

The Highland Council

Agenda Item	15
Report No	CP/25/26

Committee: Communities and Place

Date: 13 August 2026

Report Title: Bereavement Service Update

Report By: Assistant Chief Executive - Place

1 Purpose/Executive Summary

1.1 This report provides an update on four key areas of The Highland Council's Bereavement Services: The Memorial Safety Programme, the Inverness Crematorium refurbishment and cremator replacement project, the Burial Ground Extension Programme, and participation in the ICCM (Institute of Cemetery and Crematorium Management) Metal Recycling Scheme.

1.2 **Memorial Safety Programme** - The Council continues to make strong progress against its statutory obligation to inspect and manage memorial safety across Highland burial grounds. Since the programme commenced in June 2024, 151 burial grounds have been inspected, with 145 completed and 6 ongoing, representing 59% of all 246 Council burial grounds by the end of Year 2 of the five-year inspection programme.

Nearly 70,000 memorials have been inspected, with only 2.69% requiring remedial action. A total of 1,825 memorials were made temporarily safe, and 149 memorials have since been permanently repaired by families or lair holders. Annual re-inspection work is also progressing, with almost 40% completed to date.

- 1.3 **Inverness Crematorium Refurbishment and Cremator Replacement** - The major crematorium upgrade remains on schedule and is being delivered to ensure compliance with future environmental emission standards and to address the ageing ATI cremator. The project will deliver two modern FTIII cremators, enhanced emissions abatement technology, new cold storage facilities, upgraded cremulation equipment, improved energy efficiency measures, and significant chapel improvements.

Construction is progressing well with the new extension in place and the first FT Cremator installed and operational. The small chapel refurbishment is expected to be completed by September 2026. Although capacity will temporarily reduce to a maximum of five cremations per day between September and November, analysis of historical demand indicates this remains sufficient to meet service requirements. Improvements to the main chapel are also expected to increase seating capacity from 120 to 140.

- 1.4 **Burial Ground Extension Programme** - The Council continues to invest in burial provision to ensure adequate capacity across Highland communities. A programme of monitoring and development is in place for locations where burial capacity is projected to fall below ten years.

Most projects remain on track; however, Glen Nevis remains a key area of concern and is the only project currently rated Red. The cemetery is forecast to reach capacity by August 2027. Significant site investigation and drainage works have been completed, with the next phase dependent on successful SEPA trial dig results in October 2026. Alness remains Amber, with current capacity projected until January 2028 and work progressing to identify and acquire a suitable site for future provision.

- 1.5 **Institute of Cemetery and Crematorium Management (ICCM) Metal Recycling Scheme** - Since joining the ICCM Metal Recycling Scheme in 2024, Inverness Crematorium has generated significant benefits for local bereavement-related charities while supporting environmental sustainability objectives. Through nominations made by the Council, Highland Hospice and Held In Our Hearts have collectively received £51,100 in funding over four award rounds between September 2024 and March 2026.

Given the success of the scheme, officers are exploring arrangements to widen opportunities for other local bereavement-related charities to be nominated in future funding rounds, with a further report to be presented to Committee.

2 **Recommendations**

- 2.1 Members are asked to:-

- i. **Note** the progress update of the ongoing memorial safety programme;
- ii. **Note** the progress of the cremator replacement project at Inverness Crematorium;
- iii. **Note** the progress of current projects within the burial ground extension programme; and
- iv. **Note** the update on the ICCM metal recycling scheme.

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.

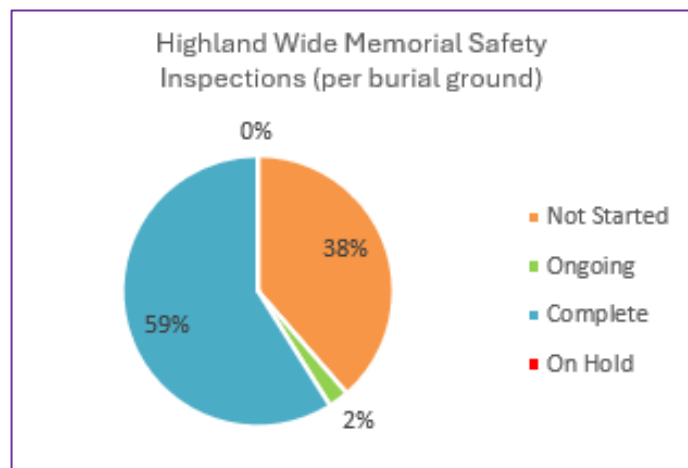
- 3.4 **Health and Safety (risks arising from changes to plant, equipment, process, or people)** – The safety of staff and visitors in burial grounds is a statutory obligation for local authorities and there is an ongoing programme of memorial safety inspections being undertaken to reduce risks.
- 3.5 **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 an update report and therefore an impact assessment is not required.

