

Agenda Item	14
Report No	SR/27/26

The Highland Council

Committee: Isle of Skye and Raasay

Date: 31 August 2026

Report Title: Bereavement Services – Project 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 and/or extended burial grounds in the Isle of Skye and Raasay area.

Two burial grounds in the Skye and Raasay area with less than 10 years' remaining capacity are being addressed through the capital programme. The completed extension at Portree Burial Ground will provide an estimated 20 to 30 years of additional capacity, while the proposed Dunvegan Burial Ground extension is expected to deliver over 70 years of capacity once constructed.

Two further burial grounds, Strath (Broadford) and Cille a'Bhealaich, also have less than 10 years of remaining capacity but have benefited from additional burial rows created in 2023, with land and space available for future expansion.

Work also continues to identify a suitable site for a new burial ground at Skeabost and Borge. Initial ground investigations highlighted potential suitability issues due to shallow groundwater levels, and further investigations are planned in October to assess an alternative area.

2 Recommendations

2.1 Members are asked to:-

- i. **Note** the current capacities and progress of burial ground extensions in the Isle of Skye and Raasay 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 247 burial grounds with 31 being within the Isle of Skye and Raasay area. Of these, 16 are operational and 15 are closed. **Appendix 1** provides a breakdown of lair availability and capacity data for burial grounds within the area.

6 Burial Ground Capacity Projects in the Isle of Skye and Raasay 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:-
- Land availability and purchase cost;
 - Developmental costs;
 - 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;
 - 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
 - Acceptability with local Planning considerations.
- 6.4 Two burial grounds within the Isle of Skye and Raasay area, currently included in the capital programme, have less than ten years of remaining capacity:-
- **Portree Burial Ground** – Construction of the extension, new access road, and car park was completed in Summer 2025. Following completion, a number of landscaping and snagging items were identified and communicated to the contractor, with works currently ongoing to address these. Once fully operational, the extension is expected to provide approximately 20 to 30 years of additional burial capacity.
 - **Dunvegan Burial Ground** – There has been a slight delay in finalising the design for the burial ground extension. Subject to approvals, the tender for the works is expected to be issued by the end of September. Once completed, the full extension area is projected to provide in excess of 70 years of additional burial capacity, helping to meet long-term burial needs in the area.
- 6.5 Although not currently included in the capital programme, a further two burial grounds within the area have less than ten years of remaining capacity:-
- **Strath (Broadford) Burial Ground** – Additional burial rows were created in 2023, increasing the burial ground's immediate capacity and helping to meet current demand. To support long-term provision, adjacent land has been acquired for future expansion, and a new boundary fence has been installed to incorporate the expansion area within the burial ground site. These measures ensure that the necessary land and infrastructure are in place to facilitate future development when required.
 - **Cille a'Bhealaich** – Works to add additional rows within the existing burial ground boundary were completed in 2023. There remains further space within the site to accommodate future extensions.

- 6.6 **Skeabost and Borge Burial Ground Provision** – Land investigations within the Skeabost and Borge area have been ongoing to identify a suitable site for a potential new burial ground. A number of locations have been assessed, with one site progressing to SEPA-standard trial pit investigations. The results of these investigations have now been received. While initial expectations were that the site would be suitable, groundwater was encountered at relatively shallow depths, which may limit its suitability for burial use.

Following discussions with the local team, it is believed that an alternative area within the wider site footprint may offer more favourable ground conditions. Further trial pit investigations are therefore planned for October to assess the viability of this area and help determine whether the site can be developed to meet future burial needs.

- 6.7 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:	5 August 2026
Author:	John MacLean, Bereavement Services Manager Rachel Robertson, Project Coordinator
Background Papers:	None
Appendices:	Appendix 1 – Isle of Skye and Raasay Burial Ground Capacities & Lair Figures

Appendix 1 – Isle of Skye and Raasay Burial Ground Capacities & Lair Figures

Figures as of 26/07/2026.

Name	Ward	Status	Number of prepared lairs available	Average Lairs sold per year	Current capacity in years
Ashaig	10	Closed	-	-	-
Cill Chrisod (Kilchrist)	10	Closed	-	-	-
Cille a'Bhealaich	10	Open	25	5.0	5.0
Culnacnoc	10	Closed	-	-	-
Dunvegan	10	Open	17	6.0	2.8
Dunvegan St Mary's	10	Closed	-	-	-
Edinbane	10	Open	124	2.3	54.0
Eynort	10	Closed	-	-	-
Fancyhill (Portree/The Lump)	10	Closed	-	-	-
Glendale	10	Open	152	3.3	46.6
Kilbeg	10	Open	176	6.2	28.3
Kilmaluag	10	Open	38	1.0	39.5
Kilmarie	10	Closed	-	-	-
Kilmartin/Staffin	10	Closed	-	-	-
Kilmore	10	Closed	-	-	-
Kilmuir	10	Open	142	2.1	66.1
Portnalong	10	Open	30	1.6	18.4
Portree	10	Open	4	17.9	0.2
Raasay Orchard Wood	10	Open	144	3.4	42.3
Raasay St Maol-Luag's	10	Closed	-	-	-
Rona	10	Closed	-	-	-
Sartle	10	Closed	-	-	-
Skeabost	10	Closed	-	-	-
St Columba's Isle	10	Closed	-	-	-
Strath (Broadford)	10	Open	58	10.7	5.4
Strathaird	10	Open	163	0.8	200
Struan New	10	Open	45	2.3	19.6
Struan Old	10	Closed	-	-	-
Trien	10	Open	105	5.0	21.2
Trumpan	10	Open	276	3.9	71.7
Uig	10	Open	173	6.1	28.1