

Agenda Item	4.
Report No	EDU/11/26

The Highland Council

Committee: Education Committee

Date: 3 June 2026

Report Title: Statutory Consultation: Request to proceed to consultation on the relocation of Thurso High, Pennyland Primary and Miller Academy Primary Schools to a new setting serving all three schools

Report By: Assistant Chief Executive - People

1. Purpose/Executive Summary

1.1 This report seeks Members' agreement to proceed to a statutory consultation, under the Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010, on a proposal to:

- provide a new secondary school for Thurso as part of a Community Point of Delivery;
- provide a new primary school of up to 16 classes, located within or adjacent to the Community Point of Delivery site;
- discontinue education provision at Pennyland Primary School;
- discontinue education provision at Miller Academy Primary School;
- discontinue Additional Support Needs provision at the Miller Academy site, with specialist provision to be re-provided within the new model of provision associated with the Community Point of Delivery.
- provide Early Learning and Childcare provision within the new primary school, with existing provision at Pennyland Primary School and Miller Academy Primary School to be discontinued and re-established within the new setting;
- retain Mount Pleasant Primary School for English Medium Education;
- discontinue Gaelic Medium Education at Mount Pleasant Primary School and provide Gaelic Medium Education provision associated with the new primary school;

The paper at **Appendix 2** sets out the basis of the proposal and related information including the educational, community and transport implications.

Appendix 3 provides information on the resource implications of the schools' related aspects of the project.

- 1.2 The Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010 requires statutory consultation in relation to proposals to discontinue or establish schools and make associated changes to school provision.

The proposed replacement of Thurso High School does not in itself require statutory consultation under the Act. However, it forms part of the wider context for the proposals relating to primary school and early years provision, which are subject to this statutory consultation.

- 1.3 The Highland Council has committed to address the condition, layout and physical suitability of the education estate in Thurso, particularly in relation to Thurso High School and associated primary school provision.
The existing buildings were constructed to standards and layouts that no longer adequately support modern approaches to learning, accessibility and inclusion, and require increasing levels of intervention to remain operational.

- 1.4 In May 2024, The Highland Council approved the Highland Investment Plan, which identified Thurso as a priority location for significant investment in the education estate.

The Plan recognises the need to address the condition, suitability and long-term sustainability of secondary school provision in Thurso, including consideration of future options for Thurso High School.

As part of this strategic approach, the existing Thurso High School campus has been identified at an early stage as a potential location for a Community Point of Delivery, subject to further development, statutory consultation, and Member decision-making.

- 1.5 The Highland Investment Plan also recognises the need to consider the future configuration of primary school provision in Thurso alongside the replacement of secondary provision. This approach reflects the opportunity to take a coordinated approach to education provision in the town, addressing the condition and suitability challenges across the wider school estate and ensuring that future accommodation is appropriate for current and future educational needs.
- 1.6 The existing Thurso High School campus has been identified at an early stage as a potential location for an education-focused Community Point of Delivery, as part of the Highland Investment Plan, subject to statutory consultation and further design development.

2. Recommendations

- 2.1 Members are asked to agree to proceed to statutory consultation, based on the proposal attached to this report at **Appendix 2**.

3. Implications

3.1 Resource

The proposals are aligned to the Highland Investment Programme, which identifies an indicative capital investment of approximately £100 million for Thurso to deliver new school provision alongside wider community facilities through a place-based, integrated campus model.

This reflects a significant capital investment linked to the Highland Investment Programme, intended to replace ageing provision and consolidate services within an integrated campus model to support a more efficient and sustainable estate. The detailed resource implications are provided in **Appendix 3**.

3.2 Legal

The statutory consultation will be taken forward as per the requirements of the Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010.

3.3 Risk

There is a risk that not progressing these proposals would result in continued reliance on aging school estate, potentially affecting service delivery and limiting the Council's ability to address condition and suitability issues.

3.4 Health and Safety (risks arising from changes to plant, equipment, process, or people)

New schools will meet modern standards for health and safety for pupils and staff.

3.5 Gaelic

The proposal includes consideration of the future location and delivery of Gaelic Medium Education in Thurso. This will be subject to statutory consultation.

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 Integrated Impact Assessment - Summary

4.3.1 An Integrated Impact Assessment screening has been undertaken on 20 April 2026. The conclusions have been subject to the relevant Manager Review and Approval.

4.3.2 The screening process has concluded that there are positive impacts for equalities and human rights by providing a new special school. There are no known negative impacts for poverty, island and mainland rural communities or data protection. In due course, should approval be given for the building of a new school, a further impact assessment will be required. Members are asked to consider the summary in **Appendix 1** to support the decision-making process.

4.3.3 A full impact assessment will be undertaken as part of the statutory consultation phase, using the information previously gathered and also informed by feedback received as part of the consultation process.

5. Overview

- 5.1 The Highland Investment Plan sets out a long-term, strategic approach to investment in the learning estate across Highland. As part of this Plan, Thurso has been identified as a priority location for education investment, reflecting the condition and suitability challenges within the existing school estate.

The Plan provides a framework for considering how best to deliver future education provision in Thurso, including options for secondary, primary and early years school accommodation. This has created the opportunity to take a coordinated approach to provision across the town, allowing options to be explored through statutory consultation to determine how modern accommodation can best support learning, inclusion and wellbeing.

- 5.2 Education provision in Thurso is currently delivered through Thurso High School, Pennyland Primary School, Miller Academy Primary School, and Mount Pleasant Primary School. Taken together, the existing secondary and primary school estate in Thurso comprises buildings of varying age and design that were not constructed to support contemporary expectations around learning environments, accessibility, inclusion and wellbeing.

Thurso High School provides secondary education for pupils across Thurso and the surrounding area and currently accommodates around 750 pupils. The school campus comprises a number of buildings dating primarily from the late 1950s and 1960s, with later extensions. The site is fragmented, with multiple detached blocks, and includes temporary accommodation following the closure and demolition of part of the estate. The age, layout and condition of the buildings present ongoing challenges in terms of accessibility, circulation, supervision and overall suitability for modern learning and teaching.

Pennyland Primary School, with associated Early Learning and Childcare provision, currently has a roll of approximately 160 pupils across seven classes. The main school building dates from 1962 and reflects design standards that limit flexibility, adaptability and energy performance. The integration of primary and early years provision within an ageing building places pressure on space and specialist facilities.

