

# The Highland Council

Agenda Item	11
Report No	CP/19/25

**Committee:** Communities and Place

**Date:** 14 August 2025

**Report Title:** Bereavement Services Update

**Report By:** Assistant Chief Executive – Place

## 1 Purpose/Executive Summary

- 1.1 This report provides Members with updates on the Council's Bereavement Services burial ground extension programme, the current memorial safety programme and the Inverness Crematorium refurbishment project.

## 2 Recommendations

- 2.1 Members are asked to **note**:-

- i. the progress of current projects in the burial ground extension programme;
- ii. the progress of the current memorial safety programme; and
- iii. the progress of the Inverness Crematorium refurbishment project.

## 3 Implications

- 3.1 **Resource** – The Council on 14 September 2023 approved a capital budget for bereavement services, with a budget of £3.846m for identified projects in 2025/26 and £1.321m for 2026/27 - 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. Regarding the Inverness Crematorium refurbishment project, failure to complete the works would result in non-compliance with the proposed new emission targets. The Bereavement Services project board, which has 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 there is an ongoing programme of memorial safety inspections being 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 a monitoring report and therefore an impact assessment is not required.

## **5 Burial Ground Extension Programme**

5.1 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.

5.2 Progress on the current approved projects is summarised in **Appendix 1**.

5.3 As shown, the only project currently marked with a red RAG status is Glen Nevis, Lochaber. The Glen Nevis burial ground in Fort William is projected to reach full capacity by August 2026. Extensive investigatory work has been undertaken locally, with over 40 potential sites assessed. However, challenging ground conditions have made it difficult to identify a suitable alternative location. As a result, efforts are now focused on developing land adjacent to the existing cemetery.

Significant groundwork has already been carried out to improve site conditions, including the removal of tree stumps, roots, bracken and other vegetation. Planning permission has been granted for Phase 2 of the project, which involves drainage improvements. A further planning application will be submitted for Phase 3, which will enable construction of the extension, subject to the successful completion of drainage works and conclusive results from trial digs.

5.4 Since the previous bereavement update in January 2025, several projects have progressed onsite, photos of which can be seen within **Appendix 2:-**

- Petty Tornagrain Burial Ground – an additional 18 lairs have been identified within the existing cemetery boundary, increasing overall capacity to approximately 5.4 years.
- Tomnacross Burial Ground – an additional 19 lairs have been identified within the existing cemetery boundary, increasing the overall capacity to approximately 11 years.

- Croy Burial Ground – works to install additional plinths within the existing cemetery boundary were completed in February 2025. These works have added 87 lairs, increasing the overall capacity to over 50 years, with space available for future extension.
- Portree Burial Ground – construction works to develop the extension were completed in June 2025 following significant groundworks, with landscaping works scheduled to follow. The extension will provide approximately 600 additional lairs, increasing capacity by an estimated 25 to 30 years.
- Kilmorack Burial Ground – works to install additional plinths within the existing cemetery boundary were completed in June 2025. These works have added 84 new lairs, increasing the overall capacity to approximately 8.9 years

## 6 Memorial Safety Programme

- 6.1 Scottish Government guidance makes clear the statutory obligation local authorities have for the safety of staff, visitors and contractors in burial grounds, primarily under the Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974 and the Occupier's Liability (Scotland) Act 1960. The guidance was created in response to recommendations made in January 2018 following a Fatal Accident Inquiry (FAI) into the death of a child. The recent introduction of the Burial (Management) (Scotland) Regulations 2025 makes it a statutory requirement for a burial authority to carry out regular scheduled inspections to ensure that headstones and other memorials in a burial ground are in safe order.
- 6.2 Using the Scottish Government guidance and matrix, each of our burial grounds were assessed in conjunction with local amenities officers. The risk score was assessed considering the location, the general condition, frequency of services, any historic or cultural significance, layout and topography, frequency of public use, age and size of memorials and any other amenities. The scores of each burial ground then broke down into priority:- High, Medium, Low and Very Low. This ranked list became our programme for inspections, starting out at the highest risk burial grounds.

Risk Rating	No. of Burial Grounds
High	6
Medium	64
Low	132
Very Low	45
<b>Total</b>	<b>247</b>

Our Memorial Technicians inspect every memorial in a burial ground, recording those that have a potential safety issue and erecting a caution sign next to the memorial, as seen in **Appendix 3**, as well as the information notice which is displayed at the entrance of the burial ground. Staff may be required to make a temporarily repair to make the stone safe, usually this by bracing the memorial using wooden stakes, examples of which can be seen in **Appendix 4**. If a memorial is deemed to be of an immediate risk, appropriate action will be taken to make it safe.

