

**THE SHAREHOLDER COMMITTEE FOR THE DORSET CENTRE OF  
EXCELLENCE (DCOE)**

**MINUTES OF MEETING HELD ON MONDAY 10 JUNE 2024**

**Present:** Cllrs Nick Ireland (Chair), Richard Biggs (Vice-Chair), Ryan Hope, Clare Sutton and Gill Taylor

**Also present:** Cllrs Scott Florek and Andrew Parry

**Officers present (for all or part of the meeting):**

Ian Comfort (Chair of the Dorset Centre of Excellence Board)  
Jen Cook (Lawyer - Contracts and Commercial)  
Kate Critchel (Senior Democratic Services Officer)  
Amanda Davis (Corporate Director for Education and Learning)  
Alice Deacon (Corporate Director for Commissioning and Partnerships)  
Aidan Dunn (Executive Director - Corporate Development S151)  
Grace Evans (Head of Legal Services and Deputy Monitoring Officer)  
Chris Harrod (Senior Democratic Services Officer)  
Andrew Holder (Managing Director - Dorset Centre of Excellence)  
Theresa Leavy (Executive Director of People - Children)  
Lesley Mellor (Director - Dorset Centre of Excellence)  
Frances Nicholson (Director - Dorset Centre of Excellence)  
Matt Prosser (Chief Executive)  
Claire Webb (Strategic Commissioner)

**1. Apologies**

There were no apologies for absence.

**2. Minutes**

The minutes of the previous meeting were noted.

**3. Declarations of Interest**

None received.

**4. Public Participation**

No requests to participate had been received.

**5. Councillor Questions**

None received.

## 6. **Terms of Reference**

The terms of reference were noted.

## 7. **Dorset Council Commissioning Report**

The Strategic Commissioner introduced the report which set out the commissioning activity that had taken place since the previous meeting, current activities taking place and also provided a forecast for the next quarter.

Officers responded to Members' comments and requests for clarification, details included:

- Dorset Council Officers considered that inclusion was well managed at Coombe House School and many children on roll were being given opportunities that they didn't have previously in other settings, which was leading to positive experiences for these children in question.
- Commissioners were pleased with the transitional arrangements that were in place for incoming pupils, particularly the planning and preparation with teaching staff and communication with parents prior to onboarding.
- Officers were also content that the arrangements in place for admissions from September was satisfactory and, in the event that there was a delay in the delivery of the ongoing building project, that appropriate contingencies were in place to mitigate the consequences of such delays.
- It was expected that there would be 136 children to be on roll at the school from September - this would be a cumulative figure.
- The question raised relating to recruitment would be answered by the school during its update to the shareholder committee.
- A robust contract management process was in place and there were regular meetings between the Managing Director and Commissioners to focus on items such as the school development plan, performance management reports and growth plans. This was considered to be 'business as usual' activity and highlights from this process, including any concerns, were reported back to the shareholder committee via this commissioning report and additional arrangements were made if necessary.
- The savings made by the council were made against the High Needs Block (HNB) and the lower cost of operating the school, as opposed to sending pupils to other independent provision out of area, had already made a difference to the expenditure within the HNB.
- The opportunities on site that were opening up were larger, including the opening of the 'schools in schools' programme, which allowed officers to be confident about the school's growth over the coming years.

**NOTED**

## 8. DCoE - Report of the Chair of the Board of Directors

The Chair of the Board introduced the report, which set out the work that had been undertaken by The Dorset Centre for Excellence since its opening, including progress made since the previous board report.

Officers responded to Member comments and requests for clarification, details included:

- The school operated a quality assurance cycle, which sought feedback on rotation from key stakeholders, including pupils, families of pupils and commissioners, to ensure that there was a well-rounded view of what was going well and identify any areas for improvement. Prior to the end of term, both pupils and their families would be sent a survey to ascertain their experiences. If concerns were raised, these were logged, reported to the commissioning team and addressed accordingly.
- The Managing Director was confident that the standards of the school would be maintained based on the business model that was in place, providing that the capital investment programme remained as expected. He further referred to the 'schools within schools' programme, which would allow better management of the site and therefore higher standards for pupils.
- It was important that the school struck the right balance for the use of its facilities between commercial and community uses, and therefore had established a Commercial and community sub-committee with this in mind.
- The school was very community minded and an example of this was the hosting of short break activities which took place during school holidays. The school had also held a community day held last year, which had proven to be successful and was particularly valuable for the families of both existing and potential students. Additionally, a number of community organisations had come forward to enquire about using the site.
- On the commercial side, there was a long-term aim of utilising part of the site as a staff development centre, which could also be used for conferences, but this wasn't currently a priority. The directors were also in the process of exploring options for social care provision in some of the housing buildings on-site with council officers.
- There was a lot of potential on-site and it was very important for the school to ensure that this was utilised to its full potential, but not to the detriment of pupils.
- The development currently being undertaken on-site was a council led project but regular discussions surrounding environmental impact were regularly had, there were some challenges with older buildings and certain elements, but further detail would be provided to Members in due course.
- There were 32 new pupils expected to join the school in September and the arrangements were being finalised for the last two or three pupils.

- The sixth form was expected to have a capacity of 40 pupils, once the site had been fully developed, although this could vary based on the commissioning needs of the school. From September, there would be one class of sixth formers, made up of 8 pupils.
- The ambition to introduce residential social care was a significant item being considered by the commercial and community sub-committee and it was hoped that the directors would be in a position to bring forward proposals in the near future following positive conversations with commissioners and other officers.

**NOTED**

9. **Forward Plan**

The forward plan was noted.

10. **Urgent Items**

There were no urgent items.

11. **Exempt Business**

There was no urgent business.

**Duration of meeting:** 10.03 - 10.57 am

**Chairman**

.....