Miller Academy Primary School serves a larger primary roll of approximately 260 pupils, alongside Early Learning and Childcare provision and specialist Additional Support Needs provision, including the SCOPE unit. The school occupies a historic building originally constructed in the late nineteenth century, with later extensions and refurbishment. The school's age, multi-block layout and internal configuration limit opportunities to provide consistent, flexible and accessible learning environments.

Mount Pleasant Primary School is situated across the river on the East side of the town. Its current primary roll is approximately 189 pupils across seven English Medium classes. In addition, it has a GME unit and a standalone Croileagan, an enhanced provision unit and Early Learning & Childcare provision. Total school roll is around 258.

6. The Proposal

- 6.1 The replacement of Thurso High School would provide the opportunity to deliver secondary education from a single, coherent campus designed to modern standards.

Appropriately designed accommodation would support Curriculum for Excellence, senior phase pathways, digital learning and a wider range of curricular and extra-curricular activities, while improving circulation, accessibility and supervision across the site.

- 6.2 Considering primary school provision alongside the replacement of secondary provision allows the Council to take a more coordinated approach to education in Thurso.

New Primary and Early Years accommodation would offer flexible learning spaces, improved facilities for group work and specialist support, and environments better suited to supporting inclusion, early learning and additional support needs.

This approach also provides the opportunity to improve continuity and transitions between stages of education, supporting pupils as they move from early learning to primary and from primary to secondary education.

- 6.3 There is potential to enhance and sustain Gaelic Medium Education by co-locating provision within the Community Point of Delivery. This would support a more coherent 3–18 learner pathway, strengthen continuity of immersion, and improve transition into secondary Gaelic provision. The proposal therefore includes the option to relocate Gaelic Medium Education provision to the new campus. This will form part of the statutory consultation process and is not a pre-determined outcome.

- 6.4 The Early Learning and Childcare provision currently delivered at Pennyland Primary School and Miller Academy Primary School is proposed to be discontinued on those sites and re-established within the new primary school at the Community Point of Delivery.

- 6.5 The proposal does not include any immediate review of the Mount Pleasant Primary School catchment area. The existing catchment arrangements will remain in place. Any future review would be considered separately, based on evidence such as pupil rolls, transport considerations or demand for provision.

- 6.6 If agreed by Members, the proposal for statutory public consultation will be to combine Pennyland Primary School and Miller Academy Primary School into a new primary school, co-located with Thurso High School within the Community Point of Delivery.

The new school would include Early Learning and Childcare provision and make provision for Gaelic Medium Education and specialist Additional Support Needs, as part of the overall model of provision, subject to the outcome of consultation. Mount Pleasant Primary School would continue as a standalone primary school serving its existing catchment as part of the Thurso High School Associated School Group and would continue to host specialist Additional Support Needs provision.

7. Community Engagement

- 7.1 An informal pre-design public consultation for the Thurso POD development was held in December 2025 and January 2026 to seek local views ahead of the project moving to the design stage. More than 500 people took part through a series of drop-in events and an online survey, building on earlier workshops with key partners and community groups.

In addition, facilitated workshops were undertaken with young people to gather views on learning environments and future education facilities. Alongside this, Council officers have engaged with a range of stakeholders, including school senior management teams, parent councils, community representatives, elected members and partner organisations.

Pre-design consultation feedback was published in April 2026. The pre-design consultation findings are being used to inform the development of more detailed proposals for the site and the process for formal statutory consultation.

The work will be supported by the Thurso Transformation Delivery Group, which brings together partners from multiple organisations to coordinate projects and maximise benefits for Thurso and Caithness.

8. Next Steps

- 8.1 Subject to Members' agreement to proceed, the Council will undertake statutory consultation. It will commence on Wednesday 19 August 2026 and will conclude on Wednesday 30 September 2026, allowing for the statutory minimum of six weeks and at least thirty school days.

- 8.2 The proposal paper will be published and made available for inspection at the locations identified within the proposal paper and on the Council's website.

Parents, pupils, staff and members of the wider community will be invited to submit written representations to the Council throughout the consultation period

- 8.3 A public meeting will be held during the statutory consultation period, week commencing 24 August 2026, to allow parents, pupils, staff and other interested parties to hear more about the proposal, ask questions and have their views recorded. The meeting will be convened by the Council and chaired by a senior elected member.

- 8.4 Following the conclusion of the statutory consultation on **30 September 2026**, the Council will forward the summary note of the public meeting, together with relevant written representations, to Education Scotland in line with statutory requirements.

- 8.5 At present, it is expected that the statutory consultation timeline would allow a final recommendation to be presented to Committee in early 2027, subject to the Council having sufficient time to fully consider the outcomes of the consultation and any matters raised.

Planning and preparatory work may continue alongside the consultation process, where appropriate, to inform future decision-making.

Designation: Assistant Chief Executive - People

Date: 20 May 2026

Author: Derek Martin, Strategic Lead - Operations

Background Papers:

Appendices: Appendix 1- Integrated Impact Assessment

Appendix 2 – Consultation Proposal Paper

Appendix 3 – Resource Implications

Appendix A - Thurso High School Location

Appendix B – Thurso Schools Location

Integrated Impact Assessment Screening

Summary

Proposal overview

The proposal relates to the reorganisation of education provision in Thurso as part of the Highland Investment Plan. It includes replacing Thurso High School with a new secondary school and reviewing the configuration of primary schools in the town. The proposal is currently at consultation stage and no final decisions have been made.

Who is affected

The proposal may affect children and young people across all stages of education, including those with additional support needs. It also affects parents and carers, school staff, partner services, and local communities who use school facilities.

Equalities impact

Overall impact is positive. There is a positive impact for disability due to improved accessibility and facilities. No impacts have been identified for other protected characteristics, and no negative impacts have been noted at this stage.

Poverty and socio-economic impact

The impact is expected to be positive, with improved access to services and enhanced facilities contributing to opportunities and local place-based benefits.

Human rights

The proposal has a positive impact on the right to education. Improved and modern facilities are expected to enhance learning, inclusion, and wellbeing. No negative impacts have been identified, and statutory consultation will act as mitigation.

Children's rights and wellbeing

A positive impact is expected. The proposal supports the best interests of the child and the right to education, with improved environments and wider opportunities. No adverse impacts have been identified at this stage. Further consultation and assessment will be undertaken.

Data protection

Personal data will be processed only for statutory consultation purposes. There are no significant changes to existing data handling arrangements, and compliance with Council policies is confirmed.

Rural communities

The proposal affects mainland rural communities but no differential or negative impacts have been identified.

