

Agenda Item	8
Report No	BIER-18-26

The Highland Council

Committee: Black Isle and Easter Ross

Date: 11 May 2026

Report Title: Bereavement Service 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 burial grounds in the Black Isle and Easter Ross area.

2 Recommendations

2.1 Members are asked to:-

- i. **Note** the progress of burial ground extensions in the Black Isle and Easter Ross 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 245 burial grounds with 31 being within the Black Isle and Easter Ross area. Of these, 16 are operational and 15 are closed. **Appendix 1** provides a breakdown of lair availability and capacity data for burial grounds in the Black Isle and Easter Ross area.

6 Burial Ground Capacity Projects in the Black Isle and Easter Ross 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 Within the Black Isle and Easter Ross area, four burial grounds are projected to have less than 10 years remaining capacity; Alness, Portmahomack Tarbat, Rosskeen and Tore:-

- Alness Burial Ground – ten sites have been investigated as potential locations for a replacement burial ground. Of these, two sites have progressed to further SEPA-level trial digs. Final reports are awaited, after which a decision will be made on the most suitable option and next steps to progress.
- Portmahomack Tarbat Burial Ground – options for a potential extension to the existing cemetery are to be assessed.
- Rosskeen Burial Ground – land acquisition to enable an extension to the current cemetery is nearing completion. Early estimations indicate the proposed extension could create over 25 years of additional capacity.
- Tore Burial Ground – works are planned to increase capacity within the existing cemetery boundary, which will raise the current capacity to over 14 years.

6.5 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: 14 April 2026

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Background Papers: None

Appendices: Appendix 1 – Black Isle and Easter Ross Area Burial
Ground Capacities & Lair Figures

Appendix 1

Black Isle and Easter Ross Burial Ground Capacities & Lair Figures

Figures as of 29/03/2026. Figures reported weekly.

Name	Ward	Status	Number of prepared lairs available	Average Lairs sold per year	Current capacity in years
Alness	6	Open	16	9.2	1.7
Avoch	9	Open	425	3.8	112.8
Avoch Churchyard	9	Closed	-	-	-
Balintore New	7	Open	158	7.0	22.6
Balintore Old	7	Closed	-	-	-
Chapelhill	7	Open	81	1.8	43.9
Cromarty East	9	Closed	-	-	-
Cromarty Gaelic	9	Closed	-	-	-
Cromarty Wester	9	Open	212	3.0	70.7
Cullicudden	9	Closed	-	-	-
Cullicudden St Martins	9	Open	228	1.2	185.3
Fearn Abbey	7	Closed	-	-	-
Fortrose and Rosemarkie New	9	Open	446	5.5	81.7
Fortrose Old	9	Closed	-	-	-
Kilmuir (Kessock)	9	Closed	-	-	-
Kilmuir Easter	7	Open	234	4.2	56.3
Kiltearn (Evanton)	6	Open	316	7.5	42.4
Kirkmichael	9	Open	28	1.9	14.6
Logie Easter	7	Open	42	1.3	32.1
Nigg Old	7	Closed	-	-	-
Nonikiln	6	Closed	-	-	-
Portmahomack Old	7	Closed	-	-	-
Portmahomack Tarbat	7	Open	29	4.9	5.9
Rosemarkie	9	Closed	-	-	-
Roskeen	6	Open	74	18.1	4.1
St Duthus New	7	Open	223	13.4	16.7
St Duthus Old	7	Closed	-	-	-
Suddie	9	Closed	-	-	-
Tore	9	Open	34	4.6	7.4
Urquhart New	9	Open	235	8.8	26.8
Urquhart Old	9	Closed	-	-	-