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Shareholder Committee for the Dorset Centre of Excellence (DCOE)

Date: Monday, 15 June 2026
Time: 10.00 am
Venue: Meeting Room 1, County Hall, Dorchester, DT1 1XJ

Members (Quorum: 3)
Cllrs Nick Ireland (Chair), Richard Biggs (Vice-Chair), Simon Clifford, Clare Sutton and Gill Taylor

Chief Executive: Catherine Howe, County Hall, Dorchester, Dorset DT1 1XJ

For more information about this agenda please contact Democratic& Governance Services Meeting Contact lindsey.watson@dorsetcouncil.gov.uk

Members of the public are welcome to attend this meeting, apart from any items listed in the exempt part of this agenda. If you would like to attend this meeting and have any specific requirements please contact the Democratic Services Officer named above.

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Agenda

Item		Pages
1.	**APOLOGIES**	
	To receive any apologies for absence.	
2.	**MINUTES**	5 - 8
	To confirm the minutes of the meeting held on 9 March 2026.	
3.	**DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**	
	To disclose any pecuniary, other registrable or non-registrable interest as set out in the adopted Code of Conduct. In making their disclosure councillors are asked to state the agenda item, the nature of the interest and any action they propose to take as part of their declaration.	

If required, further advice should be sought from the Monitoring Officer in advance of the meeting.

4. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

Representatives of town or parish councils and members of the public who live, work, or represent an organisation within the Dorset Council area are welcome to submit either 1 question or 1 statement for each meeting. You are welcome to attend the meeting in person or via MS Teams to read out your question and to receive the response. If you submit a statement for the committee this will be circulated to all members of the committee in advance of the meeting as a supplement to the agenda and appended to the minutes for the formal record but will not be read out at the meeting. **The first 8 questions and the first 8 statements received from members of the public or organisations for each meeting will be accepted on a first come first served basis in accordance with the deadline set out below.** Further information read Public Participation - Dorset Council

All submissions must be emailed in full to lindsey.watson@dorsetcouncil.gov.uk by 8.30am on 10 June 2026.

When submitting your question or statement please note that:

- You can submit 1 question or 1 statement.
- a question may include a short pre-amble to set the context.
- It must be a single question and any sub-divided questions will not be permitted.
- Each question will consist of no more than 450 words, and you will be given up to 3 minutes to present your question.
- when submitting a question please indicate who the question is for (e.g., the name of the committee or Portfolio Holder)
- Include your name, address, and contact details. Only your name will be published but we may need your other details to contact you about your question or statement in advance of the meeting.
- questions and statements received in line with the council's rules for public participation will be published as a supplement to the agenda.
- all questions, statements and responses will be published in full within the minutes of the meeting.

5. COUNCILLOR QUESTIONS

To receive questions submitted by councillors.

Councillors can submit up to two valid questions at each meeting and sub divided questions count towards this total. Questions and statements received will be published as a supplement to the agenda and all questions, statements and responses will be published in full within the minutes of the meeting.

The submissions must be emailed in full to lindsey.watson@dorsetcouncil.gov.uk by 8.30am on 10 June 2026.

Dorset Council Constitution – Procedure Rule 13

6. REVIEW OF TERMS OF REFERENCE 9 - 14

To note the shareholder committee terms of reference.

7. FORWARD PLAN 15 - 20

To consider the Forward Plan.

8. DORSET COUNCIL COMMISSIONER'S REPORT 21 - 24

To consider a report of the Head of Service – Health, Education and SEND Commissioning.

9. DCOE - REPORT OF THE CHAIR OF THE BOARD 25 - 28

To consider a report of the Chair of the Board.

10. URGENT ITEMS

To consider any items of business which the Chair has had prior notification and considers to be urgent pursuant to section 100B (4) (b) of the Local Government Act 1972. The reason for the urgency shall be recorded in the minutes.

11. EXEMPT BUSINESS

To consider passing the following recommendation:

Recommendation

That in accordance with Section 100A(4) of the Local Government Act 1972 to exclude the public from the meeting for the business specified in item(s) No 12 because it is likely that if members of the public were present there would be disclosure to them of exempt information as defined in paragraph(s) 3 of Part 1 of schedule 12A to the Act and the public interest in withholding the information outweighs the public interest in disclosing the information to the public.