Climate change

At the consultation stage, the proposal gives rise to minor and short-term greenhouse gas emissions, primarily associated with staff travel, site visits and stakeholder engagement activity, including travel between Inverness and Thurso.

These impacts are limited in scale, temporary in nature, and not considered significant.

Measures will be taken to minimise emissions associated with consultation activity, including the use of hybrid and virtual engagement methods, prioritisation of public transport and shared travel, use of low emission or electric vehicles where available, and co-ordination of meetings and site visits to reduce unnecessary journeys.

The proposal also presents potential longer-term opportunities to improve climate outcomes, should it progress, including through energy efficient design, reduced carbon emissions, and improved resilience to extreme weather.

No direct impacts on biodiversity or the natural environment are anticipated at this stage, as no physical works or site changes are proposed.

A full Climate Change Impact Assessment will be undertaken if the proposal progresses to design, site selection or construction stages, where impacts would be more substantial.

Overall conclusion

The overall impact is assessed as positive across equalities, poverty, human rights, and children's wellbeing. A full Integrated Impact Assessment is not required at this stage, but further assessment and consultation will take place before any final decision.

THE HIGHLAND COUNCIL

EDUCATION COMMITTEE

PROPOSAL TO REORGANISE EDUCATION PROVISION IN THURSO

EDUCATIONAL BENEFITS STATEMENT

This is a proposal paper prepared in terms of the Education Authority's agreed procedures to meet the requirements of the Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010.

INTRODUCTION

The Highland Council is proposing, subject to the outcome of the statutory consultation process, to reorganise education provision in Thurso in order to provide modern, sustainable, and high quality learning environments that better meet current and future educational needs.

The proposal forms part of the Highland Investment Plan and the development of a Community Point of Delivery for Thurso.

If approved following consultation, the proposed changes would be implemented following the completion of new accommodation.

The proposal is to:

- provide a new secondary school for Thurso as part of a Community Point of Delivery,
- provide a new primary school of up to 16 classes, located within or adjacent to the Community Point of Delivery site,
- provide Early Learning and Childcare provision within the new primary school, with existing provision at Pennyland Primary School and Miller Academy Primary School to be discontinued and re-established within the new setting,
- discontinue Gaelic Medium Education at Mount Pleasant Primary School and
- provide Gaelic Medium Education provision associated with the new primary school,

Appendix 2

- retain Mount Pleasant Primary School for English Medium Education,
- discontinue education provision at Pennyland Primary School,
- discontinue education provision at Miller Academy Primary School,
- discontinue Additional Support Needs provision at the Miller Academy site, with specialist provision to be re-provided within the new model of provision associated with the Community Point of Delivery.

Clarification on Scope of Statutory Consultation

For the avoidance of doubt, the Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010 requires statutory consultation in relation to proposals to establish or discontinue schools and make associated changes to school provision.

The proposed replacement of Thurso High School does not in itself require statutory consultation under the Act. However, it forms part of the wider strategic context for the proposals relating to primary school provision, which are subject to this statutory consultation.

Accordingly, this proposal paper sets out a combined and coordinated approach to future education provision in Thurso, while the statutory consultation relates specifically to the proposed changes to primary school provision and associated Early Learning and Childcare, Gaelic Medium Education and Additional Support Needs provision.

SUMMARY OF THE CONSULTATION PROCESS

Proposal Paper Publication

The proposal paper will be available for inspection, free of charge, at:

- Thurso High School
- Pennyland Primary School
- Miller Academy Primary School
- Thurso Library
- And published on The Highland Council website
 - www.highland.gov.uk/schoolconsultations

Copies of this Proposal Paper are also available on request from:

Education Business Support Team,

Highland Council Headquarters,

Glenurquhart Road,

Inverness

IV3 5NX

E-mail: Education.Consultations@highland.gov.uk

To request this information in an alternative format, e.g. large print, Braille, audio formats, or suitable language, please also contact:

Education Business Support Team,

Highland Council Headquarters,

Glenurquhart Road,

Inverness

IV3 5NX

E-mail: Education.Consultations@highland.gov.uk

Formal notice of the proposal and relevant information will be given and be made available, free of charge, to the consultees listed as follows:

- i. Parents of pupils attending Thurso High School, Pennyland Primary School, Miller Academy Primary School, Mount Pleasant Primary School; including parents of pre-school pupils
- ii. The Parent Councils of the above schools
- iii. All staff of the above schools
- iv. Members of Parliament and Members of the Scottish Parliament for the area affected by the proposal
- v. Trade union representatives
- vi. Thurso Community Council
- vii. Councillors representing Thurso and Northwest Caithness ward
- viii. Education Scotland

Advertisement in Local Media

A notice announcing the public meeting will be placed in the John O' Groat Journal and on the Highland Council's Facebook page and "X" account.

Consultation Period

The consultation for this proposal will begin on 19 August 2026 and will end on 30 September 2026. This period allows for the statutory minimum of six weeks, including at least thirty school days.

Public Meeting

A public meeting will be held the week commencing 24 August 2026.

Anyone wishing to attend the public meeting is invited to do so. The meeting will be convened by the Council, will be chaired by a senior elected councillor, and will be addressed by officers of The Education Service. Invitations will be sent to all statutory consultees.

The meeting will be an opportunity for the public to hear more about the proposal; to ask questions about the proposal; and to have the views of all stakeholders recorded so that they can be considered.

A note will be taken at the meeting of questions asked and views expressed. This note will be published on the Council website. The meeting may also be recorded.

The note will be forwarded to Education Scotland, along with other submissions and comments received by the Council during the consultation process.

Responses to the Proposals

Interested parties are invited to respond to the Proposals by making written or electronic submissions on the Proposals to:

Education Business Support Team,

Highland Council Headquarters,

Glenurquhart Road,

Inverness

IV3 5NX

Email: Education.Consultations@highland.gov.uk

Or via an online form, a link to which can be found on

www.highland.gov.uk/schoolconsultations

When responding, you are invited to state your relationship with the school – for example, “pupil”, “parent”, “carer”, “relative”, “former pupil”, “teacher in school”, “member of the community” etc. However, it is not compulsory to do so.

Those sending in a response, whether by letter or electronically, should know that their response will be open to public scrutiny and may have to be supplied to anyone making a reasonable request to see it. If they do not wish their response to be made publicly available, they should clearly write on the document: “I wish my response to be considered as confidential with access restricted to councillors and officers of The Highland Council”. Otherwise, it will be assumed that the person making the response agrees to it being made publicly available.