The responsibility for the full and complete repair of an unsafe memorial remains the duty of the lair owner or their family.

- 6.3 Since the programme started in June 2024, 95 burial grounds have been inspected. 92 have been completed with 3 ongoing, equating to 37% of our burial grounds completed. **Appendix 5** shows a breakdown of inspections carried out per area.

As of 4 July 2025, nearly 50,000 headstones have been individually inspected since June 2024. 880 of these required to be made safe and 5 required further action. This equates to 1.82% of stones inspected requiring additional work to be carried out for the memorial to be made safe.

## **7 Inverness Crematorium Refurbishment Update**

- 7.1 As previously reported to this committee, the replacement of equipment at Inverness Crematorium is necessary, driven by two key factors:-
1. The UK Government is introducing stricter emission standards for crematoria. Although initially proposed for implementation by January 2027, the updated guidance requiring both existing and new crematoria to adopt enhanced abatement technologies is still progressing through Parliament. Despite delays, the new standards are expected to come into force within the next 2-3 years.
  2. Unfortunately, ATI, the manufacturer of the existing cremators ceased trading in 2020. While regular servicing and maintenance are currently carried out by external contractors, the absence of direct support from the original manufacturer introduces an increased risk to the long-term reliability and resilience of the cremation plant.
- 7.2 The proposed crematorium upgrade includes the installation of two FTIII SE cremators, both designed to accommodate bariatric coffins, ensuring accessibility for larger coffins. A double flue mercury and nitroxide abatement system will be integrated to meet environmental standards. The facility will also feature a new cremulator and ash transfer cabinet, alongside an air blast cooler with a heat exchange system that will contribute to heating the building. Cold storage facilities will be added, providing capacity for up to six coffins. Refurbishment works will enhance the small chapel for direct cremations and intimate services, while the main chapel will see improvements to the catafalque area, including a new catafalque and lectern. Additionally, a new control room will be constructed to support the upgraded operations.
- 7.3 Tenders for the replacement cremators have been evaluated, with the contract awarded to Facultatieve Technologies Ltd (FT). Morrison Construction has been appointed as the main contractor and design development is currently underway in collaboration with their design team. Planning permission has been submitted for the proposed extension and preparations are in progress for the building warrant application, marking a significant step forward in the crematorium upgrade project.

- 7.4 Onsite works are scheduled to commence in November 2025, marking the beginning of the crematorium upgrade. The extension is expected to be wind and watertight by March 2026, aligning with the removal of Cremator 1. Installation of the new Cremator 1 will follow, with completion anticipated by June 2026 after a 10-week installation period. Cremator 2 will be removed in July 2026, with its replacement installed by September 2026, also over a 10-week period. Facultatieve Technologies Ltd (FT) is expected to complete their handover by September 2026, finalising the cremator installation phase of the project.

Designation: Assistant Chief Executive – Place

Date: 4 July 2025

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Background Papers: None

Appendices: Appendix 1 – Current Approved Capital Projects  
Appendix 2 – Project Update Photos  
Appendix 3 – Memorial Safety Signage  
Appendix 4 – Memorial Safety Temporary Repairs  
Appendix 5 – Memorial Safety Data Breakdown

