

The Shareholder Committee for the Dorset Centre of Excellence

9 March 2026

Dorset Council Commissioner's Report

For Review and Consultation

Cabinet Member:

Cllr C Sutton, Children's Services, Education & Skills

Local Councillor(s):

Senior Leadership Team:

P Dempsey, Executive Director of People - Children

Report author and job title: Ross Bowell, Head of Service – Health, Education and SEND Commissioning

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Statutory Authority: N/A

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

Executive summary

1.

- 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 an update on the review requested by Shareholders on the longer-term intentions for the Coombe House School (CHS) site.

2. **Recommendation(s)**

- 2.1 Shareholders are asked to note the report.

3. **Reason for the recommendation(s)**

- 3.1 The report is to note as there are no Shareholder decisions required.

4. **The report**

- 3.1 This report provides an overview of the current position in relation to delivery by the DCOE against the commissioning agreement and an update on the report requested by Shareholders on the longer-term intentions for the CHS site.
- 3.2 The Dorset Centre of Excellence Commissioning Group, which includes senior officers from Corporate Development, Place and Children's Services, continues to oversee Council activity in relation to DCOE including taking forward the action from the June 2025 Shareholder Committee for a review of the longer-term intentions for the CHS site.
- 3.3 The review is being undertaken by Atkins Realis and Vail Williams supported by Edgington Architects. Fieldwork and stakeholder engagement will conclude in March with a final report to the June 2026 Shareholder Committee meeting.
- 3.4 At the invitation of the DCOE board, the Head of Service – Health, Education & SEND Commissioning attends the DCOE Board meetings. Regular contract review meetings continue between the Managing Director of DCOE and the Strategic Commissioner for Education, focused on the performance of CHS and on development of service to meet identified and emerging needs, with the next review scheduled for 27 February.
- 3.5 In the last quarter there have been additional visits to observe CHS in operation and to meet with leadership and board members by Dorset Council's Chief Executive, Director of Children's Services and the Corporate Director of Education and Learning.
- 3.6 Recent quarterly commissioner reports have reported positive progress in the performance of Coombe House School as summarised in the Annual Performance report presented to the December Shareholder Committee meeting and as recognised through the recent Good OFSTED report which evidences strong performance as well as the governance to sustain high standards and continue to make further improvements. There is no material change to this assessment to report in this quarter.
- 3.7 As of 12 February, there are 145 children on roll of whom 141 are Dorset Council placements against the current commissioned capacity for Dorset pupils of 152, with 8 further placements in progress. 2 of the 4 non-Dorset pupil were originally Dorset placements who have subsequently moved out of county.

4. **Alternative options considered**

5.1 Not applicable.

5. **Legal considerations**

5.1 There are no specific legal considerations arising from this report.

6. **Financial implications**

7.1 There are no specific financial implications arising from this report.

8. **Natural environment, climate & ecology implications**

8.1 There are no specific natural environment, climate & ecology implications arising from this report.

9. **Well-being and health implications**

9.1 There are no specific wellbeing and health implications arising from this report.

10. **Other implications**

10.1 There are no other implications arising from this report.

11. **Risk implications**

11.1 There are no specific risk implications arising from this report.

12. **Equalities**

12.1 An Equality Impact Assessment is not required.

13. **Appendices**

13.1 N/A

14. **Background papers**

14.1 N/A

15 **Report sign-off**

15.1 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)