

WEST NORTHAMPTONSHIRE COUNCIL CABINET

17th JANUARY 2023

CABINET MEMBER WITH RESPONSIBILITY FOR HOUSING, CULTURE AND LEISURE - COUNCILLOR ADAM BROWN

Report Title **West Northamptonshire Council-Northamptonshire Partnership
Homes Governance Framework**

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List of Appendices

Appendix A – WNC – NPH Governance Framework

Appendix B – WNC – NPH Governance Framework – Implementation Approach and Plan

1. Purpose of Report

1.1 To note the governance arrangement framework in place with West Northamptonshire Council (WNC) and Northamptonshire Partnership Homes (NPH) and the subsequent implementation of these arrangements.

2. Executive Summary

1.1. Northamptonshire Partnership Homes (formally Northampton Partnership Homes) was formed in 2015 to take on the management of housing stock for Northampton Borough Council, now West Northamptonshire Council. The company was formed as an ALMO (arms-length management organisation) and remains a subsidiary and provider of essential services for West Northamptonshire Council.

1.2. The key services that NPH currently provide are:

- Housing Management
- Repairs and Maintenance
- Allocations and lettings
- Tenancy support
- Tenant engagement
- New build housing and development
- Management of Ecton Lane traveller site
- Investment of existing stock

1.3 With the establishment of West Northamptonshire Council in April 2021, it was acknowledged that there was a requirement to create a framework to give better structure to the relationship between WNC and NPH. This needed to be supported by clear reporting, improved governance and effective performance management, whilst recognising the need for flexibility in delivery.

1.4 Although there is a Management Agreement in place, which sets out the responsibilities of the Council and NPH to manage the Council's housing stock, it was recognised that this needs to be improved and is not deemed to be providing a suitable framework in which to manage the relationship.

1.5 The WNC/NPH Governance framework purpose is to:

- Establish and inform a robust governance structure and partnership approach through WNC-NPH activities,
- Establish and maintain inter-organisational cultural values of transparency, openness, and joint-partnership within all levels of the WNC-NPH relationship,

- Establish and ensure clarity in decision-making, intelligence sharing, and assurance activities,
- Facilitate appropriate levels of assurance and compliance between organisations pertaining to the statutory and regulatory requirements,
- Formulise and treat shared risks and issues pertaining to the WNC-NPH relationship, and
- Establish clear lines of accountability, roles, and responsibilities between the organisations and further support collaboration and co-creation within the WNC-NPH relationship.

3. Recommendations

It is recommended that the Cabinet:

- 3.1 Note the contents of the WNC-NPH Governance Framework and Implementation Plan

4. Reason for Recommendations

- 4.1 To ensure that there is a robust oversight and assurance in delivering landlord services.

5. Issues and choices

- 5.1 Background to the report

5.2 The need for more robust governance arrangements is set against a wider context of key changes to legislation and regulation which resets the relationship between social housing tenants and their landlords. The Regulator of Social Housing and the new Building Safety Regulator will hold the landlord (WNC) as responsible for meeting the regulatory standards and will be held to account for the performance and the impact on tenants of how their homes are managed. These accountabilities cannot be passed on to NPH (the ALMO). It is incumbent on the LA as the landlord to ensure the homes it owns are safe.

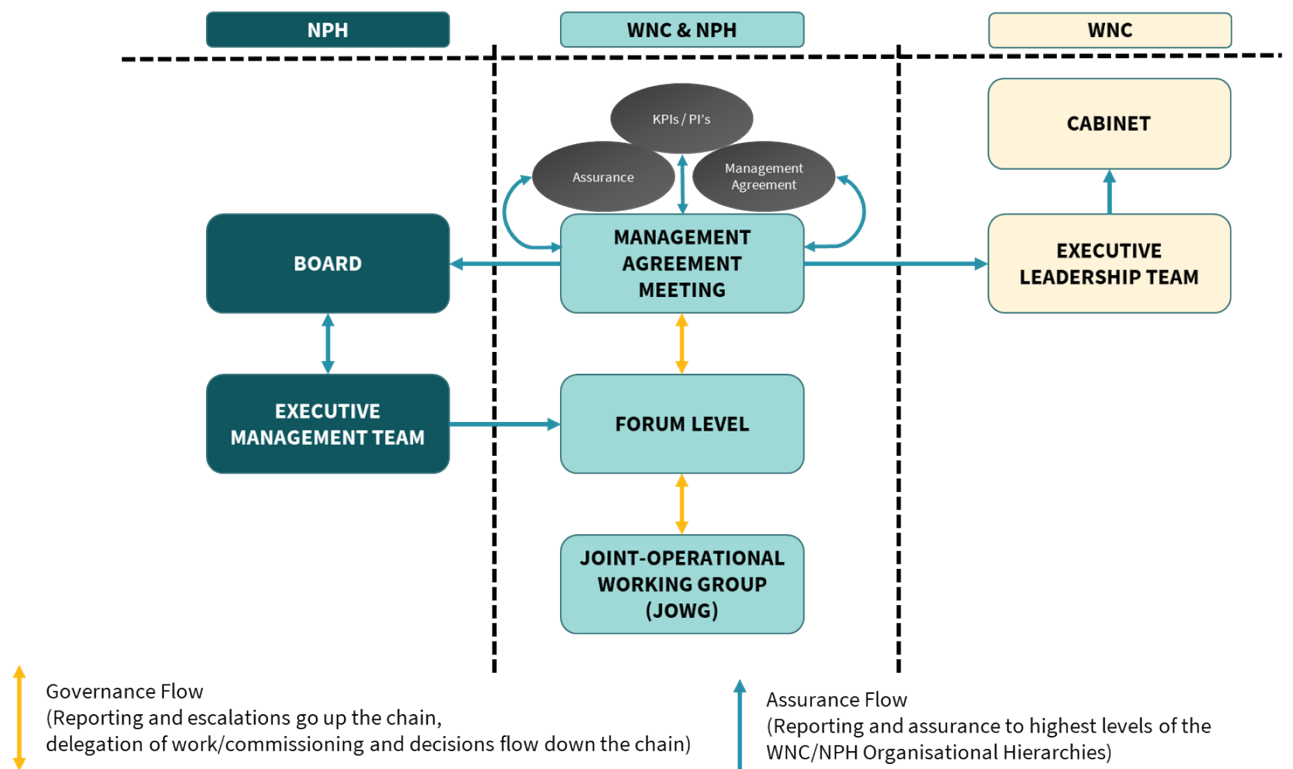
- 5.3 Some of the key changes are:

