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# NORTH AYRSHIRE COUNCIL

6 February 2025

## Audit and Scrutiny Committee (Special)

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<b>Title:</b>	<b>Petition: “Proposal to cut the Eglinton Park rangers service and closure of the community garden”</b>
<b>Purpose:</b>	To advise the Committee of the terms of a petition regarding “proposal to cut the Eglinton Park rangers service and closure of the community garden”.
<b>Recommendation:</b>	That the Committee considers the terms of the petition and agrees, or otherwise, to make a recommendation to Cabinet.

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### 1. Executive Summary

1.1 In terms of the Scheme of Administration, the Audit and Scrutiny Committee has a remit:

“To receive all petitions and deputations submitted to the Council except those relating to the Council’s planning functions, which shall be considered by the Planning Committee. The arrangements for receiving petitions are as set out in Appendix B to the Standing Orders relating to Meetings and Proceedings of the Council and Committees”.

1.2 This report sets out the background to the receipt by the Council of ‘over 5,000 signatories’ on an online petition addressed to the Chief Executive concerning “proposal to cut the Eglinton Park rangers service and closure of the community garden” which was acknowledged as a valid petition in terms of the Council’s Deputations and Petitions Procedure on 28 January 2025.

### 2. Background

2.1 The wording of the petition is detailed below:

*“North Ayrshire Council are proposing to CUT the park ranger service from Eglinton Country Park as part of their annual budget review.*

*Removing the rangers service will result in Eglinton losing it's 'Country Park' status and instead it will become open land that the council is not required to maintain as much. It will also bring an end to education visits, several volunteer programmes, irreplaceable knowledge about the park and many more key attributes that the service currently delivers.*

*The community garden which has prospered over the last 4 years under the stewardship of the rangers service and many dedicated volunteers will be closed and left abandoned.*

*The council will meet in February 2025 to decide on the fate of the park - help us lobby the council to keep Eglinton Country Park a place for all to enjoy and keep the only country park in North Ayrshire!”*

- 2.2 There is provision in Standing Orders for petitions relating to decisions that the Council is about to take.
- 2.3 The Head of Service (Connected Communities) has provided a briefing note on the background to this matter, which is detailed at Appendix 1 to the report.
- 2.4 In terms of the procedure for petitions and deputations set out in Standing Orders, representatives of the petitioners have been invited to attend the meeting to address the Committee. Spokespersons should be restricted to addressing the specific points raised in their petition.
- 2.5 The spokespersons have, collectively, 10 minutes to address the Committee. This may be extended at the discretion of the Chair.
- 2.6 Once the Committee has heard from the spokespersons for the petitioners, the Chair will invite Members of the Committee to ask questions of the spokespersons.
- 2.7 While it is for the Chair to decide the stage at which officers should speak to their briefing, previous Committee practice has been for the Cabinet Member or Officer to speak to this after the Committee has heard from the petitioners. The Cabinet Member or Officer will then respond to any questions that Members of the Committee may have. In this case, as no decision has yet been made by Council, no Cabinet Member will address the committee. After the submissions and questions have been heard by the committee the parties will be given to opportunity to sum up prior to the committee taking its decision.

### **3. Proposals**

- 3.1 It is proposed that the Committee considers the terms of the petition and agrees, or otherwise, to make a recommendation to Cabinet.

### **4. Implications/Socio-economic Duty**

#### **Financial**

- 4.1 No direct financial implications arising from this report.

#### **Human Resources**

- 4.2 None arising from this report.

#### **Legal**

- 4.3 None arising from this report.

#### **Equality/Socio-economic**

- 4.4 None arising from this report.

#### **Climate Change and Carbon**

- 4.5 None arising from this report.

## **Key Priorities**

4.6 None arising from this report.

## **Community Wealth Building**

4.7 None arising from this report.

## **5. Consultation**

5.1 The Head of Service (Connected Communities) has been consulted and made aware of the terms of the petition and has provided a briefing note which is attached as Appendix 1 to the report.

**Aileen Craig**  
**Head of Service (Democratic)**

For further information please contact **Craig Stewart, Committee Services Officer**, on **01294 324130**

## **Background Papers**

Correspondence with lead petitioner

## **Petition – Possible Removal of the North Ayrshire Countryside Rangers Service**

### Overview

The Council is facing unprecedented financial challenges which may impact on its ability to deliver front line services. An engagement exercise regarding the future budget was carried out in late 2024. This put forward a range of potential savings or ways to generate income and invited the public to feed back on the impact that these would have, should they be implemented.

This exercise allowed for early engagement with residents to find out how the 2025/26 budget may affect communities across North Ayrshire. The feedback can then inform any decisions made by the Council.

### Proposal

The engagement exercise included a proposal relating to the removal of the Countryside Ranger Service based at Eglinton Country Park. This would see the loss of volunteering opportunities in and around the park, the loss of skills and specialist knowledge in relation to countryside management and biodiversity and the potential closure of the Eglinton Community Garden.

The proposal includes the retention of the existing Caretakers and Visitor Services Assistant who will carry on delivering the core, day to day operations at the park, facilitate use of the assets and support events. An additional post would be added to this team to support this aspect of the work at Eglinton Country Park.

### Further information

The engagement exercise received over 4,000 responses in total, and 38 conversations regarding the proposals were held with different community groups. The feedback regarding all proposals which were part of the engagement exercise is currently being analysed.

In addition to the engagement exercise, the Council also received detail feedback from a range of specialists including the Scottish Countryside Rangers Association and the local Biodiversity Action Group.

The petition advises that if the saving was to be implemented, the park will lose its 'Country Park' status. The formal designation of a Country Park is not contingent on the provision of a ranger service.

No decisions have been made regarding any budget savings for the 2025/26 financial year and the results of the engagement will help inform any proposals which will be carried forward.

The Council will consider the responses to the engagement as part of the budget setting process for 2025/26.

North Ayrshire Council will meet on 26<sup>th</sup> February to agree its budget for the following year.

Rhonda Leith

Head of Service (Connected  
Communities  
North Ayrshire Council

10 January 2025