

The Shareholder Committee for the Dorset Centre of Excellence

10 June 2024

Dorset Council Commissioner's Report

For Decision

Portfolio Holder: Cllr C Sutton, Children's Services, Education and Skills

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

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

Brief Summary:

This report provides an overview of the current position in relation to delivery by the Dorset Centre of Excellence (DCOE) against the commissioning agreement, and the enhanced co-operation between Dorset Council and DCOE.

Recommendation:

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

Reason for Recommendation:

Progress continues to be sustained enabling the company to focus on delivering the business plan, growing school places, the breadth/quality of the offer and preparing for further growth.

1. Report

- 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, and the enhanced cooperation between Dorset Council and 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 between the Managing Director of DCOE and the Strategic Commissioner for Education, focused on the performance of the school. Regular operational meetings are in place to support conversations about individual children and to plan admissions. Contract management focuses on assessing progress on the School Development Plan, operation of the school, stability through growth and progress since the Ofsted Inspection.
- 1.3 Commissioners continue to attend the DCOE Board.
- 1.4 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:

- **Recruitment and retention:** Recruitment activity continues to be a high priority for the school, with continued activity on recruitment to support the planned growth in pupil numbers for next year. The learning and development offer continues to expand ensuring suitably trained staff.
- **Ofsted and key performance indicators:** There are no issues arising; performance reports continue to be received and are reviewed alongside post Ofsted improvements, through contract management. A child level review of all pupils at the school was also undertaken by commissioners and the headteacher. Commissioners are assured of the steps taken to support attendance including the EBSA project for those pupils with emotional based school avoidance and the multi-agency work being undertaken.

Commissioners are also assured that the school has a strong focus and understanding of all their pupils, and that this is reflected in the reporting to and oversight/challenge of the DCOE Board and associated committees.

- **Pupil growth:** Progress continues to identify additional pupils, working towards 116 by the end of this Summer Term, with a focus on ensuring that transfer arrangements deliver a strong start. This continues to be overseen through the weekly tracking system.
 - **The learning offer:** Enrichment and broadening of the learning offer continues, with good use being made of forest school approaches, the walled garden, and the established focus on cultural capital and community engagement for pupils, so they begin to be prepared to be part of their local community, providing valuable life skills
- 1.5 **Community engagement:** Arrangements for use of the swimming pool by local community groups and schools are in place, have expanded and are well received.
- 1.6 The company has appointed a suitable independent financial auditor to oversee the 2023/24 accounts.
- 1.7 As reported in the previous commissioner's reports, 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 is reducing and is now focussed largely on assurance (including enhanced contract management) and managing growth.
- 1.8 The position will be assessed again in the summer term (the current position is highlighted in bold, a full update will be provided in the September report). If the following are in place, it is proposed that the enhanced co-operation agreement is ceased, with regular contract management meetings and joint working to manage growth and admissions continuing:
- a) Assurance that teacher recruitment and plans for the new academic year will enable DCOE to successfully manage the next growth in pupil numbers – **this continues to be reviewed at contract management meetings. Full confirmation of appointments made during the most recent recruitment round is due shortly (in line with teacher resignation timescales of 31 May 2024)**
 - b) Evidence that improvements made following the Ofsted inspection have been embedded – **a site visit is taking place 14 June 2024,**

**carried out by Principal Lead - Best Education for All,
Education Challenge Lead and Strategic Commissioner
Education**

1.9 A summary of the position against the enhanced co-operation agreement is provided below (this remains unchanged from previous reports):

- Monthly contract reviews are in place
- Regular operational meetings continue
- 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 with no requirement for on-site presence identified
- 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 continues to focus 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 of Dorset Council continues to meet to oversee the next phases of growth required to deliver the Business Plan. Attendance includes officers from Finance, Legal Services, Assets and Regeneration and Children's Services.

2.2 As described in previous commissioner's report, 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 September 2024 to support the delivery of the Business Plan. Contractors have been appointed for the Phase 2 works, with work underway on site and progress being managed by Assets and Regeneration.

2.3 Assets & Regeneration have now agreed the overall site rental costs associated with progressive handover of the buildings in use by DCOE. These will now be incorporated into a revised lease by Legal Services. The

aim is to ensure the commercial content of the lease is consistent with DCOE business plan.

3. Financial Implications

Fee price continues to be maintained at the previously agreed rates.

Work continues to develop the site to meet the growth trajectory required in the business plan. The funding for Phase 2 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

11. **Report Sign Off**

- 11.1 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)