



From mountain to sea

Aberdeenshire Council Ranger Strategy Review 2017-20

“We will aim to raise awareness and understanding in order to promote and protect Aberdeenshire’s natural and cultural heritage - connecting people with place”



Summary

Aberdeenshire Council Ranger Service seeks to connect people to place through improved engagement with our natural and cultural heritage. This connection enables responsible use, protection and enhancement of our natural and cultural heritage. Developing connection to place can also improve health and well-being, provide volunteering opportunities, provide learning opportunities and increase skill levels, and support regeneration and tourism.

The review of the 2017-20 Strategy demonstrated the breadth and value of service delivery and indicated a high level of performance and achievement for the Ranger Service. The Ranger Service had face to face contact with 28,897 residents and visitors, with demand for the service exceeding capacity in all areas of public engagement in each year of the Strategy.

A summary of the key figures for the Strategy period can be viewed below:

Table 1: Summary of main performance indicators

Service delivery	2017-18	2018 - 19	2019-20	2017-20 totals
Number of Public event sessions	89	85	109	283
Number of Community sessions	127	162	124	413
Number of School Sessions	220	187	158	565
Public session attendees	2,566	2,524	3,067	8,157
Community session attendees	2,080	2,893	1,893	6,866
School session attendees	4,849	4,405	4,620	13,874

Highlights of the Strategy period included delivering 164 sessions for disadvantaged or vulnerable groups attended by 920 people; delivering 209 sessions, attended by 2,872 volunteers, offering 4,407 volunteer hours; developing two Ranger Service volunteer job profiles; recruiting five Ranger Service Volunteers; and the Bennachie Visitor Centre maintained its 4 star Visit Scotland rating and was crowned the Tourist Hotspot of the Year at the Pride of Inverurie Awards in August 2018.

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1. Introduction

From mountain to sea, Aberdeenshire boasts a rich and valuable resource in its natural and cultural heritage. Wildlife sites of international importance, local and national nature reserves, award winning beaches and Country Parks, and a diverse timeline of cultural heritage assets to share and manage sustainably.

Identifiable by the national ranger logo, the Aberdeenshire Council Ranger Service provides the welcome to Aberdeenshire's outdoors. The Rangers work wherever people engage with the environment, whether that is in Aberdeenshire's rural, urban, coastal, inland or upland settings. The Rangers are highly knowledgeable about Aberdeenshire's natural and cultural heritage and the sustainable management of Aberdeenshire resources, and are imaginative and effective communicators who are able to share this knowledge with residents and visitors.

1.1 Review of Strategy

The 2017-20 Strategy was developed to demonstrate where the Ranger Service objectives deliver or contribute, to Scottish Government and Aberdeenshire's priorities and provide a structured approach to service delivery. The Ranger Strategy objectives provided a framework for a customer focussed service with measurable and accountable outcomes.

This review of the Strategy over the 2017-20 period will look at whether those objectives were achieved and their outcomes. New and emerging Government and Council priorities, aims and objectives, including the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic, will be considered for the next Strategy period. This will ensure the Ranger Service continues to deliver national and local priorities to our diverse communities and respond to our changing environment, notably the impact of biodiversity loss and climate change. This review will also identify any strategic and operational changes that need to be made going forward to enhance efficiency, performance, recording and reporting, and to continue best practice.

1.2 Aberdeenshire Council's Vision for the Ranger Service 2017-20

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

It is the vision of the Ranger Service that the benefits gained from Aberdeenshire's unique environment should be available to those who live, work and visit Aberdeenshire, and that the value of these resources and the need to protect and enhance them for future generations through sustainable management is understood. This vision for the Ranger Service can be summarised as:

“We will aim to raise awareness and understanding in order to promote and protect Aberdeenshire’s natural and cultural heritage - connecting people with place”

Increasing public engagement with the natural environment can lead to its enhancement for future generations, improved health and well-being, reduced inequalities, increased opportunities for volunteering, increased skills learning, and can support regeneration and tourism.

2 Overview of Ranger Service Strategy Performance 2017-20

The Ranger Service Strategy aims and priorities were drawn together to reflect the strategies, plans and policies which formed the ‘golden thread’ between Scottish Government outcomes and delivery on the ground. The Team objectives provided a common framework for a customer and performance focussed service. The Staff worked in partnership with stakeholders to deliver a high quality, efficient service for best value.

2.1 Key Priorities 2017-20

In summary, Key Priorities 1 and 2 saw an increase in service delivery. Key Priority 3 saw a decrease in the number of sessions. This is primarily due to a change in recording between Strategy periods to exclude Ranger Service sessions to prevent double counting. The overall visitor numbers at the Bennachie Visitor Centre remained roughly steady across the Strategy period.

Table 2: Key Priorities 2017-20

Priority	Success Measure	Actual Output	Impact
1 Further develop partnership working to reach vulnerable and disadvantaged groups	Number of sessions with vulnerable/ disadvantaged groups	164 sessions delivered Increase of 160%	Increased wellbeing Increased joint project delivery
2 Develop volunteer policy and procedures, and increase volunteering opportunities	Number of volunteers	Volunteer policy and procedures developed and implemented 209 Volunteer sessions delivered	Improved engagement with local environment Better protected and enhanced biodiversity

		Increase of 75%	Greater awareness and understanding of natural heritage
3 Develop promotion of the Bennachie Visitor Centre through Visit Scotland accreditation schemes	Receive accreditation of the Quality Assurance Criteria, Welcome Scheme and Visitor Information leading to increased visitor numbers	4 Star accreditation achieved and maintained Visitor numbers remained steady across Strategy period 60 events, schools, training and meeting sessions hosted at the Centre 85% decrease	Increased awareness and recognition of this asset Increased public awareness of the natural and cultural heritage of Bennachie Improved service delivery

2.2 Volunteer Opportunities

2.2.1 The Ranger Service recognises the valuable contribution volunteers make to service delivery and the positive impact volunteering can make on volunteers. This was a key priority throughout the Strategy period. During this time the Ranger Service developed two volunteering job profiles and has successfully recruited five Ranger Service Volunteers to the Service. This enables the Service to increase the breadth of service delivery improving the service to the public. It also provides volunteers with skills and knowledge in Ranger Service delivery improving employability for those wishing to enter a career in conservation or rangering. For others it provides a welcome opportunity to gain knowledge in biology and ecology.

2.2.2 The Ranger Service has also provided opportunities for communities to make informed decisions and take practical action to combat biodiversity loss and climate change. Over the course of the Strategy there were a total of 209 volunteering sessions attracting 2,872 volunteers delivering 4,407 volunteer hours. Examples of volunteer opportunities include planting of trees and orchards, wildflower planting, erection of bat and bird boxes and removal of invasive non-native species.

Case Study 1 Volunteer Opportunities Created

Where	Formartine, Kincardine and Mearns
Objective	To provide volunteering opportunities to support delivery of Ranger Service work to combat biodiversity loss and climate change.
Actions	A Ranger Service volunteer supported the Ranger Service in site monitoring of amphibian ladders, mink rafts and the non-native invasive species piri-piri burr.
Outcome	<p>More efficient working through use of volunteers to support and compliment the Ranger Service.</p> <p>Accurate records are collected enabling the monitoring of actions to combat biodiversity loss.</p> <p>Volunteer gains experience of working as a Ranger in an environment and conservation role, and gains skills and knowledge which improve employability opportunities and enjoyment of the countryside.</p>

Mink Raft, Scottish Invasive Species Initiative



Case Study 2 Restoration of raised bog habitat	
Where	Portlethen Moss, Portlethen, Kincardine and Mearns
Objective	Peatlands are important for carbon storage, water storage and biodiversity. Portlethen Moss is a remnant raised bog with active peat forming areas but has suffered through water loss from drains cut in the moss many years ago.
Actions	<p>A number of volunteer sessions were organised to build dams at locations through the site to slow down water loss from the site to improve the moss habitat.</p> <p>This project was funded by Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH) Peatland Action project.</p>
Outcome	<p>A number of natural dams have now been placed along the drainage ditch successfully slowing down water loss and creating habitats for freshwater invertebrates. These were all created by volunteers on North East Climate Week events and a Butterfly Conservation Bog Squad led volunteer day.</p>
	<p><i>Dam made with piling.</i></p> 
	<p><i>Dam made with hessian sacks.</i></p> 

Case Study 3 Recording of priority Lepidoptera species in the Cairngorms National Park

Where	Upper Deeside locations, Marr.
Objective	To collect robust Lepidoptera records to create baseline data from which to monitor climate change and the impact of conservation work to improve habitats for Lepidoptera.
Actions	Working in partnership with Rare Invertebrates of the Cairngorms project and Private Estate Rangers, Aberdeenshire Council Ranger Service trained volunteers to give them the skills to set, monitor and make accurate records from moth traps.
Outcome	Increased opportunities for volunteering and increasing skills and knowledge with volunteers. Increased submission of biological records through the North East Scotland Biological Records Centre (NESBReC) to national databases. This contributes to monitoring habitat improvements, thereby improving the quality of our environment as a place to live, work and visit.