The public and the press will be asked to leave the meeting whilst the item of business is considered. (Any live streaming will end at this juncture).

Reason for taking the item in private

Paragraph 3 - Information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the authority holding that information).

12. **Future site options** 29 - 600
Para 3
To consider an exempt report.

SHAREHOLDER COMMITTEE FOR THE DORSET CENTRE OF EXCELLENCE (DCOE)

MINUTES OF MEETING HELD ON MONDAY 9 MARCH 2026

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

Present remotely: Cllrs Gill Taylor

Apologies: Cllrs Ryan Hope

Others 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), Jen Furnell (Corporate Director for Education and Learning), Andy Holder (Managing Director), Lesley Mellor (Board Member), Frances Nicholson (Board Member), 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)

30. **Minutes**

The minutes of the meeting held on 1 December 2025 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

31. **Declarations of Interest**

There were no declarations of interest.

32. **Public Participation**

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

33. **Councillor Questions**

There were no questions from councillors.

34. **Forward Plan**

The Forward Plan was noted.

35. **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. In addition, the report provided an update on the review of the longer-term intentions for the Coombe House School site.

In presenting the report, the Head of Service reported that the focus of the commissioning work was working with the company and the school to oversee the core operation of the contract. Performance against the contract continued to align with the good Ofsted report that had been received and Dorset Council officers continued to meet with the company around the wider operations, which included work related to the green agenda and working towards full capacity of the school. It was noted that 145 of the 152 places were currently filled, which represented a continued upward trajectory.

The Executive Director, Children reported that an options appraisal report was due to be available from the end of March and that a report would be brought to the shareholder committee at the June meeting.

The report was NOTED.

36. **DCoE - Report of 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, the Chair of the Board noted that the school was close to its target capacity and provided further information on discussions taking place with representatives from the local community regarding the provision of community facilities and how leisure facilities could be structured moving forward.

The Managing Director ran through the areas covered by the report and made particular reference to government guidance on the use of mobile phones in schools, the use of reasonable force, work being undertaken with Dorset Transport and grant funding achieved for environmental works. In addition he noted that the school welcomed opportunities to engage and work together with Dorset Council in respect of the recent Government White Paper on school reform.

Councillors reviewed the report and points were noted in the following areas:

- A discussion was held in respect of the use of mobile phones in school, following guidance published by Government and also Dorset Council, and it was noted that the school would be launching a new approach in April. Communications had been undertaken with young people and their families, and feedback could be provided at a future meeting. Early points raised were around the use of mobile phones during travel to school and the ability for children to be able to contact home during the day if required. Consideration was being given to how the new approach would be managed

- Support being provided to pupils considering their transition to Post-16 education was raised and it was noted that pupils had the opportunity to make an informed choice about whether to stay at Coombe House or transition to another college
- The significant impact of ‘Therapeutic Thinking’, the new framework for a relational approach to meeting individual pupil needs, was noted
- A discussion was held with regard to financial aspects and budget setting for the next financial year and how issues including travel costs and recent world events would impact on the business model. It was recognised that some as these aspects were very recent and therefore had not been factored in currently. The Managing Director provided information on work being undertaken including maximising the use of sustainable energies and ensuring there were contingencies built into budgets. The Chair of the Board noted that the finance committee would be considering all aspects of this area
- The transport of children to the school was a cost for Dorset Council, but close working continued between the company, school and Dorset Council to find efficiencies in this area
- It was recognised that there were opportunities arising from the recent Government White Paper, including how the school could provide support to other schools across the region
- The company continued to work with Wiltshire Council to maximise the environmental and broader benefit from the Farming in Protected Landscapes (FIPL) grant funding.

The report was NOTED.

37. **Urgent Items**

There were no urgent items.

38. **Exempt Business**

There was no exempt business.

