustainability and Climate Change	Ranger Services, allied professionals and specialist providers, e.g. Outdoor and Woodland Learning Scotland.

3 Aberdeenshire Council Ranger Service Golden Thread

Scottish Government Purpose	**To focus government and public services on creating a more successful country, with opportunities for all, increase wellbeing of people, create sustainable and inclusive growth, reduce inequalities, and give equal importance to economic, environmental, and social progress**			
Scotland Performs **Scottish Government National Outcomes (A1)**	*National Outcome* We live in communities that are inclusive, empowered, resilient and safe *National Outcome* We grow up loved, safe and respected so that we realise our full potential	*National Outcome* We value, enjoy, protect, and enhance our environment *National Outcome* We are well educated, skilled and able to contribute to society	*National Outcome* We are creative and our vibrant and diverse cultures are expressed and enjoyed widely *National Outcome* We tackle poverty by sharing opportunities, wealth and power more equally	*National Outcome* We are healthy and active *National Outcome* We respect, protect and fulfil human rights and live free from discrimination
Scottish Government National Plans, Policies & Strategies (A2-13)	A2) The Environment Strategy for Scotland: Vision and Outcomes (2020)	A3) National Planning Framework 3	A4) National Tourism Development Framework	A5) Scotland's Biodiversity: It's in Your Hands (2004)
	A6) 2020 Challenge for Scotland's Biodiversity (2013)	A7) Curriculum for Excellence – Learning for Sustainability – Outdoor Learning	A8) Scottish Outdoor Access Code	A9) Community Empowerment
	A10) Climate Ready Scotland: Climate Change Adaptation Programme 2019-2024	A11) Active Scotland Delivery Plan	A12) A Culture Strategy for Scotland (2020)	A13) Connecting people and places – a policy statement on rangering in Scotland (2020) (*currently in draft form*)
Aberdeenshire Council Vision	**Serving Aberdeenshire from mountain to sea – the very best of Scotland**			
Aberdeenshire Council & Community Plans & Strategies (B1-7)	B1) Aberdeenshire Council Priorities (2020)		B2) Local Outcomes Improvement Plan	
	B3) Aberdeenshire Council Plan 2020-22		B4) Infrastructure Services Delivery Plan	B5) Local Development Plan 2017 / 2021
	B6) Community Action Plans		B7) Community Place Plans	
Ranger Service Vision	**We will aim to protect, sustain and enhance Aberdeenshire's natural and cultural heritage so those who live, visit and work here can develop and benefit from connection to place through raising awareness, understanding and care of these resources.**			
Ranger Service Strategy (C1)	C1) Aberdeenshire Council Ranger Strategy 2020 - 23			
Ranger Plans (C1a-b)	C1a) Annual Team Action Plan		C1b) Annual Individual Workplans	

3.1 Legislative Context

The Countryside (Scotland) Act 1967 (as amended) provides powers for local authorities and other public bodies to employ Rangers to provide assistance and advice; to secure compliance with byelaws and to perform other related duties.

The Land Reform (Scotland) Act 2003 provides powers for local authorities to employ Rangers with the purpose of providing advice, assistance and related functions in respect to outdoor access rights.

The Ranger Service assists with the Council's duty to further conservation of biodiversity as part of the Nature Conservation (Scotland) Act 2004.

The Ranger Service assists with the delivery of the Climate Change (Scotland) Act 2009.

4 Ranger Service Strategy Priorities, Aims, and Objectives

The Ranger Service Strategy's aims and team objectives have been drawn together to reflect the strategies, plans and policies which form the 'golden thread' (see Section 3) between the Scottish Government outcomes and delivery on the ground. The Strategy's team objectives provide a common framework for a customer and performance focussed service which works in partnership with stakeholders to deliver a high quality, efficient service for best value.

As part of this process key priorities have been identified which not only deliver cross-cutting outcomes over the aims of the Strategy, but which also deliver the most positive impact on natural and cultural heritage within Aberdeenshire which take their lead from Aberdeenshire Council's Strategic Priorities which are underpinned by key principles under the three pillars of: Our People, Our Environment and Our Economy.

Section 5 of this Strategy provides the list of key performance indicators the Ranger Service will use to measure how the core outcomes of the Strategy have been achieved. The Team will use the Strategy and Action Plans to develop individual annual work programmes which will reflect the specific natural and cultural environmental needs and aspirations of Aberdeenshire.

