

APPENDIX 1

ABERDEENSHIRE COUNCIL RANGER SERVICE ANNUAL REPORT 2016/17

1.0 PUBLIC EVENTS

The Team delivered a public events programme across Aberdeenshire for children, families and adults to promote awareness and understanding of the area's natural and cultural heritage.

Outcome: Participants gained a greater knowledge and understanding of Aberdeenshire's natural and cultural heritage, resulting in them being more likely to be engaged with their local environment.

<i>Aberdeenshire Performance Indicator</i>	<i>2016/17</i>	<i>2015/16</i>
Number of public events	94	98
Number of attendees	2888	2471
Attendees who found the events well organised, informative, enjoyable and made to feel welcome	100%	99%

<i>Aberdeenshire Performance Indicator</i>	<i>2016/17</i>	<i>2015/16</i>
Number of public volunteer events	15	27
Number of volunteers	117	199
Number of volunteer hours	197	647

Volunteer numbers were significantly higher in the previous year due mainly to the Natural Networks project in Ellon and the Ballater flood clean-up work that happened that year.

Case Study 1 – Climate Week North East Activities

Activity:

Ranger led cycling events for Climate Week North East and a guided walk for Earth Hour were delivered by the team to raise local awareness of climate change and promote sustainable and active transport.

Outcome:

Twenty participants gained further knowledge and understanding of climate change and the effects of their actions, and were encouraged to improve their health and wellbeing through active travel. These events contributed to Aberdeenshire Council being awarded a "Super Local Authority" badge by the World Wide Fund for Nature.

2.0 COMMUNITIES AND ORGANISED GROUPS

The Ranger Service worked with local communities and organised groups to raise awareness and understanding of our natural and cultural heritage, and to provide opportunities to protect and enhance biodiversity.

Outcome: Communities and groups gained a better understanding and awareness of their local environment, and contributed to its management, biodiversity and biological records.

<i>Aberdeenshire Performance Indicator</i>	<i>2016/17</i>	<i>2015/16</i>
Number of community/group sessions	141	107
Number of attendees	2326	1739
Attendee percentage who found the events well organised, informative, enjoyable and made to feel welcome	100%	100%

<i>Aberdeenshire Performance Indicator</i>	<i>2016/17</i>	<i>2015/16</i>
Number of community/group volunteer sessions	41	15
Number of volunteers	278	135
Number of volunteer hours	618	348

<i>Aberdeenshire Performance Indicator</i>	<i>2016/17</i>	<i>2015/16</i>
Number of sessions for disadvantaged or vulnerable	64	27
Number of disadvantaged or vulnerable attendees	450	191

Support was also given for 8 groups undertaking the John Muir Award.

A priority of the Service during 2016-2017 was to build on the work done in the previous year on reaching disadvantaged or vulnerable members of our communities, through working with organised groups. As a result the number of group sessions and attendees increased by a third.

Case Study 2 – Foyer REACH

Activity:

Members of the team worked with four groups from the Foyer REACH programme by supporting them to achieve the John Muir Award. REACH is a 14 week employability course based on community involvement, personal development, wellbeing and employability for adults in recovery. The work of the Ranger Service on inclusion was recognised by the John Muir Trust when one of the team was invited to speak on the Partnership Approach to Promoting Inclusion at the annual national networking event for John Muir Award providers in Edinburgh.

Outcome:

Feedback from REACH coaches and participants showed that working outdoors with the Rangers to learn about the local environment and how they can help conserve it, the participants felt it improved their wellbeing, self-confidence and employability. Increased national recognition of the work of Aberdeenshire Council Ranger Service on working with partners and inclusion.

3.0 SUPPORT FOR SCHOOLS AND ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION PROVIDERS

The Ranger Service supported teachers and other environmental education providers in their delivery of outdoor learning.

Outcome: Participants gained knowledge and understanding of their local environment, and are more likely to be engaged with it and help conserve it in the future.

