

Referral to Cabinet

28 July 2026

From the Shareholder Committee for the Dorset Centre of Excellence on 15 June 2026

Coombe House School – Future Site Options

For Review and Consultation

Cabinet Member:

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

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

Report Status: Part Exempt Para 3

Reason for referral

In the meeting of the Shareholder Committee for the Dorset Centre of Excellence (DCOE) held on 9 June 2025, Dorset Council officers provided the shareholders with an overview of the key considerations for the council in respect of potential additional capital expenditure at Coombe House School and at other locations. Consideration was also given to commercial opportunities in relation to the wider use of the site. Consequently, shareholders requested a report on the longer-term intentions for Coombe House School.

A structured options appraisal report was provided to the Shareholder Committee for the Dorset Centre of Excellence (DCOE) meeting held on 15 June 2026.

The options appraisal report was considered by shareholders in the context of the Schools' White Paper published in February 2026, Every Child Achieving and Thriving, the linked national consultation on Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) reform, and the re-commitment of the Department for Education to deliver the Special Free School at Osprey Quay in Portland. Further detail of the reforms and implications for Dorset is set out in the Local SEND Reform Plan report also on the agenda of this Cabinet meeting.

In recognition that any decisions about the future options for the wider site and asset including Coombe House School will be for Cabinet, shareholders determined that the options appraisal report should be referred to Cabinet along with three recommendations for instructions to Dorset Council officers.

Recommendation:

The Shareholder Committee for the Dorset Centre of Excellence recommends to Cabinet that:

1. Cabinet instructs the Executive Director Children's Services to work with the Company to model the impact of the 2026 Schools' White Paper and the impact of the proposals relating to Osprey Quay.
2. Cabinet instructs the Chief Executive to establish a working group to review the commercial options for the site, with the Company.
3. Cabinet recognises the need for a short-term investment plan for the site to ensure it is being maintained, (whilst acknowledging the work required in respect of the long-term plan for the site) and instructs the Executive Director Economy and Environment, to prepare the short-term investment plan.

Appendices

- 1) Report to Shareholder Committee for the Dorset Centre of Excellence, Agenda item 12, 15 June 2026 – Future Site Options - **Exempt**
- 2) Coombe House Options Appraisal May 2026 – **Exempt**

Background papers

None