5 Memorial Safety Programme Update

- 5.1 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 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. The guidance requires every memorial to be inspected once within a 5-year period, creating a rolling 5-year programme. Any memorials temporarily made safe must be re-inspected on an annual basis to ensure no further risk is presented.
- 5.3 Since the programme started in June 2024, 151 burial grounds have been inspected. 145 have been completed with 6 ongoing, equating to 59% of our burial grounds completed by the end of year 2 of our 5-year programme. **Appendix 1** shows a breakdown of inspections carried out per area.



As of 6 July 2026, nearly 70,000 headstones have been individually inspected since June 2024. 1,825 of these required to be made safe and 21 required further action. This equates to 2.69% of stones inspected requiring additional work to be carried out for the memorial to be made safe. Of the 1,825 made safe, 220 of these had dangerous urns removed and laid at the foot of the memorial. 149 memorials have confirmed to have been permanently repaired by the lair holder or their families.

Of the annual re-inspections for 2026, 726 of the 1,825 have been reinspected as of 6 July 2026, representing 39.7% completed so far.

6 Cremator Replacement Project 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 has progressed through Parliament. Despite delays, the new standards will come into force in December 2029.
- 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.

6.4 Follow our previous update at the last committee, works to refurbish the small chapel are ongoing and expected to be complete by beginning of September.

Construction works on the new extension are progressing in preparation for the second new FTIII cremator arriving on-site in September. Photos of the ongoing works can be seen in **Appendix 2**.

Following the removal of the second ATI cremator in September, the crematorium will operate with only one new FTIII cremator until the second replacement cremator, and its associated abatement plant are fully commissioned and operational in November. During this period, cremation capacity will be limited to a maximum of five cremations per day.

Cremation data for the corresponding three-month period over the previous three years has been reviewed and indicates an average demand of 4 to 5 cremations per day, which is within the temporary operational capacity available during the installation and commissioning period.

- 6.5 Works in the main chapel to refurbish the catafalque area, including the removal of the existing gates, and installation of a new curtain system are scheduled to commence at the beginning of September. It is estimated capacity of the refurbished main chapel will increase from 120 to 140. During the works in September the large chapel will be unavailable for services for a period of up to four weeks while these improvement works are undertaken.

7 Burial Ground Extension Programme

- 7.1 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.
- 7.2 Progress on the current approved projects is summarised in **Appendix 3**.
- 7.3 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 August 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 has now been completed and is currently in the settlement phase. A further planning application will be submitted for Phase 3, which will enable construction of the extension, subject to the conclusive results from SEPA trial digs in October 2026.
- 7.4 As shown, the only project currently marked with an amber RAG status is Alness. The current Alness burial ground is expected to reach full capacity in January 2028. 10 sites have been investigated, however, only 2 now have potential for suitable cemetery use. Both sites have had SEPA-level trial digs carried out, with both showing suitable ground conditions. Discussions are ongoing with PDU with regards to development and design, with land acquisition to follow.

8 Metal Recycling Scheme

- 8.1 Inverness Crematorium has participated in the ICCM Metal Recycling Scheme since 2024. The scheme allows metals recovered following cremation, where appropriate consent has been provided, to be recycled through the ICCM and Orthometals partnership. Funds generated by the scheme are distributed to charitable organisations nominated by participating crematoria. The ICCM confirms that participating crematoria may nominate local or national bereavement-related charitable organisations to receive funding through the scheme.

Since the ICCM scheme's introduction in 2004 the scheme has raised over £23 million for charities across the UK. Participation in the scheme supports both the Council's environmental objectives and its commitment to supporting local causes.