All written responses must be received by the last day of the consultation period, 30 September 2026 at 5pm.

Involvement of Education Scotland

When the proposal document is published, a copy will also be sent to Education Scotland by the Council. Education Scotland will also be sent, by 16 September 2026, a copy of any relevant written representations that are received by the Council from any person during the consultation period.

Education Scotland will also receive the summary note of the public meeting and, so far as is practicable, a copy of any other relevant documentation. Education Scotland will then prepare a report on the educational aspects of the proposal not later than 7 October 2026. In preparing their report, Education Scotland may visit the affected schools and make such enquiries as they consider appropriate.

Review of Consultation Exercise

The Highland Council will review the proposal having regard to the Education Scotland report, written representations that it has received, and oral representations made at the public meeting. It will then prepare a consultation report. This report will be published in electronic and printed formats and will be sent to anyone who submitted a written representation during consultation. It will be available on the Council website as well as at the affected school and local library, free of charge.

The report will include a summary of the written and oral representations made during consultation and a copy of the Education Scotland report, together with the Council's considered response to the issues raised. The report will include details of any alleged inaccuracies and/or omissions and how these have been handled. The consultation report will be published at least 3 weeks prior to being submitted to the Council's Education Committee, who will make a recommendation to the full Highland Council.

In publishing the report, the Council will invite any person or party to make further representations to the Committee prior to its meeting. A notice to this effect will also be published on the Highland Council website.

At the present time, the Council intends to publish its report in November 2026 prior to submission to the Council's Education Committee in February 2027. However, this timescale may change depending on the nature of issues raised during consultation, and the need to give full consideration to those issues. In the latter event, the report may not be submitted until a later Committee meeting.

Any proposal approved by the Education Committee would require to be confirmed by a subsequent meeting of the full Highland Council. This is currently planned for March 2027.

Note on Corrections

If any inaccuracy or omission is discovered in this proposal paper, either by the Council or any other person, the Council will determine if relevant information has been omitted or, if the paper contains an inaccuracy. The Council will then take appropriate action, which may include the issue of a correction, the reissuing of the proposal, or the revision of the timescale for the consultation period. In that event, relevant consultees and Education Scotland will be advised.

Proposal

1. Legislative Background

1.1 The proposal is advanced within the context of all applicable legislation. Amongst other duties, education authorities are required to secure adequate and efficient provision of school education (S.1 of the Education Act 1980); and to publish or otherwise make available information as to their arrangements for the placing of children in schools under their management (S.28 of the 1980 Act).

1.2 In common with all public bodies in Scotland, The Highland Council also has a duty to provide best value. This includes making arrangements to secure

continuous improvement in performance, whilst maintaining an appropriate balance between quality and cost; and, in making those arrangements and securing that balance, to have regard to economy, efficiency, effectiveness, equal opportunities requirements and to contribute to the achievement of sustainable development.

2. Reasons for the Proposal

2.1 A number of existing school buildings in Thurso no longer provide environments that adequately support modern learning and teaching approaches.

2.2 The Council must therefore consider a revised configuration of the school estate to ensure that accommodation is suitable, adaptable, and capable of supporting high quality education for current and future generations.

2.3 In May 2024, The Highland Council adopted a new Highland Investment Plan (HIP), which sets out how the Council will work over the next 10 years to optimise its investment of resources in its learning estate in a prioritised manner to meet the needs of 21st century learning and teaching. As part of this, a new generation of community facilities was envisioned for the Highlands, with Points of Delivery (PODs) providing a range of public services brought together in a single location.

2.4 The Highland Investment Plan identified Thurso as a priority location for investment, including consideration of future secondary school provision.

2.5 The Plan also recognises the need to consider the future configuration of primary school provision in the town, alongside alongside early learning, Gaelic Medium Education and additional support needs provision , to ensure that the overall education estate is suitable for modern learning and teaching and capable of meeting future demand.

2.6 Following approval of the Highland Investment Plan approach, detailed master-planning and engagement work has been undertaken to develop proposals for a Community Point of Delivery in Thurso.

2.7 The existing Thurso High School campus has been identified as the preferred location for the future education-focused Community Point of Delivery, subject to statutory consultation and further design development.

2.8 While the overall site has been agreed in principle, the precise arrangement, scale, and location of individual education facilities within the site will be informed through the statutory consultation process and the subsequent design stages.

2.9 Appendix 2 identifies the location of the proposed community POD and includes the relevant land areas that would be required for each of the component parts, i.e. the Primary School, and other co-located community and partner facilities.

3. Pre Consultation & Engagement

3.1 A programme of informal engagement has been undertaken as part of the development of the Highland Investment Plan and the emerging proposals for a Community Point of Delivery in Thurso.

3.2 This engagement has focused on understanding local priorities for education provision, the condition and suitability of the existing school estate, and the potential opportunities arising from long-term investment in education and community infrastructure.

3.3 As part of this work, the Council has undertaken a programme of informal engagement relating to the development of a Community Point of Delivery for Thurso.

3.4 This has included public drop-in events and facilitated workshops held during 2025, together with ongoing meetings with key stakeholders through established governance and partnership arrangements during 2024, 2025 and early 2026. This engagement was intended to raise awareness of the Highland Investment Plan, explore early options for education provision, and inform the development of proposals prior to statutory consultation.

3.5 Public drop-in events were held to provide members of the community with the opportunity to view emerging proposals, ask questions, and provide early feedback.

3.6 In addition, facilitated workshops were undertaken with young people to gather views on learning environments and future education facilities. Alongside this, Council officers have engaged with a range of stakeholders, including school senior management teams, parent councils, community representatives, elected members and partner organisations.

3.7 An online survey was also carried out as part of the informal engagement process and received approximately 550 responses.

3.8 The survey explored a range of potential models for future education provision in Thurso and highlighted key themes, including the importance of the quality and suitability of learning environments, safeguarding and age-appropriate separation, access to facilities, and safe and walkable routes to school.

3.9 The responses demonstrated a range of views and preferences and have been used to inform the development of the proposal rather than to determine an outcome.

3.10 The Council has considered the views expressed during informal engagement alongside its strategic responsibilities under the Highland Investment Plan and its statutory duties in relation to school education.

3.11 Having reviewed the information gathered and the range of potential options, the Council considers that a statutory consultation is now required to allow all interested parties to comment on a defined proposal for future education provision in Thurso.