Dark Bordered Beauty Male,

Dark Bordered Beauty Female



2.3 Disadvantaged and Vulnerable Groups

- 2.3.1 The benefits of accessing the outdoors, particularly those associated with health and wellbeing should be available to everyone living in Aberdeenshire. During the period of the Strategy the Ranger Service welcomed 920 disadvantaged or vulnerable people to 164 sessions, covering a variety of topics across Aberdeenshire. It was a Key Priority of the Strategy to further develop and increase opportunities to work with these groups.
- 2.3.2 The Ranger Service has worked in partnership with other Council services and partner organisations to reach those who are disadvantaged or otherwise vulnerable. Other Services and organisations supported include: Adoption Team, Alcohol and Drugs Partnership, Branching Out Project, Criminal Justice Team, Family Placement Team, Community Mental Health Teams, Early Years Teams (intervention), Family Support Teams, Foster Care Team, Home Start Groups, NHS Healthy Minds Groups, NHS Health Walk Group Leaders.
- 2.3.3 An example of working in partnership to support a disadvantaged group was the Ranger Service working with the Council's Early Years Development Team in Kincardine and Mearns. The Early Years Teams were seeking to develop connections between the travelling and non-travelling communities in the St. Cyrus area. The Ranger Service organised sessions on minibeasts and pollinators to engage children from both communities and bridge barriers of perceived hostility from both communities whilst promoting enjoyment and responsible use of the countryside.

Case Study 4 Mearns and coastal healthy living network sessions.

Where	Laurencekirk and Fettercairn, Kincardine & Mearns.
Objective	To make Ranger Service activities available to those who may not be able to make a visit to the countryside. Residents and staff informed to take practical action to improve local biodiversity.
Actions	Presentations to residents of nursing homes on gardening for wildlife and pollinators. Practical session to plant pollinator friendly species in the grounds of the nursing home.
Outcome	<p>Opportunity to enjoy Aberdeenshire's wildlife for those who would otherwise be excluded from attending a session.</p> <p>Increased knowledge and understanding of gardening for wildlife and the importance of pollinators in staff and residents.</p> <p>Practical planting to combat biodiversity loss and improve habitats for pollinators and the enjoyment of residents.</p>

Pollinator friendly species planted by Ranger Service



Case Study 5 Sessions with Grampian Child Bereavement Network.

Where	Bennachie, Garioch.
Objective	<p>Provide opportunities for the group to relax and enjoy the wellbeing benefits of the countryside with others in similar circumstances. Provide opportunities for children to socialise with children in similar circumstances through activities to increase awareness and understanding of our natural and cultural heritage and enjoy the wellbeing benefits of accessing the outdoors.</p> <p>Provide support to enable sustainable independent visits to the countryside.</p>
Actions	Sessions on Pond dipping, social history walk and hill walk.
Outcome	<p>Children able to meet and learn with those in similar circumstances. Support for those who would not otherwise have the confidence to access the outdoors and enjoy the health and wellbeing benefits it brings.</p> <p>Families had confidence to attend Ranger Service public sessions.</p>

Natural Art Activity, a therapeutic engagement activity enabling connections with nature



Case Study 6 “FraserDeen” Project

Where Fraserburgh, Banff and Buchan

Objective “FraserDeen” is a partnership project with Community Learning and Development, Score Group, North East Scotland College and Aberdeen Football Club Community Trust. The project works with young people following an alternative curriculum and seeks to engage them in developing life skills alongside supporting learning where they may otherwise be excluded.

Actions Sessions to enable young people on the project to achieve the John Muir Award.

Outcome Young people were supported to achieve the John Muir Award through the project, recognising skills and learning in discovering and exploring local habitats and biodiversity, conservation skills and presenting information.

Beachcomb activity to explore the seashore and provide a platform for further learning



2.4 Overview of Resources

Aberdeenshire Council Ranger Service is part of the Specialist Services Team within the Planning and Environment Service which is part of Infrastructure Services. There are six Full Time Equivalent (FTE) Rangers, one based in each administrative area. The Ranger Service provides staff for the Bennachie Visitor Centre on behalf of the Bennachie Centre Trust. The staff resource provided to the Trust is 0.5 FTE Centre Warden, 0.7 FTE Centre Assistants, 0.27 FTE Centre Cleaner. The Team is line managed by a 0.6 FTE Ranger Service Co-ordinator. With the exception of a change of personnel in the Co-ordinator role, staffing arrangements were unchanged during the Strategy period.

Table 3: Ranger Service Budget Expenditure including salaries and associated staff costs

Year	Costs	Income	Net Expenditure
2017/18	£310,184	£10,731	£299,453
2018/19	£308,778	£4,952	£303,826
2019/20	£324,098	£7,525	£316,573

2.5 Aim 1 – Deliver a Programme of Public Events

Deliver a programme of events for residents and visitors to Aberdeenshire to raise awareness and understanding of Aberdeenshire’s natural and cultural heritage, to protect and enhance biodiversity, and to provide opportunities for volunteers.

Table 4: Team Objectives – Deliver a Programme of Public Events

Team Objectives – Deliver a Programme of Public Events – Achieved 2017-20

- 1.1 Raise awareness and understanding of Aberdeenshire’s natural and cultural heritage at public events

- 1.2 Promote responsible behaviour and the Scottish Outdoor Access Code at public events

- 1.3 Promote the health benefits of outdoor activity at public events

- 1.4 Protect and enhance biodiversity and provide volunteer opportunities at public events

- 1.5 Work in partnership with colleagues and other organisations, and support local, national and international festivals and initiatives

Outcomes

- Greater awareness and understanding
- Improved engagement with local environment
- Promotion of the region
- Greater awareness and understanding of access rights and responsibilities
- Increased wellbeing
- Better protected and enhanced biodiversity
- Increased volunteering opportunities
- Efficient working and best use of resources
- Increased joint project delivery

Table 5: Aim 1 Performance Indicators

Performance indicator	2017-18	2018-19	2019-20	2017-20 totals
Total number of events delivered	89	85	109	283
Total number of participants on events	2,566	2,524	3,067	8,157
Total number of events offering volunteering opportunities	21	14	22	57
Number of event volunteers	256	96	115	467
Number of event volunteer hours	484	244	275	1,003

2.5.1 A diverse programme of events was delivered across Aberdeenshire during the Strategy period. Events were devised to engage a wide variety of audiences including, residents, visitors, returning and new participants. During the period of the Strategy over 50% of events were oversubscribed.

2.5.2 The outcome of public event sessions is increased awareness, understanding and care of our natural and cultural heritage, improved health and well-being and increased awareness of access rights and responsibilities.

2.5.3 There were 283 events attended by 8,157 residents and visitors across Aberdeenshire during the strategy period. There were 9 public events to promote health and wellbeing benefits of accessing the outdoors, 248 events to promote awareness of natural heritage, 96 cultural heritage promotion and 87 events where access rights and responsibilities were promoted. Events may have more than one key message promoted.

2.5.4 The Ranger Service worked in partnership to deliver many events. This allowed the Ranger Service to work more efficiently and share resources to improve service delivery. An example of this type of work was working with Aberdeenshire Council Library Service to deliver bird box building sessions for National Nest Box Week. This gave the Ranger Service access to accessible buildings in our communities and gave both partners new audiences. The public feedback from the sessions was extremely positive. Over the course of the Strategy the Ranger Service worked with many partners to deliver public events including:

2.5.5 Aberdeen City Council, Aberdeenshire Astronomical Society, Backbone CIC, Bailies of Bennachie, Balmoral Ranger Service, Bat Conservation Trust, Butterfly Conservation, Cairngorms National Park Authority, Cairngorms Nature, Chapelton Community, Donside Camera Club, East Grampian Coastal Partnership, Forestry and Land Scotland, Formartine Partnership, Friends of Denlethen Woods, Glen Tanar Ranger Service, Haddo Visitor Services, Macduff Marine Aquarium, Marine Conservation Society, National Trust for Scotland, North East Scotland Biodiversity Partnership, North East Scotland College, National Health Service, Outdoor Woodland Learning Scotland (OWLS), Portlethen Moss Conservation Group, Royal Society for Protection of Birds, Scottish Natural Heritage (now known as NatureScot), Scottish Wildlife Trust, and University of Aberdeen.

2.5.6 The Ranger Service delivered events to support local and national initiatives. These events support local economies, community empowerment and promote the importance of Aberdeenshire's natural and cultural heritage at a national level. Some of the events supported include:

Ballater Walking Festival, Beachwatch, Banchory River Festival, Big Butterfly Count, Big Garden Birdwatch, Cairngorms Nature Big Weekend, Climate Week North East, Haddo Country Park Visitor Services Officer, Moth Night, National Nestbox Day, National Meadows Day, North East Scotland Bioblitz, Scotland's Nature Festival, Scottish Archaeology Month, Wellbeing Festival and Wild About Aden

Case Study 7 National Annual Great British Beach Clean (formally Beachwatch) weekend

Where Beaches in Banff and Buchan, Buchan and Formartine.

