

Committee	Finance and General Purposes		
Date paper prepared	03/06/2026	Date of committee meeting	10/06/2026
Subject	Thurso Lifelong Learning and Innovation District		
Author	Debbie Miller		
Action requested	I. For noting		
Purpose of the paper	To keep committee informed of the continuing discussions with Highland Council and the renamed Lifelong Learning and Innovation Campus in Thurso. Further information will be provided at regular intervals as we progress this initiative.		
Summary of the paper	Background and Purpose Background and Progress Update As previously reported, the Highland Council's Highland Investment Plan identified the current Thurso High School site as the preferred location for the proposed Thurso Community Point of Delivery (POD), representing a potential investment of approximately £100 million in Thurso. Since the Board's last update, significant progress has been made in developing the Lifelong Learning Campus concept. Through partnership working between The Highland Council, UHI North, West and Hebrides, hub North Scotland, Nuclear Restoration Services (NRS), Highlands and Islands Enterprise (HIE) and Focus North, the project has evolved beyond a campus redevelopment proposal into a wider place-based regeneration and economic development programme. An extensive feasibility study has been completed which explored a range of options for integrating the future Community POD with the potential for a redeveloped UHI North, West and Hebrides campus. The preferred option remains a new-build integrated campus model at Ormlie Road, creating a connected education, research, innovation and community hub. The proposed concept includes nursery, primary and secondary education provision, further and higher education facilities, research laboratories, engineering and construction training facilities, an innovation centre, shared community spaces and opportunities for future partner accommodation. NHS Highland Chief Executive has also indicated interest in the project and are currently keeping a 'watching brief'. The feasibility work has demonstrated significant opportunities for shared facilities, improved learner pathways, more efficient use of public assets and stronger links between education, research, industry and community		

services. The proposals also support the College's ambitions to expand engineering, construction and energy-related curriculum provision and to consolidate research activity onto a single site.

Recognising the wider economic opportunities presented by the project, partners have agreed to broaden the scope of the initiative and have adopted the title "Thurso Lifelong Learning and Innovation District". This reflects a shared ambition to create an integrated model of lifelong learning, research, innovation, skills development and economic growth which supports the long-term regeneration of Thurso and Caithness.

A draft Memorandum of Understanding has been developed between The Highland Council, UHI North, West and Hebrides, Dounreay NRS, HIE and Focus North. The Memorandum establishes a shared vision and objectives focused on:

- Developing integrated learner pathways from nursery through to further and higher education, apprenticeships and lifelong learning.
- Aligning infrastructure investment across partners.
- Supporting innovation, research and economic development.
- Creating opportunities linked to energy transition, net zero and future employment growth.
- Maximising inward investment and wider community benefit.

A key priority during the next phase will be the development of an Investment Prospectus to support engagement with Scottish Government Ministers and national agencies. The prospectus will position the Thurso Lifelong Learning and Innovation District as a nationally significant project capable of supporting Scotland's ambitions around skills, economic transformation, energy transition, population retention and community regeneration. The timeline for the next phase is a short with engagement with Scottish Government ministers expected over the summer period.

The College continues to play a leading role in the development of the project and is represented on all key strategic and governance groups. Work is underway to further define the College's future estate, curriculum, research and innovation requirements to ensure they are reflected

Further Reading is available here:

[25051A_040226_Thurso Lifelong Learning Campus - Post Meeting Considerations.pdf](#)

[ThursoLifelongLearning_MemorandumOfUnderstanding_FinalV5.docx](#)

Consultation	All partners are being consulted and a delivery group has been set up to progress the initiative. UHI NWH ELT members have been involved in workshops and the college has wider membership of the council led Thurso Delivery Group.
Resource implications	Current resource implications remain largely ELT and senior staff time associated with project development, stakeholder engagement and shared preparation. The College is actively working with partners to identify external funding opportunities to support the next phase of strategic development work, including the Strategic Brief, Outline Business Case and Investment Prospectus.
Risk implications	The principal risks remain the availability of future capital funding and the alignment of partner investment programmes and timescales. There is also a need to continue managing stakeholder and community expectations as the project progresses from feasibility to business case development. However, the strong commitment demonstrated by partners and the alignment of the project with national, regional and local priorities significantly strengthens the strategic case for continued development.
Link with strategy	Summarise how the paper is linked with the university's strategic plan, policy, or operational framework, where relevant. The project aligns strongly with the College's Estates Strategy, Curriculum Strategy, Research and Innovation ambitions, and Regional Economic Development priorities. It supports the creation of a modern, sustainable and future-focused learning environment while strengthening the College's role as a key anchor institution within the North Highland economy.
Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion	Ensuring our documents can be read and understood by everyone, including people with disabilities or impairments, is a legal requirement under the Equality Act 2010.
Island Community Impact	Not required in this instance. See the Island communities impact assessments: guidance and toolkit - gov.scot (www.gov.scot) Things to consider: • Will your policy, strategy, service, or decision have the same impact across the region or area? Think about whether there are potential island impacts which differ from the regional impact or whether there are any barriers which may unfairly disadvantage islanders. • If your policy, strategy, or service is mainland-focused, you should consider if there is a corresponding need in island communities and think about how this has been otherwise considered or catered for. • It is also a good idea to identify any benefits for the island community, such as better access to services.

Paper status	☒ Open – The paper may be circulated to non-members of the committee and published online without restriction. ☐ Restricted – The paper must not be circulated to non-members or published online until after the committee meeting. ☐ Confidential - The paper must not be circulated beyond the committee members and should not be published online. Some information is considered commercially sensitive. [Please note papers may still be subject to Freedom of Information requests – see below].
<u>Freedom of information</u>	Choose an item. FOISA exemptions Scottish Information Commissioner (itspublicknowledge.info) If closed/ withheld, select date this will become 'open': Enter a date.