

The Shareholder Committee for the Dorset Centre of Excellence

18 September 2023

Dorset Council Commissioner's Report

For Decision

Portfolio Holder: Cllr B Quayle, 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:

Progress continues to be sustained enabling the company to focus on welcoming more children to the school and delivering the business plan.

1. Report

- 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 an update on Dorset Council activity required to realise the delivery of the Dorset Centre of Excellence Business Plan.
- 1.2 Regular contract review meetings continue focused on the performance of the school, with continued engagement between the Managing Director of DCOE and the Strategic Commissioner for SEND. Regular operational meetings are in place to support conversations about individual children and to plan admissions. Contract management focuses on assessing progress on the priority action plan, stability and operation of the school and learning from the Ofsted Inspection.
- 1.3 Commissioners can report that the Executive Leadership team of the Dorset Centre of Excellence and the Board of Directors are continuing to make good progress in the following areas:
 - **Governance:** Regular Board meetings and sub-committees are in place, meeting regularly and providing assurance, support and challenge to the executive leadership team. Dorset Council Commissioners attend in an advisory capacity.
 - **Recruitment and retention:** Recruitment activity continues to be a high priority for the school, with all teaching and teaching assistant vacancies for September filled and plans underway for further recruitment to support the planned growth in pupil numbers for January 2024.
 - **Ofsted and key performance indicators:** The school was inspected by Ofsted in the Summer Term, areas of strength and areas for development, particularly related to the development of curriculum. Commissioners have been in discussion with DCOE regarding how the enhanced co-operation agreement can be used to provide any support required. A fuller update will be provided to the Shareholder Committee, alongside analysis of delivery against key performance indicators in 2022/23 academic year.

- **Pupil growth:** The school reached the expected target of 56 pupils agreed at the end of term and identification of additional pupils is now underway for a trajectory of 72 by the end of this Autumn Term.
- **Pupil experience:** Capturing pupil voice is a priority for the coming year and commissioners look forward to receiving information about this in ongoing reporting.
- **Enrichment and broadening of the learning offer:** The school is proactively planning to enhance its preparation for adulthood (PfA) offer, proposals include making use of the walled garden. The schools end of term newsletter demonstrates how the site is being well used to benefit the learning and broader experiences of pupils.
- **Community engagement:** Arrangements for use of the swimming pool by local community groups and schools are progressing well. The Dorset Centre of Excellence hosted a Holiday Activity and Food Programme over 2 weeks during the summer holidays culminating in a Family Fun Day open to the wider community. This was well attended with almost 500 families having booked to attend. We were able to take advantage of the grounds and facilities utilising the tennis courts, grass area and swimming pool. We offered a variety of sporting, music and arts activities, a walkabout performer, and activities with outdoor education. Hot food was provided for our families eligible for free school meals. Members of the Board of Directors and representative from the Dorset Parent Carer Forum were on hand to chat to families who have children with a special educational need or a disability. Feedback included:

“I have a 10-year-old with ADHD and a 2 ½ year old on the pathway for autism assessment and they both loved the whole day thank you so much for all your hard work for all the children.”

“I thought this was amazing, it’s the first time my children have been able to have a bit more freedom to explore, it was safe and secure!”

“All the time and effort involved to give families a free day out is very much appreciated. We loved being able to use the pool. It was

our first time in this pool. Are there plans for local families to be able to use this lovely facility again in the future please?"

1.4 As in the last commissioners report, the enhanced co-operation agreement remains in place, however the executive leadership team and the Board of Directors continue to be in a place where the support from Dorset Council officers has significantly reduced. A summary of the position against each is provided below:

- Fortnightly contract reviews have been replaced by monthly reviews recognising the progress made. Updates to the block contracting arrangements have been agreed and a variation to the service specification is being made to reflect this.
- Regular operational meetings continue but are not required to be on a weekly basis
- Admissions process – joint working continues to identify new pupils to attend this term and beyond will continue for the foreseeable future until the school is a maximum capacity
- On-site presence of DC officers – this continues to be at the expected levels
- Commissioner attendance at the board continues
- Joint approach to complaints and communications – DCOE are fully leading this, with no input from Dorset Council required
- Recruitment activity – continues to be successfully led by DCOE
- Support Offer – all DC support offered continues to be accepted and action taken as a result. This is primarily focused now on planning for growth including ensuring the delivery of appropriate classroom space.

2. **Support required to deliver the Company Business Case**

2.1 The Dorset Centre of Excellence Commissioning Group, chaired by the Chief Executive continues to meet to oversee the next phases of growth required to deliver the business plan. Attendance includes officers from Finance, Assets and Regeneration and Children's Services.

2.2 Increasing the number of additional classrooms available to the school and suitable for the delivery of a high quality Special Educational Needs curriculum is essential by 2024 and the DCOE Commissioning Group is overseeing these plans. An external company has been procured to work alongside the Managing Director of the school and the council to explore options and to procure the capital works required. This includes bringing into use existing buildings on the site that have been vacant.

- 2.3 Lease arrangements for the site are being reviewed to ensure that they fully reflect the use of the site and associated activities and clarifying roles and responsibilities and the block contract agreement is being updated to reflect updated pupil number projections.

3. **Financial Implications**

Following the agreement of the Business Plan at the previous shareholder committee, commissioners have worked with the company to agree new block numbers for the academic year 23/24 supporting a continued increase in pupil numbers over the year. Fee price has been maintained at the previously agreed rates.

As described above, work has begun to further develop the site to meet the growth trajectory required in the business plan. Faithful and Gould, have been commissioned to work on this and have undertaken benchmarking, using the National Schools Delivery Cost Benchmark database to assess value for money of the proposed scheme. The projected per pupil place costs indicate that the scheme, when adjusted for location and inflation sit under the 20th percentile and at the low end of the end of the range of costs per pupil at around £42,111 per pupil compared to a benchmark average of £86,000 per pupil. This will be reviewed as the capital works continue.

The funding for this work is contained within the Capital Budget which was approved by Cabinet in March 2023.

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

None identified at this stage – further work will be required as the programme develops.

5. **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.

6. **Other Implications**

None identified

7. **Risk Assessment**

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

Current Risk: Medium
Residual Risk: medium

8. **Equalities Impact Assessment**

Not required for this report

9. **Appendices**

None

10. **Background Papers**

None