

SHAREHOLDER COMMITTEE FOR THE DORSET CENTRE OF EXCELLENCE (DCOE)

MINUTES OF MEETING HELD ON MONDAY 15 SEPTEMBER 2025

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

Also present: Cllr Derek Beer

Also present remotely: Cllr Jane Somper

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), Grace Evans (Head of Legal Services and Deputy Monitoring Officer), Andy Holder (Managing Director) and Lindsey Watson (Senior Democratic and Governance Officer)

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

Sean Cremer (Corporate Director for Finance and Commercial) and Alice Deacon (Corporate Director for Commissioning and Partnerships)

11. Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on 9 June 2025 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

12. Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

13. Public Participation

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

14. Councillor Questions

There were no questions from councillors.

15. Forward Plan

The Forward Plan was noted.

16. 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. As additional points, it was noted that the report following the recent Ofsted inspection of the school had been published and it was highlighted that the council and the school were currently working together to develop reporting arrangements for performance indicators, which would be brought to the shareholder committee at future meetings.

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

- The Chair and members of the committee congratulated the school on the outcome of the Ofsted inspection which had rated the overall effectiveness of the school as Good
- The report noted an improving trend in attendance and reduction in unauthorised absence, and it was reported that it reflected a steady trajectory of improvement. There was confidence that the trend would continue to develop. The positive position regarding attendance had been identified in the Ofsted report
- A question with regard to implementation of the business plan and re-profiling associated with phases 3 and 5 would be picked up during discussion of the report from the Chair of the Board
- In response to a question, the Head of Service noted that the school was moving towards reaching the numbers stated in the commissioning agreement.

The report was NOTED.

17. 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 addition, the Chair provided a summary of the key findings of the Ofsted report and in particular noted the ‘Outstanding’ rating in respect of the Personal Development category.

The Managing Director highlighted key successes from the summer period, which included a positive open day for families and a good set of exam results. In addition, he noted that it was hoped to share performance information at the next meeting of the shareholder committee and further information was presented in respect of recent positive annual quality assurance and annual safeguarding review visits by Dorset Council and Wiltshire Council.

A discussion was held with regard to work to implement the approved Business Plan and it was noted that dialogue was ongoing with Dorset Council officers. Reference was made to work being undertaken to reprofile phases and in response to a question, further detail was provided as to the detail of phases 3 (growing site capacity) and 5 (residential proposal). Work was underway to ensure

that the next phases of the required development would best facilitate the company's planned growth and represented value for money for all stakeholders. It was noted that all procurement to date had been managed through Dorset Council, although this was being discussed.

In response to a question relating to increasing the number of children at the school, the Executive Director, People – Children, noted that Coombe House School provided a good educational facility for children that may have previously had to travel further for school, with the associated transport costs for the council. Coombe House School was part of a wider strategy in Dorset and discussions were ongoing in respect of provision at the Dorset Centre of Excellence and also meeting wider needs across the area.

It was noted that there were both children from within and outside of the Dorset Council area attending the school and a point flagged that the Teckal arrangements in place put a restriction on the number of children that could attend the school from outside the area.

Further information on GCSE subject areas provided would be brought to the next meeting of the shareholder committee.

The Executive Director congratulated the school on a very successful period.

The report was NOTED.

18. Urgent Items

There were no urgent items.

19. Exempt Business

There was no exempt business.

Duration of meeting: 10.00 - 10.24 am

Chairman

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