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Dear David

Thank you for your letter of 23 June 2020 on behalf of the National Access Forum (NAF) concerning resourcing for outdoor access in Scotland. You ask about resources to provide advice and support for land managers; to make sure that people understand their responsibilities under the Scottish Outdoor Access Code; and to develop and maintain the necessary physical infrastructure in both urban and rural areas.

The Scottish Government continues to believe that the delivery of local authority duties should be delegated at a local level where possible. Against this background, local government funding is distributed directly by means of a block grant. It is the responsibility of individual councils to manage their own budgets and to allocate the financial resources available to them on the basis of local needs and priorities, once they have met their statutory obligations.

Local authorities will receive a total funding package of £11.8 billion in 2020-21 through the local government finance settlement, and taken together with the ability to increase council tax by 3% in real terms, local authorities have access to over £1 billion additional support for day to day services in 2020-21, which equates to 10.2%.

The Scottish Government values the important contribution that Scotland's National Park Authorities make to a broad range of our national outcomes, in particular rural development and sustainable and inclusive economic growth, as well as supporting and promoting access to the countryside and protecting the environment in the National Parks. This has been reflected in our commitment to protect and increase both organisations' budgets over a number of years, with both Park Authorities continuing to prioritise their spending plans to ensure effective delivery and use of resources that has enabled them to make progress towards delivering a range of key commitments, including investment in infrastructure that has directly benefited access to the National Parks.

Forestry and Land Scotland (FLS) has no direct funding from the Scottish Government that is tied specifically to, or ring-fenced for, recreational activity or infrastructure. It is unique from

most other public bodies in that it self-generates a large proportion of its funding to support the management and development of the national forests and land. FLS expenditure on access and recreation is funded through the Agency budget and balanced against all the other programmes and objectives. Work is carried out through a mix of contract and in-house delivery. The cost to the Agency of providing, maintaining and managing access, recreation infrastructure and visitor services is partially offset by commercial recreation income, including car park charges.

The Scottish Government fully recognises the importance of the service provided by Scotland's access officers and countryside rangers. They are a valuable asset, undertaking functions and tasks that help to deliver a range of environmental, social and economic benefits, benefiting tourism, health and well-being, and local economy.

Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH) currently provides funding towards the core costs of seven community and five private estate ranger services. SNH and partners, including the Scottish Countryside Rangers Association, are working together through the Ranger Development Partnership to prepare a revised policy statement on rangering in Scotland. This will set out collaborative action to promote the benefits that rangers provide, support the career development of rangers and allied professionals, and develop more sustainable approaches to core and project funding to maintain these services for the future. This statement will be published later this year.

Considerable effort is underway to promote responsible access during the phased exit from lockdown, which is being led by SNH at national level, and by access authorities at local level, in line with their respective statutory duties. Monitoring during the initial lockdown to the end of May indicated that this national campaign had a total reach of around 427,000 on Facebook and Twitter, with uptake by 19 traditional media outlets, and underpinned 75,000 visits to the SOAC website, including over 15,000 visits to the Covid-19 guidance page. SNH will maintain and develop this campaign as necessary to support a green recovery from Covid-19, and the continued support of NAF members will of course be important in this task. Access officers have key complementary roles in local access management, and rangers can also help to promote local awareness of responsible access, contributing to making access rights work on the ground.

Concerning funding for infrastructure, apart from local authorities and National Park Authorities, a number of other funding sources that are typically suggested for paths include: National Lottery Heritage Fund; Sustrans Places for Everyone / National Cycle Network fund; LEADER; Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH); Paths for All; charitable trusts; and Scottish Landfill Communities Fund. More detail on funding is available through the TCV Scotland Funding Update: <https://www.tcv.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/tcv-scotland-funding-update-march-2020.pdf> Also, the Funding Scotland website: <https://fundingscotland.com/>

Innovative means of raising additional sums have comprised: crowd-funding and "friends" donation initiatives; advertising and commercial sponsorship; charges for services such as toilets, parking or accommodation; and merchandise.

Following the UK decision to exit from the European Union, the Scottish Government set out proposals for future agricultural funding in its June 2018 consultation 'Stability and Simplicity' www.gov.scot/publications/stability-simplicity-proposals-rural-funding-transition-period which provides a period of stability until 2024. The current UK Government funding guarantees end in 2020 and the UK Spending Review has been postponed to an undetermined date. Scottish Ministers are pushing the UK Government to provide a clear statement on future funding for all aspects covered by the current EU Common Agricultural

Policy. This will allow Scottish Ministers to take decisions on the support that will be available from 2021 and provide certainty and reassurance to the whole rural economy.

In light of the Covid-19 pandemic, the two National Park Authorities have reprioritised their Operational and Budget Plans for 2020-21 to focus on managing the safe reopening of the National Parks, as part of the phased approach of Scotland's Route Map through and out of the crisis, and implementing plans for a green recovery aligned with Scottish Government's commitment for recovery from the Covid-19 pandemic to deliver a fairer, greener and more equal society. The reprioritised plans recognise the important role that rangers have to play: in Loch Lomond and The Trossachs National Park, working with public sector partners to manage the significant visitor pressures there in recent weeks; and in Cairngorms National Park, following the recent recruitment of seven seasonal rangers, to provide practical support for land managers on visitor management issues at key sites, linking closely with the existing ranger services in the area. Additionally, £150k has also been awarded, as part of the Scottish Government's 'Return to work' package of funding measures announced by the Finance Secretary on 16 June, to support one of Cairngorms National Park Authority's capital projects in its Green Recovery Plan to extend the non-motorised users route at Glenmore.

For car parking, VisitScotland continue to administer the Scottish Government's £9M Rural Tourism Infrastructure Fund, which has delivered much needed assets to rural locations to alleviate the impact of growing numbers of visitors. This includes toilet facilities, car parking to reduce the impact on local communities and improve road safety, and campervan amenities. The current round of the fund is still open, and applications can be made by local authorities and the National Park Authorities (and on behalf of communities).

A Scottish Government monitoring exercise of local authorities and National Park Authorities on their functions, duties, powers and expenditure under Part 1 of the Land Reform (Scotland) Act 2003 (LRSA) will take place in 2020. The last year the monitoring exercise was conducted was financial year 2015-16. We now propose to instate the exercise again, data-gathering for one financial year, once every three years, commencing with the year 2019-20. This will enable us to gain an illustration of work going on on the ground without overly burdening access officer and Scottish Government staff resource.

The monitoring exercise has been delayed until after the phased exit from Covid-19 lockdown, taking into account the practicalities of the local authorities and National Park Authorities gathering the necessary data under the circumstances. The data will be made available in the public domain shortly after all monitoring returns have been submitted later in the year. This does not imply that the Scottish Government will engage directly with local authorities on how they conduct their business.

I hope this is helpful.

Yours sincerely,



ROSEANNA CUNNINGHAM