Duration of meeting: 10.00 - 10.25 am

Chairman

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THE SHAREHOLDER COMMITTEE FOR THE DORSET CENTRE OF EXCELLENCE

7.1 Role/Terms of Reference and Membership

a. The Dorset Centre of Excellence Shareholder Committee shall be primarily responsible for the following delegated functions except where specific functions have been delegated to an Officer:
   - monitoring the performance of the DCOE (including in relation to Business Plans and associated budgets);
   - monitor the business affairs, finances, and accounts of the DCOE;
   - overseeing the strategic direction of the DCOE or proposed and adopted business plans and budgets for future years to be presented in draft as they are developed or the review of future service developments and opportunities;
   - considering the risks and opportunities faced by the DCOE and impact on the Council (including, for example, in relation to commercial factors, governance issues, and health and safety records);
   - monitoring DCOE compliance with relevant legislation;
   - assuring that DCOE status as a 'Teckal' company is maintained;
   - taking decisions that relate to any matter identified as being reserved to be taken by the Shareholder ("Council Consent" matters) listed within Appendix 1, within the Articles of Associations and/or the Shareholder Agreement for the DCOE.
   - Provided that where a decision affects the Council budgetary framework the Shareholder Committee will consider the decision and provide a recommendation to Full Council.
   - exercising the Shareholders reserve power by Special Resolution (in accordance with item 5 of the Articles of Association).
   - reporting and making recommendations to the Cabinet on areas outside of the Shareholder Committee's delegated authority.
   - reporting to Cabinet annually on the performance of the trading activities of the DCOE.
   - reviewing these Terms of Reference annually and make any necessary recommendations to Cabinet.

b. The Shareholder Committee will not have operational control over the DCOE. All decisions regarding the day-to-day operation and management of DCOE rests the DCOE board of directors, which must ensure that DCOE business is conducted in accordance with the terms of the Shareholders' Agreement entered into between the Council and DCOE (Shareholders' Agreement) and in accordance with DCOE articles of association.

c. The Shareholder Committee shall comprise of 5 Members drawn from the Cabinet to be appointed by the Leader of the Council/Cabinet.

d. The quorum of the Shareholder Committee shall be 3 Members.

e. There shall be no power to appoint substitutes to the Shareholder Committee.

f. The Chief Executive, Section 151 Officer, Monitoring officer and Executive Director People – Children (or their nominees) will be advisors to the Shareholder Committee. Additional advisors and DCOE officers and directors may be invited to attend the Shareholder Committee as required.

7.1.2 Appointment of Chair and Vice-Chair

The Leader of the Council/Cabinet will appoint the Chair and Vice-Chair of the Shareholder Committee.

7.1.3 Meetings

a. The number of ordinary meetings of the Shareholder Committee each year will normally be quarterly unless otherwise determined by the Leader of the Council.

b. The Chair of the Shareholder Committee shall have the power to call one or more special meeting(s) of the Shareholder Committee.

c. The Chair of the Shareholder Committee may determine that a meeting should be cancelled for insufficient business.

7.1.4 Delegated Powers and powers of recommendation of the Shareholder Committee

a. The Shareholder Committee shall have the powers as set out in Functions of the Council - Part 3(1) of the Constitution.

b. For the avoidance of doubt the Shareholder Committee can delegate any of their powers to any Officer.

7.1.5 Council Consent Matters (Shareholder Agreement Schedule 1) Set out in appendix 1 below.

Appendix 1

THE SHAREHOLDER COMMITTEE FOR THE DORSET CENTRE OF EXCELLENCE

Council Consent Matters (Shareholder Agreement Schedule 1)

1 No Company shall, unless it has Council Consent:

1.1 vary in any respect its articles of association or the rights attaching to any of its shares/ members; or

1.2 appoint any person as a director of the Company; or

1.3 permit the registration of any person as a member/ shareholder of the Company; or

1.4 issue any loan capital or enter into any commitment with any person with respect to the issue of any loan capital; or

1.5 make any borrowing; or

1.6 propose that its members pass any resolution for its winding up or present any petition for its administration (unless the Company has become insolvent); or

1.7 engage in any business other than as set out in the Company's Business Plan or defraying any monies other than in good faith for the purposes of or in connection with the carrying on of such business; or