3.12 The statutory consultation process will provide a further opportunity for parents, pupils, staff and the wider community to express their views before any final decision is made.

4. Description of the Schools

Thurso High School

4.1.1 Thurso High School provides secondary education for young people across Thurso and the surrounding area and currently accommodates approximately 750 pupils.

4.1.2 The campus comprises a number of buildings dating primarily from the late 1950s and 1960s, with subsequent extensions.

4.1.3 The site is dispersed, with multiple detached blocks, which creates challenges in relation to circulation, accessibility, supervision and overall site efficiency.

4.1.4 In 2022, a routine structural inspection identified significant concerns relating to the presence of High Alumina Cement Concrete within Block A, resulting in its closure.

4.1.5 Following further assessment, Highland Council approved the demolition of this block due to the scale of the structural defects, and temporary modular accommodation was introduced to replace the lost teaching space.

4.1.6 The reliance on temporary accommodation, combined with the fragmented layout of the remaining estate, limits the suitability of the campus for modern learning and teaching.

4.1.7 Although the school has sufficient capacity to accommodate forecast changes in pupil numbers, the forecasts reinforce the importance of ensuring that future accommodation is appropriately scaled, flexible and fit for purpose, rather than continuing to maintain an oversized, fragmented and poor quality estate.

4.1.8 These factors highlight the limitations of the current estate and the challenges in delivering a modern, coherent secondary learning environment on the existing campus.

They provide context for considering how future secondary education provision in Thurso could be delivered from accommodation that is better aligned to current educational standards, supports effective supervision and movement across the site, and offers greater flexibility to respond to future needs.

Pennyland Primary School

4.2.1 Pennyland Primary School is a non-denominational primary school located in Thurso, with associated Early Learning and Childcare provision.

4.2.2 The main school building dates from 1962 and reflects the design standards and educational requirements of that period.

4.2.3 The school currently accommodates approximately 160 pupils across seven classes.

4.2.4 While the building benefits from a range of internal spaces, including a gym hall and specialist rooms, its age and original design limit flexibility, energy performance and the ability to adapt spaces to support contemporary approaches to learning and inclusion.

4.2.5 The integration of primary education and early years provision within a single ageing building places additional pressure on space, circulation and specialist facilities.

4.2.6 The physical constraints of the site limit opportunities to reconfigure accommodation without significant intervention, making the long-term suitability of the building an important consideration in future planning.

Miller Academy Primary School

4.3.1 Miller Academy Primary School is located close to Thurso town centre and serves a large primary population alongside Early Learning and Childcare provision.

4.3.2 The school occupies a historic building originally constructed in the late 19th century, with later extensions and refurbishment, including major works undertaken during the late 1990s.

4.3.3 The campus also accommodates specialist Additional Support Needs provision, including the SCOPE unit, which places particular requirements on accessibility, circulation, support facilities and the relationship between specialist and mainstream spaces.

4.3.4 While the building retains architectural character and strong local identity, its age and multi-block configuration present ongoing challenges in terms of internal layout, accessibility standards and consistency of learning spaces.

4.3.5 Although refurbishment has extended the usable life of the building, the inherent constraints of the historic estate limit opportunities to create flexible, modern accommodation capable of supporting integrated provision at scale without significant further intervention.

Mount Pleasant Primary School

4.4.1 Mount Pleasant Primary School is situated across the river on the East side of the town.

4.4.2 The school currently accommodates approximately 189 pupils across seven English Medium classes.

4.4.3 In addition to mainstream provision, the school includes Gaelic Medium Education provision, a standalone Croileagan, Early Learning and Childcare provision, and specialist Additional Support Needs provision serving the Associated School Group.

4.4.4 The school plays an important role in delivering both mainstream and specialist provision within the Thurso area, including its role in supporting pupils with additional needs and providing access to Gaelic Medium Education.

5. Strategic Context

5.1 Taken together, the existing education estate in Thurso comprises buildings of varying age and design, many of which were not constructed to support

modern expectations around learning environments, accessibility, inclusion and efficient site layout.

5.2 While pupil numbers across the Thurso catchment are forecast to change gradually over time, the primary drivers for reviewing education provision are the condition, layout and physical suitability of the buildings themselves.

5.3 The Highland Investment Plan identifies Thurso as a priority location for education investment and provides an opportunity to consider education accommodation holistically, ensuring that future facilities are well designed, appropriately scaled and capable of meeting current and future needs. This includes consideration of early learning, Gaelic Medium Education and Additional Support Needs provision as part of a coordinated approach to education delivery.

6. Educational Benefits

6.1 The purpose of the proposed reorganisation of education provision in Thurso is to secure clear and lasting educational benefit for children and young people. The existing pattern of education provision is delivered from buildings that were designed for an earlier model of education and which are constrained by their age, condition and layout.

6.2 These constraints limit the ability of schools to provide learning environments that fully support contemporary approaches to teaching, learning, inclusion and pupil wellbeing.

6.3 The Highland Investment Plan provides an opportunity to address these challenges through the replacement of Thurso High School and the coordinated consideration of primary school provision.

6.4 A new secondary school would offer modern, purpose-designed accommodation capable of supporting Curriculum for Excellence, senior phase pathways, digital learning, and a wider range of experiences and achievements within a coherent, secure campus.

6.5 This would also improve accessibility, internal circulation and supervision, supporting a safe and supportive learning environment.

6.6 Considering primary school provision alongside secondary replacement allows the Council to explore whether educational benefit can be delivered through a more integrated approach.

6.7 New primary accommodation, designed to modern standards, would provide flexible learning spaces, improved facilities for group work and specialist support, and environments that can better support inclusion, nurture and wellbeing. Such accommodation would be designed to support early years, primary education and additional support needs in a planned and coordinated way.

6.8 The proposal also offers educational benefits through improved transitions. Closer alignment between early learning, primary and secondary education has the potential to strengthen continuity of learning, support more effective transitions, and enable earlier engagement with support services where required. Modern accommodation can also support stronger partnership working with other services, helping to meet the wider needs of children and young people. The proposal also provides the opportunity to strengthen Gaelic Medium Education through co-location within a single campus, supporting continuity of immersion, improved transition into secondary Gaelic provision, and a more coherent 3–18 learner pathway, subject to the outcome of consultation.

6.9 While pupil numbers are forecast to change gradually over time, the educational case for the proposal is not driven by roll forecasts. Instead, the proposal focuses on ensuring that education in Thurso is delivered from accommodation that is appropriate in scale, flexible in use, and capable of supporting high-quality learning and teaching for current and future generations, rather than continuing to rely on an oversized, fragmented and poor-quality estate.