4.1 Key Priorities 2020-23

Table 2: Key Strategy Priorities 2020-23

Key Priority	Success Measure	Impact
KP1 Further promote the health and wellbeing benefits of accessing the outdoors and ensuring it is accessible to all	Sessions for vulnerable, disadvantaged and minority groups. Sessions to promote health and wellbeing benefits of accessing the outdoors. Information on health and wellbeing benefits of accessing the outdoors made available.	Increased public access to information. Better public understanding of Aberdeenshire's natural and cultural heritage. Increased wellbeing amongst communities and individuals.

		Vulnerable, disadvantaged and minority groups have skills, knowledge and confidence to access outdoors.
KP2 Increase opportunities available for outdoor learning and environmental education to ensure it is accessible to all	Develop an education pack on Aberdeenshire's natural and cultural heritage. Continuous Professional Development sessions for teachers and Early Years Practitioners. Sessions for schools.	Greater understanding of sustainable outdoor learning opportunities available in Aberdeenshire's countryside and coast. Increased participation in outdoor learning and environmental education.
KP3 Increase positive action to combat biodiversity loss and climate change at an individual and community level	Sessions for communities to improve local biodiversity and take action on climate change. Public sessions on biodiversity loss and climate change. Information on biodiversity loss and climate change impacts made available	Improved local biodiversity. Increased action on climate change. Increased awareness of biodiversity loss and climate change.
KP4 Promote Aberdeenshire's countryside and coast as a green tourism destination and increase opportunities for income generation potential for the Service.	Amount of engagement on social media channels. Amount of donations received.	Promotion of Aberdeenshire destination for green and wildlife tourism. Increased information on Aberdeenshire's natural and cultural heritage accessible online. Service expenditure reduced

4.2 Aim 1 – Promotion of our Natural and Cultural Heritage

Provide a warm welcome to our countryside for residents and visitors and provide support to vulnerable and minority groups to access our natural and cultural heritage.

Table3: Aim 1 Team Objectives

Team Objective	Golden Thread (see Section 3 and Key Priorities)	Outcome
1 Increase awareness, understanding and care of our natural and cultural heritage through personal connection	A1, A2, A3, A4, A5, A6, A8, A9, A10, A11, A12, A13 B1, B2, B3, B4, B6, B7 KP1, KP2, KP3, KP4	Improved connection with place at an individual and community level Increased public understanding of the value of natural and cultural heritage resources Increased public awareness of the importance of the sustainable use of our natural and cultural heritage resources National and local initiatives are supported Promotion of Aberdeenshire's natural and cultural heritage to tourists
2 Support recreation and enjoyment, helping to improve people's physical and mental health and well-being	A1, A2, A3, A4, A5, A6, A8, A9, A10, A11, A12, A13 B1, B2, B3, B4, B6, B7 KP1, KP4	People have confidence to access the outdoors for improved well-being Support for initiatives such as National Health Service Wellbeing Festival, Branching Out
3 Provide a welcoming and reassuring presence for less confident users, including tourists and people and groups who benefit from increased support.	A1, A2, A4, A5, A6, A8, A9, A10, A11, A12, A13 B1, B2, B3, B4, B6, B7 KP1, KP2, KP4	New audiences are engaged with the Ranger Service Promotion of Ranger Service events to tourists Those who are unable to visit countryside sites can access and enjoy our natural and cultural heritage through online resources Those who are excluded or disadvantaged have access

		to the benefits of our natural and cultural heritage
		Engagement with Black Asian Minority Ethnic (BAME) and other minority groups, facilitating their sustainable independent access of our natural and cultural heritage resources.
4 Provide Ranger Service volunteer opportunities in public engagement roles	A1, A2, A5, A6, A8, A9, A10, A11, A12 A13 B1, B2, B3, B4, B6, B7 KP1, KP2, KP3,	Volunteers are able to develop confidence in interpersonal skills, have access to training and experience to improve employability
		Volunteers can share their personal skills and knowledge to enhance the visitor experience
5 Develop community engagement with our natural and cultural heritage	A1, A2, A3, A4, A5, A6, A8 A9, A10, A11, A12, A13 B1, B2, B3, B4, B5, B6, B7, KP1, KP2, KP3	Community initiatives supported, including those in regeneration areas
		Local biodiversity is improved
		Increased community empowerment and capacity building through increased knowledge and understanding of natural and cultural heritage
6 Promote responsible countryside access	A1, A2, A4, A5, A6 A8, A9, A11, A12, A13 B1, B2, B3, B4, B5, B6, B7, KP1, KP2, KP3,	Increased awareness of access rights and responsibilities
		Reduction of irresponsible behaviour through ignorance
		Community and "Friends of" groups promoting responsible use of local sites are supported
		Landowners/managers are supported in enabling responsible access

Image 1 Left: Guided walk promoting Aberdeenshire's natural and cultural heritage.

