

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

**MINUTES OF MEETING HELD ON MONDAY 9 DECEMBER 2024**

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

**Apologies:** Cllrs Ryan Hope

**Also present:** Cllr Andrew Parry

**Also present remotely:** Cllr Gill Taylor, Cllr Jane Somper

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

Ian Comfort (Chair of the Dorset Centre of Excellence Board), Alice Deacon (Corporate Director for Commissioning and Partnerships), Paul Dempsey (Executive Director of People - Children), Aidan Dunn (Executive Director - Corporate Development S151), Grace Evans (Head of Legal Services and Deputy Monitoring Officer), Andy Holder (Managing Director), Lesley Mellor (Board Member), Matt Prosser (Chief Executive), Claire Webb (Strategic Commissioner) and Lindsey Watson (Senior Democratic Services Officer)

**23. Minutes**

The Chair noted that Councillor Gill Taylor's name had been spelt incorrectly in the minute relating to the election of a chair for the meeting.

Subject to the above, the minutes of the meeting held on 16 September 2024 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

**24. Declarations of Interest**

There were no declarations of interest.

**25. Public Participation**

There were no questions or statements from members of the public or local organisations.

**26. Councillor Questions**

There were no questions from councillors.

**27. Forward Plan**

The Forward Plan was noted.

## 28. **Dorset Council Commissioner's Report**

The Shareholder Committee received a report of the Strategic Commissioner Education, which provided an overview of the position in relation to delivery by the Dorset Centre of Excellence against the Commissioning agreement.

Councillors considered the issues arising from the report and during discussion the following points were raised:

- Preparations for the next business plan were underway and this would be presented to the meeting in March 2025. This would be included on the committee's forward plan
- An overview of community engagement activities was provided and the importance of the facility being part of the local community was recognised
- Capital budget issues were considered and it was noted that commissioning needs were being reviewed to ensure service requirements were being met. Further information would be available when the business case was considered
- The Strategic Commissioner Education reported that a new classroom facility had been opened on site which had been well received.

The report was NOTED.

## 29. **Report from the Chair of the Board**

The Chair of the Board introduced the report, which provided an update on the current situation at the Dorset Centre of Excellence ("the Company") and the Coombe House School ("the School"). The report included progress made in relation to governance, leadership, staffing, estate, community use and finance.

Councillors considered the report and discussion was focused on the following areas:

- Further information was provided on income and expenditure in relation to the swimming pool on site. The benefits to the children in the school were recognised
- There was a focus on making special educational needs and disability (SEND) provision work for all, with the scale of the challenge having been noted in recent national publications, with radical change recognised to make sure all children were able to thrive. This included making mainstream school more accessible to all children
- New requirements regarding the application of VAT to independent schools, as included in the recent government budget, would not impact the school, as VAT would be charged to Dorset Council who were then able to claim it back
- Impact on the High Needs Block was being considered by government
- Positive feedback from parents and carers was noted and showed an outcome of work undertaken.

The report was NOTED.

30. **Coombe House Annual Performance Report 2024**

The Managing Director (Dorset Centre of Excellence) presented the Coombe House Annual Performance Report 2024. In addition, Board Member, L Mellor (Dorset Centre of Excellence) provided an overview of performance and activities as set out in the report.

Councillors reviewed the annual performance report and discussion was held in the following areas:

- An overview of the broad plans to engage the young people in programmes of employability post-16 and earlier and to look at routes to employment. The school and Dorset Council officers were working in collaboration to ensure the pupils had access to the same opportunities as all other young people. This would include bringing in people to talk to the young people and learning in the community
- The section on green credentials was welcomed
- The achievement of value for money was important and to demonstrate that this was a sustainable and effective model for other local authorities to follow. It was noted that there was wider awareness of the offer and activities in Dorset
- Recruitment and retention were raised, and it was noted that there were no concerns in this area
- Clarification was being sought with the Valuation Office around the business rates liability and a challenge as to whether the organisation should be exempt as a special educational needs school
- There was recognition of what had been achieved at the school in just two and a half years and congratulations and thanks to all involved were given.

The report was COMMENDED.

31. **Urgent Items**

There were no urgent items.

32. **Exempt Business**

There was no exempt business.

**Duration of meeting:** 10.00 - 10.48 am

**Chairman**

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