Agenda Item 12

York Schools Forum **12th November 2026**

Report of Assistant Director, Education and Skills

Title: **Update on the neighbourhood model and school clusters**

Summary

1. This report provides the members of School Forum with an update on the work taking place to implement the neighbourhood model and school clusters following the launch of the school neighbourhood clusters on 25th September 2026.

Main Report

2. As previously reported to School Forum in July 2026, the academic year 2026-27 will see the development and implementation of the neighbourhood cluster model to support mainstream inclusion. Central government has placed neighbourhood working as a core component in the delivery of its reforms through the Best Start in Life, Families First and the SEND and school reform plans. The delivery of the national SEND reforms sees pooling resources as a core strategy to create a more efficient, collaborative system which places children and families at the centre of service delivery. By bringing together funding, expertise, and staff across local partnerships—including schools, local authorities, and health services—the goal is to improve early intervention, strengthen inclusion in mainstream settings, and prevent needs from escalating. The pooling of resources allows schools to collectively commission services, share assistive technology, and pool specialized staff rather than trying to secure resources individually.

3. The work to develop the model in York has started and was launched with school leaders on 25th September. The launch introduced the rationale for working in the neighbourhood clusters and shared a prototype data dashboard with schools. Feedback from the launch event was that the practicalities of how the neighbourhood clusters will work needs to be the main focus of the development phase.

4. There are a number of existing models nationally and all of these have different pros and cons, but learning from them will help us to develop a model which adds value in the context of York.

5. In order to develop the model the suggested starting point is to focus on the practical co-ordination of each of the school neighbourhood cluster. One interesting model is provided by the REACH Foundation cradle to career programme (see Annex A). The REACH Foundation's approach is that 'No minister can join up the support around a child, and no strategy document can make a health visitor and a Year 6 teacher talk to each other. That work is done by people who share a neighbourhood, know the same families, and decide to organise differently.'

6. We have good foundations to build on in York. We now need to take the next steps. The York Schools and Academies Board (YSAB) are supporting the next steps through adopting the neighbourhood cluster as one of their task and finish workstreams for 2026-27. This workstream will focus on the logistics of implementing the neighbourhood clusters. The work will involve the following steps:

   - Establish the vision and operational guidance for the school neighbourhood clusters
   - Development of the neighbourhood dashboard to map neighbourhood resources and identify common priorities
   - Identify opportunities to collaborate in each neighbourhood cluster and establish coherent neighbourhood cluster working to the delivery of the Best Start in Life, Families First and SEND Reform so that schools do not see these as competing demands but a seamless programme of activity to strengthen relationships between professionals, communities and families.

Recommendations

7. School Forum are asked to support the work of the YSAB task and finish group. The group will be led by the local authority with membership drawn from each neighbourhood cluster. The group will meet between December 2026 and February 2027. This group will develop the vision and implementation plan for the neighbourhood cluster model with a focus on the practicalities of the allocation and management of pooled resources and the delivery of collaborative activities to support transitions, early intervention and building and strengthening the links with partner agencies at neighbourhood level.

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