1.8 form any Subsidiary or acquire shares in any other company or participate in any partnership or joint venture (incorporated or not); or

1.9 amalgamate or merge with any other company or business undertaking; or

1.10 alter its name or registered office; or

1.11 enter into any transaction or arrangement of any nature whatsoever with any of the Company's members or directors or any person who is connected (within the meaning of sections 1122 and 1123 of the Corporation Tax Act 2010) to any of its members or directors whether or not any other person shall be party to such transaction or arrangement; or

1.12 enter into any arrangement, contract, or transaction outside the normal course of the Company's Business or otherwise than on arm's length terms; or

1.13 create or permit to be created any mortgage, charge, encumbrance, or other security interest whatsoever on any asset or its business in whole or in part; or

1.14 adopt or amend its annual Business Plan save in accordance with clause 2.4 of the Shareholder Agreement, or enter into any contract or commitment not provided for in the Business Plan under which it may incur costs in excess of £100,000; or

1.15 change its financial year end; or

1.16 make any loan (otherwise than by way of deposit with a bank or other institution the normal business of which includes the acceptance of deposits) or grant any credit (other than in the normal course of trading); or

1.17 give any guarantee, suretyship, or indemnity to secure the liability of any person or assume the obligations of any person; or

1.18 factor or assign any of the book debts of the Company; or 1.19 establish or amend any profit-sharing, share option, bonus, or other incentive scheme of any nature for directors, officers, or employees; or

1.20 establish or amend any pension scheme or grant any pension rights to any director, officer, employee, former director, officer or employee, or any member of any such person's family other than in accordance with the Remuneration Policy; or

1.21 dismiss any director, officer, or employee in circumstances in which it incurs or agrees to bear redundancy or other costs in excess of £10,000; or

1.22 agree to remunerate (by payment of fees, the provision of benefits-in-kind or otherwise) any director, employee or consultant to the Company save in accordance with the Remuneration Policy; or

1.23 make any agreement with any revenue or tax authorities or make any claim, disclaimer, election, or consent exceeding £25,000 for tax purposes in relation to the Company or its business; or

1.24 breach the terms of the Company's Code of Conduct; or

1.25 issue or allot any share capital; or

1.26 amend, in any material respect, the terms and conditions on which any employee of the Company is employed, save in accordance with the Remuneration Policy; or

1.27 change the nature of the Business or commence any new business by any Group Member which is not ancillary or incidental to the Business; or

1.28 make or permit to be made any change in the accounting policies and principles adopted in the preparation of its audited or management accounts except as may be required to ensure compliance with relevant accounting standards under the Companies Act 2006 or any other generally accepted accounting principles in the United Kingdom; or

1.29 appoint or remove the Chair; or

1.30 institute, settle or compromise any material legal proceedings instituted or threatened against it or submitting any dispute to arbitration or alternative dispute resolution, save in relation to any legal proceedings, arbitration or alternative dispute resolution between the Company and the Council; or

1.31 make any acquisition, disposal, or structural modifications of any material asset(s), leases, or land interests; or

1.32 allow any of its employees, agents, or officers to reside within the premises unless specified within the service contract between the Council and the Parent Company; or

1.33 give notice of termination of any arrangements, contracts, or transactions in excess of £50,000 in value, or materially vary any such arrangements, contracts, or transactions; or

1.34 consent to proceed with capital development of any material asset(s) such as on the land it operates; or

1.35 enter into an agreement to do any of the above.

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The Shareholder Committee for the Dorset Centre of Excellence (DCOE) Forward Plan
June to September 2026
(Publication date – 14 MAY 2026)

Explanatory Note:
This Forward Plan contains future items to be considered by the Shareholder Committee for the Dorset Centre of Excellence. It is published 28 days before the next meeting of the Committee. The plan includes items for the meeting including key decisions. Each item shows if it is 'open' to the public or to be considered in a private part of the meeting.

Definition of Key Decisions
Key decisions are defined in Dorset Council's Constitution as decisions which are likely to -

(a) to result in the relevant local authority incurring expenditure which is, or the making of savings which are, significant having regard to the relevant local authority's budget for the service or function to which the decision relates (***Thresholds - £500k***); or
(b) to be significant in terms of its effects on communities living or working in an area comprising two or more wards or electoral divisions in the area of the relevant local authority."