6.10 The Council recognises that current Additional Support Needs provision in Thurso is delivered through a combination of specialist bases supporting a range of needs across the Associated School Group.

6.11 The proposal includes the re-provision of Additional Support Needs currently delivered at Miller Academy within a new model of provision. This provides the opportunity to deliver specialist and enhanced provision within modern, accessible accommodation designed to support inclusion and meet identified needs across the Associated School Group.

6.12 The Council considers that these potential educational benefits justify proceeding to statutory consultation.

6.13 The consultation will allow parents, pupils, staff and the wider community to consider whether the proposal delivers sufficient educational benefit and to influence how future education provision in Thurso should be shaped.

7. Impact on School Transport

7.1 The Council recognises that any reorganisation of education provision has the potential to impact on school travel arrangements for some children and young people.

7.2 School transport has therefore been considered as part of the development of this proposal.

7.3 At this stage, no detailed transport routes have been determined. Any future transport arrangements would be developed following the conclusion of statutory consultation and in line with the Council's school transport policy.

7.4 Pupils who are entitled to free school transport under existing policy would continue to receive this entitlement. The proposal does not alter the Council's statutory duties in relation to school transport.

7.5 The identification of the existing Thurso High School campus as the preferred location for future education provision reflects its established role, central location and accessibility within the town. The site benefits from existing transport infrastructure and established travel patterns.

7.6 Active travel has been an important theme emerging from informal engagement. Any future arrangements would take account of opportunities to support safe walking and cycling routes where appropriate, alongside the provision of school transport for those who require it.

7.7 Should the proposal be approved following consultation, the Council would engage further with parents and carers to confirm individual travel arrangements and ensure that transport provision continues to meet the needs of children and young people.

8. Integrated Impact Assessment

8.1 In line with the Council's Integrated Impact Assessment framework, an initial Integrated Impact Assessment screening has been undertaken in relation to this proposal.

8.2 The screening has considered potential impacts across equality, children's rights and wellbeing, human rights, island and mainland rural communities, data protection and climate change.

8.3 The proposal has been identified as having potential positive impacts, particularly in relation to:

- children and young people's rights and wellbeing;
- accessibility and inclusion, including for children and young people with additional support needs; and
- the provision of modern, fit for purpose education environments.

No adverse impacts have been identified at this stage.

8.4 The screening recognises that the proposal relates to education provision within a small remote town serving a wider mainland rural catchment, and that further consideration of accessibility, transport and community impacts will be informed by statutory consultation responses.

8.5 At this stage, the proposal relates to statutory consultation only. A full Climate Change Impact Assessment would be undertaken and reported as part of any subsequent decision to progress new school provision. Potential impacts, including those associated with construction, energy use and travel, would be considered as part of that process.

8.6 As the proposal is to undertake statutory consultation only, the Integrated Impact Assessment screening concludes that a full Integrated Impact Assessment is not required at this stage.

8.7 On the basis of this, the Council will determine whether a full Integrated Impact Assessment, is required prior to any final decision being taken. This will be informed by:

- Education Scotland's report; and
- further development of the proposal.

9. Recommendation

9.1 Taking account of the matters set out in this proposal paper, The Highland Council recommends that education provision in Thurso be reorganised through the replacement of Thurso High School, Pennyland Primary School and Miller Academy Primary School with a new secondary school and one associated primary school within the Thurso Community Point of Delivery, including Early Learning and Childcare provision and potential Gaelic Medium Education provision, while retaining Mount Pleasant Primary School.

9.2 This proposal paper is issued in accordance with the Council's procedures and to meet the relevant statutory requirements of the Schools (Consultation)

(Scotland) Act 2010.

9.3 Following the conclusion of statutory consultation, a report summarising the consultation process, responses received and Education Scotland's report on the educational aspects of the proposal will be presented to the Education Committee of The Highland Council for further consideration and decision.

Appendices A&B show the location of the existing Thurso High School campus, which has been identified as the preferred location for the future Community Point of Delivery, subject to statutory consultation, together with the locations of existing primary schools within Thurso.

The precise layout and configuration of facilities would be developed following consultation.

End of Proposal Paper

Appendix 3 – Financial Implications

1. Strategic Financial Context

The proposal forms part of the Highland Investment Plan and the development of a Community Point of Delivery in Thurso.

The financial assessment considers the long-term sustainability of the overall education estate, including Secondary, Primary, Early Learning and Childcare, Additional Support Needs and Gaelic Medium Education provision.

The proposal represents a reconfiguration of provision rather than a single closure decision.

2. Current Cost of Provision

The current annual cost of education provision across Thurso High School, Pennyland Primary School and Miller Academy Primary School is approximately £6.6 million per annum, based on 2024/25 actual spend.

This comprises:

- Thurso High School: £4.67 million
- Pennyland Primary School: £0.82 million
- Miller Academy Primary School: £1.08 million

The majority of expenditure relates to staffing.

Cost per pupil

- Thurso High School: approximately £6,200 per pupil
- Pennyland Primary School: approximately £5,300 per pupil
- Miller Academy Primary School: approximately £4,000 per pupil

This reflects differences in school size, configuration and staffing structures across the current estate.

Mount Pleasant Primary School is not proposed for discontinuation as part of this consultation and will continue to provide English Medium Education. The statutory consultation does, however, include consideration of the future location of Gaelic Medium Education provision currently delivered from the Mount Pleasant site.

3. Future Position Without the Proposal

The current model requires the Council to maintain multiple sites and staffing structures, resulting in duplication of estate and operational costs.

Without investment and reconfiguration, these costs would be expected to continue and potentially increase due to deterioration of the buildings and exterior areas.

The proposed reconfiguration directly addresses these issues by reducing the number of operational sites and aligning provision within a single, modern campus model.

4. Capital Investment

The Highland Investment Plan includes circa £100 million of capital investment in Thurso, associated with the development of a Community Point of Delivery on the current Thurso High School site.

This investment supports a coordinated approach to the delivery of public services and includes provision for:

- the replacement of Thurso High School
- new primary school provision
- Early Learning and Childcare
- Additional Support Needs provision
- Gaelic Medium Education
- wider community and partner facilities

The proposed reorganisation of education provision set out in this proposal paper forms part of that wider programme of investment.

At this stage, the total capital allocation relates to the overall Community Point of Delivery, and detailed costs between individual elements, including education provision, will be determined through subsequent design, development and procurement processes.

