

The Shareholder Committee for the Dorset Centre of Excellence

9 December 2024

Dorset Council Commissioner's Report

For Decision

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

Executive Director: P Dempsey, 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.

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 delivering the business plan, growing school places and 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 delivery by the Dorset Centre of Excellence (DCOE) against the commissioning agreement and an update on Dorset Council activity required to realise the delivery of the Dorset Centre of Excellence Business Plan. Reflecting the focus on 'exception reporting' and the strong position of the company in delivering against the commissioning agreement this is a short report.

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, and stability through growth.

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:** no issues to report, despite the significant number of new staff starting this academic year, to enable the growth in pupil numbers.
- **Ofsted and key performance indicators:** The school held their first formal examination series in the summer with strong results (a Grade 4 is considered a pass, a Grade 5 a strong pass):

GCSE English Language (Grade 4+)	2 pupils - 50%
GCSE Maths (Grade 4+)	2 pupils - 67%
Pupils gaining an English qualification	3 pupils = 75%
Pupils gaining a Maths qualification	3 pupils - 75%
Pupils gaining an English and a Maths qualification	3 pupils - 75%

2 pupils are now attending further education at a mainstream college. No pupils were reported as NEET for the end of the academic year 2023/24. Destination checks are being completed in October 2024 to track engagement over time.

Well done to all the pupils at Coombe House School for your achievements throughout the year.

- **Pupil growth:** This continues to be overseen through the weekly tracking system, with a focus on ensuring that transfer arrangements deliver a strong start. Across last academic year the school also embedded and expanded the therapy team to support pupils.
- **The learning offer:** Enrichment and broadening of the learning offer continues, with the Quality Assurance arrangements further strengthened and a continued focus.
- **Engagement with families:** The school held its first Parent open afternoon which was attended with over 120 visitors. This will be an annual event with further opportunities built in across the year. A termly newsletter has also started.

1.5 **Community engagement:** No issues to report.

1.6 The Company appointed a suitable independent financial auditor to oversee the 2023/24 accounts; the Independent Auditors Report was unqualified.

1.7 As reported in the previous commissioner's reports, the enhanced co-operation agreement has now ceased, reflecting the significant progress made by the company; with regular contract management meetings and joint working to manage growth and admissions continuing.

1.8 Reporting from DCOE on carbon footprint related activity is included within contract management arrangements; positive steps are already being taken by the company. A fuller report is due shortly from DCOE, to be considered more fully by commissioners.

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, Assets and Regeneration and Children's Services.

- 2.2 As described in previous commissioner's report, contractors were appointed for Phase 2 works to increase capacity, managed by Assets and Regeneration, Dorset Council. The additional classroom space has now been handed over (originally planned to be the start of this academic year).
- 2.3 Work on finalising the lease continues, with a timeline of ensuring this is complete to enable DCOE to prepare their business plan for the next Shareholder Committee meeting.
- 2.4 Commissioners are working with DCOE to clarify commissioning needs going forward and assess the appropriateness of any proposal, the outcome of these discussions will be reflected in the any revised commissioning agreement and DCOE will reflect this in their Business Plan.

3. **Financial Implications**

- 3.1 Fee price continues to be maintained at the previously agreed rates.
- 3.2 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. Funding for Phase 3 is being sought as part of the next capital funding decision early 2025.

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

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

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

- 5.1 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)