



News Release

March 2026

New chair announced for North East partnership helping to improve local housing and support community growth

The North East Housing Partnership, a collaborative group of 19 North East social housing providers, has appointed a new Chair to lead its response to meeting the region's affordable housing needs.

Chief Executive of Bernicia John Johnston, has been appointed to the role, following three years as the partnership's Vice Chair.

With 40 years of experience in housing, John will help take the partnership through its next phase of delivery, focusing on four key themes set out in its refreshed 2026 prospectus: Development and regeneration, Quality of homes and investment, Better lives, skills and inclusion and Homelessness, specialist and supported housing.

Speaking on his appointment John said: "The North East Housing Partnership has been on a fantastic journey over the last three years. We mobilised to work together and collaborate, and to support our Combined Authority and local authority partners in the delivery of ambitious growth plans that are unlocking the potential of our region and improving living standards for the regions people.

"Looking back, we have already achieved so much together, building new and improving existing homes, providing support and opportunity to improve the quality of life and life chances for our tenants and the wider communities we serve.

“Our success has been because of our brilliant members, mutually supporting each other and delivering positive impacts across a wide range of projects. We hope we are now viewed as a key delivery partner in the North East and have exciting plans for the future.”

John is taking over the role of Chair from Karbon Homes' Chief Executive Paul Fiddaman, who will step down from the role in April after three years in post.

John added: “I would like to thank Paul Fiddaman Chief Executive of Karbon Homes and the partnerships initial chair, for his passion, vision, support and guidance over the last three years. I know Paul will continue to be an active member and advocate for all that we do.”

Reflecting on his time as Chair, Paul said: “It's been great to see the partnership grow over the last three years and I'm proud to have been able to play such a role in the brilliant projects and initiatives it's delivered to date.

“We knew that by bringing the region's providers together we could do so much more and deliver great outcomes for our customers, but it's been brilliant to see such a significant shift, from organisation working in relative isolation, to the development of a strong and unified force for change.

“NEHPs successes to date highlight perfectly the extent of what can be achieved if as a housing sector we invest together, work together, and plan together.”

Launching in 2023, the North East Housing Partnership (NEHP) formed to enable the region's providers to work collaboratively in tackling the region's 50,000+ social housing waiting list.

Partners consist of both housing associations and local authorities with a strong presence in the seven local authority areas covered by the new North East Mayoral Combined Authority. Collectively the partners own and manage over 200,000 homes across the North East.

The partners are believe housing, Bernicia, Castles & Coasts, Durham Aged Mineworkers' Homes Association, Durham County Council, Gateshead Council, Gentoo, Home Group, Karbon Homes,

Living, Newcastle City Council, North Star, North Tyneside Council, Northumberland County Council, Places for People, South Tyneside Council, Sunderland City Council, Thirteen and Tyne Housing.

John will be supported by newly appointed Vice Chair, Louise Bassett, Chief Executive of Sunderland based Gentoo Group.

Louise has led on the partnership's tackling child poverty initiative, which included partnering with the four leading sports foundations across the North East to launch the The Together Through Sport campaign, designed to ensure every child, regardless of background, gets the chance to play, grow and thrive.

Four new workstream leads have also been appointed, each responsible for activity under one of the partnership's key themes.

Sarah Robson, Executive Director of Development and Asset Management at Karbon Homes will lead activity under the development and regeneration workstream. Marc Edwards, Executive Director of Property at Gentoo will lead on quality of homes and investment. Alan Smith, Chief Executive of Believe Housing is taking on better lives, skills and inclusion. And Vicky Sibson, Strategic Housing Services Manager at Gateshead Council will head up the homelessness, specialist and supported housing workstream.