In determining the meaning of *"significant"* for these purposes the Council will have regard to any guidance issued by the Secretary of State in accordance with section 9Q of the Local Government Act 2000 Act. Officers will consult with lead members to determine significance and sensitivity.

Committee Membership 2026/27

Cllr Nick Ireland – Leader of the Council and Cabinet Member for Climate, Performance and Safeguarding
Cllr Richard Biggs – Deputy Leader of the Council and Cabinet Member for Property & Assets and Economic Growth
Cllr Simon Clifford – Cabinet Member for Finance and Capital Strategy
Cllr Clare Sutton – Cabinet Member for Children's Services, Education & Skills
Cllr Gill Taylor – Cabinet Member for Health and Housing

Subject / Decision	Decision Maker	Date the Decision is Due	Cabinet Member	Officer Contact
June 2026				
Dorset Council Delegated Decisions (if required) **Key Decision** - No **Public Access - Open** To note any decisions taken under delegation.	**Decision Maker Shareholder Committee for the Dorset Centre of Excellence (DCOE)**	**Decision Date 15 Jun 2026**	Cabinet Member for Children's Services, Education and Skills	*Executive Director - Children's Services (Paul Dempsey)*
Dorset Council Commissioner's Report **Key Decision** - No **Public Access - Part exempt** To provide an overview of the current position in relation to delivery by the Dorset Centre of Excellence against the commissioning agreement.	**Decision Maker Shareholder Committee for the Dorset Centre of Excellence (DCOE)**	**Decision Date 15 Jun 2026**	Cabinet Member for Children's Services, Education and Skills	*Ross Bowell, Head of Service - Health, Education & SEND Commissioning ross.bowell@dorsetcouncil.gov.uk* *Executive Director - Children's Services (Paul Dempsey)*
DCoE - Report of the Chair of the Board **Key Decision** - No **Public Access - Part exempt** To provide an update of the	**Decision Maker Shareholder Committee for the Dorset Centre of Excellence (DCOE)**	**Decision Date 15 Jun 2026**	Cabinet Member for Children's Services, Education and Skills	*Chair, Dorset Centre of Excellence* *Executive Director - Children's Services (Paul Dempsey)*

Subject / Decision	Decision Maker	Date the Decision is Due	Cabinet Member	Officer Contact
current situation at the Dorset Centre of Excellence and the Coombe House School, including progress made in relation to governance, leadership, staffing, estate, community use and finance.				
Review of Terms of Reference **Key Decision** - No **Public Access** - **Open** To note the shareholder committee terms of reference.	**Decision Maker Shareholder Committee for the Dorset Centre of Excellence (DCOE)**	**Decision Date 15 Jun 2026**	Leader and Cabinet Member for Climate, Performance and Safeguarding	*Grace Evans, Head of Legal Services and Deputy Monitoring Officer grace.evans@dorsetcouncil.gov.uk*
Future site options **Key Decision** - Yes **Public Access** - **Fully exempt** To consider future options for the site.	**Decision Maker Shareholder Committee for the Dorset Centre of Excellence (DCOE)**	**Decision Date 15 Jun 2026**	Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Property & Assets and Economic Growth, Cabinet Member for Children's Services, Education and Skills, Cabinet Member for Finance & Capital Strategy	*Chief Executive, Director - Resources (Section 151 Officer), Executive Director - Children's Services (Paul Dempsey), Executive Director - Regeneration, Infrastructure and Growth (Jan Britton)*

