

Shareholder Committee Dorset Centre of Excellence

13 March 2023

Commissioner's Report

For Review and Consultation

Portfolio Holder: Cllr A Parry, Children, Education, Skills and Early Help

Local Councillor(s): Cllr

Executive Director: T Leavy, Executive Director of People - Children

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Report Status: Public

Brief Summary:

This report provides an overview of the current position in relation to the enhanced cooperation between Dorset Council and the Dorset Centre of Excellence (DCOE) and the progress made in the recovery plan previously described in earlier meetings.

Recommendation:

Shareholders are asked to note the progress made and support the continued cooperation between the council and the Dorset Centre of Excellence.

Reason for Recommendation:

Following initial challenges with the opening of Coombe House school, progress continues to be sustained enabling the company to begin focusing on welcoming more children to the school and consider the wider use of the site.

1. Introduction

1.1 This report provides an overview of the current position in relation to the enhanced cooperation between Dorset Council and the Dorset Centre of

Excellence (DCOE) and the progress made in the recovery plan previously described in earlier meetings.

- 1.2 Regular contract review meetings have continued focused on tracking the recovery plan, with continued engagement between the Managing Director of DCOE and the Strategic Commissioner for SEND and Commissioner attendance at the Board has continued. Regular operational meetings are in place to support conversations about individual children and to plan for additional children to join the school in the summer term.
- 1.3 The Managing Director has updated the recovery plan and commissioners are assured that this covers appropriate matters and progress is being reported through the fortnightly contract review meetings. Although early days for the new leadership team, they are making progress against priority issues, including:
 - Leadership of staff and development of positive and stable culture
 - Improved sickness absence rate
 - Implementation of a staff retention plan
 - Support to employees through regular meeting cycles
- 1.4 A new permanent experienced headteacher started at the end of January and this is having a positive impact, enabling the Managing Director to focus on the development of the company as a whole. An experienced deputy head teacher has been appointed and will take up their role after May half term.
- 1.5 The most recent school safeguarding monitoring visit conducted by Dorset Council Safeguarding and Standards Advisor (undertaken in January 2023) reviewed all areas of safeguarding practice. The visit showed significant progress made and noted the wealth of experience that the Managing Director brings and the support that is being offered to the Designated Safeguarding Leads in the school to ensure they are equipped to fulfil that role.
- 1.6 DCOE submitted an action plan to the Department of Education following the unannounced inspection in line with the guidance for Independent Schools and progress is tracked through contract review meetings. The company is focused on preparations for a full Ofsted Inspection, which in line with regulations, will be completed by the regulator within the first year of operation.

- 1.7 Work is progressing on the development of a suite of indicators that will enable full oversight of all contract Key Performance Indicators as outlined in the service specification. Reporting at contract review meetings includes the progress of individual pupils and in particular the response of the school to children who had previously experienced challenges. Examples of this include the implementation of creative curriculum, including more offsite activity and evidence of good engagement by children.
- 1.8 The DCOE board continues to meet regularly. On-boarding of the Non-Executive Directors approved at the last board has taken place and sub-committees are meeting regularly, with the re-establishment of the finance committee.
- 1.9 The enhanced co-operation agreement remains in place, however the level of officer involvement from Dorset Council is reducing as the Company's leadership team strengthens. A summary of the position against each is provided below:
 - Fortnightly contract reviews continue
 - Regular operational meetings continue but are not required weekly
 - Admissions process – joint working is taking place to identify new pupils for the summer term and beyond
 - On-site presence of DC officers – this is at the levels expected
 - Commissioner attendance at the Board continues
 - Joint approach to complaints and communications – DCOE now take the leadership on these issues, with support from DC if required
 - Recruitment activity – this is now led and owned by DCOE
 - Support offer – all DC support offered was accepted and action taken as a result
- 1.10 Plans are now being developed for the building works required for Phase 2 of the development of the site.

2. **Financial Implications**

- 2.1 Following the decision to focus on Coombe House school and to slow down growth in pupil numbers work has been ongoing to reprofile the growth plan for the school. This modelling continues to be refined but is slower than in the original business plan and this will have an ongoing impact on pace of the High Needs Block Reduction Strategy.

2.2 Council officers continue to work alongside the company on business development opportunities on the rest of the site, including children's residential care, and to develop a timeline for implementation as agreed at the previous Shareholder Committee. A revised Business Plan will be submitted for decision by Shareholders at the June Committee meeting.

3. Environmental Implications

None identified at this stage.

4. Well-being and Health Implications

The health, safety and wellbeing of children and employees is of paramount importance so close collaboration between Dorset Council and the Dorset Centre of Excellence will continue.

5. Other Implications

None identified

6. Risk Assessment

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

Current Risk: Medium

Residual Risk: Medium

7. Equalities Impact Assessment

Not required for this report

8. Appendices

Not applicable

9. Background Papers

None