

SHAREHOLDER COMMITTEE FOR THE DORSET CENTRE OF EXCELLENCE (DCOE)

MINUTES OF MEETING HELD ON MONDAY 15 JUNE 2026

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

Apologies: Cllrs Simon Clifford

Also present: Cllr Carole Jones

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

Ross Bowell (Head of Service - Health, Education & SEND Commissioning), Jan Britton (Executive Director - Economy and Environment), Ian Comfort (Chair of the Dorset Centre of Excellence Board), Paul Dempsey (Executive Director - Children's Services), Grace Evans (Head of Legal Services and Deputy Monitoring Officer), Jen Furnell (Corporate Director for Education and Learning), Andy Holder (Managing Director, Dorset Centre of Excellence), Catherine Howe (Chief Executive) and Lindsey Watson (Senior Democratic and Governance Officer)

1. **Minutes**

The minutes of the meeting held on 9 March 2026 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

2. **Declarations of Interest**

There were no declarations of interest.

3. **Public Participation**

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

4. **Councillor Questions**

There were no questions from councillors.

5. **Review of Terms of Reference**

The terms of reference for the shareholder committee were noted.

6. **Forward Plan**

The Forward Plan was noted. Following recent changes to Cabinet member titles, these would be checked and updated on the forward plan.

7. **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.

In response to a question regarding attendance levels, it was noted that attendance was at a good level in terms of expectations for specialist schools. Whilst it was difficult to make comparisons with attendance levels in mainstream schools, there was confidence that attendance at Coombe House School was moving in the right direction.

The report was NOTED.

8. **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.

Councillors considered the areas covered by the report and during discussion, points were raised in the following areas:

- In respect of attendance levels, it was acknowledged that some children found going to school challenging. The school was supporting those children affected and it was felt that the attendance profile was good at the present time
- A discussion was held on the transition of some pupils to post-16 mainstream education. There were no key performance indicators in this area as it was about ensuring that pupils took the next steps that were right for their requirement. In some cases, children were moving back to education provision closer to their home/community
- Recent activities included a successful residential trip to Hooke Court and a farm open day
- Progress was being made in the implementation of Government guidance on the use of mobile phones in school and in respect of the use of reasonable force
- The Company was ready to be an effective partner with Dorset Council in respect of the requirements of the 2026 schools' white paper
- The Coombe House farm was run as a therapeutic farm, which offered both learning facilities beyond the classroom setting and had a wider community impact, demonstrated by the good community turnout at the recent farm open day.

The report was NOTED.

9. **Urgent Items**

There were no urgent items.

10. **Exempt Business**

It was proposed by R Biggs seconded by C Sutton

Decision

That the press and the public be excluded for the following item in view of the likely disclosure of exempt information within the meaning of paragraph 3 of Schedule 12A to the Local Government Act 1972 (as amended).

Reason for taking the item in private

Paragraph 3 – Information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the authority holding that information).

11. **Future site options**

The shareholder committee considered an exempt report regarding future site options.

Responses were provided to questions and comments raised. The shareholder committee requested that a report be brought to Cabinet on 28 July 2026 to progress consideration of the issues. As part of this, the wording of a recommendation to Cabinet was proposed by N Ireland seconded by R Biggs and agreed by the shareholder committee.

Duration of meeting: 10.00 - 11.15 am

Chairman

.....