Subject / Decision	Decision Maker	Date the Decision is Due	Cabinet Member	Officer Contact
September 2026				
Dorset Council Delegated Decisions (if required) **Key Decision** - No **Public Access - Open** To note any decisions taken under delegation.	**Decision Maker Shareholder Committee for the Dorset Centre of Excellence (DCOE)**	**Decision Date 14 Sep 2026**	Cabinet Member for Children's Services, Education and Skills	*Executive Director - Children's Services (Paul Dempsey)*
Dorset Council Commissioner's Report **Key Decision** - No **Public Access - Part exempt** To provide an overview of the current position in relation to delivery by the Dorset Centre of Excellence against the commissioning agreement.	**Decision Maker Shareholder Committee for the Dorset Centre of Excellence (DCOE)**	**Decision Date 14 Sep 2026**	Cabinet Member for Children's Services, Education and Skills	*Ross Bowell, Head of Service - Health, Education & SEND Commissioning ross.bowell@dorsetcouncil.gov.uk Executive Director - Children's Services (Paul Dempsey)*
DCoE - Report of the Chair of the Board **Key Decision** - No **Public Access - Part exempt** To provide an update of the current situation at the Dorset	**Decision Maker Shareholder Committee for the Dorset Centre of Excellence (DCOE)**	**Decision Date 14 Sep 2026**	Cabinet Member for Children's Services, Education and Skills	*Chair, Dorset Centre of Excellence Executive Director - Children's Services (Paul Dempsey)*

Subject / Decision	Decision Maker	Date the Decision is Due	Cabinet Member	Officer Contact
Centre of Excellence and the Coombe House School, including progress made in relation to governance, leadership, staffing, estate, community use and finance.				
Annual Reports				
Review of Terms of Reference (June) **Key Decision** - No **Public Access - Open** To note the shareholder committee terms of reference.	**Decision Maker Shareholder Committee for the Dorset Centre of Excellence (DCOE)**	**Decision Date**	Leader and Cabinet Member for Climate, Performance and Safeguarding	*Grace Evans, Head of Legal Services and Deputy Monitoring Officer grace.evans@dorsetcouncil.gov.uk*
Annual Performance Report (December) **Key Decision** - No **Public Access - Open** To consider the Coombe House Annual Performance Report.	**Decision Maker Shareholder Committee for the Dorset Centre of Excellence (DCOE)**	**Decision Date**	Cabinet Member for Children's Services, Education and Skills	*Executive Director - Children's Services (Paul Dempsey)*

Private/Exempt Items for Decision
Each item in the plan above marked as 'private' will refer to one of the following paragraphs.

1. Information relating to any individual.
2. Information which is likely to reveal the identity of an individual.
3. Information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the authority holding that information).
4. Information relating to any consultations or negotiations, or contemplated consultations or negotiations, in connection with any labour relations matter arising between the authority or a Minister of the Crown and employees of, or office holders under, the authority.
5. Information in respect of which a claim to legal professional privilege could be maintained in legal proceedings.
6. Information which reveals that the shadow council proposes:-
   (a) to give under any enactment a notice under or by virtue of which requirements are imposed on a person; or
   (b) to make an order or direction under any enactment.
7. Information relating to any action taken or to be taken in connection with the prevention, investigation or prosecution of crime.

The Shareholder Committee for the Dorset Centre of Excellence

15 June 2026

Dorset Council Commissioner's Report

For Review and Consultation

Cabinet Member:
Cllr C Sutton, Children's Services, Education & Skills

Local Councillor(s):

Senior Leadership Team:
P Dempsey, Executive Director of People - Children

Report author and job title: Ross Bowell, Head of Service – Health, Education and SEND Commissioning

Email: ross.bowell@dorsetcouncil.gov.uk

Statutory Authority: N/A

Report status: Public (the exemption paragraph is N/A)

1. **Executive summary**

1.1 This report provides an overview of the current position in relation to delivery by the Dorset Centre of Excellence (DCOE) against the commissioning agreement.

2. **Recommendation(s)**

2.1 Shareholders are asked to note the report.

3. **Reason for the recommendation(s)**

3.1 The report is to note as there are no Shareholder decisions required.

4. **The report**

3.1 This report provides an overview of the current position in relation to delivery by the DCOE against the commissioning agreement.

3.2 The Dorset Centre of Excellence Commissioning Group, which includes senior officers from Corporate Development, Place and Children's Services, continues to oversee Council activity in relation to DCOE.

