

The Highland Council

Agenda Item	9
Report No	RDB/11/26

Committee: Redesign Board

Date: 27 August 2026

Report Title: Abandoned and Nuisance Vehicles

Report By: Assistant Chief Executive - Place

1 Purpose/Executive Summary

- 1.1 Abandoned vehicles have a significant negative impact on communities, public safety and the environment. The Council has a statutory duty under the Refuse Disposal (Amenity) Act 1978 to investigate and remove vehicles that are considered abandoned. In recent years, reports of abandoned and suspected abandoned vehicles have increased substantially, rising from 936 reports in 2023/24 to 1,738 reports in 2025/26, creating increasing operational and financial pressures on the Environmental Health team who have responsibility for the statutory duties placed on the Council.

Nuisance vehicles cause obstruction and block valued parking spaces in residential areas. Whilst Environmental Health have no powers to manage vehicles identified as being nuisance vehicles, information about these will be passed to other partner agencies who may have powers to assist. These partner agencies include the Parking team within the Council as well as the DVLA and Police Scotland.

- 1.2 Following the Redesign Board workshop on 4th June 2026, this report provides an update on the actions officers are taking forward.
- 1.3 To strengthen the Council's response, the report sets out a programme of improvements including enhanced cost recovery, development of vehicle uplift and storage arrangements, closer working with the DVLA and Police Scotland, improved public communications, and consideration of future enforcement powers. The establishment of a vehicle uplift and storage contract and a vehicle storage compound would provide greater flexibility in dealing with abandoned and nuisance vehicles but would require additional investment and staffing resources.

2 Recommendations

- 2.1 Members are asked to:-

- i. **Note** the update from environmental health on abandoned vehicles including the data from 2025/26;
- ii. **Note** the proposed improvements being considered to address abandoned vehicles by Environmental Health; and
- iii. **Note** the role of the Council and wider partners in addressing nuisance vehicles and proposed improvements.

3 Implications

- 3.1 **Resource** - The resources available to Environmental Health must be prioritised, focusing on areas of greatest public health significance. The team continually explores ways to delivering services more efficiently and within budget including reviewing associated income streams and seeking efficiencies in working practice and team structure. The report highlights the demand and resource challenges on abandoned vehicles.

Work is ongoing to investigate the provision of a contract for the uplift and storage of vehicles which would be used by both Environmental Health and Parking. There is no identified budget for the provision of such a service so this will be submitted as a budget pressure. Without additional resources, it is not possible to implement this proposal.

- 3.2 **Legal** – The Council has statutory duty under the Refuse Disposal (Amenity) Act 1978 to remove abandoned vehicles from land or roads within their area. The Refuse Disposal (Amenity) Act 1978 does not give Environmental Health powers to address nuisance vehicles.

For vehicles parked in car parks, the operator of the car park may be able to take action to remove nuisance vehicles as set out in the conditions of parking.

There are powers available to the Police to require vehicles causing an obstruction of the highway to be removed. The Police also have powers in relation to vehicles being driven without a valid MOT test.

The DVLA has powers to remove vehicles parked on the highway or on public land which are untaxed.

- 3.3 **Risk** – Failure to deliver statutory responsibilities for abandoned vehicles may impact on the safety of residents and visitors to the Highlands, impact on environmental quality and open the Council to reputational risks.

- 3.4 **Health and Safety (risks arising from changes to plant, equipment, process, or people)** – Failure to deliver statutory responsibilities for abandoned vehicles may impact on the safety of residents and visitors to the Highlands.

- 3.5 **Gaelic** – There are no Gaelic implications arising from this report.

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. Redesign Board workshop on 4th June 2026 - Abandoned and Nuisance Vehicles

5.1 Following discussion at the Board's March meeting, a workshop on abandoned and nuisance vehicles was held on the 4 June 2026. Members engagement on this challenging issue was welcomed by the Environmental Health team.

5.2 A summary of the discussions held at the workshop are provided in **Appendix 1**.

The overall discussions from the workshop can be summarised as:

1. Develop a stronger abandoned vehicle policy.
2. Create a vehicle pound/compound to enable uplift of vehicles for storage and potential sale.
3. Improve communication with councillors and the public.
4. Increase enforcement activity and deterrence.
5. Seek better cost recovery and national support.
6. Address specific challenges around caravans, campervans and nuisance vehicles.
7. Use pilots and hotspot interventions to test a tougher approach.

5.3 A report on Abandoned and Nuisance Vehicles will be taken to the Communities and Place Committee on 13th August 2026. The report provides an update on demands, the legal position on abandoned and nuisance vehicles, includes an abandoned vehicle policy and proposed improvements. A verbal report will be provided to the Redesign Board on the outcome of the Communities and Place Committee report.