<i>Aberdeenshire Performance Indicator</i>	<i>2016/17</i>	<i>2015/16</i>
Number of school sessions	191	249
Number of attendees (children)	4830	6597
Attendee percentage who found the events enjoyable and made to feel welcome	100%	100%
Teacher attendee percentage who felt confident to do more outdoor learning with their class	84%	82%

<i>Aberdeenshire Performance Indicator</i>	<i>2016/17</i>	<i>2015/16</i>
Number of volunteer school sessions	16	15
Number of volunteers	537	737
Number of volunteer hours	741	348

<i>Aberdeenshire Performance Indicator</i>	<i>2016/17</i>	<i>2015/16</i>
Number of school sessions for disadvantaged or vulnerable	25	4
Number of disadvantaged or vulnerable attendees	280	15

Support was given for 12 classes undertaking the John Muir Award.

There is a continued commitment by the Service to deliver sessions for schools and environmental education providers. However, as Outdoor Learning becomes more embedded in the curriculum, the Ranger Service continued to deliver sessions for schools but also encouraged and enabled teachers to lead their own sessions. While the numbers for schools are down by a quarter, more time has been spent focussing on communities and groups. Also the Service has continued to develop partnerships with Children's Services to provide opportunities for outdoor learning for disadvantaged and vulnerable children, and this area has seen an increase in activity this year.

<i>Aberdeenshire Performance Indicator</i>	<i>2016/17</i>	<i>2015/16</i>
Number of CPD sessions for teachers/group leaders	5	4
Number of attendees	66	101

The Ranger Service contributed to a programme of local Scottish Countryside Ranger Association training events for other environmental education providers.

Case Study 3 – “My World Outdoors” Activities

Activity:

The Ranger Service worked with two classes from Buchanhaven Primary School. One class attended a Ranger led session exploring and investigating their local rocky shore. The other class had support from the Ranger to deliver their own outdoor learning session on traditional skills.

Outcome:

The children involved gained knowledge and understanding of their local environment, and are more likely to be engaged with it and help conserve it in the future. The staff at the school were supported and enabled to deliver their own outdoor learning allowing Ranger time and resources to be allocated to other areas of work. Aberdeenshire Council Ranger Service was recognised at a national level as examples of good practice - these two sessions were included as case studies in a Care Inspectorate report ‘My World Outdoors’, which was produced as a resource for early years childcare providers to share examples of good practice of learning outdoors.

4.0 PROTECT AND ENHANCE NATURAL HERITAGE, AND PROMOTE RESPONSIBLE ACCESS

The Ranger Service delivered sessions and worked on projects to protect and enhance natural heritage. Responsible behaviour was promoted through raising awareness of the Scottish Outdoor Access Code.

Outcome: Residents and visitors gained a greater knowledge and understanding of Aberdeenshire’s biodiversity; contributed to its management, enhancement and biological records; were made more aware of their responsibilities under the Scottish Outdoor Access Code.

<i>Aberdeenshire Performance Indicator</i>	<i>2016/17</i>	<i>2015/16</i>
Sessions to protect or enhance biodiversity	72	57
Sessions promoting the Scottish Outdoor Access Code	124	100

The Ranger Service worked with colleagues and partners on the following projects and initiatives to protect and enhance Aberdeenshire’s biodiversity:

Amphibians in Drains, British Trust for Ornithology (BTO) Beached Bird Survey, Pollinator Strategy, Local Nature Conservation Sites (monitoring), Local Nature Reserves management and conservation, North East Scotland Biodiversity Action Plan projects – Camera Trapping and Pooling Our Ponds, Open Air Laboratories (OPAL) Surveys, Pearls in Peril, Saving Scotland’s Red Squirrels, Scottish Mink Initiative, Scottish Wildcat Action, UK Biodiversity Action Plan Species – priority Lepidoptera species.

Case Study 4 – Local Biodiversity Action Plan Community Projects

Activity:

Aberdeenshire Council Ranger Service has contributed to the Local Biodiversity Action Plan Partnership, working with partners and communities to promote, protect and enhance Aberdeenshire's natural heritage since the start of the Partnership 20 years ago. Work has continued this year, examples of which are work on Portlethen Moss to enhance the habitat, and on the Ythan to remove invasive non-native species.

Outcome:

Biodiversity of local sites has been enhanced or protected for the benefit and enjoyment of local communities. The contribution of the Ranger Service to biodiversity was recognised at the Partnership's 2017 20th anniversary celebration event and award ceremony - the Portlethen group was awarded the Community Champion Award, and the Ythan project was included in a booklet of twenty articles on local biodiversity projects. Eight of the projects showcased at the awards ceremony involved contributions of the Ranger Service.

