

Highland Council: Questions: 17 September 2026

1. Mr A Graham

To the Leader of the Council

Will the Council end the confusing plethora of contact phone numbers and introduce a single Highland Council contact number ?

RESPONSE

Our customer experience strategy has been designed to put the person at the centre of what we do and to make it easier to contact the correct resolver group first time. While a single number may seem a logical thing to do, it is not necessarily in the customer's best interests.

Highland Council delivers a wide range of services, from straightforward enquiries to highly complex and sensitive cases. One single number would result in either a complex hierarchy of self-selecting options for customers to choose from or, alternatively, going directly to contact centre staff who would require the skills and tools to triage customers effectively and ensure enquiries reach the right service first time. The latter is likely to take more time and increase call wait times. Neither of these options would improve the customer's current experience nor align with the Customer Experience Strategy principles of making it easier to contact the correct resolver group the first time.

This is not to rule out changes in the future, but any changes would require changes to existing practices, removal of dedicated service numbers and agreement on shared standards and responsibilities. The customer first approach is the ethos of the Customer Experience Strategy and the Target Operating Model of the website – the Council are in the early stages of adopting these practices and transforming our current processes.

With this all in mind, at this point, transferring to a single contact number would not improve the experience of customer's contacting the Council nor align with the Customer Experience Strategy.

2. Mr R Stewart

To the Leader of the Council

The EHRC's new guidance states that Scottish law requires separate toilet facilities for boys and girls. The School Premises Regulations also require, in schools not exclusively for girls, that no more than one third of the sanitary appliances provided for boys are WCs, with the remainder being urinals. Can the Leader confirm how many Highland schools currently fail to meet these requirements.

RESPONSE

The EHRC Code of Practice confirms the requirement for single-sex toilet facilities, as set out in the School Premises (General Requirements and Standards) (Scotland) Regulations. However, it does not appear to place any additional or more stringent requirements on schools beyond those already contained within the existing regulations.

It should be noted that the School Premises Regulations do not specifically address the provision of accessible facilities or unisex accommodation for pupils, as required under other legislation and current good practice. As a result, toilet provision within schools must also take account of accessibility requirements and the diverse needs of pupils.

Also, It should be noted that urinals are not generally provided as part of current new-build or refurbishment projects, with provision typically focused on fully enclosed toilet cubicles and accessible facilities in line with modern design standards and user expectations.

The Scottish Government recently undertook a consultation on proposed updates to the School Premises Regulations to ensure they better reflect modern educational requirements. The consultation closed in March 2026, and it is understood that the Scottish Government is currently considering the responses received.

In August 2026, the Housing & Property Committee approved capital investment across the school estate, including improvements to toilet facilities at a number of schools identified as the highest priorities following a review of toilet provision across the estate.

3. Mr M Reiss

To the Leader of the Council

Will you give a simple and cast-iron assurance that the funds identified to be spent on new schools and other projects within the Highland Investment Plan will not be diverted to any other purpose(s)?

RESPONSE

The recent report to Highland Council on 25th June 2026 on the Highland Investment Plan set out the programme for capital spend over the coming years, directed to the specific projects contained within it. The Council considered and approved the continuing work on progressing Phase 1 of the HIP and other major projects, conducting place-based reviews and developing masterplans, all as outlined in the report. That remains the position.

4. Mrs I MacKenzie

To the Leader of the Council

In light of the Scottish Government's commitment to 'Fairer Funding' principles for the third sector, could the Leader of the Council outline how the Highland Council is embedding these specific mechanisms, namely multi-year funding streams, inflation-adjusted uplifts, timely payments, and the Real Living Wage, directly into its strategic partnership and funding allocations with the Highland Third Sector Interface (HTSI) to protect our region's vital community groups from financial instability?

RESPONSE

As set out in the report on the Poverty Commission on today's agenda, developing a Third Sector Strategy will consider the points made in the question and deliver on the calls to action made by the Poverty Commission which align with the Scottish Government's Fairer Funding principles.