Objective In its 27th year, this project records and monitors beach litter, including plastics, from across Britain. The Ranger Service sought to contribute results from Aberdeenshire beaches to the national programme.

Actions The Ranger Service worked with community and interested group volunteers, including schools to collect, remove and record beach litter including plastics, from beaches across north Aberdeenshire.

This was a partnership project working with Landscape Services, East Grampian Coastal Partnership Turning the Plastic Tide, and Economic Development who provided funding for pony access to remove the litter using a pony and trap.

Outcome Increased awareness and understanding of beach litter including plastics and the threat it poses to marine wildlife.

Volunteering opportunities as part of a national programme.

Successful partnership working to implement sustainable method of uplifting litter from sensitive and difficult to access places.

Improved local environment



Obama the Pony sustainably removing beach litter



BeachClean Volunteers

Case Study 8 Bird Box building sessions in Aberdeenshire Council Libraries as part of National Nest Box Week.

Where	Libraries in Banff and Buchan, Formartine, Garioch, Marr and Kincardine and Mearns.
Objective	To reach new audiences for bird box building sessions in community-based locations across Aberdeenshire. To increase nesting opportunities for a range of bird species, mitigating habitat loss.
Actions	Sessions were organised in partnership with Library Service to provide opportunities for families and adults to build a variety of bird boxes. Advice was given on the siting of boxes built and caring for wild bird species.
Outcome	<p>Successful partnership working with the Library Service, most sessions were booked to capacity and public feedback was very positive. There were more requests for sessions than the Ranger Service had capacity to deliver so we will continue to work in partnership with the Service to increase service delivery.</p> <p>Increased nesting locations birds to mitigate the impact of local habitat loss and improving local biodiversity.</p> <p>Increased awareness and enjoyment of birds in Aberdeenshire and wider biodiversity, contributing towards making Aberdeenshire a better place to live, work and visit.</p>

Selection of Bird Boxes



Case Study 9 Formartine Walking Festival 2019

Where	Locations across Formartine
Objective	To support the Formartine Partnership in the development and delivery of the first Formartine Walking Festival.
Actions	Six guided walks to showcase the natural and cultural heritage of the countryside and coast of Formartine.
Outcome	Residents and visitors encouraged to visit less well-known areas of Formartine, supporting local businesses and communities. Residents and visitors have a greater understanding of Aberdeenshire's natural and cultural heritage.



RANGER SERVICE Summer Events 2019 **Aberdeenshire COUNCIL**

Formartine Walking Festival

<p>Tuesday 18th JUNE 7.30pm - 9pm YTHAN ESTUARY AT NEWBURGH Co-organised with the Formartine Partnership. Loads of local history including salmon fishing operations, Newburgh lifeboat, WW2 defences. Then Elders and Terns and much more in the lower Estuary with the huge seal haulout of both common and grey seals right at the river mouth. <i>Booking essential.</i> Newburgh Beach AB41 6BY Meet in the car park at the end of the road past the Ythan Hotel (Baggeris) in Newburgh. https://formartine.newburgh.eventbrite.co.uk</p>	<p>Wednesday 26th JUNE 7.30pm - 9pm PITMEDDEN HOUSE AND TOLQUHON CASTLE Co-organised with the Formartine Partnership. From the well-known Pitmedden House along old and historic ways to the well conserved ruins of Tolquhon Castle. A lovely evening walk, away from busy roads, tracing tracks and ways that were in their time, likewise very busy but with horses and carts not motor cars! <i>Booking essential.</i> Pitmedden & Tolquhon AB41 7FD Meet in the Pitmedden House car park. https://formartine.pitmedden.eventbrite.co.uk</p>
<p>Thursday 20th JUNE 7.30pm - 9pm DEN WOOD Den Wood is a fine area of woodland owned and managed by the Woodland Trust. A variety of footpaths throughout the site lead to a mix of habitats. It is mainly open broadleaved woodlands with lovely ground flora. There are extensive views over the countryside from the far end of the wood. <i>Booking essential.</i> Den Wood AB51 6AW Meet in the small car park serving the site. https://formartine.denwood.eventbrite.co.uk</p>	<p>Sunday 30th JUNE 10am - 4pm METHLICK TO GIGHT Co-organised with the Formartine Partnership. The Jewel of the Ythan valley, this day walk takes in a wealth of superb wildlife habitats with red squirrels, foxes and buzzards. Biotied into all of these natural world features there is the spooky Gight Castle and the ghastly legend of the Hagberry Pot! <i>Booking essential.</i> Methlick and Gight AB41 7EP Meet in the main car park in Methlick. https://formartine.methlick.eventbrite.co.uk</p>
<p>Sunday 23rd JUNE 10am - 4pm FORVIE & OLD SLAINS CASTLE Co-organised with the Formartine Partnership. Meet at Collection car park. From Collection around the stunning Forvie National Nature Reserve with spectacular cliffs, dunes and coastal heath, then back to Collection and on along the coast to the historic Old Slains Castle returning via country roads. <i>Booking essential.</i> Forvie NNR, Collection, Old Slains AB41 Meet at Collection car park. https://formartine.forvieandoldslains.eventbrite.co.uk</p>	<p>Wednesday 3rd JUNE 7.30pm - 9pm WINDYHILLS Co-organised with the Formartine Partnership. Enjoy the peace and quiet of a little known but superb site in Formartine. A very rare and fascinating geological site that relates back to the last ice-age. But all of this is overgrown by a fine area of open broadleaved woodlands with a mix of natural habitats, each with its specialist flora and fauna. <i>Booking essential.</i> Woodhead AB53 Meet in the Community Centre car park Woodhead. https://formartine.windyhills.eventbrite.co.uk</p>

www.facebook.com/AberdeenshireCouncilRangerService
www.aberdeenshire.gov.uk/felcurs-4p00f-and-outfursranger-service/

Festival Flyer



Enjoying Formartine Walks

2.6 Aim 2 - Enhance Community Learning and Participation

Work with local communities and organised groups to raise awareness and understanding of our natural and cultural heritage, and to provide volunteer opportunities to protect and enhance biodiversity.

Table 6: Team Objectives – Enhance Community Learning and Participation

Team Objectives – Enhance Community Learning and Participation – Achieved 2017-20	
2.1	Deliver sessions to communities and organised groups on natural and cultural heritage
2.2	Promote the Scottish Outdoor Access Code on sessions with communities and organised groups
2.3	Promote the health benefits of outdoor learning on sessions with communities and organised groups
2.4	Provide volunteer opportunities for communities and organised groups for biological recording, practical conservation and biodiversity enhancement
2.5	Deliver, or support the delivery of, the John Muir Award to organised groups
2.6	Support local communities in projects that achieve sustainability, protect the environment, and conserve and enhance biodiversity
2.7	Engage disadvantaged and vulnerable communities and groups with the environment
Outcomes	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Greater awareness and understanding
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improved engagement with local environment
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Greater awareness and understanding of access rights and responsibilities
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increased wellbeing
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Better protected and enhanced biodiversity
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increased volunteering opportunities
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Greater awareness and understanding

- Increased joint project delivery

Table 7: Aim 2 – Performance Indicators

Performance indicator	2017-18	2018-19	2019-20	2017-20 totals
Total number of sessions delivered	127	162	124	413
Total number of participants	2,080	2,893	1,893	6,866
Total number of sessions offering volunteering opportunities	22	37	26	85
Number of group volunteers	244	327	236	807
Number of group volunteer hours	554	628.75	518.5	1,701.25
Total number of sessions for disadvantaged or vulnerable groups	27	51	34	112
Number of participants	191	314	243	748

2.6.1 The outcome of facilitating and delivering community and interested group sessions is improved awareness, understanding and care of our natural and cultural heritage in our communities, improved health and well-being and raised awareness of access rights and responsibilities. Capacity for group sessions was reached during each year of the Strategy.

2.6.2 The Ranger Service worked with community and local interest groups to improve local biodiversity and greenspaces through biological recording and practical conservation volunteer sessions. The practical sessions give communities the skills knowledge and confidence to enable them to make informed choices and actions regarding the protection and enhancement of local biodiversity. Community groups worked with through the Strategy period include: Banff Academy Rural Skills Group, Belhelvie Community Trust, Chapelton Community, Culter 50+ Group, Friends of Denlethen Woods, Grampian Ramblers Group Greener Kemnay, Gourdon Lower Park Group, Huntly and District Development Trust, Inch Reminiscence Group, Laurencekirk Friends Group, Port Erroll Heritage Society, Portlethen Moss Conservation Group, and Turriff University of the 3 Age (U3A).

