

SHAREHOLDER COMMITTEE FOR THE DORSET CENTRE OF EXCELLENCE (DCOE)

MINUTES OF MEETING HELD ON MONDAY 9 JUNE 2025

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

Apologies: Cllrs Ryan Hope

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

Ross Bowell (Head of Service - Health, Education & SEND Commissioning), Ian Comfort (Chair of the Dorset Centre of Excellence Board), 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 (Dorset Centre of Excellence Board Director), Frances Nicholson (Dorset Centre of Excellence Board Director), Lindsey Watson (Senior Democratic Services Officer) and Beth Whittaker (Interim Corporate Director for Education and Learning)

1. **Minutes**

The minutes of the meeting held on 10 March 2025 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

2. **Declarations of Interest**

There were no declarations of interest.

3. **Public Participation**

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

4. **Councillor Questions**

There were no questions from councillors.

5. **Forward Plan**

The Forward Plan was noted.

6. **Terms of Reference**

The terms of reference for the shareholder committee were noted.

7. Dorset Council Commissioner's Report

The Shareholder Committee received a report of the Head of Service – Health, Education and SEND Commissioning, which provided an overview of the position in relation to delivery by the Dorset Centre of Excellence (DCoE) against the commissioning agreement.

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

- Good progress was being made in a number of areas and a question was raised as to how progress was measured. In response, it was noted that there were a range of key performance indicators in place, including measures around teaching, attainment, safeguarding, health and safety, finance and corporate. Some of these could be brought forward to the shareholder committee moving forward
- Reference was made in the report to pupils earning valued qualifications and further information was provided at the meeting on how this was being progressed including through the provision of a widening range of subjects
- The school continued to focus on children within the Dorset Council area although there had been interest from neighbouring local authorities, which could be explored further in the future
- There was a discussion around the number of children that could potentially attend the school moving forward, although it was noted that a level of capital investment would be required and that this would need to be carefully managed. Further work was required in this area
- Consideration was given to commercial opportunities in relation to the wider use of the site. Although it was recognised that the priority for the site was for the school and the provision of SEND services, the site needed to be looked at as a wider asset, including longer term plans to generate additional income from the site
- The Executive Director Corporate Development and S151 Officer provided an overview of the key considerations for the council in respect of potential additional capital expenditure at Coombe House and at other locations
- A request was made for a report on the longer-term intentions for the site.

The report was NOTED.

8. 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.

In presenting the report it was noted that work was being undertaken with the children to choose subjects to assist with life beyond school, noted that bespoke solutions could be put in place where required, links being made with parents and the local community and thought being given to the creation of a group of schools with similar characteristics, for the purpose of making comparisons in areas such as attendance and key performance indicators.

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

- Recruitment issues were considered and there was confidence in the position with staffing levels for September
- It was noted that there had been no use of agency staff and that cover was being provided by teachers
- In response to a question regarding the potential use of part of a building on site as a gym, it was noted that there was a current issue with regard to the application of business rates and that the board was engaging with Dorset Council and relevant professionals to consider the issues and options.

The report was NOTED.

9. **Urgent Items**

There were no urgent items.

10. **Exempt Business**

There was no exempt business.

Duration of meeting: 10.00 - 10.40 am

Chairman

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