The Council has approved this investment through the Highland Investment Plan in order to:

- address the condition and suitability of the existing education estate
- reduce reliance on ageing and temporary accommodation
- deliver modern, fit for purpose learning environments
- support a more efficient and sustainable configuration of services over the long term

The findings of the statutory consultation will inform how the education elements of the programme are taken forward within this approved capital envelope.

5. Revenue Implications

The proposed model consolidates education provision across fewer sites, reducing duplication in estate and operational costs.

While staffing remains the primary cost driver, rationalisation of the estate is expected to support more efficient deployment of staff and resources over time.

The proposal therefore aims to move towards a more consistent and sustainable cost base, rather than deliver immediate cashable savings.

Detailed modelling of the future revenue position will be undertaken as part of the next stage of business case development.

6. School Transport

The current annual cost of school transport associated with the Thurso Associated School Group is approximately £365,000, based on 2026/27 projected costs.

This comprises:

- a core transport network centred on Thurso High School of approximately £332,000, which includes a number of routes shared with primary provision; and
- additional dedicated and specialist routes, including Gaelic Medium Education transport, of approximately £30,000–£35,000 per annum.

Transport – Structure of Provision

A significant proportion of transport provision is already aligned to the Thurso High School catchment, with a number of routes serving both secondary and primary pupils.

The existing transport model is partially integrated, rather than separate networks for each school.

Transport – Implications of the Proposal

Given that the proposed Community Point of Delivery is located on the existing Thurso High School site, it is anticipated that:

- the core transport network will remain broadly consistent;
- existing shared routes can be retained and potentially optimised; and

- changes to overall transport costs are not expected to be significant, although this will be confirmed through detailed modelling

Transport – Next Stage

Detailed transport modelling will be undertaken following consultation to:

- confirm future route configurations;
- assess any changes in cost arising from revised pupil distribution; and
- ensure continued alignment with the Council's school transport policy.

7. Alternatives Considered

A range of alternative approaches has been considered, including retention of the existing school estate and partial or phased refurbishment of current buildings.

These approaches would maintain the current pattern of provision across multiple sites and would not address the underlying structural issues identified through the Highland Investment Plan. The existing estate in Thurso is characterised by variable building condition and levels of occupancy.

Retention or refurbishment of individual buildings would therefore require continued investment across a number of separate sites, without resolving the fundamental challenges of estate fragmentation, variable quality of accommodation and long-term sustainability. Such approaches would represent an incremental response rather than a strategic solution.

In contrast, the proposed development of a Community Point of Delivery enables a coordinated, long-term approach to investment, bringing education provision together within a modern, purpose-designed setting alongside wider services. This reflects the strategic direction set out in the Highland Investment Plan, focusing on sustainable estate renewal and improved alignment of resources, rather than continued adaptation of an ageing estate.

8. Assumptions and Risks

The financial position is based on current cost information and reflects the existing configuration of education provision in Thurso.

The assessment of the proposal is based on a number of key assumptions, including:

- that pupil rolls remain broadly in line with current forecasts;
- that new education provision will be delivered at an appropriate scale to meet demand; and
- that the integration of services within a single campus will support more efficient use of resources over time.

At this stage, detailed modelling of the future operating structure has not been completed, and the precise revenue implications of the proposed model will be confirmed through the next phase of design and business case development.

Key risks associated with the proposal include:

- variation in construction costs and programme delivery timelines;
- changes in pupil numbers affecting future capacity requirements;
- transport cost variation arising from changes to catchments and travel patterns; and
- the potential for short-term transitional costs associated with moving from the current model to a new configuration of provision.

These risks will be managed through the Council's established governance arrangements for the Highland Investment Plan, with further detail developed and reported as part of the consultation process and subsequent decision-making.

9. Overall Financial Conclusion

Current education provision in Thurso represents an annual revenue commitment of approximately £6.6 million across the core school estate.

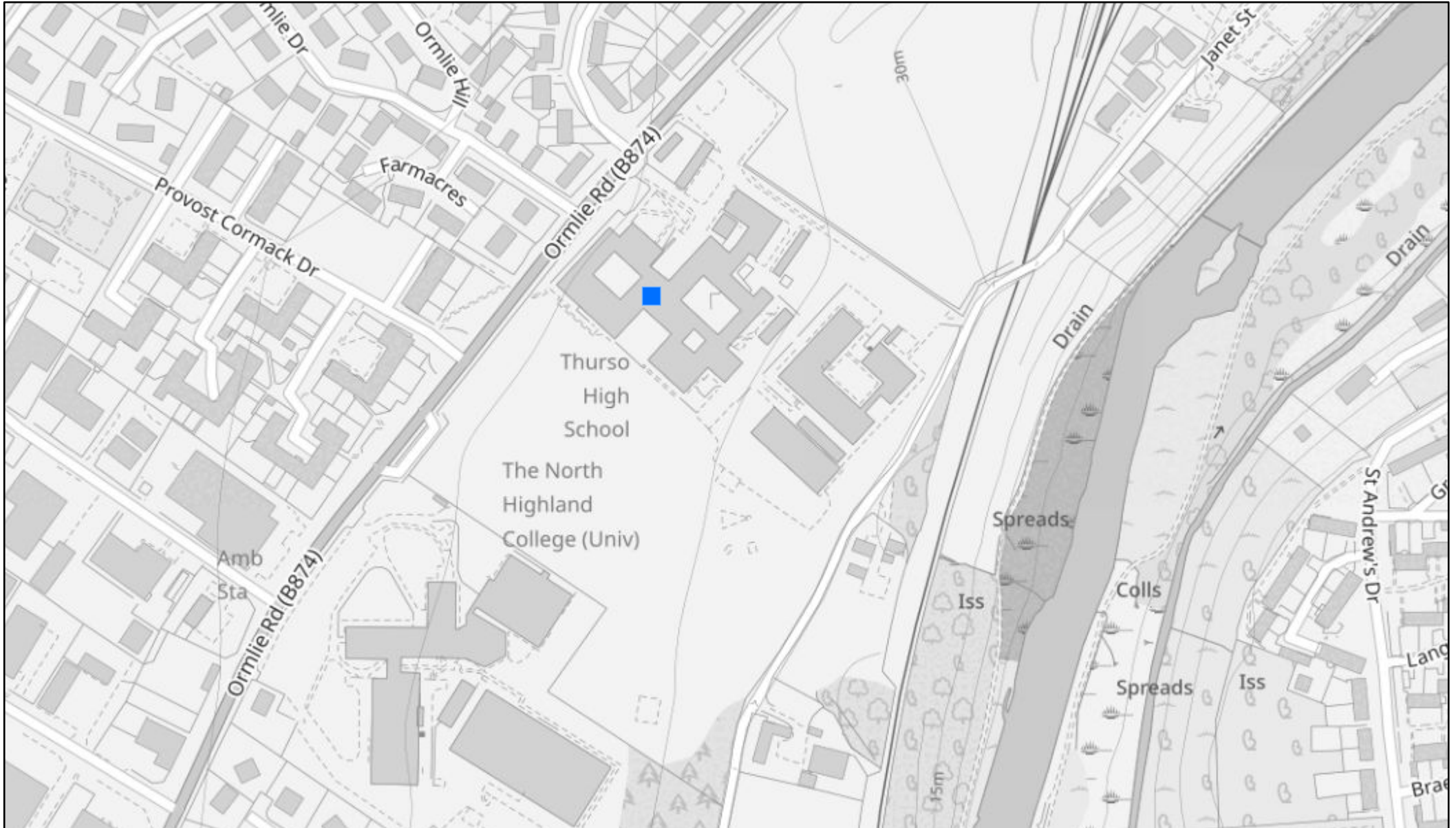
Given that pupil numbers and staffing requirements will remain broadly consistent, it is anticipated that the total revenue cost of providing education in Thurso will remain at a similar overall level under the proposed model.

