

The Highland Council

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| Agenda Item | 7 |
| Report No | SCC/15/25 |

Committee: Sutherland County

Date: 2 June 2025

Report Title: Bereavement Services – Project Updates

Report By: Assistant Chief Executive – Place

1 Purpose/Executive Summary

- 1.1 This report provides an update to members on the work being undertaken on burial ground capacity and new and/or extended burial grounds in the Sutherland area.

2 Recommendations

- 2.1 Members are asked to:-

- i. **Note** the current capacities and progress of burial ground extensions in the Sutherland area; and
- ii. **Note** the challenges with identifying and developing suitable land for burial ground development

3 Implications

- 3.1 **Resource** – The Council on 14 September 2023 approved a capital budget for bereavement services of £2.226m for 2023/24 and £4.168m for 2024/25 - 2028/29.
- 3.2 **Legal** – The Council has a statutory obligation to manage burial provision, memorial safety and cremations as set out in the Burial and Cremation (Scotland) Act 2016.
- 3.3 **Risk** – If burial ground extensions or new sites are not provided there is a risk that the Council will be unable to provide burials in some locations to meet the expectations and preferences of communities. The establishment of a project board for proactive oversight and support for projects serves to reduce service risks.
- 3.4 **Health and Safety (risks arising from changes to plant, equipment, process, or people)** – The safety of staff and visitors in burial grounds is a statutory obligation for local authorities and memorial safety inspections are undertaken to reduce risks.
- 3.5 **Gaelic** – There are not considered to be any Gaelic implications.

4 Impacts

- 4.1 In Highland, all policies, strategies or service changes are subject to an integrated screening for impact for Equalities, Poverty and Human Rights, Children's Rights and Wellbeing, Climate Change, Islands and Mainland Rural Communities, and Data Protection. Where identified as required, a full impact assessment will be undertaken.
- 4.2 Considering impacts is a core part of the decision-making process and needs to inform the decision-making process. When taking any decision, Members must give due regard to the findings of any assessment.
- 4.3 This is an update report and therefore an impact assessment is not required.

5 Background

- 5.1 Section 3 of the Burial and Cremation (Scotland) Act 2016 requires each local authority to provide at least one burial ground within its area. The Highland Council has 247 burial grounds with 40 being within the Sutherland area. Of these, 24 are operational and 16 are closed. **Appendix 1** provides a breakdown of lair availability and capacity data for burial grounds in the Sutherland area.

6 Burial Ground Capacity Projects in the Sutherland area

- 6.1 Through the capital programme the Council aims to provide appropriate burial ground provision in the Highlands. The team are reviewing burial ground extensions where current capacity is less than 10 years based on past trends. Information on burials and lair sales is monitored on a weekly basis following submission from all bereavement services administrative teams.
- 6.2 The Bereavement Services Project Board meets regularly, to support the work of the team delivering burial ground extensions and new sites. The board ensures good governance in delivering the programme and membership includes key internal partners in delivering the projects such as the Estates management team, the Project Design Unit and Finance.
- 6.3 The Board recognises the challenges in some areas with burial ground provision with it becoming increasingly difficult to identify available land for development of extensions or for new burial grounds. The reasons include:-
 - a) land availability and purchase cost;
 - b) developmental costs;
 - c) land suitability and geology – land conditions and requirements must comply with SEPA guidelines for burial grounds, be relatively flat land with little or no rock formations;
 - d) regulatory requirements – the selection of any new sites or extensions must not cause any pollution to the environment, including groundwater and this is regulated by SEPA; and
 - e) acceptability with local Planning considerations.