5.4 The improvements included in the Communities and Place Committee report have been identified and are being progressed. Joint working with Waste, Parking and Housing teams are well established.

- **Cost recovery** - The team are working to increase cost recovery and will seek permitted cost recovery **for all uplifted vehicles** where a registered keeper has been identified. Data for Q1 of 26/27 shows that this is happening in all cases where cost recovery is possible.
- **Traffic Regulation Orders (TROs) pilot** - A pilot has commenced in Balintore with housing and parking teams to establish TROs for car parks that have ongoing issues with abandoned and nuisance vehicles. TROs are now in place with further work required on related vehicle uplift.
- **Vehicle uplift for storage** – Currently, only abandoned vehicles that are in such a condition they should be destroyed, can be uplifted, as destruction by contractors is the only option available. Research has been undertaken to introduce **vehicle uplift for storage** which will require suitable uplift vehicle,

contract and suitable vehicle storage compound. This would introduce further options to address identified abandoned vehicles (of value) and nuisance vehicles and would assist the parking team with persistent fine evaders. The Council can recharge storage costs to the registered keeper of the vehicle.

- **Vehicle uplift for storage - contract** - In 2025, work started with procurement on an uplift for storage contract. Other Councils in Scotland have been consulted on similar contracts. This is being progressed in 2026/27. The contract may involve possible multiple lots with local garages/scrap businesses providing uplift & storage at own secure pound and/or Council temporary/permanent vehicle storage compound. The option of an inhouse vehicle uplift option is also being considered. Additional funding would be required in order to progress this option.
 - **Vehicle storage compound** - To enable uplift for storage and enforcement work with the DVLA, work is ongoing with the Council's estates team on identifying a vehicle pound in inner Moray Firth area. Five sites investigated – work on one site is ongoing. Additional funding would be required in order to progress this option.
 - **Abandoned Vehicle Sales** – The Refuse Disposal (Amenity) Act 1978 enables local authorities to dispose of vehicles in their custody in such a manner as they see fit. With a vehicle storage compound, abandoned vehicles that have a value may be uplifted, stored and sold. Should an owner subsequently come forward within one year, the authority is required to pay them the proceeds of the sale, minus all removal, storage and disposal costs.
- **DVLA joint enforcement** – There has been very positive recent engagement with the DVLA on re-establishing regular joint enforcement exercises targeting untaxed vehicles. Work is ongoing to identify a suitable temporary vehicle storage compound.
 - **Comms & education** – the team are working with the corporate communications team on general messaging on abandoned vehicles to raise public awareness and to consider communications linked to enforcement exercises.
 - **Website** – Linked to the general comms and education point above, a review of the website is underway to better explain when to report abandoned vehicles to the Council and who to report nuisance vehicles to. A streamlined process for signposting the public to the correct service to deal with nuisance vehicles is being designed. This will result in a quicker response for the public as it would remove Environmental Health as an intermediary in the process. This would then better allow officers to focus on the abandoned vehicles.
 - **Police Scotland liaison** – the team are engaging with Police Scotland's road traffic team on offences related to vehicles either parked on the road or being driven with no MOT.
 - **DVLA devolved powers** – the team are engaging with DVLA on devolved powers for untaxed vehicles. The Parking team had considered this a number

of years ago but was not viable at that time. We are aware of a Council in England that has successfully gained the devolved powers which are enforced by their environmental health team to use as required. This is a future option for Highland but will require a suitable permanent vehicle storage compound either provided directly by the Council or through a contractor.

- **Prosecution** – the team are liaising with Crown Office and Procurator Fiscal Service on reporting of offenders where sufficient evidence is available.
- **Legislation changes** – The team have engaged with Scottish Government on statutory fees for removal, storage and disposal of vehicles with a view to ensuring these permit full cost recovery for Local Authorities.
- **Legislation changes** – The team have discussed with the Scottish Government on introduction of FPNs for abandoned vehicles as available in England and Wales. It is hoped this is an option that would be made available for Scottish Local authorities in the future.
- **Council facilitation** – When the uplift contracts are established, the team will review the possibility of the Council using the contract to facilitate requests from the public to uplift their own vehicles. This would be on a full cost recovery basis, including the administration costs of such a scheme. Other Councils operate similar schemes and by simplifying the process and making it easily accessible this may be a useful further option to remove vehicles from communities.