2.6.3 The Ranger Service also delivered active group sessions to interested groups including youth groups. This enabled people to connect to new areas and environments building an appreciation and awareness of natural heritage resources and responsible

countryside access. Sessions have included guided walks to a variety of countryside and coast sites, visits to areas of cultural heritage and interest badges and awards for youth groups.

- 2.6.4 The Ranger Service has also delivered a number of illustrated presentations to community groups on a number of different topics including, gardening for wildlife, the work of the Ranger Service, social and natural heritage of Bennachie, Mad, Bad and Dangerous to know (Life of Lord Byron), Wooden Ships and Iron Men (whaling industry in Peterhead), Pirates of Aberdeenshire, Corvids!, Great Crowns of Stone (recumbent stone circles) and Cruden Bay's Gothic Connection (Bram Stoker in Aberdeenshire). The presentations promote Aberdeenshire's natural and cultural heritage to new audiences and make our service accessible to those who may not be able to take part in an outdoor visit.
- 2.6.5 The Ranger Service worked in partnership with other Council Services and partner organisations to focus on providing opportunities for those in areas of deprivation or who are otherwise disadvantaged, to benefit from access to the outdoors. During the Strategy period there were 112 group sessions for 748 disadvantaged or vulnerable people.
- 2.6.6 The Ranger Service worked with 6 Foyer Groups, supporting those with mental health and/or addiction problems, to achieve the John Muir Award. The Ranger Service also worked with 19 school classes to achieve Discovery level award. The award recognises an increase in environmental awareness and skills in conservation and presentation, demonstrating an increase in skills and learning.

Case Study 10 Backbone Community Interest Company (CIC) New Scots Project

Where	Forvie, Haddo Country Park (Formartine) Bennachie (Garioch) and Burn 'O' Vat (Marr)
Objective	To provide a warm welcome to our countryside to New Scots, Syrian Refugees. To support the New Scots in exploring our countryside and sharing similarities and differences with the Syrian countryside. To support independent access to the countryside through training some from the group in the skills needed to plan and deliver a countryside visit.
Actions	<p>A series of sessions with the Al-Amal group of refugees to explore various sites in Aberdeenshire. Sessions were in partnership with Scottish Natural Heritage and Balmoral Estate.</p> <p>Support the group leaders in planning the outings through sharing skills, knowledge and techniques in leading outdoor sessions to enable sustainable independent enjoyment of the outdoors.</p>
Outcome	<p>New Scots are able to access and enjoy the countryside and have increased knowledge and understanding of our shared natural and cultural heritage, helping to make connections with the wider community and environment.</p> <p>New Scot group leaders have the skills knowledge and confidence to undertake their own outings to various outdoor sites across Aberdeenshire. This will help the group to access the health and wellbeing benefits of visiting the outdoors and to develop understanding of the environment and countryside and how to access it responsibly.</p>



Ranger Service working with New Scots from the Al-Amal group

Case Study 11 Commemorative World War One Orchard

Where Portlethen Community Woodland, Portlethen, Kincardine and Mearns

Objective To work with community volunteers to create a commemorative area in the community woodland to mark the hundredth anniversary of the signing of the armistice in 2018 and to remember the 27 men from Portlethen who lost their life in World War One.

Actions Working in partnership with the Planning Environment Team, Portlethen Moss Management Conservation Group, local volunteers, schools and local businesses an orchard was created within the community woodland.
27 native wild fruit trees and shrubs planted to add to the existing Portlethen edible trail and provide food and shelter to wildlife.
Opening ceremony to mark the community effort involved in the project and to remember the men of Portlethen lost in World War One.

Outcome Apples, plums, cherries, black and red currants, and gooseberries, chosen to suit the site, were planted and provide a variety of fruits through the summer and autumn. A loosely planted hedgerow provides natural protection to the fruit trees and bushes, which in turn provides shelter to wildlife, attracting pollinators in to visit the orchard. 150 people from the local community attended the opening ceremony.



Commemorative Orchard Planting

Case Study 12 Wetland Management for People with 1st Alford Scouts

Where	Haughton Country Park, Alford, Marr
Objective	To create a bog garden in a problem waterlogged grass area, preventing irresponsible use and improving the attractiveness of the site for visitors and wildlife.
Actions	An area of grass which is wet and waterlogged has suffered abuse from cars being driven irresponsibly over it. Working in partnership with Landscape Services and the Environment Team, the Ranger Service worked with volunteers from the 1 st Alford Scouts to create a bog garden by planting various wetland flowers including native species and pollinator friendly species.
Outcome	<p>Forty volunteers gained further knowledge and understanding of their local natural heritage and were given the opportunity to take practical, informed action to protect and promote its biodiversity</p> <p>Landscape Services has changed the mowing regime and attractive flowering plants and other vegetation growing in the uncut areas are attracting pollinating insects, providing shelter for wildlife and helping reduce nutrient run-off that causes excess pond algal growth. This has helped to make one of Aberdeenshire's Country Parks a more attractive place for people to come and visit, and enhance the local biodiversity within the area.</p>



Before Poor Quality Grass Area



After volunteer session to improve biodiversity

2.7 Aim 3 - Support Schools and Other Environmental Education Providers

Provide advice, support and expertise to other education providers in their delivery of environmental education and outdoor learning

Table 8: Team Objectives – Support Schools and Other Environmental Education Providers

Team Objectives – Support Schools and Other Environmental Education Providers – Achieved 2017-20	
3.1	Deliver education sessions for schools and other formal education groups on natural and cultural heritage
3.2	Promote the Scottish Outdoor Access Code on formal education sessions
3.3	Promote the health benefits of outdoor learning on formal education sessions
3.4	Provide volunteer opportunities on formal education sessions for biological recording
3.5	Deliver, or support the delivery of, the John Muir Award to formal education groups
3.6	Work in partnership with colleagues in Children’s Services to provide opportunities for outdoor learning for disadvantaged and vulnerable children
3.7	Contribute to and deliver CPD, workshops and training for other environmental education providers
Outcomes	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Greater awareness and understanding
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improved engagement with local environment
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Greater awareness and understanding of access rights and responsibilities
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increased wellbeing
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Better protected and enhanced biodiversity
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • practical conservation and biodiversity enhancement
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increased volunteering opportunities

- Increased joint project delivery

- Increased skills learning

Table 9: Aim 3 – Performance Indicators

Performance indicator	2017-18	2018-19	2019-20	2017-20 totals
Total number of education sessions delivered	220	187	158	565
Total number of participants	4,849	4,405	4,620	13,874
Total number of school sessions offering volunteering opportunities	29	25	13	67
Number of school volunteers	549	666	383	1,598
Number of school volunteer hours	588	637.25	477.5	1,702.75
Total number of sessions for disadvantaged or vulnerable school groups.	27	10	15	52
Disadvantaged or vulnerable school groups number of participants	69	58	45	172
Number of CPD sessions delivered or supported, and number of participants	15	8	8	31
Number of CPD participants	165	139	156	460

- 2.7.1 The Ranger Service works with schools to deliver outdoor learning opportunities in school grounds, local greenspaces and sites such as Country Parks. Access to outdoor learning opportunities is embedded in Scotland's curriculum - Curriculum for Excellence (CfE), and our sessions engage young people with the natural world, building a lifelong appreciation for Scotland's outdoors, responsible countryside access and promoting healthy lifestyles.
- 2.7.2 The Ranger Service works with all curriculum ages and covers a broad range of topics, including Beach School, bird feeding, the Celts, Citizen Science surveys, community garden planting, food chains, forestry, pollinators, making hedgehog homes, hibernation and migration, plants, pollution and conservation, rocky shore ecology, species ID, schools camera trap project, wild orchard planting, and woodland biodiversity.
- 2.7.3 The Ranger Service sought to ensure those of school age who are disadvantaged have access to the benefits of connecting to nature and the outdoors. Over the period of the Strategy, 52 sessions for disadvantaged or vulnerable school groups were delivered. For example, the Service worked with the Community Learning and Development Team and Aberdeen Football Club to deliver the "FraserDeen" project with secondary aged pupils who are following an alternative curriculum. This project sought to give young people the opportunity to explore and understand their local environments, undertake conservation tasks, and to achieve the Discovery Level John Muir Award.
- 2.7.4 The Ranger Service also seeks to engage young people in volunteering opportunities to improve local biodiversity building connection to nature and benefiting the wider community. For example, the Ranger Service worked with Mackie Academy staff and pupils to plant 200 trees creating a wild orchard for the benefit of wildlife, the school and the wider community.
- 2.7.5 The Ranger Service worked in partnership to deliver 31 Continuous Professional Development (CPD) sessions attended by 460 teachers and other providers. This enabled teachers to deliver sustainable outdoor learning in their school grounds or local area, increasing the number of pupils engaged in outdoor learning across Aberdeenshire.
- 2.7.6 Capacity for school sessions was reached during each year of the Strategy.

