

1. EXPENSES PAYMENTS TO VOLUNTEER RANGERS (A163/STP)

Proposal

- 1 This report concerns proposed changes to the system for refunding expenses for the Peak District National Park Volunteer Rangers., The proposal seeks to decouple the expenses claimed by volunteers from the annual pay award for employed staff by introducing an equipment and subsistence expenses claim and fixing the amount that can be claimed for travel expenses. Because the current system was established as part of a previous member resolution in 1983 the changes proposed in this report must be approved by Committee.

2 RECOMMENDATIONS:

That

1. **The current system of expenses payments is terminated with effect on 31st March 2009 and the new payment system commences from 1 April 2009**
2. **That a new equipment and subsistence expenses payment of £600 per annum for Part-Time Assistants, including Volunteer Supervisors, and £500 per annum for Patrol Rangers**
3. **That a fixed travelling allowance of up to £10 per duty is payable to all rota attendees and all pre-arranged Volunteer Ranger duties**
4. **That all future variations to the remuneration of expenses for Volunteer Rangers are dealt with by the Resources Management Team within the Authority's Standing Orders**

Policy Background

- 3 The part-time and volunteer rangers form a key element of the Authority's Ranger Service and are instrumental in delivering a wide range of Corporate Outcomes and carrying out a significant number of Key Corporate Activities, including:

A: *The Landscapes of the National Park are valued for their beauty, character and natural resources and managed to adapt to the effects of climate change*

D: *People feel welcome in the National Park and have opportunities to participate in recreational activities that enhance the quality of their lives*

E: *increasing the quality, distinctiveness and resilience of the bio-diversity of priority habitats and species consistent with climate change*

F: *The distinctive cultural heritage characteristics of the settlements and landscapes are conserved and enhanced*

G: *Understanding of the special qualities of the National Park is increased so that people recognize its value and have the opportunity to contribute to its sustainable management*

Key Issues

- 4 The impetus for these changes came from the Ranger Service review, which itself developed from an Authority member scrutiny process. Although the original member review focussed on the established Ranger Service posts and functions, the management process of review continued with the volunteer rangers.

- 5 We have a fixed budget for this area of work. The total budget for Part-Time and Volunteer Rangers in 2008/9 is £165,000. The current expenses payments would take us over that budget and so we have been required to make adjustments to the number of volunteers to stay within this figure. The specific proposals in this report provide a new expenses payment system to ensure we will remain in budget indexed at the 2008/09 level, whilst also addressing disparities that also exist in the current system.
- 6 Part-Time Rangers who are on the rota can currently claim in expenses £25.73 as Part-Time Assistants and £20.01 as Patrol Rangers. In addition they can claim up to 130 miles for travel costs incurred. Volunteer Rangers who are not on the rota or acting as a 'stand-in', can claim nothing (not even travel) under the current provisions.
- 7 A resolution in 1983 of the previous Establishment Sub-Committee of this Authority ties the current system to the annual pay increase for established staff. This permits a misperception that the Authority may be paying part-time post holders for work as opposed to the intention of reimbursing the expenses of volunteers. Encouraging travel expenses of up to 130 miles conflicts with the Authority's approach to environmental management and its target of reducing the carbon footprint of its activities.
- 8 A new system of payments is proposed made up of an annual equipment allowance of £500 for Part-Time Patrol Rangers, together with an additional £100 annual administration allowance for Part-Time Assistants to cover stationary, consumables and telephone calls they incur at home in connection with their duties.
- 9 In addition, all rota and non-rota part-time and Volunteer Rangers would be entitled to a travel payment up to a maximum of £10 for each 'pre-arranged' duty.

APPENDIX

Background

- 1 The Volunteer Ranger Service is an integral part of the delivery Area Teams actions. The Area Teams form a cornerstone of the new Authority structure and they have been identified as essential to the delivery of Key Corporate Actions and Corporate Outcomes including Promoting Understanding and Conserving and Enhancing the Natural assets of the landscape. In doing so the Volunteer Ranger Service also directly contributes to partnerships with United Utilities, Severn Trent and Yorkshire Water's joint ranger service, which generates in excess of £170,000 income annually. It also provides opportunities for the public to directly contribute to the National Park through volunteering. In addition to the mainstream ranger activities, Volunteer Conservation Supervisors enable the Authority to deliver a conservation volunteer programme, which in itself contributes to Authority Corporate Outcomes and Key Corporate Actions as well as providing conservation volunteer opportunities for young people and under-represented community groups from priority target areas.
- 2 The term 'Part-time Rangers' has traditionally been used to describe those Volunteers who are rota'd, requiring them to attend either a Saturday or Sunday on alternate weeks, whereas those not attached to a rota are called Volunteer Rangers. Strictly speaking, both are Volunteer Rangers in as much as they are not established staff employed by the Authority. All Volunteer Rangers are required to undergo extensive training for which no payments are made at all. The training lasts on average 12 months and typically will entail 20 or so visits where they are shadowing existing rangers. Upon completion of the course, several examinations and a final interview, successful trainees are awarded an Annual Certificate of Authority (ACA). In order to ensure that skills and knowledge are retained, Volunteer Rangers who are not on a rota are required to carry out between 10 and 20 duties per year to retain their ACA.
- 3 The following table shows the different types of Volunteer Ranger, all of who have had to undergo the 12 month training and who hold an ACA.