- Introduction of tenant satisfaction measures to monitor performance (need to be implemented by April 2023)
- A strengthened and more proactive Housing Ombudsman whose role supports the work of the Regulator of Social Housing
- New Building Safety Act 2022 – safety requirements for landlords of higher-risk buildings.

- 5.4 This governance framework is key to the WNC-NPH relationship. It supports the delivery of WNC and NPH strategies and drives accountability, addressing statutory and regulatory assurance.

5.5 A good practice document produced by Councils with ALMOs Group (CWAG) was comprehensively used to develop the framework. This report highlighted that a strong relationship between the local authority and ALMO has to be underpinned by explicit structures that set out clearly defined roles and responsibilities for both organisations and individuals. A fundamental principle underpinning governance framework is openness and transparency, which is a two-way relationship between WNC and NPH to allow the relationship to mature and develop.

5.6 The Governance Framework will be structured through three areas of the WNC /NPH relationship. The table below outlines the function at each level, including key responsibilities and roles.



5.7 As illustrated, by the table above, there are three key governance levels, each with a distinct purpose:

1) Joint operational working groups

Groups that are structured around the day-to-day management of service areas within the WNC/NPH relationship. They allow NPH and WNC representatives to discuss specific problems, day-to-day risk and issues, and progress joint operational activities.

2) Forum meeting

There are three Forum level meetings pertaining to People, Place and Finance and Resources. The Forums are the formal elements of the governance framework and cover high level discussions, assurance monitoring and where appropriate, approvals and escalations on the relevant areas. The Place and the Finance and Resource Forums will take place monthly, and the People Forum will take place on a weekly basis.

5.8 The table below represents the areas that each Forum will discuss:

Place Forum	People Forum	Finance and Resource Forum
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ WNC Housing Strategy ▪ NPH Development Strategy ▪ Development Programmes ▪ NPH Asset Strategy ▪ Health and Safety ▪ Building Safety ▪ Affordable Housing Development ▪ Sustainability Strategy/Policies ▪ Regeneration Activities ▪ Traveller Site Investment 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Customer and Resident experience ▪ Tenant Engagement ▪ Complaints ▪ Cases & Severe Casework ▪ Allocation services ▪ Public Health Strategies ▪ Income & Rental collection impact ▪ Traveller Site Activities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Financial Performance ▪ HRA Fund ▪ Capital Fund ▪ General Fund ▪ Budget Variances ▪ Aids and Adaption Budgets ▪ Disaster Recovery & Business Continuity Plans ▪ Rental Increases ▪ Income & Rental collection ▪ Right-to-Buy ▪ Service Charges

3) Management Agreement meeting

This will have a specific remit around the oversight and development of the WNC-NPH Management agreement and enable monitoring of NPH's performance against the Management agreement. These meetings will take place on a quarterly basis.

5.9 The implementation of the governance arrangements has begun, with the first Place Forum being held in November, with the 2nd meeting scheduled for January. Meetings for the People and Finance and Resources Forum have been scheduled in diaries 2023/2024.

5.10 In addition to the implementation of the forums, to ensure that these new governance arrangements are embedded across the organisation meetings will be taking place with directorate teams.

6. Implications (including financial implications)

6.1 Resources and Financial

There are no resources or financial implications arising from the proposals.

6.2 Legal

There are no legal implications arising from the proposals.

6.3 Risk

There are no significant risks arising from the proposed recommendations in this report.

6.4 Consultation

Staff from WNC and NPH have been fully involved in co-designing and co-creating the governance framework

6.5 Consideration by Overview and Scrutiny

None

6.6 Climate Impact

WNC and NPH are working together in line with the WNC Sustainability Strategy and the NPH Sustainability Strategy to proactively monitor our climate impact and make progress towards our commitment to Net Zero.

6.7 Community Impact

None

6.8 Communications

Further communications and engagement work will take place with directorates to ensure that the new governance arrangements are embedded across the organisation.