Case Study 13 Battlehill Woodland Interpretation panel with Gordon Schools

Where	Battlehill Wood, Huntly, Marr
Objective	To increase enjoyment and understanding of the woodland. To increase awareness of the wildlife living in the woodland and the significant cultural heritage of the site. To increase community connection to the woodland after a period of management actions.
Actions	Working with the Environment Team, the Ranger Service engaged with the pupils of Gordon Schools to explore and discover the habitats and history of the site. Pupils applied their knowledge from site visits to work with the Ranger and Environment Planner to create an interpretation board for the site.
Outcome	Improved knowledge and understanding of the natural and cultural heritage of the site in pupils, their families and wider community. Pupils gain knowledge of the process of creating a public interpretative panel and knowledge of employment opportunities in forestry environment, and conservation. Improved information provision onsite for residents and visitors.



Interpretation Panel by Gordon Schools working with Ranger Service

Case Study 14 Early Years in Nature Training Course

Where Banff and Buchan, Buchan, Garioch, Formartine, Kincardine and Mearns, Marr

Objective To support the delivery of the Early Years in Nature training course for Early Years Practitioners. The course gives the participants knowledge and understanding on the key elements of using the outdoors with pre-school children with the purpose of giving the confidence to increase outdoor learning by Early Years Practitioners.

Actions Working in partnership with North East Scotland Outdoor Learning Group (NESOLG) and the Council’s Early Years Team, the Ranger Service worked with the participants in their early years setting or local sites to support on the ground delivery of skills and knowledge developed on the course.

Outcome Sustainable use of the outdoors for learning through increased understanding of basic wildlife, habitats and strategies and activities for outdoor learning amongst Early Years staff. The course has been very successful in increasing the use of outdoor sites and many staff are now operating effective outdoor learning in their own settings throughout Aberdeenshire. This will help ensure children are aware of the natural environment from a young age and help to protect and promote it in a sustainable way so that future generations can continue to benefit from it.



Banff & Buchan Ranger demonstrating safe use of Kelly Kettles to teachers

Case Study 15 Development of Arnhall Moss, Local Nature Reserve (LNR) discovery trail

Where	Arnhall Moss LNR, Westhill, Garioch
Objective	TAQA, a business with an office close to the site sought to work with Elrick Primary School and the Ranger Service to develop a community accessible resource to raise awareness of local biodiversity and enjoyment of the site.
Actions	The Ranger Service led school sessions to the LNR to increase awareness and understanding of the value of the site for local biodiversity. The children chose a species found at the site to research further and provide information for a discovery (nature) trail on the site.
Outcome	Pupils have a greater understanding of local businesses and a local business was able to contribute to the protection, promotion and enhancement of their area.

Pupils and TAQA staff have a greater knowledge of the significance of the site for local biodiversity.

Discovery Trail has been created, enhancing the site for visitors and producing an education and interpretative resource available for school and community use.



Active e-learning about local wildlife on the Discovery Trail



TAQA , Elrick Primary School and Ranger Service on the newly opened Discovery trail

2.8 Aim 4 - Protect and Enhance Natural Heritage

Work with colleagues and partners on projects and initiatives to protect and enhance Aberdeenshire's natural heritage.

Table 10: Team Objectives – Protect and Enhance Natural Heritage

Team Objectives – Protect and Enhance Natural Heritage – Achieved 2017-20	
4.1	Work with colleagues in the Environment Team on biodiversity projects and monitoring of key wildlife sites
4.2	Support the work and projects of the North East Scotland Biological Records Centre
4.3	Support the work and projects of the North East Scotland Biodiversity Action Partnership and Cairngorms Nature
4.4	Support national and international nature conservation initiatives
4.5	Provide support and advice to residents, visitors, groups and communities on accessing and protecting our natural heritage and enhancing biodiversity

Outcomes

- Better protected and enhanced biodiversity
- Greater awareness and understanding of natural heritage
- Increased joint project delivery

Table 11: Aim 4 – Performance Indicators

Performance indicator	2017-18	2018-19	2019-20	2017-20 totals
Total number of public events to protect or enhance biodiversity	81	82	85	248
Community sessions to protect or enhance biodiversity	122	156	107	370

Education with school sessions to protect or enhance biodiversity	132	165	134	431
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- 2.8.1 The Ranger Service contributed to and supported the delivery of actions from community site management plans, biodiversity action plans, Cairngorms Nature, Invasive Non-Native Species (INNS) and Scottish Invasive Species Initiative (SISI) strategies to protect and enhance our biodiversity at a local, national and international level. During the course of the Strategy, the Ranger Service worked with colleagues and partners on the following projects and initiatives to protect and enhance Aberdeenshire's biodiversity: Aberdeenshire Biodiversity Champions, Aberdeenshire Council Pollinator Strategy, British Trust for Ornithology (BTO) Beached Bird Survey, Buglife's B-Lines, Local Nature Conservation Sites (monitoring), North East Scotland Biodiversity Action Plan's Camera Trapping, Open Air Laboratories (OPAL) Surveys, Saving Scotland's Red Squirrels, Scottish Wildcat Action, The Wild North East - Scotland's Natural Gem short film, UK Biodiversity Action Plan/Cairngorms Nature Action Plan – priority Lepidoptera species.
- 2.8.2 The outcome of this work is greater awareness and understanding of our natural heritage at a local and national level, increased protection and enhancement of our biodiversity and improved service delivery through partnership working.
- 2.8.3 The Ranger Service worked with Landscape Services Landscape Officers, Principal Landscape Officers and Greenspace Officers to improve the quality of Council owned greenspace for people and biodiversity through the Greenspace Project. This project has included working in partnership to identify areas suitable for a reduced mowing regime which will reduce costs and improve biodiversity and identify areas for community tree planting which will again reduce costs and benefit biodiversity.
- 2.8.4 During the Strategy period the Ranger Service worked in partnership with North East Scotland Biodiversity Partnership to create "The Wild North East – Scotland's Natural Gem" a short film highlighting the wonderful wildlife and wild places throughout the North East of Scotland. The film has been widely distributed through social media channels and had received over 90,000 views after two weeks. The film will inspire others to enjoy Aberdeenshire's wild places, to understand about the services nature provides and the importance of caring for the natural environment for the benefit of ourselves and future generations. Viewers will gain greater awareness and understanding of Aberdeenshire's environment, and are more likely to be engaged with it and help conserve and enhance it in the future. It is also hoped it will attract more people to North East Scotland so they can appreciate and enjoy what the natural environment has to offer here.

Case Study 16 Local Biodiversity Action Plan Camera Trap Project

Where	Gamrie, Banff and Buchan
Objective	To give Early Years Practitioners the skills and knowledge to set accurately and record findings from camera traps in the countryside.
Actions	Practical sessions to set, review and record from a camera trap.
Outcome	Camera trap records submitted to NESBReC which form valuable data for development and measurement of actions to combat biodiversity loss. Increased awareness, understanding and enjoyment of local wildlife by staff and pupils at Early Years setting.



Biological recording using camera traps

Camera Trapping with Early Years and Schools

Case Study 17 **Habitat Creation for Aspen Loving Moths**

Where Crathie, Marr

Objective To provide public volunteer opportunities to enhance the natural heritage for the benefit of aspen loving moths, in partnership with Balmoral Estate.

Actions Fencing erected to protect aspen suckers from grazing.

Outcome Aspen loving moths benefit from the growth of aspen suckers through enhanced natural heritage which combats biodiversity loss and benefits the wider environment.

Volunteers benefit from opportunities to learn skills in conservation and environmental management.



Volunteers, Balmoral Estate Rangers and Aberdeenshire Council Ranger Service improving areas for aspen suckers

Case Study 18 Toolbox talks for Landscape Service mowing teams

Where	Landscape Services Depots, Banff and Buchan (Banff, Fraserburgh 2 sessions) Formartine (Ellon, Turriff)
Objective	To present the benefits of a reduced mowing regime to Landscape Services staff, supporting the Service to answer questions from the public on managing Aberdeenshire’s greenspaces. Develop partnership working between the Services.
Action	Area Rangers delivered presentations on mowing regimes and biodiversity to Landscape Services mowing teams at depots across Aberdeenshire.
Outcomes	<p>Improved knowledge and awareness of biodiversity in Landscape Services mowing teams.</p> <p>Quality of Aberdeenshire’s greenspaces improved for people and biodiversity.</p> <p>Improved communication and understanding between the services, creating a foundation for future joint working projects and continued improved of Council-owned greenspaces for biodiversity.</p>

Wildflowers mean more wildlife

- More wildflowers and tree species provide a home for a variety of insects, including our wild pollinators, which in turn provide food and shelter for wildlife such as garden birds and hedgehogs
- This variety of life is what we mean by biodiversity





Planting wildflowers and native tree species

- Provides food and shelter for a variety of pollinators from moths and butterflies to bumblebees and hoverflies



Slides from ToolBox Talk to Landscape Services

2.9 Aim 5 - Support, Sustain and Enhance Facilities at the Bennachie Visitor Centre

Work in partnership with the Bennachie Centre Trust, Forestry Land Scotland (formally Forestry Commission Scotland) and the Bailies of Bennachie to deliver a quality experience for visitors to Bennachie and the Bennachie Visitor Centre.

