

Chairs Report for SCRA EGM 2009

2008/9 has been another year of successes for SCRA. I am delighted to have been the Chair of the association for my third term, and am proud of the work that we have achieved over the past year. Of course, there are still areas where work is needed, and the year has thrown up many challenges to the association; some more trying than others.

The Ranger Review

Rangering continues to change. The changes announced at the end of the Ranger Review have now been implemented and Rangers around Scotland, particularly those within a local authority are coming to terms with not having ring fenced central funding from SNH available any more. The resultant changes have been mixed, and SCRA have been concerned by developments in some areas where Rangers have lost their jobs, or seen the professionalism of their roles diluted. However, for the most part, Rangers continue to be a valued part of the delivery of many organisations.

SCRA has taken these concerns seriously, and, in response to the former Ministers comments at the Ranger Rendezvous, approached the Ministers office on several occasions in 2009, meeting with the Minister and corresponding with her office on several occasions. A joint meeting was held between the Minister, SCRA and SCAN to discuss a wide range of issues. These efforts have not been particularly rewarding; whilst the Minister stated her continuing support for the work that Rangers undertake, the message was very clear in that this is a local issue affected by local Community Planning Partnerships and not one that central government is able to become involved in. SCRA continue to take every opportunity to promote the work of Rangers to the highest level of government and are keen to support members and Rangers in promoting their work within their own employers effectively to secure support for their service.

National Reporting

With the change in funding for a great many Rangers now in place, SNH no longer receive reports from Ranger Services in terms of Annual Reports and Interim Reports. In April 2009, SNH announced that they would like to continue to collect information on what Rangers do on a national basis to enable them to continue to champion the role of the Ranger as widely as possible. SCRA expressed concerns at the format and nature of request that SNH were making and stated a concern that whilst we felt that collection of information on a national basis was vitally important, we had concerns over the nature and format in which it was proposed to gather this information. We have arranged a Ranger Manager Forum in October where we would hope to generate constructive discussion resulting in a more effective national monitoring tool. However, SCRA are fully supportive of the vital need to gather relevant information on the outcomes of Ranger Services across Scotland, and urge members to respond as positively as you can to requests of this nature – without robust details of the outcomes that Ranger deliver, SCRA is less able to effectively argue for support for Rangers.

Ranger Development Partnership

After the Ranger Review came to an end, SCRA felt that the partnerships formed on this panel were of value and should continue. SCRA have convened a group known as the Ranger Development Partnership since early 2008. The group takes its membership from Cairngorm

National Park Authority, Loch Lomond and the Trossachs National Park, Clydemuirshiel Regional Park, Stirling Council, Forestry Commission Scotland, the National Trust for Scotland, Historic Scotland and Scottish Natural Heritage, supported by Perth and Kinross Council.

The Partnership were responsible for delivery of the Ranger Rendezvous, a tremendously successful event in 2008 attracting over 120 delegates – the biggest ever Ranger gathering in Scotland. Plans are underway for a second Rendezvous to be held in November 2010 in the Cairngorms somewhere.

The Partnerships main body of work to date has been in terms of the coordinated delivery of the SCRA Development Plan and associated projects. This work, valued over three years at in excess of £120k, is supported by grant from Scottish Natural Heritage. Through 2008, the partnership developed the Scottish Ranger Standards Manual. This manual features a code of practice for Rangers, identifies professional standards, promotes best practice, and, perhaps most importantly, outlines in detail, the proposals for a recognised system of Continuing Professional Development for Scotland's Rangers.

Through 2009, this work has continued. The partnership has been engaged in the complete redevelopment of the SCRA website into a Countryside Portal for Scotland. This work places SCRA central to the professional status of Rangers and is a welcome recognition of the vital role the association plays in Scottish Rangering. The website will officially be launched on October 28th, but will be under constant review and development. The group has also convened the Ranger Manager Forum; an initial step toward an ongoing meeting of Ranger Managers to influence and steer the future of Rangering in Scotland.

The new web site is based on a Content Management System – so we are keen to find out any members that are keen to play a role in the ongoing management of the site – no experience necessary as full training will be given. Please contact me if you can help.

The website also contains the Ranger Standard Manual which was always designed as a web ready resource. SCRA urge its members and wider Rangers to help the manual to succeed by becoming familiar with it, and implementing it at work. You can request that your manager use the manual, or you can use it yourself to help guide your development in Scottish Rangering. A leaflet will be available at the EGM introducing the Manual and its contents.

Finally, the partnership has been busy looking into running pilots over 2010 to start the implementation of the manual and its contents.

Other things ...

SCRA has gone from strength to strength in many ways over the past two years. We are enjoying an ever increasing membership; we have achieved our membership targets and can now competently argue that we are a truly representative professional association. We have a strong image nationally, and are viewed both by Rangers and Ranger managers as an organisation to be valued. However, there are many challenges that the association continues to face.

Rangering will continue to evolve in the new context in which we find ourselves. An increasingly pressured financial situation within the public sector will see many services facing pressures either indirectly through their funding and grant giving powers, or directly

through cuts to budgets and increased competition for resources. SCRA needs to remain strong to be the voice for Rangers and the support for the profession in these challenging times.

But as an association we also face challenges. At a time where membership is growing, where the work that we are doing is well financed and well resourced and increasingly well respected, at a time when we are really a significant influencing factor in Scottish Ranging, SCRA Council is struggling.

Over the past two years, SCRA Council has become smaller as members have retired from Council posts and moved on to other things. Currently, we have vacancies in several key committee positions and are very sorely in need of new members on Council to help steer, support and deliver the work of the Association. The challenge of maintaining an effective Council is one which needs to be addressed urgently, and I would ask that any SCRA member that has an interest in being on SCRA Council in any way, contact me before or during the EGM. Without an effective SCRA Council, the association will flounder – and at a time when we are stronger and more powerful than we have been for many years, this would seem to me to be a desperate loss should it occur.

SCRAmble continues to be an issue for SCRA. You will have no doubt noticed an absence of the SCRA newsletter in 2009 to date. We very much hope that a SCRAmble will be with you before the end of the year. The difficulties in compiling SCRAmble continue to challenge the association. Very few members submit ideas and articles for inclusion, and we have very limited resources to compile the magazine. Again, any member that feels strongly about SCRAmble is invited to discuss your feelings and views with me so that we can continue to deliver the services our members value. It may be that SCRAmble is not a valued part of your membership and that we should divert efforts elsewhere; the views of the membership will be critical in ongoing discussions regarding the future of SCRAmble.

So please, remember, it is your association, run for and by Rangers in Scotland. If you value any aspect of SCRA's work, please make your feelings known and support the association in any way you can in these testing times.

Finally...

SCRA works in a series of partnerships. Partnerships with Rangers, Ranger Managers and employers, politicians, other bodies and its membership. These partnerships are critical to the success of the association and I would like to take this opportunity to sincerely thank our partners, particularly SNH for their ongoing support, both financial and in other ways.

But I would also like to thank my Council colleagues. Council has contracted over the past two years, but the dedication and devotion shown by Council to working for the betterment of the profession is admirable, and I count myself fortunate to be Chair of such an enthusiastic and tirelessly hard working group. Thank you.

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