

Scotland's first inspector of crematoria appointed in wake of baby ashes scandal

A former policeman has been appointed as Scotland's first inspector of crematoria in the wake of the baby ashes scandal.

Robert Swanson will take up the post after a 41-year career which included serving in Thailand as the senior investigating officer for UK police after the 2004 Boxing Day tsunami.

His role will include carrying out inspection visits to every crematoria in Scotland at least once a year.

Mr Swanson was appointed by the Scottish Government in the latest step towards implementing the recommendations of Lord Bonomy's Infant Cremation Commission.

The commission was established to look at infant cremation in Scotland after it emerged that Edinburgh's Mortonhall Crematorium had secretly buried the ashes of babies for decades without the knowledge of their families.

Other local authorities including Aberdeen City Council were subsequently implicated.

The Government accepted Lord Bonomy's 64 recommendations, which included establishing the post of an independent inspector.

Public health minister Maureen Watt said: "As well as providing appropriate oversight and scrutiny of practices within Scotland's crematoria, the inspector will also be a point of contact for families who have any concerns about crematoria practices, anywhere in Scotland.

"With Robert's extensive experience of investigating serious crimes, and of working with families and victims of crime, I know he will be well-placed to deal with the sensitive nature of the work of the inspector."

Ms Watt said the Government had implemented a quarter of Lord Bonomy's recommendations, with most of the remaining issues to be dealt with in the Burial and Cremation Bill, due to be introduced into Holyrood before the end of the parliamentary session.

Former Lord Advocate Dame Elish Angiolini is currently heading the work of a national investigation unit looking at the scandal and Ms Watt said its work was "progressing well".

Mr Swanson said: "I would like to thank the Scottish Government for my appointment and whilst privileged to accept, I am saddened by the circumstances which gave rise to the creation of the post.

"As the minister for public health has intimated, it is my role to ensure that the ongoing changes to legislation and working practice are being adhered to, and to be the point of contact for any future complaints or queries from members of the public concerning cremations."

He was born and brought up in the far north of Scotland and began his career with Edinburgh city police in 1972, serving in the capital before becoming a member of Special Branch in 1990.

In 2001 he became Detective Superintendent of Major Crime and deputy head of the Criminal Investigation Department, where he was in charge of serious investigations.

After retiring from Lothian and Borders Police in 2006, he was appointed serious crime review manager for the force, a post he held until the creation of Police Scotland in 2013, when he joined the national team on homicide and governance review.