Table 12: Team Objectives – Support, Sustain and Enhance Facilities at the Bennachie Visitor Centre

Team Objectives – Support, Sustain and Enhance Facilities at the Bennachie Visitor Centre – Achieved 2017-20

5.1 Provide a quality experience for visitors

5.2 Work in partnership with other parties to maintain and develop interpretation and information available at the Centre

5.3 Promote and support the use of the Centre for events, groups and schools with the Ranger Service

5.4 Promote and support the development of the Centre as a host for environmental and educational initiatives - training courses, workshops and meetings.

Outcomes

- Greater awareness and understanding

- Information, and advice, and feedback on visitors' experience

- Promotion of Bennachie and other attractions in the area.

- Improved visitor experience

- Increased joint project delivery

- Improved engagement with local environment

- Increased skills learning

Table 12: Aim 5 – Performance Indicators

Performance indicator	2017-18	2018-19	2019-20	2017-20 totals
Total number of visitors (uncalibrated)	38,467	35,379	35,509	109,355
Total number of events, groups and schools at the Centre	20	5	4	29
Total number of training events, workshops and meetings at the Centre	20	6	5	31

Note: The figures 2018-20 exclude Ranger Service sessions already counted elsewhere.

- 2.9.1 The Ranger Service provide staff on behalf of the Bennachie Centre Trust to operate the retail facility, provide a welcome to visitors, work with others to develop an annual display plan and manage bookings for the Centre facilities.
- 2.9.2 During the Strategy period the Centre maintained visitor numbers above 35,000 people every year. The Centre maintained its 4 star rating following a quality assurance assessment of the Centre in 2018 by Visit Scotland under their revised Visitor Quality Assurance Scheme. It was crowned the Tourist Hotspot of the Year at the Pride of Inverurie Awards in August 2018 beating off competition from Inverurie Golf Club and Castle Fraser. The Centre was also shortlisted as a finalist in the Best Visitor Attraction category at the Aberdeen City and Shire Tourism Awards, with it only being pipped to the post by Peterhead Prison Museum.

Case Study 19 Across the Grain Festival 2019

Where	Bennachie Visitor Centre
Objective	Contribute to the Across the Grain Festival
Action	Puppets were made by children at Keig, Old Rayne and Chapel of Garioch primary schools to illustrate stories about Bennachie. The puppets were then put on display at the Bennachie Visitor Centre for the October holidays. Families enjoyed a woodland stories event at the Centre on Saturday, October 19, when local storyteller, Grace Banks, took participants on a journey feasting on fantastical creatures and Bennachie beasts. The event was undertaken in partnership with Bailies of Bennachie, Live Life Aberdeenshire, Puppet Animation Scotland and local storyteller, Grace Banks.
Outcome	Through the medium of art and storytelling the rich history of Bennachie was interpreted to a new audience of visitors; both young and old. Local school children learnt about Bennachie and shared their knowledge through the creation of a variety of puppets.



Across the Grain Festival Puppet

2.10 Aim 6 – Continuous Improvement

Ensure that the Ranger Service delivery is high quality, continually improving, efficient and responsive to local people's needs.

Table 13: Team Objectives – Continuous Improvement

Team Objectives – Continuous Improvement – Achieved 2017-20
6.2 Develop and maintain a Team Strategy and Action Plans
6.3 Ensure staff CPD requirements are met
6.4 Maintain Key Performance Indicators
6.5 Produce performance reports
6.6 Maintain continuous service improvement
6.7 Use social and other media to promote the Ranger Service and its work, including the Bennachie Visitor Centre, for communication and feedback
Outcomes
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Efficient working
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Professional standards are maintained
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Monitored work outcomes
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continuous improvement
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Effective communication and promotion

2.10.1 During the period of the Strategy the Ranger Service moved public event bookings to an online platform - Eventbrite. This has resulted in a considerable saving in the staff time associated with managing bookings and allowed for effective promotion of the public event programme reaching new audiences.

- 2.10.2 During the period of the Strategy the Ranger Service has developed its social media¹ presence which has allowed for increased levels of public engagement with the service at no additional cost to the Service.
- 2.10.3 During 2019-20, the Ranger Service also sought to increase levels of income through welcoming donations to the service. This resulted in £2,513.62 being received.
- 2.10.4 The Ranger Service attended training courses and workshops to ensure the work of the Ranger Service is to a high standard and up to date with current good practice standards.
- 2.10.5 The Ranger Service has sought to reduce the carbon footprint of the service through minimising vehicle use and using online meetings and other online resources where possible.
- 2.10.6 The Ranger Service requested feedback from users at public events, community and interest group sessions and schools through an anonymous online survey platform. Feedback was overwhelmingly positive over the course of the Strategy with no interventions required and requests for further sessions in all areas of service delivery.

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

3.0 Ranger Service Strategy 2017-20 Discussion and Looking Forward to 2020-23

3.1 2017-20 Strategy Review Discussion

3.1.1 This review document has shown that the Ranger Service achieved the aims set out in the 2017-20 Strategy document and customer feedback reflects the high quality of service delivery. There were 22 events and bookings cancelled in March 2020 due to the Covid-19 pandemic which is reflected in the monitoring for that year.

3.1.2 The review identified the following issues which should be taken into account in preparing the future strategies:

- Our cultural heritage is intertwined with our natural heritage and separating the two in the course of the Strategy was not of benefit to the Ranger Service, user groups or environment. Future strategies should align with other Ranger Services and include both natural and cultural heritage objectives.
- The current recording of performance indicators does not fully reflect the breadth and value of service delivery and future recording should seek to give an accurate reflection of the value of all work streams.
- The Service was oversubscribed in many areas during each year of the strategy period. The next Strategy should seek to continue to develop partnership working and explore ways to increase capacity and reach new audiences using online resources.
- Through the course of this and the previous Strategy the Bennachie Visitor Centre staff function has changed and the original support role to the Ranger Service has now largely moved online. As a result, the work streams for the staff at the Centre are now primarily guided by the Bennachie Centre Trust Action Plan and progress reported back to the Trust and its partners. Future strategies will focus on Ranger Service delivery of Aberdeenshire Council priorities as part of the national network of Ranger Services. The Bennachie Visitor Centre, whilst retained in the Specialist Services Team, will not be part of the Ranger Service Strategy but continue to follow the Bennachie Centre Trust Action Plan. This will allow both organisations to develop robust action plans to match their own strategy objectives and desired outcomes.

3.2 Recommendations for the Ranger Service Strategy 2020-23

3.2.1 The 2020-23 Strategy will seek to support the three pillars of the Council's Strategic Priorities and align to the 2019 Scottish Natural Heritage (now NatureScot) "Connecting people and places – a policy statement on rangering in Scotland" document. The priorities of the rangering in Scotland document demonstrate the broad reach of service delivery and the benefits of Ranger Services to our communities, economy and environment. The "Connecting people and places – a policy statement on rangering in Scotland" document sets out a national vision for Scottish Ranger

Services and highlights the important role Local Authority Ranger Services will play in delivering the vision. Aligning to the “Connecting people and places – a policy statement on rangering in Scotland” document will enable our service to contribute to national reporting and bench marking.

- 3.2.2 The value of volunteering opportunities at an individual and community level is recognised and the 2020-23 Strategy will seek to increase volunteering opportunities for individuals and communities.
- 3.2.3 The 2020-23 Strategy will seek to include online service delivery as a route to increase accessibility, reach new audiences including tourists, and build the capacity and efficiency of the Service. This will be achieved through development of online facilities and resources for individuals, communities and schools. The efficiency of service delivery will be further developed through the continuation and growth of partnership working, both with other Council Services and partner organisations.
- 3.2.4 Future performance indicators will clearly highlight the breadth of service delivery and demonstrate the value of Ranger Service delivery in areas including health and wellbeing, engagement with those who are disadvantaged or vulnerable, enabling community empowerment and actions to combat biodiversity loss and climate change.

3.3 Impact of Covid-19

- 3.3.1 There were 22 events and bookings cancelled in March 2020 due to the Covid-19 pandemic which is reflected in the monitoring for that year.
- 3.3.2 The pandemic has shown how important connection to nature is for health and wellbeing, and that elements of this can be shared online and on social media. The pandemic has also proven the vital role Rangers have in providing a welcome to the countryside and informing visitors and land managers of access rights and responsibilities.
- 3.3.3 At the time of writing there remains a need to be responsive to local and national requirements and as such future strategies and action plans need to be responsive and flexible to focus service delivery and method of delivery to where it is most required and effective. This will be taken into account when developing the 2020-23 Strategy and associated action plans.

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Appendix 1

Aberdeenshire Council Ranger Service Strategy 2017-20

“We will aim to raise awareness and understanding in order to promote and protect Aberdeenshire’s natural and cultural heritage - connecting people with place.”

