

SHAREHOLDER COMMITTEE FOR THE DORSET CENTRE OF EXCELLENCE (DCOE)

MINUTES OF MEETING HELD ON MONDAY 14 SEPTEMBER 2026

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

Apologies: Cllrs Nick Ireland

Also present: Cllr Derek Beer

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

Ian Comfort (Chair of the Dorset Centre of Excellence Board), 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 (Director - Resources (Section 151 Officer))

VICE-CHAIR IN THE CHAIR

Due to the Chair of the shareholder committee having given apologies for the meeting, the Vice-chair, R Biggs, chaired the meeting.

12. Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on 15 June 2026 were agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

13. Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

14. Public Participation

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

15. Councillor Questions

There were no questions from councillors.

16. Forward Plan

The Forward Plan was noted.

17. **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.

The Managing Director provided an overview of the issues covered in the report, which included an update on GCSE and other qualifications achieved by pupils over the summer and the school’s requirement to balance the needs of pupils attending a special needs school, with the aspiration for pupils to take and achieve qualifications. An update was provided on pupil turnover including transition to post-16 education, some to mainstream settings, and further information and analysis would be available for the next meeting of the shareholder committee. Other areas covered by the report included a note on the participation of the Managing Director at a meeting of the Dorset Inclusive Education Alliance to discuss how the wider educational system could serve all children in Dorset, adventurous experiences offered to pupils and to note that the accounts would be presented to the shareholder committee at the next meeting.

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

- In response to a question relating to pupils transitioning to mainstream education, the Managing Director noted that the single common factor was that this was driven by a high motivation in the young person
- The school had a rich offer of Key Stage 4 subjects, which included Maths, English and humanities. Where possible, the school would consider the passions of the pupils in determining available courses. The size of cohort in school presented some challenges in this area and there was an aspiration to look at ways to find individual approaches to subject provision
- A request was made for financial information to be made available as soon as possible
- The Director of Resources noted that there were ongoing discussions regarding some technical points relating to the wider group structure for council owned companies. Once this had been concluded, the position for the Dorset Centre of Excellence could be confirmed
- The Chair of the Board confirmed that the draft financial information would be made available to members of the shareholder committee
- In response to a question regarding the position with NEETs (young people ‘Not in Education, Employment or Training’), a programme of check-ins with young people were undertaken to see how they were getting on over time and the school could assist with any queries. The role of other responsible organisations in enabling young people to access post-16 education was also noted
- In response to a question from D Beer, the Managing Director provided an update on work to look at future options including the potential for progression of community use on site. It was hoped that more clarity could be provided in the next phase of work in this area.

The report was NOTED.

18. **Urgent Items**

The Chair noted that there was one item of urgent business. The report 'Dorset Council Commissioner's Report' had been received past the standard deadline for agenda publication. The Chair had agreed to add the item to the agenda to ensure timely dissemination of information to members.

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.

Following discussion at the last meeting of the shareholder committee on future site options, the Corporate Director for Education and Learning provided an update on work undertaken to progress the recommendations which had been made and subsequently agreed by Cabinet. A further update would be provided at the next meeting of the shareholder committee, which would cover progress relating to all three recommendations.

In addition, the Corporate Director provided an overview of the areas covered by the report which included continuing regular contract review meetings, detail of an educational practice review which had taken place over the summer, which had provided positive assurance, detail on attendance levels including hot weather measures undertaken, admissions and transition arrangements being finalised for the new school year and a community farm event that had been held.

The report was NOTED.

19. **Exempt Business**

There was no exempt business.

Duration of meeting: 10.00 - 10.26 am

Chairman

.....