Part-Time Assistant	There is one PT Assistant per shift (A or B – Saturday or Sunday i.e. one duty per fortnight) at each briefing centre. These people in effect operate the briefing centre and manage the Patrol Rangers who operate from it. They are first in and last away and will also carry out a degree of administration work at home relating to either general issues to do with wider Ranger Service, or organising events etc.
Patrol Ranger	These people work a particular shift equating to one per fortnight. Patrol Rangers are allocated to a particular briefing centre and provide the 'presence on the ground' dealing with the public etc. They also play an important role in delivery walks and events.
Volunteer Ranger	These people carry out the same role as a Patrol Ranger but are not fixed to a rota or attached to a specific briefing centre.
Volunteer Supervisor	These people operate on a similar role to the Part-Time Assistants, but they supervise volunteer work parties made up of groups delivering practical conservation projects

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- 4 As has already been stated, the impetus for these changes came from the Ranger Service review, which itself developed from an Authority member scrutiny process. Although the original member review focussed on the established Ranger Service posts and functions, the management process of review continued with the volunteer rangers. A project team made up primarily of Part-Time and Volunteer Rangers working with team leaders and managers of the Service. Existing Part-Time and Volunteer Rangers were consulted extensively during this process through meetings at briefing centres and a questionnaire.
- 5 Two main factors came out of the review process:
- The fact that the budget is a fixed sum meant that the annual cost increases were being met by reducing the overall number of positions by not filling vacant rota positions as they arose. This process although possible in recent years, has now reached the point where large 'gaps' were appearing in numbers of Patrol Rangers at a number of centres which needed to be addressed.
 - As part of a previous exercise to discourage people from simply undergoing the training process to 'enhance their *curriculum vitae*' without actually becoming Volunteer Rangers, the number of duties needed to obtain and retain the ACA qualification was increased to 20 for the first two years. However, under the current system, those who are not on a rota receive nothing to reimburse the legitimate expenses they incur, despite being obliged to do those duties for their ACA. This was exacerbating an already growing dissatisfaction with the existing situation among a significant number of both Volunteer and Part-Time Rangers.
- 6 As outlined above, retention of the current system is not sustainable financially within service budgets and runs counter to the Authority's Environmental Policy. The Ranger Service management team consulted the Volunteer Rangers on a number of proposals to alter the current system and an alternative option has therefore been developed.
- 7 This option restricts the Volunteer Ranger expenses budget to 2008/09 level (though this may be reviewed in future years according to need) and introduces system of equipment and subsistence expenses claims as well as a ceiling on travel expenses. It is proposed that Volunteer Assistant Rangers are refunded for equipment and subsistence expenses of up to annual amount of £600 for Volunteer Assistants and £500 for Volunteer Patrol Rangers. This could be claimed quarterly in arrears. In addition the above volunteers would be able to claim £10 in travel expenses.
- 8 The budget would also allow for a number (up to 600 plus) of volunteer duties, outside of the rota system, to claim a travel expense of £10. This would allow flexibility and would allow Volunteer Rangers not on the rota system, who currently are not able to claim for travel expenses because of budget limitations, to be able to do so.
- 9 The advantage of this system is that it ensures working within a fixed budget whilst allowing flexibility to meet our targets; it engages our Volunteer Rangers and reimburses them for their expenditure costs.

Resources

- 10 The 2008/09 budget for part-time and volunteer rangers is £165,000. The proposals ensure that we operate within this figure. However this does prevent any subsequent review of this figure and consequent alteration to the establishment if this amount changes. It is further proposed that any review of the actual amounts in future years is made be the Resources Management Team.
- 11 Payments to patrol rangers are paid through the payroll system and are subject to tax/National Insurance deductions depending on the individual's circumstances and the amount of the claim. A suitable revised claim process will be introduced in liaison with our payroll provider (currently Derbyshire County Council).

Risk Management

- 12 Wide ranging consultation was carried out as part of the development of these proposals with many elements coming from Volunteer rangers themselves, with majority support for the proposals. There is a degree of risk that some long-serving volunteers may decide to discontinue their work with the Authority and the consequences of this would be managed to ensure that the impact on the services is minimised.

Human Rights, Equalities, Health & Safety

- 13 There are no human rights, equalities or health and safety implications apparent.

Consultees

- 14 Full-time, part-time and volunteer Rangers, Area Team Managers and the Resources Management Team have been consulted to develop these proposals.

List of Background Papers (not previously published)

- 15 None

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- 16 Sean Prendergast, Head of Field Services.

Publication date

- 17 15 January 2009