5.5 The majority of the themes raised at the June 2026 workshop are included in the improvement programme, particularly around vehicle storage compounds, cost recovery, joint working with DVLA and Police Scotland, communications, enforcement activity and legislative change. The workshop suggestions not yet researched relate to the use of byelaws, anti-social behaviour powers, and work is to be done on the development of guidance for Members and the public.

5.6 The environmental health team will continue to progress the abandoned vehicle actions and work with partners on the nuisance vehicle improvements. An update report will be provided to the next Redesign Board.

Designation: Assistant Chief Executive - Place

Date: 3 August 2026

Author: Alan Yates, Strategic Lead - Environmental Health & Bereavement Services
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Background Papers: None

Appendices: Appendix 1 – Summary notes - Redesign Board workshop on 4th June 2026

Appendix 1 - Redesign Board workshop on 4th June 2026

Summary of Workshop

1. Policy, Strategy and Definitions

A recurring theme was the need for a clearer and more robust policy framework.

Key comments

- Develop a formal abandoned vehicle policy (using the previous 2018 proposal as a starting point).
 - Adopt a stronger, "zero-tolerance" enforcement approach.
 - Create a more concrete action plan for future Redesign Board discussions.
 - Review national approaches and best practice from other councils.
 - Investigate whether local byelaws could provide additional powers.
 - Consider use of anti-social behaviour legislation where appropriate.
 - Clarify definitions, as there is currently no statutory definition of an abandoned vehicle.
 - Explore local definitions for categories such as:
 - Abandoned vehicles
 - Nuisance vehicles
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2. Public Communication and Awareness

There was significant discussion around improving understanding amongst both the public and elected members.

Key comments

- Produce guidance for Councillors and public:
 - FAQ sheet
 - Process flowchart
 - Definition guide
 - Clarify why some vehicles cannot be removed immediately.
 - Explain the difference between abandoned and nuisance vehicles.
 - Publicise charges and penalties.
 - Run a publicity campaign encouraging owners to dispose of vehicles responsibly.
 - Ensure Councillors report all known cases to the relevant team.
 - Improve communication on the actual scale of the issue (e.g. surprise expressed at the proportion classified as nuisance vehicles).
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3. Enforcement and Operational Improvements

Many comments focused on speeding up interventions and taking a firmer stance.

Key comments

- Process is perceived as taking too long.
 - Run pilot schemes using a more aggressive enforcement approach.
 - Apply stricter controls around untaxed and uninsured vehicles.
 - Make owners aware they will be charged wherever possible.
 - Lobby for greater powers and full-cost recovery.
 - Consider permit controls in affected locations.
 - Explore time limits before action is taken.
 - Take action on airport-related parking abuse.
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4. Storage, Vehicle Compounds and Infrastructure

The strongest operational theme related to the lack of vehicle storage facilities.

Key comments

- Establish a vehicle compound ("car pound").
 - Store vehicles before making disposal decisions.
 - Potential locations identified:
 - Balintore
 - Dingwall
 - Land near the waste plant
 - Removal activity is constrained without a secure storage facility.
 - DVLA support could potentially increase if a compound was available.
 - Accept that compounds will involve additional costs.
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5. Cost Recovery and Financial Considerations

A major concern was the financial impact on the Council.

Key comments

- Understand the overall cost to the Council.
 - Seek full cost recovery wherever possible.
 - Promote recovery charges more clearly.
 - Lobby nationally for improved cost recovery arrangements.
 - Recognise statutory fees are set nationally and not by the Council.
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6. Partnerships and External Agencies

Several comments highlighted challenges when working with partner organisations.

Key comments

- Current partnership working can slow progress.
 - Cases can pass repeatedly between Police, DVLA and the Council.
 - Clarify Police understanding of processes and responsibilities.
 - Explore opportunities for closer working with DVLA.
 - Identify alternative organisations that may take vehicles for reuse or training purposes (similar to previous Fire Service arrangements).
 - Engage with scrap yards as part of disposal solutions.
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7. Specific Vehicle Types

Participants highlighted a need to broaden the scope beyond standard cars.

Key comments

- Include caravans within the strategy.
 - Include campervans.
 - Consider torched vehicles as a separate component of the workload.
 - Recognise that many vehicles contain waste and rubbish.
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8. Problem Locations and Data

Discussion highlighted the importance of understanding geographic trends.

Key comments

- Better area-based data is required.
 - Members would like reporting by ward and locality.
 - Issues exist across Highland, not just in isolated locations.
 - Balintore and Dingwall specifically mentioned as problem areas.
 - Culloden highlighted for airport parking-related issues.
 - Consider trialling solutions in urban/built-up areas first.
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