

SHAREHOLDER COMMITTEE FOR THE DORSET CENTRE OF EXCELLENCE (DCOE)

MINUTES OF MEETING HELD ON MONDAY 1 DECEMBER 2025

Present: Cllrs Nick Ireland (Chair), Richard Biggs (Vice-Chair), Clare Sutton and Gill Taylor

Present remotely: Cllrs Ryan Hope

Apologies: None

Officers and others present (for all or part of the meeting):

Ross Bowell (Head of Service - Health, Education & SEND Commissioning), Ian Comfort (Chair of the Dorset Centre of Excellence Board), Paul Dempsey (Executive Director of People - Children), Grace Evans (Head of Legal Services and Deputy Monitoring Officer), Jen Furnell (Corporate Director for Education and Learning), Andy Holder (Managing Director), Stuart Jones (Board Member), Lesley Mellor (Board Member), Frances Nicholson (Board Member) and Lindsey Watson (Senior Democratic and Governance Officer)

20. Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on 15 September 2025 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

21. Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

22. Public Participation

There were no questions or statements from members of the public or local organisations.

23. Councillor Questions

There were no questions from councillors.

24. Forward Plan

The Forward Plan was noted.

25. **Dorset Council Commissioner's Report**

The Shareholder Committee received a report of the Head of Service – Health, Education and SEND Commissioning, which provided an overview of the position in relation to delivery by the Dorset Centre of Excellence (DCoE) against the commissioning agreement.

Councillors considered the issues arising from the report and during discussion, points were raised in the following areas:

- There was a particular focus on the development of pathways for reintegration of pupils into mainstream education. Information was included in the Annual Performance Report and further information was provided at the meeting in respect of children transitioning after Year 11 and opportunities to identify children in earlier year groups for future transition into mainstream education. A key aim was to prepare children for life after education
- Steps being taken to improve environmental impact were noted and how this could link with climate-related work being undertaken by Dorset Council, including work to reduce the carbon footprint across the council's estate
- Areas for improvement flagged during the recent Ofsted inspection were areas that had already been identified by the school and had the full attention of the board and leadership
- The primary aim was to ensure the best outcomes for children attending the school
- In response to a question, the Managing Director provided an overview of work undertaken to support the transition of pupils out of the setting. This began at an early stage and included prioritising high quality careers advice and familiarisation visits to colleges. Work was also undertaken with families within the school, in terms of setting out the pathways and ensuring it was a positive experience for children and families
- Work continued to investigate opportunities to enable wider community use of the school site, which included considerations relating to business rates. A number of options were being looked at, with further investigation required
- The use of some of the buildings as college provision was being considered.

The report was NOTED.

26. **DCoE - Report of the Chair of the Board**

The Chair of the Board introduced the report, which provided an update on the current situation at the Dorset Centre of Excellence ("the Company") and the Coombe House School ("the School"). The report included progress made in relation to governance, leadership, staffing, estate, community use and finance.

The recent Ofsted report had been included with the report as an appendix and the Chair of the Board thanked those involved for their work on this and in particular the curriculum and quality committee.

The focus for the meeting was in respect of the Annual Performance Report, which captured the school's successes over the past 12 months, and it was agreed to move forward to the agenda item.

27. Coombe House Annual Performance Report 2025

The Chair of the Board presented the Coombe House Annual Performance Report 2025. In addition, a number of members of the board attended the meeting to answer questions as required.

Councillors reviewed the annual performance report and discussion was held in the following areas:

- The Cabinet Member for Children's Services, Education and Skills highlighted a number of positive areas within the report which included input from the children and the emphasis on the holistic approach, with children being equipped with skills to move through life
- In response to a question, the Managing Director provided more detail on the key stage 4 options offered at the school and it was noted that the number of courses and options offered had been widened. In order to provide the right amount of challenge, there was a careful balance made when deciding which exams children should be entered for and this included social, emotional and health considerations
- IT and STEM skills were a growing area of the economy and this was being built into courses being made available. Links could be made with work being undertaken at the Dorset Innovation Park
- The school was keen to support education at a wider level and already worked with the heads of other schools in the North Dorset area and was considering how this could be developed further. This could include providing outreach and sharing training and shadowing opportunities. It was noted that plans could be made in alignment with the council as part of a wider strategy and the school were open to options as to how to progress this
- The school was registered to provide education for ages 5 up to 19, although was not operating at full range currently. This was being considered, including opportunities for sixth form provision
- Further information on how attainment was measured, was provided and it was noted that this was being constantly developed
- The Managing Director highlighted that the school had done more this year and had the capacity to do more and was keen to grow beyond the current capacity and offer more support to other schools
- The report would also be included on the agenda for Cabinet in January 2026.

28. Urgent Items

There were no urgent items.

29. Exempt Business

There was no exempt business.

Duration of meeting: 10.00 - 10.35 am

Chairman

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