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| Agenda Item | 12 |
| Report No | PLA 11/17 |

HIGHLAND COUNCIL

Committee: Places Committee

Date: 15 June 2017

Report Title: Highland Council Ranger's Service – Proposed Transfer to High Life Highland (HLH)

Report By: Director of Development and Infrastructure

1 Purpose/Executive Summary

1.1 The report proposes the transfer of the Highland Council Ranger service to High Life Highland (HLH), summarises the staff consultation undertaken to date, sets out the benefits and opportunities arising from the transfer and seeks Members' agreement to the transfer.

2 Recommendations

2.1 Members are asked to:

- approve the recommendation to transfer the Ranger Service to HLH later in 2017 following the conclusion of statutory procedures; and
- delegate final details of the transfer to the Director of Service, in discussion with the Chair and Vice-Chair of the Places Committee.

3 Introduction

- 3.1 The Highland Council's Countryside Rangers is one of the largest local authority ranger services in Scotland. The Service run many events and guided walks which aim to help raise awareness and encourage appreciation of the scenery, wildlife and heritage of the Highlands. Events are aimed at schools, local communities and visitors alike.
- 3.2 The Countryside Rangers also have responsibilities for; the promotion of the Scottish Outdoor Access Code and wider access duties, contributing to the Highland Council's Biodiversity duties; promoting Eco-school status; work with local communities and are involved in the management of a large number of countryside sites throughout the Highland Council Area.
- 3.3 The Service maintains wide support across the Highlands but has been subject to a reduction in staffing levels from 22 FTE to 10.5 FTE over the last few years to meet savings targets and deliver efficiencies. The likely ongoing budget constraints on the Council mean that alternative solutions need to be found to safeguard the future delivery of the service

4 Current position

- 4.1 Following the 16 February 2017 Highland Council meeting, to agree the 17/18 revenue budget savings, the Council agreed a small reduction in the ranger service and a commitment to consult staff on the potential transfer of the remaining team to HLH who would take over the day to day management of activities and assist in the development of a more commercial approach.
- 4.2 HLH is a Council Arm's Length Organisation (ALO); it is a limited Company with charitable status, funded by the Council but able to draw in additional sources of grant /funds to deliver the same range of services which are currently delivered by the Council. The relationship between the Council and HLH is managed through a Service Delivery Contract, which specifies the budget and the service required of HLH.
- 4.3 If the transfer is approved it is anticipated that all remaining Ranger staff (10.5FTE) will transfer to HLH under The Transfer of Undertakings Regulations (TUPE) i.e. staff would transfer to the ALO on their existing contractual terms and conditions. Formal staff consultations would follow and determine final numbers. Transfer arrangements, TUPE processes and timetable will need to be formally agreed between Highland Council and HLH
- 4.4 Initial informal consultations with staff, HLH and D&I Service Planning and Environment Management team took place on 24 April 2017 to discuss the implications of the proposed transfer and answer staff concerns. The meeting was fully attended and was well received by staff. In addition, Council Officers with the support of Highland Council Human Resources also met with Trade Unions on 15th of May 2017 to discuss the transfer and to seek in principal support for the proposed transfer. Trade Unions have raised no objection and are broadly supportive of the proposal. A further meeting between HLH management and senior rangers took place on 22nd May 2017 to discuss potential operational issues and provide an opportunity for any other issues to be discussed. The potential loss of Ranger identify and prioritisation of workload are the main concerns expressed by the rangers. HLH have given assurances that these will be preserved and the Service Delivery Contract will reflect this commitment. Staff are aware that until such time as Committee approve the proposed transfer that no further action will be taken.

4.5 It is anticipated that the budget transfer will be in the order of £430,000. This sum can be covered from within the existing cost centre and work will be ongoing to finalise budgets with HLH over the next month, once 17/18 roll forward budgets are in place.

5 What the service would look like

5.1 If the transfer goes ahead, the Countryside Rangers would join the HLH Outdoor Activities Team. The team is managed by the Outdoor Activities Manager, assisted by the Outdoor Activities Development Officer and supported by two Outdoor Education (safety) staff.

5.2 Two of the key tasks of this team are to:

1. Develop and manage the delivery of an outdoor activities programme to meet the needs of and demand from schools, community groups, families and individuals.
2. Develop and manage an interpretive service for the purposes of raising awareness and appreciation of the environment, wildlife and heritage of the Highlands.

5.3 The Countryside Rangers would join this team, with the two Senior Rangers reporting to the Outdoor Activities Manager. The line management of the other Rangers would remain the same. The work of the Countryside Rangers would contribute directly to the second key task listed above to raise awareness and appreciation of the environment, wildlife and heritage of the Highlands.

6 Benefits and Opportunities

6.1 Benefits

The following benefits could be achieved if the transfer were to go ahead:

- Co-ordination and enhance the work of HLH and THC staff on outdoor activity services; e.g. Summer/October programmes
- Expansion of the range of services offered collectively by the team;
- Expansion of the outdoor activities service through cross collaboration with other HLH services such as Active School, Leisure Facilities, libraries and Arts;
- Potential inclusion of outdoor activities on the High Life Scheme;
- More extensive promotion of outdoor activities through HLH outlets and social media;
- Greater combined range of services to schools.
- Open up wider commercial opportunities

6.2 Opportunities

The following opportunities could arise as a consequence of the transfer:

- Inclusion of outdoor activity opportunities within the HLH Leadership Programme;
- Greater number and range of activities offered during school holiday periods;
- Closer joint working with SNH/Forestry Commission.

6.3 Timetable

At the time of writing it is anticipated that if transfer is approved then formal consultation with staff can begin over the summer period and staff could formally transfer to HLH at by September 2017. Dates may vary and come forward if this can be accommodated by staff.

7 Implications

7.1 Resource – an agreed budget will transfer to HLH to enable the ongoing delivery of the countryside ranger service. The Budget will come from the current cost centre to allow the transfer to proceed. As it is anticipated that all ranger staff will transfer with associated budgets there are no significant resource implications anticipated

7.2 Legal, Risk, Gaelic, Climate Change or equality - There are no known legal, risk, Gaelic, climate change or equality implications arising from this report as staff will transfer with associated activities and the ranger service will continue. If anything, there is the potential to provide a more integrated and wider service to communities across Highland. As stated in section 2.2 a Service Delivery Contract, will specify the budget and the service required of HLH.

Designation: Director of Development & Infrastructure

Date: 6 June 2017

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