3.3 Recent quarterly commissioner reports have reported positive progress in the performance of Coombe House School as summarised in the Annual Performance report presented to the December Shareholder Committee meeting and as recognised through the recent Good OFSTED report which evidences strong performance as well as the governance to sustain high standards and continue to make further improvements. There is no material change to this assessment to report in this quarter.

3.4 Attendance continues to rise, reaching 77% in Spring 2026, which is up from 75% in Autumn 2025 and 69% in Spring 2025. Work is underway to improve reporting on the timeliness of EHCP annual reviews; this is to ensure completeness of routine assurance rather than in response to a specific commissioning concern. We are working with the school's leadership and practice colleagues to improve the referral process to ensure timely responses to consultations.

3.5 Regular contract review meetings continue between the Managing Director of DCOE and the Strategic Commissioner for Education, focused on the performance of CHS and on development of service to meet identified and emerging needs, with the spring 2026 review having taken place on 19 May.

3.6 The review noted that CHS continues with a strong focus on high aspirations, progress and reintegration into mainstream where appropriate, notably at post 16. Recent activity to support this (and demonstrating good work against the Gatsby Benchmarks) includes a careers & apprenticeship show, and employer visits and talks in school. The implementation of Therapeutic Thinking continues, supporting practice and curriculum delivery.

3.7 DCOE continues to find opportunities for community activities, the most recent example being the open farm event on 7 June which is a charity event that will enable the local community to see how the farm has been created as well as promoting understanding and visibility of CHS in the local community.

3.8 Aligning with the council's priority of responding to the climate and nature crisis, it is pleasing to report that the school's renewable energy infrastructure, including solar panels and biomass systems, is now operating reliably, resulting in RHI payments for contributions to the National Grid and that there is ongoing woodland management aimed at restoring traditional English woodland, with the initiative expected to be cost neutral but beneficial for the environment and educational engagement.

3.9 As of 20 May, there are 142 children on roll of whom 140 are Dorset Council placements against the current commissioned capacity for Dorset pupils of 152, with 16 confirmed starters for September, 7 placements in progress and further consultations in progress. The expectation is that, allowing for leavers, the school will be close to or at capacity in September.

4. **Alternative options considered**

5.1 Not applicable.

5. **Legal considerations**

5.1 There are no specific legal considerations arising from this report.

6. **Financial implications**

7.1 There are no specific financial implications arising from this report.

8. **Natural environment, climate & ecology implications**

8.1 There are no specific natural environment, climate & ecology implications arising from this report.

9. **Well-being and health implications**

9.1 There are no specific wellbeing and health implications arising from this report.

10. **Other implications**

10.1 There are no other implications arising from this report.

11. **Risk implications**

11.1 There are no specific risk implications arising from this report.

12. Equalities

12.1 An Equality Impact Assessment is not required.

13. **Background papers**

13.1 N/A

14. **Report sign-off**

14.1 This report has been through the internal report clearance process and has been signed off by the Director for Legal and Democratic (Monitoring Officer), the Executive Director for Corporate Development (Section 151 Officer) and the appropriate Portfolio Holder(s)

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Dorset Centre of Excellence Shareholder Committee

15 June 2026

Report from Chair of Board

For Review and Consultation

Report Author: Ian Comfort
Title: Director and Chair, Dorset Centre of Excellence Ltd

Report Status: Public

Brief Summary:

This report provides an update on the current situation at the Dorset Centre of Excellence ("the Company") and the Coombe House School ("the School"). It considers progress made in relation to governance, leadership, staffing, estate, community use and finance.

The Shareholder is asked to note the content of this report and to continue its support for the Company.

Reason for Recommendation:

The Board, in collaboration with colleagues from Dorset Council, continues to make progress towards its objectives. The Board is mindful that the ongoing support of Dorset Council to deliver the next phases of growth required to deliver the business plan through cooperation with the Council is ensuring the viability of the Company.

1. **Background**

1.1 The Company continues to perform well against its business plan, growing the pupil roll of Coombe House School, improving its quality and developing its wider commercial and community offer.