## Appendix 1 – Current Approved Capital Projects

	Project status RAG	Date of estimated full capacity	Proposed works start date	Operational date	Budget 2025/26 £000	Budget 26/27-28/29 £000	Comments
<b>Major Projects</b>							
Crematorium Refurbishment	G	N/A	04/08/2025	25/09/2026	1082	500	Project group taking forward design and works.
Alness burial ground	G	01/06/2027	01/03/2026	01/05/2027	200	200	Works ongoing to identify new site – investigative trial digs to be completed in Autumn 2025.
Dores burial ground	G	Closed	01/10/2025	01/07/2026	303	0	Design work complete. Joint project for road work with Housing – cemetery work to progress thereafter.
Dunvegan burial ground	G	01/02/2028	01/11/2026	01/01/2028	274	0	Planning application now approved. Tender process to commence over Summer 2025.
Glen Nevis burial ground	R	01/08/2026	01/05/2025	01/07/2026	400	74	Land purchase and ground works to clear sites of tree stumps, etc. complete. Drainage works to be carried out over Summer 2025.
Kilmorack burial ground	C	01/01/2026	26/05/2025	25/08/2025	30	120	Additional plinths within cemetery completed.
Mount Vernon burial ground	A	01/06/2026	01/08/2025	01/05/2026	246	0	Land purchase for extension near completion.
Portree burial ground	G	01/02/2026	03/03/2025	01/01/2026	505		Construction works completed in June 2025. Landscaping works to follow.
Reay burial ground	G	01/01/2028	01/12/2026	01/12/2027	0	110	Land investigation/acquisition underway for new extension.
Skeabost burial ground	G	Closed			100	0	Land investigation works ongoing. Trial digs to be carried out in Autumn 2025.
<b>BS General (incl. minor projects)</b>							
Blarour burial ground	G	01/12/2028	01/08/2025	01/03/2026	82	0	Extension works to start in Summer 2025 to ensure capacity cover in Lochaber.
Broadford Strath burial ground	G	01/12/2031	01/11/2030	01/11/2031	0	20	Land purchased. Design work ongoing for future phasing of additional rows.
Keiss burial ground	G	01/04/2029	01/09/2028	01/03/2029	0	25	Land investigation underway for extension.
Kilvean burial ground	G	01/08/2029*	01/04/2028	01/07/2029	50	63	*Note 2029 date based on prepared lairs in current phase. Drainage works for new extension completed. PDU designing detailed layout for new extension and updated phasing plan is being prepared.
Kinlochmore burial ground	G	01/07/2027	01/06/2026	01/06/2027	150	0	Land investigation underway for new cemetery.

Petty-Tornagrain burial ground	C	01/12/2025	02/02/2025	01/05/2025	40	0	Additional plinths within cemetery completed.
Tomnacross burial ground	C	01/08/2026	02/02/2025	01/05/2025	30	30	Additional plinths within cemetery completed.
Tore burial ground, Black Isle	G	01/08/2032	01/09/2025	01/01/2026	30	0	Works for additional plinths to be completed in Autumn 2025.
Wick burial ground	G	01/04/2028	01/03/2027	01/03/2028	100	149	Land investigation underway for new cemetery.
Burial Grounds – General	-	-	-	-	50	150	-
<b>Other Projects</b>							
War Memorials					19	0	-
Memorial Safety					39	0	-
					3846	1321	5167 total



## **Appendix 2 – Project Update Photos**

### **Croy Burial Ground – February 2025**



### **Portree Burial Ground – June 2025**





**Kilmorack Burial Ground – June 2025**



**Glen Nevis Burial Ground – June 2025**



## Appendix 3 – Memorial Safety Signage

### Information and safety notice displayed at burial ground entrances

**SAFETY NOTICE**



**Memorial Safety Inspections**

As part of an ongoing programme, Memorial Safety Inspections are being carried out across the Highland Council area.

Please take care around headstones and on uneven ground while visiting this Burial Ground.

- A programme of memorial safety inspections are being carried out following Scottish Government guidance. The safety of staff and visitors in burial grounds is a statutory obligation for the Council.
- If a memorial is found to have a potential issue, a notice will be attached and methods may be taken to make the memorial safe, pending contact with the owner.
- If a memorial is deemed to be of an immediate risk to staff and visitors, the council will take appropriate action to make safe.
- **Please note that the responsibility for the full and complete repair of memorials remains the duty of the lair owner. For any repairs, please contact a Memorial Stonemason or a Funeral Director to discuss.**
- Should a lair holder require additional information, please contact the Bereavement Services team below.



**The Highland Council**  
Comhairle na Gàidhealtachd

Thank you

For assistance, please call 01349 886606  
or email [Memorial.Safety@highland.gov.uk](mailto:Memorial.Safety@highland.gov.uk)

### Caution sign displayed on memorials that may be unsafe





## Appendix 4 – Memorial Safety Temporary Repairs

Example of bracing



Example of stake and band



Example of safety awareness sign only



## Appendix 5 – Memorial Safety Data Breakdown

### Area Breakdown (per burial ground)

Area	Total	Complete	% Complete
Alness	5	2	40%
Badenoch & Strathspey	20	16	80%
Dingwall & Black Isle	30	16	53%
Drummuie	28	3	11%
Gairloch	6	2	33%
Inverness	39	15	38%
Kyle	4	1	25%
Lochaber	23	3	13%
Nairn	8	4	50%
Skye & Lochalsh	40	18	45%
Tain	10	3	30%
Thurso & Wick	27	6	22%
Ullapool	7	3	43%
<b>Totals</b>	<b>247</b>	<b>92</b>	<b>37%</b>

### Highland-wide Breakdown (per burial ground)

Status	Total	% Total
Not Started	152	62%
Ongoing	3	1%
Complete	92	37%
On Hold	0	0%
<b>Total</b>	<b>247</b>	<b>100%</b>