5.0 THE BENNACHIE VISITOR CENTRE

Partnership working with the Bennachie Centre Trust, Forestry Commission Scotland and the Bailies of Bennachie has continued to deliver a quality experience for visitors to the Bennachie Visitor Centre (BVC).

Outcome: Visitors had an enjoyable and informative experience, gaining knowledge and understanding of Bennachie and its natural and cultural heritage.

<i>Aberdeenshire Performance Indicator</i>	<i>2016/17</i>	<i>2015/16</i>
Number of visitors (people counter)	36,640	n/a
BVC Facebook likes	1,298	808
Number of public events at BVC	23	13
Number of sessions at BVC for schools and groups	70	39
Number of training/workshops/meetings at BVC	93	63
Number of public enquiries	907	n/a

The team continued to use Facebook, the Centre's visitor book and SurveyMonkey as methods of communication and feedback. Visitor feedback showed that both, new and repeat visitors felt welcomed by the staff and that visitors enjoyed the educational value of the Centre, felt that it was good for children and generally showed an appreciation of the facilities available.

A refurbishment of the Centre (Bennachie Welcomes), funded by a successful Heritage Lottery Fund bid by the Bennachie Centre Trust, took place over the winter, with Warden and Ranger staff providing support to the Trust to deliver these improvements. The Visitor Centre now offers a refurbished retail and reception area, gallery space and multi-purpose Community Room for meetings and events.

Further improvements to the BVC include:

- New Bennachie Visitor Centre website launched (April 2016)
- World Host status in recognition of excellence in customer service
- New interpretative panels outlining the history of Bennachie and the Centre
- Annual programme of temporary displays
- New touch-screen story phone with local myths and legends
- Production of a BVC Annual Report and Action Plan.

6.0 CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT

The Ranger Service continued to work to the 2013-2016 Strategy delivering a quality service to residents and visitors focussing on National Outcomes, National Ranger Aims, the Aberdeenshire Council Plan Strategic Objectives, the Community Plan themes and the Infrastructure Service Plan.

The team continued to use Facebook and SurveyMonkey as methods of communication and feedback. The Ranger Service Facebook page now has 1,102 likes, and the programme of 2017 summer events post reached 13,092 people on Facebook.

Members of the Ranger Service Team attended 42 training courses and seminars to increase knowledge and skills, keep up to date with legislation, guidelines and research, and benefit from examples of best practice to ensure a quality delivery of service.

Partnership working and contributions to a wide variety of local and national initiatives and events continues to offer benefits of marketing, promotion and reach; networking and collaboration; ensuring the most effective use of resources:

Local and national festivals and initiatives -

Ballater Victoria Week, Ballater Week of Walks, Banchory River Festival, Big Butterfly Count, Big Garden Birdwatch, Cairngorms Nature Festival, Climate Week, Earth Hour, Energetica Summer Festival, Moth Night, National Insect Day, National Nestbox Day, National Meadows Day, Scotland's Nature Festival, Scottish Archaeology Month, Wellbeing Festival, Wild About Aden, and the Year of Innovation, Architecture and Design.

External partners -

Aberdeen City Council, Aberdeenshire Astronomical Society, Atholl Estate, Bailies of Bennachie, Balmoral Estate, Bat Conservation Trust, Bennachie Centre Trust, Buglife, Butterfly Conservation, Buzzclub Citizen Science, Cairngorms National Park Authority, Chapelton Community, Donside Camera Club, Forestry Commission Scotland, Haddo Visitor Services, Huntly and District Development Trust, Invercauld Estate, John Muir Trust, NE Scotland Biodiversity Partnership, NHS, RSPB, Pitscurry Project, Scottish Natural Heritage, Scottish Wildlife Trust, Marine Conservation Society, Mill of Benholm, Portsoy Community Trust, Rampart Scotland, Westhill Gala Committee, World Horse Welfare.

Colleagues and internal partners -
Aberdeenshire Outdoor Access Forum, Active Schools, Community Learning and
Development, Economic Development, Environment Planning, Landscape Services,
Libraries, Macduff Marine Aquarium, Museums Service, North East Outdoor Learning
Strategy Group, North East Biological Records Centre (NESBReC) and Social Work.