2. **Coombe House School**

2.1 Coombe House School (the School) continues to successfully grow its pupil roll in partnership with Council commissioners. Plans to manage the intake for the new 2026/27 academic year are well-advanced. Additional spaces have been created as a result of some of our post 16 pupils developing plans to transition to less-supported placements in mainstream colleges. The Company considers this to be a positive outcome and the impact of the positive work of the School.

2.2 The School is experiencing another positive season of its pupils sitting external examinations. Some pupils are being entered for accreditation for the first time. We look forward to the results being published.

2.3 A range of extra-curricular activities are being planned. With the School's first residential trip taking place in June 2026, along with trips to Longleat in partnership with the Rotary Club, and expeditions as part of the Duke of Edinburgh scheme.

2.4 The annual Summer Sports Day events are being planned, with personalised, differentiated activities allowing the vast majority of our pupils to engage and thrive.

2.5 The School is managing the recent changes to statutory and non-statutory guidance updated by central government. Updates to the guidance surrounding the Independent School Standards are being implemented, along with changes to the guidance surrounding the use of mobile phones in schools, and the use of physical interventions in educational settings.

3. **White Paper**

3.1 The Company continues to interpret the implications of the SEND White Paper and is working closely with the Council to plan for the upcoming changes.

3.2 Opportunities to support the Council with their implementation plans are being explored. To this end, the Company is pleased to have been invited to be part of the Dorset Inclusive Education Alliance, where it hopes it can be an effective partner in the development and implementation of the Local SEND Reform Plan.

4. **Commercial and Community Activities**

4.1 On 7 June 2026 Coombe House Farm is participating in 'Open Farm Sunday', a national scheme allowing free access to farming environments for local communities. Various workshops, educational trails and family-focussed activities have been planned.

4.2 Work to further the community access to our leisure facilities, with successful swim school pilots allowing high quality swim tuition for the local community being reviewed.

5. **Business Plan Implementation**

5.1 The Company has welcomed the opportunities to contribute to the forward planning for the Coombe House campus, which is required for it to implement the next stage of its business plan.

6. **HR**

6.1 The Company is currently recruiting for September 2026, which for educational organisations is typically one of the busiest times for starters and leavers.

6.2 The Company continues to carefully monitor staff engagement and was pleased that its recent staff survey showed an improvement in this metric over time.

6.3 The HR team have successfully led a series of line management training sessions, which have been well received and are proving impactful.

7. **Financial Implications**

7.1 The Company ended the 2025/26 financial year ahead of budget and forecast, continuing a now established pattern of strong financial management.

7.2 The independent audit of our year-end accounts has begun with the on-site element taking place in June 2026. Once published, the findings will be shared in line with the Shareholder Agreement.

7.3 The Company continues to demonstrate its commitment to offer high quality and excellent value when delivering services to the Council.

8. **Natural Environment, Climate & Ecology Implications**

8.1 Work to further benefit from the Farming in Protected Landscapes (FIPL) grant funding managed by Wiltshire Council continues to progress. Using this funding, Coombe House Farm has installed rainwater harvesting, additional polytunnels and wooden cabins to provide working spaces for both pupils at Coombe House School and members of the community.

8.2 The Company continues to explore partnerships to optimise the management of its forests and woodlands. Commissioning a land agent and re-applying for the necessary felling licences will allow for works to commence that will increase the biodiversity and sustainability of these important environments.

8.3 The Company’s use of its solar and biomass provisions has increased as the servicing and maintenance of these becomes more efficient.

8.4 The Company is reviewing the impact of the apparent increase in the regularity of ‘extreme heat events’ and works it may need to commission to ensure that any necessary adaptations are implemented.

9. **Well-being and Health Implications**

9.1 The Company continues to prioritise the health and wellbeing of the members of its community and carefully monitors the feedback we receive in this regard.

10. **Other Implications**

10.1 No other implications have been identified.

11. **Risk Assessment**

11.1 HAVING CONSIDERED: the risks associated with this decision; the level of risk has been identified as:

Current Risk: Medium
Residual Risk: Low

12. **Equalities Impact Assessment**

12.1 The Board has not conducted an Equalities Impact Assessment for this report.

13. **Appendices**

13.1 None

14. **Background Papers**

14.1 None

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