The Strategy is primarily an Aberdeenshire Council working document to help manage and deliver key priorities of the Ranger Service for the next 3 years.

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1 Introduction

From mountain to sea, Aberdeenshire boasts a rich and valuable resource in its natural and cultural heritage. Wildlife sites of international importance, local and national nature reserves, award winning beaches and Country Parks, and a diverse timeline of cultural heritage assets to share and manage sustainably.

Identifiable by the national ranger logo, the Aberdeenshire Council Ranger Service provides the welcome to Aberdeenshire's outdoors. The Rangers work wherever people engage with the environment, whether that is in Aberdeenshire's rural, urban, coastal, inland or upland settings. The Rangers are highly knowledgeable about Aberdeenshire's natural and cultural heritage and the sustainable management of Aberdeenshire resources, and are imaginative and effective communicators who are able to share this knowledge with residents and visitors.

1.1 Scope of Strategy

Connecting people with place, Aberdeenshire Council Ranger Service promotes the enjoyment, understanding and care of Aberdeenshire's natural and cultural heritage. This is in alignment with other Ranger Services and follows National Ranger Service Aims identified by Scottish Natural Heritage. The Service delivers first-hand provision of information, advice, activities and interpretation on Aberdeenshire's natural and cultural environment for people of all ages and social groups. The Service contributes to the management, enhancement and monitoring of environmental assets to promote and encourage engagement with Aberdeenshire's outdoors in a responsible and sustainable way.

This Strategy shows where the Ranger Service Objectives clearly deliver or contribute to Scottish Government and Aberdeenshire Council Priorities. The Strategy is primarily an Aberdeenshire Council working document to help manage and deliver key objectives of the Ranger Service. The Strategy also provides opportunities to improve efficiency, participation and collaboration with key stakeholders and partners and embed best practice in the delivery of the Ranger Service.

The Strategy provides a structured approach to service delivery for the next three years. Through the period of the strategy there will be a requirement to consider the challenges of our changing environment and changing needs of our present and potential user groups. To reflect these changes and challenges, an Annual Team Action Plan will be prepared which will provide detailed actions on the delivery of the Strategy and will reflect new and emerging priorities.

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.

It is the vision of the Ranger Service that the benefits gained from Aberdeenshire's unique environment should be available to those who live, work and visit Aberdeenshire, and that the value of these resources and the need to protect and enhance them for future generations

through sustainable management is understood. This vision for the Ranger Service can be summarised as:

“We will aim to raise awareness and understanding in order to promote and protect Aberdeenshire’s natural and cultural heritage - connecting people with place”

Increasing public engagement with the natural environment can lead to its enhancement for future generations, improved health and well-being, reduced inequalities, increased opportunities for volunteering, increased skills learning, and can support regeneration and tourism.

2 Resources

Aberdeenshire Council Ranger Service is part of the Specialist Services Team, Planning & Building Standards within Infrastructure Services.

The Ranger Service comprises six (Full Time Equivalent) Rangers and staff at the Bennachie Visitor Centre. The Centre is staffed by one (0.5 FTE) Warden, part time (0.7 FTE) Seasonal and Relief Assistants, and one (0.27 FTE) cleaner. The team is line managed by a (0.6 FTE) Ranger Co-ordinator.

The Ranger Service has a base in each of the Council administrative areas and is therefore ideally placed to work with residents and visitors to engage them directly in the local environment.

The Bennachie Visitor Centre staff manage the day to day operation of the building and its resources on behalf of the Bennachie Centre Trust. The Centre attracts over 35,000 visitors each year and provides an educational resource for the whole of Aberdeenshire.

3 Aberdeenshire Council Ranger Service Golden Thread

The Golden Thread of the Ranger Service is illustrated in the table below. In addition, the Rangers work to the following National Ranger Aims:

- To ensure a warm welcome and provide support to help people enjoy the outdoors.
- To increase awareness, understanding, care and responsible use of the natural and cultural heritage.
- To support the sustainable management and use of the outdoors to meet a range of social, economic and environmental objectives.

Scottish Government Purpose	To focus government and public services on creating a more successful country, with opportunities for all to flourish, through increasing sustainable economic growth.			
Scotland Performs	<i>National Outcome</i>	<i>National Outcome</i>	<i>National Outcome</i>	
Scottish Government National Outcomes (A1)	Our young people are successful learners, confident individuals, effective contributors, and responsible citizens	Our children have the best start in life and are ready to succeed	We live longer, healthier lives	
	<i>National Outcome</i>	<i>National Outcome</i>	<i>National Outcome</i>	<i>National Outcome</i>
	We have strong, resilient, and supportive communities where people take responsibilities for their own actions and how they affect others	We value and enjoy our built and natural environment and protect it and enhance it for future generations	We take pride in a strong, fair and inclusive national identity	Our public services are high quality, continually improving, efficient and responsive to local people's needs
Scottish Government National and Plans, Policies & Strategies (A2-8)	A2) Scotland's Biodiversity – A Route Map to 2020	A3) Curriculum for Excellence - Learning for Sustainability - Outdoor Learning	A4) Physical Activity Implementation Plan – A More Active Scotland	A5) Land Reform Act (Scotland) 2003 – Delivery Plan
	A6) Community Empowerment	A7) National Tourism Development Framework		A8) National Planning Framework 3
Aberdeenshire Council Vision	Serving Aberdeenshire from mountain to sea – the very best of Scotland			
Aberdeenshire Council Plans & Strategies (B1-6)	B1) Aberdeenshire Council Single Outcome Agreement 2013-23			
	B2) Aberdeenshire Council Community Plans			
	B3) Aberdeenshire Council Plan 2013-17			
	B4) Infrastructure Services Service Plan 2017-20			
	B5) Local Development Plan 2017			
	B6) Corporate Asset Management Plan 2015-20			
Ranger Service Vision	We will aim to raise awareness and understanding in order to promote and protect Aberdeenshire's natural and cultural heritage - connecting people with place			
Ranger Service Strategy (C1)	C1) Aberdeenshire Council Ranger Service Strategy 2017 - 20			
Ranger Service Plans (C1a-b)	C1a) Annual Team Action Plan C1b) Annual Individual Workplans			

4 Ranger Service Strategy Priorities, Aims and Objectives

The Ranger Service Strategy aims and objectives have been drawn together to reflect the strategies, plans and policies which form the 'golden thread' (see Section 3) between Scottish Government outcomes and delivery on the ground. The Strategy 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 reflect current national and corporate priorities of inclusion, community empowerment, biodiversity, sustainable economic development and tourism. The Strategy is, however, intended to be a flexible document that can be amended through the Annual Team Action Plan each year, which can provide detailed actions to ensure delivery of the Strategy to reflect new and different work opportunities and requirements.

The Annual Team Action Plan (Appendix 1) provides the detailed actions the Ranger Service will take to achieve the Strategy Objectives and indicates how the core outcomes of the Strategy will be measured. The team will use the Strategy and the Action Plan to develop individual annual work programmes which will reflect the specific natural and cultural heritage needs and aspirations of Aberdeenshire.

4.1 Key Priorities 2017-20

Table1: Key Strategy Priorities 2017-20

Key Priority	Success Measure	Outcome
1 Further develop partnership working to reach vulnerable and disadvantaged groups	Number of sessions with vulnerable/disadvantaged groups	Increased wellbeing Increased joint project delivery
2 Develop volunteer policy and procedures, and increase volunteering opportunities	Number of volunteers	Increased volunteering opportunities Improved engagement with local environment Better protected and enhanced biodiversity Greater awareness and understanding of natural heritage
3 Develop promotion of the Bennachie Visitor Centre through Visit Scotland accreditation schemes	Receive accreditation of the Quality Assurance Criteria, Welcome Scheme and Visitor Information Partner leading to increased visitor numbers	Increased awareness and recognition of this asset Increased public awareness of the natural and cultural heritage of Bennachie Improved service delivery

4.2 Aim 1 – Deliver a Programme of Public Events

Deliver a programme of events for residents and visitors to Aberdeenshire to raise awareness and understanding of Aberdeenshire’s natural and cultural heritage, to protect and enhance biodiversity, and to provide opportunities for volunteers.

Table 2: Aim 1 Objectives

Objective	Golden Thread (see Section 3)	Outcome
1.1 Raise awareness and understanding of Aberdeenshire’s natural and cultural heritage at public events	A1, A2, A7, A8, B1, B2, B3, B4	Greater awareness and understanding Improved engagement with local environment Promotion of the region
1.2 Promote responsible behaviour and the Scottish Outdoor Access Code at public events	A1, A2, A5, B1, B2, B3	Greater awareness and understanding of access rights and responsibilities
1.3 Promote the health benefits of outdoor activity at public events	A1, A2, A4, A8, B1, B2, B3	Increased wellbeing
1.4 Protect and enhance biodiversity and provide volunteer opportunities at public events	A1, A2, A6, A8, B1, B2, B3, B4, B5	Better protected and enhanced biodiversity Improved engagement with local environment Increased volunteering opportunities
1.5 Work in partnership with colleagues and other organisations, and support local, national and international festivals and initiatives	A1, A2, A4, A5, A6, A7, B1, B2, B3, B4	Increased joint project delivery Promotion of the region Efficient working and best use of resources

4.3 Aim 2 – Enhance Community Learning and Participation

Work with local communities and organised groups to raise awareness and understanding of our natural and cultural heritage, and to provide volunteer opportunities to protect and enhance biodiversity.

