Dorset Centre of Excellence Shareholder Committee

15 September 2025

Report from Chair of Board

For Review and Consultation

Report Author: Ian Comfort
Title: Director and Chair, Dorset Centre of Excellence Ltd

Report Status: Public

Brief Summary:

This report provides an update on the current situation at the Dorset Centre of Excellence ("the Company") and the Coombe House School ("the School"). It considers progress made in relation to governance, leadership, staffing, estate, community use and finance.

The Shareholder is asked to note the content of this report and to continue its support for the Company.

Reason for Recommendation:

The Board, in collaboration with colleagues from Dorset Council, continues to make progress towards its objectives. The Board is mindful that the ongoing support of Dorset Council to deliver the next phases of growth required to deliver the business plan through cooperation with the Council is ensuring the viability of the Company.

1. **Background**

1.1 The Company continues to perform well against its business plan, growing the pupil roll of Coombe House School, improving its quality and developing its wider commercial and community offer.

2. **Coombe House School**

2.1 The School continued to experience a positive final period of the summer term following the previous meeting with the Shareholder Committee.

2.2 Particular highlights were the sports day and the parent / carer open evening. Both were well supported and led to significant positive feedback from stakeholders.

2.3 The summer exam period was a success with the school reporting a significant increase in the number of pupils sitting and passing all external examinations, including an increase in the number of pupils sitting and passing an improved range of GCSE external examinations.

2.4 In the final weeks of the summer term, the School received an expected but unannounced standard inspection from Ofsted. The verbal feedback was overwhelmingly positive with the report likely to be published early in the new academic year (Ofsted do not typically publish inspection reports during the summer holidays).

2.5 Alongside the Ofsted report, the School also welcomed colleagues from both Dorset Council and Wiltshire Council who completed their respective annual quality assurance and annual safeguarding review visits. Their reports were positive and praised the robust safeguarding and governance practices seen, as well as elements of innovation that may benefit other schools who are seeking to develop their inclusive practice.

3. Commercial and Community Activities

3.1 Following the end of the contract with our previous swim school provider, a partnership with a new alternative provider has now begun and is going well.

3.2 In addition, our leisure team used the summer holiday to pilot 1:1 swimming lessons for local families, which were well attended and received positive feedback.

3.3 The community swimming continues to be popular and has maintained steady attendance despite the local Shaftesbury Lido offering its seasonal alternative to our users.

4. Business Plan Implementation

4.1 The Company is engaging with Council colleagues regarding the next steps around the implementation of the approved Business Plan.

4.2 Work is underway to ensure that the next phases of the required development will best facilitate the Company’s planned growth and represent value for money for all stakeholders.

5. HR

5.1 The Company has continued to have strong recruitment processes to ensure it is able to meet the growth expectations of its business plan.

5.2 Turnover for the School at the end of the 2024/25 was ‘sector-typical’ within normal expectations and so was comfortably managed.

5.3 The Company continues to provide stability of leadership and governance.

6. **Financial Implications**

6.1 The Company has received a draft report following its financial audit of the 2024/25 which took place in late June 2025.

6.2 The audit process was successful with praise being given for the way the Company has conducted and governed its financial affairs.

6.3 The Company's accounts shall be given an unqualified report. The Company will share these with the Shareholder at the appropriate point in line with the Shareholder Agreement and they shall be submitted to Companies House by the auditors once signed off by the Board of Directors.

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

7.1 The Company has prioritised work on its natural environment, climate and ecology projects since the last Shareholder Committee meeting.

7.2 Work to maximise the energy generated by our solar panel portfolio has increased efficiency and work to improve the reliability of our biomass boiler has been planned.

7.3 Work to develop Coombe House Farm has led to a positive impact beyond the boundaries of the farm. In taking a broader view of the management approaches used in the estate, the Company is looking to improve the biodiversity of our woodlands and grasslands.

7.4 To support the Company in the above, it has successfully sought external grant funding to aid its investment into a number of regeneration projects.

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

8.1 The Company continues to prioritise the health and wellbeing of the members of its community and carefully monitors the feedback we get in this regard.

9. **Other Implications**

9.1 No other implications have been identified.

10. **Risk Assessment**

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

Current Risk: Medium
Residual Risk: Low.

11. **Equalities Impact Assessment**

11.1 The Board has not conducted an Equalities Impact Assessment for this report.

12. **Appendices**

12.1 None

13. **Background Papers**

13.1 There are no background papers to be included with this report.