Image 2 Right: Partnership working to support health and well-being and learning opportunities through connection with nature.

Image 3 Left: public bird box building sessions. This type of activity helps combat habitat loss and increase awareness and enjoyment of our biodiversity.

Image 4 Right: promoting Aberdeenshire's cultural connection to Bram Stoker's "Dracula" on a public guided walk.

4.3 Aim 2 – Support Nature Connection in School Pupils and Young People

Provide support to schools and youth groups to undertake and benefit from outdoor learning opportunities. Provide support to attain awards recognising increased understanding of our natural and cultural heritage.

Table 4: Aim 2 Team Objectives

Team Objective	Golden Thread (see Section 3 and Key Priorities)	Outcome
7 Support outdoor learning and help young people to enjoy, share, understand and connect with the natural and cultural heritage of Aberdeenshire	A1, A2, A5, A6, A7 A8, A9, A10, A11, A12, A B1, B2, B3, B4, B5 KP1, KP2, KP3	Increased knowledge of the local environment Increased awareness and understanding of Aberdeenshire's natural and cultural heritage Health benefits of accessing the outdoors is recognised Sustainable independent environmental education through Aberdeenshire-specific environmental education pack Improved resources for schools visiting Country Parks to understand the natural and cultural heritage of the sites and how it links to Scotland's Curriculum for Excellence (CfE) and local environment
8 Deliver training in outdoor education to teachers and other education providers	A1, A2, A5, A6, A7, A8, A10, A11, A12, A13 B1, B2, B3, B4, B5 KP1, KP2, KP3, KP4	Teachers are enthused and enabled to undertake independent sustainable outdoor learning sessions in their school and local environments Early Years Practitioners have the skills and confidence to undertake sustainable outdoor learning in their settings
9 Develop the next generation of Rangers through Junior Ranger schemes and the promotion of rangering as a career path for young people	A1, A2, A3, A4, A5, A6, A7, A8, A10, A11, A12, A13	Young people are supported to attain an award recognising environmental knowledge and transferrable skills

B1, B2, B3, B4, B5
KP1, KP2, KP3

Image 5 Left: Aberdeenshire pupils contributing to National Beachwatch event monitoring beach litter including plastics and learning about the importance of our marine and coastal environments.

Image 6 Right: Outdoor learning sessions contribute to the Curriculum for Excellence and develop a connection to place through greater understanding and appreciation of our natural and cultural heritage.

Image 7 Left: Sharing skills with teachers to enable sustainable outdoor learning in Aberdeenshire's school grounds and local environments.

Image 8 Right: Wild food orchard planting at Mackie Academy to improve school grounds for both biodiversity and the local community.

4.4 Aim 3 – Protect, Sustain and Enhance Care of our Natural Heritage

Support positive action by public and communities to combat biodiversity loss and climate change and support the enhancement of biodiversity.

Table 5: Aim 3 Team Objectives

Team Objective	Golden Thread (see Section 3 and Key Priorities)	Outcome
10 Provide volunteer opportunities for communities and organised groups in biological recording, practical conservation, biodiversity enhancement and climate change actions	A1, A2, A3, A5, A6, A8, A9, A10, A11, A12, A13 B1, B2, B3, B4, B5, B6, B7, KP1, KP2, KP3	Increase in number of biological records made to NESBReC Increase in records for target species enabling informed management decisions Volunteers supported to gain training to increase skills and knowledge Communities are empowered to make decisions to improve local biodiversity and take action to combat climate change Areas are improved for biodiversity and action taken to combat climate change
11 Enhance the condition of natural and historic features through site and countryside management	A1, A2, A3, A4, A5, A6, A8 A9, A10, A11, A12, A13 B1, B2, B3, B4, B5, B6, B7, KP1, KP2, KP3	Council-owned spaces are welcoming to people and improved for biodiversity Biodiversity is protected and enhanced Site action plans are delivered in partnership for the benefit of communities and biodiversity
12 Encourage and support positive action by the public to address the climate	A1, A2, A3, A4, A5, A6, A8, A9, A10, A11, A12,	Individuals and communities supported to take action to address the

emergency and biodiversity loss	A13 B1, B2, B3, B4, B5, B6, B7, KP1, KP2, KP3	climate emergency and biodiversity loss United Nations Decade on Ecosystem Restoration supported
13 Support partner organisations to combat biodiversity loss and climate change and support the enhancement of biodiversity	A1 A2, A3, A4, A5, A6, A7, A8, A9, A10, A11, A13, B1, B2, B3, B4, B5, B6, B7, KP1, KP2, KP3, KP4	Practical actions are taken at community and individual level to combat biodiversity loss and climate change and enhance biodiversity United Nations Decade on Ecosystem Restoration supported Value of Aberdeenshire's natural resources recognised at a local, national and international level

Image 9 Left: Roe Deer fawn picture captured as part of school camera trap project. The Ranger Service promotes biological recording and supports volunteers to undertake biological recording.

