



Press Release

3 February 2017

For immediate release

Mountaineers' concern at cuts to outdoor services

Time for a coherent and forward-looking policy

At a time when the value of the great outdoors to physical and mental health is being more widely appreciated, there are fears that council budget cuts will impact on the nation's health – and its NHS costs.

In recent weeks The Highland Council Ranger Service has been told to prepare for staffing cuts. And in a letter to Mountaineering Scotland this week, Highland Council has indicated that cuts in access staff are possible.

At the other end of the country, campaigners are fighting to save Falkirk Outdoors, a community trust which has learned it is likely to be closed following Falkirk Council's budget meeting this month.

Both the ranger service and Falkirk Outdoors work with thousands of children and adults, and access officers provide an already overstretched service in trying to protect the access rights which give people in Scotland the much cherished right to roam.

David Gibson, Chief Executive Officer with Mountaineering Scotland, said: "These are just three examples where extremely valuable services are at risk because of budget cuts.

"We appreciate councils have to operate within financial constraints, and that difficult choices must be made, but we wonder how many more council-provided or funded services are at risk right now, being dismantled with no overview of what we are losing. These services have introduced thousands of children to the outdoors over the years – that fine tradition and its infrastructure is under serious threat.

"These services encourage and enable people to experience positive, life-changing opportunities. We're constantly told of the importance of getting off the sofa, and the benefits to physical and mental health which come from outdoor pursuits are well-attested. A forward-looking, joined-up policy should be looking to expand such services rather than reduce them.

"The cost of cuts to these services will result in additional pressure on the National Health Service and other social services from an increasingly unhealthy population.

"We appeal to both councils and the Scottish Government to take a long hard look at this issue, to avoid cuts in the short-term and develop a coherent and forward-looking policy which protects and promotes such essential services as these."

Ends

Notes for editors:

Photos for this press release are available here:

http://www.mountaineering.scot/assets/contentfiles/media-upload/Kids_outdoors_1a.jpg

http://www.mountaineering.scot/assets/contentfiles/media-upload/Kids_outdoors_2.jpg

These images are of children undertaking supervised climbing on a course, but they are not connected with either Falkirk Outdoors or the Highland Council Ranger Service

A petition to save Falkirk Outdoors can be seen at <https://www.change.org/p/save-falkirk-outdoor-activities>

A petition to save the Highland Council Countryside Ranger Service can be found at <https://you.38degrees.org.uk/petitions/retain-the-highland-council-countryside-ranger-service>

Further information contact:

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About Mountaineering Scotland:

- Mountaineering Scotland is the only recognised representative organisation for hill walkers, climbers and ski-tourers who live in Scotland or who enjoy Scotland's mountains.
- Mountaineering Scotland provides training and information to mountain users to promote safety, self-reliance and the enjoyment of our mountain environment.
- The MCoS is a membership organisation with over 13,000 members representing hill walkers, climbers and mountaineers, funded through a combination of membership subscriptions, non-governmental grants and investment from sportscotland, which supports public initiatives and services in mountain safety, mountain training and the development and promotion of mountaineering activities.
- Mountaineering Scotland also acts for 75,000 members of the BMC or British Mountaineering Council on matters related to Landscape and Access in Scotland.
- Mountaineering Scotland landscape and access work is supported financially by the Scottish Mountaineering Trust and the BMC
- Mountaineering Scotland has launched the ClimbScotland initiative to encourage young people to participate in climbing and support their progression. It offers a dedicated website and a development team, which will introduce young people to climbing at schools, climbing walls and via youth organisations with a range of activities and events, while developing kids clubs and providing specialist support to parents, volunteers and teachers.
- Mountaineering Scotland is the national governing body for sports climbing. It offers pathways to climbing coaching, organises and promotes a range of regional and

national climbing competitions, and manages the Scottish climbing and bouldering teams. It contributes to the management of the GB teams with the ultimate aim of seeing a Scottish athlete achieve a podium position in the Olympic Games.

- Mountaineering Scotland is the new name for the Mountaineering Council of Scotland (MCofS), which acts to represent, support and promote Scottish mountaineering.
- Mountaineering Council of Scotland remains the registered company name.
- The MCofS is a not for profit company limited by guarantee and incorporated in Scotland. Company number SC322717.
- Mountaineering Scotland, The Granary, West Mill Street, Perth PH1 5QP