

Agenda Item	9.
Report No	CP/06/26

The Highland Council

Committee: **Communities and Place**

Date: **29 January 2026**

Report Title: **Bereavement Services Report**

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, and the Inverness Crematorium refurbishment project.

2 Recommendations

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

- i. the progress of current projects on the burial ground extension programme; and
- ii. 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 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 now projected to reach full capacity by April 2027. 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 to improve drainage, which is currently underway onsite. 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 prior to the end of March 2026.

5.4 Mount Vernon, Thurso is the only project in Appendix 1 with an amber RAG status. The current burial ground is projected to reach full capacity by October 2026. Land acquisition for the extension is nearing completion and planning permission has been granted. Construction works will commence once the land purchase has completed.

5.5 The existing Wick Cemetery is projected to reach full capacity by July 2028. Investigative works around the current cemetery have confirmed that an extension is not feasible due to the surrounding unsuitable ground conditions. Fourteen alternative locations in the area have been investigated for a possible replacement burial ground, and all were found to be unsuitable. Land acquisition is currently underway for a site near Newton Road, Wick, which has shown suitable ground conditions for burial.

5.6 Since the previous bereavement update in August 2025, the extension at Blarour Burial Ground, Lochaber has now been completed. The works, utilising land within the existing cemetery boundary were completed in September 2025. These works have added over 130 additional lairs to the cemetery, equating to approximately 22 additional years capacity. Photos of the extension can be seen in **Appendix 2**.

6 Inverness Crematorium Refurbishment Update

6.1 As previously reported to this committee, the replacement of equipment at Inverness Crematorium is necessary, driven by two key factors.

- 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.
- 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.

6.2 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. Additionally, a new control room will be constructed to support the upgraded operations. Refurbishment works will enhance the small chapel for direct cremations and small, intimate services, while the main chapel will see improvements to the catafalque area, including a new catafalque.

6.3 The replacement cremators supplier is Facultatieve Technologies Ltd. Morrison Construction has been appointed as the main contractor. Design development is complete with planning permission granted and building warrant approved, a significant step forward in the crematorium upgrade project.

6.4 Onsite enabling works commenced in November 2025, marking the beginning of the crematorium upgrade and the main construction works started at beginning of January. The extension is expected to be wind and watertight by April 2026, aligning with the removal of the first cremator. Installation of the first new cremator will follow, with completion anticipated by June 2026 following a 10 week installation period. The second cremator will be removed in September 2026, with the second new cremator and abatement equipment installed and operational by November 2026, finalising the cremator installation phase of the project.

6.5 During the refurbishment, there will be an impact on service delivery. Chapel service times will be reduced to three per day at 10:00, 11:00 and 12:00, with an increased number of direct cremation slots available. At certain stages of the project, overall capacity may be limited to five cremations per day. Information on the changes has been supplied to Funeral Directors and publicised.

Designation: Assistant Chief Executive – Place

Date: 12 December 2025

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Background Papers: None

Appendices: Appendix 1 – Current Approved Capital Projects
Appendix 2 – Project Update Photos

Appendix 1 – Current approved capital projects

Project	Project status RAG	Date of estimated full capacity	Proposed works start date	Operational date	Comments
Major Projects					
Crematorium Refurbishment	G	N/A	04/08/2025	25/09/2026	Works underway.
Alness burial ground	G	01/11/2027	04/11/2026	01/09/2027	Works ongoing to identify new site – investigative trial digs completed in December 2025.
Dores burial ground	G	Closed	01/02/2026	01/10/2026	Design work complete. Joint project for road work with Housing – cemetery work to progress thereafter.
Dunvegan burial ground	G	01/09/2028	01/05/2026	01/07/2028	Planning application now approved. Tender process and works to progress over Spring 2026.
Glen Nevis burial ground	R	01/04/2027	07/10/2025	01/02/2027	Land purchase and ground works to clear sites of tree stumps, etc. complete. Drainage works to be carried out in January 2026.
Kilmorack burial ground	C	Complete	Complete	Complete	Additional plinths within cemetery completed.
Mount Vernon burial ground	A	01/10/2026	01/01/2026	01/08/2026	Land purchase for extension near completion.
Portree burial ground	C	Complete	Complete	Complete	Main construction works complete. Snagging and further landscaping works to follow.
Reay burial ground	G	01/07/2028	01/11/2027	01/05/2028	Land investigation/acquisition ongoing for new extension.
Skeabost burial ground	G	Closed			Land investigation works ongoing. Trial digs to be carried out in early 2026.
BS General (incl. minor projects)					
Blarour burial ground	C	Complete	Complete	Complete	Extension works completed in September 2025.
Keiss burial ground	G	01/03/2030	01/09/2029	01/01/2030	Additional plinths to be created within existing cemetery boundary.
Kilvean burial ground	G	01/11/2029*	01/06/2028	01/09/2029	*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	01/03/2028	01/01/2027	01/01/2028	Land investigation underway for new cemetery.
Petty-Tornagrain burial ground	C	Complete	Complete	Complete	Additional plinths within cemetery completed.
Tomnacross burial ground	C	Complete	Complete	Complete	Additional plinths within cemetery completed.

Tore burial ground, Black Isle	G	01/05/2033	01/07/2032	01/03/2033	Additional plinths to be completed within the existing cemetery boundary.
Wick burial ground	G	01/07/2028	01/03/2027	01/05/2028	Land acquisition underway for new cemetery.

Appendix 2 – Project Update Photos

Blarour Burial Ground, Lochaber – September 2025