- 6.4 The following projects have recently been completed within the Sutherland area:-
- Proncynain Burial Ground – the completed extension opened for use in April 2024. Works added over 720 lairs to the burial ground, allowing for over 60 years additional capacity.
- 6.5 Although out with the present capital programme, three burial grounds in the Sutherland area have less than 10 years capacity; Golspie, Lairg and Melness:-
- Golspie Burial Ground – there is anticipated 7.3 years remaining capacity within the burial ground. All options are being investigated and reviewed.
 - Lairg Burial Ground – there is anticipated 9.7 years remaining capacity within the burial ground. All options are being investigated and reviewed.
 - Melness Burial Ground – there is anticipated 10 years remaining capacity, early discussions are ongoing with adjacent landowners for additional land for future extension.
- 6.6 Work is still ongoing to review detailed projects for the current capital budget for 2024/25 - 2028/29 of £4.168m. The bereavement services team will continue to engage with local members on projects in their area and their ongoing support is appreciated.

Designation: Assistant Chief Executive - Place

Date: 7 May 2025

Author: John MacLean, Bereavement Services Manager
Rachel Robertson, Bereavement Services Project Coordinator

Background Papers: None

Appendices: Appendix 1 – Sutherland Burial Ground Capacities & Lair Figures

Appendix 1 – Sutherland Burial Ground Capacities & Lair Figures

Figures as of 11/05/2025.

| Name | Ward | Status | Number of prepared lairs available | Average Lairs sold per year | Current capacity in years |
|--------------------|------|--------|------------------------------------|-----------------------------|---------------------------|
| Achness | 1 | Closed | - | - | - |
| Balnakeil | 1 | Open | 119 | 4.2 | 28.6 |
| Bunahoun | 1 | Open | 49 | 0.8 | 65.3 |
| Clachan | 1 | Open | 44 | 1.9 | 23.0 |
| Clyne | 4 | Open | 518 | 10.8 | 47.8 |
| Clynekirkton | 4 | Closed | - | - | - |
| Creich | 1 | Open | 326 | 6.3 | 51.5 |
| Croick | 1 | Open | 17 | 0.0 | 17.0 |
| Dornoch Cathedral | 4 | Closed | - | - | - |
| Dornoch Old East | 4 | Closed | - | - | - |
| Edderton | 4 | Open | 236 | 2.8 | 83.3 |
| Elphin | 1 | Closed | - | - | - |
| Golspie New/Old | 4 | Open | 65 | 8.9 | 7.3 |
| Helmsdale | 4 | Open | 193 | 6.3 | 30.5 |
| Inchnadamph | 1 | Closed | - | - | - |
| Invershin | 1 | Open | 29 | 1.7 | 17.4 |
| Kildonan | 4 | Open | 161 | 0.4 | 386.4 |
| Kinbrace | 4 | Closed | - | - | - |
| Kincardine | 1 | Open | 480 | 2.8 | 174.5 |
| Kirkton | 1 | Closed | - | - | - |
| Lairg | 1 | Open | 60 | 6.2 | 9.7 |
| Lochinver | 1 | Closed | - | - | - |
| Loth New/Old | 4 | Open | 136 | 0.3 | 408.0 |
| Melness | 1 | Open | 15 | 1.5 | 10.0 |
| Navidale | 4 | Closed | - | - | - |
| Need | 1 | Closed | - | - | - |
| Oldshoremore | 1 | Closed | - | - | - |
| Proncynain | 4 | Open | 763 | 10.5 | 72.7 |
| Rogart | 4 | Open | 403 | 3.4 | 118.0 |
| Rogart St Callan's | 4 | Closed | - | - | - |
| Sciberscross | 4 | Closed | - | - | - |
| Scourie | 1 | Open | 146 | 1.0 | 146.0 |
| Sheigra | 1 | Open | 182 | 2.8 | 66.2 |
| Skerray | 1 | Open | 58 | 1.8 | 33.1 |
| Stoer New | 1 | Open | 92 | 4.3 | 21.6 |
| Stoer Old | 1 | Closed | - | - | - |
| Strathy | 1 | Open | 89 | 3.8 | 23.2 |
| Syre | 1 | Open | 117 | 0.8 | 156.0 |
| Tongue | 1 | Open | 35 | 1.3 | 28.0 |
| Tutim | 1 | Closed | - | - | - |