- 8.2 The scheme provides environmental benefits by reducing waste and supporting the reuse of valuable materials. Proceeds from the recycling of metals are distributed to bereavement-related charitable organisations nominated by participating crematoria.
- 8.3 It must be noted that nomination of a charity does not guarantee that funding will be awarded. The final decision regarding acceptance of nominations and the distribution of funds rests with the ICCM, which administers the national Recycling of Metals Scheme on behalf of participating crematoria.
- 8.4 Nominations made through the Inverness Crematorium have so far been made for two charities: The Highland Hospice and Held in our Hearts. The charities have been successful in the recent rounds of the scheme with the following awards having been made:

	Sep-24	Feb-25	Sep-25	Mar-26
Held in Our Hearts	£4,640	£3,750	£4,000	£6,800
Highland Hospice	£6,960	£8,750	£6,000	£10,200
TOTAL	£11,600	£12,500	£10,000	£17,000

- 8.5 Given the success to date of participation in the scheme, officers are reviewing arrangements to consider other local bereavement-related charitable organisations to express interest in nomination through Inverness Crematorium. A report on these arrangements will be taken to a future Committee in 2026.

Designation: Assistant Chief Executive - Place

Date: 8 July 2026

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Background Papers: None

Appendices: Appendix 1 – Memorial Safety Area Breakdown
Appendix 2 – Photos of works at Inverness Crematorium
Appendix 3 – Current Approved Capital Projects

Appendix 1 – Memorial Safety Area Breakdown (per burial)

Area breakdown (per burial ground)

Area	Total	Complete	% Complete
Alness	5	5	100%
Badenoch & Strathspey	20	18	90%
Dingwall & Black Isle	30	22	73%
Drummuie	28	6	21%
Gairloch	6	4	67%
Inverness	39	37	95%
Kyle	4	4	100%
Lochaber	23	4	17%
Nairn	7	7	100%
Skye & Lochalsh	40	19	48%
Tain	10	8	80%
Thurso & Wick	27	7	26%
Ullapool	7	4	57%
Totals	246	145	59%

Appendix 2 – Photos of ongoing project at Inverness Crematorium



Small Chapel



New extension



Outside new extension

Appendix 3 – Current Approved Capital Projects

Project	Project status RAG	Date of estimated full capacity	Estimated or latest works start date	Comments
Crematorium Refurbishment	G	N/A	Ongoing	Works ongoing with a completion date estimated for December 2026.
Alness burial ground	A	01/01/2028	01/02/2027	Works ongoing to identify new site – investigative trial dig reports being assessed for suitability of ground conditions for 2 potential sites.
Canisbay burial ground	C	Complete	Complete	Extension works completed.
Dores burial ground	G	Closed	01/07/2026	Cemetery extension works have been awarded with works to progress over summer.
Dunvegan burial ground	G	01/02/2029	01/10/2027	Planning application approved. Tender process to progress in Spring 2026, with a view of works starting late Summer 2026.
Glen Nevis burial ground	R	01/08/2027	Ongoing	Land purchase and ground works to clear sites of tree stumps, etc. complete. Drainage works completed in January 2026 currently in settlement phase, until SEPA trial digs can take place in October 2026.
Kilmorack burial ground	C	Complete	Complete	Additional plinths within cemetery completed.
Mount Vernon burial ground	G	01/06/2031	01/07/2030	Land purchase for extension complete. Additional lairs within current cemetery have extended existing capacity.
Portree burial ground	C	Complete	Complete	Main construction works complete. Snagging works ongoing.
Reay burial ground	G	01/11/2027	01/02/2027	Land investigation/acquisition ongoing for potential new extension.
Skeabost burial ground	G	Closed		Land investigation works ongoing. Investigative trial dig reports being assessed for suitability of ground conditions for 1 potential site.
Blarour burial ground	C	Complete	Complete	Extension works completed in September 2025.
Croy burial ground	C	Complete	Complete	Additional lairs within current cemetery boundary completed.
Proncynain burial ground	C	Complete	Complete	Extension works completed.
Keiss burial ground	G	01/08/2030	01/02/2030	Additional plinths to be created within existing cemetery boundary.
Kilvean burial ground	G	01/01/2030*	01/08/2028	*Note 2030 date based on prepared lairs in current phase. Drainage works for new extension complete. Plan underway for future use of site.
Kinlochmore burial ground	G	01/06/2028	01/04/2027	Land investigation underway for potential new cemetery.
Petty-Tornagrain burial ground	C	Complete	Complete	Additional lairs within cemetery were identified.
Tomnacross burial ground	C	Complete	Complete	Additional lairs within cemetery were identified.
Tore burial ground	G	01/02/2033	01/06/2032	Additional plinths to be completed within the existing cemetery.
Wick burial ground	G	01/07/2028	01/02/2027	Land purchase for new cemetery complete. Awaiting trial dig report to enable design and planning processes to begin.
Rosskeen burial ground	G	01/07/2030	01/08/2029	Land acquisition underway for extension to existing cemetery.