The financial case for the proposal is therefore not based on delivering immediate cashable savings, but on how resources are utilised. The proposed reconfiguration enables education provision to be delivered within a smaller number of modern, purpose-designed facilities, reducing duplication across multiple sites and supporting more efficient use of estate, staffing and operational resources over time.

This approach is expected to provide a more consistent and sustainable cost base, reduce reliance on ageing infrastructure, and minimise the need for ongoing reactive investment, while aligning resources more effectively with the delivery of high-quality education.

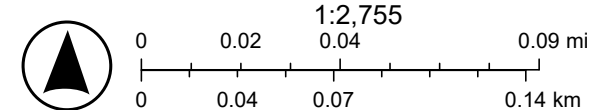
Financial considerations have been assessed alongside the educational benefits set out in this proposal, with the overall aim of ensuring that available resources are deployed in a way that is both sustainable and supports improved outcomes for children and young people.

Appendix A: Thurso High School

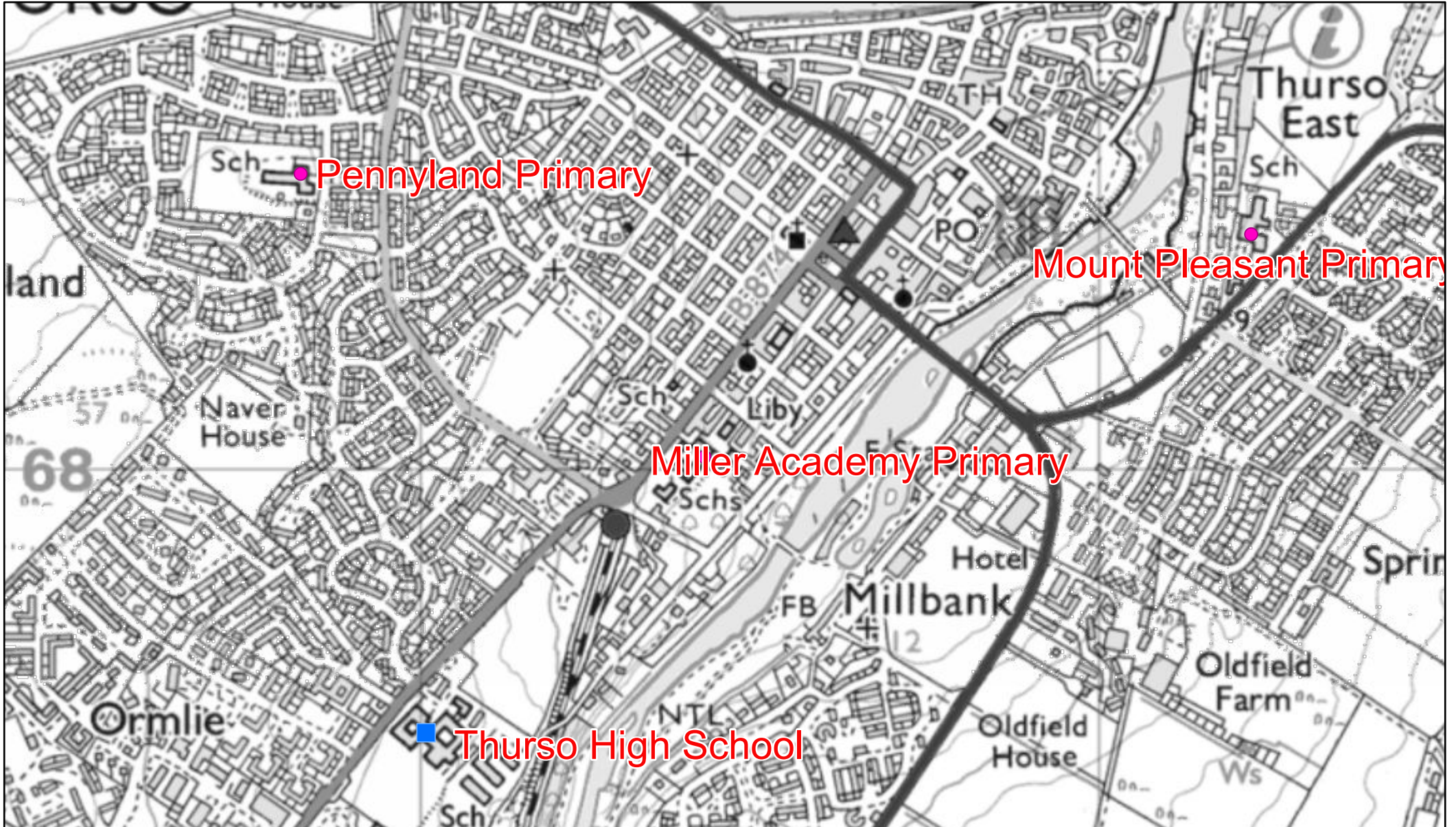


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 Secondary Schools



Appendix B: Thurso Schools



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- Primary Schools
- Secondary Schools