Table 3: Aim 2 Objectives

Objective	Golden Thread (see Section 3)	Outcome
2.1 Deliver sessions to communities and organised groups on natural and cultural heritage	A1, A2, A3, A6, A8, B1, B2, B3, B4	Greater awareness and understanding Improved engagement with local environment
2.2 Promote the Scottish Outdoor Access Code on sessions with communities and organised groups	A1, A2, A5, A6, B1, B2, B3	Greater awareness and understanding of access rights and responsibilities
2.3 Promote the health benefits of outdoor learning on sessions with communities and organised groups	A1, A2, A4, A6, A8, B1, B2, B3, B6	Increased wellbeing
2.4 Provide volunteer opportunities for communities and organised groups for biological recording, practical conservation and biodiversity enhancement	A1, A2, A4, A6, A8, B1, B2, B3, B4, B5, B6	Better protected and enhanced biodiversity Improved engagement with local environment Increased volunteering opportunities
2.5 Deliver, or support the delivery of, the John Muir Award to organised groups	A1, A2, A6, B1, B3	Greater awareness and understanding Improved engagement with local environment Increased joint project delivery
2.6 Support local communities in projects that achieve sustainability, protect the environment, and conserve and enhance biodiversity	A1, A2, A6, A8, B1, B2, B3, B4, B5, B6	Better protected and enhanced biodiversity Improved engagement with local environment
2.7 Engage disadvantaged and vulnerable communities and groups with the environment	A1, A2, A4, A5, A6, A8, B1, B2, B3, B4, B6	Increase wellbeing

4.4 Aim 3 – Support Schools and Other Environmental Education Providers

Provide advice, support and expertise to other education providers in their delivery of environmental education and outdoor learning.

Table 4: Aim 3 Objectives

Objective	Golden Thread (see Section 3)	Outcome
3.1 Deliver education sessions for schools and other formal education groups on natural and cultural heritage	A1, A2, A3, B1, B2, B3, B4	Greater awareness and understanding Improved engagement with local environment
3.2 Promote the Scottish Outdoor Access Code on formal education sessions	A1, A2, A3, A5, B1, B2, B3	Greater awareness and understanding of access rights and responsibilities
3.3 Promote the health benefits of outdoor learning on formal education sessions	A1, A2, A3, A4, A8, B1, B2, B3	Increased wellbeing
3.4 Provide volunteer opportunities on formal education sessions for biological recording, practical conservation and biodiversity enhancement	A1, A2, A3, A8, B1, B2, B3, B4	Better protected and enhanced biodiversity Improved engagement with local environment Increased volunteering opportunities
3.5 Deliver, or support the delivery of, the John Muir Award to formal education groups	A1, A2, A3, B1, B2, B3	Greater awareness and understanding Improved engagement with local environment Increased joint project delivery
3.6 Work in partnership with colleagues in Children's Services to provide opportunities for outdoor learning for disadvantaged and vulnerable children	A1, A2, A3, A4, A8, B1, B2, B3, B4	Increase wellbeing
3.7 Contribute to and deliver CPD, workshops and training for other environmental education providers	A1, A2, A3, B1, B2, B3	Increased skills learning

4.5 Aim 4 – Protect and Enhance Natural Heritage

Work with colleagues and partners on projects and initiatives to protect and enhance Aberdeenshire’s natural heritage.

Table 5: Aim 4 Objectives

Objective	Golden Thread (see Section 3)	Outcome
4.1 Work with colleagues in the Environment Team on biodiversity projects and monitoring of key wildlife sites	A1, A2, A8, B2, B3, B4, B5, B6	Better protected and enhanced biodiversity Greater awareness and understanding of natural heritage
4.2 Support the work and projects of the North East Scotland Biological Records Centre	A1, A2, B2, B3, B4	Better protected and enhanced biodiversity Greater awareness and understanding of natural heritage
4.3 Support the work and projects of the North East Scotland Biodiversity Action Partnership and Cairngorms Nature	A1, A2, A8, B2, B3, B4	Better protected and enhanced biodiversity Greater awareness and understanding of natural heritage Increased joint project delivery
4.4 Support national and international nature conservation initiatives	A1, A2, A8, B2, B3, B4	Better protected and enhanced biodiversity Greater awareness and understanding of natural heritage Increased joint project delivery
4.5 Provide support and advice to residents, visitors, groups and communities on accessing and protecting our natural heritage and enhancing biodiversity	A1, A2, A6, A8, B2, B3, B4, B5, B6	Better protected and enhanced biodiversity Greater awareness and understanding of natural heritage
<i>See also Objectives 1.4, 2.4, 2.6 and 3.4</i>		

4.6 Aim 5 - Support, Sustain and Enhance Facilities at the Bennachie Visitor Centre

Work in partnership with the Bennachie Centre Trust, Forestry Commission Scotland and the Bailies of Bennachie to deliver a quality experience for visitors to Bennachie and the Bennachie Visitor Centre.

Table 6: Aim 5 Objectives

Objective	Golden Thread (see Section 3)	Outcome
5.1 Provide a quality experience for visitors – provide a welcome, information, and advice, and obtain feedback on visitors' experience	A1, A2, A7, A8, B1, B2, B3, B4	Greater awareness and understanding Promotion of Bennachie and other attractions in the area. Improve visitor experience
5.2 Work in partnership with other parties to maintain and develop interpretation and information available at the Centre	A1, A2, A7, A8, B1, B2, B3	Greater awareness and understanding Increased joint project delivery
5.3 Promote and support the use of the Centre for events, groups and schools with the Ranger Service	A1, A2, A3, A4, A5, A6, A7, B1, B2, B3	Greater awareness and understanding Improved engagement with local environment
5.4 Promote and support the development of the Centre as a host for environmental and educational initiatives - training courses, workshops and meetings	A1, A2, A3, A4, A5, A6, A7, B1, B2, B3	Increased skills learning

4.7 Aim 6 – Continuous Improvement

Ensure that the Ranger Service delivery is high quality, continually improving, efficient and responsive to local people's needs.

Table 6: Aim 5 Objectives

Objective	Golden Thread (see Section 3)	Outcome
6.1 Develop and maintain a Team Strategy and Action Plans	C1, C1a, B3	Efficient working

6.2 Ensure staff CPD requirements are met	C1, C1b), B3	Professional standards are maintained
6.3 Maintain Key Performance Indicators	C1, B3	Monitored work outcomes
6.4 Produce performance reports	C1, B3, B4	Monitored work outcomes
6.5 Maintain continuous service improvement	B1, C1, B3, B4	Continuous improvement
6.6 Use social and other media to promote the Ranger Service and its work, including the Bennachie Visitor Centre, for communication and feedback	C1, B3	Effective communication and promotion

5 Annual Performance Indicators

5.1 Aim 1 – Deliver a Programme of Public Events

- I. Total number of events delivered
- II. Total number of participants on events
- III. Total number of events offering volunteering opportunities, number of volunteers and number of volunteer hours
- IV. Feedback from participants

5.2 Aim 2 – Enhance Community Learning and Participation

- V. Total number of sessions delivered
- VI. Total number of participants
- VII. Total number of sessions offering volunteering opportunities, number of volunteers and number of volunteer hours
- VIII. Total number of sessions for disadvantaged or vulnerable groups, and number of participants
- IX. Total number of John Muir Awards supported or delivered, and number of participants
- X. Feedback from participants

5.3 Aim 3 – Support Schools and Other Environmental Education Providers

- XI. Total number of education sessions delivered
- XII. Total number of participants
- XIII. Total number of sessions offering volunteering opportunities, number of volunteers and number of volunteer hours
- XIV. Total number of sessions for disadvantaged or vulnerable groups, and number of participants
- XV. Total number of John Muir Awards supported or delivered, and number of participants
- XVI. Number of CPD sessions delivered or supported, and number of participants
- XVII. Feedback from participants

5.4 Aim 4 – Protect and Enhance Natural Heritage

- XVIII. Total number of events, community sessions and education sessions to protect or enhance biodiversity

5.5 Aim 5 – Support, Sustain and Enhance Facilities at the Bennachie Visitor Centre

- XIX. Total number of visitors
- XX. Total number of events, groups and schools at the Centre
- XXI. Total number of training events, workshops and meetings at the Centre
- XXII. Feedback from visitors

5.6 Aim 6 – Continuous Improvement

- XXIII. Up-to-date Ranger Service Action Plan