Image 10 Right: Employees from local oil industry office volunteering at Portlethen Moss.

Volunteering can improve our biodiversity and volunteer's health and well-being and also promote connection to place through engagement with nature.

Image 11 Left: Wildflower plug planting at Gordon House

Image 12 Right: One year after planting.

Working with the Planning Environment Team and Landscape Services to improve Council owned and managed greenspaces to improve biodiversity and reduce mowing requirements.

4.5 Aim 4 – Continuous Improvement

Maintain a skilled and committed ranger workforce, adaptive and responsive to the needs of our diverse communities, delivering a high quality, efficient, continually improving service to all users.

Table 6: Aim 4 Team Objectives

Team Objective	Golden Thread (see Section 3 and Key Priorities)	Outcome
14 Ensure work of the team is meeting customer expectations	C1, C1a	Consistent high quality service delivery
15 Ensure social media[1] information is current and accessible		Current and accessible information available
16 Ensure webpages are current and accessible	C1, C1a	Relevant and accessible information available
17 Continue to support Scottish Countryside Rangers Association through contributions to Ranger Development Partnership, Ranger Managers Forum and SCRA Grampian.	C1, C1a, C1b	Opportunities for national standards and benchmarking supported
18 Ensure training needs of the team are met	C1, C1b	Team is trained to current professional standards
19 Make Ranger Service users aware that the service accepts donations and explore opportunities for income generation for services which the Service provides.	C1, C1a, KP4	Income generation for the Service
20 Continue to consider the impacts of climate change in our work	C1, C1a, C1b	Team resilience to the impacts of climate change
21 Record, monitor and measure performance.	C1, C1a, C1b	Efficient and high-quality service delivery

Recognition of individual contributions to Ranger Service delivery |

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[1] Social Media accounts and content are managed and delivered by the Ranger Service, without any additional support from internal or external sources.

Monitored and accountable individual service delivery

5 Annual Performance Indicators

5.1 Aim 1 – Promotion of our Natural and Cultural Heritage

I. Number of public sessions offered and number of participants
II. Number of group sessions for health and well-being supported and number of participants
III. Number of online resources made available
IV. Number of sessions with vulnerable or disadvantaged groups
V. Number of sessions with BAME or other minority groups
VI. Number of Ranger Service volunteers recruited to role VR080 (public facing)
VII. Number of "drop-in" volunteers at public and group sessions and number of volunteer hours
VIII. Number of community group sessions to promote connection to natural and cultural heritage
IX. Number of presentations delivered to local communities and groups and number of attendees
X. Number of community group requests for meetings and site visits to empower local decision making
XI. Number of sessions where Scottish Outdoor Access Code and access rights and responsibilities are promoted
XII. Number of resources produced

5.2 Aim 2 – Support Nature Connection in School Pupils and Young People

XIII. Number of school sessions delivered and number of participants
XIV. Number of education resources completed
XV. Number of training sessions delivered and number of participants
XVI. Number of young people attending sessions and achieving Junior Ranger Award
XVII. Number of Junior Ranger Award sessions supported

5.3 Aim 3 – Protect, Sustain and Enhance Care of our Natural Heritage

XVIII. Number of Ranger Service volunteers recruited to role VR070 (non-public facing)
XIX. Number of attendees at community/ad-hoc volunteer sessions, attendees and volunteer hours
XX. Number of sites where Ranger Service delivery has enhanced natural or historic features and number of site management plan actions delivered
XXI. Number of Aberdeenshire Council's Pollinator Action Plan actions delivered
XXII. Number of partner organisations supported, and number of partnership action plans objectives /sessions delivered to combat biodiversity loss and climate change

5.4 Aim 4 – Continuous Improvement

XXIII. Customer survey results
XXIV. Number of followers on social media and number of social media post engagements and number of video views
XXV. Number of hits to webpages

XXVI. Number of Scottish Countryside Rangers Association (SCRA) meetings attended
XXVII. Number of training courses completed and CPD sessions attended
XXVIII. Total amount of donations received
XXIX. Positive changes to work regime recorded, including miles/CO2 savings
XXX. Up-to-date Ranger Service Action Plan and produce annual report.
XXXI. Personal Performance Plans up to date

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